Palgrave Studies in Risk, Crime and Society

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Risk is a major contemporary issue which has widespread implications for theory, policy, governance, public protection, professional practice and societal understandings of crime and criminal justice. The potential harm associated with risk can lead to uncertainty, fear and conflict as well as disproportionate, ineffective and ill-judged state responses to perceived risk and risky groups. Risk, Crime and Society is a series featuring monographs and edited collections which examine the notion of risk, the risky behaviour of individuals and groups, as well as state responses to risk and its consequences in contemporary society. The series will include critical examinations of the notion of risk and the problematic nature of state responses to perceived risk. While Risk, Crime and Society will consider the problems associated with 'mainstream' risky groups including sex offenders, terrorists and white collar criminals, it welcomes scholarly analysis which broadens our understanding of how risk is defined, interpreted and managed. Risk, Crime and Society examines risk in contemporary society through the multidisciplinary perspectives of law, criminology and socio-legal studies and will feature work that is theoretical as well as empirical in nature.

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Sarah Wright Monod

Making Sense of Moral Panics

A Framework for Research

palgrave
macmillan

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For Joe, and Chilla

Preface

This book has a number of beginning points. One of these was my captivation with the idea of moral panic. Another was my frustration at not knowing where to start if I wanted to explore one. And another one was the need for some clarity about what 'moral panic' referred to: an abstract concept to unpack social phenomena? Or material on-the-ground-happening reactions that emerge in real life social situations? Perhaps the most significant beginning point, however, was in the latter months of 2002, as I witnessed a young boy being actively demonized by the news media in New Zealand where I live, and my experience of being a voyeur who could do nothing to mitigate the consequences for his life-chances that I suspected would follow. I later felt that the directions in which the scholarship of panic has been headed over the past decade were too narrow. I thought that despite the good intentions to extend the capacity of the concept of panic by connecting it with theory, it was too soon.

We live in a time when we need moral panic more than ever. We don't need more material on-the-ground-happening moral panics (though they do perform a function, as will be discussed). We need the abstract concept, or at least *a* concept, or even *a number of* concepts,

that can help us to think critically about how and why issues are presented to us in the ways that they are, and why we respond to only some of them. We live at a time when the leader of the free world wants to build a wall to keep his nearest neighbours out, uses social media to vilify officials and journalists and denies that climate change exists. My senior colleague, Professor John Pratt, argues that this moment in time marks 'the end of reason'.

Making sense was written to assist with the practice of doing panic research, with a view to rekindle thinking about the shape of the analytical concept. It is a book for students and scholars interested in both *moral panics* (material on-the-ground-happening panics) and *moral panic* (the analytical concept). It focuses on the relationship between the two articulations. It prepares readers to investigate a panic and supports them to contribute their findings to moral panic scholarship.

Lastly, a shout out to my postgraduate students: Madeleine, Sarah, Megan, Danny, Hannah, Jordan, Ange and Sophie, each of whom I have been privileged to see blossoming into remarkable criminologists.

Wellington, New Zealand   Sarah Wright Monod

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