

Introduction: The Moral Panic Concept

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A moral panic may be defined as an episode, often triggered by alarming media stories and reinforced by reactive laws and public policy, of exaggerated or misdirected public concern, anxiety, fear, or anger over a perceived threat to social order. Details of the term's origin remain obscure, but its conceptualization began as an outgrowth of the politically engaged social perspective advanced by a group of leftist sociologists in the United Kingdom called the National Deviancy Conference (NDC). The NDC was formed in July 1968 in reaction to the Third National Conference of Teaching and Research on Criminology, held at the University of Cambridge, where, as the new organization's founders saw it, participants made the crucial mistake of treating deviance as an objectively discernible class of behaviors rather than an ascribed social category. In 1971, founding member Jock Young employed the term in "The Role of the Police as Amplifiers of Deviancy, Negotiators of Reality and Translators of Fantasy: Some Consequences of Our Present System of Drug Control as Seen in Notting Hill," his contribution to *Images of Deviance*, an anthology chiefly comprising papers originally presented at NDC meetings, edited by his friend Stanley Cohen (also an NDC founder). The next year, Cohen explored the idea in depth in *Moral Panics and Folk Devils: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, his analysis of media, public, and state responses to clashes between youth gangs that took place in Clacton and other resort towns along England's southeastern coast in 1964. Both Young and Cohen may have been influenced in their choice of words by the brief appearance of the term in Marshall McLuhan's (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (xxxv).

In the decades that followed, the study of moral panics proceeded in two intersecting yet distinct waves. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the relatively few moral panic researchers concentrated their efforts on expounding, corroborating, and elaborating the concept. By the early or mid-1990s, which Kenneth Thompson (1998: 1) has aptly called "the age of the moral panic," these scholars were joined by many others newly engaged with the topic. Investigations of moral panics began to cut a deep and broad swath across varied academic fields and disciplines that

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included cultural studies, media studies, education, sociology, communication studies, religious studies, cultural anthropology, cultural geography, political science, criminology, literary studies, legal studies, philosophy of science, and gender and sexuality studies. At the same time, the notion of moral panic spread beyond the confines of university and college campuses, wending its way into the popular imagination. Paradoxically perhaps, though hardly unexpectedly, greater acceptance of the moral panics model among scholars, the media, and the public occasioned a concurrent critical strategy of questioning and evaluating its advantages and limitations as a framework for explaining the causes, structures, and functions of social, cultural, and political crises.

First Wave

Jock Young

In his chapter for Cohen's *Images of Deviance* (1971), Jock Young focuses on the phenomenon of deviance amplification, when sensational media coverage of deviant behaviors unintentionally increases rather than restrains apparent deviance. Young also mentions the related phenomenon of moral panic:

The media, then—in a sense—can create social problems, they can present them dramatically and overwhelmingly, and, most important, they can do it suddenly. The media can very quickly and effectively fan public indignation and engineer what one might call 'a moral panic' about a certain type of deviancy. (Young 1971b: 37)

To a great degree, moral panics take place in the media. During moral panics, media coverage, rousing public fears over a reputed social problem, also assists appreciably in constructing that problem.

While the term itself appears nowhere in the book, in *The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Use*, published the same year as *Images of Deviance*, Young presents the sort of critical viewpoint that would become closely associated with moral panic research:

What has to be explained is why certain groups or individuals select particular drugs, outlining the significance of drugtaking not only to them but in the context of work and leisure in modern industrial societies. This done, we must go further and explain why certain drugs are labelled legal and others are totally prohibited; we must concern ourselves as much with the reasons for the social reaction against particular forms of drugtaking as with the causes of drugtaking itself. For the reasons behind prohibition disclose as much about the meaning of drugtaking in society as does analysis of the motivations

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of the drugtaker. Moreover, it is the social reaction against the use of illicit drugs which, to a considerable extent, shapes and buffets the way in which the drugtaker lives; circumscribing his activities, and even structuring the effects of the drugs that he normally takes. (1971a: 10)

Human behaviors acquire their meanings within specific social contexts. Disapproving social reactions to deviant behaviors dictate their significance even for those who engage in them. Therefore, to understand deviance as fully as possible, researchers must explain not only the motives behind particular uncondoned activities, but also, and just as importantly, the fundamental causes of society's responses.

Throughout his study, Young (1971a: 94, emphasis in original) delineates his preferred, "relativist" sociological standpoint, addressing its political implications as well, at one point stating,

The absolutist social scientist assumes social reactions against the deviant. He does not question, for example, why society reacts against the person who smokes marihuana but not those who smoke tobacco. In contrast, the relativist regards deviancy as not a property *inherent* in any activity but something which is *conferred* upon it by others. He turns the searchlight of inquiry, therefore, not only on the drugtaker but also on the people who condemn drugtaking. His interests are consequently wider than the absolutist for he must examine the power structure of society; explaining why certain groups have the ability to proscribe the behaviour of others and in what terms they legitimize their activities.

Going much further than simply proposing a novel research topic or method, Young stakes out a new relativist sociological position regarding both deviance and society. He admonishes scholars that societies and, more specifically, prevailing power relations define both deviant and condoned behaviors and groups. Shedding light on deviance, he contends, means casting a cold and critical eye on society and the structure of power.

Stanley Cohen

It was Stanley Cohen's *Moral Panics and Folk Devils: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (2002), which, like Young's work, investigates divergent social reactions to deviance and their roles in constructing both deviant and condoned behaviors, that provided the definition of moral panic that subsequent researchers would most regularly cite. In this book, originally published in 1972, Cohen (2002: 1) describes at length the social response to deviance outlined by Young:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, a person or group of persons emerges to

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become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.

Cohen portrays moral panics as more or less discrete social processes. Though they may express ongoing public concerns about “something which has been in existence long enough,” individual episodes emerge in response to dangers that appear to have surfaced suddenly. For Cohen, certain fairly well-defined steps occur in the development of moral panics. They commence when a person, group, or set of values, behaviors, or circumstances emerges as a perceived threat to social order. Frequently, they are sustained by moral crusaders, supported by media sensationalism, and enforced by state policies and practices. Then, they diminish or end, sometimes leaving behind sizable political and social changes.

In accord with Young’s findings, Cohen emphasizes that, like the moral panics of which it is often a part, the process of deviance amplification is driven largely by the mass media. Early in his book, Cohen (2002: 8, emphasis in original) explains,

Much of this study will be devoted to understanding the role of the mass media in creating moral panics and folk devils. A potentially useful link between these two notions—and one that places central stress on the mass media—is the process of deviation amplification as described by [criminologist Leslie T.] Wilkins. The key variable in this attempt to understand how the societal reaction may in fact *increase* rather than decrease or keep in check the amount of deviance, is the nature of the information about deviance. As I pointed out earlier, this information characteristically is not received at first, it tends to be in such a form that the action or actors concerned are pictured in a highly stereotypical way. We react to an episode of, say, sexual deviance, drugtaking or violence in terms of our information about that particular class of phenomenon (how typical is it), our tolerance level for that type of behaviour and our direct experience—which in a segregated urban society is often nil. Wilkins describes—in highly mechanistic language derived from cybernetic theory—a typical reaction sequence which might take place at this point, one which has a spiraling or snowballing effect.

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Stirring up moral panics, media direct their attention to “folk devils,” that is, to deviant individuals or groups seen as embodying a new or extraordinary social threat. Sometimes, such coverage may have unexpected consequences, intensifying instead of suppressing the targeted deviance. In such cases, the scope of the deviance seems to spiral: provocative media reports on deviant or unconventional behaviors result in even more attention being paid to them, isolating those termed deviant from the rest of society, which often causes them to identify more strongly with each other, fostering greater deviance, and so on.

Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts

In 1978, five scholars affiliated with Birmingham University’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies—Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts—published *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, a critical examination of a nationwide moral panic over mugging that befell Britain in 1972–3. In this comprehensive work, Hall et al. (1978: 16, emphasis in original) offer a definition of moral panic arguably second only to Cohen’s in its influence among scholars:

When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is *out of all proportion* to the actual threat offered, when ‘experts’, in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians, and editors *perceive* the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk ‘with one voice’ of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress ‘sudden and dramatic’ increases (in numbers involved or events) and ‘novelty’, above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a *moral panic*.

Like Cohen, Hall et al. examine the typical or exemplary progression of moral panics. Likely to be recognized only *in media res*, moral panics gain momentum as politicians and other moral crusaders join forces to define and combat a perceived social threat through public discourse, the law, and public policy.

The affinity with Cohen’s work runs deep: part of the authors’ program in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* was to revise and expand Cohen’s moral panics model in light of recent political developments in the United Kingdom and the United States:

And part of our intention is certainly to situate the ‘moral panic’ as one of the forms of appearance of a more deep-seated historical crisis, and thereby to give it greater historical and theoretical specificity. This relocation of the concept on a different and deeper level of analysis does not, however, lead us to abandon it altogether as useless. Rather, it helps us to identify the ‘moral panic’ as one of the principal surface

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manifestations of the crisis, and in part to explain how and why the crisis came to be *experienced* in that form of consciousness, and what the displacement of a conjunctural crisis into the popular form of a 'moral panic' accomplishes, in terms of the way the crisis is managed and contained. We have therefore retained the notion of the 'moral panic' as a necessary part of our analysis: attempting to redefine it as one of the key ideological forms in which a historical crisis is 'experienced and fought out'. (Hall et al. 1978: 221, emphasis in original)

Hall et al. align Cohen's processual model of moral panics with a Marxist critique of false consciousness. In response to "a conjunctural crisis," that is, to the growing difficulty of forming consensus because of the inherent conflict between capitalism and social progress, moral panics divert potential dissenters' attention toward imagined or misrecognized social threats. Moral panics, they conclude, must be understood not merely as occasional incidences of public concern and fear, but as diversionary manifestations, intended to maintain the *status quo*, of a continuing historical crisis.

Whereas Young (1971) and Cohen (1972) spoke of deviance amplification, Hall et al. (1978: 225) describe the "signification spirals" that commonly accompany moral panics:

In the public signification of troubling events, there seem to be certain thresholds which mark out symbolically the limits of societal tolerance. The higher an event can be placed in the hierarchy of thresholds, the greater is its threat to the social order, and the tougher and more automatic is the coercive response. ... The use of convergences and thresholds together in the ideological signification of societal conflict has the intrinsic function of escalation. One kind of threat or challenge to society seems larger, more menacing, if it can be mapped together with other, apparently similar, phenomena—especially if, by connecting one relatively harmless activity with a more threatening one, the scale of the danger implicit is made to appear more widespread and diffused. (1978: 225–6)

Building on the notion presented by Young and Cohen, Hall et al. discuss not just amplification (that is, an intensification or extension) of deviance, but rather escalation or accretion in its meaning. In the authors' view, the limits of social tolerance are relative: sanctions against harmful or socially threatening activities tend to be stronger than those against deprecated but largely innocuous behaviors. However, in the signification spiral propelled by moral panics, less dangerous activities become identified as symptoms or precursors of superficially similar but more destructive behaviors. Because both types of behavior are now taken to express a single pervasive menace, activities that were once discouraged but socially tolerated become almost as blameworthy as far more perilous or troublesome ones.

Second Wave

Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda

Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda's *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (2009), first published in 1994, includes a comprehensive analysis of the typical characteristics of many moral panics. Increasingly used as a frame for studying the phenomenon, this conceptualization became known by some scholars as the attributional model, so called in contrast to Cohen's concentration on the social and cultural development of episodes, which in this context came to be referenced as the processual model (see Critcher: 2010, Klocke and Muschert: 2010). Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (2009: 37–43) itemization of five key attributes of moral panics can be summarized as follows:

1. Concern. There must be a measurable increase in the level of anxiety arising from the conviction that a group's behaviors pose a substantial threat to society, a response seen by those who experience it as a reasonable reaction to a definite social menace.
2. Hostility. The source of the alleged social menace must be viewed with enmity or resentment as a readily identifiable group independently responsible for the danger its behaviors pose to society.
3. Consensus. Substantial agreement that a threat to society exists need not be achieved throughout society, but must be achieved within a segment of the public large or powerful enough to defuse opposition to its preferred definitions or policies.
4. Disproportionality. The intensity of public concern over a perceived social threat must be out of proportion to the measurable or demonstrable level of danger posed.
5. Volatility. Moral panics tend to arise suddenly and dissipate quickly, sometimes leaving behind enduring social changes.

While their consideration of the structural characteristics of moral panics represents a distinct shift in perspective from Cohen's attention to their progression over time, that Goode and Ben-Yehuda contextualize their own work by cogently analyzing Cohen's ideas throughout their book suggests that their intention was to supplement rather than displace his processual model.

Nearly as influential as their presentation of the typical properties of moral panics has been Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (2009: 51–72) concise taxonomy of commonly held scholarly models of, or theoretical perspectives on, the evolution of such episodes. Goode and Ben-Yehuda detail three main models or theories tacitly employed by moral panic scholars:

1. The grassroots model suggests that the public itself creates and maintains most or the most important moral panics. While the media or moral crusaders take

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- the lead in spreading and reinforcing moral panics, they do so in response to widespread concerns among the public.
2. According to the elite-engineered model, during moral panics, "The richest and most powerful members of the society consciously undertake campaigns to generate and sustain concern, fear, and panic on the part of the public over an issue that is not generally regarded as terribly harmful to the society as a whole" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009: 62).
 3. Concerning the interest-group perspective, which they call, "By far, the most common approach to moral panics (2009: 67)," Goode and Ben-Yehuda (citing sociologist Howard S. Becker) note, "Rule creators and moral entrepreneurs launch crusades, which occasionally turn into panics, to make sure that certain rules take hold and are enforced" (2009: 67).

As their text nears its conclusion, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009: 226) make plain their own conviction that all moral panics models must remain incomplete and tentative because episodes are, above all, variable and inconstant:

As we have seen throughout this book, moral panics make up an extremely diverse collection of events. We do not find that they go through specific, predetermined stages, with a beginning, a middle, and a predictable end. ... Their locus may be society-wide, or local and regional; more specifically, and broad, society-wide panic may be evident in all or nearly all communities nationally, or may or may not explode in certain specific locales, or alternatively, a panic may be extremely brief, lasting as little as a month or two Or they may be more long term and run their course only after several years. Some of the longer panics may represent the temporally limited portion of a much longer-range concern.

In discussing the attributes of moral panics as well as scholars' perspectives on the phenomenon, Goode and Ben-Yehuda offer tools for examining the causes, structures, and effects of moral panics rather than a classification system into which any given episode might readily be placed.

Angela McRobbie and Sarah L. Thornton

In "Rethinking 'Moral Panic' for Multi-Mediated Social Worlds" (1995), cultural studies scholars Angela McRobbie and Sarah L. Thornton contend that, to remain useful to researchers, the moral panic concept must be revised to account for the social and cultural transformations wrought by a rapidly changing media landscape. They contend that as mass media have become both more culturally central and more fragmented, the viewpoints they entertain have grown in number and diversity, and the folk devils targeted during moral panics have a far greater capacity to air their own opinions than was often the case when the concept was first advanced:

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One of the main aims of pressure groups is timely intervention in relevant moral panics—to be able to respond instantly to the media demonization of the group they represent, and to provide information and analysis designed to counter this representation. The effectiveness of these groups and in particular their skills at working with the media and providing highly professional ‘soundbites’ more or less on cue make them an invaluable resource to media machinery working to tight schedules and with increasingly small budgets. They allow the media to be seen to be doing their duty by providing ‘balance’ in their reporting. At the same time, they show how ‘folk devils’ can and do ‘fight back’. (McRobbie and Thornton 1995: 566)

According to McRobbie and Thornton, as niche media with limited budgets seek audiences by broadcasting reproving and nonconforming perspectives alike, the boundaries between moral crusaders and folk devils have become less distinct. Those whose behaviors crusaders deem deviant can access the means of offering their opposing perspectives.

McRobbie and Thornton’s (1995: 567) criticism of the moral panic concept extends to questioning whether it might not be inherently inaccurate and unuseful:

The delicate balance of relations which the moral panic sociologists saw existing between media, agents of social control, folk devils and moral guardians, has given way to a much more complicated and fragmented set of connections. Each of the categories described by moral panics theorists has undergone a process of fissure in the intervening years. New liaisons have been developed and new initiatives pursued. In particular, two groups seem to be making ever more vocal and ‘effective’ intervention: pressure groups have, among other things, strongly contested the vocality of the traditional moral guardians; and commercial interests have planted the seeds, and courted discourses, of moral panic in seeking to gain the favourable attention of youthful consumers.

This leads us to query the usefulness of the term ‘moral panic’—a metaphor which depicts a complex society as a single person who experiences sudden fear about its virtue. The term’s anthropomorphism and totalization arguably mystify more than they reveal. Its conception of morals overlooks the youthful ethics of abandon and the moral imperatives of pressure groups and vocal experts. In the 1990s, we need to acknowledge the perspectives and articulations of different sectors of society. New sociologies of social regulation need to shift attention away from the conventional points in the circuit of implication and control and look instead to these other spaces.

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Earlier scholars asserted that social control was imposed on folk devils by media and moral crusaders through moral panic. As the social relations between media, moral crusaders, and folk devils have broken apart and become more changeable, an analytic model of society as a single organism subject to intermittent moral panics no longer has any validity. Youth, frequent choices as folk devils, nevertheless have exceptional power as consumers, and clear distinctions between moral guardians and folk devils can no longer be assumed.

Kenneth Thompson

In *Moral Panics* (1998), Kenneth Thompson presents a systematic review of the concept's development that highlights the substantial reconsideration of the model that took place in the 1990s. Looking back on the 1980s, he ventures a reason for the relative dearth of moral panics analyses after Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978):

In the 1980s, however, the focus of sociologists turned to the rise of the New Right economic policies and ideology, involving economic deregulation coupled with cultural and moral re-regulation. The concept of moral panic seemed less relevant because it appeared to focus on episodic and discrete events, giving too much attention to symptoms rather than focusing directly on political-economic developments and their relationship to ideological trends. Other sociologists dispensed with the concept because it seemed to involve subjecting 'representations' to the judgement of the 'real', rather than concentrating on the operations of representational systems in their own right. (Thompson 1994: 140)

Thompson identifies two coinciding causes for many researchers' lack of interest in the moral panics model at the time, one related mostly to the politics of the 1980s, the other to the limitations of the concept itself. First, the New Right's association of "free market" policies with moral regulation highlighted the enduring causal relationship between economics and social relations, which the notion of moral panics as discrete episodes seemed not to address. Second, the assumption of clear and substantial distinctions between "representations" and the "real" involved in the moral panics model failed to engage scholars who saw laws, economics, public policy, and social identities as jointly forming comprehensive "representational systems" (a viewpoint, it might be added, that the rising neoliberalism of the 1980s appears to confirm).

Turning his attention to the revival of moral panic research in the 1990s, Thompson (1998: 140–41) finds both conceptual and historical reasons for the model's resurgence (as he did for its earlier neglect):

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Ungar calls on scholars to revisit the moral panics model in relation to the somewhat similar but distinct phenomenon of risk society crisis:

Risk society issues do not generally fit a top-down model. If responses to nuclear reactors are prototypical, panics appear to require some catalytic real-world event that is given direction by interest groups and carried forward by elements of the informed public, often as part of social movement organizations Significantly ... political authorities and large actors often find themselves the target of such activities and have encountered strong resistance in their efforts to influence long-term public opinion

From a social constructionist perspective, claims making pertaining to moral panics can derive more from a shift in moral boundaries than either the objective standing of a condition or new evidence. ... Moreover, claims may be about valence issues (these are one-sided issues, as in hard drug use) or involve relatively disproportionate power on the contending sides, as folk devils are pitted against better-organized and more powerful groups. With the risk society, issues tend to be warranted more by scientific findings or claims, with scientists, for all their public liabilities, playing a central role in the cast of claims makers. Given scientific uncertainties, the likelihood that the media's attempt to strike an equilibrium will be greater for 'factual' than for moral claims ..., and the chance that the powerful will find themselves targeted, a more equal balance of power between rival claims makers is anticipated with risk issues.

In short, moral panic has conventionally focused on social control processes aimed at the moral failing of dispossessed groups. Risk society issues tend to involve diverse interest groups contending over relatively intractable scientific claims. However, the former have come closer to the latter as diverse media and attention to a broader range of voices allow folk devils to contest the setting of moral boundaries. Social regulation processes, in other words, have become less predictable and more fractious.

Adopting the notion of risk society (societies where media play a crucial role in reporting on, and managing public reaction to, the dangers, such as global warming or nuclear accidents, associated with late modernity) from German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992), Ungar notes several crucial differences between risk society crises and moral panics. Moral panics typically involve "valence issues," that is, contests over contrasting behavioral goals (ending illicit drug use vs putting a stop to both illicit and recreational drug-taking, for instance) in which one alternative is presented as morally superior to the other. Risk society crises, on the other hand, may have no clear moral component, and the most effective response to a perceived problem, and even the nature of the problem itself, may be difficult to determine. Though fueled by misrecognition of, for example, folk devils or the actual goals

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of public policy, moral panics nevertheless focus on apparently understandable dangers posed by supposedly readily identifiable individuals, groups, or behaviors. Corporations and governments are likely to become the focus of risk society crises, while moral panics usually center on marginalized individuals or groups. Yet, as folk devils have acquired the means to fight back (like Thompson, Ungar here alludes to McRobbie and Thornton's work), moral panics and risk society crises have become more alike at least in respect to their targets' capacity to mount successful counter-offensives.

The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics

In necessarily broad outline, the preceding consideration of researchers' particularizing, questioning, and emending of the moral panics model describes the scholarly debate into which the present anthology enters. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* is organized thematically into six main parts: "The Evolution of the Moral Panic Concept," "Sex Panics," "Media Panics," "Moral Panics over Children and Youth," "Moral Panics and Governance," and "The Future of the Moral Panic Concept." Each section treats a major topic or proposition often deliberated in current research, each begins with a brief overview intended to draw connections between the chapters contained within it, and other recent scholarship, including pertinent texts not remarked upon above.

Moral panics are characteristically media driven and, reflecting the variety of forms that public discourses may take, the definition of media texts recognized by the contributors to this volume is extremely (though not limitlessly) wide in scope. It encompasses, for example, films, television programs, newspaper reports, videogames, online posts, laws, photographs, podcasts, political speeches and statements, government documents, protest signs and car window stickers, mass actions, and scholarly articles.

The critical perspectives presented in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* cross both national borders and disciplinary boundaries. This anthology collects research examining social problems pertinent to, among other countries, Canada, the United States, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Poland, Australia, and Japan. Mostly but not exclusively employing qualitative research methods, its contributors draw on ideas and utilize techniques developed in disciplines and fields of study such as philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology, literary studies, international studies, economics, immigration studies, education, policy studies, cultural geography, communication studies, social history, the philosophy of science, film studies, social psychology, media studies, architecture, city planning, legal studies, criminology, performance studies, visual studies, political science, and cultural studies.

Rather than literature reviews or review essays, the succeeding chapters comprise new research efforts centering on historical and especially contemporary issues concerning moral panics, which should be useful to researchers because

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they engage insightfully and persuasively with scholarly conceptualizations of the phenomenon. Importantly, this collection includes both significant elaborations on and informed critiques of the moral panics model.

Besides researchers, this volume's thorough treatment of its subject, inclusion of a range of perspectives, and clear thematic organization should appeal to undergraduate and graduate students, college and university professors, and many others interested in studying social problems and cultural issues. Of the two appendices that follow the contributors' chapters, one, meant to facilitate the book's use in classrooms and on course reading lists, offers alternative ways to organize the chapters according to various themes, while the other, designed to assist researchers, constitutes an extensive bibliography of scholarly texts on moral panics and related topics.

It is hoped that a diverse readership will judge *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* clearly written, amply informative, easily utilized, and readily applicable to research practice. Perhaps not a few may find it enjoyable as well.

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