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MEDIA MADE CRIMINALITY

THE REPRESENTATION OF CRIME IN THE MASS MEDIA

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CRIME IN THE MEDIA: SUBVERSION, SOCIAL CONTROL, OR MENTAL CHEWING GUM?

Mass media representations of crime, deviance, and disorder have been a perennial cause of concern. Two competing anxieties can be discerned in public debate, and both are reflected in a large research literature. On the one hand the media are often seen as fundamentally subversive, on the other as a more or less subtle form of social control.

Those who see the media as subversive see media representations of crime themselves as a significant cause of offending. This has been a constantly recurring theme of that 'history of respectable fears' which Geoffrey Pearson has traced back through the last few centuries (Pearson 1983). At the end of the eighteenth century, for example, the Middlesex magistrate Patrick Colquhoun claimed that crime was rising because 'the morals and habits of the lower ranks in society are growing progressively worse' (Radzinowicz 1956: 275). He attributed this in part to an alleged wave of bawdy ballad singers who went around entertaining in pubs. He regarded suppression of these as counter-productive, so he urged the government to sponsor rival groups of wholesome ballad singers. He was confident that these eighteenth century precursors of Sir Cliff Richard and Dame Vera Lynn would soon supplant their bawdy brethren in popularity and influence.

A different concern about media representations of crime has worried liberals and radicals (Wykes 2001). To them the media are the cause not of crime itself but of exaggerated public alarm about law and order, generating support for repressive solutions. A fundamental theme of the radical criminologies of the 1960s and 1970s was the power of the mass media to foment fears about crime and disorder (Cohen 1972; Cohen and Young 1973; Hall *et al.* 1978). Within the field of media studies the influential 'Cultural Indicators' project has for three decades monitored the damaging consequences of media representations of violence for democratic institutions (Gerbner 1970, 1995).

In their ideal-typical form these perspectives are polar opposites, sharing in common only their demonization of the media, whether as a subversive threat to law, order, and morality, or as an insidious form of social control paving the way to authoritarianism by cultivating exaggerated fears about criminality. Each has generated huge research industries conducting empirical studies of media content, production, and effects (Leishman and Mason 2002).

Because of the difficulties in rigorously establishing straightforward causal relationships between images and effects, some researchers tacitly imply that media images of crime do not have significant implications. This often provokes the canard that media researchers are blinkered by libertarian prejudices. For example, Melanie Phillips has claimed that 'for years, media academics have pooh-poohed any link between violence on screen and in real life' (1996: 2). She denounced the supposed 'cultural studies orthodoxy that media images have no direct influence on behaviour . . . such images merely provide "chewing gum for the eyes" '(ibid.). It is of course a non sequitur to move from the denial of a *direct* influence to the assertion of *no* influence, and this portrait of media studies 'orthodoxy' is a caricature. Nonetheless it does point uncomfortably to the way some opponents of censorship have interpreted the complexity of the relationship between images and behaviour as a warrant for implying that there is none at all.

This chapter reviews the broad contours of empirical research, theorization, and policy debates about crime and the media. It is organized in terms of three interrelated issues that have been the primary foci of research: the *content*, *consequences*, and *causes* of media representations of crime. Each has been the basis for a voluminous literature attempting to analyse the content, effects, and sources of media images of crime. These are phases of an intertwined process that can only be separated artificially. Analysis of content always presupposes criteria of relevance in interpreting and coding aspects of communication. The categories of content are chosen because of an implicit assumption that they are significant because of their effects. Creators of media products, whether their primary motives are commercial, political, moral, or aesthetic, hope to achieve some audience response. The consequence of media images depends on how content is interpreted by different audience sections, and this often involves attempting to assess the meaning of the text intended by authors.

Texts, audiences, and authors are interdependent. The organization of this chapter into the three main sections of causes, content, and consequence should be taken as a presentational convenience rather than implying hermetically sealed areas. I will begin with a review of the vast literature on the content of representations of crime. I will then look at the extensive research attempting to assess the consequences of media images in terms of audience attitudes and behaviour. Following this I will turn to the attempts to understand content by studying production processes. In the concluding section I will assess the implications of the detailed research for the alternative views of the significance of the mass media representation of crime that were outlined earlier.

THE CONTENT OF MEDIA IMAGES OF CRIME

PROBLEMS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Most analyses of the content of mass media have been within a positivist paradigm. As defined by one leading practitioner: 'content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communications in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring certain message variables' (Dominick 1978: 106). While 'content analysis' so-called has been colonized by this positivist and quantitative approach, it may be distinguished from the more general project of the analysis of content. The claim made for traditional content analysis is that it 'provides for an objective and quantitative estimate of certain message attributes, hopefully free of the subjective bias of the reviewer' (ibid.: 106–7). Dominick goes on to concede that 'inferences about the effects of content on the audience are, strictly speaking, not possible when using only this methodology. More importantly, the findings of a particular content analysis are directly related to the definitions of the various content categories developed by the researcher. The validity of these definitions is an important consideration in the evaluation of any content analysis' (ibid.).

There are major problems with the claim that traditional content analysis is 'object-ive'. While the categories used to quantify 'certain message attributes' may be free of 'subjective bias' they are neither randomly plucked out of thin air, nor do they miraculously reflect a structure of meaning objectively inherent in the texts analysed. They always embody some theoretical presuppositions by the researcher about criteria of significance. Moreover, while content analysis indeed cannot justify 'inferences about the effects of content on the audience', the categories selected for quantification tacitly presuppose some theory about likely consequences. There would be little pur-pose in studying media texts without a presupposition that the meanings conveyed by them have an impact on audience beliefs, values, or practices. The common tactic in content analyses (e.g., Pandiani 1978; Surette 1998: 47–51, 69–70) of contrasting the pattern of media representations of crime and criminal justice with the 'real world' picture (supposedly conveyed by official statistics), is only of interest on the assump-tion that this 'distortion' leads to problematic consequences such as excessive fearful-ness or support for vigilantism. Meticulously counting units of 'violence' is not a form of train-spotting for sadists but motivated by concern that exposure to these images carries risks such as desensitization, or heightened anxiety. Thus the 'objectivity' of traditional content analysis lies in the precision of the statistical manipulation of data, but the categories used necessarily presuppose some theory of meaning, usually about likely consequences (Sparks 1992: 79–80).

There is a further fundamental problem with traditional content analyses. They collate 'message attributes' according to characteristics set *a priori* by the observer. But what in the abstract may seem to be the 'same' image may have very different meanings within particular narrative genres and contexts of reception. How viewers interpret images of 'violence', for example, is not just a function of the amount of blood seen or number of screams heard. The same physical behaviour, for instance a

shooting, means different things to any viewer depending on its placement in different genres, say whether it is news, a Western, a war film, or a contemporary cop show. It will be interpreted differently if the violence is perpetrated on or by a character constructed in the narrative as sympathetic. How audiences construe violence will vary according to their own position vis-à-vis the narrative characters, quite apart from any preferred reading intended by the creators or supposedly inscribed in the narrative (Livingstone *et al.* 2001). For example, to black audiences, Rodney King, whose beating by Los Angeles police officers was captured on an amateur videotape, was a victim of police racism, while to many white police officers he appeared to be a threatening deviant who invited the beating (Lawrence 2000: 70–73).

This does not mean that quantification is necessarily misleading. Any reading of content, even an avowedly qualitative one, implies some quantification, contrasting observed behaviour with an assumed norm, for example reading a character as 'brave' or 'strong'. Nor should the statistical manipulation of such categories be ruled out. The questions raised are about the claims of positivist content analysis to quantify in a value-free way aspects of a supposed objective structure in texts. Counting features of texts should be self-consciously seen as based on the observer's frame of reference, according to explicit criteria. Results must be interpreted reflexively and tentatively as one possible reading. As such, they can yield valuable insights and questions about the significance of trends and patterns.

CONTENT ANALYSIS: A REVIEW OF RESULTS

Most analyses of the content of media representations of crime have focused on news—print and broadcast—although there are also many studies of fiction. Crime and criminal justice have long been sources of popular spectacle and entertainment, even before the rise of the mass media. This is illustrated by the genre of criminal biography and pre-execution confessions and apologias, of various degrees of authenticity, which flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Faller 1987; Rawlings 1992; Durston 1996). Similar accounts continue to the present day, filling the 'true crime' shelves of bookshops (Rawlings 1998; Peay 1998; Wilson 2000: chapter 4), and they have been joined by the many volumes retelling the exploits of legendary cops as if they were fictional sleuths (e.g., Fabian 1950, 1954). On the side of overtly fictional crime narratives, ultra-realism (often a quasi-documentary style of presentation) has been common (using such devices as voice-overs giving precise dates and locations, and acknowledgements to the files of Scotland Yard and similar legendary police organizations as the source of stories).

The fact/fiction distinction has become more fluid in recent years, with the emergence of what is usually referred to as 'reality' television or 'infotainment' (Fishman and Cavender 1998; Surette 1998: 70–80; Beckett and Sasson 2000: 111–16; Leishman and Mason 2002: chapter 7). There has been the growth of programming such as *Crimewatch UK* that recreates current cases, often with an avowed purpose of solving them (Dobash *et al.* 1998). Fly-on-the-wall footage of actual incidents has proliferated in documentaries like Roger Graef's pioneering 1981 Thames Valley Police series (Gregory and Lees 1999), and entertainment programming based on real cops in

action, for example *Cops* (Doyle 1998; Kooistra *et al.* 1998). Live newscasts of particular occurrences are increasingly common, such as the O.J. Simpson car chase and subsequent trial. Film footage of criminal events in process are frequently used in news broadcasts, like the amateur video capturing the beating by Los Angeles police of Rodney King (Lawrence 2000), or the CCTV shots of Jamie Bulger being led away by his killers. The police in turn resort to the media as a part of criminal investigations (Innes 1999, 2001), as well as to cultivate support more generally (Mawby 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002). The media and criminal justice systems are penetrating each other increasingly, making a distinction between 'factual' and 'fictional' programming ever more tenuous (Manning 1998; Ferrell 1998; Tunnell 1998). The implications will be explored further in the conclusions, but I will turn next to a consideration of the results of content analyses.

Deviant news

Crime narratives and representations are, and have always been, a prominent part of the content of all mass media. Many studies have provided estimates of what proportion of media content consists of images of crime, sometimes comparing this across media, or over time.

The proportion of media content that is constituted by crime items clearly will depend on the definitions of 'crime' used. Probably the widest definition was that adopted by Richard Ericson and his colleagues in their penetrating study of newsmaking in Toronto (Ericson *et al.* 1987, 1989, 1991). Their concern was 'social deviance and how journalists participate in defining and shaping it' (Ericson *et al.* 1987: 3). Deviance was defined very broadly as 'the behaviour of a thing or person that strays from the normal . . . not only . . . criminal acts, but also . . . straying from organisational procedures and violations of common-sense knowledge' (ibid.: 4). When defined so broadly deviance is the essence of news; 'deviance is *the* defining characteristic of what journalists regard as newsworthy' (ibid.). Stories about crime in the narrower sense of violations of criminal law are a more limited proportion of all news, varying between outlets according to their medium (e.g., radio, TV, or print journalism) and market (e.g., 'quality' or 'popular' journalism).

Unsurprisingly, given their broad definition, Ericson *et al.* found that a high proportion of news was about 'deviance and control'. This ranged from 45.3 per cent in a quality newspaper to 71.5 per cent on a quality radio station (Ericson *et al.* 1991: 239–42). Both medium and market influenced the proportion of news related to deviance. Contrary to most other studies, they found that 'quality' broadcasting outlets had more deviance stories, because of 'their particular emphasis on deviance and control in public bureaucracies' (ibid.).

Ericson *et al.* adopted a broad concept of 'violence' in which ' "state violence" and "state terrorism" were conceptualised in the same way as various acts of violence by individual citizens' (ibid.: 244). They included stories, for example, about 'harms to health and safety such as impaired driving, unsafe working environments, and unsafe living environments' (ibid.). This covered concerns that are more characteristic of 'quality' than 'popular' news outlets, but nonetheless Ericson *et al.* find that in each medium more attention is paid to violence by popular than by quality journalism.

Broadcast news gave more prominence to stories of violence than print (ibid.: 244–7).

Ericson *et al.* adopted an equally wide-ranging concept of 'economic' deviance. This included not only property crimes but also 'questionable business practices . . . legal conflict over property . . . and social problems related to economic matters' (ibid.: 247). 'The reporting of economic *crimes* was rare in all news outlets . . . Much more common in all news outlets were reports of violation of trust, with or without criminal aspects or criminal charges being laid' (ibid.). Their data contradict the conventional finding of limited news coverage of business crime (Marsh 1991: 73). But the reporting of white-collar crime tends to be concentrated in 'quality' news-papers and is often restricted to specialist financial pages, sections, or newspapers (Stephenson-Burton 1995: 137–44), and is framed in ways that mark it off from 'real' crime (Tombs and Whyte 2001; Levi 2001).

Overall, Ericson *et al.* found that stories of deviance and control constituted the majority of items in most news outlets. 'Popular' media focused overwhelmingly more often on 'interpersonal' conflicts and deviance (ibid.: 249–50), but 'quality' ones included many items on such official deviance as rights violations, or on policy debates about criminal justice or corporate conduct. The pattern of reporting about deviance and control varied in complex ways according to media and markets, but deviance in a broad sense is the staple, defining feature of newsworthiness across the board.

The extent of crime in the news

Most analyses of the content of media representations of crime have focused more narrowly on a legally defined category of crime, not the broad sociological concept of deviance adopted by Ericson *et al.* Some studies look only at stories about specific criminal incidents, but others include stories, articles, or editorials about the state of crime generally, about criminal justice, and about criminal law violations related to political and social conflict, such as terrorism. The proportion of crime stories varies according to medium and market, and between different times and places. 'Because of this variability, estimates of the proportion of total news that is devoted to crime coverage range from 5 to 25% ' (Sacco 1995: 142[1]).

The lower estimates tend to come from earlier research (such as Harris 1932; Swanson 1955; Deutschmann 1959). More recent American studies have found higher proportions of crime-related items, in most media and markets. Graber found that crime and justice topics accounted for 22 to 28 per cent of stories in the newspapers she studied, 20 per cent on local television news, and 12 to 13 per cent on network television news (Graber 1980: 24). A literature review of thirty-six American content analyses of crime news conducted between 1960 and 1980 found considerable vari-ation in the proportion of crime: from 1.61 per cent to 33.5 per cent (Marsh 1991: 73).

The first study of crime news in Britain came to similar conclusions (Roshier 1973). This looked at reporting for September 1938, 1955, and 1967 in a range of

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[1] Other useful reviews of this literature are: Dominick 1978; Garofalo 1981; Marsh 1991; Surette 1998: chapter 3; Howitt 1998: chapter 3; Beckett and Sasson 2000: chapter 5.

newspapers. In the national dailies the proportion of total news space devoted to crime varied according to market position. In September 1967 the percentage of crime news was 5.6 per cent in the *Daily Mirror*, 4.4 per cent in the *Daily Express*, 2.4 per cent in the *Daily Telegraph* (and 2 per cent in the *Newcastle Journal*). The *News of the World* gave crime much more prominence: 11 per cent of news space. There was no clear trend over time. In the dailies the proportion of crime news in 1967 was virtually the same as in 1938, but it had been higher in 1955 in the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*. The *News of the World* showed a similar U-shaped pattern: crime was 17.8 per cent of news in 1938, 29.1 per cent in 1955, and 11 per cent in 1967 (ibid.: 45).

In Britain, more recent studies find higher proportions of crime news than Roshier's average of 4 per cent for 1938–67. For example, a study of six Scottish newspapers in 1981 found that an average of 6.5 per cent of space was given to crime news (Ditton and Duffy 1983: 161; see also Smith 1984; Schlesinger *et al.* 1991: 411–15). This rise was confirmed by a later study comparing coverage of crime in ten national daily newspapers for four weeks from 19 June 1989 (Williams and Dickinson 1993). 'On average, 12.7% of event-oriented news reports were about crime' (ibid.: 40). The proportion of space devoted to crime was greater the more 'downmarket' the newspaper. The smallest proportion of crime news was 5.1 per cent in the *Guardian*; the largest was 30.4 per cent in *The Sun* (ibid.: 41).

Broadcast news in general devotes even more attention to crime reports than most newspapers (Cumberbatch *et al.* 1995: 5–8). There are similar variations in the proportion of news items concerning crime between different media operating in different markets. Commercial radio and television broadcast a higher proportion of crime news stories overall than the BBC, although the latter carried more reports about crime in general or criminal justice. Crime news is more frequent than any other category for every medium at each market level (ibid.: 7).

Given that different studies work with vastly different concepts of crime, and have ranged over many different newspapers and places, it is not possible to conclude from a literature review whether there is a trend for a greater proportion of news to be about crime. Although later studies predominantly find higher proportions of crime stories than earlier ones, they have also adopted broader concepts of crime, so the increase may well be a result of the measurement procedures used rather than a reflection of change in the media.

A recent study I conducted with Sonia Livingstone and Jessica Allen examined a random sample of issues of *The Times* and the *Mirror* for each year between 1945 and 1991 (Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b; Reiner 2001). We found a generally upward (albeit fluctuating) trend in the proportion of stories focused on crime in both newspapers (from under 10 per cent in the 1940s to over 20 per cent in the 1990s). The sharpest increase occurred during the late 1960s, when the average annual proportion of crime stories almost doubled, from around 10 per cent to around 20 per cent in both papers. The percentage of crime stories overall, and *a fortiori* the proportion which is specifically about criminal activities as distinct from criminal justice, is almost always slightly higher in the *Mirror*. In both papers the proportion of stories about the criminal justice system, as distinct from the commission of criminal offences, has clearly increased since the Second World War. Criminal justice stories

were on average 2 per cent of all stories in the *Mirror* between 1945–51, and 3 per cent in *The Times*. By 1985–1991 the average had increased to 6 per cent in the *Mirror*, and 9 per cent in *The Times*. This is probably a reflection of the politicization of law and order policy in this period (Downes and Morgan, in Chapter 10 of this volume).

In conclusion, estimates of the extent of news devoted to crime are highly sensitive to the varying definitions adopted by different researchers. They are also variable according to differences between media, markets, and over time. Deviance and control in a broad sense are the very stuff of news. However, stories about the commission of particular offences are more common in 'popular' news outlets (although for official or corporate crime the reverse is true). The proportion of news devoted to crime, and even more so the proportion about criminal justice, has increased over the last half-century.

The pattern of crime news

Content analyses have found systematic differences between the pattern of offences, victims, and offenders represented by the news and in official crime statistics or crime surveys. The last two sources are usually taken as representing the 'real' world of crime, ignoring the many pitfalls in interpreting the meaning of such statistics (Maguire, in Chapter 11 of this volume).

Although many studies do recognize the problems of inferring effects on audiences from analyses of media content, there is usually at least an implicit assumption that the gap between media representations of crime and the actuality supposedly disclosed by official statistics causes significant problems. Most commonly, the media are accused of exaggerating the risks of crime, cultivating an image of the world that is 'scary' and 'mean' (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Carlson 1985; Howitt 1998: chapter 4). Fear of crime and the coping strategies it leads to (such as not venturing out at night) are deemed disproportionate to the actual risks, and thus irrational and problematic in themselves (Sparks 1992 gives a cogent critique of this 'realist' conception of fear). Furthermore, media misrepresentation of crime risks is said to increase political support for authoritarian solutions to the supposed 'crisis' of law and order (Hall *et al.* 1978; Sasson 1995; Beckett 1997: chapters 5, 6).

Whatever its consequences, crime news does exhibit remarkably similar patterns in studies conducted at many different times and places. From the earliest studies (e.g., Harris 1932) onwards, analyses of news reports have found that crimes of violence are featured disproportionately compared to their incidence in official crime statistics or victim surveys. Indeed a general finding, emphasized originally in a pioneering study of Colorado newspapers, has been the lack of relationship between patterns and trends in crime news and crime statistics (Davis 1952).

Marsh reviewed thirty-six content analyses of crime news in the USA published between 1960 and 1988, and twenty studies in fourteen other countries between 1965 and 1987 (Marsh 1991). These all found an over-representation of violent and interpersonal crime, compared to official statistics, and an under-reporting of property offences. In America 'the ratio of violent-to-property crime stories appearing in the surveyed newspapers was 8 to 2; however, official statistics reflected a property-to-violent crime ratio of more than 9 to 1 during the survey period' (ibid.: 73). A

similar pattern is found in the content analyses reviewed for other countries (ibid.: 74–6).

Reiner *et al.*'s historical study of two British newspapers since the Second World War found that homicide was by far the most common type of crime reported, accounting for about one-third of all crime news stories throughout the period. Other violent crimes were the next most common. However, there were significant shifts in the proportion of stories featuring other sorts of crime. In particular there was a marked decline in the proportion of stories featuring 'volume' property crimes such as burglary in which no violence occurred. These are of course the overwhelming majority of crimes according to official statistics and crime surveys (Maguire, in Chapter 11 of this volume). During the 1940s and 1950s they also featured frequently in news stories, but after the mid-1960s they were hardly ever reported unless some violence ensued from them. On the other hand, some offences began to feature prominently in news stories only after the mid-1960s, notably drug offences, which by the 1990s accounted for about 10 per cent of all crime stories (Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b; Reiner 2001).

Studies conducted in the 1990s continue to show the same pattern of over-representation of violent and interpersonal (especially sex) crimes (Chiricos *et al.* 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000: chapter 5). In some respects this tendency is increasing. Between 1951 and 1985 the number of rape trials in Britain increased nearly four times, from 119 to 450. In the same period, the number of rape cases reported in the Press increased more than five times, from 28 to 154. The percentage of rape cases reported in the Press jumped from 23.5 per cent in 1951 to 34.2 per cent in 1985 (Soothill and Walby 1991: 20–22).

The proportion of news devoted to crime of different types, and the prominence with which it is presented, varies according to market and medium. In one month of 1989, 64.5 per cent of British newspaper crime stories dealt with personal violent crime, while the British Crime Survey found that only 6 per cent of crimes reported by victims were violent (Williams and Dickinson 1993: 40). The percentage of stories dealing with crimes involving personal violence, and the salience they were given (as measured by where they appeared in the layout and the extent of pictures accompanying them), increased considerably the more downmarket the newspaper studied (ibid.: 40–43).

The pattern of offences reported varies according to medium as well as market. In Britain, the proportion of violent crimes relative to other crimes reported in television news broadcasts is closer to the tabloid figure than the quality or mid-market Press, especially for local rather than national bulletins. A study of crime news in January–March 1987 found that the proportion of reports about non-sexual violence against the person in 'quality', 'mid-market', and 'tabloid' newspapers respectively was 24.7 per cent, 38.8 per cent, and 45.9 per cent. On national news bulletins it was 40 per cent, while on local bulletins violent crime stories were 63.2 per cent of all crime news. There was no significant difference between ITV (43.5 per cent) and BBC1 (42.3 per cent), but Channel 4 was more like the quality Press (18.2 per cent; Schlesinger *et al.* 1991: 412–15). Similar patterns are found for other offence categories: there are some 'market' differences between broadcast news channels, but on the whole the

proportion of different offences portrayed on television news is closer to tabloid than broadsheet print journalism.

Violent crimes in general figure disproportionately in British broadcast news, although there are substantial variations according to medium and market. In one study, over 40 per cent of crime news items concerned death and murder on nearly all BBC Radio stations. On television, murder and death accounted for 53 per cent of all crime stories on Sky News, 42 per cent on ITN, and 38 per cent on BBC1 (Cumberbatch *et al.* 1995: 25).

A further indirect consequence of the pattern of offences reported by news stories is an exaggeration of police success in clearing-up crime (resulting largely from Press reliance on police sources for stories). As summed-up in a review of fifty-six content analyses in fifteen different countries between 1960 and 1988, 'the over-representation of violent crime stories was advantageous to the police . . . because the police are more successful in solving violent crimes than property crimes' (Marsh 1991: 73). A historical study of British crime news stories found that although the overwhelming majority report crimes that are cleared up by the police, this is declining. The clear-up rate for stories in *The Times* fell from 80 per cent in 1945–64 to 64 per cent in 1981–91, and from 75 per cent to 70 per cent in the *Mirror* in the same period (Reiner 2001).

There is a clear pattern to news media portrayal of the characteristics of offenders and victims. Most studies find that offenders featuring in news reports are typically older and higher-status offenders than those processed by the criminal justice system (Roshier 1973: 45–6; Graber 1980; Reiner 2001). This finding needs some qualification, however, in the light of the problems of official statistics (cf. Maguire, in Chapter 11 of this volume). The profile of offenders dealt with by the criminal justice system is likely to be biased misleadingly towards lower-status offenders. In this respect the socio-economic characteristics of offenders in media stories may actually be closer to the—ultimately unknowable—'real' pattern than the official statistics which are based on the small proportion of offenders who are the losers of the criminal justice lottery. The over-representation of higher-status offenders is primarily confined to national news media. There is contradictory evidence about whether news reports disproportionately feature ethnic minority offenders (Graber 1980; Garofalo 1981: 324; Marsh 1991: 74; Sacco 1995: 143). Crime reports in local newspapers or broadcasting clearly focus more on ethnic minority and lower-status group suspects (Dussuyer 1979; Garofalo 1981: 324; Beckett and Sasson 2000: 79). 'Reality' TV programmes also present a marked variation to national news reports in terms of the demography of the offenders portrayed, concentrating on stories with young, ethnic minority suspects (Oliver and Armstrong 1998; Kooistra *et al.* 1998). The one demographic characteristic of offenders which is overwhelmingly congruent in news stories and in all other data sources on crime is their gender: 'both crime statistics and crime news portray offending as predominantly a male activity' (Sacco 1995: 143).

Studies assessing the profile of victims in news stories are fewer in number than analyses of the representation of offenders, although there is a clear trend for victims to become the pivotal focus of news stories in the last three decades (Reiner 2001). This parallels the increasing centrality of victims in criminal justice and criminology

(see Zedner, in Chapter 13 of this volume). Victims have also become the focal point for crime fiction narratives (as shown in Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b). News stories exaggerate the risks faced by higher status, white, female adults of becoming victims of crime (Graber 1980; Garofalo 1981: 324; Mawby and Brown 1983; Chermak 1995; Chiricos *et al.* 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000: 79–80), although child victims do feature prominently (Reiner 2001). The most common victims of violence according to official crime statistics and victim surveys are poor, young, black males. However, they figure in news reporting predominantly as perpetrators.

Another consistent finding of studies of content is the predominance of stories about criminal incidents, rather than analyses of crime patterns or the possible causes of crime. As summed up in one survey of the literature, 'crime stories in newspapers consist primarily of brief accounts of discrete events, with few details and little background material. There are very few attempts to discuss causes of or remedies for crime or to put the problem of crime into a larger perspective' (Garofalo 1981: 325; see also Marsh 1991: 76; Sasson 1995; Barlow 1998; Beckett and Sasson 2000: 80–81). Although an aspect of the more general event-orientation that is part of the 'eternal recurrence' of news (Rock 1973), the 'mass media provide citizens with a public awareness of crime . . . based upon an information-rich and knowledge-poor foundation . . . Anyone interested in learning about crime from the mass media is treated to examples, incidents, and scandals but at such a level of description that it is impossible for them to develop an analytical comprehension of crime' (Sherizen 1978: 204).

An important example of the concentration on events rather than exploration of underlying causes is the reporting of child sex abuse, which has systematically excluded issues of gender and focused primarily on the alleged excesses or failures of social workers in particular cases (Nava 1988; Skidmore 1995). Reporting of rape and other sex crimes is another area where issues of power and gender disappear in the fascination with the demonization of individual offenders or victims (Soothill and Walby 1991; Lees 1995; Gregory and Less 1999).

The tendency to exclude analysis of broader structural processes or explanations is also evident in stories about political disorder (Halloran *et al.* 1970; Hall 1973: 232–43; Sumner 1982; Tumber 1982; Cottle 1993). The portrayal of political conflict such as riot or terrorism is often in terms of sheer criminality, echoing the discourse of conservative politicians (Clarke and Taylor 1980; Hillyard 1982; Iyengar 1991: 24–46). This has been evident again in the overall media coverage of the events of 11 September 2001. However, the pattern varies according to different phases in the reporting of such conflicts (Wren-Lewis 1981/2). After the initial reporting of events such as the 1981 Brixton riots, which tends to be in terms of criminality, there is often a later phase of analysis of possible causes, especially if there is an official inquiry like Lord Scarman's (Murdock 1982).

There are also variations between different media and markets. Print journalism, especially 'quality' newspapers and editorial pages, will often have more analysis, with radio news having the least, and television intermediate (Ericson *et al.* 1991; Cumberbatch *et al.* 1995: 7). Newspapers and quality broadcasting channels are more likely to carry points of view critical of the actions of the authorities, giving some voice to those campaigning against officials. There is a tendency in recent years for critical and

campaigning groups to have more access to the media. This is partly because of the sheer growth in the space for news in all outlets, partly because of the increasing politicization of law and order (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Lawrence 2000; Downes and Morgan, in Chapter 10 of this volume).

Although critical stories exposing wrongdoing by the police or other criminal justice officials are regularly published, and an aspect of the high news-value attached to uncovering scandals amongst the powerful, this 'watchdog' function does not necessarily undermine the legitimacy of criminal justice institutions. Corruption and other police deviance stories have traditionally been set within the 'one bad apple' framework, whereby the exposure of individual wrongdoing is interpreted as a testimony to the integrity of the system which dealt with it (Chibnall 1977: chapter 5). As the volume of police deviance stories has increased in recent years (Reiner 2001), the 'one bad apple' story becomes harder to recycle. An alternative frame, in which malpractice is often revealed within a damage limitation narrative, is by presenting it as a story of institutional reform. This acknowledges the problems of previous practices but safeguards the legitimacy of the institution as one that is already putting things right (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994: chapter 7).

An earlier literature review concluded 'a typical metropolitan paper probably devotes around 5–10% of its available space to crime news. Further, the type of crime most likely reported is individual crime accompanied by violence. Less than 5% of available space is devoted to covering the general issue of crime: its causes, remedies etc.' (Dominick 1978: 108). This pattern remains recognizable, but there have been changes over time (Reiner 2001). The proportion of crime news is higher, and there is more about criminal justice. Increasing attention is paid to the effects of crime on individual victims. While reports of violent crime still predominate, there are many stories about other types of deviance and control. More critical and analytic pieces have increased in frequency. The representation of crime in the news clearly varies between different media, markets, and historical periods.

THE CONTENT OF CRIME FICTION

Some social scientists have conducted quantitative content analyses of film and television crime fiction.[2] More commonly, however, crime fiction—in print, the cinema, or on television—has been analysed using a variety of qualitative techniques and theoretical perspectives drawn from literary, film, and social theory.[3] The pattern of

[2] Gerbner 1970; Gerbner *et al.* 1980; Dominick 1978; Pandiani 1978; Gunter 1985; Carlson 1985; Lichter *et al.* 1994; Powers *et al.* 1996; Surette 1998: chapter 2; Allen *et al.* 1998.

[3] McArthur 1972; Shadoian 1977; Rosow 1978; McCarty 1993; Clarens 1997; Hardy 1997, 1998; Rubin 1999; Chibnall and Murphy 1999 and Rafter 2000 are just a few of the many studies of gangster and crime movies. Haycraft 1941; Watson 1971; Cawelti 1976; Palmer 1978; Knight 1980; Porter 1981; Benstock 1983; Most and Stowe 1983; Mandel 1984; Bell and Daldry 1990; Thompson 1993; and Clarke 2001 are some of the numerous texts on literary detective stories. Everson 1972; Tuska 1978; Meyers 1981, 1989; Parrish and Pitts 1990a offer histories of detective films and television shows. Reiner 1978, 1981, 1994, 2000a and 2000b; Park 1978; Hurd 1979; Kerr 1981; Clarke 1983, 1986, 1990; Dove 1982; Dove and Bargainnier 1986; Inciardi and Dee 1987; Buxton 1990; Parrish and Pitts 1990b; Laing 1991; Winston and Mellerski 1992; Sparks 1992: chapter 6, 1993; Eaton 1996; Hale 1998; King 1999; Wilson 2000; Gitlin 2000: chapters 11–14 examine police stories. Nellis and Hale 1982; Mason 1996; Cheatwood 1998 are studies of prison films.

representation of crime in fictional stories, in all media, resembles the results of content analyses of crime news.

The frequency of crime fiction

Respectable fears about waves of excessive media focus on crime are perennial, just as they are about crime in reality (Pearson 1983). (Recent examples include Medved 1992; Powers *et al.* 1996: chapter 5.) However, while there have been important changes over time in *how* crime is represented in fictional narratives, crime stories have always been a prominent part of popular entertainment.

Stories of crime and detection have been staples of modern literature since the early days of the novel, as the works of Defoe, Fielding, and Dickens illustrate (Ousby 1976; Durston 1996). Some authors have sought to trace the ancestry of the detective story as far back as possible. 'We find sporadic examples of it in Oriental folk-tales, in the Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, in the play-scene in *Hamlet*, while Aristotle in his *Poetics* puts forward observations about dramatic plot-construction which are applicable today to the construction of a detective mystery' (Sayers 1936: vii). This was clearly an attempt to emphasize the 'snobbery' rather than the 'violence' of the classic ratiocinative detective story (Watson 1971). The dominant style of crime fiction has varied from the classic puzzle mystery exemplified by Sayers and Agatha Christie, to the tougher private eye stories pioneered by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, and the police procedurals of Ed McBain, Joseph Wambaugh and others (accessible histories include Symons 1972, Binyon 1989, and Ousby 1997).

In the heyday of the 'Golden Age' detective story, the 1930s, crime novels were about 25 per cent of the popular fiction titles available through the W.H. Smith subscription library service (Watson 1971: 31). One estimate suggests that 'between a quarter and a third of total paperback output could probably be put into the category of "thriller" of one kind or another . . . since 1945, at least 10,000 million copies of crime stories have been sold world-wide' (Mandel 1984: 66–7).

Crime stories have also been a perennially prominent genre in the cinema, the dominant mass medium of the first half of the twentieth century (Rafter 2000). As with its successors, television and video, the cinema has been haunted by respectable fears about its portrayal of crime and violence (Barker 1984; Mathews 1994; Miller 1994). The proportion of films about crime has fluctuated cyclically since the Second World War, but there is no long-term increase or decrease in crime films (Allen *et al.* 1997). In most years, around 20 per cent of all films are crime movies, and around half of all films have significant crime content.

Radio was the main broadcasting medium of the first half of the twentieth century. Stories about crime and law enforcement were a popular part of radio drama, in Britain and North America, although never as dominant as they subsequently became on television (Shale 1996). In the USA it has been calculated that the proportion of evening radio programming taken up by crime stories was 4 per cent in 1932, 5 per cent in 1940, 14 per cent in 1948, and 5 per cent in 1956, by which time there was significant competition from television (Dominick 1978: 112–3).

Stories about crime and law enforcement have been prominent on television ever since it became the leading broadcasting medium in the 1950s. In the early to

mid-1950s, the proportion of prime-time television devoted to shows about crime and law enforcement hovered just under 10 per cent (Dominick 1978: 114). But by 1959 over one-third of prime-time television was crime shows. Since then there have been cyclical fluctuations, but in most years at least 20 per cent of prime-time is given to crime shows, and in a few years nearly 40 per cent (ibid.). Crime shows are just as much a staple of British television. In most years since 1955 around 25 per cent of the most popular television shows in Britain have been crime or police series. While there are sharp cyclical fluctuations, there is no long-term trend (Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b).

Thus crime fiction, like crime news, is a prominent part of all types of mass medium, usually accounting for about 25 per cent of output. Whereas there was some tendency for the proportion of news space devoted to crime to increase in the last half-century, this was not true of fiction. Crime stories seem to have been a staple of popular entertainment throughout the modern period. While concern about crime in fiction appears to have been a constant, there have been changes in *how* crime and criminal justice are represented. The overall pattern of fictional representations of crime is similar to that in news stories—and shows similar discrepancies from the picture conveyed by official crime statistics.

The pattern of crime in fiction

Murder and other violent crimes feature predominantly in crime fiction, vastly more frequently than other offences that are much more common in official statistics. In a recent study (financed by ESRC grant no. L/210/25/2029), Jessica Allen, Sonia Livingstone, and I analysed in detail the crime films that have done best at the British box office since the Second World War (Allen *et al.* 1998; Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b). Murder was the primary crime (the McGuffin of the plot, in Hitchcock's terminology) in the overwhelming majority of films throughout the period. However, property offences provided the McGuffin in a significant minority of films up to the late 1960s, though seldom thereafter. Sexual and drug offences began to appear as central aspects of narratives only after the late 1960s. Up to the mid-1960s, most films did not feature any crimes which were not directly related to the McGuffin. After that they begin to portray a world which is full of contextual crimes, unrelated to the central crime animating the narrative (to the point where characters like the eponymous Dirty Harry cannot go for a hamburger without coming across a bank robbery in progress). Up to the mid-1960s, crime was represented usually as an abnormal, one-off intrusion into a stable order. Thereafter images of an all-pervasive, routinized threat of crime become more common. Linked to this is the increasing prevalence in films of police heroes. This signifies that crime has become sufficiently routine to provide employment for a large bureaucracy, not just a diversion for enthusiastic amateurs at country house weekends (Reiner 1978, 1980, 2000b; Allen *et al.* 1998: 67–8; King 1999; Rafter 2000: chapter 3; Wilson 2000).

The representation of violence has become increasingly graphic throughout the period since the Second World War. Up to the early 1970s, hardly any films in our sample showed more than a minor degree of pain or damage to the victim (beyond the fact of the murder itself!). Since then there has been an increasing number of films

depicting severe suffering by victims, who are often depicted as severely traumatized (see also Powers *et al.* 1996: 104–106). There is an even more marked increase in the extent of violence shown in contextual crimes, as well as a growing frequency of violence not strictly necessary for the achievement of instrumental objectives (such as escaping arrest).

On television also, fictional narratives have always featured violent crimes more prominently than other offences, but are focusing on them to an increasing extent. Studies of American television suggest that about two-thirds of crime shown on prime-time shows consists of murder, assault, or armed robbery (Dominick 1973: 245; Garofalo 1981: 326; Sparks 1992: 140; Lichter *et al.* 1994; Beckett and Sasson 2000: chapter 6).

A recent historical content analysis of 620 randomly selected prime-time TV shows broadcast between 1955 and 1986 demonstrated the growing preponderance of violent crime in television fiction (Lichter *et al.* 1994: chapter 8). It found that 'television violence has far outstripped reality since the 1950s. In the first decade of our study, there were seven murders for every one hundred characters seen on the screen. This was more than 1,400 times the actual murder rate for the United States during the same time period' (ibid.: 275; the measure of 'reality' is taken to be the FBI *Uniform Crime Reports*, which of course suffer from the same limitations as other official crime statistics).

Violent crimes apart from homicide also featured prominently.

Other violent crimes accounted for one crime in eight on TV during the decade 1955 to 1964. Violent crimes short of murder occurred at a rate of 40 for every 1,000 characters. At that time the real-world rate was only 2 in every 1,000 inhabitants . . . During the second decade of our study, covering 1965 to 1975, crime rose both on TV and in the wider world. In the real world the rate for serious offences doubled to 25 for every 1,000 inhabitants, according to FBI statistics. Despite this increase in crime rates around the country, the television crime rate remained more than five times that of the real world, at 140 crimes per 1,000 characters. The FBI-calculated rate for violent crimes also doubled to 3 incidents per 1,000 inhabitants. The TV rate for violent crimes, at 114 incidents per 1,000 characters, was more than 30 times greater. (Lichter *et al.* 1994: 276)

The victimization studies that began in the late 1960s in the USA reveal far more crime of all kinds than the FBI statistics, but the 'television rate for violent crimes was still fifteen times higher than estimates from victimisation surveys' (ibid.).

In the third decade covered by Lichter *et al.*'s historical content analysis, television and the world of statistically recorded crime converge slightly. On the one hand, broadcasting standards were altered in 1975 to create 'Family Viewing Time', which led to reduced levels of television violence. 'The rate for serious crimes on television fell 3 percent to a "low" of 110 crimes per 1,000 characters. The rate for violent crimes also dropped almost 3 percent, to 86 incidents in every 1,000 characters . . . Thus, television and reality have moved closer together in terms of the overall crime rate, but television continues to present far more violent crimes than occur in real life' (ibid.: 278). The drop in the television violence rate was more than compensated for by the appearance of serious crimes which hitherto had hardly featured in genre

crime fiction: prostitution and other organized vice such as pornography, and drug-related offences. On American television there was a fifteenfold increase in prostitution offences and a tenfold rise in drug-related crime between 1975 and 1985 (ibid.: 285).

Ironically, in relation to property crime risks television has become safer than the world presented in official statistics. Between 1955 and 1964 and 1975 and 1984, the average annual rate for serious property offences in the USA increased from ten to fifty incidents per 1,000 people according to the FBI data. Victimization studies show the rate increasing from about 50 per 1,000 between 1965 and 1974 to 100 for every 1,000 inhabitants in 1975–84. However, on television 'the rate for serious property crimes has remained steady at 20 incidents per 1,000 characters over the thirty years of our study' (ibid.: 284). Thus between 1955 and 1964 the television property crime rate exceeded the official statistics, but since then it has fallen far behind them, and *a fortiori* behind the picture presented by victimization surveys. There is also a trend for the cinema (and newspapers) to understate the risks of property crime (Allen *et al.* 1998: 65; Reiner 2001: 5).

The portrayal of crime on television and in other fiction presents it as predominantly violent, contrary to the picture in official statistics. Apart from statistical frequency, the *qualitative* character of crimes depicted in fiction is vastly different from the officially recorded pattern. While most 'real' murders are extensions of brawls between young men, or domestic disputes, in fiction murder is usually motivated by greed and calculation (Dominick 1973: 250; Garofalo 1981: 326–7; Lichter *et al.* 1994: 279; Allen *et al.* 1998: 69). Rape is also presented in opposite ways in fiction and criminal justice statistics. In reality most reported rapes are perpetrated by intimates or acquaintances, not strangers (Barclay and Tavares 1999: 16). On television and in other fiction, although rarely shown (and virtually never before the early 1960s) rape is usually committed by psychopathic strangers and involves extreme brutality, often torture and murder ('5% of the murders on TV result from rape', Lichter *et al.* 1994: 279–80).

While crime fiction presents property crime less frequently than the reality suggested by crime statistics, the crimes it portrays are far more serious than most recorded offences. Official statistics and victim surveys concur in calculating that the overwhelming majority of property crimes involve little or no loss or damage, and no physical threat or harm to the victim—indeed, there is usually no contact at all with the perpetrator. In fiction, however, most property crimes involve tightly planned, high value, project thefts, and are frequently accompanied by violence (Garofalo 1981: 326; Lichter *et al.* 1994: 284).

Related to the disproportionate emphasis on the most serious end of the crime spectrum is the portrayal of the demographic characteristics of offenders and victims presented by crime fiction. Offenders in fiction are primarily higher-status, white, middle-aged males (Pandiani 1978: 442–7; Garofalo 1981: 326; Lichter *et al.* 1994: 290–5; Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b). Interestingly, the new genre of 'reality' info-tainment cop shows such as *Cops* differs from this pattern, primarily presenting offenders as non-white, underclass youth (Fishman and Cavender 1998; Beckett and Sasson 2000: 113). The social characteristics of fictional victims are similar, but a

higher proportion are female. Apart from gender, the demographic profile of offenders and victims in fiction is the polar opposite of criminal justice statistics (Surette 1998: 47 calls this 'the law of opposites'). (See also Pandiani ibid.; Garofalo ibid.; Lichter *et al.* ibid.; Barclay and Tavares 1999: chapters 2 and 3. Sparks 1992: 140–45 offers a qualitative analysis.)

A final important feature of fictional crime is the high clear-up rate. This is paralleled by crime news, but completely different from the picture presented by official statistics. In fiction the cops usually get their man (Dominick 1973: 246; Garofalo 1981: 327; Lichter *et al.* 1994: chapter 9; Powers *et al.* 1996: chapter 5). Although crime fiction concentrates on the kind of serious violent crimes that have the highest clear-up rates in reality, the media have always exaggerated this. In Allen *et al.*'s sample of movies since 1945, there was no film before 1952 in which criminals escaped capture, and hardly any up to the early 1970s. Thereafter, offenders get away with their crimes in an increasing number of films, albeit still a minority (Allen *et al.* 1998: 185; Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b). Trends on television are similar, with the overwhelming majority of crimes cleared up by the police, but an increasing minority where they fail (Lichter *et al.* ibid.).

The police and criminal justice system are thus overwhelmingly portrayed in a positive light in popular fiction, as the successful protectors of victims against serious harm and violence. This continues to be so, although with increasing questioning of police success and integrity (Reiner 2000b). Although the majority of police characters in films and television shows are represented as sympathetic, honest, and just, there is an increasing portrayal of police deviance. Corrupt, brutal, and discriminatory police officers have become more common since the mid-1960s in films (Powers *et al.* 1996: 113–6; Allen *et al.* 1998: 185–6) and television (Lichter *et al.* 1994: chapter 9), as has acceptance of routine police violation of due process legal restraints (Dominick 1978: 117; Garofalo 1981: 327; Sparks 1992: chapter 6).

A major shift in media crime fiction is the increasingly prominent representation of victims. Victims have moved from a shadowy and purely functional role in crime narratives to a pivotal position. Film and television stories increasingly focus on the plight of victims, whose suffering is portrayed more graphically and often constitutes the driving force of the story (Allen *et al.* 1998; Reiner *et al.* 2000a and 2000b). This is paralleled by their treatment in news stories (Reiner 2001). Support for law and enforcement and criminal justice is increasingly constructed in narratives by presenting them as defenders or avengers of victims with whose suffering the audience is invited to identify.

THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF CRIME: A SUMMARY

The review of analyses of the content of media representations of crime suggests the following conclusions:

1. News and fiction stories about crime are prominent in all media. While there is evidence of increasing attention to crime in some parts of the media, overall this fascination has been constant throughout media history.

2. News and fiction concentrate overwhelmingly on serious violent crimes against individuals, albeit with some variation according to medium and market. The proportion of different crimes represented is the inverse of official statistics.

3. The demographic profile of offenders and victims in the media is older and higher status than those processed by the criminal justice system.

4. The risks of crime as portrayed by the media are both quantitatively and qualitatively more serious in the media than the official statistically recorded picture, although the media underplay the current probabilities of victimization by property crimes.

5. The media generally present a very positive image of the success and integrity of the police, and criminal justice more generally. However, in both news and fiction there is a clear trend to criticism of law enforcement, both in terms of its effectiveness and its justice and honesty. While in the past the unbroken media picture was that *Crime Does Not Pay* (the title of a series of short films produced by MGM between 1935 and 1947), this is increasingly called into question in contemporary media news and fiction.

6. Individual victims and their suffering increasingly provide the motive force of crime stories.

The next section will discuss the possible implications of this pattern of representation.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEDIA IMAGES OF CRIME

This section offers an overview and analysis of the huge research literature assessing the impact of media images of crime. Much of the inspiration (and dollars) for empirical evaluations of media effects derives from the broader, apocalyptic concerns of subversion or hegemony. However, in practice most research has sought to measure two possible consequences of media representations (which are not mutually exclusive): criminal behaviour (especially violence); and fear of crime. I will first consider the way that the media feature in the most common social theories of crime, and then assess the empirical research evidence. (For detailed critical surveys of theories and research evidence on the media and crime causation, see Surette 1998: chapter 5; Howitt 1998: chapters 1, 5–8, 10–11.)

THE MEDIA AND CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

The media play at least a subordinate role in all the major theoretical perspectives attempting to understand crime and criminal justice (see Rock, in Chapter 2 of this volume). To illustrate this the predominant theories of crime can be assembled in a simple model. For a crime to occur there are several logically necessary preconditions, which can be identified as: labelling; motive; means; opportunity; and the absence of

controls. The media potentially play a part in each of these elements, and thus can affect levels of crime in a variety of ways.

Labelling

For an act to be 'criminal' (as distinct from harmful, immoral, anti-social, etc.) it has to be labelled as such. This involves the creation of a legal category. It also requires the perception of the act as criminal by citizens and/or law enforcement officers if it is to be recorded as a crime. The media are an important factor in both processes, helping to shape the conceptual boundaries and recorded volume of crime.

The role of the media in helping to develop new (and erode old) categories of crime has been emphasized in most of the classic studies of shifting boundaries of criminal law within the 'labelling' tradition. Becker's seminal book *Outsiders* analysed the emergence of the Marijuana Tax Act in the USA in 1937, emphasizing the use of the media as a tool of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and its moral entrepreneurship in creating the new statute (Becker 1963: chapter 7). Jock Young showed that media representations amplified the deviance of drug-takers (Young 1971). Stan Cohen coined the influential concept of 'moral panic' in his study of the part played by the media together with the police in developing a spiral of respectable fear about clashes between 'mods' and 'rockers' (Cohen 1972). Hall *et al.*'s wide-ranging analysis of the development of a moral panic about a supposedly new type of robbery, 'mugging', emphasized the crucial part played by the media. Newspapers stimulated public anxiety, producing changes in policing and criminal justice practice which appeared to confirm the initial reports by processing more offenders: a self-fulfilling spiral of deviancy amplification (Hall *et al.* 1978).

Since these pioneering works many other studies have illustrated the crucial role of the media in shaping the boundaries of deviance and criminality, by creating new categories of offence, or changing perceptions and sensitivities, leading to fluctuations in apparent crime. For example, Roger Graef's celebrated 1982 fly-on-the-wall documentary about the Thames Valley Police was a key impetus to reform of police treatment of rape victims (Gregory and Lees 1999; 'TV that changed the world', *Radio Times*, 24–30 November 2001). This also contributed, however, to a rise in the proportion of victims reporting rape, and thus an increase in the recorded rate. Many other studies document media-amplified 'crime waves' and 'moral panics' about law and order.[4]

What all these studies illustrate is the significant contribution of the media to determining the apparent level of crime. Increases and (perhaps more rarely) decreases in recorded crime levels are often due in part to the deviance construction and amplifying activities of the media (Barak 1994; Ferrell and Sanders 1995; Surette 1998: chapter 7).

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[4] E.g., Fishman 1981; Christensen *et al.* 1982; Best and Horiuchi 1985; Nava 1988; Altheide 1993; Orcutt and Turner 1993; Skidmore 1995; Lees 1995; Brownstein 1995; Beckett 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000: chapters 4, 5, 7.

Motive

A crime will not occur unless there is someone who is tempted, driven, or otherwise motivated to carry out the 'labelled' act. The media feature in many of the most commonly offered social and psychological theories of the formation of criminal dispositions. Probably the most influential sociological theory of how criminal motives are formed is Merton's version of *anomie* theory (Merton 1938; echoes of which are found in more recent work such as Lea and Young 1984; Dahrendorf 1985; Young 1999; and Messner and Rosenfeld 2000). The media play a key role in these accounts of the formation of anomic strain generating pressures to offend. The media are pivotal in presenting for universal emulation images of affluent life-styles, which accentuate relative deprivation and generate pressures to acquire ever higher levels of material success regardless of the legitimacy of the means used.

Psychological theories of the formation of motives to commit offences also often feature media effects as part of the process. It has been claimed that the images of crime and violence presented by the media are a form of social learning, and may encourage crime by imitation or arousal effects. Others have argued that the media tend to erode internalized controls by disinhibition or desensitization through witnessing repeated representations of deviance (for detailed discussion of such theories, see Bailey 1993; Carey 1993; Wartella 1995: 309–11; Livingstone 1996: 308).

Means

It has often been alleged that the media act as an open university of crime, spreading knowledge of criminal techniques. This is often claimed in relation to particular *causes célèbres* or horrific crimes, for example during the 1950s' campaign against crime and horror comics (Barker 1984; Nyberg 1998). A notorious case was the allegation that the murderers of Jamie Bulger had been influenced by the video *Child's Play 3* in the manner in which they killed the unfortunate toddler (Morrison 1997). A related line of argument is the 'copycat' theory of crime and rioting (Tumber 1982; Howitt 1998: 75–84; Surette 1998: 137–52). Despite a plethora of research and discussion, the evidence that this is a major source of crime remains weak.

Opportunity

The media may increase opportunities to commit offences by contributing to the development of a consumerist ethos, in which the availability of tempting targets of theft proliferates. They can also alter 'routine activities', especially in relation to the use of leisure time, which structure opportunities for offending (Cohen and Felson 1979). The domestic hardware and software of mass media use—TVs, videos, radios, CDs, personal computers, mobile phones—are the common currency of routine property crime, and their proliferation has been an important aspect of the spread of criminal opportunities.

Absence of controls

Motivated potential offenders, with the means and opportunities to commit offences, may still not carry out these crimes if effective social controls are in place. These might be *external*—the deterrent threat of sanctions represented in the first place by

the police—or *internal*—the still, small voice of conscience—what Eysenck has called the 'inner policeman'.

A regularly recurring theme of respectable anxieties about the criminogenic consequences of media images of crime is that they erode the efficacy of both external and internal controls. They may undermine external controls by derogatory representations of criminal justice, for example ridiculing its agents, a key complaint at least since the days of Dogbery, resuscitated in this century by the popularity of comic images of the police, from the Keystone Cops onwards. Serious representations of criminal justice might undermine its legitimacy by becoming more critical, questioning, for example, the integrity and fairness, or the efficiency and effectiveness of the police. Negative representations of criminal justice could lessen public cooperation with the system, or potential offenders' perception of the probability of sanctions, with the consequence of increasing crime.

Probably the most frequently suggested line of causation between media representations and criminal behaviour is the allegation that the media undermine internalized controls, by regularly presenting sympathetic or glamorous images of offending. In academic form this is found in the psychological theories about disinhibition and desensitization, which were referred to in the section above on the formation of motives (Wartella 1995: 309–12; Surette 1998: 119–30 are succinct evaluations).

In sum, there are several possible links between media representations of crime and criminal behaviour which are theoretically possible, and frequently suggested in criminological literature and political debate. In the next section I will review some of the research evidence examining whether such a link can be demonstrated empirically.

CRIMINOGENIC MEDIA? THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

In a comprehensive review of the research literature, Sonia Livingstone noted that 'since the 1920s thousands of studies of mass media effects have been conducted' (Livingstone 1996: 306). She added that even listing the references to research in the previous decade would exhaust the space allocated to her article (some twenty pages).[5] But 'despite the volume of research, the debate about media effects—whether it can be shown empirically that specific mass media messages . . . have specific, often detrimental effects on the audiences who are exposed to them remains unresolved' (ibid.). Reviews of the literature regularly recycle the apotheosis of agnosticism represented by the conclusion of one major study from the 1960s: 'for some children, under some conditions, some television is harmful. For some children under the same conditions, or for the same children under other conditions, it may be beneficial. For most children, under most conditions, most television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial' (Schramm *et al.* 1961: 11).

This meagre conclusion from the expenditure of countless research hours and dollars is primarily a testimony to the limitations and difficulties of empirical social science. The armoury of possible research techniques for assessing directly the effects

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[5] Other useful overviews of the evidence about media effects in relation to crime and violence include Bailey 1993; Carey 1993; Wartella 1995; Surette 1998: chapter 5; Howitt 1998: chapters 1–2, 5–11.

of media images on crime is sparse, and suffers from evident and long-recognized limitations.

The primary technique used by such research has been some version of the classic experiment. The archetypal form of this is to show a group of subjects a media stimulus—say a film, or TV programme, or extract—and measure the response, in terms of behaviour or attitudes compared to before the experiment. In a characteristic example, children of four to five were shown a five-minute film in the researcher's office, and then taken to a room with toys and observed for twenty minutes through a one-way mirror (Bandura *et al.* 1961, 1963). The children were randomly assigned to watch one of three films, enacting scenarios in which a boy who attacked another boy and some toys was depicted as either being rewarded, punished, or neither. The children (especially the boys) who saw the film about the boy rewarded for his attack by getting all the toys to play with, were observed to carry out twice as much imitative aggression as the other groups, but no more non-imitative aggression.

This example shows all the problems of inferring conclusions about links between media and violence from laboratory-style experiments. Are the results a Hawthorn effect arising from the experimental situation itself? For instance, were the more aggressive children who saw a film in which aggression was rewarded influenced by their perception that the experimenter approved of such behaviour? How far can results from one context of viewing be extrapolated to others? Do experimental results exaggerate the links in the everyday world by picking up short-term effects of media exposure that rapidly evaporate? Or do they underestimate the long-term cumulative effects of regular, repeated exposures by measuring only one-off results? To some the artificiality of such experiments fatally compromises them (Surette 1998: 122–3). Others point out that 'laboratories' (or more typically researchers' offices or other convenient campus locations) are social situations 'whose particular dynamics and meanings must be considered . . . and generalisability depends on how far these same factors may occur or not in everyday life' (Livingstone 1996: 310).

Given the huge number of such experimental studies (using different forms of stimuli and different types of measures of response, for different sorts of subjects, at many different times and places) it is hardly surprising that there are considerable variations in the extent of effect shown, if any. However, most studies do show *some* effect, and the few that conducted follow-ups over time found that while effects diminished by about 25 per cent over the fortnight or so after an experiment, they do not disappear (Livingstone 1996: 309–10). There are many suggestions in the experimental literature about what determines the degree of effect caused by media exposures. These include the perceived realism of the representation, whether violence or deviance was seen as justified, punished, or rewarded, whether the viewers identified with the perpetrator, the variable vulnerability or susceptibility of the viewer, and so on (ibid.).

Typically, however, the effects of exposure to media stimuli in experimental situations are small. Interestingly, most of the research has looked at supposed negative effects of media, such as violence. The few studies that have examined the effects of 'prosocial' images suggest that these are much larger. One meta-analysis of 230 studies of media effects estimated that overall they showed that a single exposure to

violent or stereotyped content was followed by about an extra 20 per cent of 'anti-social' responses, compared to an extra 50 per cent of 'prosocial' responses after viewing positive images (Hearold 1986; Livingstone 1996: 309). All of this has to be qualified, however, by the above caveats about how far such findings can be extrapolated to 'natural' contexts of viewing, and long-term effects in ordinary life (Wartella 1995: 306).

Given the limitations of laboratory experiments, some studies have tried to assess the effects of media exposure in more or less 'natural' everyday situations. One method has been by looking at the introduction of some form of medium (usually television) in an area where it did not exist before. This was most frequently done in the 1950s, when the spread of television ownership, first in the USA, then in the UK, provided the opportunity of a once-and-for-all natural experiment. One study of matched sets of thirty-four US cities in the early 1950s found that larceny increased by about 5 per cent in those cities where television was introduced for the first time, compared to cities without TV or those that had been receiving it for some time (Hennigan *et al.* 1952). However, British research in the same period does not find similar effects on deviance (Himmelweit *et al.* 1958; Livingstone 1996: 312–3). Since the virtually universal availability of television, such natural experiments are seldom possible. One recent example found that children's verbal and physical aggression increased in a Northern Canadian town after television, was introduced, compared to two towns with established television (Williams 1986). While such natural experiments do not suffer from the artificiality of their laboratory counterparts, they are of course less completely controlled: the possibility can never be ruled out that differences between experimental and control areas were due to factors other than television which changed at the same time.

The same issue arises in comparing the natural viewing habits of people who differ in their attitudes or behaviour concerning crime. Several studies have compared the viewing patterns of known offenders and (supposed) non-offenders. Some studies have concluded that more exposure to television is related to greater aggressiveness (see Belson 1978, and the other examples in Wartella 1995: 307–9); others that the viewing preferences of delinquents are remarkably similar to the general pattern for their age (Hagell and Newburn 1994). Neither conclusion is free from the possibility of other, unmeasured factors explaining either the association or the lack of it.

There is also some evidence that abuses of power by police and other criminal justice agents may be affected by media representations. A study of 'reality' TV programmes such as *Cops* suggests that the police may adopt forms of entrapment or illicit punishment of offenders to ensure good video footage for such shows (Doyle 1998: 110–12).

The big fix: the media–crime connection

A reading of any of the recent reviews of the research literature on possible links between media and criminal behaviour refutes the canard that libertarian wishful thinking has blinded researchers to the harm done by violent or deviant images. As one such survey found, 'current reviews conclude that there is a correlation between violence viewing and aggressive behaviour, a relationship that holds even when a

variety of controls are imposed' (Wartella 1985: 306). However, the overall negative effects of media exposure seem to be small compared to other features in the social experience of offenders. Thus 'the question that remains is not whether media violence has an effect, but rather how important that effect has been, in comparison with other factors, in bringing about major social changes such as the postwar rise in crime' (ibid.: 312).

The problem with most of the effects debate and research is that it has often been directed at a rather implausible notion. What has been at issue is the will o' the wisp of a 'pure' media effect. The implicit model behind much popular anxiety, which was imported into the research agenda (especially in earlier work), was of the media as an autonomous and all-powerful ideological hypodermic syringe, injecting ideas and values into a passive public of cultural dopes.

It is far more plausible that media images affect people, who are not passive recipients but active interpreters, in a complex process of interaction with other cultural and social practices. Changes in media representations do not come fully formed from another planet and produce changes in behaviour patterns *ex nihilo*. They are themselves likely to reflect on-going changes in social perceptions and practices. Changing media images will then be interpreted by different audience sections in various ways, which may reinforce or alter emerging social patterns. The relationship between developments in the media and in the wider society is a dialectical one. While this makes the isolation and measurement of pure media effects chimerical, it certainly does not imply that media representations have no significant consequences.

As Sonia Livingstone concluded:

Most media researchers believe that the media have significant effects, even though they are hard to demonstrate, and most would agree that the media make a significant contribution to the social construction of reality. The problem is to move beyond this platitude . . . Part of the continued concern with media effects (aside from the occasional moral panics engendered around key issues) . . . is a concern with changing cultural understandings and practices . . . The study of enculturation processes, which work over long time periods, and which are integral to rather than separate from other forms of social determination, would not ask how the media make us act or think, but rather how the media contribute to making us who we are. (Livingstone 1996: 31–2)

Most of the research on the consequences of media representations of crime has concerned their possible impact on offending. In the last thirty years, however, another policy and research issue has come to the fore: the impact of the media on public fear of crime, and the consequences of this.

THE MEDIA AND FEAR OF CRIME

In recent years policy debates have focused increasingly on fear of crime as an issue potentially as serious as crime itself (Ditton and Farrell 2000; Hope and Sparks 2000). Concern is not just about the unnecessary pain of excessive anxiety, nor even the damage done to trust and social relations by fear and the prevention strategies it encourages. In the 'cultivation analysis' tradition which Gerbner and his associates

have been developing for thirty years, media images of crime and violence are a threat to democracy.

Fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled, more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures—both political and religious. They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their insecurities and other anxieties. That is the deeper problem of violence-laden television [Signorielli 1990: 102].

'Cultivation analysis' is derived from an on-going project of annual 'violence profiles': an elaborate content analysis of one week's prime-time television in an American city (Gerbner 1970, 1995). When reel-world violence is compared to real-world crime as measured by official statistics, it appears that the media images exaggerate the probability and severity of danger. This is said to 'cultivate' a misleading view of the world based on unnecessary anxiety about levels of risk from violent crime. The content analyses of programmes is the basis for construction of a set of 'television answers' to survey questions: the views about crime and violence which would be given by respondents 'if all we knew is what we saw' (Pandiani 1978). The closeness of fit of actual survey respondents' answers to these questions is then analysed according to their pattern of television consumption. The general finding is that 'heavier' television viewing is associated with world-views closer to the 'television answer' (Carlson 1985; Signorielli 1990: 96–102). There has been extensive criticism of the empirical and theoretical validity of these claims (Sparks 1992: chapter 4 is a penetrating and detailed review of these arguments).

The empirical debates have centred on two broad issues (Howitt 1998: chapter 4 is a useful review). How much of the association between measures of exposure to the media and of fearfulness survives the introduction of other control variables such as class, race, gender, place of residence, and actual experience of crime (Doob and MacDonald 1979; Gunter 1987; Chadee 2001; Roberts 2001)? Could any association between viewing and fearfulness result from the opposite causal process to that suggested by Gerbner and his associates, i.e. do more fearful viewers watch more TV rather than vice versa? More generally, it appears that 'cultivation' does not export well. British attempts to replicate the Gerbner findings have failed to do so, possibly because American television has a much higher violence profile (Wober 1978). This means that 'the British *heavy* viewer may see less television violence than American *light* viewers' (Gunter 1985: 250).

Gerbner and his colleagues have replied by various developments of their perspective, most significantly the concept of 'mainstreaming' (Gerbner *et al.* 1980). This is the argument that television views are all-pervasive, constituting the cultural mainstream, and this dampens down the measurement of distinct effects. To a large extent 'cultivation' through heavy viewing reinforces widespread images in the dominant television-formed world-view. In order to rescue this plausible argument from untestability, subsequent research in the tradition has tried to measure mainstreaming by calculating the extent of 'the sharing of common outlooks among the heavy viewers in those demographic groups whose light viewers hold more divergent views' (Signorielli 1990: 88).

Although the debate about the empirical validity of the cultivation hypothesis continues, there is evidence from other studies to confirm the plausible idea that exposure to media images is associated with fear of crime. A recent British study, for example, concluded after extensive multi-variate analysis that there was a significant relationship between reading newspapers with more emphasis on violent crime and measures of fearfulness expressed in a survey (Williams and Dickinson 1993). This association survived control by a number of demographic variables, such as socio-economic status, gender, and age. However, this association was not found with behavioural concomitants of fear, such as going out after dark. Neither could the study rule out the possibility that fear led to heavier readership of newspapers with more crime, rather than vice versa. On the empirical issue, while it remains a reasonable hypothesis that much public fear of crime is created or accentuated by media exposure, the research evidence remains equivocal about the strength, or even existence, of such a causal relationship (Sacco 1995: 151).

As with the research on media and criminal behaviour, much of this inconclusiveness is rooted in the theoretical limitations of positivist content analysis (Sparks 1992: chapter 4). In Gerbner's violence profiles, for instance, items of violence are collated according to operational definitions used by observers, without reference to the narrative contexts within which they are embedded. As shown earlier, it remains the case that most narratives have conclusions in accordance with Miss Prism's celebrated definition of fiction: 'The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily' (Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Act II). Although there is a trend towards the incorporation of more critical perspectives and greater ambivalence and ambiguity, most crime stories still have an underlying emphasis on just resolutions of conflict and violence (Zillman and Wakshlag 1987; Reiner *et al*. 2000a and 2000b). It is not obvious that exposure to high degrees of violence en route to a happy ending has a fear-enhancing effect. 'When suspenseful drama featuring victimisation is known to contain a satisfying resolution, apprehensive individuals should anticipate pleasure and enjoyment' (Wakshlag *et al*. 1983: 238). Neither do counts of disembodied acts of violence distinguish between representations which are perceived as more or less 'realistic', and their differing impact.

Above all, quantitative assessments of the relationship between 'objectively' measured units of media content and survey responses cannot begin to understand the complex and dynamic inter-dependence of the differential experiences of crime, violence, and risk of different social groups and their subjective interpretations of the meaning of texts. The subtle intertwinings of differential social positions and life experiences with the reception of media texts is only beginning to be addressed by studies of content and interpretation. These use qualitative methods and ways of reading that seek to be sensitive to the complexities of analysing meaning (Sparks 1992, 2000, 2001; Schlesinger *et al*. 1992; Livingstone *et al*. 2001). As with the issue of the effects of media images on criminality, so too with fear, the issue is not whether media representations have consequences. Hardly anyone would deny this. The agenda is the unravelling of the complex interrelationship of media content and other dimensions of social structure and experience in shaping offending behaviour, fear of crime, and the politics of law and order (Sasson 1995; Beckett

1997; Girling *et al.* 2000; Stenson and Sullivan 2000; Hope and Sparks 2000; Garland 2001).

Having examined the content and consequences of media representations of crime, the next section will consider the causes of these images. What processes and priorities produce the pattern of representation of crime?

THE CAUSES OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CRIME

Until recently, accounts of the production of crime news were primarily based on inferences drawn from content analyses and the political economy of the media, and valuable studies of this kind continue (e.g., Hall *et al.* 1978; Sherizen 1978; Tunnell 1998; Green 2000; Lawrence 2000). Other research has used interviews with reporters and other creative personnel or the police (e.g., Chibnall 1977; Fishman 1981; Ross 1998; Mawby 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002; Innes 1999, 2001). It is only relatively recently, however, that studies based on observation of the production process itself have been conducted (Ericson *et al.* 1987, 1989, 1991; Schlesinger *et al.* 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber 1992, 1993, 1994; Chermak 1995, 1998; Skidmore 1996; Doyle 1998).

CRIME NEWS AS HEGEMONY IN ACTION

Most of the earlier studies supported a version of the dominant ideology model. The immediate source of news content was the ideology of the reporter, personal and professional. However, a variety of organizational and professional imperatives exerted pressure for the production of news with the characteristics identified by content analyses. The sources of news production were seen as threefold:

1. The political ideology of the Press.
2. The elements of 'newsworthiness'.
3. Structural determinants of news-making.

The political ideology of the Press

The majority of newspapers have a more or less overtly C/conservative political ideology, and individual reporters are aware of this whatever their personal leanings. The broadcasting media, especially the BBC, are characterized by an ethic of political neutrality and professional objectivity in performing a public service of providing news information. In practice, however, this becomes a viewpoint which takes for granted certain broad beliefs and values, those of moderate, middle-of-the-road majority opinion—what Stuart Hall succinctly called a 'world at one with itself' (Hall 1970). The master concepts of this world-view include such notions as the 'national interest', the 'British way of life', and the 'democratic process' as epitomized by Westminster. In political or industrial conflict situations these are seen as threatened by 'mindless militants' manipulated by extremist minorities seeking 'anarchy' and

subversion, with only the 'thin blue line' to save the day for law and order (Chibnall 1977: 21). Political conflict is assimilated to routine crime: both are portrayed as pathological conditions unrelated to wider social structures (Clarke and Taylor 1980; Hillyard 1982; Iyengar 1991; Beckett 1997: 38; Lawrence 2000: 57–60).

Traditional crime reporters explicitly saw it as their responsibility to present the police and the criminal justice system in as favourable a light as possible. As a crime reporter put it: 'If I've got to come down on one side or the other, either the goodies or the baddies, then obviously I'd come down on the side of the goodies, in the interests of law and order' (Chibnall 1977: 145). This of course did not mean that even the most pro-police crime reporter would not pursue stories of police malpractice as assiduously as possible. But it generated a tendency to present these within a 'one bad apple' framework (ibid.: chapter 5). However, the characteristics of crime reporting were more immediately the product of a professional sense of news values rather than any explicitly political ideology.

The elements of 'newsworthiness'

News content is generated and filtered primarily through reporters' sense of 'newsworthiness', what makes a good story that their audience wants to know about, rather than any overtly ideological considerations. The core elements of this are immediacy, dramatization, personalization, titillation, and novelty (Chibnall 1977: 22–45; Hall *et al.* 1978; Ericson *et al.* 1989). The value of novelty means that most news is about deviance in some form (Ericson *et al.* 1987). The primacy of these news values explains the predominant emphasis on violent and sex offences, and the concentration on higher-status offenders and victims, especially celebrities. It also accounts for the tendency to avoid stories about crime in general, or explanation of criminal trends and patterns.

These news values also encourage the presentation of political violence or disorder in terms of individual pathology rather than ideological opposition; as discrete criminal events, not manifestations of structural conflict (Lawrence 2000: chapter 3). This was shown in a detailed study of the reporting of the 27 October 1968 anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Grosvenor Square (Halloran *et al.* 1970). The media constructed their reporting around the issue of violence, crystallized in a photo showing a policeman being held and kicked by demonstrators, which appeared prominently on most front pages the day after the event (Hall 1973). The overall peacefulness of the occasion, let alone the broader issues of Vietnam, were subordinated to the emphasis on one dramatic but isolated incident of anti-police brutality. Most of the features of news reporting are not the result of ideology—political or professional—but are unintended consequences of a variety of structural and organizational imperatives of news-gathering.

Structural determinants of news-making

A variety of concrete organizational pressures underlying news production have unintended consequences, bolstering the law and order stance of most crime reporting. For example, concentrating personnel at institutional settings like courts, where newsworthy events can be expected to recur regularly, is an economic use of reporting

resources. But it has the unintended consequence of concentrating on cleared-up cases, creating a misleading sense of police effectiveness.

The need to produce reports to fit the time schedules of news production contributes to their event orientation, the concentration on specific crimes at the expense of analysis of causal processes or policies (Rock 1973: 76–9; Lawrence 2000: chapter 8). Considerations of personal safety and convenience lead cameramen covering riots typically to film from behind police lines, which unintentionally structures an image of the police as vulnerable 'us' threatened by menacing 'them' (Murdock 1982: 108–109).

The police and criminal justice system control much of the information on which crime reporters rely, and this gives them a degree of power as essential accredited sources. The institutionalization of crime reporters as a specialist breed itself becomes a self-reinforcing cause of regular crime news. Crime reporters tend to develop a symbiotic relationship with the contacts and organizations they use regularly, especially the police (Chibnall 1977: chapters 3 and 6). According to one influential account of news production, this means that such institutional sources as the police become the 'primary definers' of crime news, which tends to be filtered through their perspective. The structural dependence of reporters on their regular sources 'permits the institutional definers to establish the initial definition or *primary interpretation* of the topic in question. This interpretation then "commands the field" in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage of debate takes place' (Hall *et al.* 1978: 58; Lawrence 2000: chapter 3).

In recent years the production of crime news (like news in general) has been transformed by a decline in the use of specialist reporters, including court and crime correspondents. This is due partly to the increasing news emphasis on celebrities, to a point where even sensational murders and other crime stories may be squeezed out unless there is also a celebrity element (as was present in the Jill Dando murder, for example). The decline of specialist reporting is also a result of the increasingly commercial orientation of the multimedia conglomerates that own most news outlets, which has restricted editorial budgets severely. Many crime and criminal justice stories, cases, and issues now fail to get aired prominently or perhaps at all, even in the sensationalist manner that used to be a core news staple (Davies 1999).

In sum, this account of news production within the hegemonic model sees news content as the largely unintended but determined consequence of the structure and political economy of news production. As one recent text summarizes it, 'journalists are not *necessarily* biased towards the powerful—but their bureaucratic organisation and cultural assumptions make them conduits of that power' (McNair 1993: 48).

CRIME NEWS AS CULTURAL CONFLICT

Observational studies of the crime news production process suggest that the deterministic implications of the hegemonic model require qualification (Ericson *et al.* 1987, 1989, 1991; Schlesinger *et al.* 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber 1992, 1993, 1994; Skidmore 1996). They do not overthrow its fundamental implications, however.

Ericson *et al.* confirm earlier accounts of the structuring of news-gathering and

presentation around a sense of news values, criteria leading to the selection of particular types of stories and perspectives. These constitute a 'vocabulary of precedents': not hard and fast rules, but 'what previous exemplars tell them should be done in the present instance' (Ericson *et al.* 1987: 348). This leaves room for flexibility and judgement; the newsroom is not characterized by normative consensus but by negotiation and conflict between reporters, editors, and sources. News stories vary in character. Many are routine fillers, where a clearly-established paradigm is followed, albeit with new names, dates, and details each time. What usually makes a story newsworthy at all is some departure from expected norms, an element of freakishness or an opportunity to explore everyday moral dilemmas (Katz 1987). But the big stories are ones where novelty is a high value, and there is more room for negotiation of angles and priorities.

There is always a tension between two contradictory pressures. The highest journalistic accolade is the 'scoop', reporting a high news value story that has not yet been reported. This exerts pressure to be ahead of the pack, to seek out sources that no rivals have yet found. However, the worst possible scenario is to miss important information that everybody else has. This generates a tendency to hunt with the pack, mining the same sources as rivals. The fear of failure usually prevails over the lure of the scoop, on minimax principles, which is why front pages tend to be so similar.

There are also systematic variations between news stories in different media and markets (Ericson *et al.* 1991). This is partly because they have different variants of political and professional journalistic ideology according to patterns of ownership (state *versus* private, for example) and perceived audience (business or policy elites, other opinion leaders, liberal professionals, or a mass public seeking entertainment; local or national). These are interconnected with differences in technological resources, budgetary limitations, and the different 'grammars' of written and spoken language, still and moving pictures.

Observation also alerts analysts to the ever-present role of contingency and cock-ups (Ericson *et al.* 1991: 93–4). 'We know that at the level of production news is more procedure-related than content-related' (ibid.), and procedures can be disrupted for all sorts of random reasons.

Detailed study reveals not only that there is more diversity, negotiation, and contingency within news organizations than the hegemony model implies, but also in the sources used. These now range far beyond the accredited agencies of the formal criminal justice institutions (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Lawrence 2000). Groups critical of the establishment (such as penal reform or civil liberties groups) *are* given a voice, depending in part on their organizational and presentational skills, and their hold on interesting knowledge; and partly on medium and market differences. This is also a process which has gathered pace over time with the politicization of law and order (Downes and Morgan, in Chapter 10 of this volume). The news values of dramatization, personalization and titillation often lead to inputs from individual victims, offenders, witnesses, or their families and friends. The hegemonic model over-emphasizes the capacity of official viewpoints to monopolize the news.

While more detailed analyses of news production in action do emphasize its contingency and fluidity compared to the determinism suggested by earlier accounts, they

do not fundamentally change the picture of the role of crime news. While news may be a competitive arena of conflicting viewpoints, it is one which is culturally and structurally loaded (Schlesinger 1989: 82). For all the fluidity and contingency which can be observed in the process of production, in the final analysis 'the news media are as much an agency of *policing* as the law-enforcement agencies whose activities and classifications are reported on' (Ericson *et al.* 1991: 74). They reproduce order in the process of representing it.

Although there have been many studies of the production of crime news, there has been no comparable research on fiction. All we have are memoirs of writers, directors, and other creators of crime fiction, and fan-oriented biographies or accounts of the making of particular films or programmes. The only exception is an interview study of Hollywood writers, directors, and producers of TV shows and cinema films (Lichter *et al.* 1994: Part IV; Powers *et al.* 1996: chapter 3). The interviews suggest that the contemporary Hollywood elite sees itself as having a mission. In essence the members of this are an example of the 1960s radicals' long march through the institutions. Their ideology is a combination of acceptance of the economic and political institutions of America to which they owe their status and privileges, and the libertarian stance on issues of personal and sexual morality that they have carried since their youth. They feel a mission to put as much of this into their work as is compatible with the overriding priority of keeping the audience ratings high and the networks happy. How this expressed ideology translates into actual creative and production practices has not been studied, however, in any research analogous to that on crime news.

OBSERVERS OR PLAYERS? THE MEDIA AND CRIME IN POSTMODERNITY

In the introduction to this chapter two competing concerns about media representations of crime were outlined: the 'respectable fear' that they were subversive and desubordinating (e.g., Medved 1992); and the radical anxiety that they were a means of social control and discipline (e.g., Wykes 2001). The review of research suggests that there is a complex interplay between media representations of crime, criminal behaviour, and criminal justice.

With variations according to medium and market, mass media news and entertainment are saturated with stories about crime. These disproportionately feature the most serious and violent crimes, but strip them from any analytic framework. The emphasis is on crime as the product of individual choice and free-floating evil, diverting attention from any links to social structure or culture (Sasson 1995). There is strong evidence that media images *can* influence criminal behaviour, but overall their direct effect is small relative to other factors. This is largely because people vary in their interpretation of representations according to demographic, generational, and other life-course factors (Livingstone *et al.* 2001). There is a variety of ways suggested by different criminological perspectives in which media representations could influence crime rates and patterns. For example, the overall volume of property crime is

likely to be affected by media portrayals of material success as the acme of the good life in a context of structural inequalities of opportunity, as Mertonian strain theories suggest. It is unlikely to be an accident that the remorseless rise of volume property crime after the mid-1950s in Britain coincided with the advent of commercial television. But such connections are much harder to test by the quasi-experimental methods that have dominated the research on media effects.

The disciplinary role of media stories about crime, reproducing as well as representing order, is supported more clearly by the research. This is due to what Surette has called 'the law of opposites': the pattern of crime in the media is in most respects the reverse of what official statistics suggest (Surette 1998: 47). (Surette himself says the media show 'the opposite of what is true', but this formulation begs the questions about the truth of the picture conveyed by the official statistics, discussed by Maguire in Chapter 11 of this volume.) Media representations tend to exaggerate the threat of crime and to promote policing and punishment as the antidote. This is likely to accentuate fear, and thus support for law and order policies. Because of organizational exigencies as much as ideological reasons, the media present viewpoints on crime and criminal justice policy which—though not monolithic—are loaded towards official perspectives.

The present trends indicate a growing symbiosis between media images, criminality, and criminal justice. In Simon Lee's words, 'The media are no longer, if they ever were, observers of the scene, they are players in the game' (cited in Peay 1998: 8). This accentuates past patterns to an extent amounting to a qualitatively new stage. The insecure borderline between purportedly factual and fictional narratives is eroding. A growing variety of criminal justice lobbies and pressure groups seek to influence, if not construct, the news. At the same time technological developments interact with cultural changes to produce more 'reality' broadcasting (Fishman and Cavender 1998).

The current stage of development reflects the impact of the more general features of 'postmodernity' on the relationship between media, crime, and criminal justice. The space–time distanciation between criminal cases and their reporting in the media, and the reciprocal feedback of images on practice, are eroding rapidly (Giddens 1984; Thompson 1995). Increasing numbers of criminal justice events, such as the 1992 LA riots or the O.J. Simpson case, are broadcast around the world literally as they are happening. An ever-wider range of participants in the criminal justice process are not only seeking to influence representations but are creating events specifically for the media. 'We live in a dramatised world' (Ericson 1991: 235), where the media are participants in the processes they represent. Criminal justice agencies tailor their activities to public relations, how their activities will play on the news. Police investigate (sometimes instigate) all the crimes fit to print. Crimes and legal processes are not only reflected in reporting with greater rapidity, they may be created for news stories. Offences have been incited by law enforcement agencies in order to have the successful investigation televised (as in the Azscam entrapment case analysed by Altheide 1993). Since the 1960s, protesters and police act with self-conscious awareness that 'the whole world is watching' (Gitlin 1980; Della Porta and Reiter 1998). The tragedy of 11 September 2001 is simply the most vivid and dramatic example of these

developments to date, when thousands of people were murdered in front of the eyes of TV audiences around the globe, in a way calculated to achieve the maximum possible media impact.

The mass media are important not only because of their ideological significance. Media technology plays an increasingly direct role in social control, above all through the growth of CCTV (Norris and Armstrong 1999), as the cover of this edition illustrates. Media technology can also be used to control the controllers, to make authorities more accountable, as the use of CCTV and other recording devices in police stations shows (Newburn and Hayman 2001). The proliferation of cheap, portable cameras contributes to this too, as the Rodney King case indicated (Lawrence 2000). Mass media technologies make the model of contemporary social control a Synopticon (Mathiesen 1997): they provide the means for the many to see the few, offsetting the Benthamite paradigm of the few observing the many. However, this reciprocal process of surveillance between elites and masses is highly unbalanced. The greater vulnerability of the powerful to exposure and scandal does not fundamentally change structures of power and advantage. Indeed Mathiesen argues plausibly that the illusion of intimacy, with elites provided by contemporary media surveillance of their activities, gives people a misleading sense of empowerment which acts as a more complex process of discipline than traditional forms of legitimation. It is possible, he argues, 'that the control and discipline of the "soul", that is, the creation of human beings who control themselves through self-control and thus fit neatly into a so-called democratic capitalist society, is a task which is actually fulfilled by modern Synopticon' (Mathiesen 1997: 215).

The growing interdependence of media representation and social 'reality' raises the spectre of 'a media spiral in which the representations of crime and the fear of crime precisely constitute . . . the hyperreal' (Osborne 1996: 36). Certainly these developments vastly complicate the vexed question of how images and narratives that are felt to be undesirable can be regulated or influenced. Perhaps hope lies precisely in the greater openness of the media to a diversity of inputs and influences (Ericson 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). Past experience, however, suggests the more pessimistic prediction that although contemporary mass communications present 'an appreciably open terrain for struggles for justice' (Ericson 1991: 242), the dice are loaded in favour of dominant interests—even if they have to struggle harder for their hegemony.

Selected further reading

Richard Sparks' *Television and the Drama of Crime* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992) is a theoretically sophisticated critique of content analyses of crime fiction, and their relationship to fear of crime. Classic studies of crime news that remain valuable are S. Cohen and J. Young (eds), *The Manufacture of News* (London: Constable, 1973) and S. Chibnall, *Law-and-Order News* (London: Tavistock, 1977). Two illuminating studies of the production and content of crime news are the trilogy by R. Ericson, P. Baranek, and J. Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, *Negotiating Control*, and *Representing Order* (Milton Keynes: Open University

Press, 1987, 1989, 1991 respectively); and P. Schlesinger and H. Tumber's *Reporting Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Useful reviews of the research on media effects can be found in: S. Livingstone, 'On the Continuing Problem of Media Effects', in J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society* (London: Arnold, 1996), and D. Howitt, *Crime, The Media and the Law* (London: Wiley, 1998). A valuable text on crime and media is R. Surette, *Media, Crime and Justice* (2nd edn, Belmont: Wadsworth, 1998). K. Beckett and T. Sasson, *The Politics of Injustice* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2000) offers an excellent critique of media representations of crime, and their impact on policy. M. Fishman and G. Cavender (eds), *Entertaining Crime* is a valuable collection of papers on 'reality television'. Very useful edited volumes offering a rich diversity of research papers on media and crime are: R. Ericson (ed.), *Crime and the Media* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995); D. Kidd-Hewitt and R. Osborne (eds), *Crime and the Media: The Post-Modern Spectacle* (London: Pluto, 1996); F. Bailey and D. Hale (eds), *Popular Culture, Crime and Justice* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1998); and the recent special issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* on 'Crime and the Media' (No. 43, Spring 2001, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, Kings College, London). Two recent valuable edited collections looking at contemporary relationships between risk and crime control policy that include discussions of the role of the media are: K. Stenson and R. Sullivan (eds), *Crime, Risk and Justice* (Cullompton: Willan, 2000); and T. Hope and R. Sparks (eds), *Crime, Risk and Insecurity* (London: Routledge, 2000).

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