

MEDIA & CRIME

Second Edition

Yvonne Jewkes



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MEDIA & CRIME

Key Approaches to Criminology

The Sage *Key Approaches to Criminology* series is intended to celebrate the removal of traditional barriers between disciplines and bring together some of the leading scholars working at the intersections of different, yet related subjects. Each book in the series will help readers to make intellectual connections between fields and disciplines, and to understand the importance of studying crime and criminal justice within a broader context of their relation to media, culture, gender, policy, law, history, and so on.

Media & Crime was the first contribution to the series and it quickly established itself as the market leader in its field. It also served as a model for the books that have followed it in the Sage *Key Approaches to Criminology* series which currently number seven with at least a further seven in the pipeline. In the five short years since *Media & Crime* was published the media landscape has altered quite dramatically, with more Internet users, the emergence and rapid ubiquity of social networking sites, increasingly sophisticated and multi-functional digital mobile technologies, more expansive and some would say insidious surveillance, and more and different ways to consume television, films and print. All these media developments have had dramatic impacts on the ways in which crime is consumed, understood, committed and punished. The time then seems right for a revised edition of *Media & Crime* which updates and adds to the original text.

Yvonne Jewkes
Series Editor

Acknowledgements

I now find myself back at the University of Leicester after 20 years away. I still think back fondly on my time as a student at the Centre for Mass Communications Research and my first job as a researcher at the then Centre for the Study of Public Order. It was in these departments that my interest in the relationship between media and crime developed and I feel fortunate to have been involved in so many projects that have allowed these interests to flourish in the intervening years. Thank you to friends and colleagues at Leicester, DMU, Cambridge, Coventry, Hull, the OU and, now, Leicester again, who have provided supportive and congenial environments in which to study and work.

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Introduction

On 1 December 2007 a 56-year-old man named John Darwin walked into West End Central police station in London at 5.30pm claiming amnesia. He told police: 'I think I am a missing person'. In fact he had been missing since 21 March 2002 when he was seen entering the sea with a red canoe in the Seaton Carew area of Teesside in the north-east of England. The alarm was raised later that evening when he failed to arrive for his night shift as a prison officer. In the days following his disappearance a huge search of the coastline was carried out, and police made numerous appeals for information or sightings, but to no avail. When the shattered remains of a red canoe were washed up a few weeks later, Darwin's family and friends feared the worst and on 21 March 2003 – exactly a year after he went missing – his widow Anne laid flowers at the beach where the broken pieces of the canoe had been found. A month later, the inquest into John Darwin's death recorded an open verdict (that is, recording a death without knowing the cause) and his widow Anne subsequently collected life insurance and pension policies worth approximately £250,000.

In the months following his surprising reappearance at a London police station there was feverish speculation in the British press about what had happened to John Darwin during the 'missing years'. On 5 December 2007 the *Daily Mirror* was the first newspaper to publish a photograph of Mr and Mrs Darwin posing happily together in Panama where they were setting up a new life together. The picture had been taken a year earlier and it was revealed that the police already knew of its existence following a tip-off from a member of the public – a woman fascinated by the case of the vanishing canoeist – who typed 'John', 'Anne' and 'Panama' into Google and came up with the image of the smiling couple on the website of a relocation company called 'Move to Panama'. Darwin was arrested on 5 December on suspicion of fraud and his wife was arrested four days later on her return from Panama where she had moved permanently six weeks before. Both were remanded in custody on charges of deception.

Among the many extraordinary details regarding this case was that the Darwins had two sons who were aged 26 and 23 at the time their father faked his death. Knowing nothing of the deception and completely fooled by their mother's feigned grief, Mark and Anthony Darwin were described by the judge as the 'real victims' in the case. In fact, John Darwin had, for the vast majority of the six missing years, been living in the family home. Their house

was a large terraced property and they also owned the house next door, which was divided into bedsits. The labyrinth of rooms that this created (spread over five floors) enabled Darwin to spend much of his time with his wife in the family home, but disappear through a small, hidden door and hide when friends or family visited. He grew a beard, affected a limp and stole the identity of a child, John Jones, who was born five months before Darwin in 1950 and had died aged four weeks. A false passport, the life insurance money his wife received when he was presumed dead, and his hirsute disguise all afforded him a reasonable degree of freedom, enabling him to make frequent trips into his home town as well as several visits abroad.

During the trial, it was revealed that John Darwin had decided to go missing out of desperation because of growing financial difficulties and impending bankruptcy. He had persuaded his wife to go along with the charade and she had done so convincingly, not only persuading her sons that their father was dead, but also taking in the police liaison officer assigned to the case. In fact, despite describing John Darwin as the driving force behind the deceit, the judge in the case was highly condemnatory of Mrs Darwin's actions and most of the British media followed his lead concentrating, not on Darwin himself, but on his wife; the 'grieving widow' who gave the 'performance of a lifetime' (*The Times*, 24 July 2008). In her defence Mrs Darwin used the little-known plea of 'marital coercion' which itself was interpreted by the court and the media as further evidence of her cunning and guile. Used only five times in the previous 75 years, this law provides that a wife has a defence to any charge other than murder or treason if she committed it 'in the presence of, and under the coercion of, her husband'. In court she described how she had been bullied, manipulated and at times neglected by John over the course of their 35-year marriage. She even tolerated him flying to the United States to meet and embark on an affair with a woman he had come across on the Internet. Telling his wife that 'he needed to get away' and take a break from being 'virtually a house prisoner', Anne was resigned to the enforced separation saying 'whatever John wanted, John got' (*Independent* 18 July 2008).

Anne's claims of an unhappy marriage to a bullying partner were somewhat undermined when the jury was shown loving and flirtatious emails the couple had sent each other, but it was her ability to sustain the lie to her children for six years that was regarded as beyond the pale by the media. A local newspaper in Teesside reported Anthony and Mark's reactions to their mother's betrayal:

Anthony said: 'Our Mam lied to our faces for six years. My Mam will do anything to save her skin. She lied in court so many times, she can't stop herself. Her maternal instincts didn't kick in for a second to protect us.' Mark, 32, said simply: 'I hate them both. She's transformed into a hideous lying bitch'. (*Evening Gazette*, 28 July 2008)

The newspaper does not report their feelings about their father, if indeed they expressed any. Meanwhile John Darwin's defence barrister Peter Makepeace's words in court were faithfully reported by the media: John Darwin had been a 'good father' until his disappearance, he was 'devoted to his family', and 'for 51 years of his life, he was in all aspects, a law-abiding, decent man' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tees/7520803.stm>). Mr Makepeace added that, since being remanded in custody, this 'exemplary father figure' was now a 'broken man' who, as an ex-prison officer, was being bullied by his fellow inmates and was taking medication for depression (*The Times*, 24 July 2008). At the end of the trial, John Darwin was sentenced to six years and three months in custody and Anne received the slightly longer sentence of six years and six months.

So why start the second edition of *Media & Crime* with the story of John and Anne Darwin? Well, in many respects this peculiar series of events illustrates some important themes of the book. Its newsworthiness assured by the sheer audacity of the two main protagonists, journalists had to do very little to garner public attention for a story that bore strong similarities to the Frederick Forsyth crime thriller 'Day of the Jackal', and so fell back on the kind of shorthand, stereotypical ascriptions that would be readily understood by audiences; notably children as victims (albeit 'children' in their twenties) and an offending woman labelled a 'bad mother'. Indeed, in a satisfying case of art imitating life imitating art, in 2010 the UK's longest-running soap *Coronation Street* featured a plotline that explicitly copied the Darwin story when Joe McIntyre set off on a boat intending to fake his own death and lie low in Ireland for a few years while his wife, Gail collected the life insurance payout to ease the financial mess that Joe had got himself into. As in real life, it was Gail who was vilified.

Aside from media misogyny and sympathy for the 'victims' of this crime, the Darwin story illustrates the ubiquity of the Internet and just how difficult it is to disappear. The fact that it was not the police who discovered the Darwins' deception, but a woman completely unknown to the Darwins, who happened to type three keywords into an Internet search engine and was immediately rewarded with a photograph of the couple in fine fettle in a real estate office in Panama, raises some interesting questions about the blurring boundaries between private and public and the opportunities that new technologies afford for a kind of democratic surveillance. The case also references a crime that many people fear becoming victims of in the 21st century; identity theft. Several newspapers carried interviews with the family of the baby boy whose identity John Darwin stole from a gravestone in a cemetery in Sunderland in order to gain a passport. John Jones' surviving brothers and sisters were swift to claim their own status as victims: 'he's brought an innocent family into this, and we're disgusted. "I felt sick to the stomach at the thought of my brother's name being used in this way. It's despicable"' (*Daily Mirror*, 12 December 2007).

The volume

In order to more thoroughly explore the relationship between 'new' media and 'new' crime such as identity theft, and also to include a more thorough discussion of crime film than was evident in the first edition, *Media & Crime* has expanded from seven to ten chapters. My hope is that the book will now map onto course curricula more satisfactorily and that *Media & Crime* can now genuinely be regarded as a 'one-stop-shop' for students on undergraduate and postgraduate modules. Like its predecessor this revised edition includes a number of pedagogic features (overviews, key terms which are highlighted at their first appearance in the chapter, summaries, study questions, suggestions for further reading, and a glossary) which, it is hoped, will make it engaging and accessible – as well as being stimulating and intellectually challenging – to students and their tutors. But, like other books in the *Key Approaches to Criminology* series, *Media & Crime* is intended as much more than an overview of the literature or a teaching text. In addition to going over necessary but well-trodden paths, it is hoped that the book will move key debates forward, develop existing knowledge and offer new and innovative ways of thinking about the relationship between media and crime (and, indeed, media studies and criminology). The first two chapters provide the foundation for what follows, and many of the themes and debates introduced here are then picked up and developed in relation to specific subjects and case studies in the remainder of the volume. Chapter 1 brings together theoretical analysis from criminology, sociology, media studies and cultural studies in order to provide a critical understanding of the relationships between these areas of academic study, and to synthesize their contributions to our understanding of the relationship between media and crime. Chapter 2 then discusses the 'manufacture' of crime news, and considers why crime has always been, and remains, so eminently 'newsworthy'. The chapter introduces a set of 'news values' which shape the selection and presentation of stories involving crime, deviance and punishment in contemporary news production. Although the chapter concentrates solely on news, these criteria – which alert us to the subtle biases that inform public perceptions of crime – extend beyond the newsroom, and underpin much of our mediated picture of crime in contemporary Britain.

The next four chapters of the book illustrate the extent to which crime and justice are constructed according to prevailing cultural assumptions and ideologies by examining a number of different issues that have gained significant media attention. Although divergent in terms of subject, the overriding theme of the book is that contemporary media deal only in binary oppositions, polarizing public responses to criminals and victims of crime, perpetuating psychically held notions of 'self' and 'other' and contributing to the formation of identities based on 'insider' and 'outsider' status. The book thus argues that the

media, in all its forms, is one of the primary sites of social inclusion and exclusion, a theme that is explored in Chapter 3 in relation to 'moral panics'. So influential has Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* been (now in its 3rd edition, 1972/2002), that a book about media and crime could not have omitted the concept he made famous. The moral panic thesis is therefore discussed, but in such a way as to move beyond the faithful re-writing of Cohen's famous study of Mods and Rockers that is favoured by many commentators, and problematize moral panics as they have traditionally been conceived.

Chapter 4 develops the previous chapter's examination of moral panics over youth, by considering the degree to which, in today's media landscape, children and young people are viewed both as folk devils, and as the victims of folk devils – notably paedophiles. The chapter discusses the extent to which mediated constructions of children in the 21st century are still seen through the lens of 19th century idealized images of childhood as a time of innocence – a (mis)representation that only serves to fuel public hysteria when children commit very serious offences or are themselves the victims of such crimes.

Chapter 5 is also concerned with constructions of offenders (and, peripherally, victims) which remain curiously embedded in the Victorian age, only here the focus is on deviant women, especially those who murder and commit serious sexual crimes. Using psychoanalytical and feminist theories, this chapter introduces a psychosocial perspective to argue that the media reinforce misogynist images of females who fail to conform to deeply-held cultural beliefs about 'ideal' womanhood. For such women their construction as 'others' renders them subject to hostile censure and their crimes can come to occupy a peculiarly symbolic place in the collective psyche.

Our gendered analysis continues in Chapter 6, which considers the ways in which victims, offenders and the police are constructed on British television. The chapter concludes that, in the main, crime narratives are constructed around female victims (usually either very young or elderly), male offenders (often black, usually strangers), either in the victim's home (increasing the impression of personal violation and female vulnerability) or in public places ('the streets', where we are all at risk), and are investigated and brought to a successful and 'just' conclusion by a caring and efficient police force that can trace its lineage back to everyone's favourite policeman, PC George Dixon who first appeared in the 1950 film *The Blue Lamp*. The salience of this archetypal narrative is explored via a brief study of *Crimewatch UK*, which also gives rise to a discussion about the extent to which media texts such as this amplify fears about crime, especially among certain sections of the audience.

Chapter 7 takes up the theme of what representations in films have to tell about the social and political contexts of real policing and changing social attitudes to crime. Given the many thousands of films that could possibly have been discussed in this chapter, it is of necessity highly selective and rather personal in its scope and content. However, the analysis of the appeal of movies

about crime and prisons, the focus on ideal masculine types in these films, the reflections on the potential power of documentaries to influence public opinion about offenders, and the discussion of what cinematic 'remakes' have to tell us about changing cultural fears and anxieties, are all intended to chime with themes raised elsewhere in this volume.

Chapter 8 returns to the theme of demonized 'others' in its examination of the extent to which surveillance technologies are employed as repressive forms of regulation and social control – but only in relation to certain sections of society. The representation of surveillance as panoptic is ultimately challenged because, not only does surveillance raise important questions about social exclusion and 'otherness' (which are especially meaningful given the preponderance of surveillance images on television and in popular culture) but it also may be regarded as something that is desirable and fun. The numerous references to Facebook that appear in this volume testify to the fact that we have become a society which likes to be watched.

Much of Chapter 8 inevitably discusses the kinds of surveillance facilitated by the Internet and World Wide Web and Chapter 9 develops this theme with another new addition to *Media & Crime*: 'cybercrime'. The subject of mixed and contested opinion about its importance and profile in the broader picture of offending behaviour, cybercrime sometimes seems at best intangible to many people. Optimists see computer-mediated technologies as a potential source of democratization and this chapter discusses examples of the 'people power' that has come with mass ownership of computers. However, not only is access to the Internet unevenly distributed across the globe, but it has also become something of an ideological battleground between states and citizens, as the case study of China discussed here illustrates. Furthermore, when we recall some of the arguments made in Chapter 8 and consider the surveillant opportunities that cyberspace brings, we may have mixed feelings about our growing dependence on the World Wide Web.

Chapter 10 attempts to round things off by offering some thoughts and words of caution about conducting research in the field of media criminology and also by reviewing and reflecting on the key themes and issues that have emerged from the previous chapters. It contends that the media's stigmatization – not only of offenders, but also of those who simply look 'different' – is a necessary counterpoint to their sentimentalization and even sanctification of certain victims of the most serious crimes, and their families. Without 'others', 'outsiders', 'strangers' and 'enemies within', the media would not succeed in constructing the moral consensus required to sell newspapers, gain audiences and, most importantly, maintain a world at one with itself.

Theorizing Media and Crime

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