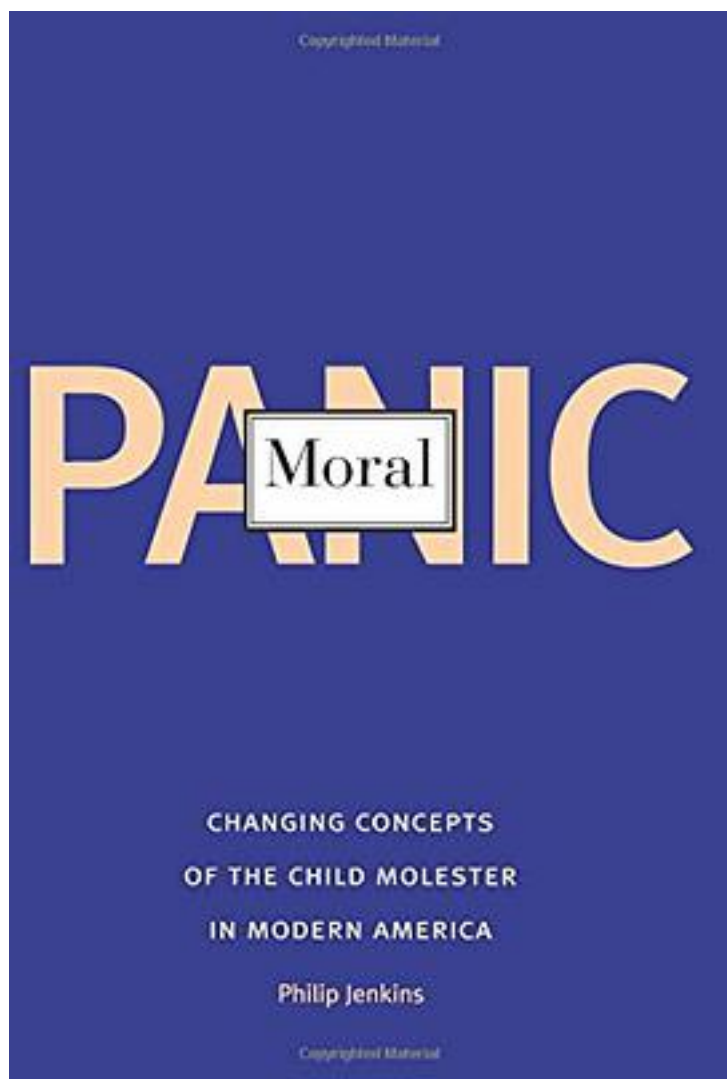


Moral Panic



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出版者:Yale University Press

出版时间:2004-12-28

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780300109634

It is commonly acknowledged that sexual abuse of children is a grave and pervasive problem and that child molesters are predators who compulsively repeat their crimes and have little hope of cure. Yet as recently as twenty years ago many experts viewed the problem far less seriously, declaring that molestation was a very rare offense and that molesters were merely confused individuals unlikely to repeat their offenses. Over the past century, opinion has fluctuated between these radically different perspectives. This timely book traces shifting social responses to adult sexual contacts with children, whether this involves molestation by strangers or incestuous acts by family members. The book explores how and why concern about the sexual offender has fluctuated in North America since the late nineteenth century. Philip Jenkins argues that all concepts of sex offenders and offenses are subject to social, political, and ideological influences and that no particular view of offenders represents an unchanging objective reality. He examines the various groups (including mass media) who have been active in promoting particular constructions of the emerging problem, the impact of public attitudes on judicial and legislative responses to these crimes, and the ways in which demographic change, gender politics, and morality campaigns have shaped public opinion. While not minimizing sexual abuse of children, the book thus places reactions to the problem in a broad political and cultural context.

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