

Crime and the Media

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- The prevalence & nature of crime news
- Coverage of CJ system
- Understanding media coverage
- How media coverage affect CJ policy

The Prevalence of Crime News

- Principle component of news reporting
- Crime news also more likely to be read/viewed and remembered by consumers

How the Media Distort Crime

- 1. Media gives impression crime is increasing**
- 2. The media suggests that violent crime is more common than actually is**
- 3. The media presents crime as committed by sociopathic predators**
- 4. Media suggest elderly, women, and whites are most frequent victims of crime**
- 5. The media portray crime as becoming more random and more likely to be committed by strangers**

Media Coverage of the CJ System

- Historical function of the press:
- Today little coverage of system v. crime news
- Highly selected, distorted, and generally uncritical
- Westfeldt & Wicker - *Indictment: The News Media & the Criminal Justice System*

Media Coverage of the Police

- Emphasize “crime fighting” role
- Show police as more effective than they actually are in solving crimes
- **90 percent** of media covered crime are solved
- Criticism of the police is rare

Media Coverage of the Courts

- Coverage has increased with court rulings allowing cameras in courtroom
- Still, selected coverage: cover what is judged “*newsworthy*”
- Greater coverage to D’s who get off on technicalities
- Fosters impression courts are *too lenient*

Media Coverage of Correctional System

- Least amount of coverage
- Coverage of new prison or some particular problem in a prison

Media Coverage of Correctional System

- Lack of coverage due to . . .
 - Perceived lack of public interest
 - Difficulty of access

Understanding Media Coverage of Crime

- Three explanations or models
 1. Market model
 2. Manipulative model
 3. Production model

1. The Market Model

- Media gives public what they are interested in *and* what is in the public interest
- Two often not in harmony

Why is the public interested in crime news?

1. **Complex psychological process**
 - *downward comparison*
 - *feel better @ self by seeing other worse off*

Why is the public interested in crime news?

2. Speaks to profound moral questions

- a) tells us @ limits of *human nature*
- b) informs us @ *moral integrity of community*

Why is the public interested in gore?

3. Consumption a collective ritual experience

- Emile Durkheim, 19th century sociologist
- all societies have “**collective consciousness**”
- At some level, crime is “good”
- Our daily reading/watching of crime news serves similar purpose
- Experience moral indignation

2. The Manipulative Model

- Media acts in direct in the interests of owners (Marxist theory)
- Capitalist societies are maintained through *coercion & consent*
- Dominant class has control over *the intellectual means of production - including media*
- Use media to make *us believe greatest threat comes from street criminal*
- **Deflect attention from their activities**

3. The Production Model

- Extent/nature of crime news function of how news is collected
- Large number of crime stories
- To make production of crime news manageable . . .
 - take positions giving easy/cheap access to crime news
 - set up in “**source organizations**”
 - the police
 - who becomes a “police reporter”

- Media retain some autonomy
 - Decide what stories are **newsworthy**
 - Generally, the novel, unexpected, or dramatic
- Crime stories are used in the editing process

Crime News and Fear of Crime

- Exposure to crime news does influence perceptions of crime
- Mixed research findings regarding the effects of media consumption and fear
- More rigorous studies do find a link

Impact of newspaper crime reports on fear of crime

(Linda Heath)

- Content analysis of newspapers in 26 cities
- Recorded number of crime stories
- Recorded whether those stories were
 - sensationalized
 - random or
 - local
- Interviews conducted with residents about their fear of crime

Heath's major findings

- Total number of crime stories did not affect fear
- In cities where papers carried more **local** crimes stories which were
 - sensationalized or random
 - residents ***more fearful***
- Reports of nonlocal crime that were sensationalized or random were associated with ***lower levels*** of fear

Ideological Effects of Crime News

- Consumers learn that the causes of crime are **individualized**
- Broader social causes are unexamined
- Traditional law and order response affirmed and supported

How the Media Can Affect Criminal Justice Policy

- Media can influence policy by **focusing attention on specific issues**
- Media can determine what **policy alternatives** are given serious consideration
- Media can be **used by policy entrepreneurs** (“claims-makers”) to further own org./personal interests

The Media as a Cause of Violence

- A historical concern
- Today, 70 % of public believe there is a link between media violence and the crime rate
- In 1990s, concern that the media markets and advertise violent products to children
- Studies confirm concerns

Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children (FTC)

- Two-thirds of all marketing plans for R-rated violent movies expressly said target audience was children under 17
- 85 percent of children age 13-16 are able to purchase music with explicit lyrics or violent video games
- 50 percent of children age 13-16 can gain access to R-rated violent movies

Research on the Media-Violence Link

- Studies focus on television violence. Why?
- Because of high level of violence
- Because exposure to TV violence is great

Summary of Research Findings

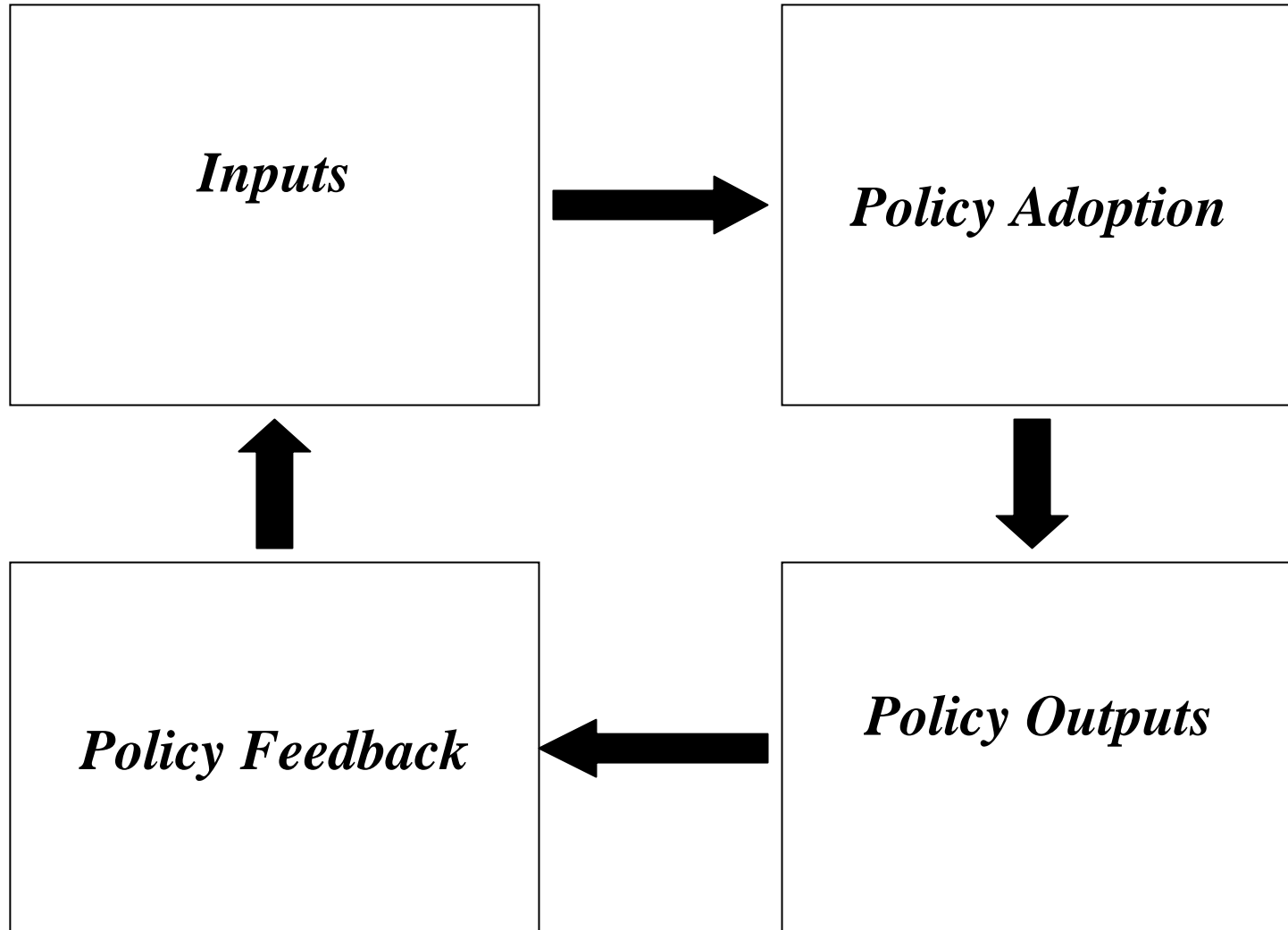
- Consumption of high levels of violence associated with increased aggressive behavior
- Media exposure increases aggression through **modeling** and **desensitization**
- Viewing violence increases fear of victimization, mistrust of others, and the use of self protective behaviors
- Worst 3 offenders

The Policy-Making Process

What is “Public Policy”

- The sum of all government activities -private or public - that impact the lives of citizens
- *Three points of emphasis*
 1. Includes all levels of government
 2. Includes public and private agencies
 3. Includes intended and unintended effects of policy
- To understand how crime policy made, need to understand “policy cycle”

The Policy Cycle



Inputs: Two Parts

1. *Agenda Setting*

- The initial step in policy cycle
- The *agenda* is the set of conditions or problems that officials are paying attention to at any given time
- Items accepted on agenda tend to remain on the agenda for long periods
- Some problems do go on and off
- Generally, things come on the agenda quickly

Inputs:

2. *Policy formulation*

- Alternative policy responses or initiatives are presented and debated
- The chances of a policy alternative being selected are enhanced by . . .
 1. the merits of the plan,
 2. its budgetary feasibility,
 3. whether the plan is incremental,
 4. and the political resources of advocates

Policy Adoption

- the adoption of a particular policy
- decision dominated by legislative branch
 - the role of standing committees
 - affected by relationships with administrative agencies and special interest groups
 - primary source of info & lobbying
- Executive branch exercises only informal influence over policy adoption

Policy Outputs

- how policy actually implemented
- sometimes, **new administrative component** created
- more often an **expansion of existing bureaucracy**
- given authority to implement the policy
- also modify policy as necessary

Policy Feedback

- policy assessment
 1. What were effects of policy?
 2. Did it have the desired effect?
 3. Recommendations to adjust/terminate the policy/program

The Primacy of Input Stage

- Agenda setting most important stage
- Manner a condition conceptualized determines policy alternatives considered
- Also, determines **what orgs. given responsibility and resources** to implement policy
- So, how does a condition get on agenda?
- How does condition become accepted as “social problem”?

How Conditions Become “Social Problems”

Two explanations

- 1. Objectivist model**
- 2. constructionist model**

The Objectivist Model

- A social problem represents an **objective, concrete, and damaging or threatening condition**.
- A social problem can exist even without people's knowledge
- What's important: does condition causes large-scale death, disease, etc.
- The greater the number of people affected, the more important the social problem
- More likely to be placed on the agenda

The Constructionist Model

- Harmful condition not necessarily a social problem
- Instead, **a social problem is a product of group or collective activity**
 - Role of advocacy groups or “claimsmakers”
 - Groups champion a particular putative condition
- Need not be the worst condition - or exist at all

Competition for Recognition as a Social Problem

- Large pool of *potential* social problems
 - A select few are picked out by ‘claims-makers’
 - presented as social problems
- But public *agendas, attention, resources limited*
 - means intense competition
- Understanding zeal of claims-makers
 - A problem for some is a benefit to others

What “Winners” Gain

- Recognition of their condition as social problem
 - gives claims-makers leg-up on policy alternatives
 - Brings *power/resources* to address the problem
 - jobs, promotion, status

Types of Claims-Makers:

1. *Insiders*

- ***Public bureaucrats*** (political appointees & civil servants)
- Success due to resources. . .
 - ***Expertise of bureaucrats***
 - **Tenure**
 - **Lobbying budgets**
- Incentives of public bureaucrats to influence agenda

Types of Claims-Makers:

2. *Outsiders*

- Special interest groups
 - Corporate interest groups
 - Membership-based interest groups

Six Techniques of Competition

How claims-makers distinguish their condition

- 1. *Narrative stories***
- 2. *Atrocity tales***
- 3. *Metaphors***
- 4. *Convergence***
- 5. *Concern for children***
- 6. *Manipulation of numbers***