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| **Crime and the Media (societal reaction to crime)** | | | |
| **Media representations of crime** | **The media as a cause of crime** | **Deviancy amplification and moral panics** | **Global cybercrime** |
| **Key points**   * Crime and deviance makes a large proportion of news coverage – up to 30% in British newspapers. * In the 1960s media coverage was often focused on murders and petty crime, today it has widened to sex crimes, drugs, child abuse, terrorism, football hooliganism and mugging. * There is also evidence for a current preoccupation with sex crimes: Soothill and Walby (1991) found that newspaper reporting of rape cases increased from under a quarter of all cases in 1951 to over a third in 1985. The coverage also focuses on a ‘sex beast’ or ‘fiend’ often by use of labels e.g. ‘the balaclava rapist’. The resulting distorted picture of rape is one of serial attacks carried out by a psychopathic stranger, but this is the excpetion not the rule, as more often than not, the perpetrator is known to the victim * The media are a powerful agency of social control that shape our perceptions of crime - they present a **distorted** picture compared to official crime statistics:   **Distortions** (minimum of 3)   * The media **over-represent violent and sexual crime** – 46% of media reports are about violent or sexual crimes, yet make up 3% of ocs. Marsh (1991) found that violent crime in America was 36 times more likely to be reported than a property crime. * The media **exaggerate the risks of victimisation** – especially to women, white and middle class people. * The media **overplay extraordinary** (dramatic) crimes and **underplay ordinary** crimes: Felson calls this the ‘dramatic fallacy’. Similalrly to solve the crime one needs to be daring and clever i.e. the ‘ingenuity fallacy’. * Crime is reported as a series of **separate events** – without structure and without underlying causes * Media coverage **exaggerates police success** in clearing up cases: this is partly to present the police in a good light, and partly because the media over-represents violent crime which has a higher ‘clear-up’ rate * The media portray criminals and **victims as older and more middle-class** than appear in the criminal justice system, this is known as the ‘age fallacy’   **News values and crime coverage: Cohen and Young (1973):**   * Distorted crime news coverage reflects the fact that news is a **social construction** – it is the outcome of a social process by which some stories are selected and others are rejected (news is manufactured). * News values determine whether a story is newsworthy and ‘manufactured’. Because crime and deviance is unusual and extraordinary it meets news values (see below, minimum of 3) and receives a lot of news coverage. * **Immediacy:** Breaking news * **Dramatisation:** Action and excitement * **Personalisation:** human interests stories about individuals * **Higher-status:** Persons and celebrities * **Simplification:** Eliminating shades of grey * **Novelty or unexpectedness:** A new angle * **Risk:** Victim-centred stories about vulnerability and fear * **Violence:** Especially visible and spectacular acts   **Fictional representations of crime**   * Fictional representations from TV, cinema and novels are also importnant sources of our knowledge of crime, because so much of their output is crime-related e.g. Mandel (1984) estimates that from 1945 to 1984, over 10 billion crime thrillers were sold worldwide, while about 25% of prime time TV and 20% of films are crime shows or movies. * **Surette** (1998) claims fictional representations follow a ‘law of opposites’ (opposites of ocs) (but similar to news coverage); * **Property crime is under-represented** – violent, drugs and sex crimes over-represented. * **Murder follows greed and calculation** – in real life homicide tends to come from brawls and domestic disputes. * **Sex crime committed by psychopathic strangers** – in real life acquaintances. Fictional villains tend to be higher status, middle-aged white males * Fictional cops usually get their man * However, more recent ‘reality’ TV shows: non-white ‘underclass’ offenders; police being less successful, as well as corrupt and brutal; victim focus, whereby audiences are invited to identify with their suffering. | * It has always been a concernt hat the media have a negative effect on attitudes, values and behaviours, especially of those groups thought to be most susceptible to influence e.g. the young, the lower classes and the uneducated * In the 1920s and 1930s, cinema was blamed for corrupting youth * In the 1950s, horror comics were held responsible for moral decline * In the 1980s it was ‘video nasties’ * Nowadays, rap lyrics and computer games such as Grand Theft Auto have been criticised for encouraging violence and criminality   ***Ways in which the media could cause crime:***   * **Imitation** – by providing deviant role models, resulting in ‘copycat’ behaviour. * **Desensitisation** – through repeated viewing of violence. * **Arousal** – through viewing violent or sexual imagery. * **Teaching** – transmitting knowledge of criminal techniques. * **Stimulation** – thorugh stimulating desires for unaffordable goods e.g. through advertising * **By portraying the police as incompetent** * **By glamourising offending**   There is a fear that media will have a negative effect on children, but it has been found overall in a majority of studies that exposure to media violence has at most  A small and limited negative effect on audiences. However, Sonia Livingstone (1996) notes, despite such conclusions, people continue to be preoccupied with the effects of the media on children because of our desire as a society to regard childhood as a time of uncontaminated innocence in the private sphere.  **Fear of crime**   * The media exaggerating violent and unusual crime, and encouraging certain groups to feel more at risk (e.g. women, old people) can lead to distortion of the public’s impression of crime and causing an unrealistic fear * In the USA, Gerbner et al found heavy users of TV (over 4 hrs a day) had higher levels of fear and crime * Schlesinger and Tumber (1992) found a correlation between media consumption and fear of crime – tabloid readers and heavy users of TV expressed greater fear of becoming a victim, especially of physical attack and mugging * This doesn’t prove that media viewing causes crime (correlations cannot establish cause and effect) e.g. it may be that * **Bandura et al.** (1977) conducted a lab experiment to see if watching filmed images of aggression made children more violent. The experimental group who saw the aggression displayed more violent behaviour than the control group who did not see the images. * However, there is no conclusive evidence that media violence directly causes violent behaviour. Most research shows the media to have a limited negative impact on audiences. For example, **Hagell and Newburn** (1994) found young offenders were no more likely to watch violent programmes than non-offenders.   **The media and relative deprivation**   * Left realists argue that the media increase the sense of relative deprivation amongst marginalised or socially excluded groups. * This is because they instil expectations of consumption/cultural inclusion (e.g. ipods, latest mobiles etc.). * **NB** – see deviancy amplification and moral panics for further ideas on how the media causes crime.   **The media causing fear of crime**   * The media exaggerate the risks of certain groups becoming a victim of crime – notably young women and the elderly. * This in turn creates a distorted fear of crime amongst those groups. * Research shows a correlation between tabloid readers and high users of TV and their fear of becoming a victim, especially of physical attack and mugging. * thesungw1However, this is not a causal relationship. ‘Media effects’ research ignores the meanings audiences give to media violence – some are realistic about risks and do not fear crime. | * The media may further cause crime and deviance through **labelling**. Interactionists argue that the media **amplify** crime and deviance through the process of creating **moral panics**. Moral entrepeneurs who disapprove of some particular behaviour – drug taking, for instance – may use the media to put pressure on the authorities to ‘do something’ about the alleged problem. If successful, their campaigning will result in the negative labelling of the behaviour and perhaps a change in the law, such as the introduction of the Marijuana Tax Act in the USA. By helping to label marijuana smoking, which previously had been legal, as criminal, the media helped to cause crime. * This moral panic is an exaggerated over-reaction by society to a perceived problem – usually driven or inspired by the media – where the reaction enlarges the problem out of all proportion to its real seriousness. In a moral panic: * The media identify a group as a ‘**folk devil’** (e.g. single parents). They become demonised and seen as a threat to social order/societies values. * The media present the group in a negative and stereotyped way. Their deviance is **sensationalised** and **exaggerated** (an over-reaction). * Moral entrepreneurs, politicians, the police, news editors etc. condemn the group and its behaviour. * Deviance becomes amplified (problem enlarged) because deviants live up to the labelling by the media and the increased social control - **a self-fulfilling prophecy** takes place. E.g. in the case of drugs, setting up special drug squads led the police to discover more drug taking. As the crackdown identifies more deviants, there are calls for even tougher action, creating a deviance amplification spiral.   **Mods and Rockers**   * Cohen (1972) found that minor fights between mods and rockers in seaside resorts between1964-1966 were very much sensationalised by the media. * Mods wore smart dress and rode scooters; rockers wore leather jackets and rode motorbikes – thiugh initially the difference was not as clear-cut and obvious. * *http://www.quadrophenia.net/thefilm/screencaptures/Mods.jpg****Exaggeration and distortion*** took place – the numbers involved and the extent of the violence and damage was dramatically distorted through sensationalised headlines such as: “Day of Terror By Scooter Gangs” and “Youngsters Beat Up Town – 97 Leather Arrests”. Even non-events were news – towns ‘held their breath’ for invasions that didn’t materialise. * **Prediction** took place – the media regularly assumed and predicted more violence would take place. * **Symbolisation** took place – the clothing, hairstyles, music etc were negatively labelled and associated with deviance. * The media’s use of these symbols allowed them to link unaccounted events e.g. bikers in different parts of the country who misbehaved could be seen as part of a more general underlying problem of disorderly youth.   **Deviance Amplification Spiral**   * Cohen argues that the media’s portrayal of events produced deviancy amplification spiral by making it seem as if the problem was spreading and getting out of hand * This led to calls for an increased control response from the police and courts. * This produced further marginalisation and stigmatisation of the mods and rockers as deviants, and less and less tolerance of them, and so on in an upward spiral * The media further amplified the deviance by defining the two groups and their subcultural styles * This led to more youths adopting the style and drew in more participants * By emphasising their differences, the media transformed loose-knit groupings into two tight-knit gangs * This encouraged polarisation and helped to create a self-fulfilling prophecy of escalating conflict as youths acted out against the roles the media had assigned to them * Cohen emphasises that many people will not have direct experience of certain events, so they rely heavily on the media for information about them - in the case of the mods and rockers, this allowed the media to portray them as folk devils (major threats to public order and social values)   **Reasons for Moral Panics – The Wider Context**   * Social change - **Cohen** believes moral panics occur during periods of social change. The mods and rockers moral panic was a result of a **boundary crisis**, where there was uncertainty about the boundary of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour during the 1960s (a new age of affluence, hedonism and consumerism). * Also put the moral panic of mods and rockers into the wider context of change in post-war British society – newfound affluence, consumerism and hedonism of the young appeared to challenge the values of an older generation who had lived through the hardships of the 1930s and 1940s * Functionalists see moral panics as a response to the **anomie** (normlessness) created by social change. By dramatising event changes as folk devils and moral panics it serves to unite society into existing (if threatened) values. * Neo-Marxists such as **Hall *et al.*** (1979) explain the media’s sensationalised coverage of black mugging in the 1970s as an attempt to draw attention away from the **crisis of capitalism** such as high unemployment and inflation and social problems such as student protests and the Northern Ireland crisis. It also served to divide the working class on racial grounds and justified increased policing to suppress opposition.   **Evaluation**  **Postmodernist theoretical evaluation of deviancy amplification and moral panics**   * **Late modernists** such as **McRobbie and** **Thornton (1995)** argue that moral panics are now routine and have less impact. Also, in late modern society, there is little consensus about what is deviant. Lifestyle choices that were condemned 40 years ago, such as single motherhood, are no longer universally regarded as deviant, and so it is harder for the media to create panics about them. * It assumes the societal reaction is a disproportionate over-reaction – but who is to decide what is a proportionate reaction, and what is a panicky one? This relates to the left realist view that people’s fear of crime is in fact rational * What turns the amplifier on and off: why are the media able to amplify some problems into a panic, but not others? Why do panics not go on increasing indefinitely once they have started? | * The arrival of new types of media is often met with a moral panic e.g. horro comics, cinema, TV, videos and computer games have all been accused of undermining morality and corrupting the youth * The same is true of the internet – both because of it’s speed of development and the scale: over ½ the worlds population is now online * Thomas and Loader (2000) define cyber-crime as computer-mediated activities that are either illegal or considered illicit by some, and hat are conducted through global electronic networks. * Jewkes (2003) notes the internet creates opportunities to commit both ‘conventional crimes’ e.g. fraud and ‘new crimes using new tools’ such as software piracy * Wall (2001) identifies 4 categories of cybercrime:  1. **Cyber-trespass** – crossing boundaries into others’ cyber-property e.g. hacking and sabotage such as spreading viruses. 2. **Cyber-deception and theft** – e.g. identity theft, fraud/’phishing’ (charity scams such as Haiti) and violation of intellectual property rights (e.g. software piracy, illegal downloading and file sharing. 3. **Cyber-pornography** – e.g. involving minors and opportunities for children to access porn on the net. 4. **Cyber-violence** – doing psychological harm or inciting physical harm. E.g. cyber-stalking (sending unwanted offensive emails or texts) and hate crimes against minority groups, as well as bullying by text.   **Difficulty policing cyber-crime**   * It is complex and on a huge scale. * Limited resources of the police. * It is global and creates problems of jurisdiction (where to prosecute). * Police culture gives it low priority – lacks excitement of more conventional policing.   **New technology, policing and surveillance**   * New ICT help the police fight crime – routine surveillance through CCTV, databases, digital fingerprinting, identity cards, and listening devices to monitor email traffic. * As Jewkes (2003) argues, ICT permits routine surveillance through the use of CCTV cameras, electronic databases, digital fingerprinting and ‘smart’ identity cards, as well as the installation of listening devices called ‘carnivores’ at Internet service providers to mitor e-mail traffic * Postmodernists are critical of such surveillance. They argue such technologies are invasive and infringe people’s human rights. New forms of surveillance technologies represent dangerous and excessive social control. |
| **In conclusion** the media give a distorted image of crime. Violent crime is over-represented because it meets many news values and helps sell newspapers/attracts audiences. Some see the media as causing crime, however evidence shows the media have limited effects. The media is perhaps more powerful in causing crime by creating feelings of relative deprivation among the poor. The media also creates moral panics which amplifies deviance. However, the effects are less strong in postmodern times as audiences are less easily manipulated by the media. New forms of media such as the internet have certainly created new opportunities both for cyber-crime and for ‘policing’ criminal and non-criminal populations. | | | |