

## **Satanism: Psychiatric and Legal Views**

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In an age of irremediable secularization (1), the mythical roots of the religious and psychopathological imagination are nowhere more obvious than in the phenomenon of satanism. Despite widespread skepticism about the continuing truth value of Christian mythology, the role and influence of the devil continues to be felt throughout contemporary society. A substantial psychopathological literature focused on satanism exists. The 1980s saw the proliferation of beliefs about satanic practices, including satanic ritual abuse. The reality of satanism and satanic ritual abuse has been vigorously debated. Some have described a moral crusade (or panic) against satanism. The attraction of Satan, in association with Gothic and other nihilistic beliefs, exercises a peculiarly powerful influence on alienated and rebellious adolescent males (2).

Reflecting the pervasive influence of the occult and associated New Age philosophies, the general public continues to be mesmerized by satanism, ritual abuse (including satanic day-care centers, sexual debauchery, sacrificial murder, cannibalism, and infanticide), satanic influences in rock and roll music, and alien abduction. Some fully accept the authenticity of cult abuse. For example, one psychiatrist (3) noted that the methods employed by "pedophiles and sexual abusers" in ritual occult abuse produce "people with programmable multiple personalities." Others point to the role of Fundamentalist religion, mass hysteria, use of hypnotically based memory recovery techniques, the role of the mass media (4), and repressed collective rage and fear in the social construction of satanic cult crime (5, 6). An extremely interesting document published by a special agent at the Federal Bureau of Investigation Behavioral Science Unit (7) reported that in more than 12,000 investigated cases involving allegations of satanic ritual abuse, no evidence to support the accusations has ever been found.

*Satanism: Psychiatric and Legal Views*, written by a psychiatrist and a legal scholar, provides a concise overview of myths, cults, and beliefs about the devil, placing the issues into cultural, historical, and psychopathological contexts. Chapter titles include: "Myths, Cults, and Culture," "The Birth of the Devil," "God Versus Satan," "Children in Satanic Rituals," "Juvenile Satanism," "Satanism and Criminal Law," "The Satanist as Criminal," and "Psychiatric Views of Satanism." The book is fascinating reading for those interested in the twisted recesses of the pathological and religious imagination. The authors maintain a middle-of-the-road, balanced perspective, elucidating the phenomena and their power but commenting on the psychiatric and legal aspects. The religious and psychopathological literature on satanism is reasonably well covered. The book should be of interest to those mental health

# Satanism Psychiatric And Legal Views

**Chao Zhang**



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