

Chapter 14

NEWSPAPERS AND THE ANTISATANISM MOVEMENT

A Content Analysis

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One of the most interesting and, for many, troubling aspects of the occult revival that has marked the past several decades in this country (Ben-Yehuda 1986a; Jorgensen and Jorgensen 1982) has been an apparent increase in satanic activities. A 1989 statewide telephone poll of over one thousand persons in Texas revealed that approximately eight in ten respondents believed that satanism is a problem in our society and that it has increased in the past five years (Texas Poll 1989). These citizens see satanism both as eroding traditional morality and leading to criminality. The New Christian Right especially sees the devil as real and palpably dangerous (Heinz 1983; Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991). Growing concerns over the influence of satanic activity on youths through music and drugs have prompted congressional hearings and TV programs like reporter Geraldo Rivera's 1988 "Exposing Satan's Underground," the most watched documentary in television history (Gates 1988). Moreover, state-supported satanism workshops for law enforcement officials have increased such that, since the late 1980s, a nationwide cult crime information network has existed among law officers (Alexander 1990; Hicks 1989).

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As they have with other social problems (Cohen 1972; Fishman 1978; Graber 1980, 1989), mass media have certainly influenced the antisatanism movement. Yet, how the satanism threat has been portrayed in the media and the nature of the media's role in the increase in citizen concerns have not been adequately examined (Rowe and Cavender 1991). This study explores these questions by focusing on one mass medium—newspapers. Through a content analysis of occult and satanism coverage in major American newspapers over a decade (1980–1989), we attempt to shed light on the growth and characterization of a national satanic threat.

THE OCCULT, NEWSPAPERS, AND MORAL ENTREPRENEURS

Although little research has examined the treatment of the occult and especially satanism by newspapers, it is evident that this medium differentiates among types of occultism. Horoscopes, for example, are not considered deviant. Papers routinely publish them, thereby actually encouraging such occult activities as astrology and clairvoyance (Campbell and McIver 1987). Consumers of this type of occult activity, whom Stark and Bainbridge (1979) and Weimann (1985) call "audience cults," rely on newspapers for participation in and information about their occult interests. Other occult practices, such as witchcraft and the many new religious movements that have emerged in the past twenty-five years (see van Driel and Richardson 1988), all go beyond the normative boundaries defined by official religion, science, and cultural ideologies and personalities (Campbell and McIver 1987), and thus may be reported on less favorably. Yet, they are not usually seen as representing a serious threat to moral order. When occult activity like satanism, however, involves crime or culturally repugnant rituals, newspapers may treat such activity as being beyond the moral pale and coverage may be highly negative.

Press coverage and differentiation among types of occult can be placed in the context of social problem construction theory (Best 1989). According to Spector and Kitsuse (1987), the first stage in the emergence of a social problem is when: "Group(s) attempt to assert the existence of some condition, define it as offensive, harmful or otherwise undesirable, publicize their assertions, stimulate controversy, and create a public or political issue over the matter" (1987, 142; see also Erikson 1966). Thus, claimants—politicians, clergymen, the media—may seek to establish or reestablish a moral boundary that casts satanic beliefs and activities as a

serious threat to social order (Erikson 1966; Kennedy 1990; Lauderdale 1976; Levine 1985; Reinerman 1979). If newspaper organizations actively incite citizens or politicians to share the view that satanism is rising and a problem, they become "moral entrepreneurs" (Becker 1963; Gusfield 1963; see also Schur 1979). They can color social perceptions, not only by providing details of events and practices but also through word choice, omissions, or accompanying stories (Graber 1980).

As moral entrepreneurs crusade against a particular condition, their efforts may touch off a "moral panic" (Ben-Yehuda 1986b, 1990; Waddington 1986; Zatz 1987). Stanley Cohen (1972) introduced the concept of moral panic in his study of the outlandish acts of English "mods and rockers" in the 1960s. For Cohen, a moral panic exists when: "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 (more often) resorted to" (9).

The press has both the motivation and capacity to create a moral panic. Not only does it benefit economically when lurid stories sell papers, but, also, to the extent powerful elites control the press, those elites can maximize their cultural/material interests (Young 1986). Moreover, newspapers have the ability to keep an issue before the public for a protracted period.

But has research shown newspaper editors to be moral entrepreneurs who generate moral panic? The literature is mixed on this question. On the one hand, Cohen (1972) argued that it was the media that created—then perpetuated—the perception that the music and behavior of the English mods and rockers represented a counterculture that threatened society. He concluded that newspaper editors were the moral entrepreneurs. However, other studies characterized the media as being more reactive to the views or opinions of experts in the field (see Roe 1985; Shuker 1986; Young 1986; Zatz 1987). These studies suggest that newspapers are secondary players that may heighten awareness of the alleged danger, but do not necessarily initiate concern over it (Ben-Yehuda 1986b; Fishman 1978).

The following analysis addresses two questions: (1) What is the pattern of occult and satanism coverage over the 1980s? and (2) Does the pattern and affective tone of these stories indicate that the press has fostered the antisatanism movement or has it been essentially reflective of

singular, local occult events? However, before turning to the study, we discuss briefly the substance of satanism.

SATANISM IN AMERICA

Contemporary satanism, defined as any activity that expresses worship and/or obedience to Satan, may be seen as having two broad strains differentiated primarily by the threat each appears to pose for society. The first is institutionalized, and, rather open, worship of Satan, best illustrated by the Church of Satan founded by Anton LaVey in 1966 (Melton 1986). A colorful character, LaVey created notoriety for himself and his church by performing baptisms, marriages, and funerals as a satanic minister. LaVey claimed such entertainment figures as Jayne Mansfield and Sammy Davis Jr. as church members.

With its membership estimated at five thousand people or less (Lyons 1988) and its somewhat "campy" reputation, most experts in the field do not view the Church of Satan or similarly established satanic sects as a direct threat to society. Indeed, the Church of Satan is recognized as a bona fide religion and as such enjoys the freedoms and tax-exempt status of other churches.

The other strain of satanism, which includes the "self-styled" and "youth subculture" satanic groups, is usually seen as much more threatening to society (Dumphousse 1991; Kahaner 1988). Although they draw on "traditional" literature such as *The Satanic Bible* (LaVey 1969) and *The Necronomicon* (Simon 1977), these persons or small groups have no allegiance to an established church or set liturgy. Instead, they freely experiment with satanic beliefs and practices. These self-styled and often youthful satanists sometimes engage in activities that are not only bizarre by conventional standards but also criminal. They have recently been linked to kidnapping, rape, and murder (Dawkins and Higgins 1989; Wedge 1988). Notorious cases illustrating this brand of satanism include Richard Ramirez (the "Night Stalker") who in 1985 yelled, "Hail Satan!" when arraigned for several killings in California (Stewart 1985), Oklahoma teenager Sean Sellers who admitted killing his parents for Satan, and several youths in Missouri who beat a boy to death with a baseball bat to please the devil (Anderson 1988).

It is both the self-styled and the youth subculture categories of this second strain that have contributed to what has recently been termed the "Satanism scare" (Kahaner 1988; Richardson et al. 1991). Clearly, to

those who lead the antisatanism movement, anything that is Satan-related, from symbols on T-shirts to possible "back-masking" on music records, is cause for alarm.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis relies on data extracted from eight major American newspapers: the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Denver Post*, the *Houston Post*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. We relied on these papers for several reasons. First, they are regional and/or national newspapers. Of course, most people in the United States do not have access to, or regularly read, these major periodicals. Indeed, as Shupe and Bromley (1980) note, most anticult stories appear in small community newspapers. Nevertheless, we reasoned that stories in the papers we examined influence thinking and dialogue about the occult, in part because small newspapers routinely reprint stories that first appear in larger dailies. Second, we chose these papers generally to represent different parts of the country, especially where we had reason to believe occult activity might have surfaced. Finally, a practical reason for limiting our analysis to these eight papers was that they were the only papers with available indexes spanning 1980–1989.

After a review of the occult literature, we devised a data collection instrument to categorize and characterize occult stories. Refinements in our instrument resulted in the following categories for occult articles: satanism, witchcraft, voodoo, Santeria, and Palo Mayombe. The latter three types refer to variations in amalgamations of African and European religions introduced to the Americas through slavery. Stories dealing with other occult topics were coded as "other." Examples in the "other" category include stories about UFO sightings and astrology. We defined satanism stories as those that focused primarily or exclusively on Satan or devil worship, satanic rites and symbols, crimes involving satanism, and concerns about or analysis of any of these. An equally specific focus was required to categorize articles dealing with other forms of the occult.

In all, 359 articles concerned with the occult made up the data set. Each article was coded on a number of format and context variables including length in column inches, locale of story, source, and date. After determining the major content variable (the types of occult activity central to the story), each article was further categorized according to its

focus: violent/nonviolent crime, general overview of occult crime, call for control/action, human interest, and historical.

In a second analysis, we evaluated each story's affective message, drawing on the approach utilized by van Driel and Richardson (1988), we rated each story as "negative," "neutral," "negative to opposition," and "positive." If the words and/or perspective of the story left the reader with the impression that the reported activity was evil or constituted a growing threat, it was coded as negative. If the piece appeared to take no side, then it was coded as neutral. If the article directly or indirectly criticized those who opposed the occultism being considered, then it was coded as "negative to opposition." And, finally, if the article defended or supported the occult activity, then it was coded as positive. As a check, one researcher conducted the initial evaluation and the other researcher reevaluated a 10 percent sample of the articles. This crosscoding strategy led to 100 percent agreement between the researchers on all cases coded as being negative. Where cases could be coded as neutral, negative to opposition, or positive, the researchers agreed 85 percent of the time. For this analysis, the 15 percent discrepancy was removed by collapsing all "nonnegative" categories into a single code.

RESULTS

We present results of the content analysis in three sections beginning with the general distribution of occult and satanism stories throughout the decade. Next, we examine the affective tone of stories about satanism in comparison to stories about another type of occult—witchcraft. Finally, we consider the issue of newspaper activism in expanding the perception that satanism is a growing threat to moral order.

Patterns of Occult and Satanism Coverage

Figure 1 shows the distribution by quarter of all occult stories, including satanism, in the eight newspapers from 1980–1989. Until mid-1985, the number of stories is consistently low, the only exception being the third quarter of 1984. That "blip" was almost entirely a result of coverage of a murder in Long Island, New York, in which the offenders as well as the victim had a history of involvement in satanism; that crime was treated by the media as a "satanic" killing. Although the number of occult stories

dropped in 1986, it rose again in late 1987 and remained notably high relative to the first half of the decade. The 101 articles listed in the second quarter of 1989 were virtually all sparked by one crime—the ritualistic killing of American Mark Kilroy and twelve others near Matamoros, Mexico. While visiting Matamoros during spring break, Kilroy was reportedly kidnapped and murdered by a group of Mexicans as part of a grisly Palo Mayombe rite. The discovery of his body, buried along with the other victims, at a ranch outside the city created an international media event.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of the 143 articles on satanism published during the 1980s in the eight newspapers examined for this study. The pattern of satanism articles shown here differs considerably from that shown in figure 1. The increase in satanism stories is much more dramatic across the decade with notable peaks in 1982, 1984, 1985, 1988, and 1989. Again, these peaks reflect coverage of specific events or acts. Although uneven, the increase in satanism stories is marked.¹ Indeed, from a comparison of figures 1 and 2 it is apparent that, with the exception of the Matamoros incident, the increase in general occult stories in late-decade very largely resulted from increases in attention to satanism.

To put the growth trends reported here into context, we examined the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* over the previous two decades because these are the only major newspapers with available indexes antedating the late 1970s. We found that from 1967 to 1979, the *New York* paper published only eight stories that were in any way concerned with satanism. Moreover, its index did not even have a "satanism" category until 1974. Stories having to do with satanism were indexed in the "witchcraft" category. The *Los Angeles Times* published only two articles about satanism in 1972 and then none until 1982.

An even stronger indication of the increased attention to satanism by the press comes from an examination of satanic homicides and how these were covered throughout the decade. Figure 2 also shows the distribution of the forty-two discrete murders (i.e., not duplicated in other stories) tied by officials to satanic activity reported during the same time period. We focus on homicide simply because it is both the most taboo and best-reported crime. Note that the number of such homicides decreased markedly over the decade, from nineteen in 1982 to one in 1988 and two in 1989. What is striking is that nineteen satanic homicides in 1982 received very little press attention; only three stories in the local paper, the *Chicago Tribune*. These killings, carried out by a group of four young men deeply involved with satanism, were not even reported in other large newspapers at the time.

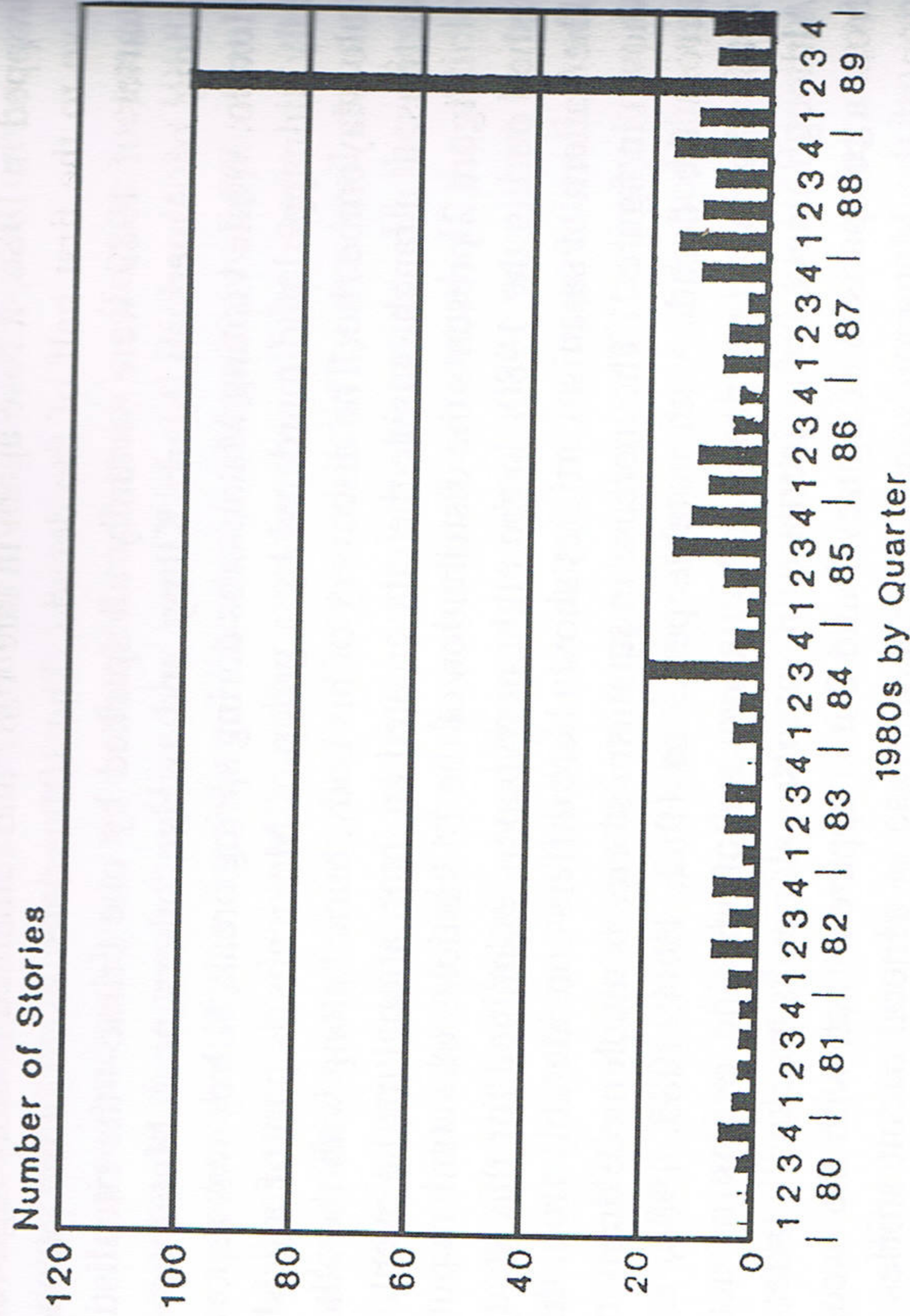


FIGURE 1. Distribution of all occult stories.

NEWSPAPERS AND ANTISATANISM

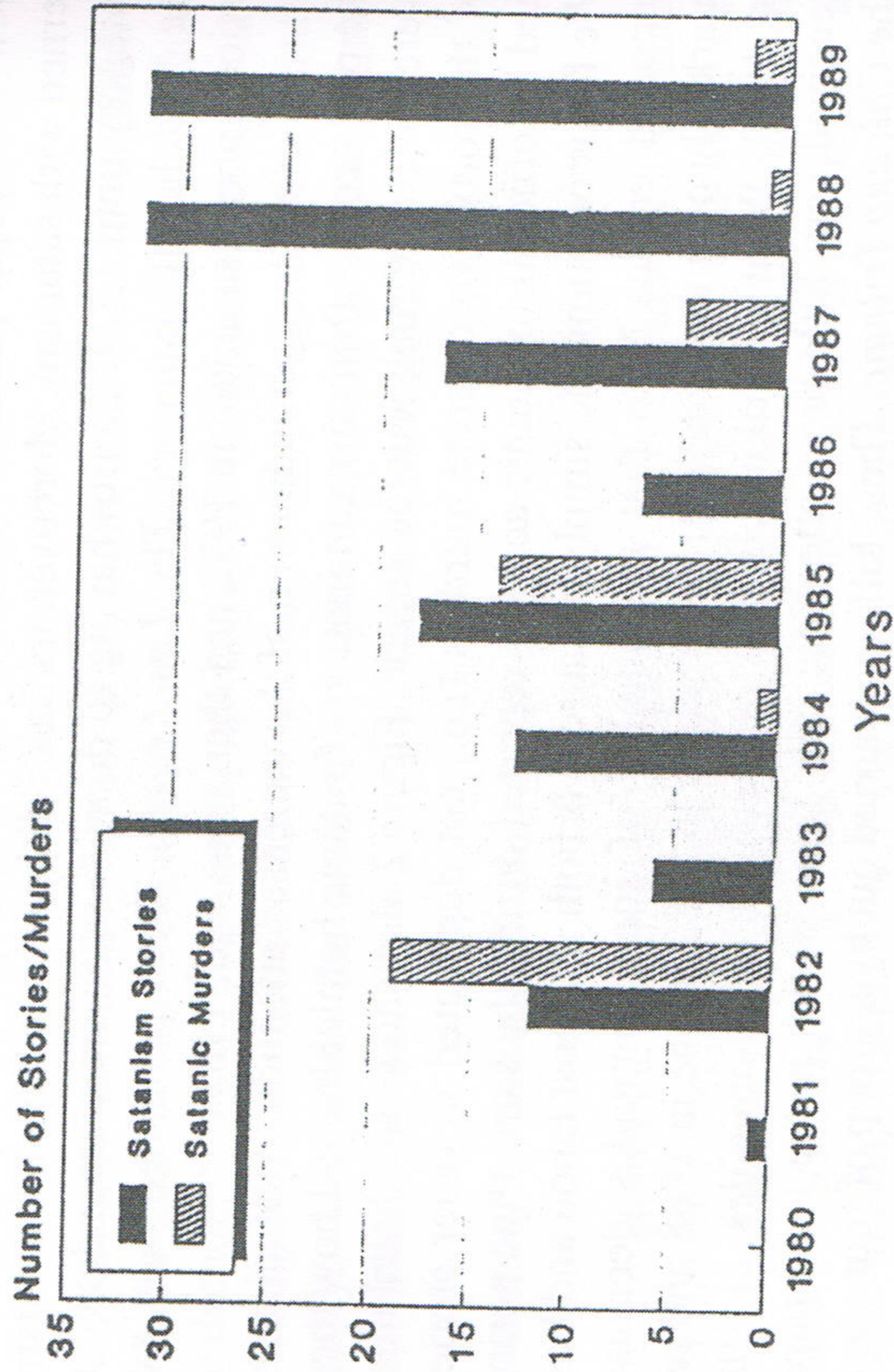


FIGURE 2. Satanism stories (1980-1989).

By contrast, at decade's end satanic stories on many topics abounded and were regularly reprinted in papers in other cities. The Night Stalker's 1989 trial for the fourteen killings in 1985 received repeated attention in most of the newspapers examined in this study. Even stories on the possible links between cat deaths and satanism (Reinhold 1989) received widespread coverage, something that multiple satanic murders could not generate in 1982.

Qualitative Differences in Satanism and Witchcraft Stories

Table 1 presents a comparison of the affective tone of all satanism and witchcraft stories in our sample. The data were developed from the researchers' judgments of the negative, positive, or neutral quality of each story. For this analysis, we combined all nonnegative stories and then calculated the ratio of negative to nonnegative stories in each two-year time period across the decade. The two-year time periods were chosen to make the analysis simpler and trends more evident.

The most striking finding is that stories on satanism are much more negative in tone, regardless of time period. The ratio of negative to nonnegative satanism stories ranges from 2.3 : 1 (1982-1983) to 4.3 : 1 (1984-1985). By comparison, there are more nonnegative witchcraft stories than negative ones in each period. Clearly, major newspapers present satanism in a more negative light.

One explanation for this difference could be a connection between satanism and criminality. If the large majority of stories in satanism involved crime—and few witchcraft stories did—then the added elements of crime could account for the more negative tone. Further analysis, however, reveals that in each two-year period, when the story did not involve a crime, there were still more than two times as many negative as nonnegative satanism stories.

The Role of the Press in the Antisatanism Movement

We now consider the issue of whether newspapers are involved in a crusade against satanism. Although our data cannot answer this question conclusively, we can determine whether papers appear actively trying to keep the threat of satanism before the public beyond what is necessary to report specific events or whether they simply allow events involving satanism to drive reporting.

TABLE 1.
TENOR DIFFERENCE IN SATANISM
AND WITCHCRAFT STORIES

Years	Satanism (3:1)		Witchcraft (.5:1)	
	Neg.	Other	Neg.	Other
1980-81	1	0	4	6
1982-83	9	4	2	8
1984-85	26	6	2	8
1986-87	21	8	3	4
1988-89	53	16	4	5

N = 190

One way to examine this question is to reexamine table 1. If the press coverage has led in creating a growing moral panic over satanism, then we would expect to find an increase in both the number and negativism of satanism stories. As we have shown, there are obviously an increasing number of stories on satanism throughout the course of the decade. However, table 1 shows that an increase in negativism is less clear. According to moral panic theory, if newspapers contribute in a direct way to a growing public concern or panic over satanism, then there should be a general, linear increase in the ratio of negative to nonnegative stories. Although the trend in this ratio is generally upward over time, it is certainly not linear. After a peak of 4.3 : 1 in 1984-85, the ratio dropped to 2.6 : 1 in 1986-87. Although the ratio rose at the end of the decade to 3.3 : 1, this was still less than the earlier peak. Thus, evidence is weak that newspapers have defined satanism as an ever-increasing threat and thereby serve as moral entrepreneurs.

Additional support for our contention that newspapers do not appear to be promoting a moral panic comes from a separate analysis (not shown) of "negative to opposition" stories. These are stories that question the evidence or motives of those who actively condemn satanic beliefs and practices. From 1980-1987, there were only eight such articles. By contrast, in 1988 and 1989, there were nine.

To further address this question, we focused on data from two important papers, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*. We

considered these two papers to be nationally influential newspapers on each coast (see Cirino 1974). The analysis indicates that these papers focus on singular, often bizarre events involving satanism rather than highlight a national threat. That is, they appear not to continue to fan the flames as would be expected of a print moral entrepreneur. We examine these data briefly.

The Los Angeles Times

Figure 3 presents the distribution of satanism stories that appeared in this paper from 1980 to 1989. Two points are immediately apparent. First, there is no general trend of ever-increasing concern over satanism; second, three separate years contain most of the satanism accounts. Close examination shows that these stories were all generated by specific events or situations. For example:

1. 1982: Because Los Angeles is an entertainment capital, the *Times* regularly focuses on that industry. A consultant from Colorado testifying before the California State Assembly Committee on Consumer Protection and Toxic Materials about backward masking on records prompted the publishing of four stories about efforts to regulate the "devil's music."
2. 1985: Richard Ramirez, twenty-five, the "Night Stalker," who allegedly worshiped Satan, was arrested and charged with fourteen counts of murder during this time period. Five stories reported here dealt with his arrest and courtroom appearances.
3. 1988: Stephen Newberry, nineteen, was beaten to death with baseball bats by his school friends, one an honor student and another the class president, in Carl Junction, Missouri. The suspects claimed to be members of a satanic cult and reported that they told Newberry that they were killing him because it was "fun." This case was reported in three articles on two consecutive days.

The New York Times

Satanism coverage from this major paper, also noted in figure 3, reflects a pattern similar to that found in the *Los Angeles Times*. Here, there is only one peak year, preceded and followed in the decade by a rather constant and unremarkable pattern of attention to satanism. The single peak occurred in the third quarter of 1984. Five of the six stories reported in

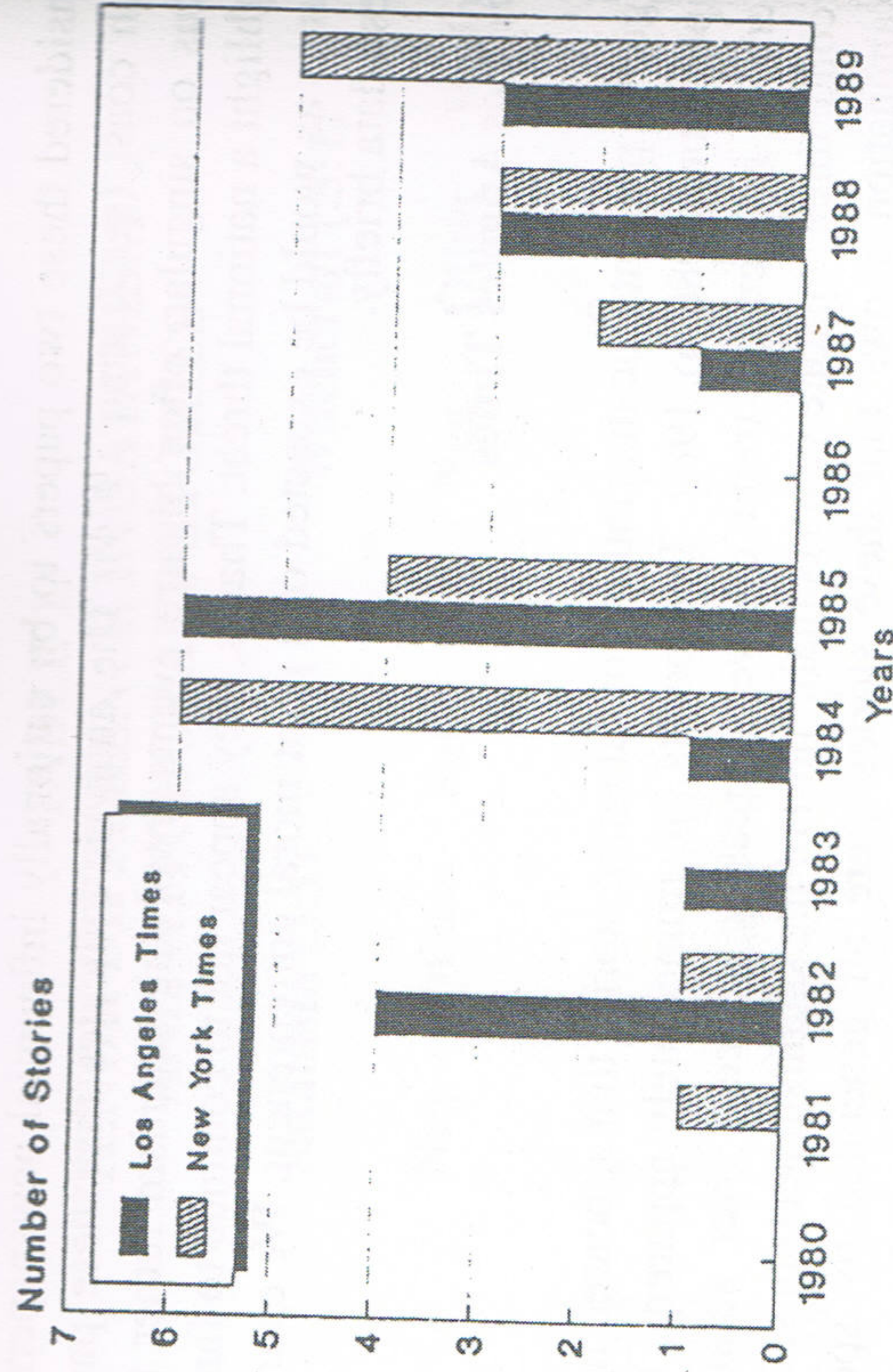


FIGURE 3. Satanism stories reported in *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

the third quarter of 1984 addressed the local ritualistic murder of Gary Lauwers, seventeen, by a group of peers in Northport, Long Island, who claimed to have made Lauwers a human sacrifice.

The apparent trend in these two papers is reflected in the other newspapers in the study. That is, they are most likely to publish a group of articles in response to a discrete, satanic event, typically involving some type of crime or bizarre behavior. Other satanism stories that do not deal directly with a crime often report the opinions of experts in satanism, such as police officers and religious leaders. Although papers publish several articles calling attention to the activities of satanists (especially concerning the activity of youths), they typically spread out their coverage throughout the decade with no recognizable effort on their part to dramatize a satanic threat.

CONCLUSIONS

Many citizens and officials in the 1980s became concerned about the effects of satanic beliefs and behavior. For this concern to become a broadly and well-defined social problem, the threat must not only be repeatedly publicized but also seen as eroding life concerns such as personal safety, Christianity, and the sanctity of family and youth. In this way, the threat can be socially constructed so as to be widely recognized as a

problem in need of social control (Best 1989; Schur 1979; Spector and Kitouse 1987). Engines of this social construction process are "moral entrepreneurs" who repeatedly point to the danger of satanism; their efforts can foster a "moral panic" if the threat grows in scope and intrusiveness. Assuming that the press plays a fundamental role in the social construction of any social problem, we have examined that role in the promulgation of public concerns about a satanic threat. Analysis of satanism stories in eight national newspapers suggests several conclusions about this role.

First, throughout the decade of analysis newspapers in our study cast satanism more negatively than witchcraft. This is not surprising since satanism stories often involve criminality, whereas witchcraft accounts virtually never involve crime. For this reason, reports on satanism are predictably more negative in tone. However, analysis shows that non-crime accounts of satanism are also much more likely to be presented negatively. This may be the result of a halo effect associating satanism with criminal activity.

It also appears from the data reviewed here that major newspapers, at least with respect to satanism, do not seem to be moral entrepreneurs, actively pushing antisatanism.² Although the treatment of satanism did become somewhat more negative beginning in the mid-1980s, the increase in negativism is uneven. Indeed, in 1989, a number of "negative to opposition" stories appeared that questioned the often extreme condemnation of satanic beliefs. Moreover, an examination of the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* suggests that when newspapers include a large number of satanism stories in a given year, the stories are triggered by specific events; in succeeding quarters there are often few, if any, satanism stories. It is reasonable to expect that if editors or owners of newspapers were seeking to create a sense of danger or moral panic about a satanic threat, there would be a consistent increase in the number of negative satanism stories; this is not the case.

This analysis indicates, then, that major newspapers, individually and collectively, essentially play a reflective role in the emergence of a perceived satanic threat (see Dominick 1978). They report local opinions and deviant acts involving satanism and, in the process, confirm that satanism is, more than other types of occult activity, unacceptable.

Such a conclusion, however, does not fully describe the role of the press in promoting particular perceptions of satanism. Our analysis suggests at least two important ways in which the press, although reflective or reactive as just argued, contributes to the social construction of a satanic problem.

First, newspapers publish what they perceive the public wants to read (Cohen and Young 1973). Newspapers are businesses designed not just to report the news, but to make a profit. Consequently, printing decisions are at least somewhat shaped by these organizational concerns. This sensitivity to public interest is apparent in the greater inclination by papers not only to report on local aspects of Satanism, but also to reproduce for local consumption Satanism stories that originated in other parts of the country. As Satanism stories in the early 1980s piqued public interest, papers apparently responded by including more material on the topic. The result was a greater number of stories about Satanism. This suggestion is consistent with the observation that, although the number of stories rose, there is little evidence of a corresponding rise in serious or threatening Satanic activity. As figure 2 shows, stories on Satanism, frequently dealing with a few, high-profile homicide cases (frequently redeveloped by and reported in a number of papers), increased over the decade—whereas the number of discrete homicides linked to Satanism actually dropped markedly.

Another way the press may expand concern over Satanism is by offering a forum for "experts." When bizarre acts occur that may involve the occult, reporters commonly seek out these experts, typically law enforcement personnel, for explanations (Chibnall 1981; Fishman 1978). According to Hicks (1990), many of these police experts (or "cult-cops") hold views that are consistent with the New Christian Right, a potent political force bent on turning America back to God (Hadden 1987; Heinz 1983). Indeed, a study conducted by Crouch and Dampousse (1991) revealed that cult-cops, who hold strong antisatanism beliefs, scored significantly higher on a religiosity index than those with neutral orientations. As Hicks (1990) and Victor (1990) suggest, some of these religiously motivated officers regularly exaggerate the Satanism problem, augmenting their seminars with fundamentalist Christian rhetoric and literature. Although many officers hesitate to link the acts or crimes to Satanism, some others readily declare that a crime or other deviant activity involves Satanic or occult elements (Crouch and Dampousse 1991; Lanning 1989). This declaration is then dutifully reported in the next edition of the paper. A problem occurs, however, when these "experts" misread or perhaps overemphasize the significance of the occult elements. If this error is later reported in the press (and it may not be), it may be buried or at least given less emphasis than the more interesting, initial declarations of a Satanism-crime link. Those initial declarations, made by authoritative officials, can leave a lasting impression on readers that Satanism is a clear (and growing) danger.

An excellent example of this scenario occurred in Albuquerque, New Mexico.³ On March 29, 1990, the *Albuquerque Journal* ran a front-page story titled "The Mystery on the Mesa" (Randles 1990a). Aerial photos revealed four hundred old car tires laid out to form a precise series of hexagons with dots in the middle, connected by jointed lines. A local police officer, known for his expertise in Satanism and witchcraft, concluded: "It is definitely a ceremonial site used by a cult . . . and it's probably still in use. . . . I'd guess it was witchcraft—a Wicca group—rather than Satanism. And I'd stay away from there if there are any people around. They'll hurt you" (Randles 1990a). A story published in this paper the following day, however, reported that the mysterious shapes were actually a "terf ball" playing field laid out by a local man. "The closest thing to Satanism was everybody having a devil of good time telling the *Journal* all about it" (Randles 1990b, A1). If readers missed this second story, they could continue to think that some type of occult group had made their desert a more dangerous place.

Complex societies continually struggle with how to define and cope with patterns of deviance. Satanism in particular illustrates this problem (Forsyth and Olivier 1990). It runs counter to traditional religious and ethical values (LaVey 1969) and has been often connected with such crimes as kidnapping, murder, and rape. This connection has drawn the attention of a large and growing number of police officers around the country who are a major source of news for the print media (Fishman 1978). Thus, other than the newspapers themselves, it is these officers, along with religious officials and critics of the music industry, who appear to be the moral entrepreneurs providing the impetus for news stories about Satanism and, consequently, the moral panic over Satanism.

NOTES

1. An analysis of the distribution of column inches over the decade revealed similar peaks and a general increase in attention to Satanism over time. That analysis is not reported here.
2. In other words, the newspaper-antisatanism movement relationship is in a sense spurious.
3. The authors are indebted to Kenneth Lanning at the FBI Academy for bringing this story to our attention.

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Chapter 15

SATANISM AS A NEWS ITEM IN NORWAY AND DENMARK

A Brief History

Asbjørn Dyrendal and Amina Olander Lap

INTRODUCTION

This article takes a comparative look at the construction of satanism as a subject of news and debate in Denmark and Norway from the early 1970s to the late 1990s. The perspective is broadly historical and motif-oriented. While we focus primarily on newspaper reports and books as sources, and less on the specific actors involved in specific instances of construction, we also concentrate on broad classes of motifs and "claims-makers." The latter we shall take to mean not only those who present satanism with a particular social problems agenda, but also those who are made to speak with authority on the subject. Although the perspective is mainly historical, space does not allow for detailed descriptions of developments. Thus, what shall be presented here is a gross summary drawn from the sources presently available.¹

The historical presentation will aim to show that satanism was seen as a marginal phenomenon for most of that time span, a phenomenon, which, with certain exceptions, received very little attention until the late 1980s. In addition, we shall endeavor to show how claims varied over time, and how for much of the period, Denmark and Norway acted as a periphery to British and American centers with regard to theories about satanism.

One might suspect that claims would travel well between Norway