Introduction

Moral Panics, Sexual Rights, and Cultural Anger

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Moral panics are the natural disasters of human society, and, like tsunamis and hurricanes, they not only present a crisis for stable social order but also contain much that threatens the well-being of individuals and communities. The social context of moral panics, the sense in which individuals and groups are perceived to pose a threat, the political invention and mobilization of this risk in the media and imagination, and whether these panics are spontaneous or socially generated, have long been debated. Such panics and great fears can be short or long term. However, the more serious they are and the longer they endure, the greater the likelihood that societies will deal with them through the production of the reactive mechanisms of surveillance, regulation, discipline, and punishment. When sexualized, moral panics appear to “have much in common with the religious disputes of earlier centuries.” Today, however, the cohesion and linkage of successive panics as part of a general process of cultural anger employed to massage fear suggests the need for a new way of thinking about and analyzing these human disasters.

Sexual crises are known from such historically disparate phenomena as the fear of the masturbation “epidemic” that haunted the 18th and 19th centuries, moral crusades against abortion and unwed teenage mothers, antipornography campaigns, efforts to criminalize prostitution through attacks on the trafficking of women, and panics surrounding homosexuality and HIV in the 20th century. What marks each of these cultural happenings as “panics” is the level to which the societal and personal expressions are out of proportion with the threat posed by the so-called “folk devils” (e.g., masturbating children, unwed mothers) and evil-doers (e.g.,
homosexuals) groups. In the worst cases, the rights of these persons are qualified or revoked, undermining citizenship and threatening democracy. By citizenship, I mean the full rights, entitlements, and opportunity structures that support household security and well-being (“life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”) in the public domain as well as in the private lives of individuals. As the studies in this book reveal, cultural reactions of such an extreme kind are not rare; in fact, they seem to be growing more frequent. These panics provoke a cultural anger in the service of moral regulation that targets the vulnerable in societies, compelling the contributing authors in this book to examine how panics provoke new techniques for governing others or for governing the self in the effort to strengthen well-being and social rights.

One of the contentions of this introduction is that moral panics in the United States are also becoming increasingly sexualized—for cultural and political purposes, in part through the Internet. Examples range from panics having to do with gays in the Boy Scouts, fears of STDs, Janet Jackson’s bra “malfunction” on television, and fears of oversexed women teachers in the classroom. For example, sociologist Janice Irvine reveals how, in the context of official U.S. government abstinence-only sex education, high school teachers are barred from discussing condoms, homosexuality, and other issues or they can be fired: that is the power of a moral sexual panic that becomes institutionalized over time. As François Girard (2004) has noted, much of this sexual content is antiwoman and antigay. Longer term, the impetus for the sexual preoccupation “within the triangle of class, race, and nationality” involves both the saturation and commercialization of sex in the United States and elsewhere, as well as the rise of neoconservatives and religious fundamentalism that is associated with sexual panics and moral politics. Some current observers believe that moral panics are becoming increasingly frequent and more prominent, especially in the media. As argued below, the cultural politics surrounding homosexuality in countries such as the United States have been infused repeatedly with moral panics and anger, reflecting state economic and social failure that taps into the fears, anxieties, and fantasies of a broad range of people. Some argue that these panics are explicitly used to achieve political hegemony. Sex education has been systematically destabilized in the United States through moral panics.

Sexual panics in advanced welfare capitalism evoke strange, lurid, and disgusting images that merge media and popular reactions “below the surface of civil society,” targeting individuals and groups in ways that
produce coherent and incoherent ideological platforms and political strategies. The conscious and unconscious resonances of this process, while unknown, are necessary in understanding the emergence of theoretical formulations of moral panics since the time of the seminal 1972 work of Stanley Cohen, who coined the idea of moral panics. Panics produce state and nonstate stigma, ostracism, and social exclusion—the opposite of what liberalism or neoliberalism has envisioned. Sexual panics, when effective, are liminal and generate images of the monstrous. In media representations, especially, sexual panics may generate the creation of monstrous enemies—sexual scapegoats. This “othering” dehumanizes and strips individuals and whole communities of sexual and reproductive rights, exposing fault lines of structural violence (e.g., racism, poverty, homophobia, etc.). Of course, not all of these events are significant or efficacious. The pattern in these reactions and counterreactions hinge repeatedly on questions of normative sexual citizenship, reproductive accommodation and assimilation, or sexual orientation and gender resistance and defiance. This book examines these themes through the description and analysis of the intersection of moral panics and sexual rights globally but with particular reference to American hegemony at home and abroad.

Defining Panics

While a variety of historical and cultural studies previously examined fears, anxieties, and happenings such as witchcraft accusations and confessions, none of them did so systematically through the concept of moral panic. That awaited the 1972 work of British sociologist Stanley Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Cohen argues that “societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.” Cohen’s study was an effort to understand youth subcultures, delinquency, and police control, and he strongly suggested that media were responsible for panics. Cohen’s work did not explicitly concern sexuality, though sexuality was later linked to it in the critiques of Cohen’s work by Jeffrey Weeks (1981), Gayle Rubin (1984), and Simon Watney (1987). Cohen’s concepts have been critiqued in detail by British academics, including Charles Critcher who looked at the media’s role in causing panics; by Watney who studied pornography, AIDS, and sexuality; and by Stuart Hall and his colleagues (1978),
who theoretically explored the role of hegemony and police control in the forces that create panics. Angela McRobbie and Sarah Thornton (1995), as noted below, provide significant clarification of the limitations of the concept: that it has often been employed more as a label, thus impeding analysis. In this book we are especially concerned with clarifying the conditions under which moral panics are created at certain times and places and not at others; why certain audiences are more susceptible to the lure of moral panics in the media and others are not; and who gains or benefits from these panics and who is harmed. In other words, we wish to explore the limitations of the ideas in history and culture.

Thirty years after his first book, Cohen reflected that his work “belongs to the distinctive voice of the late Sixties,” because it explored anxieties about youth deviance, delinquency, and drugs. Cohen did comment on sexual child abuse scandals and terrible mob reactions to sexual predators in England, but otherwise, sexuality still was not a focus.

Here we need a sharper and somewhat more refined vocabulary to distinguish the social forms to be discussed in this book. Among these, I wish to contrast the following:

1) Moral shock. Moral shock is defined as a socially significant incident or threat that galvanizes public outrage and that is commonly associated with “the idiom of disgust.” As an example, Janice Irvine points to the Christian Right using outrage in opposing gay school reform, as in the controversies surrounding gay-straight alliances in high schools.

2) Great fear. This is a term used by John Gagnon (2005) that has some of the connotations of moral shock but is extended over longer periods of time and is at a heightened level of anxiety and worry. Great fear can take either a sexual or nonsexual focus. As with the great fear of masturbation in the 18th and 19th centuries, there were decades of worry that led to a subsequent “panic” without any necessary social changes to the state apparatus. Nevertheless, great fears can alter—even overhaul—and impact our cultural meaning systems and scripts, as we shall see.

3) Moral campaigns. Whether focused on sexual matters such as “purity” or sex education, temperance, or women’s emancipation, moral campaigns are defined by strong moral and ethical sentiments and ideologies necessary for changing the way values are organized. Moral campaigns try to implement organizational transformation but though entirely through nonstate mechanisms. Joseph Gusfield (1986) has similarly written of “symbolic crusades” in arenas such as the temperance movement, exploring how social class, domination, conflict, mobility, and reform all
conditioned reactions to moral campaigns as they destabilized public status. It is notable that many examples of anti–sex education fundamentalist efforts described by Irvine (2002) create rhetoric, volatile emotional climates, and mobilize broad constituencies through nonstate means that have broader purposes and hidden agendas going far beyond the particular moral values exploited at the time.

4) Moral panics. Moral panics are large social events occurring in troubled times when a serious threat by evil-doers incites societal reaction: Cohen has responded to criticism that the term “panic” suggests the connotation of “being out of control,” which is unfortunate because these panics have a social shape. Sexual panics seem to be increasingly media orchestrated and purposeful or planned, which belies the irrationality implied by the term “panic,” until it is realized that panics can be culturally staged. There is a difference in the directionality of these panics. For example, as noted below, it is useful to contrast the historical construct of the Cargo cult, in which the outcome is apocryphal and focused on agents outside of society, with the moral panic that identifies or represents fears of devils within our own midst.

5) Sexual panics. Sexual panics, as employed in this chapter, are a form or subspecies of moral panic. But, in the specifically modern transformation of these large social events we find a peculiar dimension that may be characterized as totalizing sexual events (what Thompson [1998] calls “all pervasive”). The Wilde and Clinton trials, noted below, began in scandal and ended in spectacle, and they belong to this genre. Through state and nonstate mechanisms that impinge on institutions and communities, people become totally overwhelmed by and defined through the meanings and rhetoric of sexual threats and fears. In this view, the sexual “folk devil”—the sexual other, whether oversexed, or undersexed—is stripped of rights, and the cultural imagination becomes obsessed with anxieties about what this evil sexuality will do to warp society and future generations.

6) Cultural Anger. A central weakness of the concept of moral panic in the contextual study has always been its weakness in providing what Watney calls an “overhead narrative,” or the way one panic gives way to another and “one anxiety is displaced across different panics.” It is this general process that I refer to as cultural anger—the marshalling of intense emotion across diffuse domains and arenas of action to unite disparate individuals and groups in political pursuit of a common enemy or sexual scapegoat. Remarkably, people compelled to vote out of cultural anger
seemingly act against their own socioeconomic interests—an enigma to which we shall return (see chapter 7).

Following Cohen’s work there have been several comprehensive social and historical reviews explicitly focused on moral panics. Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda employed numerous examples of sexual panics, such as diffusion of sexual psychopath laws from the 1930s to the 50s (as noted by Sutherland in his classic study), the “Boys of Boise” sexual perversion scandal, and antipornography and antiabortion fears (which became larger panics in the 1960s and 70s). The processes of moral panic Goode and Ben-Yehuda noted include heightened concern in a society, increased large-scale hostility, consensus that the problem is “real, serious, and caused by the wrongdoing group,” a sense of disproportionality (the problem blown way out of proportion to its accurate appraisal), and volatility (being subject to extreme periods of intensification or lapse possibly resulting in institutional or routine measures that often affect state apparatus via institutional, legislative, and courtroom mechanisms). The sociological framework of these case studies was typically incidental to the larger “social construction of deviance” perspective that informed social constructionism. Thompson (1998) identifies contemporary sources of moral panics and concludes that panics are succeeding each other more rapidly, becoming more comprehensive or totalizing, and perhaps even constituting a “permanent” state of society. The latter is an oxymoron, according to Cohen. This recent work has led to the important idea that the moral panic is not “an isolated phenomenon but a connective strategy” for moral campaigns and the cultural politics and hegemony of civil society in late 20th- and early 21st-century social life.

Subsequently, a variety of social histories of sex panics, generally ushered in by the seminal work of Gayle Rubin (1984), opened up the notion of moral panic in American studies. Rubin viewed a “moral panic” as a crusade that has been incited against a sexual community or deviant sexual practice. Her famous chart (“The Sex Hierarchy: Charmed Circle Versus the Outer Limits,” 153) demonstrates a “charmed circle” of social hierarchy in which the sexual “normals” and the “scapegoats” are at the mercy of panics because their sexualities are “evil” compared to “traditional” hetero-normative standards. Others have followed in this line of analysis, and social histories of actual sex panics have found their way into the literature. For example, Fred Fejes (2000) examines the first murder and sex panic in postwar Miami and links mass media panic to the marginalization of homosexuality during the Cold War.
The point is that these studies examined “great fears, both sexual and non-sexual, [that] have swept through many cultures,” while “sexual panics” was not the center of this valuable line of work. Moreover, as Gagnon (2004) has narrated so brilliantly in retrospect, earlier researchers were generally more optimistic about progress in politics and sexual culture than has been borne out in fact.

As these ideas and the critique of moral panics as representational forces suggest, panics are not “an isolated phenomenon but a connective strategy” for the ways in which cultural elites can dominate media and discourse in civil society. Through moral panics, the tug-of-war between state and nonstate and between political, religious, and social coalitions and civil society are reproduced, and these struggles are most recently concerned with issues of rights.

**Historicizing Moral Panics**

Perhaps the oldest and most famous of all moral panics was the trial of Socrates in ancient Athens. In the view of I. F. Stone, this historic panic was caused by the fear of moral pollution among the students and followers of Socrates, whose political views challenged democracy in the Greek city-state. Socrates dared to suggest that a wise monarch would rule better than a democrat, which provoked a storm of outrage—as well as the reaction (ultimately successful) of silencing him. Socrates responded to his opponents that “He who is now taking away our freedom of speech is also destroying the customs of democracy as surely as if he were gouging out the eyes or cutting out the tongue.” Through his suicide—aimed at marking the importance of his ethical stance—Socrates may be claimed as the first of many victims of moral panics in Western civilization. The apocryphal characteristics of this story also suggest the cosmic potential for moral panics to turn political fear into a broader cultural anger that seeks scapegoats.

Moral panics are processes of representing and demonizing scapegoats in popular culture and media, commonly identified with the dread of “folk devils,” or subalterns, undermining cherished sociality and morality. But who or what do the panics scapegoat and why? Historians have demonstrated in key cases such as the great fear of masturbation in the 18th and 19th centuries that the panic focused on younger males and provided a powerful mechanism for evading or redirecting unwanted emotions and experiences (such as anger or shame) ultimately concerned with larger
patterns of dreaded social failure. Hunt speculates that the deep and persistent anxieties associated with Britain's ability to govern and sustain its empire led to the masturbation panic in that country. Countless children were shackled and mistreated at the hands of parents, teachers, and doctors whose actions, by today's standards, would be child abuse. It seems likely that it was cultural anger that mobilized the 19th-century imagination of masturbation to feed the growing crisis of masculinity and social antagonism surrounding the ebb of British power.

Historically, moral panics such as these have been fired in part by the now famous folk language of a "slippery slope" of moral decay. Once moral "weakness" or temptation is given in to, masturbation leads to homosexuality or degeneracy for boys, or masturbation leads to loss of virginity, lesbianism, prostitution, or nymphomania for girls. As historian Alan Hunt notes, the public had long feared that "the slippery slope is not only a private fate, but also a social disaster; masturbation leads downwards to the theatre, ballroom, public house, bad company, and everlasting ruin."

The Dutch historian, Theo van der Meer (1994) has delineated the "slippery slope" that surrounded the rise of the scourge of "sodomy" in 18th-century Holland. The notion of the slippery slope initiated a moral panic and fear that Catholics had introduced the "sin of sodomy" into Holland in the early modern period, with boys as young as eleven, and older men too, arrested for acts of sodomy. The public came to fear this as a widespread secret network—a remarkable new imaginal (that is, a socially imagined form of conduct and action in the society). As the sexual fear grew, the sodomites were rounded up and executed—first in secret and then in public—as a lesson to people not to fall prey to moral depravity lest they, too, slide down. Eventually the slippery slope preoccupied myriad areas of post-Reformation Dutch thinking about the need to stay busy, be productive, be morally upstanding, and be sexuality sanitary.

Indeed, this provides an exquisite example of panic made into state policy through the Dutch approach to the "cordon sanitare" on which is based the famed "red light" district of Amsterdam and other cities. This state policy was a new cultural mechanism for regulating prostitution and thus solidifying the boundary between the "chosen" and the "fallen." Examples such as these support Foucault's (1980) idea that internalized norms for morally acceptable male gender roles and intimate sexual relationships advanced a new regime of self governance and discipline in the modern period. Even today, gay bashers in Holland are prone to offer the
slippery slope argument in defense of their acts of violence against homosexuals with whom they had consensual sex, often for payment.43

It is fascinating to see, three hundred years later in the United States, the same notion of a slippery slope,44 of sexual conservatives’ fearful warnings of the risk to heterosexuals by online purveyors of sexual panics. Through this ancient folk model, contemporary moralizers still argue that if marriage is legalized for gay men and lesbians, Americans will want incest, bestiality, and other horrors legalized.45

The great fear surrounding gay and lesbian marriage is likely to be with us for a long time (see chapter 5). But not all moral panics are so long lived. In the early 1980s there was a moment in Atlanta, Georgia, when it was so feared that mosquitoes could spread HIV disease that people stayed in doors, avoided going to work, or school, and so on. After a couple of days the panic fizzled. Muggings fanned media fears and sensational outrage associated with police brutality in England; these lasted for quite a while and initiated the original notion of moral panic.46 Satanic ritual abuse of children beginning in 1980 in the United States and Western Europe became a widespread but short-lived moral panic that ultimately proved to be groundless.47

Panics may also have the ultimate effect of displacing responsibility for security and well-being from the self and community to real or imagined others on the margins of society. Consider, for example, the infamous moral panic of homosexual predation that came to be known as the “Boys of Boise” scandal at the height of the Cold War. The scandal became an instant national sensation in the United States, featured on the cover of the New York Times Magazine.48 Subsequent analysis revealed that the charges against “humble and powerless victims” were largely contrived and blown out of proportion—and even politically inspired.49 The Boise homosexual panic was one of many such panics of the 1950s that secured a new chain of folk devils or demons from the 1930s to the 1950s, beginning with the Catholics and on to the Jews, “Commies,” and “Homos.”50 Some people do stand up against panics and speak out against the victimization of innocents or uphold the juridical principle that one is innocent until proven guilty.51 However, when sex panics and moral campaigns to demonize categories of people are implemented “with the full force of the law,”52 compassion is hard to come by. For example, when there were widespread calls at the beginning of the AIDS pandemic for “mass quarantining of people,” few spoke out in protest.53 Gary Dowsett chronicles this insidious story in the United States and Australia in chapter 4.
Do people speak out against the violations of rights and citizenship, especially at the beginning of a moral panic? Sometimes yes, and sometimes, when fears are heightened, as with parents who feel “weird” if they defend sex education against its fanatical enemies,54 the answer is “no.” There were few defenders in Boise, and the innocence of the alleged perpetrators was entirely beside the point. As one local farmer remarked, it did not matter if the homosexuals had actually sexually violated the boys or not, “they should be run out of the state” anyway.55 The sexual sanitation provided by moral panics, the ability of the police or other agents to undertake a “cleansing” of the social body to rid it of miscreants in what Cathy Cohen (1999) has referred to as the “politics of deviancy,” is all too painful to observe. Such cases also reveal the generalized crisis associated masculinity and gender roles in the early Cold War period,56 which Enloe (1993) has referred to as the “militarization of masculinity” in the post–Cold War period. It was legitimately asked not only if homosexuals would corrupt normal men but also whether they lacked “the sort of manly qualities presumed to be needed to wield a gun.”57

As Judith Levine argues in a controversial book about young people’s sexuality and the fear and misrepresentation surrounding the pedophile panic (the book itself created a minor moral panic), that contemporary moral panics sexualize the scapegoats as sexual “monsters” and “predators,” whether in the neighborhood, the nuclear family, or now on the Internet.58 These sexual panics dehumanize the alleged perpetrators, some of whom are innocent bystanders, stripping them of rights and destroying their lives, while at the same time leaving children more vulnerable than ever.59 It is extraordinary that Hunt’s 1998 historical study of school masters and teachers enforcing mechanisms for the control of masturbation in the 19th century reaches the same conclusion: the panic worsened the condition of children while it did nothing to alleviate the fears and anxieties of their parents. Likewise, the threat of the pedophiles (via the Internet) is as great as ever;60 the prior panics not having secured new mechanisms of protection for individuals or communities and posing the great probability of future panics targeting the same scapegoats.

The link among religion, antisexual and sex-negative attitudes, and moral panics in the modern period is well known.61 America’s Puritan background surely provides support for chronic cycles of purity, hygiene, and Christian reactions to premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, and a variety of related fears and anxieties.62 In the later 20th century these religious and moral campaigns have targeted vulnerable populations.63
They have gradually increased both in frequency and number throughout the period following the ascendancy of Reagan and neo-Conservatism. Lessons from the struggle for reproductive rights are also germane. As Joffe’s work on reproductive rights has made clear from the beginning, Americans regarded birth control as “immoral” because it made possible nonprocreative sex between married persons. Subsequent changes in the law over the past decade have made abortions increasingly inaccessible to women, especially the poor. Since then, media and electoral campaigns in response to moral panics waged against reproductive rights led to the policy dilemma that the rights could be preserved, but only if the movement became more conservative itself. These transformations are examined by DiMauro and Joffe in chapter 2, but it is useful to note that they are not unique to the United States. Correa and Parker (2004) have shown that new religious fundamentalism is a backlash to cultural change and theocracy in Islamic countries and Pentecostal and radical fringes of the Catholic Church in the South.

Moral panics thus compress social, political, media, and psychological fears and anxieties, whether real or culturally imagined (often a combination of both) and solidify the boundaries between victim and victimizer, safety and danger, based on the widespread notion that folk devils are inside one’s own group. When the political reaction and will are great enough, as in “longer-lasting panics,” new institutional or organizational mechanisms are created to deal with the threats. The targeted “undesirables” are chased out or scapegoated, new controls are implemented to regulate these populations, yet future panics ensue. It may be argued that these spectacles actually weaken the social fabric, though they may strengthen the hand of elites, at least temporarily.

Anthropologists have long studied a phenomenon in tribal societies at the time of first contact, conquest, and colonization by Western colonial powers that bears a family resemblance to moral panics but takes a different cultural form: the Cargo Cult, or Millenarian Movement. For example, in response to the arrival of allied forces on the Admiralty Islands during World War II, local people built a kind of airstrip, destroyed their religious and traditional possessions, and awaited the arrival of new riches from afar. Prophets announced that the world was ending or changing. Among the Trans-Fly peoples of New Guinea, entire villages destroyed their ritual cult houses and upset and destabilized conventional gender roles in anticipation of an expanded, brighter, richer and more powerful future, albeit one that they did not understand. These peoples were
ineffective in controlling their dealings with the other, and utopias of this kind were the result. They often failed, but were no less significant in prompting change.

What is remarkable about these Cargo Cults is that they were prompted by external connections—hegemonic and conquering states from the outside—which resulted not in the scapegoating of internal enemies but in the fearful, ambivalent representation of imaginals that promised a future of wealth and power. Mary Douglas (1970), a British structuralist who was interested in how notions of purity and danger got transposed onto categories of nature and culture in the social imagination of humans, argued long ago for a theory of grid/group control relations that supports the effort to conceptualize how and why moral panics scapegoat and victimize in the United States and complex modern nations. “Group” in contemporary life is difficult to define. Increasingly, moral values and fears have become the boundary conditions for saying who is and who is not a moral, full citizen and human being. If Cargo Cults define futures by way of unknown or unknowable outsiders, sexual panics fuel cultural anger toward those inside society who pose serious risk, and the panics are experienced phenomenologically as threatening the future or the reproduction of one’s own society, so that the folk devils must therefore be identified, incarcerated, exiled, or destroyed.

Sexual Scandals, Media, and Modernity

Although sexual panics target enemies within a group, in the modern period, the media, first in print and then in radio and on television and now on the Internet, play an enormous role, sometimes to paradoxical effect, in actually spreading fearful imagery and ideas far into the culture. The literature on moral panics has, since its inception, been confused, ambivalent, and contradictory regarding the relationships between media and panics. Stuart Hall and colleagues (1978) argue that media only reproduce and sustain moral panics originating with public officials (the police, for example). Hall thus assigns a greater historical specificity to social regulatory processes and begins the trend of detailing the role of the media that goes beyond mechanistic and reifying notions of moral panics driven by media and other social institutions that were never sustainable. Watney was particularly skeptical about a mechanistic reliance on media, suggesting that larger social and imaginative processes must
operate to explain “the overall ideological policing of sexuality, especially in matters of representation.” Hier has also been critical of the conflation of “media discourse and social perception,” but even more so, he has critiqued the failure to theorize how social perception is connected to collective action.

When great sexual fears drive media to broadcast and exaggerate fears beyond their local source, these panics have the effect of massaging the feared moral decay through social and political tactics or media into everyday speech and habits. Take note, however, of the paradoxical effect of some media panics. Seemingly it is as if a moral campaign meant to slander a public figure or depose him or the effort to remove a hated political group from opposition has the reverse effect of purposely spreading the dangerous knowledge, forbidden meanings, and corrupt practices into the general population, entirely counter to the presumed aim of containing or stamping them out. The moral panic of sodomites in Holland seems to have had this unintended historical effect, as did the great masturbation fear.

Consider the classic illustration of how print media fermented sexual panics during the London trial of Oscar Wilde in the early 1890s. As is well known, the accusations of sodomy brought by Lord Douglas, the younger lover of the famed playwright (Wilde being a married man with children), opened perhaps the first media scandal of the modern period, massaged by newspapers around the world. It was not just the sexual transgression (perhaps more common than was known) that was at stake. Indeed, masculinity, social-class stability, and the emergence of a modern sense of internalized homophobia (that is, the sense of self-hatred created through same sex desire that tormented and then provoked the accusation of sexual victimization) were surely a paradigmatic cultural message. The Wilde trial criminalized “sodomy” (“unnatural sex”) and homosexual identity and also formed the basis of a large-scale production of knowledge and meanings associated with naming “the vice that dared not speak its name.” Victorians of the time paradoxically may have had their sexual attitudes altered, their vocabulary expanded, and their private lives exposed to same-sex desires and behaviors that should have scandalized the moral guardians of the times. The effect was to speed up social change in the cultural meanings surrounding sexuality and homosexuality. This example seems counter to the effort to regulate sexual scapegoats, but that is the Foucaultian paradox—panics inflame policing and control while concomitantly spreading new sexual meanings and cultural practices via late 19th-century print media.
A century later in the United States, a similar process seems to have occurred surrounding the extramarital sexual scandal of President Bill Clinton. Similar to the trial of Wilde, the world was saturated day after day with the shocking details of the scandals, including, for example, discussions of telephone calls Clinton had while being fellated, thus introducing concepts (particularly “oral sex”) that were previously taboo for the mass media and presumably unknown to small-town America where the Cold War had surrendered its grasp on sexuality very slowly. Will we come to see the paradigmatic effect of the Clinton scandal like that of Oscar Wilde’s—actually opening up a broader, more sustained dialogue about sexuality in the United States? Whatever the answer, critics have seen in the spectacle an example of how difficult it is to create a “winning script” for media spin, even when the public sees a moral panic as politically inspired. Janice Irvine has suggested that the attempted impeachment of President Bill Clinton over his sexual adultery provoked “sexual shame,” while the panic “prompted widespread sexual dialogue” about oral sex and adultery. This panic in the late 20th century was fanned on television, radio, and the Internet, not just in the newspapers as was the case in the Wilde trial. One effect of this was that the public was much more skeptical of sexual surveys and polls. Thus, the political risk of a political campaign using moral panics is the indirect change in producing counterhegemonic discourse.

My own sense is that the 1980s ushered in new discursive possibilities because of the AIDS pandemic and media coverage that constantly massaged public opinion, introducing terms such as “anal intercourse” for the first time. Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush could never bring themselves to utter the term “gay” or “homosexual” in public. Notably, it was President Clinton who did so in the context of the policy on gays in the military that came to be known as “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” Surely, Foucault (1980) would see in these paradoxical effects of what Reagan would not say and Clinton would, the demonstration of his view that sexual discourse shatters silence, increases social control by the state, incites self-regulation and preoccupation with the sexuality of the normative self, and hence heightens both the power of “sex” and its threat to society. At any rate, it is clear that sexual conservatives and Republican strategists seized on the Monica Lewinsky scandal as a way of undermining Clinton’s moral authority and destroying political opposition to their own political agenda. One thing is clear: as Clinton’s approval ratings stayed in the 60 to 70 percent level throughout the trial, public opinion recognized
a distinction between the political office and the private citizen. Ironically, some believe that the American people proved once and for all that there is but a tenuous connection between what they expect of the president as a political leader and what they want to know about his private life.

Panics can turn into cultural spectacles such as the Wilde and Clinton trials. Spectacles are cultural events that take on social importance, inciting new kinds of talk and action so as to constitute a cultural happening—a unique marker and historical cohort event\textsuperscript{86} in the lifetimes of individuals and societies. Everything is defined with respect to the trial of Clinton, before and after, in media lingo. Surely in contemporary society, and particularly today’s television and Internet media, sex panics have an entertainment value (of course the Wilde and Clinton sexual scandals are exmaples) and voyeur or curiosity capital that “sells” or markets products, whether newspapers or books, television products, souvenirs, and kitsch memorabilia. Media mogul Rupert Murdoch exploited this in the AIDS epidemic.\textsuperscript{87} Nearly twenty years later, as Frank Rich (2004) argues, far from being merely a cog in the machines of capitalism, Rupert Murdoch’s FOX news is the “true cultural elite” through the sensationalizing of media events ranging from Britney Spears’s escapades, the so-called Janet Jackson “wardrobe malfunction” on primetime, and so on (see Herdt, chapter 5).

Historically, sexual spectacles incite fearful feelings and a sense of danger to society and concomitantly compel novel forms of public declarations such as sightings of strange and ominous events, confessions, and accusations of guilt of sexual congress with devils or practice of witchcraft. These declarations broke the silence surrounding topics such as witchcraft during the Renaissance period or, later, drugs and sodomy. These are all processes of radical social change long known to social study.\textsuperscript{88}

The power of the media to influence sexuality and sex research in a new and significant way came when Alfred Kinsey published his infamous sex studies (\textit{Sexual Behavior in the Human Male} in 1948 and \textit{Sexual Behavior in the Human Female} in 1953). A zoologist and researcher profoundly interested in nature and natural variation, Kinsey also wrapped himself in the cloak of scientific objectivity (he often wore a white clinician’s smock when interviewing) and appealed to the authority of the medical doctor in achieving his success in stalking the dragon of sex in mid-century American society. The near panic that ensued from the publication of his first book in 1948, resulting in accusations that he was promoting communism and moral depravity, cost him his funding from the
Rockefeller Foundation and no small amount of personal stress and pathos, precipitating ill health and premature death. In fact, Kinsey as a personality became the object of a moral panic in his own time—not unlike a messianic figure or prophet who cries out for reform and liberation—and then targeted as a folk devil. James Jones’s (1997) biography of Kinsey attests to this, as well as the superb 2004 film *Kinsey*, which has done more than any other Hollywood movie to awaken Americans to the repetitive idée fix (Freud would call it a “repetition compulsion”) of moral panic in their sexual lives. Kinsey was like Freud, Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and other academic sexual progressives of the modern period, not only in being a “sexual enthusiast,” but also in seeing himself as a reformer of attitudes, mores, and institutions, as all Kinsey’s biographies agree. Fifty years later, significant right-wing Web sites slander Kinsey as “evil” and the “cause” of sexual immorality in our time, causing no end of continuing difficulties to the well-respected Kinsey Institute at Indiana University.

The Kinsey studies illustrate, as Gagnon (2004) has repeatedly suggested, the difficult social politics, changing historical mores, and ethical and scientific problems associated with sexual morality in small-town America. Kinsey exposed the subterranean underside of American life that both shamed and titillated Americans and hence revolutionized the study of sexuality. But Kinsey did not truly understand the political opposition he would engender (he was, after all, a zoologist) and could never formulate an adequate political response to the panic. A generation would pass until the next and more statistically significant survey of sexual behavior would take place in the United States. Not surprisingly, its team would have a much better strategic response. However, that did not stop the wrath of then-Senator Jesse Helms, who blocked its funding, accusing the scientific investigators of “perversions” and having “promoted marijuana,” among other such scurrilous accusations. Notwithstanding this last example, the fact is, American academics have handled sexual panics surrounding media and science poorly due to the absence of an articulated vision or conception of precisely who the enemy is—the purveyors, not victims, of panics.

Simon Watney has famously complained of media exploitation of panics. He wrote: “the theory or moral panics is unable to conceptualize the mass media as an industry which is intrinsically involved with excess.” He chafes at the notion that media cannot distinguish between “real” panics and their “representations” or that media moguls such as Rupert Murdoch could care less about whether local sensitivities are violated by their
exploitation of scandals and panics. However, Watney continues, “Moral panics seem to appear and disappear, as if representation were not the site of permanent ideological struggle over the meaning of signs.”

I shall return to this view later, but I want to point out that sexual panics go beyond representation, a notion that preoccupied social and cultural theory in the 70s and 80s. Moral panics in their awful sweep do material damage, undermine careers, incite riots, and kill people. As a panic picks up momentum, in stories of mass sexual abuse of children by adults, for example, media frenzy takes over, and the cultural spectacle becomes a form of capital for media consumption. The point is not the difference between real and unreal representation—all of these messages and scripts are “real” parts of the process of empowering some individuals and groups and de-humanizing others. Panics are instrumental to a broader production of cultural anger out of which churns the neopolitical order today.

Moral panics overwhelm individual rights and require a new attention to the role that sexual panics play in perpetuating structural violence and reproducing forms of inferior citizenship. As these subjectivities emerge into consciousness and social expression, they unleash powerful energy, titillate and entertain, creating the sense of cultural spectacle, provoking a new power (Foucault might have called it the “biopower”) previously contained in a repressed or tabooed discourse such as “virginity” or “sodomy” or the oral sex of presidents. All of these forces of moral regulation ultimately disempowered the self; that is, mechanisms come into place that emotionally and ideologically connect state and nonstate agents, institutions, and the victimized cultural imaginaries. Not only do panics expose the limitations of individualism and rights precisely at the moment that market capitalism is becoming the most sophisticated, synthetic, and hegemonic entity capable of promoting packaged sex, but panics also reveal “an emphasis on the moral deviant/degenerative to engage a morally responsible ‘ethos,’ which is co-opted to refashioning of the self.”

Sexual Panics and Structural Violence

Human societies across time and space often have experienced times of dread, anxiety, fear, panic, disgust, depression, and denial to such an extreme degree that social collapse seemed possible. Some of these events may simply be random, as when natural disasters result in ecological collapse, depopulation, and social decline, as Hurricane Katrina revealed.
Linked to such histories are the politics of adaptation, survival, and colonization amid the usual fault lines of structural inequalities (such as racism, for example). While examining a variety of forms of social deviance, including sexuality, Stanley Cohen and others in this line of theory were not primarily concerned with structural violence as a determinant of panics, as we think of these today. Cohen’s (2002) retrospective reveals cases of sexualized panics, particularly sexual abuse, and these are not without interest. Hall and his colleagues (1978) did look at the effect of media panics’ impact on racism. Clearly, in the modern period, systematic forms of discrimination within and across societies have been pivotal in the production of panics.

Moral panics expose the ideologies, hierarchies, and social fissures of societies, typically registered, as with many human phenomena, along the lines of systemic forms of structural violence. Nowhere is this more pernicious than in the reproduction of sex and gender differences. Medical anthropologist Paul Farmer has defined poverty, racism, and inadequate health care as among the greatest threats to common human dignity. A recent review adds homophobia, heterosexism, ableism, classism, and xenophobia to the list of forms of discrimination and dehumanization that result in violence against the self and sexuality. AIDS has been particularly shaped by the social disparities of society. Farmer has also raised the fundamental question of how or through what mechanisms “social forces ranging from poverty to racism become embodied in individual experience?” As will now be apparent, I view sexual panics today as among the most pivotal mechanisms—political, economic, and religious—that reproduce structural violence of all kinds: they serve to embody fear, disgust, and social exclusion in speech, meanings, and practices. Teunis and Herdt (2006) have examined several critical cases linking sexual inequality to systematic structural violence, including gay-straight alliances in schools, people with disabilities, young women of color in classrooms teaching sexual education, gay men involved in circuit parties—all of which reveal moral panics, pivoting on the violation of norms and normative citizenship.

Connecting the literature on moral panics in the United Kingdom and the emergence of a cultural model dealing with sexual panics in the United States is the work of Gayle Rubin (1984). Her classic paper anticipated the structural violence analyses to be followed in the 90s through Lisa Duggan. Cohen’s work preceded the problematic of heteronormativity, sexual citizenship, and the politics of using moral panics to “coerce
people into normality,” that distinguished the deep, organic analysis of Rubin. Her influential critique of feminist resistance to sexuality analysis laid the groundwork for the new thinking of the 90s by feminists and those who followed.107

In the modern period, Rubin understood that sexual panics were a means of inflicting structural regulation on categories of people. By examining what she called “sexual hierarchies” or ideologies, including those of medicine, on contemporary thought, her anthropological perspective raised critical questions about the role that normativity and cultural anger play in the management of sexual citizenships in societies:

All these hierarchies of sexual value—religious, psychiatric, and popular—function in much the same way, as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalized well being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble. It is difficult to develop a pluralistic sexual ethics without a concept of benign sexual variation. Variation is the property of all life. . . . Yet sexuality is supposed to conform to a single standard. One of most tenacious ideas about sex is that there is one best way to do it, and that everyone should do it that way.108

In what must surely be one of the more trenchant and prescient reviews in social science, Rubin specifically examines how a new wave of sexual panic has threatened to unleash powerful forces of structural violence in the United States after 1977: “Right-wing opposition to sex education, homosexuality, pornography, abortion and premarital sex moved from the extreme fringes to the political center stage” as these crusaders “discovered that these issues had mass appeal.” 109 She goes on to say that sexual reaction played a role in the election of 1980, through organizations such as the Moral Majority. Rubin, writing in the context of a growing AIDS pandemic, later identified a coming moral panic launched by the right wing on AIDS as among the real threats of our times.110 She concludes that “AIDS will have far reaching consequences” for sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular.111 How much this was true has been born out in Herdt (1997), Levine (1998), Watney (1987), and Rubin (1997) herself, writing on the impact of the epidemic that was to devastate the gay (“leather”) community in San Francisco.

In the 1980s, the influential work of Simon Watney (1987) explored deep links between sex panics and sexual structural violence through examination of the panic of the AIDS epidemic. As noted, Watney was
skeptical about the concept of moral panics, suggesting that they could not account for either the imaginative processes of conscious and unconscious meanings that formed the “deeper resonances” of panics. He believed that the panics themselves always linked to a preexisting process of victimization. Watney recalls that no less a figure than William F. Buckley, Jr., then the editor of the *National Review*, a darling of the neoconservative movement, and friend to Ronald Reagan, called for the incarceration of gay men.\(^{112}\) It is useful in this context to recall that Herek’s (2004) definitive study of sexual prejudice sees homophobia as a form of structural violence that seeks scapegoats by relationship to the object regarded as the greatest risk—homosexuals to heterosexual men.

**Panics and the Disruption of Rights**

Structural violence and sexual prejudice constitute powerful historical forces that have worked in tandem to provoke moral and sexual panics in late modern societies. The work in this field came before the emergence of a notion of sexual rights, although reproductive health and rights had been growing for years.\(^ {113}\) The introduction of sexual rights into debates about moral and sexual panics surely suggests a fundamental change about the identity and representation of the advocate for the sexually oppressed, the sexual scapegoat. Sexual rights have now come to mean the right of access to the highest standard of sexual health care.\(^ {114}\) One who willingly speaks out on behalf of rights, who no longer passively accepts incarceration, policing, or exile, is a new kind of social agent in the context of a sexual panic. To recall the words of famed gay African American writer James Baldwin, “The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim; he, or she, has become a threat.”\(^ {115}\)

What was added to critical studies of sexual panic was a new concept of rights, conceptualized as “human rights” as famously ushered in by declarations of the United Nations after World War II, a new and historically distinctive development that began to increase in importance in the last part of the 20th century.\(^ {116}\) An emphasis on social justice and liberationist pedagogy, often referenced to the work of Paulo Freire (1970), anticipated the U.N. declarations. However, Freire never explicitly examined sexuality as “a common striving toward awareness of reality . . . for the education process or for cultural action of a liberating character.”\(^ {117}\)
Seen in historical and cultural perspective, there is good reason why sexualized moral panics could not have been distinctive analytical or theoretical concerns prior to the 1990s. The human rights paradigm did not arise by accident; it was the product of intense changes in societies, including in the United States, which have increasingly challenged traditional notions of sexuality. This is augmented by the cultural growth of “recreational” sex since the 1960s, giving rise to what Giddens (1992) has called “plastic sex”—that is, malleable forms of intimacy. Watney (1987) has long insinuated that it was the change in perception of sexual desires and the migration of people in and between sexual cultures that provoked panics. Such a paradigm is in stark contrast to the sexual reform movements of the 1960s and 70s—a period in which Gagnon (2004) suggests that there was a significant increase in sexual behavior. While the middle class accepted this trend, goaded by the feminist movement and the changes associated with egalitarian sexual relations, such changes were never accepted by neoconservatives and fundamentalists. Panics have repeatedly surrounded new forms of intimate relationships, such as the threat to feminists by sadomasochistic sex, predicted by Rubin (1984), the controversies surrounding HIV in the African American community, and, most recently, the threat of transgender individuals. All are indicators of social change; they signify the emergence of new “sexual markets” that socially organize these diverse forms of sexuality to challenge traditional definitions of citizenship.

The “sexual revolution” of the 1960s, the second in the 20th century, was famously associated with the invention of the birth control pill around 1964, which ushered in recreational sex. However, a large-scale stream of new social movements, led by second-wave feminism and the rise of the gay liberation movement, sowed the seeds of a cultural reaction a generation later, the so-called Reagan revolution of “economics and cultural values” that intensified the cultural anger of neoconservatives. These issues are reviewed in chapter 2 by Diane DiMauro and Carole Joffe. As the AIDS/HIV moral panic transformed into a social movement in the late 1980s, a reaction to the medical hegemony of doctors and government and public health scientists and claims for a new self-help formation based on the women’s health movement of the 1970s, activists, followed by academics began to study sexuality and reproductive health, identities, and behaviors with new funding. New support for grassroots community-based organizations helped to advance sexual rights.
As mapped out in Teunis and Herdt (2006), it was during this period that significant changes began to occur in the construction of public health, political, and policy debates surrounding sexuality: namely, the transition from identity-based sexual movements, such as the gay and lesbian movement in the post–World War II phase in the mid to late 1960s, to the sexual health movement of the 1980s and 90s. In fact, science in general, and social science in particular, were silent or reluctant to address this gap or to respond to the challenges of explicit or implicit government-sponsored sexual inequality, at least until the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. Note, for example, the very slow response of academics to the AIDS crisis in the United States, with the psychologists responding earlier than anthropologists.

The now-famous Cairo and Beijing conferences of the mid-1990s changed the face of human rights in a positive way and influenced cultural forces such as moral panics. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994 was an historic turning point in bringing a broad spectrum of reproductive rights into the global arena. ICPD created a Programme of Action to promote gender equality and girls’ education, influencing sexual and reproductive behavior in very significant ways. The ability to have free choice in reproductive decisions and “the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health” was a critical achievement of these events. The following year in Beijing, the Fourth World Conference on Women placed sexuality front and center in the discussion of sexual rights. Included in the declaration were the words “Full respect for the integrity of the person, . . . consent and shared responsibility for sexual behavior and its consequences.”

The rise of American hegemony, unilateralism, and militarism since the end of the Cold War have all played a role in the conflict between sexuality, rights, and U.S. power. Since the 1980s, U.S. internal policy opposition to abortion and women’s reproductive rights solidified. Elements of the U.S. opposition to the Beijing conference statements on women’s rights included collusion with the Vatican and fundamentalist Islamic regimes, introduction of welfare reform legislation in 1996 (which mandated an “Abstinence-Only” sex education policy) designed to further destabilize reproductive rights and health, especially of poor and minority women and families. Meanwhile, sexual conservatives became increasingly aggressive in the use of the media and the media-based moral panics related to such issues as gays in the military, and the rise of phony science, by local and national political coalitions of sexual and moral conservatives.
Under the current government of President George W. Bush we have witnessed the rise of a new level of cultural anger marshaled to promote moral panics internally and in global politics. Girard (2004) has studied these manifestations of cultural anger or backlash; they include the reimposition of the “Global Gag Rule” as Bush’s first act in office, assertion of his opposition to gay marriage—later to take the form of a proposed constitutional amendment—and promotion of Abstinence-Only as the triumph of sexual education policy in the 21st century. Each of these three actions reveals major contradictions in U.S. policy externally and/or internally; each of them has become a wedge issue filled with fear and a moral panic market campaign to influence attitudes, regulate sexually, deny rights, and enforce new policies.

Notably, the mainstreaming of this rights-based approach, as Petchesky (2000) has well argued, began with a negative perspective by focusing on what rights were missing, removed, or under threat. While this “deficit” approach lends itself to the analysis of citizenship, the negative rights approach is a reaction to the continuous cycle of moral panics that has plagued the arena of reproductive and sexual rights. The Vienna Conference of 1993 on social and economic development marked a change in regarding “sexual violence” as a violation of human rights; it secured for the first time insertion of “sexuality” into the language of human rights. U.S. policy should focus on attaining positive rights and on what is needed to assure full human potential in development, health, and social justice. In Brazil, for example, access to full sexual and reproductive health care is regarded as a new right of the citizen.

In 2000, a new International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights (ICESCR) included sexual orientation protection for the first time. Although not ironclad, Alice Miller points out, this new advance helped pave the way for recommendations that assure a rights-based approach to sexual health by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, providing larger recognition of sexual rights as human rights. Increasing resistance from the Vatican, fundamentalist Islamic countries, and the United States also produced new strategic tools and alliances across diverse movements to promote rights as a global trend.

Much more discussion has been directed toward the United States in this current of change. In the United States, the 2001 surgeon general’s report on sexuality may be seen as a watershed of American sexual health policy and a reaction to the events of the 1990s. The report, titled “Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior,”
advocated new levels of support for research, public awareness, and intervention. This report was not officially approved either by the Clinton or Bush administrations. It must be remembered that the surgeon general’s report was necessary in part because of the federal government’s official policy on Abstinence-Only education, a policy largely bereft of scientific credibility.141

Regarding the role of sex research and moral panics, it is useful to remember that there have been only two preoccupations over the past half-century: first, teen pregnancy and population control from the late 1950s to the 70s, followed by AIDS/STD sexual-risk behavior research in the 1980s and 90s, which led to the Abstinence-Only policy as reviewed in chapter 2 by DiMauro and Joffe.142 Public- and private-sector funding of sexuality research/sexual-policy formation in these arenas has significantly supported both the emergence of rights and interest group coalitions to support them as well as the concomitant backlash of moral panic.

Teen pregnancy, especially among young women of color, very clearly became a broad theme that fueled cultural anger and a variety of loosely related moral panics.143 Racist notions of who was and was not a fit parent, who was and was not a “welfare queen,” and the like were powerful mechanisms of moral and sexual regulation bearing on young African American women as unwed mothers or as “welfare” mothers. These debates helped to shape gender rights in the United States.144 By the mid-1990s this focus was increasingly transformed into a debate about the moral imperative to replace comprehensive sexual education with Abstinence-Only policy, as per the 1996 Welfare Reform legislation, which chartered Abstinence-Only sex education to such a degree that critics referred to it as “ignorance-only.” These debates disrupted an open discourse about sexuality in the schools, placed young people at risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and increased the risk of unintended pregnancy.145 Ultimately these policies have been exported into the global order via the 2001 “Gag Rule,” and Abstinence-Only policies or ABC (Abstinence, Be Faithful, Wear Condoms) policies in such major cultural regions as Africa, where sexual citizenship is now being contested in a variety of societies.146

The assault on sexual rights in the 1980s was driven by the perception of risk associated with HIV, triggering new scapegoating of individuals and groups that constituted the pandemic.147 Safe sex campaigns were meant to counter stigma and marginalization of gays, bisexuals, Haitians, commercial sex workers, and hemophiliacs, and with some exceptions these efforts were successful in spite of enormous social pressures exerted
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from extremist organizations and in the absence of U.S. government support until Surgeon General C. Everett Koop began to speak. Central to these debates was not only the tabooed arena of homosexuality, but also the illicit and immoral areas of hidden desires and practices. Attacks on these public health campaigns were common, and attacks on the funding of “prohomosexual” campaigns continue to the present, as witnessed by attacks on government-funded research studies at such institutions as the University of California, San Francisco. To many observers, it was the assault on desire itself, on sexual minority men, and on the reconstitution of sexual citizenship. Dowsett has reviewed these important events and contrasted them in a significant Australian case study.

Indeed, in my view, so important is the invention of sexual rights as a framework connecting academic theory with advocacy innovatively that we ought to think of the period of the end of Cold War and the beginning of the postmodern and more global order as conditioned by the rise of a new paradigm of sexual and reproductive rights. These include the agenda of having rational goals or pedagogy and human rights advocacy, and the creation of rights as “irreconcilable subjectivities” with social laws and conventions in some places. Feminist scholars and activists, following the historic Beijing and Cairo conferences of the mid-1990s, which were set up in part as a response to the efforts of gay, lesbian, and, later, sexual orientation activists including those looking for transgender rights following the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, have been instrumental in rights advocacy. Critics of the “rights model” have impugned its “individualist” bias, argued that it is not universal, and criticized its polarization of public and private discourses. However, leading activist scholars remind us that rights, in the sense of “liberty” or “choices,” are dependent on broader structural or “enabling” conditions such as social welfare, economic security, and political freedom.

Looking back, it seems obvious that this emergent model of sexual rights was seldom applied to analysis of the continuing waves of sexual panics that have occurred over the past decade or so. The difficulty of conceptualizing the purveyors of moral and sexual panics occurs throughout the early literature on the subject, as noted by Rubin (1984), Watney (1987), and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), and there are significant theoretical and historical reasons for this gap. In part, the problem hinges on the distance between the academy and activists (which Rubin and Watney, respectively, among others tried to bridge), as related to the long, slow response to AIDS by academics, and the lag created by research that
includes social hierarchies of sexuality and social justice today.\textsuperscript{159} We have not specifically tied the cultural politics of producing moral panics to the mobilization and formation of new interests in politics.

Some analysts see fundamentalists and sexual conservatives losing ground on issues of sexual diversity, identity inclusion, recreational sex, and the cultural values that promote this social justice in society.\textsuperscript{160} Their means of reaction has increasingly been to stir up emotional fear, hate, anger, and disgust in ways that push their agendas into broader social, economic, and policy arenas.\textsuperscript{161} It was too early to see this trend in the 1980s in spite of the work that first examined moral and sexual panics, though Rubin (1984) had many forward-thinking ideas about what might ensue from thinking about the consequences of the AIDS epidemic for sexuality in general. Today, however, it is possible to go further in understanding the role that a newly fashioned uses of cultural anger plays in late modern politics.

\textbf{Cultural Anger and Sexual Scripts}

Throughout this chapter I have suggested that moral and sexual panics are related to the cultural anger associated with perceptions of social safety risk and security in American society and throughout the world. Panics, as they emerge in a complex society such as that of the United States, are means of generating insipient ideologies of cohesion that can override other forms of difference, whether of class, race, nationality, or religious orientation. Media in local, national, and global settings have a vested interest not only in mainstreaming sex and its marketing, but also in massaging the opinions and fears of the public. Political and religious groups must learn how to massage or “spin” their stories in order to gain support in the effort to win or lose sexual citizenship. Panics in this model fuel anger as a general process of forming collective narratives and cultural scripts. These scripts are vital to the political and media strategies. But how are they different? Moral conservatives and fundamentalists seek to shape government and exert control over the governance of the self.

The work of journalist Thomas Frank (2004) on cultural anger provides a suggestive clue as to the direction that social and cultural analysis might take. Frank’s book, \textit{What’s the Matter with Kansas?} is a political study of how the state of Kansas historically changed from being extremely progressive to a bastion “red state” (neoconservative), destroying
the opportunities for decent wages and education and housing. In particular, Frank has written of what he calls “cultural anger” in the Republican and neoconservative movement; the use of “yeoman righteousness” and anti-elitist, anti-intellectual and antisexual rhetorical structures as “the blunt instrument of propaganda” in the effort to win hearts and votes in the heartland.162 The targets of this political usurpation are working-class and aspiring lower-middle-class wage earners, whose rights and well being are dependent on health care and educational programs that typically require government support or direction. The effect draws on the illusion of moral panics to gain popular control of the electoral process through the subversive use of misleading rhetoric—reminding us strikingly of George Lakoff’s (2004) argument that Republicans strategists used these emotional rhetorical devices successfully in recent years. Frank’s ideas, especially surrounding the pivotal role of “authenticity” sought in “small town” ideologies that oppose the “endless acts of hubris” that characterize wealthy urban “blue state” liberals, is a promising means of analysis in studying the role of the systematic use of moral panics today to gain working-class support for free market capitalism solutions, such as tax cuts for the rich.163 The paradox of this political position and its negative effects on wage earners suggests an historical view.

American sexuality history is relatively brief by the standards of Western Europe, and yet the genealogy of American moral panics reveals a rich and complex history and set of contradictory themes, such as virginity, abstinence, and antihomosexuality rhetoric and fears that re-cycle sexual preoccupations and social conflicts, periodically erupting into the now-familiar tsunamis of sexualized movements and sex panics. These panics reveal a flaw in the personal sexual morality (premarital intercourse, masturbation, unintended pregnancy, abortion, homosexuality, and prostitution) of individuals. This is typified by the middle-class American historical concern that sex is individual, “natural,” or “innate” (more or less, as a product of gender, race, and class) but also subject to moral “choice” and “free will,” though this concern is pivoted not on the middle class but rather people of color and the colonized.164 Christian fundamentalism has played and continues to play a large role—although its rhetoric and scripts are changing.165

A brief glance at how progressive movements, ideologies, and emotional rhetoric in the United States have changed since the 1870s helps us to understand the fundamental point that political liberalism has never been the same as sexual liberalism in this country.166 Traditionally,
19th-century progressive movements were viewed as an effort to control big business. Progressive movements during this time involved broad changes from the grassroots that linked moral and economic reforms with the rise of workers’ rights and the labor movement. States such as Kansas, which were once regarded as the seat of progressivism, had reversed course completely by a century later, while the issues had changed as much as their economies had declined. Progressive efforts were directed as much at individuals as at institutions and grew from the optimistic belief that things were mutable and could be changed. Environmentalism as a simple theory of human development was one source of these optimistic beliefs. Moral reforms arise from the same efforts; for example, the adoption by the State of Kansas of prohibition was largely as a result of the efforts of temperance advocates such as Carrie A. Nation. Alcoholism, like other social ills of the time, was real, not illusory, but the fears extended into moral campaigns, such as treating prostitution as a “social evil.” Margaret Sanger began her proreproductive rights magazine, Woman Rebel, in 1914 in the face of opposition by postal authorities. Progressive support for this and other forms of control of pleasure and leisure surely compromised the reform movement. Later, Progressive support of the labor movement and Wobblies drew strong social reaction in progressives’ effort to organize wage earners in cities such as Spokane. Overall, middle-class reformers had little success in shaping workers and the elite alike. Ironically, progressives opposed the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Jane Addams voted against him) because of his support for the expansion of big government and lack of a progressive vision. Throughout this long period, progressive reform was not very supportive of women’s rights, sexual and reproductive support, and protection of rights. There was a distinctively antidemocratic element in this progressive transformation.

Today, the link between panics and cultural anger has taken on a very different political form not known before. “Authenticity,” that is, what counts as natural, normal, innate, is pivotal to how the public reacts to politics generally, as one can see in the presidential campaigns of 2008, and, more specifically, in sexuality and sexual panics. The appeal to emotionality and cultural scripts that stereotype segments of the society are critical to this change. Frank’s (2004) account of neoconservative reactions suggests that sexual innatism in folk ideologies of sexuality and gender is pivotal to the production of cultural anger. Authentic social living and, indeed, authentic sexuality, is something that is “natural” as well as “God
given” and also inexplicably “just happens.” Sex drives for men and mothering for women are normal and natural; these are not learned or planned or scripted. They are just there; they are real, and they are not performed. We can look at the Monica Lewinsky scandal during the Clinton Administration to ask if this same rhetorical structure was what bedeviled the Republican strategists who wanted to “get Clinton?” We can wonder if this is a key reason even the red-state voters never turned against Clinton during the sexual scandal: it was a “normal and natural thing” for a man to do, and it was a “normal and natural thing” for Hillary to “stick by her man.” No qualified social constructionist theorist since Freud, and certainly not following Kinsey, could possibly accept such an simplistic view—and none would—and yet this is what ordinary people are taught to believe and, in fact, believe if we are to accept Frank’s account at face value. Surely we can understand in such a symbolic and rhetorical frame the obviousness that follows from the current president of the United States saying “Marriage between a man and a woman is the pillar of civilization” (Herdt, chapter 5).

From this perspective, not much has changed in the worldview of sexual conservatives, and it appears that none of the last fifty years of social constructionism have done the least bit of good. This does not mean that the media simply mirrors this view. Educated and professional people obviously have more complex and sophisticated views, as suggested by their support for a variety of initiatives such as reproductive choice. And the blue states presumably support a more Catholic, if not a more constructionist view, that sexuality is, whatever else we might grant it to be or be made up of, a performance in context with social actors that respond to the cues and scripts of their respective communities.

This is all true except that a lot has changed: the use of orchestrated cultural anger to fire up moral and sexual panics seems to be growing; it seems that it is becoming a regular stratagem and political tactic in the so-called culture wars (once called the “sex wars”). Culture wars are, however, the wrong concept for this process and, according to Lakoff (2004), the old idea accepts a rhetorical structure that is misleading and undermining of the root causes of sexual change in the post–Cold War period. As Duggan argues repeatedly, the economic neoconservative agenda has increasingly parted company from the cultural complaints of the neoliberal view over the past twenty years. The larger view Duggan advocates as part of the “more visible conflict among elites” in cultural politics is, on one side, that the residual strategy of cultural traditionalism deployed
during the late 20th-century culture wars—energetic attacks against “multiculturalism” and “permissiveness” was intended to shrink the funding bases as well as the popular support for sites of nonmarket politics—the arts, education, and social services.¹⁷⁷

What I want to suggest is that cultural anger has propelled panics in a significant new way—more pernicious, more grassroots in character than the culture wars of the past sketched by Duggan. The neoliberal response, according to Duggan, is to support diversity and tolerance narrowly defined and within a global framework. In other words, the culture wars have undermined the social egalitarian process in the United States, but these have not touched the occurrence of the structural violence which moral panics continue to impact and perpetrate.

But from where did this pervasive cultural anger come? There have long been cycles of sexual purity movements and great scares, as previously stated, in American history,¹⁷⁸ while sexual panics also have been seen in Western Europe since the early 18th century.¹⁷⁹ Politically, sexuality was becoming the increasing focus of what Thomas Frank (2004) has so aptly called “cultural anger” directed toward such debates concerning homosexuality, abstinence, prostitution, bisexuality, and so on. While Frank did not explain the sources of this cultural anger, he did posit a generalized use of “baiting” tactics and economic fear and greed in the late 1990s and into the early 21st century. He implicitly recognized how sexual panics were increasing in number and frequency in elections, legislatures, and courtrooms. However, Lisa Duggan suggests a compelling source: a “precarious consensus” regarding the balance between regulation of sexual behavior and representations, as in art and the artistic and personal expression of sexual feelings, especially in private. This balance remained “substantially intact right up to the 1980s, when conflict broke out all over the place.”¹⁸⁰ She suggests that antipornography crusades and the antigay hysteria fanned by AIDS “fueled a revitalized activism among gay people and advocates of humane health care.”¹⁸¹

In the case study on the moral panic of gay and lesbian marriage in chapter 5, I examine how cultural politics and policy debates on marriage equality rights (gay and lesbian marriage) in the United States and around the world inserted not only moral panics into the presidential election of 2004, but also more generally unleashed cultural anger and backlash concerning what are “real” marriage, family, adoption, and the moral values of society. Underlying this discourse, I believe, is a deeper and more fundamental cultural script that stems from thinking of sexuality as sin or
disease or both, from the 19th century onward. To put it in value terms, are homosexuals fit to be married? Are they fit to be parents? Fit to adopt children? Or even fit to be citizens? Such are the moral questions and sentiments that underlie small-town life in the United States, as clearly revealed in the significant ethnography of rural Oregon by Arlene Stein. Thus, through a sequence of parochial and nationalist concerns, including quite traditional Christian value coalitions in the United States, we begin to understand how the definition of citizenship in its full political, economic, and social sense is itself at stake in fueling cultural anger.

But while cultural anger has merit, it can only take us so far in the analysis of the complex, disparate, and often multidimensional features of these sexual panics and their ability to destabilize scientific knowledge, the pedagogy of sexuality education, and progress in providing for democracy and social justice to all segments of society. Scripts, that is, sexual script theory, in the social and psychoanalytic writings of Gagnon and Simon, Robert Stoller, and in the long run especially John Gagnon provide the missing link for this work. Like the sociological idea of a master narrative or landmark narrative (more focused than the anthropological concept of “worldview” and its successor, “sexual life ways”), scripts have the ability to organize a variety of divergent areas of meaning and action. Additionally, script theory is useful in articulating three distinct levels of meaning and action: individual, interpersonal, and cultural.

The power of scripts to articulate and coordinate social life and subjectivity cannot be underestimated. Here I want to suggest that cultural anger provides a powerful mechanism for the coordination of rhetorical action across individuals, situations, and communities. The role of powerful scripted emotions, such as rage, anger, fear, and shame are evident in this long history; Rubin (1984) repeatedly refers to it in her seminal analysis of sexual hierarchies and moral values. Lisa Duggan’s 1995 work explored the emotional reactions to what she calls “sexual dissent” in the context of the “porn wars.” Janice Irvine’s 2002 work has greatly illuminated the systematic use of emotional scripts to provoke political reactions (including fear and shame) and thus exert control over institutions and events surrounding sex education. In a new analysis in chapter 7 she deepens her contribution in this arena.

What I have suggested is that as proponents of sexual rights gained increasing political power in the United States, fundamentalists, sexual conservatives, and bigots increasingly reacted with organized forms of cultural anger—in the extreme form, sexual panics. Sometimes these panics
have served as what I have previously defined as a “moral shock,” goading coalition of opponents to rights into antiwoman, antigay, or antisexual campaigns. Irvine has noted this: American extremist organizations have effectively “scripted the public conversation on sexual education through rhetorical frames which organize ambivalence, confusion, and anxieties.” In the book Talk about Sex, Irvine goes further in thinking about the contribution of sexual shame to the rise of cultural anger and moral panics in the United States.

To conclude, panics are characteristic of states that experience times of divided public opinion, changing social, economic and political circumstances, and a clash between state mechanisms of control and the free expression and individual elaboration of sexuality. The clash often initiates a regime of increased scrutiny and threat to rights and even the removal of sexual and reproductive rights. In the United States, this change over the past century must be seen in relation to the rise of being a superpower state, the uneasy balance between state security and militarization, masculinity, sexual freedom, and the Cold War. This uneasy balance can also be seen in the post–Cold War period in response to new challenges to reproductive rights and sexuality that have gained force through the use of a well-scripted cultural anger that attempts to undoe rights and thus uphold the contradictions of class privilege and dismantle underclass benefits. The trend under the George W. Bush Administration is to extend these cultural scripts of anger toward sexual change abroad, which has a global impact. Abstinence-Only sex education and antiabortion rights campaigns are the most salient examples of this effort, but antihomosexual campaigns have risen in their power and impact. Time will tell how effective these neoconservative moral panics were in global politics. However, this book raises the question of a need for new study of these questions in sexual politics. The need for a new social progressive movement is obvious, and the effort to counter such trends has already begun.

NOTES

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6. Dr. Nancy Kendall, personal communication.


24. Frank, What’s the Matter with Kansas?

25. Cohen, Folk Devils, xxvii.
34. Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 163. This article received the notion of ‘moral panic’ not through Cohen’s work but through Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 14–15, who defined this as “the political moment of sex, in which diffuse attitudes are channeled into political action and from there into social change.” Presumably, Weeks borrowed the notion from Cohen’s prior work.
38. We have to wonder what role sexuality and the famed pedagogical homosexuality in Greece may have played in slandering the reputation of Socrates as well; see Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).
41. Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*.
42. Hunt, “Great Masturbation Panic,” 598.
44. For the domino theory of sexual peril, see Rubin, “Thinking Sex.”
46. Cohen, Folk Devils.
47. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, Moral Panics, 57–62.
49. A teacher who apparently had been having homosexual relations was so shaken up by reading the news of the spreading scandal that he rose from his unfinished breakfast and drove straight to San Francisco, never reporting to school that day and never returning to Boise. Cited in Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 145.
52. Watney, Policing Desire, 56.
54. Janice Irvine, Talk about Sex.
55. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, Moral Panics, 8.
58. Judith Levine, Harmful to Minors (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 44.
60. Levine, Harmful to Minors.
73. Cohen, *Folk Devils*.
75. McRobbie and Thornton, “Rethinking ‘Moral Panic.’”
80. David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*.
82. Irvine, *Talk about Sex*, 196. The passage merits quoting:
The dynamics surrounding President Clinton’s impeachment offer some insight into how public reaction might undermine the intentions of conservative speakers. Rather than singularly reinforcing sexual shame and reticence, Clinton’s affair prompted such widespread sexual dialogue that one headline proclaimed, “in a matter of days, a change in culture” in which “Americans have actually debated the definition of duality, made ‘oral sex’ part of the public conversation, and speculated about the most private elements of the President’s life in ways . . . Inconceivable as . . . [In] Harry Truman’s day or even Ronald Reagan’s.”
84. Shepard; reviewed in Herdt, chapter 5.
88. For example, on witchcraft, see Robert A. Levine, *Culture, Personality and
Behavior (Chicago: Aldine, 1973); specifically as a moral panic, see Goode and Ben-Yehuda, Moral Panics, 144–84; on drugs, see Goode and Ben-Yehuda, Moral Panics, 205–22; on sodomy, see D’Emilio and Freedman, Intimate Matters and Weeks, Sexuality and Its Discontents.


91. Judith Reisman is a ring leader, having written a bogus book about Kinsey; she was once awarded $734,000 to study pornography by the Justice Department during the Reagan Administration, has gone on to be the cheerleader of the anti-Kinsey movement, employing articles, books, and websites to propagate unfounded accusations that Kinsey was a pedophile, while also advancing works such as The Pink Swastika, which argues that the Holocaust was the creation of the German homosexual movement and believes that gay youth programs in the United States ought to be compared to Hitler youth. Daniel Radosh, “The Culture Wars,” The New Yorker, December 6, 2004, p. 48.


93. Gagnon and Simon, Sexual Conduct.


95. Watney, Policing Desire, 41.

96. Watney, Policing Desire, 41.

97. Levine, Harmful to Minors.

98. Hier, Conceptualizing Moral Panic, 328.

99. Anthony F. C. Wallace, Culture and Personality, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1969); see, especially, the reformulation of prophecy and cognitive dissonance.


101. Farmer, AIDS and Accusation, 8.


103. Rafael M. Diaz, “In Our Own Backyard: HIV Stigmatization in the Latino Gay Community,” in Teunis and Herdt, eds.

104. Farmer, AIDS and Accusation, 30.

105. Teunis and Herdt, Sexual Inequalities.


111. Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 164. The most detailed review of this era remains the journalistic account by Randy Shilts, And the Band Played On (New York: St Martin’s 1987).
112. Watney, Policing Desire, 92.
115. Watney, Policing Desire, 37.
118. Laumann et al., Social Organization of Sexuality.
120. Girard, Global Implications.
121. See Cohen, chapter 3.
122. Paisley Currah, Transgender Rights (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
129. Herdt and Lindenbaum, The Time of AIDS.
131. United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economics,
Social, and Cultural Rights, General comment 14, UN Doc. No. E/C/ 12, 1994, paragraph 7.3.

132. UN 1994, Paragraph 96.

133. Girard, Global Implications.

134. Issues long promoted by the Family Research Council; see Epstein, “The New Attack.” Klein, America’s War on Sex.

135. Clinton suspended the “Global Gag Rule” after years of prior Republican use of this mechanism of sexual and reproductive rights limitation.


139. Misra and Chandiramani, Sexuality, Gender and Rights, 20.

140. Saiz, “Bracketing Sexuality.”

141. Douglas Kirby, Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy (SIECUS Reports, 2001). These developments are surveyed in chapter 2 by DiMauro and Joffe.

142. DiMauro and Joffe, chapter 2; see also Teunis and Herdt, Sexual Inequalities.


145. Irvine, Talk about Sex.


147. See Dowsett, chapter 4; Watney, Policing Desire.

148. Levine, Harmful to Minors.

149. Herdt and Lindenbaum, The Time of AIDS; Parker et al. Framing the Sexual Subject.

150. Watney, Policing Desire.

151. Diaz, “In Our Own Backyard.”

158. The late Martin Levine, a sociologist who pioneered the study of HIV risk among gay men, was one of these scholars; the groundbreaking conference he chaired tells the story (Levine et al., In Changing Times).
159. Teunis and Herdt, Sexual Inequalities.
160. Gagnon, An Interpretation of Desire; Gagnon, “T. Laqueur, Solitary Sex.”
161. Girard, Global Implications.
162. Frank, What’s the Matter with Kansas, 16–18.
163. Frank, What’s the Matter with Kansas, 27.
164. Hunt, “Great Masturbation Panic.”
168. McGerr, Fierce Discontent, 80.
175. Duggan and Hunter, Sex Wars. A. Stein, Shameless, pp. 111ff, refers to the emotional cultural war.
179. Laqueur, Solitary Sex. Van der Meer, “Dutch Gay Bashers.”
180. Duggan and Hunter, Sex Wars, 76.
181. Duggan and Hunter, Sex Wars, 77.
185. Gagnon and Simon, Sexual Conduct; Stoller, Sexual Excitement.
187. Duggan and Hunter, Sex Wars, 5.
188. Irvine, Talk About Sex, 8.

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