

# Reintegrative shaming and social control report examples

[Business](#), [Company](#)



## **Introduction**

It seems ridiculous to think we're suffering a global economic crisis when bankers are receiving six figure salaries. Blame is hard to pin and the news media is reluctant to pin it but it's because of corporate greed and institutionalized corruption at the highest levels of banking, health care and insurance companies but that is not something we want to read in the papers because people want to believe that bad people do bad things and not the people we rely on like bankers. The recession was caused by unregulated capitalism; Karl Marx once stated that capitalism sowed the seeds of its own destruction because the greed of the bourgeoisie would be too great to ever be regulated fairly. (Karl Marx 1883)

### **“ News papers protect corporate reputations by failing to provide frequent, prominent and criminally orientated Coverage of common corporate crimes”**

Sandra Evans and Richard Lundman (1983)

Business crime is in different newspapers, it's not for the public eye, or at least packaged away from the other crime it is considered different by papers, less newsworthy so does not deserve the same coverage, and reports on such matters are only found in specialist newspapers, separated from “ real” crime. (Barak 1994, 2003; Tombs and Whyte 2001)

### **The main problem in terms of shaming these companies when it comes to big**

Corporations is; truth. All the ' truth' we have is produced by power; they justify this truth by the constant hunt for and evaluation of the truth

(Foucault 1980). Many news channels are backed by corporations so there will always be a “ Pro-Corporate” tilt in the news room may be “ conveyed by editors at a daily news conference by silence, or it may take the form of self censorship” (Morton Mintz 1991). News forms part of the public’s “ general politics of truth” so this effectively becomes true as there is no other point of reference.

## **Existing theories**

Reintegrative shaming is the method of shaming an individual for corporate crimes committed through the media other such mediums. I’ve chosen to tie this in with the theory of social control as I believe that the process of shaming is a form of social control as social controls are controls placed up on individuals that are subtle and purveyed by the media in order to create a certain type of behaviour.

Reintegrative shaming will not be a one size fits all solution because it’s focused more on an individual’s feeling of shame when in fact a multinational corporation is a machine and a machine feels no shame whatsoever, so as a deterrent it will not work. There still aren’t really any concrete ways of punishing a corporation because it’s virtually impossible to assign guilt because there are so many mechanisms of dispersing that guilt that these corporations put into place. Sometimes in the case of BP they just have a media blackout and how can you tell what’s going on when you’re not allowed to know even though it could affect you. Look at other instances of disaster caused by corporate negligence like in the Westray disaster in which twenty six miners were killed in a gas explosion when safety precautions

were ignored.

In this particular debate in the newspapers human suffering transfers into a legal disaster, distancing corporations from the harm done, it becomes less about the corporations committing crime and more about the law failing to regulate their actions.

They then focus on the human side, the accident is dubbed a “ natural” accident in the headlines, the blame of corporations is lifted by the fact that coal mining is still a dangerous job but it’s the corporation that put them in that danger of which they were aware.

Political economy is the next topic touched on; reporters claim Westray was a disaster in the making, conditioned by economic forces and by state action and inaction. The economy is blamed in terms of implying that the corporation had no choice financially other than risking the lives of its employees to make a profit, they almost come off as the victims of a poor system forcing them into a corner. (Cohen 2001)

Furthermore blame falls on the state for a failure in regulatory concerns in the opinion of the news, the state is incompetent and negligent, and it’s their responsibility to regulate the actions of corporations.

When in actual facts corporations are almost states unto themselves with their own laws and regulations that fit them and it should be their responsibility not to risk the lives of their employees and/or engage in unethical practices to raise profits. The reports on Westray were found to be much less likely to fall on moral judgements; only 6% of the coverage fell on outrage of the loss of life and the failure of legal proceeding. Only 1 in 10 news stories on Westray relayed criminal culpability on the event, focusing

on offender/victim relationships. They don't judge it as a crime because it's an accident but if you put someone under a piano hanging by a thin thread you are responsible for what happens next.

Voices of the workers at the event were overshadowed by legal and political professional's voices, so the actual people involved were pushed aside and ignored by the news media for the testimony of supposed experts on the subject. Inanimate natural forces are always blamed first rather than organizational decisions. Mobilization of safety issues questioned rather than the avoidance of danger. Corporate wrong doing was drowned in issues emphasizing the anonymity and unpredictability of the explosion, almost like nature is the bad guy, it's like banging your toe on the coffee table and getting mad at the table.

You see there are many mechanisms for which blame can be spread or displaced away from its actual cause, so shaming may prevent individual white collar criminals but in terms of disasters caused by corporate negligence or large scale fraud committed by banks, we not only can't focus on a singular person to blame within the company but also confusion is raised through practices of denial to displace blame to outside forces, which further muddies the water. We not only have no idea how to punish but we don't know who or even why and that's exactly why BP restricts the access of the press and the scientific community because they want to keep people in the dark to stop people assigning blame, they just want it to go away.

## Hybrid theory

The hybrid theory uses Reintegrative shaming as a form of social control, named Societal shaming. In his book *Folk devils and Moral panics* Cohen talks about how the language used to describe folk devils is similar to that of natural disaster he claims the purpose of this is to invoke moral panics. He claims the purposes of moral panics are that of diverting attention towards certain groups like young people, paedophiles and ethnic minorities and immigrants shaming those populations and putting pressure on them. Putting the spot on these groups he claims alleviates pressures on the government itself, it diverts attention away from our real problems which I've been talking about above. The problems aren't necessarily with us but the system that is counterproductive. The system says one thing and does the complete opposite, and its good intentions are limited due to convenience.

Cohen is incredibly concerned about the manufacture of news as he realises most people source the majority of their knowledge from the news. If someone can just make the news up who wouldn't believe it? Why wouldn't you believe the news? It's the news. So the news can make something up and make you believe it, they can twist the truth to coax a certain reaction from you, making you think a certain way. The news shapes the way people think about crime and deviance, take for instance the stories on Madeleine McCann's mother; the papers noted the fact she did not cry in her press conference appealing for the safe return of her daughter. Because she did not conform to their ideals of 'normal behaviour' at the loss of her child she was demonised and the finger of blame was pointed at her, just because she

wasn't acting in the way they wanted. It's also interesting to point out in cases in which the parents have killed the child they may have cried in their press conference, so tears don't mean a thing.

Although because she wasn't crying and the papers didn't think this was normal Madeleine McCann's mother was suspected of killing her or selling her, just because she wasn't crying. So you see the papers have the power to cast guilt on people as they see fit they have the power to tell us not only what deviance is but even to point it out and/or assign it.

The news in this context is a vehicle for social control, a social control that exists outside of the penal system, one that can be in your house and in your neighbourhood, in this sense your home can become a prison where your neighbours are your guards constantly vigilante over your normality, ready to act if you don't fit their ideas of normality. The main focus of Folk Devils and Moral panics are the mods and rockers, because they were literally described as if they were a terrorist threat words like "invasion" were used and the truth of the events were just a few teens throwing rocks on a beach. This hardly sounds like an invasion, the media has the power to coax deviance where there isn't necessarily evidence for it, they construct deviance from assumptions and these assumptions get interpreted as fact. The case of the mods and rockers was in fact a self fulfilling prophecy because when people read about these completely overblown incidents and about the made up mods and rockers inevitably some people wanted to be either a mod or a rocker. The news literally created the mods and rockers from a bunch of kids messing about on the beach, when the news predicts crime it's as good as making it happen. So if nothing else this illustrates the

power the news has over people and how dangerous it as a tool of social control.

Supposedly the only reason anyone started writing about the mods and rockers was because there was nothing going on but is it really just about giving people what they want? Or is there a more sinister goal? The obvious need to create news like this is to sell papers, what is the media if not a business? Its prime goal is money but you can't just write off these deviance inventories they create as a series of coincidences and mistakes, the distortion of information is aimed, it is very deliberate, which needless to say denotes a much more sinister purpose. The media itself is a type of expert they are agents of social control and it's sad but true that agents of social control are more believable than you or I, so in terms of the media "Is it news?" becomes just as important as "Is it true?". Whether or not something is true doesn't necessarily change whether or not it will be believed and become part of our general politics of truth, like for instance believing an urban myth.

### **Who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences and with what relation to the power” (Foucault 2001)**

The main reason news media is social control is because it highlights what it thinks we should know, it reproduces order through representation (Ericson et al. 1991) Really the only truth we have comes from power and the reason it's truth is so justified is because it's always searching for justification, it's always hunting for the truth and the evaluation of said truth. (Foucault 1980)



## Conclusion

The impact of this is obviously that the media can write whatever it wants if it's not specifically informed in the effort of selling papers. The exaggeration of the event created a torrent of public attention and anger leaving BP nowhere to hide essentially and they were forced to accept all the blame and a hefty fine from the government. In theory although the papers did exaggerate it's something they do all the time and it actually inadvertently did some good in an effort to increase corporate transparency. Nevertheless, it's the media's job to report on the news, not to make it up, the media used its influence to create a storm around the event, to increase attention for the purpose of money so it's entirely unethical to construct lies for money from any stand point. Even if the lies inadvertently do some good. What qualifies good journalism? Is it how much money it makes? How much fear it induces? Or how many eyes it opens? It's hard to distinguish because most of the time good journalism does all three.

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