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CONTESTED SUBURBS:
SPACE AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN MORAL PANICS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
The College of Urban and Public Affairs

by

Stacey L. Simmons

B.A., University of New Orleans, 1996

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Abstract

Over the last thirty years there has been modest investigation into the phenomenon of moral panic. Several high profile moral panics have been investigated by social scientists but with relatively little new theoretical developments. This research hypothesizes that there are two different forms of moral panic that have not been discerned by other researchers. I call these: metapanics and localized panics. In addition, in the last two decades a handful of well-respected theorists have drawn attention to the fact that social research is dominated by an historical perspective. Edward Soja, and Henri Lefebvre have been at the fore, but even Michel Foucault and David Harvey have entered opinions on the spatial dimension of social reality as at least overlooked, and at the worst intentionally obfuscated.

In this research, three communities where moral panics have taken place are compared with each other from the perspective of their human geography at the time of the panic, as reflected in the census data for the period. In addition, the histories of the cases are examined and compared through rhetorical analysis. The spatial dimension is examined in its representation in the common themes, phrases, and concepts of the public discourse on each individual panic. Qualitative data in the form of accounts from newspapers, television transcripts, and other media-related data are used to demonstrate

the importance of the media and their setting of the tone for investigations. allegations. and any moral panic that ensues. With this research I hope to inspire others to examine spatiality in their work on moral panic. In addition to the more concrete questions of place. there is another area of place that has been ignored. the representation of place in moral panic. This research concludes that the best indicators of whether or not a panic will become a metapanic are to be found in the real and represented socio-economic status of the community where the panic takes place.

Introduction

In the last several decades the landscape of suburbia has been the subject of much public discourse. Developers and planners have argued over sprawl, while urban supporters have tried to make urban areas more appealing to residents and businesses. These subjects of discourse reveal that the economic and planning consequences of suburbanism are the most commonly argued.

In recent years interest in the study of images (and thus representation) of the city has increased. Scholars with interests as diverse as media studies, urban studies, geography, planning, anthropology, and sociology have studied how cities are represented on television and in other mass media. This is important work, but begs examination of another related spatial area of representation, the suburb. The suburban landscape is an often ignored social product. Perhaps this is because those of us who study social products and relationships are (predominantly) products of those same suburban landscapes that deserve our critical attention. In short, we have seen the face of the suburbs and it is us; thus we choose not to turn a critical eye to what we are in the process of producing and reproducing. As other researchers have already examined (LIST) suburban life as we now know it has been dominated by the desire for

separateness, safety, and homogeneity. Yet, the social ramifications of this separation are not typically the subject of study beyond the spheres of planning or human geography.

In recent years, the study of the *urban* image has become popular in media studies, planning, and cultural theory. But the logical development of the study of the suburban image has not yet come into its own. In the last two decades there have been several popular media critiques of suburbanity. Some have won awards like the film *American Beauty*, with its intense critiques of homogeneity, gender roles, and consumerism. Others are more sophomoric, like the Tom Hanks film, *The Burbs*, where the bored suburbanites spin themselves into a panic accusing a new family of immigrants of murder after moving into the neighborhood. There are several readings of these films and others like them. But their critique of suburbia is clear. Social scientists should follow this trend and begin to examine these mass media critiques of suburbia.

Moral Panic

The study of moral panic has been limited to two areas of study: sociology and folklore studies. Scholars who have examined moral panic have contributed rich histories and analyses. But their examinations have not included an examination of the place where a given moral panic takes place, nor have they sought to examine what place means to that community in the course of the panic.

This study proposes that the suburbs are intrinsic to the development of moral panic. Place is not the most important factor, but it is a telling factor in which panics influence Americans *en masse*. The landscape of suburbia is painted in homogeneous colors- from green lawns to white inhabitants. To middle class suburbanites diversity is

an ideal, not a goal. And the real message whether it is embedded in the text of the film *American Beauty* or the moral panic of the Columbine Massacre, is that the suburbs are most dangerous when strangeness goes undetected.

Chapter 1
Thinking About Moral Panic and Suburbia

In the last thirty years a number of moral panics have occurred in the United States. Some have been of predominantly local interest, while others have erupted in a given locale, only to give birth to nationwide panic. Although moral panics are accepted as valid sociological phenomena, little is known about how, why, and when they occur. In addition, there is currently no accepted standard for evaluating a moral panic, with the exception of the use of the indicators of a moral panic developed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). Historically, this has made it difficult to perform comparative analyses.

The original moral panic thesis proposed that there are key elements or an outline of events in the development of a moral panic. These include:

1. Someone or something is defined as a threat to values or interests;
2. This threat is depicted in an easily recognizable form by the media;
3. There is a rapid build up of public concern;
4. There is a response from authorities or opinion makers;
5. The panic recedes or results in social changes.

(Cohen 1972:191-198)

Several authors since Cohen have added important dimensions, such as symbolic projection (Jenkins 1993, Bromley 1993, Victor, 1993, 1990). Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) condensed Cohen's (1972) work, as well as the developed theories of other

researchers, and adding to them, developed five indicators of moral panic: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 33-41). Cohen's original thesis includes most of these, but they were not succinctly delineated as a systematic way of determining whether or not a moral panic has occurred. For Cohen, the most influential aspect of the moral panic was the influence of the mass media on public perceptions of events that lead to panic (Cohen, 1972: 31-38). The majority of his original work dealt with that aspect of moral panics.

In the last twenty years, there have been contradictory developments in the moral panic theory. Some researchers have downplayed the importance of the mass media, while others have focused solely on the media's responsibility for social construction. In terms of theory, there have been very few contributions to further the development of moral panic in the body of social theory. Moral panics are identified and analyzed as historical/sociological events, and contribute to the overall body of work on the topic, but few have generated any new or innovative methods or ideas.

I will criticize the current state of theory on moral panic and offer a new theoretical dimension by arguing for the use of socio-spatial indicators in the analysis of moral panic. It is my intent to contribute to the current literature on moral panic, as well as to the current theory on spatial social theory through this work.

In the course of preparing the preliminary research, I became aware of certain similarities between the locations of the panics I investigated, and the ways that these places were represented by the media. In preliminary investigations of the panic that surrounded the school shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, I looked at fifteen

communities where school shootings had occurred and found that sixty-seven percent of these had taken place in cities within fifty miles of a major urban center. Sixty percent of the communities (a total of nine) had more than 10,000 people according to the 1990 census, and one hundred percent had above average incomes according to the same census data.

Why is this relevant? Nearly all media representations of the places where the school shootings took place were quick to point out that the locales were "sleepy" rural or suburban towns. An examination of the transcripts, footage, and census data however revealed a contradiction. The census is vague about its definition of what a rural community is, but the commonly used definition is an incorporated city or town with fewer than twenty-five hundred residents (U.S. Census Bureau definitions, 1990).

The data on the media-covered school shootings did not include a single town with fewer than 3300 residents, although one community's population data was missing. I combined this information with the other panic-towns I had been investigating, Manhattan Beach, California, and West Memphis, Arkansas. All were suburban communities with similar moral panics. One, Manhattan Beach, fit a profile similar to the communities where the most well-known school shootings had occurred: high educational attainment, and high income, within a short distance from a major urban center. Manhattan Beach is an affluent suburb of Los Angeles. Littleton, Colorado is similar, the town boasts above average incomes, and educational attainment. West Memphis had both similarities and differences. Like the other towns, West Memphis is a suburban community near a major urban center. However, it is fundamentally different in terms of both education and income, and is better described as a working class suburb.

One of the most important questions to me was whether or not there was a difference in the portrayal of place by those people involved in the panic. Kai Erikson, in his examination of panic among the Puritans, (Erikson, 1963), proclaimed that the most important defining characteristic of the Puritan "witchcraze" was the moral boundary drawn around the communities by their definition of deviance. According to Erikson, a *moral* line of demarcation developed to define the cultural and political boundaries of the town. This point of view is overly simplistic, that the community members, (namely the public and agents of social control), state their objections to the inflammatory event by framing themselves and the community itself as a place of unambiguous morality. The community is defined by exclusion; the delimiting boundaries of influence are the physical boundaries of the community itself. Everything beyond the technical borders becomes the frontier where anything is possible, and in the context of the development of a moral panic this unpredictability is perceived as overwhelmingly negative. However, this explanation is overly simplistic as it ignores the reality of complex causality. There are several possible contributing factors to the development of moral panics. And they will not always be equal.

In examining the moral panics in West Memphis, Manhattan Beach, and Littleton, several similarities emerged. The most important commonality was geographical. The proximity of the communities to a major urban center seemed a consistent factor that other researchers had not investigated. This characteristic is important because, without it, mass communication is made more difficult. Access to a major urban center is very important structurally to the moral panic. Without highways, and local news agencies that have access to remote (on-location) production and distribution equipment there are

limited means of reporting. If events cannot be reported in a timely fashion, then it is unlikely that they will garner sufficient attention to foster a panic.

To date, scholars investigating moral panic have described events following Cohen's original thesis (Cohen, 1972). Many have also relied on the work of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). What is lacking in the current work is more theoretical development, especially into the origins and development of the panic over time. As other scholars (Balshaw and Kennedy 1999, Soja 1996) have expressed, and I will emphasize in this research, there is a missing dimension in much social investigation: space. The study of moral panic is no exception. Spatiality as a theme of investigation is often overlooked outside of geography and urban studies, even though the space where events occur is seminal to understanding them.

Moral panics are generally examined by social scientists in one of two disciplines, sociology and folklore studies. Not surprisingly, these disciplines have shaped the understanding of the phenomenon because of the research agendas and tools traditionally used by investigators in those fields. Folklorists have tended to study panics that spread by word-of-mouth. Not surprisingly these panics tend to be called rumor-panics. Sociologists tend to study panics whose effects are felt on a broader scale, where the events surrounding the panic are synthesized into the national consciousness.

How are these different? To read the accounts they do not seem to be very different, as both rely on the theoretical model of Cohen (1972) to substantiate their claims. However, under closer scrutiny, they are very different. The folklorists' rumor-panic differs dramatically from the moral panic theory in that the use of the mass media is not deemed as the most influential aspect of the panic. Instead, the panic develops

around frightening rumors in the community which travel across distances, often spreading from town to town via word of mouth. The fears are very often reported in the local newspaper, in the same format as the rumor. The rumor panic lacks certain fundamental aspects of the moral panic theory put forth by Cohen (1972). The most crucial of these is the involvement of the mass media. But there are other important contradictions as well. Very rarely do rumor-panics have broad social implications such as influencing public policy or instigating social movements.

The moral panics studied by sociologists are much larger phenomena. The sociologist[1] investigates the events that lead to the panic, including the influence of the mass media. In addition, the panic often enters the national consciousness and has long-lasting effects. Most often these come in the form of legal ramifications and changes in social policy. Often these social movements involve the development of non-profit groups, social agendas for politicians and lobbyists, or are the impetus for the creation and enforcement of new laws.

Many times moral panics erupt in communities and fizzle out. Sometimes panic erupts over a nonevent. There are still other events that are so heinous that an outbreak of moral panic is expected, but never arrives. Current theory fails to explain why this is so. Yet, all moral panics seem to have similar characteristics of human geography. In reading the research of other scholars, the setting is painted as suburban sometimes, rural at others. This suggested that geography does make a difference. Do panics that develop in "rural" areas never make it out of those areas and into the broader consciousness?

---

[1] For examples see works by Philip Jenkins (1992, 1994,1998), Michael Welch (2000) and Joel Best (1987).

Moral panics that eventually reach beyond their own environs have more complex interactions than the transmission and sustainability of rumor. The space itself is alive with some conflict, or that place would not lend itself so explicitly to the continuation of the panic. According to Soja (2001),

> The dialectised, conflictive space is where the reproduction of the relations of production is achieved. It is in this space that produces reproduction, by introducing into it multiple contradictions (Lefebvre, 1976a, 19) –contradictions which must be analytically and dialectically 'revealed' to enable us to see what is hidden behind the spatial veil (Soja, 2001:50).

This is consistent with Jenkins (1992) and Victor's (1993) assertions that moral panic has as one of its components the symbolic projection of some fear or perceived threat:

> These stories function as a collective metapnor to express a group or society's anxieties about its future. They say in symbolic form, that our future (our children) is threatened by mysterious forces that we cannot fully comprehend or control (Jenkins, 1993:233).

To compare these two thoughts, I propose that one of the products of the moral panic, in its wider state, is to obfuscate reality. For most previous investigators of moral panic the place where the panic takes place is given as setting, merely a footnote to the story's occurrence. But authors like Soja (1996, 2001) and Lefebvre (1994) enjoin the reader to consider the fact that the space itself is a social creation. In this social creation people erect the physical symbols of their opinions, discourse, and politics: office buildings, monuments, slums, apartments, houses. Lefebvre (1994) in particular argues that these are not simple dwellings or containers for inhabitants; rather they are a physical construction of social reality. To ignore the space is to examine without sight, like a blind man looking through a microscope.

The places where moral panics take place have been represented along a continuum that begins in rurality and ends with suburbanity. The representations have been fairly consistent, most especially in examining the representation of the alleged perpetrators. While the degree to which the rural dimension of the community varies, the commonality of the representation is present. Even in the obvious urban suburbs like Manhattan Beach, California, where the McMartin Preschool Case was rooted, there were descriptions of the preschool and its owners that intimated an unsophisticated, rural identity. Reporters commonly drew attention to three generations of family members working in the same place and living in close proximity to one another, almost implying an incestuous environment. It was very common for reporters to comment on the unusual nature of the McMartin family's living and working arrangements. They all lived close to one another and worked together. The implication of strangeness is rooted in the assumed unusual finding of a functioning extended family.

In Littleton, Colorado, ten miles from Denver, reports of the murders at Columbine High School were rife with descriptions of a suburban town where two deviants did the unthinkable. Contrary to the televised representations of the crime scene, the community of Littleton, Colorado is actually an affluent suburb of Denver, not a sleepy, rural town. It is a community that boasts middle-class incomes and very low racial dissimilarity.

West Memphis, Arkansas differs from both Littleton and Manhattan Beach. The town is smaller and its appearance more rural in nature. Perhaps this is relative to the size of the urban center to which it is suburban. Memphis, Tennessee is not a booming metropolis, like Los Angeles or Denver.

The real and alleged crimes that took place in these communities were not minor. However, the reactions to the crimes on the parts of the local community, the national news media, legislators, judges, and other lawmakers do not necessarily correlate with the seriousness of the crimes. In terms of actual seriousness, the murders at Columbine High School and in Robin Hood Hills in West Memphis are the worst. But in terms of the spread of moral panic, the crimes with the widest and most far-reaching effects were those associated with Columbine and the McMartin preschool. Why the disparity? What complex of historical and spatial realities can give us insight into these panics?

I propose, like other researchers before me, that moral panics are complex phenomena. It is not my goal here to attempt to tease out the origins of panic and follow the development to a logical conclusion. Rather, I offer one possibility for consideration, that moral panics are intensely spatially-dependent phenomena. I hypothesize that the phenomenon that social scientists call moral panic is actually two separate phenomena. Both are types of moral panic, but they are separate and very different in their representation and in the spatial realities of their human geography. One type of panic occurs on a local level only, and while the events may lead to national coverage, the national consciousness is not affected. I call this form of panic a *localized panic*. The other type, which is more in line with the overall theory proposed by Cohen, is what I have chosen to call a *metapanic*. In this form, the moral panic transcends its local area and enters the national consciousness, giving birth to social movements, political agendas, and policy changes.

It is my belief that the metapanic has certain social consistencies that make it attractive to the news media as well as the public. Specifically, I intend to demonstrate,

at least in the exploratory cases covered here, that the metapanic occurs when the community where the panic takes place is associated with idyllic suburban life. If a threatening situation occurs in communities with a higher percentage of white people, higher socioeconomic status (SES), and higher educational attainment, then the moral panic that develops there is much more likely to appeal to a broader audience and become a metapanic. If a community suffering an inexplicable catastrophe or crime does not fit the idyllic suburban image, then even though a moral panic may occur in the community, it is unlikely that the rhetoric around the panic will become part of the national consciousness.

It is important at this point to define some terms used throughout this book.

Operational Definitions

Community sensitization (also simply **sensitization**)
A key process in a moral panic whereby the public discourse on a series of events develops a mythology and the community becomes sensitized to, or familiar with a standardized set of behaviors or typified appearances of the folk devils (see below) in the panic.

Escalation
The process by which the community members develop their mythology and increase the importance of events and behaviors in a moral panic. Importantly, this period is also marked by community leaders and moral entrepreneurs making connections (diffusion) with outside agencies and groups that might be able to aid the community. These can include law enforcement as well as the media.

Folk Devil
A human being or class of people associated with the evil-doing in a moral panic. The folk devil has no redeeming qualities and is often framed in the most negative possible light.

Localized Panic
A moral panic that does not influence social thought or public identity beyond its local environs.

Metapanic
A moral panic whose influence spreads beyond the local environment, and that subsequently enters the national discourse through the mass media, or through social or legislative policy-making.

Moral Panic
This term was coined by Jock Young (1971) and defined by Stanley Cohen (1972) as "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by bishops, editors, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel, and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself" (Cohen 1972:9)

Opaqueing
The active, although possibly unconscious, process of decontextualizing events from their settings in order to engage in a greater discourse that removes the socially produced place from the rhetoric of events.

Method of Organization

This research will first give a detailed examination of moral panic from a sociological and theoretical perspective. The influences of other theoretical realms are introduced where relevant, and an overall theory of metapanic will be introduced based on the work of other researchers.

The research will then focus on the examination and comparison of moral panics in three communities: Manhattan Beach, California; Littleton, Colorado; and West Memphis, Arkansas. Specifically, I will examine the representation of these events in local and national mass media. In addition, the communities are compared to one another from a socio-demographic perspective. Census data was gathered and submitted to

statistical tests to determine if there is any significant difference between the communities where the panics occurred and their respective counties to account for any variation at the local level. The towns were then compared with each other. The dissertation concludes with a summary of the findings and a proposal for future research.

Scope and Limitations of Study

The three cases discussed in this dissertation have each generated millions of pages of print-media text, court transcripts, television transcripts, and hours upon hours of news footage. Due to differences in archiving, it proved difficult to get case materials on the Robin Hood Hills murders. The Crittenden County criminal court division was willing, but unable, to provide documentation. The decisions themselves were unavailable from the lower court, although the appeals were available on Lexis-Nexus. The original trial transcripts were available only by visiting the Crittenden County Courthouse and gaining permission from the presiding judge to review them. Making this task even less feasible are page counts running well over the hundred-thousand mark[2].

In Littleton, the prospective defendants committed suicide, hence there was no trial. However the investigation created millions of pages of official documentation. Many of these documents are available to libraries, but because they were not designed for public consumption, their tone and representation are very different than documents prepared for a broader audience. The official Jefferson County report on the events at Columbine High School was used for its detailed description of the timeline and events of

[2] Personal communication, Crittenden County Clerk of Court, January 23, 2002.

the Columbine Massacre. The McMartin decisions were generously provided by the librarian of the California Bar Association.

The majority of the analysis performed here is based on the public representation of each of the cases in local and national newspaper articles and television transcripts. Television transcripts were mostly limited to Cable News Network (CNN). The reasons were simple. CNN provides in-depth national coverage and is also a major provider of wire feeds to local news organizations as well as networks. In this regard, CNN acts as a gatekeeper for many local news broadcasts, suggesting a high consistency of story perspectives and representations across regions.

The findings discussed herein offer just a beginning of what is needed in future examinations of moral panic. This study is not intended to demonstrate an irrefutable mathematical correlation. Rather, this study is exploratory illustrating that there is merit in investigating the socio-spatial dimension of moral panic.

Chapter 2
Bringing Together Theories of Moral Panic and Space

Social scientists have been interested in moral panic for several decades. It was not until the term was coined by Jock Young in 1971 (Welch, 2000) that the term began to be used to describe the social phenomena associated with certain types of social disturbances. Originally, social scientists examined the phenomena under the category, "witch-hunts." Anthropologists and sociologists have examined the pattern of stereotyping and mystification around which deviants are categorized in emerging and industrialized societies. The processes are similar regardless of the setting. In 1972, Stanley Cohen contributed to the literature on social problems by introducing a rubric under which certain behaviors connect with social distress. He used the term, moral panic, coined by Jock Young in his work, *The Drugtakers* (1971). Cohen used the term to describe a phenomenon that had emerged among British seaside communities from 1964 through 1967. During those years public attention was focused on "riots" between rival classes of young people who visited the seaside communities. A media frenzy began with the disturbances in Clacton, a small seaside resort, and continued through the holiday seasons for the following three years.

Research on moral panic has contributed to understanding other areas of social inquiry. Some of the most important areas that have been influenced by moral panic research are the investigation of: social problems, collective behavior, and social stress. During a moral panic the behavior of certain individuals or groups of people is focused upon as the cause of problems or insipient danger. This behavior is deemed so reprehensible that the eradication of the perpetrators is often proposed as the only viable solution. The threat is perceived as imminent and personal to the community that feels the threat. Because the danger is so severe, it seems that great measures are necessary to address its cause. Frequently resources in human and financial capital are redirected to address the threat.

The putative threat is often seen as so heinous that it is associated with evil. A potentially dangerous cause need not begin as a moral crisis to be redefined through that frame. The fear and panic in the 1980's that spread with the discovery of the AIDS virus soon left the realm of a medical emergency and became framed instead as a moral epidemic. Homosexuality was established as the moral cause of the problem of AIDS. As such, many moral entrepreneurs seized upon the opportunity to attack homosexuality by addressing it through a problem that was medical in nature.

The issue around which a moral panic develops is almost always portrayed as an immediate threat. The nature of the behavior is often described in terms associated with diseases or war. The threat is "virulent." If it is not stopped now, it will spread out of control. Or the threat is represented as an assault on moral values, a battle, which if not entered into now, will spread unbridled and become insurmountable later.

The feelings that are aroused in a panic can be characterized as "heightened emotion, fear, dread, anxiety, hostility, and a strong feeling of righteousness" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1999:31). The panic itself is centered on the behavior of a certain group of people. This group engages, or is reputed to engage, in a behavior that brings the most ignoble of consequences, not only to the perpetrators, but to the society as a whole. Cohen (1972) called these characters folk devils, wholly unsavory characters who have no positive attributes. They are seen as a threat to the basic moral nature of society as a whole; and are painted as unrighteous deviants who are beyond salvation. The only possible way of dealing with their evil influence is to repudiate them and eradicate them or their influence from the greater society.

The Fathers of the Field

In 1964, Stanley Cohen was a graduate student in England. An expatriate of South Africa, Cohen studied at the University of London. In the spring of that year, a small seaside community in Britain called Clacton was gripped by a wave of vandalism that soon became a news sensation. The community was crowded with bored young people visiting for the Easter holidays. There were several rumors among the young people that a local bartender had refused to serve a group of young men because they were suspicious-looking: their hair was too long, clothes too strange. Arguments led to bar room and street fights. These eventually led to brawls and vandalism.

The young people involved soon divided into groups along class lines. As these groups formed they began to be associated with real violence in Clacton. The windows of a disco were smashed, and several small beach huts were vandalized (Cohen, 1972:29). Not being accustomed to any outbreak of violence, the local police

overreacted, arresting nearly one-hundred young people (Cohen, 1972: 30). To further the tension, a fight broke out between young people and authorities when a young man was targeted by police and provoked into a street fight with a police officer (Cohen, 1972:91). This incident heightened tension and gave credence to public fears about violence in the usually quiet resort town.

The disturbance in Clacton, and later in Brighton, generated world-wide news attention. Stories were run on the violence, and given sensational treatment. The stories were often painted from the perspective of the sleepy town versus an invasion of violent young people. Soon, stories became more detailed and elaborate. Theories were generated about the reasons for the violence. The young people were said to be "invading" the seaside communities from London (Cohen, 1972:35). Official documents from the police and the courts were soon circulated widely in the press. In addition, Clacton residents and business owners were extensively interviewed by members of the press. Their opinions were widely quoted and rarely criticized. There were far fewer interviews with the individuals accused of perpetrating the crimes, than with the "upstanding citizens" of seaside communities.

> The media reflected the real conflict of interests that existed at various levels: for example, between local residents and police on one hand and the Mods and Rockers on the other. In such situations the media adjudicate between competing definitions of the situation, and as these definitions are made in a hierarchical context-agents of social control are more likely to be believed than deviants-it is clear which definition will win out in an ambiguous and shifting situation (Cohen, 1972:46).

Three years after the Clacton disturbances, the press and prominent politicos still invoked Clacton when incidents of "mob violence" erupted.

Stanley Cohen was attracted to these phenomena for a number of reasons. As a radical South African, who had left his homeland for political reasons, Cohen was drawn to a case where he could counter the prevailing assumptions of the time. He found the sensationalism that the case created both intriguing and disturbing (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994: 23). For Cohen, the most important social issues raised in the disturbances had to do with the scale of the overreaction and exaggeration. Cohen characterized the reactions of the media specifically as unrepresentative, and inappropriate in proportion to actual events (Cohen, 1972:31). In his analysis, Cohen laid much of the responsibility for the scale of the public reaction on the media. Media reports seemed to be created out of thin air. Rumors were reported in the press as factual happenings, and the number and intensity of events were exaggerated and distorted. Disorganized, loosely affiliated groups of young people were represented as highly structured, delinquent gangs poised for violent acts. A circular argument ensured their guilt. They were guilty because of their associations with violent gangs, and hence needed to be stopped. A Scandinavian news story even titled their report as "West Side Story on English Coast" (Cohen, 1972:30).

As stories about the Clacton disturbances became more numerous, a caricature of the "delinquents" and the nature of the violence perpetrated began to emerge as a recognizable, structured tale of good versus evil. With the threat seeming so imminent, and its intensity exaggerated, those in power, including the agents of social control and the media, reacted in a prescribed manner to the behaviors they had defined as deviant. Cohen called this process of heightened awareness and reaction "community sensitization" (Cohen, 1972: 77).

Cohen used the term moral panic as a way to systematically describe the reactions of the media, the public, and agents of social control to the disturbances at Clacton and other seaside communities. Cohen wrote that in a moral panic:

> A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved, or resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the subject of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly disappears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or event in the way society conceives itself (Cohen, 1972:9).

In reading the above, the reader can see how it is possible that the studies described by folklorists as rumor-panics and by sociologists as widespread moral panics, can fall under the same definition.

The Actors in a Moral Panic

The Press

In the Clacton, Brighton, and other seaside disturbances, the press were an important social barometer, as well as gatekeepers, in the representation of events. The media portrayal of the youth disturbances from 1964 at Clacton and until 1967 in other British communities was characterized according to Cohen by exaggerated attention, exaggerated events, distortion, and stereotyping (Cohen, 1972:31-8). Newspapers often over-reported events, promoting a heightened state of awareness and assumption that the

events were more prolific. In addition, skirmishes and vandalism were inflated and given media importance out of proportion to their actual significance.

In addition to this sense of over-reporting, the manner of reporting was exaggerated with inflammatory language employed in a sensational manner, exacerbating public concern. Cohen (1972: 30, 42) reported that the media commonly used phrases like:

- Battle
- Riot
- Orgy
- Days of terror
- Screaming mob
- Blood-curdling anxiety
- Smeared with blood and violence

During a moral panic the most characteristic behavior on the part of the press is the creation of a tale of mythological proportions, a stereotypical treatment of events. The tale follows a familiar format. There are good guys, and bad guys. The good guys are on the side of all that is moral and right, while the bad guys have set out to destroy the moral order. The bad guys are typically given a stereotyped appearance, their hair, clothing, or other physical attributes may be codified in a format that is easily identifiable. The same rule applies to certain forms of behavior. In Cohen's study, the behavior of the mods and rockers was painted as dangerous, violent. Both groups were codified as riding motorcycles or scooters, and being prone to violent outbursts.

Cohen (1972) pointed out that this stereotyping on the part of the media was central to the development of a particular technique in news reporting around the events in a moral panic. He called the results of this process "manufactured news" (Cohen, 1972: 44). In it Cohen describes the creation of an inventory of images and storylines,

allowing reporters to simply fill in the blanks, giving the audience what they expect. He called the use of the manufactured stories "spurious attribution."

> The tendency towards spurious attribution on which the putative deviation is built, stems directly from the inventory (of images and stereotypes)…in all cases, the function of the spurious attribution is the same: to support a particular theory or course of action (Cohen, 1972: 54).

The focus of reporting ceases to be investigation during these crises. Instead, the "new" event is laid over the format, and the public determines its accuracy based on how formulaically the story fits the stereotype (Cohen, 1972:55-61).

Exaggeration in reporting allows events to fit more broadly to a prescribed stereotype or inventory. In addition, the treatment of a broad phenomenon is more likely to garner widespread appeals that move away from the real cause of social problems, and instead allow social commentators and moral entrepreneurs to focus on corrective measures (Hall et al., 1978: 330-334). Stigmatizing behavior is brought into sharp relief against the moral society that the behavior is inflicted upon. This process allows the generation of a public discourse, a forum to engage in rhetorical examination of the problem.

The public portrayal of the events in the seaside communities during the mods and rockers disturbances was that of resorts being under siege by highly-organized criminal gangs from London. In fact, most of the young people who participated were from neighboring towns and villages. There were likely no organized gangs at all, just loosely affiliated groups of kids who came to Clacton to see the action, not lay siege to the community. Most newspaper accounts included references to motorcycles and scooters, though most incidents of vandalism were perpetrated by pedestrians. Given the

overwhelming negative and violent tone of news reports, a high number of correlating arrests for violent acts could be expected. The majority of arrests cited were for relatively unimportant crimes like petty theft, threatening behavior, and obstruction (Cohen, 1972:36).

The Public

A moral panic cannot and will not occur in a media-controlled vacuum. There must be some genuine public concern for moral panic to erupt (Cohen 1972, Jenkins, 1992). This is not to say that the moral panic explicitly addresses those fears, but there must be some underlying principle of concern that can be expressed in the moral outrage of the panic. Victor (1993) refers to these as metaphors, and Jenkins (1992) refers to the phenomenon as symbolic projection.

Cohen identified the two underlying symbolic themes in the Mods and Rockers disturbances. These were dominated by resentment of the younger generation by the older generation (Cohen, 1972:178-179). The generation of mature adults who had seen the realities of World War II and were unprepared for a generation who benefited from post-war affluence, but suffered from boredom and malaise. Cohen identified the older generation as being annoyed and frustrated that these young people were so spoiled and unaffected by the costs their parents' generations had endured. It cannot be overstated that these events occurred in the turbulent sixties. Indeed, these frustrations can be seen as having an influence in later social movements. The older generation assumed that the real problem was the fact that the young people of the mid-sixties were spoiled. The means of repairing the problem seemed (to the older generation) self-evident: stricter

punishment (corporeal if necessary), harsher penalties, and more intense, longer prison sentences (Cohen, 1972: 101-102, 127-136).

The struggles in the resort communities were a dense symbol of greater concerns that consumed much of British society at the time. As such, the amorphous feelings of frustration could be given a voice in the disturbances. Feelings of frustration over the apparent disdain the mods and rockers had for their easy lifestyle were filtered through the moral outrage displayed by their parents' generation. Cohen's thesis draws on the perception of the audience, so his treatment does not at all attempt to unravel the interpretation of the mods and rockers themselves.

Law Enforcement

The sector of law enforcement is important in a moral panic for many reasons. Law enforcement includes the police and the courts, and in Cohen's original thesis, is associated with two social processes which he describes as fundamental in a moral panic: diffusion and escalation.

Law enforcement's importance in a moral panic should not be underestimated. They are the threshold between the public and the monolith of "society." This sector represents the government, but is made up of local people who interact daily with those they protect. It is within this bridge between the public and society that diffusion and escalation occur. Diffusion might also be called coalitioning, as that is one aspect of the social process that it describes. In the process of diffusion, ties between law enforcement agencies are strengthened or created. Networks between local and national law enforcement agencies are established or reinforced so that they can more effectively deal with the threat at hand.

One of the side benefits to diffusion is that it commingles responsibility for enforcement against the threat. This increases communication between agencies, officers, responsible bodies, officials, and the courts. These rhetorical measures continue the public discourse, and become the main focus of addressing the putative threat. Coalition building in the process of diffusion allows the public and the agents of social control (law enforcement, politicians, and legislators) to enter and continue the public discourse about the nature of the social problem responsible for the threat. But, this process also has the potential to either increase or diffuse power (a la Foucault), through the exchange of power (Cohen, 1972:86).

Clearly the goal of the agents of social control is to increase their power. However, the process of diffusion by its very nature also lends itself to destabilizing power by broadening the number of parties responsible for controlling the putative threat. To apply a Foucaultian point of view it is possible that power is not a finite substance in limited currency, but rather is the result of exchange, not the subject of it. In this manner, the possibility exists that the power and responsibility of social control increase through the process of diffusion. Simultaneously, responsibility is potentially diluted, even as power and authority are increased, thus making it more difficult to control the threat.

Escalation is the term Cohen used to describe the heightened response of the agents of social control during a moral panic. Cohen's treatment of the events in Clacton described expanded use of police powers. In order to broaden the power and ability of police powers to deal with the putative threat, new methods are employed, often at the cost of civil liberties. These measures are deemed appropriate in relation to the threat. It is in the process of escalation that law enforcement proposes stiffer punishments and

penalties, attitudes become more fixed on punitive measures, and new methods of control are proposed or established. It is in the escalation phase of the panic where the power of the social enforcers is given the most voice. Not only is rhetorical attention given to the threat- but enforcers are given expanded agency to address it. In Clacton, some of these measures included the confiscation of property associated with the perpetrators, such as motorcycles and scooters. In addition, it was not unknown for the police to escort suspicious-looking young people to the train station or out of town all together. Many times police made arrests of young people on their looks alone. At other times it was not at all uncommon for police to provoke young people into an exchange of words or blows in order to arrest them (Cohen, 1972:101-106).

Politicians and Legislators

While law enforcement is the bridge between the public and society, politicians and legislators are on the front line of public opinion. This sector is particularly given to heightened reaction, as it is ostensibly attending to the interests of their constituencies that keep politicians and legislators in power. If the public outcry is loud enough, the political arm of society will often respond with great enthusiasm. There are few forces as powerful as a crisis to raise opinion polls and approval numbers.

Using political power and influence, politicians and legislators will introduce and often quickly pass legislation that addresses the public fear and/or moral outrage felt by the public. Frequently politicians and legislators will align themselves with the "right" side of the panic. By the time political concerns are involved in the panic, the threat is established in the public mind as an epic tale of good versus evil. Positioning themselves on the side of righteousness is often the only option public figures possess. To be a

dissenting or even moderate voice is used derisively by other public servants as evidence that the threat is so very real that it has tainted the hallowed walls of the political establishment. Symbolic alignments by public figures are a defining component of moral panic.

Action Groups

In most social movements there is a stage of development where an action group is created to deal with the social problem. Becker (1963) called these individuals, moral entrepreneurs. In Becker's classification moral entrepreneurs are those individuals who believe that the current mode of thought or action is insufficient to deal with the problem at hand. Often the moral entrepreneur has something to gain from his or her involvement. Gains are usually social and ideological, and sometimes monetary, though this is usually indirectly so. The gains can translate into increased public awareness of his or her expertise, which in turn can lead to speaking engagements, etc.

The development of social movements deserves its own area of sociological inquiry. Very often social movements will develop out of moral panics, though they are not always lasting or influential. More frequently, action groups develop in response to a moral panic. Action groups tend towards a short life-span. When the threat dies out, so does the action group.

In Cohen's (1972) analysis two action groups developed. The first called for a return to corporeal punishment. They sought the use of a birch cane to publicly flog offenders (Cohen, 1972:125). The second action group proposed the reintroduction of hard labor as punishment for offenders (Cohen, 1972:133). Neither of these two groups

continued once the disturbances faded from public attention, nor did they latch onto another cause, or become part of a larger social movement.

Folk Devils

The one group of people that is formed during a moral panic that has no ability to alter the definition of the group is the one in a moral panic which is artificially created from the outside. This body is wholly constructed by the different constituent groups that participate in the moral panic. Most often the group is created by combining recognizable and familiar characteristic. The most obvious indicator of a folk devil is that the individual or group of individuals are stripped of all compassionate characteristics. The folk devil is assigned an entirely negative persona. There are no positive attributes in the public view. Like the process of diffusion and escalation, where the rhetorical development exists in an exaggerated state to be effective, so too, the folk devil is painted in exaggeration. A folk devil is an ineffective character if he or she has any human attributes.

Once the group of folk devils has been identified, it requires very little additional effort to reinforce their negativity. They are labeled as the antagonists in the unfolding morality struggle. From this point forward in the development of the public discourse, simply the invocation of the group's label, (i.e., trench coat mafia, Satanists, mods, rockers) will conjure up the requisite picture of stereotyped negativity needed to perpetuate the myth. The purpose of any moral panic, according to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), is to identify and root out the dangerous elements in society. The dangerous group must be stopped, their effects neutralized. Because the threat is framed

as a saga of good versus evil, the obvious story unfolding is that of the righteous against the immoral.

The Indicators of Moral Panic

The original theory of moral panic as proposed by Stanley Cohen did not include a succinct list of indicators of a moral panic. What Cohen offered was a short, undetailed outline of events in a moral panic, and how they unfold. He then provided a long list of actors, and demonstrated how, in Britain in the mid-to-late sixties, these actors came together, (most notably, the media) in the development of a moral panic.

The work of Cohen (1972) and Phillip Jenkins (1992) were influential to the work of Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda who developed a list of five indicators of moral panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Currently, most social scientists studying moral panic use the indicators as a guide or simple test as to whether or not a moral panic is taking place. In particular they help the researcher establish whether he or she is dealing with a genuine moral panic, as opposed to a nascent social movement, social problem, or other sociological phenomena (All from Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994:33-39).

Concern
There is widespread concern in the group or community over the behavior of a group or category of people. Efforts are made to publicly make known the consequences of such behavior. Consequences pertain not only to those who commit the offending behavior, but also for the members of the social group who do not curb the behavior.

Hostility
In order to be labeled a moral panic, there must be increased hostility toward the group or category engaging in the offensive behavior. Members of that group are collectively designated as the enemy. The group is seen as responsible for the threat at hand.

The Origins of Moral Panic

Researchers have not yet successfully teased out why moral panics occur. They are complex phenomena. A particular event might lead to public concern in one community, and develop into a full-blown panic in another. Though many social scientists have developed timelines about specific panics, there seems to be no current synthesizing theory that might shed light on the origins of a panic, in order to help predict when and where one might occur.

Cohen (1972) offers researchers an important controlling factor in his analysis. Though he studied the public representation of the events at Clacton, Brighton, and other seaside resorts, he noted that public opinion was diverse, even though the media representation was fairly homogeneous (Cohen, 1972:66). Thus, in fairness, it must be stated that the media representation and public opinion are not always the same, even when a moral panic develops. The media representation will influence public opinion. But researchers should be fair and not assume that the public are simply dupes to moral entrepreneurs and the media.

The three theories of moral panic

It is very hard to criticize the work of the fathers of the field. But perhaps it is only in semantics that any criticism is warranted. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) in their tome on moral panics contributed three theories of moral panic. The authors clearly state that the theories are not exclusive territories of distinction. The theories are simply labeled: the grassroots, the elite-engineered, and the interest group, theories. In reality, none of these are sufficiently systematic to be considered even a loosely-defined theory. They vaguely address the original impetus for the creation of a moral panic. The main

weakness of the "theories" as they are developed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) is that they seem to be encoded with broader theoretical constructs which the authors are not explicit in addressing. For example, all of the theories seem to fall along a Marxist continuum. The authors categorized the work of other researchers based on two separations of arenas of origin. These are the "morality versus interests" perspective and the "the elitism versus grassroots dimension" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994:124). The authors explicitly state that the Western social sciences have been heavily influenced by Marxism (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994:125-126). But they do not offer the reader other possible alternative approaches to their theory. Indeed, under closer scrutiny, it is relatively easy to punch holes in the three theories.

The grassroots model points to the general public as the original force behind a moral panic. In this model, the general threat is widely perceived and genuinely felt. In this form of moral panic, posit Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), public expressions of fear, through the agents of the media, law enforcement, and politics, are mirroring the deeply felt and widespread fears of their audiences or constituencies. In this model, the authors propose that the elite class of people associated with the agents of social control would be unable to start a moral panic over a nonexistent or unperceived threat. The major problem with this approach is that it assumes agency belongs entirely in the hands of the public. Further, it also assumes that moral entrepreneurs have no tangible interest in creating or exacerbating a threat.

The elite-engineered theory promotes the idea that elites manufacture panic over some nonexistent or minor threat in order to distract the public from real problems in society. Such a view is obviously tied to the belief that elites have enormous power in

any given community or society at large. This theory assumes that elites control the media, the government, law enforcement, and the resources upon which action groups and social movements depend. While there is some merit to the perspective one can gain by examining the potential for control, especially the control of images and representation by the media, it is unlikely that any panic could be maintained if there is no constituency to support it.

In short, to accept either of the above theories would be contrary to some of the foundations of Cohen's original thesis. He strongly urges the researcher to assume that there is a greater symbolic meaning underlying the initiation and spread of panic (Cohen, 1972). It is this dense, embedded meaning that is important. If we assume that Cohen is correct, then the above theories become unhinged on the issue of symbolic perception. If the elites engineer the projected fear, then there is no real reason for panic to ensue. Indeed, the process would be far too complicated. First the elites would have to create an issue around which the ignorant masses could gather their fears. They then would have to stoke that fear and help to develop the amorphous sentiment around which the panic finds its expression in some external event.

The grassroots theory entails almost the inverse problem. The assumption is that the masses have exclusive agency and that there is enough of a collective identity within the group (and no input from the greater social network of elite agencies and social enforcers) to develop a fully developed panic over an oblique issue that finds its expression in some related event or fear.

The interest–group theory is almost a simplified restatement of Cohen's original thesis (1972). This theory supposes that there is some extant social issue around which

there is underlying stress or unrest. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) this last is the most common of the three theories of moral panic. However, it is probable that the interest-group theory is the most likely because it adheres closely to Cohen's theory. It also could be that researchers have used Cohen's model, and their research has reflected this influence.

The interest-group theory is most often associated with ideological gains. Interest-group approaches to moral panic simultaneously take on some of the characteristics of the grassroots and elite theories. Most-importantly, it is this theory that supports the theoretical developments associated with the social construction approach. There must be public discourse on the issue if there is to be social construction, otherwise the construction would be invention on the part of one individual or constituency.

Researchers like Michael Welch (1999) and Philip Jenkins (1992) have included both the original Cohen thesis as well as the three theories of moral panic offered by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). Thus far, all of the previous researchers who have included the above authors' works in their research, have concluded that the three theories of moral panic offered by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), are useful for examining individual panics, but that the categories themselves do not adequately describe any real aspect of the panic, nor do they offer any novel techniques or theories for understanding the origins of a moral panic. Rather, the three theories give the researcher a means of thinking about the phenomenon under investigation. This encourages researchers to look beyond the social milieu during the panic, in favor of teasing out the micro-political and social relationships that might have an influence on the direction of the panic itself.

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Not only are the three theories of moral panic proffered by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) insufficient to the task of analyzing moral panic from a theoretical perspective, they are misleading. They do not offer researchers theoretical models they can apply to actual cases. There is no area of society in our current global condition that is not touched by technology or information in some way. In that manner there is no place where a grassroots model of moral panic could truly develop. The gatekeepers of the media do not answer to the public, really. Their story budgets are determined by other elites and financial concerns. As such, the constituency would have little power over the media in promoting its cause. Likewise, the development of a panic would have little real possibility in a time when news of events are transmitted almost solely through the mass media. A collective identity does not currently exist in the absence of the media. As such, it is irresponsible to address the grassroots model without further or deeper development of the changing importance of the mass media in contemporary society.

Social Construction and Specialized Moral Panic

After the introduction of Stanley Cohen's thesis on the mods and the rockers, other researchers used his definition and his work as a benchmark. These researchers have done considerable study on specific panics, but few have contributed to the overall body of theory on moral panic. The exceptions are Goode and Ben-Yehuda, (1994) and Philip Jenkins, with his research on the social construction of missing children (Jenkins, 1992), as well as on his examinations on serial homicide and the murder panic of the 1980's (Jenkins, 1993). Jenkins also recently published a new book on the changing construction of child molesters (Jenkins, 1999).

The work of Jenkins and Goode and Ben-Yehuda, were heavily influenced by the work of Spector and Kitsuse in their 1977 work, *Constructing Social Problems*. Though social constructionism as a theoretical construct influenced social research much earlier with the work of Berger and Luckman (1966), its importance in moral panic research was not truly felt until the work by Spector and Kitsuse (1977). The major innovation in their work was the central role of claimsmakers in the social construction of a social problem (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977). Since 1977, the study of moral panic has been universally undertaken from a social constructionist perspective. This approach to social problems provides the scholar studying moral panic with the ability to examine the moral panic with a number of theoretical tools. The two most important are the necessary rejection of a structural-functionalist paradigm in examining social problems; and the idea of "claimsmaking" being at the core of both social construction and moral panic. For the social constructionist, a social problem is not simply an object of study, but rather the product of complex social discourse. There are limitations in the way social

constructionists approach moral panic, but mostly these are dependent on the theoretical standpoint of the researcher.

Claimsmaking at the Core

Most treatments of moral panic address claimsmaking as the central activity under investigation. Under the social constructionist rubric, the investigator is encouraged to uncover, often through rhetorical analysis, the sublimated meaning in the symbols and language of claimsmakers. It is the claimsmakers' role that separates the social constructionist approach from that of Berger and Luckman (1966). This means of examining moral panic is uncontested among investigators of this phenomenon. What is missing however, is a more detailed examination of the approach so as to be able to apply it to a different view of moral panic, one that includes space as a dimension of signification, and not only the rudimentary setting of a story.

Also absent from the social constructionist perspective is a more lengthy examination and synthesis of the extant literature in order to proffer a central theory of moral panic to update that of Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). So far this has not been done. Rather, social scientists have recorded outbreaks of moral panics, using Cohen's definition (1972:9) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda's indicators (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994:33-41) and the three theories of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994:124-143). All of the current research on moral panic also includes the work of Spector and Kitsuse (1977) and their approach to social problems through social constructionism. This has enabled researchers to justify the rhetorical frames implied by the claimsmakers, and tender a detailed, precise view of the claimsmaking process.

To understand how claimsmaking is used in the study of moral panic, researchers must understand the processes claimsmakers use. Rhetorical devices must be teased out, including how the claimsmakers use the problem, its roots, and the remedies to explain the dangers of the problem. As such constructionist research focuses on:

1. The interests particular groups have in promoting a problem.
2. The resources available to claimsmakers and moral entrepreneurs.
3. The ownership claimsmakers or groups eventually secure over the issue, or the degree to which their analysis is accepted as authoritative (Best 1990:11-13).

Studies of moral panic usually are focused on the rhetorical devices employed in promoting a given view of an event, crime, or behavior. In addition, students of moral panic also study the stages of development in framing techniques and the presentation of the problem(s). Events must be identified and given an appropriate context (Jenkins, 1994). The message must be presented in a *format* familiar to the audience. Cohen associates this with the creation of an inventory by the media (Cohen 1972:27). In most circumstances the media are the vehicle for the dissemination of images, contexts, and messages.

> If the world is not to be represented as a jumble of random and chaotic events, then they must be identified (i.e., named, defined, related to other events known to the audience) and assigned to a social context (i.e. placed within a frame of meanings familiar to the audience). This process-identification and contextualization- is one of the most important through which events are "made to mean" by the media (Hall, et al. 1978:54).

In order to understand how social constructionists arrive at their analyses there are several terms which must first be explained. The process of framing is achieved by applying certain rhetorical devices to the events that place them within a structure so they can be understood in a context. Best (1990) uses the term "domain statement" to further

describe this phenomenon. By using a domain statement, the individual or group responsible for the claim defines the boundaries of the social problem. The domain area becomes a clearinghouse for social ills, providing a convenient area of thirdspace (Soja, 1996); a socially constructed area, (which can include geographical boundaries), within which are laid the complex social definitions in both real and symbolic form.

Typification refers to the process by which problems are placed under a greater social rubric for addressing the potential of the problem to cause harm. Some problems are typified as moral problems, while others are addressed as medical or mental health problems. How a problem is typified is often the most influential aspect of a social problem in the creation of a moral panic. For instance, by *typifying* the spread of AIDS in the 1980's as a morality problem, moral entrepreneurs were able to divest themselves from the threat to the general population and focus on it as a moral issue, clearly establishing it outside of the medical realm.

Amplification is the term used to place a social problem in the framework of an existing problem (Cohen, 1972:82). Hall et al. (1978) refer to this process by another term, *convergence*. In this stage of construction, other frames are linked (by moral entrepreneurs) to the phenomenon in order to clarify the appropriate social meaning for the intended audience. To use the earlier example of AIDS, it is clear that many moral entrepreneurs used the issue of homosexuality as a means of amplifying the problem posed by the disease. By clearly linking it in the public mind to homosexual promiscuity and licentiousness, anti-gay activists and opponents to funding for AIDS research were able to create for the public a heightened awareness of the problem and a causal/moral

compass for understanding the problem within the context that served a conservative agenda.

Escalation is also important for an understanding of the constructionist study of social problems, especially in the context of moral panic (Cohen, 1972:86). As awareness of the social agenda becomes more developed, escalation is often a result. Hall et al. (1978) describe this part of the process as a "signification spiral" a "self-amplifying sequence within the area of signification." What this describes is the end result of the above actions, whereby the public continually perceives the event or behavior as an ever-increasing threat to the public good. In the case of AIDS or homosexuality in general, this is painted as a threat to innocent children, delicate wives of straying husbands, or another group in need of social protection.

Mapping refers to the process of using the power of one threatening influence as a contextualization tool. *Mapping* places the putative threat within the *domain* of an already established threat or menace. By framing pedophilia with homosexuality, moral entrepreneurs easily place homosexual behavior in the realm of deviance. Likewise, the same technique is often used for other forms of "deviant" sexual behavior. In 1992, the conservative religious leader, Pat Robertson, mapped feminism together with witchcraft and child murder in a political letter to discourage the passage of a state equal rights amendment in Iowa.

> "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism

> and become lesbians" (attributed to Pat Robertson, quoted in *The Houston Chronicle* September 2, 1992, by Jane Ely, Editorials)[1].

He clearly intended to associate the goals of feminism with the "dangers" of witchcraft, and the ultimate evil, the murder of children. By mapping all three of these together, his intended audience was to understand unequivocally that witchcraft was evil and equivalent to child murder, and that feminism was as evil as witchcraft. By the commutative property in logic, it is easy to deduce: feminism=witchcraft, witchcraft=child murder, child murder=evil, therefore feminism=evil.

Social constructionists studying moral panic have utilized the social constructionist paradigm almost exclusively. As with any form of analysis, controversy has developed regarding the appropriateness of the techniques. There are weaknesses of a purely constructionist approach. Most of these deal with issues pertaining to a position called "ontological gerrymandering" (Pollner, 1978:289) in the discourse on social theory. The position is that the purely constructionist approach reduces the events or phenomena under investigation to events with no context. In the purely constructionist view, there is no such thing as a "real" social object or social event. The language is reifying and cumbersome to the "true nature" of a disputed reality. The critical response to this is that there must be an agreed reality, one where the participants agree that some social acts, problems, or phenomena are not simply fabrications of elaborate social processes which can be deconstructed into oblivion. Rather, some scholars, including Best (1990) and Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) claim that social scientists should endeavor

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[1] See also Palast and Laurance; *The Observer, Guardian* Newspapers, June 6, 1999, and Goldberg and Riley; *Newsday*, November 3, 1994.

instead to reveal the social processes by which a "condition-category[2]" is created and recreated into a process whereby the claimsmakers and their audience engage in a collaborative genesis, creating the world (and its social conditions) together.

Instead, what most social constructionists (at least those studying moral panic) agree upon is the use of a term called "contextual constructionism" (Best, 1990, 1994; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Welch 2000; Jenkins 1993, 2000). This term refers mostly to the study of the rhetoric of the putative threat (or condition-category) in the context of the claimsmakers. It is similar to grounded theory, in that it permits the researcher to allow the events to unfold and be told in their context by those living them. It removes an assumption of ontological superiority and replaces it with contextual acceptance.

Most constructionists are not comfortable with Ibarra and Kitsuse's replacement of the term "putative conditions" with their preferred "condition-category" (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993). The newer term's intended meaning is to reinforce the reflexive nature of any topic around which a social problem, or moral panic may develop; it is instead a cumbersome term that has not been adopted in the literature. The term putative condition has remained, despite some criticism that the term itself has become a reified concept. A reading of the original work of Spector and Kitsuse, (1978) reveals that the meaning is not being used by most social scientists studying moral panic as a reified concept at all. Instead, there seems, at least in the development of moral panic theory, that the original

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[2] This term is offered by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) as an alternative to the term "putative conditions" which they believe has become a reified concept.

meaning of the term, putative conditions, has been held in check. It refers to the rhetorical processes in which a group engages to produce and reproduce a social problem.

Studying Moral Panic

The study of moral panic developed considerably after the 1980's. The conservative social and political influence of that period made the examination of claimsmaking relatively easy. As such researchers have been able to examine several instances of moral panic that took place in the 1980's and 1990's. And while there have been numerous analyses of specific panics, there still have been few significant theoretical contributions to the theory of moral panic.

The most prolific students of moral panic have been Philip Jenkins and Jeffrey Victor. Jenkins has examined moral panic in relation to child molesters (1999), serial murder (1993), and the problem of missing children (1992). Like most social scientists he approaches moral panic using analytical history and rhetorical analysis as his primary means of investigation. In most of Jenkins' work, his case studies are built on histories that are extremely detailed. Jenkins' particular strength lies in the great pain he goes through to elucidate rhetorical understanding of the changing views of particular folk devils over time.

Jenkins' studies show how social problems are constructed through social discourse between claimsmakers and the public. He also demonstrates how public images are created through competing discourse. Claimsmakers are not alone in the development of social agendas. Any disputed condition or putative threat often fuels counter-claims by opposing social activists or moral entrepreneurs. It is in this mediated territory where the study of the phenomenon gains its ontological power.

Michael Welch builds his case on flag burning (1999) from the contextual constructionist standpoint. His work examines the rhetoric on flag burning that came to national attention in the 1980's. Welch deftly navigates the terrain of flag burning with civic religion and uses this as his dominant frame in analysis. His work is intriguing, but apart from his methods and standpoint, has little import in the discussion here except that his work also demonstrates a metapanic as it has a national focus. He demonstrates the creation of a social agenda based on religious fervor over a nationalistic symbol, the American Flag. He traces controversies over the flag and links the most recent controversy to the conservative social agenda that emerged (not coincidentally) with the 1980's and early 1990's. Like other moral panics of that period, the conservative political climate was a major influence on the rhetoric of flag burning. The Cable News Network (CNN) coverage of the Gulf War fueled the controversy. The protectors of Old Glory are depicted in that period as defenders of freedom, while those who believe flag burning is a valid form of protest are established in the conservative rhetoric as seditionists. Welch's topic of study is particularly given to a national focus because of the obvious national symbolism of the flag. In his discussion of moral panic theory, Welch (1999) strongly urges the reader that the three theories of moral panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994:124-143) are not independent categories of classification. Rather, they should be used as eclectic tools for understanding the venues in which moral panic is produced and reproduced.

Jeffrey Victor has most often studied a sub-phenomenon of moral panic called satanic panic. This form of panic has waned since its most influential period, the 1980's. Remnants of it persist in contemporary images and themes. Victor's examination of

satanic panic lacks some fundamental features of moral panic as proposed by Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). The most important of these is the amount of import that Victor places in the mass news media. Victor and other sociologists (like Best) who approach moral panic from the folklorist perspective downplay or ignore the effect that the news media has on the *construction* of localized panics. Instead, they point to the overall influence of perpetrators in films and television wherein, the archetypes can be found.

There is a fundamental difference here. The folklorist perspective shows that archetypal images found in the mass media are used in the rumor-development, and mythological processes of localized panics. However, in these studies, there is little to no *media-construction* on the level that Cohen (1972) described. Rather events follow the process of rumor circulation (Victor 1993, 1998; Shibutani, 1996; Best, 1990).

In the processes that Cohen (1972) describes, the media are the primary motivating force in the formation and continuation of a moral panic. This is not the same process that takes place in the development of the rumor-panics described by folklorists. The social construction process is different. The rumor-panic process has frequently turned up in cases that involve fears of Satanism. Because of this, it might appear to be a unique form of panic. However, it is more likely that there is a geographical component to the panic which has been systematically overlooked in the theory development on moral panic that I will address later.

There is another theory offered by Victor (1998) which deserves attention. Victor (1998) proposes that all forms of collective behavior are actually degrees on a continuum of moral panic. I disagree. Clearly there are demarcations of degree that do not reflect

the model of moral panic as it was originally proposed or is currently accepted. Victor (1998) claims that all collective behavior demonstrates aspects of the indicators of a moral panic. He even leaps to the assumption that all collective behavior is actually moral panic. On its face this argument is not supportable. Moral panic is an established form of collective behavior, but the two are not equal. Just as no one would make the mistake of saying that all cats are mammals therefore all mammals are cats; as researchers, we should not fall into an ontological hole that assumes all incidences of collective behavior are actually reflections of varying stages of moral panic. Instead of generalizing to a more sweeping theory of moral panic and collective behavior, it is my opinion that the dialogue on social problems, collective behavior, and moral panic should be expanded. This expansion should be rooted in a reexamination and redefinition of the theory on moral panic. The theory is in desperate need of development and expansion. Many aspects of it are dated and require cogent research to further the efforts of future investigation.

These renowned scholars do not counter the prevailing constructionist point of view, and indeed, neither do I. However, there is a level of abstraction which deserves theoretical attention. Jenkins (1992, 1994, 1998) and Welch (1999) have studied moral panics where social problems have been constructed and addressed on a national scale. The social problems, putative threats, and their respective rhetorical, legislative, and social solutions attract federal administrative and judicial attention. This is accomplished by media attention, and the rhetorical responses of the actors in a moral panic: moral entrepreneurs, claimsmakers, legislators, politicians, the public, agents of social control, and the public.

As Cohen (1972) demonstrated, the media are the centralizing force in a moral panic. When the media attention, the official responses, and the public discourse converge on a social problem leading to a moral panic, events and concern unfold on a national scale. It is my opinion that this level of abstraction is a separate entity from the localized panics described by Victor (1989, 1993, 1998), and Best (1990). It is my view, and one that I will explore here both qualitatively and quantitatively, that the reason these national panics erupt is based in the human geography of the areas where the initial panic events take place. Specifically, a localized panic cannot be disembedded from its place. The description and representation of the place are enmeshed in the unfolding story. Metapanics are national phenomena. Part of the purpose of the moral panic at this level of abstraction (national) is to remove it from the place, to decontextualize the events from the location. By entering the national discourse, the local is avoided, allowing the place to be mystified. The place becomes a purely social space, one imbued with collective, mythological meaning, as opposed to direct experiential meaning.

The study of moral panic has been fairly devoid of localized panics. Instead, the theory, starting with Cohen (1972) illustrates the importance of a local panic in the greater social movement that develops over the perception of the threat of a constructed social problem. This then spreads, especially as other incidents of inappropriate or unacceptable behavior erupt. A panic that occurs in one place only, or in the case of a rumor panic, one place at a time, and never develops into a national phenomenon, is rarely studied. Even when it is studied, (Victor, 1989, 1993; Best, 1990) it does not fit the theories of moral panic as they are widely accepted under Cohen's (1972) thesis.

This led me to ask the obvious question. How are these different? Why do some panics enter the national awareness, and others remain fixed in a local environment? I propose that there are spatial differences, both in the real demographics of a place, as well as in the social and representational space [also called "thirdspace" by Soja (1996)]. Some of the indicators I decided to examine reflect both geographical and social locations: place, class, income, and distance from urban center. By examining these I propose that there are actually two types of moral panic. One of these I call a localized panic. This type of moral panic occurs under certain geographical conditions which I will explore later. But the panic can generally be characterized by intense rumor creation, and a limited geographical influence. The second type of panic I call a metapanic. The metapanic occurs when events transcend the local environment and raise interest on a broader playing field involving the expanding interests of the media, government, legislators, and public. I will argue later that there are likely special geographical indicators which may be used in future research to further develop this theoretical concept. However, before I can delve into my findings I should first present a brief discussion of spatial theory and how it can be applied to moral panic theory.

Theories of Space

In traditional social science, space is often ignored, relegated to the disciplines of urban studies and geography. But space is a much more complex concept. In other social science disciplines space is treated, not as a social product with embedded meaning, but simply as setting.

With its emphasis on the city, urban studies as a discipline is a natural fit for examining space as a complex social product. Often, urban analyses focus on the

experience and exchange of power, especially in the political arena. The assertion of power requires a physical domain through which to wield it. But power is a difficult commodity to study. Structure and agency are the channels through which power relations are usually analyzed. But power can be examined another way, not as a commodity that is exchanged, but rather as a technique, a process, a verb.

Michel Foucault presents power not as a monolithic currency (Foucault, 1980:84-86) that is horded or issued by elites. Rather Foucault suggests that power is exchanged by people of every stratum, even those who are unaware of their participation. In this reading, power is commodified by people, and the rate of exchange is determined based on the signification of knowledge and the exchange of information (Foucault, 1980).

Although the link between space and power was not made consciously by Foucault until late in his career, space is intrinsic to many of his analyses on power. He identifies power as a technique through the spatial archetype of the panopticon. Space is the context for the ever-vigilant, microscopic self-examination of Bentham's prison in Foucault's analysis. The panopticon is offered as an example of the self-surveilling mechanism/technique that modernism has imposed on the Western individual. In this example, Bentham's panopticon is both metaphor and technique for self-examination. By examining the self as a social product, the researcher is permitted to examine the space the self inhabits, creates and is created by. Space itself becomes contextual. The space of self-identity and social action emerge from the background and are exposed as the field, or weft of action, the anchor of interaction.

In applying this view of space as context, spatiality becomes a more important dimension in addressing questions of domination, deviance, media influence, and

representation. The panopticon is not understandable out of context. It is defined by the space the prisoner occupies, the architecture of the prison, and the gaze imposed by this complex structure of architecture and confined space. What Foucault asserts in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), is that the complex itself is not only created space that imposes meaning, but also a reflection of meaning, a social product that situates philosophy in geography and architecture.

By applying this view and merging it with the work of the social constructionists and theorists like Foucault, Soja, and Lefebvre, space (the concept) takes on the layered meaning of a complex social product. As a concept of analysis, space is so complex a phenomenon that uncovering its many possible readings can be daunting. The layers of meaning must be uncovered in order to understand space as a truly multidimensional social creation.

> To approach space as a social product, though, prompts fresh consideration of the instrumentality of space as a register not only of built forms but also of embedded ideologies. This entails a demystifying of space as natural and transparent so that it is understood as a social entity with particular, localized meanings (Balshaw and Kennedy, 2000:2).

As such, I propose that space should be treated as a third dimension in the social calculus. As the introduction of the Z-plane changes the perspective of an algebra problem from a simple line to a complex geometrical shape, so too, does the addition of this thirdspace[3] plane, a dimension that creates depth of field, giving perspective to the phenomenon at hand, situating it.

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[3] For another definition of thirdspace see Soja's 1996 work of the same title.

The study of space is rich, and virtually untapped in its potential. Human beings have a supernatural ability to change the landscape we inhabit. Because of the monolithic way capital changes the landscape, the space we inhabit is perceived as a permanent and unchanging. History complicates this reality, marking time with the structural, created landscape. In this view historicism wins over spatiality. Space is used by history as a tool, especially in rendering a vision for demonstrating historical periods, changes, or outcomes. A "snapshot" wherein the writer provide a description of an era, period, or event, must first be given a setting, a space that has relevant meaning to the events of history or story.

All of the authors who have produced work on moral panic have done so in a historical context. Events are recorded. The rhetorical devices of the media, politicians, courts, participants, and scholars are studied. Nowhere has there been any development of the spatial dimension of the events associated with a moral panic. Lefebvre (1999) and Soja (1989) point out that spatiality is an important (though often ignored) partner in examining historical events. Space in most instances of social inquiry (with the obvious exceptions of geography and urban studies) is ignored; treated as setting like a play in a black box theater, where the backdrop is intentionally absent so as not to distract the audience.

For Foucault, space has ceased to be "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile." (Foucault, 1980:70 & 77). Rather space is a highly contested field for the production, reproduction, and interpretation of meaning. Soja (1989) has also taken up this charge. For him, "space is 'filled with politics and ideologies' both inscribing and concealing the contradictions of global capitalism" (Soja, 1989:6 quoted in Balshaw and

Kennedy, 2000:02). As such, space is accorded the role of invisible colossus, so ubiquitous that it ceases to be of consequence, unworthy of examination except in quantitative use. Social meaning traditionally has been relegated to architecture and planning.

Race, gender, and class have historically been in the social foreground for the examination of social problems. Space is simply the place where the interactions take place. In this context social phenomena do not produce space. As such, space becomes oblique. It becomes the social window through which we see events. Instead, Lefebvre, Soja, and Balshaw and Kennedy suggest that the window is painted by the events, or the actors of the events. It is not a clear pane through which we observe social facts in action, rather it is a stained glass production of events:

> The relationship between material and imaginary spaces is one that is rendered opaque as well as transparent by the force of representation. We need to understand not only the will to transparency in representations of urban space but also its necessary correlate, the production of opacity-this correlation is ever active in the illusory power of representation to render space 'legible'" (Balshaw and Kennedy, 2000:3).

Transparency is the term applied to the theoretical implications of space when it is ignored as a social product. Specifically both "transparency" and "opacity" refer to the representational space, which is the focus of space in this research. Like a dirty window, it can be used to conceal some social realities, just as it may highlight others. Any space is imbued with dense cultural meaning. Space is an extremely complex context, and as such cannot be reduced to any easy view. Soja puts it succinctly in *Postmodern Geographies:*

> ...space more than time...hides things from us, the demystification of spatiality and its veiled instrumentality of power is the key to making practical, political, and theoretical sense of the contemporary era (Soja, 1989:60).

Thus, like the contextual constructionist, the researcher can tease out meanings through examination, revealing dimensions of space that may have relevance and bearing to other investigators.

Space and Representation

There is always choice in the representation of images and places. Sometimes the representation is decided by individuals to intentionally highlight a particular view, as in advertising. In other instances, a given representation is the indirect product of a social agenda. In either case, space is a discursive production. For Henri Lefebvre, contemporary space is a product of modern and late-modern capitalism (Lefebvre 1999). For Lefebvre, social space is complex, dense, and holds multiple meanings. It is important to note however, that in Lefebvre's position, the multiple meanings of space are conflictive, and also potentially oblique, intentionally mystifying through concealment. Thus, space conceals through representation. For example, the white, middle class order of suburbia intentionally conceals the far-reaching effects of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1999). The poor are concealed in the city's center. Their plight is clearly out of the view of the middle class who dwell in relative safety. But the middle class is also living in illusion; that they are somehow not entrenched in the same power struggle as their poor counter-parts in the city center. According to Soja's interpretation of Lefebvre:

> The very survival of capitalism, Lefebvre argued, was built upon the creation of an increasingly embracing, instrumental, and socially

> mystifying spatiality, hidden from critical view under thick veils of illusion and ideology. What distinguished capitalism's gratuitous spatial veil from the spatialities of other modes of production was its pevuliear production and reproduction of geographically uneven development via simultaneous tendencies toward homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchization- an argument that resembled in may ways Foucault's discourse on heteroptopias and the instrumental association of space, knowledge, and power (Soja, 1989: 50).

Thus the production of space is multi-dimensional and tangible. Social space is also highly symbolic. Social space reflects the ideologies and political influences of the period. In addition, space is imaginary, it reflects the ethereal qualities of mythological space. The mythology is created in the social realms from a variety of influences, these include literary treatments, official documents like planning guides, but also television, news, and film representations.

Lastly, it is important to note the combination of both representational space and the intentional representation of opacity or transparency. There is a circular continuum implied here, at the ends of which are the total invisible space and the ultimately consciously created space. The extremes are both illusions. The invisible space conceals by ignoring space as a social product, while the consciously created space conceals through mystification, obfuscating what is real by producing an "image" of reality.

Chapter 3
Building a Multiple Case Study on Representational and Demographic Data

In order to demonstrate that there is a spatial component in the social construction of moral panic, I chose a multiple case study approach in the research. The first task is thus to state the theoretical position (Yin 1994, Ragin 1987). Next the three cases must be built based on data from multiple sources. Only then, can the communities and their respective panics be discussed (Yin 1994, Ragin 1987). This case study is exploratory, in the hope that this research will promote the gathering and analysis of spatial, demographic, and representational data in cases of moral panic.

What stood out were the apparent similarities in the three communities I examine. Each was within suburban distance to a major urban center. Littleton and Manhattan Beach are both affluent suburbs. West Memphis is not. All of these communities have been represented as rural or rustic in media portrayals. In truth, some are more rural than others. However, none are strictly rural according to the definitions for rural areas set forth by the United States Census Bureau (U.S. Census Definitions, 1990). The theory I propose is based on examining the work of other researchers in the field of moral panic (Jenkins 1992, 1994, 2000; Ellis 1989; Victor 1989, 1993) and noting the lack of

demographic indicators and no examination of the representation of space in the communities where the panics occurred.

I read every study of moral panic that I could find, from the historical Renaissance Witch Craze and Salem Witch Trials centuries before, to the flag burning, and murder panics of the 1980's and 1990's. In every case the same theme seemed to emerge: most places where the panics occurred seemed to be very close to urban centers. They also seemed to fit (in their representation at least) the definition of what most people would loosely call a suburb. Moral panic theory proports that a moral panic begins with no real indicators, and develops in a given area for reasons researchers have not yet discerned.

I first show how each of the communities presented here conform to the theory on moral panic as originated by Cohen (1972) and developed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). I then propose that these panics are different from one another in fundamental ways. I present an analytical history of the cases and examine the representation of each panic. I compare the demographics of each community based on the 1990 census. I demonstrate that there are similarities between the communities where metapanics occurred as opposed to localized panic. Finally, I propose some theoretical contributions to the theory on moral panic as a whole.

It is my intent in this research to show that there are similar demographic characteristics between communities and that these play into the social construction of the panic, contributing to whether or not a metapanic or localized panic will occur, or whether a localized panic will explode into a metapanic. This research will explore the possibility that a metapanic will be more likely to occur in a community where there is

social stress, but where demographics and media representations of place are classically suburban. I also propose that a localized panic will follow the same form as a moral panic, but will never blow up into a national concern, because action groups will not develop outside of the local community. It is my opinion that the community where a *localized panic* occurs is ***not*** representative of an idealized suburbia, but that communities that spawn metapanics always are.

The Panic Towns

Census Data

I gathered census data on each community. I compiled the census data for each on the block group level. The units of analysis are the towns where the moral panics occurred, and their representations in the media. For the demographic analysis there were several hundred possible indicators, but I settled on the following because they lent themselves to customary sociological concerns of race and class. I chose ten from the census. These were:

- Incomplete High School Education
- Terminal High School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate Degree
- Unemployment
- Media Household Income
- Families in Poverty
- White population
- Black population
- Other population

These indicators were chosen for their ability to test for consistency (Singleton and Straits 1999:125), and because they are commonly used by other researchers to

determine socio-economic status, educational attainment, and race in the community. The data were first compiled based on raw number counts. Then the data were run again on percentages in the community. The data were gathered on the county level in addition to the block groups in order to compare each community with its environs. This test was performed to make sure that the suburban communities were not so substantially different from their environs that difference might simply be explained at the county level. Tests were run to compare each community with its respective county. Then Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were run comparing the communities with each other.

The Representational Data

Since social construction and representation of space are the most important areas of analysis, I examined both local and national media coverage of events. Materials reviewed included television stories, transcripts, newspaper articles and reports in mainstream magazines. Where available I also examined official written data such as court transcripts, and decisions, as well as investigative reports from official agencies. I used standard methods of content analysis in examining the data for the rhetorical analyses.

I did not conduct many interviews for this study. I had limited opportunities to speak with some individuals in West Memphis, Arkansas, as well as in Littleton, Colorado (via telephone). However, I was not able to gather enough systematic data via interviews for such data to be considered authoritative and reliable. Moreover it would be unlikely that either field interviews or surveys would have been equally reliable in all cases. Each occurred in a different historical period. The McMartin case began in 1984, and ended in 1993. The West Memphis murders began in 1993; and the Columbine

shootings took place in 1999. It is likely that eyewitness reports would have been more reliable for Columbine than for the others. In the McMartin case use of interviews is further complicated by the fact that there was a near-complete reversal in public opinion after the last trial. Fortunately, although first hand accounts would have added to the richness of the cases, they are not essential to a basic understanding of the representation of events.

That being stated, I must also add that it is important to not paint a picture of media representation as the only portrait of events that the public creates for themselves either as groups or as individuals. The media portrayal is one representation, and as Cohen (1972) has shown, people are not dupes who buy the media construction of events in whole cloth. Rather both Cohen (1972) and Stuart Hall (Hall et al., 1978) have demonstrated, that individuals and groups of people form their own opinions based partially on what they see in the mass media. The rest of their constructions derive from their participation in other groups and from their own personal histories. This more complex area will not be examined in this dissertation. Rather, only mass media and, where possible, official representations will be used. As a result, I do not assume that mine is the only possible reading of these events.

Triangulation

In social research triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods, in order to demonstrate a relationship. In this research I was pleased to find that the triangulation of the media's representation of events and for example, the analysis of income data, produced similar findings. The strength of triangulating is that different sources of data are not subject to the same theoretical weaknesses, specifically the likelihood of the same

errors and biases (Singleton and Strait, 1999:394). In this research, triangulation primarily involved media and official data as well as the census data. I attempted to collect other data, for example video clips focusing on the Columbine Massacre. Cable News Network (CNN) had an extensive online video archive from this period, and many of the video images were supported by transcripts of the same or similar reports. But the video data could not realistically be included, because there was no video footage was available for the other two cases.

Conversely several popular books about the events at the McMartin Preschool have been written. These were not used because they approached the problem from a critical historical perspective, written more than a decade after the events concluded. They did not report on the events as they unfolded in the media, and were thus not reliable sources for this study. However, a popular book entitled *Blood of Innocents* that focused on the Robin Hood Hills Murders was used because it was written at relatively the same time and by two of the same authors (Marc Perrusquia and Bartholomew Sullivan), as the majority of articles printed in *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, Tennessee.

Case Studies

The case studies herein were undertaken using recommendations from Ragin (1987, 1994), and Yin (1994). I have also borrowed from the work of Cohen (1972), Welch (1999), and Jenkins (1992, 1999) in constructing descriptions of the moral panics. However, in most investigations of moral panic only one phenomenon was studied. Because no studies of moral panic to date have included human geography or

demographic data, I relied on Yin (1994) for an explanation of why the case study methodology is appropriate:

> A case study is an empirical inquiry that
> * investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life content when
> * the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
>
> In other words, you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study (Yin, 1994:13).

Contextuality is the idea that social and cultural phenomena are shaped by the specific geographical settings within which they develop (Stump 2000:2). I argue that the spatial context and the locations distance from an urban center are very important to the development of a moral panic, specifically to which type of panic will occur. For my investigation the central aspects of context are two-fold: the demographic data from the 1990 census, and the spatial representation of the events. Also important is the distance of each suburban community from its respective urban core.

> In some fields, multiple-case studies have been considered a different "methodology" than single-case studies...From the perspective of this book, however the choice between single- and multiple-case designs remains within the same methodological framework—and no broad distinction is made between the so-called classic (that is, single-) case study and multiple-case studies. The choice is considered one of research design, with both being included under the case study strategy.
>
> Multiple-case designs have distinct advantages and disadvantages in comparison with single-case designs. The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriot & Firestone, 1983)...Every case should serve a specific purpose with the overall scope of inquiry. Here, a major insight is to consider multiple cases as one would consider multiple experiments- that is, to follow a "replication" logic. This is far different from a mistaken analogy in the past, which incorrectly considered multiple cases to be similar to the multiple respondents in a survey (or to the multiple subjects *within* an experiment)- that is, to follow a sampling logic. The methodological

> differences between these two views are revealed by the different rationales underlying the replication as opposed to sampling logics (Yin 1994: 45).

In addition, this investigation is closely related to what Ragin (1987) would call a comparative case study. In a comparative case study, the purpose is to detect multiple, conjunctural causation (Ragin, 1987: 27, 40-44). The methodology seeks to establish similarities between cases of the same or similar phenomena so that the differences between them might also be discerned. The differences then allow the researcher to further his or her theoretical explanations by explaining factors that might otherwise have been considered unimportant to the causal variations *between* cases:

> The typical goal of a comparative case study is to unravel the different causal conditions connected to different outcomes-causal patterns that separate cases into different subgroups. This explicit focus on diversity distinguishes the comparative approach from the qualitative approach. Recall that in qualitative research, the goal is often to clarify categories with respect to the concepts they exemplify by examining similarities across the instances of a category (such as taxi-drivers). One common outcome of comparative research is the finding that cases may have been defined as "the same" at the outset are differentiated into two or more categories at the conclusion of the study (Ragin, 1994:108).

Defending the Case Study

It would be inappropriate to continue without showing that the research undertaken here meets standard tests for validity and reliability. In doing so it is important to note that the case study is not a methodology unto itself, but rather a comprehensive research strategy (Yin 1994: 13). This research uses several different forms of data in order to generalize about each community as an individual case.

Construct Validity

Construct validity is meant to measure whether or not the means of measurement fit the concepts being studied (Yin 1994, Ragin 1987, 1994, Singleton & Straits 1999). The "goodness of fit" between the subject of study and the methods employed in the study is determined by submitting the research design to a test of whether or not the operational measures are appropriate for the concepts being studied (Yin 1994:33). The hypothesis herein is that there are demographic and representational differences between the communities where moral panics occur.

In addition to the socio-economic indicators, representation of place is important to this study. Transcripts from television reports as well as newspaper articles from local and national sources were used as primary data. Ensuring consistency of analysis among the three cases meant recognizing that the majority of the data on the Columbine Massacre were fundamentally different. Because these data were mostly from national news sources, I went back and collected over 300 local articles from *The Denver Post* to maintain consistency with the other cases.

Statistical Methods

Demographic differences are measured using the 1990 census data. The 1990 data were used for several reasons. The McMartin trial did not begin until 1987, even though the panic began in 1984. The panic lasted through 1990. The West Memphis case began in 1993. These cases then both are understandably represented by the 1990 census data. However, the Columbine Shootings did not occur until 1999. The 2000 census data would have been more appropriate, but at the time of this writing, all of the 2000 data were not available from the census bureau.

Several standard indicators are compared including: distance from urban center, median household income, white population, black population, employment, and educational attainment (because the communities being studied showed little diversity, detailed racial information was not needed).

To test the hypothesis, I compared population statistics from the 1990 census. I used several different indicators to measure socio-economic status (SES). These were then subjected to ANOVA tests and subsequent post hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) to determine if there were any differences between the groups. Post hoc tests such as Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) are used to determine which groups are different when the number of compared means is greater than three. The Tukey's HSD test compares data in pairwise comparisons looking for statistical differences. Because the pairwise comparisons are cumulative, this increases the risk of type I errors. The best way of controlling for this type of error is to make sure that the test groups have identical or at least similar size groups.

The Tukey's HSD test is commonly used in psychological research. Tukey's test computes a single value that determines the minimal difference (the HSD) between treatment means that is necessary for significance. If the mean is greater than Tukey's HSD then there is a significant difference between treatments. Otherwise there is no statistically significant difference, and there is no difference between treatments.

My hypothesis is that the means of each indicator will not be equal to one another. In this instance, for each indicator the null hypothesis is that the means will be equal to one another (H_0: $\mu_X = \mu_Y$). The test hypothesis is that the means for each indicator will not be equal to one another (H_1: $\mu_X \neq \mu_Y$). Should the test hypothesis be true, this will give

weight to the proposition that there is a distinct difference in the communities where metapanics occur. Furthermore, should there be a distinct difference this would lend weight to the theory proposed here.

Internal Validity

A test for internal validity relates to how the testing mechanism measures the phenomenon in question. The primary goal of this study is exploratory, but the same concern for accurate reporting must be met. The multiple case study must conform to the basic tests of case studies whether one is studying a single case or comparing cases. The fundamental concern is that the case or cases are represented fairly and that they are not represented in a skewed fashion that may fit the proposed theory, but that subverts the researcher's honesty in creating a partial (or in the worst case, untrue), representation.

For each case I examined as many articles and transcripts as I could find on the events in question. I looked at the articles from local and national newspapers, as well as articles from nationally distributed magazines. I created a timeline of events and compared them against articles, and when available, the work of other researchers. I also used official documentation whenever it was available. The only official data available on the McMartin case came from the trial decisions that were generously provided by the California Bar Association. In West Memphis, there was much less official material available. I had only the appellate records available through Lexis-Nexus. However, I had more diverse material on the West Memphis case than I had in the McMartin case. The majority of the articles on the McMartin case came from the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) archives. This is a substantive limitation of this study. Local articles on the McMartin case were difficult to procure as they were

frequently only available in the local sections of the Los Angeles Times. As these are not provided for libraries on microfilm or microfiche it appears as though they are not in the newspaper at all, even though electronic searches clearly list them. However, many of the articles that turned up in the electronic searches actually originated with the AP and UPI wire services. I therefore trust I have at least the source of many articles both from the local and national perspectives.

The West Memphis case generated less overall material than the other two cases, but it was rich and diverse. Most of the newspaper articles came from Memphis' daily newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*. But the case did make the wire services and thus was covered in The New York Times, and popular magazines such as People Weekly. In addition, the sensational nature of the case guaranteed coverage on television, there were several transcripts from CNN's programs as well as other network sources.

The Columbine Case posed a problem of a different sort. The amount of coverage was so enormous that I had to limit how much I examined. In addition, after the first level of analysis I realized that the majority of my source material on Columbine was coming from national news sources. I went back to the searches and found that there are two local newspapers in Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News* and *The Denver Post*. I initially examined about fifty articles from both newspapers that covered the first three days after the shootings. *The Denver Post* had superior reporting, with much more detail. *The Rocky Mountain News* reported on the same stories and in the same tone, but with a much less rich description of events. I chose to examine only one local newspaper, *The Denver Post*. Because the amount of material was so enormous, I limited myself to three hundred articles from Denver's local newspaper. That number of articles covered

approximately the first month following the massacre. However, I also went back and collected about twenty-five articles on the anniversary of the Columbine Massacre.

Thus for each case I used one local newspaper source, as many television transcripts as I could find (though in the case of Columbine I again had to limit this number I used approximately 75 CNN transcripts). I also used as many national articles as I could find. I did not limit these at all, though some were fed over the wires and duplicated the local articles.

I analyzed all of the articles using the same criteria. Some coding topics emerged in the beginning of one case or another, such as the importance of Satanic rhetoric in the West Memphis. I made sure that each coding measure was used in all three cases to determine any similarities between cases. By using as many multiple articles and sources of original material as possible, the multiple case study here satisfies the test for internal validity. The following categories were the most frequent:

Social Class
Race
Satan- as influence on people
Satanism as practice
Local Community ("our town" "this place" "Our community")
Local politics
Children in need of protection
Satanic Ritual Abuse
Serial killers
Violent media
Evidence
Escalation (including outside agency references)
Quotes from moral entrepreneurs
Clothing
Rural
Suburban
Urban
Sophistication
Us & Them

Good parents
Homey
Weird
Gender typing
Incest
Sexual abuse

External Validity

The third test is to determine whether or not the results are generalizable outside the context of a single study. This consideration prompted me to undertake a multiple case study.

> The external validity problem has been a major barrier in doing case studies. Critics typically state that single cases offer a poor basis for generalizing. However, such critics are implicitly contrasting the situation to survey research, in which a "sample" (if selected correctly) readily generalizes to a larger universe. This analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies. This is because survey research relies on statistical generalizations where as cases studies (as with experiments) rely on analytical generalization. In analytical generalizations, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory (Yin, 1994:36)

Ragin (1987) submits a specific theory for the comparative case study. He proposes, as Yin alludes to above, that multiple or comparative case studies are very similar to experimental research. In comparative case studies, Ragin asserts, there are often multiple conjunctural factors. Social events are extremely complex, and as such have complex causes. By employing Ragin's comparative case study approach, the researcher has the potential to determine the variables that are causally relevant to the phenomenon in question. Especially relevant here is that a multiple case study approach permits the analysis of complex phenomena. This benefit allows the contextualization of the phenomena in question. By comparing the cases, their similarities permit the researcher to examine the phenomena in ways that a single case study does not permit.

The phenomena can be studied layer by layer, and in this research, with regard to their place in time and space.

> Many features of social life confound attempts to unravel causal complexity when experimental methods cannot be used. Three are especially relevant to this discussion because they concern issues of multiple and conjunctural causation. First, rarely does an outcome of interest to social scientists have a single case...second causes rarely operate in isolation. Usually it is the combined effect of various conditions, their intersection in time and space that produces a certain outcome. This social causation is often both multiple and conjunctural, involving different combinations of causal conditions. Third, a specific cause may have opposite effects depending on context (Ragin, 1987:27).

Reliability

Reliability is the most common test, and is the easiest to duplicate. The statistical methods for determining the relationships between the communities are described in most standard social science statistics texts. The census data used in this research are available online at the U.S. Census Bureau's website (www.census.gov). In addition, while taped copies of the news events are more difficult to procure, the transcripts are available from Lexis-Nexus, allowing any researcher with access to this database, the ability to obtain these transcripts at little or no cost. Every method used in this research can be replicated with ease.

Analytical History

Like other research (Jenkins 1992, 1994, 1999; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Cohen, 1972, Welch 2000) in the field of moral panic, the cases herein are built using an analytical historical method. However, the cases are intentionally built to highlight the spatial representations and demographics of each community. This approach is taken in response to Soja's (1996) and Lefebvre's (1994) critique of the domination of historicism

in social inquiry. Though this may appear antithetical it is the best means at a combined strategy for understanding both the spatial and historical allowing the researcher to build the case study around both areas of inquiry.

> Still another strategy is to search for general causal explanations of well-defined historical outcomes or patterns, (Skocpol, 1984.) In this case, the investigator does not focus on a particular historical event but rather on two or more similar events or cases, which are then compared systematically to identify causal regularities. (Singleton and Strait, 1999: 377).
>
> Historical analysis thus consists of (1) reconstructions of past events which emphasize the accurate description of what happened; (2) applications of a general theory to a particular case(s) which focus on how the theory applies; (3) tests of explanations of historical events, which examine why a specific event occurred; (4) the development of causal explanations of historical patterns, which also analyzes why events occurred but seeks a more general understanding of social phenomena; (5) the use of history to understand the present, or explain how and why particular phenomena came to be ... Descriptive historians are interested in presenting sequences of specific, concrete events, whereas analytical historians, especially whose applying abstract theories may apply highly general concepts and propositions. Quantitatively oriented analysts engaged in testing hypotheses of a particular historical instance tend to follow the traditional scientific model of investigation, and are more specific about operationalizing concept. Comparative historians, on the other hand, typically take an inductive approach similar to field researchers. Finally those who examine long-term temporal sequences and connections among events may combine the historian's narrative approach with the quantitative analysis of the sociologist (Ibid: 378).

In accord with these principles, the events for each exploratory case begin with an historical narrative of the event that stirred the moral panic in the respective community. Following the historical narrative is a rhetorical analysis that examines the representation of events and spatial contexts in each community through the mass and local media.

Rhetorical Analysis

Social constructionists have been using rhetorical analysis in the examination of moral panic since the work of Cohen (1972). Rhetorical analysis examines the images, idioms, themes, and communication styles of those involved in the social construction process. It is important to note that the process I am describing is collective in nature. The process of discourse does not flow in only one direction. A complex discourse grows out of the rhetorical positions of moral entrepreneurs, the public, legislators, mass media, and other agents of social control.

It is impossible to submit every constituency's publications, internal documents, productions, photographs, and other artifacts to a comprehensive rhetorical analysis. Instead, I have chosen the one source I believe is the most influential in studying representation, and that is mass news media accounts of events. In order to satisfy the test of construct validity, I have drawn on multiple sources of media representation, including newspaper articles, popular magazine articles, and television transcripts. In addition, when available, I have examined court decisions and investigative reports from official sources. This was in an effort, not only to check facts, but also to do my best to ensure that the cases were as well-developed as possible given the constraints of time and the overwhelming amount of information available. Also, using "official" source material provides another view into the discursive process, as the public are forced to move between official and mass media representations in developing their own views.

I wanted to demonstrate that there is a possible spatial relationship between suburbanity and the incidence of moral panic. All of the methods described above were used to develop detailed case studies based on the most representative historical portrayal

possible, as well as concise spatial and representational analyses in order to compare the cases with one another systematically.

Comparative Method

One of the major distinctions of the comparative method versus other analytic methods is that, as opposed to others, it focuses on examining the differences between cases (or subjects), as opposed to their similarities. Examinations focus on comparing cases so as to highlight their differences. By so-doing, the cases are a more effective theoretical tool that enables the researcher to make classifications and typologies based on similarities and differences, "the goal of the investigation is to explain the diversity within a particular set of cases" (Ragin, 1994:106.)

The comparative method also provides a powerful means for dividing cases into subgroups. As has been noted by comparative researchers (Welhofer 1989, Mace and Pagel 1994, and Ragin 1987, 1994), the assignment of units of analysis can be very problematic in comparative research. Geographical areas differ in development, construction, and social involvement. There are often multiple potential causal factors that cannot be simultaneously controlled for in their entirety. By undertaking a comparative study, the researcher is able to reduce similarities and differences, possibly revealing common themes that do not appear as obviously in the examination of a single case.

Chapter 4
Space and the Suburban Ideal

From the very beginning of my research into moral panic and through the dissertation, I noticed some apparent similarities among the places where moral panics occurred. Most places where the panics occurred seemed to be very close to urban centers, and most fit the common definition of a suburb. Moral panic theory describes the typical moral panic as beginning with no real indicators, and developing in any given area for reasons researchers have not yet discerned. I found this fascinating and began to ask fundamental questions of the theory itself. In addition, with the exception of the work of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), few contributions to the theoretical development on moral panic have been made in the last two decades.

In reviewing the literature on moral panic I was struck by a difference in reporting. Folklorists commonly study moral panics. In addition, they used the model described by Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). However, these studies frequently were missing important constituent elements of the panic as described by Cohen (1972) such as mass media influence and the development of action groups. However, they included the indicators developed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). The folklorists focused on the manner in which rumors of the threat spread, and the patterns

of movement across related geographic areas. These rumor panics tended to be spread from community to community without benefit of mass communication, though occasionally articles would appear in local newspapers. This seemed to be contradictory to the theory as it was originally developed by Cohen (1972).

In addition, I had already examined the work of other researchers whose work appeared to depend heavily on mass media influences in the spread of moral panics. I found this confusing, and I found myself making a logical leap, that heretofore had not appeared in the literature. I began calling the panics that seemed to be rooted in the mass media and that branched out into the national consciousness, metapanics. I didn't know what to make of the rumor panics that had been discussed by Bill Ellis (1990), Joel Best (1992) and Jeffrey Victor (1993).

These metapanics always happened in suburban areas with relatively homogeneous populations, usually predominantly white and middle to upper-middle-class. This insight led me to examine the cases described in this study. As a small exploratory into the topic, I looked at several communities where school shootings had occurred between 1997 and 2001. Most were represented in the media as more rural than suburban, even though none of the communities fit the Census Bureau's definition of a rural area. In addition, ten of the school shootings occurred in towns within fifty miles of a major metropolitan area, and had residents earning higher incomes than the national average (see table 1).

The exploratory study led me to reason that perhaps there are two types of moral panic. The first category is the more easily understood: a metapanic occurs when a moral panic's influence reaches out beyond the environs of its initial setting and enters the

national consciousness. Cases like McMartin and Columbine reached into the national awareness, sparking comparisons with other cases around the country and affecting policy on the state and/or federal levels. These cases tended to be focused on places that are easily defined as suburban. Suburban idealism seems to be fundamental to the development of a moral panic.

Cases like the Robin Hood Hills murders are different. While this case adhered to all of the patterns described by Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), there were subtle differences in the representations of the case. The panic did not reach metapanic proportions, in that the rhetoric and community actions did not spread outside of the local community. No national rhetoric developed based on that case, specifically on the issue of Satanic Murder[1]. The research question followed naturally for me. What was different about West Memphis? And were there similarities between Manhattan Beach and Littleton?

Utopian Mythology: television as collective memory of suburbia

In the era following the close of the World War II, the United States saw unprecedented development of single family detached homes in suburban developments. There is a great deal of scholarship on the implications that red-lining, unfair lending practices, and the involvement of government agencies like the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) had on the creation of the American Suburban Landscape, and by attrition, on the urban landscape as well. However, it should be noted, that while there is

[1] Phillip Jenkins (1993) described a murder panic that occurred nationally in the 1980's and early 1990's. It is possible that the reason the panic did not develop into a metapanic was based on history. The nation had already experienced a murder panic, and in some instances there had been Satanic overtones (Jenkins 1993, Victor 1993). I cannot rule out the possibility that history affected the lack of development, but because it cannot be tested I chose to focus on the socioeconomic indicators.

a wealth of research on the establishment of suburbs, and the subsequent devastating effects of out-migration on central cities, there is far less research on the representation of suburbia, its effects of social relationships within suburbia, and suburban anomie.

In the period from 1950 and 1980, the number of people living in a suburban environment nearly tripled. The number of suburbanites rose from 35.2 million in 1950 to over 100 million in 1980. By 1990, almost half (46%) of all Americans lived in a suburban environment (Sharpe and Wallock 1994:2). According to cultural historian Lynn Spigel (2001) though suburban living was preferred, there were critics of the recently developed homogeneous environment as early as 1956. But despite dissenting views on the utopian promise of suburbia, the suburban ideology still exists, albeit in a slightly different form than the 1950's ideal.

Emily Talen (2001) studied suburban attitudes in an affluent Texas suburb outside of Dallas. Her research found that suburban attitudes are not as straightforward as one might assume. As Lefebvre (1999) describes, the distinction between suburban and urban is a limited one, based on real living conditions rather than ideology, because of the relationship of the two social spaces in the economic relationships of the physical space and the influences of mass media culture. Because of this, the social meaning that the suburbanite inscribes into the social space (whether suburban or urban) is still somewhat urban in its orientation, as a product of the interdependence of the two spaces.

Talen (2001) studied suburban attitudes and found that suburbanites frequently disconnected the effects of suburban development from environmental issues and problems of commuting from and within suburbs. Talen (2001:202) associated this incongruity with a lack of education about the planning process and the effects of low-

density development. Suburbanites were much more interested in suburban development problems (mostly centering on the time spent in their cars), but seemed unsure about the role of public policies on infrastructure investments such as whether or not public funds for transportation should be designated for mass-transit or highway development.

I use this example to demonstrate that the suburban landscape is richly invested in an ideology of separateness that they neither fully accept nor fully understand. Other researchers (Fishman 1987, Marsh, 1990, Jackson 1985) have detailed the history of the 1950's era suburbs as areas of social and physical exclusion. I do not contest this history, and do not feel it necessary to cover it here. But the history and ideology of suburbia should be briefly examined if only to illuminate how they connect some of the arguments of this research.

Suburbs have existed as long as have urban areas. The word "suburbe" [sic] even shows up in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. As urban areas have grown they engulf the suburbs on the outskirts. It is common to see this historically by examining the residential areas of large metropolitan cities, what was once a suburban area historically, eventually was swallowed up by the urban center. In the twentieth century, however, suburban areas were developed after (and in many instances during) an unprecedented housing shortage following the Great Depression. The era following WWII saw the development of long-term home loans supported by government agencies, and the mass production of tract housing making development efficient and cost-effective.

However, these suburban enclaves were not offered universally to the masses of people in need of housing. Instead, systematic practices on the part of banks and federal housing authorities, mostly in the area of mortgage lending, made it impossible for black

people, and other ethnic minorities (mostly non-white) to acquire financing for the purchase of a home. The most notorious of these practices was that of red-lining. This practice was part of the mortgage guarantees offered by the Federal Housing Administration. Bankers were only allowed to offer loans for home purchases in areas where there was already value, or in areas where there was a lower economic value in property. This meant that, by default, there was no mortgage lending in areas that needed the boost of capital offered by the guaranteed mortgages.

Suburban developers were quick to take advantage of the opportunity for new sources of capital financing, and developed new subdivisions of tract housing outside of the urban limits. However, the common use of covenants in the new suburban developments made it nearly impossible for people of different races or ethnic backgrounds to buy property in those areas. Covenants were used to regulate everything from the width of sidewalks and positioning of mailboxes, to the race of people to whom the current owners could eventually sell their homes.

In addition, to stave off the eventual absorption of the newly developed suburbs by encroaching urban limits, suburbs commonly incorporated their townships or districts to have their own tax base. In exchange, suburban communities provided their own utilities, public services, law enforcement, and political infrastructure. They were not dependent on the urban center for services or government. The boundary between the urban area and its suburbs was more clearly defined, and in the first flush of development after WWII, the communities were better able to exclude people based on race, income, ethnicity or social class.

Idealism and the 1950's

Since the 1980's there has been a growing nostalgia for simpler times. Usually this nostalgia is presented as having been real as recently as the 1950's. And moral entrepreneurs often cite this era as the "best of times." But research suggests that the nostalgia associated with this time period is not based in reality but is rather based on people's shared reality of having watched 1950's era television shows, both in and after the period. The 1950's are represented as a time of enduring family values, happy suburbs, religious adherence, and nice girls and women (girls didn't have extramarital sex, and women stayed at home and raised children).

In actuality, the 1950's were not representative of those values[2], though they are associated with them because of the explosion of television culture in that period. Programs like *Leave it to Beaver, The Donna Reed Show, Father Knows Best, and The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, gave viewers a glimpse into a happy suburban environment, where neighbor children played, mothers stayed home and baked cookies, and dissention was usually embodied in a single bad character (such as Eddie Haskell on *Leave it to Beaver*) who could be controlled by the community of adults. In actuality, according to Spigel (2001:42), one of the reasons that television flourished in the 1950's was because many of the new suburban dwellers shared a sense of being uprooted in leaving friends and family in the city. Families like the Cleavers and the Nelsons, provided a sense of instant community for the new suburban dweller, as well as a model

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[2] See *American Demographics*, August 1992, pages 38-43 for a full comparison of demographics with current mythologizing of the 1950's.

family upon which to base their own behavior in the absence of the familiar social structure of the urban neighborhood.

> These televised neighbors seemed to suture the "crack" in the picture window. They helped ease what must have been for many Americans a painful transition from the city to the suburb. But more than simply supplying a tonic for displaced suburbanites, television promised something better: it promised modes of spectator pleasure premised on the sense of an illusory- rather than real- community of friends. It held a new possibility for being along in the home, away from the troublesome busybody neighbors in the next house. But it also maintained ideals of community togetherness and social connection by placing the community *at a fictional distance* (emphasis hers). Television allowed people to enter into an imaginary social life, one that was shared not in the neighborhood networks of bridge clubs and mahjong gatherings but on the national networks of CBS, NBC, and ABC, (Spigel, 2001:45).

This imaginary idyllic era remains the basis upon which many suburbanites base their expectations of suburban life. However, many suburban areas that are immediately adjacent to urban areas have experienced an increase in crime and poverty. The suburban rates of crime and poverty have not yet caught up with the urban centers, but suburbanites fear those influences, (especially crime) more now then in previous decades (Marcuse, 1997).

I believe that because of the unique combination mass television culture and real suburban exclusion created- there exists a suburban utopia in the memories of those white people who had the privilege of participating in it when the suburbs first developed. And because these television series have continued to be shown on television since their introduction- they reinforce the memories- and give substance (through reinforcement) to the public memory of an idealized era. I doubt most black people or people of other racial or ethnic minorities would characterize the 1950's as an idyllic time in our nation's history.

The Hypothesis

Communities where panics occur are different in SES from communities where no panics happen. The development of a panic or the possibility of one seems to be limited to suburban areas often these have higher than average SES. The higher the status of the community the more likely it is that under the right conditions, (intense social stress), and in the presence of the indicators: concern, hostility, consensus, volatility, and disproportionality; a moral panic will develop.

The Metapanic

It is my proposition that the development of a panic that becomes part of national consciousness appeals to a broader constituency. The use of the term metapanic is based on the Greek prefix *meta*, meaning to transcend. In this case the moral panic transcends its local community and becomes a synthetic phenomenon, drawing on a broader identity. In order to appeal to a mass audience, the metapanic has two requirements in addition to those put forth by Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) covered earlier. First the metapanic must have actors who are broadly sympathetic; they must represent "everyman." In this *everyman* definition, it is important that the actors are represented not only in the way the audience identifies themselves, but more importantly, in the way that the audience wishes to be identified. Most Americans prefer to see themselves as suburban and middle class (Gans 1979:233). And so, the representation of the actors in the metapanic, in order to attract a national following, must embody those same characteristics.

In addition, the location of the panic must be accessible through a mass media outlet, making it important that it is accessible through local, and to, national media. This

means that certain urban features are required. First the location must have the tools to handle media coverage. The infrastructure of creating national news reports must be in place. In most urban centers live coverage is achieved by news trucks equipped with microwave transmitters. These have a range of less than twenty miles from the receiver. The live feed goes from the live truck to the receiver, then from the station via satellite. Some urban markets have trucks that can transfer directly to satellite. These units are extremely expensive however, and it is only likely that they will be found in a wealthy media market.

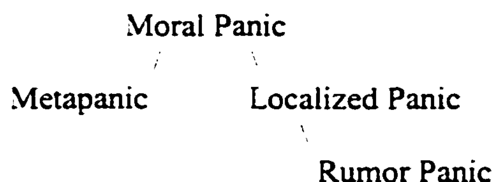
In addition, the metapanic generally joins a broader social problem such as "school shootings" or "satanic ritual abuse." This feature also contributes to the effect that the metapanic has in blurring the geographical lines of community. I call this phenomenon opaqueing, and it refers to what other researchers have called the opaqueness or embededness of setting. No one before has described this as a process however. The *place* is sublimated, driven to the background. This is done in preference to the phenomenon at hand, giving phenomenology and historical perspective preference over the spatial, as though the event itself took place without the involvement of place as a social construction itself.

The Localized Panic

It is important to note that in no way am I separating these two categories of panic from the broader theory on moral panic. Each of these is considered a form of moral panic based on certain conditions in the community where the panic occurs. Localized panics are moral panics whose concerns do not reach very far past the immediate area where the panic begins. Though escalation occurs, where agents of social control and

moral entrepreneurs are able to extend their connections outside of their immediate jurisdictions for help with their case or problem, there is no real sharing of the fear or concern beyond the physical boundaries of the local area. It is the hypothesis of this research that areas where localized panics occur will have lower SES, and be more heterogeneous than communities who spark metapanics. In addition they are likely to be further from major urban centers, and thus not have the same level of access to urban media technology that suburban communities have.

Figure 1 .



To test this idea, I reviewed the literature and chose five communities where rumor panics occurred. I compiled data on their populations and income data, in an attempt to determine whether or not there is a basis for the theory of localized panics. Before presenting this data, I would like to add, that from a theoretical perspective, I am not suggesting that the rumor panic construct is not useful. Rather, I believe that there is an intermediate level between moral panic and rumor panic; that level is the localized panic. The localized panic is characterized by a lower than average SES. The panic that occurs does not extend beyond the localized area, and the representation is more rural than urban. This will be revisited later in the comparative findings of the research.

Table 1. Towns where rumor panics occurred in the late 1980's & early 1990's.

Town Name	Panic Event	1990 Population	1990 Median Household Income	1990 Per Capita Income
Jamestown, NY	Satanic scare	34,681	$20,582	$10,731
Edenton, NC	SRA scare	5,268	$17,140	$13,887
Missoula, MT	Ritual Murder	42,918	$21,033	$11,759
McComb, MS	Satanic scare	11, 591	$14,579	$8,539
Richmond, VA	Teen suicide scare	203, 056	$23,551	$13,993

The Focus of the Following Chapters

There are three communities examined in the study. Each was chosen because a moral panic had occurred and was covered in the local and national press. It is the hypothesis of this research that the communities where moral panics become metapanics will be more racially homogeneous and have a higher SES than places where there is no metapanic, or areas where a panic remains localized.

Possible Indicators

If we examine the history of the moral panics in these three communities it is fairly easy business to determine that the panics in both Manhattan Beach, California, and Littleton, Colorado, developed into much larger social movements and garnered much broader media coverage and public support than did the events in West Memphis. Going by the number of articles written on these topics alone, the Columbine Massacre is the largest, defining the parameters of school shootings into a metapanic. In second place for media coverage is the McMartin Preschool case, which is remarkable for its longevity. The panic itself developed and lasted in that community for over five years. The effects of the panic have not been completely overcome for the victims, the accused, or the community. Both of these events are considered watershed moments in the histories of

the social movements associated with each of them. They are snapshots, reified examples. As is common in many moral panics both McMartin and Columbine led to the development and contribution of both state and federal policy. And thus should be considered part of the definition of a metapanic.

For example, in California, parents of the McMartin's alleged victims successfully brought a case to the California Supreme Court (which was eventually overturned) to change the state's laws on children's testimony. This proposed law allowed children in abuse cases to be brought as witnesses via closed circuit television (CCTV), providing a safe environment in which children could provide their testimony without feeling intimidated by their abusers. This legislation was a model for other proposed legislation around the country. Children in abuse cases would be able to avoid testifying in open court all together. Eventually the California Supreme Court determined that this approach was unconstitutional. The decision was reversed and the interest in similar legislation around the country soon dissipated. McMartin also raised the profile on child abuse in many ways. This joined with the greater discourse on child abuse drawing attention to the possibility of abuse taking place in affluent environments.

In a similar vein, the reality of school shootings was drawn into sharp focus by the events at Columbine High School. There was a barrage of proposed legislation in its wake, on both ends of the political spectrum. The conservative position held that the problems contributing to school shootings were violent television programs and films, violent video games, lack of prayer in schools, and disintegrating family values. The liberal position held that the school shootings were the result of the gun lobby's grip on

the U.S. congress, and the gender stereotyping we submit our young boys to as they mature into young men.

In contrast, the West Memphis child murders did not result in any state or federal contributions on Satanic or ritual murder. There were some case law changes proposed in Arkansas in the court of appeal, but these had more to do with the treatment of indigent offenders. Defense attorneys have been investigated and have admitted (in hindsight) to some breech of ethics and possible weakness in the defense under pressure to make the story more saleable and dramatic to two New York producers making a documentary on the case.

Thus, to summarize, there are three possible indicators that can be used to distinguish between a metapanic and a localized panic. The first is simply the amount and type of media coverage. The number of articles, hours of news coverage, and local versus national coverage should be considered. A second indicator is the effect of the panic on policy development. Does the panic expose (or create) a social problem? The McMartin Case "exposed" child abuse in affluent environments, and raised interest in sex abuse; the Columbine case raised issues of school safety and sharpened the focus on school shootings. Demographic data is a possible third type of indicator that can be used in separating metapanics from localized panics. Demographic data are inherently place-based and hence a primary means of distinguishing different types of communities from one another, regardless of their size.

Chapter 5
Accusations of Satanic Ritual Abuse: The McMartin Preschool

On a summer day in August 1983, Judy Johnson returned from having her two-year old son examined in the Kaiser Permanente emergency room. Her toddler had been complaining that it was painful to sit down. Johnson suspected abuse, and took her son to see a doctor. The doctor informed her that it was possible her son had been sexually abused. Johnson contacted the Manhattan Beach police department and informed Detective Jane Hoag that her son had been molested by Raymond Buckey at the McMartin Preschool.

Buckey was arrested less than three weeks later, on September 7, 1983. But the police could not hold him as the only evidence against him was the suspicion of Judy Johnson. However, on September 9, the Manhattan Beach police department sent out over 200 letters to families whose children currently or formerly attended the preschool. These letters informed parents that the police were investigating Buckey on suspicion of rape, sodomy, oral copulation, and fondling. The letters asked parents to question their children about these accusations. Several parents removed their children from the school, and a number of civil suits were filed against the Buckey and McMartin families. The

letters had been sent in an attempt to bring out new evidence against Buckey. Instead they created in the community a widespread panic.

Buckey was arrested a second time, on September 15, less than a week after the letters went out. He was released on bail pending an investigation. The public was frightened, but very little information was available to parents and the public. *The Los Angeles Times* carried a handful of stories, but they were not concise and did not specify evidence or the claims being made by prosecutors.

In the fall of 1983, the Manhattan Beach police department contracted the services of Children's Institute International (CII), a children's therapeutic practice, to help them get testimony from the children about the alleged abuse. Kathleen "Kee" McFarlane, one of the chief social workers, and her staff were hired by the police (as well as some parents voluntarily) to provide counseling for the victims and to try to provide testimony for the investigation. The techniques used by McFarlane and her staff were thought at the time to be cutting-edge in eliciting difficult testimony from frightened or traumatized child witnesses. More than 200 children were interviewed by McFarlane and her staff at CII. After Buckey's arrest, the majority of the investigation was based on accusations gleaned from the testimony of children at CII.

Investigators told parents and the public that the children reported being touched by strangers, raped, sodomized, and subjected to a game called "Naked Movie Star" in which they were forced to disrobe and pose for a camera. Attention quickly focused on these allegations, and the public demanded action from the courts. Before any evidence of the photographs could be seized, Raymond Buckey and six other defendants (Buckey's mother, Peggy McMartin Buckey; his grandmother, the school founder, Virginia

McMartin; Ray Buckey's sister, Peggy Ann Buckey; and three teachers who were unrelated to the Buckey family: Mary Ann Jackson, Betty Raidor, and Babette Spitler) were arrested on charges of child molestation, trafficking in child pornography, and related charges. All but two of the suspects were held without bail.

The preliminary hearing against the preschool staff began in June of 1984, nine months after the initial allegations. This hearing lasted eighteen months, one of the longest pretrial hearings in U.S. criminal history. Defense attorneys wanted to close the proceedings to the press, because the tenor of media reports asserted the guilt of the accused. Deputy district attorney Eleanor Barrett was frequently quoted. She believed, based on the children's testimony, the preschool had been a front for child pornography. Despite the fact that no pornographic or even questionable photographs of the children were ever found, she asserted this repeatedly.

> Children who attended the Virginia McMartin Preschool told authorities they were forced to play such games as "Naked Movie Star," in which they were photographed nude and touched by strangers, court documents revealed Tuesday. "It appears that the primary purpose of the McMartin Preschool was to solicit young children for pornographic purposes," Deputy District Attorney Eleanor Barrett of the Child Abuse Unit said in a legal motion filed in Los Angeles Superior Court (Associated Press, March 27, 1984 AM cycle).

It is important to note another battle in the background of the investigation, an intense political battle for the office of Los Angeles County District Attorney. At the time the initial charges against the McMartin staff came to the fore, the District Attorney of Los Angeles was Robert H. Philibosian. Ira Reiner, the city attorney of Los Angeles ran against him for the seat, and won. Many claimed that both candidates used the McMartin case (and several others) to grandstand. This contributed to the heightened

attention given to the case by the press and the public. This public use of the case as a political indicator is similar to a theory of the Salem Witch Trials proposed by Boyer and Nissanbaum (1998). Their study demonstrated that the accusations and trials were a means for the community to work out their political issues. The currying of public favor in the political and social arenas in Salem was linked to fluctuations in the accusations of witchcraft. Weeks before the elections in Los Angeles, there were more developments in the case, and 118 counts were added against the defendants. The Philibosian-Reiner campaign was particularly ugly, with both candidates engaging in mudslinging. In the end, Ira Reiner, the candidate who many believed threw the least mud, won. Despite the public rhetoric about the case, the judge allowed the proceedings to remain open to the public.

Investigators raided the homes of eleven employees and associates of employees. During the investigation police seized photographs of children and other items. No suspicious photographs turned up and no evidence of pornography or abuse could be found. Police investigators seized over 100 photographs of children, but most were snapshots of relations, or the school setting. None were inappropriate. Despite this fact, most articles in the months that followed repeated the accusations that the McMartin family and staff were actively trafficking in the production and sale of child pornography.

Even though no evidence was ever uncovered, the accusations were sufficient for the original judge to deny bail to all of the defendants in custody. Part of the legitimation of this action was an attempt by the prosecution to map the McMartins with drug dealers, racketeers, and members of organized crime syndicates. Deputy District Attorney Lael Rubin successful argued against bail, claiming that the McMartins should not be

permitted to use the illegally gained proceeds of their child pornography activities to post bail. Every article available during this period of the investigation included lengthy references to the game "Naked Movie Star," as well as assertions by the chief investigating officer, Detective Jane Hoag, and Deputy District Attorney, Eleanor Barrett, that the children's stories were true. All of the articles also included a minor reference, usually in the form of a single sentence, that investigators had never found any pornographic photos.

> Despite Ms. Barrett's assertions, prosecutors and the FBI said no photographs or films have been recovered. "It is also my belief," Ms. Barrett said, "that these children were the victims of child prostitution when they talk about being touched by strangers." Deputy District Attorney Lael Rubin told UPI many of the children said they were taken from the school to other locations where still and motion pictures were made and where the youngsters "were offered up (to strangers) for whatever purposes." (United Press International, March 28, 1984)

It would be nearly a month before the defendants were arraigned. All seven defendants pleaded innocent at their arraignment, in which they were charged with sexually abusing eighteen children over ten years, and intimidating them with death threats in order to guarantee their silence. After their arraignment, prosecutors added more charges to the indictment bringing the total charges to 208.

During the initial proceedings children claimed to have been molested, forced to play "naked games," and one child reported that he was forced to drink rabbit blood in a church where animals were killed. A medical doctor testified that she found evidence of molestation in thirty-three of the more than two-hundred children who were questioned at CII. In January 1986, nearly two-and-a-half years since the initial complaint, Judge Aviva K. Bobb ordered all seven defendants to stand trial in Superior Court.

By this point in the case, Ira Reiner had taken over as District Attorney for L.A. County. He ordered a reduction in charges for the defendants in the trial. Importantly, he dismissed charges against five of the defendants. Reiner dismissed the charges based on lack of evidence against all but Raymond Buckey and his mother Peggy McMartin Buckey. During this time period, allegations of abuse were circulating all over Manhattan Beach and other Southern Beach communities. Sheriff Sherman Block announced a special task force to investigate allegations of abuse at day care centers in Manhattan Beach and Hermosa Beach. Seven preschools closed as a result of these allegations, more than sixty were investigated.

The public discourse centered mostly on the guilt of Ray Buckey. In nearly every article that mentioned his name, there was also an inclusion of the accusations made by therapists and officials on behalf of former students. The three terrors that almost always followed his name were: (accused of) rape, sodomy, and fondling. Buckey made an obvious scapegoat. He was the only male staffer at the school. He was quiet and slightly built. Like his mother, Peggy, Ray Buckey was somewhat eccentric, a devout vegetarian who grew his own wheatgrass, and had been rather aimless in his career and life choices. Some of the descriptions of him seem like a critique of the stereotypes of Southern Californians in general: vegetarian, drifter, new-ager. But the press also mapped Buckey with other demeaning traits: child-molester, rapist, pervert. Yet, however damaging, the stories had not reached their most fantastic.

The first trial against Ray Buckey and Peggy McMartin Buckey began in 1987, four years after the date of the first complaint. Both defendants had been held in custody, without bail, Ray Buckey for this entire period, Peggy for two years. The trial lasted

more than two years, the longest criminal hearing in U.S. history (it surpassed the Hillside Strangler trial which had held the record until 1989). The authorities, the press, and therefore, the public, had not forgotten about the game "Naked Movie Star." But there was no evidence to support the accusations of child pornography. At one point the chief investigator, Jane Hoag, stated that she believed the photographs had been buried, and would eventually be found. Reporters also quoted Deputy District Attorney Lael Rubin criticizing the police department for mishandling the case. Specifically she alleged that the police bungled the investigation, giving the defendants the opportunity to dispose of evidence.

The number of children interviewed at CII jumped from 200 to 400 by the time the trial had begun. Staffers at the center claimed that of the 400, 366 showed indications of having been molested. The staff at CII had videotaped all the interviews with the McMartin's alleged victims. This video testimony was the key evidence being offered by the prosecution. In an unprecedented move, the prosecution moved to not allow the defense attorneys access to the video tapes. Fearing the tapes would wind up in the hands of the media, the district attorney's office refused to copy the video testimony for the defense (the press was later highly criticized for sensationalizing the case). Defense attorneys claimed that the prosecution did not want to give the defense the ability to properly defend their clients. The judge agreed with the prosecution's reasoning. The case was under constant media attention, and the sensational could hardly be avoided. The television culture of Los Angeles combined with the incredible mix of sex, violence, children, and occult overtones, provided constant media fodder. While the judge did not want the tapes to be accessible to the media, there were legal ramifications to consider.

Violating rules of evidentiary procedure, specifically those for nondisclosure of primary evidence, is grounds for a mistrial, so she could not deny the defense team access to the video taped interviews. The judge decreed that, rather than provide the defense with copies of over four-hundred hours of videotaped interviews, the tapes would be viewable by the defense twelve hours of every day, at the district attorney's office. However, defense attorneys were not permitted to make even the most minimal transcripts of the children's testimony without the judge's permission. This seriously limited the defense's ability to contradict the veracity of the witness statements.

Instead, the defense focused on the techniques employed by the staffers at CII. What emerged from their careful examination of the tapes was that the children were not properly interviewed, especially in consideration of their testimony for trial proceedings. McFarlane and her staff repeatedly asked the same questions of children who gave responses they did not like, and rewarded the children when they gave the "correct" response. McFarlane herself verbally punished children who did not give her satisfactory answers to her questions. In one interview, a child was asked about the game, "Naked Movie Star." She responded that she knew nothing of the game. In response, on tape, McFarlane said to the child, "What good are you? You must be dumb" (Carlson 1990).

McFarlane had also used anatomically correct puppets to elucidate detailed descriptions of how and where children were touched. She also had in the interviewing room a box she called the "secret machine." Children could whisper their accounts of abuse or things of which they were ashamed into the secret machine. Children reported being taken on airplane rides, drinking blood in a church, killing horses with bats. Stories

that began with one student were repeated to other students by McFarlane and her staff, greatly increasing the likelihood that the same stories would be repeated.

There was little evidence to support the remaining charges. Child pornography which had been at the center of the investigation was never proven. No incriminating photographs of the McMartin students were ever produced in court, despite an international search that took advantage of the willing cooperation of several government agencies (including the Federal Bureau of Investigation) and foreign governments.

In January of 1990, more than six years after the initial complaint, the jury deliberated on fifty-eight counts still leveled against Raymond and Peggy McMartin Buckey. The prosecution paraded the children, the video-taped testimonies and the likelihood of child pornography before two different juries. The defense poked holes in the prosecution's case by pointing out inconsistencies in the children's testimony. In the end, though, the most damaging issue for the prosecution *was their own evidence.* Defense attorneys showed where Kee McFarlane had led the testimony of her patients in manners that a judge would never have permitted of a trial attorney. In addition, defense attorneys were able to demonstrate that the stories being circulated were not at all likely. And if some aspects were unlikely, then it was possible that the entire testimony was faulty. Indicative of this was a test the prosecution gave some of the children. They were presented with random photographs of individuals and were asked to identify subjects who had participated in the abuse with the Buckeys. Besides pointing out photographs of indiscriminate strangers pulled from random sources like magazines, several children identified photographs of the governor of California, and celebrities like Chuck Norris as

having participated in their abuse. This stalled the jurors' ability to trust the infallibility of the young witnesses' memories.

The jurors acquitted Peggy McMartin Buckey on all charges but one, and acquitted Raymond Buckey on all but thirteen charges. They were deadlocked on these thirteen and Buckey was set to be retried. Many of the jurors believed that several of the children had been abused. The evidence, however, had not proven that the abuse had been perpetrated by Buckey. The last trial against Ray Buckey began in July of 1990 after he had been investigated, tried, acquitted, and had spent a total of five years in prison without bail.

On July 27, 1991 a second jury was deadlocked, and the judge, Stanley Weisberg, was forced to declare a mistrial on the last thirteen counts against Buckey and the remaining single count against his mother. By the time of the decision, the fervor had somewhat subsided in the community. In an uncharacteristic turn of the media upon itself, the McMartins were more or less publicly forgiven. Stories circulated about the travesty of justice against the McMartin family and the staff of their school. Nine years later, most people saw the trial and the media coverage as an unfair witch hunt that had reached ridiculous proportions. Virginia McMartin died at eighty-one disappointed in the system. Her daughter, Peggy McMartin Buckey died several years later of heart failure. She herself had spent more than two years in prison without bail.

Two unresolved issues remained, however. First, many of the jurors believed that several children were actually victims of abuse. However, there was no proof that the abuse had been perpetrated at the McMartin preschool. So, the question remains, if there was abuse, who committed it? And will those parties ever be brought to justice? Second,

the majority of the children who testified still believe that they were molested by the McMartin staff. Studies have confirmed that young children can be led to believe what they are told.

Coleman and Clancy (1990) found that children's therapists often used leading questions to elicit testimony. However, this is usually not done with the intention to mislead. The authors point out that child therapists and social workers are child advocates, and they generally feel they are working in the best interest of the child. Social psychologists call this technique priming. Social cues given by the therapists or social workers, can be subtly altered to elicit the "correct" response from children, inadvertently shaping in them "recovered memories." These memories are then reinforced in later conversations or references thus making it possible that the subjects are "remembering" events that never took place.

As such it is possible, even probable, given the nature of the interrogation techniques of McFarlane and her well-meaning but over-zealous staff at CII, (and the controversy that has emerged in recent years over repressed and recovered memory techniques) that there was never any abuse at the McMartin Preschool. Nonetheless, there are still former students, now in their late teens and early twenties, who believe they were molested by Satanic Ritual Abusers who prostituted them out into the community via secret underground tunnels. These children believe that they watched while Ray Buckey and other staffers at the school cut the ears off of rabbits and crushed baby turtles to frighten them into silence. Their lives are irrevocably changed.

Some good came out of the McMartin trial, however. In the years following the trial, reports of child abuse have increased. Attention has been drawn both to genuine

claims as well as the possibility and damage of false allegations. New legislation has been passed regarding child abuse. Cases of multiple victims have become a part of regular discourse on child abuse, despite the fact that most of these are perpetrated in the home. There is a much greater tendency to treat child abuse, and sexual abuse as a real and valid phenomenon. In addition, the use of techniques such as those used by Kee McFarlane and her staff at CII, have been heavily scrutinized and are no longer allowed in most court cases.

Moral Panic Criteria

The McMartin Case is a widely used example of moral panic, especially in regards to accusations of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA). The press and moral entrepreneurs are credited with driving the case to the level of a moral panic prior to the second trial of Raymond and Peggy Buckey. As predicted in Cohen's original thesis (1972) the numbers of victims in the McMartin case were grossly exaggerated. Investigators claimed that out of approximately 400 interviews, 366 showed signs of being abused.

Exaggeration was not limited to the number of victims, however. As the evidence in court became less credible from a judicial perspective, moral entrepreneurs engaged in grander myth-making by asserting "evidence" of finding underground tunnels beneath the foundation of the razed school. This was in an effort to confirm the children's stories, and hence the position of the moral entrepreneurs. Geological experts asserted that there were no tunnels, but skeptical parents examined the soil themselves and called in their own experts who claimed that the differences in soil were evidence of a sophisticated manner of filling in the tunnels. This sophistication, like other allegations of Satanism, is

based in the case's lack of evidence. When there is insufficient evidence, adherents claim that this is evidence of the sinister plot, Satanists (and child molesters) are so well networked, and smart (evidently) that they can dispose of evidence in manners where no one will ever find it[1].

Claimsmaking ran particularly rampant in the McMartin trial. Everyone with a possible stake in the outcome came forward to make claims about the activities in the McMartin (and other) preschool(s). Chief among these claimsmakers were deputy district attorneys, Lael Rubin and Eleanor Barrett, and chief juvenile investigator for Manhattan Beach Police, Jane Hoag. These three women were dogged in their assertions of the guilt of the McMartins and their staff. Even when no photographic evidence against Raymond Buckey could be found, Rubin and Barrett frequently went on record asserting that the evidence existed. In the beginning they swore that they would uncover it. When they did not they blamed the police department for giving the Buckeys the opportunity to dispose of evidence.

Kee McFarlane also had an important stake in protecting her claims, both as a professional social worker and as a moral entrepreneur. Despite the facts that her techniques of recovered memory were later discredited and that the public was aware of her use of them, she has continued as a child therapist. As a moral entrepreneur, she always claimed to believe the children, but did not fight publicly when her techniques were criticized.

The Buckeys, and specifically Raymond Buckey, were easily created folk devils in the public's discourse on the events. No matter how much they promoted their

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[1] For a more in depth analysis of satanic panic see Jeffrey Victor (1993).

innocence, their assertions only made them look more guilty in the public view. The constant stream of children who accused them made a compelling argument.

But the greatest force against the McMartin staff, and specifically Raymond Buckey, was the conservative political climate of the period. The 1980's were a field day for many social conservatives. There was a high regard placed on material attainment, requiring most families, even those with greater resources, to have double incomes. Childcare was a necessity. And in that socially conservative era, a man working in child care was a natural target.

The indicators of a moral panic were present: concern, hostility, volatility, consensus, and disproportionality. Most of these can be explained by the mistakes in the investigation that the police in Manhattan Beach made, namely in the mailing out of over 200 letters to the McMartin parents. In one fell swoop, the police created an environment of hostility, concern, volatility, and consensus. The letter accusing Buckey of sodomy, oral copulation, and fondling, guaranteed a consensus. Because the letter came from an official source, it is easy to see where the parents would assume that the police already had substantial evidence against Buckey, when in fact they had none. The letter was sent to parents in hopes of obtaining evidence, when in fact it created the illusion of evidence, thus securing Buckey's guilt in the public view. This allowed concern, hostility, and volatility to be secured by the sudden concern of parents for the well-being of their children and their horror at the possibility, even (given the letter) likelihood, that their children had been abused right under their noses.

Disproportionality was a different matter. At the time, the techniques of recovered memory and allegations of SRA were new in the media. Lengthy

investigations into the accusations were not yet in the public view. Indeed at the time, the social movements that asserted the veracity of claims of child abuse were in their infancy. In that period, child abuse as a social problem was coming into its own. Adult children who had been the victims of abuse in a period when it wasn't discussed urged public discourse on the reality of child abuse. Social conservatives and feminists, usually odd bedfellows, found themselves on the same side- fighting for the legitimacy of children's rights. This unity made the veracity of claims all the more believable. It was not until prolonged study of child abuse came into the public view that investigators publicly asserted that the majority of child abuse, and sexual abuse in particular, was much more likely to happen in the child's own home or somewhere familiar to the child, like the home of a trusted relative or friend. Disproportionality was achieved because a much higher proportion of abuse occurs in the home than in public daycare facilities. But at the time of the McMartin investigation this was not widely known.

Rhetorical Analysis

In investigating the public discourse on the McMartin Case articles, transcripts, and other media were investigated. Over 100 transcripts and articles from both local newspapers and national media were examined. The case is unique among the cases investigated here. The story first broke in 1983, and was not officially resolved until 1992. The panic lasted until about 1990, when all but the most die-hard supporters of the McMartin victims realized that the reality of a "mass molestation" was unlikely, especially under the conditions purported by the victims and the staff at CII.

I have done my best to reproduce events as they appeared in the numerous articles and transcripts without going into the daily minutiae of the cases. In the earliest news

coverage, stories tended to quote authorities and moral entrepreneurs directly, with little investigation or fact-checking. Later, facts and allegations were often mixed together. After 1989, however, the stories became more critical. Surprisingly after the Buckey's acquittal in 1990, the media also turned their critical view on themselves. By the end of the trial, media portrayals of Buckey and his family were sympathetic, portraying him as a folk hero rather than folk devil.

Following the investigation of the events in the McMartin trial was in some ways the most difficult. Even in 1994, when the Robin Hood Hills case had gone to court, the use of the internet was widely accepted, and because of this, a forum for dissenting opinions on the case and the trial were established and available. There is no such historical record for examining the McMartin trial. Only the media portrayals are available, which because of a lack of dissenting views, all seem to blur together. This makes finding the information, relatively easy, too easy. It makes the news accounts more suspect, and makes me less sure about my conclusions in this case. My discomfort likely stems from my own comfort in reading many views on the same events. However, this singular reading is supported by Cohen's original theory (1972), demonstrating that the news media generally create a story out of whole cloth, and then adhere to the format of manufactured news.

Metapanic vs Localized Panic

This research asks fundamental questions about the nature of moral panics and why they do or do not spread out beyond their initial environs. The McMartin case made the national news, in both print and television media. It sparked several other similar cases around the country, and was part of a greater wave of panic about SRA all over the

United States. I had assumed initially, that the case would be similar to the theories of Erickson (1966) and demonstrate that the people of Manhattan Beach had drawn a moral line around their suburban community to banish evil from their midst. This was not the case. I expected that the claimsmakers and moral entrepreneurs would use community rhetoric, defending their community's way of life as under threat by some outsider. They did not. References to community were simple, geographical references only, not complex community-themed references. There were no community-themed rhetorical devices like "our town," "our children," or "our community." This was my first hint at the phenomenon of opaqueing I address in Chapter Seven.

I believe this occurred because Manhattan Beach is a very "urban" suburb. As it is part of Los Angeles County, the community likely considers itself part of Los Angeles, the City. The court proceedings took place in Los Angeles County Superior Court, and were prosecuted by the Los Angeles (County) District Attorney. The 1990 census also classifies all of the population of Manhattan Beach as "urban." In early articles, however, there are some interesting references that helped to shape the direction of this research.

Ethically and legally, the press had a responsibility to keep the identities of the child victims anonymous. Thus, the only focus of news articles could be on the investigators and the accused. They were never profiled together. During the investigation, articles discussed how the McMartin family was unusual. An early article in *People Weekly* described the McMartins in a particularly damning light. The title of the article was "The McMartins: the 'model family' down the block that ran California's nightmare nursery." Even the title reveals several aspects of the media representation

that are key to understanding the way the media created a suburban nightmare and capitalized on it. "The model family down the block" quote uses irony to describe the contested nature of the suburbs. The press is pointing out how normative or idealized suburban life is somehow suspect. And the "nightmare nursery" conjures up the deepest fears parents have about leaving their children in the care of someone else. But by calling it "California's nightmare nursery," the title moves the boundary of the tragedy beyond the community, beyond the city of Los Angeles, and broadens it to the people of California. The tragedy belongs to all Californians. This was my first glimpse at the opaqueing of place that occurs in metapanics.

The *People Weekly* article also made references that were consistent with other coverage of the events. The author makes it known that this is a community with high incomes, an idealized suburbia under siege.

> But for sheer shock value, nothing has equaled the Manhattan Beach tragedy. Not only has it polarized the affluent suburb of 31,500 residents—some of whom staunchly defend the accused—but it has marked the ruin of one of the town's first families (*People Weekly*, May 21, 1984:110).

The community is affluent, and suburban. But some of the adjectives used in this and other articles try to frame Manhattan Beach as rustic, or with a small-town air. Phrases like "townspeople," "rustic," "kin," and "homey," are used in contrast to the urban setting of Los Angeles. In addition, the McMartin family was "different." They were Christian Scientists. They were unusually devoted to one another. Peggy lived in a house adjacent to her mother's. Three generations of McMartins worked in the same place. Virginia McMartin had been forced to fend for herself and her family when her

husband left her in 1946, a time when divorce was uncommon. All of these descriptions were used to show how unusual the family was.

One of the most commonly used references about the McMartin family was the intergenerational feature of the preschool's operators. It does not appear to have been included to intentionally create an air of suspicion, though the reference is tainted with the implication that Raymond Buckey and his mother, Peggy, conspired to molest the children at the school, implicity suggesting an incestuous relationship between the two.

> The charges, based on testimony from nine boys and nine girls now aged 2 to 13, named three relatives of founder and owner Virginia McMartin, plus two other women (AP, March 23, 1984).
>
> The wheelchair-bound Mrs. McMartin, 76, her daughter and two grandchildren and three female teachers were indicted last week on 115 counts of child molestation (UPI, March 25, 1984).
>
> In a companion declaration to Ms. Barrett's, Ms. Rubin said a 3-year-old reported that Buckey raped her at the school last Jan. 3 in the presence of Buckey's mother (AP, March 28, 1984).
>
> Mrs. Buckey, 60, and her 29-year-old son are charged with 100 counts of molestation and conspiracy in the 4-yeear-old case that once included seven teachers at the now defunct Manhattan Beach school (AP, September 28, 1987).
>
> Parents wept when (a) Los Angeles jury tossed out 52 sensational sex-abuse charges against a mother and son who ran the now defunct school (*U.S. News & World Report*, Jan 29, 1989)

Almost all of the articles mentioned two adjectives together, "affluent" and "suburb." This is relevant to the analysis in two ways. First, because the identifier of "suburb" may be the distinguishing place description that takes the place of "town" or "community" in this context. Second, the connection of suburb with affluent is important to the proposed theory that there are two types of moral panic: metapanic and localized

panic- and that these are divided by class, income, race, education, and distance from urban center. Under this theory the moral panic in Manhattan Beach would predictably fall under the rubric of a metapanic. I propose that media representations (and real SES) of the community as affluent are indicators that a moral panic will reach beyond its local audience(s) and influence national policy and/or consciousness.

Other than the ubiquitous references to the "affluent suburb" of Manhattan Beach, there is little rhetoric on space in the articles. Reporters refer to the preschool itself, and the adjacent homes of Peggy Buckey and her mother Virginia McMartin. Apart from these there is little community or spatial rhetoric. Rather, the majority of rhetoric on the preschool centers on the child victims and protecting them, or on the court proceedings. This is consistent with Philip Jenkins's (1993, 2000) assessment that the United States was in the midst of a conservative wave that transcended locale and contributed to several convergent moral panics in the 1980's and early 1990's. These moral panics focused on murder, child abduction, child abuse, and Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA). In one way or another all of these panics involved children. Reporters cited children as main victims of abuse from strangers and parents, and contributed to a response that brought great social change on many fronts including new legislation.

During the period of the preliminary investigation, the majority of the articles and transcripts focused on a pornography ring being the center of the McMartin preschool's operation, an idea that began in interviewing sessions at CII. It is no coincidence that, only a year before, Lael Rubin had been the prosecutor of a sensational case of child pornography trafficking. She won a conviction against a female defendant and was assigned to the McMartin case because of her previous success.

The pornography scenario was the focus of most of the articles until well into the first trial. When no evidence of pornography could be found, more elaborate mythological representations of good and evil emerged. A child in an unrelated molestation case in Lomita claimed to have been molested by a babysitter wearing black robes who burned candles during the abuse. This officially started accusations of SRA, although it had been hinted at when prosecutors alleged that Buckey had tortured and killed animals (e.g. cutting off a rabbit's ears) to procure the victims' silence. The unrelated abuse case also included rabbit ears in the evidence, and the McMartin judge was asked to the introduction of a black robe, rabbit ears, and candles into the court to show the children.

> Bobb also took under consideration Thursday a request to show the boy (witness) severed rabbit ears, a black cloak, and candle confiscated in a weekend raid on a house in Lomita, 20 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. Prosecutors have contended the items corroborate the boy's account of animal sacrifice and ritualistic ceremonies by teachers and others, even though they were seized in connection with a separate case of alleged child molestation involving a babysitting service (AP, February 22, 1985).

Immediately after this, police searched the homes of all original defendants in an attempt to discover any ritualistic or satanic items. After this initial reporting there were over thirty references to SRA in later articles. Many of them appeared after the acquittals, however, as statements to the press by the alleged victims.

After the first trial which ended in January of 1990, the discourse shifted, taking the form of a public mea culpa. The press became especially sympathetic to Raymond Buckey who spent five years in prison before being released on $1.5 million bail in 1989. The panic died down some during the second trial which ended in July of 1990. By the

time the verdict was read, the public was no longer sure of their guilt. However, district attorney, Ira Reiner feared a backlash (he was up for reelection) from a second round of acquittals. Before announcing a decision on the final thirteen charges, Reiner consulted with the parents of the victims who wanted another trial. The jury in July of 1990 acquitted the Buckeys of all but thirteen counts. At the prospect of a third trial, the press and public were tired of the accusations. A third trial loomed on the horizon. But after a mistrial on the last of the thirteen counts, energy was low, and the public desire to convict the Buckeys had evaporated. Though it was scarcely a traditional "happy ending," public opinion did reverse in favor of the McMartin family. The watershed date for the change in public opinion coincides with the acquittals in the January 1990 trial.

The bill for the original hearing and trials came to over $15 million, one of the most expensive in American history. Virginia McMartin died not long after the first trial began, and Peggy McMartin Buckey died in 2000, still waiting for the parents of her former students to apologize. The trial cost the McMartins and the Buckeys everything they had accumulated, houses, the school, money, reputation. In the end the family was left with nothing, even their name was a hindrance.

Most people in Manhattan Beach admitted (after the fact) that they believed the trial was nothing more than a media-exaggerated witch hunt. The real victims however, were the children. CII claimed that 366 children were molested and terrorized at the McMartin preschool. Of those children, 103 were witnesses in the preliminary hearing and trial. Most of the children still adhere to the stories of molestation and abuse. They have memories of events that possibly did not occur.

Symbolically, the McMartin trial was a warning from parents to childcare workers that ultimately it is the parents who are in control of the child. Ultimately seven preschools were closed in association with the McMartin allegations. In a time of conservative politics, a great struggle took place between the promotion of traditional roles and the need for two incomes to support affluent lifestyles (Best 1990, Victor 1993, Jenkins 1993, 2000). Parents lashing out at child care workers perfectly summarize this struggle. It offered parents the ability to prove their commitment to their children, and to be publicly mapped on the side of "goodness," and the "system" or "necessity" of childcare as the ultimate evil.

Chapter 6
Satanic Murders in a Small Town: The Robin Hood Hills Murders

On the afternoon of May 5, 1993, young Christopher Byers got a spanking from his stepfather. The child had been riding his skateboard on his stomach down the middle of the street. John Mark Byers, Christopher's stepfather had warned him repeatedly that he did not want him to play in such a dangerous manner. Christopher had also broken another cardinal rule, he had played in a neighborhood of which the elder Byers's did not approve. John Mark Byers gave his stepson a crisp spanking with his belt, and then left to collect his other stepson. He punished the eight-year-old boy, instructing him to clean up outside in the yard until he returned.

Later, while cleaning the yard, Christopher Byers was met by two of his second-grade buddies, Michael Moore, and Stevie Branch. Both boys lived in the neighborhood, they enticed Christopher to join them, three boys riding down the street on two bicycles. Michael Moore's mother wanted him to come inside and sent his sister Dawn to find him. Dawn saw the boys riding away, but her voice couldn't reach them. They turned the corner together, leaving Dawn yelling in the middle of the street. No one would ever see the children alive again.

When John Mark Byers came home from picking up his stepson, Ryan, Christopher was gone. Byers assumed the boy had ditched his chores, because of his punishment. He became angry, grabbed his keys and went looking for Christopher. The family had planned to eat out together that night, and Byers thought Christopher's spite at being punished might ruin their plans. When Christopher hadn't come home or been found by 6:30 that night, Byers claimed he became worried. The Byers family did not know that their son had gone off to play with the other boys until Diana Moore, Michael's mother knocked on their door asking if they'd found Christopher. She then explained that the boys had been together.

Around 4:30 P.M., Pam Hobbs, the mother of Stevie Branch, had told her son he could only go out to play for an hour. She was leaving for work at a local restaurant and wanted her son home when his stepfather arrived. When her shift ended she was shocked to learn that her son had not returned home. The families contacted the police, and an official search began for the three boys. Police and volunteers scoured neighborhoods, knocked on doors and asked questions at local businesses. No one had seen the boys since the afternoon. Some reported seeing them riding their bikes toward Robin Hood Hills.

Robin Hood Hills is a small patch of wooded area. It sits adjacent to the Blue Beacon Truck Wash on Interstate 40. It is a small lush area, overrun with trees, high grass, and weeds; in addition, a small creek-like drainage ditch runs through the center. It is not difficult to understand the allure of the place to adventurous children. I visited the area in 1999 as part of my initial research. By that time it was more overgrown than what

is described in police accounts. But it is easy to understand why parents did not want their children playing there.

Robin Hood Hills is actually sort of an L-shaped piece of land. The leg of the "L" sits behind the Blue Beacon Truck Wash, while the longer part of the "L" sits right next to it, stretching from a levee (separating it from the residential area) to Interstate 40. The Blue Beacon is a typical "Truck stop" that one might find traveling along the interstates. It is a large building with a convenience store and a restaurant. At the rear of the property, adjacent to Robin Hood Hills, there is an expansive concrete area where truck drivers can park their rigs. Parents in the area had long declared the area off-limits to local children, citing its proximity to the interstate, as well as the reputation of the place for attracting vagrants. But as many local children and teenagers attested, the reputation of the place combined with parent's interdictions, only made Robin Hood Hills that much more tantalizing.

Late in the evening of May 5, 1993, John Mark Byers and several others including Terry Hobbs, Stevie Branch's stepfather ventured into the woods to look for the boys. Four teenagers accompanied them, Byers' older stepson Ryan Clark, and neighbors Brit Smith, Robbie Young and Ritchey Masters. Inappropriately dressed for searching through the woods, Byers went home alone to change his clothes. Hobbs examined one side of the park while the teens split up into two groups. Smith and Clark claimed to hear splashing noises in the darkness, and ran out of the wooded area frightened.

Across town, a telephone call came into the West Memphis Police Department (WMPD) about a frightened man who was in the bathroom at a local fast-food restaurant, Bojangles Chicken, quite dazed and covered in blood and mud. The man was described

as a young black man, wearing a blue-jogging suit, wet from the hips down. The WMPD dispatched a unit to the scene. Officer Meeks arrived as the restaurant was closing. By the time Officer Meeks arrived the man had left. She did not enter the restaurant, but drove around to the drive-through window asking if everyone was alright. The restaurant manager asked the officer if she wanted to come in, she declined and drove off. The closing crew cleaned up the area, which the manager had described as covered with blood, mud, and human waste. The loss of the "Bojangles Man" would later be counted as a major oversight in the case.

Meanwhile, there were no new developments in looking for the missing children. Around two in the morning, the crews returned to their homes to get some rest and wait for first light. The parents, understandably were the first up, and resumed their searches at around 6 A.M. Parents searched abandoned homes, trailers, buildings, wooded areas, and even searched Weaver Elementary where the boys attended school together. There was no trace of the three friends.

The WMPD resumed their search with the aid of several volunteers and Crittenden County's search and rescue unit. Later in the morning WMPD Detective Bryn Ridge, Sergeant Mike Allen, and a handful of volunteers would return to Robin Hood Hills. Earlier the search had been in other parts of West Memphis, but investigators returned to get a better view of this area in daylight. The searchers split up, with Allen and juvenile officer Steve Jones searching an area with a steep embankment that local children called the Devil's Den. There was a steep drop into the drainage ditch from this perch. Jones and Allen ambled through the area, when Jones noted something floating in the ditch, a shoe. Allen reached for a branch to steady himself, lowering his body to

retrieve the item. But he overreached and fell into the waist-deep water, coming face to face with the body of Michael Moore.

News spread quickly among the searchers that one of the boys had been found, albeit, not how the searchers had hoped to find them. Soon all of the officers converged on the spot where Allen had found Michael Moore's body. Detective Bryn Ridge volunteered to get into the gulley and search for the bodies of the other two boys. It was not long before he found them. The other two boys' bodies were found not too far from where Michael Moore had been discovered. And though the officers were shocked at finding their bodies; they were more perplexed when removing the boys from the water. All three boys were nude, and had been tied hand to foot. Stakes in the water held down their clothing. The boys had been bludgeoned to death, and one of them, Christopher Byers, had been sexually mutilated.

These are the sad events that led to a moral panic in West Memphis, Arkansas. Soon the police, the media, the victims' families, the public, and several moral entrepreneurs would be involved in the case. What follows is a description of the events of the investigation and trial, then a rhetorical analysis of the public discourse on the events and the investigation and trial for the murders of Stevie Branch, Michael Moore, and Christopher Byers.

History

Because of the seriousness of the crime and the outrage of the small community, the WMPD were inundated with tips and accusations. One of the most frequently reported tips was that there were dark forces at work in the community. Several tipsters reported that Robin Hood Hills was a favorite meeting place of Satanists in West

Memphis. The police initially dismissed accusations of Satanism, and discouraged the spread of such rumors. They reported to the Memphis newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*,

> Police have found no evidence that the boys were killed during a cult-like ritual, as some West Memphians have been speculating... (*Commercial Appeal* May 12, 1993:A1)

Rumors continued circulating however, and two of the most influential proponents of the Satanism theory were Crittenden County Juvenile officers Steve Jones and Chief. Jerry Driver. Jones had been with Sergeant Mike Allen when Michael Moore's body was found. He later reported to *Commercial Appeal* reporters Marc Perrusquia and Bartholomew Sullivan that he *knew* a young man named "Damien" was involved right from the beginning.

> Police suspicions about Damien actually had started the moment the boys' bodies were discovered in the ditch. It began with the numbness that had overcome juvenile officer Steve Jones as he watched Det. Bryn Ridge pull the bodies from the ditch. Jones's horror was more than just a reaction to the grisly scene. His fears had come true, he would tell others. Damien Echols, that dark, moody teenager from Lakeshore, had finally killed somebody (Guy et al. 1995:93).

Though the police tried to quell the public's speculation that the crimes were cult related, they entertained the concept especially in the absence of other evidence. This was not their only theory of the crime however, and investigators pursued other leads. They interviewed known offenders, drug dealers, child molesters. They interrogated parents, and neighbors. But despite their best efforts, there was no physical evidence linking anyone to the crime scene or the victims' injuries. The killer or killers had done well placing the bodies in the ditch. The water from the drainage had removed most of the evidence from the victims, and the clothes were handled by police in such a way as to be

very limited as evidence[1]. In addition, because so many people, including volunteers, had been through the woods to aid in the search and rescue efforts, there was no footprint evidence available. The woods were muddy and yielded little to no reliable evidence.

The police were aware of their predicament, but said nothing to the public about the state of evidence. In the absence of official leads and information, the rumors of Satanism continued, growing more and more important to the public and investigating officers. As early as the day after the bodies were discovered, the suspicions of Jerry Driver and Steve Jones were making waves in the WMPD. Driver, Jones, (of the Crittenden County juvenile investigation office) and Lieutenant James Sudbury (of the WMPD) drove out to the Broadway Trailer Park to interview Damien Echols about the murders.

Damien Echols was familiar to Jerry Driver and Steve Jones. They had a history. Driver had driven Echols to a state mental facility, and on another occasion had confiscated several occult-related items from his room after an arrest. These events had taken place in 1992, a year before the murders. When the officers arrived at Echols' home, he complied with their interview. The investigators brought with them some occult-crime information from a handbook, and asked Damien's opinion on the crime. He was happy to oblige, agreeing with their theories, and giving what he would later call, "common-sense' answers (Guy et al. 1995:347). He claimed that the murders were likely

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[1] Typically evidence is treated in a manner called the "maintenance of the chain of evidence." Once evidence is collected it is meticulously handled, with documentation as to who handled the evidence and under what conditions, so as to explain any contamination that might confound the investigation. The clothes of the victims in this case were put into a paper bag where they sat on a shelf, soaking through. They also developed mildew and other microscopic contaminants before much evidence could be collected from them. They were deemed unreliable at trial (see Supreme Court of Arkansas No. CR99-1060, Damien

a "thrill-kill." The officers armed with their literature, asked if there was any reason to defile the victim, from a cult perspective and whether or not the young age of the victims was pertinent. Damien agreed that defiling the victim could be important, and that the younger the victim, the more likely it was that the murderer could consider the victim appropriate for sacrifice (West Memphis Three website[2]).

Meanwhile, the police were also hunting down other leads. The WMPD interviewed John Mark Byers, the stepfather of Christopher Byers. The elder Byers had a police record, and had a history as a confidential informant, aiding the police in a marijuana sting two years earlier. He had also been an informant in other cases, and had several complaints against him from his neighbors. Detectives asked him direct questions about his potential involvement, which he denied, and police did not press him. Importantly, the press did not latch onto Byers as a potential suspect.

As police continued to follow up leads, many people continued to report to authorities that Satanist activity was occurring in West Memphis. As police pressed the connection between the murders and Satanism, Damien Echols's name continued to surface. No informants were able to connect him conclusively with the murder scene, nor were they able to supply police with related crimes, though several young people were interviewed about Echols' involvement in an alleged coven of witches. However, Jerry Driver, the chief investigator for the Crittenden County Juvenile services division, had followed Echols' "career' for some time. Whenever there was an event, crime, or evidence of occult activity, Driver made time to ask Damien Echols about it. Driver had

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Wayne Echols, appellant v. State of Arkansas, Appellee: 344 Ark. 513; 42 S.W.3d 467), though the judge did permit some fiber evidence to be admitted.
[2] www.wm3.org

a suspicion about Echols. In 1992, Driver had investigated a complaint from the mother a teenage girl involved with Echols. The two had evidently run away. Driver found them in an abandoned trailer. When the girl lost interest in Echols he reportedly threatened her new love interest. The girl claimed to be involved in witchcraft, and rumors circulated freely that the two wanted to have a baby so that they could sacrifice it to the devil.

The rumors were never substantiated, but when Driver learned that Domini Teer, Damien's new girlfriend was pregnant, he was convinced that the baby would be offered as a sacrifice to Satan. When the Robin Hood Hills murders occurred, Driver believed that Damien was the culprit. But Jerry Driver was not the only person in West Memphis who speculated that Damien was involved.

The key to tying Damien Echols to a Satanic motive in the killings would come from a local woman, Vicky Hutcheson, who also believed the strange teen was involved. Victoria Hutcheson told the detective at the WMPD that she had taken it upon herself to look into the murder, though her reasons were not very sound. She said she had a hunch that the murders were part of a "devil worshipping thing" (Guy et al. 1995:152). Her neighbor, Jessie Misskelley, had told her some weird stories involving Damien Echols, and she decided to find out more on her own.

She claimed to have checked out some books on Wicca from the library and befriended Echols. She also told detectives that Damien Echols had invited her to a witches' esbat (lunar celebration ritual), and that she had gone, to learn more. Besides being friends and neighbors with seventeen-year old Misskelley, Hutcheson had been loosely connected to the victims. Her ten-year-old son, Aaron had been in the same cub-scout troop with them, and was good friends with Michael Moore. Aaron would later

claim that he had been playing in the woods with the victims on the fifth of May but left before the violence began. Hutcheson is the link between the WMPD and the ability to build a circumstantial case around Damien Echols. Her son, Aaron, contributed to the theory of the crime. Later he would say that he and the victims frequently played in the woods together, and that sometimes they would spy on five men painted black, performing rituals. Hutcheson was the only adult who could claim that she had attended a ritual with Damien Echols. And she was the person who introduced Jessie Misskelley to the investigation.

On June 3, 1993, almost a full month after the murders, Jessie Misskelley, Sr., the father of Jessie Misskelley, Jr., asked Detective Bryn Ridge about the reward money that had grown over the last few weeks. The reward fund had grown to almost $30,000. Ridge let Misskelley know that the money was available for anyone who helped get a conviction. The senior Misskelley, after hearing his son's conversations with Vicky Hutcheson, suspected his son knew something about the crime. Ridge told the elder Misskelley to get his son and bring him back to the station, enticing him with the reward money (Guy et al. 1995). On the way to the station the two Misskelleys joked about buying a new truck with the reward money. Jessie, Sr., dropped his son off, having no idea what would happen next.

When West Memphis police interviewed Jessie Lloyd Misskelley, Jr., they had no idea that the teen would implicate two other suspects, and himself. They also did not know the younger Misskelley had a learning disability, and an I.Q. of 72. Misskelley went into the interrogation room and told West Memphis Police that, not only did he have details of the murder, but also had actually witnessed the events. Jessie Misskelley Jr.,

told the officers that he had attended several Satanic meetings with Damien Echols, and that at these meetings the members of the group had passed around photographs of the victims.

Chief WMPD investigator Gary Gitchell felt that Misskelley was holding back. He pressed the teenager, encouraging him to develop his story a little more. Misskelley claimed that the photos of the victims had been kept in a briefcase, along with a small gun and some cocaine. He claimed that the boys had been targeted in advance by the Satanists. Police responded well to this information, and pressed Misskelley for more, playing a piece of audio tape by Aaron Hutcheson claiming to know about the crimes. Fearful, Misskelley relayed to the detectives that on May the fifth, the three victims skipped school and were lured into the woods by Echols. Misskelley joined them in the woods, and watched while Miskelley and his friend, Jason Baldwin, sexually abused the boys. Then, surprisingly, Misskelley claimed that one of the boys, (who he could not name, but identified in photos as Michael Moore), had tried to run. Jessie claimed that he stopped him, chasing him down, and returned him to Baldwin and Echols. At this point Jessie claimed to be upset and frightened, and left the murderers and their victims in the woods.

Gary Gitchell, Bryn Ridge, and the other detectives were surprised. They wanted to secure warrants to search the homes of Echols, who they already suspected, and his friend Jason Baldwin. But the testimony was shaky, and there was no corroborating evidence. The officers called in the district attorney and a judge, asking for warrants. Both claimed that the confession was not enough for a search warrant. But they would be on hand should those circumstances change. Under pressure to obtain a search warrant,

Ridge and Gitchell repeatedly went in and out of the interrogation room asking questions of Misskelley. The questions were recorded, where the previous interview was not. The questions appeared to be very leading, with Misskelley giving very generic responses. This could be due to many factors. Some estimates are that Miskelley spent over twelve hours in police custody. More conservative estimates calculate the time at six hours. Either way, police admit that Misskelley's testimony was only partially recorded.

Under pressure to make an arrest, Gitchell repeatedly asked questions about crime scene details. He was desperate to get Misskelley to corroborate facts of the crime that only someone present would know. However, reading the questions, it is apparent, that while the discussions of these events might have taken place earlier, it is also possible that the suspect is unaware that he is implicating himself, and agreed (according to police Jessie Misskelley, Jr., waived his right to counsel) in whatever manner possible in order to get out of police custody.

> MISSKELLEY: Then they tied them up; tied their hands up; they started screwing them and stuff, cutting them and stuff, and I saw it and I turned around and looked, and then I took off running.
> RIDGE: Okay, now when this is going on, when this is taking place, you saw somebody with a knife. Who had the knife?
> MISSKELLEY: Jason.
> RIDGE: Jason had a knife, what did he cut with the knife? What did you see him cut, or who did you see him cut?
> MISSKELLEY: I saw him cut one of the little boys.
> RIDGE: All right, where did he cut him at?
> MISSKELLEY: He was cutting him in the face.
> RIDGE: Cutting him in the face. All right, another boy was cut I understand. Where was he cut at?
> MISSKELLEY: At the bottom.
> RIDGE: On his bottom? Was he faced down, and he was cutting him-
> GITCHELL: Now you're talking about bottom, do you mean right here?
> MISSKELLEY: Yes.
> GITCHELL: In his groin area?
> MISSKELLEY: Yes.

RIDGE: Do you know what his penis is?
MISKELLEY: Yeah, that's where he was cut at (Guy et al. 1995:173-174 and *Commercial Appeal* June 7, 1993 pA4)[3]

It is easy to speculate that this partial interview was either the result of previous conversations when Misskelley had already clarified details and was now simply repeating them for the record, or that the police officers had discussed the details with him and he was simply parroting responses. Police officers claimed the former, while in both Misskelley's and the Echols-Baldwin trial, defense attorneys claimed that the defendant's low I.Q. made it possible that his testimony was spurious.

In addition to the above statement, Jessie Misskelley, Jr., also corroborated the theory of the crime as being Satanic, by verifying that there was a cult operating in the area, and that Echols was the head of it. He described an initiation ceremony where, in order to get into the cult, the new member would have to kill a dog and skin it, then cook the hind leg meat over a bonfire and eat it, "If he can't eat it, then he don't get in" (*Commercial Appeal*, June 8, 1993: A1).

The detectives also got some corroborating information on the wounds of the victims from Miskelley's Statement. He described that two of the boys had been sodomized and forced to perform oral sex on the other defendants. Police used this information to corroborate bruises on the sides of the victims' heads that were consistent with forced oral copulation. These were the specific details that WMPD needed corroborated before they could get a search warrant. The warrant was issued late that

[3] For other references to this testimony see Jessie Lloyd Misskelley Jr.'s appeal : Supreme Court of Arkansas CR94-848 Jessie Lloyd Misskelley, Jr. Appellant, v. State of Arkansas, Appellee;323-Ark. 449:915 S.W.2d 702.

evening around eleven. Misskelley was arrested. Police went to the home of Damien Echols and arrested him and Jason Baldwin who was present. In addition, police searched the homes of both boys, as well as the home of Echols's girlfriend, Domini Teer.

The Misskelley Statement was made public, reproduced in part in *The Commercial Appeal* on June 7, four days after his interrogation and the arrests of Baldwin and Echols. All three boys were arraigned. They did not waive their right to a speedy trial, (meaning that the trial had to take place within nine months), and were taken into custody. It was reported by Dan Stidham, court appointed defense attorney for Jessie Misskelley, that Misskelley did not understand why he was being arraigned, or that his defense attorney was there on his behalf (*The Commercial Appeal*, June 7, 1993:B1, see also Guy et al. 1995).

Once the arrests were made, the public face of the panic shifted. A brief calm came over the community while the police and attorneys prepared for trial. Occasional stories made the news about the development of the cases. But for the most part, there was a sense of relief in the community, that the right people had been caught. The Misskelley trial was first, and the community was nervous. The defense team and the prosecutors knew that Misskelley's trial would be the bellwether for the trial of the other two defendants.

Between the arrests and the trials there were some interesting developments. One of the most important was an eyewitness statement who claimed that she saw Damien Echols and Domini Teer walking along the service road near Robin Hood Hills the night of the murders around 9:30 in the evening. The witnesses' name was Narlene

Hollingsworth. She was a distant relative of Domini Teer, Echols's girlfriend. Hollingsworth claimed that she had been driving with several members of her family on the night of May 5, and saw Echols and Teer walking into the Robin Hood Hills woods. She described Echols as wearing a long black trench coat and Teer wearing jeans with white flowers on them, and holes in the knees.

Deputy Prosecutor John Fogleman was not completely convinced of the state's case. He thought that the case had some holes in it, but made a profound attempt to do the best he could with the case. He ordered that blood, hair, and semen samples be taken from Misskelley and the other two suspects. However, despite collecting this evidence, there was no physical evidence from the crime scene or the victims to compare it against. To compound problems, WMPD had left behind evidence at both the original crime scene, and at the homes of the defendants, and Domini Teer. Specifically the prosecution did not have a murder weapon. The boys had been bludgeoned to death, but one of the boys had been sexually mutilated, and another had been cut in the face. No knife had ever been recovered. And though there were tree limbs that could have served as the murder weapon in the area where the bodies were found, they were not collected as evidence until several weeks after the murders. In addition, police did not collect Echols's black trench coat from his home, though it was lying in plain view.

Jessie Misskelly's trial began over six months later, on January 19, 1994. Both trials had to have changed venues. Misskelley's trial took place under heavy press attention. Everyone was aware that the outcome of the following trial would be dependent on whether or not Misskelley would be convicted. Defense attorneys pointed out that Jessie Misskelley's statement was full of inconsistencies with the facts of the

case. Misskelley claimed that the victims had skipped school and that the defendants met in the woods at around nine in the morning. The defense proved that the victims had all been in school for the entire day, and that one of the defendants Jason Baldwin had also attended school that day.

Defense attorneys also tried to explain Jessie's "confession" as a coerced statement. He brought in an expert in coercive testimony from Stanford University, but Judge David Burnett refused to let the expert testify to the specifics of Misskelley's testimony. He would only allow him to refer to the generalized theory of coercive testimony. In addition, the prosecution brought in Vicky Hutcheson as a witness. Her testimony about attending an esbat ritual was admitted, even though the event was supposed to have occurred two weeks after the murders. Stidham, Misskelley's attorney objected, but was overruled by Judge Burnett. In addition, Jessie's alibi witnesses were not consistent, and many were not allowed to testify. Jessie did not take the stand. The jury deliberated for until 11:54 the following morning. They returned a guilty verdict. Jessie Misskelley was convicted of one count of first degree murder, in the death of Michael Moore, and two counts of second degree murder in the deaths of Stevie Branch and Christopher Byers.

The Misskelley trial had a change of venue to Corning, Arkansas. A change of venue would also be necessary in the second trial. Because the evidence against the two co-defendants was very different in nature, (Echols made no denial about his interest in the occult versus Baldwin who claimed not to be involved), defense attorneys for Jason Baldwin asked for the trials to be severed. The judge refused. The two friends would be tried together. But they would not be tried together in West Memphis, or in Corning

where Misskelley's trial had taken place. Both towns were far too inflamed, even the media asked the question of whether or not the boys could get a fair trial.

Judge Burnett settled on a nearby town called, Jonesboro. Defense attorneys had hoped for a change of venue, but were sorely disappointed in the Burnett's decision. Jonesboro had a nickname, in a town of nearly 46,000 there were more than 100 churches, it was referred to as "Fort God." The town is a stronghold for conservative and fundamentalist political and religious views. In the weeks prior to the Echols-Baldwin trial there were two incidents that should have been taken into consideration by Judge Burnett. The first was a seminar on Satanism that had been arranged by a local preacher. The seminar was a sellout. Also just prior to the trials, a local bookstore owner had been run out of town. He owned an occult book store, and the landlord had canceled his lease. Several demonstrations by local citizens, some who he claimed threatened him with violence, had convinced him he was no longer welcome or safe in Jonesboro.

These events did not interest Judge Burnett, and the trial of Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin began on February 22, 1994. On that day the judge had not decided whether he would permit the prosecution to use Satanism as the implicit motive for the killings. Before the jury was admitted in, prosecutors were asked to provide the outline of this theory in the judge's chambers. The defense objected that the state's witness was a retired police officer who had obtained a masters degree and Ph.D. from a mail-order diploma mill called Columbia Pacific University. Griffis had also appeared as an "expert" on an episode of ABC's 20/20 and had written a guide for law-enforcement officers on occult crime. Based on these two accomplishments, Burnett allowed the

testimony of Griffis as an expert on occult crime. The Satanic motive would be accepted by the court.

The trial began and ended with a great deal of drama. Almost all of it focused on Damien Echols. Defense attorneys knew that the opinion of their clients was based partially on Damien's attitude and appearance. They also knew that his involvement in Wicca and his interest in the occult were going to have to be explained. When Echols was put on the stand he eloquently explained about Wicca, though he did not squarely resolve its difference from Satanism.

> ECHOLS: The one (pentagram) that points up is from the Wicca religion; [sic] the one that points down is from Satanism. The one that points up symbolizes a man or a woman with arms and legs outstretched; Satanism pointing down would be a goat's head.
> PRICE: Did you ever practice any of these spells?
> ECHOLS: Not that I know of.
> PRICE: Did you ever use any of that material (in his journal) to conjure up any evil, or anything like that?"
> ECHOLS: No (Guy et al. 1995:340).

Related testimony would only show that Damien owned books with dark themes, and was familiar with the work of sinister occult figure Aleister Crowley. The prosecution's cross-examination of Echols was artfully accomplished by John Fogleman, and assistant prosecutor Davis, who turned the heat up on Echols, breaking his calm exterior. Davis did little more than rile Echols up, and make insinuations, but it would be enough for the jury.

> DAVIS: So did you tell (Detective Bryn Ridge) that the killer would want to hear the kids scream?
> ECHOLS: It's common sense, if he got off on killing people, he'd probably want to hear them scream.
> DAVIS: And is it part of the common sense, that whoever kills eight-year-olds would feel good and whoever kills eight-year-olds would like to hear them scream? Is that part of your "common sense" philosophy?

> ECHOLS: I figure they must have, if they did it.
> DAVIS: How did you think that candle wax got there?
> ECHOLS: I don't know. Maybe whoever killed them put it there or maybe it was there before they left home (Guy et al 1995: 347-349).

The defense attempted to show that Echols had been targeted by the police since the beginning of the investigation. Baldwin's defense rested on his attending school the day of the murders and on a single defense witness who testified that fiber evidence found in Baldwin's home was not consistent with fibers found on one of the victims. The prosecution scrambled rebuttal witnesses, and that point soon lost its influence. The defense attempted to offer several alternative theories to the crime. The only one that Judge Burnett allowed involved John Mark Byers, the stepfather of one of the victims.

In the course of the investigation and trial, a television crew making a documentary on the case had been permitted access to the court, as well as to her officers and the defendants. The victims' families were willing to be on camera most of the time, with the exception of the Moore family who avoided the spotlight. (Later appeals would question the propriety of this, as the film makers offered $5000 to defense attorneys for allowing them access to meetings and proceedings.)

However, an alternative theory of the crime involved the film makers from HBO. They had interviewed John Mark Byers for their documentary. Around Christmas time, Byers gave the two-man crew a gift, a small folding knife, with a serrated blade. Upon examining the knife when they returned to New York, the filmmakers realized that the knife was not new, it had been used before and there was some tissue in the hinge of the knife. They sent the knife to the WMPD, who subsequently sent the knife for testing. The DNA results for the knife were relatively inconclusive. They determined that the

material in the hinge was blood, and that the blood was consistent with both John Mark Byers and Christopher Byers, even though the two were not genetically related. There was not enough material in the hinge of the knife for a more detailed test. Byers was called to testify. He claimed that he had used the knife to prepare venison just prior to Thanksgiving. That explained blood, but not human blood. Byers countered that he must have cut his thumb preparing the meat.

Closing arguments were heated. John Fogleman, the chief prosecutor was experienced at connecting with the jury. He played on the "down-home" feeling of the community, drawing attention to the difference between the local witnesses, and the outsiders who marked the defense's witness list, including a professor of sociology from Virginia. He asked the jury not to be blinded by the simpleness of the eyewitnesses. He admitted they weren't sophisticated, but he claimed, they knew who and what they saw (this was specifically directed at Narlene Hollingsworth's testimony that she had seen Echols and Domini Teer walking into Robin Hood Hills the night of the murders). He reminded them that Satanism was the only possible motive for the crime, because no other possible motive could explain the senseless murder and torture of three small children.

When the defense made their closing arguments they fell right into the trap that Fogleman had created. Defense attorneys pointed to the testimony of experts and to inconsistencies in the stories of the witnesses. They pointed to police incompetence in dealing with evidence from the crime scene. In short, they pointed out how much more the experts "knew" about evil than the local people affected by the crimes. The jury did not buy it, and returned a guilty verdict the day after closing arguments. They found

Damien Echols guilty of one count of capital murder and two counts of first degree murder. Jason Baldwin was found guilty of one count of first degree murder, and two counts of second degree murder. The jury later returned a sentence of life in prison without parole for Jason Baldwin, and death by lethal injection for Damien Echols.

Moral Panic Criteria

At this point in the discussion of the events in the West Memphis case it is useful to recount the ways in which the case adheres to the theory of moral panic as developed by Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). The suspects were chosen by design. From the moment that the case broke, Crittenden Count juvenile investigators Jerry Driver and Steve Jones suspected Damien Echols' involvement. They informed the WMPD of their suspicions, and the evidence upon which these opinions were formed. The evidence consisted of a cryptic journal filled with dark poetry, a book on Wicca, and a book on the evils of witchcraft by Cotton Mathers.

These items and several drawings were seized from Damien Echols's room more than a year before his arrest. Damien had been treated in the public health system for depression, and had been hospitalized for mental problems. Both juvenile officers were aware of this and on at least one prior occasion, Jones and Driver had transported him to a state mental hospital.

Based on Driver's recommendation, officers of the WMPD, accompanied by Jones and Driver, visited Echols at his home, asking him about possible Satanic themes in the crime. They did this despite the direction of their own office to the media that there was no evidence of occult themes in the murders. This shows an official basis for the continuation and further development of satanic rumors being supported in the

community. Even while the WMPD was denying that the crimes were occult in nature, they were investigating that very motive. In fairness, it should be stated, that the Satanic rumors were cropping up everywhere, including the police department, and investigators did pursue more than one "satanic" lead. However, moral entrepreneurs (Driver and Jones) had been fixated on Echols for some time even before the murders. He made an easy, if obvious, target.

As soon as May 7, the day after the bodies were discovered, police were interviewing Echols. While the official arm of the law was pursuing the Satanic link, the official discourse immediately following the murders was that the killer definitely had to be an outsider. Reporters and police theorized that vagrants frequently camped in the Robin Hood Hills woods, perhaps hitchhikers had committed the crime. The press had already reported their belief that the perpetrator was a stranger.

By committing early in the investigation, that the killer was an outsider, the stage was set for the typification and escalation that was to come. One of the most important issues that occurred in the development of the public's theory of the crime was the commitment of the local authorities to the processes of escalation and diffusion by contacting and strengthening ties to outside organizations, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Bu doing so, local authorities set up a symbol in the signification spiral of the killer as an outsider. They then committed their resources to his discovery. Articles repeatedly referred to the difficulty of identifying suspects in a "serial" murder, though there was no evidence that the crime was sequential to any other around the country. Articles and public discourse also focused on the discovery of the boys near the truck stop, which placed the scene of the crime squarely in the arena of a vagrant moving

through town. Later, as escalation grew, the place where the bodies were discovered served another purpose; it set the suspects in the world of "poor white trash."

Investigators and the media focused on the crimes having been perpetrated by an outsider. Reports in *The Commercial Appeal* claimed that police had little evidence from the crime scene. Police asked for assistance from numerous agencies at the county, state, and Federal levels. The governor offered to give the small jurisdiction whatever it needed to solve the crimes. Under intense public pressure to find the killer(s) West Memphis police inspector Gary Gitchell announced that the WMPD had asked for help from the FBI. Specifically, they had asked the Arkansas FBI field office in Little Rock, to contact the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCVAC) in Quantico, Virginia. This unit of "profilers" is the celebrated (and sometimes denigrated) team of criminal analysts who build theories of criminal behavior based on crime scene evidence and psycho-social construction. Their work came to public attention with the book and film *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jenkins, 1993).

Though there was no evidence of a serial killer, police sent information on the crime and the crime scene to investigators at the NCVAC, asking for a profile of a serial killer. The newspaper reported that the WMPD had asked for the profile. This statement tied into public fears that the community was being threatened from an outside evil. The statement also removed the threat from the local context, establishing or reflecting an opinion that the crimes could not have been committed by someone from West Memphis. This theme will be explored in more detail later in the rhetorical analysis.

Escalation, the term used by Cohen (1972), Jenkins (1992, 1999), and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) is also termed a signification spiral by Hall et al. (1978). In this

reference, the term signification spiral is more telling. This process refers to an ever-increasing, self-referential spiral. References continue to escalate with emotion, even while referencing the same events or individuals, sometimes with greater drama. This escalates, and can become an important component of the myth-building in a community.

Jerry Driver's and Steve Jones's opinions that Damien Echols had "finally killed somebody" (Guy et al, 1995:93) fueled the investigation into an occult-related motive. The theory was driven by supporting testimony from other witnesses and tipsters, who believed that there were evil rituals behind the murders. Driver and Jones benefited from being labeled as moral entrepreneurs. Indeed, in later interviews they claimed that they were vindicated, having brought up the appearance of Satanic artifacts throughout Crittenden county, and been scoffed at by the "real" police, now they were seen as heroes (*Commercial Appeal*, June 13, 1993).

In addition, escalation took on another form. As is described by Cohen (1972) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) escalation also has an affect on authoritative powers by the agents of social control. After the Misskelley statement to police, authorities immediately attempted to secure search warrants for Echols's and Baldwin's homes. In order to secure these warrants, police relied on testimony from Misskelley that they knew was false in some instances, and was shaky in others. Specifically, Misskelley's statement referred to the victims being bound with ligatures made with brown rope. Police officers knew that when the bodies were found, the victims had been tied hand to foot with shoelaces. They rushed the interview, and pushed testimony that might not have come through otherwise, and used this as corroboration to obtain the warrants (Guy et al. 1995).

Of lesser importance, but adhering to the moral panic theory, there were frequent references in the media to the types of clothes the defendants wore. Echols was repeatedly reported to wear all-black, have black hair, and wear heavy boots, even in the heat of summer. This phenomenon is important to sensitization. At one point, there was a report that sixteen black T-shirts were confiscated from Jason Baldwin's home. The majority of these were T-shirts for heavy metal bands, though one black T-shirt had the face of country singer Reba McIntyre on it. Sensitization was achieved in West Memphis by the official agents of social control, the police, and the media in this case, reifying the dress, style, and actions of the teenage suspects. The actions that in other communities are often associated with teenage rebellion, in the case of West Memphis were mapped with criminal, lower class, amoral, and evil behavior.

The five indicators of moral panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994) are also present: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. These are ubiquitous in almost every reading of the material from West Memphis, but they should be covered for the sake of consistency and thoroughness. Consensus, concern, hostility, and volatility are obviously indicated in the events at West Memphis. The citizens of West Memphis were terrified at the prospect of a killer of children in their midst. Considerable effort on the part of community leaders and law enforcement was garnered in support of the victims' families. Law enforcement officials in the investigation demonstrated both consensus and concern. Hostility was very obviously directed toward the crime itself and then to the suspects, especially Damien Echols. Hostility did not end with the suspects, their families were targeted, as was anyone that could be associated with the defendants. This category was not limited to those who knew the defendants

but, could be extended to include anyone who could be associated through the sensitizing behaviors, like taste in music, similar clothes or jewelry.

Volatility is also fairly obvious. Volatility was demonstrated by the community's response to the crimes and their demand for swift resolution to their fears in the form of public pressure on the police department. The murder of three second-graders was great fodder for fear in the community as well as social rhetoric about the dangers of evil, and the very real presence of Satan in the midst of the good people of the small community. The sheer magnitude of the crime was enough to prove disproportionality.

According to Cohen (1972) disproportionality is measured by the threat of the event being eminent and consistent in society. The murder of children by strangers is extremely rare. Most times murdered children are the victims of their parents or someone that they know[4] and trust. The possibility that the children of West Memphis would be targeted again (by a stranger) was highly unlikely. Thus the amount of rhetoric and time dedicated to the topic is highly questionable and demonstrates the disproportionality of the threat. Though the loss of the individual children is incalculable from the perspective of parents and loved ones, the likelihood that the atrocities would be repeated is extremely low.

After one month with no solid stories in the press, and no official information forthcoming from the WMPD, tensions were high. Reports in the newspaper were becoming tepid. The Misskelley statement that broke in newspapers on June 7, 1993, provided the media, the community, and the police with the momentum they needed. Immediately after reporting on the Misskelley Statement, moral entrepreneurs began

making their claims. Claimsmakers and moral entrepreneurs are an enduring feature of moral panics (Cohen 1972, Jenkins 1992, Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, Victor 1993).

The headline of *The Commercial Appeal* on June 13, 1993 read, "Cult Experts Gave Warning in 1992." The lengthy article and related stories spanned the entire front page section of the newspaper. The article was based on the Jerry Driver's and Steve Jones' reports on finding burned out fires, animal carcasses, candles, satanic graffiti, and other evidence of cult rituals throughout Crittenden County. The article also told about a murder several years prior in an adjacent county where a young girl had been killed and left in a cemetery. More well-established moral entrepreneurs were cited in the article. Conservative speaker and author Carl Rashke, and psychologist, Dr. Paul King were quoted often, lending an authoritative voice to the public perceptions and fears of Satanism in their midst.

> Most of what brings this on is people dabbling in the occult...The truth of the matter is that Satanic Crimes in this country are definitely out there, it's the evolution of teenage rebellion in the last thirty years. It's getting much more extreme.
>
> Carl Rashke, quoted in *The Commercial Appeal*, June 13, 1993.

The assumption is that Satanism is a "real" phenomenon (from a moral or spiritual perspective) and that it was running rampant in West Memphis, two facts that have not been proven with any substantive evidence. In no articles or transcripts examined in this research was Satanism ever treated as anything other than an anti-moral, dehumanizing evil.

> Good versus evil is an important part of identity development. There's an ideology of violence and evil that attracts young people who don't

[4] Capitol Hill Hearing Testimony, house judiciary committee hearing on Juvenile Crime: March 8, 2001.

> have strong values. Heavy metal music may sound like irritating noise, but its lyrics glorify the power of evil and the child who sits in his room brooding over lyrics may display an unhealthy preoccupation...this child (Echols) should have been recognized as disturbed or eccentric.
>
> Dr. Paul King author of *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll...Dealing with Today's Troubled Youth*, quoted in *The Commercial Appeal*, June 6, 1993.

This quote also demonstrates how heavy metal music, brooding, and eccentricity are all suspect, and potentially doors to evil influence. The claimsmakers were out in force to support the theory of a Satanic motive in the Robin Hood Hills Murders.

Jessie Misskelley, Jason Baldwin, and Damien Echols, were all put on trial for capital murder. The only evidence in any of the cases was the Misskelley statement and the corroboration of witnesses. The evidence was not important in this case, however. The community had suffered enormous stress over the brutal murder of three young children. In response to this stress, there arose internal and external pressure on the local police (as the enforcers of this kind of moral authority) to find the killers.

Cohen (1972) and Hall et al (1978) demonstrated that in a period of extreme social stress the agents of social control in the communities they studied went through a period of extended escalation. Police agencies and prosecutorial offices developed networks with other agencies within the criminal justice hierarchy. In West Memphis, the police department followed suit. They stepped up their police power and carried out searches and seizures that would have otherwise been illegal. The community and members of the legal system supported these extra measures because of the depravity of the crime and the relative threat felt by the community.

Sensitization to the type of perpetrator the authorities were looking for, was interlaced with local rumors and legends, and produced an ideal folk devil in Damien

Echols. Claims-makers and moral entrepreneurs poured forth explanations and support of the claims of their colleagues. Simultaneously, moral entrepreneurs demonstrated the suspects' "obvious" depravity and relation to the stereotypes, simply by their deviance. This deviance was a line drawn around the community by claims-makers to quell the fears of anxious and frightened people in West Memphis. This is the known symbolic purpose of a moral panic (Jenkins 1992, Erikson 1966, Cohen 1972, Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). The people of West Memphis felt threatened, on more than one level. They invoked the devil to confront his threat to their well being. In a symbolic reinvigoration of the line between deviance and acceptance, the people of West Memphis banished Satan from their midst.

Rhetorical Analysis

Immediately following the gruesome discovery of the bodies of Stevie Branch, Michael Moore, and Christopher Byers, articles began to appear in *The Commercial Appeal*. In the first few days following the slayings, the stories focused on the investigation and the grief of the families of the murdered children. Chief inspector Gary Gitchell became the official police department spokesman for the case. In the first week after the murders, he acknowledged that authorities were not close to an arrest. Gitchell cast a wide net to demonstrate that the police department was doing everything in their power. One of the most significant references in this period was to the murders having been committed by a stranger, an outsider. A constituent part of this rhetoric was that the police were interested in learning about a potential serial killer. The most telling of these references (and one that demonstrates escalation) is that the police contacted the FBI's NCVAC in Quantico to request a profile of a serial killer.

In the earliest articles, before there were any suspects named in the press, speculation was that the victims had been chosen at random. Between May 6, and June 4, 1993, nearly every article mentioned the possibility of a serial killer. There are over twenty references to serial killers in the week following the murders. Six different times in that first week, articles mentioned how difficult it can be to find a perpetrator who chooses his victims randomly.

> FBI specialists apparently have been asked to draw a psychological and social profile of the killer or killers of three 8-year-old boys found in a West Memphis drainage ditch this week...Except for those killed during a robbery or another violent crime, murder victims usually die at the hand of someone they know. For suspects, investigators usually look first at relatives, friends and acquaintances.
>
> They have no such starting point when the killer selects his victims at random...few details have been released, but the absence of any apparent motive creates speculation that they were random victims.
>
> Information that FBI agents in Arkansas have asked for a profile of a possible killer was revealed, perhaps inadvertently, by a woman who answered the phone at the (NCVAC) center in Quantico. She said the agents had furnished information to analyst Tom Self about noon Friday....Self, reached at the Quantico center, said information on the West Memphis killings were [sic] sketchy, and the center had no general profile of serial killers available (*Commercial Appeal*, May 8, 1993:A1.)

This logic symbolically aligns the murderer as an outsider. He is not "one of us." By establishing the murderer as someone clearly outside, and therefore not sympathetic, the possibility of a folk devil was made more tangible by the press. It is important to note that John Mark Byers was questioned as a suspect. However, police and public sympathy were overwhelmingly positive and Byers was not considered a serious suspect again until the Echols-Baldwin trial. And even then, the public never associated Byers with evil. He was publicly portrayed as a grieving father, never as a possible murderer.

Most important to this investigation is the way that the setting is treated by reporters and other media gatekeepers. Memphis' newspaper *The Commercial Appeal*, and national shows, like *Geraldo*, were dedicated to the portrayal of West Memphis as a rural area. There were hints at suburban identity, but this was mostly as a contrast to the defendants in later articles. The majority of reporters portrayed the setting in a definite non-urban atmosphere. Over seventy-seven references ruralized West Memphis. Most of these were references to the crime scene itself.

> Three 8-year-old boys were found slain Thursday, their bodies submerged in a drainage ditch...the culvert, which connects to the drainage ditch, runs under Interstate 40 near a truck wash. The ditch was a few hundred yards north of where the children were last seen, and less than a half-mile from the children's homes....It's nothing but woods, woods and trails- a few trails just wide enough to get a three wheeler through (*Commercial Appeal*, May 7, 1993).

> Three West Memphis boys found dead Thursday in a slow-moving creek were killed by multiple head blows, the police's lead investigator said Friday. Weaver Elementary School second-graders Steve Branch, Christopher Byers and Michael Moore disappeared Wednesday evening while riding bikes near the so-called Robin Hood Park, a boggy woods near Ten-Mile Bayou (*Commercial Appeal*, May 8, 1993).

> ...the bodies of the three Weaver Elementary School second-graders were found within 10 feet of other. They were behind the Mayfair Apartments, in a wooded, undeveloped area known to residents as Robin Hood Park...It's several little streams that run through the area, from a trickle to two to three feet of water (*Commercial Appeal*, May 10, 1993).

> Police wouldn't say what authorities were doing at the crime scene. But it was clear that a week after West Memphis police found the bodies of the boys near the Ten Mile Bayou, investigators were still trying to unearth clues from the soggy ground behind an Interstate 40 truck wash (*Commercial Appeal*, May 15, 1993).

When referring to the area where the boys lived, there are frequent references to the area as a suburban community, though sometimes these are peppered with inferences

that might be construed as working class, like the reference to the Blue Beacon Truck Wash. The area where the boys lived is clearly in close proximity to the interstate. By mapping the truck stop with Robin Hood Hills, the reporters establish not only the rural identity of the place, but also a working class, white-trash flavor which denotes both "rural" and "poor."

> The neighborhood of neat family homes is bounded by apartment buildings to the west, and the bayou to the north (*Commercial Appeal*, May 7, 1993:A7)

> They lived in the same northeastern neighborhood, near the interstate and swampy Robin Hood Park....The family lived in a comfortable ranch house at 1601 S. McAuley, with log reindeer in the front yard and Steve's pet chow, King, in the back yard...Four-year-old Amanda called her brother (Steve Branch) "Bubba" (*Commercial Appeal*, May 9, 1993: A19).

There are clear distinctions in the treatment of the suspects and the victims when it comes to income. When reporting on the searches of the suspects' homes, the reports consistently reported that the accused lived in trailer homes. Even in the most liberal-minded community, the identification of trailer with home is a heavily coded statement on income and social class.

> The case's notoriety apparently prompted a trailer park landlord to evict Echols' 16-year old girlfriend from her $175-a-month trailer home (*Commercial Appeal*, June 7, 1993:A1).

> A reporter sifting through trash discarded last week from the trailer where Echols lived in Lakeshore Estates mobile home park (actually Domini Teer's home) revealed more literature. Among the rubbish was an underground publication of a California-based organization called the Secret Order of the Undead (*Commercial Appeal*, June 13, 1993: A1).

> The pregnant girlfriend of the West Memphis murder suspect known as Damien could be taken into protective custody if the rented mobile home she lives in isn't cleaned up, the girl's mother said Wednesday. Dian Teer, 43, said agents of the Arkansas department of Human Services

> visited her home in the Lakeshore Estates trailer park with an ultimatum: clean up or possibly lose custody of 16-year old daughter, Domini (*Commercial Appeal*, June 22, 1993:B1)

During this period, articles are overwhelmingly sympathetic to the community and victim's families in West Memphis. In contrast to the suspects, the victim's families are painted as suburbanites, (see previous quotes). This displaces the victims and identifies them more with suburban niceties than with poverty or the dismal setting of the crime scene.

After the Misskelley statement, the press paid less attention to the place references, and more attention to the Satanic undertones of the story. However, there is a national reference that sheds some light on the representation of place from a national perspective, *The Geraldo Rivera Show*. Geraldo Rivera is not the most respected of journalists. His sensational treatments have often overshadowed whatever reputation he once had for hard-hitting journalism. His treatment of the West Memphis case can be considered tabloid-esque. His treatment of the families of victims and accused is telling in that the representation of "countryness" represents the place in portraying the family members themselves. For all of those interviewed, the parents of victims and the father of (then) defendant Jessie Misskelley, the representations speak for themselves. Their speech patterns and colloquial language speak more than any other intentional representation could.

> "I've got fifteen, twenty people that saw him out here in this trailer park that day up until 7:30. Then he went to Dysart and he saw the wrestle. There's no way he could have been up there to kill those boys. He was out here in this trailer park because they have witnesses to prove that he

was here. But the police they say he was not here. They got up there and lied. Jessie was not in on it because—said he ate the hind leg of a dog? Jessie won't even eat fried chicken. What are you talking about?"

Jessie Miskelley, Sr., father of convicted killer Jessie Misskelley, Jr. quoted from *Geraldo*, March 16, 1994.

"What did they do to him? His jaw was completely tore loose from his face. His eye was busted in the socket. His chest and all was kicked and stomped. His face was kicked and stomped—just pitiful, pitiful. It's something a decent human being wouldn't even do to a live dog, let alone a human being."

Mr. Jackie Hicks, grandfather of Michael Moore, one of the victims of the West Memphis child murders quoted from *Geraldo*, March 16, 1994.

"...I didn't get a chance to say anything to you after the trial. But what I say—and I'm talking personally to you (to Jessie Miskelley, Sr.). I see a re-repeat—a repeat of a beer-drinking—all I see is—it—what I'm trying to say is it's his raising. I feel sorrier for him (Jessie Misskelley, Jr.) than I do for you. You've never done nothing for him. And that's all he ever knew is what he was done. And brother, that's your fault as much as it's his."

Mr. Jackie Hicks, grandfather of Michael Moore, one of the victims of the West Memphis child murders quoted from *Geraldo*, March 16, 1994.

Unlike the representations of Manhattan Beach whose descriptions commonly included the words "affluent" and "suburb" in one sentence, West Memphis is not described in such a way. Rather the setting is described as suburban some of the time, but with rural modifiers and tones.

The three 8-year old boys lived in a quiet neighborhood of ranch houses and twisting streets, dotted with "Slow- Children at Play" signs and Neighborhood Watch warnings. But the neat green lawns and the fields of Weaver Elementary School weren't the favorite playgrounds of the children. Many of them couldn't resist the lure of the swampy Robin Hood Park where the slain bodies of schoolmates Steve Branch, Christopher Byers, and Michael Moore were discovered Thursday afternoon. "It's a crazy world anymore," said Stella Vaughn, 32, a neighbor whose 6-year old son, Jeremy attended Weaver with the boys. "They were my friends," said Jeremy, shirtless and cheerful and not seeming to understand. The boys had been missing since early

> Wednesday evening. Their bound and mutilated bodies were found by police Thursday afternoon, submerged in one of the deep rainwater filled ditches that scar the Ten-Mile Bayou area...(*Commercial Appeal*, May 8, 1993).
>
> ...The woods where the boys were found stand between the Mayfair Apartments and the Blue Beacon Truck Wash, which faces an access road paralleling Interstate 40...(*Commercial Appeal*, May 8 1993).
>
> ...The crime scene... remains roped off by yellow police tape, and Gitchell said detectives are still studying the site. It lies hidden inside a small, boggy, wooded area between the boys' neighborhood and a truck wash near an Interstate 40 access road...(*Commercial Appeal*, May 11, 1993).

It may simply be that the majority of reporting analyzed here was from local newspapers. But it is my argument that one of the main reasons the West Memphis case did not become a moral panic of national proportions, (i.e. a metapanic) was that the victims and perpetrators were not close to the suburban ideal that most Americans identify with.

Also unlike the rhetoric surrounding the McMartin Case, there was evidence that a crime had been committed. Though there was little evidence as to who perpetrated the crime, the crime scene and the murder of three small children was not a topic for public debate or doubt. The development of the panic itself though was similar to McMartin. Each case included a localized crime with definite suspects. Speculation and moral entrepreneurship rose in prominence through the course of the respective trials, and public opinion in both cases was created nearly whole cloth out of the media reporting on the case. In examining the media reports, witness statements, and available court transcripts in the West Memphis case it is easier to linguistically trace the witness statements to the media reports as they are nearly identical in every sense. Those will not

be discussed here as they are not relevant to the hypotheses put forth as the goals of the research.

There were far more references that could classify West Memphis as rural rather than suburban or urban in the West Memphis press reports. It is worth repeating that the press we are dealing with in all the cases contained here starts at the closest neighboring city and sometimes includes national press. This difference sets up a potential bias in reporting. As Gans has noted (1979:51) there is a definite pastoral bias in reporting on the part of most news agencies. This bias favors not only the idyllic pastoralism of the non-urban center, but also favors the white, middle class representation. To add to this mix, there is also a bias in favor of sensational reporting (Gans 1979:208).

Thus there is a built-in bias on the part of the media establishment toward subject matter that is sensational, as well as a history of presenting the suburban and the rural in an idyllic manner. Unlike the few rural references used in the McMartin Case where words like rustic and homey were used, the rural references used by the press could not be seen as cute or friendly. Some can be considered ambivalent, like "woods," and "bayou". They describe the local terrain and geographical area. Others, like the frequent references to Interstate Forty and the Blue Beacon Truck Wash, clearly establish the social class of the community as poor and low in social class.

Though the area surrounding Memphis, Tennessee could be described as more rural than urban, the references in articles about the West Memphis Child Murders often used signifiers mapping the area as separate from the urban area of Memphis. The rhetoric and language of the articles from *The Commercial Appeal* made distinctions between suburban and rural rhetoric. When comparing West Memphis to the larger,

more urban Memphis, Tennessee, the modifiers used to describe West Memphis were generally benign, though somewhat mixed between suburban and rural.

> The boys were last seen cutting through the yard of a resident who lived on Goodwin Avenue, just south of the brush-choked bayou...The neighborhood of neat family homes is bounded by apartment buildings to the west, and the bayou to the north (*Commercial Appeal*, May 8, 1993:A1).

In one editorial, the writer draws a very clear line between the urban problems of Memphis (framing them as alarming, but understandable urban problems) and separates them distinctively from the anonymous, disturbing crimes across the state line.

> As word of a tragedy like this spreads, individuals and communities tend to redouble security efforts. Parents become especially watchful. It is always sensible to take precautions, but of course there is a limit to what can be done. It should not be necessary to make yourself a prisoner in your own home. Memphis itself has been deeply concerned about violent crime in recent weeks. Mayor Herenton wants to put additional police officers on the streets. Officials are talking about new security measures at the City Hall building. Courts here and elsewhere have had to tighten security. Many Memphians have been particularly alarmed by several shootings on school grounds. A broad-based task force has recommended to the Memphis Board of Education a number of steps to deal with school violence of all kinds, and those are under consideration. AS MEMPHIANS (emphasis theirs) grapple with these frustrating problems, they share the anguish of those across the river who have suffered such great loss (Editorial, *Commercial Appeal*. May 7, 1993).

It is useful to note how the author moves from the general to the specific in this case, and how her treatment of the tragedy is soon displaced by the urban problems of Memphis. The author's treatment equates the devastation the community of West Memphis feels at having been (at this point in the rhetoric) the random victim of a potential serial killer, with school shootings, and police shortages in Memphis. There is also a patronizing tone that emerges in this same editorial, one that smacks of drawing attention to the class

distinctions between the urban identity of Memphis and their more backward of their neighbor to the west.

> Immediate neighbors need also to search their minds for any shred of information that might help police solve this puzzling case. Travelers along Interstate 40 in the area of Ten Mile Bayou across from Southland Greyhound Park in the late afternoon or early evening Wednesday when the boys were last seen, or truckers who were using a nearby wash facility might be able to help. (IBID)

Once the West Memphis police had suspects in custody the portrayal of the victims and perpetrators came to be the most common representational tool. The press had already established the blue-collar undertone of the victims' families. After the identification of the suspects, the focus was on their difference from the families of the victims. This difference was drawn not only on the difference in self-identifying and compliance strategies like clothing, music, and religion (all typical of sensitization and the creation of folk devils from Cohen's thesis), but also in the difference in socio-economic status of the suspects. Articles were written about Jason Baldwin's attorney asking the "taxpayers" to buy the young defendant appropriate civilian clothes for the hearing and trial. All three boys were clearly marked as trailer trash. Not once did articles reference their homes generically. Instead their homes were always represented as "trailers," "trailer homes," or "mobile homes." In one article Domini Teer, the girlfriend of suspect Damien Echols, was represented as pregnant, and in danger of being removed from her mother's trailer by child protection because of unsanitary conditions. Another article reported that the mother was being evicted from her trailer because of the negative publicity of the trial and she had no where to go. The rent that the single mother paid for her trailer was published in the article, $175 per month. The interpretation of the

representation of the suspects was clearly that they were lower in class relative to the suburban (though lower middle class or even blue collar) parents of the three child victims, as well as the higher-class, cosmopolitan Memphians. Every suspect lived in a trailer in a trailer park; "trailer trash" did not have to be written, it was very clearly implied.

This rhetoric also mapped the suspected perpetrators with the mythical representation of Satanism prevalent in the eighties and early nineties. Quickly the public discourse focused on the ways in which Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin fit the stereotype. Jessie Misskelley was not treated as the pariah that the other suspects were. This is mostly due to his confession, and his claim in the Misskelley statement that he ran away, and did not participate in the murder and sodomy of the three children.

Whatever their guilt or innocence, examining the articles and transcripts on the case of the West Memphis Child Murders demonstrates that the community was in the throes of a moral panic, specifically a satanic panic (Victor, 1993). The ability of the community members to discern truth from fiction was made nearly impossible by the circular treatment of the case in the media and from official sources like the police department. In fact, one local reporter, in doing his investigation for his television story, wound up collaborating with the WMPD and the district attorney, providing them with information obtained under the guise of investigative reporting. He subsequently lost his job. But there is an important relationship established in that incident. There is a close relationship between the media and local authorities. This is not based on sensationalism, but is a relationship very common to reporters due to the time constraints in reporting the news in a world of constant change (Websdale and Alvarez, 1998). Fact-checking is

commonly done through official police sources in order to facilitate the fastest means of checking the facts of a given story or case against the official positions. In the cases of McMartin and West Memphis the relationship was symbiotic. Each source was feeding off of the other, and this circularity was at instrumental to the socially constructed moral panic in both cases.

Chapter 7
The Reified School Shooting: The Columbine Massacre

The morning of April 20, 1999 seemed like any other at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Teachers took roll and students chatted at their lockers in between classes. But while the morning was unfolding according to its regular schedule, two students at Columbine High School packed their cars with ammunition and homemade explosives. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold prepared to kill their classmates and destroy Columbine High School. They had meticulously planned their attack, and the day would end with worldwide news coverage of the affluent suburb's misfortune. As Harris and Klebold had hoped, they would be famous, and Columbine and Littleton would become household words.

Harris and Klebold's attack on their school was not the first, nor was it the last school shooting in the United States. But it was a watershed event in the media representation of school shootings. After April 20, 1999, there was not a single publicized account of teen terrorism that did not include references to Columbine High School. Moral entrepreneurs, politicians, ministers, authors, all made references to Columbine. All urged the public to become involved, to consider Columbine, and use it as an example of the worst that is wrong with "our" children. Suddenly, school violence

was a new phenomenon because it involved teenagers from nice, affluent, suburban communities.

With the events at Columbine, a national dialogue began on school violence and disaffected teens. The most prolific were religious in nature, though some had a liberal view. Moral entrepreneurs have publicly drawn attention to the massacre as a barometer of social illness in our society. Since Columbine there have been other school shootings. There were two in the San Diego area in 2001, but none have captured the media attention of Littleton.

Columbine became a part of this research as I delved into moral panic. Why did it always seem that moral panic happened in the suburbs? What was it about this suburban frontier that invited panic? In the initial stages of research I had an opportunity to present a paper at the British Film Institute's (BFI) conference on global images in the summer of 2001. I chose to examine moral panic from a spatial perspective for that presentation.

I examined thirteen different school shootings that took place from 1997 to 2001. These occurred all over the country during that time period. However, up until the Columbine Massacre, the events were portrayed as almost exclusively rural. Who can argue with the rural representation of places with names like West Paducah, Kentucky, and Pearl, Mississippi?

But what seemed to emerge from the data was that the areas were not specifically rural. Rather they seemed to be in between suburban and rural. And by far, those that received the most attention seemed to happen in the suburbs that were the most affluent, and were the closest to urban centers. A theory began to emerge in my mind, that moral

panics were influenced by space, specifically by the human geography and the representation of place.

Columbine High School is not particularly special. Like other public high schools in affluent areas, the population of the school is not particularly diverse. The school is expansive, a very large complex of buildings. In 1999, when the shootings occurred a handful of reporters mentioned that the school buildings were new, only two years old. Columbine touched a chord with most Americans. What I will explore here is why.

Table 2: School Shootings in the United States from 1997-2001 covered by CNN

Town Name	Nearest City	Distance between	1990 Town Population	1990 MSA Median Family Income
Conyers, GA	Atlanta	30 miles	7,380	$41,047
Deming, NM	Las Cruces	60 miles	10,970	$24,720
Edinboro, PA	Pittsburgh	86 miles	7,736	$32,787
El Cajon, CA	San Diego	13 miles	88,693	$39,798
Fayetteville, TN	Nashville	80 miles	6,921	$35,797
Fort Gibson, OK	Tulsa	50 miles	3,359	$32,578
Grayson, KY	Charleston, NC	70 miles	3,510	$31,647
Littleton, CO	Denver	10 miles	33,685	$40,222
Olivehurst, CA	Sacramento	50 miles	9,738	$38,850
West Paducha, KY	Evansville, IL	80 miles	27,256	$33,523
Pearl, MS	Jackson	6 miles	19,588	$31,575
Santee, CA	San Diego	21 miles	52,902	$39,798
Oxnard, CA	Los Angeles	50 miles	142,216	$50,091

History

At about 11:15 bin the morning on April 20, 1999, two high school students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, entered Columbine High School armed with semi-automatic weapons, shotguns, handguns, and a seemingly endless supply of magazine clips and

home-made pipe bombs. The boys had also planted several large propane bombs in and around the school grounds. By most accounts, (based on the meticulous notes kept by Harris), the two gunmen had planned their attack for well over a year. In the end, the school shooting was massively destructive. Thirteen people were killed, another twenty were injured. Bombs exploded destroying some of the newly constructed school buildings. The rampage ended when Harris and Klebold took their own lives in the school library.

Sadly, their attack on fellow students, and teachers was not unheard of, but it was different. Their preparation and the massive nature of the destruction singled the events out. The incident was made worse when officers arrived on the scene, as Harris and Klebold had set up bombs around the victims, so that they could not be recovered easily. The bomb squad was unable to use their traditional mechanized methods because of the high volume of fire power that surrounded the injured and the slain.

The rampage lasted less than an hour, but many parents were kept waiting for information until the next day. On April 21, the day after the rampage, only one living person was removed from the school buildings, sparking controversy over the way authorities handled their emergency response. It took several weeks after the incident for the killers' level of planning to become part of the public discourse. When the official Jefferson County Sheriff's office report (nearly ten months later), was released, the full level of their planning was finally revealed to the public.

Harris and Klebold began their day by setting up several bombs on timers in another part of Jefferson County. This was intended to divert the attention of emergency staff, so that fewer officers would be able to respond to 911 calls from the High School.

The distraction was somewhat successful, the detonation of one of their home made bombs delayed police and fire fighters from arriving on the scene immediately after the initial 911 call came in to the police dispatch center from Columbine High School. The following is a partial description of events as they occurred at Columbine High School on the morning of April 20, 1999 (based on the official Jefferson County Sheriff's report).

Erica Harris and Dylan Klebold drove to school in their own vehicles which were packed with explosives. They arrived at approximately 11:10 in the morning and parked on opposite sides of the school parking lot. This part of the parking lot flanks the school cafeteria and the lower level entrances and exits. As he walked toward the school, Eric Harris told a student to leave campus because he liked him. This was the only apparent direct warning between Harris or Klebold and any of the students at the school.

The two entered the cafeteria wearing long, black trench coats, loaded down with ammunition. Each teenager carried a large duffle bag, which held a twenty-pound propane tank with a bomb rigged to it. The two left their bags next to two tables and other scattered backpacks and bags in the cafeteria. The power of the explosives was enough to kill all of the students assembled in the cafeteria for the first lunch rotation. Harris' detailed plans stated that he had studied the lunch rotations, and knew that the busiest time, when the greatest number of students would be present, was 11:17 in the morning. Harris timed the propane bombs to explode at this precise time, in order to kill the maximum number of students.

The two gunmen left the cafeteria and returned to their cars. They intended to watch the carnage, and then enter the school. The bombs did not explode, however, and the two decided to enter the school anyway. Harris and Klebold, armed with pipe bombs,

shotguns, nine-millimeter semi-automatic weapons, and handguns, positioned themselves at the highest point of the exterior entrance so that they would have a wide field of vision. They approached the school from the West side of the school, approaching the cafeteria. They fired their first shots through a crowd of students outside of the cafeteria doors. Two students, Rachel Scott and Richard Costaldo were shot, Scott was killed, Costaldo injured. Immediately after the first shots, three students exited the cafeteria. Daniel Rohrbough, Sean Graves, and Lance Kirklin, were exiting the cafeteria towards an area popular with students who smoked. As they entered the open area beyond the doors, the three were hit by semi-automatic gunfire and fell to the ground.

Several students reported that at first, they did not take the sounds of gunfire seriously. They were expecting Senior pranks some time before the end of the school year. Witnesses reported to the Jefferson County authorities that their initial impression was the loud pops were not gunfire but firecrackers. By 11:20 that morning, the impression of pranksters had faded and students were running for their lives. Before entering the building, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot their automatic weapons into the groups of students who by now were beginning to run from the shooters. Another student was shot as he ran for cover, and was incapacitated, unable to reach the safety of an outdoor storage area. At this point, Dylan Klebold walked back down the stairs that led to the cafeteria entrance. He approached the three students who had fallen under their automatic gunfire.

Klebold shot Daniel Rohrbough again, at close range, killing him instantly. Lance Kirklin was also shot a second time at close range, but was not killed. Several witnesses reported that the gunmen were lighting and throwing explosives in many

different directions. Pipe bombs were thrown onto the roof, down hallways, into empty classrooms, and into the parking lot of the school.

The first 911 call came into the police dispatcher at 11:23 A.M. with reports that a girl had been shot outside the school. The call was received from a cell phone, and the caller believed that the girl was paralyzed. Several teachers and custodians entered the school cafeteria trying to figure out what was causing the disturbances there. When they arrived they instructed the remaining students to get onto the floor.

Patti Nielson, a teacher was on duty in the hallway. She saw the gunmen enter the west hall. Klebold and Harris had made a "fictional" video about a high school massacre for a communications class. When Nielson saw the guns her initial assumption was that they were making another video, that the guns were toys. On sight, one of the gunmen fired in the west hallway injuring Nielson and a student, Brian Anderson. Nielson was able to get herself and Anderson to a safe hiding place in the library.

Realizing the gunfire and bombs were real started a mass exodus all over the school. Teacher Dave Sanders was seen directing students through the school. Injured teacher, Patti Nielson, who escaped to the library, called 911 from beneath the check-out counter. She remained on the line reporting the appearance of smoke and the sounds of explosions in the school. Nielson instructed students in the library to find hiding places under desks and tables.

Meanwhile, Klebold and Harris occupied themselves by chasing individual students down. The gunmen were temporarily distracted from pursuing students by incoming gunfire from police outside the building. They exchanged fire, and moved their location, heading towards the library. As they changed direction they encountered

teacher Dave Sanders escorting students out of the building. He turned the opposite direction to avoid them, but was shot. Another teacher, Richard Long pulled Sanders into a nearby classroom where Long and several students administered first aid and attempted to stop his bleeding. Students reported trying to motivate Sanders to remain conscious by talking to him about his family and showing him photographs of his children from his wallet.

The school was now relatively empty. Anyone who could leave campus safely had done so. The gunmen moved through the empty hallways randomly firing their weapons into classrooms. They were also lighting pipe bombs and throwing these into hallways, classrooms, and stairwells. The two killers entered the library hallway, shooting and throwing bombs. Patti Nielson, still on the phone with the emergency dispatcher reported that a gunman was just outside the entrance to the library. She abandoned her call, but left the phone off the hook.

Outside of the school buildings, students gave police officers descriptions of the perpetrators. They were described as young men, wearing black trench coats. One was older and taller, and wore a black baseball cap turned around the wrong way. Around this same time the SWAT team arrived. Not knowing how many gunmen to worry about, authorities questioned how they could get close to the school. They pulled a firetruck in and as it moved slowly, the SWAT team ran behind it, using it for cover. Jefferson County police established a perimeter around the school. The five-member SWAT team entered the building. An emergency triage center was set up on the East side of the school to treat the injured.

Klebold and Harris entered the library at approximately 11:29 A.M., they would leave and return to the library later. Though Nielson was no longer manning the phone, the dispatcher had not yet abandoned the call. The emergency operator reported hearing one of the assailants telling someone to "Get up." The Jefferson Parish Sheriff's report believes that the library was not an intended destination. It was not included in Eric Harris's detailed plans for the massacre. Investigators believe, based on the video surveillance, and audio tape evidence, and the discovery of Harris's plans, that the library was a random strategy on their part. Authorities believe that the two went to the library after wandering through the hallway. The theory is that the two were waiting for all of their explosives to discharge.

Upon entering the library, witnesses reported that Harris addressed the "jocks" advising them to stand up so that they could be killed. The gunmen approached the windows, shooting one student along the way. As they shot, the muzzle flare from their weapon tipped police off to their location. Police opened fire on the library. Klebold and Harris were temporarily distracted from the students in the library while they returned fire on the officers below.

When the exchange between the two teenagers and the police ended, they turned their attention back to their targets in the library. They young gunmen shot eight students at short range, interrogating them before they shot. One student was targeted by the killers because of his race. Isaiah Shoels, an African-American and a "jock" was called a "nigger" by Harris and shot in the face. He was then shot several more times by both assailants. Throughout this and other parts of their rampage, both gunmen were heard to scream and make excited gestures as they celebrated their attacks and hits. As they

prepared to exit the library, they shot randomly into the room, then reloaded their weapons.

The two left the library and headed toward the science wing of the school. According to reports, the gunmen were not nearly as destructive in this part of their rampage. Witness reports from the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's investigation claim that the gunmen looked into classrooms from the hallways, but did not make any extraordinary effort to enter the rooms. Some students claimed that the killers even made eye contact with them, but did not attempt to enter the rooms. The shooters continued to fire randomly into the hallways, lockers, and classrooms, though investigators determined that in this phase of their onslaught they were apparently rather directionless.

The killers returned to the cafeteria after this, in an attempt to detonate the bombs left there at the beginning of their spree. They adjusted the timing devices and Harris even shot at one of the propane tanks. But the bombs did not detonate. The gunmen gave up and headed back toward the library. Around 12:08 PM, after firing a few more shots into the library at random, Harris and Klebold turned their weapons on themselves. In total, ten were killed in the library, and twelve were injured. Thirty-four people in the library escaped injury all together.

During this time, there were other events unfolding around the school and in the area. Police had commandeered a television helicopter in order to secure a clean aerial view of the school. A man, who was originally thought to be a sniper on the roof, was later revealed to be a repairman on a service call to the school. An emergency response number was set up for parents to call. Students from other local area schools were either locked-down or sent home. Columbine students who had escaped were brought to a local

elementary school to be reunited with parents. The Denver area media started reporting live around noon. It was during the live coverage that the first reports of the "trench coat mafia" emerged. A student was interviewed by local media and stated that members of the "goth" group were responsible for the shootings.

The Aftermath

When the shooting spree was over, parents focused on finding their children, and the police were consumed with determining whether or not there were other assailants. Suspicion circulated around the possibility of a third shooter, as several eye witnesses reported another perpetrator. Police officers also reported that they were investigating whether or not there had been other people involved in the planning stages, helping the two gunmen to plant bombs throughout the campus. Several emotional pleas were heard from parents, and rumors circulated freely about the identity of other suspects.

In the days that followed the murders, the local and national media was locked on the events in the affluent suburb of Denver. Many eyewitnesses reported that the shooters were members of the trench coat mafia. The majority of the initial finger-pointing fell on the group. The trench coat mafia became the butt of initial moralizing. Threats were made against other members of the group and loose speculation fell on them, mapping them simultaneously with Satanists and Nazis.

Another controversy developed over a proper memorial to the victims. A Cincinnati carpenter, Greg Zanis, himself the victim of a violent crime, felt called to offer a memorial and constructed fifteen crosses. He drove all night from his home in Ohio, and erected the crosses in the park across the street from the school. Each cross bore the names of a victim. Zanis's tribute included crosses for the two assailants, Eric Harris

and Dylan Klebold. The debate began when enraged father Daniel Rohrbough, took a chainsaw to the crosses inscribed with the names of Klebold and Harris. Weeks later, after the funerals of the victims, the controversy would expand to include controversy over the endorsement of religious symbols in the public park known as Rebel Hill.

There were other controversies that emerged in the wake of the massacre at Columbine High School. Most of them are not relevant here. These included continuous debates over gun control, school prayer, and the posting of the Ten Commandments in school. Harris and Klebold shocked the Denver Metro area, and the country. But with their deaths, they left no one upon whom to exact punishment.

Moral Panic Criteria

The most prolific evidence of a moral panic are the presence of the moral panic actors. The press, the public, agents of social control, politicians and legislators, action groups, and moral entrepreneurs all participated in the public discourse. But the the folk devils, were not present. There was no one to act as a scapegoat, no one to pursue. Klebold and Harris will always be the folk devils of the event, but only by default as the perpetrators of the violence. At first, the news media latched onto the identity of the trench coat mafia. In that, the public, the press, and moral entrepreneurs had an opportunity to distinguish a group against whom they could lash out their frustrations. In the first few days following the massacre, several well-known moral entrepreneurs attacked the group, as well as the goth subculture, the group apparently identified with. People like Carl Rashke, who also spoke out in the West Memphis case, mapped the Goths with Satanists and violent behavior. The negative publicity was soon over, however, when *The Denver Post* ran a handful of articles on Goths. And while not overly

positive, the articles did present a comparative view which seemed to curb the association of Goths with murderers and Nazis.

> ...at a "goth" coffeehouse in an Arvada strip mall, there was talk that anyone seen in a black trench coat-the uniform of some "goth" youngsters and the attire worn by the two suspects in Tuesday's killing rampage- will be "targets of rage." "Just because black clothes were involved in the shootings, it doesn't mean that everybody with black clothing is a white supremacist wacko with a gun," said Bob Alberti, who owns the Rising Phoenix, which hosts "Goth Night" dances twice a week. "But this is going to give people something to direct their anger at and that's sad. I have a tremendous concern for these young people (in the 'goth' community). They're all going to be targets of rage," Alberti said (The Denver Post, April 22, 1999:A11).

The first week or so following the massacre there was a great deal of attention paid to the clothes the gunmen had worn. Most specifically the black trench coats were used as a tool of community sensitization. For a while, they were banned at schools all over the country. There was some escalation in the beginning as the community struggled to answer the impossible question of "why?" With Harris and Klebold dead, there was little opportunity for the kind of accusations and investigations usually associated with escalation. Normally, escalation begins with the process of typification, where the (generally unknown) perpetrator is given an identity, (always negative), and mapped with certain traits and behaviors. Harris and Klebold were painted as Hitler-loving, violent, sociopaths who were driven by hatred. They wore black clothes, swastikas, trench coats, and loved guns and German punk music.

> Senior Jennifer LaPlante talked to Harris and Klebold in bowling class. "I would say, 'Why do you guys wear all that German stuff? Are you guys Naziz?" LaPlante recalls. "They'd say, 'Yeah, Heil Hitler!' I would just walk away. I didn't think they were serious." Other students who bowled with both boys also say they heard Klebold's "Heil Hitler!" after he rolled a good ball, but it's unclear whether the remarks constituted ethnic enmity or just tasteless humor. In any event, those

> who knew Klebold have a hard time reconciling his quiet malleable persona with the young man who stormed Columbine High School (*The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:A19).

At first authorities believed that there were other gunmen, or at least other people who had helped Harris and Klebold hide bombs throughout the school. Authorities and the press were fixated on the Trench Coat Mafia, as well as associates of the teenagers. The evidence, however, pointed to the entire massacre being planned by Harris, and executed by the two alone. Harris was credited with leading; Klebold was labeled as a follower.

Though typifying the perpetrators and any possible accomplices was difficult and unfulfilling with the two boys dead, other escalation behavior is seen in the case of Littleton. This is partly accounted for by the geography of the metro area. Included in the Denver metro-area are four counties which converge on each other. These are Denver County, Arapahoe Country, Adams County, and Jefferson County where Columbine High School is located. The town of Littleton and its environs fall in both Arapahoe and Jefferson Counties. As such the area is accustomed to interactive relationships when it comes to law enforcement. In the case of Columbine, law enforcement chapters cooperated with each other, offering help and providing services as needed.

In the investigation phase, Jefferson County investigators called on state offices, other local law enforcement chapters, local mental health providers- both private and the metro and county levels. As is typical in escalation, the community leaders made strong bonds tying them to larger more influential organizations like the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF). The FBI aided in the investigation, and the ATF

helped locate gun dealers who sold Klebold and Harris their weapons. In addition, because of the high profile of the case, and the sympathy of viewers around the country, (indeed around the world), other ties were made. Congressmen, state and federal representatives, President Bill Clinton, and Vice-President Al Gore all visited Columbine. Both political parties used the incident to promote their own agendas for social reform. The conservatives called for prayer in schools, stricter moral codes, and more responsibility on the parts of parents. The liberals called for tighter gun control laws and higher education budgets to protect children in schools.

The five indicators (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994) were also present: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. These hardly seem worthy of covering, so obvious are they in regards to what has already been said here. Consensus, concern, hostility, and volatility are obviously met in the events at Columbine. The entire nation entered into a discourse on school shootings, demonstrating both consensus and concern. Hostility was very obviously felt towards the Harris and Klebold families. The media and "the violent society we live in" were also targets. Volatility was also fairly obvious, as there were hot tempers on both the liberal and conservative fronts. Less obvious is disproportionality.

According to Cohen (1972), disproportionality is measured by the threat of the event being eminent and consistent in society. While school shootings are more prevalent that they have been in the past, it is still more likely for a teenager to be the victim of a car accident than a bullet at school. The Centers for Disease Control (April 21, 1999) cited that less than 1% of all homicides among school aged children (5-19 years of age) occur in or around school grounds or on the way to and from school. Thus

the amount of rhetoric and time dedicated to the topic of school shootings, and specifically in the local context of Columbine, is disproportionate to the real risk of there being another incident in the same place, under the same conditions.

Table 3. Indicators of a Moral Panic

	Concern	Hostility	Consensus	Volatility	Disproportionality
McMartin	Parents alarmed at possibility their children subjected to ritual abuse	Parents angry at day care workers and the "need" to put kids in day care.	In the beginning, most parents thought that the threat was real and probable.	The feelings stirred in the community were based on the anger, devastation, and guilt, the parents felt at being betrayed by the McMartins.	It is most likely that no abuse occurred at McMartin. And though SRA was a popular topic in the time period, no genuine evidence of SRA has ever been found.
Robin Hood Hills	Community terrified over the murder of three children	Hostility was intensely directed toward the suspects, with several quotes and threats of lynching in lieu of a trial	The community was convinced that the murders were Satanic, this was in part based on local myth building, and in part on testimony from witnesses.	Feelings ran rampant initially over the fear of a murder in their community. Later, the volatility was based on the instability of the case, and the fear of not resolving the crime.	Murders of children by strangers are extremely rare. Most homicide victims know their assailant. Also the issue over whether or not Satanic crime is a real phenomenon is debated by law enforcement experts. There was no evidence of ritualistic activity in this case.
Columbine	Very real worry over school violence.	Anger over events and the deaths of children.	The problem was considered very serious by all levels of society, both locally and nationally.	Feelings were vitriolic. Threats were made against "Goths" & one parent tore down the crosses erected for the killers.	Homicide of children is typically committed by parents, or other family members. Of the homicides of children in 1999, only 1% occurred on school grounds.

Rhetorical Analysis

The majority of the analysis on the Columbine Massacre focuses on two areas, the establishment of the moral panic response, and the use of setting and community rhetoric in the public discourse. Over four-hundred articles and transcripts were identified and

analyzed. These were separated into two categories, national and local news. In the other two cases, the fervor was somewhat more easily contained. In the McMartin case, the investigation and trials occurred in the era just preceding the internet explosion of mid 1990's. In the case of the West Memphis child murders, the case did not spark a national panic, so there was a much smaller number of articles and transcripts, both locally and nationally.

There were over five-hundred articles in Denver area newspapers in the three weeks following the Columbine Massacre. The sources were *The Denver Post*, and *The Rocky Mountain News*. After examining several articles for content, I decided to limit my local newspaper source to The Denver Post for simplicity. The articles in *The Denver Post* were more detailed, gave more in depth coverage, and covered a broader range of topics. In addition, the articles that appeared in *The Rocky Mountain News* were nearly identical in topics to some of the articles in *The Denver Post*. There was simply more, deeper, and better coverage in *The Denver Post*.

Because of the national interest (and hence the development of a metapanic) in the events at Columbine High School, there were a multitude of television transcripts available as well. I chose to use only CNN transcripts for two reasons. The CNN transcripts were easier to obtain than other media transcripts, and more importantly, CNN is a "feed" provider. The network licenses their stories to other networks, and many local affiliates. Thus there was a high probability that the CNN information was available in many smaller, local markets as well as national news syndicates, reflecting a higher probability that the rhetoric was familiar to a national audience.

There were some differences in the manner that CNN and *The Denver Post* represented the stories about Columbine. One of the major differences was in their representation of the setting. In the CNN reports there was a nearly even split between rural and suburban representation. There is a slightly higher number of phrases that imply a rural setting in the television representations. In the local newspaper representations however, (in over two hundred newspaper articles), there were only two references that smacked of anything rural. The majority of newspaper stories from *The Denver Post* represented the Columbine community as upper-middle class, suburban, and affluent. This was in stark contrast to the schools that had suffered school shootings in the two years prior to Columbine.

Prior to the Columbine Massacre, there were four school shootings that made the national news. These occurred in the following communities: Pearl, Mississippi; West Paducah, Kentucky; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and Springfield, Oregon. Of these, only the Springfield incident is not considered "The South," though all smack of a rural identity. Though Springfield is a suburban community, it did not garner enough public identification to be considered a Bellwether for the phenomenon of teen terrorism. This is most likely because the perpetrator in the Springfield case had killed his parents as well as other students. He was painted as a psychopath who had committed patricide, a somewhat different representation then Klebold and Harris, who apparently killed others and themselves because they were unpopular, ostracized, and according to some accounts, bullied by the ruling social caste at their suburban high school, the jocks.

CNN's Picture

CNN covered the events at Columbine High School in great depth. Their representations were very similar to the local picture in many respects, but with one exception. The majority of transcripts describe, (and images concur) the area where Columbine High School is located as being rural more often than suburban.

> ....The tragic shooting at Columbine High School is part of a recent pattern of shootings at schools across the country. The only patterns authorities see is that all of the shootings were in rural areas, all of the shooters were teenagers and most were suicidal (CNN transcript, April 21, 1999:8:34PM).

> ...The day after and a small town is in agony, wondering why so many of its children had to die. But throughout the day, some questions were beginning to be answered—some. (Ann McDermott, CNN Correspondent, April 21, 1999:8:01 PM).

> ...Littleton, Colorado joins a lengthening list of communities that could be Anytown, USA, that now are linked by a common tragedy. Towns that have become so familiar by their names: towns like Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; Edinboro, Pennsylvania; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Springfield, Oregon. As each other those continues to grow on the list of names, for many Americans they are striking closer and closer to home (Martin Savidge, CNN Correspondent on *Crossfire*, April 21, 1999:10:00 PM).

In the transcripts analyzed for this research, there were forty-two references to Littleton as a rural community, and thirty-four as a suburb of Denver. In nearly all other rhetorical aspects the television and newspaper accounts were the same. As will be explored in more depth later, the most frequent references in local newspaper articles had to with prayer, God, church, or Jesus. These do not appear frequently in CNN coverage. I attribute this difference to a structural difference in reporting. CNN covers events for a national and international audience, and as such, is unlikely to include religious references so as not to offend any constituency. In addition, CNN's coverage is anchor

and correspondent dependent, unlike the print news in the Columbine case. The majority of references to God in the newspaper articles come from interviews and editorials, which are much less frequent on CNN.

In nearly all other respects the CNN coverage indicates similar findings to the local news. In fact, the sheer volume of the CNN coverage suggests a metapanic. The CNN coverage refers to the "Littleton community," and links it with the greater community of Americans in much the same way the newspaper does. In this regard, and in particular in the last quote above, we see that there is an intentional blurring of geographical boundaries, into purely symbolic space. I call this phenomenon opaqueing and link it to the process of a metapanic. When opaqueing occurs, the media, moral entrepreneurs, and other agents of social control, intentionally link their community with a greater social body. This serves two purposes; it removes the context of place from the immediate threat, making it a bigger problem, and directs attention away from any structural causes in the local environment that might have contributed to the problem. This process also enables and justifies the process of escalation, or opaqueing may happen as a result of escalation.

The Denver Post's Representation

Columbine High School serves Jefferson County, the most populated County in Colorado. It serves Littleton, the affluent suburb of Denver. It is considered by many to be a school for affluent suburban teens. One article even called it "Abercrombie High" (The Denver Post, May 2, 1999:A1) referring to the high-end, preppie retailer, Abercrombie and Fitch. There were more than seventy-eight newspaper references to the suburban identity of Columbine High School. Articles that mentioned Klebold and

Harris frequently made a point to include the dollar values of the homes the boys lived in: $400,000 and $180,000 respectively (*The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:A18; ibid, May 3, 1999:A19).

There were several references like those above. Those articles that did not mention the killers' homes, did not hesitate to point out the affluent identity of the area. There were forty-six references to the income levels, class levels, or other socio-economic indicators of the families affected by the tragedy. Many of these were directed at the perpetrators.

> ...Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were the youngest sons of two-son suburban families (*The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:A1).
>
> ...(The Elder) Klebold left the company about three years ago and now runs a mortgage and property management company out of his Deer Creek Canyon home... (*The Denver Post*, April 30, 1999:A12).
>
> ...Tom Klebold, 52, met Susan Yassenoff, 50, when both were art students at Ohio State University. He was a year ahead of her. Susan came from a prominent Jewish family in Columbus, the granddaughter of the late philanthropist and construction magnate Leo Yassenoff, who built the local Jewish community center that bears his name. Tom, who also grew up in Ohio, had lost both his parents by the time he was a teenager. They married in 1971....Tom who had majored in sculpture before turning to engineering, found work in metro Denver as a geophysicist for Champlin Oil Co. during the oil and gas boom and the family began shaping its own American Dream in suburbia (*The Denver Post*: May 2, 1999:A19).
>
> ...Wayne Harris, a Scoutmaster and baseball coach, got elected to the nine-member Lake Shore Owners Association. Kathy Harris was a stay-at-home mom. The family lived on a wooded lot on a street where deer often graze in the flower gardens and kids splash around at the neighborhood beach club. After work, Wayne Harris shot baskets with his boys... (*The Denver Post*: May 2, 1999:A18).

The identity of the assailants and victims as suburban, normal, like anybody, made an appealing headline. Also, the vast dimension of the planned destruction and the body

count made it doubly menacing and frightening. The story of Columbine was portrayed as being possible in any suburban community in the United States.

There was a clear representation of the Columbine community as an affluent, suburban utopia shattered by unspeakable evil. There was an another representation that was, by far the most frequent quoted by victims, local observers, newspaper columnists, families and others touched by the events, a constant reference to God. It is normal for people to call on God in the midst of tragedy. But the representation of the events at Columbine was unusually high in its participants invoking their relationship with the Almighty. There were more than one-hundred-and-twenty (124) references to God, Jesus, Prayer, or church in the first month of *The Denver Post's* reporting on the massacre.

> The Queen City of the Plains, with the 2 million-plus residents that make up the metro area, is broken and bleeding, and struggling to regain a sense of peace. Billboards that normally blare sports slogans or NRA advertisements read: "Pray for the Kids." And the marquee outside a Hooters restaurant tells the children: "Columbine, Our Prayers Are With You" (*The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:A21).

> Many religious symbols, including the 8-foot crosses, have been placed at Clement Park since two Columbine High School students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, killed 12 students and a teacher there on April 20 before committing suicide (*The Denver Post*, May 8, 1999:A23).

> With the moon still shining silver in a predawn sky, about 100 parents began to gather in small groups in front of Chatfield High School to pray for the safe return of Columbine students to the classroom. "We came to pray for safety and comfort and healing," said Gina Schrek, whose 15-year-old son, Jacob, attends Columbine...Many parents from Chatfield, other Jefferson County schools and surrounding neighborhoods came to the 6.A.M. prayer walk to support the Columbine parents..."This is the most important thing we can do," said Cheryl Brubaker, who has a daughter at nearby Dakota Ridge High School" (*The Denver Post*, May 4, 1999:A10).

Before I delve any further into the local representation of the tragedy, I can sum it up by stating that in the first month after the massacre, the local community had represented the community as: Christian, suburban, and affluent, in that order. That also sums up the way most Americans think about themselves. There was no such explicit representation of the community in either West Memphis or Manhattan Beach. As I already noted, Gans (1979:48-50) established that there is a pastoral bias in the representation of news in America. This pastoral bias favors suburban and rural identities over the urban. It also protects the "suburban" ideal by maintaining suburbs as flawless, perfect places. Order is maintained above all things in the suburbs (Gans 1979:59). It is represented as a place separated from the chaos of the urban jungle, where children are allowed to be innocent, ride bikes, play baseball, and drink lemonade.

One of the more interesting features of this representation, however, was that the local press also made a point of demonstrating that its suburbs were filled, not only with lily-white suburbanites, but that they were tolerant, and somewhat liberal. A great deal of attention was paid to the fact that killers Harris and Klebold targeted student Isaiah Shoels because he was black. The press also frequently mentioned that he was one of only a few black students in the school. The reporters made a point of demonstrating that students, parents, reporters, and other community leaders were outraged, hurt, and saddened by this racist display.

> Isaish Shoels, a popular, 18-year old Columbine athlete was the only black victim of the massacre. Witnesses said one of the gunmen called Shoels a "nigger" before shooting him in the library...We know that there was some racial component to the killing of Isaiah Shoels, and under Colorado law, you can remove the caps on punitive damages if you can show ethnic intimidation on the part of the defendant (The Denver Post, May 27, 1999:A17).

> LARRY KING: Did you know the two kids who were shot (outside the school) ?
> JUSTIN NORMAN: No I didn't.
> KING: Your friend who was shot—where was he?
> NORMAN: He was in the library.
> KING: Was he killed?
> NORMAN: Yes, he was.
> KING: Do you think he was killed because he was black?
> NORMAN: That's what I heard. They said they were looking for the little n*gg*r. And he was pretty small. And they shot him.
> KING: How many black students at the school.
> NORMAN: About fourteen.
> KING: He was the only black shot, though, right?
> NORMAN: Yes, I believe so (From CNN, *Larry King Live*, April 21, 1999 9:00 PM).

However, the fact that Shoels was only one of a handful of black students at Columbine High School intimates an insipient racism and classism were present in the community and the school.

Another interesting topic of coverage was the state sponsored memorial service, which offended many. The service was held for the parents, students, staff, and the greater Littleton community. The governor's office had arranged the service, where the Reverend Franklin Graham was the headlining speaker. Many parents and even some fellow clergy were unhappy with tone of the service. Detractors claimed that it was too evangelical, and did not represent the Columbine community. In a series of articles and editorials that focused on the service, there were several references to Evangelical Christianity, some critical, some supportive.

> In the wake of one of the nation's most heinous tragedies, some liberal Christians, blacks and Jews apparently are outraged by last Sunday's memorial service for the murdered at Columbine High School because- are you ready?- the service was "too evangelical and too white." So ran a story in *The Denver Post* on Thursday, the same day the last child- the only black child killed in the rampage- was laid to rest. The protesters

> have promised to file formal letters of complaint to Colorado Gov. Bill Owens, whose office helped plan the event. Imagine this: Your child has been murdered by an insane classmate. You're still curled up in a fetal position under the dining room table. You're trying to figure out how to breathe, and some self-serving, self-righteous religious/racial critic-at-large is mad about how you mourn.
>
> I'm white, I admit it. I was raised by Christian parents, sorry. So you could say that, technically, my particular ethno-religious group was covered. But you'd be wasting your breath because I don't give a rip. On this day, such personal posturing trivializes the monumental loss of these families. (*The Denver Post*, May 1, 1999:B7)

> I agree with the condemnation of the evangelical tone of the Columbine memorial service, but would take it a bit further. There are three groups of people who cannot resist an audience, particularly a large audience: professional politicians, professional entertainers, and professional evangelists. Unquestionably the most poignant, tender moments were delivered by the two young Columbine men who sang their song, and the two young Columbine women who payed such sincere tribute....in other words it was the nonprofessionals who shone. We should have heard from more students and at least a teacher or two. Instead Gov. Bill Owens solicited the professionals, all of whom stood to gain by being there whether or not that was their intention (Editorial W.L. Bradbury, *The Denver Post*, May 6, 1999:B6).

Outside of these and similar references, the most frequent themes were the personal stories of triumph in the face of adversity. Many articles told the personal stories of survivors, victims who were recovering in the hospital. Updates were a regular occurrence. Other stories discussed memorials to special students or teachers, like Dave Sanders, the only teacher killed at Columbine, who was shot shepherding students to safety. The short lives of the children cut down were lauded, as were the heroic acts of students and teachers who saved others.

Opaqueing

One of the most important references was found both in the local and national representations of the Columbine massacre. The linking of events to a broad community

was common. In the newspaper accounts, there were sixty-five references to Columbine as a national tragedy. Other statements were made that indicated "America's obsession with violence" or "Our healing as a nation."

> ...Littleton, Colorado joins a lengthening list of communities that could be "Anytown, USA," that now are linked by a common tragedy... (CNN, Crossfire, April 21, 1999: 7:30 PM).

> ...Directly out of Columbine. Columbine was a social earthquake. Few things have the impact on the general public, by the way.... (CNN Morning News, April 20, 1999: 9:00 AM).

> ...a lot of kids lost their lives, because two kids wound up killing many other kids. And I think anytime we have the problems we have with the kids, with lack of anger management, kids feeling alienated, and all the other symptoms of modern-day society, and then putting and having a proliferation of guns in the hands of these kids is outrageous (CNN April 22, 1999:1:00 PM).

> ...I look at the pictures, the high school pictures of these two boys, and I'm thinking, boy, from outward appearances they have all the ambience of being normal, American kids, and you wonder what takes that into a child whose heart was clearly so filled with darkness...(CNN, Crossfire, April 22, 1999: 7:30 PM).

> The WB has been wrestling with a programming decision regarding its Emmy-winning comedy-horror series, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer:" Should the network broadcast the upcoming episode about impending death and destruction at Buffy's high school graduation? Is the hour appropriate to air considering the nation's raw nerves after recent, real life high school shootings? (*The Denver Post*, May 24, 1999:F1).

> Enforce gun laws although some Republicans are blasting President Clinton's proposed gun legislation as a "typical knee jerk reaction" to the massacre at Columbine High, we support such rational restrictions for a nation drowning in gun violence (Editorials, *The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:G4).

> The Denver area's grief in the wake of the Columbine High School shootings is as public as a country mourning a national hero and as personal as a family struggling with its most intimate pain (*The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:A21).

These quotes place the events at squarely into the area of everywhere and nowhere, decontextualizing the place from the event. In this manner the event is liminalized, put into a separate category for which our collective consciousness endeavors to find a soothing closure. This is in line with Lefebvre (1972) and Soja (1996). The spatial is intentionally mystified. In the case of Columbine High School and other school shootings around the country this serves a dual purpose. It removes the "setting" from the story, allowing the public discourse to eliminate any possible interference of place with events as a conspirator in the evils of society, almost asserting (by ignoring) that nothing could be wrong with the suburbs, the suburban mindset, or the suburban means of production and reproduction! In addition, this mystical obfuscation elevates the events by taking them out of context, allowing the national media to claim the events, linking the local with the national, and in the case of Columbine, even the global.

It was in Littleton that the national media created the reified school shooting. Prior to "Columbine" or "Littleton"[1], school shootings had been covered in the national press, but there was always a sense of the place being far away, different in social class and background. Until Columbine, the place where school shootings occurred in the United States was definitely represented as rural. With the advent of the events at Columbine, the public's concern was raised to a new level, begging the question, over and over again, how this tragedy could have occurred in such a nice place.

The mixture of rhetoric after Columbine included public displays of religious symbols, vitriolic debates on gun control, gender-typing in raising children, and overtly

[1] There are numerous references of this sort in public speeches by high ranking moral entrepreneurs as well as politicians and legislators. See the reference section for several transcripts that quote President Bill Clinton, and Vice-President Al Gore.

indulgent parenting. Battle-lines were drawn along lines of traditional conservatives versus the liberals. Some argued that violent video games were to blame, others chose the National Rifle Association's history as a lobbyist for gun ownership as the real culprit. In many ways it was easier to analyze than the other panics because the issues were mainstream and clearly marked along party lines. There was little room to build mythology about the events because the perpetrators had killed themselves, sealing their guilt, but leaving the responsibility to be determined by a frightened public.

Mythology was a mute point in the Columbine tragedy. This process is usually subconscious and projectionist, (Jenkins 1993, Erickson 1966), in that it reflects the fears underlying the social anxiety of the period. In the McMartin case the mythology was built nearly out of whole cloth. The projected fear related to the fear parents had of leaving their children in the care of others, and served as a moral dividing line between the superiority of parents as care givers over those who surrogate their care in exchange for monetary compensation. The moral message is clear. The true care givers, the parents, are superior. And the paid help better watch out, because the parents and the children will make sure you remember who is in control.

In West Memphis the moral line took a different form. The line was drawn in a not-so-subtle fashion against outsiders of any kind. While the crime was not one that most parents around the country feared could happen to them, it was so heinous that it demanded immediate justice. The community reacted to their need for justice to the exclusion of other issues because of their fear of outsiders. The community projected from the beginning, that the murders could only have been perpetrated by a stranger. The community was able to rally around the arrest and conviction of a known outsider,

Damien Echols, with very little concern over the process of justice. Their collective consciousness was set on an outsider, and they already had one they could use.

Columbine's efforts to produce a folk devil were thwarted by Harris and Klebold themselves. By committing suicide, the two demonstrated their culpability, as well as their eventual treatment in the press as disturbed teenagers. The two have received mixed treatment in the press. Few articles treat them entirely as psychotic killers. In many accounts they are treated as victims of our disturbed, violent culture. The feminist critique has even been applied as well, where critics use the events to question how American culture has contributed to nihilistic associations for the male gender. Critiques have entered the discourse on the way American culture has unrealistic and sadistic expectations of boys' gender development. Critics claim that boys have internalized the violent culture fostered by the media in television, films, and video games.

The representations of the events in these three cases are all different in some way. However, there are similarities in the representation of two of them, Columbine and Manhattan Beach. I argue that these representations are based on social class and suburban identity. Had the Robin Hood Hills Murders taken place in Littleton, Colorado, then Americans might have been arguing over Satanism in 1999 instead of gun control. I believe that events of this magnitude come to be this important in our culture, only when they occur in affluent, suburban communities. Besides the representational argument, I will next examine real indicators of SES, demonstrating that representation is not all that these events rely upon.

Chapter 8
Comparing the Demographics of the Panic Communities

Data from the 1990 census were gathered on all three communities and their respective counties. The data were collected at the block group level and entered into SPSS. Each suburban community was compared to its county with a standard t-test to determine whether a significant difference exists between them. This was done in order to determine whether or not the communities were comparable with each other or if all of the variation could be accounted for between the local communities and their counties.

The only community that was consistently (and significantly) different from its county was Manhattan Beach, California. This was not surprising: Los Angeles is one of the largest urban, as well as one of the most diverse places, in the United States, and Manhattan Beach occupies only 48 of its 6008 block groups. The basic premise that I wanted to establish was whether there was a difference on all of the variables between the means of the community and the means of the respective county. I do not think it is necessary to get into a lengthy description of each variable at this level. Rather, each variable was tested independently in a standard two-tailed t-test, all at the $p<.05$ level.

The null hypothesis in all of the cases was that the County mean (μ_1) was not different from the place (or community) mean (μ_2). This was the standard for each variable.

$$H0: (\mu_1 = \mu_2) \quad H1: (\mu_1 \neq \mu_2)$$

The community of Manhattan Beach is very different from Los Angeles County According to the results of the t-test performed here. The variables were chosen in order to maximize the possible factors contributing to the overall SES of the community. Later the means will be compared and interpreted as percentages, demonstrating the relative difference between the communities themselves. However, even by examining the means in the following table, the researcher is confronted by the indicators of higher SES in Manhattan Beach. Manhattan Beach surpasses Los Angeles County by twice the mean level of both per capita and median household income. Both variables are included as a control for income. In addition, Manhattan Beach reported higher levels of educational attainment and much lower population diversity (ninety-four percent white).

Littleton, Colorado is a part of the Denver Metro Area, which is made up of four different counties (Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson Counties). Jurisdictional Responsibilities are often blurred. For example, some public schools that are not in Denver County participate in the Denver Public School System. This situation shows clearly how the suburban landscape flows out from the urban center, not particularly bound by the sharp but arbitrary political geography of the county boundaries. Littleton is located in Arapahoe County abutting the Jefferson County line; but Columbine High School is actually located in an unincorporated part of Jefferson County. Even though it

has a Littleton address, it draws most of its student body from unincorporated areas in Jefferson County.

Table 3. Manhattan Beach: Results of t test (community versus county means)

Variable	Value of t	DF	Significance	Place Mean	Test Value (County Mean)	Standard Deviation
Education >9th but < 12th grade	-18.57	47	.00	2.67	9.00	2.31
Education ends w/ 12th grade	-7.85	47	.00	8.22	13.40	4.52
Bachelor's Degree	13.69	47	.00	26.26	9.38	8.45
Graduate Degree	12.74	47	.00	16.70	5.31	6.13
Unemployment	-10.49	47	.00	1.60	3.69	1.36
Median Household Income	12.89	47	.00	$66,130	$37,927	$15,159
Families in Poverty	-25.53	47	.00	.30	2.50	.59
White Population	46.56	47	.00	93.95	58.88	5.16
Black Population	-80.90	47	.00	.65	11.84	.95

All data is based on percentages of individual block groups from the 1990 census.

In order to be fair to the data, I compared the census data from Littleton not only with its home county of Arapahoe, but also with Jefferson County where Columbine High School is located. Littleton is not statistically different from either county on any issue other than population diversity. These findings will be explained further when I describe the findings from the ANOVA tests.

The only ways in which Littleton as a community is significantly different from its surrounding counties is in matters of race and education. The differences in race are negligible. There is not a large enough diversity of races in the Littleton area for the handful of other racially represented groups to be of any interest to this study. Littleton is ninety-seven percent white.

Table 4. Littleton versus Jefferson County-results of t-test

Variable	Value of T	DF	Significance	Place Mean	Test Value (County Mean)	Standard Deviation
Education >9th but < 12th grade	-.15	46	.89	5.46	5.56	4.59
Education ends w/ 12th grade	-.80	46	.43	16.44	17.29	7.30
Bachelor's Degree	1.74	46	.09	15.32	13.53	7.05
Graduate Degree	.87	46	.39	6.72	6.18	4.20
Unemployment	-.11	46	.91	2.64	2.66	1.68
Median Household Income	.51	46	.62	$39,702	$38,461	$16,811
Families in Poverty	.51	46	.61	1.27	1.14	1.58
White Population	4.63	46	.00	97.04	95.12	2.84
Black Population	-.374	46	.71	.55	.60	1.09

All data is based on percentages of individual block groups from the 1990 census.

Table 5. Littleton versus Arapahoe County-results of t-test

Variable	Value of T	DF	Significance	Place Mean	Test Value (County Mean)	Standard Deviation
Education >9th but < 12th grade	1.09	46	.28	5.46	4.73	4.60
Education ends w/ 12th grade	1.34	46	.19	16.44	15.01	7.30
Bachelor's Degree	.31	46	.76	15.31	14.90	1.03
Graduate Degree	-.17	46	.86	6.72	6.82	4.20
Unemployment	.25	46	.80	2.64	2.58	1.69
Median Household Income	.01	46	.99	$39,702	$39,693	$16,811
Families in Poverty	-.20	46	.84	1.27	1.31	1.58
White Population	17.81	46	.00	97.03	89.66	2.84
Black Population	-31.08	46	.00	.54	.55	1.09

All data is based on percentages of individual block groups from the 1990 census.

West Memphis was compared with its county, Crittenden. As is demonstrated by the results of the t-test in the above table, the community defined by the political boundary of West Memphis is not significantly different from Crittenden County. Both have a very low SES with low educational attainment and very low income. Importantly, it is the community that has a particularly diverse racial component, as will be demonstrated in the comparative data that follows.

Table 6. West Memphis versus Crittenden County-results of t-test

Variable	Value of T	DF	Significance	Place Mean	Test Value (County Mean)	Standard Deviation
Education >9th but < 12th grade	-.14	35	.89	14.08	14.21	5.39
Education ends w/ 12th grade	.65	35	.52	18.02	17.24	7.24
Bachelor's Degree	.37	35	.72	3.81	3.58	3.87
Graduate Degree	.37	35	.71	1.43	1.32	1.79
Unemployment	.717	35	.48	4.04	4.37	2.79
Median Household Income	.84	35	.41	$21,465	$20,014	$10,305
Families in Poverty	-.58	35	.57	6.20	6.74	5.59
White Population	.12	35	.90	49.82	48.95	42.38
Black Population	-.12	35	.91	49.46	50.28	42.72

All data is based on percentages of individual block groups from the 1990 census.

Means Testing: Analysis of Variance

The communities were compared with their respective counties in order to account for any local variation. With the understanding that the community of Manhattan Beach was significantly different from Los Angeles County, I proceeded with the analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the communities themselves. This permitted me to disregard the counties in the ANOVA making the calculations easier and reducing the risk of Type I errors. The number of census block groups among the communities is

similar. Including the counties led to a much higher risk of type I errors because of the difference in size. It is recommended in analysis of variance that the number of cases be the same (if possible), or at least somewhat similar[1].

In comparing the means in the ANOVA test, percentages of the total population were used in order to offer meaningful comparisons. In order to have the boundaries of the groupings defined, post hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) were also completed. This permitted the researcher to determine where the groups were best defined, allowing similarities and differences between communities to be examined. These are represented as homogeneous subsets.

In the following ANOVA tests the null hypothesis states that all of the means will be equal to the means of like variables in different communities. The test hypothesis is that the means are different from each other. In nearly all of the variables there were significant differences between the communities where panics occurred, thus I could not accept the null hypothesis. The original ANOVA tests are not included here; they were performed on the raw data first, census counts at the block group level. The tests were repeated on percentages. The F-scores and critical levels reported are those from the tests on the percentage data.

Educational Attainment and SES

As might have been predicted by the earlier t-test, it is now clear that there is a definite difference between the communities on the levels of high school dropouts.

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[1] By eliminating the need to compare the counties in the ANOVA, this contributes to the overall reliability of the test.

Manhattan Beach had the lowest level reporting 2.61% of the population of Manhattan Beach not having completed High School. Littleton was more than double the percentage

Table 7. Percentages of Population with incomplete High School Education

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2	Subset 3
Manhattan Beach, California	48	2.61%		
Littleton, Colorado	47		5.46%	
West Memphis, Arkansas	36			14.08%

F =80.50, p<.01

of Manhattan Beach, but their level was still a modest 5.46%. The rate of non-completion of high school reported in 1990 in West Memphis is a little more striking. It was nearly three times the level of Littleton, Colorado, and six times that of Manhattan Beach, California. The national average of high school dropouts in 1990 was an extraordinary 24.8%. While West Memphis's high school drop out rate was much more dramatic than that of Littleton or Manhattan Beach, it still ranked below the national average. But it does show the difference between the different communities.

Table 8. Percentage of Populations with Terminal High School Diploma

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2
Manhattan Beach, California	48	8.22%	
Littleton, Colorado	47		16.44%
West Memphis, Arkansas	36		18.02%

F =29.51, p<.01

It is important to note when examining the statistic that the reported percentages record the percentage of the local population whose educational attainment *ends* with a high school diploma. Otherwise the table would look very out of place indeed. Again Manhattan Beach reported the lowest percentage of individuals whose education ended with high school. West Memphis's and Littleton's levels were somewhat similar, and statistically they fell in the same grouping, indicating similar patterns of educational

attainment, at least in the percentage of adults whose education ends with high school. The national high school completion rate in 1990 was thirty percent.

Table 9. Percentage of Population Reporting Completed Bachelor's Degree

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2	Subset 3
West Memphis, Arkansas	36	3.81%		
Littleton, Colorado	47		15.32%	
Manhattan Beach, California	48			26.26%

$F=107.41, p<.01$

In examining the levels of higher education, the three communities began to separate from each other. Educational attainment in Manhattan Beach was extremely high. Nationally the percentage of people who reported holding a bachelor's degree in 1990 was just over thirteen percent (13.1%). Over twenty-six percent of Manhattan Beachers reported holding a bachelor's degree and another sixteen percent reported holding a graduate or other advanced degree. This was also high compared to the national percentage which was slightly higher than seven percent (7.2%). The percentages in Manhattan Beach were striking, even compared to Littleton, Colorado, whose demographics were more in line with the national averages. In Littleton, just over fifteen

Table 10. Percentage of Population Reporting Completed Graduate Degree

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2	Subset 3
West Memphis, Arkansas	36	1.43%		
Littleton, Colorado	47		6.72%	
Manhattan Beach, California	48			16.71%

$F=122.13, p<.01$

percent of people reported holding bachelor's degrees and nearly seven percent held advanced degrees. These levels are still respectable compared to the paltry levels in West Memphis, where less than four percent of the population held bachelor's degrees, and less than one-and-a-half of a percent held advanced degrees. In both indicators,

bachelor's degree and advanced degrees, Littleton is closest to the national averages, Manhattan Beach, on the other hand, reported much higher averages in both areas.

Table 11. Percentage of Community Unemployment

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2
Manhattan Beach, California	48	1.61%	
Littleton, Colorado	47	2.64%	
West Memphis, Arkansas	36		4.04%

$F = 15.61$, $p < .01$

The percentage of unemployment reported in 1990 in each of these communities contributes to an overall understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of the area. Although Manhattan Beach and Littleton form a definite homogeneous subset versus West Memphis unemployment rates for all three communities were low (the national average was 5.5%). The unemployment rate in West Memphis (4.04%) was higher than the other two communities, indicating that the West Memphis community was less economically stable than the other communities in 1990. All the communities were low, but Manhattan Beach and Littleton were well below the national average for that time period. Unemployment is a telling variable but the differences in income compared to the other indicators already discussed will give the reader a much more concise view of the SES of these communities.

Table 12. Median Household Income

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2	Subset 3
West Memphis, Arkansas	36	$21,465		
Littleton, Colorado	47		$39.702	
Manhattan Beach, California	48			$67.537

$F = 99.16$, $p < .01$

Income is obviously one of the most important indicators in this study. Littleton's income fell neatly right in the middle. Obviously the income levels of these communities

were vastly different from each other. Each community is its own homogeneous subset, from most poor to affluent. It is in comparing these local numbers to the national income averages that we see the most difference. As I have already noted, the communities are very different from one another. Littleton is the most "average" of the communities. Like the educational statistics, Littleton is almost the quintessential average American community. The median family income for Littleton is around $39,000 per annum. The national census profiles claim that the median family income for the United States in 1990 was $34,914. Littleton was slightly above average, but still a typical American community.

When comparing these national profiles to the other two communities, two very disparate communities are reflected. Manhattan Beach is clearly affluent, nearly twice the national average in median family income for 1990. Clearly Manhattan Beach is a community of much higher SES than Littleton, but it is strikingly different from West Memphis. In that community the median family income of $21,465 per year is about forty percent lower than the national average.

Thus we have three very different communities in terms of socioeconomic status. West Memphis is well below the national averages. Yet it does not fit the definition of a community in poverty ($12,100). The lower than average median family income levels indicate that there are probably more families in poverty than in the other communities that I examined in this study. West Memphis is not your typical American community, and neither is Manhattan Beach. But Littleton is clearly "America's Town" it reflects the national average in many ways. And while Manhattan Beach may not be average, it is probably enviable.

Population Diversity

The racial data show that the only community that was not overwhelmingly white was West Memphis. In fact, Littleton and Manhattan Beach reported an unusually high percentage of whites; both reported less than 1% of African Americans in their communities. Tests were done examining the percentages of other minority populations in the three communities but these were not statistically significant. The national average reports that the majority of people in the United States in 1990 were white, 83.9%. Only 12.3 percent of the population in 1990 was African American. Littleton and Manhattan Beach both reported some Asians, people of Hispanic origin, Native Americans, and people that reported they were part of the catch-all category of "other." None were particularly relevant to the comparisons of the communities with each other.

Table 13. Percentage of the Population that is White

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2
West Memphis, Arkansas	36	49.82%	
Manhattan Beach, California	48		93.96%
Littleton, Colorado	47		97.04%

F=53.71, p<.01

Table 14. Percentage of the Population that is Black

Place	N	Subset 1	Subset 2
Littleton, Colorado	47	.55%	
Manhattan Beach, California	48	.65%	
West Memphis, Arkansas	36		49.46%

F=61.67, p<.01

Distance from Urban Center

One of the last pieces of this dissertation's hypothesis is that metapanics tend to happen in the suburbs, rather than rural or urban areas. Whether this is due to media availability or other factors of proximity is not the purpose of this research, though it is a

question I plan to address in the future. However, all of the areas examined in this dissertation are within twenty-five miles of the downtown of a major urban area. The distance was determined by measuring the distance from the suburban area to the downtown (based on the address of City Hall), by asking for a distance measurement on the internet service provider Mapquest (mapquest.com)[2]. In the case of Littleton, Colorado, rather than measure from the town itself, the address of Columbine High School was used as the point of origin.

It was most interesting to me that the furthest distance from urban center was from Manhattan Beach to downtown Los Angeles. Had I not once lived in that sprawling megalopolis this might have surprised me. But Los Angeles is described by the 1990

Table 15. Distance from Urban Center

Town	Nearest City	Distance to Urban Center
West Memphis, Arkansas	Memphis, Tennessee	9.34 miles
Littleton, Colorado	Denver, Colorado	12.04 miles
Manhattan Beach, California	Los Angeles, California	20.35 miles

census as having an urban population throughout the county. Many parts of Los Angeles County, including the beach communities where Manhattan Beach is located, could be considered suburban rather than urban.

Both West Memphis and the Littleton area are considered suburban based on their distance from their respective urban centers. In the case of West Memphis, it is just on the other side of the Mississippi River, which is also the state boundary separating Arkansas and Tennessee. Because the events at Columbine High School were the focus

[2] Originally, I tried to get the distances from urban centers by inputting the data into GIS but I was unable to get the latitude and longitude of the City Halls from any source without paying for them. Because the data being compared here was not dependent on the distance being reproducible in GIS, I chose to use the mapquest method for expediency.

of that part of the study it became necessary to compare Littleton with Jefferson and Arapahoe Counties. Littleton, the suburb, (rather than the incorporated township) falls in both Arapahoe and Jefferson Counties, as is demonstrated by Columbine High School being part of Jefferson County, but, with a Littleton address.

The differing distance of the communities from their respective urban centers did not appear to make much difference. All three suburban areas are very close to their urban centers, much closer than I expected in the cases of Littleton and West Memphis. This indicator may have implications for future research on metapanic, but there are not enough cases here to undertake a statistical comparison. And while suburban distance may be a telling detail in whether a moral panic occurs at all, it seems to be unrelated to the predictability of whether a localized or metapanic occurs.

The Moral Panic Profile

In comparing these three definite differences can be found. Manhattan Beach is a wealthy community of people who can be described (according to population means) as well-educated, earning above average incomes, and largely white. Littleton is similar in homogeneity, but less well-to-do than Manhattan Beach in income and educational attainment. Littleton and Jefferson County, Colorado, where Columbine High School is located, have the highest percentages of white people and the lowest percentages of African Americans among the study groups. In comparison, both West Memphis and Crittenden County, Arkansas, have higher reported percentages of black people, lower educational attainment, and lower income levels.

This returns the focus of the research to the question of how the panics are represented. Is there a difference in the representation of the events caused by

differences in their respective communities? The answer seems to be, "Yes." The two strongest indicators of difference were whiteness and income. Manhattan Beach and Littleton were very similar in terms of whiteness, 94% and 97% respectively. Both of these communities were very white, even in comparison to the U.S. overall where whites made up nearly 85% of the population in 1990. West Memphis's population was different from the other two communities. The racial mix in 1990 was nearly 50/50 white to black (49.82% white, 49.46% black). There were no significant percentages of other racial populations in West Memphis.

These data support the hypothesis that the communities where the metapanics occurred have higher SES than those where localized panics happen. In addition, the two communities where metapanics occurred were similar in their racial composition. It is fair to conclude that future research should be pay attention to the racial composition and SES of the communities where moral panics occur. Metapanics may prove to reflect the suburban voice of most public discourse (Gans 1979, Lefebvre 1974). Or the development of a metapanic may have more to do with a community's ability to pay for services necessary for the panic to develop or be sustained. It costs money, in the form of tax dollars, (and in the McMartin case health insurance and counseling fees) to keep an investigation going.

The case studies reveal that there is likely a pattern in the SES of where moral panics develop. How that contributes to the overall development of the panic and the consecutive social movements only future research can tell. The goal of this research is exploratory. In exploring the relationships between the 1990 census data, and distance from urban center, there appear to be two major structural contributions, whiteness and

higher than average SES. Distance from the urban center seemed to be of little consequence. However, the common theme whether it was in the representation of the communities, or the actual demographics, was that the communities with broader panics tended to be whiter, and have average to above average incomes and educational attainment.

Chapter 9
Comparing Three Moral Panics

According to Ragin (1994:108), the purpose of comparative research is to tease out the differences between groups being studied. The systematic examination of differences between categories of variables, populations, or other units of analysis systematically leaves the researcher with the similarities. The researcher can then categorize the groups under study based on the differences and similarities opening doors for future research or the development of theory (Ragin 1987, Yin 1994).

Based on the comparison of data from the 1990 census as well as a comparison of the rhetorical analyses from the media accounts of the three events, there is a definite basis for further investigation into the socio-spatial dimension of moral panic. The census data demonstrate that there is a likely bias either in the development of the panics themselves, or in their representation, based on socioeconomic status and race. Because the study of moral panics is functionally a study of historical events and their repercussions, it is not possible to determine whether eruption of a moral panic is predictable. However, the data indicate that whether or not the moral panic develops into a metapanic or remains a localized panic is predictable.

The development of a metapanic seems rooted in the suburban representation of the place where the panic occurs. But this does not imply that the two events that sparked the panics in Manhattan Beach and Littleton were equal. They were not. In the McMartin case seven defendants lost their reputations, their life savings, and in the worst case scenario, five years of Ray Buckey's life in prison. The alleged McMartin victims lost their innocence. It is of little consequence to them whether or not there was any abuse. The people who were students at the preschool and who were subjected to the now panned techniques of recovered memory believe they were victims. Yet, however terrible those consequences are, they cannot compare to the carnage of the Columbine Massacre. Thirteen people lost their lives to gunmen in a school building. Fifteen families lost loved ones, (I include here the families of the teenagers who perpetrated the massacre). As a result, there is a fundamental difference in the types of panics that occurred in the communities of Manhattan Beach and Littleton.

However, both cases did cause controversy, and both stirred action far beyond the boundaries of their towns. The two cases reached out and touched every level of American consciousness. The communities where these events happened represented the American Dream. They are the places to which Americans *escape* in order to feel safe, the suburbs. But life is never shaped simply by the location of a place, how far it is from the nearest city. Indeed, while distance from an urban center might be important to whether or not a moral panic occurs at all, it seems to have little bearing on whether that panic develops into a metapanic or remains a localized panic.

Instead, what is important is the social place, the representational place. The suburbs represent safety, good moral values, cleanliness, and order. When a fearsome

event or series of events affects such places, then there is the possibility for a localized panic to develop into a metapanic. If we, as American consumers of media(ted) information, cannot identify with the community that is represented in the panic, then it is unlikely that the panic will stretch much further than the community where it occurs.

Although Manhattan Beach, California, differs from Littleton, Colorado, both are represented as suburban in the public discourse. Both communities are *represented* as affluent. Both communities are represented as white, mostly by default, as not other groups are represented as "normal" to those communities. In the case of Columbine, Isaiah Shoels, the young African American man who was murdered, was consistently referred to as "remarkable," different from his classmates, and yet the same. In effect, the point is simply that, despite Isaiah Shoels's race, he was just as upper-middle class as everyone else at the school, and therefore not deserving of being targeted by killers Klebold and Harris.

While there are substantive differences in the census data on income and education, sufficiently separating the two communities into their own homogeneous subsets, they are represented the same way in the media portrayals. Articles about the McMartin case used the same reference in nearly every article, "the affluent suburb of Manhattan Beach." Meanwhile articles about the Columbine Massacre referred to the pretty houses and the neat streets. They referred to it as a moral community and a wealthy suburb of Denver.

In addition, one of the major similarities between the treatments of these two communities in the media was in their portrait of the suspects. *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Denver Post* commonly pointed out distinctions between the suspects and their

communities. The rhetorical device that was consistently used by both was irony. The suspects were shown to be different from their surroundings, imperfections in a perfect world. Eccentricity, tolerated by the other suburbanites, was really a symbol of a darker, destructive force embodied in the suspects. It is unimportant whether or not this painting of the folk devils is a true depiction or not. They are shown to be unsavory, as Cohen (1972) describes the creation of folk devils in any moral panic. In all three cases the folk devils are painted as deviant based not exclusively on a moral compass, but also on their distance from the suburban norm.

In the McMartin case, this was accomplished by painting both Ray Buckey and his family as eccentric. The press pointed out how unusual the family was: displayed in their unusual devotion for each other and in their quasi-incestuous relationships with each other- grandmother, mother, and two adult grandchildren all working in the same place and living in close proximity to each other. This was a constant theme in articles about the McMartin investigation. The subtext was clear: the McMartins were unusual because they were unusually un-suburban in their family relationships.

In the same vein, Littleton gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were portrayed as children given every luxury of suburban life. Article after article discussed how the boys had seemed so normal, just on the edge of the acceptable line of teenage eccentricity. Articles discussed how they had attended the prom in a limousine, handed out cookies to pretty girls in class, and made plans to go college. The media were particularly sympathetic to Klebold. Eric Harris's family was not treated as positively in the press; generally they were treated as pariahs who were trying to avoid lawsuits by asking for immunity from the authorities before aiding in the investigation. Klebold's

family, on the other hand, was treated rather kindly in the press, in part because they cooperated with authorities in the investigation. It was no surprise that they were also represented as being more well-to-do than the Harris family. Many articles and transcripts mentioned that the elder Klebold had given up his successful position in engineering in the oil industry to manage his many rental properties around the Denver Metro area. Dylan Klebold was painted as a sympathetic character who followed Harris's lead.

This is quite contrary to the media portrayal of Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin. Press reports very rarely discussed their similarities to the community. In fact, there was little rhetoric that included the community at all. Rather, the two were treated as guilty in the press. They were painted as outsiders mostly because of the public representation of Damien Echols as a devil-worshipping, high-school drop out. He had a pregnant sixteen-year-old girlfriend, carried an animal skull around with him, and listened to heavy metal music. He also had a history of mental illness. Although his history of depression was not made a lasting part of the public discourse, the evidence used to prove his depravity was confiscated in a social work intervention. In no article I found on the West Memphis case did I come across any rhetorical themes of "where did we go wrong?" or "what's wrong with our community?" Only in the Columbine case did any rhetoric surface asking what "we" did wrong as a community. The McMartins, the Buckeys, and Klebold and Harris, were all depicted as having been members of the community at one time. Not so with Echols, and by default, his co-conspirators.

A common theme in all of the representations was income. As has already been shown, Manhattan Beach and Littleton were represented in the media in a similar fashion

despite their substantive difference in income levels. By contrast, Echols, Baldwin, and Misskelley were all portrayed as white trash. The 1990 census data has already demonstrated that West Memphis is not affluent, but the killers were depicted as distant from the community by constant references to their living conditions. In all of the articles that mentioned evidence found at the defendants' homes, the more specific word "trailer" was used to describe their residences.

The most telling comparison is on the use of monetary amounts to describe the backgrounds of the perpetrators. A story on Domini Teer, the pregnant girlfriend of then murder suspect Damien Echols, mentioned that Dian Teer's (Domini's mother) landlord was threatening to evict them. The second article discussed how the department of children's services (DHS) was threatening to remove Domini from her mother's trailer because their home was unsanitary in the extreme. The article even went so far as to describe in graphic terms the nature of the unsanitary conditions:

> The case's notoriety apparently prompted a trailer park landlord to evict Echols' 16-year old girlfriend from her $175-a-month trailer home (*Commercial Appeal*, June 7, 1993:A1).
>
> Tom Dalton, director of the DHS in Little Rock said he couldn't confirm whether agents visited Teer's home, but said the state has power to temporarily remove a child from an abuse situation caused by unsanitary conditions and place the child in a foster home. A reporter who visited the trailer on Friday found the floor in one room covered in cat feces, while food and garbage were found throughout the home...(*Commercial Appeal*. June 12, 1993: B1, 2.)

In contrast, an article on the Columbine Massacre describing the homes that killers Klebold and Harris grew up in said that Klebold's parents had bought a $400,000 home not long after Dylan's father left his position as a geophysicist with a Colorado oil company. The elder Klebold had started his own management company so that he could

dedicate all his time to managing his real estate investments. Eric Harris's family had a less prestigious background. Harris's father had been in the military, and now retired, worked for a local aircraft school, teaching and working on planes. The Harris family moved into a nice suburban home costing $180,000 not long before Eric entered High School.

> ..."I'd say Eric had it in him," says Brian Anderson, a 17-year-old junior injured in the rampage. "Dylan was kind of influenced and followed." Klebold, the second son of college sweethearts shaped by the liberal-minded '60s, grew up amid white-bread suburbia and normalcy, and an affluence that went relatively unreflected outside the family's $400,000 Deer Creek Canyon home...(*The Denver Post*, April 30, 1999:A12).
>
> ...After school, Harris played kickball in the street with other kids and jumped on the neighbor's trampoline. He also followed the new baseball team in town, the Colorado Rockies. In 1996, Wayne Harris bought a $180,000 home on a cul-de-sac overlooking Chatfield Reservoir in the tidy Columbine Knolls subdivision...(*The Denver Post*, May 2, 1999:A18).

These references put the subjects into the discourse as inside of the establishment, even though they were misfits at school. Clearly Klebold and Harris (though the former is more invested than the latter) are part of the community, while Echols and the other "trailer trash" are not.

In all other measures of SES, Littleton's profile was almost identical to the national averages. I believe that this is very important to the treatment of the Columbine massacre in the press, as well as in the development of the metapanic. Littleton is America's quintessential suburban ideal. The community's characteristics are just slightly better than the American average, indicating that they are only slightly ahead, neatly summing up our collective, suburban ideal. It is much different in this regard from both Manhattan Beach and West Memphis. Each of these communities are on the far

Table 16. Comparison of community data against 1990 census data

	Incomplete High School Education	Terminal High School Education	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree	Median Family Income
1990 National Average	24.8%	30%	18.7%	13.1%	7.2%	$34,914
Littleton	5.6%	16.44%	15.14%	15.32%	6.72%	$39,702
Manhattan Beach	2.6%	8.22%	18.30%	26.26%	16.71%	$67,537
West Memphis	14.08%	18.02%	7.61%	3.81%	1.43%	$21,465

ends of the average. Clearly, a community need not be average to qualify for a metapanic. But if we use these criteria, we can possibly predict that if a moral panic occurs, it will not develop beyond the local environs into a metapanic.

Another area of interest in the representation of events relates to the public discourse on God and prayer. Articles about both Columbine and West Memphis made frequent references to God, where those about Manhattan Beach did not. The invocation of Satan in reference to the crimes in Manhattan Beach came late in the course of events, when other theories about the alleged crimes had been exhausted. Though both communities included religious references and rhetoric about God, their tones were different. The tone in the West Memphis articles was condemnatory and moralistic, while the public discourse in the Columbine tragedy was more hopeful and soothing. The examples below highlight this difference.

West Memphis

> Mark Byers, father of Christopher Byers said that whoever killed his son is an "animal." "I hope God shows a little mercy on his soul, because I sure wouldn't," he said (*Commercial Appeal*, May 7, 1993).

...Dr. Nieburg points out, these kids probably were very marginal. They probably weren't getting along very well at home, not doing well in school, dropouts, spiritually as well as physically, and felt very, very powerless. Maybe twenty years ago they would have stolen hubcaps. But today in this age of decline of moral responsibility, you know they'll do a lot worse than that (Mr. Jack Levin, Satanism Expert on Geraldo, March 16, 1994).

..."While I do believe to the very core of my being in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," Rector Fred H. Tinsley Jr. said in his homily, "I freely admit to you this morning that my heart is sorely troubled." Tinsley called the slayings "the incarnation and manifestation of evil." "We're not dealing with the garden variety of sin here," Tinsley said. "Anyone who would do this is not like you or me...They've reached the point where they refuse to recognize that anything wrong was done" (*Commercial Appeal*, May 10, 1993:B1).

Columbine

..."We came to pray for safety and comfort and healing," said Gina Schreck, whose 15-year old son, Jacob, attends Columbine. "So many of the parents are feeling hopeless and afraid. You can either be paralyzed or you can take action. We thought this would be a good thing to do instead of being paralyzed." ...Many parents from Chatfield, other Jefferson County Schools and surrounding neighborhoods came to the 6 A.M. prayer walk to support the Columbine parents. "This is the most important thing we can do," said Cheryl Brubaker, who has a daughter at nearby Dakota Ridge High School... *(The Denver Post*, May 4, 1999:A10).

...Is it any wonder that small disagreements come to blows and even shootings? It's not the guns, and it's not the lack of Christian morality, and it's not the lack of prayer in schools, and it's not the jocks, and it's not Charlton Heston, and it's not the drugs. It's the fact that we've forgotten how to get along...(Editorials, *The Denver Post*, May 7, 1999:B10).

...And I keep asking myself what is the thing that ties this together, and I think it's hatred lodged in the human heart, and that's why, as a pastor, yes there needs to be all kinds of healing, emotional healing, but spiritual helping as well, and that's our concern, that Jesus Christ can heal the human heart, and we want to walk through the valley with the students and be of any help that we can... (Rev. Don Sweeting, on CNN Early Edition, April 21, 1999:7:01 AM).

The people of the Denver area seemed to be reaching out to and with God to help themselves and the other members of the community. In West Memphis, the focus was more on evil and moral corruption, which is rather understandable, as the crimes were represented as Satanic murders. With all of the mention of the "cult murders" there was little need to moralize about the evils of Satanism. It seems that the main difference is that the Columbine tragedy made people question, "Why here?" Frequent religious references appear in both communities' discourses, but overall the tone in the Denver area was more positive than that in West Memphis[1].

The perpetrators in both the West Memphis case and Columbine were teenagers. Their clothing was used as a sensitizing tool in the development of panic in both communities. Frequent references were made to the trench coats that Klebold and Harris wore. In Columbine these references appeared right at the beginning of the timeline at the outset of the investigation. Before much was known about the events, and before the press had the stories of personal tragedy and triumph on which to report, they were fixed on typifying the assailants. The "Trench Coat Mafia" soon became a reified concept throughout America. Trench coats were banned for a time at schools throughout the country. Klebold and Harris were framed as frequently wearing all black. Likewise, Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin were typified by their wardrobes, and Echols was said to have often worn a trench coat, even in the sweltering heat of summer. Echols was

[1] This is most likely due to the nature of the theory of the crime. However, it is important to recognize that the creation of the Satanic motive came from the rumors of Satanic activity in the community and hearsay about Satanic rituals and who participated in them. These were backed up by graffiti and "pseudo-satanic" activities in the area, most specifically the use of two local legend sites, where teens would gather to have sex, experiment with drugs, and tell spooky tales. For more on teen Satanism and Psuedo-satanism, see Jeffery Victor, 1993.

portrayed as always wearing black. In addition, some of the most "compelling" evidence seized from Baldwin's trailer consisted of sixteen black T-shirts (Guy et al. 1995).

The major themes in the rhetorical analysis relevant to this research were those that had to do with social class (often through the coded lens of suburban identity), and community. There are more differences than similarities between all three communities. Across most of the SES indicators there are three distinct homogeneous subsets rather than two. However, despite this difference, two communities, Manhattan Beach and Littleton were represented in similar fashions by the local and national press. Both communities were represented as suburban and affluent (though Manhattan Beach more so than Littleton). And while both communities are above the average in socioeconomic indicators, there are distinct differences in income and educational attainment between the two. This difference can likely be at least partially attributed to regional differences. But most of the SES indicators have Manhattan Beach surpassing Littleton by nearly double the national averages.

The conclusion I draw from comparing the data for differences and similarities is that the most important difference is the way in which the communities were represented in the media. The suburban identity was clearly established for both Manhattan Beach and Littleton in a manner that West Memphis was not. It would seem that the pastoral bias Gans (1979) described as common to news production does appear to win out over the urban. This bias, though may refer not only to the traditional pastoral bias noted by Gans (1979) but also to the social class and suburban identity of the media personnel themselves. In 1992, journalists were overwhelmingly white, 92%. They also earn

incomes above the national average. Their individual incomes in 1992 ranged from $27,000 per year for female reporters, and around $33,000 for male reporters[2].

In the case of moral panic, it appears that suburban representation is more influential than other indicators. Because of its proximity to Memphis, Tennessee, West Memphis could have been represented as suburban, but it was not. The representation was that the area was low-rent and backward. This may have to do with an urban, cosmopolitan bias on the part of the Memphis media, but this is unlikely. Certainly the national representation of events in the Robin Hood Hills Murders was that the area and its inhabitants were clearly rural. And one might argue, ignorant.

The important aspect of representation in a moral panic appears to be whether or not the area can be classified as idyllically suburban. The more suburban the place, the more likely it is that a moral panic will develop into a metapanic, and extend beyond its local environment. However, representation is not the only criteria we can use to determine whether or not social stress that leads to panic will develop into a metapanic or remain localized. The other indicator is socioeconomic status. In this research that status was linked to income and educational attainment. Race was included to gain the standard profile of community diversity. Race was not an important factor in the development of the hypothesis of this research. However, racial dissimilarity should be considered a strong indicator in future research. Homogeneous populations should be studied further as an indicator of the development of moral panic into a metapanic. The goal of this exploratory study was not to predict the intensity of moral panics. But the census data comparisons indicate that future research on moral panic should include human

geography as well as rhetorical analysis and analytical history. Initial data indicate that it is possible that the more a community (undergoing moral panic) is in line with the average American socioeconomic status, the more intense and widespread the metapanic will be.

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[2] *Editor and Publisher*, November 28, 1992:p16.

Chapter 10
The Meaning of Space in Moral Panic

Further research into the body of current theory needs to be undertaken to contribute to whether the terms metapanic and localized panic are valid theoretical constructs. Under the assumption that they are, metapanics, tend to favor the white, middle class, and suburban, in representation. Distance from urban area seems to be of little consequence, though a more conclusive test for correlation should be done at a later date with a much larger sample.

I hope that this research will encourage others to study the effects of place (both real and representational) on social phenomena. Given the opportunity to perform this research again, I would have liked to have been able to give a more thorough treatment of the events in Manhattan Beach. The story of the moral panic in that community is enough for an entire case study unto itself. I also believe that the case studies would have been more rich if they were balanced with actual observations of the space of each place. This would not require extensive fieldwork, but questions of spatial representation are best analyzed first hand. In that vein, it would have been best if all of the original television reports could have been examined along with the transcripts in order to include

the visual data in the content and rhetorical analyses. This would have permitted a more detailed view of the representation of space, and social class. As I indicated earlier, the only video data that was available was from the Columbine Massacre. The video images gave a somewhat contradictory view of Littleton. While Littleton was spoken about as a suburban area, the visual images were usually of vast open space surrounding Columbine High School, which suggested, (and indeed some CNN reporters explicitly stated) that the area was rural. They failed to mention that Denver was on the other side of the mountains one could see behind Columbine High School.

The events described in this work reflect the ability of people in groups to participate in a social process of exclusion, drawing a clear line of demarcation around social behavior considered unacceptable. The comparison of the case studies indicates that there is good cause to believe that there are three main constituents to a moral panic, though their causal relationships have not been established. These are racial composition, socioeconomic status, and suburban identity in public representation. The West Memphis case is the only moral panic studied here where the community was not treated as suburban, and it is also the only community whose events were not connected to other similar events around the country, synthesizing into a moral panic on a broader, national stage.

It is likely that the representation of Manhattan Beach and Littleton as suburban had much to do with their saleability to a national audience. This permitted the space where the tragedies occurred to be opaqued, deliberately made transparent. This reflects the possible link of suburbanite consciousness to urban identity, as put forth by Lefebvre (1999), but it also demonstrates the connection of the suburban with greater social power.

The suburbs thus emerge as highly contested, socially-produced space. The opaqueing of this space is intended to mask problems and social production and reproduction (Lefebvre 1999, Soja 1996).

The moral panic that develops into a metapanic is different. The responsibility of the panic, and the number of people affected by it, are beyond the local sphere. This socially unites the community with the national consciousness. In doing this, the national "community" both dilutes and magnifies the social problem about which there is a panic. Suburbanites can call on their national neighbors in the event of a crisis in order to master the fearsome conditions. Power is coalesced in a moral statement about the condition of society. Rhetoric and claimsmaking outside of the local environment decontextualize the problem, taking it out of its setting, and setting it apart from where it occurred. This removes the causal responsibility out of the local sphere, and begs the greater audience to consider what is going on with "us" that could be causing the trouble. The focus is assumed to be outside of the local community, the suburbs are perfect, and so the problem can't be a part of the suburban context, it must be elsewhere.

Future Research

The direction of this work has naturally led me to ask questions about several different areas of social inquiry. This research has pointed out to me that one of the areas that deserves the most attention is in the representation of the suburbs, and the production and reproduction of their mythology. In order to pursue this, I plan to pursue a research agenda focusing on suburban myth-building, and the reality of suburbs constraining against the urban areas that historically have been allowed to engulf them.

Thus research under this rubric can include any facet of suburban identity from planning and policy, to politics. But in the near future my interests are in the representation of suburbs, and in the silence of social scientists in deconstructing the suburbs and their myths. I also see this research eventually leading to an examination of crime rates and fears about crime in the suburbs, and how these fears play a role in the suburban ideal.

Contesting the Suburbs

This research found that there is likely a distinct difference in the way that moral panic events are represented. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if this concept is indicative of real occurrences of moral panic, both at the metapanic and localized panic levels. It is reasonable to consider that in addition to the symbolic projections that occur in areas where moral panics become metapanics, that there is another social purpose. This is the projection of suburban identity maintaining itself in the face of adversity, an enactment of myth. The suburbs react to a proposed or real threat in their midst, and react to subvert it. What is accomplished (in addition to the expulsion of the threatening force), is the creation of real community identity and shared experience fighting the threat.

The Columbine Massacre and the McMartin Preschool cases drew attention to the community while symbolically aligning the community not to its local urban anchor, but to a greater community of white, middle class Americans via the mass media. This deflected attention away from the community itself as well as its potential problems, and focused it instead as an attack on American values. It is ironic, that Eric Harris in his journal, and in his internet ravings, clearly stated that his anger and resentment were

based on his being ostracized by the popular "jocks" at his school. Some media representations made mention of these frustrations, but the horror of the events made it difficult to be overly sympathetic. However, the opaqueing of the events occurred at precisely this level. The message is clear: to draw attention to the flaws in suburban ideology is unacceptable. Suburbia by its very nature is the homogeneous, white, middle class life that most Americans desire. Suburbia is therefore good and beyond reproach. This myth of goodness connects to a greater social identity (with the mythology supported by myths of the television families like the Cleavers and Nelsons) to demonstrate the ubiquity of suburban idealism and the projection of the myth as universal, concealing both the exclusionary nature of suburbanity and the enforcement of the rule of homogeneity- when heterogeneity exists in the suburbs, it is suspect, sometimes dangerous, and should be met with caution. Thus I propose that metapanics occur when the foundation of suburban mythology is brought into question by the social events in the community. In reaction, the media and moral entrepreneurs address the threat to *suburbia as America*, by aligning the locale with a national community, opaqueing the geophysical community and its possible real nonconformity with the mythological suburban utopia.

Another theory is that a metapanic is a snapshot into the possible disconnection between the suburban ideal and the practical reality of life in the suburbs. As the suburbs have become more urbanized there is greater reliance on institutional support. In the suburbs this institutional support is commercialized: child care, public schools (which in most U.S. cities are supported by local property taxes), private schools, and shopping malls (which act as pseudo-public spaces). It is also possible that the events leading to

the metapanic are a critique of the untenable myth, revealing the flaws in the institutional reliance. The act that initiates the panic contests the ideology of the idealized suburb. The reaction, the metapanic, decontextualizes the place, making the issue the "everyplace" and begs that we ask ourselves what have we done to bring this about, without allowing the myth to be tainted. It is not the system that is flawed. The flaw lies in those who cannot live the ideal.

Without conflict there can be no reproduction of ideals or social practices. Therefore, the *conflicted space is essential to the continuation of the suburban ideal.* The contradictions and flaws in the space must be addressed, and if necessary, any deviance adjusted. The first chapter of this book included the following quote by Edward Soja:

> The dialectised, conflictive space is where the reproduction of the relations of production is achieved. It is in this space that produces reproduction, by introducing into it multiple contradictions (Lefevbre, 1976a, 19) – contradictions which must be analytically and dialectically 'revealed' to enable us to see what is hidden behind the spatial veil (Soja, 2001:50).

If we apply this view to the suburban conflict in a moral panic, then the moral panic acts not only as a punishment for deviants who subvert suburban homogeneity, but also as a clear boundary of exclusion. Suburban production is reproduced, discouraging not only the introduction of difference but even the tolerance of it.

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