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**A Hybrid Model of Moral Panics:
Synthesizing the Theory and Practice of Moral Panic Research**

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Abstract

We seek to address criticisms of the concept of moral panics by offering a hybrid model of moral panics (MPs) that synthesizes theory and practice of MPs research. A review of the literature on MPs from sociology, media studies and related fields shows a wide variety of usage and lack of conceptual clarity of the term moral panic. Yet there are few articles explaining how to analyze MPs. We present a theoretical clarification of MPs by addressing elements of *scope*, *intensity* and *reception*, to create distinction from other related theoretical concepts. In order to develop a working method for researching MPs, one must have an understanding of social conditions that give rise to, sustain and result in the success or failure of MPs, as well as possible lasting effects. We synthesize Cohen's process-oriented model of MPs and Goode & Ben-Yehuda's attribution-oriented model of MPs, creating a critical hybrid model of moral panics that integrates processes and attributes. We then utilize the hybrid model to offer practical suggestions for researching and analyzing the conditions, processes and effects of MPs, in the hopes of encouraging a more rigorous research agenda for scholars of moral panics.

Keywords: Moral Panics, Deviance, Social Control, Theory, Methodology

Introduction

Social scientists have observed that varieties of risks or social threats periodically emerge, and cultivate wide-spread fear, public reaction, intense discourse, legislation, or enforcement. Stanley Cohen articulated this point when he wrote the following:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or groups of persons emerges to 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 (Cohen 1972, p. 9).

Since the first use of the term moral panics (MPs) as an academic term in 1971, by Jock Young, and its subsequent classic formulation (see above paragraph) in Stanley Cohen's 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, it has seen widespread use in the social sciences in Britain and the United States. In recent years, it has expanded to studies of MPs by scholars and contexts from countries as diverse as Italy (e.g., Maneri 2001), Israel (e.g., Ajzenstadt 2009), Germany (e.g., Schifflauer 2007), Netherlands (e.g., Baerveldt 1998), Sweden (e.g., Lindgren 2006), Australia (e.g., Humphrey 2007; Zajdow 2008; Anthony 2009) and New Zealand (e.g., Rohloff 2008). While the study of MPs is primarily concentrated in the fields of Sociology, Criminology, and Media Studies, journals in Cultural Studies (e.g., Robinson 2008), History (e.g., Roberts 2005) and Education (e.g., Timmerman 2008) have also published recent articles on MPs, among others. Even since Goode's (2000) reference to a "bumper crop" in the MPs field, publication in the field seems to have accelerated.

Ironically, the success of the concept evidenced by its widespread and thirty-eight years of use, has also resulted in loose or outdated theoretical applications (Cornwell 2002; Garland 2008; McRobbie & Thornton 1995) and increased critiques of its efficacy (Cornwell 2002; Hier 2008; Ungar 2001). This paper seeks to address criticisms of the interdisciplinary concept of MPs by offering a theoretical guide, as well as methodological suggestions for thoroughly analyzing case studies of MPs. First, a brief history of the concept of MPs will be offered, then a discussion of theoretical issues involved in the

research of MPs, and finally an explication of our model and methodological suggestions for MP research.

Background to Moral Panics

Roots

The earliest precursors of the study of MPs were MacKay (1980 [1841]) and Le Bon (1979a [1895]) who examined how individuals participated in-group dynamics such as panics and crowds. Cohen and Young's initial research in MPs dealt with sociological issues related to the study of deviance and social control, and was influenced by deviance theory of the 1960s in general. The social upheaval of the time observed in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere, sparked increasing efforts by the state for social control and the criminalization of youth subcultures, especially minority youth. Becker (1963) identified the role of "moral entrepreneurs" in labelling individuals as deviants and criminals and pressuring the police, through the media, to exercise their moral authority to crack down on deviants. Critical sociologists at the time were in Young's words, "seized by a deconstructionist impulse" (Downes 2007, p. 53), that turned the accepted social control of deviance by authorities on its head and argued that extreme measures of social control, rather than simply responding to deviance, also created deviance, "by labelling more actions and people" as a threat to the established moral order (Cohen 2002, p. xxiv).

The Foundation of Moral Panics

The foundational work to the study of MPs was Cohen's dissertation project that was worked into the (1972) book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*. It studied official and public reaction to conflicts between rival youth subcultures—the rockers, who rode motorcycles and wore leather, against the mods (for modern styles), who drove scooters—that involved some fights and property destruction after their unanticipated arrival in a beach town. Cohen's work, as well as the work of Young (1971) on the MP about drug users, identified five categories of groups as contributing to the collective process of a MP; 1) control agents (e.g., police), 2) mass media, 3) the public, 4) lawmakers and politicians, and 5) action groups (e.g., moral entrepreneurs). Ultimately, they included the actions of the folk devils themselves as well (Cohen 1980; Young 2009a & 2009b), although this is a point of contention in the literature.

Cohen (1972) emphasized the crucial role of media in constructing the mods and the rockers as an exaggerated threat to society that disturbed the moral

consensus. As the police infiltrated the gatherings of mods and rockers and developed early warning systems of expected violence, the media served to amplify the deviance of the youth. The mods and rockers became “folk devils” in the eyes of moral entrepreneurs who sought corrective action from “control agents” against these uncivilized youth “gangs”. Cohen alleged that the over-reaction from the police and others was actually counterproductive as folk devils reacted to and partially embraced their new polarized social identity. Yet, a few years later, the MPs of mods and rockers faded into the background. However, Cohen (1972) indicated that the standardization of symbols representing their “devilish” behaviors provided the framework for the emergence of future MPs.

In the second edition of his book (1980) Cohen illustrated the main stages of this process-oriented model that are usually present in MPs, implied in the opening paragraph of his first edition quoted at the beginning of this article, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Elements of Cohen’s Model of Moral Panics

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- C1. Behavior by folk devils is defined as a threat to societal values and interests.
 - C2. The threat is depicted in a recognizable dramatic form by the media.
 - C3. A rapid build-up of public concern arises.
 - C4. Authorities, politicians and moral entrepreneurs call for a strong solution to the problem.
 - C5. The panic recedes and/or results in social and institutional changes.

Source: Cohen 1972.

We will return to these stages later, but first we summarize elaborations and advancements in the formulation of MPs by other social science scholars.

Policing the Crisis

Stuart Hall, et al., in the seminal (1978) book, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, expanded upon Cohen’s concept of MP by explicating the role of ideology in the media’s contribution to the process of a MP, particularly during times of political, economic, and cultural crisis, which they theorized, draw the public attention away from social and economic troubles and toward the particular subject of the MP for increasing forms of

social control.

The moral panic appears to us to be one of the principal forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a “silent minority” is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a “more than usual” exercise of control (Hall et al. 1978, p. 221).

Using Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony and the signification of “common sense,” these scholars contend that “the media tend to reproduce the definitions of the powerful” (Hall et al. 1978, p. 57), while maintaining relative autonomy. The media rely on the police, government officials, and other “primary definers” of social reality to render the news of the day for their audience, the public, who are believed to be concerned about crime and disorder. A series of muggings in Britain were presented as a new and growing crime wave when in fact they were neither. The media, in their position as “secondary definers” amplified the distorted threat and criminalization of Afro-Caribbean males and the purported need for more law and order in society. *Policing the Crisis* can be seen as integrating sociological and cultural studies approaches to MPs and inspiring more studies of MPs (Stabile 2001). Early theorists of MPs (e.g., Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978), contributed to the foundations of what is now known as the process of othering by cultural studies scholars and was a precursor to the social constructionist perspective, which does not take reality as a given, but as something that is produced by the actions of individuals and groups and their interpretations of how the world works.

Moral Panics Extended

Subsequent studies of MPs included the following topics: witch hunts (Ben-Yehuda 1980 & 1985); AIDS (Watney 1988, Weeks 1989); drug scares (Ben-Yehuda 1986, Baerveldt 1998, Collin 1998, Armstrong 2007); street crime scares (Waddington 1986, Chambliss 1995); minority youth violence (Zatz 1987, Welch 2004), child abuse and pedophilia (Critcher 2002 Parton 1985, Jenkins 1992 & 1998), Satanism (Jenkins and Maier-Katkin 1992, Victor 1993); religious cults (Jenkins 1992, Levine 1992); crack mothers (Humphries 1999), school shootings (Burns 1999); and day care ritual abuse (deYoung 2004), among others. In addition, the term MP was used in mass media accounts of the 1990s and beyond in Britain (Thompson 1998), and scholars in the United States (e.g., Best 1999, Glassner 1999) have successfully published in formats with a broader public appeal beyond the academic audience. Altheide (2009, p. 83) reveals that news reports of MPs continually increased after 1985, with more than 200 articles in the UK’s *Guardian* and the US’s *New York Times* from

the years 2000 through 2007.

The widespread usage of the concept of MPs has obscured its general theoretical coherence. However, there have been many theoretical advances to MPs in the last two decades.

One of the most important advances has been provided by Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) book, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. It is frequently cited because of its extension of the MP concept into a testable, attributional model distinguished by five criteria, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Elements of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's Model of Moral Panics

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- G1. Concern: There is heightened level of *concern* over the behavior and social consequences of a certain group.
 - G2. Consensus: There is a general *consensus* that the threat is real, serious and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behavior.
 - G3. Hostility: An increased level of *hostility* develops towards the deviants whose behavior is seen as threatening to society.
 - G4. Disproportionality: The public concern is in excess of what is appropriate if concern were directly proportional to objective harm.
 - G5. Volatility: Panics are by their nature fleeting, often subsiding as quickly as they erupt

Sources: Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994a & 1994b.

Other recent scholars have added theoretical refinement to the Cohen's and Goode and Ben-Yehuda's classic models in answering the question of why some MPs never fully develop. Jenkins (2001 & 2009) has studied child pornography on the internet as a failed MP in the context of an under-reaction (Cohen 2002, p. xxxiv) to a social problem. He lists seven factors (2009, p. 44-46), too extensive to elaborate here, that make a panic likely and six factors that make it unlikely to develop. He contends that "small villains" are more likely to become MPs "than large or well connected ones" (Jenkins 2009, p. 45). Michael Levi (2009) seems to concur in explaining why white-collar crime, while creating folk devils periodically, does not usually develop into a MP. Their centrality to social structures, he argues, puts "moral boundary maintenance" (Levi 2009, p. 64-65) too close to home, and makes it more likely that law-breakers of lower social status will become folk devils.

Another reason why MPs may not fully develop is due to the ability of identified folk devils to resist in a more fragmented media landscape (McRobbie & Thornton 1995) where folk devils sometimes even produce their own media. In a creative example of action-based research in Australia, Veno and Van Den Eynde joined with “an outlaw motorcycle club in an emerging MP” (2007, p. 490), and with an effective media counter-campaign neutralized the panic. They demonstrated that “folk devils, moral entrepreneurs, experts, media and public—all have agency in the process and the process of demonization can be stopped” (Veno & Van Den Eynde 2007, p. 504).

On the other hand, MPs, as “noisy constructions” of social problems may not fully develop due to the skill of professional claims-makers “working in organizations and with no public or mass media exposure,” in what Cohen (2002, p. xxiii) calls “quiet constructions” of social problems. Tepper (2009) confirmed this in a study of police efforts to criminalize youth raves in Chicago. He showed that the deviants, “in the absence of a highly visible moral campaign were unable to mobilize” and the raves were shut down.

Conceptual Complications of Moral Panics

We now turn to a brief discussion of additional theoretical issues in formulating the parameters of the concept of MPs in order to distinguish it from related concepts and to provide a foundation for our methodological guide in the next section. Some of the scholarly applications as well as critiques of classic models of MPs seem to stem from differences in theoretical and sub-discipline specific perspectives in contextualizing the utility (or lack of utility) of the concept within larger social dynamics. For example, Altheide (2009) connects media use of MPs to news formats and the discourse of fear. Cottle (2006) lists it as one of several types of mediatized rituals, including scandals and disasters, among others. Miller (2006) provides a supportive connection of MPs to the risk society and Ungar (2001) a more critical one. Still others place it within larger realms of moral crusades and moral regulation (Critchler 2009, Thompson 1998), with Hier (2002 & 2008) providing a critique; as well as collective behavior and social movements (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994), with (Cornwell and Linders 2002) providing a critique. Some critics of MPs argue that its overlap with so many “adjacent concepts” has “stretched so far beyond the original limits” that the term “has lost most of its conceptual ground” (Cornwell & Linders 2002, pp. 313-4) and “analytical precision” (Cottle 2006, p. 417). Other critics have argued that the dynamics of social panics are so frequent in the contemporary risk society that they have become routine (Cavanaugh 2007; Ungar 2001). However, many proponents stress that MPs occur not only when moral regulation is successful (Hier 2002) or hegemony is established (Young 2009), but also

when it is perceived to have failed and to be in crisis (Cohen 1972, Hall et. al. 1978).

In order for MPs to be a robust concept, its operationalization needs to be clear and coherent. Thus, for the concept to have utility, its scope is important. Not all constructions of a social problem can qualify as a MP, nor can it apply to all situations of public anxiety in a risk-focused society. Jewkes indicates “the term has become a shorthand description for *any* widespread concern” (2004, p. 78 [emphasis in original]). The distinction of MPs from similar typologies of public concern needs to be considered, and MPs should be seen as one aspect of a broader range of moral regulation, public anxieties, and ideological discourses of social control, but not totally subsumed by any one of these concepts.

In clarifying what constitutes a MP, in the tradition of the sociology of deviance, we follow Young’s (2009a, p. 13) explanation that MPs involve “a process of mass stigmatization,” and “a widely circulated narrative on the genesis, proclivity and nemesis of a particular deviant group that tends to amplify in intensity over time” and eventually recedes. The framing of a MP will involve provocative language to describe the deviance or its impacts (e.g., drug zombies, welfare cheats, crack mothers, Satan worshipers, etc.) and will declare the level of the threat as high (e.g., ticking time-bomb, flood of immigrants, etc.) and needing punitive and/or preventive action.

MPs may be initiated by a particular event at a local level, but in order to become a full-blown MP, we argue that its scope of concern must expand beyond the local level and a singular event to institutional and public concern of sustained intensity, over the claimed immoral behavior that is seen as a threat to good citizens, or even to society as a whole. Since MPs rely on stereotyped subcultures as folk devils, we see the scope of MPs as distinguishable from conditions and episodes involving one individual, or a more abstract, non-personified threat, such as the following: political scandals (e.g., President Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky); consumer panics (e.g., health scares, product recalls, Y2K, etc.); industrial accidents (e.g., oil spills), economic crises (e.g. global recession); and natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes and tsunamis).

Successful MPs, while being widespread can vary in scale. They do not have to grip “everyone or even a majority of the members of a given society at a given time” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, p. 157). However, they need to establish interactive resonance with the media, social control agencies, moral entrepreneurs, politicians, action groups, and the general public (i.e., the groups suggested by Young [1971]), to a level of intensity that would

stimulate non-routine responses to the real and/or perceived threat.

However, MPs don't just act to control folk devils but also serve to affirm and normalize dominant society and govern its boundaries, as many social scientists have pointed out (e.g. Ajzenstadt 2009; Critcher 2008; Hier 2008). In the arena of competing claims-makers, from moral entrepreneurs to folk devils, people are not only controlled, nor reactive but are also drawn to identify with different ideological frames. They are "guided by the groups they belong to, the roles they occupy in the social structure, and the interests and understandings they develop in interactions with others" (Cornwell 2002: 309). Yet, this obviously does not mean that social interaction operates on a level playing field. Thus it is surprising that many critiques of MPs seem to avoid a critical analysis of dynamics of social status, social and cultural capital, and political and economic power infused in the processes of MPs and disproportionately distributed across social groups. A thorough analysis of a MP must include a critical formulation of material, symbolic, and discursive power that was a hallmark of Cohen's classic study.

A Hybrid Model of Moral Panics

In the 15 years since the development of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) model of MPs, major changes have occurred in the media, the main institution through which MPs are communicated. When they developed their model, text-messaging, blogging and tweeting were practically non-existent. The number of corporate media conglomerates controlling the U.S. news media (Bagdikian 2004) during this time has decreased from more than ten to just five. The fragmentation of media spawned by new communication technologies has opened up spaces for counter media narratives, yet at the same time the increasing concentration of media ownership by corporations trying to increase their profits and the development of a competitive 24-hour news cycle has made news sensationalism more prominent. Thus, the complexity and intensity of the interaction of news media production and audience reception dynamics have increased. Reflecting this understanding, recent scholars (Critcher 2008; deYoung 2004; Cornwell & Linders 2002) have criticized Cohen's and Goode and Ben-Yehuda's models as assuming predetermined media dynamics and effects, while being vague on the outcomes of a MP. The classic models of MPs would be strengthened by an expanded account of the social conditions that give rise to, sustain and result in the success or failure of MPs. A strong model of MPs needs to not only to identify *what* happens during a MP but the process of *how* it happens. It also needs to allow for the possibility of counter-narratives not only from folk devils but also from others engaging in the fragmented mediascape, while considering the impacts of a MP beyond its volatile media and social life-

span. Although the term and concept of MPs has become more widely used (Altheide 2009), it has often been used with less precision. The popularity of the concept has produced some imprecise uses (Cornwell 2002; Garland 2008; McRobbie & Thornton 1995) which has led some scholars to question its utility (see e.g., Hier 2008; Ungar 2001).

In order to develop a more specific and useful model for analyzing contemporary MPs, we combine Cohen's process-based model (see Table 1) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (see Table 2) element-based model into a modified hybrid model (see Table 3) that examines social conditions and interactive social processes before, during and after a MP, with a focus on the media as the nexus for public discourse of MPs.

Table 3: Hybrid Model of Moral Panics

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1. Cultivation: the emergence of conditions, actors and discourses that make the growth of a MP more likely, such as:
 - Conflict among competing moral universes and/or rapid social change
 - Economic or political crisis
 - Media attention/public concern about related social problems
 2. Operation: processes that function during a MP
 - a. Episode (C1, C2, G1) – coverage of the shocking event or series of events that identify the problem/threat
 - i. Distortion – descriptions of the event and the deviants are exaggerated
 - ii. Prediction – there is a prediction of future deviance
 - iii. Symbolization – dramatic images and symbols are attached to the problem behavior.
 - b. Magnification (C3, G2, G3) – the period of intense attention and prolonged media coverage to the causes and consequences of the threat, represented by a shift from media inventorying the episode to value-laden sense-making activities.
 - i. Moralization – identification of the folk devils and why they are a threat to the social order, and a typification of their behavior as representative of the danger they pose/problem they embody
 - ii. Officiation – increasing involvement of police, experts & officials, moral entrepreneurs, and community leaders through media interviews, press releases, public statements, etc.
 - iii. Amplification – Coverage of the panic becomes themed and a re-occurring feature. Media focuses on heightened public

- concern evidenced by opinion polls, letters to editor, protests, web pages, blogs, etc.
- c. Regulation (C4, G4) – the advocacy of strong measures of social control through the media, to deter, manage or eradicate the threat, often met with varying levels of resistance.
 - i. Surveillance – calls for law enforcement, other officials and the public to be vigilant and to report suspicious behavior.
 - ii. Mobilization – gathering of personnel and resources for civic, legislative, and law enforcement action to manage the problem, as well as the mobilization of resistance groups countering the demonization of the folk devils.
 - iii. Institutionalization – implementation of new structures of governance or enforcement, creation of social movement organizations and counter-organizations, passage of new laws or tougher penalties. If resistant groups are successful in critiquing the MP, institutionalization will not occur.
3. Dissipation: the receding of a MP from the public limelight. (C5, G5)
- Normalization – a new hegemony is established (e.g., the new normal – living with the threat)
 - Transformation – the panic results in social, ideological and/or institutional change either in support of moral regulation or in opposition to it.
 - Dissolution – the moral panic is challenged or debunked, offending behavior drops off, or another pressing social problem takes its place).
 - Re-circulation – aspects of the MP are reproduced into the discourse or social dynamics of a new MP, or become a more permanent feature of prominent discourses of social risks and moral regulation.

Sources: Cohen 1972 and Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994a & 1994b.

Notes: 1) Parts G1-5 really are descriptive elements of all stages of the operation of a MP, and G4 & G5 are more likely to be determined after the dissipation of the MP. 2) Parts a, b & c in the operation stage are not meant to be discrete or linear steps.

The hybrid model and our suggestions for applying the model to MPs research (see Table 4) attempt to account for the indeterminacy and volatility of contemporary MPs phenomena, and the capacity of folk-devils to resist, while acknowledging the disproportionality of social and institutionalized power. Our model also recognizes the ability of ideological and discursive patterns and structures to cultivate future MPs and to have lasting cultural

and institutional outcomes. Below we explicate our hybrid model of MPs.

Cultivation

For a MP to develop there needs to be a conflict between two or more competing moral universes that is articulated by moral entrepreneurs who have been busy in creating a public perception of the problem, setting the stage for the possible development of a MP.

Often, moral crusades occur during times of rapid social change and “growing social pluralism”, that “create(s) increasing potential for value conflicts and lifestyle clashes between diverse cultural groups, which turn to moral enterprise to defend or assert their values against those of other groups” (Thompson 1998, p. 11). Economic (e.g., recession) and political crises (e.g. war), or other challenges to social hegemony (e.g., social movements, youth and alternative sub-cultures, etc.) can also provide the conditions ripe for a MP. Past MPs can also form a foundation for future ones. For example, the panic around one ‘crime wave’, such as the panic around LSD can provide a familiar narrative or discourse genre for a later hybridized MP, such as the crack panic

Current deviant behavior is often depicted through the interplay of moral crusaders, folk devils, and mass media in ways that draw on previously existing images and symbols. A MP is more likely to emerge when folk devils are of marginalized social status (e.g., race, class, gender, etc.) or disavow their own social status and values of their dominant culture (e.g., John Walker Lindh – the American Taliban, hippie culture, etc.). In order for a MP to grow, there needs to be significant media attention to the social problems related to an emerging MP. News media have a particular role in alerting the public to risks and dangers. Many scholars (Best 1999, Stabile 2006) conclude that for journalistic and economic reasons, the mass media have an interest in reporting crimes especially when they appear to be a new category of crime or threats to the dominant culture.

Operation

Episode. When a MP commences, there often has been a precipitating event that has a strong element of inherent drama. There is immediate news coverage that inventories the episode(s) and identifies the social problem and the suspected or known troublemakers. Descriptions of the event and the deviants are dramatized and usually exaggerated or distorted. There is a prediction of future problem behavior from the deviants and dramatic images and symbols are attached to the problem behavior.

Magnification. The panic around the moral threat becomes magnified through the focused discourse surrounding the threat. The folk devils are identified and their behavior is explained to be a threat to the existing social order. News media shifts from detailing the 'facts' of the episode to sense-making journalism, while public officials and moral entrepreneurs mobilize their resources to speak out about the problem. There is an increasing involvement of officials and 'experts' giving press conferences and the media using a preponderance of official sources as the primary definers of the MP. Government officials, social institutions, and action groups use rhetorical heat (Goode 2008:542), often revealing atrocity tales to emphasize the threat and typify the behavior of folk devils as representative of their inherent evil nature. Folk devils may speak out, usually eliciting more concern or possibly mitigating the panic. The media may construct themed taglines or headline frames in their expanded coverage and focus on heightened public concern evidenced by opinion polls, letters to editor, protests, web pages, blogs, etc.

Regulation. In conjunction with the magnification of the MP are calls for strong measures of social control to deter, manage or eradicate the threat, including pre-emptive action. Law enforcement widens their net of surveillance and encourages the public to also be vigilant and report any suspicious behavior to officials. Agents of social control and action groups mobilize financial and human resources to take corrective legislative, civic and law enforcement measures against the new threat. The mobilization of regulatory forces may become institutionalized with the creation of new formal organizations, such as neighborhood crime-watch groups or law enforcement task groups, the passage of new laws or tougher penalties, etc.

However, control responses may also spark counter-movements to resist social control. A MP and attempts at social control are more likely to resonate with individuals, groups and organizations that are a part of, or affiliate with the social identities (e.g., race, class, gender, religion, nationality, etc.), social status and/or ideology of the groups that appear to be threatened, rather than those of the folk devils. In addition, socially empowered folk devils are more likely to resist the mass stigma associated with the status. For example, white collar criminals are better able to avoid being the subject of a MP than are violence criminals (Levi 2009). If folk devils or their sympathizers are successful in counter-claims and explanations, they will impede or dissolve a MP. As interactive and volatile processes, the resonance of a MP with particular social groups may shift as more information is revealed, and either deflate or inflate the MP.

Dissipation

Four types of groups have a significant impact on the outcomes of the operation of a moral panic; public officials (politicians, law enforcement, etc.), action groups (moral entrepreneurs, folk devils, and supporting groups of both), the public, and the media. While any one of these groups or combination thereof may be the primary facilitator of the dissipation of a MP, media collectively are the most important, for they are the main access point through which the masses try to become aware of, formulate and interpret collective meanings. They are also the figurative public cauldron through which claims makers and counter-claims makers evaluate and contest these social meanings.

As a MP recedes, whether through “success” (the moral threat of the folk devils is mitigated) or “failure” (e.g., MP is revealed as a faulty myth) there are several possibilities of the outcomes of the decline. One possibility is that the normalization of the threat and attempts at regulation become an accepted part of the routines of daily life. Another possibility is that the panic results in longer lasting social or institutional transformation (e.g., new laws), either in support of moral regulation of folk devils, or against it and accepting them as part of a changing democratic culture. The immediacy of a MP may also dissolve if the premises of it are debunked, offending behavior drops off, or another pressing social problem takes its place.

MPs also have the capacity to leave legacies in discursive and ideological forms. Certain aspects of a MP may re-circulate into the discourse of a new MP. The descriptions, frames, and causal statements made in media accounts for previous MPs can contribute and influence the way in which the media portrays similar social problems in the future. In severe cases, a place name, date or other usually innocuous label can become endowed with extraordinary meaning. For example, Pearl Harbor, Columbine, and 9-11 are now triggers for much deeper emotional meanings than their place or date names. A MP may also dissipate into more obscurity when the legitimacy of the panic is challenged by experts, investigative journalists, or a successful counter-social movement, and debunked as being more myth than fact. MPs can also fade away if the offending behavior drops off or disappears, or fails to compete with a more pressing social problem or a more tangibly immediate MP.

Moral panics have always been assumed (and thus far have always been empirically demonstrated) to be temporary social events, although they may leave notable legacies. The emotional effervescence (Durkheim 2001 [1912]) experienced in a moral panic cannot long persist, and the social relations must return to normal or a new normal. As has been suggested by communications scholars, there is an issue-attention cycle (Downs 1972) at work in the media

(and reflected in the public discourse), meaning that issues of public concern can only occupy the public consciousness temporarily. In media studies, the life course of a typical issue in the media has been demonstrated via empirical analysis to be 18.5 months (McCombs & Zhu 1995), and in a more sociological vein, scholars have identified processes through which social problems rise and fall in the public arena (see Hilgartner & Bosk 1988).

However, ideologies, discourses and social dynamics don't necessarily just disappear after being brought into existence. They often become latent until conditions and contexts arise again for them to re-manifest into a new MP, or they may become a more permanent feature of new social norms and broader discourses of societal risks and moral regulation.

Strengthening Moral Panics Research

Many of the studies of MPs have focused on determining whether or not some past episode of social drama was a MP. We believe this is unfortunate and concur with Critcher (2008, p. 1138), who suggests that analysis should start by seeing MPs as an "ideal type" of a perhaps more extreme form of moral regulation, social control, and public anxiety. Thus, studying MPs should be the "means of beginning an analysis" of larger social processes that involve the interactive production, regulation and resolution of deviance and social problems, "not the entire analysis in itself" (Critcher 2008, p. 1138). In this vein, our hybrid model of MPs and methodological suggestions are proposed in the hope of encouraging a workable and more rigorous research agenda for scholars of MPs.

Applying the Hybrid Model

The proposed hybrid model can help to remedy some of the conceptual shortcomings often observed in the MPs literature. However, for those sitting down to start a MPs study, still the question remains, where does one start? Asking interesting questions is the key to producing interesting research. In this regard, scholars of MPs have an advantage, as their topics have already generated some amount of social response inside and outside the academy. In Table 4 we suggest general conceptual and analytical tasks related to the processes, elements and attributes of MPs as outlined in our hybrid model.

Table 4: Suggestions for Researching Moral Panics

1. Cultivation Stage
 - Describe existing value conflicts.

- Describe pre-existing problem frames.
 - Identify and describe pre-existing folk devils from earlier panics.
 - Identify and describe key interest groups and moral entrepreneurs.
 - Measure perceptions of relevant social problems/threats and identify social-historical conditions cultivating them.
 - Examine mass media reportage of the problem/threat prior to the panic.
2. Operation Stage
- a. Episode Sub-Stage
 - Describe the precipitating event(s), identifying key responders and their actions (e.g., agents of social control).
 - Identify key commentators (e.g., agents of social control, experts, or community leaders) and analyze their characterizations of the event(s).
 - Interpret and analyze dramatic images and symbols attached to the deviants.
 - Identify predictions about the future recurrence of the problem/threat.
 - b. Magnification Sub-Stage
 - Describe efforts to characterize the broader meaning of the precipitating event in value-laden terms and interpret the needs and interests of various stakeholders.
 - Identify efforts to connect the current problem/threat with other past problems/threats or to create a new folk devil.
 - Analyze official statements and media discourse about the extent of the problem/threat, as well as its causes and solutions. Identify any discursive patterns typifying the behavior of the folk devils. Analyze any statements from the folk devils and reactions to them.
 - Analyze media coverage of the social problem and compare it to past coverage. Identify recurring themes/frames and elements of the coverage.
 - c. Regulation Sub-Stage
 - Identify the social group(s) targeted for surveillance and the methods and means of social regulation attempted.
 - Identify sources of mobilization and justifications for civic, legislative and enforcement action, as well as any groups mobilized and campaigns created to counter the MP.

- Analyze the processes and outcomes of key social control responses undertaken to mitigate the problem/threat.
3. Dissipation Stage
- Analyze the factors and conditions leading to the decline of the MP.
 - Identify institutional legacies of the panic (e.g., new organizations, policies, or laws).
 - Identify symbolic legacies (e.g., new or continuing problem frames and symbols/images) that may cultivate future MPs or dissuade them.

In proposing this guide, we hope they will provide some clarity regarding the comprehensive types of analysis that can be included in MPs studies. At the same time, we hope it will be clear to our colleagues in various disciplines that we respect the ad hoc and often phenomenological nature of MPs research. Indeed we stop far short of suggesting that positivistic logic or a monolithic conceptual approach be applied to MPs work. Rather, we see plenty of room for a middle ground, one that balances the need to conduct social research via empirical observation, while considering the subjective interpretations of observers and participants of social life.

Building Methodological Rigor

Just as Critcher (2005) asserts that there is no single MPs theory, it might equally be said that there is no unified MPs methodology. However, much can be improved in the nuts-and-bolts of doing MPs research, without specifying such a unified method. Our broad review of the research produced under the rubric of MPs reveals that there seems to be no consistent way of conducting research in MPs, nor are the methods employed always clear. In some cases, methodology sections are omitted from manuscripts, and in other cases methods are ambiguous. Since MPs research is an interdisciplinary endeavor, the ability to specify one's methods is perhaps more crucial than in research that occurs typically within disciplinary boundaries. Certainly, scholars in a variety of humanities or social science disciplines should include specific and detailed descriptions of the methods they employed.

Without limiting the variety of approaches for which the MP concepts are utilized, we suggest a number of operational improvements which, if included, could enhance individual research agendas while also strengthening the field of MPs research. First, triangulation of findings using

multiple methods and sources of data to study a MP could greatly enhance the quality of the field. We have noted that most studies of MPs utilize a single method and data source. We encourage scholars to incorporate multiple sources and types of data and multiple methods of analysis when possible. Most, though certainly not all, studies in MPs rely on mainstream media discourse as a source of data. Potentially rich, though rarely used, data sources include interviews with moral entrepreneurs/action groups or agents of social control; official documents; ethnographic work with folk devils or agents of social control; public opinion polls; video/visual representations; tweets/blogs/listservs; analysis of social networking sites (e.g., Myspace and Facebook); alternative media; art work (e.g., music, drama, poetry, literature dance, or visual art), and participation/observation at protest events.

Second, we stress the importance of comparative studies. A common criticism of (Critcher 2003) MP analyses is that they are frequently limited to single case studies. The expectation that the models fit the details of a chosen case undermines their relevance to a wider range of issues. We echo the call from many researchers (Baerveldt 1998, Cohen 2002, Critcher 2003, and others) of MPs for more comparative studies. The literature of MPs would benefit from more comparative studies of MPs between countries, cultures, time periods, subjects of MPs, as well as successful and failed MPs, productive and destructive MPs, and MPs promoted by the political left versus the political right.

Finally, because studies of MPs constitute neither a universal theory nor a monolithic method, researchers must situate their findings in substantive theoretical areas related to the particular social problems/threats studied. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the concept of MPs, we stress the importance of connecting each study to other fields of inquiry. An effective example of this is Brayton's (2006) article about John Walker Lindh, the so-called American Taliban, which is situated in the MPs literature, while leaning effectively on theories of racial identity and nationalism. Being situated in multiple literatures adds an element of stability to the scholarly endeavor, something that the MPs literature alone may fail to provide.

Future Research

It is our intent that this article should serve as a reassessment and reorientation for seasoned scholars and aspiring scholars of MPs alike. The concept of MPs is one of the few sociological concepts that has resulted in interdisciplinary and mainstream usage and has lasted more than thirty-seven years. The irony of its resonance with scholars and the media is that it has lost some of its coherence. We hope that the conceptual clarifications and practical

issues we have discussed will encourage continued research in MPs and refine the concept as an important conceptual tool in social scientists' toolkit, for understanding dynamic processes in the social construction of deviance and social control.

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