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- Fictional representations from TV, cinema and novels are also important sources of our knowledge of crime, because so much of their output is crime-related.
- For example, Mandel estimates that from 1945 to 1984, over 6 billion crime thrillers were sold worldwide, while about 25% of prime time TV and 20% of films are crime shows or movies.
- Fictional representations of crime, criminals and victims follow what Surette calls ‘the law of opposites’: they are the opposite of what official statistics – and strikingly similar to news coverage.
 - Property crime is under-represented, while violence/drugs/sex crimes are over-represented.
 - While real-life homicides mainly result from brawls and domestic disputes, fictional ones are the product of greed and calculation.
 - Fictional sex crimes are committed by psychopathic strangers, not acquaintances. Fictional villains tend to be higher status, middle-aged white males.
 - Fictional cops usually get their man.
- However, three recent trends are worth noting:
 - Firstly, the new genre of ‘reality’ infotainment shows tends to feature young, non-white ‘underclass’ offenders.
 - Secondly, there is an increasing tendency to show police as corrupt, brutal and as less successful.
 - Thirdly, victims have become more central, with law enforces portrayed as their avengers and audiences invited to identify with their suffering.

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- Lab based research has focused on whether media portrayals of crime and deviant lifestyles lead viewers to commit crime themselves.
- An alternative approach is to consider how far media portrayals of 'normal' rather than criminal lifestyles might also encourage people to commit crime.
- E.g. left realists argue that the mass media help to increase the sense of relative deprivation- the feeling of being deprived relative to others among poor + marginalised social groups.
- As Lea and Young put it: "the mass media have disseminated a standardised image of lifestyle particularly in the areas of popular culture and recreation, which, for those unemployed and surviving through the dole queue or only able to obtain employment at very low wages, has accentuated the sense of relative deprivation".
- In today's society, where even the poorest groups have media access, the media present everyone with images of a materialistic 'good life' of leisure, fun and consumer goods as the norm to which they should conform.
- The result is to stimulate the sense of relative deprivation and social exclusion felt by marginalised groups who cannot afford these goods.
- As Merton argues, pressure to conform to the norm can cause deviant behaviour when the opportunity to achieve by legitimate means is blocked.
- In this instance, the media are instrumental in setting the norm and thus in promoting crime.

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- Most influential study of moral panics + role of the media is Cohen's. He examines media's response to disturbances between 2 groups of largely WC teenagers, mods + rockers from 1964-66 + how this created a MP. Mods wore smart dress + rode scooters; rockers wore leather jackets + rode motorbikes.
- The initial confrontations started in Clacton, with a few scuffles, some stone throwing+ some windows being broken. However, although disorder was relatively minor, the media over-reacted. In his analysis, Cohen uses analogy of a disaster, where media produce an inventory or stocktaking of what happened.
- Cohen says this inventory contained three elements:
 - **Exaggeration+ distortion:** media exaggerated no. involved, extent of violence/damage+ distorted picture through dramatic reporting +sensational headlines.
 - **Prediction:** media regularly assumed + predicted further conflict + violence would result.
 - **Symbolisation:** symbols of mods + rockers- their clothes, bike/scooters, hairstyles, music etc.- were all negatively labelled + associated with deviance. Media's use of these symbols allowed them to link unconnected events. E.g. bikers in different parts of country who misbehaved could be seen as part of a more general underlying problem of disorderly youth.
- Cohen argues that the media's portrayal of events produces a deviance amplification spiral by making it seem as if the problem was spreading and getting out of hand. This led to calls for an increased control response from the police + courts. This produced further marginalisation + stigmatisation of the mods + rockers as deviants +less tolerance of them.
- The media further amplified the deviance by defining the 2 groups+ their subcultural styles. This led to more youths adopting these styles + drew in more participants for futureclashes. By emphasising their supposed differences, the media crystallised two distinct identities and transformed loose-knit groupings into two tight-knit gangs.
- This encouraged polarisation+ helped to create a self-fulfilling prophecy of escalating conflict as youths acted out the roles the media had assigned to them.
- Cohen notes that media definitions of the situation are crucial in creating a moral panic, because in large-scale modern societies, most people have no direct experience of the vents themselves+ thus have to rely on the media for info about them. In the case of the mods+ rockers, this allowed the media to portray them as folk devils- major threats to public order and social values.