TRANSIENT FEELINGS

Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotions

Janice M. Irvine

Throughout the 1990s, during my field research into conflicts over sexuality education, I was initially riveted by what I found—public discussions that flared into furious arguments. Neighbors hurled epithets like "fascist" and "McCarthyite" at each other, while school board meetings went from sleepy affairs to late-night shouting matches involving hundreds of residents. Adrenaline buzzed throughout public meetings, all of us alert to the next outburst. School board members told me about receiving death threats, being spit on, and having tires slashed. After explosive meetings they received police escorts to their cars. One prominent sex education foe collapsed from an anxiety attack during his speech at an especially rancorous meeting, while those of us left waiting in the school auditorium worried in hushed whispers that he had died of a heart attack. Sex education conflicts escalated rapidly through the 1990s and spread to nearby cities as though contagious. Sensational media coverage heightened these public battles, while officials scrambled for solutions. These were the feelings of community controversies, local dramas played out in the shadow of national politics.

To paraphrase the British sociologist Stanley Cohen, societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of sex panic.[1] A derivative of Cohen's concept "moral panic," the term *sex panic* was coined in 1984 by the anthropologist Carole Vance to explain volatile battles over sexuality.[2] Both *moral panic* and *sex panic* have been used by activists and the media and have been adopted and revised by sociologists, historians, and cultural studies scholars. Prominent researchers, among them Estelle Freedman, Gayle Rubin, Jeffrey Weeks, and Lisa Duggan, deployed the panic metaphor—moral panic, sex-crime panic, AIDS panic, or sex panic—to explore political conflict, sexual regulation, and public volatility about sex.[3]

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A vivid analytic term, *moral panic* bespeaks the mobilization of intense affect in the service of moral politics. Cohen's moral panic, which described the 1960s reaction to rioting by youth groups (the mods and the rockers) in the vacation town of Brighton, featured angry crowds milling at British seacoast towns and hyperbolic media coverage. Likewise, *sex panic* aptly captured the hostile political climate during late-twentieth-century controversies over gay rights, censorship, and sex education.

Sex panics are significant because they are "the political moment of sex," which Weeks and Rubin both describe as the transmogrification of moral values into political action.[4] I extend their important claim by suggesting that public emotion is a powerful catalyst in effecting this political moment. In this article, I suggest that we can enhance the analytic power of the moral/sex panic framework by integrating social theories of emotion.

As I discuss below, the sex panic literature tends to focus on structural elements, in particular the expansion of state power through institutional mechanisms of regulation. Public feeling, although acknowledged in passing by most sex panic scholars, is often represented as anarchic, moblike, and hysterical, all descriptions that recall late-nineteenth-century critiques of the irrational crowd. Lack of attention to public sentiment in the sex panic literature is likely intended to minimize its importance, in contrast to moral conservatives who exaggerate the significance of collective outrage to legitimate social control. As Cohen noted in the recent thirtieth-anniversary edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, political progressives tend to use the term *moral panic* to expose collective volatility as "tendentious."[5] Unfortunately, however, this strategy places the *panic* of a sex panic outside social and political reach. I am suggesting that we broaden our analysis of sex panics to include their deep emotional dimensions, including how emotions braid through and legitimize structures of domination.

Overt emotion is not only increasingly acceptable but seemingly required in contemporary politics, where it conveys righteous solidarity and demands state intervention. Contemporary Western societies consider feelings the core of the self; they are constructed as a site of truth and ethics. Hence feelings, as Michel Foucault has argued, are "the main field of morality," and indeed of the moral panic.[6] In contrast to scholars who view the emotions of sex panics as irrational, moral conservatives cast them as authentic moral outrage. Because of its cultural authority, public emotion can pressure politicians, police, media, and other regulatory agents to respond to fierce community battles. As a result, laws and policies that restrict sexual rights may be hastily enacted yet exert a pernicious influ-

ence for decades. Moreover, the legitimating power of emotions naturalizes sexual hierarchies, establishing some sexualities as normal and others as disgusting or unspeakable. Affective conventions of sexuality—in particular, sexual shame, stigma, fear, disgust—enforce and reinforce this regulatory system and are therefore political. In its wake, the *panic* of moral panics legitimizes enhanced state power through fostering the illusion of a singular public mobilized in support of traditional values.

Rather than see the public feelings of sex panics as either irrational or as deeply authentic outrage, my analysis resolutely sticks to the surface. Indeed, it problematizes a popular notion of authenticity that casts feelings as expressive of a core, moral self. It does not take the psychoanalytic path to the unconscious, nor does it deny its possible influence. I posit emotion as deeply social, constructed from the outside in. Likewise, this article explores the public feelings of sex panics as produced through dynamic flows of encounters and interactions, scripts and political spaces. I argue for the political significance of emotions and emotional publics, and suggest theoretical possibilities for analyzing what I call the *transient feelings* of moral panics and sex panics.

This concept is informed by Ian Hacking's "transient mental illness," his term for a historically and culturally specific malady that "appears at a time, in a place, and later fades away."[7] In his case study of fugue and other disorders in the late nineteenth century, Hacking argues that it is unproductive to debate whether such illnesses are real. Rather, these illnesses occupy an ecological niche created by specific historical circumstances. They are incomprehensible outside their niche.

Whether individual, collective, cultural, or structural, sex panic feelings are transient because they are the product of a specific context; in its absence, they recede. Like Hacking's transient mental illnesses, moral panics emerge in a particular space and time. The seemingly irrational and contagious expression of emotion during these panics is instead social and discursive. That is, transient feelings can be usefully understood as dramaturgically produced and performed in local settings.

It is no coincidence that a metaphor of illness should resonate with the study of moral panics. Disease tropes have long abounded in accounts of moral panic: contagion, epidemics of fear, mass hysteria, fevered atmosphere. Moreover, both moral panics and the syndromes Hacking calls transient mental illnesses are outbreaks of a sort, subject to debates about whether they are real or constructed, valid or disproportional. Hacking historicizes his disorders, showing how

they emerge and thrive in specific structural and cultural contexts. The transience is not a characteristic of the afflicted individual but expresses the historical evanescence of these maladies. However, the analytic significance of transient mental illnesses and what I am calling transient feelings is not that they come and go. It is that their comings and goings must be explained, lest they be naturalized as a form of universal irrationality (or morality).

The concept of transient feelings encourages the mapping of specific features of the historical moment, institutional agents and practices, cultural and discursive strategies, media representations, dynamics of specific political movements and their activists as a way to understand the eruption of feeling at public events along with the complex processes by which individual citizens embody or refuse this feeling. As I explore how emotional demands and public feelings are produced and suppressed by these myriad historical and situational factors, I use transient feelings as a concept with which to analyze the crucial nodes of connection among the state, political interest groups, social movements, media representations, and individual citizens who themselves constitute multiple, intersecting emotional publics.

I make the following arguments about moral/sex panic, as both political event and analytic term. First, moral/sex panic concepts are stronger when they attend to how emotion weaves through structural, cultural, and political processes, as well as to how public settings produce collective feelings. Second, collective activity is an important level of analysis in sex panics, although an emphasis on structural factors has obscured its significance. Moreover, this collectivity more closely resembles a public, or more accurately multiple publics, than the anomic crowd. The sex panic public, miscast as singular, is often internally fractured. Third, public feelings matter in politics. These public emotions are neither eruptions of irrationality, as they are depicted in some academic research, nor authentic expressions of moral outrage, as depicted by religious conservatives and the media.

Local moral/sex panics are paradoxical events, unpredictable outbreaks that are highly scripted. Seemingly timeless, they both rupture and reinforce ordinary political life. They are discrete, episodic uprisings within a generalized climate of social regulation.[8] The moral/sex panic framework must be agile enough to embrace and explore these paradoxes of continuity and change, spontaneity and performativity.

Elsewhere I have written about the volatile emotions of sex education panics. Since the late 1960s, Americans have fought bitterly over sex education. In my book *Talk about Sex*, I demonstrated a national dimension to these local panics.[9]

Starting in the 1960s, leaders of the early Christian right wing recognized that sexuality could be exploited to agitate citizens, recruit constituents, raise money, and ultimately consolidate political power. They captured the terms of debate about sex education through emotionally powerful rhetoric used nationally and also locally at school board sessions and town meetings. Rather than epiphenomenal, intense emotional reactions were strategically produced through a discourse of sexual danger and depravity that shaped how citizens throughout the United States spoke and felt about sex education. Thus local confusion about sex education programs morphed into sex panics. In what follows, I use examples from these conflicts to speculate about the transient feelings of moral/sex panics.

Intended as a series of theoretical reflections on moral/sex panics, this article is written in the spirit of ongoing conversation about public feelings in politics. These conversations are occurring — somewhat separately — in both sociology and cultural studies, two fields that have been cotravelers in the past.[10] Indeed, the moral panic concept — as developed in Stuart Hall's *Policing the Crisis* and Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* — has early roots in the unruly inter- and extradisciplinary mix at the Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology (the Birmingham School).[11] Since then, social scientists, historians, and cultural studies scholars in both the United Kingdom and the United States have deployed the moral panic concept across disciplines, although with somewhat different emphases. Unfortunately, the scholarship on emotions enjoys less cross-disciplinary vibrancy. Sociologists and cultural studies theorists often explore the affective dimension of political culture with little productive engagement.[12]

This article acknowledges but does not pretend, or aspire, to bridge this gap. Instead of conducting exhaustive literature reviews of moral panic theory, sex panics, or sociological and cultural studies work on emotions, I use some of the representative literature in these areas to imagine new possibilities for research on the role of emotions in politics.

In its substantive reflections, this article focuses on sex panics. I use the term *sex panic* as a form of moral panic to designate sites of public conflict over sexuality and sexual morality. I use this term when referring to my own research or specifically to controversies related to sexuality. However, my theoretical suggestions about public feelings apply to the concept of moral panics in general and its uses in controversies such as those over drug use, youth violence, or satanic rituals. When I am making an analytic or theoretical point, I sometimes use the terms *moral panic* and *sex panic* interchangeably or fuse them into *moral/sex panic*.

Panics: Moral and Sex

In Cohen's enduring book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* the moral panic has a natural history. In the first stage, a group, person, or issue emerges as a social threat. The media frame this "threat" in a simplistic and stereotypical way, fueling intense public concern. In the second stage, moral crusaders devise coping mechanisms and solutions. Moral panics are significant in their potential to enhance state power by triggering repressive changes in law or social policy. In the third stage, the perceived threat diminishes, and the panic recedes. Conflicts over sexuality have followed this condensed cycle of putative threat, collective outrage, demonization, and state repression, and so the moral panic begat the sex panic.

The "panic," as Cohen stresses, is social reaction operating as social control and is therefore ideological and political. Conflicts over pornography, public funding of art with sexual themes, gay rights, sexuality in media, and sexuality and AIDS education lend themselves to a moral/sex panic framework, because of the volatility of sexual politics.[13] As I review below, the concept has enabled researchers to make powerful analytic moves in three areas: sexual demonization; institutional mechanisms of sexual regulation and social control; and the residua of repressive laws and policies.

Informed by the reconceptualization of deviance in U.S. sociology in the 1960s, moral panic foregrounds how moral crusaders turn a controversial issue or marginal cohort into a "folk devil." The concept locates the origins of deviance in the proliferation of social rules rather than in the inherent characteristics either of certain behaviors or of individuals who engage in those behaviors. Deviance, in other words, is socially produced. The panic framework is highly productive for analyzing sexual politics, where the folk devil metaphor is so resonant. In addition, the panic framework has been applied to the scapegoating of sexual minorities such as lesbians and gay men, as well as alleged sex offenders.[14]

Moral panic highlights the relationship between the "deviant" act and the reactions of institutions and agents of social control. Sex panic scholars have focused on state sexual regulation, exploring interconnections among courts, law enforcement agents and agencies, and legislators. For example, the historian David Johnson argues that a "moral panic within mainstream American culture" in the 1950s justified a vast expansion of the U.S. security state.[15] Johnson examines how congressional hearings, presidential executive orders, and state security bureaucracy operated during this panic. In her study of antiobscenity moral panics in the first half of the twentieth century, the historian Andrea Friedman explores the roles of government officials, religious organizations, censorship boards, and

interest groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.[16] The journalist Neil Miller exposes how the institution of psychiatry and its mental hospitals reinforced the harsh punitive measures of the state against gay men swept up in sex-crime panics of the 1950s.[17]

Media representation is the institutional unit of analysis for many moral panic theorists.[18] Likewise, many sex panic studies examine how the media operate to establish legitimacy for state control. Miller, for example, shows how newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, and editorial cartoons all helped produce a volatile climate for the enactment of sexual psychopath laws. Newspapers, he notes, "tried to stir up as much public feeling as possible" in their sensational coverage of child murders. One cartoon depicted a rat walking away from an overflowing garbage can with the caption: "A Bad Smell—In Sioux City . . . the Morals Problem."[19] The hyperbolic media coverage that both reflects and produces sex panics has been a theme in many other studies.[20]

Finally, moral/sex panics may leave repressive measures of sweeping scope. The historian James Morone writes that even "passing panics" lead to enhanced state powers in the form of new legislation, reinterpretations of the Constitution, and the establishment of public regulatory agencies.[21] The sexual psychopath laws, obscenity crackdowns, and restrictions on public AIDS and sexuality information are compelling examples of this. Additionally, in separate studies, Duggan and Vance have mapped the restrictive measures enacted by conservatives in the wake of sex panics sparked, paradoxically, by feminists. Duggan shows how antipornography feminists fostered and reinforced a climate supportive of conservative initiatives to eliminate public funding of erotic art and ban information on childhood sexuality.[22] In her discussion of sex panic at the Barnard sexuality conference, Vance not only describes the sexual scapegoating of conference speakers by antiporn feminist protesters, but also shows how the university administration mobilized to increase surveillance of the women's center and seized and attempted to censor the conference diary.[23] In addition to provoking punitive measures, sex panics can generate enough fear to exert a widespread chilling effect on art, academic scholarship, political activism, and journalism.

Although sex panic literature has accomplished significant theoretical and historical work with a structural analysis that exposes moral actors along with their regulatory activities, two crucial aspects of sex panics have yet to be studied: the specific role of the public and the nature of collective emotion. Most sex panic scholars suggest that volatile public reaction prompts state response in debates over pornography or sex offenders. These studies describe "public opinion," "public pressure," "public outrage," "public clamor," and "public anger."[24] However,

it is unclear who this public is and what exactly it is up to in exerting pressure or producing a clamor. The public's feelings are often similarly glossed.

As I discuss later, one close reading of emotional politics and a climate of sexual shame appears in Vance's work on the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, which operated in the 1980s.[25] Largely, however, the emotional dynamics of sex panics appear only through hyperbolic metaphors (even panic itself!). Although some scholars mention public meetings or letters to the editor, we read about "moral fever," "fevered atmosphere," and "cultural fears" without much specific discussion of the heightened emotional climate. Despite thoroughgoing feminist critiques of the nineteenth-century medical use of the term *hysteria*, it remains a popular metaphor for the collective emotion of sex panics, as in "national hysteria" and "public hysteria."[26] We find "completely unhinged hysterics" engaged in "irrational panic and hate-filled attack."[27]

Inattention to the emotions of sex panics has several possible sources. As I discussed earlier, downplaying public feelings seemingly offsets the moral and cultural authority that conservatives give to them. In addition, emotions have only fairly recently garnered academic attention. And, given the tendency toward insularity in academic subfields, moral/sex panic studies have not drawn on the contemporary social movements and cultural studies literatures on politics and emotions. Moreover, the false binaries of cognition versus feeling and macro versus micro politics plague the study of politics. Many scholars relegate emotions to the realm of individual or social psychology, ignoring the structural, cultural, and political realms of feelings. Public feelings—clamor, outrage, hysteria—occupy a seemingly inconsequential status compared with enduring regulatory structures.

While this theoretical inattention might seem to diminish the significance of public reaction in a sex panic, it has some unfortunate analytic consequences. For one, the broad terms *public anger* or *public outrage* give the erroneous impression of a public united in moral fury or possessed by a wave of outrage that is largely uncontested.[28] In the earliest edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Cohen noted that there was, in fact, heterogeneity to public responses in the moral panic at Brighton.[29] Indeed, there is often fierce contestation in moral politics. Cohen called for future research to emphasize the plurality of public positions, interests, and values, but one finds scant mention in sex panic literature of internal conflict and resistance, thus making a fractured public appear unified.

Failure to theorize the public feelings of sex panics makes "the hysterical public" seem not only unified but also anonymous and inscrutable. Its feelings are allegedly irrational and easily manipulated, residing outside social influence. This renders public feeling itself seemingly impervious to social analysis. As I discuss

later, this approach harks back to early social theories that cast overt collective emotion as evidence of a crowd or herd mind-set.

Public Feelings and Feeling Publics

Sex panics are locally situated in arenas of discursive interaction and debate, such as school board meetings, legislative hearings, and town hall events — the hypothetical public sphere of rational discourse. In my own research on local sex panics over sexuality education, I found that they were provoked by only a very small minority of citizens.[30] These religious conservatives — with their own sophisticated discursive infrastructure — can be considered a subaltern counterpublic, substantiating Nancy Fraser's suggestion that subaltern counterpublics may well be "antidemocratic and antiegalitarian."[31] Moreover, religious conservatives' success in sex education battles underscores how public emotion can make a fractured public appear unified and a weak public appear dominant. Conservative religious activists on the national level came to dominate the public conversation on sex education through discursive strategies that triggered the fierce emotions of local political debates.

This article also argues that the rational public sphere is, indeed, also emotional. Sex panics belie an easy distinction between a rational, deliberative public and an irrationally emotional crowd. Further, they challenge the rational/emotional binary itself. If, as the cultural theorist Michael Warner suggests, the public in modern society involves us in "speaking, writing, and thinking," the public is also an emotional field; affect suffuses these various forms of civic engagement.[32] Discursive strategies designed to evoke intense public affect through provocative and stigmatizing sexual rhetoric have played an important role in igniting community battles. Individuals engage in emotional deliberation in emotional settings, having been drawn into civic debate through emotional scripts.

While both popular media and academic accounts may mistake intense emotion as the spontaneous outrage of a singular dominant public, the alleged spontaneous outrage of panics is similarly misrepresented as a singular affect. Yet like the "phobia" of homophobia, the "panic" of moral panic and sex panic is metaphoric. References to hysterical mobs and stampedes in the sex panic literature are likely intended merely to conjure a climate of public volatility. Our research might productively disaggregate the many highly condensed emotions that constitute particular sex panics.

What, then, are the emotions of a sex panic? Broadly, the diverse emotions of a sex panic draw their affective power from historically specific conventions in

the broader emotional culture of sex. Sex, for Western cultures, is a paradoxical domain of desire and dread, excitement and fear. It is taboo yet considered the core essence of the modern self, simultaneously repulsive and attractive, disgusting and vital to our happiness. This is an affectively dense mix, escalating through social interaction and varying contextually in any given sex panic.

The term *sex panic*, of course, highlights aversive feelings such as fear, anxiety, anger, hatred, and disgust. Indeed, these emotions may inhere in what the sociologist James Jasper calls the "moral shock," a powerful impetus for social activism and, we might infer, moral/sex panics.[33] The galvanizing outrage of a moral shock occurs either from a sudden incident or from news perceived as threatening. For example, sex education panics commonly erupt when one or two parents begin to describe a program with inflammatory terms such as "sodomy curriculum." Although fear and anger are highly mobilizing emotions, in order for protest to arise from moral shock, there must be a target of blame. Demonization of an enemy is crucial in moral protests such as sex panics, in part because this strategy triggers strong feelings of hatred that may temporarily bind together activists in opposition to a folk devil who is cast as a legitimate and deserving target.

Disgust is another powerful emotion in moral politics. It evokes sensory images so deeply unpleasant that, as the cultural theorist William Miller says, "no other emotion, not even hatred, paints its object so unflatteringly."[34] In sex panics related to issues such as AIDS education, sexual disgust can be particularly powerful for mobilizing parents. Antigay materials have been used to link gay sexuality to fetishes such as boot licking and sadomasochism in order to conjure public disgust.

Meanwhile, a palpable frisson of pleasure may accompany the moral politics of sex panics. This emotional energy may be the dynamic Foucault had in mind when he referred to "the pleasure of the pleasure of surveillance."[35] Emotions not only attract individuals to moral conflicts such as sex panics, they may perpetuate them through what the sociologist Jeff Goodwin and colleagues call "the pleasures of protest."[36] These pleasures might involve enhanced sociality; they can also include the enhanced energy of passionate emotional arousal.[37] Moral sentiment, however, often promotes a sense of righteousness that easily turns to rage.[38] We would do well to explore the degree to which a thrill of collective rage and scapegoating underpins particular sex panics.

Who panics in a sex panic? As I showed above, regulatory institutions mobilize against sexual folk devils, inflamed by sensationalist media representation. However, the sex panic climate does not simply exist institutionally or discursively, most notably in media space. It also depends on public dynamics. Sex panics thrive

in the energy generated by embodied emotional battle in public settings. Fighting and shouting erupts at public meetings, derailing community debate. Emotional conflicts may escalate rapidly and spread to nearby cities as though contagious. Media coverage heightens such public arguments, prompting regulatory efforts by politicians and other officials. It is this public volatility to which sex panic scholars refer with metaphors such as "outraged stampede" and "rabid mob."

For more than a century, social scientists have examined the political significance of crowds versus publics; their emotionality or rationality; and the role of discourse in constructing a public. This early social theory anticipates these concerns about collective fervor that are evoked in the sex panic literature. In a necessarily brief discussion of this extensive body of work, I focus on the varied ways that earlier theorists used to explain collective feelings and the rapid escalation of emotional intensity and display, and then draw on cultural sociology and cultural studies to argue that the seemingly irrational expression of feeling during sex panics is deeply social. In a sex panic, emotional publics temporarily engage in moral politics. Collective emotion, evoked discursively, can bring publics into being, organizing diffuse, sometimes inchoate beliefs and moralities into political action.

Crowds and Publics

Early European social theorists viewed overt emotion as evidence of a crowd or herd mind-set. They condemned the crowd as a powerful, potentially disruptive, and easily manipulated unit. Writing in the late nineteenth century, the French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon lamented that the masses were reshaping society, displacing old power structures that had favored the divine right of kings. Le Bon argued that crowds form a collective mind resembling "inferior forms of evolution" such as women, savages, and children.[39] This crowd mind, he suggested, is irrational, prone to sentiment and hallucination. Antidemocratic theorists such as Le Bon saw the putative irrationality of the milling masses as a threat to social order and elite dominance. He advocated social control measures to govern the masses, whose alleged suggestibility rendered them unfit to govern themselves.

Sociological theorists of collective behavior challenged this antidemocratic view of crowds. In perhaps the earliest of this work, Robert Ezra Park (who launched the collective behavior field) argued in his doctoral dissertation that the crowd (as well as the public) served to "bring individuals out of old ties and into new ones."[40] Crowds, Park noted appreciatively, could be a vehicle for social change, dealing the deathblow to existing institutions and introducing a new social or political spirit.

Despite the significance of emotions in early- to mid-twentieth-century social psychology, most writers simply assumed the spontaneous irrationality of mass sentiment. Le Bon compared the emotionally reactive crowd to leaves swirled and scattered by tempests, a dynamic that the social psychologist Wilfred Trotter later likened to the "herd instinct."[41] Many theorists used the metaphor of contagion to describe how the emotion of each individual pervaded the entire group. Emotional contagion in crowds, for theorists like Le Bon and Trotter, was a primitive, instinctual process.

In contrast, sociologists eventually brought the notion of emotional contagion into a social framework. Park viewed emotions as extremely contagious, especially in gatherings like political meetings, yet he understood collective emotions as socially interactive. Emotional contagion, for Park, occurred when everyone's attention was collectively focused. Suggestibility — that herdlike quality derided by other critics — was, he argued, a form of "collective attention."[42] While Park's student Herbert Blumer viewed contagion as a common mood that rapidly intensifies and can "spread like wildfire," eventually contagion theory fell from favor as too mechanistic.[43]

Although many early social theorists disagreed on the particulars, they distinguished between the emotionally irrational crowd and the discursively engaged, rational public. Early-twentieth-century social theorists such as the French scholar Gabriel de Tarde viewed "the public" as the new social form of modernity brought into being by an expanding mass media.[44] Unlike the physical crowds of the older marketplaces, the modern public was dispersed and fragmented, brought together through the shared experience of newspaper reading. The public, for Park, was a "universe of discourse," a notion that reached its apotheosis in the theater of rational discourse known as the bourgeois public sphere.[45]

In contrast to the deliberative style of political engagement idealized in the concept of the public sphere, crowds were seen as anomic. Their individuals lacked an enduring social tie that would seemingly protect them from being swept up into emotional fervor. It was visceral emotion rather than deliberative reason that characterized a crowd, discrediting the crowd as irrational. Implicit in this distinction between a crowd and a public, of course, is the problematic assumption that emotion itself is irrational, constituted outside social influence, and devoid of power to forge bonds among crowd members.

Still, even some early theorists worried that the boundary between the emotional crowd and the rational public is clearly porous. The same burgeoning media that, however partially and imperfectly, brought a public into being could also create news events to cultivate mass emotion and manipulate public opinion.

The social psychologist Edward Ross, for example, saw the press as effecting mass suggestion among a public that no longer had to be physically present as a crowd in order to "share the same rage, alarm, enthusiasm, or horror."[46] Mass media of the twentieth century, in Ross's view, thus constituted a "space-annihilating" apparatus, a conclusion shared by the political theorist Graham Wallas, who dubbed this development "organized thought."[47]

As I suggest later, discourse has the power to bring into being publics produced through what might instead be called organized feeling. The term *transient feelings*, however, more accurately captures this powerful but fleeting coalescence of emotion. Hostilities temporarily bind citizens together in explosive public events whose fury is captured in, and further cultivated by, media coverage. These hostilities are not the instinctual and irrational reflexes of the milling crowd, as imagined by earlier theorists, nor are they the rabid mobs described by contemporary scholars. These are emotional publics, produced through specific historical and social conditions, engaged in moral politics.

The "Panic" of Moral Panic

The *panic* had a long lineage by the time Cohen adopted the term. Blumer had referred to panics as a form of primitive grouping, like the stampede and the riot, while the sociologist Neil Smelser defined panic as collective flight based on "hysterical beliefs."[48] Panics represented extreme, disorganized fear and flight, such as that seen on the battlefield, in burning buildings, or during natural disasters.

Cohen's moral panic was a different conceptual animal; it afforded the panic logic and cyclic structure, while the term itself acknowledged the affective component of these episodic dramas. Cohen himself shifted perspective on the nature of the actual "panic," variously describing it as concern, outrage, or "a splutter of rage."[49] The first edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* in 1972, in which Cohen compared the moral panic with mass reaction to, for example, natural disasters, drew criticism that the moral panic was yet another version of the irrational crowd or herd mentality.[50] In the thirtieth-anniversary edition of his book, Cohen wrote that he had once downgraded the panic to "mere metaphor" after criticism of his use of the term.[51] He later insisted on the usefulness of "panic" as an idiom for a particular emotional outburst—the "microphysics of outrage" (xxxi). His moral panic was a step away from the herd of early-twentieth-century social theorists and toward situating collective emotional expression in a social and political context.

Still, discussions of moral panic have lacked a theory of the emotional dimension that *panic* so viscerally evokes. In this sense, the term was a product

of its historical moment, the "rational turn" in 1970s social sciences. Inspired by radical protests of the 1960s, social theorists of the 1970s de-emotionalized theories of collective action. They stressed the strategic rationality of activists to counter classical notions of the irrationally emotional actor.[52] The cognitive practices of the allegedly rational actor moved to the foreground of psychology, political science, and sociology.

The current renaissance in the study of emotion across the disciplines now allows us to view moral/sex panics not as reflexes of the milling crowd but as social and political practices that produce public feelings. Although a complete review of this literature exceeds the scope of the present article, I briefly mention scholarship on the politics of emotions in sociological theories of social movements and in humanities research, particularly history and cultural studies.

In the introduction to their influential collection on emotions and social movements, *Passionate Politics*, the sociologists Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta observe that in these last several decades of backlash against earlier notions of the irrational crowd, "emotions have led a shadow existence" in the study of politics.[53] Recently, however, sociologists have drawn from symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and the cultural sociology of emotions to examine myriad connections among social movements, politics, and public feelings. For example, social movement theorists, particularly feminists, have demonstrated how feelings such as love and anger play a significant part in both the strategic actions and internal dynamics of movements.[54] In his call for a more comprehensive examination of feelings in protest movements, Jasper has shown how social movement concepts such as identity and frames have significant emotional dimensions.[55] A proliferation of edited volumes, case studies, and special journal issues have articulated new theoretical perspectives and added to our empirical evidence of the operations of emotions in politics.[56]

Research on emotion and politics burgeons in the humanities as well. Informed by social constructionist theory that posits emotion as variable across eras and cultures, historians are exploring how dynamics of emotional expression vary during specific periods. For example, in *American Cool*, Peter Stearns argues that emotional conventions in this country have evolved from a late-nineteenth-century valorization of emotional intensity into a contemporary ethos of emotional restraint (my own research belies this view). Meanwhile, literary theorists examine emotions in cultural politics as, for example, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's rich explorations of shame, and Lauren Berlant's analysis of rhetorics of affective persuasion in the intimate public sphere.[57] (Berlant is also a cofounder of Feel Tank Chicago, a group of activists, academics, and artists in creative and criti-

cal engagement with the public feelings of the U.S. political sphere.) Linda Kintz shows how the Right creates “resonance” for its politics among a diverse public through the skillful use of intimate emotions, and Ann Cvetkovich explores how affective experience shapes public culture.[58] The cultural theorist Sara Ahmed takes up many of the subjects in this article from the perspective of philosophy and cultural studies, while post-structuralist analysis has suggested how emotions could be deployed in the governance of the self, a notion with clear significance for moral/sex panics.[59] This work is significant for its attention to the affective dimension of political culture.

Social theory on emotions has advanced significantly since Le Bon wrote that the feelings of an individual in a crowd “are atavistic residuum of the instincts of the primitive man.”[60] However, early theorists’ convictions that collective feelings were irrational, residing outside the social, have had lingering influence, including in the moral/sex panic literatures. What follows draws on diverse social and cultural theories to propose alternative strategies for examining emotions, politics, and moral/sex panics. Unbraiding the twists of emotion in specific sex panics helps us ground transient feelings in local social contexts and recognize them as products of specific political strategies. We can explore how public feelings are evoked, in what ways they are expressed, whether and how resistance emerges in a competing public, how collective emotions fade, and under what circumstances they might backfire against those who seek to provoke them.

Dramaturgical Production of Transient Feelings

If it can be pleasurable to engage in moral panics, it can also be pleasurable to study them. I was, for several contented years, “the sociologist as voyeur”—a term Laud Humphreys coined in his enduring book Tearoom Trade *to convey the passionate pleasures of social research.[61] Yet one morning when I picked up the newspaper and saw that yet another nasty conflict over sex education was raging in a city to the north of me, I paused before packing the car. I couldn’t bear the idea of visiting one more virulent school board meeting. What’s this about? I wondered. Sex panics were thrilling—all that fighting, shoving, and screaming was at least as compelling as those tabloid television shows that were proliferating at that very mid-1990s moment. And yet, oddly, I realized I was bored. Initially I had viewed the fighting and vitriol as spontaneous eruptions of community disagreement. Then I began to discern striking similarities in both the form and content of local sex panics. It was as if there were a national script, rendering every unhappy city unhappy in precisely the same way. I had anticipated, and found, an eerie unifor-*

mity in activists' accounts of their beliefs and motivations.[62] *Both seasoned activists and newcomers repeated rhetoric right down to the exact same stories, sentences, and even phrases. Moreover, activists "borrowed" freely from each other, and many anti–sex education documents read like carbon copies. Often I recognized material as verbatim quotes from the documents of national Christian right-wing groups. At times, reading the local documents from widely diverse communities was like grading papers from a course in which every student had plagiarized from the same text, right down to the typos and bad grammar. I had been less alert to the affective dynamics of communities in conflict, with citizens expressing the same feelings in precisely the same ways. I began to feel as if I were in my very own Groundhog Day of field research, each emotional conflict seemingly repeating the one before it.*

Part of the cultural power of sex panics is that they are read as unmediated public expressions of the attitudes and feelings of individual Americans in response to controversial issues. But if, as I am arguing, sex panics are not simply indigenous uprisings, how can we interpret disagreements among citizens that become hostile, even violent, sex panics? There are different analytic approaches to the emotional intensity of moral/sex panics. As I discussed earlier, many sex panic researchers simply avoid the problem of collective volatility, presuming it to be irrational outrage. Others view emotions as perhaps the deepest, most natural expression of our core selves. "The public is outraged!" Headlines of this sort demand regulatory action.

The sociologists Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda suggest that we can empirically measure the proportionality or disproportionality of public anxiety.[63] Collective uprisings can be considered moral panics, they argue, only when public fears far exceed the putative actual harm posed by the condition or group. Social scientists, they argue, could empirically evaluate the (dis)proportionality of public feelings by measuring the degree of threat posed by erstwhile folk devils in any collective outburst.[64] Such evidence, supposedly, could reveal whether intense public feelings are justifiable. This approach has many problems. In addition to the ahistorical reification of emotion, it lands us in the quagmire of debating the reality or unreality of public feeling.

Rather than ignore public feelings, study them as static entities subject to empirical verification, or afford them the moral power of collective outrage, I suggest that they are transient social practices that are dramaturgically produced in a specific historical context. In this section, I foreground the transient feelings of sex panics as they appear in such local contexts as town meetings, school board sessions, legislative hearings, and public protests. I suggest that emotional

actors in local sex panics are not acting irrationally, outside the social. Nor are they merely expressing authentic outrage. I have shown elsewhere that these debates are often scripted; virtually identical dialogue is often employed not only in different communities but across decades.[65] The emotional arc of sex panics can be similarly routinized, as outrage, anger, and disgust are dramatized in public arenas.

As a sociological paradigm, dramaturgy explores the creation of meaning, emphasizing the situational context rather than the causes of individual and social behavior.[66] Dramaturgy posits social life as a series of performances, deploying metaphors of the theater—settings, cast, audience, staging, masks—to explain human action. Erving Goffman, who is considered the "godfather of dramaturgy" within sociology, concentrated on surfaces, appearances, and impressions rather than a fundamental, core self.[67] The self, he argued, is a performed character, "a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented."[68] Dramaturgy underscores that the self and identity are not stable and autonomous but inherently social, accomplished through interactive performance rather than preceding it.

By extension, I suggest that emotions are similarly dramaturgical. Although intense feelings appear seemingly "contagious" in mass settings, they are best viewed as scripted and situationally produced rather than instinctively aroused, authentic sentiments.[69] This perspective on emotions as social does not mean they are not "real." The dichotomy between real and scripted is a false one in its implication that there is emotion/thought/behavior that is original and outside culture. As I show below, a dramaturgical approach to the transient feelings of politics underscores the importance of space, discursive scripts, situational events, and social actors engaged in strategic performances.

The Scripts of Sex Panics

As early social theorists recognized, discourse brings a public into being. Sex panics can be understood as an emotional public brought into being by the feeling rules and expression norms of particular sexual discourses. Coined by the sociologist Arlie Hochschild, the term *feeling rules* denotes social guidelines for how individuals will produce and manage affect.[70] Like feeling rules, which govern the content of daily emotional life, expression or display norms govern emotional behavior.[71] These norms cue us to the appropriate range and intensity by which to communicate (and interpret) feelings. There is, for example, a palpable difference in tone, gesture, and volume between showing irritation and expressing rage. Feeling and expression norms constitute an important way in which emotions are not outside the social. Emotion is not an unmediated response but an arena of social performance entailing systems of meanings, norms, motivation, and social reaction.

Moreover, these social norms deeply affect the individual, in the ways that they shape embodied feelings.

Sex panic discourses authorize and legitimate particular ways of thinking and talking about sex in public.[72] In addition, feeling rules, Hochschild notes, are the "underside of ideology."[73] Likewise, I argue that both feeling and expression rules, the norms that define emotional tone and expectations of a situation, are interwoven through the language and symbols of discourses such as those of religious conservatives. Discourse not only authorizes and legitimates particular ways of thinking and talking but ways of feeling as well. This is, as the cultural theorist Raymond Williams said, "not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought."[74]

Discourse, rhetoric, and language have received widespread attention in the mainstream media since the 2004 presidential election. Linguists such as George Lakoff in his influential book *Don't Think of an Elephant!* and Geoffrey Nunberg in *Talking Right* argue that Republicans have captured the terms of public debate through powerful political frames and resonant language.[75] Social movement theorists have long defined frames as interpretive schemata that code issues and events into common understandings.

However, many sociologists have argued that the framing approach is limited in several ways, including its failure to encompass a theory of power in its analysis of different framing strategies employed by conservatives as compared with liberals. Framing theory, as many linguists and social movement theorists use it, is largely cognitive; it ignores the important emotional dimension in the success or failure of frames. Finally, the framing concept is fairly static, failing to account for the instability of discourses and language.[76] As I discuss later (and as is also implicit in the term *transient feelings*), this instability applies to the emotional dimensions of frames (and scripts) as well.

I use the term *sex panic scripts* to denote affectively rich ways of talking. Intended to evoke intense emotional responses, the scripts themselves are emotional. When they are successful, scripts represent, to paraphrase Williams, speech as felt. I am not suggesting a mechanistic or deterministic process, however. Discourse is unpredictable, and the plurality of discourses in operation during any particular conflict may trigger unexpected reactions and counterreactions. The notion of sex panic scripts is meant to suggest merely one way in which social factors can create emotional publics as part of panics.

Sex panic scripts stress danger and disease. They employ provocative language and symbols, scapegoating, and depravity narratives. Their striking similarity in both form and content, even across decades, is an important indication

of how national organizations can authorize specific ways of thinking and talking through their broader discourses. These national scripts are exported to the local level through printed resources, prominent speakers, and media such as evangelical television, radio, and now the Internet. In Goffmanesque fashion, scripts (along with the staging of public space) encourage the production of feelings such as outrage and fear in community debates. By the end of the century, conservative religious activists came to dominate the public conversation on sex education through discourse that triggered fierce, albeit transient, emotions.

Sex panic scripts rely heavily on tales about sexual groups or issues that use distortion, hyperbole, or outright fabrication. Two prominent depravity narratives circulated in the late 1960s in sex education battles. The first story was that a sex education teacher had had intercourse in front of the class as a pedagogical strategy. The second was that male students raped a teacher after they watched a sex-ed film in class. Other tales circulated to the effect that children were being encouraged to fondle each other, sexual intercourse would be taught in kindergarten, schools would install coed bathrooms with no partitions between stalls, and youth were being told about bestiality with donkeys and sheep.

A crucial element of sex panic scripts is evocative sexual language and imagery. Conservatives use strategic vocabularies and images to outrage and thereby mobilize a diverse constituency. For example, critics of a first-grade teacher's guide in New York City that mentioned lesbian and gay families dubbed it "homosexual/lesbian propaganda" that was "teaching sodomy to first graders." The allegation of "sodomy curriculum" conjured up images of six-year-olds learning about oral and anal sex. Some conservatives insisted on calling gay individuals "sodomites," characterized gay reform initiatives as "sex clubs" or "sodomy curricula," and described homosexuality as "sodomy," "anal sex," "deviant sex practices," "sodomythology," and "homosexology." In other sex education conflicts, opponents described curricular materials as "pornography."

Sex panic scripts operate as what Ahmed calls "sticky signs," or words that accumulate affective value.[77] Ahmed stresses that emotions do not reside within texts; rather, texts "work" emotionally through the "sticking" of signs to bodies. The language and images in sex panic scripts are cultural and historical, interacting with negative affects in the broader sexual culture. Sex panic scripts employ frank sexual language in a context intended to be emotionally evocative, in order to prompt fears of sexual transgression and perversion.

The emotions of sex education conflicts are intensified by conventions in the broader emotional culture, such as those concerning children and sexuality. Our modern ideal of an asexual, pure childhood requires shielding young peo-

ple from all sexual knowledge.[78] Since the earliest calls for sex education in the public schools at the turn of the twentieth century, the phantasm of the innocent child corrupted by sexual information has provoked controversy. Embedded in the iconic image of the sexually innocent child is the emotional expectation to feel uneasy, at best, when sexual speech in any way connects to childhood. Sex education opponents hope to produce anger, fear, and disgust among parents by tapping those affective expectations inherent in our cultural narrative about violating childhood innocence. Provocative speech about sexuality is used to scare parents with threats to their children and to mobilize parents into overt emotional displays opposing comprehensive sex education. Rather than being an instinctual reaction, the public expression of anger and intolerance is cultivated in sex education debates.

Scapegoating

Moral/sex panics depend on a folk devil, an issue or minority group that is scapegoated. Hence sex panic scripts demonize sexual groups or issues through association with highly stigmatized forms of sexuality. Warner notes that despite the contemporary public visibility of sexuality, "anyone who is associated with actual sex can be spectacularly demonized."[79] Indeed, strong language in sex panics is intended to scapegoat its folk devils. While these folk devils are often members of sexual minorities, sometimes they are simply individuals who have acquired a "courtesy stigma" through employment or political involvement with sexual issues.[80]

Sex educators have been vulnerable to such stigma for decades, through scripts that depict them as sexually troubled, out of control, or perverted. In the 1960s, hate mail flooded the office of a prominent sex education advocate, calling her "Mistress of the Devil" and "Misfit Prostitute of Hell."[81] More recently, conservatives have described sex educators as "the pornographers in the public school system."[82] In the 1990s, the national right-wing activist Judith Riesman claimed that sex educators tend to be pedophiles seeking access to young people.[83]

A scapegoating script usually entails lengthy lists of sexual terms, many of which are unfamiliar or denote uncommon sexual practices. As a political strategy, sexual demonization deploys deeply unpleasant sensory images in what William Miller calls "the idiom of disgust," a powerful tool in moral politics.[84] Disgust reinforces social boundaries over which citizens are worthy and acceptable and which are not. For example, Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition, said about Planned Parenthood, "It is teaching kids to fornicate, teaching people to

have adultery, teaching people to get involved in every kind of bestiality, homosexuality, lesbianism — everything that the Bible condemns."[85] These are the sorts of terms, or "sticky signs," that Ahmed suggests operate in an economy of disgust, sticking to certain bodies such that they become disgusting.[86]

Opponents of gay rights link gay sexuality to historically stigmatized sexual activities. Antigay videos, such as *The Gay Agenda* (released by a group called "The Report" in 1992), associated gay sexuality with eating and smearing feces, drinking and bathing in urine, and other fetishes. High-profile religious conservatives made heavy use of a sexual scapegoating script in response to landmark gay rights rulings. After the Supreme Court nullified sodomy laws in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), Justice Antonin Scalia warned that without such laws it would be impossible to uphold "state laws against bigamy, same-sex marriage, adult incest, prostitution, masturbation, adultery, fornication, bestiality, and obscenity." Admonitions about bestiality proliferated after the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court legalized gay marriage in that state. This rhetoric prompted the *Village Voice* journalist Richard Goldstein's article about "petaphilia" and the "man-dog marriage panic."[87] Goldstein claimed that a LexisNexis search turned up over a thousand citations of this rhetoric, a clear example of the proliferation of this sex panic script.

Emotional Space

Setting matters. Against the grain of a therapeutic culture of individualism, sociology argues for the power of context and situation. The emotions of sex panics do not primarily and originally reside within the individuals who constitute a public but are brought into being by the situation. Certain settings are more densely configured than others to produce emotions through particular webs of scripts, staging, actors. (Think, for example, of a funeral home.) Space itself is emotionally saturated, and, in turn, spatial elements transmit the feeling and expression rules that fuel sex panics. A buzz can be produced through spatial features such as police presence; the visibility of reporters or other media; picketers protesting inside or outside the event; a domineering, provocative chairperson; and arguments erupting in hallways or lobbies. Some of these elements, such as warning signs posted in a meeting place, might be thought of as props, in Goffman's dramaturgical sense. In this section, I discuss the emotional geography of local sex panics such as those unfolding in public meetings and legislative hearing rooms.[88]

Situational norms for emotional expression can be transmitted formally through institutional mechanisms. In her research on the Meese Commission,

Vance exposed the shrewd tactics by which antipornography officials in the Reagan administration created an emotional climate of shame and intimidation during the commission's public hearings. Commissioners humiliated witnesses who did not hew to an antipornography ideology and frequently projected sexually charged images of stigmatized behavior in the federal courthouse chambers, thereby fostering an atmosphere of anxious arousal. These strategies, Vance noted, produced "the ritual airing and affirmation of sexual shame in a public setting."[89] Individual resistance to these institutional mechanisms of shaming can be almost impossible, since any objection to the proceedings is itself stigmatized and dismissed. Known for her work on the power of pleasure for feminist politics, Vance correctly anticipated that the emotional atmosphere produced by right-wing "pleasures of looking" would become a political force with which to reckon.[90]

In other contexts, media and word of mouth can establish permission, even expectations for, conspicuous display of feelings. These might include attempts to dominate meetings, shouting, and shoving matches. Newspaper headlines and articles emphasize feelings of rage and hatred, often framed in the language of battle: "A Fight Rages . . ."; "Battlelines Drawn . . ."; "Amid the Uproar . . ." They not only sell newspapers but coach citizens in the emotional possibilities of town meetings: "Parents: Emotion Is Running High," "Parents Clash . . . ," "Outcry Grows. . . ." These articles spread the message that public meetings are polarized in irreconcilable hostilities. Nearby towns that have not even had conflicts often take preventive measures such as assembling a police presence. At one town meeting I attended, written warnings circled the auditorium: ALLOW SPEAKERS TO FINISH THEIR PRESENTATIONS; THIS MEETING IS NOT A DEBATE!; RAISE YOUR HAND AND STAY IN YOUR SEAT. The very presence of these structural deterrents sets an emotional tone. Telling people what is prohibited instructs them in what is possible.

Physical proximity facilitates the escalation of emotional intensity. Large numbers of people can establish the expectation of unrestrained emotional displays and demonstrations of fury. One school board president in Brooklyn said, "In the early meetings people were yelling 'Faggots out!' and stuff like that. We stopped that and tried to create a tone that didn't let any of that happen. But every once in a while people just went off the rails, and publicly — a thousand people in the audience."[91] In these large public settings, emotional acts and outbursts can seem like obligatory forms of civic engagement. He continued, "The thing I did understand is that you needed a mass to do that. The same people who were passionately and wildly furious in large group settings were different in smaller group settings." A school board member in another town concurred that people reacted

very differently in mass settings. She said, "People that I trusted and had good relationships with would at least engage me in dialogue and they never came out and verbally abused me except at public meetings where everybody was yelling and you couldn't figure out what they were calling you."[92] This is not the primitive contagion described by early-twentieth-century social theorists but a manifestation of transient feelings. Because emotions are interactive, different settings establish different affective norms.

Sex panic scripts, seemingly static when out of context, come alive in public settings. When conservatives at public demonstrations called a curriculum that mentions gay families "the sodomy curriculum," they recuperated historical meanings about the perversion of homosexuality while also tapping emotional expectations of fear or anger on the part of concerned parents. Speakers can use fiery rhetoric to inspire public performances of feeling, an important element of sex panic emotion work. The spectacle of a crowd in action, leaping to its collective feet, acts as a further emotional accelerant. One parent later told me how she was galvanized by a speaker: "I see this woman up there, and she gets up and in the middle of this just flips out. I mean, the woman, I don't think she went crazy but she was slamming her fists down and—do you remember how she was? She was 'Stand up if you would die for your children!' Wow, this is heavy. You know, I just thought, do we want to teach this or don't we?"[93] Never before involved with sex education, this mother became an activist right after the forum, showing how emotion can draw us into civic and political engagement.

Sex panics depend on repetition for their power. This feature makes them not simply performances (which might or might not be unique) but performative, that is, governed by the repetition of a prior set of authorizing norms while appearing to be eruptions outside the social.[94] The performativity of sex panic emotion underscores the productive power in repeating regulatory norms. The reproduction of highly charged sexual speech by critics who wish to censor it is a familiar tactic in sex-related political contests.[95] Sex education opponents commonly read explicit sexual materials aloud at public venues. One activist from the 1960s told me how, undaunted by imposed three-minute time limits, people would line up at the microphone and simply hand off the material to the next person like a baton in a relay race.[96] In the 1990s, one community school board chair told me she privately warned a sex education opponent four times that he couldn't read explicit sections of a book at school board meetings, so he called various media and read the text over the phone. Finally, at a public meeting he read a section on sexual foreplay and oral sex.[97]

The tactic of repeating the unspeakable is intended to produce public feel-

ings. Local sex panics depend on iterative public dramatizations deploying these scripts.[98] Sexual language and images are strategically repeated in order to trigger intense emotional displays of anger, fear, and disgust, *even if an audience is skeptical*. Regardless of whether the activists themselves or their audience believed these provocative scripts, they encourage citizens to express sexual fears for political purposes. This can foster the social process that earlier theorists described as "contagion." It should not be surprising that, indeed, scary rhetoric often scares, or hateful images evoke hatred through the stickiness of such signs. Alternatively, as I explain below, individuals perform the emotion work necessary to produce such feelings, however briefly. Moreover, sexually charged language and the screening of taboo images in an anomalous public setting create an atmosphere that Vance described as "excited repression," further heightening and complicating the collective mood.[99] This electricity can transmit and escalate affect in settings such as school board meetings.

I have argued that sex panics are temporal and spatial events in which intense feelings are evoked, produced, and homogenized into a seemingly unified public emotional reaction. Although they depend on situated conflict, however, they are not simply confined to physical space. Heightened media coverage that is characteristic of sex panics, and the "space-annihilating" feature of mass media, generate a broader sex panic climate. This generalized emotional combustibility, in circular fashion, may well then prompt situated conflicts such as demonstrations, informal arguments, even violence. And out of this hostile emotional climate arise police action, legislative hearings, and policy implementation.

The Affective Citizens of a Panic

Sex panics, such as those over sex education, are a form of citizenship politics. These struggles determine which sexualities will be recognized and valued, what will be spoken, and what remains excluded and silenced. Sex panics may buttress state regulatory power by implementing policy or legislation that restricts sexual rights. This has certainly been the case with comprehensive sexuality education, for which the space is shrinking in U.S. public schools.[100] Advocacy groups now argue that access to sexual knowledge is not simply an individual privilege or health concern but a fundamental element of citizenship. In 2001, for example, the National Coalition against Censorship opposed reauthorizing federal funding for abstinence-only programs, saying that they exercise government control over what students were allowed to "read, see, hear, think, and say."[101] These programs not only constrain teachers from speaking but also determine acceptable and

legitimate boundaries of speech. Sex panics are public arguments about sexual citizenship.

I have shown how the affective discourse of religious conservatives can amplify local debate into a sex panic. But how, specifically, is the individual drawn into this realm of citizenship politics? How does affective discourse bring into being the affective citizens of an emotional public? I have earlier noted a tendency in the sex panic literature to view heightened emotions as hysterical or irrational. This perspective would suggest that individuals are simply manipulated or dupes of the crowd mind. Conversely, when religious conservatives insist on the moral authenticity of collective outrage, it suggests that individuals respond to sex panic scripts because of deep religious and political predispositions. Unlike either of these perspectives, a dramaturgical approach allows us to see how historically specific and situational factors can produce outbursts of public feelings.

In the theater of a local moral/sex panic, we observe one specific formation of affective citizenship. I would suggest that some citizens at explosive public events produce affect that they decide is called for by the situation. They read the feeling and expression rules, and they temporarily produce public displays of emotion. They do so partly to conform to the feeling rules in discursive scripts and partly to conform to norms of emergent expression. At times, the emotions of moral/sex panics may have a cultural logic, serving as a form of social communication among multiple publics.

Individuals may escalate public emotion as a response to the feeling rules and expression rules that both circulate in the broader culture and are implicit in political discourses. When political activists evoke feelings, they do not tap into essences that are outside discourse and culture. Rather, they engage in strategic practices that will motivate individuals to engage in what Hochschild calls "emotion work"—the effort to produce "a desired feeling which is initially absent."[102] We engage in "emotion work," or emotion management, to produce feelings suitable to the situation.

This is not merely a mechanistic process in which feelings are faked. On the contrary, Hochschild identifies two levels of emotion management. "Surface acting" is the Goffmanesque monitoring of outward appearance such as gestures and facial expression. Additionally, Hochschild argues that adults have considerable capacity to manage their emotions, and in a complex process of microaction that she calls "deep acting," individuals can evoke or suppress internal feelings in order to correspond with emotional norms and conventions. Deep acting entails actively working to produce a normatively appropriate feeling or banish an errant one. Individuals

tap their knowledge about the feeling and expression rules in the broader emotional culture in order to accomplish the emotion work required in both surface and deep acting, and both entail some level of emotional embodiment.

The production and display of intense affect can serve as social communication in its own right. Emotional displays may become signifiers of identity, status, and beliefs. Moreover, individuals may engage in emotion work to communicate very different messages, reminding us that despite the power of norms, participants do not necessarily have identical experiences of the event. Whether through "surface" or "deep" acting, citizens who express fear or anger may be doing so in order to communicate political beliefs, sexual orientation, degree of religiosity, or even parental protectiveness. For example, one parent told me she began shouting at a public event in order to signal concern for her children, while an official who *failed* to protest publicly the inclusion of masturbation in a school curriculum told me that she had been made to "feel dirty" and neglectful as a parent.

This notion of emotion work for social communication is further evidence that the public feelings of sex panic are neither irrational nor core authentic expression. It suggests, rather, that audiences are themselves strategic actors, sometimes deploying emotional displays for their own purposes. The use of such displays for a specific presentation of self is another way in which feeling, both individual and collective, is profoundly social. This sort of emotion work bridges the personal and the political, and the public sphere of conflict and everyday citizenship.

I found surface acting to be prevalent in local sex education conflicts, during which citizens at times hewed to particular emotional norms solely for communication, regardless of whether they actually believed in the rhetoric. At one town meeting I attended, a speaker exhorted audience members to leap to their feet if they would be willing to die for their children. Virtually the entire audience immediately arose. Most were clapping, although a strong undercurrent of grumbling suggested surface acting on the part of some who were on their feet. By calling for the performance of public feeling to demonstrate parental caring, this speaker made it difficult for parents to remain seated. On these occasions, individuals, as social agents, produce and display feelings for social communication. Still, the situational pressures underscore a coercive dimension of these social and political demands to produce suitable feelings.

Indeed, Hochschild aptly notes that in emotion work, especially deep acting, we can grasp the reach of the social into the individual psyche. In both surface and deep acting, response to social norms may produce affect. In this

sense, Hochschild challenges characterizations of moral/sex panic emotion as hysterical, moblike behavior. If anything, Hochschild's concept of emotion work tends toward the cognitive, where individuals produce emotion in response to their reading of social norms.

So, what about the "vibe" of public feelings — the energy of collective affect and the physical sensations of the emotional body? In moral panics, how might we understand the corporeality of emotion, how emotional experience transforms "the embodied vehicle of conduct" and likewise permeates a broader emotional climate?[103] With some interesting intersections, scholars in both sociology and cultural studies are troubling the familiar boundaries between the biological and social, and natural and cultural, dimensions of emotion.[104] This work explores how emotion works on the body and how it seems to be transmitted among individuals in a group situation, reworking late-nineteenth-century ideas of the crowd mind and contagion.[105]

Ahmed argues that emotions like hate and disgust operate to reorganize or "re-form" both social and bodily space. The language of hate, as manifested, for example, through hate crime, transforms surfaces of bodies and their alignment with each other in physical space, as "the hated" is expelled from social proximity. Likewise, disgust operates through a relationship between bodies, or "the intercorporeality of the disgust encounter."[106] In her intriguing book *The Transmission of Affect*, the feminist theorist and humanities professor Teresa Brennan asks who has not, at least once, "walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere'?"[107] Brennan uses the term *transmission of affect* to describe a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect. Socially induced affect changes our bodies and in turn is transmitted in social groups. The emotions of a person or crowd can enter the body of another, either enhancing or depressing that individual's emotional energy. Inverting Hochschild, Brennan argues that affects evoke thoughts; individuals may become emotionally attuned, or "entrained," even though the particular meanings one attaches to those affects will vary. Much more specific than Ahmed in theorizing the mechanism of transmission, Brennan combines diverse social theories with neuroendocrinology to suggest that affective energy moves among humans through palpable chemical and electrical exchanges. In particular, she believes we "feel the atmosphere" through unconscious olfaction. Brennan applies this idea to conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome and attention deficit disorder.

Like Brennan, the sociologist Randall Collins explores embodied emotion and its entrainment in collectivities.[108] Collins argues, following Émile Durkheim and Goffman, that when human bodies share space, the result is body synchronization and rhythmic alignment. The energy of bodies attunes to the energy of

other bodies. Occasions with a high degree of emotional entrainment, along with a mutual focus of attention, constitute what he calls *interaction rituals*. Although it is impossible here to capture adequately Collins's expansive concept of interaction ritual, several aspects of his research suggest further areas of inquiry concerning moral panics. He argues, for example, that interaction rituals pump up emotional energy in individuals, which becomes a gratifying experience that individuals seek to replicate. These group experiences leave them with a heightened sense of the group's moral rightness and its need to adhere to its symbols and defend them. Collins's arguments place intense emotional embodiment at the heart of moral politics and panics.

These social and cultural theories help us consider the charged vibe of moral panics — the energetic and embodied quality of the escalation and spread of public feelings. While it might seem to evoke the organicity of Le Bon's swirling leaves and Trotter's herd instinct, contagion is rather a *social* process and a physical experience for Brennan and Collins. The transmission and escalation of emotional energy depend on a shared focus of attention and physical proximity. (Collins argues that powerful symbols keep individuals emotionally engaged in the absence of the social group, and I would suggest the same is true of discursive scripts.) Ahmed, however, rejects the contagion or transmission model embraced by Brennan. You might enter a room and feel the atmosphere, but you may readily discover that others in fact do *not* share those feelings. Emotion is not a property passed along to others, she argues. Despite their disagreements, these theorists expand the possibilities for social and cultural research on the emotional spark of sex panic and its embodiments. Moreover, they may help us think through the ways that sex panics fade.

Denouement

In one town I visited, the emotional strategies deployed by conservative activists intent on provoking a sex panic ultimately backfired on them. Religious conservatives on the school board enacted the most restrictive public school antigay speech initiative in the nation. It banned any instructional or counseling activity that had "the effect of encouraging or supporting homosexuality as a positive lifestyle alternative."[109] *Suddenly, the town was galvanized by discussion of homosexuality. One newspaper proclaimed, "Homosexuality remained foremost on the minds of residents on Tuesday's raucous School Board meeting, the first since the board approved a landmark policy last month banning any mention of homosexuality in a positive light."*[110] *Visibility and support for gay issues further increased on the*

night of the school board vote, when protesters held the city's first-ever gay rights rally in the school's parking lot. About 150 participants stood in peaceful protest outside the school, where speakers addressed them from the back of a pickup truck adorned with American flags.[111] *A local newspaper covering the rally concluded that "the angry debate over a policy that seeks to limit discussion of homosexuality will have the opposite effect, making students more interested than ever before in talking about it in school."*[112] *One teacher said the conservative Christian majority on the school board "took out the smoking gun, which is homosexuality, and it backfired on them because it enraged the town."*[113] *In the end, the anger that conservatives mobilized was directed back toward themselves.*

The sociologist Philip Jenkins wondered in his book *Moral Panic*, "Why has the public been so fickle with its fear?"[114] Although his question concerns the characteristically cyclical nature of moral panics, it might just as easily speak to the unpredictability of emotional politics. Moral panics end. And when people aren't provoked by emotional scripts, conservatives risk encountering ambivalence and indifference or even fostering the circumstances for public resistance wherein provocative speech casts suspicion on the speakers rather than the targets.

The concept of transient feelings situates public emotionality in social, temporal, and spatial contexts rather than in the irrationality or false consciousness of participants, suggesting that the same shifting mix of historical and situational factors that ignite a panic — scripts, setting, normative demands — can also extinguish it or enable resistance. Shifts in the broader emotional culture of sex — such as growing public acceptance of lesbian and gay rights and culture — may exhaust certain scripts. Like crying wolf, the same repetition that escalates affect in certain settings can also deaden the metaphors, images, and symbols of provocative discourse. Or, as Judith Butler suggests, with the repetition of injurious speech may come an erosion of prior associations, allowing for the possibility of reworking and resistance.[115] It remains to be seen, for example, how long it will be strategically effective for religious conservatives to employ their "petaphilia" script. Their long lists of allegedly frightening perversions may collapse through sheer banality, failing to bring into being an emotional public. Likewise, vagaries of physical setting shape moral panic. Speakers may be flat, the attention of the group wanders, a buzz never builds. Media coverage may diminish or, through lack of sensationalism, fail to outrage. Finally, citizens may simply move on, out of fatigue or when reassured that officials have vanquished the folk devil through new repressive policies.

I have discussed the role of political discourse in sex panics. Yet political

discourse is unpredictable and may, as the sociologist Marc Steinberg points out, take "a wolfish turn on the activists who rely upon it."[116] Likewise, the feeling rules bound up in discourse are similarly unruly. Ultimately, emotional appeals are no more under the control of activists than is the language of their scripts. This is not because emotions are irrational but because, like language and symbols, they are overdetermined. When the emotional demands of a political situation call for people to produce strong negative emotions, they may comply. But the target of those emotions is beyond the control of strategists.

The sociologist Josh Gamson found striking emotional fluidity in his analysis of sexual nonconformity and tabloid talk shows. When episodes featured virulently antigay, right-wing experts, the audiences turned their wrath on them and not the lesbian, gay, or bisexual guests. Such experts served as "hateful embodiments of intolerance."[117] However, in the experts' absence, the audiences direct hatred and anger toward sexual minorities. This dynamic is not unlike that of moral/sex panics; it shows that a collective emotional response is not a fixed expression of the aggregate of individual beliefs but is more situationally produced. This instability underscores that the emotions of moral/sex panics — hatred, anger, disgust — are not immutable mental states or discrete essences residing within individual bodies. Instead, hatred and fear might well be viewed as transient feelings — interactional processes and community events that are either mobilized or assuaged in specific historical and situated contexts.

The terms *moral panic* and *sex panic* ought not simply reference the volatility of certain political conflicts. If the terms are to be analytically and conceptually useful, they must be good to think with in ways other than the merely structural. Through social and cultural theories of emotion, moral/sex panic concepts can be strengthened. Without theorizing public feelings, we cannot fully understand the volatile cycle of panics, the tenacity of media coverage and its impacts, the pressures brought to bear on various institutional agents such as legislators or psychiatrists, or the putatively contradictory actions of individuals in collective situations.

I have argued that the concept of transient feelings encourages analytic questions about the production and operation of emotion under specific historical, social, and political conditions. Discursive scripts, scapegoating, and spatial features can be important elements in creating emotional publics in opposition to a putatively threatening folk devil. In these instances, discourse temporarily unites publics by transmitting scripts that guide the production of emotion. Emotion, transmitted through these affective elements of discourse, captures attention,

focuses mutual engagement, and fosters a sense of intense moral righteousness. The local moral/sex panic—with its settings, performances, scripts, and transient feelings—is a dramaturgical event with significant political impact.

Sex panics and moral panics are only one form of affective politics in the early twenty-first century. For example, political fear—what the political scientist Corey Robin calls "Fear, American Style"—has been a rationale for many policies in the United States after the 9/11 attacks.[118] The Bush administration uses color-coded "terror alerts" and emotionally provocative rhetoric to enlist individuals into affective citizenship, encouraging national performances of hatred, outrage, or fear. A view of the public as a hysterical mob, or constructions of these intense feelings as expressions of either irrationality or a core moral essence, masks political strategies and diverts attention from those who both foster and benefit from panics. The recognition that sex panics and other political emotions reside within social and discursive realms affords us considerably more space for social theory than a perspective that locates public feelings outside the social. Mapping transient feelings in space and time reveals the "panic" as contestation among emotional publics. We may see resistance, reversals, and backlashes by citizens both locally and nationally, suggesting that while moral regulation through panics is formidable, it is not inevitable or irrevocable. As such, sex panics are potentially open spaces for progressive political intervention.

Notes

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1. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972). The well-known first sentence reads, "Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic."
2. Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 434.

3. See Estelle Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920–1960," *Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 83–106; Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
4. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981), 297; Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 14–15.
5. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), xxxi.
6. Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *Michel Foucault, beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 238.
7. Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.
8. Stuart M. Hall (*Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* [London: Macmillan, 1978]) approached moral panics as discrete but interconnected eruptions in which the media operate to secure consensus and establish legitimacy for punitive state control. Simon Watney rejected the moral panic concept, however, arguing that it is unable to account for the generalized climate of sexual policing that comprises the "overhead narrative" of each distinct controversy about AIDS. Moreover, he argued that media representation is an ongoing rather than episodic location of ideological struggle and suggested that "we do not in fact witness the unfolding of discontinuous and discrete 'moral panics,' but rather the mobility of ideological confrontation across the entire field of public representations, and in particular those handling and evaluating the meanings of the human body, where rival and incompatible forces and values are involved in a ceaseless struggle to define supposedly universal 'human' truths." See Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 41–42.
9. Janice M. Irvine, *Talk about Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
10. Sociology and cultural studies were likely more comingled in the United Kingdom than in the United States. While sociology is far too capacious a discipline for making generalizations, I would venture that some contemporary points of difference among certain scholars in sociology and cultural studies might concern methodologies, the nature and quality of evidence, and the bases for making claims about the social world. Still, there are many points of overlap between cultural sociologists and cultural studies scholars. For example, there are many sociologists, myself included, who resonate with the cultural theorist Judith Halberstam's notion of a scavenger method-

ology that refuses strict disciplinary confines (*Female Masculinities* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998], 13).

11. I largely discuss moral panic and sex panic work done by historians and social scientists. For key examples of a cultural studies approach, see Angela McRobbie and Sarah L. Thornton, "Rethinking 'Moral Panic' for Multi-Mediated Social Worlds," *British Journal of Sociology* 46 (1995): 559–74; Arnold Hunt, "'Moral Panic' and Moral Language in the Media," *British Journal of Sociology* 48 (1997): 629–47 (note the UK sociology–cultural studies crossover in terms of publication venue); and Joanna Zylinsak, "Ethics and 'Moral Panics,'" in *The Ethics of Cultural Studies* (London: Continuum, 2005), 41–61.
12. Sara Ahmed's book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004) is an exception. Ahmed references the work of sociologists such as Émile Durkheim, Arlie Hochschild, and Jack Katz, along with anthropologists such as Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod. Still, her book resides largely in cultural studies. Conversely, the present article draws on cultural studies while residing mainly in sociological theory.
13. Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*; Rubin, "Thinking Sex"; Duggan and Hunter, *Sex Wars*; Janice M. Irvine, "Emotional Scripts of Sex Panics," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy: Journal of NSRC* 3 (2006): 82–94.
14. David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Neil Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic: A Journey to the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 2002); Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires"; Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
15. Johnson, *Lavender Scare*, 9.
16. Friedman, *Prurient Interests*.
17. Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic*.
18. Stuart M. Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978); McRobbie and Thornton, "Rethinking 'Moral Panic'"; Hunt, "'Moral Panic' and Moral Language in the Media."
19. Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic*, 85.
20. Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires"; Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*; Jenkins, *Moral Panic*; Irvine, "Emotional Scripts of Sex Panics."
21. James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 11.
22. Lisa Duggan, "Censorship in the Name of Feminism" and "Sex Panics," in Duggan and Hunter, *Sex Wars*, 30–42, 74–78.

23. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger.* Also, *Diary of a Conference on Sexuality* (New York: Barnard College Women's Center, 1982), 431–39.
24. See the following sources for the quotations in this sentence: Friedman, *Prurient Interests*, 32; Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic*, 191; Duggan and Hunter, *Sex Wars*, 78; Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic*, 87; Jenkins, *Moral Panic*, 185.
25. Vance does not use the sex panic framework in this discussion, but it remains an influential analysis of emotional strategies in volatile political conflicts. See Carole S. Vance, "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography," in *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, ed. Faye Ginsburg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Boston: Beacon, 1990), 118–34.
26. One notable exception is Elaine Showalter, who writes about "hysterical epidemics," of which her examples include chronic fatigue syndrome and Gulf war syndrome, and "hysterical movements," of which her examples include witch hunts and the recovered memory movement. Showalter sees hysterical epidemics and movements as universal and transhistorical. Contrary to my own argument, she largely situates hysteria as a psychological process through which "human beings convert feelings into symptoms when we are unable to speak," and she concludes that "if we can begin to understand, accept, pity, and forgive ourselves for the psychological dynamics of hysteria, perhaps we can begin to work together to break the crucible and avoid the coming hysterical plague." See Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 207.
27. See the following sources for the quotations in this paragraph: Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 297; Eric Rofes, "The Emerging Sex Panic Targeting Gay Men" (speech given at the Creating Change Conference, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, San Diego, November 16, 1997); Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, 3; Jenkins, *Moral Panic*, 62; Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires," 206; Jenkins, *Moral Panic*, 62.
28. Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda argue that although there may be disagreement, a moral panic is marked by consensus about folk devils. They note that "while there is often—usually—disagreement concerning definitions of a condition as a threat, a substantial segment of the public must see threat in that condition for the concern to qualify as a moral panic." See Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 35.
29. See Cohen, *Folk Devils*, 49–58.
30. For example, the degree of consensus that citizens publicly report about their attitudes toward sex education is striking, even in embattled communities. Public opinion polls since the sixties have consistently shown widespread support for sex education. A 2000 poll sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation indicated that by a large majority, parents want their children to have *more* classroom hours of sex education that covers "sensitive topics" than such programs currently do.

31. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15. For discussion of counterpublics, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
32. Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 52.
33. James M. Jasper, "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements," *Sociological Forum* 13 (1998): 397–424; Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
34. William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9.
35. Michel Foucault, "The History of Sexuality," interview with Lucette Finas, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 186.
36. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 20.
37. Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
38. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, a Study in Religious Sociology* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1915); Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.
39. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd, a Study of the Popular Mind* (London: Unwin, 1896), 10.
40. Robert Ezra Park, *The Crowd and the Public, and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 76.
41. Wilfred Trotter, *The Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (London: Unwin, 1916).
42. Park, *Crowd and the Public*, 49.
43. Herbert Blumer, "Collective Behavior," in *Principles of Sociology*, ed. A. M. Lee (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1951), 176.
44. Gabriel de Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, trans. Elsie Worthington Clews Parson (New York: Holt, 1903).
45. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
46. Quoted in Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 72.
47. Quoted in Ewen, *PR!* 72.
48. Blumer, "Collective Behavior"; Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 153.
49. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, 3rd ed., xxx.
50. Cohen does discuss crowds in *Folk Devils*, but his crowds are the milling youth and their audience. This is distinct from the social reaction, which is the "panic." Still,

like most theorists of collective behavior, Cohen had harked back to Le Bon in his examination of the crowds at Brighton. In contrast to Le Bon, however, Cohen saw emotional crowd behavior as meaningful and interactive. Whereas Le Bon had compared crowd sentiment to windswept grains of sand, Cohen described the affective "air of expectancy" as "a process of communication" in which the members of a crowd send and decode social cues (*Folk Devils*, 129). "A common emotional tone develops," he argued, through a collective process of interpretation (129). This happens not through the organic reaction whereby flowers turn en masse to seek the sun, the metaphor described by Park early in the century.

51. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, xxx.
52. Mayer Zald and John McCarthy, *Dynamics of Social Movements* (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishing, 1979); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978).
53. Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Why Emotions Matter," in Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, *Passionate Politics*, 1.
54. V. Taylor, "Watching for Vibes: Bringing Emotions into the Study of Feminist Organizations," in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 223–33.
55. James Jasper, "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements," *Sociological Forum* 13 (1998): 397–424.
56. Helena Flam and Debra King, *Emotions and Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 2005). See also the special issue on emotions and contentious politics in *Mobilization* 7, no. 2 (2002), guest edited by Ronald Aminzade and Doug McAdam.
57. Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Lauren G. Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
58. Linda Kintz, *Between Jesus and the Market: The Emotions That Matter in Right-Wing America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
59. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Deborah Lupton, *The Emotional Self: A Sociocultural Exploration* (London: SAGE, 1998).
60. Le Bon, *Crowd,* 22.
61. Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).
62. This experience is not uncommon for field research with social movements, and Kathleen Blee has also discussed this phenomenon in relation to her work with organized racist groups in the United States (*Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate*

Movement [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002]). Such homogenization of discussion about sexuality education is an important indication of how national organizations can authorize particular ways of thinking and talking through discourses. Additionally, I argue that these national discourses can also evoke routinized feelings and emotional expressions in local community debates.

63. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*.
64. Their four indices of measurement are exaggerated figures, fabricated figures, comparison to other harmful conditions, and changes over time.
65. Irvine, *Talk about Sex*.
66. I use the term *dramaturgy* in this article in its sociological sense, as a form of symbolic interactionism, rather than in its theatrical meaning as a term related to writing and representation of drama. I use the terms *performance* and *performativity* in ways that draw from both sociology and queer theory, perspectives that actually overlap in significant ways. In the 1990s, feminist and queer theorists posited the performative aspects of both gender and sexuality. The concept of performativity drew on diverse intellectual influences such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, and performance studies, while as Eve Sedgwick noted, it carried "the authority of two quite different discourses, that of theater on the one hand, of speech-act theory and deconstruction on the other." Theorists deployed the concept of performativity in myriad ways, for example, to challenge stable notions of identity, to examine how gender performativity produces (hetero)sexuality, and to interrogate the power and practices of speech acts such as coming out. While interpretive sociology of the 1960s and 1970s lacked this sophisticated theoretical power, the Meadian concept of the interactive self, along with dramaturgy and ethnomethodology, did support a body of sociological work that prefigured at least one dimension of the concept of performativity that emerged in the 1990s — it used metaphors of the theater to challenge both gender and sexual essentialism. Using the language of their time period, sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s argued that sexuality and gender were dialogic performances, dramatic roles, scripted dramas, displays, and accomplishments. Judith Butler rightly emphasizes that *performance* (a bounded act) cannot be conflated with *performativity* (a coercive and productive reiteration of norms). However, the work of sociologists such as Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman, and William Simon and John Gagnon much anticipates this later notion of performativity without using the term itself. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's 'The Art of the Novel,'" *GLQ* 1 (1993): 1–16; Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ* 1 (1993): 17–32; George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934); Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1967); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).
67. Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley, eds., "The Dramaturgical Perspective," in *Life as Theatre* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), 1.
68. Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 24.

69. No one comes to sex education debates devoid of prior experiences that might shape an emotional response. Nor, conversely, is the particular reaction of anyone involved in a community dialogue fixed or determined. Individual predispositions interact with contextual dynamics in a person's response to the emotional triggers that abound in local sex education debates. Predispositions might include factors such as strong political inclinations, personal experiences with sexual diversity, and openness toward sexual pluralism. Religious commitments can mediate emotional responses in important ways. Values can predispose an individual toward specific feelings, while the display of intense emotions can also be a means by which one demonstrates religious or political affiliation. Still, many people come to community debates without extreme predispositions. I am suggesting that the polarization of debates over the last decades stems from practices purposely intended to evoke passionate feelings.
70. Arlie R. Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (1979): 551–75.
71. Peggy Thoits, "The Sociology of Emotions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 317–42.
72. Irvine, *Talk about Sex*; Irvine, "Emotional Scripts of Sex Panics."
73. Hochschild, *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure*, 557.
74. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.
75. George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant!* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2004); Geoffrey Nunberg, *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times–Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left-Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006).
76. Marc Steinberg, "Tilting the Frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing from a Discursive Turn," *Theory and Society* 27, no. 6 (1988): 845–72.
77. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92.
78. Rubin, *Thinking Sex*; Berlant, *Queen of America Goes to Washington City*; Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998).
79. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 23.
80. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 147.
81. Gary Clabaugh, *Thunder on the Right: The Protestant Fundamentalists* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1974), 43.
82. Don Feder, "What's Wrong with Sex Education Anyway?" public forum sponsored by Newton Citizens for Public Education, Newton, MA, March 31, 1993.
83. Judith Riesman, "What's Wrong with Sex Education Anyway?"

84. Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, 9.
85. Robert Boston, *The Most Dangerous Man in America? Pat Robertson and the Rise of the Christian Coalition* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996).
86. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 82–100.
87. Richard Goldstein, "Petaphilia: The Great American Man-Dog Marriage Panic," *Village Voice*, March 23, 2004.
88. For new work in this area of space and emotion, see Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith, eds., *Emotional Geographies* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2005).
89. Vance, "Negotiating Sex and Gender," 129.
90. Vance does not use the sex panic framework in this discussion, but it remains an influential analysis of emotional strategies in volatile political conflicts. See Vance, "Negotiating Sex and Gender."
91. Local activist, interview with author, 1994.
92. Local activist, 1994.
93. Local activist, interview with author, 1993.
94. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity"; Butler, "Critically Queer"; Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
95. Marjorie Heins, *Sex, Sin, and Blasphemy: A Guide to America's Censorship Wars* (New York: New Press, 1993); Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
96. Local activist, interview with author, 1994.
97. Local activist, interview with author, 1990.
98. As Ahmed notes, signs become more affective the more they circulate (*Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 45).
99. Vance, "Negotiating Sex and Gender," 126.
100. While in 1988 only 2 percent of teachers taught abstinence as the *sole* means of pregnancy and disease prevention, 23 percent did so in 1999. A poll of schools in September 2000 indicated a sharp increase to 30 percent among instructors who taught abstinence only and did not provide information about condoms and other contraceptives. A study of public schools revealed that among all districts in the United States, 10 percent had a comprehensive sexuality education policy, 34 percent promoted abstinence as the preferred option for teenagers but allowed for discussion of contraception, and 23 percent required the sole promotion of abstinence. The researchers concluded that of all U.S. students who attended a public school including grades six and higher, only 9 percent were in districts with a comprehensive sexuality education policy. See Tina Hoff and Liberty Greene, *Sex Education in America: A Series of National Surveys of Students, Parents, Teachers, and Principals* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000).

101. National Coalition against Censorship, "Abstinence-Only Education: A Joint Statement," NCAC, New York, Winter 2000–2001. See also Gary Simson and Erika Sussman, "Keeping the Sex in Sex Education: The First Amendment's Religion Clauses and the Sex Education Debate," *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies* 9 (2000): 265–97. Thanks to Joan Bertin for a discussion of these issues.
102. Hochschild, *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure*, 561.
103. Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 407.
104. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 2004; Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991); Katz, *How Emotions Work*; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds., *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*. Sedgwick and Frank criticize the approach to emotions in much of contemporary cultural studies as an anti-essentialism that morphs into a highly moralistic, antibiologism. They criticize a simplistic binarization of concepts such as internal/external, natural/cultural, biological/social.
105. Although not directly relevant to this article, in *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies* (London: Palgrave, 2001), Lisa Blackman and Valerie Walkderdine challenge Le Bon and early notions of the crowd mind through analysis of media coverage of events such as the mourning following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.
106. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85.
107. Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*, 1.
108. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.
109. Merrimack School District, "Prohibition of Alternative Lifestyle Instruction," policy 6540, August 1995, New Hampshire.
110. Jeffrey Merritt, "Opponents of Gay Policy Plead with Board to Rescind Vote," *Nashua Telegraph*, September 6, 1995.
111. See Don Botsch, "Meanwhile in the Parking Lot," *Merrimack Village Crier*, August 22, 1995; and Jeffrey Merritt, "Enforcement of Gay Policy Stirs Concern," *Nashua Telegraph*, August 16, 1995.
112. Merritt, "Enforcement."
113. Local activist, interview with author, New Hampshire, July 29, 1996.
114. Jenkins, *Moral Panic*, 216.
115. Butler, *Excitable Speech*.
116. Steinberg, *Tilting the Frame*, 17.
117. Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 126.
118. Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 316.