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Sarah Wright Monod

# Making Sense of Moral Panics

A Framework for Research

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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.

I have loads of people to thank. Firstly, to my colleagues at the Institute of Criminology at the Victoria University of Wellington, especially Fiona Hutton, Lizzy Stanley, John Pratt and Kim Workman. You have all been tremendously instrumental in my thinking and in the directions in which my work has gone (and is going). I also owe so much to the following people for their wisdom and guidance: Mike Hill, Mike Rowe, Rob White, Allison Kirkman, David Pearson, Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich, Chamsy el-Ojeili, Jan Jordan, Venezia Kingi and Heather Day.

My dear friend Amanda Rohloff deserves a special mention. What an outstanding mind! She made some deep impressions in my work and challenged me often. I miss you, Mandy.

A massive thanks to my family who put up with me. Jake, you are my everything. Paul, you rock my world. Diana, I can't be without you. Peter, you are always there for me. Mike and Nikki, we got this thing called life! Arohanui Shannon, Jesse, Bri and Kairo.

Big, big thanks to my RA's Josh Barton, Jordan Anderson and Samantha Keene, and to the students in CRIM326 in 2016. You lot smoothed out the rough edges.

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

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