
CRIME IN THE MASS MEDIA

(EL DELITO EN LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACION MASIVOS)

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SUMMARY

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SUMARIO

El significado del tema. El ejemplo de un estudio de caso empírico. Las bases teóricas. La imagen del delito y la justicia penal en los medios de comunicación masivos. Cinco ejemplos de formas particulares de imagen de los medios de comunicación de masa. La opinión pública sobre el delito. Los efectos sobre la realidad de los estados subjetivos de la seguridad pública. Objeciones contrarias al concepto expuesto. Recomendaciones para la conformación de una opinión deseable, desde el punto de vista criminológico, a través de los medios de comunicación masivos.

1. The Significance of the Topic

In the last decade the mass media has grown worldwide to be larger, more influential and more powerful. After it was possible in the Federal Republic of Germany in the Fifties to receive one TV program and in the Sixties and Seventies to receive three TV programs, the number of receivable TV programs has risen for a huge part of the population in Western Europe through cable TV to eleven or even more programs in the last years. More TV channels are announced. Additionally there is the huge offer of videos. The distribution of video recorders in the population is increasing. Worldwide we are on the way to a communication - to a mass media society in which fiction, fantasy, the definition of reality assume a greater role than reality itself, where people want to be permanently entertained, and where the portrayal of the contents gains more emphasis than the contents itself.

For centuries news on crime have fascinated the population. In the Middle Ages ballad singers moved very successfully from town to town in order to spread their ballads which were to a great part murder stories. Criminal stories are not a new development because they do not report anything really new. They are regularly told according to the pattern of the "familiar sensation" because they have a function of relief for the society, because through them, the "law-abiding citizen" can set himself apart from the criminal, because they prove to him that his identity is "normal" and because he can be content to feel that he is better than the criminals and that he successfully managed to escape the criminal act (**Paul Reiwald** 1948; **Helmut Ostermeyer** 1975). There is a huge demand in the population for crime news because they are entertaining and banish the boredom of everyday life. The mass media willingly fulfill this demand because crime news are cheap and easy to get hold of and because they help sell almost any product. That is why there is a symbiosis, an unholy alliance between mass media and society against which the critical criminologist advances his objections almost in vain.

2. The Example of an Empirical Case Study

In 1922, **M.K. Wisehart** was the first who discovered that publicized opinion (the mass media) had a considerable influence on the public opinion on crime and criminal justice, although neither of the two opinions was in accordance with the reality of crime as expressed in crime statistics and criminological research. The reality of crime and criminal justice in criminological research is a construct as well. It raises the epistemological

question whether we really perceive the things we mean to perceive. It is further based on the concept of social perception, which assumes that everything we perceive is strongly influenced by the society in which we live. Apart from these theoretical and methodological problems which have to be faced by every kind of research, the criminological construct of the reality of crime and criminal justice is as a rule incomparably safer in its reliability and validity than the media's portrayal of crime and criminal justice. Since **Wisheart's** time the social- psychological mechanism he discovered was confirmed in numerous empirical research studies (**F. James Davis** 1952; **E. Terrence Jones** 1976; **Drew Humphries** 1981). One of the most recent studies was published in New Zealand (**Jane Kelsey, Warren Young** 1982).

The thesis that the portrayal of crime and criminal justice in the media and public opinion are constantly influencing each other, and that the criminological research on the reality of crime has almost no impact on publicized opinion and on public opinion can be demonstrated through an example which has been impressively developed by **Mark Fishman** (1978): The mass media produce "crime waves", subjective impressions of periodic outbreaks or epidemics of criminal offences. In late 1976, New York City experienced such a media crime wave. The three newspapers "New York Times", "New York Daily News", and "New York Post" as well as the five local television networks reported in their newscasts case after case of violent crimes against elderly people. The media recipients received the impression that crimes against elderly people were increasing. This media crime wave lasted for about seven weeks. Newspapers and television networks all over the United States took notice of it. "Crimes against the elderly" were typical crimes with typical victims, typical offenders, and typical circumstances. The perpetrators of robbery, murder, and rape against elderly people were in most cases young colored people with long juvenile records. They came from ghetto neighborhoods in the vicinity of residential areas for elderly white people, the typical victims, who, for various reasons, mostly poverty, had not fled the inner city of New York City to move into the suburbs. The journalists used the concept of "crime against the elderly" like a film script, and during November and December 1976, they reported one brutal incident after another.

The media crime wave had no factual basis whatsoever. The crime statistics of the New York Police Department did not show any increase in crimes against elderly people for November/December of 1976. As a matter of fact, for murder of elderly people, the crime statistics even showed a decline of 19% as opposed to the previous year. 28% of the crime news referred to murder of elderly people, while in the New York City police statistics, murder of elderly people accounted for a rate of less than 1%. The crimes against elderly people in 1976 differed in no way from the crime trends of the general

population (**Fishman 1978**). Although the media crime wave had no basis in reality, it nevertheless caused an interaction between publicized opinion and public opinion. Opinion polls in the USA in May 1977 showed that 60% of the respondents stated the opinion that crimes against the elderly had risen in number. 50% of the respondents over 50 years of age feared that they might not be as safe in the street as one year ago (**Fishman 1978**). As soon as the mass media have "invented" a crime theme for their reporting, they will also report the reactions, which they themselves have caused. In this sense, mass media "create" their own crime news. Publicized opinion and public opinion have a mutual influence on each other; they interact constantly. The mass media do not only reflect the social process they inform about. They interfere on the contrary with the social process by creating reactions to their news and reporting about them. Reform proposals for the criminal justice system are made. Questions and debates are on the parliamentary agenda. New police programs are realized, and citizens' meetings are held. The official reactions make the "crime wave" seem even more believable than it was before on the basis of media reports. By means of selective reporting, the mass media direct social awareness, they shape social visibility of crime according to their media needs, neither according to criminological research nor according to the needs of social control.

Even if the media crime waves exist only in the imagination of the communicators and recipients of the mass media, they still have effects. The imaginative interaction of publicized opinion and public opinion has consequences in social reality, in the administration of justice, and even in penal legislation. This became visible as well during the media crime wave at the end of 1976 in New York City. The juvenile court system was criticized. Juvenile courts and training schools were considered too lenient and too indulgent. Under the impression of the public opinion, juvenile courts and training schools altered their practices: They inflicted more severe sentences, and they executed them more relentlessly. Bills aiming at aggravating penalties for juvenile offenders with long juvenile records, who had committed a crime against an elderly person, were submitted to the New York State legislature (**Fishman 1978**).

The reason for creating media crime waves is quite simple. Journalists approach the abundance of crime news with thematic propositions. The news theme becomes, for some time, the selective criterion and unifying concept around which news items are grouped, which are generally reported only if they correspond to a trend in crime and social control - real or alleged, past or only just beginning. "Media crime waves" result from the interaction between news organizations. In search for the subject "What is the crime news of the day?", all competitors do the same thing: They read, listen to and view each other,

and they use the same sources of news: news agency reports, press releases and police news dispatches. The press offices of the criminal police are cooperating with the mass media towards the creation of media crime waves insofar as they supply the mass media with crime news which they assume to be of interest to the public and therefore suitable for mass media presentation.

3. The Theoretical Bases

The thesis that the portrayal of criminality and criminal justice results in consequences in the personal as well as in the social reality, rests on the one hand on social learning theory (**Albert Bandura 1977**). According to this theory, behaviour is learned not only according to its success, but also through observation of models, through "substitutory" experience. Men create, through their behavior, social conditions which, in turn, affect their behavior. Men learn not only behavioral modes, but also attitudes and justifications of their behaviour from social stereo-types and social prejudices. Most of all, they learn through processes of self-encouragement in which the measure of self-reward and self-punishment may again result from social prejudices. They follow value notions and behavioral styles, because they assume that the majority of the population considers them to be correct. The mass media adjust themselves to such value notions of the public opinion; they do shape them as well. They both form and deform social behavior.

The thesis that the portrayal of criminality and criminal justice results in consequences in the personal as well as in the social reality can on the other hand, be traced back to the theory of symbolic interaction (**George Herbert Mead 1976, Herbert Blumer 1972**). In the interaction between mass media and public opinion, it is important what kind of **meaning** the mass media attribute to socially deviant and criminal behavior, how they interpret them. They do, after all, influence the society stereotypes which, in turn, enter the human interaction as interpretation. The mass media alienate the phenomenon of criminality from society. In their minds, men nurse pictures of criminality and criminals that do not correspond to the reality of crime. Such pictures result from prejudices and conceptual cliches that the mass media produce and that people believe in, because they do not have any experience with the violent crimes that are depicted. The distance reaction of the mass media, their "projecting into remote distance", and their concept of the criminal as the "bad guy" contribute to a change in the definition and the self-definition of the law violator and both reinforce and accelerate the rejectionary process from society. The law violator adopts the picture that he thinks society holds of

him. The constructed image of criminality and criminal justice delivers the measure according to which every day criminal situations in society are defined and attitudes towards criminals and towards criminal justice and the effectiveness of social control are developed. Constructed reality becomes, in our minds, reality as such, because we believe in it and adjust our behavior accordingly.

4. Media Portrayal of Crime and Criminal Justice

Numerous content analysis have performed analytic research on the form and content of the portrayal of crime in TV news programs (**Bob Roshier** 1973; **Steve Chibnall** 1977; **Joseph R. Dominick** 1973, 1978; **Drew Humphries** 1981; **Sanford Sherizen** 1978), reports, documentaries, news shows, search and seizure and entertainment programs (**Hans Joachim Schneider** 1977, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1987; **Maria Helene Stein-Hilbers** 1976 , **Werner Jubelius** 1981; **John A. Pandiani** 1978), in serious newspapers as well as in yellow press publications, and especially in caricatures, comics, and court reports in newspapers. Of utmost importance are the TV entertainment programs about crime (detective stories, Western movies), since they are broadcasted on prime time with high audience ratings, and since they outnumber, by far, any informational TV program on criminality. Moreover, they appeal intensively to both hearing and seeing. Their contents are completely detached from the reality of crime. Crime news and documentaries are incapable of correcting the portrayal of crime in entertainment programs in terms of a stronger reality orientation. Documentaries are presented predominantly in minority programs. They are broadcasted at less favorable times (late night) or in local networks and are directed mainly at an academic audience in their presentation (language, high degree of abstraction). In addition to this, they rarely try to make crime understandable as a normal, everyday phenomenon (proximity perspective). Documentaries on the contrary often employ the principle of entertainment in trying to make crime look interesting as something extraordinary, thus frequently supplementing, supporting, and enlarging the entertaining crime portrayal (remote perspective). The same is true for TV news and for crime reporting in serious newspapers, both of which differ from TV entertainment and the yellow press only in terms of form, but not of contents of their crime reporting. As crime reports and crime entertainment programs appear on the TV screen in the form of a variety program, and as crime entertainment programs frequently try to create the impression of reality, the recipient with an average education is almost

incapable of distinguishing between facts and fiction, even more so as the contents of crime report and crime entertainment are practically identical. Content analysis render conclusively a fairly uniform picture of crime, which the mass media distribute with remarkable continuity, and which they correct only insufficiently:

- Media criminality is almost exclusively violent crime between strangers. There is no portrayal of violence in the family, or among relatives, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. Neither is demonstrated that violent crimes, e.g. criminal homicide, develop in interaction processes between perpetrators and victims, who often know each other and in many cases share a more or less intense emotional relationship. Violence is presented in an embellished, aesthetically appealing fashion. The negative consequences of violence are ignored. The very frequent traffic violations, property and economic crimes are minor subjects in the mass media.

- The crime portrayal in the mass media concentrates on the perpetration and the detection of the offense. It is directed at events that refer e.g. to the exterior form of the offense, the prosecution, and the conviction. The development of crime prior to the perpetration itself, and the developments of the offender and the victim after the conviction of the offender are presented but rarely. The criminal offenses are viewed through the eyes of the investigators, i.e. in most cases the police. The investigators' personal and social backgrounds, however, are hardly exposed. Likewise, events in criminal procedure or corrections are no subjects for criminality entertainment; they are seldom taken up by crime reporting.

- In the "media world of crime", the offender is an unfair, disagreeable, reckless, and egotistical character. In most cases, he has a criminal record and plans his crimes carefully. His motives either remain obscure or are superficial greed or revenge. Underlying causes of law violations are not depicted. The description of the offender's personality development and his criminal career is but insufficiently differentiated. There are no informations about his familiar back-ground, the social position of his parents, living conditions in his parental home, or his school performance.

- In the "media world of crime", the victim is guileless and completely surprised by the crime. The offense -generally a serious violent crime- does not develop in an interactional process between offender and victim, who neither know nor have a relationship with each other. The victim never endangers himself; it never puts itself into victimogenous situations, where it may easily become a victim of crime. It is passive and never provokes the offender. It is completely guiltless, not involved in the crime, helpless and wholly at the mercy of the criminal. Contrary to the offender, it is likeable and socially useful so that the recipient can easily identify with the victim. Still, its personality is depicted

as shape- and colorless, its social background is disregarded. If it suffers damage from the offense, it is practically always death. Social and psychological damages to the victim are not made visible in the mass media, which is the reason why they are virtually unknown to the population and do not present a serious problem.

- In the "media world of crime", crime control is performed almost exclusively by the formal social control through police, courts, and correctionals. As compared to the investigators, private detectives and police lieutenants, the portrayal of judges, prosecutors, and correctional institutions is rare. In any case, the informal social control through family, school, professional and recreational peer group has no function. The social responsibility for crime prevention is disregarded as is the societal causation in the development of crime. Crime control is always a repressive specialists' occupation, which is depicted as highly successful. Practically all the crimes present are detected. As the media recipient is left uninformed on the enormous dark figure of hidden, unreported crime and on the low detection rate of identified offenders of property crime, he can indulge in a deceptive fictitious feeling of safety. The media fail to explain to their recipients that the formal social control, e.g. the police, can work effectively only if the informal social control, e.g. the family, is fundamentally intact and undisturbed.

- Neither in the personal nor in the social context, do the mass media devote sufficient treatment to the causes of crime. They analyze neither the individual crime nor criminality as a mass phenomenon. In the media portrayal, the individual act of crime is set apart from its social and personal circumstances and put into conceptual processes that are artificial and alienated from reality. This "projecting into remote distance" renders criminality both dramatic thrilling, and sensational as well as unrealistic and incomprehensible (G. Peter Hoefnagels 1973, pp. 16-42).

5. Five Examples of Particular Forms of Media Crime Portrayal

The portrayal of crime in the TV news, in the TV "search and seizure" programs and in serious newspapers, especially in caricatures and comics and in reports about court proceedings in the newspapers, does -with regard to the contents- not differ considerably from the outlined general image of criminality in the mass media which is predominantly coined by the TV entertainment programs dealing with crimes:

- TV news have a high audience rating and a high authenticity. Through the selection and placement of the news they contribute to the formation of

public opinion. The TV news "Tagesschau" (TV channel one in the Federal Republic of Germany) and "Heute" (TV channel two in Germany) concentrate in their crime reports on the outer form of the course of events in spectacular domestic and foreign violent crimes, which often bear a political reference (for example terrorism), and on their immediate reactions: investigation, search, detection, arrest, detention, conviction, extradition, deportation, expulsion. Crime news "for orientation" are mostly highlights which do not illuminate the background information and do not reveal the context for a better understanding, although there are special TV programs, "Tagesthemen" (channel one) and "Heute Journal" (channel two) for the purpose of news background information (Rita Höing 1983; cf. also Dorris A. Graber 1980).

- On the "Second German TV Channel" a television series which has been running for more than twenty years, which is very popular with the TV audience and the criminal police and which turns the search for offenders into a kind of entertainment can be watched. The public is asked to participate in the search. This TV program is also broadcasted in Switzerland and Austria. The TV series not only searches for unidentified offenders but also offers help for the clearing of crimes. In this context it publishes pictures and names of persons who are brought into connection with crimes -mostly violent crimes- without these person having been sentenced in a criminal procedure. Despite its high popularity, this TV series is problematic. Television is not an investigation authority. Because of its collaboration with the criminal police this TV series is considered to be a "mouthpiece of the police". Its ostensibly official character enhances the recipients' impression that violent crimes are widespread and that the investigations of the criminal police constitute the main task in the repression of crime. The TV series can interfere with the course of future legal proceedings because judges, especially lay judges, are negatively influenced in their attitude towards the accused by the TV portrayal (J. Edward Gerald 1983). It can complicate the rehabilitation of criminal offenders who have been searched in this popular TV program and therefore been stigmatized by a large part of the TV audience. The TV series, which is presented by a free-lance collaborator of the "Second German TV Channel" but which is made with the collaboration of the criminal police, does not offer any criminological analysis in individual cases or with regard to the development of criminality in society (Friedrich Geerds 1979; Konrad Schima s.a.; Martin Killias 1982, p.24.).

- A comparison of the portrayal of crime in the "Bild-Zeitung", the largest yellow press publication of the Federal Republic of Germany and in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", the most respected serious newspaper of Germany rendered the result that the portrayal of crime differed from one newspaper to the other only in terms of form, but not of content. The press

reporting focuses on the perpetration, the detection, and the sanctioning of the offense. The image of criminality in both newspapers is dominated by a description of the offense attaching too much importance to outer appearances. Unanimously, the problem of crime is presented in an abridged form in that both newspapers hardly devote any attention to the criminological and criminal justice problems of the offender, the victim and the formal social control, the police, courts and correctional institutions, and in that no analysis of the causation of the crime, of the perpetrator's and the victim's personalities, and of the criminal justice reaction of the courts and the correctional institutions is performed. This result comes as a surprise, since it had generally been assumed that serious newspapers offered analysis of criminality to their readers. The portrayal of criminality in both newspapers differed only insofar as the "Bild-Zeitung" presented its crime reports in a sensational and dramatizing fashion, appealing to its readers' emotions, while the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" reported in a sober, reserved and composed style about crime, to which it generally does not seem to attribute as great importance as the "Bild-Zeitung" (Bettina Schwacke 1983).

- In cartoons and comics, criminality plays an important role. They immunize children and adolescents against feelings of sympathy and make them num and insensitive to the sufferings of others. In cartoons and comics, criminals and non-criminals are easily recognizable by their "tabs of identity": The detectives are blonde, blue-eyed elite men, who fight inferior law violators, in whose faces, evil-mindedness, envy and jealousy are written all over. Law violators have bird-like, sly faces, gappy teeth with saliva dripping from them, and clawlike gouty hands. They are characterized as inferior and repulsive by their peaked caps, their protruding cheekbones, their cauliflower ears, their unshaven faces, and their receding foreheads. In cartoons and comics, there still lives the spirit of Cesare Lombroso's criminologically refuted theory, according to which, offenders may be identified by physical characteristics, criminality is hereditary, and criminality is hereditary, and criminality represents a retrogression into primitive epochs of the history of man (Albert G. Hess, Dorothy A. Mariner 1975).

- An analysis of the courtroom reports of a Westphalian provincial newspaper produced the result that the choice of vocabulary leads to similar tendencies of stigmatization for the offender. The defendant is a fiend, a "firebug", a crook, a light-finger, a have-not craving for recognition, a scoundrel, an evil, cruel father, a dodger, a boozing mate. He is bad, dangerous and dissolute. This choice of vocabulary is unobjective and degrading. The reports are enriched with inventives, swearwords and florid phrases. In order to create a round story, facts are omitted or invented. "Anything the defendant does is wrong, ridiculous, mean, stupid, malicious, irresponsible - typically criminal."

The courtroom reports of this German provincial newspaper are mere light entertaining short stories, which paint reality in black and white, nothing but variations of anecdotes. They do not fulfill their tasks in terms of control of jurisdiction and analysis of crime (**Helmut Ostermeyer** 1971).

The communicators of the mass media try to achieve suspense and entertainment by portraying criminality as something outrageous, obscure, weird, extraordinary and miraculous. Criminality is presented as appealing and beautified. The criminal event is farcical; it stimulates a pleasant creepy feeling; it makes the moral self-satisfaction and self-conceit of the non-criminal possible, who can thus set himself apart from the criminal. The media still follow in their crime portrayal an outdated theory of criminality which regards the offender as a psychopath, a mentally abnormal person. In the media the offender is a monster which deserves hate and contempt. The victim of crime belongs to the untouchables, the taboo persons, with whose true fate one better should not be concerned with, who were just hit vicariously for all other people, who live on the dark side of life, who might have even subconsciously wanted to be a victim of crime.

It cannot be argued that the false crime picture that the recipients possess on the basis of media crime portrayal can easily be corrected by the daily experience that people have with crime. It must be admitted that many people become victims of crime once or even several times in their lives. There is, however, a considerable difference between the personally experienced law violation and the kind that one reads, hears about, or watches in the mass media. While immediately experienced, crime consists most often in petty offenses, shoplifting and employee theft, minor frauds and traffic violations committed and regulated informally within the community (unless they remain undetected altogether), the mass media present capital crimes (e.g. murder, kidnapping, bank robbery) in a sensational and dramatized fashion. Immediately experienced crime differs in so many ways from the crime presented in the mass media that the actual experience of crime is very often not even perceived and recognized as such. 95% of all people in Western industrialized societies gather their "experience" with violent crime, which they consider "real" crime, from the mass media, which are considered a reliable source of information (**James Garofalo** 1981, p. 334; **Michael O'Connor** 1978). Television is perceived as the most trustworthy form of media, because it leaves its audience under the impression of being immediately involved in a situation and of experiencing contemporary events with their own eyes. Yet, even live programs deliver, through picture selection and camera angles, mere interpretations rather than complete pictures of reality. A recipients' poll of the West German TV news programs "Tagesschau" (Eyewitness News) and "Heute" (Today) rendered the result that 76% of their viewers considered these

programs to be reliable (**Michael Abend** 1974), p. 174/5. In the USA, 80% of the interviewees delivered the opinion that the actual problem of crime was just as or even more serious than, its portrayal in the mass media (**Michael J. Hindelang, Michael R. Gottfredson, James Garofalo** 1978, p. 172). These results show that the public opinion is highly perceptive to the portrayal of crime in the mass media.

6. Public Opinion about Crime

Publicized opinion and public opinion on crime and criminal justice interact constantly. If one tries to gain an insight into the subjective state of public security on the basis of victimization surveys (**Australian Bureau of Statistics** 1979, 1984; **Solicitor General Canada** 1983-1985; **David Biles** 1985; **Jan J.M. van Dijk, Carl H.D. Steinmetz** 1980; **Mike Hough, Pat Mayhew** 1983, **Akira Ishii** 1979; **Tetsuya Fujimoto** 1982; **Knut Sveri** 1982, **Luis Rodríguez Manzanera** 1984; **Marshall B. Clinard** 1978, **Hans Dieter Schwind** 1975; **Egon Stephan** 1976), attitudes corresponding to those distributed by the mass media can be found:

- Violent crimes and crimes against the person are considered to be the main criminal problems. Victimization surveys in numerous countries unanimously discovered that the importance of crime is perceived as being more extensive, serious, and threatening as frames of reference move further away from the respondent (cf., for example **Michael, J. Hindelang, Michael R. Gottfredson, James Garofalo** 1978, p. 161; **Egon Stephan** 1976, p. 326). Criminality is seen to be increasing "somewhere else" but not in the immediate residential area. Outsiders, foreigners, unknown offenders are held to be mainly responsible for the criminality which is inflicted upon the neighborhood, the society from the outside by an outgroup. With the help of this projection, which was first discovered by psychoanalysis, the law-abiding citizen is able to transfer his criminal wishes into a social outgroup, the criminals. The "we-they"-dichotomy permits the socially conforming citizen to condemn more harshly the "abnormal", "psychopathic" offenders. In contrast to this, delinquency and criminality, according to concurrent criminological research, are not distributed in the population "either - or" but rather "more or less" (cf., for example, **Maynard L. Erickson, LaMar T. Empey** 1963). Criminality is a continuum at the one end of which there are those offenders, who commit many and serious crimes and who are discovered comparatively often, and at the other end of which are people who rarely commit petty crimes and whose criminality is mostly hidden and undiscovered. The transitions are fluid. This criminological model of the distribution of criminality which is based on modern

empirical-criminological research has not yet been adopted by the mass media. It is doubtful whether it will ever be accepted by them as it makes the societal projection and thus the recipients' experience of relief impossible.

- Fear of crime has freed itself from its rational basis and concentrates predominantly on violent crimes committed by strangers. Since this type of crime is a very rare phenomenon, what the population fears is actually the least frequent of all law violations. Fear of sexual and violent crimes within the family or the community (e.g. relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbors) is less present in the population. These crimes are committed more frequently but remain to a large extent hidden and undetected, because they are not reported to the police. Neither is the population very worried about falling victim to traffic violations or to property and economic crimes, although these crimes are very widespread. Property and economic crimes, after all, have in most cases collective or anonymous, impersonal victims. Traffic violations are to a large extent considered pardonable offenses. Violent crimes committed by strangers are feared most by women and elderly people, although these sex and age groups are victimized less often than the population average (**John Braithwaite, David Biles, Ray Whitrod 1982; Yves Brillon 1983, Micheline Baril 1983**). Thus, fear of crime in women and elderly people has no basis in their actual victimization risks.

- The majority of the general population in Western industrialized societies believes that crime should be controlled on the one hand by reinforcement of the police in terms of increasing manpower and improving equipment and training, on the other hand by more severe sanctioning, sentencing, and execution of punishment (cf., for example **Albert J. Reiss 1967, Raymond H.C. Teske, Greg P. Farrar 1978**). The police performance is generally considered satisfactory. The general public overrates the importance of formal social control, of police, courts, and correctional institutions in the control of crime. The importance of informal social control in the prevention and control of delinquency through family, schools, professional and recreational peer groups is largely underestimated. Informal social control, which works towards law-abiding, socially conforming behavior in a life-long process of socialization, hereby supporting formal social control, must not, however, be confused with self-help that attempts to take the place of formal social control.

7. Consequences of Subjective States of Public Security in Reality

The constant interaction of publicized opinion and public opinion on crime and criminal justice has serious consequences in reality. As the reality of crime

investigated through criminological research has almost no impact on the portrayal of crime in the mass media, the subjective state of public security loses its basis in reality. Although it is not the mass media alone who -through their unrealistic portrayal of criminality- produce fear of crime, aggressive lifestyles and an unjustified alteration of legislation and application of penal law (**Richard W. Harding** 1984), they form an important factor in the development of these socially damaging appearances. Their contribution to the rise of these phenomena is not inconsiderable. -Contrary to the TV light viewer, the TV heavy viewer perceives the world as much more dangerous than it really is (**George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross** 1976a, 1976b; **Margaret Gordon, Linda Heath** 1981). He is more distrustful and fearful than the light viewer. He considers himself to be in danger of criminal victimization. He lives in an exaggerated fear of crime, by which he feels threatened and towards which he assumes an insecure, emotional position. Here, the emotional fear of crime is caused not only through the form of the portrayal of crime, the dramatization and sensationalization of offenses, but the contents of the crime portrayal are highly important. An empirical criminal psychological study performed in Würzburg/Bavaria concludes that the reactions to offense and offender become the more emotional, the more fearful, the less competent, the less real, the less rational the mass media information on the offender in personal and social respect is (**Michael Föster, Josef Schenk** 1984).

The portrayal of suicides on television leads to an increased number of suicides by teenagers. In the USA, the effects of 38 nationally televised news of feature stories about suicide from 1973 to 1979 were investigated. A significant increase in suicides by teenagers within seven days after the television broadcasts was found (**David P. Phillips, Lundie L. Carstensen** 1986). These research outcomes were confirmed by further empirical research carried out in New York in 1984/85 (**Madelun S. Gould, David Schaffer** 1986) and in the Federal Republic of Germany from 1981 to 1985 (**Armin Schmidtke, Heinz Haefner** 1986). The increase in suicides, which in the Federal Republic of Germany amounted for the presented age group and for the presented kind of suicide to 167% and 175%, can exclusively be explained by learning through observation of models (cf. also **P.V. Wynn, T. Vinson** 1982).

Through a long term study covering more than 30 years, it has been proved (**Leonard D. Eron, L. Rowell Huesmann** 1980, 1984) that continued viewing of violence on television by children exercises a lasting negative effect on the whole course of these children's life and that it can lead to violent and criminal behavior in their adolescence and adulthood. Further empirical-psychological studies support this research outcome (**Dorothy G. Singer, Jerome L. Singer** 1980; **William A. Belson** 1978; but cf. **Patricia Edgar** 1977; **Barrie Gunter** 1985). The television teaches its audience

aggressive styles of behavior. Through the perpetual repetition of media violence the television audience not only becomes used to react aggressively if provoking circumstances seem to require such a behavior (**Albert Bandura** 1973), but the continual repetition of violence on the television screen also causes a reduction of emotional responsiveness to violence and a growing acceptance of aggressive attitudes and values (**Richard E. Goranson** 1970). Violence in the media results in satiation, habituation and accommodation to aggression which leads to a continual decline and finally to a disappearance of emotions. The perpetual presentation of violence on television creates a climate of aggression in society (**Clement Semmler** 1975).

Aggressive pornography results in a violent attitude towards women (**Neil M. Malamuth** 1984; **Edward Donnerstein** 1984). The suffering, the pain, the physical and mental damage of the victims of rape are not shown in pornographic films and videos. Through a "beautified", "illusionary" portrayal of sexual violence -for example through an involuntary orgasm of the rape victim- is rather demonstrated that the victim of rape enjoys the rape. Such aggressive pornography justifies the use of violence. Men and women learn through models the social prejudice of "pleasant", sexually exciting, aggressive behavior (**Edward C. Nelson** 1982, pp. 203, 207). Men do no longer take up a negative attitude towards rape after they have continually been watching aggressive-pornographic films and videos; they become used to rape; they develop an aggressive attitude towards women.

Juvenile delinquency does not, as a general rule, arouse great interest in the mass media. An exception, however, is the delinquency of youth gangs. By the varying frequency of their reporting of delinquent activities of youth gangs, the mass media create the erroneous impression that the amount of youth gang delinquency rises or falls or that its distribution varies considerably in different big cities (**Walter B. Miller** 1976, pp. 95, 97, 105). The reaction of the mass media to gang delinquency satisfies the gang members' craving for recognition, and it supports the youth gang's bonds by producing a "moral panic" in the population and by creating "folk devils" (**Stanley Cohen** 1980). The more infuriated the public is about gang delinquency, the more closely the youth gangs join up. The media reporting about gang delinquency fascinates other boys' groups and has contagious effects; it shapes and reinforces the dramatic stereotypes of gang structures and activities in the public opinion. Gang research has shown that media reports about gang delinquency have a similar effect on the gang members as theatre reviews have on actors or sport reports have on professional soccer players. The gang receiving large news coverage is happily excited, since its reputation has been supported. Those gangs that are not reported about are disappointed. As sensation and drama are well received in the mass media, the gangs try to act as sensationally and

dramatically as possible (Walter B. Miller 1970, pp. 59, 61). They hope for additional publicity through spectacular law violations, to which they are spurred on by the media reports. Through the public branding, the gang members see themselves at the same time confirmed as delinquents, and they alter their personal identities increasingly towards delinquent personalities.

By the selection of special crime problems as subjects and by one-sided directing of public awareness, the mass media cause aggravations of penal laws and of their application, that do not appear justified criminologically. This negative influence of the mass media has already been proved by research that **Edwin H. Sutherland** (1950) performed on the Sexual Psychopath Laws, and that **Howard S. Becker** (1963, pp. 135-146) did on the Marihuana Tax Act with its penal clauses. A more recent example is the media coverage of the delinquency of Maori and Polynesian youth gangs in Auckland/New Zealand in the years 1978 to 1980 (**Jane Kelsey, Warren Young** 1982): Gang activities were exaggerated in the mass media and presented as an oppressing social problem. As a result of these media dramatizations, two sections of the penal code were aggravated and more severe sentences imposed upon gang members of the racial minorities. Increasing amounts of police manpower and resources became available, and the fear of gang delinquency rose in the population. The economic crisis of the mid-Seventies, unemployment, and inflation had saturated the climate of opinion with a general fear of the future which the mass media canalized against the youth gangs, thus concretizing it. The youth gangs were socially visible, well organized, and their life-style, behavior, and value notions were completely contrary to those of the majority of the population. All of a sudden, they were depicted as a threat to society, even though they had been a continuous problem. The social problem of economic crisis was turned into a personal problem of Maoris and Polynesians, who actually suffered most from unemployment.

8. Objections against the Submitted Concept

Against the concept that criminological research outcomes have almost no influence on the portrayal of crime in the mass media and that the permanent unrealistic interaction between publicized opinion and public opinion has negative consequences in reality for the development of fear of crime, and aggressive lifestyle and unjustified alterations of legislation and application of penal laws, three objections are expressed:

The mass media and some socialscientists (cf., for example **Hans-Jürgen Kerner, Thomas Feltes** 1980; **Martin Killiass** 1983; **Thomas Feltes,**

Christian Ostermann 1985) maintain that the influence of the mass media on feelings, attitudes and behavior of their recipients has not been proved, that even presently it could not be proved at all. They plead that the operating mechanisms between mass media and recipients are very complex, that therefore linear causal links cannot be established and that the influence of the mass media cannot be separated from other factors of influence. With this argument they meet the sympathies of the population who experiences it as degrading to be substantially influenced by the mass media in its feelings, attitudes and its behavior. Most people entertain the illusion and are especially proud to be much too critical in their judgement ability to be influenced by the mass media in any respect. They do not -uncritical towards themselves as they are- try to account for the influences of the mass media.

The methodological difficulties of the mass media influence research are not denied at all though there is detailed psychological research which proves the effects of the mass media on their recipients. It seems wondrous, however, that the mass media deny their own influence although they finance themselves mostly through advertising and that trade and industry spend a lot of money for commercials in the mass media although such a kind of advertising does not -allegedly- exercise any influence. It is furthermore surprising that the mass media, which -as is generally conceded- present reality-distorting violent crime portrayals, do not have to prove that their behavior is harmless, but that they lay the burden of proof on the social scientists who already have proved that the contents of the media is violent and reality-distorting.

A North American (**Wesley G. Skogan, Michael G. Maxfield** 1981) and a Swiss (**Martin Killias** 1983) study both deny that the mass media create fear of crime. They do concede that violent crimes are rare phenomena in reality, that the mass media present violent criminality constantly and excessively, and that the emotional fear of crime in the population is very widespread. Still, they deny the part the mass media play in the causation of emotional fear of crime. This fear is held to develop only through personal victimization, through physical and social vulnerability to criminal victimization, and through personal conversations about crime. The advocates of this opinion are not able to explain the contradictions arising from the results of their studies. It is inexplicable why on the one hand victimization through violent crimes is rare, but on the other hand allegedly many people should know and talk to victims of violent crimes about their criminal victimization. From our victimological experience derives the knowledge that, on the contrary, victims of violent crimes avoid talking about their victimization experiences. Furthermore, it is not plausible why personal conversations about crime should be based exclusively on actual victimization experiences, but not on the media portrayal of crimes.

A recent study, which was carried out by a research team of the "National Broadcasting Company", one of the three big commercial television networks in the USA (**J. Ronald Milavsky, Ronald G. Kessler, Horst H. Stipp, William S. Rubens** 1982) comes to the conclusion that the portrayal of violence on television has no effect whatsoever on the attitudes and styles of behavior of the television audience. This study, which wants to attribute violent behavior exclusively to the influences of the family and the neighborhood, is, however, not convincing. This is because it can not give reasons why aggressive learning models in the family and the neighborhood affect the behavior; learning models of the television, however, do not.

9. Recommendations for a Criminologically Desirable Opinion formation through the Mass Media

It is out of the question that the freedom of the press should be restricted in any way because of the reported research outcomes. The media communicators can, however, not only withdraw themselves to the attitude that the mass media have to entertain their recipients exclusively with crimes and deviant behavior. In a democratic constitutional state of Western orientation, the mass media must also fulfill the tasks of information about criminality and criminal justice in an objective way. They must instruct the potential victims of crimes about their risks of victimization, control penal legislation and the criminal justice as "watchdogs of the public", and explain to society where the borderline is drawn between allowed and forbidden behavior (borderline hypothesis) (**Kai T. Erikson** 1966; **Michael Sturma** 1984). The mass media are by no means allowed to do as they please in the fulfillment of their tasks. They must not tolerate hate propaganda (**Law Reform Commission of Canada** 1986), which, for example, during the time of National socialism in Germany led to disastrous consequences.

The mass media must not be made scapegoats, who alone are responsible for the causation of social deviance and crime. Although the present state of criminological media research suggests that the mass media contribute to the causation of crime, this does not mean that the criminological research in the relationship between mass media and criminality has come to an end. The internal pressures within the mass media organizations that lead to the distortions in crime coverage must on the contrary be investigated in detail. **Paul Wilson** and **Peter Grabovsky** of the "Australian Institute of Criminology" in Canberra are presently conducting such criminological research work. To my

mind the media communicators follow in their portrayals of crime the public opinion (interaction between publicized opinion and public opinion) about crime and criminal justice and not their personal beliefs. It is of great international interest which research outcome the "australian Institute of Criminology" will achieve. A realistic assessment of the present state seems to prohibit to withdraw from the recipients the popular entertainment forms dealing with deviant and criminal fantasies completely. The entertainment forms about criminality should, however, not deviate as extremely from reality as this is presently the case. Most of all, the mass media should in their entertainment forms on criminality not try to create the appearance of criminal reality. It should rather be a demand of truthfulness for them to point out in a suitable way that criminal television stories are games, brain teasers, modern fairy tales (Heike Jung 1985a, 1985b).

The crime reports in the mass media have to convey to their recipients a more complete and more reality-oriented portrait of criminality, offenders, and victims. Crime news have to be completed through background information, through documentaries which should be broadcasted at prime time with a high audience rating and should make the research outcomes of criminology and their practical consequences understandable to a mass audience. It is not sufficient to quote criminologists; the journalists have to make themselves acquainted with the research outcomes. It is not enough to hastily put together documentaries under the compulsion of actuality. The analysis of criminal problems requires, moreover, calmness, thoughtfulness and patience. The journalist must have the courage to face the everyday occurrence and normality of crime. This, however, is hard to do as the recipients are oversophisticated and spoiled through the criminal entertainment. But this is not impossible to achieve if the journalists can free themselves from the idea that their recipients want to see criminality in the way it is presently portrayed.

Above all, it is necessary that a larger public and especially the mass media are being acquainted with the empirical research outcomes of criminology in an understandable and modern fashion. The "Australian Institute of Criminology" performs pioneering work for the world criminology in this respect by issuing the series "Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice" since 1986. The problem lies in a better cooperation between criminology and the mass media, to which both sides must contribute. Everything which is demanded here from the mass media can be summed up in one sentence: They should contribute to peace, truthfulness and honesty so that we can cope better with the problems of social deviance, juvenile delinquency and criminality as it is the case at the present time.

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