

Moral panic is often cited criminology essay

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



Moral panics are essentially but not necessarily media-induced. The media is always a major contributing factor in exaggerating and distorting actual realities[4]. Media often fail to portray the real cause of the problem. They fabricate- or contribute to the fabrication- of a scapegoat reason thus diverting the public's attention from the real cause of a problem[5].

The 'rock n' roll' scene was taking place alongside the 'drug culture' which took place during the 1950s and the 1960s. The latter raised fears that that rock and roll pushes individuals towards promiscuity and anti-social behaviour while the latter promoted the anxiety that an entire generation would become drug 'crazed' addicts[6].

Cocaine first appeared in the British dance scene in the late 1915s following the imposition of restrictions on legitimate entertainment to enhance the war effort.

Prostitutes at the West End were indeed a thriving hub of cocaine dealing with roots from North America as evidenced by the type of slang they used[7]

In interviews with a prostitute in 1916[8] the use of slang to describe cocaine shows that this was an emerging subculture with American roots. With references such as 'London in the grip of cocaine craze' and 'cocaine deadlier than bullets'[9], cocaine was well subjected into a moral panic with Canadian soldiers were in the epicentre. The government seemed to have jumped on the cocaine moral panic wagon, motivated by cocaine's adverse effects it had on soldiers and the war effort. It transformed cocaine from a 'useful element of pharmacopoeia' to a drug that dominated the British

underground drug scene. The spasmodic reaction of Britons to cocaine, and future new drugs, such as the vicious cycle of banning and emergence of new legal highs, is associated to its inability to adapt to 'modernity'[10], the fear of letting go of the 'status-quo' which provided for their current lifestyle, the human nature's apprehension of the 'new' along with its immediate correlation with deviance, hostility, unfamiliarity. Cocaine's moral panic was strongly associated not with the pharmaceutical properties of the drug itself per se but with its delinquent use, users, the lifestyle it was associated with. Moral panics are often not a response to the drug itself but its by-products. They rarely take place solely because of the pharmaceutical properties of a drug and its dangerousness. With cocaine possession becoming a criminal offence, the drug itself transformed within 6 months[11] from a miracle into a menace.

Cocaine moral panic was revolved mostly around women. Britain was going through major transformations at the time, one of which was female emancipation. When the status quo is shaken in a nation, its sense of established morality is shaken. That is when a nation has to take either one of two steps. Engulf itself in a moral panic or transform. The former takes place when that country is unable to transform either because it is still not ready or because it is unwilling[12]. Are moral panics a vehicle for transformation? Definitely. Are they a convenient, constructive vehicle or a damaging and negative one? It depends on the proportionality between the real and the perceived threat. It depends on whether there is a genuine benefit for the wider public in tackling moral panics and restoring the status quo ante? It depends whether the new status quo is unalterable and the

actual process itself of suppressing and harnessing an otherwise harmless moral panic would be akin to throwing oil into a fire thus creating a vicious cycle. It is the trigger that rouses the government into action.

The West End district of London was the heart of a polymorphic hedonistic scene. It was the progressive part of London. The multitude and diversity of hedonistic services meant that people from all walks of life would meet in a place much unlike its surroundings that were characterised for their conservatism. This is Britain's first ever 'full blown drug panic'[13] because of fears that cocaine was threatening 'soldiers'[14].

Cocaine was used as a suicide method by two actress sisters in 1901 who failed to reach success in the entertainment industry. The reason being that cocaine reached common people last. Those who were firstly accustomed to cocaine were the 'cleverest' people.. Cocaine itself was not a threat to society. Its ideological by-products were the ones that fuelled the movement behind the drug; that soldiers using it were made incapable of fighting, prostitution was threatening white women's virtue, promoting foreign threat, hedonism and moral peril[15]. Establishing a link between use of cocaine or in fact any drug itself, its users and the public, is the lethal combination in not only forming the cocaine moral panic but also igniting it.. Mephedrone, a legal stimulant not as dangerous as other drugs, is a prime example of this; having created a sensational media panic in the last years. Government inaction will be applauded by the libertarians across the nation.. Letting go of prohibition would be aligned with libertarian beliefs. Nonetheless, use will increase and the fallout costs will be vast. It will affect communities,

individuals, government debt will rise. Does the public have to pay additional taxes for medical care to users? Where will the government's main purpose is to protect the public, even if it means that a minority's rights will have to be restricted. Rastafarians's right to use cocaine for religious purposes[16]since freedom of religion is a qualified right but So is the right to property[17](including capital which would undoubtedly be affected by high taxes in order to accommodate drug related fallbacks by the NHS). Freedoms are two sided. acid house inadvertently affected people who were not part of the scene. Acid house was a test to Thatcher's conservative government boundaries and authority. moral panics are not self contained scenes affecting a limited number of people, a single type of subculture or an ephemeral ideology. they are constant reminders and causes of change. A test of the boundaries of each government. " an intersection of between politics, popular culture and the social order"[18].

A moral panic is an ideal way for the government to present the need for security and policing as necessary and proportionate to the alleged ' threat'[19]. this simulated threat allowed the police to introduced further video surveillance, compulsory identity cards- thus allowing a policeman to instantly retrieve information about an individual by a single scan of the card-, and electronic tagging -thus enabling selective curfew[20]. Acid House moral panics were dealt with, as many moral panics, disproportionately by the police. the bad publicity of the press demonises them. Are they dealt with that way because their harm is disproportionately inflated? If yes then the excessive force used by the police could be justified[21]. If anything else, the Acid House scene, is credited with a reduction of football hooliganism;

the 'Summer of Love'[22] which took off in 1967[23], and at Manchester; the 'second summer of Love' with its own dance scene; 'Madchester'.. Acid House was perceived, unnecessarily and disproportionately, as a threat to the order and governance of Thatcher's government[24],[25].

Disproportionality seems as a prevailing commonality element among moral panics[26]. Perhaps the acid house itself had a self-destructive effect on the youth subculture and government stepped in to protect the subculture from dancing while taking ecstasy, an activity seen deviant enough to provoke a moral panic[27]. Acid House can be seen as the culmination of postwar moral panics[28]. Each one treated with the same apprehension by the press and the law. The clash of Acid House and Thatcherism might be due to the actual dangers posed by acid house subculture. Chaos, fear, robberies and disorder, escorted every acid house event that took place in the countryside[29]. Parties often lacked the correct licences and failed to meet the safety regulations[30]. Labour government sought to better regulate the parties rather than the full-on attack by the conservatives[31] to prevent acid houses from "evoking the notion of the rampaging mob"[32]. Perhaps if Labour's approach had been adopted for the preceding moral panics, then the dance subculture would have followed a more regulated evolutionary process, from the west end area in London, to the now, national, dispersed dance scenes.

Moral panics test the liberal boundaries of each government. They are most often, if not always, a step ahead. They are a constant reminder for reform. Acid House was the cause for special laws directed towards the movement itself. It was a test for the liberalism of Thatcherism. Was acid house too

deviant for Thatcherism or a result of too much " liberal element in the political system and government of that period'[33]'? the Sun and the Daily Mail were biased at best while more right wing papers[34]not only debated the subculture movement but at times celebrated it[35].

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a continuity of a common distinguishing feature among the various dance scenes that emerged[36]. From the jazz clubs in West End through Acid House, Rave and the Dance subcultures. It was the consumption of alcohol and/or illicit drugs[37]. While the Acid House scene did not pose any legitimate threat[38], it nevertheless induced the formation of the Party Unit in 1989 and the passing of the Entertainment (Increased Penalties) Act in 1990. This attitude not only led the movement underground but put it in the hands of criminals thus opening the gates to the criminal elements[39]. Government response failed in its objective to suppress it. It paved the way for the modern, commercialised dance scene[40]. Ecstasy, the then drug of choice, fell in popularity only to give way to the rise of the use of Ketamine and GHB[41]. Total prohibition is uncreative. It is the equivalent of the government's legislation in response to acid house. There are much more creative ways which include a combination of the right amount of criminalisation and legalisation in order to achieve the right balance of regulation, which unavoidably would lead to an increase in use, but reducing the development of a black market.

Heroin proved that moral panics can be contagious[42]. Heroin, a drug more powerful than morphine, had a low profile in the UK, unlike the US which saw it as a social evil. Criminalisation thus can occur without any internal moral

panic taking place. Instead, it is enough that the moral panic takes place on a governmental, international, academic, political, level. The US was a staunch defender of prohibition on a global scale in an effort to establish itself as an influential global game changer. Turkey and Egypt defended prohibition due to Islamic law. Moral panics can be global. The US started going after cannabis with a great zeal which made other countries, including the UK falsely think they have a cannabis problem[43]. It is the same with anti-depressants.?

Reducing supply and demand for illegal drugs has been a failed endeavour by every government of the day. Scientific and sociological research are put into second place. Perhaps cutting the direct link between MPs and their constituencies would allow Parliament to be unaffected by any moral panics and enforce the right measures unaffected by public opinion.

Government's reactive reaction to a moral panic results often in misguided classifications. A drug going through normalisation often escapes the cyclone of a moral panic and as a result the government's regulatory grip. Tobacco and alcohol are the causes of more deaths than all the other drugs combined[44]. Prohibition does not work but instead leads the drugs underground whilst increasing their usage and reduces their purity. It is a well-known fact. Mephedrone is a prime example of that. Nonetheless, opponents of prohibition might argue that availability would increase use. Increased use would increase trying and long term use[45]. A multi-faceted approach is preferred over a blanket approach. In this light, the Drugs Misuse Act was right in distinguishing between three classes of drugs. Reactively and

hastily responding to a moral panic such as mephedrone's shows that moral panics justification depends on how the moral panic is handled by the government. The public's discontent will come and go, but the governments actions are long lasting and permanent. It is unfortunate that government's actions are so dependent on disproportionate moral panics which are rarely proportionate to the real degree of harmfulness of a drug..

Ecstasy: a moral panic was created with the death of Leah Betts from ecstasy in November 1995. Ecstasy, a class A drug under the Drug Misuse Act has a death rate of about 27 per year. the famous 'Sorted: Just one ecstasy tablet took Leah Betts' caption that escorted a picture showing Leah Betts in a comatose condition made sensational headlines. Nonetheless, water intoxication was a major contributing factor in her death . had she had taken the drug alone she might have survived[46]. This part of the story did not get as much publicity. Going against the current that a moral panic creates is counter intuitive. Relatives and supporters of the victims often acquire a serene, almost angel like authority[47]which makes it hard to go against. Heroin's moral panic contributed in labelling of ecstasy as a class A drug while legal drugs such as tobacco and alcohol reign free. This raises the question of how much should government interfere. Ecstasy is closely related to the moral panic of the 90s and its rave scene[48]which were tackled by the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

Ecstasy has some of the most loyal followers than most of the other drugs.

Teenagers respond

Similarly, many Class A drugs such as 4-MTA, LSD, heroin, and cocaine, don't even match the mortality rate of legal drugs such as tobacco and alcohol. The media always sides with the anti-drug supporters in such a great extent that they distort facts and figures. Having a default stance against any type of drug is portrayed as the right thing to do, by the media[49].

The involvement of the army gave the law a greater leverage in which respectable people were convicted[50] for supplying HM Soldiers with cocaine. Cocaine was more rare than the then veronal barbiturates but more 'ferocious'[51]. It became the most common form of drug taking, after alcohol. DORA 40B drove the drug scene underground. It prohibited, for the first time the possession of, inter alia, cocaine, in Britain. War traumas that were responsible for the ignition of dance-dope workers whose lifestyle could only be maintained by them maintaining an 'energetic and vivacious' mood throughout the night. Moral panic was made worse by the death of Billie Carleton. Whether this moral panic that culminated and made worse from this death is justified or not is not clear. Kohn claims that her death was not a direct result of cocaine overconsumption but her overuse of depressants in addition to cocaine[52]. It was only made worse by cocaine. This is often attributed to the increased responsibilities of women at that time that included, inter alia; working in factories for the war, driving ambulances and gaining the right to vote., Kohn argues that cocaine simply opened the door to the emergence of the 'female psyche' instead of actively adding to the whole menace. Carleton's death brought the moral panic surrounding cocaine to its peak. Despite her death being attributed to the overdose of her doctor-prescribed drugs, the media focused on her use of cocaine. She

was a polydrug user.[53] Her death, the prohibition in the US, the death of the Yeoland Sisters in 1902, Freda Kempton in 1922, encouraged the British Government to legislate extensively against it[54].

there is a thin line separating an emerging moral panic from normalisation of a new drug that might be fueling the moral panic. Not criminalising a new substance in its early stages would significantly contribute to its normalisation. Criminalising 'legal highs' would not reduce their use[55]. A new one appears every week[56]. placing them under temporary banning orders only encourages the development of new drug compounds[57].

The moral panic model described above is applied to many areas, inter alia; drugs, AIDS, street violence and youth crime[58].

Goode:

The kneejerk reaction of the officials and the media to point the finger to the consumption of alcohol and the use of marijuana is a major contributing factor in associating drug use with crimes while lacking real evidence supporting their connection. Moral panics seem to engage the public in general to a greater extent than they should and often result at the end in the passing of a law that often seeks to restrict or completely eliminate the deviant behaviour. Moral panics are transient[59]. the public concern regarding marijuana subsided in the 1940s the same way public concern about the prohibition went away. Goode[60] notices that moral panics, albeit about 'sexual psychopathic laws', faded immediately after the passing of the relevant laws, which were nonetheless rarely applied. Perhaps a moral

panic is seen by the public as a threat to the status quo of its way of living and an outcry for reforms that will ensure its survival. Goode distinguishes the features of a 'moral panic' with a 'moral crusade'. He describes the latter as promoted by activists who often lack rational and protectionist interests while describing the former as a product lacking a per se direct and proportionate association with the real magnitude of the threat. A moral crusade is created by activists, entrepreneurs[61] whereas the initiators of a moral panic might be found in a different context, in terms of location and nature. It could be the unconscious by-product of activists, politicians, the media, and economic elites[62].

Cohen[63] identifies the main actors in a society whose reaction heavily influences and promotes a moral panic. First is the press with its 'exaggerate attention, exaggerated events, distortion and stereotyping'[64]. Then it's the reactive capacity and potential of the public to respond to simple raw material which will later escalate to a sensational issue. The zealous impatience of the law enforcement bodies in exercising their broad powers as demanded by the 'panic-crisis-scare'[65]. Crack cocaine first emerged in the UK in 1983[66].

Methoxetamine

Methoxetamine, a legal stimulant, used as an alternative to the banned ketamine- a class B drug- has been found in the bodies of two individuals in Leicestershire. It made the news in February 2012 and made a class B drug the next year. The ACMD pushed for criminalisation of methoxetamine while acknowledging that there were no known deaths to date caused solely by its

use[67]. Neither in the UK, in Europe nor in the rest of the world. Pushing an otherwise legal stimulant into the black market by criminalising it will harm the numbers of users who will have to face an unregulated methoxetamine of questionable purity. Despite being made illegal, it is now even more popular[68]. The ban has not only increased its popularity but does not deter club goers[69] from using it. In a study conducted by researchers at Lancaster University and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS foundation trust[70] it was found that mephedrone had surpassed all other drugs, with 27% of the gay club goers in the study reporting that they either took it or intending to take it later that night. After being banned, a second study by the same researchers showed that the purity of the drug (mephedrone) has dropped while its price and popularity have risen despite reports that their popularity has been reduced.

The sooner the government bans a drug, the sooner a new drug is invented and emerges[71]. This is the case especially with legal highs. The transitional period until they're put under the purview of the Drug Misuse Act is detrimental. People often confuse them as actually being legal forever. Often, legal is confused with safe, regulated and controlled. There are an infinite number of ways of creating - or better yet; altering the structure of an illegal drug, so as to make it legal. Barkham[72] suggests legalising safer drugs in order to prevent the need for alternatives. Moral panics regarding legal highs can also be counter-intuitively misdirecting the public. Calling them 'legal' would help normalise the possibly dangerous drugs by the uninitiated members of the public and even legislators.

In 2010, there were six deaths caused by mephedrone unlike cocaine which was the cause of 144 deaths. Following this, there was a media panic which prompted the control of mephedrone and related compounds under the Misuse of Drugs Act in April 2010[73].

Proving that mephedrone causes death is a difficult thing to do. Nonetheless, do the six deaths justify the media panic? probably not. In addition to that, the six deaths related to mephedrone might actually be more than a single digit figure since not all toxicology laboratories were able to recognise that substance[74]. Mephedrone is an amphetamine-type stimulant known for causing around one hundred deaths per year in the UK[75] which has been available since 2008. Legal highs have been available for decades. Recent developments in social networking which facilitated the transition from closed markets to open markets made them more readily available to the public. Banning mephedrone under the settings of the Drug Misuse Act is controversial. Mephedrone is found to be more popular among clubbers even after its re-classification as a former 'legal high'[76]. Even more popular than ecstasy and cocaine[77], it has become, after being made illegal in April 2010, the clubbing scene's drug of choice[78] by being the fourth most popular drug in the UK[79]. It seems to have a loyal following which surprisingly did not switch to an alternative stimulant which was -still- legal. Users are willing to obtain it on the street if any other legal route was unavailable[80]. Mephedrone is now in the eye of the law. The moral panic that surrounded - and still surrounds - the drug validly takes credit for bringing mephedrone under the purview of the Drugs Misuse Act. Do moral panics have an ultimate goal? Considering that they are an amalgamation of

the public's concerns which are reinforced and followed - and even created by- media panics, successfully identifying a legit goal would be an elusive and difficult task. Whatever the goal is, stricter regulation of mephedrone, and any other drug seems to tone down moral panics. The rise of the use of mephedrone is owed partly to the increasing decrease of MDMA in ecstasy which pushes users to mephedrone which produces similar if not better experience[8]