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Lacey Corey Brown

*Southern Illinois University Carbondale*

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# After School Satan: Mimicry and Counteridentity as Strategies for Religious Resistance

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Lacey Corey Brown is currently a PhD candidate in the Communication Studies Department at Southern Illinois University. This paper was previously present at the 2017 National Communication Association convention, Dallas, TX. The author would like to thank Michael Forst, and the reviewers for their critiques and recommendations.

# After School Satan: Mimicry and Counteridentity as Strategies for Religious Resistance

Lacey Corey Brown

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*The Satanic Temple strategically constructs their identity using counteridentifying symbols, such as Satan, to metaphorically resist Christian dogma in the context of U.S. American law and popular opinion. Through mimicry, they use faith as a tool of resistance to challenge the presence of The Good News Club, an Evangelical student program, in public schools. This paper rhetorically analyzes The Satanic Temple's website to examine the communicative tactics used to shape the counter spiritual reality within their newly established and subversive After School Satan club. This paper concludes that without communicative adaptation and dialogue with parental stakeholders, The Satanic Temple ultimately fails to achieve their social justice goal.*

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Keywords: Religion, identity, popular culture, and social justice

The phrase “Educatin’ With Satan” is centered at the top of the After School Satan (2018a) homepage. The after school program is sponsored by The Satanic Temple, which is a politically active religious organization. While the organization uses catchy, or even shocking, language to describe itself, After School Satan closely resembles a science club. The website explains that the club uses games, projects, and thinking exercises to engage with scientific, rational, and non-superstitious topics (After School Satan, 2018b). As an organization, The Satanic Temple challenges religious superstition. They argue

Are we supposed to believe that those who pledge submission to an ethereal supernatural deity hold to their values more deeply than we? Are we supposed to concede that only the superstitious are proper recipients of religious exemption and privilege? In fact, Satanism provides us all that a religion should, without a compulsory attachment to untenable items of faith-based belief: It provides a narrative structure by which we contextualize our lives and works. (The Satanic Temple, 2018, para.4)

To ensure public schools make space for religious pluralism, The Satanic Temple only implements clubs in school districts that also host the Good

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News Club, an Evangelical Christian organization. The website argues that it is best to keep religion out of schools, but that, if only one religious voice utilizes their First Amendment right, they will surely receive “special privilege within their community” (2018b, para. 7). The Satanic Temple’s ultimate goal is to “ensure that plurality and true religious liberty are respected” (para. 7). Local Satanists who are affiliated with The Satanic Temple have volunteered at various public schools across the United States to implement After School Satan clubs; however, many of these communities resent the organization entering their school systems.

The local media in Marietta, Georgia, described The Satanic Temple as a “thorn in the school district’s side” after the religious organization announced their intentions to start an After School Satan program at Still Elementary School (McGowan, 2016). Susan Thayer, chair of the school board in Cobb County, shared with the *Marietta Daily Journal* that The Satanic Temple felt like the “Ku Klux Klan coming in” (McGowan, 2016, para. 6). She also interpreted their actions as a political push to remove religious organizations from the school district. Thayer explains, “If you let one group in, another group wants to come in. It sounds like they just want to get the Good News Club out” (McGowan, 2016, para. 8). Ironically, Thayer is correct, but she fails to fully understand The Satanic Temple’s social justice intentions concerning religious plurality. In response to Thayer’s comments, The Satanic Temple tweeted, “Advised by lawyers to say nothing, Atlanta School Board chair still couldn’t help but say something this stupid...” (The Satanic Temple, 2016a), and included an embedded link to the article quoting Thayer.

Allen (2013) proposed that the disciplinary intersection between intercultural and organizational communication creates deliberate mutual goals. This study follows Allen’s call to address contemporary issues, such as difference, identity politics, and intergroup dialogue, in organizational communication research. The goal of this paper is to examine how The Satanic Temple strategically uses their social difference through the process of identity construction and to identify why intergroup dialogue between The Satanic Temple and community stakeholders is ineffective. Allen also argues critical interdisciplinary approaches to research should be conducted at the macro level to include historical, cultural, and political influences. Utilizing a macro lens, this paper defines The Satanic Temple as a collective of people challenging power relations that permeate school systems across the United States, in an effort to dismantle the system of oppression.

The field of critical intercultural communication needs a more complex understanding of identity, as it relates to organizations’ identities (Allen, 2013; Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015). The organizational identity of The Satanic Temple supports this call, as their members are religiously diverse. Members spiritually identify as agnostics, atheists, pagans, and wiccans, along with other members of free thought and secular communities (Mythicist Milwaukee, 2016). Many followers identify as anti-theists, while

simultaneously embracing The Satanic Temple as a religion. The diversity of this coalition also includes Christian allies, such as America United, a Baptist organization that supported the St. Louis chapter of The Satanic Temple in their effort to remove “In God We Trust” signage from city property. This alliance establishes solidarity between dominant and marginalized religious groups, which suggests difference can be overcome if groups work toward specific social justice goals. This collective uses the identity construction of The Satanic Temple, and the implementation of After School Satan, as rhetorical tools of resistance in the context of U.S. American law and popular opinion.

Nakayama and Halualani (2013) call for more scholarly analysis of religious identities as a way to better understand how religion shapes national identity and promotes community formation. They argue it could be difficult to study religion because it is “ideologically ingrained and connected to the forces of Empire and the States” (p. 598). Their observation is supported through this case study, as The Good News club is affiliated with the Christian Nationalist movement and follows the belief that the United States is a Christian nation and that Christians have the right to “take it back” (Stewart, 2012 p. 3). Following Nakayama and Halualani’s (2013) call to find different ways of analyzing religion, this paper explores how After School Satan uses the identity construction strategies of mimicry and counteridentification to challenge The Good News Club. Through a rhetorical analysis of text and video footage, I examine how The Satanic Temple has communicatively constructed their faith in relation to their after school program. This paper further explores The Satanic Temple’s identity by examining how the media textually describes the introduction of After School Satan programs into various communities. Through this analysis, I also consider how public stakeholders (parents) interpret The Satanic Temple’s identity and compare this interpretation to the identity constructed within The Satanic Temple’s promotional material.

### **Religion, Identity, and U.S. American Law**

The rhetorical situation of the First Amendment must be considered to contextualize After School Satan’s counteridentity and use of mimicry. The Supreme Court has interpreted the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment to protect religious organizations in two ways, (1) through religious exemption and (2) from discrimination. The Satanic Temple has strategically used their religious identity as a resistance tool to invert the Supreme Court’s interpretation in two different religious freedom legal cases. First, *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* opened new possibilities for claims of state and federal exemption; causing The Satanic Temple to argue “conservatives do not have a monopoly on accommodation” (Loewentheil, 2015, p. 90). Following the court ruling, The Satanic Temple encouraged individuals to use this new interpretation of religious freedom as a tool to

resist abortion regulations. Second, in *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, the Supreme Court interpreted public schools as spaces of public forum (Coval, 2003). This ruling reversed limits on the teaching of morality in these spaces, even concepts taught through a religious lens, which were previously determined to be unconstitutional (Mangrum, 2002). Ultimately, this ruling removed policies preventing public school spaces from being used for religious purposes, in turn granting access to school systems for both the Good News Club and After School Satan. The Satanic Temple's identity construction is used as a tool for resistance within U.S. American law and popular opinion in response to both Supreme Court rulings.

Despite the legal protection of the First Amendment, navigating a religious identity can be challenging due to the need to adapt communication when engaging with the public. Koschmann's (2013) ethnographic study notes religious leaders find it difficult to maintain an identity that serves the community involved in the organization, while also not alienating external stakeholders. Furthermore, Koschmann notes non-religious stakeholders have to navigate identity negotiations and adapt their communication and behavior when engaging in social justice projects organized by religiously identified and mission driven groups. Religious groups who have established power within a community, such as The Good News Club, may fear losing their social authority when forced to share communal space with religiously marginalized groups (Lengel & Holdsworth 2015), such as The Satanic Temple.

Culturally embracing religious pluralism can create moments of tension and conflict for groups across the spectrum of social privilege. For instance, marginalized groups seeking equal representation might have hostile intentions toward dominant religious groups due to historical exclusion (Hunter, 2009). Religious otherness impacts how an organization and its members communicate with those outside of their faith based community. Panikkar (1984) proposed six responses to religious otherness. One of Panikkar's responses applies to the historical and communicative tension between The Good News Club and After School Satan. The Satanic Temple believes religion is a social construct influenced by history, which can be seen within their identity construction. For example, The Satanic Temple strategically uses rhetorical symbols to challenge Christian dominance and social influence in U.S. American public schools, such as The Good News Club.

## **The Good News Club**

Katherine Stewart (2012) began to investigate the Good News Club after they opened a chapter at her daughter's school. Through a review of Stewart's analysis, I will explain what the Good News Club is, describe how their presence in public schools is legal, and outline their recruitment process. By understanding the implications of the Good News Club, we gain insight into why and how The Satanic Temple is conducting a social justice campaign against them.

The Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) sponsors the Good News Club. Their mission is to “produce conversion experiences in every young child and thus equip them to ‘witness’ for other children” (Stewart, 2012, p. 13-14). Stewart notes CEF’s literature identifies public schools as “mission fields” and refers to engaging with children in the public school system as “harvest work” (Stewart, 2012, p. 16-17). CEF literature also claims, “It is difficult for children of Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist backgrounds to recognize lying as a sin, for they do not have moral absolutes” (Stewart, 2012, p. 17). Stewart writes about the experience of a Unitarian couple in Illinois whose second grade daughter was told by a Good News Club attendee that she could only go to heaven if she was Christian. When the parents inquired further, the child who had attended the Good News Club said, “It is true! I learned it in school and they don’t teach things in school that are not true” (Stewart, 2012, p. 21). In another example, CEF created such a disruption for non-Christian and LGBTQ families at Loyal Heights Elementary School that the administration had to publically state, “This school welcomes all families, and if you don’t feel welcome, call this number” (Stewart, 2012, p. 17). After parental pressure, the PTA of Loyal Heights eventually tried to push the Good News Club out, but CEF’s legal backer, the Liberty Counsel, prevented their removal from the school district. It is worth noting that the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) identified the Liberty Counsel as a hate group following their representation of anti-LGBTQ Kentucky County Clerk Kim Davis in 2015 (After School Satan, 2016a).

Due to the Supreme Court ruling in *Good News Club v. Milford*, local PTA groups cannot legally remove the Good News Club’s presence in their schools, because doing so is an act of discrimination against legally-protected religious expression. During the ruling, Justice Scalia argued that non-school affiliated adults have the right to persuade children through evangelizing. He explained, “The compulsion of ideas – and the private right to exert and receive that compulsion (or to have one’s children receive it) is protected by the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses” (Stewart, 2012, p. 96). Thus, attendees are required to have parenteral permission to join the Good News Club.

The Good News Club sells itself to public elementary schools as a Bible study group for children between the ages of four and 14. The Christian Right refers to this demographic as the “4/14 Window” (Stewart, 2012, p. 129). Christian missionary strategist, Louis Bush, PhD, implemented this approach in 2009, arguing a child audience will fulfill their evangelical mission “to convert all of humanity,” as children are “the world’s most fruitful field” (Stewart, 2012, p. 129). Some of the children within this age range cannot read, thus the Good News Club provides “the Wordless Book” (Stewart, 2012, p. 235), which has color-coded sections representing different parts of the Christian Gospel. During one of the Good News Club’s meetings, Stewart observed an instructor explain, “Some of those children who are

there in your class that week will never come back. And, you know who doesn't want you to give an invitation?" Collectively, the children responded, "Satan" (Stewart, 2012, p. 236).

## **The Satanic Temple**

The Satanic Temple's metaphor of Satan can only ideologically exist within the context of the Christian belief that Satan is real. The Satanic Temple's identity is a reflection of Christianity's emotional fear of the devil – without which there would be no logical basis for the existence of The Satanic Temple. The Satanic Temple's first protest was a mock rally supporting Florida Governor Rick Scott for signing a bill that permitted prayer at public school assemblies and sporting events (Lavender, 2013). On the steps of the capital, the group chanted "Hail Satan! Hail Rick Scott!" (Lavender, 2013, para. 2). The group's co-founder and spokesperson, Lucien Greaves, told the press, "The Satanic Temple embraces the free expression of religion, and Satanists are happy to show their support of Rick Scott... allowing our Satanic children the freedom to pray in school" (Lavender, 2013, para. 7). However, Lucien makes it clear that despite their strategy to meet absurdity with absurdity, The Satanic Temple is not simply a group of pranksters. They are registered as an LLC and to demonstrate the importance of the separation of church and state they do not seek tax exemption status as a religious organization.

Lucien Greaves, also known as Doug Mesner, identifies as an atheistic Satanist (DaneC.Sorensen, 2014). He challenges the concept of religion by arguing that one does not need to "subscribe to superstition" (3:18) to be considered religious, and that doing so gives people "privileges and redemptions for superstition, rather than nonbelief" (3:32). The Satanic Temple (2016b) follows Seven Fundamental Tenets, which include respecting the freedoms of others, not distorting scientific facts, and having legal agency over one's body. These tenets religiously protect their members from forced procedures like pre-abortion vaginal ultrasounds or fetal cremation, thus using Satan as a symbol to challenge "arbitrary authority" (Dane C. Sorensen, 2014, 5:19).

## **The Satanic Temple and Identity Construction**

Pecheux (1982) defines a person or a collective identity that discursively causes trouble by rebelling against "external determination" (p. 157) as counteridentifying. The Satanic Temple strategically counteridentifies from the normative performance of the Good News Club through their version of an after school program. Scholars (Muñoz, 1999; Pecheux, 1982) have argued that counteridentification is not a productive strategy because it fails to rhetorically persuade populations that align with the dominant ideology. For example, Muñoz (1999) explains that feminists counteridentifying with "man" as the only way to truly identify as "woman" do not build toward

effective change or achieve social justice goals. He argues that personal identities are complicated and gender does not function within a binary, therefore constructing an identity within the confines of a binary limits dialogue. Members of the dominant audience need to (at least partially) identify with the message shaped by the counteridentity, or they will not listen. This prevents marginalized people or groups from achieving their social justice goal of transforming systems of oppression. However, through their website rhetoric, The Satanic Temple attempts to establish a relatable counteridentity by highlighting the “irrational” fear of Satan, politically pushing for the separation of church and state, and publicly protesting against an oppressive Evangelical group. Thus, dialogue with Evangelical groups is not their organizational goal. The purpose of The Satanic Temple’s counteridentity is to establish dialogue with groups who also believe in religious pluralism and the separation of church and state.

The Satanic Temple believes that “religion can, and should, be divorced from superstition” (The Satanic Temple, 2018) and views Satan as a symbol of the “Eternal Rebel in opposition to arbitrary authority.” The core of their identity is a paradox, as it is directly tied to the Christian belief in Satan while simultaneously rejecting the belief of the supernatural power Satan holds within Christianity. For example, during the unveiling of The Satanic Temple’s Baphomet statue, a goat-headed winged figure, in Detroit, the organization was forced to change the event location due to the amount of threats received by the owner of the original venue (Zaimov, 2015). As an attempt to weed out protesters, attendees had to sign a contract pledging their souls to Satan before receiving the new location. The use of counteridentity helped to remove potential protesting audience members who truly believed signing a piece of paper pledged their souls to Satan. This event and metaphorical tactic received support from Christian leaders, like Bishop Charles Ellis III, who made public arguments for tolerance. Thus, the strategic use of counteridentity, in this instance, created alliances across difference.

The Satanic Temple also uses the strategic tool of mimicry while forming After School Satan clubs. Sarup (1996), drawing from Bhabha (1984), described mimicry as a behavior that is noticeably similar to the dominant group but still different. This is an effective way to disrupt power, because the similarity between the two groups eventually becomes a menace to the identity of the dominant group. The After School Satan club has only been implemented at schools where the Good News Club is present. However, continuing the strategy of counteridentity, the After School Satan club promotes “benevolence and empathy for everyone,” a mission that directly contrasts the Good News Club’s mission to “evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and to establish (disciple) them in the Word of God and in the local church for Christian living” (Acker, 2016, para. 4). Besides only being established in schools that host the Good News

Club, the After School Satan club only meets the same day and time as the Good News Club, thus their approach to mimicry has subversive potential.

## **Method**

To capture the complexity of The Satanic Temple, this paper analyzes both the organization's website and media coverage of After School Satan. I examined both text and video content to discover the underlying meaning that might have been overlooked during a traditional, singularly focused content analysis (Billings, Moscowitz, Rae & Brown-Devlin, 2015; Gorp, 2007). Furthermore, incorporating external conversations (media coverage) in the data set allowed for a fuller understanding of the public's interpretation of the organization's identity.

I examined the communicative strategies The Satanic Temple used to construct their non-religious faith to determine how symbolic language challenges Christian dominance and influence. The findings indicate that the media's description of After School Satan uses metaphors and catch phrases to deconstruct and reconstruct The Satanic Temple's political agenda. I then evaluated the effectiveness of The Satanic Temple's counteridentification strategies by noting what is and what is not paraphrased or quoted from their website.

The rhetorical artifacts available on The Satanic Temple's After School Satan website include a promotional video, a corrections page to address audience misconceptions, an explanation of their intentions in relation to the Liberty Council, and a press kit. Following Lindlof and Taylor's (2011) advice, I identified vivid language as a code and incorporated a "constant-comparative" approach to determine which self-identifying descriptions were repeated, thus developing a full understanding of how The Satanic Temple strategically constructs their identity through counteridentifying tactics. This analysis interweaves the media's description and parental stakeholder responses to determine if external stakeholders and community members rhetorically "other" The Satanic Temple's identity. Lastly, I considered if The Satanic Temple's counteridentity and metaphorical tactics distract from their social justice goal of resisting The Good News Club.

## **Findings**

After School Satan established programs in nine schools in Los Angeles, California. In an article on CBS's national news website, a reporter from the LA office described The Satanic Temple's announcement video as "disturbing" (2016). The video uses horror inspired vintage filters, similar to Rob Zombie's cinematography, accompanied by eerie music. Dark red text states "An after school club focused on rationalism" (written over footage of an entrance to a school) and "free inquiry" (written over video footage of what appears to be an ant crawling on something in a blood red filter). The video then cuts to dated footage of a little girl, who appears to be around

5-years-old, dressed in vintage clothing (The Satanic Temple, 2016c). Towards the end of the video, music begins to play backwards, representing the fear of hidden satanic messages in secular music popularized during the Satanic Panic (Runtagh, 2014). The video's horror film aesthetic disrupts any attempt toward rhetorically invitational features. Especially for external audience members who might find footage of children running backwards into the woods "disturbing." The promotional video strategically rejects superstitious audience members at the cost of being labeled "disturbing" by mainstream media. The strategic choice to not be invitational counters the approaches used by the Good News Club to motivate meeting attendance.

Despite the label of disturbing, people still inquired about volunteer opportunities and requested instructions to help launch the program in their local schools. The CBS article referenced previously concludes by warning readers, "Los Angeles could be fertile ground for a Satanist after-school program" (para. 5). The article legitimizes this threat through a reminder that "a self-proclaimed Satanist and former U.S. marine recently ran to replace out-going State Senator republican Sharon Runner" (para. 5). Oddly, this reminder fails to mention this "self-proclaimed" Satanist's name, despite their campaign winning 12 percent of local votes. Furthermore, the media description places the label of Satanist before U.S. marine.

### ***Implementation***

Lucien Grieves, The Satanic Temple's spokesperson and co-founder, attended the first After School Satan meeting in Portland, Oregon, to answer questions and meet with parents (Acker, 2016). The press was not invited to observe the meeting, likely due to the negative social pressure placed on children Satanists. A local Oregon newspaper quoted The Satanic Temple's website mission statement and clearly explained the organization "does not promote a belief in a personal Satan" (para. 5). Acker interviewed Ron Imig, the Assistant Director of Child Evangelism Fellowship in Portland, who stated that despite disagreeing with what The Satanic Temple does, they are legally allowed to be present in the school system under the Equal Access law. Though there is only one After School Satan program in Portland, there are five Good News Clubs in the area. Imig declined noting which schools housed the Club.

The first official national meeting of After School Satan attracted protestors. To ensure the demonstrations did not disrupt the students, Sacramento Elementary School in Portland opted for an early release day. Members of America Needs Fatima, a Catholic group affiliated with the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, protested outside of the elementary school, arguing Satanism is not a religion. When questioned what defines a religion, one protester argued, "worship of God, the one true God" (para. 17). By claiming that The Satanic Temple is not a religion, this particular protester is rhetorically othering the

organization. Despite their legal protection, The Satanic Temple's identity is challenged by historical and cultural definitions of religious legitimacy. Similar to an Evangelical Christian belief system, the Catholic Church also adheres to Panikkar's (1985) religious identifier – believing one's religion is the only true religion. Ultimately, established religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church, distract audiences from After School Satan's social justice goal by challenging the organizational and religious legitimacy of The Satanic Temple.

Acker (2016) explains, "Parents were less than thrilled about the club and protests" (para. 24). One parent stated, "Everybody knows there's nothing good about a Satanic group, the Devil's obviously an evil thing... we all know what they're really about" (para. 26-27). However, The Satanic Temple's members stood next to the protesters holding posters that read, "Did you know..." listing information about the Good News Club (The Oregonian, 2016, :49). In video footage of this protest, parents appear to find the information about both organizations and protesters overwhelming and confusing. The Satanic Temple cannot initiate dialogue with stakeholders if they are unable to establish legitimacy and clearly articulate why they are present within the school system.

### ***Correcting Misconceptions***

The "Corrections" tab on After School Satan's (2016b) website explains that After School Satan should not be "contextualized as a battle of Satanists against Christians" (p. 3), because they do not view Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) as a representation of Christianity. Thus, their resistance against CEF is not intended as a resistance against all of Christianity. To strengthen their argument, The Satanic Temple highlights the Good News Club's anti-Catholic stance, which is ironic given the presence of Catholic protesters in Portland. The last point on the "Corrections" page explains that After School Satan is "not interested in converting children to Satanism" (para. 7). Supporting the strategy of counteridentification, the section states, "Unlike the Child Evangelism Fellowship, which openly seeks to convert children to their religious view through fear and threats of eternal suffering, The Satanic Temple does not believe in imposing a one-size-fits-all approach to religious opinion" (para. 7). The section continues by explaining the social and philosophical principles they believe can be achieved through co-existence of multiple perspectives. Reflecting their pluralist orientation, The Satanic Temple affirms children do not need to identify as Satanists to participate in the after school program. There is also a guarantee the adult leader will never ask the children to identify as such. The page concludes by explaining, "...none of these efforts of elaboration and clarification will help, though it really doesn't entirely matter. Thanks to the Liberty Counsel, the law is on our side" (para. 8). The audience that perpetuates misguided claims against The Satanic Temple, such as the parent who suggested they "know

what The Satanic Temple is *really* up to,” will probably not be motivated to search the After School Satan website. Thus, the “Corrections” page will not help their organization combat misconceptions, which creates a gap in their strategy. This begs the question, why create a webpage for an audience that is not interested in learning specifics about the organization?

### ***Political Agenda***

The next section of analysis examines “The Liberty Council” tab on the After School Satan webpage. The Satanic Temple uses, what I would consider to be, aggressive language on this page. For example, the page argues, “One can already picture the likes of Glenn Beck sniveling in an extended, pained monologue, bemoaning that we live in a declining and dissolute nation wherein Christian prayer has been all but criminalized while the door to the schoolhouse have contrariwise been thrown open to invite Satanists in” (After School Satan, 2016a, para. 1). The rhetorical approach demonstrated on this page does not align with content on other pages of the website. Furthermore, Glenn Beck has yet to make a comment about After School Satan, beyond sharing an article from *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

Oddly, Katherine Stewart, the author of the previously cited book, *The Good News Club*, wrote *The Salt Lake Tribune* article shared on Beck’s website. Stewart describes the Good News Club as “the Temple’s true foe” (2016, para. 10). Stewart explains the Good News Club is present in five percent of the United State’s elementary schools and states, “The Satanic Temple makes no secret of its desire to use that same approach,” supporting the strategy of mimicry. During an interview, Greaves, co-founder of The Satanic Temple, sarcastically thanks the Liberty Council again for “opening the doors to the After School Satan Clubs through their dedication to religious liberty” (para. 14). Stewart notes the Liberty Council recognizes The Satanic Temple’s right to offer an after school program, but the council’s chairman stated, “I can’t imagine there’s going to be a lot of students participating in this. It’s probably dust they’re kicking up and is likely to fade away in the near future for lack of interest” (para. 16).

Rhetoric used on the “Liberty Council” webpage does not follow the strategies of counteridentification or mimicry, as it is combative and disorganized. Furthermore, the intended audience is unclear. The text generalizes Christian identities, saying,

The shocking reports of impending in-school Satanic activity is altogether too much for religious conservatives to ignore, but the reality of the how and why is entirely irreconcilable with their cherished narrative of Christian persecution and assaults upon their religious freedom to allow them to cover the story in any fashion that might even resemble honest reporting. (After School Satan, 2016a, para. 1)

Mocking rhetoric, such as “their cherished narrative,” disrupts their previously stated claim that The Satanic Temple is not at war with Christianity. The webpage refers to the Liberty Council as a herd and an insidious organization. The text’s disorganization resembles an angry email that was simply copied and pasted into the After School Satan website. It reiterates information mentioned in other tabs, such as the *Good News Club v. Milford Central School* case and states, “We feel that our presence in schools that are burdened with the loathsome stink of the Good News Club serves an anti-indoctrination function” (para. 7). The piece concludes by thanking the Liberty Council, again, for legally creating the opportunity to allow The Satanic Temple into public schools. This webpage does not support the theoretical concepts of counteridentity, as Satan is not used as a symbolic tool. Nor does this webpage support the theoretical concept of mimicry, as the Liberty Council rhetorically dismisses The Satanic Temple.

### ***Scripted Public Engagement***

As After School Satan slowly organizes across the United States, media reports describe its presence as a development that is giving parents anxiety. For example, a Tacoma, Washington, newspaper’s headline reads, “After school Satan club concerns Tacoma parents” (King, 2016). However, the story only included one parent’s perspective, which is placed at the end of the article. The parent states, “Anything that represents the name or the word Satan to me is anything but evil, and I don’t appreciate the fact that they’re letting evil come into the safe haven of learning for our kids” (para. 12). I believe the parent is linguistically mistaken by referring to Satanists as “anything but evil,” and instead meant that Satanists are evil. Furthermore, the parent does not identify the Good News Club as an equally unsafe organization in their child’s school. The article does not mention The Good News Club and the administration of the Tacoma elementary school admits, “We do have a Christian based organization that rents space from us...” (para. 6), but the organization is not referred to by its name.

The webpage titled “Press” (After School Satan, 2016c) provides publishable information for the media to reference during their coverage of new After School Satan programs. However, the Tacoma article discussed previously does not include information from this webpage. Instead, the journalist interviewed a member of The Satanic Temple who responded with similar rhetoric to that which is posted on the “Press” webpage. The Satanic member’s delivery is overly scripted during their interview, which might be an unintentional form of mimicry. Stewart (2012) critiques the Good News Club instructors, explaining, “I’ve heard all of this before, in exactly the same words... It’s like hearing a comedy routine for a second time... Everything is scripted, down to the last punch line” (p. 235). Though The Satanic Temple is performatively enacting behavior similar to the Good News Club, there

is no evidence to suggest uniformity is an intentional choice. The scripted response from The Satanic Temple member might be influenced by the organization's delicately constructed identity. For example, their identity was not created organically, collaboratively, or with ideological autonomy. Thus, members might not be able to respond from a place of emotional truth and autonomic experience, which we would expect from CEF members whose evangelical narratives begin as "born again Christians." The Satanic Temple was established in 2012, thus the emotional roots connecting members to the organization do not parallel Evangelical Christianity. This is especially true given that Satanists believe religion to be socially constructed (Panikkar, 1985). Furthermore, the newness of the religion creates space for the chairman of the Liberty Council to make dismissive claims that the After School Satan club is a passing trend (Stewart, 2016).

### ***Spiritual Identity***

Within this analysis, two aspects of spiritual identity can be identified. First, The Satanic Temple is socially constructed to celebrate pluralism. Acknowledging that identity markers are inspired by historical symbols, The Satanic Temple must maintain the message that they do not promote a personal belief in Satan. However an implication of politically embracing pluralism means they cannot strategically distance themselves from other Satanists (who worship Satan as an actual superhuman spiritual being), which creates confusion among external stakeholders. Spiritually celebrating pluralism suggests that The Satanic Temple will not impose their religion on others, or police the expression of their religion. Thus, there is not a standardized performance of their religious identity. However, this declaration is weakened by the scripted performance of public statements. Second, their identity is grounded in rationalism, which is a component of the Secular-Religious Identity Spectrum (Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015). The approach to a spiritual identity exists within the tension of faith and scientific rationality, challenging a binary understanding that a religion needs a central deity.

The second finding suggests that challenging the binary between faith and scientific rationality transforms their faith into a tool of resistance against Evangelical Christianity. The Satanic Temple is politically taking advantage of religious privileges to highlight that "God" is not required as a cornerstone of religious identity. The policy to welcome non-Satanists within the club is an attempt to build a resistance collective. However, their implementation into school systems does not communicatively adapt to situational constraints. An effective collaborative resistance needs to adapt messages and identity performances with varying circumstances (Koschmann, 2013). The Satanic Temple's inability to adapt their identity performance in turn perpetuates their identity as "other."

## Discussion

Currently, After School Satan is the only organization challenging the Good News Club's presence in public schools. However, Stewart (2012) owns the hyperlink "thegoodnewsclub.com" to promote her anti-Good News Club book, and the media clearly articulates and represents her research. For example, a newspaper in Arroyo Grande, California, published an article describing the Good News Club using language from Stewart's investigation (Zender, 2016). Thus, it is unclear if The Satanic Temple is shedding a different or new light on CEF or if communities would naturally push against CEF after being informed through Stewart's book.

When satanic members explain their right to be present in the school system, parents and community members appear to be distracted by their Satanic counteridentification and are unable to fully understand the social justice goal of challenging CEF. It is easier for these parents to follow the rhetoric of "Keep Satan out of Schools," than it is to understand how and why CEF's tactics might be dangerous for their children. This finding adheres to Allen's (2013) argument that resistance collectives functioning at a macro level have to manage their complex identities. The Satanic Temple is a national organization initiating programs in communities who are unaware of both the Good News Club and CEF. Disrupting these school systems without considering the individualized needs of the community will continue to confuse and overwhelm stakeholders. One communicative problem Koschmann (2013) identified within religious organizations is the inability "to communicate with different audiences, yet still remain true to religious beliefs and convictions" (p. 116). If the Satanic Temple continues not to take the time to introduce themselves to community members at a micro level, their identity will continue to be misunderstood and misrepresented.

Despite their misrepresentation in popular discourse, The Satanic Temple attempts to disrupt oppressive systems within the school system and to reframe our understanding of and relationship with Satan through its Protect Children Project. The campaign is noted on the front page of the After School Satan (2018a) website, "Satanism in Schools: The Satanic Temple offers exemptions against corporal punishment & solitary confinement in schools" (p. 2). Nineteen states within the U.S. legally allow corporal punishment, which is defined as "the intentional infliction of physical pain upon the body of a student as a disciplinary measure" (N. C. Const., art. XXVII, p.4). U.S. American cultural support for this practice is rooted in a Biblical understanding of law and order (Schuppe, 2016). However, if a child who identifies as a member of The Satanic Temple attends a public school with corporal punishment policies, they can become religiously protected against such acts of violence (Protect Children Project, 2016). The Protect Children Project is another example of mimicry, as The Satanic Temple inverts the court's interpretation of religious exemption. This form

of social activism causes me to wonder if it matters whether or not we can quantitatively measure the effectiveness of The Satanic Temple's mimicry and counteridentification strategies. If a few children find a place of safety through After School Satan or are physically protected by religious exemption, does it matter if a larger external audience or community stakeholders understand the ideological battle between The Satanic Temple and CEF? Perhaps it is irrelevant if The Satanic Temple's counteridentity is misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Furthermore, Stewart's (2012) investigation highlighted a social evangelical philosophy that I believe is also used by the political left. "When you get them young, you have a better chance of keeping them for life" (p. 129) is a tactic often referenced by the political left for fighting racism, homophobia, sexism, Islamophobia, and other "isms." The argument, "It is imperative that we see children and young people as a strategic force that can transform a generation and change the world" (p. 129) is a tactic I have seen my colleagues use in college classroom spaces to challenge the constructs of institutional oppression. It is worth pointing out that we only view these philosophies as inspirational if used for causes with which we agree. Otherwise they are labeled as coercion. Thus, there is a danger in using mimicry if one's indoctrinating practice is similar to the very ideology one is resisting.

## **Conclusion**

After School Satan not only provides a space for children to engage with scientific, rational, and non-superstitious topics, but the program also ensures public schools are creating space for religious pluralism and individual liberty. Despite their legal protection, After School Satan's implementation into U.S. elementary schools has created some controversy among external stakeholders. Their metaphorical use of Satan and promotional materials frame their identity as "other," which disrupts their ability to establish dialogue with external stakeholders. Specifically, After School Satan self-stigmatizes through the images and production choices used in their promotional video. The strategic choice of counteridentification has attracted outrage by other religious organizations, such as America Needs Fatima. Unlike their previous campaigns, The Satanic Temple's After School Satan has yet to establish a mainstream religious ally.

Scholars define mimicry as an identity strategy that is a menace to the identity of the dominant group, ultimately disrupting their power. However, After School Satan fails to achieve this goal. The media clearly frames The Satanic Temple as a menace organization, but After School Satan is currently unsuccessful in their attempts to remove the Good News Club's cultural power and social influence. Instead, the label of "menace" negatively impacts the legitimacy of the program and organization. By choosing to be non-invitational, as a means to maintain a counteridentity, the group is unable

to rhetorically persuade external audiences. Muñoz (1999) and Pecheux's (1982) argument that counteridentity is not a productive strategy is supported within the case of After School Satan. The organization is inadvertently fighting the counteridentity they have created for themselves by clarifying they do not promote a belief in a personal Satan. The labor required to constantly manage self-inflicted stigma limits the club's ability to disrupt the Evangelical movement or the system of oppression (manifest as singular religious expression) the Good News Club perpetuates. Future organizations that consider adopting the identity strategies of mimicry or counteridentity need to consider the potential negative implications this choice might have on their overall agenda.

Though the use of mimicry does not limit the organization's efforts, it also does not effectively achieve the goal of disrupting power. Social justice oriented organizations should consider whether or not the use of mimicry will enhance their ability to achieve organizational goals. In the case of After School Satan it provided neutral results. After School Satan's use of counteridentity garnered media attention, which might have provided unseen benefits to The Satanic Temple beyond this specific project. Thus, this strategy should be utilized mindfully and organizational leaders should consider the risk of self-stigmatization.

Overall, The Satanic Temple's strategic use of mimicry clearly communicates that their social justice efforts are meant to target The Good News Club; however, the use of counteridentification disrupts the legitimacy of their organization, which in turn distracts from their political agenda. Attempts to correct misconceptions about the organization on their website are most likely futile, as stakeholders might not be aware of the website or have the motivation to seek information beyond the media's description. If The Satanic Temple does not shift the way they engage with community stakeholders, they will continue to be framed as a "thorn" in the side of school districts across the country (McGowan, 2016).

### **Future Implications**

Finally, more research needs to be done to fully understand the impact of After School Satan on the United State's social, political, educational, and religious landscapes. Ethnographic, immersive research of the after school program would allow researchers to understand how volunteers for The Satanic Temple interact with children and to discover if mobilization tactics are implemented through the club. Furthermore, survey-based research would allow us to understand the impact After School Satan has on parents and other stakeholders. Parents who are neutral about the matter are not likely to engage with the media, as compared to parents who are outraged. Also, parents who support After School Satan might be hesitant to voice their support publically for fear of community backlash. Anonymous surveys would allow researchers to examine how communities feel when the media is not present.

Further research could create opportunities to identify intersections of social identities and diverse stakeholders (Allen, 2013) who form alliances either in support of or in opposition to After School Satan. For example, research could consider the unexpected relationship formed between the Catholic Church and Evangelical Christians, as cited in this paper. As the resistance against the Good News Club gains more media attention, scholarship can find a new space to understand how religion can be used as a tool of resistance. Lastly, researchers should continue to study the implications of counteridentification. Though this study supports past research, counteridentity might provide rhetorical benefits in other social justice efforts.

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