



TRANSFORMATIONS  
*comparative study of social transformations*



CSST  
WORKING PAPERS  
The University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor

"Cultural Analysis and Moral  
Discourses: Episodes, Continuities,  
and Transformations"

Sonya Rose

CSST Working  
Paper #112

CRSO Working  
Paper #539

October 1996

Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses:  
Episodes, Continuities, and Transformations

Sonya O. Rose  
University of Michigan

During World War II women and teenage girls in Britain became the focus of anxious public attention. Newspaper reporters, social workers, clergymen, government officials, members of moral welfare and social purity organizations, and writers of letters to the editors of local newspapers across the country condemned women and girls for actively seeking out sexual adventures with soldiers. For example, the March 23, 1943 issue of the Daily Herald carried the headline, "'Good-Time' Girls of 14 are Running Wild."<sup>1</sup> Quoting Home Office sources, the report blamed a number of factors that were to be cited repeatedly in other articles and in letters to the editors of local newspapers. The decline in young girls' moral standards was due to their fathers being in uniform; their mothers in war work; the girls "could get any job they wanted" and earned too much money; and young girls simply could not resist "the romantic appeal of a uniform." A memorandum from the War Office that circulated among other government departments complained of the hordes of women who were "accosting" soldiers on London streets.<sup>2</sup> The Bishop of Norwich, echoing clergymen from far flung parishes, chastised women and girls in "town and village alike" for their "casual acquaintances" with soldiers. He warned, "we are in danger of our national character rotting at the root."<sup>3</sup>

This seemingly spontaneous outburst of pronouncements about sexual morality was certainly not a unique historical occurrence.

In World War I there was an outcry about the young girls who were seen hanging around military bases. They were depicted in the press as being unable to resist the allure of men in uniform, and like the girls and young women in World War II, they were accused of being sexual predators.<sup>4</sup> In the last decades of the nineteenth century, and continuing into the prewar period, Britain was the scene of rampant concern, fuelled by the print media, over white slavery, and before that over prostitution.<sup>5</sup> During the 1830s and 1840s public commentary periodically focused on working-class women's sexual morality which was believed to be endangered as a consequence of the "promiscuous mingling of the sexes" in factories and mines.

Analyzing such outbreaks or upsurges of publicly articulated apprehension about sexual morality raises a number of perplexing questions concerning how to think conceptually about what are seemingly recurrent historical events, about questions of cultural continuities and discontinuities, and about the nature of moral discourses. In this paper I examine how scholars using various forms of structuralism have approached such episodes, and explore the consequences of using structural analysis for considering issues of recurrence and continuity. In the final sections of the paper I discuss an alternative, non-structuralist approach to cultural analysis and suggest a redefinition of the concept of moral discourse.

An important line of sociological inquiry has viewed such an eruption of excessive concern over morality as occurred in World

War II Britain as an instance of "moral panic." The term "moral panic" originated with British sociologist Jock Young who coined it to refer to late 1960s British responses to drug use by youth.<sup>6</sup> It was used in an influential analysis by sociologist Stanley Cohen to depict the reactions by the public, the media, and agents of social control to the behavior of particular youth groups who emerged in mid-1960s Britain.<sup>7</sup> Cohen argued that the media distorted the events in which the youth groups were involved by repetitively producing stylized accounts of them, and the police responded by over-reacting, "amplifying" the deviancy of the youth. He suggested that moral panics provide occasions for those in power and their agents to extend their reach by elaborating technologies of social control.

Building on Cohen's analysis, Stuart Hall and his colleagues used the Gramscian concept of hegemony to analyze a mid 1970s "moral panic" over the perceived increase in crime by Afro-Caribbean males.<sup>8</sup> They argued that "moral panics" provide opportunities for the state to shape public perception that a crisis of social order and a breakdown in social control exists, thus justifying an expansion of its powers of control and coercion.

These analyses did not systematically take up the question of what makes such incidents episodic or repetitive. Both Cohen and the scholars associated with the Center for Cultural Studies suggested, however, that they were not unique historical events, but rather were particular instances of a more general phenomenon. To make sense of the repetitive character of such historical

events, they drew on the ideas of Kai Erikson who had argued, powerfully, that such outbreaks occurred when communities faced moral "boundary crises."<sup>9</sup>

Erikson used the term "crime wave" to refer to what others since have called "moral panic." A "crime wave" according to Erikson refers to "a rash of publicity, a moment of excitement and alarm, a feeling that something needs to be done," to combat what are perceived to be altered patterns of deviation by members of the community.<sup>10</sup> A crime wave is likely to occur "whenever a community is confronted by a significant relocation of boundaries... The occasion which triggers this boundary crisis may take several forms -- a realignment of power within the group, for example, or the appearance of new adversaries outside it..."<sup>11</sup> Implicit in Erikson's ideas is the Durkheimian proposition that moral beliefs and norms are integrative -- they bind people together and comprise the cultural glue of social order. "Troubled times" disturb the boundaries and Erikson, following Durkheim, conceptualizes crime waves or moral panics as ritual responses through which societal representatives reassert the moral order by focusing on those deviants who are perceived to be transgressing the boundary-defining values.

Erikson's ideas have been enormously influential. The Center for Cultural Studies group, for example, used the "troubling times" hypothesis and Durkheimian-inspired idea of boundary crisis and combined it with a Marxian approach in analyzing youth subcultures and reactions to them. Resistance Through Rituals, for example,

suggested that "movements which disturb a society's normative contours mark the inception of troubling times, especially for those sections of the population who have made an overwhelming commitment to continuation of the status quo."<sup>12</sup> The Birmingham group defined moral panic as a "spiral in which social groups who perceive their world and position as threatened identify a 'responsible enemy' and emerge as vociferous guardians of traditional values."<sup>13</sup> They maintained that in the 1970s youth became both a symptom and a scapegoat of social anxiety wrought by social change.<sup>14</sup>

Mary Douglas whose work, like Erikson's bears a Durkheimian cast, has been particularly influential to historians and sociologists attempting to make sense of why moral panics arise and why they recur. Order, according to Douglas, depends on the conceptual or categorical boundaries that social actors use in negotiating their lives. She maintains that culture "provides...some basic categories, a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered...it has authority, since each is induced to assent because of the assent of others."<sup>15</sup> Thus, she argues, "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience. ...By their means, symbolic patterns are worked out and publicly displayed. Within these patterns disparate elements are related and disparate experience is given meaning."<sup>16</sup> Pollutions, she argues, "are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order."<sup>17</sup> They are the symbolic expressions of social order and disorder. Thus disturbances within the social order are

dealt with, in part, symbolically and how they are dealt with is determined by a cultural logic -- a logic belonging to structural properties of the cultural system. Social objects come to be defined as polluting when the symbolic boundaries defining the sacred and pure are transgressed. Disorder then is experienced as dangerous, and pollution behavior "is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classification."<sup>18</sup>

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow, influenced by Douglas's structural approach, maintains that cultural analysis should focus on how symbols are related to one another in a formal structure.<sup>19</sup> Wuthnow asserts that culture creates order through the structured relationship among cultural symbols rather than via the meanings that people attribute to them. He defines a moral code as "a set of cultural elements that define the nature of commitment to a particular course of action."<sup>20</sup> Following Douglas, he argues that moral codes are composed of cultural elements or symbols that express the boundaries through which the social world is ordered and social interaction is possible. Boundaries or distinctions demarcate the categories through which the social world is ordered and social interaction is possible. "Uncertainty" occurs when these boundaries blur or shift leading to the likelihood of moral crises. A variety of different situations generate uncertainty and provide the conditions for the enactment of rituals like witch hunts, lynchings, and moral panics that dramatize the moral order.

Such ideas about boundary crises, symbolic order, and



troubled times, while appearing to explain why and when moral panics occur are problematic. First, and most obviously, they view history as composed of two distinct forms of time--troubled and untroubled. The scholars who use such approaches do not, however, indicate the criteria for distinguishing troubled and untroubled times independently of whether or not a moral panic occurs, nor do they identify the kinds of disordering events that are likely to lead to moral panic.

Second, while as I shall argue later, distinctions and boundaries are crucial components of cultural processes, Douglas and Wuthnow seem to suggest that symbolic boundaries either passively reflect or are instrumental by themselves in creating social order. Distinctions and boundaries, however, are actively created as people manipulate symbols.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, they create order not simply because they provide a cognitive map which everyone in a society just follows, but because they are the outcome of struggles over the power to define--of contests, in other words, over symbolic power.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, because Wuthnow's framework in particular stresses the relationship between symbols rather than what it is that is being symbolized, it cannot address the question of why some moral panics focus so obsessively on physical bodies as the symbolic representation of the social body and on sexuality as a source of social disorder. Structuralist thought isolates "from the content of experience a formal set of constitutive elements and relationships among the elements."<sup>23</sup> For structuralists like

Wuthnow, content is determined by form. But then why has the physical body so often been the site of social anxiety, and why has lack of sexual control been so recurrently imagined as symbolic of social decay?

In Natural Symbols Douglas argues that cultural structures and social relations merge with images of the body.<sup>24</sup> The physical body, its parts and its functions, symbolically represents the social body, and concerns about social order become translated into concerns about bodily control. Thus sexuality is a particularly compelling metaphor for social disorder.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has made use of Mary Douglas's ideas in her powerful analysis of the obsessive public concern over masturbation by young men in Jacksonian America.<sup>25</sup> Following Douglas, Smith Rosenberg maintains that the physical body simultaneously symbolizes the social body while its carnal desires threaten to disrupt it. "The biological body, transformed by the human mind into a cultural construct, undergoes a second metamorphosis, emerging as the symbolic representation of the social forces that created it."<sup>26</sup> Smith-Rosenberg writes

"order within the world of symbol and metaphor, by its nature, is invested with power to maintain itself and contain the forces of disorder. But disorder also possesses its own wild formless power. ...Formlessness will appear particularly threatening when a society, or specific groups within that society, experience rapid change -- a movement either toward less structure or to

a new and untried structure."<sup>27</sup>

She suggests that this was the case in the U.S. as pre-industrial commercial capitalism began to decline, and the hierarchically ordered and settled world of the 18th century crumbled. Significantly, the institutions such as apprenticeship that guided male youth in their transition to adulthood declined. Drawing upon both Victor Turner's ideas about liminality and Douglas's ideas about the dangers of marginal beings, Smith-Rosenberg suggests that "the dangers inherent in liminality and marginality intersected and fused," in Jacksonian youth.<sup>28</sup> Unapprenticed men living outside of the guidance of both their families and trusted economic institutions were perceived to be sexually threatening. Using Douglas's ideas about the links between the social body and the physical body, Smith-Rosenberg suggests that young men and their sexual practices became potent symbols of fearful social transformation in Jacksonian America and produced the purification ritual that took the shape of the Victorian male purity campaign.

As suggestive as such an analysis is for comprehending the symbolic logic that links social and physical bodies, it assumes as does Wuthnow, that events or event-sequences such as moral purity campaigns, witch-hunts, and moral panics are discrete occurrences whose similarities stem from the fact that they were produced by similar social conditions and cultural effects -- social transformations that destabilize cultural categories or boundaries. Yet, the moral discourses that are produced at different times have a long history. They appear to draw upon, recirculate, and

rearticulate cultural thematics and symbolic linkages that have earlier, recurring, and continuing incarnations.

Discourses about sexual purity, the disorderliness of women, and female sexual promiscuity, for example, have a very long history, indeed. As Simon Watney has noted in his discussion of the media's handling of the contemporary Aids crisis, "we do not in fact witness the unfolding of discontinuous and discrete 'moral panics'." Rather "in a ceaseless struggle to define supposedly universal 'human' truths" there are continuing ideological skirmishes about public representations generally, and over the nature and meanings of the human body and its needs and desires in particular.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Watney understands sexual moral panics as phases in on-going ideological struggles over the nature and meanings of the human body and its needs and desires. Furthermore, if Foucault's analysis has taught us anything, it has suggested that sexuality has been a pervasive subject of discourse in the modern era.<sup>30</sup> Various institutions and discursive practices have been involved both in producing and regulating it. It is useful, then, to think about upsurges of public commentary about sexuality and/or youth (or drugs, immigrants, crime, etc.) as episodic rather than as discrete events.

According to Webster's dictionary the literary meaning of the term "episode" is "a developed situation that is integral to but separable from a continuous narrative." An episode has the characteristic of being somewhat separate and distinctive, but yet is part of an on-going historical process. A structural analysis

like Wuthnow's, for example, cannot address the question of continuities in the content of moral discourses. For his purposes what is important is that regardless of their content they work in the same way -- to maintain moral boundaries. Rituals or expressive symbolic acts, whether they are witch hunts, televised moral events, or lynchings are produced by the same causal mechanisms. They are socially organized responses to uncertainty which results from strains in symbolic boundaries. According to Wuthnow's structural analysis of the culture of moral order, the similarity between a panic over sexuality in 1942 and one in 1915 is due to the fact that both are caused by the same underlying structural properties, rather than that they share similar preoccupations and are a part of the same on-going history. Yet, Geoffrey Pearson's discussion of the periodic bouts of public anxiety in Britain about working-class male adolescent "hooliganism," suggests that a "fixed vocabulary of complaint rumbles on through ... history almost without interruption."<sup>31</sup>

The work of Jeffrey Alexander focuses precisely on the continuities in vocabularies of moral discourse.<sup>32</sup> Alexander draws his inspiration explicitly and directly from "late Durkheimian" thought, but in contrast to Wuthnow, he focuses centrally on the issue of "meaning". Like Wuthnow and Smith-Rosenberg he builds on the work of Mary Douglas in his attention to semiotic processes. He argues that what makes culture a structuring set of practices that has an autonomous or independent effect on "action" is that it is composed of sets of symbolic antinomies that have their own

logic. But he maintains that these binary oppositions are not merely formal elements in a semiotic structure. Rather, they are particular antinomies that separate ideas and things into the sacred and profane, "oppositions that are highly charged both emotionally and morally."<sup>33</sup> Sacred symbols, he argues, are "not simply one side of an abstract dichotomy. They are the focus of heightened affect, reflecting the emotional desirability of achieving the good."<sup>34</sup> Alexander conceptualizes culture, in other words, as a system of symbolic codes that specify "the good and the evil."<sup>35</sup> By virtue of its internal semiotic structure, it has causal autonomy and the possibility of generalizing between different historical contexts. Codes affect action because they are internalized, and provide the basis for moral imperatives. They also "constitute publicly available resources against which the actions of particular individual actors are typified and held morally accountable."<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, discourses are institutionalized, and it is through their institutional settings that they affect the processes of practical social life.

Alexander and Smith argue, for example, that the discourse of civil society, the institutional realm that is centrally concerned with moral regulation, is constituted by a unique, historically durable set of cultural codes.<sup>37</sup> The discourse of civil society, "constitutes a general grammar from which historically specific traditions draw to create particular configurations of meanings, ideology and belief."<sup>38</sup> Specific understandings of American civil society are organized and elaborated according to this grammar.

During times of tension, unease, and crisis, they suggest, the structure becomes the key foundation of public debate. Alexander and Smith illustrate their approach by examining crises and scandals in American politics over a 200 year period. Their analysis suggests that presidential impeachment rhetoric and intense public debates over presidential authority are structured by a remarkably unchanging discourse of democratic liberty. It is historically durable, they argue, because "there is an underlying consensus as to the key symbolic patterns of American civic society." <sup>39</sup>

There is much to recommend Alexander's way of conceptualizing cultural analysis and the discourses of moral regulation. However, while Alexander and Smith appear to demonstrate continuity in the "discourse of civil society," they do not explain how and why it is so enduring except to say that there is an underlying consensus about its key symbolic patterns. This is not an explanation since they do not reveal how that underlying consensus was created and how it is sustained over time. Their argument that culture is an autonomous structure that is capable of creating effects gives rhetorical power to their argument because it both suggests that cultural processes have their own logic that makes the system or structure work, and the term "structure" itself creates a sense of solidity and consequence. But the idea that this structure is historically durable because there is such widespread consensus about it is neither directly demonstrated empirically nor is it explained theoretically.

Alexander and Smith maintain that meaning is created by a "formal logic of homology and opposition." Although they suggest that discourses play a concrete role in defining and regulating social practices and structures through their institutional settings, and that the formal symbols have referents that are "practical, potent, and `real'," these referents and institutions do not play a role in the creation of meaning. Alexander and Smith's structural model, then, disembods meanings from their historical and social contexts. It is as if the meanings associated with civil society move through time without ever being affected by the events that take place during it, or by the changing discursive contexts that mark the periods in which the discourse is being reappropriated.

In this model these abstract codes endure because they are part of a "deep structure".<sup>40</sup> They comprise what William Sewell Jr. calls, a "cultural schema" -- a set of conventions or scenarios for structuring action and allocating resources.<sup>41</sup> Cultural schemas have a virtual existence enabling them to be extended to new situations when necessary.<sup>42</sup> Deep cultural schema are present in a variety of different institutional spheres, practices, and discourses. They operate as taken-for-granted and relatively unconscious assumptions and procedures. Sewell sees language as the prime example of a deep structure which operates as a cultural schema.

According to this way of thinking, if a cultural form is repetitive and if it is also extensively deployed in numerous



institutional arenas, it is a deep structure. The cultural schema that links women's open expressions of sexuality with social disorder and moral decay is certainly one that appears in numerous different kinds of discourses, and it is extensively rearticulated in different times and places. Thus, by definition it is such a deep structure. This formulation, while appealing, because it seems to suggest that particular cultural forms endure because they are deep, in the end relies on circular reasoning. If a cultural form or practice endures, it is deep. It is deep because it is part of common sense and it is pervasive. It is part of common sense and pervasive because it is structured in a particular way. But if all cultural forms are structured by antinomies, why are some durable and others not? We are forced to read back from the observation that something endures to a theory of structure which deals with order rather than continuity.

The concrete problem that I am trying to explain with these theoretical reflections is this: why have women's open expressions of sexuality recurrently been linked in public discourse with images of societal moral decay and family breakdown? In the end a structural argument doesn't tell us how and why such issues become significant at particular times and places, nor does it give us any clue as to the particular meanings that are generated when this language of morality is expressed.

Alexander and Smith suggest, in fact, that a conjunctural approach is necessary to determine whether the consequence of social conflict or strain will be heightened public attention to

moral questions.<sup>43</sup> Such a conjunctural approach would take into account the social actors and institutional resources involved, as well as other social, political and cultural circumstances. As Alexander and Smith argue, "ritual, or 'social drama' is a contingent social development that can come into play only within a distinctive conjuncture..."<sup>44</sup>

While I think such a conjunctural approach is exactly the right way to go, we need to ask how the particular contexts in which women's sexuality becomes intensely important shapes the moral discourse and its meanings, and what consequence that shaping might have for how cultural formulations continue.<sup>45</sup> To answer such questions we need to abandon the idea that culture can be theorized as a fully autonomous system because it is structurally organized. We need a more flexible and multi-stranded approach to symbolizing, one that begins with the idea that cultural practices and patterned social practices are indelibly interwoven. To argue that cultural processes have effects that are not reducible to the non-semiotic aspects of social practices it is not necessary to claim that culture's internal structure is responsible for creating meaning independent of the relations in which the particular cultural processes are embedded.<sup>46</sup>

The ideas about language by Bakhtin (/Volosinov), the Gramscian concept of "articulation," and Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic power together provide ways to understand continuities and transformations in moral discourse that allow for a more historical view of how culture works than the kinds of

structuralist models so far considered. For Bakhtin, communicative interaction, or what has come to be known as dialogism, is central to understanding how language or symbolizing processes have effects in the world. A discourse is produced in response to other discourses, and it has meaning only in its relation to complex networks of meanings. Language, is always language in use rather than an abstract system of relations.<sup>47</sup> In Bakhtin's view, "verbal discourse is a social phenomenon--social throughout its entire range and in each and every one of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning."<sup>48</sup>

The very social nature of dialogism means that utterances (Bakhtin's term for variable units of language) are history-laden - - are always part of an on-going historical process. As Holquist has suggested, an utterance is never in itself originary. Rather it is always an answer; it is conditioned by and it in turn qualifies the prior utterance.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that discourse is produced in an unending process of recuperation and transformation. As Bakhtin wrote

The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past ... will always be renewed in later dialogue ... forgotten meanings ... will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival."<sup>50</sup>

Yet, each recuperation creates something that was not there before--its meanings are the product of a particular conjuncture.<sup>51</sup> Discourses are embedded in contemporaneous networks of meanings and social relationships, with their own histories of transformation, that come together in a particular conjuncture and are thereby mutually reconfigured. Thus while particular cultural themes may be repeated, each repetition has new resonances and produces new meanings and effects.

Although Foucault's ideas have primarily been associated with the notion of rupture, in fact, his method of archaeology suggests a very similar process of reappropriation and transformation. Foucault does not dispense with the idea of continuity per se. Rather, he is concerned to establish the conditions of existence for discursive formations -- regularities that organize different kinds of statements, concepts, and themes.<sup>52</sup> Discursive formations may incorporate themes that have a long history of use, but it is their local configuration that is the object of analysis. For Foucault an analysis of a discursive formation deals with statements "in the density of the accumulation in which they are caught up and which nevertheless they never cease to modify, to disturb, to overthrow, and sometimes to destroy."<sup>53</sup> He suggests that when one discursive formulation is substituted for another, "it is not that all objects, concepts and theoretical choices disappear." Rather, archaeology examines the new rules of formation to "describe and analyse phenomena of continuity, return, and repetition."<sup>54</sup> Foucault's archaeological method makes

repetitions and the "uninterrupted" problems for analysis. He writes, "for archaeology, the identical and the continuous are not what must be found at the end of the analysis; they figure in the element of a discursive practice; they too are governed by the rules of formation of positivities."<sup>55</sup>

In her recent "post-colonial" reading of Foucault's ideas about race, Ann Stoler argues that Foucault does not depict different racial discourses as totally distinct; "he identifies not the end of one discourse and the emergence of another, but rather the refolded surfaces that join the two."<sup>56</sup> Stoler uses the term "fold" to "identify the recursive, recuperative power of discourse itself, in a way that highlights how new elements (new planes ) in a prior discourse may surface and take on altered significance as they are repositioned in relation to a new discourse with which they mesh." <sup>57</sup> Stoler's analysis thus highlights a central feature of Foucaultian methodology -- what she identifies as the tension between "rupture and reinscription in the discourse of history and the implications of practices predicated on it."<sup>58</sup>

While Foucault and Bakhtin share a common point of view about continuity and transformation although from quite different perspectives, Bakhtin's ideas allow for a more historically dynamic understanding of the instability of discursive forms and meanings than do Foucault's. For Bakhtin, transformation occurs not only because of a dialogical process, but because this dialogical process takes place in a heterogeneous social world in which people elaborate different discourses depending upon their social location

and the dialogical histories in which they have participated. Bakhtin uses the term "heteroglossia" to conceive of "the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages."<sup>59</sup> Signs also are multi-accentual so that the same words can take on different values and meanings.<sup>60</sup> These ideas suggest that discourses are elaborated within and are a constituent of contested terrain.<sup>61</sup>

But how then does a particular discourse become dominant -- and how are meanings fixed, however temporarily? How is it possible for discourses to produce systematic effects? This is where the Gramscian notion of "articulation," is particularly useful. "Articulation" refers to the complex "set of historical practices by which we struggle to produce identity or structural unity out of, on top of, complexity, difference, contradiction."<sup>62</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, for example, argue that "any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of difference, to construct a center."<sup>63</sup> Moral discourses, therefore, specify a single standard of virtue, while denigrating and/or marginalizing alternative practices.

Morality, in other words, is elaborated in a struggle over symbolic power which is ultimately the power to define social categories and groups and to establish the legitimate vision of the social world.<sup>64</sup> As Pierre Bourdieu suggests, the power that any set of social actors has to define categories and identify groups depends on social authority acquired in previous struggles, and is, therefore, the result of a long process of institutionalization.<sup>65</sup> In contemporary society, the media have been primary institutional

arenas in which moral authority is established and contested.

The perspective that I have been elaborating here recognizes that there are always diverse beliefs and practices represented in a community; always different standards of virtue jostling for dominance, and a continuing array of behavioral practices that resist and unsettle those standards. Moral discourse intensifies, I want to suggest, when establishing unity or identity has become especially important to a community.

Sociologists have generally thought about moral discourses in two ways: as statements of the sacred rules that dictate action, and as the evaluative and normative categories that organize perception and action.<sup>66</sup> In a fruitful shift of emphasis, philosopher Richard Rorty, building on the studies of Michael Oakeshott and Wilfrid Sellars, suggests that morality is "the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language."<sup>67</sup> This shift of emphasis focuses attention on the connections between morality and collective identities. Morality, Rorty proposes, is a matter of "we-intentions," and the core meaning of "immoral action" is "the sort of thing we don't do."

An immoral action is, on this account, the sort of thing which, if done at all, is done only by animals, or by people of other families, tribes, cultures, or historical epochs. If done by one of us, or if done repeatedly by one of us, that person ceases to be one of us."<sup>68</sup>

This way of thinking about morality suggests that periods in which there is an outpouring of moral discourse are those in which the

issue of community identity has become especially significant; they are times when questions about community or national solidarity and homogeneity become highly charged.<sup>69</sup> Moral discourse becomes especially intensified, I am suggesting, when perceptions of difference and diversity are particularly problematic. War is just such a time.

War exaggerates the significance of the nation as a source and object of identity. War is an especially critical juncture as people in a nation-state are called upon to unify in defense of their supposedly common "way of life." During wartime propagandists manipulate patriotic sentiment to stimulate loyalty and sacrifice and focus public attention on questions such as who "we" are and what it is that "we" stand for. It is a time when physical bodies and the social body--the national body--are threatened on a variety of fronts. War, especially total war, transforms the everyday in unparalleled ways as women and men face various new and untested opportunities with unforeseen consequences. Thus, war's liberating potential threatens the very unity that the nation is imagined to represent. Under such conditions, and in a society with a long history of constructing female sexuality and the pursuit of pleasure as dangerous, women who were perceived to be actively seeking out sexual adventures might well be defined as subversive. Yet specifically how community or national identity becomes linked to women's sexual morality, and how these linkages are represented are a product of the particular conjuncture -- of the specific contexts in which



these identities are articulated.

While war is likely to provoke heightened attention to questions of group or national identity, it is not the only social condition that might do this. Periods of large-scale immigration and urbanization, as well as times when there is widespread social and political unrest, may also make the question of "who are we" extraordinarily salient. Group and national identities are continually being reimagined, and moral discourses are central to this process.

I am suggesting, then, that moral discourses are crucial components of imagined unities. As Angela McRobbie has written

The kind of social issues and political debates which were once included on the agendas of moral panic theorists as sites of social anxiety, and even of crisis, could now be redefined as part of an endless debate about who 'we' are and about what 'our' national culture is.<sup>70</sup>

In her analysis of moral reform rhetoric, Mariana Valverde similarly argues that social purity was central to nation-building and state formation in late nineteenth-century English Canada.<sup>71</sup> She suggests, furthermore, that social purity rhetoric was crucial in "the constitution of certain practice-based social subjectivities."<sup>72</sup> Valverde concludes that such an approach links the study of moral reform to larger theoretical goals "best envisaged as a process oriented (not structure-based) model which begins with a reflection on how specific social groups are organized in social praxis, and on the role of systems of meaning

in this practical organization."<sup>73</sup>

Defining moral discourses as statements of group identity suggests that theories of the cultural formation of (group or national) identities may offer insights for analyzing "moral panics". While such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, I want to suggest here possible ways of thinking about this. In her recent analysis of new right discourse on race and sexuality, Anna Marie Smith makes insightful use of Derrida's notion of the logic of supplementarity and ideas from psychoanalytic theory.<sup>74</sup> Smith writes about the Thatcherite campaign against homosexuality,

...homophobic discourse is organized not around a fear of otherness but around an obsession with otherness. This obsession is structured symptomatically: insofar as homophobic representations condensed a whole range of anxieties onto the queerness signifier, queerness began to function as a supplement to Thatcherite discourse. Queerness became one of the enemy elements which supported the phantasmatic construction of the family as the antagonism-free centre of the British nation.<sup>75</sup>

In deconstruction, identity is only possible by its contrast with what it is not. And since the "what it is not" is essential to identity, identity is never unitary--it always depends on the margins or what is excluded from it. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory suggests additionally that the obsession with the excluded or marginal is a product of the impossible desire for wholeness or unity. As Smith writes about the discourses of race and

homophobia, "the exclusion of the demon symptom figures produces the order, the consensus, the sense of common purpose which is supposed to have been there all along. The exclusion of dangerous difference is necessary for the creation of a sense of unity ('our' nation, 'our' shared norm), yet the inclusion of difference is a necessary support for that exclusion."<sup>76</sup> The production of identity through a repudiation of the "low", has also been explored using a quite different theoretical approach by Stallybrass and White who suggest, following Barbara Babcock, that "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central."<sup>77</sup>

But does this kind of analysis lead us right back to a formal analysis that theorizes cultural process as fully autonomous from patterned social relations and practices, a theoretical position that I have argued places cultural forms outside of history? I think not. Rather the particular targets for "outsider status" are selected and constructed through complex social and cultural processes. Additionally the very language through which they are represented as sources of subversion and disorder is rooted in a "tradition" of representational practices. As Smith suggests, such discourses "should be located genealogically, within the long tradition of similar representations of subversive social elements and popular anxieties about prostitution, pornography, abortion rights, the provision of contraception to persons under the age of consent, sex education, various diseases, communist infiltration, immigrant populations, crime 'waves', drug 'crazes', 'hooligan' youths and so on."<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the specific discourse about

sexuality as a source of disorder and its relation to group or national identity has its own historical specificities and resonances. It grows out of what Foucault has identified as the modern discursive construction of sexuality as a form of power/knowledge, and is related to the emphasis on sexual self-control in the creation of the bourgeois self.<sup>79</sup> The deployment of sexuality in the construction of group and national identity, tells a familiar story, in other words, because it has been told before. And each retelling, while having a unique historical resonance, still repeats the theme that unruly sexuality, however it may be defined, threatens social stability. As Ken Plummer has suggested, "stories once told become more tellable, more likely to assume an autonomy of their own, irrespective of their original experience. ...Their significance may lie in the repeated telling of the story ...".<sup>80</sup> Yet each retelling in some way has the potential to modify the one that preceded it.

## NOTES

1. Daily Herald, March 23, 1943, p. 5.
2. "Accosting in City Streets," memo written by Colonel R. W. Rowe of the War Office, February 19, 1943. FO371/34214 at the Public Records Office, Kew.
3. Norfolk News and Weekly Press, October 9, 1943, p. 4.
4. Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War," Journal of Contemporary History 29 (1994): 325-347, and Susan R. Grayzel, "Women, Culture, and Modern War: Gender and Identity in Britain and France, 1914-1918," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1993.
5. Judith R. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991); Donna J. Guy, "'White Slavery,' Citizenship and Nationality in Argentina," in Nationalisms & Sexualities edited by Andrew Parker, et al (New York and London: Routledge, 1992): 201-217. On Australia in World War II see Kate Darian-Smith, On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime 1939-45 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990); Rosemary Campbell, Heroes and Lovers: A Question of National Identity (Sidney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); Marilyn Lake, "Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II," in Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century edited by Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 60-80; Kay Saunders, War on the Homefront: State Intervention in Queensland, 1938-48 (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993).
6. Jock Young, The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Use (London: Paladin, 1971).
7. Stanley Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Martin Robinson, 1980).
8. Hall, Stuart, Critcher, Charles and Jefferson, Tony, Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order (London: Macmillan, 1978).
9. Kai Erikson, Wayward Puritans (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1966).
10. Erikson, p. 69.
11. Kai Erikson, p.68.

12. John Clark et al, "Subcultures, Cultures, and Class," in Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 71.
13. Ibid, p. 72.
14. Geoffrey Pearson who documented recurring fears about youth and lawlessness throughout British history suggests that these fears are actually expressions of more general social apprehensions, particularly those accompanying the advance of democratization. See Hooligans: A Study of Respectable Fears (London, 1983).
15. Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger (New York: Routledge, 1966), p.39.
16. Douglas, Purity and Danger, p.3.
17. Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, p.3.
18. Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, p. 36.
19. Robert Wuthnow, Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).
20. Wuthnow, Meaning and Moral Order, p. 66.
21. For a similar critique see Nicola Biesel, "Constructing a Shifting Moral Boundary: Literature and Obscenity in Nineteenth-Century America," in Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality edited by Michele Lamont and Marcel Fournier, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 107.
22. "Symbolic power" is Pierre Bourdieu's term. See his "Social Space and Symbolic Power," Sociological Theory 7 (Spring 1989): 14-25.
23. Ino Rossi, "Relational Structuralism as an Alternative to the Structural and Interpretive Paradigms of Empiricist Orientation," in Structural Sociology edited by Ino Rossi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 5.
24. Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).
25. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity," in Culture and Society: contemporary Debates, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 160-170.

26. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct, Visions of Gender in Victorian America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 48.
27. Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol," p. 164.
28. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol," p. 165.
29. Simon Watney, Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 42.
30. Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, Vol I, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).
31. Geoffrey Pearson, Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears, p. 230.
32. See Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Analytic Debates: Understanding the Relative Autonomy of Culture," in Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven C. Seidman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Culture and Political Crisis: 'Watergate' and Durkheimian Sociology," in Durkheimian Sociology: cultural Studies, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies," Theory and Society 22 (1993).
33. Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Analytic Debates," p. 18.
34. Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Culture and Political Crisis," p.217.
35. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, p. 196.
36. Alexander and Smith, p. 196.
37. Ibid, p.161.
38. Ibid, p. 166.
39. Ibid, p. 165.
40. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "The Deep Structure of Moral Categories," in Structural Sociology edited by Ino Rossi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 66-98.
41. William H. Sewell, Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation," American Journal of Sociology 98 (July 1992): 1-29, esp. pp 22-23.

42. For a critique of the notion that culture is virtual, see Sharon Hays, "Structure and Agency and the Sticky Problem of Culture," Sociological Theory 12 (1994), p.66.

43. Alexander and Smith, p. 159.

44. Alexander and Smith, p. 159.

45. For an excellent conjunctural and sociological approach to the construction of adolescent women's sexuality as a social problem, see Constance A. Nathanson, Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Women's Adolescence (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

46. This is, in part, what Ann Kane suggests in her discussion of the uses of cultural analysis in historical studies. But, Kane argues that culture should be conceptualized as fully autonomous at the analytical level, but relatively autonomous at the empirical level. She insists that the theoretical autonomy of culture is necessary in order to show that culture is independent of social structure and has its own effects. See Ann Kane, "Cultural Analysis in Historical Sociology: The Analytic and Concrete Forms of the Autonomy of Culture," Sociological Theory 9 (Spring 1991): 53-69.

47. See especially, "Discourse in the Novel," in The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). For a powerful statement of the social nature of individual thought, and the inextricably social nature of the sign, see V. N. Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). For expositions of Bakhtin's ideas about dialogism, see Michael Holquist, Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); and Thomas Kent, "Hermeneutics and Genre: Bakhtin and the Problem of Communicative Interaction," in The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture edited by David R. Hiley, James F. Bohman, and Richard Shusterman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). For creative uses of Bakhtin's ideas about dialogism in historical sociology of class formation, see Marc W. Steinberg, references.

48. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," p. 259.

49. Michael Holquist, Dialogism, p. 60.

50. Quoted by Michael Holquist, Dialogism, p. 39.

51. The utterance, as Ken Hirsckop quotes Bakhtin, "always creates something that had not been before, that is always new and nonreiterative...". In Ken Kirschkop, "Introduction: Bakhtin and Cultural Theory," in Ken Kirschkop and David Shepherd, Bakhtin and



Cultural Theory (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 11.

52. Michel Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, check page reference -- p. 28?

53. Foucault, Archaeology, p. 125.

54. Foucault, Archaeology, p. 173.

55. Foucault, Archaeology, p. 173.

56. Ann Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire, Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p.72.

57. Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire, note 19, page 72.

58. Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire, p.82

59. Holquist, Dialogism, p. 69.

60. The term, "multi-accentual" comes from V.N. Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973). Check

61. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has used Bakhtin's perspective in her analysis of the various rhetorics about uncontrollable male sexuality, abortion, and the New Woman in the U.S. in the last half of the nineteenth century. See, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Body Politic," in Coming to Terms: Feminist theory and Politics (New York: Routledge, 1989): 101-121.

62. Lawrence Grossberg, "History, Politics and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies," Journal of Communication Inquiry 10 (1986), p. 63.

63. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (London: Verso, 1985), p. 112. Stuart Hall identifies this kind of discursive practice as an ideological practice. For an enlightening discussion of how to think about the similarities and differences between discourse and ideology see Trevor Purvis and Allan Hunt, "Discourse....Ideology," British Journal of Sociology 44 (Sept. 1993): 473-99.

64. Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power." p. 23.

65. Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," p. 23.

66. See for example, Arthur Stinchcombe, "The Deep Structure of Moral Categories," pp. 68-69.

67. Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 59. Rorty elaborates on Michael Oakeshott's idea that "A morality is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules, but a vernacular language. ... What has to be learned in a moral education is not a theorem such as that good conduct is acting fairly or being charitable, nor is it a rule such as 'always tell the truth,' but how to speak the language intelligently." Michael Oakeshott, Of Human Conduct (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp 78-79, as quoted by Rorty, p. 58.
68. Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, p. 59.
69. Nicola Beisel, in her study of the politics of censorship, suggests something similar when she argues that "cultural power" of moral appeals, stems in part, from how they "construct group and individual identities." See "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, The Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude," American Sociological Review 58 (April 1993), p. 148.
70. Angela McRobbie, Postmodernism and Popular Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 216.
71. Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).
72. Mariana Valverde, "The Rhetoric of Reform: Tropes and the Moral Subject," International Journal of the Sociology of Law 18 (1990), p. 61.
73. Mariana Valverde, "The Rhetoric of Reform," p.63.
74. Anna Marie Smith, New Right Discourse on Race & Sexuality, Britain 1968-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
75. Anna Marie Smith, New Right Discourse, p. .
76. Smith, New Right Discourse, p. 225.
77. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics & Poetic of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.20. The quote is from Barbara Babcock, The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p.32.
78. Smith, New Right Discourse, p. 199.
79. For a provocative analysis of the significance of sexual control to nationalism, see George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

80. Ken Plummer, Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change, and Social Worlds (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.41.

