

Influence of media representations of crime



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The media represents the multitude of means of communication, such as newspapers, radio, movies, internet, and video games, that has the purpose to inform the audience about all kinds of news, from political, educational, cultural, environmental to shocking crime stories. The most long-lasting newspaper published in England of which there is existing proof had the first edition in 1665 and was named 'The London Gazette', at first 'The Oxford Gazette' (A history of the Gazette n. d.). Since the beginning, this newspaper had been considered in the official royal declarations as 'the most sensationalist of crime reporting', as a result, being censored for the benefit of the fearing audience (ibid.).

Thus far, the media had an impressive evolution, from the invention of the printing press in 13th century, to 1829, when Burt created the typewriter, revolutionizing the written press, then, the 1839 with the creation of photography and after almost a century, in 1930s, the television, the computer in 1970s and the launch of Google in 1998 (Case et al., 2017: pg. 166), methods by which we allow information to pass easily, educating the audience and satisfying the need to fill a void about crime, offenders, victims and the mediation of the law enforcement into the cases (ibid.).

The ubiquity of various types of mass media is an essential characteristic of our modern life. Each person spends a massive amount of time on reading the newspaper, watching TV or social media, managing some values to shift as the time goes on and the things are developing. For instance, it has been proven that, in UK, from 2007 to 2017, as the development of the internet and social media, the amount of time spent reading the newspaper, as well as listening to the radio or watching TV is in dropping, leaving room for the

uptake of the internet, which increased from, on average under 1 hour per day, in 2007, to almost five hours and a half in 2017 (Daily time spent with select media in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2006 to 2017 (in hours) n. d.)

In his book, Maguire claims that crime stories and representation were always a notable subject for all mass-media (Maguire et al, 2012 pg. 248 – 250). The proportion of crime-related subjects depends on the interpretation adopted of ‘crime’. As Richard Ericson and his colleagues have provided an interesting definition of deviance: ‘the behavior of a thing or person that strays from the normal...not only... criminal acts’ (Ericson et al. 1987). In a later article, they concluded that an outstanding proportion of the news is related to ‘deviance and control’, varying from 45.3% in the newspaper to 71.5% on the radio (Ericson et al 1991: 239 – 242). It has been proved that the proportion of crime in the news has raised in the recent years, from 4% on average, in 1967 (Roshier 1973) to 6.5% in 1981 (Smith 1984) to 12% in 1989 (Williams and Dickinson 1993) Another factor that modifies the volume of crime news in the newspaper is the popularity of the newspaper, as remarked by Williams and Dickinson (ibid.: 40). In the most popular newspapers, such as the Guardian, crime occupied nearly 5%, yet in ‘downmarket’ newspapers such as the Sun, the proportion was over 30% (ibid: 41)

Regarding the visual media, the fundamental issue with content analysis is the audience’s perception of the same image reproduced in different contexts, such as ‘the same physical behaviour, for instance shooting means different things in different genre, say western, a war film, a contemporary cop show or news bulletins’ (Maguire et al, 2012: pg. 248 – <https://assignbuster.com/influence-of-media-representations-of-crime/>

250). How people interpret violence fluctuates according to how they see their own position in relation to a narrative character. For example, the African American audience, with the case of the taxi driver, Rodney King, who was assaulted by the LAPD, action that was caught on camera, he was a victim of police racism, but to the white audience and police officers, he was a dangerous deviant who provoked the fight. (Lawrence 2000: 70-3)

There have been found a lot of patterns, even preferences of the public, in crime studies, regardless of time or space. The analysts discovered that violent crimes are disproportionally compared to the index in the official data. Moreover, Marsh confirms that, in the United States of America, as in many other countries, people do not tend to report property crimes, with the ratio being 8 to 2 in the surveyed newspapers, while on the official statistics is 9 to 1 (Marsh 1991: 73-4).

Reiner in his studies pointed out that, since the Second World War, in the data deriving out of two newspapers from the United Kingdom, homicide crimes have a leading position regarding the most reported crimes, having a ratio of one out of three of the crimes from those newspapers (Reiner et al 2003). The second place is taken by other kinds of violent crimes. Depending on the period, most of the offenses suffered variation in the ratio of reported in the news, such as property crimes, which were frequent in the news between the 40s and 50s, yet by the end of that decade, they were hardly seen on a newspaper, unless there was a celebrity involved; the drug offenses were a notably stressed type of crime in the news from 1965, accounting in the 1990s to be about 10% of all news regarding crime. (Greer 2010)

However, this pattern is putting in display that there is an evident increased interest in violent and sex crimes, rather than property or environmental crimes. In their study, Soothill and Walby concluded that from the 50s to the mid-1980s, the rates of so-called 'delightful' cases such as rape trials, that boosted from 120 to 450, and the rape reports in the newspaper increased from almost 30 to more than 150, and consequently, the reports at the police station raised from 23% to 34%. (Soothill and Walby 1991)

Most of the offenders in the newspaper are either older or high-status than the offenders that are processed officially by the CJS (Reiner et al 2003: 19-21). In the local news, the crimes that aim attention at, are the crimes involving black people and ethnic minority and indigent people (Beckett and Sasson 2000: 79), whilst in the national bulletins, the attention is centralized on stories with ethnic minority suspects and youth. (Oliver and Armstrong 1998)

The attention of the media, in general, is drawn to two different characteristics. One of them is that usually men are the people that commit crime (Sacco 1995: 143), and the other is that it centralizes the incidents of crimes more than the possible causes or analyses of the patterns of such deviance. (Sasson 1995). However, the mass media implement alertness of crime to the audience, based more on the quantity of information and less on the quality of knowledge that people can gain by reading it. (Sherizen 1978: 204).

Moreover, one of the most popular book genres from the seventeenth century was crime and detection. As Paa and McWhirtler claim, the more

attention a subject gets in media, the more influential it is for the audience (Paa and McWhirtler 2011). Even though there were writings about crimes since the Apocryphal books from the bible, many authors, such as Agatha Christie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham revolutionized the crime literature, creating characters like Hercule Poirot, Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey and Albert Campion which are now role models for children that want to study criminology and even grown-ups who choose to work in law enforcement and criminology. Past studies show that since 1945, for almost 75 years, over 10, 000 million crime books were sold worldwide. (Mandel 1984: 66-7). A recent study coordinated by Nielsen Bookscan program showed that in 2017, crime fiction novels reached the apogee of the bestsellers, being the third year in which there is an obvious increase of 19%, selling over 18. 7m books. (Swope 2018)

There are a lot of variables that can influence people to commit crimes. Many violent video games are accused due to the manner that they change children's perspective over life, making them aggressive, violent and easily irritable (Dill and Dill 1998). Grand Theft Auto, for instance, is an action-adventure game series, in which armed robbery, possession of a rocket launcher, vehicular manslaughter, carjacking, and even first-degree murder are possible, crimes that if occurred in real life, would be sentenced from 3 years plus fines to life imprisonment. Even though such cases are extremely rare, there is an evident bad influence for children, and also for teenagers and young adults that want to recreate these games, such as the case of Zachary Burgess, a 20 years old student from Auburn University, who stole a car, kidnapped a woman and hit nine other cars because he ' wanted to see

what it was really like to play the video game Grand Theft Auto' (Warren 2013)

The idea of fear of crime has been debated in the recent studies, concluding that this is a bigger and more relevant problem as crime itself, due to the increased rates of unnecessary prevention and trust issues of the public into society and even into justice and law enforcement (Chadee and Ditton 2005). By expanding the panic, media prospers to control and manipulate the audience into accepting any repression, if it helps them dispose of fear. In Signorielli's study from 1990, he compared the rate of violence with the one of actual crimes and concluded that media exaggerates the information transmitted to the public, the severity and the probability of something to happen (Signorielli 1990: 96-102).

As a conclusion, the main goal of the current study was to determine the importance and the influence of media representations of crime. The results indicate that every method existing of broadcasting crime-relating information to the audience, manages to succeed, in one way or another, to influence the children and the adults into either making bad choices or crimes, either correcting the mistakes of others, through their careers.

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