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DISCIPLINE OR DESUBORDINATION?
CHANGING MEDIA IMAGES OF CRIME

Final Report

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Background

The research was intended to contribute in quite a specific way to the longstanding concerns about media representations of crime which have flourished at all points in the political spectrum, albeit with different inflections (Sparks, 1992; Reiner, 1997). A large body of research has examined the possible harmful impact of media representations on criminal behaviour and public fear of crime and the political and policy spin-offs from these (Livingstone, 1996).

Our research aimed at supplying a hitherto absent historical dimension. The alleged effects of changes in media representations figure large in various discourses about why crime rates and patterns have changed, especially since the Second World War (although such anxieties have a much longer ancestry; Pearson, 1983). The most familiar of these discourses is that of moral decline and fall: the media increasingly sensationalise deviance, thus glamourising offending and undermining moral authority and social control.[1] The media also figure in more radical discourses about crime and criminal justice. A common theme is that media representations unduly accentuate fear of crime, hence bolstering public support for more authoritarian forms of criminal justice policy.[2]

Despite the voluminous research literature attempting to assess the possible relationships between media representations, crime and fear of crime, virtually all studies examine the relationships at only one point in time.[3] Changes in representations might be examined by comparing the results of studies conducted in different periods, but the drawback is that they will have collected data using different variables and measurement techniques. The present research was intended to plug this gap by providing an account of changing media content concerning crime over the post-war period, by examining how audiences interpret these changes.

Objectives

The research project had two principal objectives:

I) To examine historically how mass media representations of crime and criminal justice have changed since the Second World War across a range of media.

II) To understand how audiences of different generations interpret different aspects of mass media representations of crime and justice, analysing their interpretations of media output and the issue of law and order as these have changed over their lifetimes.

It was not our objective to ascertain the extent to which shifting media images cause, or reflect, the reality of crime and criminal justice. Our reviews of the research literature on these issues lead us to the conclusion that the most plausible model is a dialectical process of interaction between changing media representations and actual patterns of criminality and criminal justice (Livingstone, 1996; Reiner, 1997).

It was our objective, however, to gather historical and interview data which could be related to various discourses about the role of the media in changes in criminality and justice since 1945. For example, the conservative discourse presumes that the media have become increasingly focused on crime, presenting offenders in more attractive ways and the criminal justice system less favourably.

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[1]In Britain the most celebrated example of this position is Mary Whitehouse's long-running campaign about the subversive effects of media permissiveness, see Newburn (1992). For an American example see Medved (1992).

[2]Gerbner (1970); Cohen and Young (1973); Hall et al (1978).

[3]The few exceptions include Roshier (1973) and Lichter et al (1994).

The combination of data and methods has allowed us to develop an account of how discourses about crime, law and order have developed during the period since the Second World War, both in the public arena constituted by the mass media and through people=s accounts of their experiences. Broadly, our two sources of data - historical mass media content analyses and focus group discussions - converge in presenting a particular picture of the changing discourses about crime and criminal justice.

Methods

In keeping with our stated objectives we examined representations of crime and criminal justice in three mass media from 1945 to 1991 together with audience understandings of, and relations to them.

I Mass media representations of crime and criminal justice 1945-1991

Clearly we could not examine all crime media, primarily due to constraints of media availability and of the researcher=s time. However, we have examined trends in three major media: cinema, newspapers and television. All are commonly considered important in shaping discourses about crime.

Our methods and analysis involved a number of research decisions which can only be outlined in brief. For each medium we examined sizeable samples randomly selected from the population of each media. For *film* our analysis combined a sample of all films released in Britain since 1945 (which included an increasing proportion of US films over the period), with a subsequent focus on box office hits, as the films most viewed by audiences. For *television*, we focused on fictional crime series as these provide the most sustained portrayals of police and the criminal justice system, although here we faced the greatest problems of access and availability of materials. For the *press* we sampled from the newspaper of record throughout most of the period, The Times, and a paper which contrasts with it in terms of both market (tabloid versus quality) and politics (left of centre versus right), The Mirror.

While we are aware of the limitations of these selections this is nonetheless a larger sampling across crime media and time than any we have found in the research literature. We note that crime itself is subject to definitional and conceptual difficulties: we used a straightforward positivist definition, adopting the categories of British criminal law.

Our aims were 1) to see if the quantity of crime media had changed throughout the period and 2) to see if qualitative dimensions of those crime stories had changed. Following our year by year sampling and coding we divided our 46-year period into three: 1945-1964 (for television 1955-64), 1965-1979 and 1980-1991. This periodisation was based on political and social histories of the period, together with preliminary analysis of the data which suggested such a periodisation might be useful and the need to condense large amounts of data. All quantitative data were analysed using SPSS.

1 Quantitative Analyses of Crime Media

1a Film

To assess the relative growth or decline of differing genres (including crime) and shifting crime contents of films by year (Allen et al, in press-a), we coded 10% of the synopses[4] of all films released in Britain between 1945 and 1991 by genre[5] and by presence of crime content within the narrative[6]. Eight years were double-coded to check reliability (95% for crime content and 73% for genre).

[4]From Maurice Speed=s *Film Review Annual* which provides a comprehensive annual listing with synopses of all films released in Britain since 1945.

[5]Western, crime, war, romance, fantasy, sex, farce, adventure, drama and other.

[6]Whether a crime, criminal or the criminal justice system was mentioned in the synopsis.

1b The Press

To assess the proportion of news stories concerned with crime and/or criminal justice since 1945, we examined between 5% and 10% of all ›home news‹ stories in The Times and The Mirror between 1945 and 1991. These were coded according to whether they were concerned with crime at all and, if so, whether they were predominantly about a specific case or about the criminal justice system.[7]

1c Television

Lists were generated of the top television programmes since 1955[8] and coded according to their genre.[9] These were used to chart changes in the proportion of popular television programmes by genre, including crime and cop series.

2 Qualitative Analyses of Crime Media

2a Film

We generated lists of top box office crime films since 1945, a total of 196 films.[10] Of those we watched 84 films, making notes about the film plot and completing a detailed coding schedule.[11] A number of films were double-coded to ensure coding reliability. We were then able to assess qualitative changes in film representations of crime between 1945 and 1991 (Allen et al, in press-b).

2b The Press

To assess any changes in qualitative dimensions of crime and criminal justice stories in newspapers, for every second year (ie. 23 years in all) the first 10 days of a random number series for both The Times and The Mirror were photocopied[12] and analysed using a detailed coding sheet.[13]

2c Television

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[7]We used a three-fold classification: 1 Crimes against British law committed in Great Britain; 2 Discussions of, and reports about, the criminal justice system; 3 Borderline/other.

[8]Source: Harbord and Wright (1995).

[9]Variety, comedy, cop series, game shows, drama, sport, westerns, magazine style, adventure soaps, crime, documentary and pop.

[10]We used a number of sources since no source has consistently listed box office hits since 1945: *Kine Weekly* (1945-65); *Motion Picture Herald* (1959-1971); *Cinema, TV Today* (1972-4); *Screen International* (1975-1991).

[11]Major coding categories included: type, numbers and violence of crimes; characteristics and attitudes of criminals, victims and criminal justice figures; portrayals of society and social relations; depictions of the criminal justice system and the tone and narrative structure of the film.

[12]Photocopied stories include: all crime stories which were editorial or op ed stories; selected other crime stories; relevant letters, for each issue the most prominent crime story and, if applicable, a domestic crime story on the front page.

[13]Coding focused on the prominence of the story, story focus, effectiveness of the criminal justice system, type of crime, tone and evaluative style, characteristics of criminals, victims and criminal justice system, commentaries on society and social relations, explanations for crime and who was directly quoted in a story.

We classified those crime programmes which had been top ten hits[14] according to a detailed generic classification based on the status or profession of the primary character.[15] This enabled us to see which types of crime programme representations of law enforcers and of the social contexts for crime had gained or receded in popularity between 1955 and 1991.

II Audience reception of crime media

To explore how audiences interpret mass media representations of crime and criminal justice, we conducted a series of focus group interviews. Based on our account (see results) of the changing representation of media crime, we asked whether audience interpretations concur or diverge from this account.[16] Given our historical perspective, this question raises methodological difficulties, for while past media have often been archived, past audiences do not exist. The project therefore combined methods from oral history - recollections of media 'from below'[17] - with audience reception methods, using homogeneous focus groups to interpret specific media contents.

While most audience research focuses on gender and social class or on self-selected fan groups, the key dimension here was age. Audience age indexes two phenomena: position in the life course (e.g. young person, parent, elderly); and generation (e.g. 'post-war' generation, 'sixties' generation), popularly understood by the particular historical period through which people live.

Following the three broad periods used to analyse the crime media texts, selected examples were used to stimulate focus group discussion of each media period and to encourage general discussion about crime, social change, notions of authority and responsibility. Four age groups (approximately 20, 40, 60 and 80 years old) discussed these media which, depending on the group=s age, involved discussing media from before they were born, from when they were in their mid teens, mid 30s, mid 50s, or mid 70s.

Following a pilot group, 16 focus groups (4 age x 2 gender x 2 social class) were recruited from 7 locations in the South-East of England (urban, suburban and rural) by a professional market research agency. Ninety-six people were interviewed in all. The interviews were audio taped, fully transcribed and analysed using NUDIST. The analysis was based on the major issues identified by the analyses of crime representations, together with additional themes raised by the participants.

Results

We have collected a large volume of data about the content of media representations of crime since 1945, primarily concentrating on the cinema and newspapers, but also including material on television and on media audiences. We are only able to present a selection of our main findings here (see 'Outputs').

I The Changing Content of Media Representations of Crime

1 The proportion of the media concerned with crime

[14]Programmes which appeared in monthly top ten lists at least twice or in the annual top ten at least once.

[15]Police procedural, police community, police vigilante, police sleuth, amateur sleuth, private investigator, extra special, offender, non-fiction and other.

[16]Only a brief account of the theory, methodology and findings can be presented in the short space provided, but see Livingstone et al (manuscript - nominated 2).

[17]This is more usually used for oral histories of leisure practices rather than content reception, see Davies (1992); Stacey (1994).

Crime narratives and representations are, and always have been, a prominent part of all mass media. What are the long-term trends, if any, in crime content since 1945? For the cinema, press and TV we measured the proportion of all narratives which were primarily crime stories,[18] and for film, those which had significant crime content even if not a crime film. Whilst an unchanging quantity of media crime would not falsify claims about possible relationships between trends in media content and developments in crime and criminal justice, a significant increase or decrease would be of considerable interest in examining the validity of the different discourses about the media/crime link.

For cinema films we found no significant change in the extent of representation of crime: the proportion of crime films neither rises nor falls, although there are many fluctuations (Allen et al, in press a). Crime has clearly been a significant concern of the cinema throughout the postwar period. Over the period some 20% of all films released are crime films with a further 45-50% containing central crime contents.

The analysis of newspaper stories 1945-91, suggests a more complex picture. Recently the proportion of stories about crime have increased considerably, especially in The Times. In The Mirror the average proportion of stories which were centrally about crime in the years 1945-51 was 9%, whilst in The Times it was 7%. By 1985-91 this had risen to 21% for both papers (suggesting a possible tabloidisation of The Times). The proportion of stories about the criminal justice system or policy (as distinct from specific crimes) also rose in both papers: from an average of 2% in The Mirror between 1945-51 to 6% between 1985-91, and from 3% to 9% in the same periods in The Times (see Downes and Morgan, 1997, on the post-war politicisation of law and order policy).

The numbers of television crime programmes (ie. both crime and cop shows, see footnote 9) also increased. During 1955-1963 only 8% of top ten programmes were crime programmes, rising to 12% in the final period. This rise was mainly attributable to an increase in crime programmes, compared with cop shows which declined from 6% to 4% of all top ten programmes between 1955 and 1991.

Changes in levels of offending or of fear of crime cannot be attributed to a sheer quantitative increase in crime content in the cinema - this has not occurred. There has, however, been an increase in crime content in the press and to a lesser extent on television. While not as marked nor as continuous as the rise in recorded crime over the same period this may be a factor in increasing concern about crime, as well as a reflection of it. However, changes in the way crime narratives are constructed relate a different story, outlined below.

2 The pattern of crime narratives in the media

We collected and analysed data on diverse aspects of crime media. We present below some of the key findings on representations of crime, criminal justice, offenders and victims (see also Allen et al, in press-b).

2a Crime

In all media studied since 1945, there were certain marked changes in the pattern of crimes represented. Murder remains the most common crime stimulating a narrative, but to a slightly diminishing extent, property crimes have plummeted (unlike the picture given by official statistics or crime surveys), whilst violent, sexual and drug-related offences have become more common. However, the degree of violence depicted in the presentation of the crimes has increased considerably, being associated with significant pain in an increasing proportion of cases. A significant trend is the increasing representation of ancillary crimes which are not the central focus of the story. This connotes a picture of a society much more threatened by all pervasive and violent crime.

2b Criminal Justice

[18] We defined a 'crime story' as one where (1) the central focus of the narrative was the commission and/or investigation of a crime, and/or (2) the principal protagonist was either an offender or a professional working in the criminal justice system.

The representation of the criminal justice system and its agents has changed in substantial ways. Interestingly, the pattern is distinct from the substance of change. As seen above, the pattern of change for most aspects of representation of crime is unilinear. However, the representation of criminal justice changes according to a curvilinear pattern. Variables are at their highest (eg. the incompetence of the criminal justice system) or lowest (eg. depictions of 'caring' police) in the middle years 1964-79.

The media differ particularly in relation to the portrayal of criminal justice protagonists. Specifically, police protagonists were almost entirely absent from cinema films until the mid-60s after which they are the most common type. On television, however, they have always been the most common kind of protagonist, giving way partially to other kinds of investigators more recently. In all media however, the representation of police protagonists has become less positive over time, although the pattern is curvilinear. Critical and negative images are most common in the period 1964-79, although they are more frequent in 1980-91 than 1945-64. This applies both to the success and the integrity of the police protagonists (Allen et al, in press-b).[19] For example, while throughout the period the overwhelming majority of film crimes are cleared up, there is a marked change in how this is achieved. In the first period, 1945-64, the most common method is that the offender is brought to justice (39%). However, in the two later periods this becomes very infrequent (15% 1965-79, 10% 1980-91) and the most frequent method becomes the killing of the offender - in 35% of films between 1965 and 1991 compared with 9% in the first period. In the press there is a decreasing tendency for crimes to be cleared up by the criminal justice system, although this follows a curvilinear pattern; from 22.9% not cleared up in the first period, 36.9% 1964-79 and 30.8% 1980-1991.

2c Criminals

Criminals are overwhelmingly portrayed unsympathetically throughout the period, in both fiction and news. There is little change, but what there is suggests an increasingly unfavourable image of offenders. For example, they are shown using excessive or sadistic force in an increasing proportion of films (80% in 1980-91, up from 50% in 1945-64). They are portrayed as committing crimes only under pressure in a decreasing minority of films (30% 1945-64; around 15% thereafter), and are instead shown increasingly as purely evil (from around 60% 1945-64 to 85% 1980-91). Films which show some sympathy for offenders have declined over time (40% 1945-64, 20% 1965-79, 15% 1980-91).

This predominantly unfavourable portrayal of offenders goes against the claim that crime has been stimulated by more attractive media representations. However, in all media crime is represented as increasingly rewarding. For example, in 91% of films between 1945-64 'crime does not pay' for the central offenders, but after 1965 this is only true in 80% of the stories - although this still suggests an overwhelming message about the folly of offending (especially by contrast with the low and diminishing clear-up rates found in official statistics). Similarly, for the press there is little evidence of increasing sympathy for offenders, although this is difficult to determine as most crime reports are brief and factual. Some concern for the criminal's perspective may be inferred from the fact that defendants and their family/associates are increasingly quoted in newspaper stories.

2d Victims

Probably the most clear-cut and significant changes we have found are in the representation of victims. In essence victims have moved from having a shadowy and functional role in crime narratives to an increasingly pivotal position, their suffering increasingly constituting the subject position or the raison d'etre of the story (mirroring increasing concern about victims in criminal justice systems; Rock, 1990). In the film sample, no concern is evinced for the plight of the victim in 45% of cases 1945-64, 35% 1965-79, but only 11% 1980-91. Victimisation is shown as having traumatic consequences in 74% of films between 1980-91, 40% 1965-79,

[19]The narratives also provide some explanation for this shift, portraying the police as more stressed and suffering more bureaucratic conflicts and demands.

and only 25% 1945-64. Victims are increasingly often represented as the protagonists of films, 56% of the films where they appear between 1980-91, but only 26% 1965-79, and 16% 1945-64.[20] News stories also increasingly present the plight of victims in sympathetic or concerned terms; in 11% of stories 1945-64, 18% 1965-79, and 24% 1980-91. Victims= families and associates are more likely to be quoted in the final period (10% of stories) than in the early period (3.1%).

II Audience Perceptions of Media Representations of Crime

We highlight several key points from the analysis of the focus group discussions.

1 The popularity of crime media

In brief, people varied over types of crime fiction they enjoyed, but most liked fiction involving an >intellectual puzzle=. Young women were particularly keen on media which are realistic and offer them information (about the nature, consequences and prevention of crime). Men preferred action plots, with fast pace, special effects and humour. Most people were ambivalent about press crime reporting, wanting to know but not to be voyeuristic. Older people recalled past media largely in terms of notorious events, prominent drama series, television and film stars and little was recalled of specific narratives. Young people showed little interest in past media and much enthusiasm for contemporary media.

2 Perceptions of past crime media

Respondents were remarkably consensual in their characterisation of the postwar period. This consensus tells a story of change in which crime representations (and society generally) shift from the 'pre-sixties' days, of little, mild crime where difficult issues were being hidden, crime was largely nonviolent and the police were your friends, to the 'post-sixties' present where crime is much more prevalent, media images more explicit and upsetting, violence has increased and police are themselves more distant and more violent.

This shift is interpreted, again consensually, as moral transition from the days when good and bad were clearly distinguished and authority structures were respected (a >culture of respect and discipline=), to the present when the boundary between good and bad has blurred, criminals are sympathetic and authorities are corrupt (a >culture of disrespect and desubordination=).

3 Generation and life course factors

The generations differed markedly in their relation to this perceived overall shift. Older people tell a story of decline - the do-gooders in the 60s upset the social order, representations are now too much 'in your face' and the effect is of voyeurism and desubordination. Young people tell a story of progress - they are optimistic, for civil rights (re: gender and ethnicity) have legitimated alternative viewpoints and issues are no longer hidden. They approve of the idea that morality should be decided by the context and respect must be earned, not given automatically to those in certain social roles.

Life course also mattered. Most striking is that people were almost universally positive about the media they encountered during their youth (and into their mid-thirties), irrespective of whether this was, in fact, media from the 50s, the 70s or the 90s. With the exception of the youngest group, people were far more tolerant of the media from before they were born than they are of media from later in their adulthood. The importance of life course suggests that the media of one's youth set the interpretive frameworks, and expectations for subsequent media experiences.

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[20]The demographic characteristics of cinema victims suggested by films resembles that of victim surveys, contrary to some previous research. Thus they are predominantly male, young, and although usually white, the proportion of ethnic minority victims is rising sharply. Newspaper stories are less in line with the survey evidence than fictional stories. Here, female and male victims roughly equal each other, and older victims are over-represented. The proportion of white victims in news stories is actually increasing.

4 Positioning the audience in relation to crime

Respondents continually 'commute' (Liebes and Katz, 1995) between a concrete concern with crime in the media and crime in everyday life. They also commute between a concern with the concrete (who commits what kinds of crimes etc?) and the moral (what does this say about the moral and social order?). This suggests that everyday perceptions of crime in society provide a salient context within which media crime is interpreted; conversely, media-fed crime triggers thoughts and feelings which are central to daily life.

Mediated forms of address position audiences in relation to media narratives. However, our data suggest that audiences are more powerfully positioned in relation to crime media according to their perceived positioning in relation to crime in society. Particularly in our early period, crime media offers audiences the subject position of 'criminal justice protagonist', the criminal becomes 'other' and the victim is near invisible. However, real world crime offers three subject positions: police/law enforcer, criminal and victim and our different groups perceived the media through the lens of these positions.

This was seen most clearly for those aged 80 who perceived media throughout the period not only through the lens of their youth (the ›culture of respect=) but also through the lens of their present day perceived vulnerability, as potential victims of crime. Their loss of a culture of respect weakens their identification with authorities. While both the media and everyday experience tell older people that they are ›muggable=, our youngest groups felt they were continually portrayed as 'dangerous youth', potential perpetrators of crime. Thus they welcome a civil rights focus and the questioning of police authority.[21]

Recalling that each generation is most positive about the media of their youth, we suggest that young people are positive about present day media because they, like it, are ambivalent about police heroes, sometimes seeing themselves as positioned as criminals in daily life. Their desire is to understand both sides through the media, to question both authority and criminality.

5 Gender and generation

This picture is cross-cut by gender, for unlike the men young women are aware of their potential victim status, particularly their vulnerability to male violence and so welcomed coverage of such crimes. The oldest women shared their generation's pessimism, yet also expressed some approval of the destruction of the ›fairy tales= of their youth - the glamorous images of femininity and masculinity which some perceived to have trapped and distracted them.

The youngest women, on the other hand, shared their male peers' scepticism about the criminal justice system and so turned not to a reliance on authorities but to themselves. Their orientation to media centred on how media provided information and opportunities to think through situations offering self-protection through realism. It was mainly when police heroes are female or feminised (as in Silence of the Lambs or The Bill) that younger women showed some approval or identification with the criminal justice system.

Neither younger nor older men in our groups would accept views of themselves as potential victims. Rather the older men accepted the proffered identification with the protagonist, typically a law enforcement hero. Younger men were particularly interested in forms of crime media in which the criminal was as much a focus as the law enforcers and in which the moral boundaries between the two were ambiguous or unresolved.

III Conclusions

[21] In fact, the cultural representation of 'dangerous youth' was actively constructed by our older groups, who attributed to young people their own fascination with violence and disrespect. These were actually concerns rather unrelated to those of young people=s which instead related to realism, surveillance, individuality and information.

The title of our project asks whether the overall trend of media representations since World War II is towards 'discipline' or 'desubordination': have the media acted primarily as an apparatus for social control (as suggested by the radical criminologies of the 1970s for instance) or have they been subversive of authority and order (as a plethora of conservative commentators claim)? Our data suggest much more complex processes of change than either alternative.

Some key variables in our analysis exhibit no pattern of change (for example the proportion of films which are centrally about crime). Others show a marked degree of change throughout the period: the graphic representation of violence, for instance. Yet others show a curvilinear pattern of development: most aspects of the representation of the legitimacy, integrity and effectiveness of criminal justice follow this pattern.

We have attempted to sum up these results suggesting a rough periodisation in terms of three ideal-type patterns of representation of crime (Allen et al, in press a & b). The first postwar decade is a period of consensus and social harmony in representations of criminal justice (and, possibly, general social and political debate cf. Marquand 1996). Crime stories - news as well as fiction - present an image of society as based largely on shared values and a clear yet accepted hierarchy of status and authority. Crime was as defined by Durkheim: it united all healthy consciences to condemn and extirpate it. Criminals were normally brought to justice, crime did not pay. The criminal justice system was almost invariably represented as righteous, dedicated and efficient.

During the mid-1960s the dominant mode of representation of crime and justice shifts as the values and integrity of authority increasingly come to be questioned and doubts about the fairness and effectiveness of criminal justice proliferate. Increasing prominence is given to conflict: between ethnic groups, men and women, social classes, even within the criminal justice system itself. Whilst street-cops feature increasingly as protagonists, they are more frequently morally tarnished if not outright corrupt. However, the increasing criticism of the social order and criminal justice is from a standpoint of reform, the advocacy of preferable alternatives.

Since the late 1970s another shift is discernible, the advent of what could be called a post-critical era. Stories are increasingly bifurcated between counter-critical ones, which seek to return as far as possible to the values of consensus, and those which represent a hopelessly disordered beyond-good-and-evil world, characterised by a Hobbesian war of all against all. It is this division of narratives which accounts for the curvilinear pattern of many variables: there is some attempt to restore the values of the past, challenged by those which exacerbate still the conflicts of the middle period.

Underneath the shifts in the mode of representation of concrete aspects of crime and justice, however, can be discerned a more fundamental shift in discourse, encompassing both media representations and popular discussion (as captured in our focus groups). This is a demystification of authority and law, a change in the conceptualisation of criminal justice from sacred to secular. The marked changes in the representation of victims are the clearest emblem of this. Crime moves from being something which must be opposed and controlled ipso facto because the law defines it thus, to a contested category. This echoes Durkheim's theorisation of the 'modernisation' of sentiments about punishment (Durkheim 1973). Criminality comes to be seen less as an offence against the sacred and absolute norms of a conscience collective, and more a matter of one individual harming another. In current media, crime may be wrong, but this is a pragmatic issue, turning on the harm which may be done to individual victims, not from the authority of the law itself. The moral status of characters in a story (news or fiction) is no longer conferred by a role in the social order. Rather, it is subject to negotiation and must be established from scratch in each narrative, depending upon the demonstration of serious suffering caused to the victims who increasingly occupy the subject position of the narrative. (Increasingly these may even be the legally defined offenders, who may be represented as victimised by a criminal injustice system).

These observed trends in representation of crime media are both supported and complicated by the audience analysis. In broad outlines, diverse audiences concur in retelling a consensual story of crime - in the media and everyday life. However, whether this is a story of decline or progress depends significantly on generation. Further audiences do not automatically accept the subject positions offered by the media and it seems that

their positioning in relation to real life crime is more significant. The rise of the victim as a subject position in the crime narrative particularly serves to divide the audience by both gender and generation with perceptions of real life potential victimhood (and criminality) influencing both preferences for media and interpretations of crime media.

The majority of narratives continue to work to justify ultimately the criminal justice viewpoint, although this must now be achieved by demonstrating particular harm to identifiable individual victims. In this sense the media both continue to reproduce order and to function as sources of social control, whilst also reflecting the increasing individualism of a less deferential and more desubordinate culture.

Future Research Priorities

1) The research proposed and conducted focused on media contents and their reception over a period of considerable social change. The process of production has in fact been studied throughly already for contemporary media (Ericson et al, 1987, 1989, 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). This could be extended by studying the process of production historically, primarily by oral history interviews with creative personnel in the three media we studied. To what extent are the changes observed in media contents to be explained by shifts in ownership of media, institutional factors behind media production or economics, or changes in the target audience for certain media? How far are editors/producers sensitive to political, policy or public debates about crime? In short, the explanation of some of the trends observed could be usefully explored in this way (the rise in violence, or in the visibility of victims, or in critiques of the criminal justice system), as could some of the similarities or differences observed across media (for example, does film lead the way and television follow? or, do American media lead the way and British media follow?).

2) 1991 was our final cut-off point for data in our historical content analysis. This could be extended forwards. 1991 was more than an arbitrary cut-off point, as it was a most significant year in criminal justice policy, the year which saw the culmination of a pragmatic trend in criminal justice policy championed by Home Office civil servants and researchers, embodied above all in the Criminal Justice Act of that year. This was rapidly followed by a major U-turn to a more repressive trend. In retrospect, 1991 now appears to have marked a number of key changes also in media representations of crime: these were only apparent in embryonic form towards the end of our period. Examples include the proliferation of 'real crime' shows such as Crimewatch on television, and the overtly nihilistic trend in the cinema spearheaded by Tarantino; law and order has become an even more significant issue. For these reasons it is plausible that 1991 was a significant watershed, and it would be important to extend the data collection and analysis to examine this.

3) It would also seem productive to return to pre-war media, repeating our analyses for earlier periods, as suggested in our original research proposal (although this would of course be problematic for audience research). The present research was conducted against a background of continually rising crime figures in society. But before 1939 the crime statistics were more or less unchanging, suggesting a very different cultural climate of concern over crime representations and possibly, a very different climate for the production of crime media. Thus the particular interest of extending the research backwards is to see how media represent crime in a period when crime was not apparently a major political issue, nor a problem that was clearly becoming worse. Extending the project back in time would necessitate greater emphasis on archive material especially for the audiences. In the project we looked at the Mass Observation Archive at Sussex, for example, and though it appeared that we could obtain little of use from it within the framework of this project, more attention to that archive, or a more concerted searching out of other archives, might prove invaluable (we gather that EMI have an archive for cinema audiences, for example).

4) Although we included higher and lower socioeconomic groups within the focus group design, we did not feel that this division was sufficiently subtle, nor were sufficient groups conducted to be able to separate out what are likely to be very important class dimensions. The findings in relation to personal experiences of crime, together with the work of Schlesinger et al (1992), suggests that future audience research could usefully pursue the relation between personal experiences of crime and criminal justice and reception of crime media. A certain amount of research has been conducted on fan groups for particular media, which suggests ways in which fans relate to media very differently from other audiences, but little research exists on fan groups for particular crime media, although these groups are often the focus of public concern. Each of these ideas could be pursued in future research.

Outputs

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