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## **Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria; A Discourse Analysis**

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### Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria:

- A moral panic sparked by the public fear and conspiracy that satanic cults were committing mass abuse, including the abuse of children and ritual sacrifices. This hysteria resulted in several false claims and accusations against innocent people during a period known as the "Satanic Panic" during the 1980's.

### Language: A system of communication used to:

- Support the performance of social activities and social identities,
- Support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions. (Gee, 1)

### Ideologies:

- Foundational beliefs that underlie the shared social representations of specific kinds of social groups. (Van Dijk, 120)
- The basis of discourse and other social practices. (Van Dijk, 120)

### Language and Ideology Interface:

- The concept that language and ideology are intersected; language-in-use is used to share and reinforce ideologies, and ideologies influence language use and meaning/interpretation.

### Discourse Analysis Theory:

- A method to study language-in-use in order to understand how and why language works the way it does when it is put into action (Gee, 8)

### Discourse Analysis Tools:

- Significance - How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
- Activities - What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize what is going on)?
- Connections - How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?

### Corpus:

- Historical Data
- Legislative Data
- Newspaper/Editorial Data

# Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria; A Discourse Analysis

Sloan Watson

ENG 371 - Discourse Analysis

## Clearinghouse Issues Warning Signs

### Emotional Changes, Preoccupation With Death Are Clues

The National Information Network, based in St. Louis, says parents can look for warning signs that their children might be involved in occult-related activities. The network is headed by Shane Westhoelter, a self-taught authority on Satanism. The group acts as a clearinghouse for information on satanic cults.

Signs that may indicate satanic obsession include:

- Preoccupation with death, devil worship, suicide and the afterworld.
- Abrupt emotional change in attitude, including rebellious and violent behavior.
- Unusual interest in books on the occult and role-playing and fantasy games.
- Obsession with heavy-metal rock music with lyrics promoting murder, suicide and sadistic behavior.
- Dressing in all-black clothing and wearing jewelry such as upside down crosses, pentagrams — a figure with five lines — and anarchy symbols.
- Drawing satanic symbols on the backs of hands or on books and papers.

Shane Westhoelter  
Heads clearinghouse

- Continuous writing, talking or communicating backward in a code or unfamiliar alphabet.

Dr. Ahmad B. Ardekani, a St. Louis psychiatrist, says that drug and alcohol use often accompany these activities and that parents might notice a drop in their children's grades.

"In some cases, you have highly intelligent teen-agers who are just curious about the occult," he says. "But more often we're talking about teen-agers who are poorly self-adjusted, suffering from low self-esteem, bored, somewhat rebellious and desperately wanting to belong to a peer group."

"They may begin by just dabbling. But that dabbling may lead to much more serious involvement, including criminal action and suicide."

One Jefferson County mother learned her daughter was being recruited by a satanic cult only after the girl attempted suicide. "She was a model student and in three weeks her behavior had totally disintegrated," the mother said.

Ardekani says he has had much better results treating youngsters when they are still in the "dabbling" stages of involvement.

— By Ellen Futterman

### "Clearinghouse Issues Warning Signs; Emotional Changes, Preoccupation With Death Are Clues" Sample Analysis:

#### Significance:

- Attributing satanic significance ("Warning signs", "clues") to certain signs or activities shown in children/teens behavior - making less significant other potential causes such as emotional, preferential, or hormonal changes that occur during adolescence or as a result of underlying mental health conditions.

- "Self-taught" overshadowed by "authority", title of leadership.

- "Curiosity" made less significant

- "Dabbling" made significant by means of extreme potential consequences (slippery slope): "Criminal action and suicide"

- Use of two sources (The National Information Network and Dr. Ahmad B. Ardekani) to make claims of "warning signs significant"

#### Activities:

- Establishing children participating in listed activities as being involved in satanic practices

- Instigating parents to act upon suspicions of satanic involvement

### McMartin Pre-School Parents fear satanic practices

#### Connections:

- Unfounded connections between listed activities and satanic practices

- Connections between listed activities and extreme potential consequences: "Criminal action and suicide"

- Connections between listed activities and drug and alcohol use.

#### Keywords:

- "Suicide," "violent," "occult," "murder," "sadistic," "anarchy," "satanic," "criminal action."

#### Interpretive Stance:

- The language used by Editorial Newspapers during the Satanic Panic made baseless connections between vague activities and involvement with satanic practices, using potential severe consequences as a threat for inaction.
- Language fostered conspiracy and panic among parents who feared for their child's wellbeing and instigated false allegations and investigative action, asserting satanic practices to be real and true threats. Placed extreme weight on child testimonies - "We Believe The Children."
- Language later used when remembering the Satanic Panic criticizes the character and actions of parents and officials during this time, asserting the conspiracies to be "fantasies".



Satanic symbols and graffiti on the wall of an abandoned water-treatment plant near Weldon Spring, in St. Charles County. The shadow (left) is of a man who said the plant had been a meeting place where rituals were performed.

### Cult Memories Stir Horror, Doubt

### Satanic Abuse Unsubstantiated In Case Survey

"After scouring the country, we found no evidence for large-scale cults that sexually abuse children." - Dr. Gail Goodman, Psychologist

Sources:

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