

The Reluctant Player:
Negotiating Tensions in the Study of Religious Satanism

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author.

NOTE: My paper was originally titled, "The Reluctant Player: Negotiating Tensions in the Study of New Religious Movements," but I changed it to the above as I presented a paper based on my master's thesis titled, *Satanists and Scholars: A Historiographic Overview and Critique of Scholarship on Religious Satanism*. As the CESNUR presentation was directly informed by the thesis, below are chapters three and four. The full online version can be read here:

<http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/974626/6/Holt.MA.Thesis.Final.pdf>.

Chapter Three: Contemporary Scholarship

LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, and Legitimacy

Towards the end of the 1990s, the resurgence of interest in Satanism brought the tensions between groups to the forefront. Despite the efforts of many Satanic groups to “debunk” the Church of Satan or LaVey, LaVey’s influential ideas are still prominent among all varieties of Satanists. Jesper Aagard Petersen explains that *The Satanic Bible* has a “privileged place” among Satanists (2009, 131), even if LaVey’s Church of Satan does not:

Both cultural and subcultural discourse on the satanic certainly existed before San Francisco became the satanic capitol of the world; [...] ‘Satanists’ did exist before LaVey. Yet his galvanizing influence cannot be overstated. What LaVey did was to codify an extremely influential satanic discourse within the cultic milieu and beyond into mainstream culture, opening space for a different type of mimetic performance that was organized as a satanic religion. Similar to other diffuse alternative religious ‘movements’ appropriating a discursive other, such as modern Witchcraft and Vampirism, the terms Satan and Satanist were ‘de-otherized’ into a positive identify of alterity. (Petersen 2011, 18)

James R. Lewis has conducted research on Satanists and the Church of Satan for decades. In his book, *Satanism Today: An Encyclopedia of Religion, Folklore, and Popular Culture*, he writes:

However one might criticize and depreciate it, *The Satanic Bible* is still the single most influential document shaping the contemporary Satanist movement. Whether LaVey was a religious virtuoso or a misanthropic huckster, and whether *The Satanic Bible* was an inspired document or a poorly edited plagiarism, their influence was and is pervasive. (2001a, xiv)

Lewis notes that Satanists do not consider *The Satanic Bible* a sacred document, or even an inspired one, but they do name it as fundamental in shaping their worldview and as an authoritative document (2009a, 56). Despite the fact that various groups or individuals use *The Satanic Bible* authoritatively, there is a dispute over the definition of Satanism itself, which Lewis notes is, “reflected in the *many* attacks on non-CoS Satanists found on the Church of Satan website” (47). The CoS uses the authority of text to justify their hegemonic stance (48).

Lewis posits that this appeal to the authority of text, despite Satanism rejecting the appeal to tradition, is a holdover from CoS members being raised in a religious household (2009a, 56). The authoritative nature of a proof-text such as the Christian Bible as imbued with special properties or as divinely inspired document influences CoS members; their childhood experience in Christianity has a ripple effect among Satanists, as they, in turn, regard *The Satanic Bible* as authoritative (as adults) in the same way they did the Christian Bible (as children) (55). LaVey appealed to science and rationality as a legitimation strategy, and rejected the authority of tradition (2009a, 56), and Lewis notes that this is somewhat contradictory:

In light of his radically secularist legitimation strategy, it is ironic that his organizational successors have subsequently attempted to legitimate their positions by appealing to LaVey as if he had actually been some kind of “Black Pope,” and to *The Satanic Bible* as if it was truly a diabolically-revealed scripture. It appears that being raised in a religious tradition that locates the source of authority in religious figures and sacred texts creates an unconscious predisposition that can be carried over to other kinds of person and books – even in the unlikely context of contemporary Satanism. (2009a, 56)

I agree with Lewis only to a point. LaVey’s successors do indeed present LaVey’s work as authoritative, and never hesitate to assert dominance over the definition of Satanism. Their unapologetic stance creates tension and potentially alienates researchers, while certainly alienating other Satanic groups. Where I disagree is the argument on the authority of text being a holdover from a childhood experience. I suggest, instead, that this notion is embedded in western culture as a whole; one does not have to have literally been raised in Christianity in order to feel its influence, as we are all raised in western culture. We are only ostensibly secular, but the notion of authority of text is a fundamental tool for all rhetoric, whether religious, political, or rational. The notion of an appeal to authority of text is entirely pervasive in western societies and thus insignificant as a factor; it excludes no one.

I highlight the above conclusions of Lewis and Petersen to emphasize that the notions of legitimacy is a contentious issue across Satanic groups. LaVey’s philosophical influence is obvious among schismatic groups, but his authority (and that of the Church

of Satan) is contested in various ways, especially in the contemporary virtual Satanic communities.

As Satanic movements grow, “Satanism” begins to refer to more than simply the Church of Satan, or even the Temple of Set. Petersen, taking a cue from Campbell’s “cultic milieu,” proposes the phrase “Satanic milieu” (2011, 5). The Satanic milieu is a subgroup of the cultic milieu, alongside New Age, UFO, Neo-Pagan, Theosophical, and Esoteric subgroups (5). Petersen writes:

The satanic milieu is in itself a polythetic category with fuzzy borders, and could be conceived of as a cult-producing substance of key terms and practices as well as the reservoir of ideas uniting the broad movement of modern Satanism, mirroring the larger cultic milieu in a fractal sense. Thus the satanic milieu is a trend in popular culture...a collective style and identity within satanic neo-tribes... and the reference points of the satanic subcultures that crystallize around distinct interpretations or manifestations of Satanism today. (2009, 5)

Just as Campbell’s notion of the cultic milieu was not contingent on the survival of each individual cult and, more often than not its ephemeral existence, so is the Satanic milieu itself the constant. This milieu is defined by the explicit symbol (metaphorical or literal) of Satan as the self, a force, or model, advocating “sex, pride, non-conformity, rebellion, and individualism” (2). Various Satanic groups may be transitory and shifting, but the prime ideas and foci remain. I adopt Petersen’s notion of the Satanic milieu as it is a fitting phrase to describe the social environment corresponding to the subgroups of active religious Satanism.

The Contemporary Church of Satan

After the dismantling of the Church of Satan’s grotto system in the mid-1970s (partly as a response to the problem of schisms), LaVey reorganized the CoS as a “fellowship of individuals” (Lewis 2001a, 256). This “cabbalistic underground” no longer had local chapters or grotto masters from which to disseminate authoritative information (Petersen 2011, 133). The lineage of authority shifted from central-authority-to-group-leader, to central-authority-to-individual (133). Members thus became independent practitioners, not required to befriend, or ever interact with other Satanists. An emphasis was placed on achievements in the world, not socializing with

other members or participating in group activities, activities now deemed entirely voluntary. It was a major reorganization, based on the notion of attracting remarkable individuals from the outside that did not require a sense of community in the traditional sense. The Church of Satan was dubbed a cabal of the “alien elite” (133).

The Church of Satan itself has remained very much the same philosophically. The changes within the CoS have been more within the structure of the institution. Leadership shifts occurred after LaVey’s death, with Blanche Barton initially as head, and then Peter Gilmore taking the role of high priest, his wife Peggy Nadramia as High Priestess, while Barton retains the title of Magistra Templi Rex (Petersen in Lewis and Petersen 2005, 429). Between the mid-1970s and the surge of Internet activity, most members made contact through written correspondence, newsletters, and the unofficial meetings between members of like-minds. Maxell Davies writes that the post-charismatic fate – that is, after the death of LaVey in 1997 – of the Church of Satan is not reliant on close social ties between members (in Petersen 2009, 77). They are dispersed geographically, and contact with others is not required to consider oneself a Satanist or live “Satanically” in the world. Authoritative statements come from the Council of Nine, the CoS’ anonymous ruling body. Even if ruling pronouncements stemmed from LaVey during his tenure, the authority was diffused. As such, the death of LaVey did not affect the CoS as much as it could have, as its members were already relatively independent (77).

Contemporary ethnographic work on the Church of Satan itself has been limited. LaVey and the Church of Satan are mentioned in almost every academic treatment, but mostly as primer information to then discuss pan-Satanic activity, focusing on Satanic texts; little research deals directly with members themselves, or how Satanism is understood and lived in modern times.

It is interesting to note how many studies or encyclopedia entries – both old and new – report that the Church of Satan is obsolete, dismantled, inactive, struggling, or simply irrelevant: Drury calls it “defunct” (1992, 48); Davies suggests that it is struggling (in Petersen 2009, 83); and Lewis states that it will continue its present decline (2010, 24). This, despite the multiple publications, movies, and articles produced, either by or about the CoS, as well as various other projects by openly-

affiliated members. There are several reasons that the Church of Satan is reluctant to participate in academic research. First, they are wary of academics and journalists misquoting, taking words out of context, or generally misrepresenting or misunderstand their worldview (Holt 2011). Second, the Church of Satan keeps their members' identities in strict confidence, and research could potentially jeopardize that anonymity. The CoS does not make available their membership numbers, nor put any member into contact with another. Access to CoS members is therefore logistically difficult; a researcher would have to approach participants without the help of the administration, and given the dispersed nature of its members, the means of contact is limited. As sectarian Satanic groups are generally more eager to participate as a method of legitimizing their religion, academics, in turn, tend to bypass conducting current research on the CoS altogether. When the Church of Satan is mentioned in contemporary academic work, it usually focuses on textual histories of their literature rather than ethnographic studies. Third, apart from addressing criminal accusations, the CoS sees little benefit to actively participate in research, as they do not seek external legitimization. Finally, the Church of Satan dislikes being involved in research that includes other Satanic groups. Viewing the CoS website will provide many examples of the CoS' firm denigration of other self-identifying Satanists. Their unwillingness to be compared to other groups, alongside their vigilant stance as the sole "true" Satanism, prompts them to be viewed as a strong-armed intimidator within the Satanic milieu.

The Church of Satan, for its part, does not lament its status as the "bully" of the Satanic milieu; it sees no need to apologize for insistence on hegemony, nor engage in ecumenical outreach. I do not have an official statement regarding academic research except for its stance regarding my own,¹ but my impression is that they might see too much attention as a negative; functioning under the radar serves their ideal as a somewhat subversive and secretive religion.

¹ Magus Peter H. Gilmore's official position regarding my research is thus: the Church of Satan does not endorse nor support my research. Any agreement reached is solely between myself, as the researcher, and the particular informant. Research is conducted outside the auspices of the Church of Satan. Despite this stance, the Church of Satan will not actively discourage members from participating (as they have been known to do), and will allow me to recruit willing participants as I see fit.

Jesper Aagard Petersen responds to the lack of contemporary in-depth research on the Church Satan in this way. First, he observes that the CoS was largely quiet during the late 1970s and most of the 1980s, and in between 1997 and approximately 2007. Scholarship, in turn, mirrors their non-presence in the public sphere. Second, he emphasizes the difference between ethnography and history; sound historical-critical research to counteract the early partisan ethnographies of Alfred, Lyons, Moody, and Truzzi, who are considered known CoS sympathizers. Ethnographical research is needed to balance the dependence upon stable sources and the tendency to reiterate claims that are now decades old (pers. comm. July 19, 2012).

Labeling the Church of Satan as defunct or struggling is perhaps premature given we have scant new research. I do, however, agree that scholarship has adjusted its focus to other forms of Satanism; the Church of Satan is no longer the sole group actively practicing, and research reflects this reality.

Given that most contemporary scholarship deals with pan-Satanism, the rest of this chapter is dedicated to other Satanic groups and its subsequent scholarship; the Church of Satan is mentioned when my own research can provide a counterpoint, but the CoS is not central to this chapter. A brief sampling of Satanic groups or organizations friendly to theistic Satanists is provided by the websites of Diane Vera, a prominent theistic Satanist on the Internet. It includes: Church Lucifer, Church of Theistic Satanism, Darks Pagans, Demonolatryas, First Church of Satan, Joy of Satan, Luciferians, Modern Satanic Church, *Ordo Templi Orientis*, Order of the Nine Angles, Reformed Church of Satan, Temple of Set; as well as Christian-based duotheists, Coven of Bel's Fire, Cathedral of Satan, Church of the Infernal, Church of Lucifer, Order of Phosphorus, Synagogue of Satan, Temple of Hel, and Temple of Kal. Vera herself self-identifies as an Azazelian polytheistic Satanist (Vera, *Theistic Satanism*, Accessed June 3, 2012; Vera, *Thoughts by an Azazelian*, Accessed June 3, 2012).² Because the groups vary widely in their understanding of Satanism, it is quite impossible to examine them all. My impression is that most may be sole practitioners or even small groups of less than ten, probably active solely on the Internet, while a small amount of other groups have begun

² Several of the links on Vera's website are invalid as of the date of publication, suggesting the highly transitory nature of many Satanic groups.

to create firmer ideologies, assemble offline, construct hierarchies, and increase membership. Scholars have not extensively studied most of the above apart from Internet presence and textual analysis of available literature; hard statistical data about these groups as a lived religion is absent.

There are too many contemporary scholarly works to analyze one by one in this chapter, ranging from critical methodological approaches, discussions of legitimacy, and surveys, to the poorly conceived and erroneous,³ although Satanism scholars remain perhaps a few dozen. I have instead grouped this chapter by themes: the Satanic milieu, demographics, geographical studies, and moving beyond Satanism.

The Satanic Milieu: Three Categories

Jesper Aagard Petersen observes that the Satanic milieu is embroiled in a “process of othering”: Christian groups, scholars, in-group versus out-group dynamics all excluding each other (2009, 6). He notes that most Satanists do not identify as a cohesive group, but a “diffuse ‘occultural’ movement” (5). Despite this, he identifies three categories: rationalist, esoteric, and reactive. Rationalistic Satanism is the highly secularized and atheistic stance, such as the Church of Satan’s (6). Esoteric Satanism is a religion of self-actualization, a theistic tradition incorporating paganism, western esotericism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (7). Reactive Satanism is unorganized youth rebellion engaged in various defiant or even criminal actions (such as church burnings). This last category is set aside, as it is not considered part of religious Satanism, and the overwhelming majority of Satanic groups strongly condemn criminal activity.

Petersen defines modern Satanism as a self-religion, an individualized worldview consisting of the “double negotiation of a positive identity construction – self-actualization – and a negative identity construction – lack of conformity,” framed in the imagery of Satan (or Devil, Lucifer), and inheriting a countercultural position from LaVey (2009, 8). “Balance, satanic nature, aesthetics, iconography, and rituals are general currency in the milieu” (8). All Satanists adhere to a stance of rebellion against

³ For example, Matthews (2009) writes a particularly negative portrayal of Satanism. He appears to have misunderstood what he opposes, and, based on a flawed premise that Satanism is inherently immoral, his arguments are skewed in an overly emotional position that Satanism is immature fascism for the violent and rebellious. Lewis calls his work a, “moralistic diatribe against religious Satanism” (2009a, 10).

the status quo, heralding ideals such as non-conformism and individualized transgression of the norm (12). A Satanist is “a carnal and emotional individualist against the cold ratio of science, the arid morality of Christianity, and the tyranny of political repression” (12). This stance is symbolized by the “most powerful symbol of resistance,” Satan (17).

I adopt the above definition as befitting for common traits of Satanists discussed in this section, although I emphasize a similar concern as Petersen: the lines of the Satanic milieu are “fuzzy,” and individuals or groups understand the above with variety and nuance.⁴ The lines between the rationalistic and esoteric are particularly intertwined, as some atheistic Satanists are widely knowledgeable of esoteric texts and ideas, while others are firmly secular with little interest in occult writings. Esoteric Satanists range from gnostic interpretations to magical and occult perspectives, with varying degrees of secular worldviews, some of which practically mirror rationalistic Satanism. The division between an atheistic/secular and theistic/esoteric Satanism is necessary for the academic in order to quantify their areas of research, and identify the larger themes within the movement. These distinctions, despite being necessary, are not firm separations within religious Satanism itself.

Demographics

Few statistical data on Satanists is available, with a few notable exceptions.⁵ Most contemporary scholars conclude that membership ranges from a dozen or so to no more than a few thousand. Kennet Granholm suggests that Satanists, “regularly generate a level of mass media and public interest not implied by [the] relatively low membership numbers” (in Petersen 2009, 93). While this is certainly true, it brings us

⁴ For example, my own research with the Church of Satan would emphasize that non-conformism is not an ideal in and of itself, but instead place the emphasis on critically understanding current social trends. One would not reject a particular idea or cultural element simply because it is popular, but instead criticize the “herd” for blindly going along with popular thought without self-awareness or taking responsibility for one’s choices; it is a Machiavellian position, not solely a rebellious one. The ideal is not non-conformism, but actually a critique of reactive, *automatic* conformism. The difference may appear subtle on the surface, yet important enough to mention in order to highlight that working definitions are necessary for the academic, but require further explanation when delving into specific groups.

⁵ See Lewis 2001b, 2009a, and 2010.

Satanists and Scholars

no closer to the actual numbers of practicing Satanists. The following (figure 1) is a selected compilation of membership numbers cited by scholars:

Recap of select membership claims			
Year	Author	Number	Claimant
1970	Lyons	100,000	Author
		7,000 CoS	
1971	Woods	7,000 CoS grouped into 25 offshoots	Author
1971	Truzzi	7,000 CoS	LaVey
1972		10,000 CoS	Author
1974	Alfred	7,000 CoS	Author
		400-500 Active CoS	
1981	Crim	"miniscule": real Satanists	Ellwood
1986	Scott	40 ToS	Author
1988	Lyons	300 CoS	"disgruntled ex-member"
		10, 000 CoS	CoS spokesperson
		5,000 CoS	Author
1989	Guiley	(exagerated) 25,000 "at its peak"	Author
1993	Nelson and Taub	1,000	Alexander 1990
		1,000,000	Forsyth and Olivier 1990
1995	Harvey	50 ToS Britain	Author
		< 10 ONA Britain	Author
2002	Lewis	"Still technically the largest Satanist group in terms of formal membership" : CoS	Author
2002	Melton	< 1,000 CoS	Author
2002	Harvey	No evidence of growth since early years: CoS	Author
2005	Lewis	300 ToS	Author
2005	Jones	< 1,000 "active"	Bromley 2005
2006	Hanegraff	< 1,000 CoS + ToS	Introvigne
2009	Evans	1,525 England and Wales	2001 National Census
2009	Granhholm	200 ToS	Author
		400 Dragon Rouge	
2009	Mombelet	25,000 France	Miviludes 2008
		4,000 France	Author
2009	Hjelm, et al.	500-600 CoS	Author
		200-300 <i>Satanisk Forum</i> Denmark	
2009	Introvigne	No more than 100 CoS	Author
		50 <i>Enfant de Satan</i> France	
2009a	Lewis	335 Canada	1991 National Census
		850 Canada	2001 National Census
		1,167 New Zealand	2006 National Census
		2,251 Australia	2006 National Census

Figure 1: Recap of membership number claims. Unless otherwise noted, membership claims are unspecified as to the affiliation, location, or type of Satanist.

As viewed above, the numbers vary. Early citations contain the often-quoted seven thousand Church of Satan members, while recent numbers claim on average one or two thousand. Most scholars themselves offer the same objections that I offer here. Firstly, there is a decided reluctance to stand up and be counted among most Satanic groups. For example, the following announcement was posted on a Church of Satan forum regarding Lewis' online survey:

If you are contacted or approached by any person who asks you to complete a "Questionnaire" called "*The Satan Census*"...please refrain from participating in it. A "Census" is designed to track and monitor habits of a specific type of person (in this case Satanists). If you really think about it, do you want to be tracked and monitored? Would you really want the "habits" of Satanists around the world available in a public document that anyone can access, and I mean *anyone!* (Frost 2009, *Letters to the Devil*. Accessed August 3, 2012)

The statement then concludes with a warning to report any spamming of survey requests, and that administrators will delete the profiles and ban the users as a consequence. Compare this discouraging warning to the website of theistic Satanist Diane Vera, on which she is responding to my own article on the Church of Satan (Holt 2011) wherein I use – after a lengthy explanation of my process – the term Satanism to apply solely to the Church of Satan exclusively within the context of that particular essay. She laments my application of the term (i.e. noting that “LaVeyan Satanism” would be more appropriate),⁶ and encourages other groups to be counted and volunteer for study:

We need to prove to the academic world that we exist in sufficiently large numbers to be worth studying. So, if you are a theistic Satanist who does not want the CoS to succeed in their attempts to monopolize the definition of “Satanism,” please respond ASAP to James Lewis’s current survey. (*Theistic Satanism*, Accessed June 3, 2012)

Vera then links to Lewis' census (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GC2RHKF>).

⁶ Upon reflection, Ms. Vera's criticism of my title (“Death and Dying in the Satanic Worldview”) has merit, although I would not have used the term “LaVeyan Satanism” as she suggests because it is considered highly insulting to Church of Satan members. Instead, I would have probably used the more specific title, “Death and Dying in the Church of Satan,” and maintained the methodological explanation of my use of terms within the essay itself.

Vera is not the only one eager to be involved in studies, as I received several emails from various types of Satanists after being published in 2011, offering to be included in my future work.⁷

I highlight the different positions above in order to stress that most scholarly claims of membership are extrapolations based on a formula; X amount of respondents multiplied by a number that not only varies from study to study, but also relies too much on guesswork and estimates. In addition to this, it is important to note that the sample groups are extremely limited; they certainly provide some insight into their respective worldviews, but I am doubtful that they can be understood as reflective of the Satanic milieu as a whole.

As an example, I refer to my own research with the Church of Satan. If one looks at the Church of Satan news page (<http://news.churchofsatan.com>), many members will advertise their various projects and activities. To view the website itself, and to judge membership solely on the types of projects advertised there and count the amount of persons involved, presents the CoS as metal music, gothic, dark art/literature/film loving types of people reflecting a particularly "Satanic" aesthetic, numbering perhaps one hundred or so. In a similar vein, known CoS members' blogs, facebook pages, and websites will demonstrate the same thing; if tallied, these public profiles and known-affiliated members may number about one hundred. Instead of then concluding that all Satanists are gothic/dark/Satanic and that they are no more than a hundred, one should conclude instead that CoS members whose association with Satanism actually helps their professional development are openly affiliated online, and therefore easily counted, but not indicative of every member of the Church of Satan. For every "dark" Facebook page, there are a multitude of professionals whose personal pages never give any indication or hint of their Satanic religion. I have known and conversed with dozens of members who are lawyers, physicians, teachers, professors, military personnel, engineers, librarians, masseuses, and stay-at-home parents. Their online personas (if they even engage much virtually besides exchanging emails for business or personal

⁷ I have kept their information, but also referred them to Lewis' study, as I am currently focusing on the CoS.

matters) provide no suggestion of their membership – some go as far as to avoid visible contact with other CoS members who are openly affiliated (i.e. not adding Facebook friends whose profiles reveals their affiliation, not linking to CoS material, never discussing Satanism on their respective blogs, and keeping associates ignorant of their religious inclination), preferring to keep those communications private. We can perhaps assume that groups aside from the Church of Satan have similar circumstances, although corroborative research would have to confirm my suspicion. Given my claims, albeit anecdotal and certainly not tested against more extensive quantitative research, I posit that current estimates of membership numbers are unreliable; in reality, scholars simply do not know.

The national censuses are another problematic source, as it is uncertain how many of the self-identified Satanists are actual practitioners of religious Satanism. For comparison, take the Canadian 2001 national census, which, in addition to the eight hundred and fifty Satanists, also listed twenty-one thousand Jedi. Some journalists surmised that the large number of Jedi is actually a form of protest of the government enforcement of the long-form census, and not because there are actually practicing religious Jedi. I posit that, perhaps, self-marked Satanists may also fall under this category, although the exact percentage is unknown. There is the additional caveat that many Satanists would not risk self-marking oneself as such in a census for fear of lapse of confidentiality and breaches of security.

Diane E. Taub and Lawrence D. Nelson note in their article, “Satanism in Contemporary America: Establishment or Underground?” that the prime obstacle in acquiring reliable numbers is gaining and maintaining access to the groups themselves (1993, 536). With the increase of public attention given Satanic groups during the Satanic Panic came the decrease of public activity among Satanists. The relative silence of the Church of Satan at the time of Taub and Nelson’s research resulted in decreased exposure overall (536). Given this, I contend that there is still much reluctance among Satanic groups to participate due to fears of professional and personal repercussions. The Church of Satan itself has always advocated self-interest above self-sacrifice, and pragmatism over rebellion; “Our religion does not require martyrs,” is an often-quoted claim by the current CoS High Priestess, Peggy Nadramia (in Frost 2007, *Letters to the*

Devil. Accessed Aug. 3, 2012). I do not advocate abandoning quantitative research; it is an important aspect of social scientific studies. My contention is for scholarship to place more emphasis on the caveat that members are protecting themselves; silence does not equal inactivity.

The scarce studies that do exist provide some interesting trends. Between Lewis' two internet surveys, 2001 and 2009, the Satan Census revealed that the average age of self-identified Satanists rose, and thus had more children and long-term relationships (2009a, 22). Over the eight years, he had over twice the number of respondents (one hundred and forty to three hundred) (3). There is a decline in the prominence of LaVey and the Church of Satan among respondents (although this is not surprising given their likely avoidance of the survey) and a surprising presence of the Joy of Satan. Lewis predicts that theistic/esoteric Satanism will continue to grow, that the Church of Satan will continue to wane, although remain present as long as *The Satanic Bible* remains the (sometimes unacknowledged) (23) standard text of the Satanic milieu (24). As scholarship on contemporary religious Satanism grows, we will hopefully be able to expand our knowledge with more statistical data, and find quantitative research methods that address the unique qualities of reclusive groups.

Geographical Areas

Many of the contemporary scholars on religious Satanism are European. Even the American scholar James R. Lewis is currently teaching at the University of Tromsø, Norway. As such, much of recent scholarship has focused on groups throughout Europe.

Graham Harvey presents his research with the Temple of Set and the Order of Nine Angles in Britain (in Lewis and Petersen 2008, 612).⁸ Eleven members of the Temple of Set responded to a questionnaire, but Harvey estimates that there are about one hundred active Satanists in Britain (613). His participants consist of different levels (degrees, orders, and pylons), seven male and four female, have a spectrum of professions (from clairvoyant to software engineer), five voted Conservative, and the rest vote Labour, Liberal, and Liberal Democrat (613-4). Harvey notes that even this

⁸ Harvey also includes the Church of Satan, although I have omitted this information in order to focus on pan-Satanism.

small sampling demonstrates that the stereotypical image of Satanists (presumably he means the image of them as anarchic or ultra liberal) is inaccurate, and their political leanings vary greatly.

The Order of the Nine Angles (ONA), a schismatic Satanic group, is described by the leader Stephen Brown as a “difficult and dangerous path of self-development, the goal of which is an entirely new individual. This path is fundamentally a quest for self-excellence and wisdom” (Harvey in Lewis and Petersen 2008, 623). Members are expected to partake in retreats that challenge the individual and face their dark natures in survivalist exercises as well as magical occult rituals. They advocate a “culling or Satanic sacrifice” by assassinating certain weak and cowardly “victims” (624). This assassination is “not always a criminal act” but can be performed magically. Harvey posits that the inflammatory language of their texts is almost certainly intentional, and that he sees “no evidence that what they assert is actually practiced” (624). The sinister content of their texts is meant to dismantle binary thinking, and force the individual to view “reality” without conceptual constructs (625). Harvey notes that there are probably less than ten people actively ONA (625). Harvey closes his discussion with a thoughtful paragraph:

While the everyday is often dully mundane, part of the enchantment that maintains our interest is that it is also suspect. Does the everyday provide a mask for unspeakable horrors? If so, the majority of the few people who identify as satanists are not part of such possible horrors even when they (perhaps playfully, certainly deliberately) perform the transgression of “normal” social discourse in order to appear as the alterity the rest of us seem to need. (2008, 631)

Various other regional studies demonstrate similar variety and questions. Milda Alisauskiene looks at Lithuanian Satanism ([2003] in Petersen 2009). She observes that Satanism first made its appearance in Lithuania when *The Satanic Bible* was translated into Lithuanian in the late 1990s (122). Her focus is on the Brotherhood of the Dark, founded by twin brothers, Vaidotas and Evaldas Jocy. They have a staunch hostility to Christianity, and advocate a “weakening of religion” (123). They name themselves Satanists as an oppositional position against social norms, although claim *The Satanic Bible* is “too weak, the same propaganda as the Christian bible,” and call the American

version of Satanism a “business” (122). She posits that the Brotherhood is a response to the increased revival of Catholicism in Lithuania, and that the group proposes freethinking, atheistic, and secular views (124-5).

Ringo Ringvee adopts a similar opinion when looking at Satanism in Estonia, that is, that Satanism is a response to the predominant Christian society of Estonia, despite Estonia being a firm secular state (in Petersen 2009, 136). Ringvee notes that political parties used the issues of legitimating Satanism as a religion as a political rhetorical tool in order to garner votes.

Other regional studies have been conducted, a small sampling of which is listed here: Hermonen offers a review of counterculture groups and Satanism in Finland ([2001] in Petersen 2009); in Italy, Menegotto discusses the cases of two religious clerics (one murdered by Satanists and the other facing criminal charges related to Satanism), and the subsequent media fallout ([2003] in Petersen 2009); in Poland, Smodczynski examines Satanic collective identities online ([2003] in Petersen 2009); Norway’s Black Metal scene and its relationship to Satanism is reviewed by Mork (in Petersen 2009); Evans examines the membership numbers of Satanists in the United Kingdom (in Petersen 2009); in France, Mombelet distinguishes between practicing Satanists, media hyperbole, and (mostly criminal) acts deemed Satanic in nature (2009); Hjelm et al. look at Satanism scares in Nordic countries (2009); on this side of the Atlantic, one study looks at teenage Satanism in the American south (Lowney [1995] in Lewis and Petersen 2008).

One particularly interesting study focusing on Scandinavia discusses the conscious construction of Scandinavian Satanism as opposed to the American model (Dyrendal and Soderlind in Petersen 2009). Some Scandinavian Satanists (namely Ole Wolf, an ex-CoS member, and his girlfriend, Amina Lap) posit that Satanism in its initial form is Americanism, and thus incompatible with the socialist cultures of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. American values are competitive and individualistic, while Scandinavian ones are based on collaboration and social democracy. The authors of this essay present the counter position of Peter H. Gilmore, who states:

I wouldn’t necessarily say that the competing individual, even in a popular sense, is necessarily an American concept. Even though it is popularized by the

American mythology...Satanism is tied to wherever there is a sense of the individual, by himself, as opposed to being subsumed to a group consciousness. (Gilmore in Dyrendhal and Soderlind in Petersen 2009, 166)

Gilmore continues his response by commenting that many Church of Satan members are active in Europe and Asia, where adapting to local culture does not necessarily translate to a rejection of CoS Americanism; he mentions his own Norse inspired "Rite of Ragnarok" as evidence (167).

As apparent above, when Satanism moves beyond its initial time and place, it adjusts to new particulars. Diaspora Satanism now has multiple factions, a variety of self-understandings, and degrees of compatibility or hostility with the Church of Satan/LaVey. Schismatic groups are now reinterpreting Satanism to such an extent that scholars are forced to consider that "Satanism" is now an inappropriate term when discussing groups or ideologies that have moved beyond Satanism.

Studies on Satanic groups entail some confusion regarding the definition of Satanism itself. The Church of Satan has a clear and relatively consistent definition of Satanic philosophy, and the early studies in the 1970s differ very little from contemporary work. Certainly, there are small changes and adjustments, but the core philosophy has not drastically shifted. Outside of the Church of Satan, however, a wide spectrum of definitions and self-understandings are present and evolving, and scholarship reflects these modifications. Embroiled in the use and application of terms is the notion of legitimacy, i.e. proclamations of "true" Satanism. Scholarly work in turn discusses the issues and concerns surrounding nomenclature within the Satanic milieu.

Multiple Princes and Princesses of Darkness

Kennet Granholm argues that the application of the term "Satanism" varies relative to the popular, familiar or academic approach (2009, 1). Most non-scholarly (and even some scholarly) reactions to the word "Satan" are extremely negative due to a twofold aspect: there exists little understanding of religious Satanism, and, because of this, the term itself is inseparable from the stereotypical connotations (2). He offers a breakdown of how academics have categorized these groups, and notes the arbitrariness of its application. For example, the *Encyclopedia of Esoterism in*

Scandinavia lists the Temple of Set under the heading of Satanism, but places the Rune-Guild and Dragon Rouge under Occultist Groups (Granholt 2009, 3). The main problem with this categorization is that the Temple of Set is very similar to the Rune-Guild, and that even though the ToS is an offshoot of the Church of Satan, they note that their prime “Satanic” figure is Set, and refer to themselves as Setians. When discussing the multiple representations of Satan in terms of its cultural counterparts (Ahriman, Odin, Set, Shiva, etc.) Granholt challenges a claim by Petersen that they are all viewed as the same type of symbol for antinomian self-religion (Petersen 2009, 8). Instead, Granholt posits that the other deities are not historically associated with the history of Christianity (like the term Satan), and thus are “post-Satanism,” and require new terms for accurate categorization (2009, 5). Post-Satanism, according to Granholt, is a term applied to groups that have relinquished the symbol of Satan. He discusses three of these: the Temple of Set, the Rune-Guild, and Dragon Rouge.

The Temple of Set views Set as teacher and guide, and is the “Ageless Intelligence of this Universe” (Aquino in Granholt in Petersen 2009, 94). The Rune-Gild focuses on the runes of the Germanic tradition, incorporating meditation, divination, and self-transformational rune-work (92). Various Rune-Gild authors consider gods/god in different forms: as “magical archetypes” that can have a “subjective existence” for individuals but also a “tripartite objective existence,” or as Odin as a god-model for self-deification (94). The Dragon Rouge has an even broader incorporation of demonic deities. They include Apep, Anubis, Leviathan, Loki, Lucifer, Melek Taos, Odin, Pan, Quetzalcoatl, Samael, Set, Typhon and others (95). The Dragon Rouge also has an emphasis on Princesses of Darkness, and incorporates feminine deities such as Hecate, Hel, Kali, Kebechet, Lilith, Morana, Naamah, Ragana, Sekhmet, Skuld, Tiamat, Urd, and Verdandi. Despite the eclectic pantheon of gods/goddesses, the Dragon is the prime symbol of the rhythm of nature, the ultimate source of power, and is manifested through individual magicians (95).

Granholt observes that these groups are engaged in a process of transformation in which they reach beyond the Satanic for symbols of their antinomian self-deification (in Petersen 2009, 89). Apart from the sectarian nature of the Temple of Set in regards to the Church of Satan, any reference to Satanism with the Rune-Gild or Dragon Rouge is

an externally applied term (97). Granholm argues that, “Satanism should be avoided whenever possible, due to the vague definition of the term and the overly pejorative connotations it arouses” (97).

Granholm suggests instead the term Left Hand Path (LHP)⁹ as a broader, more appropriate term to describe groups beyond Satanism, but that share certain characteristics. LHP has five characteristics, repeated here verbatim from Granholm’s text:

- i) The ideology of individualism; where the individual is positioned at the absolute center of that person’s existential universe.
- ii) The view of man as a psycho-physical totality; where a division of more bodily and more spiritual components becomes essentially meaningless, at least in view of the next characteristic.
- iii) A focus on life in the here-and-now; where the pursuit of a perfect after-life becomes if not meaningless, then assumes a secondary role to living-in-the-moment.
- iv) The goal of self-deification; interpreted in a wide variety of ways, but that always involves the individual becoming in as total as possible control of his/her own existence.
- v) An antinomian stance; in which the individual questions and breaks societal, cultural, and religious taboos in the quest for personal liberation. (Granholm 2009, 4)

In essence, Left Hand Path religion is a category that includes both self-identified Satanists as well as those who follow the above criteria but have evolved beyond Satanic symbols (Granholm in Petersen 2009, 97).¹⁰

I agree with Granholm’s conclusions with regards to taking into account the self-identifying nomenclature of groups while also considering the ever-evolving nature of their worldviews. My issue is that even among rationalist/atheist Satanists, a variety of mythologies and symbols are used in rituals (Holt 2011),¹¹ and therefore even self-identifying Satanists re-appropriate other symbols of antinomian self-deification. Further, a rejection of the term “Satanism” because of its overwhelming negative

⁹ For a brief but thorough discussing of the history of the term Left Hand Path see Evans in Petersen 2009.

¹⁰ Neo-Pagan movements also identify as Left Hand Path. These groups mostly strongly reject any association with Satan or the Satanic, symbolically or otherwise.

¹¹ For example, if a member of the Church of Satan responds more viscerally to the symbol of Odin than Satan in ritual, it is not considered less Satanic; the prime importance is the emotive quality of the symbols used within the rite, and not the specific references to Satan. See Holt 2010, 2011.

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connotation is not the concern of scholars; Satanists themselves adopt the term exactly because of its implications, even while they reinterpret this negative stereotype into that of a rebel-hero. If Satanists themselves adopt the term, scholars are making a value judgment by rejecting it for its negative connotation; our primary concern is the accuracy and appropriateness of a term. These points do not directly refute Granholm – that is not my intent as I mostly concur – but I present them to highlight that even when trying to unpack the varied nuances of a term, we encounter problems.

Modern Satanism

Scholars on contemporary religious Satanism are examining a field that has split apart into a wide variety of areas. The stream started by the Church of Satan is now a delta of multiple groups, each fighting for legitimacy, practicing in dispersed geographical areas, and continually redefining Satanism itself. Scholarship also has its variety, as different approaches to research, the spectrum of questions posed and answered, and the influence of respective disciplines and standards all contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion on religious Satanism. Modern Satanism is now a wealth of material from which the scholar draws their ideas. The scholar's task is to sift through this murky area of shifting ideas and approaches, in order to find effective ways of providing critical research on religious Satanism.

Chapter Four: Further Considerations

Contemporary scholarship on religious Satanism, being an amorphous field approached from a variety of methodologies and theories, prompts this chapter. Informed by all the previous chapters, in this chapter I present some further considerations and suggestions for the academic study of Satanism.

Nomenclature: On Defining One's Terms

Within religious groups that do self-identify as Satanic, there is tension with regards to terms used and applied across studies, and scholars must negotiate this minefield carefully. For example, the Church Satan's hegemonic stance on the term Satanism is well-known, and they insist that other groups are Devil Worshipers, but scholars should not adopt their terminology; it demonstrates a partisan, witnessing position, not an academic one. To distinguish between groups, most scholars have used the term LaVeyan Satanism to identify the Church of Satan. This, however, I also reject, as members of the CoS consider this insulting; I am careful not to antagonize a particular group with an externally applied term. Scholars reject the word "cult" for similar reasons. Scholars also discard the notion of "devil worship" for theistic Satanism, preferring to reframe it as honouring their deity. Other nomenclature given to various groups are Traditional Satanism, Rational Satanism, Orthodox Satanism, Modern Satanism, Luciferian Satanism, and Pagan Satanism. The labels are both internally and externally applied nomenclature. They are at times undefined, poorly defined, inaccurate, or in certain cases, an affront to the group they purport to be studying. Beyond the term Satanism or Left Hand Path, other definitions are contested, some of which are:

- i) *magic*, as psychodrama or mystical event;
- ii) *community*, which is spurned for its overtly welcoming communal connotation;
- iii) *religion* versus *philosophy*, and how these terms relate to Satanists' self-understanding and worldview;
- iv) *non-conformity*, as a critical position or a rash rebellious stance;

- v) *conversion*, as Satanists consider themselves “naturally” predisposed to Satanic ideas, and thus do not convert to a new religious life;¹²
- vi) and even what is considered an *active member* within and across groups differs.¹³

What, then, do scholars call them? How do we apply a term with nuanced meanings? Which terms are most useful, helping scholars to produce sound critical research? Who gets to decide which terms are more accurate or appropriate to use?

Methodological Approaches

Before beginning to answer the above questions, I must first note that scholars are approaching the topic of religious Satanism from a variety of disciplines: sociology, history, psychology, religious studies, and anthropology. This is exciting and an issue at the same time; such diverse approaches lead to increased insight, as well as inconsistencies across studies. To begin solidifying methodological approaches, I refer to a discussion by Max Marwick, which expresses concerns over the wide discrepancies in research on magic, witchcraft, and sorcery throughout Africa and Oceania. Marwick highlights five suggestions to improve studies within the context of his field. These criteria, however, are easily adapted to contemporary work on Satanism; indeed, Satanism studies have far less inconsistency overall, and therefore my suggestions are more fine-tuning than an unneeded overhaul.

Marwick’s first suggestion is to clearly define one’s terms (1970, 292). He underlines that certain acts labeled as magical in the African and Oceanic context can either be socially condemned or socially sanctioned, and that these distinctions are not always clear. Researchers, translating from local languages, apply nomenclature drawn from their native western tongues, that causes confusion across studies; one tribe may view “magic” as a necessary tool, while another views it as malevolent and criminal. For Satanism, Marwick’s mandate still applies; the nuances of magic (psychodrama versus

¹² For a discussion on conversion gleaned from surveys please see Lewis 2010.

¹³ For example, a member of the Temple of Set is required to maintain contact and pay annual fees to remain a member, while the Church of Satan has a once in a lifetime membership fee, and requires no contact with other members in order to be considered active. The ToS defines active as mystical/magical pursuits, while the CoS defines active as living successfully in the material world using magic as a tool.

mystical communion), the notion of community (either shunned or embraced), definition of active member (mystical pursuit versus lived religion), Satanism itself (and the disagreement over the term), are all integral to the academic discussion on religious Satanism. Any word choice that the scholar makes is a delicate balance, guaranteed to disappoint, as no clear, inoffensive, value-free terms are currently evident. Scholars should instead explain their choices, outline the process of how they came to adopt and apply certain terms and phrases, and continue the discussion as the environment itself changes.

Second, Marwick advocates a comparison between “the ideal with the real” (293). That is, general statements about how something is perceived must be contrasted with specific examples. Marwick states that, even within a cohesive group, “differences between what informants tell us and what, when we are fortunate enough to have the opportunity, we actually see happening” (283). He provides the example of one cohesive group, in which virtually all informants claimed two things; that death was almost always the result of witchcraft, and that most witches were female (284). When he compared this perception to a case study of two hundred deaths, he found that only 55% were attributed to witchcraft and that only 42% of the alleged sorcerers were female (284). In this case, the anecdotal perceived reality diverged from the statistical data.

This can also apply to Satanism. For example, Satanists providing anecdotal evidence is insufficient on its own, and requires support from other sources. Since the Satanic milieu is rife with anecdotal data, and access to hard quantitative data is limited (although growing), application of this particular point can be difficult. It should, however, be kept in mind as scholarship advances within these groups in order to counterbalance the heavy reliance on anecdotal evidence from few informants. This is especially true when one group makes claims about another group in terms of their activities and membership numbers; as outsiders (or even insiders), their anecdotal evidence requires corroboration with case studies.

Third, the social setting must be taken into context. For Marwick, that is the social currency of alleged witchcraft/sorcery/magic accusations, and their implications. Marwick notes that societies enact a moralized drama with alleged witchcraft

accusations. The accusations can relieve or exacerbate tensions, but are always an expression of the larger context of social dynamics. This is particularly relevant for Satanism studies as questions of legitimacy, attacks on other groups and leaders, debates surrounding authority, and the relationship between the popular understanding of Satanism and the religious practice, are social concerns enacted in public forums. The Satanist is constantly negotiating a generalized suspicion of malevolence from the population at large, and the specific mudslinging from within the Satanic milieu. These tensions are negotiated through Internet blogs and videos, published literature, media portrayals, and the scholars themselves. The social setting, even for participants ostensibly unconcerned with popular acceptance, is important.

Marwick's fourth criterion advocates examining the relationship between the accused, the alleged sorcerer or witch, and the believed victim. Unveiling the rivalries and alliances between them reveals the social tensions. This particular consideration is more aptly applied to studies on the Satanic Panic, which, while related to Satanism, is not within the scope of this essay.¹⁴ I would, however, change Marwick's criterion: instead of carefully examining the sources of alleged witchcraft accusations, I posit that scholars carefully examine the academic sources themselves, and be aware of unexamined biases and unacknowledged tensions within the Satanic milieu. For example, as already stated, Petersen notes that Alfred, Lyons, Moody, and Truzzi were known partisans of the Church of Satan, suggesting that their research was perhaps unbalanced in favour of the positive. I do agree that careful corroboration of claims is necessary, but would add that most scholars also reference ex-members of the CoS or its known antagonists (such as Ole Wolf or Michael Aquino), without offering the same consideration. An overtly positive portrayal is equal to an overtly negative portrayal; both are partisan, both require either substantiations or, at the very least, an emphasis on the objectivity of the work itself. To frame Alfred, Lyons, Moody, and Truzzi as partisan because they are on good terms with the CoS means that, by the same argument, Wolf and Aquino are also partisan because they are at odds with the CoS. In actuality, I reject the labeling of partisanship for all these sources (Alfred, Aquino, et al.).

¹⁴ For an excellent study on the Satanic Panic see Victor 1993; for a discussion on the notion of evil, see Frankfurter 2006.

I am simply highlighting the flaw of partisanship accusation by applying the same argument to both sides. To be clear: I do not advocate rejecting an academic study simply because a particular scholar or source personally identifies as a Satanist. Many scholars looking at Satanism are members of a Satanic group or sole practitioners, and if considering oneself a Satanist meant their work is *automatically* considered partisan, they could never be objective or harsh enough to please critics. I do, however, advocate an equal consideration for both positive and negative portrayals, and everything in between; judge and evaluate the work itself in terms of its critical analysis, sound insight, and high standards, not the personal affiliation of its author.

Marwick's fifth element is for the ethnographer to establish a canon of fieldwork; not rely on one particular informant, but instead examine their claims in relations to the central characters. This is certainly relevant to Satanism, although the full spectrum of the field has not yet been studied. As the field grows, hopefully more and more researchers will gain access to these reclusive persons and groups, and then be able to place their comments into the wider area from which they emerge.

Thoughts on Studies in New Religious Movements

The great majority of research on New Religious Movements involves a discussion on the public perception of the NRM studied. Academic authors commonly begin with a statement about how the group is generally perceived, and either accept, reject, or alter that perception through their arguments and claims. NRM scholars are in dialog with a pre-existing framework, either explicitly or implicitly, in popular and academic forums alike. There is an apprehension that must be addressed, a social tension in which scholars become unwilling factors, as a triangle is created between NRM, the NRM scholar, and popular perception.

There is a tension between NRMs and the population at large, as NRMs are often perceived as evil, destructive, and subversive. I include these thoughts on NRM studies to highlight that a discussion on religious Satanism is not complete without a discussion on the popular perception that NRMs themselves are evil. David Chidester, in his book, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (2003) discusses how officials dealing with the remains of the nine hundred and thirteen bodies in Dover,

Delaware, went through a lengthy process to make decisions for disposal. Chidester states that ten times the normal amount of chemical treatments was used to disinfect the remains. The danger of bodies contaminating the ground – the physical symbol for the more visceral fear of contaminating the mind, of being susceptible to the kind of “cultish” thought that could potentially lead to such acts as those at Jonestown – draws a parallel that, “The deceased immediately came to represent a more fundamental, and dangerous, defilement of American territory” (16).

This reflects the broader issue of the “Culture War” itself. Anti-cult groups provide journalists and editors polarizing and damaging sound bites regarding NRMs fueling the idea that there is a war on the frontiers of society. The language and rhetoric used regarding this contentious topic is almost always the same; cults are evil and destroying morality/society. Satanists, perhaps, are especially regarded this way, although most NRMs experience similar tensions. These groups and ideas are held up against a polished and idealized version of a perfect society, and consequently demonized.

James R. Lewis and Susan J. Palmer both also address these particular concerns. In Lewis’ introductory note to his edited anthology on Scientology, he writes, “This volume will...likely end up pleasing no one engaged in the Scientology/anti-Scientology conflict” (2009b, 5). This becomes more relevant throughout his text, as well as reading reactions to his anthology, post-publication. Lewis’ volume received criticism from popular and academic sources alike for being an apologetic volume, prompting Lewis to write, “An Open Letter to: Scientologists, Ex-Scientologists, and Critics of the Church of Scientology.” It was reprinted on various Internet blogs. In it, he addresses the so-called “cult controversy,” and makes a somewhat clear statement about his personal views on the Church of Scientology. Lewis states in the “Open Letter” that, “Neither I nor the great majority of new religions specialists view ourselves as defenders of groups like Scientology. Rather, we are interested in understanding social-psychological processes and the dynamics of social conflict.” He continues to affirm that if NRM scholars are defending anything it is good science versus bad science. This is a provocative claim not in its content, but because it is apparently necessary to address publicly. Scholars in other areas are not as often forced into clarifying their personal position with such

regularity or firmness. It is perhaps relegated to areas of controversial study; queer, race, feminist, and Islamic research all fall under popular and academic scrutiny because they involve contentious issues.

Palmer describes an event wherein a journalist that signed-up for a Sensual Meditation Camp held by the International Raelien Movement recorded the sound of couples making love in their tents (2004, 70). This tape was played on a radio broadcast and described as “an unbridled sex orgy where brainwashing was perpetuated and sexual perversions encouraged” (70). She further recounts that many members lost jobs and custody of their children as a result of these types of ambush journalism. Instead of journalists approaching an NRM with the position of curiosity and professional courtesy, they disingenuously portray NRMs negatively. She claims these depictions are the direct result of anti-cult movements, which encourages and promotes the notion of NRMs as threats. She writes, “The media is generally unsympathetic towards ‘cults’ and churns out stigmatizing news reports and hostile deviance labeling, using words like ‘cult,’ ‘sect,’ ‘brainwashed,’ and ‘mind-control’ – terms that indicate the journalists’ heavy reliance on the anti-cult movement” (2004, 79).

Palmer recounts a humorous incident in "Caught Up in the Cult Wars: Confessions of a Canadian Researcher" wherein she faced accusations of being a “cultlover” by a judge (2001). Social scientists on new religions learn to negotiate charges of being cult apologists and, more even more offensive, poor scholars. I am hard pressed to imagine scholars on areas of study involving peoples and cultures long extinct facing the same type of skepticism of their work. In this sense, scholars are viewed as defending those subversively evil cults that are destroying society. We may or may not be considered evil ourselves, but we are certainly not helping.

Despite my comments in this section, they are not meant as a lament, nor as a call for pity of the NRM scholar. Instead, I posit that perhaps this triangle between NRM scholar, the NRMs themselves, and the popular perception be more closely examined. As Lewis states, scholars are not particularly well adept at the sound bite; our training necessitates a reasoned, well supported, and logical presentation of our points of view. My claim, however, is that since results of our research can directly influence public perception, and even perhaps can directly influence the ever-developing groups

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themselves, means that NRM scholars are social actors reluctantly involved in the creation of these groups. We are embroiled in their history-making.

Satanism, as a sub-group of New Religious Movements, is even more at odds with its popular perception, and the scholar on Satanism automatically becomes a player in the social setting. I encourage future research related to the role of the NRM scholar enmeshed in the NRM struggle for legitimacy in order to gain further insight and discussion into this delicate balance.

One final consideration for Satanism studies requires addressing. As much as scholars are trained to isolate, define, categorize, and convert data into handy statistics, this becomes a daunting task when the milieu itself is constantly shifting. As scholarship is conducted in segments – papers converted into chapters converted into books referenced in encyclopedias – it is too large a task to always incorporate every methodological and theoretical standard into every work, even if there existed one widely agreed-upon approach, which would itself entail a stagnation of critical thought. My position is that researchers within the Satanic milieu remain cognizant of the issues and concerns enveloping their studies, be aware that their adoptions of nomenclature, methodology, and theory reflect the tensions within the milieu, and because of this, explain the process by which they makes their choices.

Conclusion

In the past forty odd years scholars have been looking at religious Satanism. In many ways, the research produced not only reveals the history of Satanism, but also a commentary on American counterculture movements in the latter half of the twentieth century, and, at the same time, presents an overview of scholarship on new religious movements themselves. Early studies portrayed a wide variety of depictions of the Church of Satan: theatrical, deviant, esoteric, and diabolical. This variety of depictions corresponds to the authors producing research, as sociologist, theologian, or popular writers attempt to understand Satanism and its larger implications. In the early years, the academic field of “cults” was a relatively new area, not always considered a legitimate academic pursuit. Much like Satanism itself, it was treated as somewhat suspect, undeveloped, and not the study of “real” religion. The early studies on the Church of Satan were not only an examination of a new religious movement, but also an exercise in a new field of academic study. They were both infants, so to speak, with Satanism and its scholarship developing in their respective spheres.

In the second phase of the progress of religious Satanism, it experienced its own growing pains: schisms and claims to authority and legitimacy. As the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set applied various methods of legitimization, scholarship, in turn, adjusts and shifts. New theories and methodologies emerge from the perspective of an increasingly growing field of scholarship on new religious movements. The adolescent phase of Satanism was turbulent and polemical. The academic study of Satanism at the time virtually disappeared, but the retroactive studies examine this turbulence with modern theories on new religious movements.

Taking my analogy of growth further, modern Satanism has matured and proliferated; there are now multiple divergent interpretations of Satanic worldviews, and just as many approaches to their study. Like Satanism itself, the scholarship on religious Satanism has ripened to produce nuanced and critical insight.

It does end not here. The ongoing dialog of scholarship on religious Satanism has its own growing pains, as it were. Scholars are in the process of sifting through their own ideas, applying methods and theories to data in order to evaluate the acumen and

soundness of various approaches. We must keep in mind the issues and concerns of the field, and continually improve as scholars on new religious movements.

This methodological thesis connects to my future research on Satanism. It was written in order to better understand the foundational scholarship, and learn from its successes and failures. As a critique of a new field (new religious movements), containing a newer field (Satanism studies), produced by a novice academic (I enter the PhD program after defense of this document), this thesis is an attempt to elucidate the scholarly work of my predecessors, and engage in their discussion. It hopefully encourages responses and critiques itself, of the field and of this thesis. After all, that is the point of scholarship.

DRAFT

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