editorial

Hazel Croall puts this issue into perspective.

It has long been recognised that for many, the mass media is the main source of information about crime and criminal justice, whether via fact or fiction, news, entertainment, or 'info-tainment'. It is generally agreed that this information is distorted, overemphasising sexual and violent crime, underemphasising routine property crime and virtually ignoring the crimes of the powerful. Crime news is generally 'bad news' with reports selectively focusing on small rises in otherwise declining crime figures or negative features of reports and

increased, evidenced by the recent launch of the journal, *Crime, Media, Culture*. Cultural criminology has emerged and this, along with the influence of post-modernism, is outlined by **Ian Marsh** and **Gaynor Melville** who also point to the opportunities provided by new forms of media for a range of cybercrimes such as those discussed in the last issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* devoted to crime and technology.

Major questions have been asked about the role of the media in enhancing the fear of crime. Yet, as **Jason Ditton**

induce fear and could fuel harassment. The largely negative reporting of asylum seekers is further detailed in **Ferguson and Walters'** contribution which points to the role of media in creating a 'new enemy within' which is used to justify what to many is the erosion of civil liberties involved in recent immigration and anti-terrorism legislation.

Youth are another group said to be demonised by being portrayed as 'yobbish' louts, and their rights to protection from publicity are threatened, suggests **Kathy Evans,** by the practice of 'naming and shaming' those in receipt of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which can also make them targets of harassment and 'vigilante' retribution. The anti-social behaviour of 'neds' was also the subject of a 'dossier' by a Scottish tabloid newspaper which became, argues **Alison Brown**, a substitute for systematic research as the 'evidence base' for the

role, he argues, in socially defining harms.

While offenders are clearly 'villains', the portrayal of the police has generally been perceived as more positive with the 'cops' normally catching the 'robbers'. The police have however been subject to media investigations of corruption or racism and, as **Frank Leishman and Paul Mason** argue, the image of the police portrayed in TV drama has become less unidimensional, with a wider range of police characters, including morally flawed and corrupt officers now being commonplace. The *Dixon of Dock Green* imagery is now more evident in 'infotainment' programmes such as *Police, Camera, Action*, whose content is more directly affected by the police. Moreover, while police comedies which portray bungling and incompetent officers might be seen as critical, **Diana Bretherick** argues that they nonetheless

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research. This distorted image is said to fuel people's fear of crime, to set in train moral panics, to encourage populist punitivism and to be used to justify repressive and regressive criminal justice policies. At the same time, the media can play a critical role by exposing corruption and the harmful activities of the powerful and of agencies of control such as the police, and it can be used to disseminate more positive messages.

The last issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* on this topic reflected different aspects of the complex and multi-faceted relationships between crime, criminal justice and the media and this issue similarly reflects a variety of themes. Crimin-ological theorising and research on the media has

argues, the public are far better informed about crime levels in their locality than might be expected and should not be viewed as 'empty vessels into which media idiocy is poured'. **Mark Banks** also stresses the importance of a sense of place and suggests that people's fear of crime is greater, and more likely to be affected by the media, where they feel less sense of belonging. Resilience to inaccurate media images, particularly where individuals have more contact with a diverse population, also featured in a study of the impact of press reports of asylum seekers and refugees, although this also found, as **Grimshaw** *et al* report, that negative portrayals and frequent references to criminality were likely to

introduction of legislation. Where a group or activity is subject to such demonisation, research, as **Alasdair Forsyth** demonstrates in relation to illegal drugs, may be selectively represented in such a way as to confirm the 'scary' nature of the substance and to justify prohibition. In contrast it is often assumed that economic crimes, many associated with elites or the powerful, are less prone to sensational coverage and exaggeration. This may be the case for some, yet as **Michael Levi** suggests, the 'mistakes' of celebrity offenders such as Martha Stewart can be contrasted with the presentation of the less respectable offenders involved in organised or serious crime. Thus the media play a major

present the police characters, however comic, as dedicated and committed to catching criminals.

The press can also play a role in exposing inhumane conditions in prisons although its treatment of prisoners tends to reflect punitive attitudes. **Yvonne Jewkes** details the major themes which frame such coverage, including a focus on celebrity prisoners, pampered prisoners, sexual relations in prison, lax security and the deaths of and assaults on prisoners with the latter becoming 'newsworthy' only when they involve celebrity prisoners or have occasioned an official enquiry. The provision of in cell TV is often seen as an example of