

Style and presentation



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NB: Criteria on the grids are guides to strengths and weaknesses. They are not equally weighted nor weighted the same for each piece of work.

Assessors may judge other aspects such as innovation, effort and flair. Marks are provisional only and subject to confirmation by the External Examiners.

Specific comments are only provided in exceptional circumstances.

Throughout history there have been a number of different approaches to Criminology drawn from many different disciplines. In a sceptical society, the views of criminality and criminal justice have become less accepted as the importance of scientific and empirical evidence have increased. But the views and ideas of Stanley Cohen have still inspired and educated despite the climate in which we live. This essay will critically explore the contribution made by Cohen to the world of criminology. The focus will be on the key areas of Cohen's work, experiences and beliefs. Starting with his earliest work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). A popular expression, although widely misused, moral panics have in many cases, proved an elusive and complex term to understand. But it has developed into a key concept for a wide variety of scholars and research fields alike. Cohen coined the phrase 'moral panic' to characterize the reaction of the media, the public and agents of social control (e. g. the police and government) to youth disturbances in the 1960's. Defined as, 'A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests...'(Cohen 1972) The theoretical framework outlined by Cohen offered various insights into the way people perceive crime and criminals ('folk devils') and how the media can effect the amount of crime committed. It promised scholars a potentially powerful tool, as they would be able to declare that the social reactions to specific threats were overblown and

unwarranted. But why has the concept remained marginal in academic circles? Becker's (1963) discussion of dope smokers, Young's (1971) study of drug takers and Cohen's (1972) analysis of Mods and Rockers attempted to demonstrate processes of 'labelling', 'deviance amplification', 'moral panic' and 'moral entrepreneurship.' The scene that Cohen sets with the Mods and Rockers 'event' (p31) and his analysis of the media's influence is the bedrock of his moral panic. It provides us with the opportunity to identify other events where the amplification (or exaggeration and distortion) of deviance is done by the media by 'over reporting' (Cohen, 1972, p31). As noted by Becker (1963)'the problem must be exaggerated to heighten concern, so the public can support the agenda of " moral entrepreneurs" (Cited in Mitchell, 2001).'If we do not take steps to preserve the purity of blood, the Jew will destroy civilisation by poisoning us all.' (Hitler, 1938)'Surely if the human race is under threat, it is entirely reasonable to segregate AIDS victims, otherwise the whole of mankind could be engulfed.' (The Daily Star, 2 December 1988)Although an extreme illustration, the above quotes serve to set up the creation of a 'moral panic'. Just as Hitler's 'facts' were unfounded, so too were The Daily Star and what resulted from both incidents was, in effect, the persecution of two minority groups within society. These two examples highlight the difficulty in debating or discussing crime in the setting of fear and moral panic. It is likely to have negative consequences and is unlikely to provide intelligent and well balanced solutions. Critics have questioned the 30 year legitimacy of Cohen's moral panic on various grounds. Critcher (1978) stressed that future moral panic analysis should provide a more nuanced interpretation of Cohen's model, concluding a useful, ideal type, a unique 'processual model of moral panics' but its

structure is too sequential for moral panics to necessarily follow and adhere. McRobbie et al (1995) notes that Cohen's model of moral panic is outdated due to the high level of different media that is available and the fact that moral panics are now a part of everyday newspaper reporting. This is direct contrast with Thompson's (1998) claim that moral panics are becoming more frequent and pervasive. A possible middle ground could be to adopt the phrase preferred by Shevory (2004), 'media' panic rather than moral panic. Shevory notes that the over use of the concept of moral panic, has sometimes had the unfortunate effect of erasing historical and cultural distinctions. For him, what is most important about Cohen's work is its emphasis on mass communication as a mechanism for encouraging panic and the political effects that flow from that. Cohen's influence goes much further, in particular his work on Social Control and his leading book in this area Visions of Social Control (1985). He provides criminologists and sociologists alike with an analysis on the various ways that the state has evolved as it 'responds to behaviour and people it regards deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable in one way or another' (p17). In order to make more sense of Cohen's theory it is useful to make at least two distinctions between modes of social control. The first mode can be thought of as 'hard line' social control, which includes the 'hard' tactics used by such groups as the FBI to directly undermine and abolish radical movements. The second mode of social control includes less direct modes of oppression, such as the control of dissent through the legal regulation of physical space. In Visions of Social Control, Cohen attempts to understand how 'soft line' social control is an equally effective tool of the state for maintaining control. He maintains that the method of 'inclusion' is

characterised by 'soft' approaches to deviance. Cohen describes 'inclusion' as the desire to deal with offenders and deviants in the community, to dismantle state apparatus, to decentralize and to root solutions in a community-based approach. Under this mode of social control 'deviants are retained, as long as possible within conventional social boundaries and institutions, there to be absorbed'. This is what Cohen refers to as the 'net widening'(p84) effect whereby community programmes and social diversion suck children in at a younger age. Children are now brought into the police network much earlier through the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which introduces antisocial behavioural orders (ASBO's), curfews and, for those under 10, exclusion orders. Since 1999 there have been over 5, 000 antisocial behavioural orders issued by all courts across the country which has not reduced the prison population but simply led to an increase in numbers controlled and the extent of control. Furthermore a probation sentence may now be passed which can remain in force for one or two years. This noticeably increases the numbers controlled at any one time by the criminal justice system. Cohen also observed that not only are the numbers controlled increased but the level of intervention in their lives is increased ('thinning the mesh'). In older probationary systems the level of intervention was low but newer schemes such as the community rehabilitation orders are punitive and demanding, 'satisfying the aims of both integration and reparative justice'(p108). Like many other control theories, Cohen's cannot explain all types of criminality or delinquency but then no theory ever could. Nevertheless it remains a useful approach and there will always be crimes which people are willing to commit no matter how great their stake in conformity. There have also been many policy suggestions which have arisen

from this field, in particular the ideas which will assist families, schools and other socialising organisations.