

Menace or Moral Panic?

**Methamphetamine and the
New Zealand Press**

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Certificate of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements”.

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Abstract

This thesis, presented as a collection of articles, journalistic in its tone, is titled “Menace or Moral Panic? Methamphetamine and the New Zealand Press”. Within the collection, evidence and background information is presented that supports a claim that a moral panic fitting Stanley Cohen’s classic model occurred between 1999 and 2004.

This moral panic was also identified using Stuart Hall’s definition of a moral panic outlined in his mugging study published in 1978 as well as the more contemporary model of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). Jock Young’s theory of The Deviance Amplification Spiral is also addressed and can be applied to this collection when considering the close ‘symbiotic’ relationship that our press here in New Zealand have with our police force. In looking at this particular subject it is vital that we look at how drugs and drug use play a role in the media. Also as part of the backgrounding for this collection it was of critical importance to find whether a moral panic happened anywhere else in the world in relation to methamphetamine. Two previous moral panics about methamphetamine are featured in this collection as part of a case study presented in “Ancient Anecdotes meet Modernity: Drugs and the Rise of Methamphetamine” in which between the years of 1989 and 1996 America passed through two moral panics brought on to a considerable extent by a mixture of media hype and political opportunism. By including a foreign case study we can begin to see how the New Zealand methamphetamine situation had similarities to the American example, making identification of New Zealand’s moral panic more definitive. Giving verification to the claims, a lengthy analysis of twenty-five samples from the New Zealand press is also featured in this collection. By looking at the way the stories from

the samples developed identification of the various stages of the moral panic become more visible. The last article in this collection investigates, using expert interviews, if there is enough evidence to support the claim that methamphetamine may be a menace to New Zealand society, but that the extent of that menace may be exaggerated by a moral panic brought on by our media and fuelled by our police force.

Introduction:

Around the time that the idea for this thesis came about, news reports about methamphetamine were appearing in the New Zealand media. Not only was it being given attention by news media outlets on television, it was also making headlines in the print media.

This thesis is an in-depth look at just how the press in this country reported on this drug (more commonly known as 'p') and whether or not it was reported on responsibly by our print journalists. The main question it asks is: Did the New Zealand press cause a moral panic about methamphetamine? But the articles also ask whether anxiousness and fear about this drug were unnecessarily being felt in our society? A question that relates to New Zealand is: Are we just adopting America's drug culture? A further question of, if it happens there, it will inevitably happen here. In order to answer such questions and reach conclusions extensive research is essential. The findings are presented in a journalistic mode as a collection of articles possibly for publication as a series in magazines such as *North and South* or *Metro*.

The first article 'Drugs and the media' briefly looks at the circumstances in which drugs appear in the mass media and the ways that those who take drugs are portrayed. It also addresses Jock Young's theories about how the media can create a relationship with the police and the judiciary and how these institutions work with each other. Also the theory of the 'deviance amplification spiral' is taken into account, that is, when the media's reportage on a certain subject or group of people sparks a reaction

that creates a 'heightening' of behaviour which in turn leads to increased media attention resulting in the situation appearing to spiral out of control.

'Drugs and the media' sets the scene for the second article in this collection, simply titled 'Moral Panics'. This article looks at the academic literature and the origins of the 'moral panic' by examining the work of Stanley Cohen and Stuart Hall, two pioneering researchers in this particular area of social theory. The last section of this article also addresses one very important area that informs this project, that is, the existing work on moral panics in New Zealand. There have been three cases in which a moral panic has successfully been identified in the New Zealand setting. All are important to this research especially when taking into consideration the circumstances under which they took place and what the media in creating these existing moral panics did.

The third article, 'Ancient anecdotes meet modernity: Drugs and the rise of methamphetamine', is a historical account of drugs, their origins and where methamphetamine sits within the wider drug culture. It also covers the history of drugs and drug use in New Zealand and the history of methamphetamine here.

The second part of this article is a case study of two moral panics about methamphetamine in America. The purpose of the case study is to look at the factors that surrounded the moral panics in the US, which will be of help when it comes to defining if a moral panic happened here with reference to methamphetamine and if there are any similarities between Aotearoa and America.

The first three articles work as a background to the next and largest article, 'Specific Cases/Official Sources: The journey of methamphetamine through the New Zealand Press, 1998-2004'. Starting from the first story the press wrote on methamphetamine, this article illuminates the journey methamphetamine took in the New Zealand press

and the subsequent shape that the whole debate took. Twenty-five samples in all were closely examined. Analyzed in terms of style, content, voice and date, all contributed in some way to how methamphetamine was received in wider society. Sample 'p' stories were chosen from the press on a nation-wide scale, from major newspapers, *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Press*, *The Dominion Post* and the *Waikato Times* as well as current event magazines, *The Listener* and *Metro*. In conclusion, the trajectory that these stories took and their subject matter mirrored many of the elements that can be seen in a classic Stanley Cohen moral panic. This is particularly so when addressing the parallels moral panics have with disaster research theory and the seven different stages that Cohen referred to in his book *'Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers'* written in 1973.

In terms of JockYoung's contention that the police and the judicial systems have a 'symbiotic' relationship with the police, this article presents evidence that this is the case in New Zealand. On analyzing the samples that were selected for this article it soon became apparent that the methamphetamine debate was dominated by an ever-present police voice, and in some instances the police were the only voice that the press sought information from. Because of the changing face of journalism and demands on journalists to be more versatile in their reporting (being able to report on a number of different subjects) specialist reporters are now few. The pressures of time and resources are also reasons for the press' heavy reliance on official sources such as the police and judiciary, and the lack of journalists willing to seek alternative angles or viewpoints.

The final article in this collection, 'Investigation: 'Meth' – menace or moral panic', supports the focus of looking at this issue as a 'moral panic'. It concludes that there was a moral panic about methamphetamine in New Zealand and that the press were responsible for generating a moral panic with the help of the police association, consequently causing our society to reel in fear, and our government to react. The investigation, seeks alternative viewpoints and sheds much light on the behaviour of the press and our police force when methamphetamine appeared on the news agenda. It is clear that a moral panic took place, this view is supported by Greg Newbold, Professor in the department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Canterbury, who was far from hesitant when he said "Absolutely" a moral panic about methamphetamine took place, and that "this (methamphetamine) is a classic Stanley Cohen example".

Drugs and the media

“Whatever we know about society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media”¹. The mass media or more specifically the news media is also where we mostly learn about drugs and drug use. “A high proportion of media content has no other aim but to amuse, flatter, excite, mystify or titillate the public and so keep it’s attention”², which makes stories about drugs ideal attention getters. In bringing us information the media open up a window to a world which we will most likely never experience first hand. In doing this, the media provide a platform for discussion in the public arena, but often that discussion may have little informational value outside the latest ‘hot topic’.

But it’s about circulation and rating, and stories involving drugs get ratings. Because “the term *drugs*, has certain connotations that are socially determined and usually negative”³, it’s a headline writers dream. It’s shorthand for a world of deviance: Crime, money, violence and if they’re lucky a celebrity can be thrown in as well.

Often the media will suddenly seize the social drug of choice of the time. For example in the mid-1990’s New Zealand experienced much anxiety about ecstasy, however when methamphetamine started to weave it’s way into our drug culture ecstasy was soon forgotten and meth was the media’s ‘drug du jour’. In all societies it is

¹ Luhman N, (2000), 1

² Curran J, (1985), 272

³ Clinard M.B., (1989), 162

“historically normal that drug use is ubiquitous”⁴ however the way the media suddenly hypes a particular drug scare can make it appear a totally new phenomenon has entered our lives.

Because a “vast majority of people in society share a common definition of reality – agree as to what activities are praiseworthy and what are condemnable” the media re-enforce this common shared reality by showing the consequences of what will or does happen to the few who choose to deviate from it. “The media unwittingly have set themselves up as the guardians of consensus; that as major providers of information about actions, events, groups and ideas they forge this information in a closed consensual image”⁵. When that information is sensationalised, or lacking in breadth or context the consensus will be likewise less than ideal.

When the media report on drugs they are showing to the majority what only a minority experience or are a part of. When the media report on drugs they often do it from limited perspectives. To journalists the most accessible sources are the police and the judicial system. The former can often have their own agendas when they decide to release information to the press and the latter is often reported more for drama than explanation or the pursuit of justice. “The news media bring some features of ‘reality’ to our attention; placing them in the light, whereas most of the rest is kept in the dark”⁶. The information left in the dark may be the context that allows the public to make sense of a confusing or complex situation. This is most apparent in the more ‘tabloid’ forms of journalism where journalists may tend to seek alternative viewpoints to a lesser extent.

⁴ Young J, (1973), 315

⁵ Young J, (1973), 317

⁶ Ginneken J.V, (1998), 23

With increasing demands and extra time pressures placed on editors and journalists there is a tendency for increased versatility and less specialisation. Background and context can be lost as each journalist comes ‘new’ to a story. The resulting journalism can therefore be more limited and the public’s appreciation of an issue correspondingly reduced.

An issue can be pushed up the media agenda when two forces have compatible goals, one side seeking attention, money or resources, the other, after a good headline or story. Robert Traini, the Chairman of the British Crime Reporters Association back in 1973 said that “moral panic over drug use was initiated in this country (Great Britain) by the police approaching journalists and informing them that the ‘situation had got out of hand’”⁷. When this happens the public are sent reeling that an epidemic has hit society, that it is out of control and that everyone is at risk.

Jock Young wrote in his 1973 article, “*The myth of the drug taker in the mass media*”, “it is not random bias but a consistent world view which is purveyed. The model of society held by the mass media, and implicit in their reporting of both deviant and normal, I will term consensualist. It’s constitution is simplicity itself: namely, that the vast majority of people in society share a common definition of reality – agree as to what activities are praiseworthy are what are condemnable.That behaviour outside this reality is a product of irrationality or sickness, that it is in itself meaningless activity which leads nowhere and is, most importantly, behaviour which has direct and unpleasant consequences for the small minority who are impelled to act this way”⁸.

Black and white are always the easiest concepts to get across to a public bombarded with more and more information, often much of it conflicting. And a starkly drawn villain always makes good copy. Young goes on to say that the illicit drug taker is, the deviant “*par excellence*”¹. It is these aspects that make drugs and drug takers

⁷ Young J, (1973), 352

⁸ Young J, (1973), 315

journalistic shorthand for deviance and correspondingly appealing as lead characters in the latest tabloid drama.

Jock Young's article, "*The amplification of drug use*", the revised version of his paper titled "*The role of the police as amplifiers of deviancy, negotiators of reality and translators of fantasy*", presents the theory of the deviance amplification spiral in a more simplified way than in the original paper. First expanded on by Leslie Wilkins, deviance amplification is when "under certain conditions, society will define as deviant a group of people who depart from valued norms in some way"⁹. This negative conception held by the majority of society can actually cause an increase in the "possibility that the group will act even more deviantly"³, especially considering the non-acceptance that comes with being labelled a deviant. When the group named as deviant begin to react to negative labeling that the majority places upon them, the deviance amplification spiral takes hold. As a result "societal reaction will increase at the same pace"³, in turn, more deviance is exercised within the social realm, in which public reaction is heightened even further. "Where each increase in social control is matched by a corresponding increase in deviancy"³ and where the "hypotheses of the police about the nature of drug use, and of the drug taker about the mentality of the police, determine the direction and intensity of the deviance amplification process"¹⁰.

It is here Young suggests that the police play a vital role in the way we perceive drugs and drug takers. Through the media, they mobilise public opinion and possibly, by extension political opinion. In this situation both parties, (the police and the media)

⁹ Young J, (1973), 350

¹⁰ Young J, (1989), 351

gain. “The media have learnt that the fanning up of moral indignation is a remarkable commercial success”¹¹.

Young believes that the relationship between the police and the media is a far more complex one than we may have first imagined. He calls this relationship ‘symbiotic’, in that the police agree to release information to the media on the condition that they co-operate with them in terms of when the public first become informed, therefore the media, in some instances, aid in police investigations.

Young’s findings then will be useful later in this series of articles when we review media stories and consider if something similar has happened in New Zealand in the moral panic surrounding ‘methamphetamine’ or ‘p’ – the more commonly known term in New Zealand society.

Following is an American example of how the media can produce this effect.

“As national concern over Crack (cocaine) wanes, public attention, (media and political), is now diverted on an “even worse” drug, methamphetamine”.¹²

Firstly the use of the word ‘national’ sends this message out to ‘everyone’. In this case the last drug that the media gave attention to is mentioned, however concern for its use is dwindling because a menace far worse than the last is on the doorstep of all American citizens. Statements like these are troublesome. Often drug fads are regional and so do not directly affect all citizens in a society, anxiousness here has been thrust onto the national stage as though everyone should be aware of the damage meth can do.

¹¹ Young J, (1989), 352

¹² Somers I, Baskin D, (2004), 1

Important to this collection of articles then, is whether or not this happened here in New Zealand. Did our press project methamphetamine onto the national stage like the American media did and are we just adopting America's social problems in the sense that 'if it happens there, it happens here'?

Moral Panics

Moral Panic can take place at any time in any society with either little or no warning. It can characterize itself in many different ways and can disappear as rapidly as it may appear.

In 1972, Stanley Cohen a British sociologist published a now historical text in his discipline 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers'.

In it he took the specific case of the Mods and Rockers, two groups of youth subcultures, to explain how the phenomena of this term 'Moral Panic' can occur.

Although Cohen was the first to recognize and formerly identify a moral panic, in 1971, Jock Young, another British Sociologist with a particular interest in crime, deviance and the media, first made reference to 'moral panic' as a term¹³.

For Cohen, a Moral Panic is defined as:

"A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; it's nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.....Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself"¹⁴

Cohen states that the media actively label individuals or groups of people who are considered to be deviant or whose actions are frowned upon by the wider society. It was Cohen's theory that took into consideration the fact that the media have a deeper function than just entertaining the masses, instead he contends that the news, "is a

¹³ Matthews L, (2001), 13

¹⁴ Cohen S, (1972), 9

main source of information about the normative contours of society. It informs us about right and wrong, about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture and about the shapes the devil can assume.”¹⁵ So, the news is not something that the audience watches in a state of passivity. Cohen is saying that the news is a carrier and transmitter about normative behaviour and perception. The news tells us what we should deem as wrongful behaviour and the ways in which we should deal with those who deviate from this simulated condition of normality that the mass media has created for us. The news also spells out who the ‘devils’ are – that is, those who are responsible for the deviation and what the populous can do to help aid in ‘fixing’ or ‘putting right’ the ‘problem’ at hand.

It is therefore easy for anyone looking at this particular area of sociology to see how a moral panic can thrust itself into the public arena, how it (the moral panic) can take shape and disperse itself into many areas of social life.

¹⁶“Through symbolization, plus other types of exaggeration and distortion, images are made much sharper than reality. A sharpening up process occurs, producing emotionally toned symbols which eventually acquire their own momentum”. It is here that we can observe the simple fact that moral panics can take on their own character and choose their own paths.

To demonstrate this idea Cohen used the case of the Mods and Rockers. Due to the way the first conflict between the Mods and Rockers was reported on Easter Sunday 1964 at Clacton, a renowned holiday destination for many people in Britain, other popular seaside destinations began to be associated with (at peak holiday times) problem youths.

¹⁵ Cohen S, (1973), 17

¹⁶ Cohen S, (1973), 43

If we take a moment to put this idea into a New Zealand context we could say that our media do much the same around the busy New Year's holiday period when usually thousands of youths descend on seaside destinations such as Whangamata and Mount Maunganui (on the North Islands' East Coast). More often than not, 'trouble', during this time, in these places, is meticulously reported on and 'extra policing' is needed to cope with the numbers. Most years a New Year's day news bulletin in this country consists of showing the highlights of the celebrations the night before, for example – fireworks displays and concerts, but it will also tell of how things went in the 'problem spots'. Reported will be the number of arrests made, with pictures of drunken youths and the good work done by Police officers to keep the situation under control.

Clashes between the Mods and the Rockers attracted ample attention by the British media. Although there was much truth to the stories, for example, it was true that these people (mostly middleclass youths) did dress in certain ways, wearing jeans, jewelry and paisley shirts and rode scooters and bikes through the streets, they did fall victim to "over-reporting".¹⁷

"The deviant(s) is assigned to a role or a social type, shared perspectives develop through which he and his behaviour are visualized and explained, motives are imputed, casual patterns are searched for and the behaviour is grouped with other behaviour thought to be of the same order".¹⁸

The British media labelled the Mods and Rockers as being folk-devils and a successful moral panic brought on by extensive press coverage took place.

Cohen points out that the moral panic of the Mods and Rockers was short lived and that "another five years later, these groups have all but disappeared from the public

¹⁷ Cohen S, (1973), 32

¹⁸ Cohen S, (1973), 74

consciousness, remaining only in collective memory as folk devils of the past, to whom current horrors can be compared”.¹⁹ As said at the beginning of this paper, moral panics come and go. Cohen sums up at the end of his book that, “more moral panics will be generated and other, as yet nameless folk devils will be created”.²⁰

British sociologist Stuart Hall and his associates undertook an influential study in 1978. The text ‘Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order’ is an in-depth look at their findings and contentions about the mobilization of a moral panic in the United Kingdom. ‘Policing the Crisis’, is an insight into the way in which the British media addressed stories, created societal anxiety, and in turn fuelled a moral panic about mugging by over-reportage and wrongful re-categorization of related incidents. In this case, like most moral panics, the British media led a moral crusade that resulted in extra policing in ‘problem areas’ where the supposed muggings were taking place, tougher sentences for muggers and unreasonable ethnic discrimination.

This text describes moral panic as follows:

“When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is all out of proportion to the actual threat offered, when ‘experts’, in the form of Police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors perceive the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk ‘with one voice’ of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress ‘sudden and dramatic’ increases (in numbers involved or events) and ‘novelty’, above and beyond that which is sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a moral panic”.²¹

Hall names directly what Cohen actually calls “moral barricades” – these are the people or organizations put in place to give authentication to the moral panic, those who give “expert” advice and information about the prevailing condition are going to be taken far more seriously by the audience than anyone else.

¹⁹ Cohen S, (1973), 12

²⁰ Cohen S, (1973), 204

²¹ Hall S, (1978), 16

“Between August 1972 and the end of August 1973, ‘mugging’ received a great deal of coverage in the press in the form of crime reports, features, editorials, statements by representatives of the police, judges, the Home Secretary, politicians and various prominent public spokesmen”.²²

Mugging as a term came about during the 1940’s in America, “derived from criminal and police parlance it refers to a certain manner of robbing and/or beating of a victim by petty professional operators or thieves who often work in packs of three or more”.²³ By reading into the definition of mugging it is easy to see how it fell victim to a moral panic when transferred to a British setting. ‘Mugging’ was first labeled by what Hall calls “experts”. In this case it was police and criminologists the media used to help define to the audience the context to which ‘mugging’ could be referred. The idea that ‘mugging’, in the eyes of the victim, could result in being beaten or robbed, or both, possibly by one or more attackers instilled fear throughout society. “Via the American transplant Britain adopted, not only ‘mugging’, but the fear and panic about ‘mugging’ and the backlash reaction into which those fears and anxieties issued”.²⁴

Although this article looks at the two most classic examples of moral panics from Great Britain, it is also of relevance to mention how contemporary American sociologists see these earlier British examples as lacking in “precise indicators”²⁵ when identifying a moral panic. Jeffrey S Victor, Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York, presents in his 1998 article, “Moral Panics and the social construction of deviant behaviour: a theory and application to the case of ritual child

²² Hall S, (1978) 7

²³ Hall S, (1978), 19

²⁴ Hall S, (1978), 28

²⁵ http://home.wanadoo.nl/ipce/library_two/files/victor_98_text.htm

abuse” clear criteria for identifying a moral panic using a model taken from “Moral Panics: the Social Construction of Deviance” written by Goode E and Ben-Yehuda N in 1994. Victor states that the model presented by Goode and Ben-Yehuda is more solid in defining the elements of a moral panic. According to them (Goode and Ben-Yehuda), a moral panic can be successfully identified when the following five specific indicators are present.

They are as follows:

- “1. Volatility – The sudden eruption and subsiding of concern about a newly perceived threat to society from a category of people regarded as being moral deviants.
2. Hostility – The deviants are regarded with intense hostility as enemies of the basic values of the society and attributed stereotypes of ‘evil’ behaviour.
3. Measurable Concern – Concern about the threat is measurable in concrete ways, such as attitude surveys.
4. Consensus – There is consensus in significant segments of the population that the threat is real and serious.
5. Disproportionality – Concern about the numbers of moral deviants and the extent of the harm that they do is much greater than can be verified by objective, empirical investigations of the harm. Even though the measurable concern is great, the numbers of deviants are minimal or even non-existent and their harm is very limited or even non-existent.”²⁶

Bearing the hallmarks of a classic British moral panic, this model spells out clearly the “Indicators” which must be present if a moral panic is to be identified. Beginning with a sudden threat to society, a moral panic must then name just who the “folk devils” are and how their behaviour is outside normative or acceptable societal values or behaviour. Concern about the perceived threat must then be present, for example, when the media begin to report on significant increases or events that, as a consequence, heighten the public’s awareness about the threat. Next, the public begin to gather evidence via discourse generated by the media that the situation is of real

²⁶ Goode E, Ben-Yehuda N, (1994), 33-39

concern. It is when this realization comes about, that fear and anxiety among the general populous is instilled and the threat becomes tangible. Lastly, a moral panic must have some sort of disproportionality. That is, that the threat or those who pose the threat is amplified or out of proportion from the actual reality of the situation. For example, a whole nation can be sent reeling in fear about something that is only happening in one particular area or region, as a result, those outside the region may feel unsafe, vulnerable or at risk unnecessarily. When identifying a classic Stanley Cohen moral panic, this model could be a useful tool in evaluation and verification of this fascinating sociological phenomenon.

The media has the power to sway societal perception in whichever direction it chooses. It is with this in mind that Hall says, “The media are often presenting information about events which occur outside the direct experience of the majority of the society. The media thus represent the primary, and often, the only source of information about many important events and topics”.²⁷ So, the media are able to outline the facts as they see them, they decide what stories are more ‘newsworthy’ than others and to which degree they can be reported. It is here we can begin to understand just how the media, with much ease, can blow out of proportion certain events. These events can then be inherently linked with other events possessing similar elements. In doing this the audience actively label and categorize events and topics into their own social reality, in fact, “if we did not inhabit to some degree, the same classification of social reality, we do not make sense of the world together”.²⁸ It can be said then, that the media contribute to the way in which we understand the world around us. In making sense of our social reality the media help us to recognize

²⁷ Hall S, (1978), 56

²⁸ Hall S, (1978), 55

what is acceptable social behaviour and what is not. The media dictate to society how to act in an acceptable collective manner and the consequences if one chooses to deviate from it.

The first published piece of work on moral panic in New Zealand came out of Victoria Universities' Institute of Criminology in 1982. Collectively, Warren Young from the Institute and Jane Kelsey, from the Faculty of Law, researched and wrote, "The Gangs: Moral Panic as Social Control". During the late 1970's they noticed that the media gave much of their attention to gangs in this country. Constantly, the media portrayed those involved in gangs as dangerous and threatening people and labeled them as deviant. The media coverage of stories that focused on the movements of the gangs led society to construct wrongful perceptions of gangs and their members. The main aim of this study was to give some sort of balance to the otherwise one-sided depiction of gangs presented by the media. With Cohen's theory in mind, Kelsey and Young, in the beginning pages of their pioneering research state that:

"Our subsequent analysis of the media, police, judicial and political response to gang behaviour during the period 1978-1980, will indicate that the gangs were indeed the objects of such panic during this period, and that the significance of their activities was both exaggerated and misrepresented. The reaction to them, particularly by the media, was highly inflated; it led to an increased emphasis upon hard-line policing policy; it gave rise to two unnecessary and repressive pieces of legislation; and it encouraged relatively severe sentences".²⁹

²⁹ Kelsey J, Young W, (1982), 3

Bearing obvious elements of Cohen's original description of a moral panic, Kelsey and Young were the first to recognize and theoretically prove a moral panic in New Zealand.

There are many reasons why this piece of literature is a classic and extremely valid case of a moral panic. Due to the way the media reported on gangs, through over-reportage and 'expert' sources, it was able to sway public opinion (into having a negative opinion of gangs) and most importantly – affect government legislation. By associating gangs with antisocial and deviant behaviour, 'gang', as a word became widely understood as having negative connotations. Also, "the use of the term 'gang' supplied such news items with an eye-catching interest which they would not otherwise have had".³⁰

It is here we can observe parallels with Hall's study, in that 'mugging' as a term, would have had much the same effect as 'gangs', in that a word can symbolize an array of images and project a negative perception. In fact, Kelsey and Young state that the use of the term 'gang' by the media gave increased mobilization to this particular moral panic and "was perhaps one of the most important devices used by the media during the entire period of the panic. It was a word which had gradually attracted a negative connotation through repeated use in earlier years, but during 1979 it appeared to take on an emotive force and dramatic quality of its own, so the use of the term translated a news item into a different kind of issue".³¹

This idea can also be incorporated into my own research in the way that methamphetamine is more commonly called 'P' by the media. Now when we hear 'P' in a news bulletin, or see it plastered on the covers of magazines or on front pages of

³⁰ Kelsey J, Young W, (1982), 18

³¹ Kelsey J, Young W, (1982), 18

newspapers, we think of it in a heightened way because of how it has been presented to us by the media.

As said earlier, a moral panic passes through many stages, in the case of the ‘gang’ moral panic, Kelsey and Young point out that there were three stages through which it passed.

1. From 1978 until the middle of 1979 there was a rapid build-up of attention given to ‘gangs’. Although the “gang problem”, was under control it was considered to be “potentially explosive”. Through information given by official sources the public became aware of the problem.
2. The intense stage came next. During August and September of 1979, after an incident involving gangs in the Northland town of Moerewa, a public hysteria occurred brought on solely by the media. The “gang problem”, had exploded as earlier predicted. Official sources reeled in over-reaction and there were demands for “instant action to be taken”.
3. The last stage of the panic was from October 1979 until late 1980 where there was a gradual decline in the “gang problem”. With official sources giving out less information to the media and because of “the hard-line tactics adopted by the courts and police in earlier months, and to the effect of the government’s longer-term social policies... the gang crisis was effectively over”.³²

When referring to Cohen here, we can apply his contention that a moral panic may possess uncanny parallels with disaster research. Listed below are the seven stages in which a disaster is handled:

1. Warning – Current tranquillity is upset
2. Threat – Communication from others about the threat of the disaster
3. Impact – Disaster strike and response period
4. Inventory – realization of impact
5. Rescue – help organized for the survivors
6. Remedy – Formal activities toward relief
7. Recovery – How and what the community does to achieve the former equilibrium.³³

Effectively then, if we take a moment to refer to moral panics; the media warn of a possible upset which then causes a sense of threat amongst the community, next, an event or episode authenticates the earlier threat, following the initial strike, the extent

³² Paraphrased from: Kelsey J, Young W, (1982), 34

³³ Cohen S, (1972), 22

of the damage is attended to in which those who were hardest hit are helped and remedial actions are taken. Lastly, at the end of a moral panic, communities will come together to collectively restore themselves to their state of order before the panic began.

In 1990, the second piece of academic literature on moral panics was published in Aotearoa. Together, Roy Shuker, Roger Openshaw and Janet Soler, from the Department of Education at Massey University wrote, “Youth, Media and Moral Panic in New Zealand: From Hooligans to Video Nasties”. Taking a more historical approach, they looked at four episodes where the activities of youths were becoming of increasing social concern.

“New forms of popular culture have been accused of being negative influences on the young: silent films, then ‘talkies’, comics, television, and videos have all variously been held accountable for undesirable youthful behaviour”.³⁴

By researching four different episodes, Larrikinism in the 19th century, juvenile delinquency in the 1950’s, the disturbances at the Hastings Blossom Festival in 1960 and the Queen Street ‘Riot’ of 1984, Shuker and his associates chose a sparse time frame to demonstrate their case of a moral panic-or be it, a number of moral panics.

“We argue that, to various degrees, the episodes we examine represented a form of moral panic: that is, the social concern generated by them was greatly exaggerated, and the perceived threat to social harmony was by no means as ominous as many regarded it”.³⁵

³⁴ Shuker R, (1990), 1

³⁵ Shuker R, (1990), 1

Shuker et al, also blame a lot of the moral panics that they looked at on the police. Drawing a lot from Hall's mugging study they highlight the fact that along with the judiciary and the media the police do not "simply respond to the moral panic" at hand, in fact, "they form part of the circle out of which 'moral panics' develop".³⁶

This can be due to the way that the police have the power to respond to crimes in which ever way they see fit, they can choose to look at crime from any angle and can more often than not, escalate the threat that certain crimes pose.

Although they clearly recognize the fact that the different episodes they looked at varied in duration for example, the Queen Street Riot lasted a day while the juvenile delinquency seen in the fifties lasted for a number of years, "there was a clear sequence of the emergence of a 'problem'; the development of associated community concern, usually amplified/orchestrated by the media; and a political reaction, often involving a legislative response to the problem".³⁷

Shuker observed that around all of these occurrences involving youth a pattern began to emerge in the media's reaction. Over time this caused attitudes to change sparking the government to act with the introduction of a new legislation following the Queen Street Riots in 1984. If only one of these events happened then a moral panic would never have taken place, it was the events in succession amplified by the media that led to a moral panic.

The most recent study of a moral panic in New Zealand was completed in 2001. Written by former Auckland University of Technology (AUT) lecturer Louise Matthews it is titled, "Home Invasion: The role of the New Zealand media in a

³⁶ Shuler R, (1990), 6

³⁷ Shuker R, (1990),105

moral panic case study”. In her study Matthews presents a strong case that a moral panic to do with home invasion took place in the late 1990’s. She covers in detail the concept of a moral panic and draws, like I have done, from the classic international studies. She then goes on to look at the climate of New Zealand society at the time of the moral panic in order to help the reader understand the political situation in the build-up to the panic. Matthews states that the beginning of the ‘Home Invasion’ moral panic came on December 1 1998 when Beverly Bowmar was raped and murdered by four men in her rural home in Reperoa. “By the end of the day one high-rating national news show had labeled the crime as one of a new type, “Home Invasion”. The press gave rise to the fact that this phenomenon had been taking place for some time and it was this ‘episode’ that brought to light the problem at hand. “Within months tough new ‘home invasion’ laws, seriously flawed in their initial concept, were tidied up, enacted and put into operation against the advice of government advisors and opposition politicians”.³⁸ Interestingly enough, previous crimes were re-categorized as home invasion to make the panic even more valid in it’s application, this created more stir amongst the New Zealand public because the press was giving the impression that home invasion was existent before the Reperoa case. As mentioned above, it just needed a defining incident to kick-start it. Matthews saw this as the amplification stage of the ‘home invasion’ panic in that the ‘effect’ of the scare is made more potent by the re-categorization of earlier events. “This re-writing of history gives audiences the sense that even while they are hearing about something new and frightening, it is something that had been with them longer than a couple of days, something

³⁸ Matthews L, (2001), 42

which had already gained a foothold in their society”.³⁹ In her findings, Matthews points out that at the time of the “home invasion” panic “New Zealanders were struggling on a number of fronts”⁴⁰. Following the 1987 share-market crash, those in middle New Zealand were hit hardest. With “job and home security more fragile”,⁴¹ as a result our middleclass became poorer. Home invasion then, came at a time when we were most vulnerable as a nation. When talking about moral panics an important component is the need or recognition of a ‘folk devil’ however, Matthews concludes that in this particular case, the folk devil is conceived to be a powerful yet unidentifiable force. “This created a sense of fear and threat from the most frightening of enemies – one which is not clearly seen or known”⁴². With the government being quick to act at a time of ‘social crisis’ and a need to reassure voters, a moral panic occurred at a rapid pace. Matthews ends her conclusion by saying that “in a New Zealand context, similar moral panics with short sighted, ineffective and even damaging solutions are likely to reoccur”⁴³.

³⁹ Matthews L, (2001), 225

⁴⁰ Matthews L, (2001), 222

⁴¹ Matthews L, (2001), 223

⁴² Matthews L, (2001), 231

⁴³ Matthews L, (2001), 232

Ancient anecdotes meet modernity: Drugs and the rise of methamphetamine.

There is no way that one can write about methamphetamine without giving a general overview of other substances or drugs. We sometimes forget that drugs are not always used recreationally and that not all drugs are illegal. This next article will seek to explain exactly what drugs are, under what circumstance they are used and what sets methamphetamine apart from the rest. This will be achieved by exploring historical, chemical and clinical aspects of a variety of drugs both legal and illegal. Also important to this discussion is how drug use affects society. I will attempt to give a brief history on drug use in New Zealand, but more importantly methamphetamine use in Aotearoa

When we think of the word ‘drug’ our minds are immediately cast to something that is deviant, illegal and socially unacceptable. However, not all drugs are illegal, in fact a drug can be something that we use everyday, like caffeine. Drugs can also be used for medical reasons and are perfectly legal. Nowadays, speaking medically, there are drugs to kill pain such as morphine and paracetamol, there are drugs to treat diseases, there are drugs to prolong life and there are also drugs to end life, there are drugs that are used to treat a number of psychological conditions and there are even drugs to help us perform better sexually. In the 20th century, with technological advances in medical science the world has seen many breakthroughs in relation to drugs in which those who suffer from terminal illness can now be made more comfortable or even cured of their illness. Drugs, in more general terms are, by no means, a recent phenomena to the social landscape, while medical drugs have evolved dramatically over the last century the more ‘established’ drugs have been around for thousands of

years. There is evidence to support claims that alcohol was brewed in the Babylonian empire “4000 years before Christ” and that the ancient Egyptians were making wine as early as “3500BC”.⁴⁴ Alcohol is the most socially accepted of all of the drugs, because it is so deeply instilled in society (due to its early beginnings) alcohol is freely and legally consumed. Ethyl alcohol or ethanol is the intoxicating chemical in alcohol. Compared to other drugs the production of alcohol is relatively simple, through the “fermentation of glucose by yeast”⁴⁵ alcohol is produced. Potency depends on the duration of the fermentation, which can last anything from two weeks to fifty years or more. The effects of alcohol are usually felt soon after consumption. Because “ethanol is soluble in both fat and water”⁴⁶ the human body absorbs this drug with speed and efficiency. When consumed in moderation alcohol can actually be beneficial to the immune system and also to the circulatory system in our bodies, however, when alcohol is consumed in large and regular doses the effects are fatal. People who are heavy users of alcohol may experience memory loss, malnutrition, and even liver failure. Psychological effects may include depression and hallucinations.

Tobacco, another legal drug, although increasingly restricted can, when used long term have serious consequences. In the UK alone 20,000 people die from emphysema (a smoking related disease) every year.⁴⁷ Tobacco contains some 4,000 chemical substances; the most lethal and prevalent is nicotine.⁴⁸ Nicotine is a drug in which users are physically dependent. It can act as both a stimulant and a depressant. The history of tobacco is sketchy. During the 15th century when Christopher Columbus

⁴⁴ Robson P, (1999), 35

⁴⁵ Robson P, (1999), 41

⁴⁶ Robson P, (1999), 43

⁴⁷ Robson P, (1999), 63

⁴⁸ Robson P, (1999), 59

arrived in North America a well-established tobacco industry was observed. Although there are no specific dates as to when North Americans first discovered tobacco we do know that tobacco reached the shores of England in the 1550's. By the 17th century England had a thriving tobacco culture with "demand always exceeding supply"⁴⁹. In Havana in 1853 the first machine-made cigarette was born, at the beginning of the industrial era cigarettes began to be mass-produced. Today tobacco companies are giant and extremely wealthy organizations. Distribution is global and of course, so is consumption.

There are two ways in which drugs are produced. While there are plant-based drugs, such as opium, cocaine, marijuana and tobacco there are also chemical-based drugs which are made in a pharmacological way, chemically based drugs include Ecstasy, LSD, amphetamines and methamphetamine. We will begin by looking at the plant-based drugs.

It is well documented that in many South American cultures chewing coca leaves is a way of life. The practice has been around for hundreds of years. It wasn't until the 16th century that the news of coca leaves reached Europe. While chewing a coca leaf is relatively harmless it is the refined form of cocaine that is a harmful drug. Usually the coca leaf is picked and converted into a thick white paste in the country of origin, it is then further refined down and purified to make "cocaine hydrochloride" which comes in the form of a powder. This powder can be "snorted, injected or smoked".⁵⁰ Because of the geographical closeness of the United States to South America (where most of the world's cocaine is produced) cocaine exploded onto the drug scene in the

⁴⁹ Robson P, (1999), 55

⁵⁰ Robson P, (1999), 88

US first. “Over the course of three decades, cocaine grew from being a medical wonder drug to an important player in American drug culture”.⁵¹ Here the ‘three decades’ are with reference to the early 1900’s, it was in the 1970’s that cocaine use reached an all-time literal high. Cocaine affects the activity of the brains natural chemical messengers noradrenaline, serotonin and dopamine, resulting in a feeling of euphoria and enhanced confidence. Cocaine is considered to be the most powerful of all amphetamines. In a survey done in 1990 “at least 30million Americans had tried cocaine at sometime in their lives”.⁵²

Opium is another one of the plant-based drugs. It is an old drug with accounts of poppy use dating back to 320BC. “Opium is referred to in Homer’s *Odyssey*”⁵³. It is from the Opium poppy, a flower that thrives in warm climates, where opium comes from. And it is hard to believe that such a beautiful flower can be refined into such a potent drug. The medical name for opium is actually opioid, “opioids remain central to pain control in Western medicine”.⁵⁴ However in Western medicine opioids are known as morphine, a powerful pain killer and a highly addictive substance if used on a frequent basis. In recreational terms opioids are more commonly known as heroin, which is one of the worlds most sought after substances. Heroin comes in the form of a powder, which is a whitish brown colour. It can either be smoked, vaporised or injected. While the medical use of opioids is reasonably safe recreational use is not. It is a well-known fact that it is “hard to use opioids without becoming addicted to them”. Because they latch onto the “receptors where endorphins would normally roost”⁵⁵ users experience withdrawal symptoms that are almost unbearable. Users also

⁵¹ Spillane JF, (2000), 1

⁵² Robson P, (1999), 93

⁵³ Goldberg R, (2002), xiv

⁵⁴ Robson P, (1999), 170

⁵⁵ Robson P, (1999), 182

suffer (when not using the drug) severe depression and almost always feel the urge for ‘another hit’.

Secondary to tobacco, cannabis is the worlds most widely used plant based recreational drug, with an estimated 300million users worldwide. “The earliest cited references to marijuana come from a Chinese book of medicine dated 2737BC, making it younger than opium but still one of the older drugs in history. The drug was known in India in the second millennium BC, and soon became widespread in ancient Greece, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Southern Europe and Africa”⁵⁶. With around 400 chemicals detected in the resin of cannabis the most active ingredient is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol.⁵⁷

While the most popular way to consume cannabis is to smoke it, it may also be mixed with food. In New Zealand cannabis is still an illegal drug, however in some countries such as Belgium and the Australian state of Queensland it has been de-criminalised. Cannabis has effects that are variable, it is said that the dominant mood before exposure is heightened after use, so, for example, if one is depressed before using it their depression will be even more so after exposure. Cannabis can also be a very sociable drug, however long-term use of it can affect one’s memory (short-term), motivation and health, due to inhaling the smoke. It is said that one joint or cigarette of cannabis is equivalent to 10 cigarettes of tobacco.

Now that we have discussed the plant-based drugs we will now move onto the chemical-based ones:

Ecstasy is one of the most popular party drugs or dance pills of our time. Those who use ecstasy describe the feeling they experience as euphoric, on top of the world,

⁵⁶ Newbold G, (2000), 165

⁵⁷ Robson P, (1999), 79

beautiful and invincible. The main ingredient of ecstasy is MDMA, which “stimulates the brain by releasing serotonin,”⁵⁸ serotonin is what makes us happy, when one takes ecstasy the serotonin is released into our system very rapidly. It is no wonder then that long-term use of ecstasy can result in depression due to the lack of serotonin in the brain. We must not be misled into thinking that ecstasy is a new drug, surprisingly enough it was first patented by “German pharmaceutical giant Merck in 1912”⁵⁹. In the 1950’s it appeared as part of the famous US Army drug trials in which LSD was a part too, and it was “psychotherapists drug of choice in the late 1960’s”.⁶⁰ Its re-emergence came in the 1990’s when Ibiza was a popular destination for young British partygoers. Consequently those who experienced the drug in Ibiza began to take it back to Britain leading to an e-explosion during this time.⁶¹ It wasn’t long after that the rest of the world caught on and now ecstasy is one of the most trafficked drugs in the world. In New Zealand all of the ecstasy that is taken here is smuggled into the country from mainly European countries. There has only been one known instance of ecstasy manufacture in our country, this is primarily because it is a very chemically sophisticated drug to manufacture and synthesis is done over a long period of time.

“The best known and the most ubiquitous, of all the hallucination-inducing drugs is dylseric acid diethylamide”⁶², more commonly known as LSD. “Hallicinogens (or psychedelics, as they became known) had been used for centuries in ancient Persia, India and South America. They had been experimented with in the late 19th century by psychologists such as William James and Havelock Ellis, and were used medically in

⁵⁸ Hammersly R, (2002), 25

⁵⁹ Hammersly R, (2002), 1

⁶⁰ Hammersly R, (2002), 1

⁶¹ Hammersly R, (2002), 1

⁶² Laing R (ed), (2003), 37

the 1950's and early 1960's"⁶³ when famous writer Ken Kesey, author of *'One flew over the Cuckoo's nest'*, was a test subject. First discovered by Dr Albert Hoffmann on the 2nd of May 1938, LSD never really emerged as a recreational drug until the early 1960's. It was during this time that LSD was used as a party drug, a potent stimulant, taking this drug could make one severely hallucinate, or 'trip out'. First used in tablet form it was dubbed the 'Peace Pill' during the Hippy era, later though LSD was made into a paper form where paper was dipped into the active ingredients. This paper form is the most prevalent now and it is very rare to get LSD in tablet form nowadays.

Amphetamine was first synthesized in 1887 in Germany, however it wasn't until the late 1920's that it was re-investigated as a "care or treatment against nearly everything from depression to decongestion".⁶⁴

Amphetamines and other stimulants include 'ecstasy' and 'ice'(methamphetamine).

The physical effects produced are elevated heart and respiratory rates, increased blood pressure, insomnia and loss of appetite. Sweating, headaches, blurred vision, dizziness and anxiety may also result from use. Matt Philp, a senior journalist for *Metro* magazine sums up the effects of methamphetamine nicely when he says that "once the brain is awash with dopamine, your cardiovascular systems shifts into sympathetic overdrive, increasing your heart rate and respiration". Time Asia journalist Karl Greenfield Philp's article "Gangland Rising" also states that "you become, after that first hit, gloriously, brilliantly, vigorously awake"⁶⁵. High dosage can cause rapid or irregular heartbeat, tremors, loss of motor skills, and even physical collapse. Long-

⁶³ Newbold G, (2000), 169

⁶⁴ Somers I, Baskin D, (2004), 7

⁶⁵ Philp M, (2002), 37

term use of higher doses can produce amphetamine psychosis, which includes hallucinations, delusions and paranoia”⁶⁶.

Amphetamines are stimulants, and were prescribed as early as 1937⁶⁷. Prescriptions were written out to people who worked long night shifts, especially those who worked in the industrial sectors during this period of time, to those in the military who faced long missions without sleep and also to people who were trying to lose weight.

“Through the mid 20th century, the amphetamine group was so widely prescribed for a variety of physical and emotional conditions as to make it seem an authentic wonder drug”.⁶⁸

As mentioned above, methamphetamine is part of the amphetamine group of drugs.

“Methamphetamine, more potent and easy to make, was discovered in Japan in 1919”.⁶⁹ And there is “evidence to suggest that ice was brought to Hawaii by Japanese soldiers”.⁷⁰

Interestingly enough though methamphetamine use went unnoticed until the late 1970’s when American West Coast media began reporting on it. On the mainland of America as early as 1962 there are reports that motorcycle gangs who were involved in the manufacture of methamphetamine in and around San Francisco spread it both north and south, along the Pacific coast. During the 1970’s the methamphetamine demographic widened from blue-collar workers “to include college students, young professionals, minorities and women”.⁷¹ It became apparent that, methamphetamine was being used by people from many different social classes.

⁶⁶ Jordan DC, (1999), 228

⁶⁷ Somers I, Baskin D, (2004), 8

⁶⁸ Jenkins P, (1999), 30/31

⁶⁹ Somers I, Baskin D, (2004), 8

⁷⁰ Yudko E, (2003), 6

⁷¹ Yudko E, (2003), 7

Up until 1980 the main ingredient of methamphetamine was P2P, which, was legally obtained by pest exterminators and sold on the black market to clandestine lab operators. However its value was soon uncovered and in 1980 in the US it became an illegal substance, this meant that it would have to be either brought in from Europe or made in illegal laboratories in the U.S. Found extremely quickly was the alternative to P2P, ephedrine/red phosphorous. (This is the chemical that clandestine lab operators seek in New Zealand to manufacture methamphetamine). This alternative meant that American “chemists could now make methamphetamine entirely from domestic legal materials”.⁷²

The versatility of methamphetamine was one thing that made it a big hit in the United States as meth could be “injected, smoked, snorted or ingested orally”⁷³, depending on the choice of local subcultures. This could have been a contributing factor to its rapid spread. In New Zealand recreational users of methamphetamine chose to smoke the substance through a glass pipe while other hard-core users will inject. In the U.S manufacturers quickly learned that “smokeable meth needed to be of very high purity”⁷⁴. Smokeable meth soon “became fashionable among upwardly mobile urban dwellers in several pacific-rim nations, including Taiwan, South-Korea and the Phillippines. Illicit markets were supplied by sizeable narcotic networks with roots in organized crime, including the Chinese Triads, and the Japanese Yakuza”⁷⁵. With such powerful organizations involved with meth its spread outside the United States was inevitable. Now meth use has been observed in other Pacific-rim countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan, and Pacific Nations have been used in the illegal trafficking of this potent drug. It must be stressed here that there are two types

⁷² Jenkins P, (1999), 50/101

⁷³ Jenkins P, (1999), 103

⁷⁴ Jenkins P, (1999), 103

⁷⁵ Jenkins P, (1999), 104

of methamphetamine. While there is methamphetamine that is considered to be a 'pure' type of speed there is also crystal methamphetamine, which is even more refined than its counterpart. While both are powerful psychostimulants crystal methamphetamine or 'ice' is absorbed into the blood stream at a faster rate increasing the "intensity and duration of the effects".⁷⁶ There are a number of effects a methamphetamine user can experience while using the drug. "Immediate effects include euphoria, increased energy and confidence, decreased appetite, and these effects can last for 4 to 12 hours depending on dosage. High doses can cause irritability, hostility, paranoia, hallucinations and violent behaviour".⁷⁷ Often users will go on 'binges' which can last a number of days, they are likely to suffer from insomnia, states of panic and terror. Sometimes users may even find themselves in a state of paranoid psychosis that resembles schizophrenia even if they have "no pre-existing psychological condition".⁷⁸

In modern day societies drug use may be inevitable. In an ever-changing social world drugs are can be seen as "merely another thread in the social fabric".⁷⁹

While some countries impose heavy laws surrounding drug use others do not. For instance in parts of south east Asia drug use may be punishable by death, however in Holland you can happily sit in a café and smoke marijuana. "From conception until death, almost everyone is touched by drug use"⁸⁰.

In a young country such as our own, drug use is a relatively recent phenomenon.

However "legal of illegal, our society is one in which drug use for recreation is

⁷⁶ Wilkins C, (2004), 3

⁷⁷ Wilkins C, (2004), 2

⁷⁸ Wilkins C, (2004), 2

⁷⁹ Goldberg R, (2002), xix

⁸⁰ Goldberg R, (2002), xiii

widespread and accepted”⁸¹. Early accounts of drugs come from the days when mining labour was brought in from China and other Asian countries. It was during “gold rush days”, (the late 1800’s) that opium was the first drug to reach our shores⁸². Right up until the 1960’s there was little drug use in New Zealand, with no existing underworld at this time supply of drugs was low. Around this time “New Zealand was hearing more and more about the drug problems arising in other countries, mainly North America and Britain”⁸³, and by the late 1960’s marijuana was being illegally imported. “It is not surprising then that the current ‘in thing’ was eventually taken up in our own society”⁸⁴. This is the classic scenario of ‘it happens there, it happens here’; with the adoption of marijuana into New Zealand society it was not long before LSD reached Aotearoa. By the end of the 1960’s LSD, along with marijuana, was identified as “part of the drug problem in New Zealand”⁸⁵. In 1968 the first pharmacy burglaries were observed suggesting that the knowledge of pharmaceutical drugs was beginning. Noted too was an increase in these types of robberies in the first half of 1970, 11 were reported. With powerful drugs like valium and morphine readily available by prescription it is no wonder that pharmacies were targeted as an easy means of supply. Today in New Zealand we are still experiencing burglaries of pharmacies but burglars are not targeting valium or morphine, it is the precursor chemical of ephedrine, the main ingredient for making methamphetamine that is in hot demand. In 1990, a regional survey (Auckland region) on drug use found that only “1% of respondents reported using amphetamine/methamphetamine in the previous year”, with no participants reporting use of crystal methamphetamine, “this state of

⁸¹ Newbold G, (2000), 195

⁸² Henwood CR, (1971), 7

⁸³ Henwood CR, (1971), 15

⁸⁴ Henwood CR, (1971), 16/17

⁸⁵ Henwood CR, (1971), 33

affairs appears to have changed quite rapidly in the late 1990's"⁸⁶ Police statistics, which began including amphetamines in annual reports in 1991⁸⁷ show a rapid increase in arrests for ATS (amphetamine type substance – including both methamphetamine and ecstasy). “During the 1990's” as a possible result of the gang activity which we are about to discuss, “amphetamines and LSD became increasingly available, especially in Auckland”⁸⁸. In 1998 there were 62 arrests made, in 2000 this number rose to 118 and in 2001 the number soared up to 414. With an established local trade police believed that organised crime were playing a “central role” in the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine⁸⁹ and were reaping huge profits as a result. In fact, in November 1998 four arrests were made at the end of a large-scale police investigation involving drug manufacture. “During their operation, police recovered \$217,000 in cash along with 3.6kg of methamphetamine and enough chemicals to produce another 74kg. It was reported that Highway 61 was being used to distribute the drugs”⁹⁰. While it can be argued that this significant increase is due to an increase in the ‘problem’ it could also be a result of more police awareness of ATS, particularly methamphetamine, and not forgetting that these statistics were from a study funded by the New Zealand Police Association. There is also an increase of activity at our borders. This is evident by looking at seizure statistics. In 1998 customs seized 3,000 ecstasy tablets, in 2000 10,000 and in 2001 a massive 73,000 tablets destined for the New Zealand market. As a consequence, customs have stepped up their policing of drug trafficking, however those trafficking these sorts of drugs are becoming more inventive in the ways in which they bring these drugs over our borders. In 2004 customs seized large amount of ATS. In November some 240,000

⁸⁶ Wilkins C, (2004), 4

⁸⁷ Newbold G, (2000), 180

⁸⁸ Newbold G, (2000), 180

⁸⁹ Wilkins C, (2004), 5

⁹⁰ Newbold G, (2000), 180

ephredrine tablets were found inside furniture shipped in from China. With chemists now having the right to demand identification when purchasing cold and flu tablets (from which meth cooks extract ephredrine) those involved in the manufacture of methamphetamine are now trafficking ephredrine in its raw form. This is yet another sign that organized crime is side-stepping the law. ATS are not the only drugs on offer in New Zealand. While cocaine, heroin and the more recently popular GBH (fantasy) are readily available it is the latter that is prevalent.

In 1971 CR Henwood wrote “A turned on world: drug use in New Zealand”. He was the first person in New Zealand to do an in-depth study on drugs, and he said, “ there is little doubt that here in New Zealand there is a growing drug problem”⁹¹. Halfway into the first decade of the 21st century this is still the case. With organized crime more sophisticated than ever before and a large market willing to consume, one can only wonder when New Zealand drug culture will be the home to yet another concoction.

⁹¹ Henwood CR, (1971), 1

CASE STUDY: The Press, Politics and the Menace of ‘Meth’ in America (1989-1996)

I will draw largely from two chapters in Paul Jenkins’s book ‘*Synthetic Panics: The symbolic politics of designer drugs*’ which discusses in detail certain elements that contributed to two moral panics concerning methamphetamine in the U.S. It will show how drug use can have an international character⁹² especially when considering that: “In New Zealand, drug use patterns and the evolution of drug law bear a strong relationship to events overseas”.⁴³ This case study is something that we can draw on when looking at what happened in New Zealand. Chapter five of Jenkins’s book refers to the first panic that the media created, ‘*The Menace That Went Away: The Ice Age, 1989-1990*’ while the second, ‘*Redneck Cocaine: The methamphetamine Panic of the Nineties*’ gives rise to a classic moral panic stemming from a governmental threat to cut Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)⁹³resources.

America passed through two panics about meth, the so called ‘ice age’ being the first and the second during President Clinton’s residency as part of a ‘get tough’ policy on hard-core drugs and the users of these drugs. “There is little question that epidemics of illicit drug use in American society have shown a cyclic pattern, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, hallucinogens and marijuana trading places as the “drug du jour”⁹⁴. In the US it has become apparent that heroin, cocaine and marijuana while being drugs that experience ‘flare-ups’ in the media every so often have actually become drugs where usage has lead to “ongoing endemic problems” within society.⁹⁵

Over the past decade methamphetamine use has also been an ongoing problem in the

⁹² Newbold G, (2000), 161

⁹³ (Drug Enforcement Agency)

⁹⁴ Rawson RA, (2002), 6

⁹⁵ Rawson Ra, (2002), 6

US, so while it was given a lot of attention during these two periods it still remains prevalent within American drug culture today. In New Zealand the nick-name of meth is 'P', this is because it is a pure form of speed, so 'P' comes from 'pure'. In the U.S, meth is more commonly known as 'Ice' because of the way it 'chilled' law enforcement officials. "The decade (1990) began with frenzied warnings about the imminent 'ice age', in which the nation was on the verge of being swept by a devastating new form of smokeable methamphetamine nicknamed ice". It was the term "Ice" that "offered potential for journalists seeking attention-grabbing headlines: the phrase "ice age" implied that the drug could somehow so dominate American society that it could give its name to an era." The phrase was also used by Hawaiian Politician Daniel Akaka and Hawaiian Police Chief Gibb in the two congressional hearings of 1989-1990 that sparked the so-called 'ice age'⁹⁶.

It was during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the 1980's that the 'ice age' grew to be known. Reagan took a heavy stance on the trafficking and use of drugs, this subsequently served to be at the centre of American domestic policy during his time in power. The first signs of an 'ice' epidemic came in 1989 when police in Hawaii uncovered evidence of importation and manufacture. Hawaii, having major ports in which to ship in ingredients and ship out the finished product seemed like the perfect place for such an operation. Subsequently there were also signs of importation and manufacture in San Diego, just one of many busy American ports. In March of the same year some 20 clandestine laboratories were busted in southern California and an even larger importation ring than was previously imagined was discovered in Hawaii. During the early 1990's "use of ice in the Hawaiian Islands became rampant".⁹⁷ The real panic however came when two congressional hearings were held offering an

⁹⁶ Jenkins P, (1999), 107

⁹⁷ Yudko E, (2003), 7

abundance of material about the epidemic on America's doorstep. As a consequence of these hearings "between September and December 1989 major stories appeared in all of the main metropolitan newspapers".⁹⁸ The press exclaimed that: "Ice had the potential to cause havoc in geographical, social and ethnic settings as yet untouched by crack (cocaine)"⁹⁹. News outlets saw a huge increase in stories on methamphetamine during this time, in 1988 there were 115 stories involving 'ice', in 1989 there was a small but significant increase with 168 stories, in 1990 a record high was reached in that 401 stories made reference to meth. Interestingly enough in 1991 there was a drop in news about meth with only 74 stories in which many people "dismissed ice as a fad".¹⁰⁰ Worthy of note is the fact that emergency rooms around America between 1988 and 1991 actually experienced a decrease in methamphetamine related cases. Meanwhile, Hawaiian politicians Daniel Akaka and Patricia Saiki were creating a whirlwind of publicity about 'ice', gaining for themselves much needed political capital. With Saiki being a Democrat and Akaka a Republican "the rivalry between the two grew all the more significant in 1989, as it became increasingly likely that both would soon be vying for a U.S Senate seat"¹⁰¹. Both Akaka and Saiki, having significant interests in drug issues "stood to benefit from making 'ice' look as perilous and threatening as possible, and both emerge as classic moral entrepreneurs".¹⁰² Akaka and Saiki labeled 'ice' as the new crack cocaine, while Saiki focused more on legislation, requesting that more government money be spent on anti-drug resources. Akaka having already served as a member of the narcotics subcommittee was the one who labeled the infamous "ice age", "it was Akaka who introduced that potent term "ice age" in the hearings and who drew some

⁹⁸ Jenkins P, (1999), 105

⁹⁹ Jenkins P, (1999), 112

¹⁰⁰ Jenkins P, (1999), 116

¹⁰¹ Jenkins P, (1999), 111

¹⁰² Jenkins P, (1999), 110

of the starkest analogies between ice and crack (cocaine)”¹⁰³. They made sweeping claims that ice “was an urgent danger to nice kids, to suburbanites and to white kids”, linking any racial overtones to the asian and white population of America.¹⁰⁴ In the end Saiki lost to Daniel Akaka, who made history by becoming the first native Hawaiian to have a seat in the U.S Senate. Although “this panic was strictly a regional event”¹⁰⁵, the mass media acted upon the methamphetamine issue as if it were a nation-wide phenomenon. And, it is true that “the incessant diet of alarming stories had it’s impact”¹⁰⁶ in that in 1986 only 3% of all Americans voiced concern about drug use and abuse, however just three years later (1989) 64% of people thought that drugs were the “nations most important problem”⁵⁹. It is statistics like these that led the DEA and law-enforcement officials to make the conclusion that “the danger of ice had been substantially overstated, and media rhetoric subsided within a few months of the congressional hearings”¹⁰⁷. Just like any other moral panic “the media found new and far more important things to become alarmed about, and public concern about drugs fell correspondingly.....Ice was dismissed as a fad: the ice age perished, scarcely mourned, barley even noticed”¹⁰⁸.

From 1991 until the very end of 1993, the American press remained largely quiet about methamphetamine. However this was just a calm before a somewhat bigger storm involving politicians, government departments, the media and most importantly, the American President at the time, Bill Clinton. “It made excellent sense

¹⁰³ Jenkins P, (1999), 112

¹⁰⁴ Jenkins P, (1999), 109

¹⁰⁵ Jenkins P, (1999), 95

¹⁰⁶ Jenkins P, (1999), 98

¹⁰⁷ Jenkins P, (1999), 115

¹⁰⁸ Jenkins P. (1999), 116

for the Clinton administration to demonstrate such intense concern about a regional crime problem like methamphetamine, especially when his party had been attacked by Republicans for being soft on crime and drug issues”¹⁰⁹. So, “the rediscovery of meth was a political product par excellence”¹¹⁰. The former American President, President Reagan, was particularly concerned with the many issues surrounding drugs, including their illegal trafficking, especially between South America and the U.S., and recreational drug use during his term in office. So, when Clinton came into the presidential office the American public, being used to having a president who was hard on drugs and crimes, were somewhat stunned by Clinton’s softer approach. “Clinton believed that his electoral constituency and political agenda were not served by a high-profile war on drugs”¹¹¹. However, following the attack from the Republicans in January of 1994 there was a shift in policy made by the Clinton administration.

Drawn up were plans to create an “institution building” process that aimed at strengthening democratic governments abroad in which the U.S would take a secondary status. In doing this they also wanted to persuade drug-producing nations to “shut off the flow and disrupt international drug trafficking syndicates”¹¹². In turn this shift in policy would seek to promote legitimate economic opportunity. Its main problem is that the administration failed to recognize that many nations’ gross national product relies on drugs so heavily that in some places without the illicit drug trade many people would be forced out onto the streets. As part of the same shift in policy, Clinton proposed a drug strategy that aimed at the treatment of hard-core users. He requested \$355 million (US) to help implement his new policy. Only

¹⁰⁹ Jenkins P, (1999), 149

¹¹⁰ Jenkins P, (1999), 134

¹¹¹ Bertram E, (1996), 116

¹¹² Walker III OW, (1996), 215/216

receiving \$57 million, many argued that Clinton failed to “re-orient national policy in ways that addressed the health problems of hard-core users”¹¹³. Clinton’s main concern at this time was with the treatment side of drugs rather than prevention, for this approach he came under much fire from the opposition.

“In the first months of 1996, meth earned star treatment in all of the major news outlets”¹¹⁴. Dr Michael Abrams of Broadlawn Medical Center in De Moines states in a 1996 article in the New York Times on Drugs in Iowa – “This is the most malignant addictive drug known to mankind. Crack, as wicked as it is, cannot compare to the destructive power of methamphetamine”¹¹⁵. The DEA made huge claims that they were experiencing another big boom larger than what they saw during the supposed “ice age”. In fact, the DEA reported that there was a 518% increase in meth related crime in California alone. It is argued though that, “the white storm warning of mid-decade can largely be traced to a DEA anxious to defend and augment its resources at a time of potential political threat”¹¹⁶. In spite of this President Clinton was quick to act on these claims, with meth having such political appeal (as earlier demonstrated), “in 1996 the president made suppressing speed a major element of his national policies on crime and justice”¹¹⁷. The re-emergence of meth was dubbed as the ‘white storm warning’ and it is obvious that the DEA began this panic because of anxieties about the president cutting back on its resources. Therefore being under a potential political threat this ‘white storm warning’ was a desperate call for Clinton to keep funding their operations. New claims began to arise about the effects of methamphetamine, and “by the mid-1990’s, crystal was being cited as a factor in

¹¹³ Bertram E, (1996), 122/123

¹¹⁴ Jenkins P, (1999), 136

¹¹⁵ Somers I, (2004), 2

¹¹⁶ Jenkins P, (1999), 133

¹¹⁷ Jenkins P, (1999), 133

roughly half of all AIDS cases in Los Angeles County”¹¹⁸ This rise in AIDS cases could be linked with the number of people injecting methamphetamine as it is similar to looking at statistics involving heroin users and AIDS cases. It is clear to see that here the DEA went overboard with the ‘white storm warning’, there were no statistics to back up these arguments and the American press, always looking for new leads, seemed to jump on the bandwagon siding with and augmenting, DEA claims about methamphetamine. While it is possible that there was some correlation between reported AIDS cases and methamphetamine it was only observed in one area. When the public believe that a drug is “sweeping” the country, “what is usually happening is that the media and law enforcement officials have discovered a regional fad, then projected it onto the national stage”¹¹⁹. And this is what happened with methamphetamine. Mostly observed on the west coast of America, the DEA, with help from the media, made those on the other side of the country think that this was a national problem and that methamphetamine was a threat to the lives of all American citizens. Some evidence to support this argument is the fact that in Arizona and Nevada, there were 132 labs seized in the year ended 1996 while in all other states there were less than 90 labs busted, therefore showing a regional problem rather than a national one. This high seizure of labs in the so called ‘wild west’ was much needed proof for the DEA to demand more resources, in this case money. However Bill Clinton decided to look at this in a different way saying that, “law enforcement was winning enormous victories in the face of the menace”¹²⁰. It is here that Clinton, instead of standing up to these claims “tended to back down rather than wage a costly political battle”¹²¹ for fear of repercussions.

¹¹⁸ Jenkins P, (1999), 103

¹¹⁹ Jenkins P, (1999), 16

¹²⁰ Jenkins P, (1999), 149

¹²¹ Bertram E, (1996), 117

The media then drew a link between methamphetamine use and violence. This is something that the New Zealand media have also picked up on. These accounts “stressed the extreme violence said to have been caused by the drug...stories of savage violence became the staple of reporting on meth issues”¹²². Increasingly meth was seen as a violent drug that turns users of it into frenzied killers. This association of methamphetamine to violence had been observed since the 1960’s, reports “told how the drug was found in individuals who had carried out heinous crimes implying a direct cause-and-effect relationship”¹²³. However it was not brought to light until the white storm warning of the mid-1990’s. It is apparent that the press needed another way to characterize methamphetamine and to make it even more of a menace than earlier perceived.

When it comes to policy, especially in the United States of America, drugs are usually high on the agenda simply because the public tend to respond to hard-line approaches. Certain approaches give the public the perception that governments are pro-active and concerned about the interests of the people. However, there is a large divide between what drug policies are and what anti-drug scares are. While anti-drug policies are for the betterment of society and to stamp out drug use, drug scares “rapidly become what sociologists term moral panics”¹²⁴. By looking at what happened in America at the beginning of the 1990’s and in the middle of this same decade, we are able get an idea as to how politics, the press and official sources can be responsible for causing an unnecessary national anxiety about certain substances. In this case it was methamphetamine. For the Reagan administration the war on the illegal importation of cocaine was high on the anti-drug agenda, especially at a time when trafficking

¹²² Jenkins P, (1999), 137

¹²³ Jenkins P, (1999), 134

¹²⁴ Jenikins P, (1999), 4

between South America and the United States was at an all time high. For the Clinton administration, waging a war on meth was vital in the re-assurance of public attitudes early in his time in office. “Drug panics of the last decade or so can be correlated to the electoral cycle, in turn however, we must not forget that, “the degree of panic associated with a social problem depends on the wider cultural and political context rather than on any intrinsic qualities of the phenomenon itself”¹²⁵.

The first panic about methamphetamine started because of the personal interests of Patricia Saiki and Daniel Akaka. Once Akaka had won and secured his seat in the US Senate methamphetamine conveniently disappeared from news reports and public opinion polls. In the case of the next panic the DEA were the main culprits. However, with Clinton seeing potential votes with the issue it is plain that the second methamphetamine panic was of benefit to both the President and the DEA.

With the media always hungry for the next big story, especially in the United States where competition is fierce, without their radical claims and reports these two panics would never have taken place.

“If anything has been learned from the history of drug use in America it is that “drug problems” are an ever-shifting and changing phenomena...and if the media are to be believed, now and then there is even a drug epidemic”¹²⁶.

¹²⁵ Jenkins P, (1999), 22/5

¹²⁶ Somers I, (2004), 1

Specific Cases/Official Sources: The journey of methamphetamine through the New Zealand Press 1998-2004

This next section is an in-depth look at how the New Zealand press reported on methamphetamine. It will present evidence that will prove whether or not a moral panic did happen and if the press reported responsibly in fulfilling their role in portraying the reality of the methamphetamine situation in an unbiased manner. This analysis will be done through a chronological examination of specific cases stories and events. These will be categorized as a ‘Case’, something that resulted in a court trial; a ‘Story’, an article in which the subject of methamphetamine was a main feature; and an ‘Event’, an occurrence that adds to and gives shape to the methamphetamine debate. On a general level I will refer to cases, stories and events as the ‘sample’. All twenty five have been chosen for being defining factors in the methamphetamine debate and collectively contributing to the nation-wide anxiousness toward ‘P’¹²⁷ and those who are associated with or use it.

The time frame of the samples spans November 1998 to November 2004, from the first hints of a methamphetamine problem to finally, calls for new government legislation in relation to the drug.

I have solely selected samples from the New Zealand print media and from them will seek to identify if the New Zealand methamphetamine debate possesses the hallmarks and parallels of a classic, Stanley Cohen, Moral Panic.

I will be sourcing samples from four different newspapers, *The New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), *The Waikato Times* (Waikato), *The Dominion Post* (Wellington), *The Press* (Christchurch) and two current affairs magazines *The Listener* and *Metro*.

¹²⁷ ‘P’ – the abbreviated name for methamphetamine. Coming from the word ‘pure’, because this drug is a pure type of speed

While the samples have been chosen to show the shape methamphetamine debate took, they have also been selected using strict criteria. These samples were researched via the Internet or through the gathering of newspaper clippings during this research. Those that were found on the Internet followed a guided keyword search. Using Newztext, each case, story or event was entered and cross-referenced with the word methamphetamine so, for example when I searched for samples about Pipiroa I put into the Newztext search engine “Pipiroa and ‘methamphetamine’” and this is how I was able to bring up each story, case and event and then gather the samples for it. Each sample will be examined in terms of its style, content and tone, whether or not it sensationalised ‘P’ and how honest the reporting attempted to be.

The journey begins on 18/11/1998, the headline reading “Judge sets deterrent sentence: ‘Speed’ manufacture labelled ‘new social evil’¹²⁸. This article states that William John Wallace, a member of the Highway 61 motorcycle gang and his three associates (one being his wife) were sentenced to a total of 24 years three months in prison for the manufacture and supply of methamphetamine as well as money laundering. The heavy sentences were passed down as a deterrent to others considering manufacturing or supplying methamphetamine. “In what was claimed to be the biggest drug-making operation in New Zealand history....Justice Giles said more than \$1.3 million of drugs passed through their hands in 18 months”¹²⁹. The end of this article comes with a warning from Crown prosecutor Ross Burns in that he was “unaware of anything of this scale in this country before. He said methamphetamine manufacture had ‘only recently begun to take off in this country’ and was a new

¹²⁸ New Zealand Herald, (18/11/1998)

¹²⁹ New Zealand Herald, (18/11/1998)

social evil that needed to be punished firmly”¹³⁰. Once again this article states that methamphetamine is a social evil, possibly even pointing to things to come in terms of what New Zealand may face in the future with regards to this so-called threatening drug. And it is true that this article in particular has all of the elements of a story that is about to ‘take off’. With the mention of gang involvement, drugs, copious amounts of money and a justice system ready to pounce, it is no wonder that methamphetamine was given star attention by the press from this moment on.

In a *New Zealand Herald* article, written by Tony Sticklely titled “Jurors under lock and key”, methamphetamine was given its second mention in the New Zealand press, on 26/02/1999. In a drugs trial involving the Hells Angels, it was decided by Justice Tompkins that all those on the jury for this case would be kept in an Auckland hotel under tight security until they reached a verdict. The nine men in question, three being patched members and another six associates, were said to have been part of a ring in which “allegations of manufacture of methamphetamine, supply and conspiracy to supply, and money laundering”¹³¹ were just some of the charges these men faced. Police also made comment that “\$100,000” in cash was also seized and that the total unexplained income was more than “\$250,000”. “Satisfied the risk was real”¹³² Justice Tompkins could disclose little more, however it is the combination of drugs and gang activity that leads the reader to the likely conclusion that the jury could possibly have been in danger of standover tactics. Something that the New Zealand judicial system has grown accustomed to since methamphetamine has become a factor in a growing number of cases.

¹³⁰ New Zealand Herald, (18/11/1998)

¹³¹ Sticklely T, New Zealand Herald, (26/02/1999)

¹³² Sticklely T, New Zealand Herald, (26/02/1999)

On the 24/07/1999, in conjunction with the New Zealand Press Association (NZPA), the New Zealand Herald published its third story on methamphetamine. The headline read, “How Gang Made Millions”¹³³. In it the NZPA says it is aware that the Headhunters are making millions of dollars through the sale and manufacture of drugs and the running of illegitimate businesses to launder money. Detective Sergeant Craig Martin Turley of the organised crime unit exclaims that organised crime has evolved at such a fast rate that it has “caught us by surprise”¹³⁴, and goes on to say that “although the sale of alcohol is profitable at such functions (at the gang’s Headquarters), the sale of Ecstasy and Methamphetamine is their (Headhunters) main source of income”. Turley singles out the Headhunters as being the ‘major players’ in the distribution of methamphetamine throughout Auckland. However, he also admits that the sophistication of this gang in particular had far surpassed law enforcement officials’ prior knowledge. This brings us to question why the police took so long to ‘bust’ this gang? Were they outsmarted? Could the ‘P’ ‘epidemic’ have been forestalled if the police were more proactive and better informed and if so, could the can of worms have been contained before it had a chance to spill?

In November 1999 the first trial of Operation Flower was abandoned. Operation Flower was the first big bust made by the police involving methamphetamine. With defendants calling it things like Operation Pansy it was clear that the seven men up for trial out manoeuvred the police in their first round in court by interfering with the jury. It would be over three years before this case brought about any convictions.

On the 13/09/ 2000 the second attempt to nail Operation Flower was made, however again there was insufficient evidence and more inklings that the jury had been once

¹³³ New Zealand Herald, (24/07/1999)

¹³⁴ Turley CM, New Zealand Herald, (24/07/1999)

more 'stood over'. 01/11/2000 was a day that all involved in the case could celebrate. After surveillance that could only be described as 'FBI' style the organised crime unit swooped upon addresses and a large warehouse which they had been watching closely. The trial was set to take place in 09/2002.

Following four months of surveillance, the police had finally gathered enough evidence to charge Headhunters boss Peter Cleven and many other associates. On the 11/01/2000, Operation Mexico was the first big bust that the New Zealand press reported, however, it was only the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Waikato Times* that ran stories on it. On the 12th the *Herald* ran a story – the headline, “Drug Bust nets speed guns and money”¹³⁵. Detective Sergeant Darryl Brazier was in charge of the investigation and said, “the drug ring has been going on for some time and had been distributing speed throughout the North Island”¹³⁶.

On stating that Ecstasy and methamphetamine were the “fastest growing drugs in the country”¹³⁷, Detective Senior Sergeant Colin McMurtrie, head of the Auckland Organised Crime Unit said “speed was gaining popularity because it was now being manufactured in New Zealand, making it more readily available. Gangs were making and selling it because it was a big money maker”⁶. The article ended with a Ministry of Health representative saying, “that in high doses, the use of methamphetamine could lead to drug-induced psychosis, paranoid delusions, hallucinations and aggressive or violent behaviour”¹³⁸. On the 13/01/2000, the *Waikato Times* picked up on the Operation Mexico story. The Headline, “16 in court after drug raids”¹³⁹. This

¹³⁵ Kairiaa S, *New Zealand Herald*, (12/01/2000)

¹³⁶ Brazier D, in Kairiaa S, *New Zealand Herald*, (12/01/2000)

¹³⁷ McMurtrie C, in Kairiaa S, *New Zealand Herald*, (12/01.2000)

¹³⁸ Kairiaa S, *New Zealand Herald*, (12/01/2000)

¹³⁹ NZPA, *Waikato Times*, (13/01/2000)

shows that the press were inconsistent in their reporting because the *New Zealand Herald* article states that 20 people were arrested while the *Waikato Times* refers to only 16 arrests. The *New Zealand Herald* was the newspaper that got the number of arrests correct, that number being 20. In just four sentences, the *Waikato Times* article is short and to the point, the most informative of the four sentences being “police searched 25 addresses in Whangarei, Auckland, Thames and the Waikato”⁸. The sources for both of these stories comes from what I would like to term ‘official sources’¹⁴⁰ (the police and the judiciary) and begins to set the scene especially in the way that it makes extensive reference to the gangs, painting them as the ‘folk devils’ that are putting speed ‘out there’. Operation Mexico will be discussed later in the article when we come to talking about the Cleven trial.

Following the Operation Mexico swoop the remainder of 2000 was quiet in relation to methamphetamine. In February 2001 however, the *New Zealand Herald* published a story, headline: “Poor mans cocaine becoming drug of choice”¹⁴¹. The opening statement; “Methamphetamine, or poor man’s cocaine, is more popular than cannabis and the drug of choice in New Zealand say police”. Firstly, poor man’s cocaine is the American name for methamphetamine, a term then that has been adopted from the US. Secondly, there are no statistics to back up the claim that methamphetamine is really more popular than cannabis it is just a police statement. In fact this whole article is just one police statement after the other. Whoever wrote this story has sought no other outside comment and therefore this story is just another way in which the press in conjunction with the police caused a furore in relation to methamphetamine. The reason for this article was actually sparked by a large-scale bust of

¹⁴⁰ Official Sources – Those sources which include the Police, the judiciary and medical practitioners.

¹⁴¹ NZPA, *New Zealand Herald*, (01/02/2001)

methamphetamine the previous day, the name of the investigation ‘Operation Pope’. Operation Pope resulted in 20 arrests in raids of 24 addresses in “Northland, Auckland and Coromandel”¹⁴². It also uncovered “280g of methamphetamine” and “glassware”, suggesting manufacture was a part of this case. Detective Inspector Viv Rickard points to the gangs being a factor, “the gangs and criminal fraternity are seeing methamphetamine as a quick way to make money” and that “methamphetamine has taken over throughout New Zealand, particularly in Auckland. It is now the drug of choice”¹⁴³. In a way Rickard is setting us up for things to come. By demonising organised crime and placing the blame on gangs for meths’ prevalence specifically in the Auckland region it is easy to see where the press have taken the lead in this whole debate. The next statement from an official source outlines my point here nicely, “The chief of the National Drug Intelligence Bureau, Detective Sergeant Tony Quale, has indicated that he hopes methamphetamine will become the key target for drug police across the country”¹⁴⁴. This story in its entirety goes from talking about meth being our drug of choice, to a covert police operation, to stating that Auckland is where meth use has been most observed, to then telling us that meth is going to be targeted by the police in the future on a nationwide scale. Unsurprisingly it then hints that the police are appealing to the government for more resources, and using gangs and methamphetamine as the reason for more money. “The police association will be encouraging the minister to provide the resources to allow police to focus on all areas of crime, especially gangs, the main suppliers of methamphetamine”, said Greg O’Connor the President of the Police Association. This story in particular will be discussed in the conclusion as a key part in how we can see and apply Jock Young’s

¹⁴² NZPA, New Zealand Herald, (01/02/2001)

¹⁴³ NZPA, New Zealand Herald, (01/02/2001)

¹⁴⁴ NZPA, New Zealand Herald, (01/02/2001)

‘Deviance Amplification Spiral’ particularly in relation to the behaviour of the police and the media when talking about methamphetamine.

While growing in popularity meth did not hit the headlines again until after the murders at the Panmure/Mt Wellington RSA in December 2001. William Bell, the man who was responsible for the three deaths and the robbery at the Panmure/Mt Wellington RSA was found to have been ‘high on P’ at the time of the brutal killings. However it was not until other violent crimes surfaced that the RSA murders became significant in the build-up to the ‘P’ out-break. It is safe to say then that the RSA murders were re-contextualised as having an inherent link to methamphetamine. We will talk about this re-contextualisation during the discussion of the murder of 6 year-old Featherston girl Coral Burrows.

To this point, all of these events and cases are what I have identified as being the background of the ‘P’ debate. All of them have been picked up later in other stories, so serve as a backbone to what was coming next.

The beginning of 2002 saw the end of the Operation Mexico re-trial and the subsequent starting point of the ‘P’ debate. On the final day of the trial (15/03/2002), Peter Cleven – whom the police name as being the ‘Kingpin of organised crime’, walked free from the High Court. The *Waikato Times* article: “Gang Boss Acquitted on drugs re-trial”¹⁴⁵, quotes Cleven thanking the jury. “Thankyou jury for putting up with everything and doing the right job”¹⁰. The jury found Cleven not guilty of methamphetamine supply over a two-year period and dealing in cannabis for over 12 years. His assets amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. He said it came from

¹⁴⁵ NZPA, *Waikato Times*, (15/03/2002)

goat farming, however the police were more than convinced it was “gained through a drugs operation conducted on a large and organised scale”¹⁰. Following his acquittal, Clevens assets were given back to him, however he claims that the trial cost him an estimated \$300,000. Detective Sergeant Darryl Brazier, giving the only police statement said, “We are disappointed”¹⁴⁶. Operation Mexico ended up being a big blow to the Organised Crime Squad. They failed to pin those who may have been guilty of crimes that made many people wealthy while costing the taxpayer large amounts of money in the process. The tone of this story spells out the disappointment of the police. While they were certain that Cleven was going to be put away for a very long time they (the police) lacked sufficient evidence and an elated Cleven walked free.

With Operation Mexico still hot off the press, nine days after Cleven’s acquittal on a quiet Saturday afternoon in Manurewa, residents witnessed a nose to tail car crash with a twist. The headline by police reporter Scott McLeod of the New Zealand Herald read, “Rammed car carried sinister cargo”¹⁴⁷. This was not the only bizarre car accident that the press ran with on this day. At 4.30pm on the same day in Karaka, another similar, however un-related incident took place. Back in Manurewa, “passing motorists watched as the rammed Mazda hatchback flipped on it’s side and hit a power pole”¹². The resident whose driveway the car blocked offered to help once the two occupants of the car had hinted at something illegal in the boot. “Neighbours saw the limping and bleeding men haul containers variously described as a small chest, a sports bag and ‘heaps of bottles’ down the short driveway to the man’s garage. One

¹⁴⁶Brazier D, Waikato Times, (15/03/2002)

¹⁴⁷ McLeod S, New Zealand Herald, (24/03/2002)

bag that was placed on the back lawn oozed a substance from a black doormat-sized hole into the grass”¹². After cordoning off the entire-street and warning residents to stay in their homes, Inspector Bruce Bird said, “the containers held glassware and ingredients used for making methamphetamine (speed)”. If the event in Manurewa was the only methamphetamine-related occurrence on this day then it is possible that the methamphetamine debate may never have been ‘given legs’. However because of the later incident in Karaka that McLeod also mentioned to in his article it seemed that methamphetamine manufacture was increasingly ubiquitous. The Karaka incident had many of the same elements. Another nose-to-tail, this time in busy southern motorway traffic, again chemicals were revealed in the boot of the car that were capable of making methamphetamine. The events on this day soon became a defining point in the beginning of the methamphetamine debate. McLeod’s article, while being well-rounded in its reporting and giving many witness as well as police accounts may never have been intentionally seeking to create a stir but simply by reporting on two related and coincidental events it had the effect of doing just that.

As a follow up to the events of the preceding weeks *The Listener* published an article called “Speed Freaks: Inside the methamphetamine craze. Social evil or moral panic?”¹⁴⁸ 06-12/04/2002. As the cover story it featured a watermarked picture of a person smoking a glass pipe. The reporter Bianca Zander, declared that methamphetamine “has been called the new street drug epidemic”. But by whom? We are not told. Her article also speaks about how methamphetamine is being made right here in New Zealand – something we are already aware of. She personalises methamphetamine through using a person called ‘Dave’, a user who claims to have

¹² McLeod S, New Zealand Herald, (24/03/2002)

¹⁴⁸ Zander B, New Zealand Listener, (06-12/04/2002)

seen the dark side of this drug, even serving time for it. After hearing ‘Dave’s’ story we then delve into the world of methamphetamine. Zander makes many sweeping claims in this article, “every person that the *Listener* spoke to – from cops to drug counsellors – said it was a drug that crossed all social and economic boundaries”¹⁴⁹. She also talks about other drugs that the New Zealand media have given attention to in recent years. “Last year it was Fantasy, the year before that it was Ecstasy. But 2002 looks like being the year of worrying about methamphetamines. According to some newspaper reports, they are the new cannabis and usage is reaching ‘epidemic’ proportions”¹⁵⁰. Although it is good that she has pointed out that other drugs have been characterised in similar ways, what are the newspaper reports that she is referring to here? And who says that meth is an ‘epidemic’?

Any ‘average New Zealander’, upon reading this article would have been left fearing methamphetamine. In fact in an ironic sense Bianca Zander could be credited for creating a ‘moral panic’ all on her own. While some of the contents of this article were informative one can see how, as an early article on this subject by a current events magazine, it hugely contributed to the beginning of the hype that was surrounding the ‘meth’ debate.

With some predictability *Metro* magazine picked up on the ‘meth’ crisis with senior writer Matt Philp’s article taking the front cover story of the June 2002 edition, “The New Drug Lords: Drugs and the rise of organised crime”¹⁵¹. Quite different to the *Listener*’s cover picture, *Metro* chose to take the gang angle on their picture combining the logo’s of New Zealand gangs, suggesting the content of this article that the gangs are uniting over methamphetamine. The 12-page ‘Gangland Rising’ begins

¹⁴⁹ Zander B, (2002), 16

¹⁵⁰ Zander B, (2002), 15

¹⁵¹ Philp M, *Metro*, (06/2002)

with the outcome of Operation Mexico and the Cleven Trial, and highlights the increasing sophistication of organised crime. Following on from this Philp goes on to talk about what happened in South Auckland at the end of March (the car lab crashes) as “lanes of speed indeed”¹⁵². He highlights a significant rise in lab seizures, with police making reference that arrests for methamphetamine are up “400%”. Philp claims that these rises in statistics “suggest something more than just better educated frontline cops”¹⁵³. Philp also states that in comparison to other OECD countries, “unsurprisingly, we are the last cab off the rank”¹⁵⁴ in following international trends of methamphetamine use. Philps’ main argument is that gangs are now collaborating and working together to reap the benefits of the methamphetamine trade. “There are strong suggestions that some of the more powerful clubs have ‘broken bread’ and are now collaborating for mutual advantage in the drugs trade. A kind of gangs incorporated”¹⁵⁵. Towards the end of this article, Philp gives attention to the fact that anyone with a ‘P’ habit is spending an estimated \$1400 a week, “where’s that coming from”, he questions. “The methamphetamine boom is a crime boom police argue”¹⁵⁶. However he also quotes Dr Greg Newbold, a Criminologist at the University of Canterbury who says that it goes with the subculture and “so it’s difficult to establish cause and effect”¹⁹. Here Philp has given balance to his argument by giving two opposing viewpoints. Although he does sensationalise ‘P’ at the start of his article he has not just given a police regurgitation of quotes as has been observed in many of the newspaper articles that have been examined as part of this research. His use of

¹⁵² Philp M, (2002), 36

¹⁵³ Philp M, (2002), 36

¹⁵⁴ Philp M, (2002), 36

¹⁵⁵ Philp M, (2002), 39

¹⁵⁶ Philp M, (2002), 39

Newbold's words show that Philp is trying to fairly look at the methamphetamine debate and that he is acting responsibly as a journalist.

On 05/11/2002 the *Dominion Post* published a story that no other daily paper ran with. It asks us to cast our minds back to 1999 and the Operation Flower trials.

"Auckland judge aborts long drug trial, reasons suppressed"¹⁵⁷ the headline read. The opening statement, "a BIG drugs trial has been aborted after eight weeks in the High Court at Auckland" and interestingly enough this reporter goes on to say.... "The reasons for abandoning the trial.....cannot be published for legal reasons"²¹. Into its ninth week of hearing Justice Nicholson "ordered a new trial, which will be held early next year". *The article goes on to name the accused however, because the Dominion Post could not give any more details it remains an abbreviated but significant piece.*

Heading up to Christmas 2002 a reaction to 'P' by the New Zealand government was made. In re-classifying 'P' those who manufactured and distributed it could now face life in prison. Although at this stage the law had only been proposed and not yet passed it was due to pass early in the New Year (2003). The *Herald* was the first to pick up on this story on the 17/12/2002, the *Waikato Times*, did so the next day.

Headlined "Speed reclassified as Class A drug"¹⁵⁸, the *Waikato Times* article claims that the proposed new laws would target those who exploit the drug. With possession for supply being set at five grams and over, those who have this amount or less could argue that its use is for personal reasons. The new legislation would also give the police the power to "search without a warrant if they suspect methamphetamine is

¹⁵⁷ NZPA, The Dominion Post, (05/11/2002)

¹⁵⁸ NZPA, Waikato Times, (18/12/2002)

being manufactured, distributed or used”²¹. Jim Anderton (leader of the Progressive Party) is quoted at the end of this article and says that “the government wanted the law to reflect how serious the drug and its consequences were”²¹. The final sentence of this article states that police found 37 clandestine labs in 2001, in 2002 up to the date that this article was published (18/12/2002) 125 were uncovered, clearly indicating that this ‘problem’ is on the rise and has been so for the last year.

2003 was to be the peak of media coverage of ‘P’. On 21 January Antonie Dixon began a violent rampage at his converted warehouse in Pipiroa, a tiny community in the Waikato Region of the Hauraki Plains. Resulting in the mutilation of two women’s hands, a gunshot death, a police chase, a hostage crisis and an armed offenders situation ending in Auckland’s eastern suburbs. Needless to say, the press had a field day. Whilst initial reports about Pipiroa focussed on Simone Butler and Renee Hills’ emergency surgery to re-attach their severed hands, the reporting soon shifted in its focus. By the 25/01 (four days after the incidents) it was made apparent that ‘P’ was a factor in this case. The first sign of a link came from the press in an article from the *New Zealand Herald* headlined “Drug ‘Pure’ linked to sword attacks and gunshot death”¹⁵⁹, it starts like this: “Investigations into the rampage that left two women with horrific samurai sword injuries and a man dead from gunshot wounds have uncovered a link to the notorious drug crystal meth”... “The *Herald* has learned that the drug known as ‘P’ or pure – is a factor in the background to these events”²¹. The evidence to back-up this claim comes from ‘police sources’ who obviously told journalists that the graffiti on the walls of the converted workshop, where the samurai

¹⁵⁹ Horwood A, Hall T, *New Zealand Herald*, (25/01/2003)

²¹ Horwood A, Hall T, *New Zealand Herald*, (25/01/2003)

attacks took place, indicate “the result of paranoia brought on by ‘P’”²¹. The head of the Drug Squad, Detective Senior Sergeant Colin McMurtrie “said pure methamphetamine was now firmly entrenched in New Zealand society and he warned that associated crimes would only get worse” and that “police had already linked at least nine homicides to use of methamphetamine”²¹. McMurtrie also stated that “we are surrounded by an epidemic of.....a drug that causes normal sane human beings to act totally irrationally”, he claimed that police commentators have been predicting this for years and that New Zealand has missed “an opportunity to stop the drug in its tracks. Everybody failed to listen and now we are suffering the consequences”²¹. This article is extremely sensationalised. Not only does it send out messages that could lead to public anxiety, it is also sketchy when it comes to giving supporting evidence. The police are the only voice in an article that should have many. And there is no questioning of the police’s role in stopping the drug in its ‘tracks’.

Unsurprisingly it is this crime and its link to methamphetamine that was a defining point in this whole debate. Throughout 2003 Pipiroa was referred to many times, especially when other crimes were said to have this same link with ‘P’. It was after Pipiroa that crimes that had happened much earlier were recast and shown as also having links to ‘P’.

“Speed Thrill”¹⁶⁰, an article released by The Press (Christchurch) on 26/09/2003 is a good example. Purporting to give a more medical evaluation of the methamphetamine debate its opening statement reads, “One in 16 first-time users of methamphetamine

¹⁶⁰ Ross T, The Press, (26/09/2003)

will develop a psychotic illness, consultant psychiatrist Roger Morgan warns”²².

Going on to talk about the health hazards that methamphetamine users may face this

article then turns to ‘P’s’ relation to violent crime. “In the past two years,

methamphetamine use has been linked to several high-profile violent crimes.”²²

Reporter Tara Ross then refers to five different crimes that involved violence to back-

up her claims. It is here that we can clearly see how the press re-contextualised events

and occurrences to fit the issues of the day, “January 03’. Antonie Dixon, was accused

of attempting to murder Simone Butler and Renee Hills at Pipiroa, near Thames, and

of murdering James Te Aute in Pakuranga. He was allegedly using

methamphetamine”²². Also mentioned are the RSA murders. A violent crime that

took place in December 2001 in which the link to ‘P’ remained unstated up until 2003

when other violent crimes started to take place. “William Bell admitted to being

‘wasted’ on methamphetamine when he murdered Mt Wellington – Panmure RSA

club President Bill Absolum, member Wayne Johnson and cleaner Mary Hobson”²².

By going as far back as 2001 *The Press* is giving its readers the idea that this

‘problem’ has been around for some time and that New Zealand is at the height of a

period that is seeing violent crimes as a result of increased methamphetamine use

throughout society.

The 17th of March 2003 at last saw the end of the Operation Flower trial. In “Drug

Lord’s day of reckoning”¹⁶¹ police claim to have “eliminated” the syndicate that

brought “the methamphetamine drug to Auckland”. Darryl Brazier, head of the

Organised Crime Unit said, “The case proved police warnings that the Auckland drug

¹⁶¹ Gower P, *The New Zealand Herald*, (17/05/2003)

scene was under the control of gangs such as the Headhunters”²³. Also given mention is that ‘P’ has been re-classified as a class ‘A’ drug by the government, as proposed in December of 2002 and that “concern about the drug also prompted the government to announce a \$6.6 million funding in this weeks budget for lab clean-up teams in Auckland and Wellington”²³. This indicated that the heat from the ‘P’ debate had reached the parliament chambers.

On 04/09/2003 South Island police teams raided addresses belonging to the Mongrel Mob. “Police raid Mob in drugs crackdown”¹⁶² was the first headline published by *The Press* alerting us to this bust. After five months of investigation, Operation Crusade was Southland’s first big methamphetamine bust. “Involving 150 police, 40 search warrants and making 26 arrests”²⁴, South Island police disrupted a huge money making business selling primarily cannabis, but also methamphetamine. Detective Sergeant Ross Tarawhiti said, “We have put a dent in their (the Mongrel Mob’s) retail operation”²⁴. *The Press* covered this story extensively because it was significant to the region however not much was heard in the North Island until the end of the trial in 2004. We will discuss Operation Crusade in more detail in the 2004 section.

A little over a month later six-year old Coral Burrows went missing in the Wairarapa town of Featherston. Her disappearance sparked a massive hunt, however the search was in vain for she was found dead days later, killed by her stepfather, Stephen Williams. On admitting to killing the little girl, Williams also claimed that he was ‘high on ‘P’ at the time of the killing. The New Zealand press went into yet another

¹⁶² Courteney D, *The Press*, (04/09/2003)

frenzy. On the 11/12/2003 the Christchurch *Press* published a story titled “The Battle against ‘P’”¹⁶³. It opens with a discussion about the factors surrounding Coral Burrows’ disappearance and subsequent death.

“Williams himself a drug dealer, has admitted to committing this heinous crime while fuelled up in the meth drug ‘P’. What more tragic evidence could there be of the insidious effects of this drug? Public outrage over Coral’s death must be converted into the tougher measures required to win the battle against the ‘P’ epidemic”²⁵.

The unidentified writer of this article is simply saying that ‘people who smoke ‘P’ kill little girls’. This unknown writer also blames the government for being too slow to act and asks Helen Clark to “seize the hour”²⁵, this sensational article with its dramatic headline, spells out one thing clearly – that New Zealanders must fear ‘meth’.

Two weeks following Coral’s disappearance a very big cross-cultural comparison was made. In “New Zealand chasing U.S sized habit”¹⁶⁴, police reporter Scott McLeod from the *New Zealand Herald* says, “New Zealand’s hard drug problem is on track to be as bad as the U.S”²⁶ quoting top intelligence police. Of course the ‘hard drug problem’ that is being referred to here is methamphetamine. To parallel New Zealand with the U.S is a huge claim to make. Detective Inspector Gary Knowles said “a visiting expert warned two years ago that New Zealand could expect to see “bizarre violent crimes” and more celebrities being busted for hard drugs”²⁹. Strangely enough, this story goes on to talk about the process methamphetamine goes through before it reaches the street, the United States is not mentioned again.

¹⁶³ The Christchurch Press, (11/12/2003)

²⁵ The Christchurch Press, (11/12/2003)

¹⁶⁴ McLeod S, The New Zealand Herald, (23/09/2003)

“The supply chain starts with ‘shoppers’ – criminals who risk jail to buy packet-loads of seemingly harmless cold and flu tablets. The trail ends with a cycle of violent crime as speed-fuelled criminals rob, and sometimes kill, for cash to feed their cravings”²⁹.

At the end of this story there is a chronological list of methamphetamine related stories over the previous weeks before the release of this story, this give the reader the impression that this ‘US sized habit’ has been brewing for quite some time.

This story is the type of account that creates unnecessary stir when put in the public spotlight and does not follow through on its headline. It is true that New Zealand has witnessed some crimes that were violent in which methamphetamine was an element but the only really ‘bizarre’ one was what happened in Pipiroa. This story does not back up any of these claims it just makes them.

As a possible reaction to this comparison, three weeks later (10/09/2003) the New Zealand police announced a ‘crack-down’ on methamphetamine. In “Insurers support Police crack-down”²⁷, The Insurance Council put forward its support for the police in their bid for more money to ‘crack-down’ on “methamphetamine, gangs and organised crime”²⁷. It argues that because of methamphetamine frontline officers do not have the resources to cope with all of the crime problems in metropolitan areas such as Auckland. With priority being given to crimes involving methamphetamine the consequences could be seen as having a “significantly reduced level of security for homes and vehicles”. Also mentioned in this article is the \$6.6 million dollars in the last budget to combat methamphetamine, referred to as “chicken feed” compared to the \$400 million dollar business of methamphetamine.

With so much frenzied reporting in 2003, 2004 is where a tailing off in interest can be observed. At the start of May 2004 the New Zealand police, in conjunction with Fijian officials busted a massive meth lab in Suva. Its final product was bound for New Zealand, Australia, the U.S and Europe. “New Zealand a target for million dollar drugs factory in Fiji”¹⁶⁵, was a story on 9th of May by the New Zealand Herald. In this story the police claim to have seized a lab with chemicals capable of making 1000kg of methamphetamine. With an estimated street value of \$890 million, this was the largest lab ever to be uncovered in the Southern Hemisphere. This discovery came as quite a shock as Fiji seemed an unlikely place to house a meth lab, however, being in a central part of the Pacific trafficking out the drug would have been far easier than from other countries.

With the Fiji meth trade foiled, the press took a rest from methamphetamine right up until the beginning of October until the trial for Operation Crusade. Unbeknownst to many New Zealanders, Operation Crusade was the biggest criminal trial in New Zealand legal history. The reason why this case was relatively under-reported is probably because it happened in Christchurch. *The Press* followed this story relentlessly however North Island newspapers only ran with Operation Crusade once the trial had ended. Resulting in 15 convictions “Gang business crumbles as trial ends”¹⁶⁶, was definitely a fitting headline. In a 15 month long investigation South Island police “secretly intercepted” phone calls, text messages and also had video surveillance of gang members ‘hard at work’. Operation Crusade was a success and has subsequently left a large gaping hole in the drugs trade in the South Island and in

¹⁶⁵ NZPA, The New Zealand Herald, (09/06/2004)

¹⁶⁶ The Press, (02/10.2004)

the gangs' membership. This article was a good piece of journalism, giving a lot of detail about the trial.

Three days after the end of the Crusade trial Dr Chris Wilkins, a researcher from Massey University released his study called "*The Socio-Economic Impact of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) in New Zealand*". On the day of its release the *Herald's* headline was "P's link to violence confirmed"¹⁶⁷. Interestingly enough, this study was actually about ATS (Amphetamine Type Stimulants), which not only include methamphetamine but also Ecstasy and Speed as well. The journalist (Bridget Carter) has accentuated the violence aspect of Wilkins' findings, in which only a small section is dedicated to the inherent link between methamphetamine and violence. Her article, on the other hand, makes it look like the whole study is about this one aspect. While the police had previously relied on "anecdotal evidence, linking amphetamine drugs with violent crime – they now had solid evidence"³¹. Other findings include that out of the 100,000 New Zealanders that tried methamphetamine in the past year (2003-2004) "one third"³¹ were regular users of the drug. Wilkins also found that Amphetamines increased users existing psychological problems and that many of these users were identified as being "young white males from the Auckland area"³¹. Of particular interest here is the fact that the Police Association funded much of Wilkins study.

The Press also reported on the Massey University Study on the same day. Titled "P and violence link – study"¹⁶⁸, this article gives less hype to the study than the one that featured in the *Herald*. It gave more attention to the fact that Wilkins' study was not

¹⁶⁷ Carter B, The New Zealand Herald, (05/10/2004)

¹⁶⁸ Kenny L, The Press, (05/10/2004)

only about methamphetamine or violence for that matter. Cate Kearney of the Christchurch based Alcohol Drug Association also gave balance to this article in saying that “violent offences among P users was far more common in people with a history of violence”, so certain people are more susceptible to acting violently when under the influence of methamphetamine than others. MP Jim Anderton is also quoted in this article, as chairman of the Ministerial Committee on Drugs he said that “the research underscored the need for tough legislation to target dealers”³¹. The article from *The Press* was far more informative and balanced than the one in the Herald, talking about more aspects of the research and calling on more sources than just the police.

Seventeen days after the release of the Massey University study (22/10/2004) came a surprising front-page headline. “Fall in p-lab busts hints epidemic has peaked”¹⁶⁹, by Simon Collins. This certainly would have made New Zealand Herald readers look twice at the front page on this day. With lab busts slightly down from the previous year ESR (Environmental Science and Research) manager of forensics “said the problem might have levelled off a bit”, however, one of three US experts from the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) hired by ESR stated “we don’t know if it has peaked. We go through variations through the year”. With two opposing viewpoints, each from experts, it is hard to make a conclusion. This is good journalism, while the headline has reader appeal, its contents give balance to its significant claim. Whilst conducting this research it did become apparent that methamphetamine was appearing less in the press, with stories in 2004 being historical rather than based on new ‘meth’ related crimes.

³¹ Kenny L, *The Press*, (05/10/2004)

¹⁶⁹ Collins S, *The New Zealand Herald*, (22/10/2004)

The final story that this article will cover was published on 27/11/2004. “Guilty until proven innocent”¹⁷⁰, by *New Zealand Herald* reporter Geoff Cumming. He talks about the proposed new ‘asset freeze law’ put forward by Justice Minister Phil Goff. This article opens with..... “Call it the Cleven clause: a law change inspired by the justice systems’ failure to snare the money of a notorious alleged drug lord”. This was sparked by Peter Cleven’s acquittal at the beginning of 2002, despite police evidence, and thousands of dollars of unexplained income. If brought to trial under the new ‘asset freeze law’ Cleven may not have gotten off so lightly. Following in the footsteps of Western Australia, where officials have seized millions of dollars worth of property and possessions, such a law has the potential to be highly lucrative for our government. If passed, those whose assets suspiciously exceed their income will be at risk of having their IRD records handed over to police investigators. For a country which prides itself on being a healthy democracy, those who oppose the law claim that it breaches citizen rights of security and is the ultimate tool in the surveillance of society.

By looking at these cases, stories and events chronologically and in yearly blocks, my main aim was to give visibility to the path that the press took when reporting on methamphetamine. While it may be argued that this is only a partial appraisal as I have not covered every story about methamphetamine by the press, I have shown and demonstrated how each of these samples and the way they were reported on contributed to the methamphetamine debate.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Cumming G, *The New Zealand Herald*, (27/11/2004)

¹⁷¹ I will explain fully in my exegesis how the samples that I have selected are representative of the meth debate and how they help outline the shape that the methamphetamine debate took and the significant developments that allowed the press to give drama to their characterisation of ‘P’.

Theoretically, on a chronological continuum, these stories successfully fit Cohen's theory of a classic Moral Panic. In 'Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the Mods and Rockers' (1973), Cohen gives a lengthy discussion as to how a moral panic can be identified using a model drawn from disaster research theory.

The theory of disaster research has seven stages which are as follows:

1. Warning – Current tranquillity is upset
2. Threat – Communication from others comes in about the threat of the disaster
3. Impact – Disaster strike and response period
4. Inventory – Realisation of impact
5. Rescue – Help for the survivors
6. Remedy – Formal activities towards relief
7. Recovery – How and what the community does to achieve the former equilibrium¹⁷²

In looking at these seven stages the timeline that follows reminds us about the cases, events and samples that have been discussed and the dates in that they were reported on by the press.

If we cast our minds back to 1998 and parallel the first headline with the disaster research theory that Cohen refers to, we can begin to see the evidence of a moral panic. The first story links with the first stage of disaster research theory in that the current tranquillity was upset by the police claiming that the gangs were making a lot of money out of the manufacture of methamphetamine.

Next in 2000 we can see the second stage at work when Operation Mexico was first reported on. These stories give warnings about the potential threat of the methamphetamine drug and its inherent link to gang members and their associates.

2001 began with the story published by the *New Zealand Herald* "Poor man's cocaine

¹⁷² Paraphrased from Kelsey J and Young W, (1982), 34

becoming our drug of choice”. Giving many warnings about what we could expect to see in the future in terms of methamphetamine use, gangs and police demands for more resources to ‘combat’ the growing problem.

2002 is where we can see the impact of the so-called meth ‘problem’. With the end of the Mexico trial and the car lab crashes we can identify these occurrences as being the beginning of the moral panic. Following these events the articles from the *Listener* and *Metro* add to this ‘impact’.

The fourth stage that Cohen calls the “Inventory” or the realisation of the impact comes next. This can be seen with the proposal put forward by the government to make methamphetamine a class “A” drug. With Pipiroa, the last trial in the Operation Flower case and Coral Burrows’ murder, the level of social anxiety was ratcheted up, and with headlines such as “New Zealand chasing US sized habit” and “Speed Thrill”, one can see where the social anxiety stemmed from – the press.

By the end of 2003, after reaction to these events had subsided we can now begin to see the period that Cohen called the ‘Rescue’ stage. This can be illustrated by the police’s move to ‘Crack down on meth’.

Lastly are the ‘remedy’ and ‘recovery’ stages. With the headlines pointing to the Massey University study and the hints that the ‘epidemic has peaked’, these can be seen as “formal activities toward relief”.

The last story that was discussed gives support to the seventh stage of disaster research in that the community and those in it try to restore the former equilibrium by taking certain measures such as making new laws like that of Phil Goff’s “Asset freeze law”. To give even more verification to this classic example of a moral panic, Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s five “Indicators” can also be successfully applied to the journey of methamphetamine through the New Zealand press. Volatility (the first

indicator) can be clearly seen in the first sample referred to in this article. In it methamphetamine was dubbed the 'new social evil' and tough sentences were passed down on those involved to discourage others from being associated with methamphetamine in the future. The second stage of hostility can be clearly seen when considering the way in which the press began to demonise and name gangs as being at the core of this so-called 'social evil'. In turn this caused the third stage of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's theory to be mobilized – measurable concern. With reports coming from the police about a steady climb in clandestine laboratory busts and arrests for methamphetamine increasing at 'alarming rates', methamphetamine, to the New Zealand public was cause for concern. This leads nicely onto the fourth "indicator" which is consensus. Following these damning reports the threat of methamphetamine became 'real and serious' in that, for the public, police claims gave authentication and an element of reality to the threat. Lastly the fifth "indicator" of disproportionality can be applied here, especially when considering that methamphetamine, although beginning as a regional fad, almost overnight became a nationwide fear in that no matter where you lived in New Zealand – rural or urban, 'meth' was knocking at your door; a parallel that can also be seen when looking at the two American case studies and the media reports that claimed that meth was an inherent danger to nice white kids, suburbanites as well as south-west country bumpkins.

Jock Young's theory of the 'Deviance amplification spiral' is also one that can be applied to the way in which the so-called methamphetamine "epidemic" went. Young talks about (as outlined in the opening article, *Drugs and the media*) his contention that the relationship between the police and the media is 'Symbiotic' and that the "hypotheses of the police about the nature of drug use, and of the drug taker about the

mentality of the police, determine the direction and intensity of the deviance amplification process”¹⁷³. So it can be the views of the police that cause this process to take place. Because they are such a reliable source for the media, what the police say is the law – that is, they speak the truth according to the press and society at large. Their views are trusted and remain at large unquestionable.

The ‘symbiotic’ relationship that Young talks about is also one of mutual gain. While the police can use the media for help in their investigations the media are rewarded access to information that can lead to possible commercial success.

While this sample tries to give balance to the methamphetamine debate in that a range of sources and subject matter have been examined, one thing has become apparent. The voice of the police has been present in a large number of the specific samples chosen for this research. It has also become apparent that ‘official sources’ have been relied on. While this has most likely contributed to commercial gain by the newspapers, the police have gained too. Through the media they have instilled fear within our society, bringing attention to the fact that meth began as a problem in the Auckland region. In their appeal for more ‘resources’ (money) the Drug Intelligence Bureau wanted drug police all over the country to ‘target’ methamphetamine. So, it can be argued, that methamphetamine was thrust onto the national stage by the police, through the media.

With all of these factors present there is sufficient evidence that a moral panic about methamphetamine happened and that it was brought on by and fuelled by the New Zealand press. Whilst some stories were good in their reportage, others were not. There were many stories that gave un-balanced arguments with too many ‘official

¹⁷³ Young J, (1989), 351

sources' (the judiciary and the police) being relied on for information, also there was a lot of lazy, sloppy and highly sensationalised journalism.

Timeline of methamphetamine panic

98'

18/11/1998

Headline: *"Judge sets deterrent sentence: 'Speed' manufacture labelled 'new social evil'"*

New Zealand Herald

99'

26/02/1999

Headline: *"Jurors Under lock and Key"*

New Zealand Herald

Tony Sticklely

24/07/1999 – Police aware of methamphetamine manufacture by organised crime

Headline: *"How gang made millions".*

New Zealand Herald

Event:

11/1999 – First trial of Operation Flower aborted

00'

12/01/2000– Operation Mexico swoop

Headline: *"Drug bust nets 'speed', guns and money".*

New Zealand Herald

Scott Kairiaa

13/01/2000

Headline: *"16 in court after drug raids".*

Waikato Times

NZPA

Event:

13/09/2000 – Second trial - Operation Flower

Event:

01/11/2000 – Operation Flower terminated. Enough evidence to swoop

01'

01/02/2001

Headline: *“Poor mans cocaine becoming drug of choice”*

New Zealand Herald

NZPA

Event:

08/12/2001 – RSA Shootings

02'

15/03/2002 – Operation Mexico trial ends

Headline: *“Gang boss acquitted in drugs re-trial”*.

Waikato Times

NZPA

25/03/2002 – Car Lab Crash

Headline: *“Rammed car carried sinister cargo”*.

New Zealand Herald

Scott McLeod

06-12/04/2002

Article: *“Speed Freaks”*

Listener

Bianca Zander

06/2002

Article: *“Gangland Rising”*

Metro Magazine

Matt Philp

05/11/2002 – Operation Flower aborted

Headline: *“Auckland judge aborts long drug trial, reasons suppressed”*.

The Dominion Post

NZPA

17/12/2002 – Government make meth class ‘A’

Headline: **18/12/2002** – *“Speed reclassified as Class A drug”*.

Waikato Times

NZPA

03'

Event:

22/01/2003 – Pipiroa sword attacks

Headline: 25/01/2003 – *“Drug pure linked to sword attacks and gunshot death”*.

New Zealand Herald

Alison Horwood and Tony Hall

17/05/2003 – Operation Flower re-trial ends

Headline: *“Drug lords day of reckoning”*.

New Zealand Herald

Patrick Gower

04/09/2003 – Operation Crusade swoop

Headline: *“Police raid mob in drugs crackdown”*.

The Press

Dave Courtenay

Event:

10/09/2003 – Coral Burrows goes missing

Headline: 11/12/2003 - *“The battle against ‘P’”*.

The Press

23/09/20-03 – NZ meth problem link with US

Headline: *“NZ chasing US sized habit”*.

New Zealand Herald

Scott McLeod

26/09/2003 – *“Speed Thrill”*.

The Press

Tara Ross

09/10/2003 – Police crackdown on meth

Headline: *“Insurers support police crack-down”*.

New Zealand Herald

NZPA

04'

09/06/2004 – Fiji lab bust

Headline: *“NZ a target for billion dollar drugs factory in Fiji”*.

New Zealand Herald

NZPA

02/10/2004 – Operation Crusade trial ends

Headline: *“Gang business crumbles as trial ends”*.

The Press

05/10/2004 – Massey University Study

Headline: *“P’s link to violence confirmed”*.

New Zealand Herald.

Bridget Carter

Headline: *“P and violence link – study”*.

The Press

Lee Kenny

22/10/2004 – Methamphetamine panic declared as over

Headline: *“Fall in p-lab busts hint epidemic has peaked”*.

New Zealand Herald

Simon Collins

27/11/2004 - Justice Minister Phil Goff proposes new “asset freeze law”

Headline: *“Guilty until proven innocent”*.

New Zealand Herald

Geoff Cumming

Investigation: Meth - Menace or moral panic?

“People have been brainwashed by the ‘P’ scare”, states Professor Greg Newbold, one of this country’s most reputable criminal sociologists. And he believes people have been brainwashed by the messages given to them about methamphetamine by the media and this has created an unnecessary stir in New Zealand society about this ‘killer drug’. This final article is a summary of all of the information presented so far. Not only will it look at just how responsible our press is it will hopefully give clarity to the ways in which our press has reported on methamphetamine and if we are just ‘inheriting’ America’s trends in relation to drug use. This investigation will conclude whether or not methamphetamine in Aotearoa is a menace, or largely a media generated moral panic. It will also confront many controversial yet falsely constructed views that the public have come to hold about methamphetamine. The article draws from interviews with those who are specialists in many different areas, whose opinions will be linked together to not only give context to this collection of articles but to also shed light on the methamphetamine situation in New Zealand and provide a guide as to where it could be headed in the future.

Professor Greg Newbold, Senior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, points out that in New Zealand as in many other parts of the world, every decade since the 1970’s has seen a new ‘so called’ problem drug or drug problem. This has often stemmed from American drug culture. “In the 1970’s it was LSD and marijuana, in the 1980’s it was heroin, the 1990’s saw a rise in ecstasy and psychedelic drugs” and lastly since the beginning of the 21st century “amphetamines and methamphetamine

have become more popular”. Angeline Barlow, the Communications Manager for the New Zealand Police agrees with the general assumption of Newbold saying that, “there are always going to be trendy drugs” and “there is always going to be a ‘fashionable’ drug to use”. It seems clear that drug epidemics seem to go in cycles and there is always going to be something new hitting the streets. However it can be argued that some drugs are given more attention than others, for example, hard drugs attract media attention on a much grander scale than the likes of the traditional, and seemingly less harmful, marijuana (which is a class C drug in New Zealand).

Scott Macleod was a police reporter at the New Zealand Herald when methamphetamine first hit the news agenda. “There was some debate in the newsroom as to just how big a story it was. The chief reporter was of the opinion that heroin was just as big a story in the 1970’s or 1980’s. My view was that ‘meth’ had taken hold of the country on a much greater scale and was the first real hard-drug epidemic the country had seen”. There are parallels here with the Hawaiian ‘snow storm’ discussed in the earlier article “Ancient anecdotes meet modernity: Drugs and the rise of methamphetamine”, in terms of how stories can be thrust into the national arena creating unnecessary anxiousness and concern within society. When the public believe, due to media reports, that a drug is “sweeping” the country, “what is usually happening is that members of the law enforcement media (those who specifically report on crime, for example police reporters) have discovered a regional fad and projected it onto the national stage”¹⁷⁴. And we have discussed earlier how attractive ‘drugs’ stories are to the media. Dr Alan Cocker, Associate Head of the school of Communications at the Auckland University of Technology noted that “methamphetamine, was a good story – it had all of the news values” and it is easy to

¹⁷⁴ Jenkins P, (1999), 16

see how the New Zealand press brought regional stories to light. With editorial demands and competitive pressures Dr Cocker was careful to point out that “you can’t blame an individual journalist”. Angeline Barlow also mentioned this news practice to take regional crime stories to the national stage, “anything that we release we presume goes national, and when there is not a lot happening, some days they (news outlets) look to local papers to fill the bulletin/pages”. Scott Steedman, from the New Zealand Police Counties Manukau Regional Drug Squad, believed that certain elements could be “sensationalised” by the press, especially when violent crime was involved. But Steedman stressed that methamphetamine differed from other drugs because, he said, “when people smoke ‘p’ they don’t tend to sit around, instead with the boost that methamphetamine gives to the cardiovascular system, increasing the heart rate, those who use methamphetamine want to get up and do something”. It is when users go to excess, going on binges sometimes lasting up to several days, that trouble begins. With insomnia being just one of the effects, users can become delusional, resulting in behaviour that is spontaneous and “bizarre”. On the flipside, those who use drugs that give a more sedated effect “tend to take the drug and relax – in the case of heroin or marijuana”, says Steedman. While Steedman, did point to the fact that some stories concerning methamphetamine were sensationalised, he did feel as though methamphetamine was characterised “pretty well” by our press. Angeline Barlow, also giving a police perspective, had a similar opinion. “I think they have characterised it fairly well”. However she too highlights that there was some sensationalism in that the “media can be over zealous”, but still believes that “this really is a killer drug” and that it “fries peoples brains literally”. Barlow also said that for the police “it’s a balancing act that you have to try and maintain in terms of

warning of the dangers of certain drugs while trying not to create too much fear about them. You have to trust that kids especially will judge”.

Louise Matthews in her thesis “Home Invasion: The role of the New Zealand media in a moral panic case study” published in 2001, argued strongly that a moral panic about home invasion happened in the 1990’s. In relation to methamphetamine she too believes that the press hyped up many aspects of methamphetamine’s effects.

“Perhaps an idea that this new version of the drug was so much stronger that it took over people’s lives, turned them into zombies (albeit raging) and made them incredibly dangerous especially in the commission of crime. I am not sure how ‘new’ the drug really is though as amphetamines in various forms have been around for years”.

Dr Cocker added an interesting dimension, he said that at first methamphetamine was largely an urban problem but when the press began reporting on incidents in more rural areas a feeling started to emerge in that “no one is safe and that no one can hide. This adds to the panic”. In terms of whether he thought the press caused unnecessary anxiety in the public arena Cocker said “commercial pressure has become more intense” therefore the press will run with a story always keeping in mind what sort of stories generate considerably higher sales. Matthews, who has been a senior journalist both here and in Britain and also worked as media liaison manager for Counties Manukau police during the 1990’s said that regional fads can cause nationwide fears “especially given media links, ownership and story supply contracts in New Zealand, as well as over-reliance on PR (public relations)”. It is possible then that this happened with methamphetamine. Matthews also commented that, “A good journalist will check the facts and can report them free of extra hype, and are not unknown to be cynical of the police version, so for a story to be ‘razzed’ up

successfully needs the help of the journalist”. In terms of whether or not our press report responsibly Matthews did say that, “overall I have to say yes, certainly compared to many other countries”.

Scott Macleod agrees “I’m sure some people use the drug and have fun without becoming addicted. It is unlikely that such people would get much column space”.

Professor Newbold is unequivocal about the media’s role, “the press have characterised meth in a negative light and that this is a classic moral panic because the press had brought into police propaganda”. Although Newbold does believe that our press do on the whole report “responsibly”, he also says that sometimes they “do not explore alternatives, they don’t get them and they don’t seek them”. Angeline Barlow characterises the media as a “big monster with a huge appetite that we have to feed” in doing this “we provide a lot of news”. However she does say that the relationship that the police have with our media is a “two way thing”. For her, using the media is “one of my tools of strategy”. The media can aid police investigations by calling on the public for help and in turn the media get information that has a high degree of newsworthiness. Newbold has probably hit the nail on the head when he mentions how police propaganda can be channelled through the press or “regurgitated”, as he puts it, “in their interests”.

Angeline Barlow talked about a story that affected her personally. She said that “there was this one case where the police found a methamphetamine lab on the kitchen bench where a family lived, the kids were making marmite sandwiches next to the meth lab”. As a mother this was a case that was absolutely shocking for her “with the chemicals alone being volatile” she wondered how people could put their children in such danger.

With many of the stories previously cited having a prevalent police ‘voice’ we can begin to see how the police influenced the shape that this debate took. Taking this into account, it is easy to see how gangs became a central factor in the press’s demonising of methamphetamine. When gangs and drugs are involved “it is easy to get people scared” in that “gangs are the enemy”, says Dr Newbold. However, he also says that while gangs have a “big stake in it” (methamphetamine manufacture and distribution) and that they are a big “link in the chain” it is more “individual members” that are involved rather than the gang as a collective and that we must be careful not to confuse the two. This is an aspect that has been blurred by the press in terms of methamphetamine.

In New Zealand, there has been an uneasiness for a long time about gangs and gang members. Newbold says that it goes right “back to the 1950’s”. In the last decade though, what has been noticed increasingly is how gangs are becoming a lot more sophisticated, almost functioning like businesses. With the arrival of methamphetamine came the realization that a lot of money was to be made and in 1999 an article was published in the *New Zealand Herald* in which the head of the Organised Crime Unit Colin McMurtrie said that the “sophistication of certain gangs has taken us by surprise”. When I put this to Scott Steedman he said that actually “we have known about gang sophistication since the 1980’s”, and that in 1999 this would have been something that the police already knew about. So why did the *Herald* publish such a story? The simplest explanation would be that the *Herald* “razzed” up police statements because of the high degree of news worthiness such a story posed – especially when it involves three very appealing angles, gangs, drugs and FBI-styled investigations.

However, gangs are not the only 'folk devils' in relation to methamphetamine. Those who have committed violent crime while apparently being high on meth have also, not surprisingly, been given intense media attention. Antonie Dixon has appeared numerous times in the media as being a 'p' crazed "freak", severing the hands of two women with a machete and filling James Te Aute with bullets before being caught by the armed offenders squad. William Bell, the man who committed the RSA murders was also labelled as a violent, cold-blooded killer after reports told of Bell going on a massive 'p' binge the night before the robbery of the Panmure RSA that left three people dead and another in a critical condition. Stephen Williams, step-father of murdered Featherston six-year old Coral Burrows admitted to being delusional at the time of the murder due to using methamphetamine. Following these brutal crimes methamphetamine soon became the drug with which people kill little girls, brutally attack others and kill in cold blood. It is cases like these that got projected on to the national stage by the press, that instilled more fear than ever in our society about this drug and the consequences of its use. The face of methamphetamine became more and more sordid and, in naming folk devils, the press were able to give voice and shape to this so-called "crisis" or "epidemic", as they liked to call it.

Dr Alan Cocker states, "even if this is not a clear cut moral panic it certainly has many of the characteristics" and in relation to the moral panic model it was definitely a "useful lens" for looking at this particular subject. Professor Newbold thought this was a classic moral panic with the presence of 'folk devils', police "propaganda" being bought into by the press and a public that was roused to a high state of anxiety. In terms of whether or not this drug was a menace there is reasonable ground to support that it was and still is a problem in New Zealand society. The police were in many regards sending out warnings about the dangers that such a drug posed.

Methamphetamine did become part of a moral panic. The police 'fanned up' certain cases and in doing so received a lot of attention from the media, which in turn led to changes in legislation and government policies. When methamphetamine became a class 'A' drug in early 2003 and with the introduction of Phil Goff's proposed 'Asset Freeze Law' in 2004, the government was reacting directly to media coverage and police claims about the dangers of methamphetamine and the potential threat it posed to New Zealand. The moral panic also resulted in a large increase in resources to help fight what the police called 'the 'p' problem. This included a special police squad set up to dismantle clandestine labs costing the taxpayer \$8 million over four years and another \$11 million given to the police in September of 2003.

The press called this "chicken feed" because it was claimed that the methamphetamine business was grossing a profit in excess of \$200 million per year. So this moral panic was also about more money to fight crime, especially in New Zealand's urban centres where police were supposedly witnessing methamphetamine use, manufacture and distribution in 'epidemic' proportions.

In many respects the police have more control than the media over crime information. The police are like the media in the sense that they are information gatekeepers. They, have a lot of power, especially when considering the wealth of information and good stories that they feed to the media. However, the media must be more careful when regurgitating police information for the simple fact that this is just one of the ways in which the police can control and manipulate our media.

In conclusion, I think that regional stories were presented to our country by the press in a manner that made our whole nation worry about methamphetamine. In terms of the American example and when considering how "regional fads became nationwide

fears”, I think that New Zealand did inherit the methamphetamine problem. While the press were responsible about reporting on methamphetamine to begin with, it is obvious that the police were giving much of the information to them and that when violent crimes started to surface where methamphetamine was involved the press went beyond responsible reportage, even recontextualising earlier crimes as having a link to this drug. Equally ‘p’ is a highly addictive drug that can produce horrific violence in its users. We must also not forget that it is a highly lucrative drug on the New Zealand drug market and that there are many people who are more than willing to brave the dangers of acquiring the ingredients, not to mention the dangers of production to supply it. It is safe to say that methamphetamine is now firmly entrenched in our society and there is no doubt it is here to stay. With the majority of the hype now over, the moral panic having been and gone, methamphetamine remains a menace that will continue to be an ongoing problem in our country.

Exegesis:

‘Menace or moral panic: Methamphetamine and the New Zealand Press.’

It was during 2003, following a story analysis as part of the Investigative Journalism Practical Project in Media and Communication at Auckland University of Technology, that the idea for this thesis first came about. 2003 was a big year in terms of stories that involved methamphetamine. While the previous year was also significant, it seemed that in 2003 there was a new ‘p’ story every week. The interest in pursuing this as a relevant thesis topic came when six-year old Coral Burrows from the Wairarapa town of Featherston, in the lower North Island, was murdered by her stepfather Stephen Williams, who was described by our news media as a “p” crazed psychopath’. The New Zealand public were outraged when this was found to be true, suddenly methamphetamine was an even bigger problem than society envisaged and if people kill innocent young girls while ‘high’ on this drug then there was reason for it to be feared. With so many stories where methamphetamine was a factor I began to question if the media were blowing stories out of proportion, and if the methamphetamine ‘problem’ was as bad as what they claimed it to be.

One of the important sociological theories on press treatment of social problems was formulated in Stanley Cohen’s book *‘Folk devils and moral panics: The case of the mods and rockers’*. In carrying out this research it soon became apparent that applying the theory of moral panic to the methamphetamine ‘scare’ was highly relevant. It was also decided that this research would look only at the way that the press reported on methamphetamine and not the television media (as this would be too large a research issue).

The first research task was to first seek an understanding of moral panics. The research done on this particular social theory was extensive. While this research could have focused on more recent accounts of moral panics, it was felt important to outline the more classic examples of ‘moral panics’ in the literature to understand the theory more. On reading Cohen, it became apparent that the second study on a moral panic done by British Sociologist Stuart Hall and fellow researchers¹⁷⁵ would also be highly relevant. This study done by Hall and his associates came about as a consequence of the British media’s claims in the late 1970’s that muggings were increasing in urban areas. It became apparent that Cohen’s definition of a moral panic and Hall’s definition did have similarities as well as stark differences. Cohen, like Hall, refers to a moral panic having its beginnings when a person, group of persons or series of events have been reported on by the media in a manner which is out of proportion to the actual original threat. When right wing conservatives give credibility to media reports about ‘sudden increases’ or certain ‘episodes’, some subjects become a ‘novelty’ to the media. Cohen’s definition goes on to be more expansive in the sense that he also talks about how the ‘condition’ that the media create can “disappear, submerge or deteriorate and become more visible”¹⁷⁶. In some cases the panic can pass over quietly and remain only in “folklore or collective memory” but sometimes a moral panic can have long lasting effects, on society, government legislation and the judicial system. Another thing that became quickly apparent is that when a moral panic occurs about a particular subject or event, a negative stigma is attached and a labeling process begins to take place. In the late 60’s the mention of Mods and Rockers as a group of people brought many negative connotations. Mods and Rockers were two distinct stereotypical youth subcultures who were deemed as being a threat

¹⁷⁵ Hall S, (1978)

¹⁷⁶ Cohen S, (1972), 9

to society, especially during the summer months at popular English sea-side resorts. Dressed in jeans, brightly coloured shirts, adorned with jewelry and riding scooters they displayed behaviour that was reported by the media as riotous. These ‘problem youths’ were reported on extensively by the British media during this time.

The Hall study focused on “mugging”. As a term ‘mugging’ is a word that carries many negative connotations. Originally coming from America, mugging simply means when a pack of three or more physically assault and rob innocent and random victims. During the early 70’s the British media began reporting on muggings and highlighting that there was a significant increase in this type of crime in suburban areas throughout the UK. Because ‘mugging’ was seen as a random act, the British public began to have a real fear of it because the media were saying that no one was safe from this terrible violation. With the increase in media reports that the mugging situation was out of control, the government acted and directed the British judicial system to pass down heavy penalties on those who carried out such crimes.

In New Zealand three identified moral panics by local researchers also had this element of a threatening word or term. Kelsey and Young’s study called “The gangs: moral panic as social control”¹⁷⁷ was the first identification of a moral panic in this country. In it they point to the New Zealand media as being responsible for public anxiety about gangs and those who chose to be members of them. It was during the period of 1978 to 1980 that gangs, while already perceived in a negative light, became much more prominently demonized in the New Zealand press. Kelsey and Young state that the media attention given to certain crimes that involved gangs and gang

¹⁷⁷ Kelsey J, Young W, (1982)

members was amplified in such a way that the government was pressed to act.

Interestingly enough, the word 'gang' in New Zealand to this very day has many negative connotations attached to it, and in more recent years, methamphetamine has also been linked with gangs by the media, in turn adding to the threat that this drug poses.

For Shuker and his associates who released a study in 1990 called "Youth media and moral panic in New Zealand: From hooligans to video nasties"¹⁷⁸, four defining events or episodes were sufficient evidence to suggest that another moral panic occurred. The episodes are Larrikinism in the 19th century, juvenile delinquency in the 1950's, the disturbances at the Hastings blossom festival in 1960 and the Queen Street 'riot' of 1984. Shuker et al also make a very valid point in terms of police involvement, that they not only respond to the panic that has been observed but they (the police) are also part of the circle which help to create and develop the moral panic.

In 2001 Louise Matthews studied 'home invasion'¹⁷⁹ as a case of a moral panic in an unpublished Masters thesis. Her research also pointed to the fact that the police had a lot to do with the direction and amplification that 'home invasion' took in the mid 1990's in this country. Following the murder of Reperoa woman Beverly Bouma after a brutal 'home invasion' incident, the media, especially the television media began to recontextualise previous 'instances' of this crime. Home invasion was something that breached home security and led New Zealanders to believe that regardless of whether or not you lived in a rural or urban area you could be subject to a home invasion incident. At a time when the economy was experiencing a downturn, home invasion became a significant issue. Home invasion became something that no one could be

¹⁷⁸ Shuker R, (1990)

¹⁷⁹ Matthews L, (2001)

safe from. The fact that home invasion was not only a breach of home security but could also involve violence and possibly death to those who fell victim to it was enough to build 'home invasion' into a significant social scare. Concluding Louise Matthews' findings, her research found that 'home invasion' was recontextualised by our television media in such a way that New Zealanders had been under threat by this phenomenon for quite some time, causing significant anxiety amongst middle New Zealand. Following the 1987 share-market crash New Zealand was experiencing an economic downturn giving 'home invasion' ample visibility. In discussing moral panics Matthews points out that the 'folk devil' must always be present if a moral panic is to be identified and named, in the 'home invasion' case the threat was present but no tangible 'folk devil' existed, the enemy remained unknown.

Research for this study involved considerable investigation into how to identify and define exactly what a moral panic was. The question then arose as to whether or not a moral panic about methamphetamine had occurred before and if so where and what were the factors that contributed to it. *Synthetic Panics: The symbolic politics of designer drugs* by Paul Jenkins (1999) provided many answers. This book outlines that two moral panics about methamphetamine happened fairly recently in the United States. One was the subject of the chapter entitled 'The menace that went away: The ice age 1989-1990' and the other was titled, 'Redneck cocaine: The methamphetamine panic of the early nineties'.

The research undertaken by Jenkins indicated that these panics were sparked by political motivations and that methamphetamine was used as a scapegoat. The first panic began with news coming out of Hawaii that methamphetamine was a major problem in the idyllic island state and it was soon to become a major problem on the mainland too. At least, these were the predictions of two Hawaiian politicians Daniel

Akaka and Patricia Saiki who were at the time competing against each other to be the first Hawaiian to have a seat in the US Senate. Following two congressional hearings held in Hawaii, attended by police heads as well as media Akaka and Saiki set out to make methamphetamine look as perilous as possible while gaining much needed votes. In fact, Daniel Akaka was the one to name the 'ice age' whilst stating that 'ice' (methamphetamine) was of inherent danger to all classes of American society and that an epidemic was imminent. Akaka also had a congressional track record when it came to drugs. He served on the Narcotics subcommittee of congress in the early 80's when cocaine was the social drug of choice and therefore had relevant experience with drugs and their effects that he could draw upon. During the so-called 'ice age' Akaka and Saiki both made claims that there was a significant spread of methamphetamine on America's West Coast and that port cities such as San Francisco were seeing more methamphetamine use because of a large manufacturing ring in Hawaii in which the precursor chemicals were being shipped in and the finished product shipped out. These two politicians placed a lot of the blame on organised crime rings such as the Chinese triads and the Japanese Yakuza for the Hawaiian methamphetamine problem and they called for special teams to be assembled to fight such organizations. Unsurprisingly the ice age disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Daniel Akaka became the first native Hawaiian to ever secure a seat in the US senate and it was arguably the help of the methamphetamine panic that won him his seat. While government legislation was not hugely affected by the so-called 'ice age', the media did give the two politicians considerable attention and there was an alarming increase in methamphetamine related stories during this period. The 'ice age' however was successful in heightening public awareness and fear about methamphetamine use possibly preparing them for the next panic which was dubbed the 'white storm

warning'. This occurred during the mid 1990's. President Clinton as Ronald Reagan's successor as president was viewed by a section of the American people as too liberal when it came to domestic policies, especially drug policies. When Clinton called for a cut in Drug Enforcement Agency funding he found there was a considerable reaction from the agency and the public. On announcing that the DEA would be facing a possible decrease in government funding the agency made claims that such a cut could cripple their operations, especially when they were seeing such a so-called rise in methamphetamine related crimes and manufacture in the mid-west of America. It was at this point that the DEA began to liaise with the American media, the 'white storm warning' had begun. In looking at this moral panic and the way that it panned out it was interesting to see how the media and government departments, the judicial system, police and even individual politicians worked together when it came to drugs. That they all in some way added to the over-all panic and all stood to benefit from it in one way or another. This case study provided a case example with clear similarities to the situation in New Zealand. The case study also helped me better understand the elements that must be present to create a moral panic about drugs, particularly methamphetamine.

After examination of the moral panic case studies it was determined that further explanation of methamphetamine and its history, especially in relation to other drugs was required. It soon became clear in the research that a look at the history of drugs was very important for research into the 'p' phenomenon in New Zealand. This section would begin by looking at all drugs in order to show how methamphetamine fitted into the overall story. The first task was to look at legal recreational drugs such as caffeine, tobacco and alcohol. The research indicated that there were two groups of

recreational drugs; those which were plant-based and those which were chemical based. The article begins by looking at the history of plant-based drugs. The use of poppies (heroin) dates back to ancient Greek times and it was even recorded in Homer's odyssey in the 4th century BC. Cocaine was another plant-based drug and the chewing of coca leaves has been around for centuries in parts of South America. Cannabis, another one of the plant-based drugs was first recoded as a medicinal drug in a Chinese book of medicine dated 2737BC. Tobacco is a relatively recent drug, which become popular in the 17th century in many parts of Europe after shipping was developed between the Americas and Europe.

Amphetamine is the oldest of the chemical-based drugs, first synthesized in 1887. In fact, all chemical drugs have a much shorter 'history' than plant-based drugs. Ecstasy was first discovered in 1912 in Germany and LSD in 1938. Methamphetamine was first discovered in Japan in 1919. Historically then, this understanding of where methamphetamine sits is important to how we see it in terms of other drugs, especially when a drug like alcohol was first brewed in the Babylonian empire as early as 3500BC.

Following research on the history of drug use it was then important to examine the media's role and the way media operate to background the reportage of 'moral panics'. The opening article in this research was originally titled 'Roles, responsibilities and realities of the news media'. For this article research would look at what the role of the media was, the history of journalism and the press in our society, and the wider social world. It was important to understand the role of the investigative journalist and how this sort of journalist was different from the everyday 'features' writer. The investigative journalist is a journalist who is willing to spend long hours examining fine print in order to find the one clue that could illuminate a

social concern. The investigative journalist also writes stories that are rich in content and lengthy, making their stories harder to get through the media demands for fast turnaround. Also the responsibilities that the news media has and how the media are responsible for bringing us information that is truthful and well rounded. It questioned if what we see, read and hear is anchored in some sort of 'reality' or if it is constructed in such a way by news organizations in order to sell more copies or get higher ratings than competitors. The article 'Drugs and the media' presented how drugs appear in the media and why drugs and drug use is such an attractive subject for news organizations to report on. Drugs will always have a high degree of newsworthiness no matter what. Also, in this opening article I present Jock Young's¹⁸⁰ theories in terms of deviant behaviour and how this marries with drug use, and the way in which drug-takers are seen by wider society, including the media. 'Drugs and the media' sets the scene for what is to come.

The next article involved the largest research task that is looking at how the press reported on methamphetamine. Firstly a timeline was constructed. The first story on methamphetamine, (1998) was chosen because it was the first story that the press gave mention to methamphetamine and the cut off point which was decided as being the end of 2004 when the New Zealand government called for a change in legislation by introducing the 'Asset Freeze law', which was sparked by the acquittal of drug lord Peter Cleven. The next step was to look at everything in between and which samples were chosen and the methods that were going to be employed. Many of the articles (samples) were found on the Internet through either the *New Zealand Herald* Website or Newstext. In doing searches for samples I used two methods. For the *New*

¹⁸⁰ Young J, (1973)

Zealand Herald searches some of the earlier samples were found by simply adding to the search engine 'methamphetamine'. For example, when looking for samples on Pipiroa the words entered were 'methamphetamine Pipiroa'. Pipiroa is a small town on the Coromandel in the north island of New Zealand. Many New Zealanders would not have even heard of it until the day that a bizarre chain of events unfolded leaving two women in critical condition, one man dead and a man-hunt that lasted nearly 12 hours. In some instances only the subject word was added just to see when methamphetamine became linked with a certain subject, for instance when stories about Pipiroa were first searched for the word 'Pipiroa' was entered into the search engine. In doing this all of the initial stories surrounding this attack could be seen and then subsequently selected as samples. Initial reports closely followed the two women's lengthy surgery to re-attach their severed limbs, however a couple of days following the attacks and with police making progress in their investigations methamphetamine surfaced. In finding samples that came from sources other than the *New Zealand Herald* I was directed to the Newztext search engine. When looking for stories from the *Waikato Times*, *The Dominion Post* and the *Christchurch Press* Newztext was used as the source. This research chose to look at everything from 1999 onwards in all of these searches and also everything published by Fairfax New Zealand. Twenty samples in all were chosen from the different sources. In choosing the samples the aim was that the method would be neutral and transparent and that the samples would fairly show the trajectory that the press took with methamphetamine. Once selected, all of the samples then had to be analyzed. A number of things were looked at once each sample was selected. Firstly the date in which the samples were released was important. The way in which the journalists reported on each incident was then closely examined. Was the reporting fair? And did it seek a range of voices?

Whether each sample sensationalized methamphetamine and if so, in what way, was another question that this research endeavoured to answer. Once all of the analysis was done I then put the stories in a timeline. Once in this timeline the samples started to give an indication as to how the moral panic had taken shape. One thing that occurred to me was the shape the timeline took, that the nature of the stories changed with time from the warning of the threat of methamphetamine to the call for new legislation in relation to the drug and the rise of meth labs being ‘busted’ by ‘specialist teams’ of the New Zealand Police. In fact, what I was seeing was Stanley Cohen’s disaster research theory in practice. In that the trajectory of stories fitted the seven stages of disaster research theory closely. There was the ‘warning’ or the first stage where the current tranquillity was upset way back in 1998. Then there was the second stage where the ‘threat’ of the disaster was communicated to the general public. Then there was also a very clear period in which it seemed the disaster had struck (where all previous threats had come true). Next there was the ‘Inventory’ or the fourth stage where the realization of the ‘disaster’ was ascertained in that methamphetamine was said to have been a real problem. Next was the ‘rescue’ stage where new legislation was proposed to help put an end to the so-called ‘p’ problem. The sixth stage is the ‘remedy’ stage in which formal activities towards relief are mobilized. This is the part where proposed government legislation was passed. Lastly the ‘recovery’ period or the seventh stage is where the community tries to return to normality and we can clearly see this in the timeline when we consider the second to last story in my sample where the headline reads ‘Fall in ‘p’ lab bust hint epidemic is over’. With all of this in mind it was plain to see that there was indeed a moral panic about methamphetamine and by using the press to demonstrate this the research seemed to indicate that it closely followed the phases first outlined by Cohen. In order to confirm my findings I

interviewed specialists to either support or deny my findings. The last section of this collection of articles draws from interviews that I did in order to reach an informed conclusion to my research.

As part of the process I interviewed Professor Greg Newbold (Sociologist/Criminologist/Drug Expert) about drugs and the New Zealand criminal and justice systems. He outlined his view of the world of drugs in New Zealand and just how methamphetamine fits into the 'bigger' picture.

Angeline Barlow (Communications Manager for the Counties Manukau Police). Angeline provided information as to how the press obtain police news and views. As a communications person her job is to liaise with the media on a daily basis. Scott Steedman a member of the Counties Manukau Drug Squad has actively taken part in a number of drugs busts in South Auckland and the wider Auckland region.

His views on methamphetamine and the way the press report on this drug were sought. Dr Alan Cocker, Political Scientist/Media Analyst provided more of an academic view when it came to this research. He gave his view as to whether the chosen 'moral panic' model was a good one to look at with this particular subject.

Louise Matthews, Journalist and former Communications Manager at Counties Manukau Police Department has written about a 'moral panic' in New Zealand.

Louise provided her views about methamphetamine and how it related to a 'moral panic' framework. Being a journalist and ex-communications manager for the police she too outlined the relationship that the media, more importantly the press, have with our police force. Scott Macleod, Police reporter for *The New Zealand Herald* was a reporter for this paper during the time when methamphetamine hit our news-stands. It was his story about the car lab crashes that seemed to set off the whole debate about

methamphetamine. An insight into what it was like to be a reporter at this time was also illuminating. While all who¹⁸¹ were interviewed did think that our press report responsibly, both Professor Newbold and Scott Macleod commented that the press do not seek out alternative viewpoints. Newbold even went as far as saying that the press, “often regurgitate police propaganda”. Newbold also stated that in relation to methamphetamine he could see a classic Stanley Cohen moral panic. Angeline Barlow in many ways supported his view by saying that some of the press coverage was sensationalized. This was a view that both Scott Steedman and Angeline Barlow agreed on. Supportive expert commentary reinforced the view that there were reasonable grounds and evidence to support my theory that a moral panic happened with relation to methamphetamine and that the press were largely to blame. Another finding was that the police and the media, or more specifically the press have a very close relationship. This backed up Jock Young’s¹⁸² theory that the media and the police can and often do have a ‘symbiotic relationship’ in the sense that they help each other out. The media aid police investigations and are rewarded with exclusive information for helping out the police. Young’s theory also applied in relation to the way in which those who use methamphetamine were portrayed by the media. That is, that they were almost always seen in a negative light. The press also made inherent links between methamphetamine and organized crime in this country although the evidence for this was often unproven.

By looking at the large sample of stories as part of this research we can clearly see that it demonstrates and reinforces the fact that a moral panic did happen and that the press were the culprits for it. The sample makes visible the journey that methamphetamine took through our press and that it passed through the stages, which

¹⁸¹ Newbold G

¹⁸² Young J, (1973)

could be closely paralleled with the seven stages of disaster research theory as outlined by Stanley Cohen.

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1998

18/11/1998

Headline: *“Judge sets deterrent sentence: ‘Speed’ manufacture labelled ‘new social evil’*

New Zealand Herald

1999

26/02/1999

Headline: *“Jurors Under lock and Key”*

New Zealand Herald

Tony Stickle

24/07/1999 – Police aware of methamphetamine manufacture by organised crime

Headline: *“How gang made millions”.*

New Zealand Herald

Event:

11/1999 – First trial of Operation Flower aborted

2000

12/01/2000– Operation Mexico swoop

Headline: *“Drug bust nets ‘speed’, guns and money”.*

New Zealand Herald

Scott Kairiaa

13/01/2000

Headline: *“16 in court after drug raids”.*

Waikato Times

NZPA

Event:

13/09/2000 – Second trial - Operation Flower

Event:

01/11/2000 – Operation Flower terminated. Enough evidence to swoop

2001

01/02/2001

Headline: *“Poor mans cocaine becoming drug of choice”*

New Zealand Herald
NZPA

Event:

08/12/2001 – RSA Shootings

2002

15/03/2002 – Operation Mexico trial ends

Headline: “*Gang boss acquitted in drugs re-trial*”.

Waikato Times

NZPA

25/03/2002 – Car Lab Crash

Headline: “*Rammed car carried sinister cargo*”.

New Zealand Herald

Scott McLeod

06-12/04/2002

Article: “*Speed Freaks*”

Listener

Bianca Zander

06/2002

Article: “*Gangland Rising*”

Metro Magazine

Matt Philp

05/11/2002 – Operation Flower aborted

Headline: “*Auckland judge aborts long drug trial, reasons suppressed*”.

The Dominion Post

NZPA

17/12/2002 – Government make meth class ‘A’

Headline: **18/12/2002** – “*Speed reclassified as Class A drug*”.

Waikato Times

NZPA

2003

Event:

22/01/2003 – Pipiroa sword attacks

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New Zealand Herald

Alison Horwood and Tony Hall

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Headline: *“Drug lords day of reckoning”.*

New Zealand Herald

Patrick Gower

04/09/2003 – Operation Crusade swoop

Headline: *“Police raid mob in drugs crackdown”.*

The Press

Dave Courtenay

Event:

10/09/2003 – Coral Burrows goes missing

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The Press

23/09/20-03 – NZ meth problem link with US

Headline: *“NZ chasing US sized habit”.*

New Zealand Herald

Scott McLeod

26/09/2003 – *“Speed Thrill”.*

The Press

Tara Ross

09/10/2003 – Police crackdown on meth

Headline: *“Insurers support police crack-down”.*

New Zealand Herald

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2004

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Headline: *“NZ a target for billion dollar drugs factory in Fiji”.*

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Headline: *“Gang business crumbles as trial ends”.*

The Press

05/10/2004 – Massey University Study

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Headline: *“Fall in p-lab busts hint epidemic has peaked”*.

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Simon Collins

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