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8 Crime and media: understanding the connections

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary era – whether we term it the information society, the network society, the image world, postmodernity, or late modernity – is a fundamentally mediatised era. It is also an era in which high crime rates and high levels of concern about crime have become accepted as 'normal'. The rapid and relentless development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) over the past one hundred years has shaped the modern age, transforming the relations between space, time and identity. Where once 'news' used to travel by ship, it now hurtles across the globe at light speed and is available 24 hours-a-day at the push of a button. Where once cultures used to be more or less distinguishable in national or geographical terms, they now mix, intermingle and converge in a constant global exchange of information. Where once a sense of community and belonging was derived primarily from established identities and local traditions, it may now also be found, and lost, in a virtual world of shared values, meanings and interpretations. In short, media are not only inseparable from contemporary social life; they are, for many, its defining characteristic. Understanding the connections between crime and the media is central to understanding the cultural place that crime and media occupy in our social world.

This chapter is an introduction to the investigation of crime and media. My main aim is to

present a summary of some of the major themes and debates which have shaped the research agenda. But I also want to sharpen the focus of investigation on some less well rehearsed issues. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first offers some background information and addresses the crucial question of why exploring media images of crime and control is important. The second section considers how scholars have gone about researching crime and media, and presents an overview of the main findings. The third section critically discusses the dominant theoretical and conceptual tools which have been used to understand and explain media representations of crime. And the fourth section considers the evidence for the influence of media representations, both on criminal behaviour and on fear of crime. Finally, I will offer some tentative suggestions about useful areas for future research and investigation.

BACKGROUND

Fortunately, though sections of the popular press may suggest otherwise, most of us have little first-hand experience of serious criminal victimization. Our understanding of the crime problem—how much crime is out there, what types of crime are most prevalent, who is most at risk, what are the best responses—derives mostly from sources other than personal experience. Paramount among these are the media. The media, then, are key producers and purveyors of ‘knowledge’ about crime, disorder and control. For this reason alone, media representations are worthy of in-depth investigation.

But precisely what kinds of knowledge do these representations generate, and to what effect? Below are some of the key questions which have perplexed students of crime and media:

- Is it possible to discern a coherent picture of ‘the crime problem’ from the media and, if so, does this picture bear any resemblance to what we may claim, however tentatively, to know of the ‘reality’ of crime and disorder?
- Do the media merely reflect, objectively and impartially, what happens in the world, or are they active agents in socially constructing ‘mediated realities’ in which certain values, interests and beliefs are promoted, while others are downplayed, or even actively suppressed?

- Do the media reproduce and reinforce prejudice and the stereotyping of marginalized groups, or actively challenge it?
- Do the media undermine or fortify the existing structures of power and authority?
- Does violence in the media make us more aggressive, more fearful, or both?

Concern about the pernicious influence of the media is perennial, and academic research exploring media representations of crime dates back to the early 1900s (Pearson, 1983; Bailey and Hale, 1996). Yet despite literally hundreds of studies, these key questions have generated few straight answers. It is important to be clear that the media cannot (if they ever could) be usefully thought of in the singular, like some monolithic, unified institution to be understood through generalized statements and assumptions. The media *are* a multiplicity of institutions, organisations, processes and practices which are hugely diverse in composition, scope and purpose (Briggs and Cobley, 2002). Today there are more media forms (television, newspapers, magazines, radio, the Internet, mobile phone Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) technology) and greater levels of diversity within each individual form (satellite, cable and digital television) than ever before. Understanding media, therefore, requires a critical and reflexive appreciation both of the diversity of forms and formats involved and of the complexity with which images, texts, messages, signs are produced, transmitted and consumed.

One of the key points to grasp—and one of the issues I want to communicate most forcefully—is that we do not all use, interpret, and respond to media representations in the same way. Images of violent crime, for example, may repel some and attract others, disturb some and excite others, frighten some and anger others. I, along with the other contributors in this collection, am keen to encourage you to look beyond the instinctive desire to tackle complex dilemmas with simplified accounts and generalizations. The relationship between media images and the world around us is so fascinating precisely because it is complex and hard to pin down.

Researching crime and media

Research on crime and media covers three principal areas of interest: content; production; and

consumption and influence. Each area has its own particular research methods and approaches (Greer, 2008). Media content analysis can be broadly split between studies which are primarily either quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative analyses are concerned first and foremost with measuring the *amount* of crime, violence or control in the media—for example, the number of crime stories reported in a newspaper, or the number of violent incidents appearing in a television programme. The ‘media picture’ of crime is then usually compared and contrasted with the ‘real world’ picture, normally derived from official criminal statistics. Quantitative approaches traditionally have predominated in research on media content. Qualitative content analyses, by contrast, are concerned primarily with investigating the *nature* of media representations of crime, violence and control. Though they often incorporate some quantitative component, qualitative research is more interested in untangling the complex processes through which media images are produced, exchanged and interpreted—for example, by exploring the use of language, the forces and constraints that shape media production, or the wider influence of the economic, political, moral and cultural environment. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses may be equally concerned with media effects.

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, but some of the limitations of purely quantitative research are particularly noteworthy. Official statistics are a very poor indicator of crime rates and may reveal more about the reporting and recording practices of the public and the police than they do about actual levels of offending (Maguire, 2008). Quantitative claims about the relationship between media images and the statistical ‘reality’ of crime, therefore, need to be treated with caution. More fundamentally, because quantitative analyses cannot tackle the crucial issue of meaning, for many they can only ever provide a surface description of media representations of crime rather than a deeper understanding, which would generally be the favoured research outcome. Nevertheless, quantitative research can offer important insights into changing patterns and trends in the representation of crime, as well as generating useful data on which deeper qualitative investigations can be based.

Content analyses of media representations of crime – whether news, film, television drama, magazine articles or Internet sites – are the key method of establishing ‘how’ various forms of

media represent crime. Content analysis alone, however, cannot explain 'why' media images take the particular forms that they do. It is only through a focus on media production that representations can be explained. Research on media production is necessarily more qualitative in nature, since it is concerned with the 'social processes' – commercial, ideological, moral – that shape media content. These processes are too complex to be quantified or reduced to statistical data. The majority of criminological research has sought to understand media production 'at a distance' by analysing, for example, the 'news values' that determine which crimes are newsworthy and which are not, or the impact of the wider socio-political environment on the representation of crime and justice in film or television drama (Soothill and Walby, 1991; Sparks, 1992; Jenkins, 1992, 1994; Reiner *et al.*, 2000a, b; Soothill *et al.*, 2002; Leishman and Mason, 2003; Peelo, 2006). A minority of researchers have sought to understand media production 'up close'. In addition to considering the structural determinants of media production and the wider socio-political environment, they have also employed interviews – with journalists, editors and producers, police and probation officers, and victims and offenders – and ethnography – immersing oneself in the natural environment of the research subjects (for example, exploring crime journalism through shadowing news reporters). The aim here is to gain a deeper, interpretive understanding (or *verstehen* in Weberian terms) of media production by engaging directly with those involved in the production process (see Chibnall, 1977; Ericson *et al.*, 1987, 1989, 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995; Greer, 2003a).

The third principal area of interest is media consumption and influence. Much media criminology is underpinned by an often implicit assumption of media influence: the media distortion of crime and deviance has a significant impact on society, and that this impact is somehow detrimental. On the political right, the concern has been that media glamourise crime and encourage criminality. On the political left, it has been that media increase fear of crime, encouraging political acquiescence to the status quo and strengthening support for authoritarian measures of control and containment. However, with the important exception of studies on media and fear of crime, criminologists have actually conducted very little research

to 'evidence' the nature of media influence. Thus there is a fundamental tension within media criminology: much is assumed, but little is actually researched, still less comprehensively evidenced. What research does exist on media consumption and influence has, like content analysis, tended to be quantitative in nature. It has largely been situated not within sociological criminology, but within a psychological positivism which foregrounds classification and counting over a more nuanced, in depth understanding of what media 'mean' to active consumers. The pros and cons of this type of research are discussed below, along with the emergence of more qualitative approaches to understanding media consumption and influence that are being championed from within media studies. Next, though, it is useful to consider in greater detail the content of media representations of crime and control.

The nature and extent of crime in the media

A virtually universal finding in the literature is that media representations exaggerate both the levels of serious interpersonal crime in society and the risk of becoming a crime victim (see also Ferrell, this volume). This is the case for studies of newspapers (Marsh, 1991), television (Gunter *et al.*, 2003) and radio content (Cumberbatch *et al.*, 1995), across both news and entertainment media (Reiner *et al.*, 2000a), and literary crime fiction (Knight, 2004). The representation of crime is largely event-oriented in that it focuses on specific criminal cases and incidents rather than wider debates around causes, prevention, or policy (Rock, 1973; Naylor, 2001; Greer, 2003a). All media forms focus overwhelmingly on violent or sexual offences.

Calculations of the proportion of news space devoted to crime vary considerably depending on the definition of 'crime' adopted, and the types of material included and excluded on that basis. Some studies, for example, may only include news reports of particular criminal events or court cases (Ditton and Duffy, 1983; Smith, 1984). Others, in addition to considering news reports, may also include feature items, editorial pieces and letters to the editor (Hall *et al.*, 1978; Ericson *et al.*, 1987). Studies may also expand the definition of 'crime' to explore a wider range of deviant acts, such as corporate offending (Cavender and Mulcahy, 1998; Tombs and White, 2001; Knotterus *et al.*, 2006), environmental crime (Lynch *et al.*, 2000), and state violence (Cohen, 2002; Herman and Chomsky, 1994). 'Popular' (normally tabloid) news outlets are

generally found to include a greater proportion of crime stories reported in a more sensational style than 'quality' (broadsheet) ones (Graber, 1980; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). Estimates of the proportion of crime in the UK news media have ranged from 4 per cent in one study (Roshier, 1973) to 13 per cent in another (Williams and Dickinson, 1993). A summary of content analyses in the US found the proportion of crime news to range from just over one per cent, to more than 30 per cent (Marsh, 1991). In the entertainment media, an average of around 25 per cent of US and UK primetime television programming, and around 20 per cent of film releases are crime-centred (Allen *et al.*, 1997; Reiner *et al.*, 2000a).

Through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods, Reiner et al (2000a, b) identified changing trends and patterns in the representation of crime and justice between the 1940s and the 1990s. Both news and fictional representations of offenders changed relatively little over this time, though portrayals have become less sympathetic toward the structural influences on criminality and more condemnatory of what is perceived as individual evil. Images of the criminal justice system have become more complex and critical, with greater attention, for example, to police ineffectiveness, corruption within the criminal justice system, and conflict between institutions. The most significant change, however, relates to representations of the crime victim, who has 'moved from a shadowy and purely functional role in crime narratives to a pivotal position. Their suffering increasingly constitutes the subject position or the *raison d'être* of the story' (Reiner et al., 2000b: 187). The increasing centrality of crime victims in the media reflects the 'discovery', growing concern about and subsequent politicisation of the victim within criminal justice systems (and criminology) throughout the 1980s (Zedner, 2007).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 Why is it both important and useful to study crime and the media?
- 2 What are the main differences between quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis and what are their respective strengths and weaknesses?
- 3 Can a coherent picture of the crime problem be discerned from media representations? If so,

what is it, and is it accurate?

This section has provided a brief review of the research literature on the content of media representations of crime and control and drawn attention to some of the factors that may influence that content. The aim in the next section is to establish a clearer picture of the forces and influences that shape media representations of crime.

Theorizing crime and media

Crime news is not simply plucked out of thin air. Nor does it exist in a vacuum. It is the end result of a complex process of selection, processing and prioritization, and is shaped by interactions between journalists, editors, their working conditions, the wider environment and, crucially, news sources. News sources are those individuals, organizations and institutions that provide the information on which journalists often base their stories. In relation to crime news, key sources include the police, probation, prison and court services, politicians, penal reform groups, victim organisations, and a host of other interested parties.

Reporting crime takes time, money and effort. Editors and producers seek to maximize the efficiency and cost effectiveness of this process by concentrating limited resources around sources which can offer consistently reliable and reportable crime material within the rhythms of the news production process. Powerful criminal justice institutions like the police and the judiciary routinely produce a significant volume of reportable information, and are therefore extremely useful to crime reporters. For this reason, they enjoy what Hall *et al.* (1978) refer to as 'privileged access' in the media: that is, they find it easier than less powerful, or less useful (in news terms), organizations to have their views or version of events publicized. This 'privileged access' is further enhanced by the credibility and cultural authority—the 'expert status'—associated with official agencies on matters of crime and control (Ericson *et al.*, 1989, 1991). That journalists are to an extent reliant on powerful institutional sources is undeniable. The consequences of this reliance, however, and the wider implications for the democratic flow of information and the objectivity and impartiality of the news product, may be interpreted very differently depending on the theoretical approach adopted.

Media theory and crime news production

Traditional theorizations of news media production can be broadly distinguished according to two opposing positions: radical and liberal pluralist. Radical approaches are influenced by the theories of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, among others, and stress the unequal distribution of economic and cultural power throughout society, and its impact on media production. Liberal pluralist interpretations are underpinned by the ideals of classical liberal theory, and emphasize the principles of freedom, choice and democracy, and their impact on media production. There are numerous variations on each perspective, but in their simplest terms, radical readings see the mass media as controlling the people, while liberal pluralist readings see the mass media as serving the people. With the proliferation of media and the transformation of the information landscape in recent decades, these modernist theoretical approaches have come under fire for being too rigid and deterministic, incapable of capturing the fluidity and unpredictability of power and information flows in multi-mediated societies. For postmodernists in particular, in today's 24-7, hyper-mediated environment the grand theories and all-encompassing statements of media power and control that tended to characterize traditional approaches have become obsolete. Some of the most relevant examples of each position are outlined below.

At the radical extreme, the 'propaganda model' views the media as an extension of the State's apparatus of ideological control. Over three decades, Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky have argued that economic, political, military and cultural elites conspire to control the content and flow of media information, filtering out or delegitimizing dissenting views to protect ruling class interests (Chomsky, 1989; Herman and Chomsky, 1994). Through analysing news coverage of 'terrorism' and the media's alleged collusion in the 'criminalization' of non-friendly regimes, the authors argue that the key actors in the news production process are not journalists, who are seen as largely powerless, but media owners, who share interests in common with other elite groups. In this critical materialist interpretation the function of the news media is to

'manufacture consent' around elite ideas in the name of the 'national interest' and, in so doing, to engender political compliance and acceptance of the established order.

A less conspiratorial approach is the 'hegemonic model', based on the neo-Marxist writings of Antonio Gramsci (1971). Here the media are viewed not as the direct mouthpieces of the powerful, but as sites of contestation on which alternative viewpoints actively compete for ideological dominance, or hegemony. Due to their privileged access, however, criminal justice institutions are able to advance a 'primary definition' of crime-related issues, which frames the terms for any ensuing debate and subverts competing viewpoints, though these may still be heard, to marginal status (Hall *et al.*, 1978). Journalists may think they are autonomous, but in practice they are constrained to reproduce the elite 'ideas' of the dominant sources on which they rely, in turn helping to make these the 'ideas' of everyone. This is why, it is suggested, crime reporting tends to favour an elite (conservative) portrayal of the crime problem—an issue of working-class, minority youth offending (not white collar corruption or state violence), requiring greater punishment and control of particular groups (not government accountability and corporate regulation) (Fishman, 1978; Barlow *et al.*, 1995).

The radical perspective in its various guises contrasts with liberal pluralist media theory (Gans, 1980; Koss, 1984; Hetherington, 1985). Liberal pluralists concede that certain official interests are advantaged in the media. But they insist that any significant source bias or pressure from media owners is offset by journalistic professionalism (in particular the requirements of objectivity and balance), the ideological and stylistic diversity of the media, and what is viewed as open and equal competition between a wide range of groups for media access and influence. Journalists insist upon, indeed pride themselves upon maintaining high levels of professional autonomy and are actively encouraged in this pursuit by colleagues who share the same system of values (Gans, 1980). Any pressure to follow a particular line, apply a particular 'spin', suppress a particular piece of information, or in some other way distort the 'truth status' of the news will be forcefully resisted.

Nor does the 'privileged access' of powerful institutions guarantee definitional control. Journalists and other social actors both can and do challenge the established order. This is clear, for example, when the high-profile exposure of scandal (political, sexual, economic) forces

senior politicians to resign from office (Thompson, 2000), or the credibility of criminal justice agencies is undermined by media exposés evidencing corruption, incompetence, or institutional racism (Greer, 2007). In the liberal pluralist view, then, the media act as ‘fourth estate’—exposing injustice and holding the powerful to account. They provide a voice for marginalized groups and, in so doing, defend the integrity of the democratic process (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995).

In practice, the power relations between journalists and sources are more fluid than radical scholars have tended to argue, but more constraining than liberal pluralists suggest (Greer, 2003a). The radical position tends to overstate the dominance of official agencies and rather understates the ability both of journalists to challenge the status quo, and of other competing groups to enter and, sometimes with alarming effectiveness, reframe the terms of a given debate (Miller, 1993). The radical view also assumes, on some level, the existence of an ‘elite consensus’ which is then promoted by some unified constellation of ruling class interests (McNair, 1998, 1999). This interpretation overlooks the considerable levels of conflict and competition both between and within political and economic elites (the ongoing debates around a European Constitution, the continued military presence in Iraq, the extended detention of terror suspects without charge), and fails to recognize that access to the media changes over time. On the other hand, liberal pluralists understate the various influences within news agencies – for example, editorial pressures and the pursuit of promotion within a particular newsroom culture – which severely limit journalists’ freedom to report ‘objectively and impartially’. And competition for media access and influence is clearly not equal. It is beyond doubt that criminal justice agencies maintain a clear definitional advantage, if not guaranteed definitional control, on issues of crime and justice. Less powerful or marginalized groups can of course gain access, but they generally need to work harder and more creatively to have their views heard. These constraints have real consequences for the production and dissemination of crime and justice knowledge, and cannot be disregarded on the basis of claims to professional autonomy, ideological diversity and equal competition.

Sensitized to the complexities of understanding contemporary media forms and flows, postmodernist thinking maintains that there is no general explanation, still less some grand

theory, capable of accounting for news production in all its diversity (Brown, 2003). Many postmodernists argue that in societies where images, signs and codes are constantly recycled through the media, it is no longer possible to distinguish with any certainty between 'image' and 'reality', the 'represented' and the 'real' (Baudrillard, 1983; Poster, 1990); *how* crime policy is presented becomes more important than *what* the policy actually is. In an age of media proliferation, political spin, ubiquitous public relations operatives, and ever-more sophisticated media audiences, perceptions of credibility may shift from story to story, and the balance of definitional power becomes increasingly unstable and unpredictable.

One recent intervention that seeks to theorize this instability and unpredictability is Brian McNair's notion of 'cultural chaos' (McNair, 2007). For McNair, the early 21st Century news mediasphere is characterized by the intensified commodification of news and counter-culture, increasing market competition, a hyper-adversarial news media, and the rapid rise of 'mediated access' to public participation broadcasting (for example, Talk Radio and live television debates). These conditions, it is suggested, coalesce to create a post-Cold War media *milieu* in which ideological hegemony is replaced by ideological dissolution, and journalistic consensus around elite ideas – whether manufactured in the radical sense, or organic in the liberal pluralist sense – is replaced by journalistic *dissensus*. The emergence of a highly diversified, widely accessible and ultimately chaotic media environment has changed the terrain upon which struggles over media power and influence are played out. At the national level, for example, an already a fragmented government struggles to control the crime news agenda, but is repeatedly beaten down by hostile journalists intent on taking the next big political scalp. Dissatisfied and increasingly vociferous victims and victim groups now routinely employ professional PR advisers to make the public articulation of their cases more 'media-friendly', and therefore more widely disseminated. Media audiences, tired of the 'permanent crisis in criminal justice', are actively encouraged to participate in the news production process by emailing, texting or phoning in their views and concerns. At the global level, the Coalition invasions and ongoing military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to attract moral opprobrium from significant sections of the press and public, making discursive closure around

the 'war on terror' an impossibility. Botched surveillance operations at home are reported alongside the mounting deaths of troops abroad. Photographs of US soldiers proudly posing beside Iraqi torture victims in Abu Ghraib prison are made globally accessible online, further undermining official efforts to maintain the moral high ground and portray Iraq as a 'just war' (Hamm, 2007). Meanwhile, 'freelance gangs of insurgents can exploit the news values of global media and compel us to watch the Twin Towers collapse in real time, or the murder of school children unfold live in Beslan. Terrorist atrocities are not new to the 21st century, but the scale of their political and psychological impact is' (McNair, 2006b: 1). Cultural chaos is one of the few recent attempts to take full account of the relentless and frequently unpredictable contemporary, 24-7 globalised news media culture.

News values and newsworthiness

Only a tiny fraction of events, criminal or otherwise, are deemed sufficiently 'newsworthy' to merit media attention. News values are the criteria that determine 'newsworthiness'. They enable journalists and editors to decide which stories to run and which to drop, which are headlines and which are fillers, which are the most important details and which are the least. Having 'a good nose for a story', then, may equally be interpreted as having a well-honed appreciation of news values.

Table 8.1 outlines three different but overlapping interpretations of what it is that make events in general, and criminal events in particular, worthy of media attention.

News values help to explain the broad profile of media representations of crime and control (see above). Interpersonal crimes of sex and violence can be more easily presented as dramatic and titillating than non-violent crimes—for example, most property and white collar offences – particularly when they have high levels of proximity (spatial nearness and cultural meaningfulness) to the consumer. By focusing on people (as victims and offenders) and events rather than abstract issues and debates, crime reporting is individualized and simplified, which also contributes to the common association of crime with individual pathology rather than wider social, structural and political influences. Crimes are more newsworthy if they involve

famous or notable people. In an increasingly secular society, some suggest that the culture of celebrity is for many a more powerful source of social cohesion than religion (Rojek, 2001). Although names will generally be included where possible, one of the most compelling images in crime narratives is that of the 'unknown' predatory stranger. As the producers of reality crime shows like *Crimewatch UK* or *America's Most Wanted* and countless newspaper editors know only too well, few stories capture the public imagination as forcefully as the killer on the loose, especially when the (potential) victims are children. In addition to their inherent drama, individualization, violence and proximity, such narratives possess a unnerving sense of immediacy and a palpable risk of further attacks. They have a clear capacity to fulfil that vital, commercially driven journalistic imperative; the requirement to shock (Greer, 2003b).

This imperative is increasingly realised by capitalizing on the highly visual nature of contemporary culture. As the experience of crime and control has become more mediated, so too has it become more image-oriented. Stories are more readily personalized and individualized, they more easily invoke empathy, disdain, shock, when they are accompanied by visual images. Today 'crime stories are increasingly selected and 'produced' as *media events* on the basis of their visual (how they can be portrayed in images) as well as their lexical-verbal (how they can be portrayed in words) potential' (Greer, 2007: 29). The availability of an image may determine whether or not a story is run or dropped. The availability of the right image can help elevate a crime victim or offender to national or even global iconic status.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the principal characteristics of the radical and liberal pluralist readings of news production? How does each reading view journalistic freedom and source power?
- 2 How useful are modernist approaches to understanding media in an age of media proliferation, diversification and saturation?
- 3 What is it that makes some crimes so eminently reportable, whilst others are scarcely mentioned?

The previous sections have reviewed the literature on the nature and extent of representations of crime and control in the media, and offered an overview of some of the main theoretical and conceptual tools used to understand why media representations take on the form that they do. The next section considers the evidence for media effects.

Problematizing crime and media

When toddler James Bulger was murdered by two ten-year-olds in 1993, enormous attention was directed at the film *Child's Play III*, and other 'video nasties', as a likely cause (Barker, 2001; Green, 2008a). When two teenagers shot twelve classmates and one teacher in Columbine in 1999, before killing themselves, the music of Marilyn Manson, the Hollywood film *The Basketball Diaries*, and violent computer games were all cited as causal factors (Muzzatti, 2003). Two events in 2007 forced the world to reflect on the costs of a celebrity-obsessed media culture in which fame is commoditised, widely accessible and ephemeral, like so many disposable consumer goods. A shooting spree at the Virginia Tech University resulted in 32 deaths, many more woundings, and the suicide of the killer. Before embarking on the worst killing spree by a lone gunman in US history, the perpetrator sent a manifesto, photographs and video tapes to NBC news, seeking global media coverage of the declaration that he would be remembered as the 'saviour of the oppressed'. When a troubled young man shot dead eight people and then himself in an Omaha mega-mall in 2007, the note he left behind claimed 'Now I'll be famous' (*The Times*, December 6th 2007).

Few today would suggest that media representations have no influence on their audiences. Rather, the debate is about the nature, extent and significance of that influence. As noted above, the concern on the political right has been that media images glamorize crime and violence, undermining respect for authority and the rule of law and encouraging criminality. On the left it has been that media images of crime and deviance increase public fears and anxieties, helping to win support for authoritarian measures of control and containment. The evidence for the criminogenic effects of the media will be considered first.

Media violence and the problem of 'effects'

Research on media effects has for decades sought to demonstrate a causal relationship between media violence and violent thoughts and behaviours in the real world. Typically, subjects (most often children) are exposed to some aggressive stimulus (say, a short violent film) within a controlled setting (frequently a laboratory or office), and then observed to see if they think or behave more aggressively than a control group not exposed to the aggressive stimulus. Myriad variations have been conducted on this 'stimulus-response' (SR) format, variously controlling for participant characteristics, type of violence shown, duration of exposure, and so on.

In a frequently quoted statistic, more than 70 per cent of studies claim to demonstrate that media violence does cause real life violence (Anderson, 1977; Howitt, 1998). In the classic example, children exposed to a short film in which aggressive interaction with an inflatable 'Bobo doll' was rewarded performed more imitative aggression (for example, striking the Bobo doll with a mallet after having observed it in the film) than those who had viewed non-aggressive interactions, or interactions in which aggression was punished (Bandura *et al.*, 1961, 1963). The authors concluded that aggressive behaviour may result, to a significant extent, from 'social learning'. Furthermore, the effects of media violence, though typically small, appear to diminish over time, but not disappear entirely (Livingstone, 1996). Huesmann (1995) concluded after a twenty year follow-up study that children who watched more violent television at age eight had secured significantly more violent criminal convictions in adulthood, even after controlling for social class and intelligence levels. The relationship between childhood exposure to television violence and later criminality has been supported in a host of other studies (see Paik and Comstock, 1994; Wilson *et al.*, 1998).

Such 'evidence' of criminogenic media effects is regularly cited by right-wing moral campaigners as justification for greater controls and censorship (Barker and Petley, 2001). But these claims should be treated with caution. Effects research has been heavily criticized on methodological, theoretical and conceptual grounds. Gauntlett (2001), and others (Howitt, 1998; Murdock, 2001; Reiner, 2007; Carter and Weaver, 2003), have identified a number of problems with the 'effects model'. Some of the most pertinent are summarized below.

- Counting 'units' of violence in accordance with the pre-established definitions of the

researcher ('this is violence, this is not'), ignores the different meanings that people attach to acts and behaviours and implicitly assumes not just that we all think the same way, but that we all think the same way as the researcher.

- It is dubious to suppose that how subjects behave in controlled laboratory or field experimental situations (where they know they are being observed), sometimes toward inanimate objects (for example, an inflatable doll), reflects how they will behave in the real world toward real people.
- There is an assumption that only certain types of person are susceptible to the influence of media violence—mostly children, who are considered helpless victims, but sometimes also 'uneducated' or 'working class' populations, who apparently lack the maturity and sense most people take for granted.
- Different forms of violence—for example, in cartoons, soap operas, and horror movies—are often conflated, treated as equal in weight, and reduced to statistical data lacking any sense of plot or context. Whether violence is rewarded or punished, realistic or humorous, perpetrated by a 'hero' or a 'villain', may influence its impact profoundly.
- A correlation—violent people enjoy violent media—is not the same as a causal relationship—people are violent *because* of violent media. Media representations may provide technical knowledge about committing violent crimes, but that does not mean they also provide the motivation to use it.
- Whether intended or not, effects studies play into the hands of conservatives and right-wing moral campaigners who wish simplistically to blame the media for society's ills, rather than addressing more intractable sources of crime like social inequality, prejudice and stereotyping.
- Media influence, short term or cumulative, can never be disaggregated entirely from other social, psychological and cultural influences, yet studies routinely search for a 'pure' (negative) media effect. Prosocial images, rarely considered, may be every bit as powerful as anti-social ones, and perhaps even more so.

While some critics have challenged the validity of the entire effects enterprise (Barker and

Petley, 2001), others are less damning. Carter and Weaver (2003: 8), for example, recognize the limitations, but maintain that the effects tradition 'needs to be engaged with intelligently, rather than rejected out of hand as ill informed'. A growing body of work is using sophisticated methods of audience research to investigate the reception and interpretation of media images, not in isolation, but as part of an ongoing process of interaction, both with other media images and with the 'material and social realities of people's lives' (Kitzinger, 1999: 11; see also Buckingham, 1993, 2000; Philo, 1999). Gauntlett (1997), for example, has explored the influence of mass media on children by inviting young participants to make their own videos. Hunt (1997) has studied the complex ways in which 'raced subjectivity'—racial sense of identity and community— influences the viewing and interpretation of images of racial violence. And Kitzinger (2004) has conducted in depth interviews and focus groups with media practitioners, interest groups and consumers to explore the role of media representations in shaping understanding of sex crime as a contemporary social problem.

Media and fear of crime

Fear of crime first registered on the policy agenda in the early 1980s, when the British Crime Survey suggested it was becoming as big a problem as crime itself (Hough and Mayhew, 1983). Its consequences may range from not walking home alone at night to withdrawing from society altogether and living in isolation (Ferraro, 1995). Given the centrality of fear of crime in the public and political imagination, understanding its origins is an important criminological undertaking. Fear of crime is influenced by a range of social and demographic variables— perceptions of risk and vulnerability, age, social class, geographical location, ethnicity, and experience of criminal victimization (Box *et al.*, 1988; Davis, 1994; Hale, 1996). Media representations, though enormously diverse, are only one possible influence among many. As such, their significance remains a matter for debate.

Probably the best known research in this area is the 'cultivation analysis' of Gerbner *et al.*, which over several decades has employed content analyses and survey questionnaires to assess quantitatively the influence of violence on prime-time US television (Gerbner and Gross, 1976;

Gerbner *et al.*, 1994). The central finding is that 'heavy' television viewers (those who watch most TV—more than four hours per day in Gerbner's studies) cultivate a world-view which more closely resembles the 'television message' than 'light' television viewers (those who watch less than two hours per day). Because television overstates both the seriousness and risk of criminal victimization, portraying the world as 'mean and scary', heavy viewing is said to cultivate higher fear of crime.

While supported in some studies (Hawkins and Pingree, 1980; Morgan, 1983), others have failed to replicate the cultivation effect (Gunter, 1987; Cumberbatch, 1989), and a number of empirical and theoretical weaknesses have been identified. It does not necessarily follow, for example, that people who watch the most television watch the most crime. An exaggerated sense of the risk of crime is not the same as fear of crime, yet these distinct concepts are easily confused. And many of the limitations of quantitative content analyses more generally—the distinction between forms of violence, the subjective definition of what violence is, the direction of influence, the relative importance of non-media factors—apply equally to cultivation studies of fear of crime.

In an attempt to address these weaknesses, more recent studies, including revised work by Gerbner and colleagues, have paid greater attention to the nature, form and context of crime and violence in the media. While earlier studies considered violent incidents as decontextualized units, recent work considers the complete scene, in which the consequences of violence are also shown, or the entire programme, in which the *overall* message may be one of restored order and reassurance, rather than dread and fear (Potter *et al.*, 1997). The extent to which images of crime and violence resonate with consumers' lives may be crucial to their impact. Schlesinger *et al.* (1992), for example, found that women may be particularly sensitive to images of interpersonal attacks. Partly on this basis, concerns have been expressed that the highly unrepresentative focus on 'real' violent and sexual interpersonal crimes in the BBC's long running reality show *Crimewatch UK* may increase levels of fear in sections of the viewing audience (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1993; Jewkes, 2004).

The resonance of media images of crime and violence may also be influenced by their perceived proximity (spatial and cultural nearness). Research on US television news concluded

that local crime coverage generates more fear than national coverage, particularly within individuals who have experienced victimization and perceive television accounts to be realistic (Chiricos *et al.*, 2000; see also Eschholz *et al.*, 2003; cf. Roberts, 2001; Heath and Petraitis, 1987). The purely quantitative approach limits any explanation of these findings, though they are supported in studies on US newspaper readership (Heath, 1984). In the UK, Ditton *et al.* have conducted a series of analyses which seek to advance the media-fear of crime debate in two substantive ways (Ditton *et al.*, 2004). Firstly, their quantitative data included variables relating to distant-past as well as immediate-past media consumption, since anxieties about crime and disorder may have been established long before participation in the study. Secondly, a sub-sample of the participants surveyed quantitatively was also interviewed qualitatively. The quantitative data reveal some fear of crime, but do not establish a connection between this fear and media consumption. In line with the 'reception analysis' work of media scholars, including Schlesinger *et al.* (1992) discussed above, the qualitative data indicate that it is not the 'objectively determined randomness, localness or sensationalism that is important, but rather the interpretation of media content as relevant to and by the consumer (Ditton *et al.*, 2004: 607).

Aside from illustrating the contradictory nature of the research findings, these examples further demonstrate the usefulness of developing qualitative research approaches which consider the everyday contexts within which media images are consumed. Such approaches help not only to describe the relationships between media and fear of crime, but also to explain and understand them. While the relationship between media images and fear of crime remains difficult to demonstrate conclusively, it is beyond doubt that media can have a profound influence on sections of the population at certain times. It is with this in mind that the next section considers the sociological theory of moral panic.

Moral panics and multi-mediated societies

The term 'moral panic' refers to the disproportionate and hostile social reaction to a group or condition perceived as a threat to societal values. It involves sensational and stereotypical media coverage, public outcry and demands for tougher controls. As the name suggests, the panic may subside as rapidly as it erupted (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Murji, 2001; Garland,

2008). Moral panics have most often emerged around youth-related issues, particularly subcultural forms of youth expression and identity—for example, punk, acid house, rave and the wider drugs culture—but football hooliganism, satanic child abuse, and the re-housing of child sex offenders in the community have also been the source of recent panic (Best, 1990; Jenkins, 1992; Silverman and Wilson, 2002; Cross, 2005).

In the original analysis, Cohen (1972) problematised the social reaction to the Mods and Rockers disturbances in 1964, when boredom and bad weather one Bank Holiday resulted in a few fights, lots of noise and some windows being smashed. Though the damage was minor, the national press exaggerated and sensationalized the disturbances using phrases like ‘day of terror’ and ‘hell-bent on destruction’. News reports predicted further violence, demanded tighter controls, and portrayed Mods and Rockers as ‘folk devils’—a symbol not just of youth delinquency, but of wider permissiveness and social decline. Cohen (1972) demonstrates how the labelling and marginalization of Mods and Rockers, and the emphasis on mutual antagonism, created a ‘deviancy amplification spiral’ in which future disturbances were virtually guaranteed. These disturbances seemed to justify initial fears, resulting in more media coverage, more public outcry, more policing, and thus the spiral of reaction and deviancy amplification continued. The moral panic occurred at a time of rapid social change. In particular, the increase in youth spending power and sexual freedom, defiantly flaunted and revelled in by so many young people, blurred moral and class boundaries and challenged the traditional ethics of hard work and sobriety, generating uncertainty and hostility among ‘respectable society’. The ‘creation’ of Mods and Rockers, then, provided scapegoats or ‘folk devils’—a deviant minority against whom the conforming (nostalgically reactionary, adult) majority could unite at a time of uncertainty, conflict and change.

In a radical, Gramscian analysis of ‘hegemonic crisis’ at a time of economic recession, political decline and class unrest in 1970s Britain, Hall *et al.* (1978) argue that the State orchestrated a moral panic around ‘mugging’, casting in the central role the image of the black street criminal. The creation of this ‘folk devil’, again against which all ‘respectable citizens’ could unite, tapped into escalating fears around crime, race and social decline, and allowed the State to reassert and relegitimate itself—‘policing the crisis’, crucially with the consent of the people, by stamping

down hard on the problem from above (see *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 4,1 for a special section on Policing the Crisis Thirty Years On).

Critics of moral panic theory have questioned the attribution of 'disproportionality' to social reaction because this assumes some superior knowledge of the objective reality of the issue against which the reaction can be measured, and a tacit assumption regarding what a 'proportionate' reaction would look like (Waddington, 1986). Left realists, in particular, have committed to 'take crime seriously' and insist that crime and fear of crime cannot simply be dismissed as groundless media-induced hysteria (Matthews and Young, 1992). Others have gone further, suggesting that in multi-mediated societies the concept of moral panic needs to be reformulated (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995; Ungar, 2001). While folk devils were once helpless against their demonization, they may now find themselves being vociferously supported in the same mass media that castigate them. In the chaotic 24-7 global mediasphere, they may also provide counter-definitions and explanations in any number of alternative media outlets. While moral panics were once rare, they are now commonplace, and even commercially desirable. One of the best ways of promoting (and selling) records, clothes, books, films—most popular cultural commodities, in fact—is actively to court controversy and generate a little 'panic'. Few things get in the way of commercial success, particularly of youth-oriented products, more than 'conventional approval'.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the 'effects' model propose, and how has effects research been criticized?
- 2 Compile a list of factors, other than media representations, which might influence fear of crime. Which of these do you think are most/least important?
- 3 Can you think of any recent moral panics? On what basis would you say that the term 'moral panic' is sociologically justified?

Contemporary dimensions in crime and media: Global terror, surveillance and the cyber

Today, newsworthy crime and justice events are reported as they happen, high-profile 'celebrity' trials are broadcast live, and the growth in 'reality' programming continues to erode the boundaries between news and entertainment, fact and fiction (Fishman and Cavender, 1998; Brown, 2003; Valverde, 2006). This blurring of the boundaries between the represented and the real shapes our perceptions of the world in profound ways. As Sontag (1977: 161) noted some years ago: 'It is common now for people to insist about their experience of a violent event in which they were caught up – a plane crash, a shoot-out, a terrorist bombing – that 'it seemed like a movie'. This is said, other descriptions seeming insufficient, in order to explain how real it was'.

The destruction of New York's twin towers – the symbolic heart of Western capitalism – on 11 September, 2001 was also an exercise in media politics. Across the world, live coverage of the horror served both as the ultimate humiliation of American imperial power and a calling to like-minded fundamentalists to join the struggle. During the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the US military employed 'shock and awe' (Ullman and Wade, 1996), a strategy that seeks to achieve rapid dominance over adversaries by overloading their perceptions and understandings of events to the point of paralyzing the will to carry on. Sheer and spectacular brute force is combined with rapidity of action and the near total control of information (and misinformation), including the relentless media broadcasting of the annihilation of enemy targets. Faced with this overwhelming military might, insurgents realize that the media are one of the most effective weapons with which to retaliate (Ferrell et al., 2005). Alongside spectacular acts of mass destruction, carefully staged mujahideen executions of Western kidnap victims – featuring props, backdrops, scripts to be read aloud by the condemned – are cast live on the Internet, bringing violence of an extraordinary intensity into the living rooms of a global media audience. The contest of strike and counter-strike, claim and counter-claim, becomes hyper-mediatised in a manner unimaginable in the industrial modern era. As Castells (2004: 139) argues, 'The media, local and global, are the means of communication through which the public mind is formed. Therefore, *action has to be media-oriented*, it has to be spectacular, provide good footage, so the whole world can see it: like a Hollywood movie because this is what has trained the human mind in our times.'

This process of hyper-mediatisation extends to other spheres of crime and control, in turn looping back to connect again with defining 21st Century fears and insecurities. With more than four million operational surveillance cameras, the UK has the dubious distinction of containing the highest ratio of cameras to people anywhere in the world: the inner city citizen can be captured by more than 300 CCTV cameras every day (Home Affairs Committee, 2008). While some level of surveillance is necessary for the smooth running of any democracy – for example, an up-to-date record of every citizen's name and address is a requirement for postal services and electoral systems to function – the exponential increase in surveillance has generated concerns about the erosion of civil liberties and the boundaries between public and private in a 'surveillance society' (Lyon, 2001; Norris and Armstrong, 1999; McCahill, 2002; Smith, 2007). Considered alongside the massive growth in personal data gathering in the private and public sectors – travel, credit, store loyalty and identity cards, mobile phones, online banking, shopping and social networking facilities, the development of predictive customer profiling systems – the clear benefits of surveillance cannot eclipse its potential problems. Individuals are reduced to 'bits' of information, classified into particular categories or groups on the basis of their recorded, expected or 'suspected' preferences or activities. There are real risks of data loss and abuse by those in power, the criminal appropriation of confidential personal information, and the demonisation and stereotyping of whole sections of society (Coleman, 2005; Finch, 2007). Such stereotyping spans the full spectrum of deviance, from efforts to control everyday youthful transgression – such as banning hooded tops or 'hoodies' from shopping centres (Hayward and Yar, 2006) – to the ongoing 'war on terror'. For Mythen and Walklate (2006), intensified surveillance breeds a climate of fear that serves to secure tacit consent for the introduction of increasingly repressive legislation, simultaneously encouraging not only personal vigilance, but also suspicion and mistrust of potentially 'risky' situations and individuals. When combined with often simplistic and reductionist media representations of the non-white 'terrorist Other' (Greer and Jewkes, 2005), the impact on ethnic minority communities can be considerable. In the five weeks following the 2005 July 7th London bombings, there was a six-fold increase in religious hate crimes (Mythen and Walklate, 2006).

The massive expansion of the Internet generates unprecedented opportunities for social

networking and establishing virtual communities (Greer, 2004), but also new forms of criminality and criminal victimisation. The spread of hate sites (Franko Aas, 2006), cyberstalking (Wykes, 2007), viral victimisation (Brown, 2003), and the 'grooming' of children and perpetration of online child sexual abuse (Martellozzo, forthcoming), have all come under the criminological gaze. In response, new forms of justice and control are likewise shaped by the cyber. In the US, following the 1994 murder of New Jersey seven-year-old Megan Kanka by a convicted paedophile, Megan's Law allows anyone with an Internet connection to access the names, photographs and addresses of convicted sex offenders living in the community. Repackaged as some kind of reality entertainment, in *To Catch a Predator* millions of Americans watch weekly as hidden camera 'sting' investigations expose potential sex offenders arriving at meetings they believe to be with minors for sex. That the meetings are arranged online with adult volunteers posing as children, and that the suspected predators are met first by camera crews, and then the police, muddies still further notions of responsibility, legal authority and justice in a multi-mediated world. Across the 24-7 global mediasphere, the conceptualization, definition and experience of crime and control are changing. The challenge is for media criminologists to keep up.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of some of the main issues and debates which continue to inform the scholarly investigation of crime and media. You should now have a sense of the nature and extent of crime, violence and control in media content, an understanding of some of the dominant theoretical and conceptual tools used to explain and understand media representations, a working knowledge of the evidence for and against media effects, and an awareness of new developments in crime and media research. Equipped with this knowledge and insight, you can now explore in greater detail any issues which have challenged your assumptions, tested your critical faculties, or stimulated your imagination.

The themes developed in this chapter should not be considered in isolation, but as part of a

much wider criminological enterprise which seeks to 'make sense' of our social world and to understand matters of crime, deviance and control from a diversity of perspectives. Some of the chapters in this volume deal with the related matters of, for example, theory, youth, policing and social control. Others describe particular movements and orientations within criminology, borne out of the growing popular, political and intellectual fascination with deviance and disorder. Cultural criminology, in particular, is highly sensitized to the significance of media, image, style and representation to the processes of criminalization, control, resistance and identity (see Chapter 7; see also *Theoretical Criminology*, special issue on Cultural Criminology, 2004).

Today, image and representation penetrate all areas of social existence. Media tap into and reinforce social and political concerns. They help shape individual and collective identities, sensibilities, fears, anxieties and appetites. They provoke public outcry and, at times, generate moral panics. They serve as ideological weapons in the ongoing struggle for hegemony. They impart important, but often mixed, messages about the nature and extent of 'the crime problem', how we should think and feel about it, who is most at risk, and what is to be done. They indicate, however inaccurately, the State of the nation. But they also entertain. 'Crime talk' (Sasson, 1995), in whatever form, simultaneously elicits fear and fascination; it is a major source of concern, but also of distraction, resistance, escapism, and moral reassurance (Sparks, 1992; Ferrell, 1996, 2003; Greer and Jewkes, 2005). Crime sells. It always has.

Whether as news, fiction, or that expanding cultural form that lies somewhere in between, the sheer quantity of crime in the media illustrates that we have an insatiable appetite for narratives of deviance and control. And there is evidence to suggest we are growing hungrier (Reiner *et al.*, 2000a). Given the close interrelationship between the political, commercial and cultural significance of crime and disorder, it is small wonder it features so prominently across all media and markets. As the boundaries between fact and fiction (the represented and the real) become increasingly diffuse and uncertain, so the importance of understanding the connections between crime and the media becomes more concrete.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Design and conduct your own content analysis of newspaper crime reporting. Make sure you include both quantitative and qualitative considerations.
- 2 Compare coverage of the same crime or justice event in at least three different media forms (newspaper, Internet, television, radio). How and why does representation differ between media forms and organizations?
- 3 Watch an episode of your favourite crime drama or a recent film and note the portrayal of policing and criminal justice. Are the representations favourable or critical?
- 4 Keep a 'crime diary' for a week and record your thoughts and feelings about crime and personal safety. Do media representations have any impact on your fear of crime?

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Greer, C. (2008) *Crime and Media: A Reader*. London: Routledge.

This book provides the only comprehensive collection of key and classic readings on crime and media in one volume, covering the key areas of: Understanding Media; Researching Media; Crime, Newsworthiness and News; Crime, Entertainment and Creativity; Effects, Influence and Moral Panics; and Cybercrime, Surveillance and Social Control.

Jewkes, Y. (2005) *Media and Crime*, London: Sage.

This highly accessible textbook offers a book length analysis of many of the issues discussed in the chapter you have just read.

Reiner, R. (2007) 'Media Made Criminality: The representation of crime in the mass media', in M. Maguire, R. Morgan and R. Reiner (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (4th edn).

Oxford: Oxford University Press.

An excellent alternative overview of many of the issues covered in this chapter.

Mason (ed) (2003) *Criminal Visions: Representations of Crime and Justice*, Cullompton: Willan

This edited collection presents a series of insightful analyses exploring the relationship between crime, control and a wide range of media forms in late modernity.

Cohen, S. (2002) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, third edition, London: Routledge.

The book that launched one thousand studies, this classic text presents the original development of 'moral panic' – one of the most widely used (and often misused) concepts in the sociology of crime and social control.

Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal, London: Sage

This international journal provides a forum for the increasing number of researchers working at the interface between criminology, media studies and cultural studies. In addition to publishing more conventional scholarly articles, CMC includes photographic essays, international research think-pieces, and reviews of relevant crime-media material.

WEB LINKS

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

Lexis Nexis is a useful resource for conducting online searches of news and other print media from around the world. As noted in this chapter, however, beware that data are returned structure, style and image free. Use LexisNexis to locate the coverage. Then go get the original copy to research it!

www.spiked-online.com

Spiked is an independent online publication which offers an alternative and always critical take on the news stories of the day. Its self-stated priorities are liberty, enlightenment, experimentation and excellence.

<http://www.theory.org.uk>

Theory.org.uk is a fun and accessible website maintained by David Gauntlett, which includes information on media effects, key social and cultural theorists, and plenty of links to other useful media-oriented sites.

<http://www.ccms-infobase.com>

The Communication, Cultural and Media Studies Infobase contains a wide range of salient links, definitions, and issues for debate—pitched at an introductory undergraduate level—which are easy to navigate.

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Figure 8.1 A Sun Reader Writes...

Source: © *The Sun*.

Figure 8.2 Bandura's Bobo doll experiment.

Source: © Albert Bandura.

Figure 8.3 The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York's twin towers.

Source: © Reuters/CORBIS.

Table 8.1 Criteria of newsworthiness

Galtung and Ruge (1965)	Chibnall (1977)	Jewkes (2004)
Threshold (level of importance required to achieve news visibility)		Threshold (level of importance required to achieve news visibility)
Unexpectedness (novelty)	Novelty (unexpectedness)	
Negativity (violent, harmful, deviant, sad)		Violence
Unambiguity (clear and definite)	Simplification (removing shades of grey)	Simplification (removing shades of grey)
Dramatisation (action)		
Frequency (timescale, fit within news cycle)	Immediacy (the present, fit within news cycle)	
Elite-centricity (powerful or famous nations or people)	Personalization (notable individuals, celebrities)	Celebrity or high-status (notable individuals)
	Structured Access (experts, officials, authority)	
Composition (balance, fit with other news)		
Personification (individual focus or causality)	Individual pathology (individual causality)	Individualism (individual focus or causality)
Continuity (sustainability)		
		Children (young people)
	Graphic presentation	Spectacle or graphic imagery
	Visible/spectacular acts	
Meaningfulness (spatial and cultural relevance)	Proximity (spatial and cultural relevance)	
Consonance (fit with existing knowledge and expectations)	Conventionalism (hegemonic ideology)	Predictability (expectedness)
	Titillation (exposes, scandal)	
		Risk (lasting danger)
	Sexual/political connotations	Sex
	Deterrence and repression	Conservative ideology or political diversion (deterrence, distraction from wider problems)

Sources: Galtung and Ruge (1965); Chibnall (1977); Jewkes (2004).