THE MARTENSVILLE MORAL PANIC

by

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Abstract

This is a study of a child abuse panic. The events that brought Martensville, Saskatchewan to national and international attention in 1992 were similar in many respects to other panics concerning multiple allegations of child abuse that occurred in the Western world in the 1980s and 1990s.

The methodology of the study included a review of descriptions of child abuse panics published in the mass media and in books and journal articles. Interviews were conducted with residents of Martensville, child advocates, reporters, investigators, officers of the court, expert witnesses and several of the accused. Five theoretical accounts or explanations of the events were examined in detail: satanic ritual abuse, recovered memories, false memory syndrome, hysterical epidemic and moral panic. These accounts were considered in light of broader sociological theory.

It was determined that the moral panic account provided greater explanatory potential than the other accounts. Moral panics are seen as a form of distorted communication that was typical of mass media treatment of certain conditions in the 1980s and 1990s under which allegations of child abuse targeted a group of people who were defined as a threat. Feminist theory, the concept of risk society and Habermas' theory of communicative action were examined to provide insights into ways of addressing and mitigating the panic and harm that occurred in Martensville.

Conclusions and policy considerations centre on the need for training of professions involved in the investigation and response to child abuse, public education within a framework of communicative rationality and, ultimately, reclamation of the public sphere with attendant expansion of opportunities for face-to-face communication in public decision-making.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................... iii
LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................... v
ALLEGED SATANIC SEX SCANDAL ROCKS SMALL CANADIAN TOWN ................. vi
INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1

## PART I WHAT HAPPENED IN MARTENSVILLE?

1 THE MARTENSVILLE STORY ..................................................................................... 4
2 MEDIA ACCOUNTS OF MARTENSVILLE ................................................................. 11
   - Analysis of News Coverage ............................................................................. 11
   - The Nightmare Begins .................................................................................... 13
   - The Scales of Justice ...................................................................................... 22
   - The Aftermath ................................................................................................. 27
   - Other media .................................................................................................... 35
   - Drawing Conclusions about Media Accounts of Martensville .................... 37

3 THE VOICES OF MARTENSVILLE ........................................................................ 39
   - Methodology .................................................................................................. 40
   - Description of Sample—Believers and Non-believers .................................... 41
   - Description of Sample—Professional or Group Perspective ......................... 43
   - Data Analysis .................................................................................................. 44

## PART II WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

4 THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EVENTS IN MARTENSVILLE ......... 53
   - Satanic Ritual Abuse ...................................................................................... 54
   - Recovered Memories/False Memories ............................................................ 60
   - Mass Hysteria ................................................................................................. 68
   - Moral Panic ..................................................................................................... 75

## PART III WHAT CAN BE CONCLUDED?

5 PRIVILEGING VARIOUS ACCOUNTS OR THEORIES ........................................... 87
   - Feminism ......................................................................................................... 87
   - Risk Society .................................................................................................... 94
   - The Mass Media ............................................................................................. 97
   - Interplay of the Various Accounts ................................................................. 101
   - Pre-eminence of a Particular Account ............................................................ 108
   - Strengths and Weaknesses of the Various Accounts ..................................... 111
   - Theoretical/epistemological Analysis of the Various Accounts ................. 117
   - Synthesis ........................................................................................................ 120

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................ 128
   - Policy Considerations .................................................................................. 131
   - Conclusions ................................................................................................... 134

REFERENCES .............................................................................................................. 137
APPENDIX “A” .......................................................................................................... 145
   - Sample Interview Questions ....................................................................... 145
APPENDIX “B” .......................................................................................................... 147
APPENDIX “C” .......................................................................................................... 148
APPENDIX “D” .......................................................................................................... 149
APPENDIX “E” .......................................................................................................... 150
List of Tables

TABLE 5.1  SUBJECTIVE-OBJECTIVE DIMENSION ............................................................ 118
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I am grateful to all those in Saskatchewan who took the trouble to talk with me about Martensville. For many of them, it was difficult to sort through a most traumatic experience, and I hope that the result will provide a better understanding of the very complex dynamics of the events explored. Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Suzanne who brought tea, ideas and encouragement at critical moments and helped the work to progress.
Alleged satanic sex scandal rocks small Canadian town

Martensville, Saskatchewan

Horrendous allegations of child sexual abuse surfaced on the morning of June 5, 1992 in the quiet community of Martensville, Saskatchewan, a small town of thirty-six hundred. Charges were laid not only against the housewife, whose babysitting service was the center of the alleged abuse and her immediate family members, but also against police officers from Martensville, the Warman Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment and the nearby city of Saskatoon. People said they were part of a Satanic cult that drugged the children, beat them, sodomized them, locked them in freezers, and forced them to drink their own blood.

The shock horror and dismay which followed rocked both Martensville and the city of Saskatoon. Caregivers and people in positions of trust had apparently abused their authority by victimizing innocent children in the most unspeakable ways. It was every parent’s worst nightmare.

Thirteen children made disclosures which resulted in the laying of one hundred and seventy-three charges of sexual abuse and criminal behaviour. The crimes allegedly took place at the caregivers’ home and in a large Quonset shed on an acreage thirteen kilometres north of the town.

—From The Martensville Nightmare by Karen Smith
Introduction

Once hidden from view, the phenomenon of child abuse has increasingly come to the attention of academics, the media, and the public since the late 1970's (Bagley and King, 1990). Three aspects of child abuse seem to have received particular attention in the media in recent years: 1) the preying on children by strangers, 2) the physical and sexual abuse of children by persons in positions of authority over them (e.g., priests, correctional workers), and 3) "satanic ritual abuse." It appears that the taboos against public discussion of child abuse no longer apply when the abuse is sufficiently salacious. The child sexual abuse scandal in Martensville, Saskatchewan presents a natural focus in that it appears to illustrate each of the above aspects.

The allegations of child sexual abuse at a Martensville babysitting service became front-page news in mid-1992. The panic in Martensville focussed on horrendous crimes allegedly committed by trusted members of the community in some form of organized child sexual abuse. What was striking about the Martensville child abuse scandal was the number of alleged perpetrators and their occupational status. Most of the accused were police officers some of whom had little direct contact with the babysitting service that was at the centre of the scandal. If the allegations were founded, this was a case of a pedophile ring that involved police officers from three forces, a corrections official, and daycare providers. These people were alleged to have engaged in a shocking mix of crimes that included physical and sexual abuse, assault and the use of weapons in ways that had appeared to have ritual overtones.

As the story unfolded, various accounts purporting to explain it were advanced in the media. It became apparent that this was more than simply a court case involving victims and accused. The various expert witnesses who appeared in Martensville pointed out that forces
were at play that extended far beyond the tiny hamlet north of Saskatoon. The charges, court cases and lawsuits continued for several years. The scars remain.

This thesis will focus on the Martensville case in an examination of the attention given to a particular form of child abuse, and some of the sociological considerations it evokes. It is organized in three parts:

I. What Happened in Martensville? Chapter 1 outlines the Martensville story, setting out the events in chronological order. Chapter 2 analyzes the various media accounts of the Martensville scandal, including print and electronic media versions, magazine articles, books and other media. Chapter 3, The Voices of Martensville, summarizes the results of interviews with participants in the Martensville affair. Various individual reactions to the shocking events are described in summary form.

II. Why did it Happen? Chapter 4 sets out various theoretical explanations for the events in Martensville. The accounts considered are satanic ritual abuse, recovered memories, false memory syndrome, hysterical epidemics and moral panic. There is also consideration of the possibilities of an actual increase in child sexual abuse.

III. What can be Concluded? Chapter 5 examines various aspects of broader sociological theory in order to determine whether one or the other of the five accounts can be considered privileged. Feminist, risk society and mass media theories are examined. The interplay, strengths and weaknesses of the various accounts are considered in determining whether one or the other should be considered pre-eminent. Theoretical and epistemological considerations are then examined as well as the possibilities for a synthesis of accounts. The final chapter presents a summary and conclusions. Various policy considerations are examined and recommendations are advanced on ways to curtail the possibilities and mitigate the effects of child abuse panics.
Part I

What Happened in Martensville?
Martensville, Saskatchewan lies 13 km north of Saskatoon in an area that was once part of the Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve. The Reserve began to be settled in the late 19th Century by Mennonites emigrating from Europe. The town of Martensville originated in 1953, when some people from Saskatoon approached David Martens for a piece of land. Their idea was to build a settlement outside Saskatoon and benefit from lower taxes. Martensville's proximity to Saskatoon was an important factor in its growth.

Most of the initial residents of Martensville were Mennonites and many were descendants of the first settlers of the reserve. They moved there for the benefits of lower taxes and relatively inexpensive land. However, there were other influences leading to the rapid growth of Martensville and neighbouring towns like Warman and Osler, just north of Saskatoon. After the Second World War, young men were displaced from Mennonite farms. Two factors contributed to this: 1) the return of large numbers who had been away, either serving in the armed forces, or as conscientious objectors, and, 2) the increasing elimination of farm jobs through mechanization. Many sought employment in Saskatoon, but this led to conflict with church leaders who viewed the city as a source of evil. Ex-urban towns like Martensville represented an acceptable compromise: The men could live with their families in a predominantly Mennonite community and commute to work in Saskatoon. Martensville represented "a people trying to bridge a gap" (Hague-Osler, 1995: 510-511).

At first, the town grew in a relatively unregulated way. Following incorporation in 1966, the town council began enforcing the building code which eliminated the shacks and substandard houses that had been a feature of the town's early years. By 1989, the town had reached a population of 3,300 and claimed to be the "fastest growing town in Saskatchewan"
There were growing pains, however. A former resident of the area stated that while originally the community had a strong Mennonite identity, this was rapidly changing as Martensville became increasingly attractive as a “bedroom community” close to Saskatoon. Other influences were now rivaling the Mennonite Church in the life of its inhabitants.

As one approaches the town of Martensville from the Southwest, one cannot but notice the prominence of religion in the town’s life. From the highway, one of the first things glimpsed is a large sign that announces: “Alliance Church.” On the Eastern boundary of the town site sits a large Roman Catholic Church. On Main Street, there are two Mennonite churches, and, not far away, Lutheran and Baptist places of worship. Despite this, many of the new residents do not come from a religious background.

The Alliance Church may well typify the changing social order of Martensville. The Christian and Missionary Alliance Church was formed in the late 19th Century. The Alliance Church was to be a fundamentalist church that eschews doctrine and relies solely on the bible for authority in spiritual matters. Just as its founders, Simpson and Salmon broke away from established churches, so too many of its modern day followers are apparently looking for a more fundamental Christian faith. It is possible that the fast-growing town was facing serious tensions in its social order. If so, Martensville’s apparent calm was about to be shattered by an eruption of these tensions.

On June 4, 1992, a story, entitled “Martensville nightmare,” appeared on the front page of the Saskatoon StarPhoenix. The words used in the subhead of the story were alarming: “7 police officers linked to horrifying child-assault case.” The story by StarPhoenix Reporter Doug McConachie refers to “horrific allegations of sexual assaults involving 30 children” at a Martensville babysitting service. The story delineates charges against two former town police chiefs, a Warman RCMP officer, two Saskatoon police
officers, two Martensville police officers, and four other people, including babysitting service owners Ron and Linda Sterling, their son Travis, and an unnamed 20-year-old female.¹

The article quotes “some parents” as saying that their children mentioned some sort of “cult-like activities.” The charges reported include sexual assault, sexual touching and sexual interference.² Some of the charges were even more disturbing and problematic: forcible confinement, assault, pointing a firearm, administering a stupefying drug and rendering a youth incapable of resistance by suffocation.³ One might wonder how such activities could occur in a daycare setting over a lengthy period without being detected.

The origins of the case date back to January 1988 with a complaint by a 10-year-old girl who was being cared for at Ron and Linda Sterlings’ babysitting service.⁴ The girl told a school counselor that the Sterling’s’ son Travis had fondled her. The complaint was lodged with the Martensville police, but did not result in charges being laid. The complaint was not pursued further at the time.

Another complaint was lodged on September 30, 1991. The parents of a two-year-old girl told the police that Travis Sterling had sexually assaulted their daughter. On October 1 of that year, Claudia Bryden, a new constable on the Martensville police force, took over responsibility for the case from Constable James Elstad. Constable Bryden was a controversial figure on the Martensville police force. Despite her inexperience—she had a total of only seven month’s prior experience with the RCMP (much less than others on the seven person force)—she apparently had the strong support of the acting chief.

The Globe and Mail describes Constable Bryden’s perspective in the following way:

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1. The woman could not be named because she was 18 at the time of the alleged assaults and her identity was thus protected under the Young Offenders Act.
2. Section 151 of the Criminal Code defines sexual interference as touching the body of a person under the age of 14 for a sexual purpose. Sexual assault is forceful sexual contact without consent.
3. Saskatoon StarPhoenix, A1, 92/06/04.
4. A Globe and Mail article by David Roberts, published on February 19, 1994 provides a chronological overview of the Martensville case. Unless otherwise noted, the events listed are as contained in the Roberts chronology.
Constable Bryden, when she learned of this earlier complaint against Travis Sterling, apparently became suspicious of her fellow officers, since the Sterlings had links with the town police. Ron Sterling worked as the deputy director of the Saskatoon Correctional Centre. Several of the officers trained together at a police academy in Regina. Some had served together in Prince Albert, Sask., where Mr. Sterling had worked before moving to Martensville. One or two officers would sometimes drop by the Sterling home for coffee. In fact, Constable Elstad took Constable Bryden to meet the Sterlings her first night on the job.\(^5\)

On October 4, 1991, sexual assault charges were laid against Travis Sterling concerning the 1988 allegation of assault. On December 12, the Sterling home was searched and three allegedly pornographic videotapes seized.\(^6\) On December 20, Linda Sterling was charged with two counts of sexual assault, one of uttering threats, and one of pointing a firearm. On January 16, 1992, Ron Sterling was charged with three counts of sexual assault, one of pointing a firearm and one of uttering threats.

Ex-RCMP officer Mike Johnston was hired as Martensville’s police chief on March 2, 1992, replacing Wayne MacGillivray, and taking over as head of the investigation. On March 17 Saskatoon police Corporal Rod Moor was seconded to Martensville as an independent investigator. A Polaroid camera, a vibrator and some rope were turned over by the Sterling’s on March 27. On March 28, former Martensville Mayor Wayne McIntyre located the Quonset hut in which children were allegedly abused.

Constable Elstad was charged on April 1, 1992 with two counts of sexual assault and one of sexual interference. On April 7, police seized dog choker chains, gray fabric straps and an axe handle from the hut.

Police re-arrested Constable Elstad and Ron, Linda and Travis Sterling on June 3, 1992. They also arrested former Martensville Police Chiefs Daryl Ford and Edward Revesz, RCMP Constable Darren Sabourin, and a 20-year-old female. In all, approximately 170 charges were laid relating to the sexual molestation of children. On June 5, Saskatoon Police

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5. The *Globe and Mail*, D1, 94/02/19.
6. The delay in conducting the search is described by the *Globe and Mail* as being due to acting Police Chief Wayne MacGillivray’s denial of Constable Bryden’s request to do the search on the grounds that more evidence was needed.
Corporal John Popowich was charged with three counts of sexual assault, bringing the total number of accused to nine.

The June 6 issue of the Saskatoon StarPhoenix recapped events on its front page, under the heading “Martensville nightmare,” and featured an article describing the bail hearing for the nine accused. The article reported that more than 100 spectators attended the hearing, including reporters from across Canada. The bail hearing was adjourned until the following Monday and the nine remanded in custody for the weekend.7

At the continuance of the bail hearing, Ford and Revesz, the two former Martensville police chiefs were released, along with Saskatoon Police Service Corporal John Popowich, Warman RCMP Constable Darren Sabourin and the 20-year-old female. However, Elstad and the Sterlings were denied bail, which led to an appeal to the Court of Queen’s Bench. The Appeal Court released the four remaining Martensville residents. Commenting on this decision, Judge Noble acknowledged that his decision to release the accused might not be a popular one, but he reminded members of the public that all people are presumed innocent until found otherwise by a judge or jury.8

A joint task-force investigating team was formed on June 11, 1992 with RCMP, Martensville, and Saskatoon police. Therapists were assigned to counsel the alleged victims. On June 30, the Crown announced that preliminary hearings for the 8 adults would be held in January 1993. On December 9 1992, however, the Crown announced that it would proceed by direct indictment, avoiding preliminary hearings.

The trial of the young female offender began on March 8, 1993. In May she was convicted of seven sexual offenses, including two charges of sexual assault, two of sexual touching, one of threatening to use a gun while committing a sexual assault, one of assault, and one of unlawful confinement.9 She was sentenced to two years in prison.

7. Saskatoon StarPhoenix, A1, 92/06/06
8. SSP, 92/06/20.
9. SSP, 93/05/21, A1.
John Popowich was cleared on June 8, 1993 when child complainants could not identify him. The judge said that Corporal Popowich was an innocent man who had been wrongly identified. Prosecutors stayed the charges, but Corporal Popowich made it clear that this wasn’t enough. “What’s been done to me and my family, nobody’s going to repair. I’m mad,” stated Corporal Popowich.10

Following an 82-day trial, Justice Ross Wimmer stated on January 25, 1994 that “not one smidgen of independent evidence” linked any of the Sterlings to the Quonset shed where the Crown said that the Martensville children were sexually abused. The judge enumerated major contradictions, lack of detail and unsubstantiated allegations in the children’s evidence. He raised questions about whether their allegations weren’t bizarre and questionable—whether some of the alleged sexual acts were even possible. The judge also asked why some of the children’s evidence regarding group activities didn’t corroborate that of other children.11 Following deliberation by the jury, Ron and Linda Sterling were found not guilty on all 32 sex-related charges on February 2, 1994. Travis Sterling was convicted on eight counts and later sentenced to five years imprisonment. He appealed, but the conviction was upheld.

On February 10, 1994, the Crown stayed all charges against Messrs. Sabourin, Elstad, Revesz and Ford, and announced that it would not appeal the Sterlings’ acquittals. Elstad filed a $6-million lawsuit against prosecutors Leslie Sullivan and Bruce Bauer, former Martensville chiefs Wayne MacGillivray and Michael Johnston, several investigating officers including Claudia Bryden and Rod Moor, the Saskatchewan government and the boards of police commissioners for Martensville and Saskatoon.12 Several of the other defendants, including John Popowich and Daryl Ford also filed lawsuits.

10. SSP, 93/06/09, A1.
11. SSP, 94/01/25, A1.
12. SSP, A1, 94/02/10.
It is evident from the newspaper coverage following the trials, that the community remained deeply polarized over the outcome. One disillusioned parent of a child who had testified said that she was considering filing a civil suit against the Sterlings. Marjalena Repo of the Community Awareness Project stated that the case was "one of a series of criminal cases based on false allegations extracted by 'totally inept' investigators." Deploring the rush to make charges despite a shaky foundation, she added: "Society cannot tolerate this kind of misbehavior by authority." Nevertheless, a "Believe the Children" movement that formed during the trial continued to be active. On the other side, a group known as "Friends for the Falsely Accused" issued leaflets on the "false accusations," contrasting the testimony of the children with the absence of corroborating evidence. Both sides called for an inquiry.
2

Media Accounts of Martensville

Analysis of News Coverage

From February 1992 to December 1997, 120 articles on Martensville appeared in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*. All but eight related to the child abuse cases. The story was front-page news sixteen times from June 1992 to February 1994. On three occasions, the story took up most of the first section of the *StarPhoenix*. Between June 4, 1992 and September 15, 1995 the Regina *Leader Post* carried 139 articles on Martensville. All were about the child abuse cases.

The electronic media covered the story of Martensville in a similar manner as the press. In the early stages of the scandal, coverage included stand-up interviews with Martensville politicians and police officials. Television carried pictures of the accused with narratives about the charges and visuals of the Sterling’s house in Martensville and the Quonset Hut where the bizarre events were alleged to have happened.

The national media picked up the same story angles as the local media, almost without exception, until the 1994 *Globe and Mail* article by David Roberts set the story in a wider context. Roberts’ story summarized the results of the trials: All but two of the cases were either dismissed for lack of evidence or found the defendants not guilty. One of the two convictions (i.e., that of the young woman) was reversed on appeal. Roberts examined the investigation and brought in expert opinion to set Martensville in perspective to other North American child abuse scandals. The Roberts article was seen by many in the Saskatoon area as being typically central Canadian in tone. “They know it all,” said one of the local residents interviewed in this study. Another called it “the official version.”

Macleans ran two articles: one in June 1992 and another in February 1994, which served as bookends for the trials. The first followed the lead of the *StarPhoenix* and played...
up the “satanic” elements of the case. The latter article was styled somewhat like the *Globe and Mail* article, raising doubt about how child abuse cases are investigated and presenting expert opinion on the testimony of children. *Saturday Night* summarized the scandal from the point of view of the children’s evidence (or lack thereof) in a nine-page article in its May 1994 issue.

After the trials, coverage by the local media followed the activities of the various lobby groups. The proponents of the “Believe the Children” group organized a petition to the Provincial Legislature. Coverage showed the group members confronting the deputy premier in the Legislative Assembly with their call for an inquiry.

During this period, local media coverage of the accused described their various lawsuits against the crown and its officers. There was also coverage of the “Citizens United for Truth and Justice” who linked the Martensville case to other perceived failures of the justice system, including the overturning of the conviction of David Milgard (in Saskatchewan) on DNA evidence. Apart from the *Globe and Mail* and *Saturday Night* articles, little of the coverage by newspapers and electronic news gathering media attempted to put the events of Martensville into a wider perspective.

This analysis of the media coverage in Martensville is informed by Mica Nava’s study of a major child sexual abuse scandal in Britain. Nava summarizes her approach as follows:

> What conceptual apparatus—if any—did the press rely on in order to understand the issues on which it focused so much attention and anxiety? In what way—if any—did the shaping and selection of news contribute, not only to the way child sexual abuse was popularly understood, but also to the formulation and consolidation of a viewpoint which might be identified as belonging to the left or to the right? To what extent were debates within feminism taken into account in this process? (Nava: 1988:103).

In her article Nava sets herself the task of making sense of a phenomenon which had been formerly taboo, but which “grew over a period of weeks to occupy a position of prominence in public discourse and popular consciousness” (Ibid.). Nava’s study, entitled
Cleveland and the Press, applies the escalations of media concern to the notion of “moral panic” which she defines in the following way:

[Moral panics] are likely to occur at particular moments of social crisis when people fear that traditional values and institutions are under attack. The media play a key part in sensationalizing the situation and, importantly... in identifying and legitimating the folk devils who become the targets for popular persecution. This process also includes the orchestration of ‘expert’ opinion which can contribute to increased demands for state intervention and the (re)formation of popular consent to a more conservative social order (Nava: 103-104).

In order to determine how the news was constructed in Martensville, an analysis of news sources is revealing. It must be noted that journalists often rely on a variety of unattributed sources (individuals who remain off the record, other news stories, wire services, news releases, etc.). While a full analysis of the sources involved in news production may require observational studies of the news room, many sources are evident through a careful analysis of news content (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991: 181). Such is the case in this study of Martensville, where information contained in articles is supplemented by my interviews with principals and additional information gleaned from visits to the area. The analysis of sources will be combined with content analysis. The focus will be on the coverage of the Saskatoon StarPhoenix and the aforementioned national media, with particular attention to the key events of the case in three phases—the initial charges in June 1992, the trials, and the aftermath of the scandal.

The Nightmare Begins

The first article about the cases appears in the Saskatoon StarPhoenix on February 19, 1992. The article, under the title “Sexual assault hearing set for Martensville man,” is on page A4 of the newspaper. In April there follow two articles about the charges against Constable Jim Elstad, likewise buried several pages into the first section of the paper.

Then on June 4, the story becomes front-page news. Headlined “Martensville nightmare” (see Appendix “B”), the story carries related articles on pages A2 and A3.
Other local media are quick to pick up the shocking details of the scandal. Local TV and radio carry the story daily whenever there were developments in the case. For the next three weeks, the *StarPhoenix* runs frequent stories under the kicker “**MARTENSVILLE NIGHTMARE**” (see Appendix “C”). With the headline of June 4 and mention of “cult-like activity,” the national media quickly pick up this story line.

An examination of the newspaper article published on June 4, 1992 reveals few attributed sources. For example, the lead story under the headline “Martensville nightmare” has only one attributed source, Martensville police Chief Mike Johnson, who has two short paragraphs listing the charges. The main source is evidently court records. However, other unattributed sources say that the children have talked about “some sort of cult-like activities.” Initially, the only people with this information were the investigators, their superiors and Crown Counsel.

An article on page three is headed “Martensville residents outraged, frightened.” This article quotes a (named) *StarPhoenix* employee, the mayor, a named mother of a tot and three anonymous sources from the town, one a neighbour of the Sterlings. None of the comments justifies the terms “outraged” or “frightened” used in the headline. The only statement approaching strong emotion is by a mother of two young children who says that the scandal has “sickened” mothers in the community.

On June 5 the headline in the *StarPhoenix* reads: “**Keep accused in jail: Crown.**” There are fourteen articles in this issue running under the “Martensville nightmare” kicker. The lead story on June 5 continues in a similar vein to that of the June 4 coverage. More details on the charges and arrests are taken from court documents. There are pictures of five of the accused—some taken from unflattering camera angles (see Appendix “C”). An unnamed source in the crown prosecutor’s office reveals that the crown doesn’t want the accused out on bail. This source is evidently one that is “friendly” to the prosecutors. The information revealed consists of details regarding the prosecution’s intention to argue that bail should be denied and the reasons for denying bail—thus schooling the public on the
rationale for holding the accused in jail. Information is given on the likelihood of a publication ban. There is also the following description of some of the evidence purporting to be taken from court documents:

... some of those charged are alleged to have used a hypodermic needle and drugs to render a youth incapable of resistance. A pillowcase was also allegedly used to suffocate a child into submission, as was an axe handle, a broken piece of glass and a bow (sic). 13

This information has already been presented in an even more graphic (and leading) format. In a box giving details on the charges on June 4, the following statement is made:

A male child was given drugs using a hypodermic needle to render him incapable of resistance, suffocated with a pillow case and beaten with an axe handle, according to charges filed in court Wednesday against two Martensville family members.

Threats were also made to children that harm could come to their parents or other family members, children were sexually assaulted and some had guns pointed at them, allege 75 new charges filed against four Martensville people... (SSP, 94/06/04, A1).

While it is undoubtedly true that the above description was taken in part from court documents, there is a discernible tendency to present the crown's case in the best light. In fact, as transcripts of the trials show, the hypodermic needle, pillow case and axe handle were alleged by children to have been used in bizarre forms of assault, the motives for which were often not apparent. 14 The obvious tendency here is to present slim facts in such a way as to appear indicative of the organized sexual abuse of children. This is the perspective of the investigators and the crown. There is no presentation of any alternative account.

Another article on the front page, under the caption "Courtroom packed," describes the courtroom scene, paying particular attention to the appearance of the accused. The scene is set with the statement: "(a)ll eyes in the court were riveted on the accused as they were led

13. SSP, 92/06/05, A1.
14. Each of these items was described in the children's testimony as being instruments of assault, rather than coercion. For example, the axe handle was alleged in the children's testimony to have been shoved into the childrens' anuses and penises (Globe and Mail 94/02/19). The idea that children were "beaten with axe handles" first appears in the StarPhoenix on June 4, but is repeated by other media, such as Macleans in its article of June 22, 1994.
into the prisoners’ docket.” The first of the accused described is Travis Sterling. We are
told: “A bearded and beefy Travis Sterling, 23, smirked as he peered out and the crowd…and stood grinning and smirking in the docket while his lawyers attempted to arrange a quick bail hearing.” We are also presented with the images of some of the other accused: Ron Sterling, who “winked at his wife and stood impassively…” Daryl Ford “dressed in baggy jeans and weathered blue T-shirt, shuffled his feet, rarely looking away from the judge.” James Elstad, “pale and drawn stared straight ahead, his brow furrowed, his eyes encircled in deep shadow.”

It is clear that the prosecution’s case is being put forward (perhaps supplemented through leaks to the media). Nevertheless, it is also apparent that the primary interest group stirring up sentiments of local residents is the media themselves. This is evident in the use of incendiary headlines and repetition of the phrase “Martensville nightmare” (initially as a headline and then as a heading for all Martensville stories). It is further advanced in the portrayal of the accused and the repetition of the shocking charges complete with conclusions about how various items of evidence were used. As in the Cleveland case, the media’s role in provoking the ensuing panic is clear. They have amplified the facts in such a way as to incite the most shocking conclusion: in this case, that nine people have collaborated in the organized abuse of children and that this abuse may have been “cult-like.”

However, while this conclusion seems founded in light of the coverage, the question of “what is being mediated” suggests looking beneath the surface of the media accounts. Where did the media get this information? We are told that it is taken from “court records,” i. e., documents filed by the prosecution. Thus, we have a newsroom (reporters, editors and publisher), the crown prosecutor’s office (crown counsel and their superiors), and the police (investigating officers and their superiors) all subscribing to a particular scenario. Where does this scenario come from? All roads lead back to Martensville and to the primary investigator, Claudia Bryden.
Constable Bryden is quoted as saying that she became suspicious of her fellow officers when, shortly after she began the investigation, she learned of the earlier complaint. Constable Bryden convinced her superior, Chief Wayne MacGillivray, that there had been a cover-up following the first complaint. The two collaborated in the initial period of the investigation and we learn that Constable Bryden often took abuse files to her home or to Chief MacGillivray's. Both Constable Bryden and Chief MacGillivray revealed that they had themselves been victims of child abuse. Constable Bryden's interest in the satanic aspects of the case is also clear. Former Martensville Constable Mike Swan said that prior to the execution of a search warrant Constable Bryden told him: "If you see any satanic symbols, be sure to grab them." There can be little doubt that Claudia Bryden, aided initially by Chief MacGillivray and later by Rod Moor, was the central figure in this case. Senior police officials, the crown and the media accepted her contention that this was a case of organized child sexual abuse. Claudia Bryden is thus the primary source.

Other sources surfacing on June 5 include, on page 3, Martensville Mayor Rob Friesen and Chief Mike Johnson (the latter having replaced MacGillivray as chief)—who appeal for help and speak of a need for healing in the community. A story about Claudia Bryden follows, under the headline "Officer who broke the case wishes it were a bad dream." It is a sympathetic article in which Constable Bryden says: "there was no magic in what I did," and adds, "I think everybody else is feeling now how I felt months ago... I'd give anything to wake up and find this is all a bad dream." In another article on the same page, Social Services Minister Janice MacKinnon offers counselling and therapy to the victims and their families. Claudia Bryden's nightmare has now become part of the collective consciousness of the town.

15. This information is first alluded to by Constable Bryden in an interview in the StarPhoenix on June 5, but is not developed until Robert's article in the Globe and Mail, published on 94/02/19.
16. Globe and Mail, 94/02/19, D1-D3.
On page A11 a different sort of article appears. A headline announces: “Police say satanic cults exist in city.” Since this article again bears the “Martensville Nightmare” kicker, it is perhaps natural for the reader to assume that it is about police findings in Martensville. Such is not the case, however. The article quotes two experts on satanic cults: one, an RCMP corporal who has investigated satanic cults in the province, and the other a retired philosophy professor who has studied satanic cults for four years. The RCMP officer begins by advising the reader to “look carefully before you say satanists… What is the hard evidence?” However, by the end of the article, he is quoted as saying that he is not surprised that these sorts of cults exist in Saskatoon. “It’s going on in barns, abandoned houses and kid’s rumpus rooms. Believe me it’s happening,” he says.

Another article on page A11 has the heading: “Sexual abuse happening everywhere: ex-Ontario mayor.” The article is based on an interview with the former mayor of Prescott, a town that has gone through a similar child abuse scandal. Finally, on page A13 is an article, also under the “Martensville Nightmare” kicker, about police recruit screening. Sources in this article are justice minister Bob Mitchell and Regina Police College director Kent Brunskill.

The net effect of this series of articles is to sensitize the reader to the fact that officials and politicians admit that there are deep-seated problems in Martensville that require “healing,” that experts say that satanic cults exist and that child sexual abuse is widespread. Unflattering camera angles and references to a “smirking” Travis Sterling leave no doubt as to whom the folk devils will be. The construction is based on the assumption that organized child sexual abuse has occurred. It adds the possibility that it may be satanic.

Saturday, June 6 again sees the front page of the StarPhoenix given over to Martensville. Articles included a recap of the week’s events, an article on the court proceedings, a cover story on sexually abused children on A1 and A2, and related stories on A3 and A4. A picture of John Popowich on the front page sets the tone for the coverage. The picture is framed on one side by a chronology of the charges, including those of three
new accused. The three, of whom Corporal Popowich is one, were charged the preceding day, bringing the total accused to nine. The picture (see, Appendix “D”) is a three-column close-up of Corporal Popowich’s face seen sideways through the wire mesh of a barrier. One portion of the mesh frames his eyes, which regard the viewer. His look is perhaps scornful, almost defiant. This could be one of the leaders of the sex ring. Looking again, the eye closest to the viewer evokes the mythological “evil eye.” One might imagine the caption: “Satan captured.”

On June 8, the *StarPhoenix* turns to human-interest subjects. The lead story is headlined: “Police feel vilified in light of charges against colleagues.” The subhead reads “Good guys’ bearing brunt of distrust.” The story quotes several police officers, one of whom says: “It’s hard to go into a coffee shop. People are staring right through you. The guys are really depressed.” Police spokesperson Al Sather is the only one of the police officers named in the article. The town’s mayor is the subject of a front-page story on “rebuilding” the town. The article profiles the mayor and reveals that he decided to run for a second term to assist in “getting to the bottom of the matter and clearing things up.” An article on the continuance of the bail hearing lists the accused, the number of charges each (now totaling 162; later to cap out at 170), and gives the names of the defence lawyers. Two more articles in this issue detail the formation of a police task force to investigate the allegations and a parade to “boost the town’s spirits.”

Further articles appear in the *StarPhoenix* on June 9, 10 and 20 detailing the release of the accused on bail—Messrs. Ford, Popowich, Revesz and Sabourin on June 8 and the Sterlings on June 19. As we have seen, the first period of Martensville coverage has been characterized by a reliance on “official” and expert sources. Almost without exception, any other sources are unnamed. The Crown’s case has been put forward and there is nothing to remind the reader that the defence side has not been heard and that the alleged crimes have not been proven. The media have amplified the case much as in the Cleveland scandal. The Martensville nightmare has extended beyond the children’s families and the accused, beyond
the town and into other affected communities—the police, therapists and child protection workers, and beyond.

A *Maclean’s* cover story dated June 22, 1992 carries the headline “The Martensville Scandal” and the subhead “A Saskatchewan town confronts the horror of child sexual abuse charges.” The story follows the lead of the *StarPhoenix* in summarizing the scandal and mentions “rumours that defendants were part of a satanic cult.” The story characterizes the local residents as “betrayed” and “afraid” and contributes several paragraphs under the heading “Satanists.” The cover story is followed by a one-page article on Satanism entitled, “The Satan factor—Bizarre cults promote child sex abuse”; another on, “The search for safe daycare”; and one on, “The agony of Martensville.” The latter article focuses on the town, but also talks about an “emerging pattern” in Canada and the United States. It refers to the case in Prescott Ontario in which thirty people were charged with child sexual abuse, and one in North Carolina in which the owner of a daycare centre was convicted of multiple charges of sexual assault.

The satanic element, introduced in the cover story, is covered in several paragraphs under “Satanists.” Two people are quoted. The mayor of Martensville, Rob Friesen states “There have been rumors of satanic cults throughout the area. I have no proof, but I don’t dispute them. If you get people abusing children in groups, this grouping part suggests there is more to it than sexual abuse.” The other individual who is frequently quoted in the media commenting about satanic events is Martensville Baptist Pastor Henry Gossen. In the *Maclean’s* article, Gossen states that he has seen satanic symbols on local cars. “It has to be organized. There is a lot of demonism involved and talk of people bonded together in satanic worship.” 17

In the second article in this issue, entitled “The Satan Factor,” *Maclean’s* gives free rein to accounts of satanic ritual abuse. These are mostly anecdotal. Leanne Boyd, who is

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described as heading “the Government of Manitoba’s satanic awareness program” states
“(w)e are getting most of our information about the satanic cults from adult survivors, their
stories, including human sacrifices, are similar, no matter what part of North America they
are from.” Henry Gossen contributes the observation that, “(t)here are stories of cats and
rabbits being skinned alive and their entrails eaten.”

Two unnamed women are quoted, but described as “currently undergoing psychiatric
counseling because they say that their parents inducted them into satanic cults when they
were children.” One woman describes being spread-eagled on an altar and raped by a man
wearing a black cape and horns. The other says she was locked in a crawl space full of bugs
because she refused to make love with a corpse. These accounts are followed by the
statement: “(b)ut such memories are usually deeply suppressed because Satanists employ a
process of almost incomprehensible painfulness to brainwash their victims.” There is no
attribution or justification for this statement. It is followed by more information from Boyd
about children often being buried in mock funerals and forced to eat the raw flesh of dead
animals.

Psychiatrist Harvey Armstrong, who is described as having treated victims of
Satanists, states that “to survive, the human mind dissociates itself from the event.”
Armstrong says that the cults’ “highly organized, highly secretive activities also make
detection difficult.” The link to Martensville is drawn by the simple statement that police
have acknowledged that they are examining allegations that the abuse in Martensville was
ritualistic.18

The article on Satanism is followed by one entitled “The Search for Safe Day Care,”
with the subhead “Parents Want Tighter Regulation.” The reporter states that the alleged
abuses in Martensville have “revived a nationwide debate over the availability of quality
care.” The article begins by detailing some interactions between an adult (likely the reporter)

18. Ibid., p. 29.
and some children playing in the yard at a day care centre in Ajax, Ontario. The article quotes two parents, one of whom is co-leader of an Ottawa lobby group for day care, talking about tighter regulations. The non-lobbyist says, "...I think there should be some sort of federal control. It couldn't do any harm."19

The Scales of Justice

During the next phase of coverage, the StarPhoenix drops the word "NIGHTMARE" from its kicker on Martensville articles. Henceforth, articles bear a graphic of the scales of justice over the word "MARTENSVILLE" (see Appendix "E"). There is a marked change in the tenor of reporting, which most likely follows complaints to the publisher from various quarters, including counsel for the accused. In July there are nine articles in the StarPhoenix about the Martensville case, and in August, just one. In September, three articles are devoted to the postponement of the case until 1993. A front-page article appears in November 1992, detailing additional charges laid against the female young offender.

An article on December 10, 1992 is indicative that the case is no longer being prosecuted in the media. The headline reads: "Crown avoids preliminary hearing." The change is revealed in the subhead: "Defence lawyers shocked by turn in Martensville case." Richard Quinney, acting executive director of public prosecutions presents the Crown's perspective in a statement saying that direct indictment "will minimize the traumas to the children required to testify" since they will not have to appear both in preliminary hearings and in the trials. Mark Brayford, representing former Martensville Constable James Elstad, notes that the children will now have to testify at least six times: "How is that beneficial to the children?" he asks. Five of the six defence counsels are quoted, stating their opposition to the Crown's move. This suggests that the StarPhoenix intends to pay more attention to balance in their coverage.

Further confirmation of this new direction occurs in a front-page article on January 7, 1993. The article, following a pretrial conference, is under the headline: “Sex assault trials face long delays.” The article presents the position of some of the defence counsel that there will now be lengthy delays in getting their clients to trial. Three of the lawyers confirm that they will challenge the process.

The development of opposing factions, clearly recognized by the media is parallel to the situation described in the Cleveland case, in which:

... two opposing positions begin to emerge in the coverage... though neither fits neatly into existing political frameworks... (Nava: 115).

While Nava finds these opposing positions difficult to evaluate in Cleveland, this is not the case in Martensville—where they divide evenly on the issue of guilt or innocence of the accused. However, as in Cleveland, the public image of these opposing factions is easily identified in Martensville, and is, “inextricably identified with two opposing positions on child sexual abuse” (Ibid.).

Two articles on Martensville appear in January 1993 and four in February. An article on page A3 on February 4 concerns the Crown’s request to have the public excluded when the children give their testimony in the trial of the young offender. Sources for the story are court trial coordinator John Cherneski and documents filed by the Crown requesting that the children be allowed to testify without having to face the accused. The Crown’s brief proposes that this could be accomplished “either by screening them with partitions, or by means of a closed-circuit video camera.” The article discusses the issues of allowing lawyers for the eight other accused and the media to be present. It also reveals that the StarPhoenix has been in court contesting a publication ban in another recent child abuse case. It is clear that publication bans are a hotly contested domain in the Martensville case—and one that has not yet received much publicity.

In March the trial of the young offender resumes and the story becomes front-page news on March 8 and March 9. There were four articles on Martensville in March and seven
in April, including one front-page story about the RCMP taking over responsibility for policing the town.

Seven articles appear in May 1993, including a front-page article on the sentencing of the young offender, four articles on the trial of John Popowich and one each on searches of the Sterling house and the Quonset shed. On May 19, the question of publication bans is again taken up with an article announcing Judge G. E. Noble’s decision to open the Popowich trial to the public, albeit with restrictions. The judge rules that no details of what the children say happened to them can be reported. However, because identification is a crucial issue in this case, any of the children’s references pertaining to the identification of Corporal Popowich can be reported. The other articles pertain to the evidence of the investigators against Corporal Popowich and the balance—at least for the moment—appears to shift towards the Crown.

On May 21, the headline announces: “She’s guilty, judge rules.” The trial of the young offender is over and the article reveals that she has been convicted of two counts of sexual assault; two of sexual touching; and one each of threatening to use a gun while committing a sexual assault; assault; and unlawful confinement. It is noted that: “(t)he reasons she was found guilty cannot be reported until after the last of the seven trials…” The article reports that the woman maintained her innocence throughout the trial and quotes her father as saying “justice had a blindfold on… We’re going to appeal.”

The coverage of the Popowich trial continues in June with articles on June 1 giving the police investigators’ testimony about how Corporal Popowich was identified. Because of the restrictions on publication, the testimony of three boys about alleged assault is not covered. Five articles on the issue of identification are published during the first week in June. Then on June 7, a series of four articles reveals that none of the three boys can identify Corporal Popowich. The headline on June 8 states: “Prosecutors pondering trial status.”

On June 9, the StarPhoenix announces the surprising conclusion: “Popowich cleared.” The lead article presents the picture of a “once proud cop who was shamed one
year ago by being charged as a child molester.” Two articles describe the judge’s comments on the staying of charges. The first article is headed “Popowich a victim of mistaken identity.” The article notes: “While the Crown was within its power to order a ‘stay’ in the proceedings, Noble made it clear he didn’t think that went far enough. He also strongly suggested Popowich should be reinstated by the police service as quickly as possible.”

The second article on the cover story quotes extensively from the judge’s remarks, some of which ring true for much of what is later revealed to have happened in Martensville:

“(You were) mistakenly accused of the type of crime which all innocent people must fear the most, simply because the stigma of being charged with a sexual offence often lingers in the public’s mind, even though there is no evidence to support it. The rest of us should realize that this can happen to any one of us... It is important to our system that everyone does not forget the basic principle of our law—that every person charged with a crime is innocent until proven guilty.”

One article appears in July. The commencement of the Sterling’s trial brings the story back to the front page in August 1993, with the selection of the jury and five articles about the pending trial. Three of the five articles are about the selection of the jury. These articles all describe aspects of the “seldom used process” in which 68 potential jurors were “challenged for cause” by defence lawyers, which allowed a series of questions to be asked of each of them.” The purpose, as explained by Judge Ross Wimmer, “was to help both Crown and defence lawyers in determining the impartiality of potential jurors.” The questions were allowed after it was revealed that a survey by Saskatchewan Legal Aid had “found only half of those considered potential jurors believed they could reach a verdict based only on trial evidence.”

A front-page article on December 7, 1993 announces that fifteen (i.e., approximately one quarter) of the charges against the Sterlings have been stayed. The case is again front page news on January 19, 1994 presenting the defense perspective in an article headed: “Children victims of police bias: defence lawyer.” The article sets out the arguments of Don Mullord, the lawyer for the Sterlings:
Both the children and their parents became innocent victims in the Martensville sexual abuse case because police, without any basis of fact, started from scratch believing there was widespread sexual abuse, defence lawyer Don Mullord said Tuesday. "None of these children (when they testified) had the demeanor of actually having been sexually abused. Their demeanor was more of kids who have been prepared repeatedly and coached to give evidence in court... Where is there any... evidence other than the children's testimony?" Mullord said every child initially denied being abused, and it wasn't until there were leading and suggestive interviews that allegations surfaced.

On January 25, the StarPhoenix devotes front-page coverage and three other articles to the Sterling's trial. The front-page story described Judge Ross Wimmer's charge to the jury and his comments that "not one smidgen of independent evidence links any of the Sterlings to the Quonset shed where the Crown says Martensville children were sexually abused." The article notes that the children's evidence cannot be reported by judicial order, but that Judge Wimmer described a number of problems with the evidence:

(he) did detail what he said appeared to be major contradictions, lack of detail and unsubstantiated allegations... he raised questions about whether their allegations weren't bizarre, strange and questionable... whether certain sexual acts were even possible, (and) asked why some of the children allegedly involved in group 'activities' didn't corroborate one another...

On February 3, and again on February 11, 1994, the StarPhoenix devotes most of its first section to the trial. On February 3, the headline announces: "RON, LINDA CLEARED." The subhead reads: "Travis Sterling guilty on eight counts." The issue devotes eight stories in the first section to the case. "Our life can never be normal," says the heading of one story about the Sterlings. Ron Sterling is quoted saying: "We're going to be tainted as the most vile child molesters for the rest of our lives." The Sterlings announce that they are going to appeal Travis Sterling's conviction: "We're going to fight it to the bitter end. These kids have suffered, but so have we." Articles include one on the Crown's plans, another on the defence lawyer's reaction, one on how the Crown "botched (the) case" and one on an interview with Mayor Friesen entitled: "Town remained strong during ordeal: Mayor." On February 4, there is a cover story on the town of Martensville. Then on February 10, the StarPhoenix runs an exclusive on the likelihood that the charges will be stayed.
The Aftermath

On February 11, the headline on page one declares: "IT'S OVER!" The subhead reads: "Charges stayed; inquiry demanded." Of course, the calls for an inquiry indicate that it is far from "over." The articles include an explanation of the Crown's decision to stay the charges due to the deterioration of the childrens' ability to testify and the improbability of jurors being convinced beyond a reasonable doubt. Two pages were devoted to the childrens' testimony and six other articles on the possibility of an inquiry, the town's reaction, and debates about publication bans and whether the justice system has tilted too far in favour of believing child victims and away from the rights of the accused. It is clear that the various camps each have their own conclusion about who is at fault.

The lead story has Richard Quinney, chief of public prosecutions for Saskatchewan saying that the police should have "asked the prosecutors for guidance" earlier in the investigation:

Prosecutors weren't consulted about the cases until charges were laid. It was only then that they learned what evidence they had to work with... Quinney said there was no longer a reasonable chance to convict the remaining defendants in the case.

John Baker, executive director of the Saskatchewan Police Commission defends the police work, saying that "the most effective means defence lawyers have to challenge evidence of young children is attacking the way it was gathered." Several of the accused call for an inquiry and others give intimations of possible civil action. An article is devoted to Justice Minister Bob Mitchell's continued insistence that an inquiry is not required. However, another article is headed: "Citizens take up petition to protest acquittals." The petition says, "justice was not properly served" in the Sterling trial: "Our children are condemned to their own little prison of horrors and are basically told they are liars." The petition, signed by about 100 people within a few hours, will be delivered to Justice Minister Bob Mitchell. Martensville residents Sonia Guenther and Sharon Nelson say that they will canvass the town for more signatures. Ms. Nelson says that while the Crown's decision may
have spared some children the trauma of repeated cross-examination, “those children are
going to have to go through trauma for the rest of their lives.” “We have to believe the
children,” adds Ms. Guenther.

Another article in the February 11 issue of the StarPhoenix is an account of some of the
evidence that led to the conviction of Travis Sterling. The article is headed: “Mother’s
concern at bath time led to Martensville investigation.” It describes the September 1991 case
that initiated Claudia Bryden’s investigation. The mother’s testimony that she discovered
redness in the child’s vaginal area and “marks all over her bum.” The story is that when she
asked the child what happened, the little girl replied that a stranger poked her in the bum.
When asked if the stranger had a name, the child responds: “It was a stranger living at
Linda’s house.” The written statement filed by the parents on October 2, 1991 led to the
arrest of Travis Sterling two days later. The publication of this article along with the
children’s testimony and news of the petition will undoubtedly serve to bolster the “believe
the children” movement.

Further along in the same issue come articles on other divisions. The publication
bans are the subject of a lengthy article titled: “Open or closed?” The article on page A8
details the “long battle” to keep the trials open to the public. The article summarizes the
arguments of the Crown, parents and therapists that publication of testimony would be
detrimental to the children. The argument by the therapists is that “the kids could suffer for
the rest of their lives if intimate details were publicized and linked back to the individual
children.” The first attempt to close the court was at the trial of the young offender. Judge
Lavoie, described as “a staunch supporter of open courts,” did not accept the Crown’s request
for total exclusion of the public. The process that was used is described as follows:

20. The use of the term “stranger” relates to a child proofing method that was used by the parents of this child.
Many of the children’s testimonies were contaminated with terminology from materials presented to the
children by parents or investigators. Claudia Bryden used the book, The Secret of the Silver Horse. The
book contains an account of an adult who “put his hands down the pants” of a boy. This phrase is heard
repeatedly in the testimony of the children (Lees, “Martensville,” Saturday Night, 1994/05/04, p. 26).
... (C)learing the courtroom when the children testified of everyone but court officials and the defendant... [and providing] a screen between the children and the defendant so they wouldn’t be able to see each other... (T)he children’s testimony would be instantly transmitted to an adjacent room on video so the public could hear the allegations... (T)he media could report on the proceedings, but not until all trials had been concluded.

Judge Lavoie’s decision is heralded by the *StarPhoenix* as fair and reasonable, but opposed by the CBC, who fought it unsuccessfully in two further legal challenges, and by the Crown who continued to argue against it to the end. The article notes that Judge Lavoie’s decision became the benchmark for the other trials presided over by justices Ted Noble and Ross Wimmer. Mostly, full reporting was held off until all of the trials were finished: “That way there could be no possible prejudice to any of the accused in following trials, the judges reasoned, and the children could testify without worrying that they could be identified.”

The arguments for balance on both sides of the legal question between believing children and the rights of the accused, are summarized in an article headed: “Saskatchewan case raises question of legal balance.” Another article addresses the question of the reliability of childrens’ testimony. FBI expert Kenneth Lanning summarizes his perspective in the following statement: “Children rarely lie about sexual abuse, but they do fantasize, misperceive events and try to please adults.” The articles presented in this issue of the *StarPhoenix* span the ideological spectrum. The newspaper is apparently seeking to find a balance through a pluralistic presentation in which there is “something for everyone.

Calls mount for the justice minister to hold an inquiry. A column by Dale Eisler in the February 12 edition of the *StarPhoenix* states: “It is unacceptable to the people charged with crimes whose lives have been ruined and it’s unacceptable to anyone who believes public accountability is a cornerstone of our justice system.” Lengthy summaries of the young offender’s and Corporal Popowich’s trials are published on February 14.

The second article in Macleans appears on February 14, 1994 and is titled: “The end of a nightmare.” The subheading states: “Acquittals in Martensville cast doubt on how abuse cases are investigated.” The article details the effects of the case on Ron and Linda Sterling, on the victims and on the town of Martensville. It also discusses the contamination of the
children's evidence and draws a comparison to a similar child sexual abuse scandal in Manhattan Beach (Calif.).

On February 15, the lead story in the *StarPhoenix* is headed: “Justice system criticized.” The article is about the push for changes by parents of the Martensville children. The *StarPhoenix* publishes the text of a statement by twelve parents of seven of the Martensville children. The statement describes the trauma the children have suffered and states that the parents will continue to believe in them. The following recommendations are made for changes in the justice system:

We are convinced changes need to be made in our legal and justice system, requiring judges and attorneys dealing with young children to obtain the proper training and upgrading. This would enable them to better understand the cognitive level of children.

These changes would ensure that the children’s disclosures about violence and abuse are taken more seriously and not viewed as bizarre, inconsistent and unreliable, as perceived by some judges.

In the same issue, Opposition Justice critic Don Toth and Tory house leader Bill Neudorf, whose riding includes Martensville, both add their names to the list of people calling for an inquiry. Carefully avoiding taking any side, Neudorf states: “I have yet to speak to anyone in that area who is satisfied with the judicial process…”

On February 16 the headline reads “Sterling gets job back.” The article details the situation of Ron Sterling, Darren Sabourin, Ed Revesz, James Elstad and Daryl Ford, all of whom were suspended or dismissed when they were charged—Sterling suspended without pay, Sabourin suspended with pay, Revesz, Elstad and Ford all dismissed from the Martensville force, which was subsequently disbanded. Various actions are pending. The cover story is an analysis by reporter Doug McConachie, under the heading “Much to be learned from Martensville case.” “What went wrong?” McConachie asks. His answer: “Everything.” He gives the following summary:

In the aftermath of the Martensville debacle, it’s easy to start casting blame and pointing fingers at the judicial system, the prosecutors, the lawyers, police, social services, therapists, psychiatrists, the parents, the media, and yes, even the children.
In McConachie’s opinion, the one lesson for anyone paying attention is “the system doesn’t work.” Also in this issue is an article on the $112,000 debt that the town of Martensville is facing as a result of the child sexual abuse case.

An article on February 19 records the latest call for an inquiry by the Martensville “We Believe the Children” group. The group has modified its petition to include a letter to the justice minister referring to Justice Wimmer’s summation to the jury, which they characterize as “misleading” and have established a “Cry Out for the Children” telephone hotline. On February 21, the StarPhoenix editorial board adds its weight to the list of those calling for an inquiry, as does the Saskatoon Child Abuse Council on February 22. Council chair Nancy Stevens says that the court system “failed the children of Martensville tragically.”

February 19 is also the date of publication of the Globe and Mail’s summary article on Martensville. The article appears in the “Focus” Section of the Globe’s weekend edition, under the heading “The Martensville Horror” and a picture of a young, innocent-looking Claudia Bryden. As the interviews in Chapter 3 show, some who believe the children’s allegations see the article as being representative of the “false memory” perspective presented by outside experts. The article deconstructs the evidence of the children and reveals the weaknesses of the investigators. It also suggests Constable Bryden’s investigatory weaknesses and personality flaws. She is described by one of her former coworkers as being “terribly paranoid.” Psychologist David Raskin of the University of Utah is quoted as saying that Constable Bryden was “probably sensitized to [the abuse] and she was terribly inexperienced.”21 Reporter David Roberts notes that Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow “has tried to duck for cover, refusing all comment on the affair.” Roberts states “those who say they were falsely accused in the Martensville cases also are talking about filing lawsuits for up to $200 million.”22

22. Ibid., D3.
On March 11, 1994 a front page article states: “Defending the Sterlings cost province $164,856.” The article reveals the fees paid to lawyers and various experts who testified at the trials. Topping the list at $16,124 in fees and an additional $2,000 in expenses, is Ralph Underwager, described as “a Minnesota psychologist and Lutheran minister who travels the world testifying in sexual abuse cases.” University of Utah Psychologist, David Raskin was paid $10,208. Fees and disbursements for the Sterlings’ legal aid lawyers Earl Kalenith, Don Mullord, and Hugh Harradence total over $100,000.

In April, items from the “Friends of the Falsely Accused” and “Poets for Justice” appear. The Friends for the Falsely accused publish a list of facts relating to the evidence of the children. The facts relate to inconsistencies in the testimony. For example, one boy testified that “Linda Sterling cut off the nipple of one of the children and swallowed it… Fact: There is no child with a nipple missing… This boy’s testimony convicted Travis Sterling and before him a young woman.” The “Poets for Justice” contribute a bit of doggerel under the pictures of Claudia Bryden and Leslie Sullivan. The “poem” contains the following line: “They told bold face wretched lies. Should they now deserve a prize?” This is perhaps a rejoinder to the news that Claudia Bryden was named Saskatoon’s Woman of the Year.

On April 30 the “Cry Out for the Children” group (also referred to as the “We Believe the Children Group”) gets front-page coverage in the StarPhoenix as they deliver a 7,000-name petition to the Saskatchewan Legislature. The group says the Martensville trials have “shaken confidence in the justice system.” Spokesperson Carol Dalton says: “We’re not asking for results to be changed. That’s not a fair thing to ask for. We’re asking for the procedure to reflect fairness toward children, who have very different needs from adults when they’re testifying.”

On May 20, the StarPhoenix covers a meeting between the justice minister and the Cry Out for the Children group. Emerging from the meeting, Justice Minister Mitchell says that he agrees better ways have to be found to deal with the testimony of young children.
Mitchell refers to the Justice Department’s “action plan for children,” which includes “a children’s advocate, expansion of the unified family court, creation of a ‘child-friendly’ facilities and better coordination of early intervention and investigation of child abuse cases.”

The group is again in the news on May 27 calling for criteria for child experts. The group’s statement is obviously in response to the article that referred to over $18,000 of taxpayer’s money being spent to bring Ralph Underwager to Saskatoon. Spokesperson Carol Dalton refers to a magazine interview of Underwager as one in which he “advocates adults having sex with children.” The article notes that in his testimony at the trial Underwager said that wasn’t his view. Ms. Dalton says that her group now has 8,600 signatures on its petition calling for a public task force to effect changes to the law.

The latter phase of Martensville coverage is marked by the absence of a clear focus. This is in contrast to the two earlier phases. As we have noted, the first phase was marked by an identification of the presumed guilty perpetrators and their labeling with a “nightmarish” litany of charges. The second phase focused on the adversaries and the balance of evidence for and against conviction. In this respect, the aftermath of Martensville resembles that of the Cleveland case:

The peculiarly complex combination of elements and circumstances… has undermined previously reliable moral and conceptual schema, and it is not only the media that has been confused in its response. This has also been the case for feminists, for those involved professionally in the area and, not least, for the general public (Nava: 104).

Nava notes that conflicting interpretations in such an emotionally charged situation heighten the confusion of the media and make the classification of expert opinion extremely difficult. In Martensville, as in Cleveland, the political inflections of expert knowledge are revealed in such an environment, but remain out of the reach of the media. Compounding this effect in Martensville is the fact that the positions of the politicians have either been inconsistent, or non-committal. Buffeted by the positions of experts for the Crown and the defense, the public has been divided in allegiance between the alleged abusers and the alleged victims.
An article in *Saturday Night* in May 1994 sets out to answer the question: “How did one infant’s skin rash and the suspicions of a rookie constable grow into the increasingly bizarre allegations of torture and sexual abuse that convicted Travis Sterling and tore apart this small Saskatchewan town?” David Lees’ article is a historical summary of the events of the Martensville scandal based on the evidence of the trials and other documents about the case.

Lees finds it incomprehensible that Travis Sterling could be convicted and Ron and Linda found not guilty:

(No matter what else you thought about the Martensville child-abuse case, [this] made no sense at all. If there was one thing that characterized the testimony of all the children, except that of the 1988 complainant, it was that their allegations applied equally to Travis and his parents. Either all three of them took the children, blindfolded and gagged, on terrifying rides to a place called the Devil Church, raped them, confined them in cages, penetrated them with axe handles and vibrators, whipped them and threw them naked into freezers and into the deadly Saskatchewan winter, or none of them had. Either the children were lying or they weren’t.)*

One of the more surprising observations made by Lees is that the Crown had freely admitted that the interviews by the investigators were flawed. Lees cites UBC forensic psychologist Dr. John Yuille, an expert in children’s memories, who at the request of the Crown had reviewed the interviews. Lees quotes from Dr. Yuille’s confidential report to the Crown:

*Bryden and Moor made little attempt to obtain corroborating details, asked leading and suggestive questions, and offered implicit and explicit rewards to the children in exchange for new disclosures.*

Claudia Bryden has proved to be a fragile heroine. She emerged early in the piece as a standard-bearer for abused children. In the latter phase she was referred to as “paranoid” and is credited by the media as having instigated a witch-hunt.

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23. Lees, p. 16.
24. Lees, p. 82.
Other media

A “Believe the Children Newsletter,” dated fall 1993, was given to me during one of the interviews. Although the newsletter is not about Martensville, per se, it is significant in that it shows that the “Believe the Children” group was not an independent idea that originated in Martensville, as many townspeople assumed. The newsletter profiles ritual child abuse. It is written in an academic style, providing definitions, a typology and prevalence. The definitions quoted include one of ritual child abuse by Lawrence Pazder, co-author of Michelle Remembers, and one from David Finklehor (1988). The newsletter also reports that Dr. Ralph Underwager, the controversial expert who later testified at the Martensville trials, has resigned from the Board of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. The article quotes an excerpt from the Paidika article that led to Dr. Underwager’s resignation from the FMSF.

Nathan and Snedeker, in Satan’s Silence (1995), devote only a paragraph to the Martensville case in their study of ritual abuse panics. These authors refer to “rumors of rampant devil worship and clouds of suspicion hanging over the local authorities.” They summarize the events in Martensville as “a classic community-wide moral panic.”

A book entitled Martensville—truth or justice: The story of the Martensville daycare trials, by Frann Harris was published in 1998. Ms. Harris is a former high school teacher, now a free-lance writer, who sat through every minute of the first two trials. Her lengthy description of the trials and the testimony of the children suffers from factual errors, but she maintains the belief that extensive child abuse actually did occur in Martensville, notwithstanding the findings of the courts.

A review by David Roberts in the Globe and Mail takes strong issue with Ms. Harris’ account:

...Frann Harris has produced a book that leaves readers with the vexingly brainless suggestion that perhaps, just maybe, something might have happened to those children—if only the truth were recoverable.
To misappropriate so badly the facts in such a high-profile case offers a sorry disservice to readers and serves as an absolute discredit to journalism, which suffers enough as it is without books such as this.  

Roberts' review of Ms. Harris' book suggests the incommensurability of accounts of Martensville, a theme that will be looked at in detail in the description of participants’ accounts, below. Nevertheless, Ms. Harris' account is egregiously biased, which Roberts' review targets:

Harris describes one of the youngsters testifying in court: ‘Freddy is in the middle of his examination-in-chief, clutching a piece of paper... I hope it gives him courage and puts a bit of distance between him and the story itself. The court should give him a medal for bravery... It takes courage to say such things in public whether he's telling the truth or not'.

Roberts observes that if Freddy is not telling the truth, then he is lying. He fails to see why Harris doesn't credit the experts about the epidemic of false allegations of satanic ritual abuse since the early 1980s. He further states: “Often it is the psychopathology of the police investigators that results in false accusations, mislaid charges and untold damage to the reputations of innocent citizens.”  

The Saskatoon Community Alert, published in April 1999, contains an article titled “Saskatoon Child Centre first of its kind in Canada.” The article describes the centre’s mandate as: “to reduce the trauma associated with the investigation of child abuse through a ‘one stop’ centralized facility dedicated to child abuse investigation, prevention and information.” The centre has three components: investigation (bringing together police, social workers and a medical practitioner), prosecution (prosecution team and victim services) and outreach (crisis intervention, prevention, community education). A “Saskatoon Child Centre Information Notice” given out by the Centre states that the Centre is equipped with the following:

- Two sound-proof, professionally designed soft rooms

26. Ibid.
27. Saskatoon Community Alert, April 1999, p. 6.
• State of the art stereo audio-visual recording systems with picture in picture and time/date generators
• Child friendly waiting rooms, support and counselling referral services
• Lapel and ear microphones and tape back up recording system
• Multiple viewing stations, family meeting rooms and work rooms, security entrances, main floor access, private parking for members.

The foregoing description, which combines "child friendly" features with sophisticated recording systems and security features will be of interest in considering the characteristics of the "risk society" in Chapter 5. The interdisciplinary and professional approach of the centre is intended to prevent the mishandling of child abuse allegations such as those of Martensville. There is every expectation that it will improve the situation, if the resources necessary to sustain it continue to be forthcoming.

**Drawing Conclusions about Media Accounts of Martensville**

There is a transition in the media accounts from the "nightmare" beginnings, through the issues of "balance" characteristic of the trial phase, to the cacophony of voices following the trials. There are many themes: the amplification of panic, officials and experts to the rescue, trial by media, lionization/demonization of Claudia Bryden, co-option of the feminist agenda, the search for scapegoats, and the near universal frustration with the system. These themes will be further examined in subsequent sections, beginning with the reactions of Saskatoon area residents who agreed to be interviewed as part of this study.

Overall, the failure of the media to deal with the central issues of child sexual abuse stands in clear relief. The local media did little to try to put the allegations in perspective by drawing on information about similar panics elsewhere or reviewing the findings of the growing literature on child sexual abuse. Moreover, the voices in the media, in the aftermath of the Martensville scandal, confirmed the community's worst fears about the inadequacies of the criminal justice system in dealing with child sexual abuse allegations. The diverse
accounts presented in the media amounted to a Tower of Babel since the media adopted a pluralist position that tried to give everyone a voice. While it is not the objective of the media to do otherwise, clearly in such an environment there is scant possibility of closure, let alone consensus. While it seems not to have happened in Martensville, there remains one possibility, however: that of learning.
The Voices of Martensville

It is apparent that most residents of the Saskatoon area have an opinion about what happened in Martensville in 1992. Certainly, among interview subjects, despite vastly different points of view, almost everyone interviewed had a strongly held version of the events.

I attempted to interview as many of those directly involved as possible. Those invited for interviews included most of the accused, and most of the local (Saskatoon area) journalists who reported on the case. Individuals who were reported in the media were also contacted. Many who were contacted were wary. The first interview was with a police officer, one of the accused. Although somewhat reassured by the interviewer’s credentials as a criminal justice professional, he would not agree on the interview until he could “check out” the interviewer. We met in a location suggested by him and the interview proceeded only after he had asked his own series of questions. Once he had satisfied himself that the process was “legit,” the interview proceeded, and clearly, he was eager to tell his side of the story. This response to interview requests became a constant theme: unless directly referred by someone, there was initial reluctance to proceed with the interview until reassurances were received about the purpose of the interview. Despite reassurances, however, some would not agree to be interviewed.

Seven out of twenty-four requests for interviews were declined. Generally, women were more reluctant to consent and a majority of the declined interviews were by women. Government officials involved in the case, including crown prosecutors and child protection workers declined to be interviewed. The parents of some of the children likewise declined. One said: “I couldn’t deal with your perspective,” although I hadn’t expressed one. Some of
the investigating officers also declined. All but two of those who declined referred to the ongoing lawsuits as the reason for not speaking about the Martensville affair.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted in Martensville on two occasions, from November 30 to December 3, 1998 and May 15 to 20, 1999. One interview was conducted by telephone on May 24, 1999. Those interviewed included Martensville residents, investigators, officers of the court, several of the accused, reporters, child advocates and local politicians. In all, seventeen interviews were conducted—with thirteen men and four women. Before commencing the interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with a colleague who had lived in Martensville until 1994. The purpose of the pilot interview was to test the questions and get initial leads for interview subjects. In addition to the interviews, there were numerous encounters with Martensville and Saskatoon residents who offered perspectives on the events in question, but for a variety of reasons, were not formally interviewed. Some potential respondents who declined interviews nevertheless provided useful corroborating information in quickly imparting their perspective. Finally, a meeting was held on August 17, 2000 with Dr. John Yuille, a Professor of Psychology at the University of British Columbia who had testified as an expert witness at the Martensville trials.

The sampling technique was a modified snowball sampling method. That is, each interview subject was asked to provide names of other interview subjects who would add to the interviewer’s understanding of the events in Martensville. Most subjects tended to recommend others of similar views, so the technique was modified in order to ensure alternative viewpoints. This was done through direct calls to individuals who had been quoted in the media as having a particular perspective.
Description of Sample—Believers and Non-believers

The views on what happened in Martensville fall into two broad categories. On the one hand, there are the believers: those who believe that what the children said is literally true. On the other hand, there are the non-believers, who say that there is no material evidence that the abuse happened, and since it cannot be proven, it did not happen. Within each grouping, there is a range of views. The four accused who were interviewed were obviously “non-believers.” Of the balance of the sample, six were “non-believers” and five were “believers.” Only two out of the seventeen interview subjects held no discernible position about what happened. One, a politician, asked: “Does one know what went on?” The other, an investigator, took a professionally neutral position and studiously adhered to it.

Although divided as to belief in guilt or innocence, there were certain propositions that subjects held in common. Most believed that the media manipulated events through their reporting. Many were concerned that the politicians played to the gallery. Most were critical of the handling of the case. Some (particularly among the accused) pointed to mistakes made by the investigating officers. There was a consensus that the whole affair was a black mark for the justice system.

Many of the subjects spoke of conspiracies. Some were apprehensive about potential reprisals, spying, lawsuits. Both sides tended to be suspicious, and some were fearful. As mentioned above, each individual had to be assured of the researcher’s identity and the nature of the study before agreeing to an interview. Upon being satisfied that the study was academic in nature, most talked freely. There clearly was a need to talk about the events of those years in Martensville.

The Believers

The believers range from people who simply take the position that “children don’t lie,” to those who believe that child abuse is organized and rampant. Some of these believe that satanic ritual abuse occurs, although hidden from public view; that there are sex rings of
pedophiles and a conspiracy extending to high levels of society to cover up its prevalence. One subject of the study, a lawyer who attended all of the trials, said that despite the absence of material evidence, s/he\textsuperscript{28} believed that there was organized sexual abuse going on at the Sterling’s’ babysitting service. Another subject who believed that the children were ritually abused said simply: “They [the accused] got away with it.”

\textit{The Non-believers}

The non-believers range from several of the accused who remain angry at the system to those who followed the trials “looking for a shred of real evidence.” It is their view that child sexual abuse in Martensville was unproven. The one possible exception is with respect to Travis Sterling. Non-believers are divided on whether he was actually the one person who was guilty, or whether he was simply a scapegoat—that someone had to take a fall and he was it. The anger of the accused stems from the fact that their lives were turned upside-down and yet many were never cleared. Several are suing the crown and its agents. They don’t know whom, specifically, to blame. They are of the opinion that the investigation was seriously flawed, and that the investigators were misguided and unskilled. As one summed it up: “They [the investigators] were in way over their heads.” These objectors tend to be of the opinion that the crown prosecutors and many others were trying to make a name for themselves, and that politicians manipulated the situation for their own benefit. They are cynical and embittered. What both sides agree on is that the system failed.

\textsuperscript{28} Due to the size of the sample and the need to maintain the anonymity of the subjects, the gender will normally be disguised and “s/he” or “h/er” will be used throughout. Exceptions will be made when a viewpoint is apparently related to gender and is deemed to be of significance. Generally, opinions did not divide along gender lines. Of the four women interviewed, two were believers and two were non-believers.
Description of Sample—Professional or Group Perspective

The interview subjects were asked to explain what happened in Martensville from the standpoint of their particular occupational/professional/lay group. Based on their responses, and other information available (from media coverage and other responses to interview questions), they were categorized as to group perspective. The following groupings of the sample were thus identified: accused (4), residents (3), reporters (3), court workers (2) child advocates (2), politicians (2), investigators (1). It should be noted that the child advocates were both members of the “Believe the Children” Group. In addition to the three residents who were not members of another discernible grouping, six of the members of other groups are, or were, also residents.29 Thus, the sample contained nine Martensville residents and eight Saskatoon residents.

Each of the three residents who were not aligned with another group initially held the view that the accused were guilty. One changed h/her perspective and became a non-believer, saying that initially s/he had faith in the investigation, but that faith was called into question. The other two could be characterized as strong believers—both considered that satanic ritual abuse had occurred.

The reporters all said that they tried to stay neutral. However, each became a non-believer as the trials progressed. Each of the reporters considered that the adversarial justice process was incapable of handling a case of this nature.

The court workers (one a believer and one a non-believer) both considered that there was insufficient evidence to convict. The non-believer said that it was a case of “false memory.” The believer said that the criminal justice system was “not adequately prepared.”

The child advocates were both of the opinion that satanic ritual abuse had occurred.

29. It is not possible to say which members of which groups were residents without giving away the identity of some subjects.
Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed according to four issues: 1) Other professional or group accounts (question 7); 2) media coverage (questions 9-11); 3) explanatory accounts (questions 12-15); and 4) aftereffects (questions 16-19). The participants’ perceptions of each of these issues are summarized below.

Other Professional or Group Accounts

Eight groupings were identified by participants: the justice system, police, social services (also referred to as “social workers” or “therapists), the media, politicians, child advocates, ministers/churches and the public. All were mentioned by more than one participant. Views of believers and non-believers were congruent. That is to say, both believers and non-believers held similar perceptions about various groups. For example, three non-believers and one believer commented that the police and social services (therapists) held similar views that the accused were guilty. Seven non-believers and three believers made comments to the effect that the criminal justice system had failed or that people had “lost confidence in the justice system.” Despite the fact that some didn’t comment on this matter specifically it was possible to conclude from other responses that this view was held, to a greater or lesser extent, by all of the participants.

1. The justice system: Comments about the justice system tended to be terse. As previously noted, it was widely held that the system had failed. Comments such as: “The Justice Department failed—there were no checks and balances,” and “there was a lack of confidence in the justice system” reflected this point of view. One member of the justice system put it plainly: “The dominant view was that criminal justice system screwed up.” Some were of the opinion that the prosecutors were trying to make a name for themselves. Many participants in the study believed that there should be an inquiry into the events in Martensville.

30. Interview schedule in Appendix “A.”
2. **The police**: Although a sub-set of the criminal justice system, the police were singled out for specific commentary. Several of the study participants commented that the police initially held the view that the accused were guilty (despite the fact that several of the police were among the accused). One said that the police trusted in each other’s work. Another said that the police were trying to hold the “thin blue line.” An alternative (minority) point of view was that the police were divided. Several participants commented on mistakes made by the police. One referred to “over-zealous investigation.” Another said that the “investigator’s tactics were weak” and summarized the investigation as “badly handled.” One said that the fact that “Claudia Bryden was investigating her peers should have raised questions” and added that the police had “little training for this type of investigation.” Another referred to the “hodge-podge of jurisdiction” of the various police forces (the Martensville and Saskatoon police forces and the RCMP were all involved in the investigation). One said: “the police leaking information upset the system.”

3. **Social Services**: Social services was mentioned as another group that held that the accused were guilty throughout the piece. As one participant put it: “Social Services had no doubt in their minds that everything had happened.” One said: “[social services] believed that there was some serious stuff going on.” The reason given for this was that child protection workers “believed the children.” Another said: Social workers were looking through rose-coloured glasses. They were sympathetic to the children.” Yet another commented that while “most [of the people in the Saskatoon area] no-longer believe that it happened, some [including police, therapists and the church] still believe.”

4. **The media**: The media were widely perceived as a group that had changed its view. This was mentioned by several participants as having had an impact on the views of the public. Many believed that the media had a profound effect in creating and amplifying the panic. One said that the media “polarized the community.” Reporters stated that the media tried to be objective, but admitted that there were biases. As one put it: “No one
was objective… The media followed each other’s leads.” A reporter who did not think that the media were biased commented “reporters present side A and side B.” However, this view was not generally agreed upon. One non-media participant commented: “The media took us in the wrong direction,” and added: “The CBC developed the cult theme…” One said: “There’s no such thing as investigative journalism.” Another said: “I became very angry at the media.”

5. **Politicians:** It was widely held that the politicians were “trying to make hay of this…” As one participant put it: “The politicians shouldn’t have been there. It was politically expedient.” Another said: The politicians [Roy Romanow and Janice MacKinnon] came to town—they shouldn’t have.” However, it was noted that the politicians’ view of the matter changed. Initially they believed that the children had been abused. Later, they evidently agreed with the court.

6. **Child advocates:** The believers and non-believers, of course, held differing views of the “Believe the Children” group. One of the non-believers stated that for the Believe the Children group “facts meant nothing.” Another said that this group “put pressure on people to take sides.” For the believers, there was “no doubt about the charges.” One said that the We Believe the Children poster was “a most healing thing.”

7. **Ministers and churches:** Many people identified the Alliance and Baptist churches as having a clear position on the events. One participant commented that “[Alliance Church members] are still steadfast believers that this happened.” Two of those interviewed were members of the Alliance Church. Both were believers.

8. **The public:** A number of participants held the perspective that the community was polarized by the events in Martensville. Most agreed that initially people believed that “something wrong had happened” or, as one put it, “the dominant account was: ‘they’re guilty’.” As another put it: “a minority of the populace ‘sided with the defendants…” The social work account was the dominant account.” The vast majority of participants agreed that there were groups with different views. A narrow majority held that public
opinion shifted after the verdict when, as one put it “the group who questioned justice [Citizens for Truth and Justice] became more credible.”

**Media Coverage**

Almost everyone (with the exception of one non-believer—a reporter—and one believer) thought that media coverage was slanted or biased. “They reported everything from the children... They believed that things happened [and] implied that the accused were guilty.” The reason: “it sells papers.” In short, the views were that the Martensville affair was “a media event.” One non-believer said that the media “showed a lack of critical ability.” Another, a believer, said that the media “cynically characterize people as unthinking.” Several participants pointed to the satanic ritual abuse (SRA) story as an example of media manipulation. These commentators believed that SRA was overemphasized. One said that SRA “fed the info.” Others (non-believers) said that the media initially “sided with the victims” and assumed that the “accused were guilty.” One believer had the following perspective on the media:

> “The media made a mockery of the allegations. They engaged in propaganda. It was a witch-hunt. They polarized the situation.”

Many considered that sensationalism is built in (i.e., structural) to the mass media. Two participants referred to the emotionalism of coverage—the endless questions of “how do you feel?”—that the electronic media, in particular, pursued.

Several participants commented on specific media. The *StarPhoenix*, the CTV, Global and the CBC all drew praise or criticism depending on the perspective of the commentator (i.e., believer or non-believer). Initially the *StarPhoenix* was seen as “running with the story, then changed.” Global was seen as being sympathetic by some of the accused. A reporter commented that CTV and Global “took what they got. The CBC and the *StarPhoenix* tried to do more.” These attempts to do more were not seen in a positive
light. As one non-believer put it, “CBC was very much involved [in making it a media event]. It was overblown.”

It was generally agreed that there was a shift in media coverage. The StarPhoenix was singled out in this respect, as was Macleans. The Globe and Mail was referred to as “the official version.” Nevertheless, believers did not consider Globe and Mail reporter Roberts’ coverage as objective. One said: “he got his information from Marjalenob Repo” of the Citizens United for Truth and Justice. A reporter spoke of the change to the “mass hysteria” angle. He said: “certain media personalities [likely referring to the Globe and Mail’s coverage of Debbie Nathan] were involved.” Generally, those who were involved with the media were able to comment on media sources. Many participants in this study indicated a greater personal awareness of the workings of the media because of the Martensville affair.

Most participants believed that the media had had a major impact. One said that the media gave the prosecutors “a mandate to proceed.” Another agreed that the media “may have pressured the prosecutors to lay charges… They were pressured into something they weren’t prepared to handle.” Another said that the media “brought groups to the public” (i.e., introduced them to the wider community). Another commented: “[the media] shaped public opinion. The truth was left out.” One summed up the impact as follows: “Those charged have paid a supreme price [because of the coverage].”

Explanatory Accounts

The accused showed a consistent perspective on issues related to memory. They all commented negatively about the possibility of recovered memories. Their comments ranged from “garbage” to the more thoughtful “I don’t believe that you should rely on this.” Some participants had obviously reflected on the recovered memory debate. One non-believer said of recovered memories: “It is possible to have them, but traumatic experiences are remembered.” While two of the study participants believed that recovered memory was a factor (one referred to recovered memory as “the crux of things”), most did not find it
relevant. As one non-believer put it: “The kids were scared to say anything”—meaning that it was not a case of memory, but rather hesitation to speak of the matter.

The idea of false memory syndrome “came with the experts brought in by the court process.” Believers and non-believers alike saw the false memory syndrome account as being imported. However, there was general agreement amongst non-believers that it became more relevant as the trials progressed. One non-believer said: “That [false memory] is what it was.” The believers did not consider false memory syndrome as being relevant and two of the child advocates commented that it was the product of a political action group.

Believers and non-believers all considered that the satanic ritual abuse account had a major impact on the case. As one non-believer remarked, “satanic ritual abuse was a major discussion point. There was no evidence of it.” This, however, was the great divide between the believers and non-believers. To believe the children you had to believe that there was organized abuse going on at the baby-sitting service in Martensville. Four out of five believers were of the opinion that the organized ritual abuse was satanic in nature, although, the definition of what constituted ritual abuse was problematic. One, a survivor herself, said that being abused on a regular basis by one’s father (“raped in the bathtub”) qualified as satanic ritual abuse. Her rationale was that abuse was evil and if it occurred at a certain time and place each day, it was, in effect, a “ritual.”

None of those interviewed was familiar with the term “moral panic.” When a definition was given (see question 12, Appendix “A”), many of the non-believers found it apt. None of the believers found it so. A non-believer said, “the parents panicked. [Initially] there was a lack of trust for the police officers. If mothers weren’t out working, the children wouldn’t have been in daycare. It gave a push towards a traditional society.”

Aftereffects

One of the believers said: “Martensville became synonymous with evil.” A high school student commented that kids in Saskatoon called it “molesterville.” As one of the study
participants put it: "You didn’t say you were from Martensville. The town died." Several of
the children’s families moved away. One commentator said: "Martensville has two groups:
Mennonites and Saskatoonians. The first group is still there." However, residents said that
the community has healed and that the children are healing.

Along with the children, the most affected people, according to the study participants,
were the accused, the two initial investigators (especially Claudia Bryden), and the
prosecutors. The accused were financially devastated by legal costs. Those who lived in
Martensville moved away. The Sterlings moved out of the area altogether. One of the
accused summarized the effects as follows:

The public didn’t learn a damn thing—there was no inquiry... People got fed up with the
details. They became desensitized—nothing could upset them anymore. There is no outlet.
The media are a one-way street. People crave information even if it’s wrong... Personally, I
feel it every day...[cries]. The truth doesn’t sell newspapers. There was no investigation into
truth. Things were taken at face value. It’s a ‘no win’ situation. There are two sides and you
can’t force them to read it [the results of the trials]. For the police force if you’re charged,
you’re guilty—it’s black and white.

I have become more critical. I always doubt [media coverage]. I look for facts—try to get all
the info. The court excludes evidence...

Another participant echoed the process of initial fascination with the media story,
then anger, then disgust and frustration:

The community reacted with anger. They wanted more answers... But they got sick of it.
There was frustration more than anything.

Another of the accused offered the following summary:

Groups pulled together. Many of the [principals] developed health problems. They took
abuse from the public. I developed diabetes and have had sleeping problems. People
recognize me. I lost my job. I had the support of family and friends. Nothing else good came
of it...

Some of the participants did point to positive changes, however:

[The events] created the motivation for a child centre. Changes were made in the way
children are interviewed. The police are more hesitant to take cases like that—take the
children to an expert...
Another participant (a non-believer) gave the following summary:

Those charged have paid a supreme price. They were harassed beyond all repair. Most people put it into the closet—it’s not talked about. Personally, it has reinforced my views that there are two sides. You have to be careful how you express views. I am upset at how this affects defendants, parents, kids. A couple of kids are still going to the MacNeil clinic. Claudia Bryden and the crown prosecutors were very affected... We have never gotten to the bottom of this. I came away with more questions than answers... The media did as well as they could have. The police have to look at how they do their job. There should have been a review, but there are court cases pending.

Believers were equally convinced that the aftereffects were negative, but pointed to different aspects:

There has been a silencing of therapists—an undermining of frontline workers. A government child advocacy position has been established, but it has no real power. They have attempted to set up one agency to deal with child abuse cases—it is a farce. The community hardened up quickly. The false memory people did an awesome job.

Implicit in each of these testimonies is a loss of innocence. People refer to hardening of attitudes, cynicism, frustration and disgust. It is clear that no one won. Both sides express a mood of vigilance. All would agree that you have to provide a safe environment for children and likely would agree with one participant who suggested that “all daycare centres should be licensed.” All agreed that there is a need for changes in the way that the justice system handles child abuse cases.
Part II

Why did it Happen?
4

Theoretical interpretations of the events in Martensville

It is apparent from the analysis of media coverage and the interviews of participants in the previous chapters that a great deal was going on in Martensville. Some of what was happening is transparent; some is hidden. In either case, the factors that gave rise to the Martensville episode bear closer examination. Certainly, the devastation of the lives of many of the participants in the drama suggests a practical reason for asking: “Why did it happen?” Moreover, the initial panic, ensuing ideological conflict and social turmoil of Martensville strongly recommend it as a subject of sociological inquiry.

The *Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* defines sociology as the study of societies, with two main aspects:

> ... the observation and description of social phenomena, and the articulation and application to these phenomena of a coherent conceptual scheme (Bullock and Stallybrass, 1977:587).

The first three chapters have been devoted to the observation and description of the Martensville scandal. The present chapter will focus on the latter task: the identification of a conceptual scheme for understanding the events that erupted in this small town in Saskatchewan in the early 1990’s.

In order to apply such a scheme, it seems reasonable to examine what happened in Martensville with respect to explanatory accounts advanced for other child sexual abuse scandals. Five such accounts have been identified: Satanic ritual abuse, recovered memories, false memory syndrome, moral panic and mass hysteria. The question to be asked is do any of these accounts yield a conceptual scheme, or theoretical explanation, relevant to Martensville?
Satanic Ritual Abuse

A new type of sex crime was discovered during the 1980's—the abuse of very young children in rituals performed by robed and hooded Satanists who also happened to be their day care providers (deYoung, 1997: 19)

In descriptions of the Martensville scandal, the alleged abuse of the children was widely referred to as “satanic ritual abuse.” According to media accounts, the scene at the bail hearings in early June 1992 was “pandemonium as press and public crammed into the tiny courtroom to hear what happened. The allegations were horrific: Little children were sodomized, beaten, thrown in cages, threatened with guns, knives and ropes. There were hints and whispers of ritual abuse, covens and something called ‘The Devil's Church’.”

Debbie Nathan, an El Paso, Texas, journalist has researched dozens of ritual abuse cases. She is quoted in the Globe and Mail as saying that the trial of The “Martensville Nine”—as the accused came to be called—resembles many trials in the U.S. in recent years. According to Nathan, these trials have resulted in both acquittals and convictions in the face of abundant rumour and an absence of material evidence. Nathan states that since the early eighties, there has been an epidemic of false allegations of satanic-ritual abuse against thousands of people. Each of these cases has been accompanied by outcries from religious zealots, law-enforcement agencies and self-styled cult experts. The atmosphere surrounding these cases is characteristic, in Nathan’s view, of “hysterical contagion.”

“These people believe satanic-ritual abuse is widespread,” says Nathan. She notes that “sexual abuse is often in the background of the investigators,” and adds: “if you look at these cases of ritual abuse as a whole, one distinguishing feature seems to be the psychopathology of the investigators.”

While Nathan’s view has gained increasing public support since Martensville, its acceptance is by no means universal. Many believed the allegations of satanic ritual abuse in Martensville. Some hold these views to this day.

31. The Globe and Mail, D1, 94/02/19.
32. Ibid.
The ritualized abuse of children is defined by Lawrence Pazder as “repeated physical, emotional mental, and spiritual assaults combined with a systematic use of symbols and secret ceremonies designed to turn a child against itself, family, society, and God” (Pazder quoted in Lanning, 1992: 115). Lanning points out that the definition has little use for law enforcement personnel. Sara Scott defines ritual abuse as: “systematic physical, sexual and emotional abuse perpetrated by groups using symbols and rituals and supporting their practices with claims to an occult/religious belief system” (Scott, 1998: footnote #4).

Michelle Remembers, one of the first accounts of satanic ritual abuse was published in Canada in 1980. Under hypnosis, Michelle Smith recounted abuse at the hands of a satanic cult to her psychiatrist, Lawrence Pazder (Smith and Pazder, 1980). Several authors point to Michelle Remembers as having had a powerful influence on subsequent accounts of ritual abuse throughout North America and Northern Europe (Nathan, 1991; Victor, 1993; Ofshe and Watters, 1994; Nathan and Snedeker, 1995: Prendergast, 1995; La Fontaine, 1994, 1998). Satan’s Underground, by Laren Stratford, was apparently modeled on Smith’s account (Stratford’s book was later exposed as a fake). There are indications that Stratford was consulted by parents of children involved in the McMartin nursery school case in 1984 (Nathan and Snedeker, 1995). By 1986, Finkelhor and his associates had identified 36 cases of allegations of ritual abuse in nursery schools (La Fontaine, 1998: 56).

A social anthropological approach to the satanic ritual abuse phenomenon yields particular insights. Jean La Fontaine takes such an approach in her 1998 study of satanic child abuse in Britain in the early 1980’s. Such allegations became common in North America in the early 1980’s and in Britain and other Northern European countries shortly thereafter. La Fontaine suggests that witchcraft has been seen by the modernist project of the developed countries as being a product of an earlier stage of evolution. Thus, witchcraft is seen as being either a relic of past European society, or a product of pagan third world societies. While this view was common in the late 19th and early 20th century ethnographies, she finds it odd that it has never been reconsidered:
To deny the relevance of comparison with other cultures is to assume that Western culture is different in kind from all the others. This unique position may be believed to have been achieved by science’s substitution of a rational understanding of the world for one dominated by powers of good and evil. However, the allegations of devil worship show a similarity between early modern Europe and the present that throws doubt on the notion that Western culture as a whole made a quantum leap that cut it off from the beliefs of the past (1998:35-36).

Cases of satanic ritual abuse began to be reported in the United States in significant numbers in the mid-1980s. Some of the most notorious examples are: 1) The McMartin Preschool, Manhattan Beach, California (1984-90) in which the owner, Virginia McMartin and six teachers were arrested, although 18 months of pretrial hearings and a two-and-a-half year trial produced no convictions. 2) The Fells Acres Day School in Malden, Massachusetts (1984), which resulted in the conviction of Violet Amirault and her two children (a son and a daughter). 3) Wee Care, Maple Wood, New Jersey's Landmark case (1987-88), which resulted in the conviction of Margaret Kelly Michaels. 4) Little Rascals (1992) Edenton, North Carolina, described as the nation's largest satanic ritual abuse prosecution with seven people brought to trial and two, co-owner Robert Kelly and the cook, Dawn Wilson, convicted. Each of these cases was described as being characterized by a “witch hunt” atmosphere, a lack of physical evidence, questionable techniques of interrogation of children, and the overturning of many of the initial convictions on appeal.

In Britain, (despite one atypical 1982 case in which there was confirmed evidence of ritual abuse), the first allegations of ritual abuse surfaced to media attention in 1987. Allegations rose to a peak in 1990 and then tapered off by 1992 (La Fontaine 1994:7; La Fontaine 1998:58). La Fontaine finds two clusters in the geographical distribution of cases.

33. Information on these trials can be found at the following websites:
www.mit.edu:8001//people/harris/witchhunt/who_are_e7

34. As in the Martensville case, the Fells Acres case resulted in the conviction of sexual assault being upheld for the son of the owner of the daycare centre. The convictions of Ms. Amirault and her daughter were overturned on appeal, but subsequently upheld by the Massachusetts Supreme Court on 25 March 1997. In the Wee Care case, Margaret Kelly spent six years in prison, but eventually had her conviction overturned on appeal. The convictions in the Little Rascal case were overturned on appeal, but separate sexual assault charges have been brought against Robert Kelly.
The highest concentrations of cases were clustered in the South East (including London) and the East Midlands. Together, these two regions account for about two thirds of the total cases reported. One possible explanation for such clustering is that an organization performing satanic rituals was responsible for the abundance of cases in each of these areas. La Fontaine considers this possibility and rejects it. She says that if the same organized group were operating in these two areas one would expect to see similarities in the allegations. Such was not the case (1998: 59-61).

A U.S. Government-funded study of ritualistic child abuse was completed in the fall of 1994. The researchers obtained responses from over 6900 clinicians (psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social workers) and from over 4600 agencies (county District Attorneys, departments of social services and municipal law enforcement agencies). They reviewed over 12,000 cases of suspected ritual abuse. However, when they looked for cases that they could say with some confidence actually exhibited evidence of abuse, they found only one.

Gail Goodman, a psychologist at the University of California at Davis, led the study. Goodman summarizes the results in the following way:

After scouring the country, we found no evidence for large-scale cults that sexually abuse children...While you would not expect to find corroborating evidence in many sexual abuse cases, you would expect it when people claim the rituals involved murders, and the reported cases come from district attorneys or police...

Sometimes, panics over ritual abuse have increased in intensity or frequency to the point where a city, state or federal government has ordered a study or an inquiry. In addition to the U.S. study, there have been Government-funded studies in the U.K. (La Fontaine, 1998).


All of these studies have reached the conclusion that satanic/sadistic ritual abuse is an extremely rare phenomenon despite the claims by its adherents and the intense media interest. The U.S. Government-funded study found one family involved in incest with a male child during satanic rituals. One case of satanic ritual abuse involving torture of children and simulated murder of infants was found during the Utah investigation.

Reviewing the allegations of ritual abuse made in Britain between 1987 and 1992, La Fontaine (1998) observes that the publicity that the cases received was out of all proportion to the scale of the problem indicated. At their peak, they represented about 10 per cent of all cases of organized abuse. Organized abuse (“involving multiple perpetrators collaborating to abuse children”) itself constitutes less than 3 per cent of reported cases of child abuse (La Fontaine, 1998:58).

Hard evidence of satanic ritual abuse is virtually non-existent. Were it to occur, a likely setting would be the unlicensed daycare centre. Yet, as several authors have noted, the sexual molestation of children in daycare centres, or by organized groups, is low when compared to that by individual relatives, neighbours, or older friends (Goode and Ben-Yehuda: 58; Gardner: 14; Jenkins, 1992).

Studies of ritual abuse tend to fall into three broad judgement categories. There are those who conclude that ritual abuse exists and is widespread (e.g. Noblitt and Perskin, 1995), those who take a non-committal approach (Sakheim and Devine, 1992) and those who take a skeptical view (Richardson, Best and Bromley, 1991; Victor, 1992; Nathan and Snedeker, 1995).

There can be no doubt that many are profiting from SRA cases. For example, Colin Ross, a psychiatrist and author of a manual on the treatment of satanic ritual abuse estimates

that he has been involved, as therapist or consultant, in three hundred cases of multiple personality disorder (officially renamed “dissociative identity disorder” by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994). In each of these cases, the subject had memories of involvement in a satanic cult. Ross states that in none of those cases has the reality of the memories been objectively verified (Ross, vii). Ross maintains a skeptical stance, but treats the symptoms nevertheless.

Jenkins finds that the outbreak of ritual abuse cases began in Britain in the late 1980’s and can be traced to ideas and materials exchanged among a relatively few individuals. He thus concludes:

> The essential context of a problem is defined by broad social trends, but the specific manifestation and impact of that issue can in large measure be determined by a relatively small number of activists, either acting in small groups and even as individuals (1992: 231).

Despite wide spread acceptance of La Fontaine’s conclusions about ritual abuse in Brittain, Sara Scott (1998) criticizes La Fontaine’s research:

La Fontaine’s research was based on questionnaires completed by police and social workers and an examination of files referred to the Official Solicitor between 1988 and 1991. Her 35 page report includes 18 tables, but no quotations or even descriptions of comments made on questionnaires or in case files. Bald lists appear of ‘features mentioned’ (‘Hats/headgear’, ‘Abortion’, ‘Drinking urine’, ‘Pentagrams’) along with the frequency with which they were recorded in allegations, but with no indication of the context from which they were extracted. In her later book (La Fontaine, 1998), more detailed analysis of transcripts of social work interviews feature twice, but again they are lists of ritual features (more hats and candles mentioned where corroboration between accounts from different children has been claimed). In La Fontaine’s interpretation of these, any similarities suggest collusion, while discrepancies are evidence of independent invention. This is a book the conclusions of which readers must accept on the author’s authority. There is no account of the research methodology; data is presented only as snippets torn from case files and conversations. There is no attempt to explore the lived experience behind the text - of either the researcher or her informants” (1998, 3.4).

Scott’s criticisms point to a possible methodological flaw, but do not invalidate the conclusions drawn by Lafontaine. The point Scott raises in the last sentence highlights a theme we will see repeated in the literature on recovered memories. The debate is over an epistemological schism between those who demand physical evidence in order to verify a phenomenon and those who focus on the “lived experience” of the informants.
Recovered Memories/False Memories

None of the participants interviewed concerning the allegations of child sexual abuse in Martensville believed that the children were recovering repressed memories. The consensus was that the children were simply providing information in response to the investigators’ questions. Neither those who believe that the allegations were founded, nor those who do not, thought that the children were subject to recovered memories. However, some of the participants indicated that the debate about false memories/recovered memories did have an effect on the Martensville case.

Shocking cases such as the McMartin and Fells Acres daycare scandals in 1984 brought child abuse to the public’s attention. The controversy over false allegations of child sexual abuse was the subject of a series of issues of Augustus in 1986 and 1987. These articles featured psychiatrist Lee Coleman’s critique of Roland Summit’s Child Accommodation Syndrome and the contention that “children never lie about sexual abuse” (Coleman, 1986).

Beginning in about 1992, a debate between clinicians and memory researchers began to rage over the question of recovered memories of child sexual abuse. The polarization that occurred is attributable to vastly different scholarly traditions. Memory researchers are generally cognitive psychologists with no clinical experience. Those who contribute to the literature on child sexual abuse tend to be clinicians who treat victims of trauma (Courtois, 1997:216). Clinicians tend to argue that the symptoms must be treated by responding to the patient’s perception, whereas researchers cite the need for evidence as to whether the phenomenon is material. This debate has both fueled, and been fueled by, the debate within the wider society. Defense attorneys may argue that an absence of corroborating physical evidence leaves open too great a risk of unjust conviction. Child protection advocates and prosecutors often take the position that children do not lie.

Abused children, according to Herman (1992), resort to a wide array of psychological defenses in order to wall off the abuse “from consciousness and memory, so that it did not
really happen, or [it is] minimized, rationalized, and excused...” Herman observes that child victims prefer to believe that the abuse did not occur. It may thus be kept secret from oneself through denial, through voluntary suppression of thoughts, or through dissociative reactions. Herman cites studies that link the severity of childhood abuse with the degree of familiarity with dissociative states:

They may learn to ignore severe pain, to hide their memories in complex amnesias, to alter their sense of time, place, or person, and to induce hallucinations or possession states. Sometimes these alterations of consciousness are deliberate, but often they become automatic and feel alien and involuntary (1992:102).

Dissociation and amnesia underlie the repression, or forgetting, associated with trauma, but according to Yapko (1997), it is not known how common this phenomenon is. Nor is there a way of distinguishing between repression and forgetting (1997:29). In their review of the evidence, Schacter, Norman and Koutstaal (1997) conclude that some experiences of childhood abuse may be forgotten for a time and later remembered. However, the evidence suggests that it is considerably less likely that a series of highly traumatic incidents could be completely forgotten and later recovered. Schacter and his colleagues also note that there is clear evidence that illusory memories can be engendered. Certainly, memories are vulnerable to distortion (1997: 88).

A significant body of both popular and scholarly literature addresses the phenomenon of “false memories,” and false accusations of sexual abuse. Increasingly, since 1990, investigative journalists have examined the growing incidence of false memories. Examples are Nathan (1990), and a series of articles by Sifford in the Philadelphia Inquirer between November 1991 and February 1992, followed by an explosion of articles in 1992: e.g., Taylor (1992), Goleman (1992); Sauer and Okerblom (1992). Books and articles by concerned clinicians, (Ganway, 1991; Gardner, 1991), were followed by scholarly articles (Loftus and Ketchum, 1994; Ofshe and Watters, 1994) that increasingly focused on the deleterious effects of recovered memory therapy. More recently, a number of empirical
studies on memory have cast doubt on the possibility that there can be widespread recovery of "repressed" memories (e.g., Poole, et al., 1995; Schacter, et al., 1997).

The recovered memory therapy movement dates from the late 1980's. One of the factors in its spread was the publication of Courage to Heal by Bass and Davis. Starting from the premise that "if you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were," (1988: 22) these authors go on to make the following claim:

When you first remember your abuse or acknowledge its effects, you may feel tremendous relief. Finally there is a reason for your problems. There is someone, and something to blame (1988: 173).

With this as its central tenet, this book became the bible of the recovered memory movement, selling half a million copies by 1992. It would appear that cases of recovered memories of incest and child abuse (including cases of satanic ritual abuse or SRA) began to increase exponentially following the book's publication. It is noteworthy that material on ritual abuse is included in Bass and Davis's book, along with a citation of Michelle Remembers (1988:86; 345-347; 417-421). Professional interest in SRA likewise increased. However, professional interest apparently peaked about 1992 and has since dropped off considerably. It seems likely that the increasing critical scrutiny in the popular press from 1992 on played a major role in the waning of credence in recovered memories.37

Another factor in turning the tide was a non-profit organization known as the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF), formed in March 1992. The Foundation has a Scientific and Professional Advisory Board composed of well-known researchers and

37. A scan of the Medline and PsycInfo data bases for articles (both credulous and skeptical) on SRA yielded the following total number of articles by year:
   - 1984 - 1 article
   - 1986 - 1 article
   - 1987 - 1 article
   - 1989 - 3 articles
   - 1990 - 22 articles
   - 1992 - 36 articles
   - 1993 - 21 articles
   - 1995 - 16 articles
clinicians from the fields of psychiatry, psychology, social work, law and education. The FMSF has lobbied actively with practitioners from these fields to restrict the harm resulting from false memories of abuse. The Foundation’s stated purpose is to: 1) analyze the spread of “False Memory Syndrome,” 2) work towards preventing new cases, and 3) provide aid to victims of FMS. Despite its credentials and noble-sounding aims, however, the FMSF is considered by some observers to be simply an advocacy group.38

The FMSF states that, increasingly, individuals in therapy came to believe that they suffered from “repressed memories” of incest and sexual abuse. While accepting that many reports of incest and sexual abuse are true, the Foundation took the position that delayed memories are too often the result of a “therapeutic” program that actually serves to generate false memories. When the memory is distorted, or confabulated, the result can be what has been called the “False Memory Syndrome.” In the view of the FMSF, False Memory Syndrome has a “devastating effect on the victim and typically produces a continuing dependency on the very program that creates the syndrome.” False Memory Syndrome not only affects the psychological well being of the primary victim, but also that of the primary victim’s family through false accusations of incest and sexual abuse.39

The FMSF adopted the following definition of False Memory Syndrome by Dr. John F. Kihlstrom, Professor of Psychology at Yale University:

[A] condition in which a person's identity and interpersonal relationships are centered around a memory of traumatic experience which is objectively false but in which the person strongly believes. Note that the syndrome is not characterized by false memories as such. We all have memories that are inaccurate. Rather, the syndrome may be diagnosed when the memory is so deeply ingrained that it orients the individual's entire personality and lifestyle, in turn disrupting all sorts of other adaptive behavior. The analogy to personality disorder is intentional. False memory syndrome is especially destructive because the person assiduously avoids confrontation with any evidence that might challenge the memory. Thus, it takes on a life of its own, encapsulated, and resistant to correction. The person may become so focused

38. Interview with Dr. John Yuille, a UBC Forensic Psychologist who specializes in child sexual abuse allegations and the reliability of children’s evidence. Dr. Yuille stated that some of the scientists who are associated with the FMSF have put advocacy before professional objectivity.
39. False Memory Syndrome Foundation website: www.fmsonline.org/
on the memory that he or she may be effectively distracted from coping with the real
problems in his or her life. 40

The methodology adopted by the FMSF has been to look for patterns in the reports of
recovered memories of sexual abuse. The patterns identified prompted serious questions
about the assumption that memories of abuse were always true. In virtually every case, the
subject was facing emotional and psychological distress. Often, the precipitating event for
this distress (e.g., job loss or change, divorce, eating disorder, relationship problem, birth or
death in the family) was not addressed in therapy. Typically the individual showed radically
changed behavior; claiming a new malady of repressed memory syndrome. Often a
redefined personal history occurred, causing the subject to assume a new identity and refuse
to have contact with anyone who did not share the beliefs of abuse.

A variety of memory enhancement techniques are used to recover “memories” of
abuse. These techniques include hypnosis, sodium amytal, dream interpretation, guided
imagery, journaling, body massages, participation in survivor groups, and reading of self-
help books.

In 1995, it was reported that such practices were used somewhat by about 25% of
Ph.D.-level psychologists in the U.S. and Great Britain, (Poole, et al., 1995). The problem
with these practices, in the opinion of the FMSF, is that they increase the risk of influence
and suggestibility. Research in the use of hypnosis, for example, shows that images arising
from hypnosis are often strongly held as accurate, may be rich in details and may have a
strong emotional content. None of these attributes indicates historical accuracy, however.
Some of the memories elicited may be historically accurate, some distorted or confabulated,
and some false.

In 1993, the American Medical Association passed a resolution on the dangers of
misapplication of these techniques. Both the AMA and the American Psychiatric
Association have stated that “…there is no completely accurate way of determining the

40. Ibid.
validity of reports in the absence of corroborating information.” Of the professional associations, the AMA has taken the strongest stance against recovered memories as evidenced by the following statement, issued in June 1994, by the Council on Scientific Affairs of the AMA:

The AMA considers recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse to be of uncertain authenticity, which should be subject to external verification. The use of recovered memories is fraught with problems of potential misapplication.  

There can be little doubt that the FMSF has had a major impact on the decreasing incidence of false memories of abuse. By 1994, the FMSF had tracked 800 cases where a complaint of child abuse had been made based on recovered memories. While child abuse is a criminal offense, 90% of the actions were civil suits. Of the civil suits, two-thirds were dropped, dismissed or concluded in favor of the accused. One in twelve criminal cases resulted in a conviction.

On the other hand, many people have retracted their claims of abuse. Over half of the retractors who contact the FMSF say that they plan a lawsuit against their therapists. In July of 1995, a retractor in Minneapolis was awarded $2.5 million dollars in a malpractice lawsuit against a psychiatrist. Since early 1995, there have been significant changes in the way recovered memory cases are handled by the courts. Special pre-trial hearings on the scientific status of repressed memories have been held to determine the admissibility of testimony. Some courts have insisted on verifiable evidence of the alleged wrongdoing.

The American Psychological Association reflected the research findings about recovered memory when it stated: “The reality is that most people who are victims of childhood sexual abuse remember all or part of what happened to them” (APA Office of Communication, August, 1995). There is no evidence to show that it is essential to “dig out” memories for healing. Memory research indicates that there is no evidence for a special
place that protects a memory from natural decay. There is substantial evidence that memories can be inaccurate.⁴²

A number of research studies have shown that it is remarkably easy to influence people so that they come to believe in memories that are false (Garry and Loftus, 1994). The argument that a traumatic memory is not subject to the ordinary processes of memory such as misperceptions, distortions, decay and change has been shown to have no scientific basis. Memories of events, whether they are traumatic or not, are reconstructed. Consequently, all memories are subject to change.

According to Yuille, Tymofievich and Marxsen (1995), misguided therapists in the role of investigators have increased the number of false allegations of child sexual abuse. Yuille and his colleagues summarize the debate between the “false memory syndrome” and repression in the following way:

Both of the extremes in this debate hold that this is a widespread phenomenon, with one side asserting that the recovered memories are genuine, while the other holds that they are not. Neither of these two tenets is supported by hard evidence. We simply do not know how prevalent the recovery of repressed memories is. Nor do we know what proportion, if any, are genuine. We do not even know whether such repression exists at all (1995: 39-40).

Hacking (1995) discusses the current “epidemic” of child abuse in the context of the sciences of memory:

We do not examine anymore whether incest is evil. To do so would be to talk about subjective values. Instead we move to science and ask who remembers incest. About memory there can be objective scientific knowledge -- or so we have been schooled (1995: 220).

As Hacking notes, Freud made one of the earliest attempts to document aspects of child sexual abuse in his female patients. His revelations shocked the medical community and led to widespread opposition. He was later forced to recant the seduction theory of hysteria, taking the position that many of the accounts could be explained by unfulfilled

⁴². Ibid.
fantasies that were rooted in Oedipal desires rather than actual circumstances (1995: 192-197). It seems that Freud had crossed the line in trying to examine the incest taboo directly. In an analysis of Freud and the recovered memory debate, Kimball (1999) observes:

In a patriarchal society one barrier to respecting essential truths is the failure of psychoanalysis and the wider society to name the father as a perpetrator. From the medical literature of France and Germany in the late 19th century to the current False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FSMF), naming the father has stimulated disbelief and denial (1999: 68).

The reason for the resurgence of the incest taboo is thought by Hacking and others to be the product of a clash between competing ideologies of the family. He cites the work of anthropologist Jean Comaroff who attributes the resurgence of the incest taboo to a challenge to the family. It is Hacking’s thesis that the sciences of memory provide the terrain for this confrontation (1995: 126).

Hacking coins the term “memoro-politics,” and it is useful to consider the political confrontations based on memory (such as that between the False Memory Syndrome Foundation and the various schools of recovered memory therapy) in this light. The term “memoro-politics” is drawn from Foucault’s anatomo- and bio-politics, which he considered to be the two poles of the relations of power in the modern era (Foucault, 1978). Hacking suggests (1995: 215) that the mind (soul) is missing from Foucault’s schema. Yet, Foucault’s views on power may provide some clues as to what underlies the panics related to child abuse.

Memoro-politics, Hacking believes, has succeeded to the point that “we have come to think of ourselves, our character, and our souls as very much formed by our past.” Yet memory is imperfect and to base one’s life on false memories, contrary-memories or “wrong-forgetting” (which he collectively terms “deceptive-memory”) is to be led into a form of false consciousness (1995: 259-260).

On the other side of this equation, Kimball (1999) finds that the political context of the recovered memory debate has “contributed to the denial of essential truths, especially the
truth of woman’s testimonies of abuse by male relatives” (1999:68). Kimball notes that truth and fantasy are tangled in people’s lives in ways that are difficult to separate. Because of these ambiguities, she cautions against labeling memories true and false. Rather, she admonishes us to acknowledge the complexities of the human mind so that “the realities of abuse and the possibilities of reconstruction of the past...can be accurate in their essentials and useful guides to the future” (1999:68-69).

While there has been a growing body of research and professional opinion that calls into question the basic tenets of recovered memory therapy, its popularity, in some quarters, remains undiminished. This relates, in part, to its grounding in the emotions rather than cognition, and in its appeal to victims’ redemptive activism.

Mass Hysteria

Some authors have written about false allegations of child abuse or satanic ritual abuse as a form of hysteria. These accounts are based on the notion that the recent outbreak of daycare scandals is a kind of popular delusion. A classical treatment of popular delusions can be found in Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds (Mackay, 1841, 1980). Recent works deal with popular delusion, variously termed “mass hysteria,” “hysterical contagion,” or “mass sociogenic illness by proxy” as a factor in the child abuse panics (Gardner, 1991; Ofshe and Watters, 1994; Nathan and Snedeker, 1995; Showalter, 1997; Jenkins, 1998). These works all refer to witch-hunts and describe either the witch-hunts of the middle ages or of Salem as a metaphor for what has been happening. This metaphor bears further examination.

Hacking warns against casual invocation of witch-hunts without serious historical study (1995: 118). Witch-hunts are widely seen as being the repressive response to religious conflicts. Erikson (1956) says of witchcraft:
Perhaps no other crime in history has been a better index to social disruption and change, for outbreaks of witchcraft mania have generally taken place in societies which are experiencing a shift of religious focus—societies... confronting a relocation of boundaries (1966: 153-154).

Marvin Harris states that the witchcraft craze was created and sustained by the governing classes to suppress the Christian messianism of the 13th to 17th centuries. He points out that military-messianic uprisings were common during the reformation. These outbreaks of messianic fervor "were directed against the monopoly of wealth and power held by the governing classes" (1974: 193). Then as now, however, many of the people were willing accomplices in this project. Harris accounts for this process in the following way:

The practical significance of the witch mania therefore was that it shifted responsibility for the crisis of late medieval society from both Church and state to imaginary demons in human form. Preoccupied with the fantastic activities of these demons, the distraught, alienated, pauperized masses blamed the rampant Devil instead of the corrupt clergy and the rapacious nobility. Not only were the Church and state exonerated, but they were made indispensable (1974: 205).

*Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* is one of the first accounts of "moral epidemics." According to Mackay, sorcery did not become a crime of any great importance in Europe until the reign of Charlemagne (c. 800 A.D.) After this period, prosecutions for witchcraft frequently occurred:

It was a crime imputed with so much ease, and repelled with so much difficulty, that the powerful, whenever they wanted to ruin the weak, and could fix no other imputation upon them, had only to accuse them of witchcraft to ensure their destruction (Mackay, 1980: 472).

There are many cases of people, whose "crimes" were clearly political or religious, but who were executed for witchcraft. These include the exterminations of the Stedinger in 1234 and the Templars from 1307 to 1313 and the execution of Joan of Arc in 1429. All were examples of this phenomenon and have been well documented (1980: 473).

Mackay observes that witches were increasingly burned in various parts of Europe from the beginning of the fifteenth century. However, "(a)as a natural consequence of the severe persecution, the crime, or the pretenders to it, increased." As fears of witchcraft increased amongst the general population, the Catholic hierarchy began to impute it to
religious sects who were pioneers of the Reformation and posed a threat to the Church of Rome (1980: 477). MacKay notes that like the Catholics, those charged were firm believers in the crime. Later, Lutherans and Calvinists became zealous witch burners themselves, so deeply rooted was the prejudice against witchcraft (1980: 479).

Observers who refer to hysteria are, in effect, presenting a diagnosis of social pathology. Gardner, a forensic psychiatrist, presents a social psychiatric examination of the factors underlying what he refers to as the "sex abuse obsession" of the late twentieth century:

1. Sex abuse prevention programs—While admittedly necessary and useful, such programs also cause harm via "the churning up and promulgating of sexual fantasies and the contribution thereby that they make to the false sex abuse phenomenon" (1991: 17-18).
2. The ubiquity of environmental sexual stimuli—Progressive relaxation of restrictions on sexually explicit material available through the mass media sexualizes children and may lead to false allegations (1991: 19-21).
3. Changes in child custody laws—Before the 1970's the "tender years presumption" meant that mothers were generally awarded custody. This presumption was challenged by fathers in the mid-'70s and replaced with the "best interests of the child presumption." This change led to more frequent and increasingly bitter child custody disputes. In such an atmosphere, a mother's allegation of child sex abuse became a weapon increasingly employed (1991: 23-24).
4. Psychodynamic factors—Various psychological mechanisms on the part of parents and others can increase the likelihood of allegations of child sexual abuse. These include:
   • vicarious gratification—sexual desires may be satisfied through identification with victim or perpetrator;
   • projection—unacceptable thoughts and feelings are projected onto others;
   • voyeurism—the salacious aspects of child abuse cases are of interest to many;
• release of anger—the frustrations of modern life lead to pent-up anger that needs release;
• displacement of blame—alleged child abuse may provide an opportunity for parents to blame others for psychological symptoms exhibited by children;
• substitution—in some incest cases, a mother may facilitate sexual relations between her daughter and her husband and thus avoid them herself;
• suggestibility—individuals are able to suspend disbelief and accept the exhortations of charismatic leaders;
• greed—damage awards and the financial interests of lawyers, therapists and expert witnesses who fire up the general public for the financial gain of many, but to the detriment of children who may be traumatized in the process (1991: 25-43).

5. Validators and other examiners—Gardner’s experience, writing at the mid-point of the child abuse panics of the 1980s and 90s, was that the vast majority of the evaluations of child sexual abuse showed significant deficiencies in the techniques employed. The problems with such examiners identified by Gardner are a lack of training and a conceptual framework such that they were often referred to as “validators,” whose chief role was to interview the children and validate the allegations of sexual abuse. The validation process is founded on the false premise that “children never lie,”—that since young children generally have no prior experience of sexual relations, they would not fabricate the details of sexual abuse. The techniques for ascertaining whether children know the difference between the truth and a lie have tended to be overly simplistic, when in reality, young children have difficulty differentiating between fact and fantasy in many situations. The use of techniques such as naming body parts and referring to anatomically correct dolls have the effect of directing the child’s attention to the fact that the interviewer wants to talk about sex. Other approaches that were found to be common were: the use of leading or yes/no questions; a belief in the preposterous and the selective
ignoring of the impossible; use of invalid “indicators” of sexual abuse; coercive techniques ("you can go when you tell me what really happened.") and a tendency to ignore the accuser and accused and focus on the child only (1991: 45-68).

The aspects of Gardner’s work that are based on his clinical experience provide what might be termed an “etiology of false allegations of child abuse.” There are some useful insights as to the factors that may have contributed to hysteria over the child abuse “epidemic.” He is on less solid ground when he attempts sociological explanations for some of the phenomena he is observing. For example, he suggests that an “erosion of values” is occurring in American society in recent years. It is clear, from his discussion that he is talking about a shift of values, and it is clear that he is not in agreement with this shift. He states that one of the “many manifestations of this moral erosion has be the progressive insensitivity of people to one another.” This sort of generalization would seem to be problematic as a basis for examining the factors underlying false accusations of child abuse.

Still, despite the methodological weaknesses in his social psychiatry, many of his observations are apt. For example, he identifies a number of changes (which he categorizes as an “erosion of values”) in the United States in the quarter century before 1990 as an underlying factor in sexual abuse hysteria. He points to increases in crime, drug abuse and homelessness as manifestations of the changing public morality. He also cites changing parental roles brought about by daycare. He states that no matter how dedicated daycare workers are, they are unable to provide the loving concern of a biological parent (1991: 81-82). There is considerable support in the literature for these observations.

Gardner sees religious fundamentalism as a manifestation of the moral changes in society (again, he terms it “moral erosion”). He sees the underlying dynamic of fundamentalism in the following way:

The more the religious fundamentalist attempts to impose his (her) religious beliefs on others, the less sensitivity the religious zealot has for the person being converted... When religious fundamentalism ignores the wishes, ideas, and feelings of other human beings, it is psychopathy masked as religiosity (1991: 83).
Based on his clinical experience, Gardner notes that the percentage of sexual abuse workers who have been sexually assaulted as children is significantly higher than the norm for other professions. He believes that this is the case because it gives people who were sexually abused the opportunity of working through their own reactions to their traumas. This fact, in his view, would open the door to projection of one’s own experience on alleged victims with the attendant effect of biasing examinations of children alleging abuse. Other reasons for people gravitating to this field include some of the psychological mechanisms identified above (vicarious gratification, reaction formation, voyeurism, etc.). It would also, by its very nature, attract those with a “savior syndrome,”—people who devote themselves to protecting children from perverts (1991: 84-86).

Gardner discusses the effects of feminism in a section entitled “overzealous feminists.” He suggests that some feminist fanatics have “jumped on the sex abuse bandwagon because it provides a predictable vehicle for venting hostility toward men.” While this observation appears overly facile, he does point to a phenomenon that has been documented by other authors (e. g., Nathan and Snedeker): a subgroup of feminists who subscribe to the view that “children never lie.” Some are from abusive backgrounds and there is a tendency to generalize from their own experience. Such individuals often become validators. This is a somewhat cursory treatment of what is undoubtedly an important phenomenon. Feminist approaches to child abuse will be examined in the following chapter.

In Gardner’s opinion, a power structure has developed involving prosecutors, detectives, investigators and others who rely on funds from the legislatures. In addition, to lawyers (mentioned previously), a cadre of mental health professionals (including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, pastoral counselors, nurses, and therapists) profit significantly from investigating, responding to, and treating child abuse.

Elaine Showalter’s treatment of mass hysteria in Hystories: hysterical epidemics and modern media, comes from a very different academic direction. Showalter, a professor of English and a literary critic, examines the hysterical underpinnings of alien abduction,
chronic fatigue syndrome, satanic ritual abuse, recovered memory, Gulf War syndrome, and multiple personality disorder:

The conflicts that produce hysterical symptoms are genuine and universal; hysteries are not liars and therapists are not villains. Instead, hystories are constructed by suffering patients, caring psychologists, dedicated clergy, devoted parents, hardworking police, concerned feminists and anxious communities” (1997: 9).

Hysterical epidemics, in Showalter’s view, “require at least three ingredients: physician-enthusiasts and theorists; unhappy, vulnerable patients; and supportive cultural environments.” Once a doctor or other authority figure has defined and publicized a disorder, patients can be attracted into its “community.” Following diagnosis of a new syndrome, prototypes of patients are advertised. Self-help books on the syndrome are published. The case studies given are usually broad enough, “like horoscopes,” to seem relevant to many people. The media disseminate information about the prototype, thus encouraging patients to come forward. “...Clinical centres, professional newsletters and journals and doctor-advocates increase a culture’s investment in the syndrome as a real disease” (1997: 17-18).

The participation of the patients is crucial in any iatrogenic illness (i.e., one created by doctor-patient interaction). Thus, people who initially had a bewildering array of troubling symptoms, emerge with a personal narrative and, often, a “network of friends, activities, doctors and treatments” (1997: 18-19).

The third component of hysterical epidemics is cultural. Showalter notes that hysterical epidemics seem to peak at the end of centuries and in times of great social change. The Salem witch trials occurred in the 1690’s; mesmerism immediately followed the French Revolution in the 1790’s. In the 1890’s, there were rebellions against imperialism, class structure, controversies over prostitution and homosexuality, the rise of feminism, a plague of syphilis, and apocalyptic fantasies. In a supportive cultural environment, hysterical epidemics are fueled as they interact with religious and political social forces and rumor
panics. "Traditional enemies or social scapegoats become part of the scenario, further fueling fears" (1997: 19).

For Showalter, "(h)ysteria is inevitably a feminist issue, because for centuries doctors regarded it as a female reproductive disease" (1997: 9). At the turn of the 20th century, hysteria and feminism became merged in the popular mind and women who spoke up for their rights were caricatured as the 'shrieking sisterhood' (1997: 49).

The proponents of "mass hysteria" present an analysis of many of the social and psychological factors underlying events such as those that occurred in Martensville and other child abuse scandals. However, the mass hysteria account has serious limitations as a theoretical interpretation of the events in Martensville. In likening social conditions to a disease, such theorists are inclined to over simplify the meaning of a change in values or "feminist influences," etc., treating them as symptomatic moral decay rather than as emergent social forces and competing discourses in the interpretation of child sexual abuse.

Moral Panic

Structuralist Approaches to Moral Panic

As suggested in the analysis of media in an earlier chapter, a possible basis for interpreting events in Martensville may be found in the literature on moral panics. The public outrage in response to perceived predation and violence on weaker members of society is a common feature of a "moral panic." The first published reference to the term was by Jock Young in 1971. In discussing public concern about an alarming increase in drug abuse, Young "observed that 'the moral panic over drug-taking results in the setting-up of drug squads' by police departments, which produces an increase in drug-related arrests" (Young, 1971, quoted in Thompson, 1998: 7). Thompson notes the "spiral effect produced by the interaction of the media, public opinion, interest groups and the authorities" that is typical of this phenomenon (ibid.).
The first systematic use of the term “moral panic” was by Stanley Cohen in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, published in 1972. Cohen’s study of Mods and Rockers suggests that the two groups may best be viewed as a social creation, the result of a moral panic. Cohen defines moral panic in the following way:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereo-typical 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; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself (1972: 9).

As Wise (2000) notes, “moral panic,” in Cohen’s classical conception, is thus a “gathering trajectory” of real events and artifacts produced through causal connection. There exists a “circularity between ‘reporting’ and ‘real events’, both those presumed to cause the panic and others made in response to it.” A moral panic, then, is a complex dynamic often having ‘a life of its own’. Within this dynamic, the media have a central role in providing information (or misinformation). The media reports and the comments of politicians or other establishment figures become part of an amplification process (2000: 3.15).

The analysis by Hall and his colleagues of the role of the media, the judiciary and the police in “producing” the mugging crisis in Britain points to a social, rather than legal or statistical, definition of crime. Thus, clearly, the police, courts, and the media are not simply reacting to crime, but are actively and continuously part of the processes to which they are reacting: “They form part of the circle out of which ‘moral panics’ develop... They also...amplify the deviancy...” (1978: 52). What is being mediated, then, is not information, but rather social control. In this process, according to Hall, the media, “help to reproduce and sustain the definitions of the powerful.” They do this by actively soliciting the views of
the powerful in initially structuring the topics, setting topics up according to certain patterns, and strategically maintaining certain areas of silence (1978: 65).

Some media theorists question Hall’s contention that the ruling class controls the media. Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1991) concede that the news media intersect with the legal institution “as part of the coercive apparatus as well as the ideological apparatus.” However, based on earlier ethnographic studies of news organizations (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1987; 1989), these authors stress the conflict and contradiction in the “discursive struggles” of news production that are evident in daily news, and suggest substantial interplay in the roles of source, journalist, and consumer (1991: 12-13). Their point of view is that the media support “a pluralism in values, morality, and belief systems” which can lead to a ‘deinstitutionalization’ of stable meanings that have, in the past, supported social institutions (1991: 19).

Ericson and his colleagues thus argue for a more subtle view of the workings of the media. Their view is of the media as the vehicles through which issues are debated in public. The argument for structuralist approaches, however, would suggest that this debate is framed and controlled.

While Hall’s work may well have held too simplistic a view of the media, the concept of moral panic has survived—thrived even—as a tool used in examining upsurges of reaction to social change. Some recent work is based on Hall’s seminal text.

McRobbie and Thornton contend that it is time to rethink moral panics for the multi-mediated environment that now exists. These authors point out that the enormous influence of Policing the Crisis on British sociologists was due to two factors: 1) its use of the empirical model of moral panic and, 2) its concern for history and political culture. It thus bridged the gap between sociology and cultural studies. Hall and his colleagues used the Gramscian concept of hegemony to show the workings of moral panics. The result was that moral panics “created the social conditions of consent which were necessary for the
construction of a society more focused towards law and order and less inclined to the liberalism and ‘permissiveness of the 1960’s’ (1995: 562).

Moral panics are not isolated phenomena, but rather part of a connective strategy, “part of the practice of hegemony which enlarges the sphere of influence which Gramsci labelled ‘civil society’” (ibid.). Moral panics are thus envoys of the dominant ideology. They provide advance warning of local issues that are likely to achieve national importance. The complexities of historical and social breakdown must then be managed through increased control and coercion. McRobbie and Thornton point out that while this begs the question of the scale of social control, what is particularly important in Hall and his co-authors’ theory is the recognition that ideology is a suffusive social process. Ideology does not simply distort truth, but rather is a force that works through the mobilization of ‘common sense’ (ibid., 563).

McRobbie and Thornton describe some of the reaction to Hall et al.’s sweeping Gramscian argument. Of the various critiques of Hall, they find Simon Watney’s argument in Policing Desire (1987), to be one of the more compelling:

The theory of moral panics is unable to conceptualise the mass media as an industry intrinsically involved with excess, with the voracious appetite and capacity for substitutions, displacements, repetitions and signifying absences. Moral panic theory is always obliged in the final instance to refer and contrast ‘representation’ to the arbitration of ‘the real’ and is hence unable to develop a full theory concerning the operations of ideology within all representational systems. Moral panics seem to appear and disappear, as if representation were not the site of permanent struggle for the meaning of signs (Watney, 1997, quoted in McRobbie and Thornton: 563-564).

Watney draws on fields such as psychoanalysis, film studies and cultural studies. The result is “a deeper account of processes of exclusion and regulation than that available in the traditional sociology of social control” (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995: 564).

Early moral panic theory tended to resort to monolithic conceptions of ‘society’ and societal reactions’, and were, thus, “ultimately functionalist.” Because the theories of Hall et al., and Watney over-state hegemony, in the opinion of McRobbie and Thornton, they
"overlook the counter-discourses from which they draw and to which they contribute" (1995: 564).

The nature and explanation of moral panics has therefore shifted. Youth culture is steeped in the legacy of previous moral panics (mods and rockers, hippies, punks, etc.). Youth have learned that the negative news coverage generated by a moral panic baptizes transgression, providing authentication for their causes. Another interesting development is that moral panics have been used in marketing as part of public relations campaigns in the music industry. In the 1990’s various interest groups (pressure groups, lobbies, campaigns) “mobilized to intervene in moral panics,” with professional soundbites ready to be inserted on cue. Such groups are useful to media machinery working with tight deadlines and budgets, ever in need of material to provide “balance” to a story. Evidently, the folk devils are capable of fighting back. Moral panics are not only the province of hegemonic forces but are part of the arsenal of various interest groups. McRobbie and Thornton consider this an important development in political culture (1995: 565-566).

The increasingly effective use of moral panics by pressure groups and marketing experts contests the use of moral panics by the traditional moral guardians. This leads McRobbie and Thornton to question the usefulness of the term “moral panic” as originally defined (1995: 567).

The main conclusion to be drawn from McRobbie and Thornton’s work is not so much that Hall’s work is invalid, but rather that the concept of “moral panic” needs enlargement by the contributions of interpretive sociology. They argue the need for a new model of moral panics.

Moral panics in Hall’s terms have remained useful to factions interested in hegemonic control. An analysis entitled “Moral Panic and the Internet” (Major, 1999), pursues this theme. Major examines the way in which the Internet was portrayed in the media after it initially became commercially available in 1994-95. His findings show that U.S. legislators were instrumental in the development of a moral panic about the Internet. Major identifies
an element characteristic of panics in the late 20th Century — contested terrain over a changing field of social relationships; the contested terrain in this case being control of the Internet. Major argues that fears, ostensibly for the corruption of children, led to attempts to regulate the Internet by the U.S. Congress.

Kenneth Thompson (1998) argues, however, that it would be a mistake to view contemporary moral panics as a continuation of the pattern identified by Cohen and Hall et al. in all respects. Thompson notes that moral panics in the 1960's and '70s tended to focus on particular groups deemed to be a threat to traditional values—youth gangs such as the mods and rockers, bra burning feminists and young black muggers. Contemporary moral panics (including those of the 1980s and '90s) tend to be different in two respects: The first is the increased rapidity in the succession of moral panics. He notes in this regard, that almost anything can spark a panic. The initial event can range from the killing of a child (the Bulgar murder in Britain), to incidents of school bullying, panics over the AIDS epidemic and outrage over pornography on the Internet. The second change is the all-pervasive quality of the panics. Contemporary panics, in Thompson’s view seem to involve many more people:

For example, panics about child abuse seem to call into question the very institution of the family and especially physical relations between fathers and their children, perhaps reflecting a general unease about masculinity and the role of the father. Just as an incident of 'home alone' children raises questions about the 'maternal instinct' and the independent woman (1998: 1-2).

Thompson suggests five points that are key to understanding the phenomenon of moral panics:

The first is that they take the form of campaigns... Second, they appeal to people who are alarmed by an apparent fragmentation or breakdown of the social order, which leaves them at risk in some way. Third, that moral guidelines are unclear. Fourth, that politicians and some parts of the media are eager to lead the campaign to have action taken that they claim would suppress the threat. Finally... that the moral campaign leaves the real causes of the social breakdown unaddressed (1998: 3).

Two points are of note in this description: The first is the use of the term “risk” which suggests the possibility of linking moral panics to risk society theorizing. The second is that
while there are certain basic features common to most, if not all, moral panics, there are new dynamics, such as the all-pervasiveness of panics observed by Thompson and the emergence of counter discourses noted by McRobbie and Thornton. An interpretive theoretical perspective may add insights to the theme of counter discourses, which became evident in the moral panics of the 1980s and 1990s. Such an interpretive standpoint emerged in the early 1990s with the social constructionist approach. Both the issue of risk and the theme of counter discourses will be pursued further in Chapter 5.

Social Constructionist Approaches to Moral Panic

Goode and Ben-Yehuda adopt a constructionist approach articulated by Blumer (1971) in their study of moral panics. They characterize themselves as moderate or "contextual" constructionists as compared to strict constructionists who would argue that the objective basis for moral panics does not exist. They also distinguish their approach from objectivist theorizing such as that of Hall et al. (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994: 88-100).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda portray the components of a moral panic as including a "strong, widespread (although not necessarily universal) fear or concern that evil doings are afoot, that certain enemies of society are trying to harm some or all of the rest of us" (1994: 11). As noted, the forms of child abuse that receive the most media coverage: predation by strangers, by persons in positions of authority over children, or by persons well known to the children, but under the influence of Satan, all seem to evoke such fears. Goode and Ben-Yehuda observe that since 1980 there has been increasing interest in the phenomenon of satanic ritual abuse as a moral panic (1994: 57).

Moral panics, according to Goode and Ben-Yehuda, may be generated at various levels of society. Elites, the middle class, or the general public can each create a moral panic, and these authors describe three corresponding models of moral panics. The grassroots model suggests that panics can originate with the public. Fear of crime is an
example of a general fear that can cause a moral panic without it having to be orchestrated by an elite or interest group. On the other hand, the elite-engineered model suggests that an elite can “deliberately and consciously” undertake a campaign to generate fear on the part of the public. The third type of moral panic is organized by interest groups originating in the middle level of society (1994: 124-141).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda argue the relative merits of the three types. Having set up a narrowly defined “straw man” in the elite-engineered model, they proceed to knock it down with the argument that the social forces at play in a moral panic are too complex to be controlled by an elite. On the other hand, they suggest that the grassroots model is unlikely to occur for precisely the opposite reason: no faction to orchestrate events. While Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s project of more precisely defining moral panic is potentially useful, their attempt to provide mutually exclusive limiting categories is infeasible. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 5.

According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda, a classical example of a moral panic can be found in the witch craze that occurred in Europe from the fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth century, and at Salem, Massachusetts at the end of the seventeenth century. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda note, a new crime had come into being during this period: that of conspiring with Satan against God. The authors note that hundreds of thousands of witches, mostly women, were executed in Europe during this period (1994: 144).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda regard the witch craze in Europe as “a byproduct of the European transition to modernity.” They suggest that there was widespread popular acceptance of the witch burnings “as a desperate attempt to recapture and restore the previous moral social order.” Witches were the only heretical group of that time that could be perceived as threatening the Christian legitimacy. Women were the logical target since they were the individuals in society most affected by the social changes. Goode and Ben-Yehuda conclude that when conditions changed, the moral panic expressed in the witch craze ended (1994: 182-184).
One of the concerns raised by authors with a historical perspective is the implicit "timelessness" of Good and Ben Yehuda's view of moral panics. For example, the "fears and concerns' underlying moral panics are said to be 'part and parcel of the human condition'" (Hunt, 1997).

Phillip Jenkins (1992, 1998) addresses this problem in his studies of moral panics. In Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America (1998), Jenkins combines a social constructionist approach with an historical perspective on the problem of child abuse. Jenkins points out that at various times during the twentieth century, social and medical investigators have contended that children were being molested and raped in significantly higher numbers than had been thought in an earlier era. Victimization surveys confirm that in the past two decades millions of children have been subjected to various forms of sexual abuse. As Jenkins notes: "The phenomenon demands public concern and an appropriate policy response." He asks the rhetorical question: "Why should we not panic?"

Jenkins answers the question in the following way:

The word panic, however, implies not only fear but fear that is wildly exaggerated and wrongly directed, and this is what can be observed quite spectacularly in eras like the late 1940s and the mid-1980s. At these times, concern over sexual abuse provides a basis for extravagant claimsmaking by professionals, the media and assorted interested groups, who argue that the problem is quantitatively and qualitatively far more severe than anyone could reasonably suppose. (1998: 6-7).

In referring to the concerns over sexual abuse that began to surface in the mid-1980s, Jenkins is drawing attention to a set of conditions and influences that surfaced in California with the McMartin Preschool scandal in 1984. Jenkins makes it clear, however, that a common set of predisposing factors were present in dozens of comparable cases all involving allegations of bizarre or ritualistic forms of abuse in the ten years that followed the McMartin affair. Whether in Bakersfield, Martensville, or Wenatchee, the common elements are as follows:

... (T)he affair generally began with a limited, plausible allegation: that a small number of children had been abused, often in a preschool or kindergarten setting. In the ensuing investigation, interrogation of child 'victims' produced evidence that far more abuse had
occurred than originally thought, and ultimately the compounding reports and rumors would implicate dozens of local residents in what could only be called sex rings or cults. Supposed victims were questioned, until they confirmed the charges and offered their own creative embellishments (1998: 168).

Nathan and Snedeker state that the roots of such social panics go back a decade prior to 1984 and stem from the feminist agenda that succeeded in making sexual abuse a public issue (1995: 11). Other features commonly present in these cases include one or more individuals alleging or investigating the abuse who were suffering from a mental disorder or who were themselves survivors of abuse. Questionable investigative techniques are also a common factor. The McMartin case is thus merely one example of the foregoing set of conditions that occurred at frequent intervals during the ten years between 1984-1994. It appears that the panics spread from large urban centres (Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Boston, New York City, Chicago, and Miami in 1984) to suburban areas, (Maplewood NJ in 1987) to towns near smaller urban centres (Edenton, NC, and Martensville, SK in 1992) and eventually to rural small towns (Wenatchie, WA in 1994).

In examining the child abuse panics of the 1980’s and 1990’s, it is instructive to consider the observations by McRobbie and Thornton about moral panics. These authors note that the theory of Hall and his colleagues reminds us of the workings of ideology—not as a conspiracy that distorts the truth, but rather, as a force that works through the mobilization of common sense.

The interpretive sociology of social constructionism stands in clear relief to structuralist approaches, such as that of Hall and his colleagues. However, McRobbie and Thornton argue for a melding of the two approaches to endow moral panic theory with a more robust perspective and methodology. It appears likely that both structuralist theories of moral panic, focussing as they do on hegemony, and the interpretive methodology of social constructionism, which addresses the limits of rationalism, provide insights with which to illuminate the events of Martensville.
The examination of the five explanatory accounts has underscored the debates between proponents and detractors of the various claims, while serving to illuminate various social forces underlying the Martensville child abuse panic. However, each of the theoretical perspectives has revealed weaknesses that prevent the respective accounts from providing an adequate theory to explain the events in Martensville.

The satanic ritual abuse account, while certainly present as a psychological factor in Martensville (and maintained by adherents to this day), fails to sustain any factual basis. The memory wars, on the other hand, have illuminated many of the factors underlying Martensville and other child abuse panics. However, neither recovered memories nor the false memory syndrome were directly at issue in Martensville, since the children simply began telling of alleged child abuse rather than recovering memories that had been repressed. Nevertheless, the conflicting positions regarding memory formed a backdrop to the events there. The recovered memory theme is apparent in the insinuation of the “believe the children” slogan, which was also evident in other child abuse panics. The other side of the memory wars was manifested in the appearance of Ralph Ungerwager (at the time a member of the Advisory Board of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation) to testify for the defense. The mass hysteria account identifies some of the social and psychological factors at play. However, reliance on a disease metaphor is limited in that observations are viewed as symptoms of pathology. Such a negative cast proves unduly restrictive and thus does not yield adequate explanation for, or potential solutions to, the events in Martensville.

Of the five accounts, moral panic seems the most pertinent. The child abuse scandal in Martensville can certainly be characterized as an interest-group-led moral panic, given that various interest groups—initially the churches, later groups such as the Believe the Children movement and the Citizens United for Truth and Justice—provided inflammatory rhetoric in the media. The moral panic account, therefore, lends useful insights into the phenomena that swirled around Martensville in the 1990s. The next section will examine how the five accounts fit within broader social theory, and what may be concluded thereby.
Part III

What can be concluded?
Privileging Various Accounts or Theories

As outlined in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to examine the various accounts of the Martensville child abuse scandal. In so doing, it may be possible to determine whether one or other of the accounts yields insights that offer a particularly telling account of events in Martensville, and which, parenthetically, add to the knowledge corpus of sociology. This chapter will review the five accounts—ritual abuse, recovered memories, false memories, hysterical epidemic and moral panic—to determine whether any one of these accounts deserves to be privileged.

In pursuing this matter, it is deemed advisable to look at a broader range of sociological theory that provides a backdrop for the social forces at play in Martensville. This section will examine certain aspects of feminist theorizing about child abuse and then consider Martensville in light of theory on the risk society. The role of the media will also be examined, as it is central to any explanation of what happened. The various accounts will be reviewed as to their interplay, strengths and weaknesses, and epistemological considerations. Finally, a synthesis will be sought by examining elements of risk society and moral panic theory with reference to a theory of change—the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas. This will set the ground for conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter.

Feminism

Examining child abuse as one of several problems of law for feminism, Carol Smart (1989) takes the position that the law “resists and disqualifies alternative accounts of social reality.” Smart contends that moral panics have played a role in shaping the law. According to Smart, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, a major British reform of the Victorian era, came
into being after a major moral panic about child prostitution. The Act raised the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16 years of age with the intent of deterring abuse of working class girls (1989:51).

In the 1970's, another moral panic erupted in Britain. This time the folk devil was the pedophile. Smart notes that incest has not received the same sort of response. In her view, this is because external threats would not only harm children, but would threaten the patriarchal ideal of the family. Smart says that the father is 'unthinkable' as a folk devil (1989:52).

Incest became a criminal offense in the UK in 1908 over strong resistance. The resistance stemmed from three positions: One was denial that there was a problem (despite evidence to the contrary presented by the National Society for the Protection of Children and the National Vigilance Association). A second objection (notably by the Lord Chancellor) was that such legislation would put ideas into people's heads. A third objection was that such legislation would open the door to blackmail by young girls. The Act was eventually passed and Smart notes that there was no accompanying hysteria. Rather than a protection for children, the Act reflected revulsion towards those having sexual relations with kin. A version that included stepdaughters was rejected (1989:53-54).

While this legislation enabled child protection agencies to prosecute more cases of incest, Smart notes that the resort to the criminal law is relatively infrequent, given the prevalence of child abuse. Child protection agencies have tended to rely on care orders to remove the children from the home and have seen criminalization as counterproductive to the goal of family therapy, traditionally favoured by social service agencies (1989:55). Smart sees a fundamental conflict between legal truth and clinical truth in dealing with child abuse:

To establish 'beyond all reasonable doubt' that a child has been sexually abused the victim must be able to withstand the rigours of the adversarial system in the criminal courts... [as contrasted with] the clinical approach [which] incorporates an element of assisting the child to tell of the abuse (1989:57).
There are deep divisions of opinion about legal intervention in cases of child sexual abuse. While many feminists have campaigned for changes in the law that would both bring more prosecutions and lesson the burden on victims giving evidence, others question whether criminalization of child sexual abuse is the way forward (Edwards, 1990:152-153). The problems with the way in which the legal system deals with children in child sexual abuse cases, which were so evident in the Martensville trials, will be further addressed in the final chapter.

There is an on-going struggle within feminist accounts of child abuse. The struggle is not about the social construction of child abuse. Ritual abuse and recovered memories are a “reality” for some and a product of “hysteria” for others. These views are largely incommensurable. The contested ground occurs, rather, within the epistemological and methodological arenas of feminist research and theorizing:

The ongoing struggle to work with the complexity of academic discourses, without denying the lived experiences of individuals, requires us to struggle with the tensions and contradictions even as we seek to make judgements about ‘truth’ claims that are inevitably socially constructed, situated and specific (Huntington, 1999:1).

This problem is evident in Sara Scott’s “Here be Dragons” (1998). Scott’s study of the lived experience of ritual abuse survivors shows the “tensions and contradictions” described by Huntington. Scott notes that ritual abuse is a highly contested social phenomenon. Stories of ritual abuse have widely been characterized as resulting from false memories and moral panic. Thus, the research involves interviewing subjects alternately characterized as “lying, manipulated, or mentally ill.” Scott began her research with the intention of putting aside the “discourse of disbelief” characteristic of public discussion of ritual abuse and instead examining the alternative accounts of adults who referred to themselves as survivors of this form of abuse. She quickly realized that this was an impossible task. As she puts it:

... (P)rivate pains and public claims persistently interpenetrate each other, rendering the relationships between my interviewees, myself, and discursive representations of 'ritual abuse' a central feature of the research project. Technical, ethical and aesthetic decisions were
inevitably made within a social context shot through with skepticism over the truth status of ritual abuse accounts (Scott, 1998:1.1)

Scott considers that specific challenges to ritual abuse claims as “accurate representations of lived experience,” are an example of the problematic of issues of truth and the status of accounts in contemporary social theory. The means by which knowledge is produced sociologically and the role of the researcher in that process have always been central concerns of feminist sociology. In Scott’s view, the impact of poststructuralism and postmodernism on the discipline has superseded the possibility of developing a specifically feminist methodology in opposition to “masculinist methods.” As Bauman (1993) has noted, sociological research has traditionally been part of the rational project of “discovering, describing and explaining what happens in society in order to improve it.” It is therefore, in Scott’s view, “part and parcel of the very modernity for which post-modernism tolls the bell” (1998:1.2).

Postmodernism introduced a radical uncertainty into academic feminism at a time when feminism had succeeded in getting gender inequality acknowledged as a social problem. Second wave feminism had focussed on a process of bringing to light experience that often had no “previous discursive definition.” Such experience Dorothy Smith describes as not having been ‘pre-appropriated by the discourses of the relations of ruling’ (Smith, 1997, quoted in Scott). However, the political and intellectual climate had changed, and according to Scott, the problem of ritual abuse occurred when a backlash over child sexual abuse was in progress (Scott, 1998:1.3-1.4).

The research process has been fundamentally affected by the public dispute over the truth status of claims of ritual abuse. Scott describes the problem facing feminist research in this field in the following way:

Research takes place within a discursive field that impacts upon the researcher, her informants and each stage of the research process... While ritual abuse may be an extreme case, the discourse of disbelief that has developed around it is connected to a broader denial of the scale and impact of the sexual abuse of children, and to a backlash against feminist claims to knowledge about sex, violence and gender (1998:8.2).
Wise (1999) gives an example of this difficulty in a critique of Scott. Wise states that the value of the insights in the research is somewhat compromised by Scott's tendency to take a "does ritual abuse really happen?" approach. That question, in Wise's view, is an effect of the hegemonic discourse. By engaging with a dominant discourse, feminists constantly have to assert and re-assert that a feminist viewpoint is valid and that child abuse is a real and important issue. At the same time, the existence of child abuse as a social construction becomes problematic in that feminist researchers and activists are required to continually assert that "it happens" and this has prevented them from moving beyond the problem to a more sophisticated analysis and understanding. Talking about child abuse/child sexual abuse in social constructionist terms tends to make the problem disappear and become unreal. This may lead feminist commentators and activists to conclude that the problem is being discounted, and anti-feminists to feel vindicated (Wise, 1999:1.4, 1.5).

Moreover, Wise states that in her exclusive concern with survivors, Scott fails to deal with the larger picture: the family and the perpetrators of child abuse, as well as the child/survivor. In focussing exclusively on the subtleties of the accounts of survivors, Scott allegedly neglects the accounts of family members or perpetrators, which, Wise believes could only add a dimension to the accounts of the survivors themselves (1998:1.8).

On the one hand, there are the needs of the survivors of child abuse whose sufferings are real and require some kind of sensitive and appropriate response. On the other hand, there are the claims and counter-claims that constitute the discourse surrounding child abuse, and the equally real issues involved in making any kind of foundational claims about this (Wise, 1999:1.11).

For Wise, "truth" in the sense of a single, seamless and foundational truth, is "at best not helpful and at worse a nonsense." Defining child abuse is pointless. What is useful, both for those who have experienced child abuse, and those who work with it, is an understanding of what "abuse" means to people in different contexts, the consequences of those meanings and the ways they are translated into official interventions into people's lives (1998: 1.12).
Wise advocates contesting both ‘radical’ orthodoxies about child abuse (i.e., that it is hidden and minimized in patriarchal society) and conventional ones (i.e., that it occurs rarely and is perpetrated by strangers). It is extraordinarily difficult to advance a radical critique while “constantly looking over one’s shoulder” and having to “engage with the conventional analysis,” thus confirming its hegemonic position (Wise, 1999: 1.13).

Huntington amplifies this view. She states that in dealing with survivors, there is a need to treat recovered memories as the narrative truth of an individual without “accepting them as unproblematically factually accurate.” It is necessary to recognize the complex processes at work when individuals are engaged in dealing with organized abuse. Huntington describes the case of a woman who dealt with her experiences through a combination of “therapy and exorcism.” Huntington notes that some individuals may internalize their abusers as “demons” to “manage the terror of traumatic experiences.” Any expression of doubt as to the “truth” of these narratives is seen as an attack on victims or a lack of understanding of gender politics and issues of violence to women and children. However, to align oneself with those who traditionally have not had their voices heard, and to listen to claims of “ritualistic” abuse, rather than ignoring or denying them, one must take great care not to present the product as unproblematic “evidence.” As Huntington puts it, “overstating such claims may offer ammunition to the ‘other side’ rather than support to those who have been victimised” (1999: 3.2).

The problem of “evidence” is underscored in Martensville, and two examples may be drawn from the interview data. The first is the case of a member of the Believe the Children movement who herself claimed to have been ritually abused. Because of her experience—which was all too real, though likely mis-defined as “satanic ritual abuse” due to her willingness to see her abuser as “evil”—she was pre-disposed to credit the childrens’ accounts, no matter how far-fetched.

The second problem raised by the “evidence” is the question of prevalence of child sexual abuse. The research on child abuse suggests that anywhere from 18-24% of a given
population in North America may have experienced some form of child abuse and the most likely perpetrators would be those well known to the children (Bagley and King, 1990: 58-70). It is thus probable that some of the children among the alleged victims of Martensville had indeed been sexually abused. Statistically, it is likely that such abuse would have been by a relative or friend rather than a stranger who was an occasional visitor to the Sterling home. Due to the polarization and intensity of Martensville, the reality of child sexual abuse there will, in all likelihood, never be known.

Moreover, as Park (1999) observes, the advent of false memory syndrome (which surfaced at about the same time as the Martensville episode) raised concerns for feminists:

(Th) e notion that false memories of abuse are commonplace casts suspicion on all women’s and children’s testimonials of abuse, thus silencing voices that have only recently begun to be heard. Prior to the 1980s, both therapists and the lay public discounted claims of child sexual abuse and ‘concluded that it rarely, if ever, occurred’. This prevalent disbelief negatively impacted abused children’s ability to heal from the abuse. Most adult survivors claim they ‘gave up trying to get someone to help them and instead adopted coping strategies to protect themselves’ (Park, 1999:289).

Clearly, the issue of child abuse has been a contentious one for feminists. Women in general and feminists in particular have been divided on several fronts: the debate over the incidence of child abuse; its form (the prevalence of molestation by strangers as opposed to incest); the arguments over recovered memories; and methodological and epistemological issues. Because of this contentiousness, the issues relating to child abuse have probably slowed, to some extent, the development of feminist theory.

The people of Martensville and the surrounding area remain deeply divided on the child abuse scandal, but these divisions are not based on gender. There are feminists and women on both sides (believers and non-believers) and from various perspectives. In their unquestioning support for the childrens’ accounts of abuse in Martensville, the Believe the Children movement undoubtedly lost credibility and may have fuelled the backlash against feminism. Although the believers clung to their position, the mainstream view (articulated
by the judges and national media, such as the Globe and Mail) held that the stories were bizarre and incredible.

**Risk Society**

Kenneth Thompson notes that moral issues are not simply debated between competing (e.g., official and unofficial) public discourses. Such a view fails to take into account “the ways in which the discourses of popular cultures, politics and professional agencies are often combined in the spiral that creates a moral panic” (1998: 5).

Commenting on the situation in Britain, (no doubt applicable to the North American experience as well), Thompson states that the dominant political discourse in the 1980s and 1990s has combined a “neo-liberal individualism and a neo-conservative authoritarian nostalgia for a moral golden age—the age of ‘Victorian values’.” This discourse has thrived at a time of increasing social inequality and a widening gulf “between a prospering majority and a sinking ‘underclass’” (1998: 6).

Politicians of both the right and the left have played on the fears of the majority, who despite their prosperity, are anxious about the risks prevalent in modern society. Thompson argues that this sense of risk is heightened through the following dynamic:

Whilst professional groups with an interest in making claims for more resources, ranging from social workers and teachers to the police and probation officers, are often prepared to provide evidence of a crisis, sections of the mass media, subjected to market pressures, have responded by presenting dramatic narratives with a strong moral content. The result has been an almost bewildering succession of moral panics (1998: 7).

This “at risk” character of modern society is played out in moral panics “due to the undermining of the authority of traditional elites and the loss of deference on the part of the lower classes, allied to the centralized and ‘incestuous’ character of the mass media” (ibid).

Thompson finds that risk society theorizing “corresponds in some respects to the politics of anxiety account of moral panics.” He cites the work of Mary Douglas (1986: 97), suggesting that “the morally punitive cosmos uses risks to uphold community.” It thus
follows that "reactive traditionalism" (Giddens, 1990: 158) and other authoritarian forms
focus on the perceived "failure of law enforcement and punishment as morally central
institutions as a primary argument for reassertion of the forces of order" (Garland, 1990: 237

The response to child abuse panics has often been to "police the crisis." Increasingly, this has meant an increase of surveillance measures and bureaucratic controls. de Young (1997) analyzes the cultural response to the McMartin case (which she considers to be typical of the day care scandals of the 1980's) as a moral panic. She describes the accusatorial climate following McMartin in the following way:

... day care providers, surrogate parents to this country's youngest children, took measures to protect themselves from their false allegations. They installed video cameras to record all of their activities, opened up private spaces to public view by taking down doors to bathrooms and closets and, fearing the act now could be misinterpreted, stopped hugging and holding their young charges. State legislatures also took measures. They hurriedly passed laws that mandated the fingerprinting and criminal records check of all current and prospective day care providers; state licensing agencies tightened regulations and by legislative fiat were given more teeth to enforce them. Yet insurance liability premiums soared, forcing many small day care centers out of business and many more, unlicensed and uninsured, to go underground (deYoung, 1997: 19).

This description highlights many features of the risk society. Examining the cultural context of the moral panic that accompanied the rise of the "satanic daycare center" in the 1980s, deYoung refers to the changing relation between the "covenantal" and "contractual" spheres of society. In the covenantal sphere of the family, relations are based on "mutual commitment, bonding, and emotional expressiveness, and are articulated through the logic of moral involvement and unity." The contractual sphere, in contrast, is that of the market economy with relations based on "mutual agreement, negotiation, and exchange, and are articulated through the logic of vested interest and shrewd involvement" (1997: 19).

Habermas (1984, 1987a) refers to the overtaking of the covenantal by the contractual sphere of society as the "colonization of the lifeworld." Such a process is comparable to the new hegemony of the risk society described by Ulrich Beck:
On the one hand, in industrial society, social life within the framework of the nuclear family becomes normative and standardized. On the other hand, the nuclear family is based on ascribed and, so to speak, 'feudal' sex roles for men and women, which begin to crumble with the continuation of modernization processes (inclusion of women in the work process, increasing frequency of divorce, and so on). But with that the relationship of production and reproduction begins to shift, like everything else connected to the industrial 'tradition of the nuclear family': marriage parenthood, sexuality, love, and the like (1992: 13).

Despite this trend, Ericson and Haggerty (1997) note a fundamental contrast between the way in which crime has become just another “risk to be assessed and managed” in the risk society and the way it continues to be played out in the mass media:

The moral order of wrongdoing, and of collective sentiment toward it, is played out according to the very different logic of the mass media in public culture. As in the past, public culture provides dramatizations of serious crime, morality plays through which people remember values that are increasingly at odds with those of other institutions that govern people’s lives (1997: 40-41).

It is readily apparent that people are generally aware of the encroachment of the system on their daily lives. They aren’t consulted about changes and it may often seem that little can be done about it. That doesn’t prevent them, however, from resenting these encroachments. The stresses of modern living are real and release mechanisms are required. If the changes are subtle and pervasive, it may seem that they cannot be resisted directly. Then indirect targets will be sought. Moral panics can be viewed as eruptions of these tensions, with a focus on a particular target—one that embodies the evils of modern society.

A consequent effect of the Martensville case was to reinforce neo-conservative views that crime is rampant, that children are threatened by changes in society such as both parents working outside the home, and that daycare is no replacement for parental care. Martensville underscored the risks inherent in day-to-day childcare arrangements. It emphasized the need for risk management systems to be applied to those who are charged with the supervision of children. The aftermath of Martensville was a heightened awareness that the risks are omnipresent—that no one, not daycare providers, not police officers—can be exempt from surveillance.
The “system,” which Habermas contrasts to the “lifeworld,” acts according to security needs rather than consensual norms. In such an environment, deterrence and punishment through public shaming are no longer the domain of the justice system, but rather the media. Yet public shaming has always been an element in human society, hence the importance of the “folk devil” in moral panics. It is thus possible to see the interplay between moral panics and the risk society as figure and ground. That is to say, the tensions that occur in the risk society often do not have a readily apparent source. These tensions may give rise to a moral panic in which a target may appear (a folk devil becomes the figure), but the ground remains.

The Mass Media

According to Anthony Giddens “only Innis and, following him, McLuhan, have theorized the impact of the media on social development in a sophisticated fashion” (Giddens, 1991: 24). While McLuhan saw the contours of the coming convergence of technologies, he was troubled by the prospect of the print medium being supplanted by electric technology. Giddens, on the other hand, considers it misleading to see print as a phase before electronic media. He notes that electric technologies have been vital to the development of mass printed media (1991: 25). Moreover, while print is not handled well by television, a glance at any computer screen connected to the Internet usually reveals a mix of text with graphics.

For Giddens, the form of modern institutions is due more to similarities between printed and electronic media than their differences. This is the result of two features of mediated experience in modernity: the “collage effect” and “the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness” (1991: 26-27).

The production of both newspaper and television stories provide examples of the collage effect. Stories with little else in common are mixed because they are timely and consequential. In Giddens view, this doesn’t spell the end of the narrative form. Rather the
collage of separate stories expresses a unity of thought and consciousness in a transformed
time-space environment.

The other feature of the media in modernity is “the intrusion of distant events into
everyday consciousness.” Rather than mirroring realities, the media shape them. Giddens
does not accept the notion of a postmodern era as “a novel stage of social development
beyond modernity.” While the notion that modernity fragments is widespread, Giddens
believes that there are unifying features that are equally characteristic of modern institutions.
As he puts it:

the ‘emptying’ of time and space set in motion processes that established a single ‘world’
where none existed previously... late modernity produces a situation in which humankind in
some respects becomes a ‘we’, facing problems and opportunities where there are no ‘others’

Both the collage effect and the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness
are strongly in evidence in Martensville. The media were forced to work with scant but often
shocking details. As we have seen, the local newspaper coverage and television coverage
conjured up a picture of events in Martensville that were added to by magazines and other
national media to form a collage.

The intrusion of the events of Martensville into everyday consciousness of local
people was striking in two respects. On the one hand, people in the Saskatoon area were
forced to take a stand. With so many alleged victims and so many accused, the lobbying for
each side became almost inescapable. Each side imported its own experts and the views of
the experts fuelled the arguments. Catch phrases such as “believe the children,” that had
been used in other child abuse panics were imported into Martensville and used as though
they had been invented there.

In The Theory of Communicative Action Habermas describes an ambivalent role for
the mass media that simultaneously act as vehicles of social control and (unintentionally) as
“conduits for messages that spark opposition” (Goodnight, 1992: 251). Herman and
Chomsky, while noting structural changes towards centralization of the media “propaganda
system," also note countervailing forces such as cable and satellite transmission systems that broaden access. They believe that the organization and self-education of activist groups in the community and workplace are "fundamental elements" toward any meaningful social change (1988: 307). Bauman sees the dual potential of "forces capable of exploding the existing network of repressions... organically present and perpetuated within the structure of dominance itself" (1991: 297).

In an analysis of the relations between the BC Forest Alliance and the media (Doyle, Elliot and Tindall 1997), the authors observe that the operation of the media is hardly unitary and seamless. They note that "... there is often a good deal of political and ideological conflict within media outlets, particularly between the journalistic and commercial arms of the operation, but also sometimes within the newsroom itself" (1997: 259).

Reviewing an account of a dispute in the Vancouver Sun concerning the BC Forest Alliance the authors state that the dispute shows "how hegemony is reproduced within media outlets—but also how this is a contested process." They thus conclude that the media offer "valuable openings for social movements struggling to contest dominant meanings" (1997: 266). This, as McRobbie and Thornton have noted, has been evident in the interest-group-led moral panics of the late 20th century.

Ratner, commenting on Doyle, Elliot and Tindall's article, notes the contested nature of media control, but sounds a warning not to underestimate the dominance of the mass media by hegemonic forces:

While the media outlets do exercise a degree of autonomy in applying their own professional 'frames' or systems of meanings in the construction of 'news', this possibility warrants neither sanguine pluralist conclusions nor simplistic conspiratorial scenarios. But it would be disingenuous to think that transnational corporations would not want to gain a controlling influence over the mass media in order to propagate consumerist ideology... (1997: 284).

Further evidence of the hegemonic tendencies of the media is presented in the next section in an account of the demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle in November and
December 1999. In light of such evidence, the role of the media in fomenting moral panics is not only seen as central, but, generally, as one of supporting the dominant hegemony.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas sees the mass media as "instruments of reification, and, as such, debilitative of political participation and rational debate" (Goodnight, 1992: 251). However, he reformulates his view in articulating the theory of communicative action twenty years later. In the later work (1984), he acknowledges that the mass media are often used in order to legitimate government policy and control public opinion; however, he believes that mass media can support public activity "to the extent networks expose competing interests and adhere to codes of professional conduct." Critical messages can be contained within products of mass culture and groups can "appropriate messages to their own purposes" (ibid). Habermas’s thinking parallels that of McLuhan, and is supported by research that shows that technology does not necessarily produce central networks of control, but rather, distributes control into diverse hands.

This is in contrast to interest group-led moral panics, such as Martensville, which, notwithstanding the aims of the groups involved, usually support the maintenance of the established order. The Martensville scandal was big news and it sold well. The local news sources framed the story, but the national media quickly picked it up. The shocking details got immediate attention: trusted daycare providers and police officers involved in what looked like organized abuse. From there, it only took some bizarre details and a religious spin by a particular interest group to turn it into a satanic ritual abuse scare.

Thus, the moral panic account, when looked at in light of feminist theory, changes to the nature of media, and the advent of the risk society provides an explanation for the events of Martensville. Before determining whether it should be privileged as an explanatory account of those events, consideration will be given to its interplay with other accounts.
Interplay of the Various Accounts

This section will consider the connections and interactions between the accounts of what was happening in Martensville.

As narrative accounts, both Satanic ritual abuse and recovered memories are tied to moral panics. Both rely on the corruption and abuse of children and thus arouse moral sensibilities. Both are salacious and sensationalistic. Both are news and sell well in the media. A shocking case of Satanic ritual abuse or recovered memories with multiple victims can easily lead to a moral panic, such as occurred at Martensville.

One of the important mechanisms that can be seen in operation in child abuse panics is scapegoating. Scapegoating is seen to be a feature of moral panics (Goode and Ben Yehuda, 1994) and of ritual abuse scares (Victor, 1993). It can be seen as an underlying feature of media coverage pertaining to each of the five accounts. By demonizing a particular group or threat, in the media, the focus of the public is drawn to that threat and other problems are forgotten. In the process, the emotions of anger and anxiety are given a target.

Nathan and Snedeker identify the factors that they think serve to produce situations like the Martensville case. "Why Satanists?" they ask. The answer, they believe, is explainable by an anthropological view of demonology. They refer to a 1991 article by Anthropologist J. Phillips Stevens Jr. Demonology, in Stevens's terms, is described as:

... the narrative, specific to every culture, that identifies the ultimate evil threatening the group. During periods of social turmoil and moral crisis, societal preoccupation with its demonology intensifies (Nathan and Snedeker, 1995: 33).

According to Victor, societies sometimes invent forms of deviance to produce scapegoats for deep-seated social tensions. He describes this process in the following way:

New social deviants are sometimes invented when rapid social change in a society results in widespread dislocation in people's lives, and the resulting frustration, fear, and anger, in turn, causes a great many people to seek scapegoats to blame. These scapegoats are 'invented' by moral crusaders who target categories of social deviants to bear the blame for threats to a society's past way of life and its basic moral values (1993: 195).
Some observers consider that the social turmoil during the years of the child abuse panics was created by feminist politics and changing family dynamics, including the institutionalization of the two-worker family, the increase in number of single parent families, and the advent of large numbers of children entering daycare. The uncertainties thus created gave rise to a need for moral certainty. This was answered by the resurgence of fundamentalist Christianity (Nathan and Snedeker, 1995: 33-35).

To take a recent example of the process of scapegoating, consider the demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in late November and early December 1999. Some 50,000 people converged on Seattle to protest the WTO ministerial meeting. The protesters were a diverse coalition of interests that included trade union members, environmental and human rights activists, students and direct action anarchists. The plans for the demonstrations were made months in advance and distributed across the Internet through activist and trade union networks (established via e-mail, mailing lists, newsgroups and websites). The Direct Action Network (DAN), a coalition of 20 activist organizations set up an office in Seattle three months prior to the WTO conference. The Direct Action Media Network (DAMN) established an independent media centre for alternative media.43

In the early morning of November 30, an estimated 10,000 protestors in the downtown area blockaded access to the WTO conference centre. The police, in full riot gear, reacted with force, using batons, tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets. The images in the media were all too familiar yet nonetheless disturbing—police in riot gear gassing and beating peaceful demonstrators. Then a group of protestors began smashing windows of various businesses. Suddenly the media focus shifted to the property damage. The following account from the Seattle Times is typical of much of the mainstream media coverage:

One of the largest protests in Seattle's history turned confrontational today as police fired paintball guns and pepper spray to disperse groups of unruly demonstrators who broke

43. Information on the preparations for demonstrations against the Seattle WTO conference can be found at the following websites: www.motherjones.com/wto/benner.html; www.agitprop.org/artandrevolution/wto/dan.html; www.damn.tao.ca/wtopage/wto.html
windows, sprayed graffiti on buildings and tried to block delegates to the World Trade Organization conference. 44

While it is typical of mainstream media accounts to refer to the "paintball guns and pepper spray" employed, what the media entirely overlooked, was the massive militaristic use of force by the police. 45 As an article by Neil deMause illustrates, the media "missed" the fact of the military use of force because they steadfastly held to the belief that the police were subduing violent looters:

"As tens of thousands marched through downtown Seattle, a small group of self-described anarchists smashed windows and vandalized stores... Police responded with rubber bullets and pepper gas." (Greg Lefevre, CNN 99/12/01, quoted in deMause). 46

Many eyewitness reports described police "ignoring" vandals while busily assaulting demonstrators who were blockading the entrance to the WTO conference centre. The Seattle Times, in its chronology of the WTO protests (99/12/05), recorded the first use of pepper spray and rubber bullets on demonstrators as occurring at 10:00 a.m. on November 30, approximately two hours before the first windows were broken. Most news outlets ignored the police assaults prior to the looting and downplayed the police use of force, adopting the line that it was the acts of protestors that led to the massive deployment of police force:

"Some of the more radical elements turned the protests into street battles" (Dan Rather, CBS, 99/11/30).


45. The armament deployed by the police is described in detail by Paul Hawken in his Seattle WTO diary: U.S. military standard M40A1 double canister gas masks; uncalibrated, semi-automatic, high-velocity Autocockers loaded with solid plastic shot; Monadnock disposable plastic cuffs, Nomex slash-resistant gloves, Commando boots, Centurion tactical leg guards, combat harnesses, DK5-H pivot-and-lock riot face shields, black Monadnock P24 polycarbonate riot batons with Trumbull stopside handles, No. 2 continuous discharge CS (ortho-chlorobenzylidene-malononitrile) chemical grenades, M651 CN (chloroacetophenone) pyrotechnic grenades, T16 Flameless OC Expulsion Grenades, DTCA rubber bullet grenades (Stingers), M-203 (40mm) grenade launchers, First Defense MK-46 Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) aerosol tanks with hose and wands, .60 caliber rubber ball impact munitions, lightweight tactical Kevlar composite ballistic helmets, combat butt packs, 30 cal. thirty-round magazine pouches, and Kevlar body armor. None of the police had visible badges or forms of identification. Hawken, P. "Paul Hawken's WTO Seattle Diary." Posted January, 2000 at www.mythical.net/hawken.html

"How Organized Anarchists Led Seattle into Chaos" (Headline in Time, 99/12/13).

"... after the worst vandalism Tuesday, police broke out tear gas" (U.S. News & World Report, 99/12/13).

[Seattle police were] "working overtime to protect this city" (KIRO-TV, Seattle, 99/12/07).47

A report by Paul Richmond for the National Lawyers' Guild finds a number of commonalities in reports about the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle:

[The reports] are written by administrators in law enforcement. They paint a picture of uncontrolled rioters, hooligans and anarchists taking over the streets of a serene, well managed town. Their regrets are that the use of force could not have been greater.

There's little or no mention of the fact that only a few dozen of the 50,000 or more of the demonstrators took part in any property destruction whatsoever. There's no mention of the fact that two thirds of the delegates found the process at the Ministerial to be undemocratic and refused to go along. And there's no mention that potentially lethal force was used on literally thousands of people throughout the Ministerial—some of it hours before any of the famous window breaking had taken place.47

As the reports by deMause and Richmond make clear, the rationale for the police action is attributed to "unruly demonstrators," "radical elements" or "anarchists" who broke windows and committed other property damage. This official rationale was uncritically picked up by most of the mainstream media. In fact, the damage was a relatively isolated event. It was perpetrated by the Acme Collective, a cell of the Black Block, an anarchist group. Specific corporate interests with a record of human rights violations or environmental destruction were targeted. The action was well planned and flawlessly executed (although one might well ask to what end?).48 The outrage that ensued in the media was a clear example of scapgoating. Coverage focussed almost entirely on the few who had done damage rather than the thousands who had marched and demonstrated peacefully. Moreover,


48. Acme Collective. "A communique from one section of the black bloc of N30 in Seattle." posted at the Seattle Independent Media Center (Indymedia) website 10:48 a.m., 99/12/04; subsequently removed and website disbanded. Copy available upon request.
the rationale given by the mayor for establishing a state of martial law and controlling movement of people in downtown Seattle was based on the property damage.\textsuperscript{49}

Authors from various disciplines (e.g., Frazer, 1900; Freud, 1953; Coser, 1956; Lorenz, 1959; Slater, 1966; Victor, 1993; Good and Ben-Yehuda, 1994) have discussed the role of scapegoats in human groups. Slater, following Freud, says that the need for a “specialized object of hostility” is essential in a group’s development. According to Freud, people “clearly do not find it easy to do without satisfaction of this tendency to aggression that is in them… It is always possible to unite considerable numbers of men in love towards one another, so long as there are still some remaining as objects for aggressive manifestations” (Freud, 1953, quoted in Slater, p. 59).

The message that discharging hostility onto a scapegoat somehow advances civilization is implicit in the Judeo-Christian mythological tradition and is apparently cross-cultural. In reviewing various cultures, Frazer concluded that in a variety of human groups, the expulsions of evils through their direction onto a scapegoat were identical in intention:

\ldots whether the evils are conceived of as invisible or as embodied in a material form, is a circumstance entirely subordinate to the main object of the ceremony, which is simply to effect a total clearance of all the ills that have been infesting a people (1900, Part IV: 224).

The problem of evil is thought by some observers to underlie the child abuse panics of the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century:

In a sociological sense, evil always exists in a society in the form of everything which is deviant from a society’s highest moral values. When the basic moral values of a society are in crisis, the people of that society seek to explain what is happening to them by attributing the cause to some agent or force which embodies all the evils which are the opposite of their highest values (Victor, 1993: 202).

\textsuperscript{49} ACLU, Washington. “Out of Control: Seattle’s Flawed Response to Protests Against the World Trade Organization.” July 2000. www.aclu-wa.org/ISSUES/police/WTO-report.html/executivesummary The report notes that “both the Mayor and Police Chief told the press on Tuesday, the sound of breaking store windows and the sight of graffiti spray-painted on some downtown stores partly inspired the decision to declare a state of emergency.”
Research of ethologists (Lorenz, 1959) suggests that other species form bonds, in part, due to direction of mutual antagonism onto a third object. Good and Ben-Yehuda believe that one of the most significant facts about satanic ritual abuse panics is that they are based on a “subversion myth.” Such myths demonize certain individuals or categories of individuals (“folk devils” as Cohen calls them), making them into scapegoats for the troubles of the group that is propagating the myth. Ericson and Haggerty note that scapegoats are a feature of “risk discourse,” creating insecurities and forcing people to turn to authorities with expert knowledge of risk for assistance (1997: 86).

Some observers (Coser, Slater) have found conflict directed towards scapegoats to be difficult to discharge. Coser calls this form of conflict nonrealistic (i.e., directed towards substitutes for the presumed frustrating object). He says that with realistic conflict (directed at the presumed frustrating object) there are various means of expressing the conflict, whereas with nonrealistic conflict there are only alternative objects (1956: 49-50). Slater refers to research by Theodore Mills (1964) that shows a link between aggression and identification with the object of that aggression. Slater states that the ambivalence of this process—simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards the object—is significant. There is a difference between an attack on a leader or one on a scapegoat. A direct attack on a leader is a dynamic process since the group perceives the leader as possessing desired attributes and is thus able to absorb some of those qualities. Attacking a scapegoat, on the other hand, “is static, since nothing is absorbed but undesired characteristics which must be projected anew onto the scapegoat” (1956: 76-77).

Attacking a scapegoat is seen as problematic. Victor notes that when a society resorts to scapegoating in dealing with internal conflicts, the “fantasy warfare” prevents resolution to the problems:

[Scapegoating] perpetuates latent, stagnating conflict, which impedes the society’s ability to adapt to change. When conflicting parties don’t confront each other in realistic conflict and work out practical compromises, they cannot innovate solutions to the underlying conditions which cause social stress. The submerged conflicts go on and on and the conflict-ridden society… finds itself unable to make adaptive changes (1993: 202).
Thus scapegoating is an ambivalent process. While a perennial feature in human groups and one that unites people, it is incomplete. Moreover, the tendency to resort to expert knowledge about the danger creates new insecurities (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997: 86). This may, in part, explain the lingering feelings of animosity and lack of closure in Martensville.

The example of the Seattle WTO demonstrations illustrates a fundamental clash of values in modern society. It could be characterized as an opposition between what Victor Turner (1969) refers to as communitas (community) and structure. Turner sees the alternation between these two poles as a dialectical process. However, it seems likely that in Seattle, we see the results of decades of erosion of the lifeworld (communitas) by the system (structure). The level of force used in Seattle and the resort to the targeting of “anarchists” as scapegoats suggests a siege mentality on the part of the authorities.

The coverage and reaction to the Seattle demonstrations shows some of the characteristics of a moral panic. It also provides a backdrop with which to examine the clash of values in a society, which, in reference to Turner’s work, one might characterize as devoid of the rituals that enable the discharging of tensions in social structures. In Seattle, the authorities resorted to responses that are directly related to the hegemonic conditions described by Hall, et al. that give rise to moral panics. However, it is apparent that the focus of protestors on the governing authorities, symbolized by the WTO, signals a change. It may be a fundamental change in society. What is significant in Seattle is the direct confrontation with authority—a process that shifts from the need to resort to a scapegoat to a direct focus on the leadership of national governments which have ceded power to supra-national global organizations, such as the WTO.

In Martensville, however, political leaders were able to avoid responsibility for the troubling situation at the daycare centre. There was an immediate targeting of a scapegoat—the pedophile. All of the accounts examined—ritual abuse, recovered memories, mass hysteria and moral panic—depend upon a scapegoat. As long as the scapegoat exists, a
target unites people regardless of their perspective. When evidence is lacking, as in the Martensville case, a refocusing of anger and search for a new target may occur—in this case towards the criminal justice system—that is typical of nonrealistic conflict.

**Pre-eminence of a Particular Account**

*In this section, the question of whether any of the various accounts deserves to be considered privileged or more plausible than other accounts will be examined.*

The moral panic account certainly does have explanatory power in looking at the Martensville affair. The role of the media in shaping the panic is clear from the analysis presented. Also, clearly, there were interest groups (Believe the Children, Citizens United for Truth and Justice) active in Martensville and the interest group theory of moral panic has direct applicability. The clash between opposing factions was one of the essential elements in Martensville and it seems worthwhile to look at the theory of hegemony put forward by Stuart Hall and his colleagues in light of the events in Saskatchewan.

Some historians have indicated their uneasiness with indiscriminate use of the term “moral panic.” Hunt (1997) examines the use of moral language in the media. He reviews various authors who suggest that there are deficiencies in the theory of moral panic. For example, interest-group theory has a tendency to focus on “deep-seated cultural causes—‘religious anxieties’ a ‘sense of dislocation’, a fear of sexual inversion and a ‘preoccupation with order and disorder’,—and to neglect local and particular causes.” The result is that moral panics “can appear strangely divorced from reality.”

Certainly religious anxieties are present in the early stages of the Martensville affair, along with a preoccupation with order and disorder and fears of sexual predation (as well as inversion). While these anxieties no doubt stem from deep-seated cultural causes, they do not negate local causes. This is particularly true in the second stage of the Martensville case
(i.e., after the trials) when local causes and concerns about child sexual abuse and justice came to the fore. Thus, the moral panic account has applicability to Martensville.

Several components of Cohen's theory, as modified by Hall, are in evidence in Martensville: First, the panic was out of all proportion to the events. Secondly, various conservative subaltern groups (such as the Baptist and Alliance churches in Martensville) fuelled the panic. Finally, politicians at various levels (up to and including the premier of Saskatchewan) joined the barricades against the folk devil of the child molester.

Hegemonic influences were present in the moral panic in Martensville. The mayor's willingness to entertain the notion that satanic influences were at play appears to be a good example of the need of politicians to shift blame and promote scapegoats. The strong reaction of the police to ostracize and shun the accused shows that "crime control" comes first. The willingness of the media to "run with the story" no matter how inflammatory is characteristic of the media's role in amplifying a moral panic. These features are all typical of moral panics in the schema put forward by Hall and his colleagues. However, unlike that model, there was clearly conflict between the positions taken by various elements of the state. The nature of the allegations, leveled, as they were at police officers, child-care providers and a corrections official, produced divisions within each of these occupational groups and the government agencies they served. Thus, the investigations and trials saw police pitted against police and splits within the child protection community (various representatives of which testified for either the defense or the prosecution) were added to the adversarial nature of the legal system.

These conflicts, while typical, given the relative autonomy of various fractions of the state (Poulantzas, 1973; Ratner, McMullan and Burtch, 1987) were intensified in Martensville. Such divisions in the Martensville case provided a backdrop for the action of various interest groups in fueling the moral panic. The nature of the moral panic that ensued was thus very different from the one described by Hall and his colleagues, writing in 1978.
Hall, et al. described a hegemonic moral panic. In Hall’s model, elements of the state apparently collaborate in creating the moral panic. In Martensville, however, due, in part, to the divisions within occupational groups, there is interplay evident between hegemonic influences and interest groups. This, as McRobbie and Thornton (1995) observe, fits the pattern of appropriating the tactics of moral panic by interest groups for their own ends. Evidence of this process includes the following:

- church groups who fuelled the allegedly satanic aspects of the abuse;
- child protection advocates who furthered the “Believe the Children” perspective, and
- “Citizens United for Truth and Justice” who added Martensville to their list of travesties of justice perpetuated by the justice system.

In Chapter 4, Kenneth Thompson’s five key elements of moral panics were set out. Thompson considers these elements to be present in all moral panics, and thus to address the changes in the nature of moral panics. They are all visible in Martensville. There were several “campaigns”: the campaign against the perpetrators, the campaign to believe the children, the campaign for justice. Evidently, these do appeal to those alarmed at the “breakdown of the social order” in a context where “moral guidelines are unclear.” Moreover, there is evidence of politicians and the media leading the initiative to “suppress the threat” represented by the alleged perpetrators. Finally following the court cases, it is clear that the real causes of the social breakdown remain unaddressed (Thompson, 1998:3).

Clearly, the moral panic account has evolved from its original static and timeless nature, to acquire both structural components (i.e., from Hall et al.) and interpretative ones (from Goode and Ben Yehuda; Jenkins). These additions strengthen the moral panic account and potentially imbue it with the explanatory power of a workable theory of mass behavior.

It is also clear that moral panic has intuitive appeal and is thus a useful concept to get people to examine what is underlying media stories. While many of those interviewed commented that the media manipulated or took advantage of the situation in Martensville, few are able to explain how that happened, or why. The theory of moral panics affords that
capability. We see in Martensville, the role of the media and various interest groups in sensationalizing the situation, labeling folk devils and marshalling expert opinion. This produces calls for state intervention and, ultimately, generates popular consent for a more conservative social order (Nava: 1988:104, see also Cohen 1972:9, Hall et al. 1978:52). The Martensville moral panic, while fitting, in many respects, the classic model of moral panics also highlights the emergence of counter discourses. In fueling moral panics, such discourses, while appearing to contest the dominant hegemony, ultimately support it.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Various Accounts**

_in light of the considerations described above, this section will examine the strengths and the weaknesses of the various possible accounts, including, primarily, an evaluation of the status of the “moral panic” interpretation. Thus a central aim of this research is to clarify the current relevance and dynamic of the “moral panic” concept as an interpretation of the child abuse phenomenon (and by extension, possibly to other phenomena). Do we need to go beyond moral panic as an explanation?_

As we have seen, the satanic ritual abuse and recovered memory accounts cannot be substantiated through material evidence, or through social science methods, as actual events. Yet, both had strong adherents in Martensville and in other instances of child abuse panics. Although neither account now sustains widespread public support, both continue to have adherents to this day. They each remain explanatory accounts for particular religious, therapeutic and child advocate communities. However, neither provides a credible sociological explanation for the events of Martensville.

Victor calls the satanic cult legend “a counter-subversion, scapegoating metaphor.” It is a medieval fable about forces threatening society’s moral order. Its social function, according to Victor, is to provide a “useful, though imaginary target for the displacement of collective frustration and anxiety about an uncertain future” (1993: 306).
Yet the symbolism of the satanic cult legend contains culturally shared meanings: a loss of faith in society to ensure the security and prosperity of its members and defend traditional values against ambiguous “heretical” forces. The threat to children is both a threat to the future of society and a reflection of disintegrating social conditions, economic instability and weakening family ties. The satanic cult legend is a projection of parental guilt stemming from the stresses on the contemporary family (ibid).

Since its advent in the early 90’s, the false memory syndrome account began to dislodge the recovered memory account as an account that held sway in the mass media. There is a trend in this direction during the events in Martensville. The chief reason for this would appear to be related to the predilection of the FMS adherents for research data. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation brought credible experts^{50} to testify at trials and received positive coverage in the media. Their account became dominant in the media concerning the Martensville case. What were the underlying mechanisms at work to sway public opinion?

Hacking (1995, 1998), in his analysis of the memory wars and the social construction of child abuse, sheds light on the events of the decade in question. He describes the tales of worldwide satanic conspiracy as “the powerful contagion of panicky rumors.” He concludes that recovered memories and multiple personalities are both manifestations of false consciousness. The end product of a great deal of therapy is “not a person with self-knowledge, but a person who is the worse for having a glib patter that simulates an understanding of herself.” He finds such false consciousness “contrary to our best vision of what it is to be a human being” (Hacking 1995, p. 267).

^{50} While this was generally the case, there were notable exceptions: Ralph Underwager, who was active in the Martensville case and other child abuse panics, became a target for recovered memory advocates because of a controversial article he and Hollida Wakefield had published in Paedike: The Journal of Paedophilia. When Underwager testified in the Martensville case, there were protests that focussed on his “sympathetic” attitudes towards pedophiles. In an interview, Dr. John Yuille, a psychologist who testified for the crown at the Martensville trials, said that Ungerwager had lost credibility with the scientific community. He also said that, in his opinion, some otherwise solid researchers have tended to breach the bounds of scientific inquiry concerning the false memory syndrome.
A previously stated, some authors refer to the child abuse scandals that occurred between the mid-eighties and mid-nineties as a form of mass sociogenic illness. Hacking’s description of a “powerful contagion” is similar to Gardner’s “mass hysteria” and Showalter’s “hysterical epidemic.” Each of these authors does a thorough job of documenting the nature and extent of such “mass sociogenic illnesses.” Each identifies a number of factors in the spread of the epidemic. None, however, provides an explanation as to why this happens. These views all use a disease metaphor, implying that panics about child abuse are a sickness. While the disease metaphor is useful in considering how such panics spread from one place to another, it is not accurate to consider that the people involved in child abuse panics are “sick.” All of the people interviewed for this study were relatively normal, healthy human beings. The phenomenon under scrutiny is a social pathology.

The account that appears to provide the greatest explanatory capability is the moral panic account. Goode and Ben Yehuda describe the contribution of the moral panic concept in the following manner:

The concept of the moral panic expands our understanding of social structure, social process and social change. It ties together concepts from a variety of disparate areas—deviance, crime, collective behaviours, social problems, and social movements. Moral panics are likely to ‘clarify [the] normative contours’ and ‘moral boundaries’ of the society in which they occur, demonstrate that there are limits to how much diversity can be tolerated in a society (Goode and Ben-Yehuda: 29).

While Goode and Ben-Yehuda attempt to discredit Hall and his colleagues’ structural theory of moral panics, their arguments miss some important features of Policing the Crisis. They categorize the work of Hall and his colleagues as an “elite engineered” theory of moral panics (1994: 135). In so doing, they over-simplify and mistakenly characterize this perspective. The thrust of the work of Hall and his colleagues is Gramscian and deals with broader mechanisms of power and ideological reproduction, which they subsume under the heading “hegemony.” This is not simply the province of an “elite.” Policing the Crisis argues, following Gramsci, that “there is no such homogenous formation as a or the ruling
class...” For Gramsci, a viable state is necessarily based on the “welding of interests of subal tern groups under the authority of a particular alliance.” Thus, a bloc is formed through which the state is able to extend and expand its authority (Hall, p. 204). However, this is a complex process, involving give and take:

The state was also the terrain in which subordinate social classes could be ‘won’ to support the authority of the ruling alliance. If hegemony was to be secured without destroying the cohesion of the social formation, and without the continual exercise of naked force, then certain ‘costs’ might have to be extracted from the dominant class to secure consent to its social and political base (ibid.)

Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s work is an important addition to moral panic theory. However, by failing to recognize the importance of this aspect of Hall’s theorizing, their work sacrifices explanatory power. If moral panics were simply ways in which some interest groups could “gain” power, how could we explain the willing complicity of other groups (media, police) in that aim? There must be something else going on. The maintenance of the established order might, in many cases, be an outcome that all these groups have a personal stake in. Seen in this context, it could be that through a moral panic a particular interest group gains attention to its issues and at the same time, other groups’ goals are met regarding the maintenance of established order. If this is the case, for moral panic to be useful as an explanatory framework, it must contain not only components of interest group theory identified by Good and Ben-Yehuda but also the concept of hegemony.

Looked at from this perspective, we see that structural forces should be taken into account in order to better understand moral panics occurring since the 1970s. The media are a necessary component. Interest groups play a part in most moral panics. The third factor isn’t an “elite,” per se, but rather a structural component: hegemonic forces. One could simply refer to the “the established order,” providing this is understood to include, not only those in power, but also the groups and mechanisms that support the power structure. Hegemony thus connects conservative interests in the ruling alliance with those subaltern groups that support the status quo.
Viewing Martensville and the other child abuse panics of the ten-year period from 1984-94 as moral panics, in the above terms, can thus illuminate their dynamics. The interest groups included factions of child protection advocates, therapists, feminists, police and members of fundamentalist religious communities. Martensville was unique in that police members were both investigators and investigated. This produced powerful rifts within the police community as in the wider community.

Moral panics appear to have a role in maintaining hegemony. That hegemony is best illustrated by recent work on the risk society, the contours of which have been mapped by Douglas, Giddens, Beck, Ericson and others.

One feature of the risk society must be borne in mind in thinking about the nature of the current hegemony. It is that the risk society is not about eliminating risk. The risk society is predicated on the management of risk. It is a public/private for profit venture—cooperatively engaged in by governments in partnership with security systems providers, the insurance industry, the high tech sector, banks, etc. Many of the features involved in the policing of the risk society, as described by Ericson and Haggerty (1997), are static (cameras, alarm systems, target hardening measures) rather than dynamic (based on human interaction, knowledge and change). Risk prediction itself is an actuarial process that examines the probability of certain conditions occurring. It is based on static features (quantifiable and measurable actions that have occurred in the past). However, risk prediction is incomplete. Without a dynamic component, there exist only statistical probabilities. Awareness of risks, in the absence of in-depth knowledge about the phenomena in question, creates and nurtures fear.

One of the more visible products of the risk society is the gated community. These are communities predicated on managing the risks of crime and disorder. Such communities are designed for those who can afford it. They thus sharpen the dividing lines between those with the resources to contain risk and those without. Like other static crime control measures, they merely relocate crime rather than preventing it. Since it deals in fear, the risk
society can, under certain conditions, unleash reaction. The fears underlying the Martensville panic are a highly visible manifestation of this tendency.

We have seen the weaknesses of some of the explanatory accounts of what was happening in Martensville. Ritual abuse, recovered memories and false memories all played some role in the interpretation of events. Each of these perspectives has limitations, however, and cannot be sustained for a variety of reasons. Hacking’s analysis of memory leads to the understanding that a false consciousness has been created. Feminist theory illuminates the problematic of the child abuse wars.

Social constructionist moral panic theorizing lends many insights to the events of Martensville. The historical approach taken by Jenkins shows the changes in language, public reaction and the law. The structural theory of Hall, while subject to criticism on some of its particulars, holds up as a theory of hegemony. However, moral panics do not remain the province of the powerful. Interest groups learn the technique, and use it to further their aims. Advocacy groups further moral panics for counter-hegemonic purposes. The role of the child advocates who introduced the “believe the children” movement in Martensville is a good example. While, the activists who advocated this perspective are generally committed to breaking down patriarchal resistance to child protection measures, by eliciting the response of the risk society to improve security, they support the established order. Indeed, the Martensville episode gave impetus to the development of the Saskatoon Child Centre, which, with its controlled environment and high-tech observation and recording devices, is a concrete example of the risk society—one that is regarded in a positive light by most (though not all) of the study participants.

This re-assertion of the dominant hegemony shows that despite the “diversification of forms of media and the sophisticated restructuring of various categories of audience” moral panics remain primarily “concerned with moral values, societal regularities and drawing of lines between the permissible and the less acceptable” (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:572-573).
Moral panic theory cannot be dismissed, as some social theorists (e.g., Hunt, 1997) have attempted to do, simply because it has become common coin. However, what is needed is a theory of moral panic that is capable of blending structuralist and interpretive insights within a critical and historical synthesis.

**Theoretical/epistemological Analysis of the Various Accounts**

*This section will consider the location of the various accounts as products of "disciplinary" investigations. It will, thus, examine the barriers to and potentialities for a synthesis of the different accounts.*

The various accounts of what is happening in child abuse panics such as Martensville come from an array of different theoretical and epistemological perspectives. For example, the satanic ritual abuse and recovered memory accounts, although often overlapping as to content, have fundamental differences in orientation. In examining these differences as to orientation, a simplified version of the frameworks laid down by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Morrow (1994) will be used.

These authors distinguish paradigms (Burrell and Morgan) or metatheories (Morrow) into which various works can be classified along a subjective-objective continuum. Burrell and Morgan state that subjectivist approaches tend to be nominalistic, anti-positivistic, voluntaristic and ideographic. Objectivist approaches tend to be realistic, positivistic, deterministic and nomothetic. These relationships are illustrated in the following schema for analyzing assumptions about social science:
TABLE 5.1 Subjective-Objective Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjectivist approaches to social science</th>
<th>Objectivist approaches to social science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominalism</td>
<td>Ontology → Realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-positivism</td>
<td>Epistemology → Positivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarism</td>
<td>Theory of Action → Determinism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideographic</td>
<td>Theory of Explanation → Nomothetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Burrell and Morgan, 1979:3; Morrow, 1994:53-56

In using the foregoing schema, it must be recognized that theories do not always fit perfectly into the categories. Moreover, it is not always easy to categorize the theories of thinkers such as Weber, Foucault, and Habermas, whose thought evolved over the trajectory of their respective careers and who have followers who emphasize one or other aspects of their work. Nevertheless, it is useful to plot the location of a particular account along the subjective-objective dimension in order to compare significant aspects of the theorizing that underlies the various accounts.

Morrow describes the clash between the subjectivist and objectivist metatheoretical positions in the social sciences. Metatheories that take an objectivist position identify with positivism, hence subscribe to natural science models of research. Those that are anti-positivistic stress the dissimilarities between natural and social sciences. Subjectivist approaches hold that the social sciences present unique logical and methodological issues related to the interpretation of meanings, subjectivity and consciousness (1994: 53).

Advocates of recovered memories tend to have a subjectivist orientation. Recovered memory therapists are descendants of the psychoanalytic tradition and rely on the Freudian concept of repression. As Giddens notes, “psychoanalysis is first and foremost interpretive”

51. The categories in the above table, originally employed by Burrell and Morgan have been revised by Morrow, who substitutes the more precise terms “theory of action” for Burrell and Morgan’s “human nature” and “theory of explanation” for “methodology.”
119

(1993: 65-66). Like the psychoanalyst, the recovered memory therapist explicates, through dialogue, the hidden meaning of the subject's life experience.

On the other hand, satanic ritual abuse advocates tend to be deterministic and positivistic. There is a belief in causality and general laws. The ideological frames of meaning are derived from Christianity, social conservatism and child advocacy. According to Victor, zealous Christian traditionalists and child advocates tend to be receptive to legends of satanic cults (Victor, 1993: 306-307). Dealing as it does in a literal belief in mythological, rather than material facts, this is not social science and, in many ways, the perspective is anti-scientific.

Several recent moral panic theorists call themselves "social constructionists" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda; Jenkins). Social constructionism tends to be interpretive and anti-positivistic in its orientation. However, there is a wide range of epistemological and political influences in so-called "social constructionist" work. Some social constructionists exhibit "relativistic pretensions," while arriving at non-relativistic conclusions (Velody and Williams, 1998: 3-4). The phenomenological foundations of constructionism, typified by Berger and Luckman (1966), that would "leave everything as it is" have been misappropriated, or misunderstood by many (ibid).

Lynch concludes that diverse constituencies have latched onto the word "construction" for differing reasons. The term:

captivates adherents, encouraging them to invest their theoretical, methodological and political hopes in an academic approach or movement. But it can be confusing when adherents try to replace the eclectic surface affinity, which fostered the success of constructivism in the first place, with something deeper and more coherent... By virtue of its current popularity, constructivism provides a useful handle for presenting and legitimizing academic work, but this handle can become slippery indeed when employed as a lever to effect radical epistemological reform (1998: 29).

Some feminists who have taken a stance on child abuse panics have adopted phenomenological or interpretative approaches, tending towards the subjective (e.g., Scott, 1998). Recovered memory therapists and researchers (e.g., Herman, 1992) likewise
emphasize the subjective, dealing with the experience of the victims. Others (Huntington, 1998; Wise, 1999) warn of the perils of accepting the accounts of victims as factually accurate rather than as the narrative truth of the individual. These authors suggest that for therapy to be effective, the narrative truth must be treated rather than debated with the hegemonic discourse. Increasingly, among both feminist theorists and treatment professionals, there is an awareness of this reality.

The problem of the harmful effects of legal processes on victims raised by Smart (1989) is evident in Martensville. There must be a separation of the treatment of victims and the prosecution of offenders. This means that children who allege abuse must be treated, while the case is being investigated, in such a manner as to minimize the contamination between these two processes. Martensville points to the need for radical change in the manner in which both the legal system and child welfare authorities respond to allegations of child abuse. To determine the nature of the changes, it is necessary to have a theoretical perspective capable of examining the conditions underlying child abuse panics and, also, the directions of needed change.

Despite perceived deficiencies in effecting reform, non-objectivist approaches are regarded by Habermas as valuable in bringing “viewpoints of moral and aesthetic critique to bear—without threatening the primacy of questions of truth…” In his view it is only in this way that a critical social theory is possible (Habermas, 1987a: 398).

Synthesis

This section will consider whether the various contestatory accounts can be, or ought to be, synthesized in some way with respect to certain dimensions.

The major contributors to moral panic theorizing—Cohen, Hall et al., and Goode and Ben-Yehuda have all contributed essential components to the theory. Cohen’s definition still holds up, though it is static in that it is not based in historical analysis and does not suggest
ways that the observed conditions may change. Stuart Hall and his colleagues’ more critical and historical approach illuminated structural components to the theory. Goode and Ben-Yehuda expanded on Cohen’s definition in looking at a variety of phenomena that could be regarded as moral panics. What is needed is a synthesis of these authors’ ideas. McRobbie and Thornton’s (1995) article is useful in this regard, building as they do on Hall’s theory, but documenting the tendency of interest groups to learn to employ moral panics.

A number of authors trace the changing views of North American society over the past century towards what is now termed “child abuse” (three very different treatments can be found in Nathan, 1995; Jenkins, 1998; and Hacking, 1999). Jenkins (1998) provides an exhaustive treatment in *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America*. Jenkins begins from a social constructionist approach that builds on Goode and Ben-Yehuda but adds a historical dimension.

Moral panics are sometimes social movements—this is certainly the case when interest groups are the force provoking the panic. While seemingly irrational, they are anything but. They are outbursts of fear that almost invariably lead to renewed social control. Frequently this new sense of control comes with a price. The risk society expands to respond to moral panics. The result is that the dominant hegemony is re-established and perhaps extended.

As we have seen, there are few perspectives that tend to ask both what is going on and how to change it. Hall’s approach to moral panics, coming, as it did from a critical and objectivist theoretical perspective, proposed a program for change. With the advent of postmodernism and feminism, little work was continued directly on Hall’s theory, however, thinkers such as Habermas have advanced our understanding of the nature of public discourse from the perspective of critical theory.

In his project for recovering the public sphere, Habermas (1984, 1987a) differentiates between strategic rationality and communicative rationality. Strategic rationality may distort communication to further various forms of control and domination (Morrow, 1994: 185).
The normative value of inter-subjective communications at the heart of communicative action provides the basis for a theory of change—an “historically contingent interpretive structuralism” (Morrow, 1994: 183). Habermas’s theory aims at a synthesis between paradigms. The theory of communicative action draws on the functionalist work of Durkheim and Parsons, as well as the interpretive elements of Weber, and G.H. Mead, who are both claimed, as Burrell and Morgan note, by adherents from more than one paradigm.

Systems of technical rationality (bureaucratization, monetization\footnote{This term is rendered in the 1987 translation by McCarthy as “monetarization.” However, Habermas is referring to money as one of two “steering media.” He clearly means the production and use of money rather than the workings of monetarist policy (which would appear to be the only acceptable use of the term “monetarization”).}) are seen by Habermas as colonizing the lifeworld (i.e. everyday life). This produces various social pathologies as well as forms of resistance (1987a: 318-327). Disturbances in material reproduction take the form of systemic disequilibria, which become crises when the performance of the economy remains consistently below the level of public expectations. There follow attempts on the part of governments to avert crises and stabilize society through attacks on culture and person. This leads to alienation and the unsettling of collective identity (1987a: 386).

This would seem to be a good description of the dynamics that occur in capitalist economies during a recession. It is of particular relevance to the conditions that obtained at the time of the Martensville case. The recession of the early 1990’s led to widespread government cutbacks, which were especially apparent in the domains of culture. At the same time, increases in personal income taxes affected the majority of taxpayers and resulted in decreases in net family income.

Structural changes in the family, education and personal development are likewise characteristic of modernity:

\[\ldots\] constraints of the economic system—concentrated in status hierarchies, occupational roles and gender stereotypes—penetrated into the innermost aspects of life history via infranational dependencies and patterns of socialization. The intimacy of highly personalized relations...
merely concealed the blind force of economic interdependencies that had become autonomous in relation to the private sphere—a force that was experienced as 'fate' (Habermas, 1987a: 387).

The “communicative internal structure of the family was not taken seriously.” This occurred because the family was viewed from functionalist standpoints that failed to account for its structural transformation. The liberalization of child-rearing practices are representative of the changing family structures that have widespread societal impact (ibid). Viewed in this light, it is significant that the moral panic in Martensville centred on daycare. The babysitting service run by the Sterlings was mentioned by some of those interviewed for this study as being symbolic of the changes to the town. Undoubtedly some of the underlying tensions in Martensville were related to the change in traditional structures of the family. Likewise, several authors (Gardner, 1991; Hacking, 1995; Nathan and Snedeker, 1995) have noted that changes to the family were underlying features of other child abuse panics.

Habermas calls attention to the need to recognize that the structural transformation in the bourgeois family is part of the rationalization of the lifeworld. With the advent of patterns that produce egalitarian relationships, individuated communications and liberalized child-rearing, there is potential for communicative action. Communicative infrastructures are emerging that are independent of systemic dependencies. There is a need to recognize this and to work within a framework that focuses on the intersubjective rather than subject-object relations (1987a: 387).

As we have seen, the mass media have ambivalent potential. The communication flows influenced by the media displace communication structures that support public discussion and self-understanding. The electronic media completely permeate and dominate the language of everyday communication.53 The content of modern culture is thus

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53. Writing in the mid-eighties, Habermas would not have foreseen how the Internet would accelerate the tendencies he was describing. However, the convergence of all electronic media in the Internet make his observations all the more cogent in the early 21st century.
transformed into sterilized and ideologically effective stereotypes that perpetuate the status quo. The mass media produce “a culture cleansed of all subversive and transcending elements for an encompassing system of social controls.” This reinforces and replaces the weakened internal behavioral controls of the consumer. On the other hand, this media power is ambivalent in that its generalized forms free communication from contexts that are restricted in time and space. A virtual communications network that provides content for multiple local contexts replaces them.

Media publics “hierarchize and at the same time remove restrictions on the horizon of possible communication. The one aspect cannot be separated from the other—and therein lies their ambivalent potential... in the light of a rationalized lifeworld in which system imperatives clash with independent communication structures” (Habermas, 1987a: 389-391).

From this theoretical perspective, the interest group led moral panic in Martensville may be seen as a resistance to the “weakened internal behavioral controls” that are characteristic of this period of modernity. In effect, then, Martensville is a case of “system imperatives” (the economic performance of the state, changing structures affecting the division of labour and the nature of work) clashing with independent communication structures (e.g., the family). People accept as “fate” changes in the nature of the family, including the advent of widespread daycare. Such changes are diffused and pervasive in modern society, thereby minimizing the potential for organized protest. The alienation and unsettling of identity remain. This may, in the right conditions, give rise to the pseudo-communication characteristic of moral panic.

Habermas maintains that distorted communication is a result of the ideological suppression of social needs and interests, and that without true communication and consensus, freedom is illusory. “What his theory requires, then, is a theoretical wedge to insert between contexts of real and pseudo-communication; a counterfactual standpoint from which pseudo-communications can be discerned in order that critical reflection can begin” (Bernstein, 1995:49-50). The theoretical problem that this raises is the obligation to justify
an alternative set of facts that is generally understandable and yet powerful enough to counter the beliefs of the existing false consensus.

Habermas’s theory would appear to provide a perspective from which a synthesis can be established regarding the moral panic of Martensville. To be regarded as a synthesizing theory, however, it would have to respond to feminist and postmodernist theorizing as well as other post-traditional theory, such as the concept of the risk society. Giddens characterizes Habermas’s theory of communicative action as “emancipatory politics.” He finds the ideal speech situation an “energising vision of emancipation.” Emancipatory politics is a stage of what he terms “life politics.” While life politics “presumes (a certain level of) emancipation,” it goes beyond emancipation to incorporate notions of lifestyle and self-actualization in a reflexively ordered world (1991:213-214). However, he states that emancipatory politics “often does more than simply ‘prepare the stage’ for life political concerns.” He gives two examples: feminism and relations between first and third world peoples. While emancipation has been, and remains, crucial to the women’s movement, making the voices of women heard would both require, and bring about, far-reaching changes in the organization of social life (1991:228-229).

Habermas differentiates “emancipatory potentials” from “potentials for resistance and withdrawal” (Habermas 1987a:393). Morrow (1994) finds this difference in value orientation compatible with Giddens’ shift between emancipatory politics and life politics (Morrow: 190). For Habermas, the struggle against patriarchal oppression by the feminist movement, anchored as it is, in the redemption of a promise of universalistic morality and law, makes feminism an offensive, rather than defensive, movement:

The resistance and withdrawal movements aim at stemming formally organized domains of action for the sake of communicatively structured domains, and not at conquering new

54. It should be noted that Giddens, writing in 1991, was likely unaware that Habermas had moved beyond the ideal speech situation. In response to critics, Habermas agreed that there was a paradox inherent in the notion of an ideal speech situation—that humans would “strive to realize an ideal, the attainment of which would be the end of human history” (Cooke, in Habermas, 1998:13-14). Habermas refocused his thinking on the idealizing suppositions regarding the process, rather than the outcome, of rational argumentation.
There is an element of particularism that connects feminism with these movements; the emancipation of women means not only establishing formal equality and eliminating male privilege, but overturning concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies. Furthermore, the historical legacy of the sexual division of labor to which women were subjected in the bourgeois nuclear family has given them access to contrasting virtues, to a register of values complementary to those of the male world and opposed to a one-sidedly rationalized everyday practice (1987a:393-394).

Such resistance movements engage in protests such as ones that resist threats to neighborhoods by large developments, oppose taxes or seek greater autonomy. These typically middle class protests join with the "core of a new conflict potential" by youth and alternative movements who are engaged in a critique of growth. Such conflicts can be seen as representing a resistance to colonization of the lifeworld.

Can the extension of hegemony in the risk society be resisted? One sees in the Martensville moral panic the advent of counter discourses against the dominant hegemony (i.e., Believe the Children, Citizens United for Truth and Justice). Yet, as in de Young's study of the McMartin child abuse scandal, it is apparent that the surveillance systems and bureaucratic processes of the risk society may be extended in response to a child abuse panic. This tendency is evident in the aftermath to Martensville. The establishment of the Saskatoon Child Centre with its "state of the art stereo audio-visual recording systems" and "multiple viewing stations" is clearly indicative of an extension of the risk society into this domain.

The lesson then, is that moral panics, as forms of pseudo-communication, circumscribed as they are to forms of non-realistic conflict, are doomed as a means of effecting change that resists an expansion of the ruling hegemony. This can be contrasted to forms of organized dissent, such as that seen in Seattle, where the conflict is realistic—directed at the leadership of modern society—and thus, perhaps, capable of effecting change.

The observations and conclusions in this chapter are based on the data that were available to me from Martensville. Some of my conclusions are necessarily speculative given the nature of the project. This seems consistent with the task of explorative inquiry.
One takes the available maps and information and then makes some educated guesses about the terrain ahead.

In the course of this thesis, I came to regard moral panic theory as providing a sound explanation for the events that occurred in Martensville. The moral panic explanation answered the question, “why did it happen?” I then found it necessary to venture into the wider domain of sociological theory. While surfaces are mapped and charted, the underlying forces are in a perpetual state of change. Such is especially the case in attempting to inquire into the nature of the social dynamics at the societal level that give rise to moral panics.

This project has taken me to the heart of sociological theory. I quickly realized the need for guides. I found some good ones, but I also came to the realization that even the best guides only know the terrain as it was. Sociological theory is constantly evolving, as are the social dynamics under consideration. I believe that an approach that combines the observable with the speculative is thus justified in that it may open phenomena such as Martensville to wider sociological scrutiny and, parenthetically, stimulate reflexive theoretical inquiry.
Summary and Conclusions

This chapter will attempt to come to grips with the moral panic phenomenon in relation to social policy. What can be done? How should we respond? Suggestions will be presented on formulating a policy to respond.

It is undeniable that the child abuse panic that occurred in Martensville harmed a great many people and this fact was one of the main points of general agreement between the interviewees in this study. Obviously, the children's lives will never be the same. Whether one believes that the children were assaulted or not, these young people were for many years the centre of controversy in the community. They were put on display, interrogated, examined and cross-examined. Their utterances, and, indeed, their lives, were the subject of daily newscasts. Few among them could not be greatly affected by all this attention. The lives of several of the accused adults were shattered. Some moved away, many experienced marital difficulties or were forced to change jobs. All experienced court costs, both material and psychological. Like the children, their lives were poked over and through. The community was, and remains, polarized. This is most pronounced in the town of Martensville, but extends to the entire metropolitan area of Saskatoon, and farther. The bitter feelings linger to this day.

What are the implications of what happened in Martensville for social policy? In answering, it will be necessary to look at the larger picture: how can such panics be mitigated, or prevented and, in particular, how can we deal more effectively with child abuse? To respond to the more general issues, it will be necessary to consider social policy from a critical perspective. We are not simply talking about tinkering with public administration but rather looking at fundamental approaches to governance.
Good social policy depends on good data. Gilbert’s (1997) analysis clearly shows the pitfalls of advocacy research that amplifies findings to make a point. By inflating research findings, and fostering moral panics, advocates have played into the hands of hegemonic forces and have, perhaps unwittingly, furthered the risk society. Rigorous and objective analysis of child abuse is an essential base on which to build social policy:

Advocacy research that uncovers a problem, measures it with reasonable accuracy, and brings it to public attention performs a valuable service by raising public consciousness. The current trend in advocacy research is to inflate problems and redefine them in line with the advocates’ ideological preferences. The few impose their definition of social ills on the many—seeking to incite moral panics. This type of advocacy research invites social policies that are likely to be neither effective nor fair (Gilbert, 1997:142).

In March 2000, the Law Commission of Canada published a report on physical and sexual abuse of children in government institutions. Some of the Commission’s recommendations pertaining to the criminal justice process have applicability to the more general problems of dealing with child abuse. A number have applicability to the Martensville case. For example, the commission recommended that those involved in the legal proceedings relating to child abuse should have special training and access to “survivor-sensitive protocols.” The commission recommended that support for survivors be made available from the beginning of a criminal investigation. Another recommendation stated that complainants should not be re-victimized in testifying (Law Reform Commission of Canada, 2000: 15-16).

The need for training of investigators and interviewers is underscored by Martensville. In their comprehensive review of true and false allegations of child abuse, Yuille, Tymofievich and Marxsen make detailed recommendations regarding the requirements for such training:

- That investigators and interviewers be thoroughly trained in interviewing techniques before questioning a child about abuse. A properly conducted interview is the only way to obtain good statements.
- That the training given to interviewers and investigators be competency based. Standards of interviewing should be met before the interviews are conducted, and not gradually reached during the course of several investigations.
That the training of interviewers be done on a continuous basis. It is imperative that information, courses, and training sessions be available to update, as well as to refresh, the interviewers.

That objectivity in the investigation of child abuse be promoted. All possible alternative explanations should be examined and fleshed out before a conclusion is reached.

That the interviewing process be investigative, rather than therapeutic. In order to maintain investigative integrity, the interview must obtain the facts from the child in a way that still meets the systematic goals of the legal system [i.e., to obtain evidence] (1995:40-41).

The lessons of Martensville suggest a number of policy considerations in order to address the underlying problems that gave rise to the Martensville moral panic and the other child abuse panics of the 1980s and 1990s. In developing policy, it is instructive to apply the principles of communicative action as articulated by Habermas.

Communicative action, (i.e., communication oriented towards understanding), is distinguished, by Habermas, from strategic action which is oriented primarily towards success. Both forms of action are necessary components of human interaction. However, communicative action presents social order as a “network of cooperation involving commitment and responsibility.” It is oriented towards ideas of truth and justice that are “grounded in idealizing suppositions that are part of everyday human activity.” Communicative rationality is not subject to local standards of validity, but, rather, its idealizing suppositions form the basis for criticizing local practices. It thus avoids value-relativism while standing as an alternative to traditional notions of truth and justice (Cooke, in Habermas, 1998:5)

In order to act communicatively and reach understanding it is necessary to achieve the following validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness. That is, the speaker must:

a. make an intelligible statement, so that speaker and hearer can comprehend one another;

b. give the hearer something to understand, i.e., communicate a true proposition so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker;
c. thereby make oneself understandable, i.e., expressing one's intentions *truthfully* so that the hearer finds the statement credible, thus worthy of trust, and

d. reach an understanding with the hearer, i.e., choosing a statement that is *right* with respect to prevailing norms so that speaker and hearer can reach agreement within a recognized normative background (Habermas, 1998:22-23).

The greatest challenge in fostering communicative rationality through policy is with respect to the media. The very nature of pre-Internet mass media has tended to further sequestration of experience and "fictional realism," (Giddens, 1991:169) rather than promote communicative action. Nevertheless, there are hopeful signs that the public sphere may be reclaimed and inter-subjective relations strengthened. With this in mind, the next section ventures a number of policy considerations that could address the problems of Martensville and other child abuse panics.

**Policy Considerations**

I. **Media coverage** - There have been many debates about limiting the media in their coverage of sensational events. Various agreements and protocols have been established to little avail. There is a need to expand "media literacy." However, it is readily apparent that North American society has not yet come to terms with the problem of "reality" in mass media. The media amplify crime in such a way as to make it difficult to identify the true impact of events on the media consumer. The Internet holds some promise that communications will be distributed in such a way as to increase communicative rationality. Ultimately, though, it is up to the consumer to insist on realistic coverage. In cases such as Martensville, the media need to be held to account to respect the principle of "innocent until proven guilty."
II. **Investigation of alleged child abuse** - One of the major contributing factors in inflaming the scandal at Martensville was the inexperience of the principal investigators. There is a need to establish clear policy as to whom is able to interview children in child sexual abuse cases, and the types of qualifications required. Training programs such as the Step-Wise program (Yuille, Hunter, Joffe and Zparniuk, 1993) should be mandatory for investigators in each jurisdiction.

III. **Policing and moral panics** - There is a tendency in the “risk society” to use public fears as an opportunity for marketing a particular product, whether that be policing, security systems, or insurance policies. There is a need for recognition of this fact although it is doubtful that policy measures could be put in place to limit the potential for abuse. In a free enterprise system, this is a complex problem. However, initiatives such as “truth in advertising” and Adbusters, show that there are potentialities for greater communicative rationality in advertising.

IV. **Child protection and social services** - Child protection services have come through a period of ideological turmoil vis-a-vis child abuse. Since the publication of the shocking statistics on the prevalence of child abuse commencing in the early 1980’s, agencies have, at times, acted precipitously upon hearing allegations of child abuse. In some cases, this has meant assuming the culpability of an alleged perpetrator, removing children from the home and taking other actions in the absence of charges. There is a need for specialized training in dealing with allegations of child abuse to ensure the safeguarding of the rights and safety of all concerned. There must be a clear distinction between therapy and investigation as to the validity tests required.

V. **Notification re: sexual offenders** - There is a growing movement that seeks broad notification of the community of potential sexual offenders. Police, community leaders, child welfare agencies and school administrations readily adopt this course of
action because such notification suggests that they have shown “due diligence.”
However, notification often does little to protect the community, may unnecessarily
heighten fears and may contribute to initiating an offender’s crime cycle, or drive the
offender underground. Clear guidelines should be established for appropriate
notification of schools and community agencies for cases in which a sexual offender
may represent a threat to the community.

VI. **Education** - Probably the single factor with the most potential for positive change is
public education. The better informed the populace is on each of the above topics,
the greater the possibility that events like Martensville will not again occur.
Authorities must take decisive action to correct an investigation (such as in
Martensville) that is going astray. This can only be achieved if there is an informed
public that understands the realities of child abuse, crime in general, and the workings
of the media.

The majority of the above recommendations and policy considerations have been
addressed, somewhat, in Saskatoon following the Martensville case. A multi-disciplinary
child abuse centre was established. The centre has offices for professionals from the various
disciplines, including police, medical personnel, child protection workers and crown counsel.
The interview rooms are designed to support fact-finding in a child-friendly atmosphere.
Personnel are selected based on competency and are given in-service training in the latest
techniques and concepts related to the investigation of child abuse. Despite the lingering
animosities in the Martensville area, there are indications that lessons have been learned.
The child abuse centre is proof of that fact.

In North American society, the conditions that gave rise to the child abuse panics
have not vanished. Scandals of this sort still occur, although they are less frequent, less
sensational, and (perhaps) less likely to result in the scars of Martensville. This is, perhaps,
due to the realization on the part of a majority of the public that ritual abuse is virtually non-
existent and organized child sexual abuse very rare. The recovered memory debate has received sufficient media attention that the public is generally much better informed on the realities of child abuse. All these factors have contributed to a public that is much more capable of separating fact from fiction. Child abuse, however, remains an all too frequent reminder of society’s ills. Outside of the Martensville area, many do not recall or have never heard of the small community just north of Saskatoon. Sadly, continuous pressures on public expenditure have led to curtailment of government funding of training for child abuse investigators in British Columbia and elsewhere.

The two important lessons learned in Martensville have to do with the investigation of child abuse and the role of the media. As noted above, the introduction of centres devoted to dealing with child abuse has the potential to address many of the problems associated with child witnesses in cases of abuse. However, there is a tendency for government cost-cutting measures to hobble such initiatives. It must be made politically perilous for governments to make cuts of this nature.

The problem of the mass media is one that is much more difficult to address and it is not within the scope of this thesis to attempt to do so. However, there is a growing body of literature on reclaiming the public sphere. The establishment of a viable public sphere is the prerequisite for communicative rationality in the media.

**Conclusions**

The intent of this research has been to attempt to make sense of the Martensville child abuse scandal. The method of doing so has been to examine various accounts of what was going on in Martensville—with special attention to the moral panic account. The purpose has been to determine whether insights could be gained into the events that brought continent-wide attention to the little town north of Saskatoon and so deeply affected its people and those of the surrounding region.
The concept of moral panic has proved useful in analyzing the events in Martensville. However, moral panic remains a concept, not a theory. In order for sociological conclusions to be drawn, the concept must be employed with respect to a sociological theory. In the past twenty years, there has been a rush to declare previous theoretical paradigms dead. This is usually attempted by adding the prefix “post” — hence “poststructuralism” and “postmodernism.” In the last quarter of the 20th Century, such tactics were often useful in demonstrating the efficacy of interpretative approaches within sociology (i.e., the need to understand or interpret actors’ meanings). However, despite all efforts to declare structuralism dead, approaches such as that of Hall, et al. retain a capacity to yield insights.

The research presented here suggests that both interpretative and structuralist perspectives are valuable in analyzing the events of Martensville. However, this is even more the case if these perspectives are embedded in a critical and historical perspective.

By construing the events in Martensville as a moral panic, a number of advantages are gained. Most importantly, perhaps, is the signal that something is awry. This is true whether the perspective is one of a layperson, a professional dealing with the events, or a social theorist. The term “moral panic” implies that there are forces at play beyond that which is immediately evident. This is surely the prerequisite for both making sense of what has happened and responding effectively. While some sociologists have disparaged the concept, many in the media have adopted “moral panic” as a descriptive term. The evidence presented here suggests that the concept of moral panic provides sociological insights that go far beyond journalistic usages.

Can such an understanding of the nature of the Martensville episode assist in alleviating the bitterness that lingers in Martensville and beyond? Perhaps it can. The determination of damages must be left to the courts. However, it is possible that some of the

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55. Jary and Jary (1991: 249) describe the aim of interpretive sociology as “to achieve a nonpositivistic formulation of social science that does not violate the premises that actors’ meanings must always be understood and that actors’ social competence and actors’ choice preclude deterministic ‘law-like accounts’ of social reality.”
participants could find the answers they seek by looking at the events as being typical of a moral panic.

Should global communications transform and expand the public sphere in the direction of communicative rationality, as they seem capable of doing, it is reasonable to hope that more and more people will learn to communicate intelligently and respectfully with one another. For this to have occurred in Martensville in 1992, allegations such as those brought forward needed to be handled much more effectively by all concerned. For it to happen in the future, the media and the professional groups concerned must heed the lessons of Martensville and other documented moral panics. With awareness and vigilance, this is an attainable goal.
References


Acme Collective. A communique from one section of the black bloc of N30 in Seattle,” posted at the Seattle Independent Media Center (Indymedia) website 10:48 a.m., 99/12/04; subsequently removed and website disbanded. Copy available upon request.


Appendix “A”

Sample Interview Questions

1. From your standpoint [occupational group] what do you think happened? Were their contrasting points of view? Was there an “official” point of view?

2. What led to your initial involvement? [For those not directly involved]: Tell me how you first learned about this case?

3. How do you understand this case from your own point of view?

4. What about the points of view of other groups? Were they different from the [occupational group] point of view? What about other professional accounts of the Martensville events? What credence do you give to those accounts if they were different from the [occupational group] account? Please explain.

5. Of the various occupational group accounts, which one seemed to hold sway or become the dominant account (i.e., most convincing, most persuasive, most currency with the public)? Why do you think it had that status?

6. What about the media coverage of the events – did the media have their own slant, or favour one of the interpretations over others (for e.g., recovered memories, false memory syndrome, satanic ritual abuse, moral panic)? Were important issues left out of the coverage? Were other issues under or over-emphasized? If so, why do you think this happened?

7. Do you think that the media coverage had a significant impact on how these events were dealt with by the criminal justice system?

8. Did the media coverage raise or lower the profile of the other occupational group accounts?

9. Some of the controversy over these events focussed on the issue of “recovered memories.” What is your view of this? Do you think this issue was relevant to an understanding of the events?

10. While some people were putting forward the idea of “recovered memories” others talked about “false memory syndrome.” Were local people in the Martensville area talking about these issues, or was discussion of them largely an imported debate?

11. “Satanic ritual abuse” was also mentioned. Do you think this was a relevant factor in the Martensville case?

12. Another term mentioned was “moral panic.” Does this term hold any meaning for you in relation to the Martensville case? My understanding of the term “moral panic” is that it is
defined as a state that may occur when people are upset with change and want to restore the previous moral order. Does this describe any aspects of what was going on?

13. Looking at the aftermath of this case, what happened to the various principals when the charges were finally disposed of, the media stopped reporting, and the case was “over”? How did people in the community adjust to the effects of the trial and their knowledge about the case?

14. How did this whole string of events affect you personally? How did it affect your understanding of what the case was about?

15. This interview has been very interesting and informative. Is there any reading that you would recommend (books, articles, etc.)? Are there any people in Martensville, or connected to the case that you think I should talk to?
Handcuffed Ron Sterling, who is led away by an unidentified police officer (right), and James Elstad (above), both of Martensville, were among eight charged in sexual-assault case.

(Photo at right courtesy of CBC-TV)

A male child was given drugs using a hypodermic needle to render him incapable of resistance, suffocated with a pillow case and beaten with an axe handle, according to charges filed in court Wednesday against two Martensville family members.

Threats were also made to children that harm could come to their parents or other family members, children were sexually assaulted and some had guns pointed at them, allege 75 new charges filed against four Martensville people.

The specific charges include:

7 police officers linked to horrifying child-assault case

By Doug McConachie
of The StarPhoenix

Horrific allegations of sexual assaults involving 30 children, who were cared for in a Martensville day-care home, resulted in two former town police chiefs and a Warman RCMP officer being arrested Wednesday.

Three other police officers — two from the Saskatoon police force who were suspended Tuesday and another current Martensville police officer — are under investigation for possible involvement, in the allegations that stretch over a three-year period, from May 1988 to August 1991.

Another Martensville police officer who was suspended and already faced 15 charges in the case was also re-arrested.

Four other persons, three of whom already face 27 sex-related charges in connection with the case, were arrested Wednesday in their Martensville homes and appeared briefly in Saskatoon provincial court charged with another 75 offences.

A 20-year-old female was also arrested and charged, but she was under 18 when the alleged assaults occurred, so she has been charged under the Young Offenders Act and her identity cannot be made public.

"Sexual assaults, pointing a firearm, aggravated assault, threatening, touching (and) unlawful confinement" are the charges, newly appointed Martensville police Chief Mike Johnston said Wednesday.

"There's been another 139 charges ... and more could be coming," Johnston said.

The charges revolve around a Martensville day-care home operated by Ron and Linda Sterling and their son, Travis.

While Ron and Linda were charged with additional counts Wednesday, police continued to search for Travis, who was believed to be in Prince Albert.

StarPhoenix sources say the children, between two and 13 years old, were sexually assaulted at a location near Martensville.

Although some parents say their children have talked about some sort of cult-like activities, police are saying only that they have heard those allegations but can neither confirm nor deny that aspect.
**Appendix “C”**

**Keep accused in jail: Crown**

**More charges pending**

By Doug McClear and Terry Craig

Crown prosecutor Bruce Bauer will vigorously oppose the release of eight persons charged in connection with allegations of sexual abuse at Martensville when they appear today in Saskatoon provincial court.

The men, former police chief Darren Ford and former Martensville police officer Travis Sterling, were charged on Thursday and were charged with all offences in connection with the sexual assaults.

The Crown will file the charges today.

**NEW CHARGES THURSDAY:**

- Two armed city notice last week.
- Ford was charged under the Young Offenders Act.
- Sterling was charged under the Criminal Code.
- Ford was charged with assaulting a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old.
- Sterling was charged with assaulting a 3-year-old.
- Ford was charged with 12 counts of sexual assault, one count of unlawful confinement, one count of uttering threats, two counts of pointing a firearm and one count of using a weapon.

**TOTAL CHARGES 12.**

- **TRAVIS STERLING, 23, day-care operator.**
  - Originally charged with two counts of sexual assault, four counts of sexual touching, five of aggravated assault, three of unlawful confinement, four of uttering threats, two of pointing a firearm and one of using a weapon.

**TOTAL CHARGES 36.**

- To be charged today:
  - **DARRIN SABOURIN, 29, Warman RCMP officer.**
  - **ED REVEZ, former Martensville Police Chief.**

Under Investigation:
- Two Saskatoon city police officers.
- One additional Martensville police officer.

Others already charged include:
- **LINDA STERLING, 41, day-care operator.**
- **JAMES ELDSTAD, 42, former Martensville police officer.**
- **RON STERLING, 41, day-care operator.**

**TOTAL CHARGES 34.**

A 20-year-old, charged under the young offenders’ act.

**TOTAL CHARGES 3.**

**Courtroom packed**

**By Terry Craig**

The courtroom was packed at the start of a preliminary hearing Thursday morning when a large crowd quickly filled the gallery in anticipation of the appearance of Darren Ford and Linda Sterling, James Eldstad, Darren Ford and a 3-year-old woman.

Among them, the six are charged with 195 counts of assault, sexual assaults, unlawful confinement, threats and other charges stemming from a nine-month police investigation. The details of the arrest warrant on the accused as they were led into the courtroom.

A brand new chicken trailer, a large box truck and a group of young students attended the hearing. The group was seen standing outside the courthouse prior to the hearing.

**The women sat throughout the brief proceedings, now and then whispering to one another.**

The gallery, along with the building, was filled with the sound of the crowd. The crowd was heard to cheer as the accused were led into the courtroom.

There were also allegations that a man was boarding a bus at the request of one of the accused.

The hearing was adjourned until next week.

**Related stories**

Pages 40, 41, 42, 43

148
RECAP OF EVENTS

The magnitude of the child sexual abuse allegations in Martensville is gradually becoming clear with the rash of charges unveiled this week. But the case first started to come to light in November with the charging of Travis Sterling, who operated an unlicensed Martensville day care with his parents, Ron and Linda Sterling. Following is a brief recap of the chain of events as they unfolded.

- Nov. 1991: Travis Sterling charged with sexual assault.
- Jan. 30: Ron Sterling charged with sexual assault, pointing a firearm and uttering threats.
- April 2: James Elstad, suspended as officer with the Martensville police force the previous week, charged with sexual assault and sexual interference.
- Wednesday: Elstad, Ron Sterling, Linda Sterling and a 20-year-old charged under the Young Offenders' Act, arrested on a total of 84 more counts.
- Thursday: Travis Sterling and Darryl Ford, a former Martensville police chief, faced a total of new sex-related charges. It was also indicated Warman RCMP officer Darren Sabourin and another former Martensville police chief, Ed Revesz, would be charged in court Friday.
Police should have asked prosecutors for guidance earlier in the Martensville sexual abuse investigation, says Saskatchewan's chief of public prosecutions.

"In hindsight it would have been fortunate if (prosecutors) had been approached," said Richard Quinney.

Prosecutors weren't consulted about the cases until charges were laid. It was only then that they learned what evidence they had to work with, Quinney said Thursday after it was announced that the Crown was staying all charges against the remaining four people awaiting trial in the case.

Quinney said there was no longer a reasonable chance to convict the remaining defendants in the case.

Darren Sabourin, Darryl Ford and James Elstad received congratulations and handshakes from supporters as they milled around in the hallways of the Saskatoon Courthouse. The fourth defendant, Ed Revesz, wasn't there.

'The Crown's action means the charges won't proceed, though they could be revived within one year.'