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Dual Panic Theory: New Insight into Moral Panics

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ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

Moral panics have been broadly discussed in the public discourse since Stanley Cohen's (1972) seminal text on the topic. Despite copious research, we believe that the theory is in need of expansion due to the increased complexity of societal interactions. Through the lens of an increasingly polarizing American culture, we believe the original concept of moral panics is overly simplified and no longer encompasses the intricacies of American society. Using the story of the McCloskey family's 2020 interactions with Black Lives Matter protestors and Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) definitional criteria, we propose a new, expanded theory of moral panics – Dual Panic Theory.

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The McCloskey Story

During the evening on June 28th, 2020, a group of Black Lives Matter protestors made their way down the streets of St. Louis, Missouri, towards the home of Lyda Krewson, the mayor of St. Louis. The group was protesting the death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement – and, in the protestor's views, the seemingly growing trend of Black men being killed by police in America. The main rallying cry of these protestors was to "defund the police" or to discontinue governmental funding of an institution that has the potential to differentially enforce the laws based on race (Kohler, 2020; Lopez, 2020; Lussenhop, 2020; Pagones, 2020; Toropin & Waldrop, 2020; Ziegler, 2020). The St. Louis protestors marched through the Central West End of St. Louis towards the mayor's home asking for her resignation.

As they marched, the protesters made their way through Portland Place, a private residential area close to where the mayor lived, which had "Private Property" signs posted. A confrontation started when protestors began to fill the area. As a result, Mark and Patricia McCloskey, while standing on their personal property, pointed weapons towards the crowd. The McCloskeys claim that it was an act of self-defense as the area was private property; however, many of the protestors claim that there were no actions directed towards the McCloskey family that indicated they were in danger. In the end, the entire confrontation lasted around 12 minutes. The protesters continued towards the mayor's home with no violence from either side.

Reactions on Both Sides

While the events in this case seem straightforward, from this incident came conflicting reactions from the media (e.g., Armus, 2020; Kohler, 2020; Lopez, 2020; Lussenhop, 2020; Pagones, 2020; Toropin & Waldrop, 2020; Ziegler, 2020). The more conservative media outlets instantly focused on the rights of personal property, self-defense, and gun ownership as justification for the McCloskeys' actions (Pagones, 2020). On the contrary, the more liberal media outlets focused on the rights of nonviolent protests and the first amendment in the context of the larger Black Lives Matter movement (Toropin & Waldrop, 2020).

With these conflicting articles came conflicting information. Overall, very few liberal news media outlets focused on how Mrs. McCloskey's gun could not have shot anyone due to being disabled, while very few conservative news media focused on the fact that the pedestrian gate was open when the protestors came onto the property, countering their claims that the neighborhood gate was destroyed. In both instances, the news media is altering the narrative to meet their social agenda - or the way in which the media selectively provide an order of importance to the world they hope to portray (Randall, 1987). This leads to differential understanding of the story by the different audiences. Media outlets seemed to exaggerate the facts and evidence to help support their side of the story with the hope of drawing more viewers.

These stories were exacerbated by the timing of George Floyd's death, combined with a contentious election year, Covid-19 lockdowns, and already explosive racial tension. Many conservative news sources directly argued that this case was another example of an attack on an American Constitutional right (Ziegler, 2020) and brought us one step closer to socialism. Similarly, the same incident, viewed through a different lens, was used by more liberal news sources to suggest that the freedoms of speech and nonviolent protest were being taken away by racists (Kohler, 2020). Using a Moral Panic framework (Cohen, 1972), this paper will present an additional model of the theory (to be added to the grassroots model, the elite engineered model, and the interest group model), showing how politics and the media play a role in what we will call "dual panics," or antithetical moral panics about the same situation by opposing sides.

Moral Panics

The concept of moral panic was first developed by Stanley Cohen (1972) in his work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Cohen (2004) described moral panics as "a condition, episode, person or group of persons [who emerges] to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest" (p. 1). From this initial panic, the mass media frames the issue in a way that, when presented to the public, adds to the panic (Cohen, 2004). Politicians and other governing entities then create solutions to help remedy the issue (Cohen, 2004). In simpler terms, moral panic is an "overreaction to a perceived social problem" (Rohloff & Wright, 2010, p. 404) that is then heightened by the media, which politicians and other officials hope to resolve (Cohen, 2004). Moral panics have a heightened sense of "urgency to do something now or else society will suffer even graver consequences later, compelling social policy to undergo significant transformation" (Wright & Miller, 2005, p. 1006).

While this definition of a moral panic is good at characterizing the concept of moral panic, it does not provide an operational definition of the phenomenon. Therefore, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) outline five criteria that identify moral panics:

concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility.

Concern is the reaction from society after the conduct causing the panic, which leads to consequences for society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Wright & Miller, 2005) and "sparks anxiety" (Garland, 2008, p.11) among members of society. The conduct in question is an act by a particular group of individuals whose behavior is assumed to have consequences for the rest of society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The spike in concern can also be measured through an analysis of society and political actions that result from the initial incident, such as an increase in media attention or legislation passed.

Hostility is related to the action by categorizing a collective group of individuals as the enemy (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Wright & Miller, 2005). When a specific group begins to engage in a behavior that society characterizes as "threatening to [their] values, interest, way of life, [or]… very existence" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 157), then society begins to act hostile towards them, making the distinction between *them* and *us* (Cohen, 1972). Primarily the hostility comes from the sense of responsibility given to the aberrant group because their actions are viewed as the cause of the threat to society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Once concern and hostility are reached, society forms a consensus on the deviant group (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Consensus is the affirmation that social reaction is assumed by a broad array of individuals (Wright & Miller, 2005). However, this is not to say that most of society must come to the same consensus for the situation to be labeled a moral panic or to say that every member of society must come to the same consensus at the same time (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The consensus of a moral panic can come in various stages, and some sectors of society may interpret the perceived threat differently than others (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Stated another way, moral panics come in all shapes and sizes.

Disproportionality suggests that the threat of the conduct is exaggerated compared to the empirical reality (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This is commonly seen when grossly exaggerated numbers are sent into society to depict a situation in a new light that is more overstated than true (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Nonetheless, disproportionality is not just seen in exaggerated numbers, but can also be seen when attention paid to certain subjects is heightened during moral panic episodes or when attention is paid to one subject but not paid to another (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Finally, volatility is the sudden outbreak of panic throughout society, which, in turn, vanishes as quickly as it came but still lies within the conscience of the public (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Wright & Miller, 2005). Volatility can be viewed as a quick eruption of panic across society that abates as quickly as it erupted (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Notwithstanding, as short or long lived as moral panics may be, volatility does not discredit its impact on society and the implications that may derive from it (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

These criteria are understood as the defining characteristics that are seen in moral panics (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The criteria should be used to understand why there is a sense of danger being created, where it came from, and why the reaction to the danger is out of proportion compared to the threat posed. Moral panics can have lasting impacts on society that can change social standards and norms, no matter how short or long the panic is.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) criteria for moral panics have historically been measured qualitatively. However, recently, researchers have endeavored to measure these phenomena quantitatively – often finding support for Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) five attributes (see, for example, Berryessa, 2022; Elsass et al., 2021; Klein & Mckissick, 2019; Schildkraut et al., 2015). There are some notable variations in the quantitative results. For example, when running factor analyses on the five attributes of moral panics as they relate to school shootings, Schildkraut et al. (2015) and Elsass et al. (2021) found that the concern variable could be split into two variables – concern as it relates to defense against school shootings (e.g., "I believe professors should be able to carry a firearm on campus if they have a concealed handgun license") and concern as it relates to the prevention of school shootings (e.g., "I believe that people should have to pass a criminal background check to purchase a firearm from a private dealer or a gun show"). However, in studying moral panics as they related to sex offenders, Klein and Mckissick (2019) and Berryessa (2022) did not find this division of the concern variable between defense and prevention. This could be due to the differential fervor of public policy debates regarding sex offenders compared to school shootings (i.e., public policy surrounding gun control is a more hotly debated issue compared to sex offenses).

Similarly, Burns and Crawford (1999) chose to omit the variable of volatility from their analysis of school shootings and moral panics due to its difficulty to measure. This choice seemed to be justified by Schildkraut et al. (2015) who found weak empirical support for the variable compared to the other four attributes (or five if you break concern into two distinct attributes). This could be due to what Downs (1972) refers to as the "issue-attention cycle" or the

fading public and media interest in the topic. However, Elsass et al. (2021), Klein and Mckissick (2019), and Berryessa (2022) all found volatility to be an empirically valid measure of moral panics. In fact, in relation to sex offenders, Klein and Mckissick (2019) found volatility to be the strongest variable in their model of moral panics as it relates to sex offenders.

Disproportionality has also been a topic of debate in the moral panic literature (see Critcher, 2017; Waddington, 1986). For a response to be disproportionate, society must know what a proportionate response would be. To determine a proportionate response, society must also have knowledge of the real extent of the problem. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to accurately claim a response as proportionate or disproportionate, according to critics. However, in empirical assessments on moral panic attributes, disproportionality is a significant factor (see, Berryessa, 2022; Elsass et al., 2021; Klein & Mckissick, 2019; Schildkraut et al., 2015).

Taken together, these empirical assessments do not demonstrate a significant justification to deviate from the five attributes of a moral panic as originally developed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). In fact, it could be that these empirical findings support the notion that moral panics come in different shapes and sizes, as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) suggest. Therefore, responses to different events that lead to a moral panic (e.g., school shootings v. sex offenders), and even the elements of the panic themselves, may be shaped differently.

In (briefly) considering the story of the McCloskeys (more detail will be discussed below), we can see all five of the original elements clearly present. Concern was sparked when images of the McCloskeys standing on their patio holding firearms emerged on national television. This concern quickly turned to hostility when it was made known that these were affluent White attorneys who were brandishing firearms at a group of Black Lives Matter protestors. Much of the media consensus was that this behavior was inappropriate and only permissible due to right-wing gun advocates that have blocked legislation banning such behavior. While there was no actual violence in this case, the media disproportionality framed this as an issue surrounding race, socio-economic status, and gun control suggesting that it was a powder keg ready to explode. Finally, volatility was seen when the McCloskeys' story was given prominent attention on a variety of media outlets. By using the criteria laid out by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), this story fits a moral panic against rich, White, conservative gun owners in their relationship with minorities.

However, this would be an incomplete picture of the panic that was seen in America at the time. Using the same story with the same fact pattern, a completely different part of America expressed concern when images of a group of Black Lives Matter protestors trespassed through private property, allegedly breaking down a gate to do so. This concern turned to hostility when it was clear that there was some minor property damage and that some of the protestors allegedly brandished firearms back at the McCloskeys. The conservative media consensus, albeit quite a bit smaller than the traditional, more liberally leaning media, and their viewers formed the consensus that had these protestors, termed "mob," not trespassed, the McCloskeys would have had no need to brandish their firearms. The media then pointed to the levels of violence by Black Lives Matter protests across the country and disproportionately exaggerated the potential for violence in this case. Finally, volatility was seen by the undue attention and coverage of the story by conservative media outlets – including inviting the McCloskeys to speak at the Republican National Convention to talk about the dangers of liberal elites backing such violent groups. How can the same incident be interpreted so differently by two different groups? What role did the media play in causing or stoking this panic?

Media and Moral Panics

A key aspect of these criteria is the influence of mass media on each variable (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994) – the term media should be broadly defined to include both legacy and social media. It should be recognized that the media purposefully feeds their narrative to engage the panic (i.e., purposefully add to the intensity of each of the criteria), to generate more news, and to appeal to the interest of their audiences (Garland, 2008) or, more specifically, to "prey on the fears of its audience" (Burns & Crawford, 1999, p. 157). Examples of this could be seen when media sources disproportionately increase their reporting on certain events with exaggerated language compared to other newsworthy topics (Wright & Miller, 2005). In this sense, the media can be seen as functioning as a carnival mirror, distorting reality to the viewer (Reiman, 1990). Nevertheless, the intentions of the media during moral panics, and their influence on panics, is important, so much so that the understanding of moral panics cannot be separated from the media anymore (McRobbie & Thornton, 1995). Rather, the media should be understood as a "primary definer" of moral panics (Cohen, 2011).

Furthermore, media and moral panics are connected such that actions done by one (the media) often influence the actions of the other (the panic of

the public; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995). The media will broadcast information to the public about the events surrounding the moral panic. The public often has too little information to form opinions independently and is often reliant on the media to provide information to them, while also being exposed to the media's personal interpretation of the story (Graber, 1980). In traditional moral panic models, the media is said to exaggerate information centered around deviance and social disorder, which then increases public fear, causing the public to create opinions based on erroneous information (Altheide, 2009). However, with the advent of the 24-hour news station and shows on traditional news networks that are dedicated to the opinions of the broadcasters, it stands to reason that the public is no longer left to come to their own conclusions. Rather, they are being given the conclusions they should draw from the media sources.

These exaggerations are subject to the agendas and narratives that individual media outlets and reporters choose to portray (Altheide, 2009), and rarely does the media fully report on events in their proper context (Burns & Crawford, 1999). This may be because media agendas are tailored information given to fit the expectations of the audience and the audience's values (Feezell, 2017). Audience members have come to expect media sources to present news and information in such a way that reflects their known agenda (Altheide, 2009). This means that various audiences are absorbing different agendas (Feezell, 2017), and while the news being portrayed is the same in some respects, it is altered to match whatever agenda each media source is hoping to meet. Since there are, presumably, endless agendas, there can be a disconnect between those in society and what they consider to be important. This decreases the likelihood that individuals will come to a broad consensus on what is considered "good" or "bad" (Feezell, 2017). Further, with increased social media usage, these non-traditional platforms can also set social agendas and influence how users rate a topic's level of importance – especially for a public that is inattentive to more traditional media outlets (Feezell, 2017). The depiction of a social problem by the media on any outlet can define how the public will perceive that specific problem (Becker, 1963), and the opposing depictions created by different media outlets allows for the public to perceive the social problem differently from others.

With these agendas come the underlying narratives they use to portray different events. Certain topics presented by the media are illustrated in a narrative that fit their social agenda and are used to shape the opinion of their audience in a particular way that benefits their agenda the most (Altheide, 2009; Feezell, 2017; McRobbie &Thornton, 1995). This is commonly seen in the U.S. as media outlets are often qualified as being liberal or conservative in their views and often relate their interpretation of stories back to the agendas of the Democratic and Republican political parties. However, it is through these different interpretations that a disconnect is formed between those with different views in society. Since each news source portrays events based on their own agenda, it stands to reason that this disconnect will not just be on interpretation of a story as good or bad but will also be about what their perception is on the truth and deciding who is right or wrong – or who is good or evil.

The idea of differential social agendas creating two different versions of events can be seen in the story of the McCloskey family mentioned above. On one side (Liberal), this was the story of an upper-class, white, privileged family that was brandishing weapons at peaceful, historically marginalized protestors who were fighting for a good cause. On the other (Conservative), this was an innocent family that was victimized by a violent mob, hell bent on trying to fundamentally change the American way of life as they knew it. Due to this differential media reporting (with both sides exaggerating the truth), there became two versions of events that took place – and therefore two different calls to action. It is through this lens of differential media perspectives that we will examine and propose a new, Dual Panic theory to help account for these seemingly disparate moral panics about the same issue.

Critics of Moral Panic

While we focus on the expansion of the idea of moral panics, some scholars have suggested that moral panics are a dated idea that no longer accurately accounts for the realities of social life, that moral panics are used to discredit a social problem as an overreaction (Horsley, 2017). Moral panics are deemed "vague" (Horsley, 2017, p. 5), and their definitions are too broad to be used from a theoretical standpoint (Horsley, 2017; Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). Therefore, according to critics, moral panic is used to define any situation in which the media exploits information, causing society to misunderstand the situation and overreact. Some critics believe the theory should be replaced with an updated version that operationalizes itself more narrowly to account for the subtle nuances hidden in society (Horsley, 2017; Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). This operationalization should also be accompanied with proposed solutions, as currently, moral panic literature offers no real solutions to solve the apparent 'problems' (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). Further, the term moral panic is seen by some to be the wrong interpretation of the

phenomenon in society as it over emphasizes the exaggeration (de Lint & Dalton, 2020), and rather should be called a moral regulation (Hunt, 1999) or a moral happening (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021; Young, 2009).

Scholars also add that the aspects of society have changed, suggesting that previous moral panic definitions no longer fit with the realities of society (Horsley, 2017). This is attributed to the way media influences society and how the structure of society has shifted (Horsley, 2017). Horsley (2017) states that the shift in media to constant news converge allows for the concept of moral panic to no longer make sense as the current state of news coverage allows for no one source to have the same impact as it previously had. Instead, today's society is subjected to a wealth of news media that helps society form its own decisions and is no longer subjected to the interpretations of just one, or a few, media outlets. The media's connection to society has put too much emphasis on the aspect of an elitist controlling class that guides the formation of the panic (Horsley, 2017). Instead, it is argued that moral panics, or society in general, may not form in the classic top-down fashion as they used to (Horsley, 2017).

While these criticisms are noted, we believe that they are not so insurmountable as to throw out the entire theoretical concept. First, whether a phenomenon is an overreaction or not does not mean that it does not have real consequences for society. One needs only to look at the way politicians suggest that the other party is a threat to democracy to encourage voting to note this. Second, we agree with Horsley (2017) that the formation of a twenty-four-hour news cycle has changed society. However, missing in this criticism is the hyper-partisanship that is present in our current news cycle causing differential levels of understanding of issues and trust in the media (Guess et al., 2021; Levendusky, 2013). Therefore, before we completely toss the concept of moral panics, we should endeavor to push the theoretical evolution of moral panics to match that of societies. This has been done successfully in specific fields, like drugs (e.g., Armstrong, 2007; Webb & Griffin, 2020), sex offenders (e.g., Berryessa, 2021; Klein & Cooper, 2019; Klein & Mckissick 2019), and school shootings (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Elsass et al., 2021; Schildkraut et al., 2015). So, we aim to help spur on some of this theoretical refinement with our own humble expansion, that of "Dual Panics." Afterall, "the theory of moral panic remains one of the most widely and frequently referenced analytical frameworks in Sociology and Criminology" (Webb & Griffin, 2020, p. 1261).

Dual Panic Theory

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) identify three theories of moral panics that should be of interest to researchers: the grassroots model, the elite engineered model, and the interest group model. The grassroots model suggests that the panics originate from the general public and are widespread and genuinely felt. It is not the action of a special group or sector that generates the panic but rather that concern raises spontaneously amongst the population, and those in power (media, politicians, etc.) are simply reacting to the panic. Contrast that with the elite engineered model that suggests that the panic begins deliberately with the goal of generating and maintaining fear, concern, and panic over an issue that they recognize to not be especially harmful to the public. Generally, the goal of such an endeavor is to divert attention away from some other, real problem society is facing that would undermine the interests of the elites. Finally, there is the interest group theory, which has been argued to be the most widely used model on moral panics (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This idea was brought forward when Becker (1963) argued that rule creators and moral entrepreneurs launch moral crusades in order to make sure certain rules are passed and enforced in society. In this perspective, groups like professional organizations, law enforcement, or religious groups have a stake in bringing some issue to public attention that is independent of the elites but could benefit their own agendas. While it is tempting to take the cynical view that these panics are self-serving in some way, not all interest group panics are devoid of advancing a moral (from the group's perspective) cause. However, none of these models account for the idea of dual, competing panics that develop over issues like the ones that are seen in the McCloskey story (NOTE: While none of these models explicitly restrict panics to one direction, most of the research on the topic is unidirectional and has not considered the phenomenon as having multiple perspectives).

The idea of a Dual Panic Theory should not be viewed as a replacement or competitor of moral panics as a theoretical idea; rather, this should be viewed as an additional model to account for more recent developments in legacy and social media along with the growing complexities of American society as we grapple with controversial, often inharmonious, issues. This model is not meant to replace the grassroots model, elite engineered model, or interest group theory, but rather to offer an additional framework with which to view moral panics. To that end, we propose dual panic theory using the same framework that Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) did for more traditional moral panics.

This new theory broadens the view of moral panics to account for the current dynamic between society and U.S. politics. The stark reality of U.S. politics, and their influence on the media, is that there are two major political parties: Democrats and Republicans. Moreover, while it is important to understand the nuances of political beliefs imbedded within each of these ideologies, it is also crucial to understand the reality of the political climate in the U.S., which tries to place every social problem or action neatly inside one category or another, in practice, creating a binary. The impact of politics on moral panics is profound and can be easily exploited by political parties to advance their agenda (Critcher, 2008). Further, the relationship between the media, politics, and moral panics is pertinent because society inevitably learns about what is going on around them through the media, who exploit moral panics to their benefit (Critcher, 2008; Webb & Griffin, 2019). The purpose of this expansion to the moral panic concept is to define and characterize the nuances that American politics has on moral panics and to help offer an additional model that may address some of the criticisms. Specifically, we propose that this new theoretical model has the same variables of traditional moral panics: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility.

Concern

Concern is the response generated by society when a certain group's behavior is seen as dangerous or detrimental to the rest of society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The most important aspect is that there must be a behavior that is perceived as a threat to society from a particular group. Critically, an actual threat does not have to exist for the criteria to be satisfied; rather, it can be satisfied by the *perception* of a threat (Wright & Miller, 2005). Simply stated, society recognizes a behavior done by a certain group, that behavior is then perceived to have consequences for the rest of society, and a portion of society grows concern for the behavior performed by that group (Wright & Miller, 2005). This concern can be measured easily by looking at media attention, public polls, or legislation that can demonstrate an influx of disagreement with a specific behavior performed by a particular group (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). In the standard moral panic theory, one group and their behavior is seen as dangerous to society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). However, in dual panic theory, two opposing groups are seen as a risk to society, and the behaviors done by each of those groups are seen to be a threat by the other group (e.g., gun control advocates v. gun owners; pro-choice v. pro-life, etc.).

Dual panic theory allows for one group (group A) to see another group's (group B) behavior as having consequences on the rest of society just as in the traditional model. But dual panic theory also allows for this to be reversed and allows group B to perceive a threat from group A's behavior as well. This produces an interesting dynamic as these events happen simultaneously, and both groups collectively see the other's behaviors as having dangerous impacts on society. Often the behaviors seen as dangerous by one group are only perceived this way because they contrast with the behavioral preferences of the other group. One group with specific morals will see another group's behaviors as a threat if they go against their perceived idea of what is good for society (e.g., protests). Moreover, the same reaction will be created by the opposing group, creating competing ideas of what is considered a threat to society.

This is portrayed in the McCloskey story of June 2020, as both sides of the political aisle labeled the other party's behaviors as a threat to American society. Republicans saw the McCloskeys as heroes, standing up for fundamental American rights, like gun possession and self-defense, as they protected themselves from the dangerous Black Lives Matter protestors spreading violence. Their primary concerns were the acts of "violence" by the protestors, who are being supported by Democrats. Republicans see this violence as making American society unsafe and the protesting for defunding the police as a threat to Americans, their safety, and their overall way of life (Lopez, 2020). Democrats saw the McCloskeys as racists using their White privilege and firearms to try to stop the peaceful Black Lives Matter protestors fighting for racial justice (Lopez, 2020). They found concern in the actions of wealthy Whites and, therefore, the Republican party, as the "violent" actions of the McCloskey family were used to reinforce the racial status quo of oppression and violence against minorities while justifying the actions of a group historically known to be oppressive (Kohler, 2020). Democrats perceive Republicans supporting racial disparities in policing as a concern to American liberties and justice (Lopez, 2020). For Republicans, the group causing a threat to society is the Black Lives Matter protestors and the Democrats supporting them, as they are perceived as causing an eruption of violence across the nation.

Both groups are concerned with the threat to American society, and each group's perceived notions of freedom contrast with the other, causing the differential perception of this threat. In this case, the Republicans see freedom through gun-possession, self-defense, and the protection of personal property, while the Democrats see freedom through racial equality and the freedom to protest. The argument of whether either notion of freedom is correct is irrelevant, but rather that each group is truly concerned

with the behaviors done by the other. The significant aspect is that both concerns derive from the same event but are understood and expressed differently. In other words, there is clear concern over the event on both sides, but the source of that concern stems from different places and is directed at different groups of people.

Hostility

Hostility is the reaction that comes after the creation of concern around a given group due to that group's behavior (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). A distinction is made between those who are considered the enemy to society and society's values and those who are considered the victims subjected to the consequences that come from the oppositions' actions (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The group labeled as enemies, however, are not just seen as enemies to the supposed victims, but they are also seen as enemies to the overall well-being of society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). A level of stereotyping is needed in the creation of the groups, as there must be a way to separate the enemies from the victims (Cohen, 1972). Moreover, there must be a connection between the threat to society and the group stereotyped as enemies, as they must be seen as the group that is responsible for the possible threat to society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Dual panic theory creates a different approach when labeling one group as the enemies and one as the victims as it allows for two groups to grow hostility towards each other, causing each group to see the other as the enemy to society – and, therefore, each group views themselves as the victim. This creates the dynamic that both groups are considered enemies and victims simultaneously, but the classification given depends on to which group one belongs. Often, the groups in conflict with each other will have contrasting beliefs surrounding the same issue, and this is mainly why they label each other as the enemy. The conflicting views allow each group to see their point of view as what is right for society and to see the group that is contrasting them as a threat to what is good for society. Just as with the variable of concern, the label of which group is the enemy to society, and which group is the victim, is irrelevant, but rather that both groups label the other as the group threatening society and see themselves as the ones subjected to the consequences of their behaviors. In the end, both groups will grow hostility towards each other, creating tension between both groups, forcing most of society to choose a side.

The growth of hostility towards opposing groups is present in the McCloskey story as Republican and Democratic hostility towards each other grew, with each side categorizing the other group as the enemy, putting society in danger with their destructive behaviors and belief systems. After the incident, Republicans quickly named the McCloskeys as the victims of protestors and the Democrats' violent actions (Kohler, 2020), while Democrats quickly named the protestors as victims, as their right to peacefully protest was met with violence by the McCloskeys (Lussenhop, 2020). The dynamic here is that each group grows hostility towards the other, stereotyping the other as the threat to society.

Consensus

Consensus is the uniform belief that the threat posed by a specific group's actions is of serious and real danger to society, and the danger is strictly tied to the actions of the labeled group (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The agreement made throughout society is usually broad and is uniform in the level of the negative reaction portrayed towards the dangerous group and their actions (Garland, 2008). Consensus is the mechanism that ties those in society together during a moral panic and makes the panic fairly widespread, as individuals are able to connect over a common belief that the threat is real and dangerous. There is also consensus that a particular group is responsible for the threat and that something must be done to save society from the group posing the threat (Wright & Miller, 2005). An important feature of consensus in moral panics is that the consensus does not have to include the majority of society but rather must include a widespread portion of society who are in agreement (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This characteristic allows for different sectors or groups of a society to form moral panics, even if that sector does not include most of society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

This flexibility of consensus allows it to be applied to dual panic theory in that the theory proposes that each group may form a consensus relating to the same incident – but the consensus of each group is different. In other words, two opposing groups form two opposing moral panics from the same incident. Importantly, each group may interpret that the whole of society is in danger due to the other group's actions. Perhaps a more appropriate outlook when applying a dual panic approach would be to say that each group, and their perceived power through their values, are in danger due to the actions of the other group.

The broadcasting of information surrounding the McCloskey story fits nicely into the framework of consensuses in dual panic theory. Many Republican media outlets reported information and news that were virtually the same, giving conservative viewers a sense of consensus based off the information provided. Fox News titles warning viewers that violence will be coming to your neighborhood, and that the violence

will be from the same type of people who participated in the "mob" that attacked that McCloskeys (Nelson, 2020), match that of other conservative media outlets who also refer to the protestors as a "violent mob" (Ziegler, 2020), "harassing" (Dreher, 2020) the McClokseys as they were in their home. These uniform depictions exposed conservative viewers to a consistent message, implying that all members of their party share the sense of danger that comes from the "mob's" actions. This uniformity, coupled with the assurance from Republican leaders such as former President Donald Trump and Missouri Governor Mike Parson (Kohler, 2020; Murphy, 2020) that the McCloskey's were in the right and the protestors were in the wrong further adds to conservative viewer's sense of consensus during the panic.

This same growth and formation of consensus is seen equally on the Democratic side as liberal news sources report virtually the same information, giving liberal viewers an alternate sense of consensus from the conservative viewers. Outlets spoke to the McCloskeys' careless actions by "waving guns" (Kohler, 2020) towards seemingly "peaceful protestors" (Lopez, 2020), giving liberal viewers an alternative sense than the conservatives, seeing the McCloskeys in the wrong for endangering citizens exercising their right to protest (Toropin, 2020). Moreover, these widespread depictions of the McCloskey's being in the wrong did not stop with just the news media but also become uniform in other forms of media when the McCloskeys are referred to as irrational, dangerous, and a "crazy…gun-toting couple" (The ReidOut, 2020, np). Collectively, these uniform depictions gave liberal viewers the ability to form the same consensus, but the consensus was opposite to that of conservative viewers because they are receiving differing interpretations, and the stories focused on different information.

The contradiction between consensuses created between Republican and Democrat viewers portrays how in dual panic theory, two opposing consensuses are reached by the opposing groups. These opposing consensuses allow for each group to adopt an agreement that the other group is the actual threat to society and that they, themselves, are the ones being put in danger. Further, this is amplified and solidified by conservative and liberal media outlets, who exaggerated each group's sense of danger and allowed each group to form consistent messaging against each other.

Disproportionality

Disproportionality is a variable that represents the measure of media exaggeration compared to the real story, so much so that it surpasses the empirical reality of the threat and is achieved by the release of data and information from the media that gives society a false sense of danger (Garland, 2008; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Wright & Miller, 2005). However, disproportionality does not only require data and exaggerated information to heighten societal fears. By reporting on one topic more than another, or by providing 'evidence' that is more opinion than fact (or even fictitious), the media can give society a real and heightened sense of danger (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This exaggeration is the primary element that creates the perceived danger to society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Dual panic theory provides a similar but alternate formula for this criterion because instead of one moral panic being fed by the media, there are two antithetical viewpoints being exaggerated by competing media agencies, creating two opposing perceptions of danger. Disproportionality in dual panic theory allows opposing media sources to exaggerate opposing data and information deriving from the same event that heightens the sense of threat one group has towards another. Exaggeration can come from nonexistent evidence, exaggerated numbers, or by simply reporting on one topic more than another, giving a false sense of importance and allowing society to believe that a situation is happening more than it really is. Importantly, differing news sources will report contradicting information when compared to other new sources, and most media outlets will often only report on information that follows the stereotypical perspective of each agency. This allows individuals receiving information from one media outlet to form a different sense of danger compared to individuals who receive information from a contrary media outlet. In dual panic theory, media outlets often take a position that conforms with their agenda, and these positions will primarily oppose other positions in belief and values, which add to the contradicting sense of danger that each group receives from their differential media consumption.

In the case of the McCloskeys, each type of media outlet would make exaggerated claims about the event, giving their viewers a false sense of reality and creating fear. Conservative media outlets would mostly refer to the protestors as a "mob" (Dreher, 2020; Nelson, 2020; Ziegler, 2020), creating the depiction that the group was dangerous and that they were putting the McCloskey family in danger. The exaggeration of characterizing the protestors as a mob gives conservative viewers the false sense of reality that the protestors may have been more violent than in reality, without any specific information to back these claims. This is contrasted, however, with the liberal media outlets who almost always referred to the protestors as just protestors or, more specifically, peaceful protestors (Lopez, 2020; Kohler, 2020;

Toropin, 2020). Nonetheless, liberal media outlets would also include exaggerated story lines when referring to the McCloskey's actions of using guns (Kohler, 2020) and their willingness to endanger protestors, most of whom were minorities, and their right to protest (Lopez, 2020; Toropin, 2020).

Volatility

Volatility is the idea that moral panics quickly erupt into media stories and the public conscience and then typically dissipate just as quickly (Garland, 2008; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Wright & Miller, 2005). The suddenness that comes from moral panic is often due to the media quickly picking up the story and broadcasting exaggerated information almost instantly, which also adds to society's sudden sense of a threat (Garland, 2008). Moral panics are also characterized through volatility as going away in the same fashion that they came: quick and sudden (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This is mostly seen as the media moves from event to event and stories become irrelevant or outdated or the public loses interest. Overall, moral panics are characterized as being temporary with relation to other events in society that span a substantial amount of time; however, moral panics still have cultural and historical impacts on society that can last throughout time (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

However, this is not to say that moral panics are singular events (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Rather, panics may reappear from time to time surrounding specific events (e.g., the moral panic around poisoned or dangerous Halloween candy reappears almost every year around Halloween; Best & Horiuchi, 1985) or become institutionalized through legislation or policy changes. Further, this does not suggest that panics do not have historical or structural precursors. Many panics, especially political panics, build off each other in a series of short-term, discrete panics that take place one after the next (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Dual panic theory follows this same pattern. The two opposing media sources allow for two moral panics to be rapidly created from the same event, with the notable exception that two different viewpoints are being portrayed. The speed at which each media source will broadcast the story will be sudden, with consistent coverage, that will then fade off as public interest shifts through time. Nevertheless, two opposing viewpoints will begin to circle society, sides will be taken, and two opposing moral panics, or a dual panic, will form in a quick fashion from the exaggerated information being provided by opposing media outlets.

The McCloskey incident was quickly picked up by media outlets while videos and photos simultaneously spread on various social media outlets – including being tweeted about by government leaders. During this time, media outlets would include their specific opinions or exaggerations, or they would report selectively chosen information to frame the event in a light that fit their larger social agenda. This allowed conservative and liberal viewers to quickly receive the information and be divided into their separate corners.

Moral Panic or Culture War?

The goal of this paper was to argue that the concept of moral panics should be expanded to account for the growing frequency in which moral panics take on a form that does not neatly fit any of the three models of panics proposed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). Using the case of the McCloskeys as an example, we argued that American society on both sides of the political aisle were panicked by what they saw. However, unlike other models, the panics were quite different from each other – namely, both sides were equally outraged by the conduct of the other. This led to conservatives viewing themselves as the victims of the liberal folk devils and liberals to view themselves as the victims of the conservative folk devils. Currently, there is no model of moral panic that can address this type of phenomenon.

Some researchers (e.g., Garland, 2008) may argue that rather than a new model of panics, the proposed model is simply a reconceptualization of the idea of a 'culture war' whereby there is simple horizontal conflict between social groups (as opposed to a vertical relationship between society and a deviant group). Garland (2008) argues that the "pervasive appearance of racial, religious, and regional divisions, fostered by identity politics and given expression by public access media…prompt markedly polarized responses" (p. 17). But these responses do not rise to the level of a true panic due to a lack of "broad public agreement" and a shift away from "consensual moral panics."

We disagree with this perspective for several reasons. First, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) argue that "moral panics come in different sizes – some gripping only certain social categories, groups, or segments, others causing great concern in the majority" (p. 157). Since the panic does not need to have wide consensus, but rather significant consensus, Garland's primary argument is null. Second, while it is tempting to view American society as a unified hegemony, we believe that doing so over-simplifies the reality of the current political and legal landscape – after all, do Supreme Court Justice appointments matter if there is a unified hegemony?

Garland further argues that in culture wars the labeled 'folk devils' will resist the label and "assert the social value and normality of their conduct" (p. 17). This is expressed in a defiant and outraged response from the 'folk devils' as opposed to a moral panic. While this may be true in some cases (e.g., most police shootings involve outrage by some, which causes a response by pro-police groups to try to justify the behavior), there are plenty of recent examples, like the one detailed above, that cause seemingly simultaneous outrage by two competing interest groups. This differential outrage causes advocacy for differential policy prescriptions based on group interests. In other words, in a culture war, Group A is outraged by the perceived actions of Group B, then Group B responds by normalizing and justifying their behavior. In dual panic theory, an action happens, even an unrelated action to either group, and Group A and Group B are both outraged, placing the blame for the action on the other (remember, liberals, as a group, supported the protestors against the McCloskey's despite the fact that the McCloskey's were registered democrats and had litigated civil rights cases in the past – group identity did not matter as much as the perception of the group in which the McCloskeys belonged). Therefore, to define all competing cultural, political, and legal conflicts as 'culture wars' is, in our view, a mistake.

Garland's (2008) final argument is that the media's handling of moral panics has become "routine and predictable" (p. 17). Therefore, public reaction to and the "mobilizing power of" moral panics is significantly more muted as the population becomes desensitized to the media's own "sensationalism" and "alarmism" (p. 18). While this may have been true in the past, this has clearly not been the case since the 2016 election where political and legal battle lines have been drawn to such an extent that some have even called for The United States to be split into two countries (Issenberg, 2018). Extreme followers of both political parties are continuing to be fed by an increasingly partisan media (including social media) to help create and exacerbate the "stoked hysteria" that Jenkins (2007, para. 4) was so critical of during the bird flu outbreak.

Conclusions

Since Cohen first introduced the idea of moral panics in 1972, scholars have been interested in the topic as a causal mechanism for a range of societal reactions to varying events. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) operationalized the concept by suggesting that moral panics have five criteria: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. They further suggested that moral panics fit into three distinct theoretical models: the grassroots model, the elite engineered model, and the interest group model. The goal of this paper was to offer an additional model – the dual panic model. This model suggests that an event can happen that causes a competing panic by two opposing sides of an issue. Different from a culture war, dual panics are genuine panics about an action rather than a reaction to oppositional outrage from a competing interest group. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) argue that "no moral panic is complete without an examination of all societal levels, from elites to grassroots, and the full spectrum from ideology and morality at one end to crass status and material interests at the other" (p. 168). As society has evolved, so too must the theoretical explanations of societal reactions, moral panic or otherwise.

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