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Media, Public Attitudes and Crime

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A chapter exploring media and crime in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland addresses two signally different jurisdictions. What little work there is from the Republic of Ireland relates largely to the media's role in a 1996 moral panic on gangland crime, while the literature on Northern Ireland encompasses a jurisdiction moving from a critical perspective on state/media relations to one now exploring representations of 'ordinary' crime. The chapter provides an overview of the content of crime in the media, public attitudes and fear of crime in the two jurisdictions within the context of international literature and theory.

Existing Research and Theoretical Perspectives

Within criminology, the study of media and crime is a vibrant area of research. Certain criminological perspectives such as labelling theory and cultural criminology posit that the representation of phenomena shapes understanding of them. What these perspectives have in common is a belief in the media's power to construct societal perceptions of persons, groups and events (Becker 1973; Hall *et al* 1978; Ferrell *et al* 2008). As many people have little direct experience of crime, the media provides a 'window on the world' and exerts influence through its power to shape public opinion (Barrat 1986).

The chapter provides an overview of media, public attitudes and crime in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, opening with a rehearsal of key arguments from existing research regarding the content of crime in the media and the potential consequences of this. Following this introduction, research from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is

presented. The chapter closes with a discussion of the possible links between crime in the media and public attitudes to crime, north and south of the border.

Content of Crime in the Media

Crime comprises a consistent component of media content (Williams and Dickenson 1993; Reiner *et al* 2000); it is a cornerstone of popular entertainment, and the blurring of news and entertainment in television schedules means that crime has become an everyday phenomenon (Garland 2001). To understand the reliance on crime as content, one must accept the view that certain biases inhere within the media:

> The media do not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy in themselves. 'News' is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories.

(Hall *et al* 1978: 53)

Galtung and Ruge (1973) compiled a list of 'news values', qualities of events which gave them priority for inclusion in news reporting, including factors such as: the frequency, whether it was dramatic, whether it was unambiguous or culturally proximate, the attraction of the negative, elite involvement and 'human interest'. Within this framework, serious and atypical crime provides events which are dramatic and unambiguous. These values are subject to change over time, for example, Jewkes (2011) has provided updated news values which incorporate the tabloidisation of news and include sex and celebrity.

The production processes underlying the prioritisation of crime in the media have been subject to a variety of perspectives. Media pluralism argues that the media present a vista of competing viewpoints. In this conceptualisation, the media act as facilitator for both

privileged and marginalised voices (McNair 2006). Alternatively, a critical perspective views the media as the mouthpiece of the powerful, engaged in reproducing consensus (Hall 1982/1988). The reproduction of dominant hegemonic ideology is said to be aided by media ownership, the status accorded official sources and the devaluing of certain voices (Barrat 1986; Herman and Chomsky 1988/1994).The selection of sources is pertinent in relation to crime reporting due to the role of 'primary definers', such as police and official sources (Hall *et al* 1978). This reliance has led many to argue that the media entrench dominant viewpoints while further downgrading dispossessed groups. However, recent work has considered the possibility that new media and the rise of the 'citizen journalist' has transferred some of the authority away from traditional agencies to create a greater democratisation of voices; anyone with a smartphone can now participate in a media dialogue (Greer and McLaughlin 2010).

The media has also been accused of simplifying complex events through the use of stereotypes (Barrat 1986). One example of this is evident in the portrayal of women. While women commit a minority of crime, women as perpetrators arouse intense media interest, especially when the crime is one of violence. Jewkes (2011) argues that female offenders are constructed around a narrow range of stereotypes which relate to sexuality, physical attractiveness, maternity, monsterisation and victimhood. Stereotypes also impact on how women as victims of crime are portrayed; for example, female victims and victims of sexual homicide are more newsworthy than other homicide categories (Peelo *et al* 2004), a hierarchy corresponding to newsworthiness and informed by stereotypical notions of the ideal victim (Christie 1986).

Consequences of Crime in the Media

The appetite for crime in the media has been matched by concern about its effects. Many of these concerns centred on the idea that reading about or watching simulations of violence

could lead to imitation; concern about 'copy-cat' violence posited a 'hypodermic' model in which media messages were injected into a passive audience (Lee 2007).

An alternative hypothesis suggested that crime in the media was more likely to provoke fear than imitation. Fear of crime has now become a policy goal in and of itself (Lee 2007), and the many methodological and ontological issues related to fear of crime have done nothing to reduce its political appeal (Walklate 1998). David Garland's (2001) 'culture of control' thesis suggested that in late-modernity as crime became a quotidian reality, the 'crime complex' created an embedded sense of fear, inflamed by political rhetoric and media saturation, which manifested a sense of perpetual crisis. Certainly, media research has suggested that news reporting may have an impact on fear of crime (Williams and Dickenson 1983). The difficulty in fear of crime research has, however, been in demonstrating the presence of a relationship between fear and media consumption; later analyses have shown that the relationship is often weak, and may be reliant on the *reception*, rather than the volume, of crime in the media (Ditton *et al* 2004).

The media has also been accused of fuelling moral panics. Moral panic refers to periods of intense concern about an issue, facilitated by alarmist media reporting, wherein social problems are 'defined and shaped' (Cohen 1972: 7). The concept was popularised by Stan Cohen, who used the term in reference to clashes between the Mods and Rockers in 1960s England. A moral panic occurs when a threat emerges, branded by Cohen as a 'folk devil', which is then portrayed by the media in a limited way and in a manner which exaggerates the threat. The media is also complicit by providing a mouthpiece for 'experts' who contribute to the escalation (Cohen 1972; Hall *et al* 1978) and in terms of the commercial success which flows from many moral panics (Garland 2008).

The preceding sections have outlined the existing research and theoretical perspectives on media, public attitudes and crime. The following sections apply these perspectives to the particular cases of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Republic of Ireland

Content of Crime in the Media

In line with existing research, the Irish media tend to prioritise serious, atypical crimes. Michael O'Connell has conducted the most extensive empirical research into the content of crime in the media in the Republic of Ireland. He demonstrated that newspapers in the jurisdiction, at the time, appeared "with almost chemical purity, to represent crime frequency perfectly negatively' (O'Connell 1999: 199).

O'Connell analysed 2,191 articles in a two-month period and found that extreme and atypical crimes were more commonly reported and that these offences received greater coverage in terms of word count than other crimes. O'Connell compared certain crimes as a proportion of the total and compared these to the proportion of the same crime in official crime figures. He found that murder was reported at 3,075 times the level of its actual incidence in the official figures. The proportion of armed robbery in the sample was 176 times the proportion of armed robberies recorded in the official figures. The wordage of all articles relating to Irish crimes was then calculated: 25.7 per cent of all words related to the crime of murder, while rape constituted the second largest category with 13.24 per cent of all words. Thus, the crimes which were the most dramatic, and yet which were negligible in official crime figures, were the most commonly reported in the newspapers.

The preference for atypical crime has also been noted by O'Donnell (2005) who found that while rising levels of violent crime in the 1990s became a focus for media attentionalate-

1990s drop in property offences received little coverage. A reporting hierarchy exists even within the category of property crime, with relatively minor but more common offences receiving little attention (McCullagh 1996). The media preference for negative stories has had a considerable impact in the context of Limerick city; reporting on the city is predominantly negative in the national newspapers, with 70 per cent of print articles prioritising the issue of crime contributing to the 'further stigmatisation and pathologising of the people and the place' (Devereux *et al* 2011: 213).

O'Connell (1999) also found a general tendency towards pessimistic accounts in articles which were written from a 'meta' or 'macro' perspective, i.e. stories written about the criminal justice system rather than a one-off crime event. However, these stories were not typical fare and most Irish reporting presented crime news as episodic, and absent a wider discussion of structural factors (O'Connell *et al* 1998; Devereux *et al* 2011; Maguire and Carr 2013).

Irish research also supports existing findings which show that tabloids report more crime news than broadsheets; O'Connell *et al* (1998) found that tabloid titles, such as the *Evening Herald* and the *Star*, carried proportionately more crime news, with less in the broadsheet *Irish Press* and *The Irish Times*. The *Star* and the *Evening Herald* also devoted proportionately more space to personal violent crime, and tended to have more prominent headlines.

Irish research has also noted the differential reporting between national and local media. Local media is particularly robust in the Republic of Ireland (O'Mahony 2000), and while national titles focus on the most serious crimes, local newspapers provide something akin to a court reporting service which runs the gamut from the most serious to the most mundane offences. Local crime news also deploys less sensationalist language (Healy and O'Donnell

2010). The sensitivities of local reporters can often provide context; by contrast, the 'parachuting' in of Dublin-based reporters has been cited as a cause of sensationalist reporting in Limerick (Devereux *et al* 2011).

One limitation regarding the research in the Republic of Ireland has been its focus on press reporting over other media. This is partly due to the ease of access for researchers (McCullagh 2007) and may be vindicated somewhat by the Republic of Ireland's high levels of newspaper readership (Elvestad and Blekesaune 2008). However it remains the case that the research thus far presents an incomplete picture of the representation of crime in the Republic of Ireland. The most comprehensive research available (O'Connell 1999) was conducted in 1993/94, and focussed only on print news; follow-up research which explored an expanded range of media would provide an essential comparison point between various media and across a longer period.

Crime Sells

As noted above, the prioritisation of bad news is a well-worn theme within media and crime research. In the Republic of Ireland, the commercialisation of crime led to fundamental changes in news reporting. One media group, Independent Newspapers, which exercises considerable influence in the market (McCullagh 2007), formed a strategy in the early 1980s to place crime at the centre of news content. Editorial changes at the *Evening Herald* ushered in a new era of reporting which conveyed a steady diet of crime news and a sales strategy directed towards a younger, professional, urban market (Kerrigan and Shaw 1985). Kerrigan and Shaw argue that while there was no 'sinister' motive behind this strategy, a climate of fear can have commercial and electoral benefits. The tangible effects of a deliberate media campaign were evident in the public opprobrium felt towards joyriding, branded a serious social problem by the *Evening Herald* in 1985, despite a 2.6 per cent drop in crime in 1985

(which went unreported by the newspaper). Joyriding became the bête noire of the *Evening Herald*, leading to the hasty opening of a detention centre for young persons on Spike Island in Cork (Kerrigan and Shaw 1985). The *Evening Herald* was not alone in its changing approach to crime news; an article in *The Irish Times* which predicted that one-fifth of all Irish households would be burgled in 1984 was based on information provided by an insurance company (O'Mahony1998).

The ideology of journalists has also been investigated as a possible influence of media content. O'Connell *et al* (1998) conducted interviews with the crime correspondents of national newspapers. The correspondents from the *Star* and *The Irish Times* believed that readers understood that crime reporting was unrepresentative; however while the *Star* correspondent stressed demand for entertainment, *The Irish Times* correspondent stressed journalistic integrity. In contrast, the *Evening Herald* correspondent believed instead that Ireland was experiencing an acute law and order crisis. These views are in accordance with the policy of crime saturation implemented at the *Evening Herald* in the 1980s (Kerrigan and Shaw 1985). Irish journalists have ranked themselves to the political left of both readership and ownership (Corcoran 2004); however, organisational restraints, and the financial benefits of crime news (Devereux *et al* 2011), may render much personal ideology moot.

1996: An Irish Case of Moral Panic?

While the Republic of Ireland had traditionally been a country 'not obsessed by crime' (Adler 1983) it experienced something of a moral panic during the mid-1990s on the issue of gangland crime. In early 1996, three murders in rural Ireland appeared to disabuse the notion that crime was an urban preserve (Kilcommins *et al* 2004). However, it was the murders of Garda Jerry McCabe, and of the investigative journalist Veronica Guerin,[i] in June of that year

which 'generated the conditions where a harsh response to perceived lawlessness became acceptable', creating 'a textbook case of moral panic' (O'Donnell 2011: 78).

During this period the media and politicians engaged in sensationalist discourse as something akin to a 'state of emergency' was declared (Kilcommins *et al* 2004). Periodic concerns about rising crime rates are often linked to fear of the 'imminent collapse of the moral order' (Tomlinson *et al* 1988: 13) and the events of 1996 provoked agonised questions on the state of Irish society. The shootings sparked a sense of crisis, and were believed to be symptomatic of the 'palpable, inner decay of Irish mores and the atrophy of key institutions, such as the Catholic Church' (O'Mahony1996: vii).

Key to understanding this reaction is the fact that opposition parties, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats, had sought to make political gains by promoting the crime agenda, especially since the Fianna Fáil annual conference of November 1995. Meade (2000) cites the party's increasingly sensationalist rhetoric during this period and contends that the Irish public was already primed for a moral panic through a process of sensitisation. O'Mahony (1996) quotes the speech from Fianna Fáil justice spokesperson John O'Donoghue at the 1995 conference, wherein he claimed that '1995 would be remembered as the year of the criminal'.[ii] Newspaper interest in crime had also escalated; the number of news stories in *The Irish Times* referencing 'organised crime' rose from 34 in 1994 to 144 in 1996 (Meade 2000). Crime reporting had become a significant feature of many newspapers by the 1990s, and coverage was frequently gossipy and included in the lifestyle sections of newspapers (O'Brien 2007). Newspapers led with allusions to the criminals as 'untouchable' mobsters (Hamilton 2007; O'Brien 2007) and this language migrated to the Oireachtas, the Irish parliament, where the concept of untouchability was pushed by the opposition parties. The 'framing' of the events did not allow for informed or reasoned debate on alternatives. For example, Hamilton (2007: 102) writes that 'some of the speeches made by TDs were

indistinguishable in both their content and style from articles in the tabloid press'. The apparent 'democratisation' of the media afforded uninformed alarmist views equal weighting and the agenda-setting role of opinion polls contributed white noise over real debate (O'Mahony 1996). As O'Mahony (1996:15) has further noted, this led to a self-sustaining process of escalating concern and coverage:

> The circle is complete: media portrayals of crime instil fear and profound concern in the public; the public express their concern to politicians who in turn vie with each other to articulate, in the most sensational language, a tough philosophy of curtailment and containment of crime.

The impact of aggressive media reporting has been linked to a political willingness to act and legislative activity. Hamilton (2005) argues that while the term moral panic has been 'accepted uncritically' by Irish criminologists in relation to the events of 1996 it remains a useful analytical tool especially in the context of the legislative innovations it sparked. The events of the summer of 1996 left a tangible legacy through the 'Summer Anti-Crime Package' of legislation: the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996, the Criminal Justice (Drug Trafficking) Act 1996 and the Bail Act 1997 made serious encroachments into the presumption of innocence through the constitutional amendment authorising preventative detention and by allowing inferences from silence (Hamilton 2007). Meade (2000: 2) writes that the public 'passively accepted the diagnosis' of a society overrun with crime, so much so that in 1996 almost half of those surveyed in an IMS/*Independent* poll believed that crime was the most important issue facing the country (O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001).

However, the anxiety experienced during this period was unsustainable. While 41 per cent of respondents named crime as the most serious issue in the 1997 election, only 20 per cent of the registered electorate had voted in the Bail Referendum of 1996 (Kilcommins *et al* 2004).

The months which had elapsed before the Bail Referendum was held in November of 1996 had seen public concern wane such that when the new laws on bail came into effect in 2000, anxiety had dwindled and many of the law and order promises made were forgotten (O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001; Kilcommins *et al* 2004; O'Donnell 2011). The anxiety had passed, but its legislative legacy remained, alongside a new cultural touchstone for the Irish people.[iii]

Tabloids and Victims

The media landscape in Ireland is now part of a modern, Western trend, which includes a concentration on celebrity news, a fragmentation of audience due to a proliferation of media, and the increased prominence of tabloids (McCullagh 1996; O'Mahony 2000). The increasingly robust Irish tabloid market has faced criticism for its aggressive reporting of criminal trials and its fetishisation of victims (O'Mahony 1996; O'Brien 2010).

The prioritisation of the victim would also appear to have a broader resonance among the Irish media. In line with Garland's (2001) 'crime complex' ,there is some evidence of a turn towards this manner of reporting, for example, in the greater newsworthiness of crimes with a vulnerable victim and invulnerable offender (O'Connell 1999). McCullagh (2006) too outlines the hierarchy of victims of homicide, concluding that newsworthiness increased in cases with 'middle-class' perpetrators and victims.

The preference for vulnerable victims (O'Connell 1999) often finds expression in the preference for female victims. Carr and Holt (2010) have explored the issue of femicide in newspaper reporting and found a binary of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' victims. Women deviating from the conventional role of wife and mother were viewed as less 'worthy'. This good/bad dichotomy (Inglis and MacKeogh 2012), evident in the news reporting of women as victims, is also present in the reporting of women as offenders. Women who commit crimes

are often viewed as unnatural because of the stereotype of women as non-aggressive (O'Sullivan 2008). This is especially so with women in prison who are typically 'represented in a partial, hostile, indeed, mythical manner' (Quinlan 2011: 244). Research into the treatment of female offenders in the Irish press has also found that women tend to be portrayed in a limited range of roles linked to gender stereotypes (Black 2009).

Media representation is a double-edged sword. While it can be problematic and one-dimensional, the media has also been instrumental in raising awareness about hidden issues like violent and sexual offences against women and children, issues which were absent from press reporting in the past (Keating 2012). Increased media coverage of sexual offences has corresponded with increased reporting to the police (O'Donnell 2005). Media mobilisation has also provoked legislative reform, such as the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990 and the Criminal Justice Act 1993 following media outcry over the perceived leniency of sentences for sexual offences (O'Mahony 1996). It could be argued that these developments are part of a legitimate realignment of understanding about sexual violence and violence against women rather than a punitive project allied to the rise of the victim.

Conservatism

Despite the tabloidisation of the media in the Republic of Ireland, O'Donnell and Jewkes (2011) contend that broadsheets continue to set the agenda, providing insulation against sensationalism. While some research has found a turn towards more punitive commentary, for example, with regard to fears surrounding sex offenders in probation news stories, these concerns were still found to be in the minority (Maguire and Carr 2013). Therefore, while tabloids continue to make-inroads, tabloidisation has not gripped Ireland to the same extent as Britain, due to 'divergent socio-political cultures' (O'Donnell and Jewkes 2011: 76). Despite some notable exceptions it remains rare that tabloid titles set the agenda in Irish politics.

Therefore, although the media may resemble Britain's, it is qualitatively different and possessed of a cultural 'Irishness', identifiable by a 'sense of societal familiarity, belonging and ownership' which engenders an awareness of community (O'Mahony 2000: 18). The smallness of the jurisdiction creates a 'national village', wherein the relationship between media and politics can be characterised as *both* intimate and ruthless (O'Mahony 2000: 18). However, while O'Mahony claims that the Irish media display a lack of deference towards those in power, others have characterised the Irish media as conservative. Conway (2010), for example, describes the media reaction to a major corruption scandal among the gardaí in the late-1990s as reactive rather than proactive; O'Brien (2007) too stresses that this story was broken by politicians rather than journalists. Conway's analysis of press discourse suggested that the media was keen to adopt explanations which could maintain the status quo. The homogeneity of the Irish media also discourages alternative voices, and the news content across various outlets and titles is remarkably uniform (O'Mahony 2000).

The legacy of censorship in the Republic of Ireland may also underlie the conservatism of media reporting. Restrictions imposed both formally and informally can foster an atmosphere of caution. Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act 1960 empowered the government to prevent the broadcasting of material likely to incite persons to crime, or which tended to undermine the authority of the state. Dating from the eruption of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland in the late-1960s this legislation was used to prevent the broadcasting of material deemed sensitive. The effects of this were palpable in the jailing of a journalist in 1972 and in a slew of news stories, not directly related to 'the Troubles', which were adversely impacted as a result of these censorship restrictions (Purcell 1991). The conservatism of the media has also been linked to the influence of the Catholic Church, and the imposition of unyielding moral codes which were enshrined by the state in legislation such as the Censorship of Publications

Act 1929. Censorship therefore operated not only in relation to political subversion, but also in the realm of perceived moral subversion (Inglis and MacKeogh 2012; Keating 2012).

In summary, beyond the events of 1996, crime has tended not to be used as a tool for electoral gain by Irish political parties (Kilcommins *et al* 2004). Related to this political reluctance to politicise crime, the Irish media can be categorised more by reference to conservatism than to sensationalism, despite some inevitable elements of tabloidisation.

Northern Ireland

Until recently, discussions of media and crime in Northern Ireland focused on 'the Troubles' with little discussion of how 'ordinary' crime was represented. This is unsurprising given that political violence in Northern Ireland received blanket coverage from 1970 (McCann 1973), becoming, in effect, a form of war reporting (Schlesinger 1978/1987). While in the Republic of Ireland political crime is usually absent from criminological research (Tomlinson *et al* 1988, and see for example O'Connell 1999), in Northern Ireland the situation is reversed and ordinary crime tended to be pushed out by a focus on the subversive. This ambivalence about categorisation reflects an ontological crisis which sits uneasily with the case of Northern Ireland and highlights the different realities 'crime' assumes. The literature on media in Northern Ireland is therefore signally different from that produced in the Republic of Ireland. The representation of 'ordinary' crime is not directly comparable as there is little research of this nature. However, the work which has emerged on the media and 'the Troubles' provided a fundamental critical perspective on state/media relations.

Reporting 'the Troubles'

The print market in Northern Ireland is small and competitive and the marketplace is dominated by three titles, the *Irish News*, the *Newsletter* and the *Belfast Telegraph* (Greer

2003). Both the *Irish News* and the *Newsletter* are avowedly ideological, serving the Nationalist and Unionist communities respectively, while the *Belfast Telegraph* positions itself as neutral (or 'bias by omission', Rolston 1991). Greer (2003) has highlighted how newspapers' established ideology determines readership, which can act as a bar to proprietorial interference.

Unlike print journalism, television news reached both communities at once (Spencer 2004). However, television news has also been accused of being complicit with state interests during 'the Troubles'. The 'reference upwards' system existing at the BBC and ITV from the early 1970s stifled contentious comment as senior-level approval was required for stories about Northern Ireland; in practice this form of internal censorship was targeted at pieces which featured Republican or Nationalist perspectives. Curtis writes that this bias gradually solidified as a BBC ban on televising Republican interviews (Curtis 1984/1996). Schlesinger argues that while the BBC could not be viewed simplistically as an arm of government, its role in 'upholding the legitimate established order… means that the BBC is essentially for order as it is defined by the state' (Schlesinger 1978/1987: 222).

Northern Ireland, in common with the Republic of Ireland, has a legacy of censorship. The 1988 Broadcasting Ban, characterised as 'the most stringent piece of peace-time censorship', prohibited statements from representatives of various proscribed organisations, as well as representatives of Sinn Féin (Moloney 1991: 27). The 1988 Ban demonstrated the media's role in the 'propaganda war' waged in Northern Ireland; the media was crucial in 'one of the most concerted and concentrated exercises in labelling ever undertaken in peace time' as the British state sought to rebrand IRA activity as criminality rather than political violence (Hillyard 1982: 37). The 'oxygen of publicity' argument, namely, that coverage of violence lent support to paramilitary organisations, was used to support these restrictions; tabloid titles especially internalised this rationale and were critical of reporting deemed inflammatory

(Moloney 1991). Rolston (1991) also argues that the timidity of regionally-based journalists was rationalised by the fears of inciting further violence.

The self-censorship exercised by journalists in Northern Ireland also had a 'chilling effect' beyond reporting of 'the Troubles'. When allegations of institutional abuse at the Kincora Boys' Home in Belfast first emerged in the late 1970s the *Belfast Telegraph* took a cautious approach and decided not to run the story (Rolston 1991). The story was highly politicised, involving the Protestant churches and allegations of a cover-up against the British state (Greer 2003). A former editor of the *Irish News*, traditionally a newspaper of the Catholic Hierarchy (Rolston 1991), has also noted the newspaper's process of 'coming to terms' with news stories alleging clerical sex abuse (Greer 2003: 108). However, by the mid-1990s, institutional and clerical sex abuse had become the 'dominant theme' of the reporting of sexual offences in Northern Ireland. The prevalence of such stories across nationalist *and* unionist newspapers demonstrated the degree to which the reporting of sexual offences transcended community divisions (Greer 2003).

Media reliance on official sources also contributed to state-leaning bias (Kelly 1986). News outlets such as the *Irish News* which directly challenged the authority of the police and the government had fractious relationships with these institutions which adversely impacted informal access to police sources (Greer 2003). This exposes the difficulty of 'manufacturing consent' in a divided society where a consensus cannot be said to exist (Schlesinger 1978/1987; Greer 2003). As Greer (2003: 187) observes:

> Northern Ireland is fractured politically, culturally, socially, economically and geographically, and the changing depth and direction of its many fissures influences profoundly the nature of the news that is produced. It is a fundamentally divided society.

Rolston (1991) found the widest editorial differences between the *News Letter* and *Irish News* as these titles focused on British and Republic of Ireland news respectively. Political alignment was also evident in the reporting of specific incidents as the newspapers downplayed the sectarian nature of killings committed by 'their' side, while highlighting violence perpetrated by the 'other' side. The less politically-aligned *Belfast Telegraph* also perpetuated unarticulated values in its reporting, with different weighting afforded to Protestant and Catholic deaths: 'the presumption is that a Catholic victim *is* a republican unless it is proven otherwise' (Rolston 1991: 170).

Elements of cultural criminological exploration are also to be found from Northern Ireland, for example, Rolston's (1989)exploration of fictive portrayals of 'the Troubles' which demonstrated that Republican figures were selected as protagonists over Loyalist figures. Rolston's work has also explored how collective memory and identity are reinforced through wall murals. Rolston has documented the evolving use of Loyalist and Republican symbolism in Northern Ireland's iconic wall murals, looking particularly at how they have adapted in response to the peace process. The allocation of state resources with the purpose of 'rebranding' the murals for a shared future has demonstrated the differential ability of the Republican and Loyalist traditions to adapt a new language of community (Rolston 2010; 2012).

Reporting 'Ordinary' Crime

Following the ceasefire of 1994, more attention was devoted to 'ordinary' crime (Hollywood 1997; Greer 2003). The unfamiliar violence-shaped hole left by the peace process created the vacuum necessary for a moral panic over drug use; dance culture became the new politically acceptable adversary and those involved 'were automatically "deviantised" by journalists acting as agents of moral indignation' (Hollywood 1997: 65). Hollywood's six-month

analysis of the main print titles showed that following the ceasefire there was a 40 per cent increase in the coverage of drug crime. The moral panic also served to legitimise recruitment to a police force that was otherwise facing rationalisation, while allowing the Nationalist *Irish News* to normalise reporting of policing. This move was in line with new ownership at the *Irish News* in the 1980s during which IRA death notices were no longer printed while recruitment notices for the RUC were carried alongside more vocal criticism of the IRA and Sinn Féin (Rolston 1991; Greer 2003).

In a similar vein, Chris Greer (2003) has documented the increased reporting of sex crime in the Northern Irish print media from 1985 until 1997. This is the first comprehensive research of its kind into 'ordinary' crime and its representation in Northern Ireland. Greer suggested that in a contested society, sexual offences have the potential to garner universal condemnation and offer a neutral role for law enforcement in post-conflict transition. Greer's research demonstrated the importance of news values in determining news content indicating that while seriousness and novelty were both significant news values, they were superseded in importance by proximity: once *The Irish Times* was excluded from the sample, 80 per cent of crimes reported were committed in Northern Ireland. Greer's research also demonstrated the different reporting styles between the mostly broadsheet dailies and the tabloid Sunday titles; broadsheets reported serious crimes while tabloid coverage also encompassed trivial or comedic stories.

In light of comments above regarding the size of the jurisdiction and its impact on reporting, is notable that Northern Irish journalists considered the smallness and sense of community as a barrier to sensationalist reporting: 'the production of news in a small jurisdiction carries with it a certain sense of social responsibility that serves to restrain the representation of sex crime' (Greer 2003: 162). However, this sense of responsibility was interpreted by tabloid journalists as engagement with a punitive message on sex crime, leading to a 'moral

consensus' mode of reporting which 'explicitly promotes popular fear and loathing' (Greer 2003: 162).Greer (2003) also found heavy use of well-worn tropes, such as the narrative of the sex offender as monster and as 'other'. The use of stereotypes has also been found in relation to how women were represented in the context of 'the Troubles' as fictive accounts portrayed women who engaged in violence as unnatural (Rolston 1989). Research in Northern Ireland has also found that reductive ideas about women underpin news reporting; the gendered gaze was particularly noticeable in relation to the salacious portrayal of women who had committed violent offences (Gordon and Black 2010).

In line with the general literature, research in Northern Ireland has found that crime is reported as episodic. Research examining the representation of hate crime, for example, has shown that it is reported without discussion of racism, as a series of dramatic one-off incidents (NICVA 2005). Greer found that despite an exponential increase in the amount of sex crime reported across his sample period, the issue had more accurately been covered in 1985 than in 1997. Over this period he found that analysis became less common, with greater focus going to discrete events: '[w]hat is left behind is a news product which aims primarily to shock and frequently, it seems, to entertain' (Greer 2003: 89).

The chapter has so far outlined research on the content of crime in the media in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The following section examines public attitudes to crime north and south of the border, and explores the possibility that crime in the media can provoke fear of crime.

Public Attitudes, Fear of Crime, and the Media

Crime in the media was initially assumed to inspire copycat offending; more recently the link has been made between crime in the media and fear of crime (Lee 2007). In the Republic of Ireland, fear of crime became a policy area for government with the establishment of the now

defunct National Crime Council in 1999 (Department of Justice 2009). While a variety of surveys have measured public perceptions of crime in the Republic of Ireland, these are sporadically undertaken which makes reliance on official statistics necessary (Healy and O'Donnell 2010; O'Donnell 2011).The available figures suggest that Irish society was largely unconcerned with crime until a rise in fear of crime in the mid-1990s (Whelan and Vaughan 1982; Breen and Rottman 1985; Kilcommins *et al* 2004), perhaps linked to the 'media-orchestrated "moral panic"' of 1996 (O'Mahony 2000 19). Thereafter, the Republic of Ireland has been characterised by European and international surveys as having a high fear of crime (van Dijk and Toornvliet 1996; Eurobarometer 60 2004; 68 2008).

In contrast to this categorisation, Irish figures suggest that feelings of safety have remained relatively stable, with approximately three-quarters of respondents feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' walking in their neighbourhood after dark (CSO 1998; CSO 2010). There is also a general downward trend in the proportion of respondents expressing worry that they or a family member will become a victim of crime (Browne 2008). However, a perception gap exists; despite stable or increasing feelings of safety, respondents believe that crime nationally is rising. This gap is also evident in the discord between perceptions of crime nationally compared to perceptions of crime in respondents' local areas; consistently, more respondents felt that crime in Ireland generally is getting worse while being much less committed to this view with regard to their own area (Browne 2008; CSO 2010).Research from the Republic of Ireland also shows a pronounced age and sex differential, with females and older persons reporting a higher level of fear. In 2010, 41 per cent of men reported feeling 'very safe' walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark compared to just 22 per cent of women. The age differential is also evident: 19 per cent of those aged 65 or over reported feeling 'very safe', compared to 36 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 (CSO 2010).

North of the border, the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) has provided data on public perceptions of crime sporadically from 1994/95 (Boyle and Haire 1996) and on an annual basis from 2005. Like the Republic of Ireland, figures from Northern Ireland also found that respondents considered crime in their local area to be lower than regional crime levels (Boyle and Haire 1996). Levels of fear in Northern Ireland have experienced a slight rise and fall; the proportion of those feeling 'very unsafe' rose from 8 to 13 per cent between 1998 and 2003/04, however, since then there has been a general downward trend to a low of 7 per cent in 2012/13 (Campbell and Freel 2013; Cadogan and Campbell 2014). These feelings of fear and insecurity are not evenly distributed throughout the community in Northern Ireland, however. The most recent NICS suggests that worry about crime and income is inversely proportionate to an individual's income (Cadogan and Campbell 2014). Geary *et al* (2000) found that Catholic communities tended to perceive higher rates of crime and lower levels of reporting to the police than Protestant communities; however, other research has suggested that there were starker differences in levels of fear between urban and rural communities than between religious communities, with urban communities experiencing generally higher rates of fear (O'Mahony *et al* 2000).Northern Irish research also shows differences by age and sex with higher rates of fearfulness for females and older persons. The most recent NICS found that 11 per cent of females felt 'very unsafe' walking alone in their area after dark versus 3 per cent of males while 13 per cent of those aged 75 or over would feel 'very unsafe' walking in their area alone after dark compared to just 4 per cent of the youngest age group (Cadogan and Campbell, 2014).

Is Fear of Crime Linked to the Media?

The link between the media and fear of crime is intuitive; however, it has proved difficult to show definitive media effects (Ditton *et al* 2004). More recent research has suggested that the

interpretation and *reception* of media content may be the key to understanding this link (Reiner *et al* 2000; Ditton *et al* 2004).

Research north and south of the border has shown a marked disparity between perceptions of crime at a national and local level. In Northern Ireland, Boyle and Haire (1996: 1) have cited media consumption as a means of explaining this perception gap, suggesting that:

> When people are asked to compare crime in their area with their concept of crime as it exists in the rest of Northern Ireland they are most likely to be comparing real first hand local experience with a view which has been formed more generally.

There is no simple linear relationship between crime, media representation and fear of crime. The outpouring of shock following the killing of Veronica Guerin in the Republic of Ireland in 1996 was not matched in Northern Ireland by the assassination of investigative journalist Martin O'Hagan in 2001 (O'Donnell 2005).Further, despite rising numbers of 'gangland' murders in the early 2000s, concern about crime did not increase as it had done in 1996; Kilcommins *et al* (2004) suggest that this may be due to the labelling of victims as 'known to the gardaí', which reduced the impact of the killings on middle-class fears. Middle-class insecurity is an element of the 'crime complex' in which fear of crime becomes an 'organising principle' (Garland 2001). In the Republic of Ireland, it could be argued that this move was deliberately undertaken in the early 1980s when crime news was prioritised at the *Evening Herald* in an attempt to resonate with young, urban professionals (Kerrigan and Shaw 1985). However, Kilcommins *et al* (2004) argue that while crime has become a 'staple' of news reporting, fear of crime has not reached endemic levels in the Republic of Ireland and that, outside the mid-1990s panic, concern about crime is easily displaced by other concerns, such as the economy. Crime in the Republic of Ireland is thus generally not a live

political issue (O'Donnell and Jewkes 2011), accordingly situating Ireland some distance from Garland's 'crime complex' (2001).

It seems that recorded crime is not directly related to fear of crime, but that *interpretation* of media reports may be. Concerns about crime rise and fall independent of the actual levels of crime. It is therefore supposed that perceptions of crime derive from some source other than official statistics, and considerable research has been undertaken into the relationship between media representations of crime and fear of crime. O'Connell (1999) linked high fear of crime and high prevalence estimates of crime with distorted newspaper reporting on crime in the Republic of Ireland. O'Connell found that newspaper readership was the most significant variable in prevalence estimates of crime (O'Connell and Whelan 1996). O'Connell *et al* (1998) tested this relationship between newspaper readership and perception of crime and found that while the causal relationship was not solely the result of a top-down model of media influence there was support for this. When the number of crime articles in the sampled newspapers was presented as a proportion of all articles it correlated to crime prevalence as perceived by newspaper readers; readers who read newspapers with proportionately more crime articles perceived crime as a more serious problem. The Northern Ireland Crime Survey also breaks down figures according to newspaper readership. Generally, readers of national broadsheets and the *Belfast Telegraph* reported lower fear of crime than readers of national tabloids. *Irish News* readers had initially experienced very high levels of fear, but this figure has dropped considerably, as has the fear of crime reported by *Newsletter* readers (Campbell and Freel 2013; Cadogan and Campbell 2014). These figures chime with findings elsewhere (Williams and Dickenson 1993) that broadsheet readers have lower fear of crime than tabloid readers while also corresponding to differences by community in Northern Ireland which have suggested that predominantly Catholic communities have a higher fear of crime (Geary *et al* 2000).

Research both north and south of the border shows that females and older persons have a higher fear of crime. The greater fear of crime felt by these groups has been referred to as a paradox due to their lower risk of victimisation. However, older persons may experience less victimisation because of conscious risk-avoidance tactics (McCullagh 1996). Crime can also have differential *impact*; Irish research found that the emotional disturbance following victimisation was greater in females and older persons (Watson, 2000). Further, the accuracy of the term 'paradox' in relation to female fear of crime has been challenged by research from both jurisdictions which demonstrated the prevalence of female victimisation (McGee 2002; Freel 2013; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). Finally, the media's preference for vulnerable, often female, victims is an unrelenting tool for teaching women that they have much to fear (O'Connell 1999; Carr and Holt 2010).

Conclusion

The introduction to this chapter outlined the key arguments from existing research relating to the content of crime in the media and the possible effects of this. The review of the research from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland suggest some immediate conclusions regarding how the relationship between media and crime in these jurisdictions can be situated within this literature.

Existing trends regarding the content of crime in the media would seem to be borne out by the literature from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Research from north and south of the border has demonstrated reliance on crime as a feature of media content, the skewing towards serious and atypical crime and the greater proportion of crime news in tabloid newspapers (O'Connell 1999; Greer 2003). A preference for vulnerable victims (O'Connell 1999), and the emergence of a culture of the victim in tabloids both north and south of the border has also been noted (Rolston, 1991; Greer 2003; O'Brien 2007). Research

has suggested that crime news is rarely contextualised, reporting instead favouring an episodic approach which frames crime as a series of discrete incidents rather than engaging in analysis (O'Connell *et al* 1998; NICVA 2005; Devereux *et al* 2011). In Northern Ireland, Greer (2003) suggested that this tendency has only become more pronounced in the recent past, with the media reporting on sex offending becoming *less* contextualised. In both jurisdictions, the deployment of stereotypes has also inhibited meaningful coverage, for example in relation to women as both victims and offenders (Carr and Holt 2010; Quinlan 2011), and in relation to sexual offenders who are portrayed as inhuman 'others' (Greer 2003). Further, the downgrading of victims according to social class (McCullagh 2006) and the perennial fascination with gangland crime post the mid-1990s moral panic (Hamilton 2007), (for example, in the context of Limerick, which has borne the brunt of relentlessly negative reporting (Devereux *et al* 2011)), has created a hierarchy of crime with differential levels of public empathy. The focus on what is 'newsworthy' has created a homogenous yet unrepresentative picture of crime (O'Mahony 2000; Greer 2003) and it has been lamented that 'in an era of almost unfettered freedom of expression, media, political and public debate on critical issues like crime is often narrow, clichéd and specious' (O'Mahony 2000: 19).

However, it is also the case that these trends have been mediated by specific local factors north and south of the border, to create historically contingent media landscapes. Therefore, while the broad brushstroke findings from existing research are present in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, these are experienced differentially, and conservatism has persisted as a defining characteristic of the media in both jurisdictions, with broadsheet newspapers retaining political salience over the tabloid press (Greer 2003; O'Donnell and Jewkes 2011). Underpinning this conservatism, the spectre of censorship has loomed large in both jurisdictions. The shared history of censorship is borne of the political violence which erupted in Northern Ireland and its inevitable 'chilling effect' has resulted in a conservative

media in both jurisdictions (Moloney 1991; Purcell 1991; Rolston 1991; Conway 2010). Conservatism may also derive from the small size of the jurisdictions, and the obligations and shared sense of community that this can create (O'Mahony 2000; Greer 2003). An added consideration, particularly in the Republic of Ireland is the influence of the Catholic Church which caused tension between competing discourses, the traditional and the modern, and which has also been articulated as a means of explaining a conservative media (Inglis and MacKeogh 2012). Therefore, while the trends identified elsewhere are present in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, these are mediated by the nuances of specific local factors expressed as cultural, social and political differences.

Research from the two jurisdictions is less explicit about the extent to which the *effects* of the content of crime in the media are being felt. A spike in public concern about crime was evident in the Republic of Ireland surrounding the moral panic of 1996. However despite being newly branded as a nation that is fearful of crime by international and European measures, the veracity of this categorisation is doubtful and fear of crime remains an issue attracting ambivalent interest which erupts only sporadically (Kilcommins *et al* 2004). In Northern Ireland, while newspaper readership appears to correspond to expected fear of crime patterns, feelings of safety there are actually increasing (Cadogan and Campbell 2014). Ultimately however, the 'perception gap' experienced between fear of crime at a macro level and the fear of crime at a local level, may be partially explained by reference to media reporting (Boyle and Haire 1996; O'Connell *et al* 1998).

Finally, for the reasons outlined above, it is important to note the signally different approach taken by the research which has emerged from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, rendering straightforward comparative work problematic. However, the recent turn towards investigation of the media representation of 'ordinary' crime in Northern Ireland has provided an opportunity to situate the relationship between media and crime there within a broader

context. One question for future research is the extent to which the normalising of the media landscape in Northern Ireland will lead to convergence with the trends evident elsewhere, and how far the historical legacy of conflict will continue to create a unique media environment. In the Republic of Ireland, while more research exists, the most comprehensive work is some 20 years old and much of what does exist relates exclusively to the events of 1996. Further research must engage with how the media in the Republic of Ireland continue to depict issues of crime and justice in an era of proliferating media channels, such as online and social media.

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[i] The murder of Veronica Guerin has been seared into the national consciousness; evidenced in the common usage of her name as a general reference point, imbued with its own meaning, and further illustrated in the feature films which detailed her life and death (O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001).

[ii] O'Donoghue also announced that 1995 was the first time that the number of indictable crimes had exceeded the 100,000 mark, although this had first happened in 1983 (O'Mahony1996).

[iii] The hugely successful RTÉ drama *Love/Hate*, a depiction of the lives of Dublin's 'criminal underworld', may be evidence of a lasting obsession with the folk devil created in 1996.