# Media portrayals of criminal justice system

Law, Criminal Justice

A limited number of people have interaction with or are having the real experience of what andhow the criminal justice systemworks. This is because majority of our ideas are generally drawn from the various forms of mass media – news, television, movies, and print media. Generally, all media forms show a very positive representation of the attainment and honesty of the criminal justice system.  The media helps to mold the mental positions and impressions of the society. It also assists in shaping the public's perceptions regarding criminals, crime, and justice, as well as the people within the system. In fact, the media is a vital source of details and an effective tool of shaping one's views on the criminal justice system.

For the reasons that media builds a social reality, creates a public's plan of action, and designs the government's response toward crime and justice, suggest that there is a complicated interaction between media portrayals of crime itself and the criminal justice system in general.

Broadcast and Print News Portrayals

An article by Shannon Petersen suggests that modern broadcast and print media portrayals of the criminal justice system unveil greatly about journalism. Petersen coined this as the yellow journalism due to the significantly and specifically shocking, challenging, and unreliable characteristics of the news it brings. This is also because the characteristics of yellow journalism were evident in news stories in broadcast media (television and radio) and in all the nation's major newspapers (Petersen, 1991).

The article titled " Yellow Justice: Media Portrayal of Criminal Trials in the Progressive Era" also states that newspaper, television, and radio companies were motivated more by the financial gain instead of its justice awareness. This oftentimes led to misleading and inaccurate news reports (Petersen, 1991). Petersen (1991) also noted that yellow journalism was very apparent during industrialization boom of newspapers and broadcasting companies.

The lack of internal restriction regarding the manner and topic to report also contributed to the wide practice of yellow journalism. In fact, Petersen (1991) reported that during the early part of the twentieth century, courts had not yet adopted judicial practices like jury segregation to avoid the presence and eventually limit the influence of media practitioners in the courtroom.

Lastly, Petersen (1991) stated that media portrayals of the judicial trials in the early twentieth century promote more about an advance era of the society. For instance, even a credible newspaper such as the New York Times was tainted when it published a report which showedracismand sexism (Petersen, 1991). This is because the report strengthened tendencies in the society and the criminal justice system.

Newspaper and broadcast reports which sensationalized the criminal justice system are stories which deal with racial and gender stereotypes, bigamy, divorceand traffic violations (Petersen, 1991). According to Pterson (1991), these articles display a knowledgeable skepticism of the ability of the society to refuse the power of the media. Surprisingly, they even show the public's willingness to sacrifice the freedom of the press in the name of justice (Petersen, 1991).

Television Portrayals

Altheide (1985), Gerbner and Gross (1976), and Gerbner (1993) presented a great relation between heavy television screening and the socialization of television-prejudiced ideas of reality (cited in McNeely, 1995). According to McNeely (1995), there is a significant involvement and study addressing the concern onviolenceon television and its influences on the viewers. A large number of works focuses on the issue of whether or not television portrayals of crime and violence have an effect to the viewing population on the aspect of engendering, rather than simply attesting similar mental positions and human conducts.

McNeely (1995) suggested that television programs should be utilized to ascertain public images of the criminal justice system itself and how those images might or might not change the knowledge, perspective, and basic understanding of the judicial system and its operation. He added that those said images and impressions can be compared with " reality" in order to add to one's understanding of the criminal law and social interaction (cited in McNeely, 1995).

McNeely (1995), however, clarified that with television portrayals, people might expect to find a comparative match and an increasing level of influence on public notion of the criminal justice system. A growing level of television viewed by the " postmodern" individual may result in more television-defined public perspectives of criminal justice and law enforcement. McNeely (1995) added that the suggested research, aside from being distinctly absorbing and suggestive, can lead to a somewhat different and persuasive examination of the interaction between the public and

judicial system especially in terms of their interactive investigation. This is because of their significant abstract and experimental implications for related studies of the tradition, government, and the criminal justice studies in general (cited in McNeely, 1995).

Movie Portrayals

In his presentation of the movie portrayals of the criminal justice system, Myers (2006) said that movies reflect some realities about the judicial system regardless of the agreement of their screenplays to Hollywood's commercial mood. The movies shine an unflattering light on the justice system and which gives encouragement to its viewers. The movies tend to illustrate that the justice system is not essentially interested in finding the truth, despite the fact that seeking the truth is a necessary aspect of the crime victims' sense of justice (Myers, 2006).

A lot of movie portrayals are critiques of the criminal justice system. Most of them show how the current system lacks in providing true justice to crime victims. This is because in movies, many crime victims and proponents of the legal system participants must resort to their personal and more risky manners of seeking justice for the crimes committed against them or their love ones. This is where the judicial practice fails which the movies apparently portray.

First, it does not provide enough resources or counseling to victims that have suffered from the crime. Second, the criminal justice system legal system does not adapt the appropriate punishment for crime suspects. While the court is still wondering whether law is a reflection of the public or simply

impacts the perspective of the people, there is no doubt that the justice system, with all its strengths and weaknesses, is portrayed most dramatically and largely on the silver screen.

The various media portrayals of the criminal justice system as presented in this paper have true and important impacts on the behavior of the public and the society. By knowing and understanding the ineffectiveness of the justice system as portrayed by the media, people can become more decisive consumers of media images.

The various media forms are in the business of affecting how and what people think of the criminal justice system. Nowadays, it is quite hard to believe that people can just ignore everything they perceive in the media because the portrayals presented are not literally correct or because they are loosely staged models of reality.

Although most people understand that what they are seeing in media is not a depiction of " real events," the persuasive and powerful presentations of media have somehow affected how the human mind works. In order for a portrayal to be efficient, the audience must, in some way, identify with the characters and what they are doing, even if some aspects of the situation are " unrealistic." This is where the media proves to be effective in presenting the true facet of the criminal justice system.

References

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