MASS MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS OF CRIME AND CRIMINALITY

Edited by Julie B. Wiest

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EDITED BY

JULIE B. WIEST
West Chester University of Pennsylvania, USA

Sponsored by the ASA Section on Communication,
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Georg Ruhrmann is a Professor and the Holder of the Chair of Media Communication and Media Effects at the Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena in Germany. Since 2019, he is also a Lecturer in the Master's degree in Security Management at the Berlin School of Law and Economics. He received his doctorate in 1986 from Bielefeld University and completed his habilitation at University of Münster. He has been awarded the Schader Foundation Prize for "Social Sciences in Practice" in the subject of "Migration"; headed two research projects in the international research group "Discriminiation and Tolerance in Intergroup Relations," funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG); headed the research project "Threat of the Agenda," funded by the German Foundation for Peace Research (DSF); and headed three research projects in the priority program "Science and the Public," funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG). His areas of scientific interest are integration and media, as well as health, risk, and science communication.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume follows *Theorizing Criminality and Policing in the Digital Media Age*, Volume 20 in the *Emerald Studies in Media and Communications* series. Both focus on the broad theme of media and crime, as both arose from the successful 2019 Media Sociology Preconference plenary panel that I organized and moderated, titled "Media Representations of Crime: Constructing Culture and Shaping Social Life." Thank you to those panelists – two of whom authored or co-authored chapters in this volume – for sharing their insights and expertise: Valerie J. Callanan (Kent State University), Venessa Garcia (New Jersey City University), Lisa A. Kort-Butler (University of Nebraska – Lincoln), Nickie Phillips (St Francis College), and Alicia Simmons (Colgate University). Thanks also to the Media Sociology Preconference organizing committee, including chair Casey Brienza, Kenneth Kambara, Laura Robinson, and Ian Sheinheit. I also am grateful to the scholars who reviewed these chapters and whose comments and suggestions certainly enhanced the overall quality of the volume; to series editors Laura Robinson, Shelia Cotten, and Jeremy Schulz for their support and guidance; and to Emerald's fantastic publishing team, especially Jen McCall, Dheebika Veerasamy, Carys Morley, and Harriet Notman.

Julie B. Wiest
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Julie B. Wiest, West Chester University of Pennsylvania, USA

Stories about crime and criminality have long been the mainstay of news and entertainment media content, and the intersection of crime and media is a common topic in scholarly research. Moreover, substantial amounts of evidence indicate that these media depictions are highly influential, especially for consumers in economically advanced societies – who tend to have little personal experience with crime – as they form perceptions about criminality, crime rates, characteristics of criminals, and even their own likelihood of victimization. One reason relates to the sheer amount of time that media consumers spend engaged in various platforms. According to the Nielsen Company (2020), the average US adult spent nearly 11 hours per day consuming mass media during the first quarter of 2020, while the comparable global average is estimated to be about eight hours per day (Zenith Media, 2019). And there is longstanding and widespread agreement among social scientists and media scholars that media representations shape consumers' perceptions of social reality (e.g., Fox & Philliber, 1978; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gerbner, 1998; Hall, 1975; Massoni, 2004; McQuail, 1979; Medrano Samaniego & Cortés Pascual, 2007; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Smythe, 1954).

Late media scholar George Gerbner (1998) and his research team launched what is known as the Cultural Indicators Project in the 1960s to study the long-term effects of media consumption on viewers' perceptions. Among the many findings of the decades-long project was an unexpected insight related to public perceptions of crime that the team dubbed the "mean world syndrome" (Gerbner, 1998). The finding called into question taken-for-granted ideas of the time that consuming large amounts of violent media content promotes antisocial behavior, especially among children (e.g., Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972), suggesting that consuming large amounts of violent media content instead tends to increase public fear and anxiety related to crime. This concept is clearly illustrated by the fact that, despite steadily declining crime rates in the United States over recent decades, US adults tend to believe that the opposite is true and also indicate a disproportionate amount of worry related to crime and violence occurring in their own community (see Figs. I1 and I2).

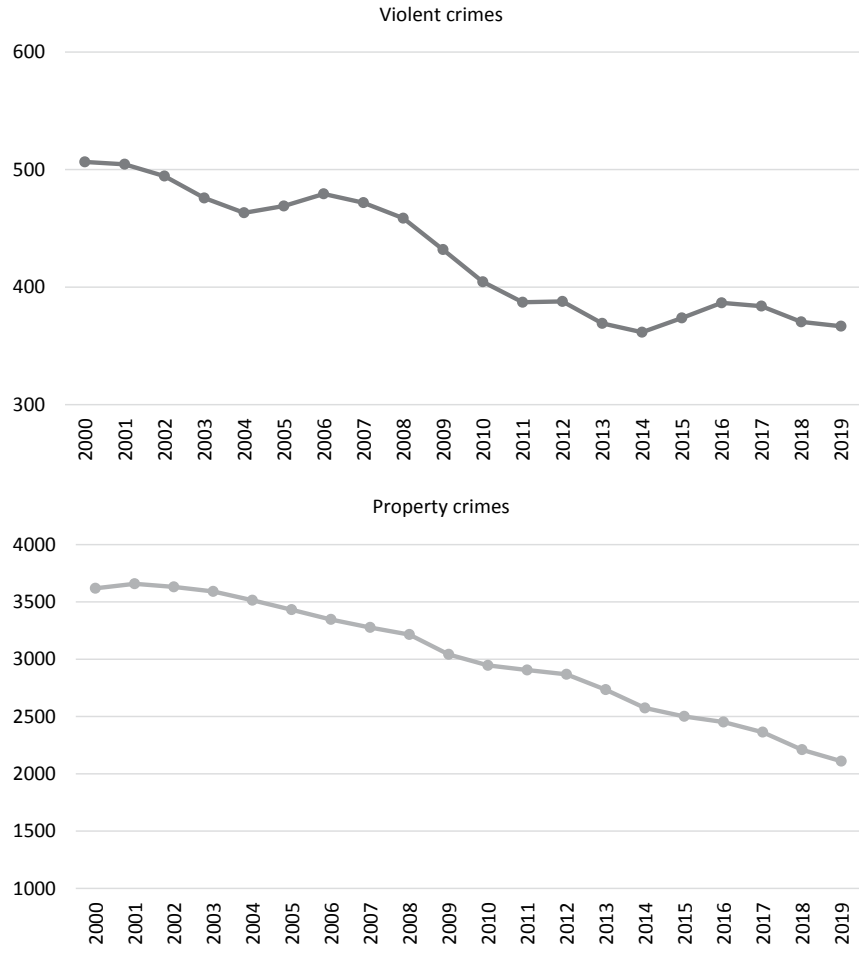

Fig. I.1. US Crime Rates per 100,000 Population, 2000–2019. *Source*: Based on data from US Department of Justice (2020).

Notes: Population figures are from US Census Bureau estimates as of July 1 for each year, except for 2000 and 2010, which are decennial census counts; violent crimes include four offenses: murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; murders that occurred as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 are excluded; property crimes include three offenses: burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft.

Ongoing examination of crime images within various types of mass media aids in understanding of the associated messages and meanings that are disseminated to consumers. Although assessing any subsequent influence on public perceptions remains difficult, comparing media representations of crime and criminality with known information about their reality can offer valuable insights. The studies in this volume will enhance the knowledge of junior and senior scholars, as well as graduate and advanced undergraduate students, in the fields of criminology, sociology, journalism, and communication/media studies, particularly because of the

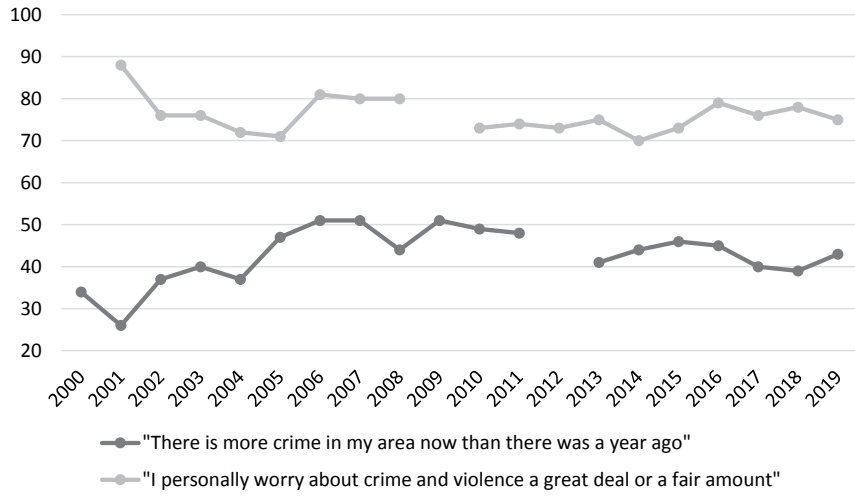

Fig. I.2. US Adults' Estimates and Worries Related to Crime, 2000–2019. *Source*: Based on data from Gallup (2020)

Notes: Data related to the question on amount of crime are missing for 2012; in other years, data are based on representative samples of US adults surveyed in early to mid-October of each year; other response options were "less" and "same amount." Data related to the question on worrying about crime are missing for 2000 and 2009; in other years, data are based on representative samples of US adults surveyed in early to mid-March of each year; other response options were "only a little" and "not at all."

inclusion of crime stories in a variety of formats and that represent media content from six nations spanning four continents.

The first four chapters focus on nonfiction media representations on platforms including contemporary and historical newspapers, television news, and video-on-demand (VOD) systems. In **"**Crime News in the Israeli Daily Press: A Comparison Between the Quality *Haaretz* and the Popular *Israel Hayom*," Alina Korn examines media representations of crime in the Israeli press by comparing reports on offending patterns in two daily newspapers, one that is considered "elitist" (i.e., *Haaretz*) and the other "popular" (i.e., *Israel Hayom*). Next, "Crime in Television News: Do News Factors Predict the Mentioning of a Criminal's Country of Origin?" by Janine Brill, Lars Guenther, Wibke Ehrhardt, and Georg Ruhrmann, is a novel study investigating the factors related to the inclusion of an accused criminal's country of origin in related news reports, as well as the potential implications.

In "Demented Mother, Maniac with a Gun, Madman: Prejudicial Language Use in Historical Newspaper Coverage of Multiple-child Murders in New Zealand," Francine Tyler analyzed 60 years of historical reporting on multiple-child murders in New Zealand to take a closer look at the longevity of "mad," "bad," and "sad" frames that have been more commonly found in contemporary studies of child murder. Then, Lorena R. Romero-Domínguez, in "Intersections between Journalistic Documentary and True Crime in the Context of VOD

Platforms: The *Alcàsser Murders* as a Spanish Case Study," offers an examination of true crime productions and investigative documentaries on VOD platforms while distinguishing between the two genres and offering insights into their divergent aims, components, and outcomes.

The next four chapters examine representations in fictional media. In "Framing Gender and Race in Television Crime Dramas: An Examination of *Bones*," Venessa Garcia uncovers unrealistic representations, as well as gendered and racialized images, within the popular television crime drama series *Bones*. Then, Jared S. Rosenberger, Valerie J. Callanan, and Darcy Sullivan, in their study, "Whose Stories? Victims and Offenders on Television's *Law and Order*," take on *Law and Order* to explore representations of crime victims and offenders on the long-running series that has likely shaped perceptions related to the US criminal justice system, victims of crime, and criminals for two decades. And Beatriz Elena Inzunza Acedo, in "The Narco as a Sui Generis Criminal Character and TV Genre," compares representations of drug figures and drug trafficking within narcotelenovelas and news accounts while identifying intertextual references that are present in both fictional and journalistic reports.

Wrapping up the volume is "'The Errors are Egregious': Assessing the CSI Effect and Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Forensic Science through a Pre- and Post-test Investigation," by Krystal Hans and Kylie Parrotta, which lends insight into the preconceptions of students who are new to forensic science, as well as their later self-assessments of acquired competencies. In doing so, the authors offer a test of the so-called "CSI effect" while also comparing the views of students in two different academic environments, namely those at an historically Black institution and others at a predominately White one.

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