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Role-Playing Games and the Christian Right: Community Formation in Response to a Moral Panic

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Abstract

During the 1980s, the newly established industry and youth subculture associated with role-playing games came under sustained attack from schools, churches, parents and governments, instigated by the Christian Right via organizations such as B.A.D.D. (Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons). While both the organization B.A.D.D and its claims linking Role-playing games to youth suicide, drug use and Satanism eventually were discredited, the impact of these accusations lingers on to the present. This article examines the impact of the role-playing game “moral panic” on the role-playing game community and investigates the responses and coping mechanisms utilised by those directly targeted and harassed by churches, the police, schools and governments during the height of the “moral panic” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The article also investigates the effect that the shared experience of being targeted by a “moral panic” had on the formation of a role-playing counter culture and community.

What are Role-playing Games?

[1] Role-playing games (RPGs) are a form of interactive novel in which the protagonists create and control the actions of a cast of characters. The characters operate in a virtual world controlled by a referee/narrator figure called the GM or games master, depending on which variant of game is being played. (Variants

include Dungeon Master, referee, narrator, storyteller, etc.). The GM creates a virtual world and the players make decisions, based on their character's interaction with that world and moderated by a combination of statistics, probability and characterisation. The worlds themselves vary from the traditional Dungeons and Dragons adaptation of Tolkeinesque fantasy realms to Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Espionage, Space Opera and Westerns and include some settings that are so surreal as to defy simple definitions. Most forms of literature have an expression as an RPG, some much more popular and mainstream than others.

[2] While overall numbers of gamers are difficult to estimate, a 1990 survey conducted in the United States, Australia and Canada estimated that at least 7.5 million people engaged in RPGs at least once a month in those three countries. A 2000 survey by the RPG company "Wizards of the Coast" estimated that approximately 5.5 million Americans play RPGs regularly. Additionally, there are numerous RPG conventions and gatherings held throughout Anglophone nations. There are also sizeable RPG communities in France, Germany, Spain and Italy, among others.

Theoretical Interpretations of RPGs in Youth Culture

[3] What was particularly new about RPGs when they emerged in the late 1970s, and that certainly contributed to their popularity, was their potential for escapism. At their most enthralling, RPGs require a multi-layered structure of close social interaction and a mechanism for exploring shared ideals, values, symbols and cultural forms (particularly those derived from literature). They require a unique format that cannot be easily replicated in other games or social activities. RPGs create a flexible mechanism for exploring virtual worlds, identities, social structures, symbols and cultural norms within a social environment that is detached and segregated from daily life. This potential for reflexivity, identity formation, close knit networks of social interaction and escapism was certainly a crucial ingredient in the popularity of RPGs and their later equivalents in computer games, Multi User Dungeons and online gaming.

[4] According to research by Sherry Turkle, RPGs have a greater

potential for escapism than many other pastimes because they not only allow the players to interact with their surroundings but give them a venue in which they can create their own socio-cultural identity. In RPGs, the role the player adopts is a tool designed to further separate the context of the game from reality. The player is not so much role-playing as persona-playing. By using fantastic and alien characters, players can create sufficient psychological distance to believe they have transcended the constraining features of their own socio-cultural identity. A character has a name, physical attributes and personality distinct from the player but that the player adopts for the game. This allows both an escape from the perceived cultural and social barriers experienced in daily life while serving as a metaphor for exploring these issues in a virtual context. The role of RPGs in youth culture can be evaluated as an example of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's psychosocial moratorium in which a "time out" is placed on the consequences of actions and identity formation. This provides people with an opportunity to expose themselves to a variety of experiences without concern for the result of those actions and to experiment with alternate forms of identity. Doing so allows the individual to develop a better-informed core self-identity and set of social values which, according to Erikson, is a significant task in adolescent psychological development.

[5] Unlike MUDs and online computer games, RPGs require a close level of face-to-face social interaction. They are usually played in an isolated area, typically a room at a private residence, school, university or community centre, marked off from the outside world with paraphernalia unique to the subculture of gamers and involving a great deal of jargon and symbols that have meaning only to those who are part of the group. There are close parallels here with Victor Turner's concept of the liminoid and communitas. Players actively work to create marked liminal spaces in which they can shake off their mainstream socio-cultural identity and adopt symbols and images deemed inimical to the mainstream cultural construction of the self but which form their own unique anti-structure in opposition to the mainstream socio-cultural order. Thirty-five percent of men and 20 percent of women choose to play characters of alternate gender and 60 percent prefer to play nonhuman characters. These high numbers give credence to the anti-structural nature of role-playing games. Similarly, the game experience lives or dies on the social interaction of its participants. It depends upon the creation of a

protected liminoid space in which the social world can be evaluated reflexively and in which a sense of *communitas* can be created as a crucial component of the success of the game. This sense of *communitas* is experienced both as a heightened sense of closeness, equality, joy and community within the group but also as a blurring of the imaginative and real world through atmosphere, anti-structural symbolism and depth of play. As one gamer commented,

Have you ever played a game where the real world has all but melted away, and the feelings and actions of you and your character become indistinct? If you have, you most likely feel that this was one of the best games you've ever played, that gaming is at its most brilliant when the boundaries of fantasy and reality become blurred.

It is this experience of escapism, community and a psycho-social moratorium in which identity, issues and cultural forms can be freely explored, that lies at the heart of gaming and the gaming sub-culture. It is also the source of many attacks against gamers and RPGs on the grounds that they blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, leading people to engage in immoral or anti-social activities, or in the case of fundamentalist Christian attacks, leading young people to Paganism or Satanism and thus away from the Church.

The Moral Panic against RPGs

[6] The moral panic in the United States (and to a lesser extent in Australia and France) directed against RPGs, especially *Dungeons and Dragons*, originated in the media response to the suicides of 16 year old college sophomore James Dallas Egbert III in August 1980 and 16 year old high school student Irving Bink Pulling II in June 1982. Despite a wide range of psychological and social factors such as drug addiction, a long history of chronic depression, confrontation with parents over sexual orientation, public humiliation in the school environment and even doubts as to whether they had actually played any RPGs regularly, the media interpretation of the events was that the "strange game of D&D" was a crucial factor in their suicides. Additionally, Patricia Pulling, mother of Bink Pulling, attempted

to sue TSR, the manufacturer of Dungeons and Dragons, for the death of her son. The case was thrown out of court in 1984. She then partnered with Illinois psychiatrist Thomas Radecki, director of the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV), to form a new organization with close links to several fundamentalist Christian bodies called Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (B.A.D.D.). Pulling linked her belief that there was Satanic influence behind RPGs to three other perceived threats to the social order: Heavy Metal music, the Pagan revival and the Satanic Ritual Abuse scare. The perceived allegiance between these disparate threats became the centrepiece of the anti-RPG moral panic. In Australia, B.A.D.D primarily operated and distributed materials through the Australian Federation for Decency (now Australia Federation for Family) from 1986 onwards, headed by the Reverend Fred Nile.

[7] Pulling's description of Dungeons and Dragons is as follows,

A fantasy role-playing game which uses demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, satanic type rituals, gambling, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, desecration, demon summoning, necromantics, divination and other teachings. There have been a number of deaths nationwide where games like Dungeons and Dragons were either the decisive factor in adolescent suicide and murder, or played a major factor in the violent behaviour of such tragedies. Since role-playing is typically used for behaviour modification, it has become apparent nationwide (with the increased homicide and suicide rates in adolescents) that there is a great need to investigate every aspect of a youngster's environment, [sic] including their method of entertainment, in reaching a responsible conclusion for their violent actions.

[8] In pursuing her campaign against Dungeons and Dragons and RPGs in general, Pulling utilised a variety of tactics which she pursued, along with Thomas Radecki, with an enormous amount of energy and dedication. These tactics include:

1. Numerous petitions to government agencies and politicians

[9] The Federal Trades Commission, the Consumer Products Safety Commission, and numerous members of Congress were lobbied to have RPGs sold with warning labels linking them to suicide and murder or have them banned outright.

2. A compiled list of RPG victims

[10] A compilation of alleged victims was constructed using names appropriated from newspaper reports and testimonials of suicides and crimes that perceived to be linked to RPG-related activities. It was labelled the “Pulling Trophy List” by mass media and gamers alike.

3. Current affairs and talk show appearances

[10] Pulling, Radecki and others appeared on numerous talk shows and current affairs programs such as the *Gil Gross Show*, *Geraldo*, *Sally Jesse Raphael*, *Donahue*, *60 Minutes* and others. decrying Dungeons and Dragons as a Satanic threat to children and a major cause of suicide and youth crime.

4. Lectures on cult crime and youth violence

[11] Lectures on RPGs being linked to cult crimes, suicide, Satanic ritual abuse and youth violence were delivered at policing and public awareness seminars on crime and the occult. Critical to this approach was the linking of RPGs to the widely held belief that there were numerous Satanic cults at work in American and Western society which attempted to seduce youth to commit immoral acts such as human sacrifice and ritual sex abuse through Heavy Metal music, RPGs, educators, child care centres and television. The following is an excerpt from a “Cult Crime” seminar presented by Detective Gary Sworin in Richmond Virginia.

We have Dungeons and Dragons and all these other demons ... and all these games that are out. And luckily within our area, we have nothing concerning repercussions from those types of games... Its to the point where, in the game itself,

you portray yourself—you take on the characteristics of another person and what you are really supposed to do at that point is make believe you are that person and you are supposed to rob, pillage; you're supposed to murder—anything you can do to achieve power in the game.

5. Lobbying and petitioning authority figures

[12] During this period there was extensive lobbying by church organizations on schools, the media, government and police, opining that RPGs were a fundamental threat to America's moral character, encouraged youth violence and were linked to Satanism and the Pagan revival.

6. "Expert" testimony in high profile legal cases

[13] Patricia Pulling and Thomas Radecki offered their "expert" testimony on RPGs in various high profile cases in which the defendant wished to apply the "D&D Defence" for criminal activities such as the Darren Molitor case and in civil cases against the RPG games industry.

7. Saturation of public places with anti-RPG paraphernalia

[14] A public awareness and education campaign was initiated, attempting to saturate schools, churches and public places with anti-gaming paraphernalia such as the infamous "Dark Dungeons" cartoon by Jack L. Chick.

[15] Apart from the claims to Satanic influence, the primary threat perceived in RPGs was the perceived breakdown between the realm of fantasy and reality. In representations of RPGs in the mass media, players were regarded as becoming so involved in their fantasy games that their concept of self and reality began to dissolve to be replaced by the virtual fantasy world of the RPG. Instead of a liminoid consequential moratorium or an example of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, players were perceived as breaking down the barriers of the public and liminoid space and thus allowing their play to have "real world" consequence. There was also concern about what youth learned in their play. In the real world, criminal or immoral behaviour has consequences, yet

in a game without these consequences, there was perceived to be no necessity for gamers to act morally. Underlying this argument was a deep fear of the unfettered imagination of youth having an impact on real world situations. In a game, players can engage in any virtual activities they wish with consequences that are equally virtual. This is reflected in Patricia Pulling's advice to police that,

It appears that a significant amount of youngsters are having difficulty with separating fantasy from reality. Or in other instances, their role playing has modified their behaviour to the extent that they react in real life situations in the same fashion that they would react in a gaming situation. This is not always obvious or apparent to the suspect. The personality change is so subtle that in some cases the role player is unaware of any behaviour or personality changes.

[16] Lying behind attacks on RPGs is the belief that a certain mindset is required to carry out criminal, self destructive or immoral acts and the negative consequences of those acts are the primary incentive against their execution. In the anti-RPG moral panic it was believed that the lack of real consequences for virtual acts would permit players to experiment with criminal or occult activities and thus act out tendencies that in the real world would be repressed. Thus it is in the interests of society to repress perceived deviant behaviour whether virtual or not. In application, it appeared that RPGs were regarded as having a greater influence upon adolescents' minds than social, cultural and moral values.

[17] As in Cohen's model of moral panics, two key factors emerged in the anti-RPG campaigns. First, "right thinking people" manned the barricades protecting the social and moral order. School principals, police, conservative politicians and churches all spoke out against RPGs. The complainants' high positions in the community gave weight to these claims, influencing public opinion. Second, articles and lectures did not specify where Satanic, Pagan or Socialist references or activities could be found. There was no description of the process by which the conclusion that RPGs were linked with other perceived threats to the social order had been reached. Additionally, the

existence of RPGs was construed as a threat to the welfare of children. With such a clear challenge laid before school boards and city officials there was little alternative action that could be taken without appearing to be unconcerned about the emotional and physical wellbeing of children.

[18] This approach to the anti-RPG campaign is well illustrated in B.A.D.D's profile of teen Satanism and the occult, distributed to police departments for interviewing suspected occult related youth crime. Also of significance was the construction of the threat in extremely vague terms which could be applied to almost every aspect of youth culture and sector of society through a process of self-fulfilling prophecy, as is illustrated here in Pulling's guide to identifying the influence of teen Satanism by police, clergy and educators. Michael Stackpole's "Pulling Report" is particularly succinct in analysing the circular logic, double hermeneutic, overt generalisations and self-fulfilling prophecies involved in Pulling's approach to identifying Satanic influences in young people.

THE WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE AND HOW OF TEEN SATANISM

WHO

1. Adolescents from all walks of life.
2. Many from middle to upper middle class families
3. Intelligent
4. Over or Under Achievers
5. Creative/Curious
6. Some are Rebellious
7. Some have low self esteem and are loners
8. Some children have been abused (physically or sexually)

WHEN does this occur?

It appears the ages most vulnerable are 11-17

WHERE?

1. Public places such as rock concerts, game clubs in communities or at school.
2. Private parties at a friend's home.

HOW?

1. Through Black Heavy Metal Music
2. Through fantasy role playing games like Dungeons & Dragons
3. Obsession with movies, videos, which have occult themes
4. Collecting and reading/researching occult books
5. Involvement with "Satanic Cults", [sic] through recruitment
6. Some are born into families who practice [sic] "satanic cult rituals"

WHAT can we do?

1. Document all information relating to occult involvement (even if it does not appear relevant at the time)
2. Keep an open mind
3. Stay objective
4. Never assume that an individual is acting alone [sic] until all other information surrounding the

case and individual has been fully investigated.

5. If individual is involved in “satanic activity,” he/she will deny a great deal to protect other members of the group as well as the “satanic philosophy”.

[sic]

6. Have a team approach; work with a therapist, clergymen and other helping professionals.

7. Educate the community so that potential tragedies might be avoided.

[19] It is difficult precisely to evaluate the extent to which the anti-RPG moral panic permeated the social order. At its peak, many schools banned the game, shops were closed, several smaller companies were forced out of business and many gamers experienced harassment ranging from minor disapproval and restrictions of behaviour from educators, police, churches and parents to more severe actions. I will discuss the experience of gamers shortly.

[20] B.A.D.D documents were distributed to police departments across America and in many schools, churches and local governments in Britain, Canada and Australia. Anti-RPG documents, articles and cartoons were distributed throughout Australian, British and Canadian churches, police departments, welfare agencies and schools, but there is no evidence to suggest that moral panic ever became embedded in educational, government or police institutions of other nations to the same extent as it did in the U.S. Several films were produced with support and consultation from B.A.D.D and other anti-RPG organizations, most notably “Mazes and Monsters”, “Cruel Doubt” and “Honour thy Mother.” Perhaps the most bizarre event was the raid by the American Secret Service on Steve Jackson Games on the premise that the RPG Cyberpunk contained secret coding on how to become a computer hacker and encouraged participators to commit cyber-crime. The Judge found that the agents in charge had acted without proper investigation and “in his zeal to obtain evidence for criminal investigation, simply concluded that Steve Jackson games was involved in illegal activities because of the wording on the

“Illuminati” bulletin board menu.” However, the moral panic did follow three clearly identifiable stages. The first was the claim that students were using occult paraphernalia included in RPGs to curse or hex fellow students, parents and teachers. This was the claim made by Pulling in her attempt to sue TSR for her son’s death and presented through many anti-RPG forums such as then infamous “Dark Dungeons” cartoon by Jack T. Chick. The second phase began in the mid 1980s and claimed that the fantastic and morally dubious world of RPGs would lead students to suicide, murder and violent crime. The final phase, which started in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was the claim that RPGs would lead gamers to become Satanists or Pagans and then to engage in immoral and violent activities.

[21] While the moral panic against RPGs was pervasive and RPGs are still stigmatised in some sectors of society as being linked to Satanism, youth suicide and the occult, the campaign against RPGs collapsed in the early 1980s and quickly lost much of its support among the judiciary, police, educators and government. Unlike the moral panics against Mods and Rockers and Heavy Metal music, the collapse of the anti-RPG moral panic has close ties to the loss of credibility and financial support by anti-RPG organizations that profited from the moral panic. In particular, with the collapse and disbanding of B.A.D.D as a political and media force, media attention was no longer being continually drawn to spectacular accusations of deviant behaviour and supposed immorality against gamers that subsequently led to the decline of the anti-RPG moral panic. The collapse of the credibility and effectiveness of B.A.D.D and other anti-RPG organizations can be traced to several specific causes:

1. Litigious failure

[22] Despite many cases supported by B.A.D.D there has yet to be a civil or criminal case in which the so-called D&D defence has succeeded. This undermined much of the incentive for its application in law and denied B.A.D.D a vital platform for publicising its agenda through the mass media.

2. Lack of academic credibility

[23] Despite numerous attempts to finance academic research

which could prove psychological transformation, a propensity to criminal activity, depression, alienation and other anti-social tendencies as linked to RPGs, virtually all these studies found that the difference was statistically insignificant or that gamers scored lower on key indicators linked to alienation, propensity to violence, depression and inability to distinguish fantasy from reality. This inability to achieve published findings in refereed journals was a major blow in B.A.D.D's attempts to legitimise its claims against RPGs. What was particularly significant with this failure to achieve academic and professional credibility for the belief that role-playing games represented a threat to youth was that without this credibility, it was difficult to create the political impetus to legislate against role-playing games or to gain support from law enforcement and educational bodies beyond the local and demagogic level. Additionally, when the levels of suicide amongst RPG players was investigated in relation to national statistics on youth suicide in Canada and the United States by the American Association of Suicidology, the Centres for Disease Control, and the National Safety Council (among others), it was found that while overall level of youth suicide (15-25) was 5300 per year, there had only been 128 suicide attempts by game players recorded by B.A.D.D and affiliated organizations between 1979 and 1988. Furthermore, most of these claimed suicides were simply accumulated unsourced newspaper clippings, often referring to the same incident several times over. According to the estimated number of RPG gamers in the country at the time, there should have been at least 1060 gamer suicides in the same period. Consequently, the finding of the report was that suicide amongst RPG gamers was actually significantly lower than national averages for the age demographic of 15-25 year olds.

3. Discrediting of B.A.D.D

[24] The credentials and activities of Patricia Pulling, Thomas Radecki and B.A.D.D were themselves under intense scrutiny in the early 1990s. Most notable is the work of Criminologist Robert Hicks and the now famous Pulling Report commissioned by the Game Manufacturers Association of America (GAMA) to investigate claims made by Pulling against RPGs. The findings of these and other investigations were scathing of the methods used by Pulling and B.A.D.D. In particular, the claims of Teen Suicide were found to have been taken from newspaper

clippings, many of which provided no date, location or details of the event. Patricia Pulling was also under fire for blatant manipulation of statistical data. Most prominent was the claim that there were 56,000 Satanists living in the Richmond, VA area. It was later discovered she had arrived at that figure by including all activities she perceived to be New Age or Pagan influenced. Another heavily ridiculed claim was her argument that eight percent of the total population of America were Satanists. This figure later emerged to have been determined by adding together an estimated four percent of youth and four percent of adults. Additionally, in the absence of empirical evidence, scepticism regarding belief in claims of Satanic conspiracies and Occult crime in general was gaining support among, law enforcement officers and welfare agencies, further undermining the claims made by B.A.D.D regarding youth and the occult.

4. The increasingly fantastic nature of the claims

[25] In the absence of supporting evidence regarding the secular claims of RPGs leading to suicide and violent crime, B.A.D.D and supporting fundamentalist Christian organizations such as the “700 Club” made increasingly grandiose and unsupportable statements, e.g., that RPGs were actually a form of Satanic worship, caused multiple personality syndrome, involved Satanic rituals, was used as a cover for human sacrifice and child abuse, and that the supposed magical rituals conducted in RPGs had a real world effect. Other grandiose claims expressed a belief in lycanthropy and vampirism. Similarly, the fixation of B.A.D.D publications on whether youth had been exposed to the “Necronomicon” was ludicrous, since it is a fictional creation used as a literary tool by pulp era sci-fi and horror writer H.P Lovecraft. The extravagant nature of these claims ultimately worked to alienate large segments of the mass media, law enforcement and the general public.

5. Organization and solidarity among gamers

[26] By the 1990s, many of the gamers targeted in secondary school and university were becoming politically active in lobbying against attacks on RPGs and gamers. Gamers Will Flatt and Pierre Savoie established CAR-PGA, the Committee for the Advancement of Role Playing Games in 1988 to provide legal

and personal support for gamers targeted in the moral panic. The organization lobbied government, law enforcement and educators extensively against the activities of B.A.D.D. Gamers also used conventions, forums in magazines like “Dragon” and in local gaming groups to coordinate local lobbying of law enforcement, schools and parents as well as engage in numerous letter campaigns and articles submitted to mainstream news letters, magazines and television programs with varying degrees of success.

Response by Gamers to the Moral Panic

[27] So how did gamers respond to being targeted by a moral panic? According to Kenneth Gagne in his dissertation on moral panics, fully-fledged and politically oriented subcultures such as Punks and Hippies became polarised when targeted, giving them strong clear identity, culture and politics. By contrast, he argues that pseudo-subcultures like RPG gamers, comic book fans in the '40s and computer gamers have typically responded by toning down their activities, reducing the anti-structural association of their cultural products and engaging in apologetics. However, in my research, which between 1979-2001 has involved field work at RPG conventions, searching through newsgroups and online forums, and an investigation of editorials, forums, letters to the editor in the magazines *Dungeon*, *Dragon*, *Breakout*, *Critical miss and Places to go People to Be (PTGPTB)*, and the satirical magazine *Knights of the Dinner Table*, I have found a variety of responses by gamers targeted by religious, educational, police, parental and government authorities for their gaming practices.

Overall Findings

[28] Overall, the number of articles, letters, editorials and forums dealing with attacks on gamers peaked between 1988 and 1992. In fact, after 1992 I have been unable to find any letters, articles or editorials on the topic except for several retrospective examinations of the history of gaming between 1997 and 2000 and an article dealing with prejudice against Christians from within the gaming community in *PTGPTB* in 1999. During the most intense periods of correspondence on the issue, almost every edition of the magazines I reviewed contributed portions of

their material to debates by gamers regarding experiences and responses to anti-gaming activity and perceived prejudice in the community. Prior to 1988, the first mention of attacks on gamers from within gaming publications is a letter expressing concerns about behavioural changes in campaigns run with evil characters in the March 1985 issue of *Breakout*. Similarly, the last piece I found was an editorial in 1993 reflecting on *DragonMagazine's* seventeenth anniversary, its "Baptism of Fire" after being attacked by Christian fundamentalists, reflecting on the hatred of fantasy, science fiction and horror by many fundamentalist Christians. The experiences described by gamers varied from minor harassment by teachers, police and clergy to that of more substantial issues of seizing property, bashings, loss of privacy, expulsion from school for continuing to play after a ban had been put in place and harassment/arrest for supposed satanic desecration of graves and churches etc. The most common complaints by gamers were:

1. Low level harassment from teachers and parents, teachers and police.
2. Being blocked from using public space or private homes to meet and socialise, whether gaming or not.
3. The sabotaging of groups by teachers, clergy and parents through leaving of satanic, drug or pornographic material prior to a session and then claiming to "find" the material in the room with students.
4. Tacit encouragement of violence, theft and abuse directed against adolescent gamers by teachers, clergy and parents.

[29] Overall, most correspondence reflected a profound sense of frustration from gamers at their inability to be heard in the face of what, they felt, was an astounding level of ignorance and superstition among the mass media and public authority figures. Many letters and comments described feelings of having been betrayed by teachers and parents. There was an overall realisation by many contributors that the games were more than a

hobby; they were a major social and creative outlet and an important vehicle for personal expression. Finally, many of the contributors described a sense of bewilderment. Many had no previous difficulties with public authority figures, maintained solid grades and maintained what they had thought to be good relationships with their parents. Suddenly they found themselves perceived as a major threat to the social order.

[30] This sense of betrayal and rift between students, teachers, religious bodies and parents is reflected in David Bromley's article on the satanic cult scare of the 1980s in which he argues that the scare, including its manifestation in the anti-RPG moral panic is a "counter subversion ideology" in which contractual-covenantal tensions, such as that between parents, children, child care centres, schools and youth sub-cultures have been exacerbated by the encroachment of the economic sphere into the realm of familial relations. The ideology surrounding the permeation of Satanism and threats to children are thus a metaphorical construction of a widely experienced sense of danger by western families in the wake of profound socio-economic transformation. In this sense, RPG gamers, as youth, are profoundly affected by this cultural and ideological shift, experienced as a bewildering change in familial relationships, the feeling of being torn between competing roles as students, friends and children (which makes the role of RPGs as a psycho-social moratorium all the more important) and becoming the target of psycho-social projection based on a social drama they are only peripherally aware of in their socially ascribed roles as students, "youth" and progeny.

[31] Some typical responses from the experiences of gamers who felt targeted by the moral panic as listed on internet forums and in letters to the editor in RPG magazines such as *Breakout*, *Dragon*, *Places to Go People to Be*, *Critical Miss*, and *Dungeon* are:

"It got so bad that any time I felt like wearing a black shirt to school a legion of counsellors, teachers, priests and police officers would descend upon me like a horde of locusts looking for signs of suicidal or violent behaviour. It sucked. Fortunately I worked with quite a few of the local cops, who I got on well with, who would chat to

me and get the teachers off my back.”

“My sister tried to start up the first RPG club in the school. The announcement was put up on the bulletin board a week prior to the meeting. It was up for 2 days before enough parents called up for the school to ban it. Of course we all heard the announcement and turned up anyway, even though it was supposed to be banned. We decided to use the local library and got their permission. We had a chance to get together twice before the local library asked us to leave.”

“Recently, a friend of mine from high school got involved with an RPG group. His teacher saw he had some friends, since he was a bit of a loner, was concerned that his friends had been seen near the local gaming store. The teacher talked to the school counsellor and local Baptist minister had also heard his new friends had been playing these evil games, and the counsellor in turn called up his parents to tell them that their kid was running around with a cult of Satan worshipers. Well grounding was the least of his concerns after that. I don’t know if his relationship with his parents will be the same again. My parents were more understanding, for which I am thankful. When I joined a local RPG group my mum asked me “Are you planning to kill yourself?” I answered “No” and have had no problems since she’s been on hand for a lot of our sessions and seen that we aren’t Satanists but just a bunch of kids having fun.”

“Our high school let students arriving early to go to the lunch room to escape bad weather while waiting for school to start. Four kids played Dungeons and Dragons while waiting and as a result were verbally attacked, bailed up against the wall and denounced in front of the school as Satanists by a teacher. Two of the kids were active members of a local protestant church, one was a very nominal Catholic and the fourth was a rather

strange kid who was part of this local group of Pentecostals ... A problem for the school was that the parents of one of the kids was a police officer. He investigated the episode and that verified their story. The teacher made this awful insincere apology and the principal claimed it wouldn't happen again. However the game is now banned from the school and the teacher was supposedly given a merit raise at the end of the year. We found it more pathetic and funny than traumatic. We used to make gestures and stick our fingers up at him behind his back for a few months after that. He claimed kids were trying to put hexes on him and would shuck the biggest stink if he caught us at it."

"On January 22 1990 I was asked to appear as a member of the audience for a taping of the 'The Shirley Show' since I was the founder of the local gaming club but the researcher had strange notions about RPGs because the show was about the threat of Satanism. The researcher Jeanette Diehl wanted to cover RPGs as one of the 8 faces of modern Satanism. When I spoke to her she became increasingly perplexed 'What do you mean you don't wear costumes and do magical rituals?' Still I was contacted only 3 days before taping. Two guests had been operating on the show for 2 months in advance they were Thomas Radecki and Patricia Pulling. These two are anti-game crusaders from the US but their arguments are full of holes. I was one of the few game players to research their claims in depth but even when I shovelled refuting evidence on the show it was ignored as if I wasn't there or shouted down by the two crusading yanks. The two guests spouted incredible nonsense about RPGs and there was no real avenue open to discredit them on the show. Pulling claimed that RPGs are based on the occult, that they are psychological manipulating and brainwashing techniques and that they include rituals worshiping Pagan gods and demons in the books. The producer responded to my complaints

on air that he wanted to get away from American style talk shows. I responded with “Then why are you importing American lunatics ...”

[32] The responses by gamers published in web forums, letters to the editor in gaming magazines and personal discussions indicated several patterns of response to being targeted by a moral panic:

1. Self Censorship and apologetics

[33] Typically, this took the form of numerous debates surrounding the idea of whether or not evil characters should be allowed in game play and numerous requests for gamers to avoid doing anything that could be construed as Satanic or anti-social.

2. Rationalist and secularist critique

[34] This approach really began in earnest in the forum of *Dragon* magazine, with the formation of CAR-PGA. Previous editions, most notably issues 151 (October 89), 152 (December 89) and 158 (June 1990) had letters and articles pertaining to Gamers perceiving major flaws in anti-RPG arguments and decrying the lack of support networks and vehicle to express their opinions. Typically, this approach was portrayed as either a free speech issue or a campaign against what was perceived as the bigotry, superstition and irrationality of the fundamentalist Christian backers of the anti-RPG campaigns. Investigations were initiated in *Dragon* magazine as to the anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic and racist materials and background of key anti-RPG figures such as Jack T. Chick. The academic credentials of Thomas Radecki and Patricia Pulling were debunked. Numerous links were forged with academics and government agencies studying youth suicide and academic publications on gaming were collated and made available to gamers wanting to investigate and/or debunk anti-RPG claims. Gamers began to coordinate lobbying campaigns by phone, letters, public forums, the burgeoning internet and word of mouth as a means of informing the media, law enforcement, educators and local government about RPGs and their role in youth culture. Links were forged with the Skeptics Society and other secularist organizations. Articles were written in Skeptics Society journals

and journals of psychology, and law enforcement officers and criminologists, such as Robert Hicks, began to debunk and expose the supernaturalist origins of anti-gaming claims and question their relevance in law enforcement initiatives. Perhaps the greatest blow to B.A.D.D, Patricia Pulling's and Thomas Radecki's credibility was the publication of Michael Stackpole's "Pulling Report" which severely criticized the ethics and methodology of anti-RPG campaigners and was widely distributed amongst law enforcement, educational bodies, game manufacturers, gamers and government agencies.

3. Satire and play power

[35] I have borrowed the term "Play power," coined by Richard Neville's book of the same name, to describe the method of challenging authority figures and the construction of moral barricades through harnessing the absurd, the nonsensical and the bizarre through the spirit of play and humour. This approach both worked to discredit anti-RPG organizations through drawing attention to the absurdity of their claims and served as an outlet for gamer anger against churches, schools, parental authority and the mass media. An example of this is wide circulation of the satirical essay "Chess: The Subtle Sin: Should Christians play chess?" based on the anti-gaming text *Should Christians play Dungeons and Dragons?* Another example is the response to Jack T. Chick's *Dark Dungeon* cartoon and the many satirical variations of it produced by gamers. Many gamers of the 1980s and 1990s claimed to distribute these at conventions, which anti-RPG bodies had covertly saturated with anti-RPG propaganda, with the text removed, to encourage gamers to put in their own subversive text. Perhaps the most famous of these is "Jesus Kills" in which the gaming group is turned into a bible study (including the use of the GM shield to not let members read the bible for themselves), the Pagan and Satanic associations made with RPGs are turned into a Christian affiliation and a member commits suicide after being cast out from the group for a homosexual encounter at university. Other examples include numerous cartoons in *Dork Tower* and *Knights of the Dinner Table* that satirise anti-RPG tracts. *The Final Church*, a game parodying fundamentalist Christianity, in which the players take on the persona of fundamentalist Christians to hunt down gamers, pagans and heavy metal fans, is another example of this kind of approach.

[36] Another tactic was a process called church baiting in which gamers would provoke fundamentalist churches into loud raucous displays in the media and in public gatherings, and then humiliate them by revealing the "bait" to be fake, or by leaving satirical models or slogans at the gathering place or supposed site of Satanic activity. An example of this approach is an extract from an article in *Critical Miss* an online Gaming magazine, on how to provoke a public response from fundamentalist Christians. The following is an example of church baiting taken from an article in *Critical Miss* magazine.

Triggering A Panic

This is actually something you could do without access to handy Pagans. Simply take a selection of RPGs that could be misinterpreted, either because they have new-age themes, or perhaps because they satirise violence, and send them (as an anonymous package) to various self-appointed moral "watchdogs" ...

What you do here is pretend to form a role-playing club, apply to a church for the use of their premises as a meeting place, get refused, then complain very loudly in the local press. (You can then use the newspaper cuttings as part of your TV pitch).

There is one very important point to note here: Pick the right church.

It's no point picking a normal neighbourhood church. All that will happen is that the vicar will say something totally unhelpful like: "Of course you can use our church ... roleplaying is an excellent pastime which teaches literacy and numeracy skills to young people." You need one of the more modern, scary, fundamentalist churches. As an aside, my Mum and Dad, who are Christians, once started getting newsletters sent by a local Christian bookshop (they didn't ask for them, these people just started sending them). One issue of the newsletter had a "prayers" section. It said

something like:

"We pray for John and Anne Sutherland, whose daughter Kirsty is suffering from Leukaemia. We pray for Jenny Richardson, who recently lost her husband Keith. We pray that the people of Israel come to realise the folly of talking peace to the Palestinians ..."

That's the sort of church you want.

Another example is the registering of the domain name B.A.D.D, calling it *Bothered About Disposable Dragons* as a site parodying "Save the Whales" campaigns.

4. Christian gamers and game designers

[37] Gamers who are affiliated with Christian churches or who come from Christian backgrounds inevitably described the highest level of harassment from parents, teachers, friends and clergy. In addition, there are several prominent game designers and authors of RPG based fantasy who are very outspoken about their Christian identity. Most notable of these are game designer and author of the *New York Times* best selling series *Dragonlance*, Tracy Hickman and ex-Baptist Minister James Wyatt. These two authors and designers of RPG paraphernalia have taken a leading role in RPG advocacy and support networks for Christian gamers. While Tracy Hickman is much more politically conservative than the liberal Democrat Wyatt, they both argue that fantasy has long been a vehicle for metaphorical representations of social and moral issues both biblically and in the work of Christian fantasy authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S Lewis. In particular, they argue that the metaphorical nature of Fantasy, Sci-fi and Gothic Horror throws issues of good, evil, compassion and morality into stark relief, developing a greater depth of understanding in real world scenarios. Christian game groups commonly bemoan the alienation of a youth sub-culture and the abandonment of a medium by hostile churches.

5. Identity formation and counter cultural imagery

[38] One important side effect of the panic was the development

of a gamer identity. RPGs are inherently an esoteric pastime with an enormous amount of jargon that can be quite alienating to the non-gamer. Similarly, a large body of slang and “Folk Speech” has emerged within the RPG community including references associated with other media such as Japanime, various forms of literature (mainly horror, sci-fi and fantasy) and cinema (especially fantasy, sci-fi and horror but also including Hong Kong and French cinema, and English comedy such as *Monty Python*), computer gaming and other material derived directly from the experience of RPGS. Some examples are Munchkins/Hack Master, Sanity Check, Monty Haul, Rules Lawyer, I Disbelieve, Red Shirt, Test Hobbit and Polish/Irish Mine Detector. Additionally, the common experience of being targeted by a moral panic among the community was spread by means of networking through forums, magazines and conventions and led to the aforementioned political action and to a sense of common cultural identity manifested through slang, fashion and cultural artefacts.

Cultural Shifts in the Wake of Moral Panic

[39] The most obvious impact of the RPG moral panic is widespread hostility to Christianity, presented as a bigoted, oppressive and violent religion. Gary Pellino in his article on prejudice within the gaming community argues that the response by gamers to Christians, particularly committed or conservative Christians, is akin to the comments reserved in mainstream society for Nazis. He argues that this hostility is almost entirely defined within the context of a sense of being unfairly targeted and harassed by Churches and Christian authority figures. Another important effect of the anti-RPG campaigns was the major shift in gaming culture towards an open embracing of Gothic-derived cultural symbols and increasingly subversive themes in games. Most prominent in this shift was the popularisation of *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* by the game publishing company White Wolf, and to a lesser extent the increased popularity of *Call of Cthulhu* based on the works of H.P Lovecraft, produced by Chaosium. These games directly dealt with issues considered taboo for RPGs during the 1980s such as sex, horror and the occult. The Gothic games originating in the mid 1990s also openly embraced cultural forms deemed inimical to fundamentalist Christianity,

such as Paganism, homosexuality and occult, and recast them as oppressed and misunderstood victims pursued by a bigoted, fearful and ignorant public. While the pseudo-Goths or Vampire Goths, as they are often referred to in the gaming community, are usually described as part of the Gothic music and fashion subculture, research by Paul Hodkison into the Gothic subculture in Britain found that, despite some crossover, they actually formed a distinct group of their own with closer links to gamers than to the Goth subculture and philosophy. As with Goths, tattoos, piercing, face and body paint are common, as are variants of clothing derived from horror literature, with nineteenth century style clothing and black leather predominating.

[40] In pseudo-Gothic games, complex rules and a focus on violence are eschewed in favour of role-playing, characterisation and amateur thespianism. In these games, protagonists deal with overtly dark themes and have become the new target of media antagonism against RPGs, but this is done through linking them to the Goth subculture rather than describing them as gamers. This has tended to increase the division between fantasy gamers and pseudo-Goth gamers. There is also a significant amount of rivalry between pseudo-Goth gamers and high fantasy gamers (labelled hackmasters/munchkins over issues of gender and cultural identity). While the number of women in games has risen from an estimated three percent in 1985 to possibly as high as 37 percent in 2000, by far the majority of women have joined the pseudo-Goth sub-category. as illustrated by an estimated 42 percent female market for *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Additionally, the construction of feminine identity by female pseudo-Goth gamers violates the symbolic construction of femininity held by fantasy gamers. leading to conflicts and rivalries as illustrated by the following anecdote:

Gigi was an ultra-skinny, pale-skinned girl with a boyish figure and black lipstick, fingernails, clothes, eyes, bruises, etc. She had really, really short hair, but only on one side. It was buzzed so short that you could see the tattoo. The other side was longer, so I guess she could comb it over and pretend like she had hair on both sides of her head, the way balding men sometimes do. Only she didn't do that, she just let the long-side dangle. Gigi also had a lot of metal in her face. I figured there

were about four pounds of metal altogether, and that's not counting metal in places I couldn't see. I asked her about all the stuff in her face, something tactful, yet direct, like, "Why do you have all that metal in your face?" She said she was making a statement. The normal English words on Gigi's character sheet described a vampire, which was somewhat depressing. Ed was much better refereeing fantasy adventure and sci-fi games than those awful, dark, neo-gothic things. I was hoping for something new and fresh. Angst-ridden, melanin-deficient, red-wine-drinking ... oh yeah, the stereotypical vampire of vampires. I made an annoying hissing noise through my teeth and handed it back to her, shaking my head-body language she seemed to take as a personal insult.

[41] A key feature of Pseudo-Gothic RPGs is that they are overtly counter-cultural in symbolism. *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, for example, features the characters engaged in a struggle against big business and corporate capitalism to prevent environmental catastrophe and preserve pristine wilderness. However, this seldom appears to relate to any form of political activism. Rather, the vehicle of RPGs seems to have a normative function akin to Bakhtin's notion of the "carnavalesque." They represent a space in which people can explore alternate forms of identity and reconcile tensions in real world scenarios without real world consequences. The virtual world of the RPG acts as an outlet for societal tension rather than encouraging behaviour in real world scenarios.

[42] Essentially, games like *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* and other pseudo-Gothic games are a vehicle for expressing the alienation of youth. They feature characters who are outcasts from society, and who must preserve their secrecy and fight against the mainstream for survival. Many of these games, and their associated literature, cinema, television programs and computer games, feature identities in which the protagonist is perceived as a monstrous outcast but is, in reality a powerful, noble and beautiful creature who is misunderstood and hounded by a bigoted and ignorant bourgeois humanity. These virtual worlds and identities reflect the experience of youth targeted by moral panics, powerless in the face of apparent

ignorance and hostility from authority figures, desperate for personal space and needing to develop models and symbols associated with empowerment and personal strength.

Conclusions

[43] The crusade against RPGs offers unique insights into the nature of moral panics, as it contains elements that are clearly symptomatic of a moral panic yet remains atypical of those directed at Mods, Rockers, Hippies and Punks. The RPG moral panic fits Cohen's definition in that it involved generalisation against an existing sub-culture implanted from outside; it was publicised through the mass media; claims were based on anecdotal urban myths rather than quantifiable evidence; and it was pursued by "right thinking people" who used their social standing to attack perceived sites of deviance and threats to the social and moral order. However, unlike Cohen's model of moral panics, the anti-RPG moral panic was almost entirely the product of campaigning by a group of like-minded political organizations, which had little general support outside of the publicity generated by organizations like B.A.D.D. This is clearly illustrated by the extent to which anti-RPG sentiment among the general public collapsed in the wake of the discrediting of B.A.D.D from 1992 onwards.

[44] Another aspect of the RPG moral panic is that unlike Punks and Hippies, there was little common cultural identity, and certainly little in the way of a political agenda, among gamers. Until the shared experience of moral panic and high publicity brought them together as a subculture with a shared identity, RPG gamers were simply hobbyists. To a large extent, the development of an embryonic common political and cultural identity among gamers was the product of being targeted by a moral panic. Even today, there is little evidence of a "gamer politics" or polarised socio-political identity as demonstrated by other sub-cultures such as Punks, Hippies and Metal Heads, etc.

[38] The shift to the Gothic in the wake of the collapse of the moral panic is particularly interesting. Essentially, this can be interpreted as a response to years of self-censorship and concerns about negative publicity of gamers regarding counter cultural imagery and mature themes through the impact of moral panics.

This reasoning can also be applied to the resurgence of Live Action Role Playing (LARPs) in the mid 1990s. It is also indicative of the shifting age demographic of gamers and the desire to explore adult themes that resonate more closely with the issues of an older gaming population. Another crucial issue regarding the shift to the pseudo- Gothic in gaming is the extent to which the experience of being targeted by a moral panic created an environment in which gamers identified with images perceived to be inimical to a Christianity caricatured as encompassing rampant cultural conservatism, a saccharine approach to morality and fundamentalist dogma. This reversal of darker images into an empowering “anti-hero” model of cultural values is, in this light, paralleled by the popularisation of witchcraft in the 1980s in the context of a constructed model of witch identity in popular culture as the innocent victims of church and mainstream persecution. One can also see these models in the popularity of comic heroes like the *X-Men* and the *Incredible Hulk* as expressions of empowerment, alienation and isolation from what is perceived to be the cultural mainstream.

[45] In the final analysis, RPGs, although virtual, are intrinsically a reflection of the socio-cultural issues and tensions of life in the real world. As the experience of gamers in relation to mainstream culture has shifted, so have the symbols, images and identities utilised by gamers to express themselves through the medium of gaming. As Kyna Foster argues:

Though the game world is constructed as an independent world, and though the players like to think of themselves as different and somehow separate from the mainstream, which they might be, the effect of the surrounding culture cannot be denied. To the point, the gaming world is shaped by the players, who are shaped by the dominant culture of that time and place.

Ultimately, the formation of a shared gamer identity is due to the experience of moral panic and thus the cultural identity created forthwith is intrinsically linked to that experience translated metaphorically through the medium of the game world and its expression in play.

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Notes

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(<http://www.thegpa.org/>). While these figures do represent industry gathered data, with all the bias such research engenders, the numbers remain generally accepted throughout the literature and are constant with my own ethnographic research.

Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1958), pp. 222, 262; Gary Fine, *Shared Fantasy Role Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 181-204; Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp 180-203.

A reasonably comprehensive study of jargon and slang amongst gamers is available in Woodelf's essay "Folkspeech by Role playing gamers." <http://www.upl.cs.wisc.edu/~woodelf/mystuff/essays/RPGlingo.html>

For more information on Turner's theory of liminal, liminoid, anti-structure and communitas please see, Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), pp 20-70.

These results come from a survey I conducted while during fieldwork at gaming conventions and stores. This was inspired by, and received approximately the same results as a survey and analysis conducted by Dr. Kathryn White in her article "Gender Bending in Games" <http://www.womengamers.com/articles/>; Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, pp 212-26 regarding online roleplaying and gender swapping.

Gary Pellino, "The Shame of the Game," *Places to Go People to Be* 4 (August 1998): 7. <http://ptgptb.org/0004/antigame.html>

Here, I am using the theory and definition of moral panics devised by Stanley Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (Oxford: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972), in which he defines a moral panic as "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 stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, Bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to;

the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible" (p. 9). While the moral panic against role-playing games never reached the heights of that directed against youth sub-cultures such as Hippies, Punks and Skinheads, the public response to role-playing games is clearly accommodated by Cohen's model, as will be discussed shortly.

William Dear, *The Dungeon Master* (New York: Ballantine, 1985), pp. 17, 20-22, 163, 316; Shaun Hatley, "The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III, Parts 1 and 2," *Places to Go People to Be* 6 & 7 (February & April 1999): pp. 15-20, 17-21; Robert Hicks, *In Pursuit of Satan: Police and the Occult* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1991), pp. 287-88. Michael Stackpole, *The Pulling Report* (Game Manufacturers Association of America [GAMA]), pp. 19-21 (http://www.rpgstudies.net/stackpole/pulling_report.html).

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For more information on Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque

see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1988), pp. 48-96.

Patricia Pulling, "Interviewing Techniques for Adolescents," BADD Inc., September 1988, p. 3.

James Golbert, *A Cycle of Outrage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 9.

Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 9.

This material is very hard to source in a global or statistical sense, as my commentary to this effect comes from newspaper clippings, gamers discussions online, letters to the editor in roleplaying game magazines and discussions with numerous gamers at conventions, etc. While it is clear that the response was widespread and creates the impression of a sense of widespread harassment by gamers, it is difficult to gain statistical evidence of the size and scale of the public response due to the inherent subjectivity of the experience. A large number of public seminars and debates on roleplaying games are detailed in the following texts: Stackpole, *Pulling Report*, pp. 19-21; Paul Cardwell, "The Attacks of Role-Playing Games," *Skeptical Inquirer* 18,2 (Winter 1994): 157-65; David Bromley, "The Satanic Cult Scare," *Culture and Society* 28 (May 1991): 63-66; Kenneth Gagne, "Moral Panics Over Youth Culture and Video Games." Unpublished dissertation submitted to the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, April 27, 2001, p 22 (<http://www.gamebits.net/other/mqp.html>); accessed October 1 2003); Hicks, *Pursuit of Satan*.

Stackpole, *Pulling Report*, pp 19-21.

Pulling, "Interviewing Techniques," pp. 13-14.

There was also a substantial moral panic and anti-RPG campaign in France but I have little information on its characteristics as yet.

With the exception of France which will be investigated further in forthcoming research.

While this attack was not directly linked to claims of Satanism or

childhood maladjustment, discussed previously, the raid against Steve Jackson games is relevant to this argument as it indicates the extent to which law enforcement agencies were willing to assume criminal behaviour and a threat to the social order on increasingly dubious evidence without through investigation, a phenomenon commented on by Richard Hicks in *None Dare Call it Reason: Kids Cults and Common Sense* (Law Enforcement Section, Department of Criminal Justice Services, Virginian Department for Children's 12th Annual Legislative Forum, Roanoke, September 22, 1989). United States District Court, *Steve Jackson Games vs Secret Service* (Austin Division, 1990). This available online from numerous sources; the most readily available is <http://www.sjgames.com/SS/complaint.html>.

Hicks, *Pursuit of Satan*; Hicks, *None Dare Call it Reason*, pp. 8-12; Hicks, *Satanic Cults*, pp. 10-18; Stackpole, *Pulling Report*, pp. 12-16; Nathan, *Satan Scare*.

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Cardwell, "Role-Playing Games," pp. 157-65; Stackpole, *Pulling Report*, p. 16.

Pellino, "Shame of the Game," p. 9.

Gagne, "Moral Panics," p. 22.

Pellino, "Shame of the Game."

See *Dragon Magazine*; in particular issues 111, 122, 125, 134, 138, 146, 148, 151, 158, 160, 162, 171, 181, 182 and 194 for examples on the debate within the RPG community on debates regarding perceived harassment and prejudice.

R. McDonald, "The Gaming Spirit," *Breakout Magazine*, 17,5 (March 1985): 9.

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Cardwell, "Role-Playing Games," pp. 161-62,

Letters to the Editor, *Dragon Magazine* (August 1990): 36.

Bromley, "Satanic Cult"; Cardwell, "Role-Playing Games," pp. 157-165; Hicks, Pursuit of Satan, pp. 286-87; Hicks, "None Dare Call it Reason," pp. 12-18; Hicks, "Satanic Cults," pp. 10-12; Stackpole, *Pulling Report*; Nathan, *Satan Scare*; Freeman, Jeff. "Truth," pp 1-11.

Moore, *Dragon* 182 (June 1992): 6-7.

For CAR-PGA's list of academic publications on RPGs see <http://www.theescapist.com/litlist.htm>.

Bromley, "Satanic Cult Scare"; Cardwell, "Role-Playing Games"; Hicks, *Pursuit of Satan*; Hicks, "None Dare Call it Reason;"; Hicks, "Satanic Cults"; Stackpole, *Pulling Report*; Nathan, "Satan Scare"; Freeman, "The Truth."

R. Neville, *Play Power* (London: Granada Publishing, 1971), pp. 31-33.

A copy of "Chess: The Subtle Sin—Should Christians Play Chess" is available online at <http://elephanticity.250x.com/xianches.html> . A copy of "Should Christians play Dungeons and Dragons?" is available online at <http://www.chick.com/articles/frpg.asp>

A copy of "Jesus Kills" is available online at http://www.pvponline.com/rants_jesus.php3 Other satirical variations of "Dark Dungeons" can be located at <http://www.planetadnd.com/humor/DD-MST3K/index.php> and <http://www.rpg.net/252/quellen/darkdungeons/pp02-03.html> and <http://www.fecundity.com/darkdung/setup.html> the Chick publication is available at http://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0046/0046_01.asp.

John Nexus, "Johnny's Action Plan," *Critical Miss* 8 (Summer 2002); <http://www.criticalmiss.com/issue8/jonnysactionplan2.html>.

Site is available at <http://baddragon2.tripod.com/dragons.html>

Darlington, "A History of Roleplaying," *PTGPTB* 8 (March 2002), p. 12.

A reasonably comprehensive study of jargon and slang among gamers is available in the essay "Folkspeech by Role Playing Gamers." (<http://www.upl.cs.wisc.edu/~woodelf/mystuff/essays/RPGlingo.html>).

Pellino, "Shame of the Game," p. 6.

Darlington, "History.

Paul Hodkison, *Goth: Identity Style and Subculture* (Oxford: Berg Publications, 2002), pp. 36, 44-46, 113, 166.

While Dancy ("Adventure Game Industry") argues that women gamers represent 20% of the market share, Foster contends that her research indicates that Dancy's numbers are flawed by his ignoring statistical data regarding women over 35. Foster instead claims that when women aged above 35 and under 15 years of age are taken into consideration the market share of female gamers based on the same survey results is 37.5% (Kyna Foster, "Dungeons, Dragons and Gender: Role-playing Games and the Participation of Women," paper presented at the 42nd annual meeting of the western social sciences Association in Washington D.C April 26th 2000, p. 13). <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~anthclub/studentwork/KynaFoster.htm> accessed may 27, 2003..

D. Waldron, "Ecofeminism and the reconstruction of the Burning Times," *Intercultural Studies* 6. (August 2003): 36-52.

Kyna Foster, "Dungeons, Dragons and Gender: Role-playing Games and the Participation of Women," paper presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Western Social Sciences Association in Washington DC, April 26, 2000; <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~anthclub/studentwork/KynaFoster.htm> .

A useful analytical tool in evaluating the role of counter-cultural symbolism in identity formation among gamers is presented in Matt Hills' *Fan Cultures*, in which he argues that in fan-based culture, toy characters act as a mechanism for fluid objectification and self-identification. Whereas traditional masculine "heroic" identities are central to the narrative structures of traditional science fiction and fantasy, he argues they are unable to retain centrality in play outside of the immediate text in terms of identity formation. Outsider identities, however, allow for a greater development of "object-relational interpellation" which creates a greater potential for subjectivity in terms of identity formation and self creation by the participant outside of narratives of compliance to traditional

patterns of authority and identity created by the masculine and hierarchical hero-narrative (Hills, *Fan Cultures* [London: Routledge. 2002]). On another note, *Horror* writer and professional film critic Feo Amante makes some insightful, if hyperbolic, comments regarding the close parallels between the representations of vampire and werewolf horror and the experience of alienated youth in American secondary schools , especially as represented in *Vampire: The Masquerade* and in vampire related action films such as “Underworld” ([http://www.feamante.com/Movies/Vampires/under world.html](http://www.feamante.com/Movies/Vampires/under_world.html)).

D. Waldron, "Ecofeminism and the Reconstruction of the Burning Times," *Intercultural Studies* 6 (August 2003).

Foster, “Gender.”