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THE PRESENTATION OF DRUGS IN THE NEWS MEDIA

THE NEWS SOURCES INVOLVED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Steven Chermak

Politicians and criminal justice officials have both a financial and an ideological stake in the way social problems are presented to the public. The issue of drugs, for example, tends to fade in and out of political priority (Peyrot 1984). Most recently, political interest in drugs escalated steadily through the 1980s. Drug enforcement was part of Ronald Reagan's crime control agenda, culminating in his declaration in 1986 that America needed yet another war on drugs (Jensen, Gerber, and Babcock 1991). George Bush retained Reagan's concern for drugs, developing a national drug control strategy, appointing the nation's first drug czar, and using the military to aid interdiction efforts.

The principal response advocated by both presidents, reflecting their political ideology, was to increase criminal justice and military enforcement efforts. Police departments cracked down on sellers, using undercover and "buy-and-bust" operations to increase the number of arrests. Courts cleared their dockets or created special drug courts to process the large influx of drug offenders. Penalties for drug offenses increased, with concomitant growth in prison populations. Moreover, the distinction between the police and the military in fighting the war on drugs eroded (Kraska 1993, 1994). Kraska (1993:161), for example, discusses how the formerly figurative "drug-war metaphor" has become more literal with the significant involvement of the military in foreign and domestic drug-control efforts.

It is significant that the rise and fall of drugs as an important political issue has not coincided with changes in the reported incidence of drug use

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(Beckett 1994; Jensen et al. 1991; Reinerman and Levine 1995). Beckett (1994:442) discovered that public concern about drugs was affected only by shifts in the level of state-initiated activities. Similarly, Jensen et al. (1991) found that the enactment of federal drug legislation was not related to objective conditions of drug use, but to politicians' efforts to promote drugs as a social problem.

For several reasons, the news media are an effective resource available to claimsmakers when they seek support for policy preferences. First, news images are important because the public's exposure to the political process is limited (Edelman 1964; Kessel 1975). According to McCombs and Shaw (1991:17), "the information in the mass media becomes the only contact many have with politics." Second, media coverage is a cost-efficient way to garner support for a policy position because the public relies heavily on the news media (Graber 1980; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Tunnell 1992). Third, the news media are an important agent of social control. Claimsmakers need public support to survive, compete, and thrive in the "social problems marketplace" (Best 1990:15), although predicting public preferences is difficult. Because "public perceptions are malleable," influenced by forces such as the mass media (Tittle 1994:32), social control agents are motivated to participate as news sources to transmit their beliefs and values, and also to legitimize themselves with the public.

An event that is presented to the public is shaped by a reporter's perception of it because it is rarely observed directly (Kappeler, Blumberg, and Potter 1996). Reporters rely on authoritative sources, such as political and criminal justice officials, to construct the event (Berkowitz 1987; Berkowitz and Beach 1993; Brown et al. 1987; Chermak 1995; Gans 1979; Sigal 1973). Sigal (1973:123) found that government officials accounted for approximately half of the sources cited in articles published in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Similarly, Chermak (1995:89) found that law enforcement and court officials accounted for more than half of the sources cited in crime stories.

"Although most research agrees with these findings, there are two general explanations for the dominance of official sources in news stories. First, several researchers argue in support of a conflict or structuralist perspective. This explanation emphasizes how the reliance on state officials is determined by macro-level forces. The structuralist perspective assumes that the media are an important symbolic mechanism used in the construction of ideology (Binder 1993; Sacco 1995). It is argued that the ideological power of the media results from their control over consumers' views of the world. Events are framed into standard modes of communication. These frames, according to Binder (1993:754-55), "help receivers make sense of social occurrences because they organize events into recognizable patterns." Consumers rely on this framing of events when deciphering reality; thus alternative viewpoints are eliminated from consideration (Beckett 1994; Binder 1993; Gamson et al. 1992; Gitlin 1980; Sacco 1995).

This macro-level focus deals specifically with questions of power and how power is expressed and distributed in society. It is important to understand the sources involved in the construction of crime because social problems can be framed in many different ways. For our analysis, the key aspect is how the reliance on government claimsmakers allows these sources to make claims and to characterize problems so as to legitimize existing social, cultural, and political relations. Political and economic elites have preferential access to the media because of their hierarchic position in society; they use this access to define the social order, maintain cultural boundaries, and reaffirm the status quo (Hall et al. 1978; Herman and Chomsky 1988).

Second, other researchers explain the reliance on these sources from an organizational perspective. Although news content may support a specific ideology, researchers argue that this is not done intentionally (Berkowitz 1987; Berkowitz and Beach 1993). Instead this reliance results from organizational and economic needs (Benedict 1992; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). News organizations are structured bureaucratically and rely on decentralized news beats to create news efficiently. Sources able to provide information in an efficient and newsworthy manner receive the opportunity to influence public discourse on crime and social control. Representatives from bureaucratic organizations understand the routine channels of news discourse and make themselves available to reporters. Researchers with this perspective, however, concede that the relied-upon sources do not completely control news images: News personnel accept only images consistent with their own organizational needs and media formats (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1987, 1989, and 1991).

Katherine Beckett's (1995) study examining the impact of sources on the presentation of drugs in the media contributes to these theoretical viewpoints and illustrates the importance of examining the presentation of sources in various types of story. In a sample of "hard" and "soft" (editorials, cartoons, opinion columns) drug stories, Beckett linked the sources cited to the "framing" of the issue. She found that the sources' ability to influence the presentation of drugs varied according to the type of story examined. First, she found that state officials affected the issue frames presented in the "hard" news stories and that the frequent presence of these frames resulted in a narrow perspective on the drug issue, supporting conservative "law and order" themes. Second, she found that a wider range of issue frames was presented in the "soft" items, supporting the conclusion that such a range results from state officials' exclusion from stories. These stories are media-generated, and the news personnel producing them are not constrained by the information provided by sources.

Other research examining relations between reporters and sources has rarely considered how these interactions evolve by type of story. Some researchers acknowledge, however, that sources other than routine crime authorities can procure media coverage, thus affecting news content and public attention to social problems (Best 1990; Gitlin 1980; Jenness 1993; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). Joel Best's (1990) study of crimes against chil-

dren documents the influence that outsider claimsmakers, such as activists and moral entrepreneurs, can exert on public and political attention to social problems by securing media coverage. Similarly, Valerie Jenness (1993) demonstrated how a group of outsider claimsmakers was able to reshape the "symbolic landscape" of prostitution and challenge the way traditional experts constructed this social problem.

The news process evolves according to the importance of the story. Chernak (1995) found that most stories are routine occurrences produced quickly in order to fill the space or time needs of a news organization. Chernak also found, however, that stories receiving significant amounts of attention are produced differently. Several reporters work on various aspects of these stories, four or five stories are presented to the public when the event is initiated, and the news media follow these stories closely over time (Chernak 1995:28-410.)

Similarly, Mark Fishman (1978:531) discussed how the news media can construct "crime waves," thus contributing to an ideological conception of crime. He found that incidents which could be attached to an ongoing theme of violence against the elderly were more likely to be published and received more attention in the news. Momentum increased as other media organizations tried to capitalize on this theme. Fishman also found that political and criminal justice officials contributed to the construction of this crime wave by taking action that received media coverage, shifting media attention to "how the system [was] working to remedy the situation" (p. 541).

In an analysis of criminal justice case processing, Friedman and Percival (1981:237) identified this "handful of cases at the apex of the system" as "celebrated." Criminal justice officials respond to different cases in different ways, and possess great discretion in deciding the importance of a case (Walker 1989:24-25). Because of the publicity received by these celebrated cases, they can affect public perception of the criminal justice system (Walker 1989:25). In applying this notion to media coverage, Surette (1989) calls the celebrated case a "media trial." Such trials have an impact far beyond their number, Surette argues, "because many viewers believe that the news and its portraits are real and accurate, the image of justice that media trials project has serious implications for public understanding of basic judicial concepts and support for the legitimacy of the entire criminal justice system" (p. 293).

The claimsmakers' involvement in celebrated cases, in contrast to their participation in typical cases, is an important aspect of social constructionism. Although celebrated cases are rare, they provide high-ranking officials with an opportunity to define the "hierarchy of credibility" in society and to reaffirm their position as a "primary definer" of an issue (Fishman 1980; Johnson 1995). Moreover, these cases can be "powerful teachers and preachers of conventional morality" (Friedman and Percival 1981:259). In documenting the sources that participate in celebrated news stories, we clarify how the relationship that results from the production of ordinary stories gives political and criminal justice officials strategic access to media personnel when opportunities arise to institutionalize their authoritative position.

In this article we examine how reporters and sources construct social problems in the news media. Specifically, we examine the sources cited in routine crime stories, in stories linked to a highly visible policy issue, and in stories examining celebrated cases relevant to policy issues. We document the news sources cited in these three types of story to determine whether the relationship between reporters and sources evolves as a story increases in importance. By examining the sources used by news organizations to define what is important about a topic of substantial interest, and then comparing the results with those for other crime stories, we understand more clearly how official sources define social problems in the news.

To illustrate the construction of social problems, we examine the problem of drug abuse, documenting the "primary definers" of the drug problem during a period when it was a high-priority news topic. Schlesinger and Tumber (1994:2) note that "only very recently have questions begun to be asked in a consistent and focused fashion about the tactics and strategies pursued by sources seeking media attention," and researchers on this topic have used only one of two research methodologies. First, most studies employ content analysis, counting and nonofficial sources (Berkowitz 1987; Berkowitz and Beach 1993; Brown et al. 1987; Sigal 1973). Second, other studies examine the relationship between reporters and sources by observing the news production process (Fishman 1978; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). Most research fails to link these two research methodologies, although each has limitations when used alone (Ericson et al. 1987). In this study we combine content and observational analysis to precisely document the sources involved in news production and to explain why, and how, political and criminal justice officials are involved in the representation of social problems in the news.

We believe that the theories traditionally used to explain the heavy reliance on official sources for news construction are not in conflict, but operate at different levels of understanding. Considered in this way, these theories are seen to complement one another; this suggests that an integrated theory may be more appropriate for understanding these officials' involvement in news construction. We argue that the relationship between sources and news personnel can evolve, and that it is influenced by the type of story in question. Most stories support the convergence of the bureaucratic goals held by news and source organizations: To make the production of crime news manageable, news media routinize their task by positioning themselves so as to gain easy access to sources that can supply crime news (Berkowitz and Beach 1993; Chibnall 1977; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). This reliance, in turn, provides these sources with the opportunity to shape the crime images presented in the news, although the information provided must be consistent with the media organization's time, resource, and format concerns (Ericson et al. 1987, 1989, 1991). In keeping with the organizational perspective, we hypothesize that criminal justice officials will dominate coverage of all types of routine crime story.

In addition, in the organizational process used to produce crime stories, news reporting is structured to support existing political, social, and legal systems. Issues that are thematically important or can be linked to celebrated cases provide strong opportunities to reaffirm the status quo. We hypothesize that a different class of social control agents will be used as sources in all drug stories and in celebrated drug cases. Because government claimsmakers have established access to media organizations, they can use specific stories as opportunities to legitimize their position as an important voice of the "deviance-defining elite" and to promote and frame a social problem. We hypothesize that high-ranking officials will be involved more frequently in typical drug cases and in celebrated cases, and will use these types of story to argue in support of a policy position because of the attention received. Drug abuse is a well-established, "recurring" social problem with potential for policy innovation and change (see Best 1990; Scheingold 1984). We examine the involvement of sources in incidents, policies, and celebrated stories about drugs to document whether the organizational constraints of news production place government claimsmakers in a position to use social problems for their strategic advantage.

Research Methodology

To examine the information on drug crimes available to the public, it is important to use various research methodologies. Here we employ content analysis of print and electronic news media to examine how drug crimes, policies, and sources are presented to the public; we also use observational and interview data to understand the origins of these news stories, the motivations of news sources, and the underlying intentions of the parties involved in news production.

We used content analysis to examine the presentation of drug-related crime in newspapers and on television. Content data were collected from six print and three broadcast media organizations, selected by geographic location and city size. We selected news organizations by generating a list of cities that had at least one local newspaper with a circulation greater than 50,000 (*Gale Directory* 1990). We matched the cities according to population size and number of index offenses for 1990, then stratified them into medium, large, and extra-large categories. The media from two cities in each category were selected to represent as many regions of the country and as much variation in crime rate as possible.¹ We examined content from one newspaper in each of the six cities (two medium, two large, two extra-large) and one television station in three of the cities (one medium, one large, one extra-large).

We coded 36 days of newspaper content from six print organizations: the *Albany* (New York) *Times-Union*, the *Buffalo News*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Dallas Times Herald*, and the *Detroit News*. Newspaper stories were coded for every fifth day of the first six months of 1990. In addition, we coded the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for 18 days over a

three-month period in 1991. These 18 days were coded for two reasons: First, the additional coding strengthens the reliability of comparisons between newspaper and television samples. Second, it allows for a comparison with the results from the 1990 newspaper sample.

Television content was coded from local evening broadcasts in Albany, Cleveland, and Dallas for an eight-week span from May to July 1991. We recorded and viewed a total of 168 broadcasts in their entirety. Crime stories were transcribed and then content-coded.²

We conducted a theme analysis of content, using a combination of coding rules from other research that examined crime content (Ericson et al. 1991; Graber 1980). Source variables, such as who was cited in a news story and that person's position in an organization, were added to the codebook to document precisely how news media present sources. We coded more than 2,500 crime stories.

The second methodology used in this study is ethnography. Ethnographic observation of the crime news production process was conducted in 1991 at one newspaper and one television station in a large metropolitan city; we spent approximately 150 hours in each news agency. These observations help to overcome the limitations of content analysis and demonstrate how decision making in news and source organizations contributes to the way the news is represented to the public.

The newspaper observed, which we will call the *Midwest Tribune*, is a large organization with a daily circulation of about 500,000. Police and court reporters produce most of the crime stories presented in the *Tribune*. Reporters working the police beat, located on the first floor of police headquarters, are responsible for producing stories about any crimes reported to the police. Court reporters are responsible for producing crime stories after an arrest is made and the defendant is arraigned. We made most of our observations on these two beats, but we also spent time with general assignment reporters and editors to broaden our understanding of news production.

Observations were also conducted at a television station in the same city, which we call the *Midwest Nightly*. All of the *Midwest Nightly* reporters are general assignment reporters, any of whom could be assigned to cover a given crime story. Reporters are assigned to stories at an afternoon editorial meeting; after these meetings, we asked reporters if we could follow their coverage of a particular story or shadow them as they made their daily routine checks.

We supplemented the ethnographic findings with 40 interviews. In addition to asking specific questions about the production process, we conducted structured, open-ended interviews for a broader perspective on how each media organization produced stories on crime: These included 20 long interviews with crime beat reporters and editors working for the organizations we observed, 15 interviews with news personnel from other organizations, and five interviews with criminal justice and victim sources. These interviews help to increase the generalizability of the observational findings.

Findings

The findings are presented in three sections. First, we establish the heightened attention given to drug crimes during the sample period, and compare the presentation of drugs as incident and policy stories with other types of crime story. Second, we examine the sources cited in typical drug stories, and compare the results with the presentation of sources in all crime stories. Although officials were the most common source cited in all crime stories, we found several interesting differences when examining drug stories. Finally, we examine local and national celebrated incidents. These results help to document the importance of such cases in the construction of social problems.

The Importance of Drugs as Incident and Policy Stories

Nearly 75 percent of the crime stories presented were specific incident stories ($n = 1,982$). A law violation is noted, and the reporter discusses who was involved and what occurred. Table 1 lists the 12 types of crime most frequently cited in print and in electronic news media. At least one of these 12 offenses was presented in 70 percent of all the crime incident stories. As in other content studies, these results show that serious violent crimes are presented frequently (Chermak 1995; Ericson et al. 1991; Graber 1980).

Table 1 The 12 Crimes Most Frequently Presented in Print and Electronic Media^a

	Lead Crime	Crimes Combined	Newspaper Results ^b	Television Results ^c
Murder	28.1%	24.6%	28.3%	27.3%
Drugs	11.1	9.4	11.8	8.2
Rape	4.7	5.0	3.7	8.5
Fraud	3.8	3.7	4.0	2.8
Assault	3.7	3.5	3.7	3.6
Robbery	3.5	4.4	3.8	2.3
Shooting ^c	3.0	2.2	2.5	4.6
Burglary	2.4	2.6	2.6	1.5
Kidnapping	2.2	2.2	1.9	3.4
Extortion	2.2	2.6	2.5	.8
Manslaughter	2.1	1.8	2.3	1.5
Larceny	2.1	2.0	2.4	1.0
	$n = 1,890$	$n = 3,712$	$n = 1,502$	$n = 388$

^a We coded up to three crimes to document the crimes that news media present as most significant. If more than three crimes were mentioned, we coded the first three crimes presented in a story, using order of presentation as our best indicator of significance. The first column in table 1 presents the results of the first crime mentioned in a specific incident story. The second column in table 1 presents multiple crime results combined into a single category.

^b According to presentation of the lead crime.

^c Not specific as to charges filed.

Drug crimes were the subject of the second most frequently cited incident story, accounting for over 11 percent of the stories. Approximately 12 percent of the incident stories in newspapers and over 8 percent of the incident stories in television news focused on drug crimes. These results differ significantly from the findings of research conducted before 1980. Graber (1980:39) found that drug offenses were the tenth most frequently cited crime in the *Chicago Tribune*; they represented less than 1 percent of the total number of offenses when examined as a single-topic category and less than 2 percent when studied as a three-topic category (1980:22). Drugs also were important in policy stories: Changes in the criminal law, usually consisting of proposed sentencing modifications, accounted for nearly 30 percent of the 138 policy stories presented. Drugs were the topic of the second most frequently presented policy story (approximately 16 percent). These results support the conclusion that drugs become more newsworthy in 1990, and presented officials with a social problem of strong public interest (see Jerin and Fields 1995).

The activities of the reporters observed and interviewed here are consistent with these content findings. Early in our observations of the *Midwest Tribune*, for example, we shadowed a reporter recently assigned to the police beat. One of the first steps in his daily news production routine was to peruse the police blotter to select potential stories. He had unrestricted access to these reports, but the pile was more than one inch thick. When we asked him what he was looking for in these reports, he emphasized that violence, crimes with young victims, and drug crimes received priority because they had the potential to win a significant amount of news space. Drugs, he explained, had the potential to evolve into an important news story, especially when large amounts of drugs or cash were confiscated. He ignored most other crimes because they rarely had the potential to be newsworthy.

On the basis of our observations of the *Tribune*, court reporters also considered drug crimes newsworthy and adjusted their newsgathering routines to increase exposure to known drug offenses. As in the news selection techniques used on the police beat, reporters relied on court documents such as motion papers, court calendars, and appellate decisions. Court reporters also established access to returned search warrants to search for drug news. These documents included a detailed inventory of the evidence seized by police officers after the execution of a warrant. Court reporters invested time to peruse these documents because of the potential for payoff in the form of a front-page story.

Reporters learned the news value of specific types of crime by interacting with their superiors. These interactions helped reporters to develop and internalize an understanding of the crimes that should receive attention in their daily work routines. Reporters contacted their superiors early in the day to discuss story selection options. As they developed their stories, they frequently consulted the editors for suggestions on story frames and contacts with sources. These editors then reviewed stories before publication; fire-

juently they changed the structure of a story or altered the presentation. This inding is consistent with that of others who have emphasized that the hierar- hical structure of the newsroom has an important effect on news content Benedict 1992; Ericson et al. 1987).

Similarly, the managing editor of the Midwest Nightly played a particu- larly important role in determining the stories to be included in the evening's roadcast. His first task every morning was to generate a list of story ideas. ater in the day, the news director, producers, assignment editors, and report- ers attended an editorial meeting to decide which of the stories selected by ie managing editor would be produced for the evening broadcast. Moreover, e had already made the initial contacts for the potential lead stories, and old reporters when specific sources would be available for an interview.

Sources Cited in Crime and Drug Stories

Table 2 presents the sources cited in specific crime incident stories.³ olice and court officials account for over 50 percent of the source attrib- utions in all such stories.⁴ These results are consistent with other research xamining the presentation of crime (Chermak 1995; Sherizen 1978), specific ime topics (Best 1990; Johnson 1995), and other news topics (Sigal 1973).

Our ethnographic results suggest that news organizations rely on police and court officials primarily because this method is most efficient for the rganization. Criminal justice organizations provide reporters with access to rganizational documents, and supply accommodating sources. The reliance n these sources increased the ability of the *Tribune* and *Nightly* to fulfill aily crime story quotas.⁵ Newspapers utilize decentralized police and court ats to produce crime stories, and allow reporters to interact with official urses. Police beat reporters from the *Tribune* rarely left police headquarters, here they had access to blotter reports, arrest logs, and public relations per- nnel. Similarly, the court beat was in the courthouse, where reporters had ccess to various court documents and members of the courtroom work- up. In general, television stations do not have enough employees to per- aniently assign reporters to police headquarters or the courthouse, although levision reporters speak with these sources by telephone.

Reporters supplemented the information provided in official reports with vo or three contacts with police or court personnel; these individuals were esented to the public as authorities on an incident. Police reporters had fre- ient contact with a departmental spokesperson; court beat reporters relied imarily on attorneys from the prosecutor's office. These representatives ere willing to provide information and answer questions, thus contributing the completion of a story.

A day we spent with a police beat reporter illustrates how reliance on slice sources increases efficiency of news production. We shadowed "Carl unders" on a day when the other police beat reporter called in sick. lthough Sanders was annoyed by his partner's absence, he easily produced ree crime stories because of his access to police sources and documents.

Table 2 Sources Used in Specific Incident Stories

Sources	All Crimes	Murder	Drugs	Rape	Fraud	Assault	Robbery	Shooting	Burglary	Kidnapping	Extortion	Manslaughter	Larceny
Police	27.7%	29.1%	26.3%	35.6%	20.7%	54.8%	44.3%	58.9%	50.0%	40.9%	11.7%	28.3%	33.8%
Court	22.9	22.6	31.6	26.0	14.4	17.9	12.9	1.4	12.5	9.1	41.6	26.5	
Defendant ^a	9.5	12.5	8.8	11.0	13.8	4.8	2.1	2.8	5.6	7.6	11.7	13.2	1.5
Victim ^b	8.3	6.5	1.0	11.7	6.0	8.7	11.5	12.3	12.5	13.7	5.2	9.4	16.2
Politician	3.8	1.9	6.4	.0	3.4	1.0	2.1	1.4	2.8	.0	3.9	1.9	2.9
Witness	3.7	4.8	2.7	4.8	2.6	2.9	3.6	5.5	1.4	1.5	2.6	9.4	1.5
Citizen	3.4	3.5	1.3	1.4	3.4	1.9	2.9	2.7	1.4	1.5	2.6	3.8	4.4
Documents	3.4	3.1	5.7	2.7	6.0	1.0	2.1	.0	1.4	.0	6.1	2.9	1.5
Media	2.0	1.3	1.3	1.4	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.5	.0	.0	.0
Experts	2.0	1.7	.7	.0	.9	.0	.7	.0	.0	1.5	.0	.0	.0
Corrections	.8	.9	.0	.0	.0	1.9	1.4	.0	.0	1.5	.0	.0	.0
Other ^c	5.3	4.3	.7	.7	.0	1.0	2.1	4.1	4.2	3.0	.0	3.8	7.4
Not Specific ^d	7.0	7.1	10.8	3.4	5.2	5.8	7.9	8.2	4.2	9.1	9.1	5.7	n = 68
n = 5,038													
n = 776													
n = 297													
n = 146													
n = 116													
n = 140													
n = 73													
n = 72													
n = 66													
n = 77													
n = 53													

n = Number of sources that commented on the crime incident.
^aCategory includes attributions to defendants and acquaintances of victims.
^bCategory includes attributions to victims and acquaintances of victims.
^cIncludes attributions to school and church officials.
^dCoded as not specific when attribution was "sources say," "officials say," or "authorities say."

After making his morning calls to sources that might provide breaking news (e.g., police districts, suburban departments, airport security), he examined the blotter reports and asked the departmental spokesperson for reports about four crime incidents: an assault in which the victim's skull was fractured, the robbery of an elderly man, the robbery of a teacher, and the burglary of a county administrative building. We met with the spokesperson, who provided Sanders with the reports for the assault and the burglary, but he also mentioned a shooting that had just occurred. Sanders produced the stories on the assault and the burglary as "local briefs," using verbatim the facts provided in the police reports. In addition, he was able to interview a sergeant and a detective by telephone to ask about the shooting. He tried to contact the victim and the victim's family, but they were unavailable for comment. Sanders produced a third story, about 12 column inches long, from the report and the information provided from the two police sources.

Access to police and court sources and documents increases news efficiency, but this reliance allows sources to protect themselves or to provide information to reporters in a way that benefits themselves. For example, reporters had only limited access to organizational documents. Police reporters did not know whether the blotter reports provided to them included every crime incident, but they did know that only partial information about an incident was included in the reports made available. From the name, age, sex, and type of crime included in these summary reports, reporters determined whether an incident had news potential. They had to request the complete report from an organizational representative, who then decided whether it would be released. Court reporters had unimpeded access to court hearings, but could report only what resulted from informal decision-making processes such as plea negotiations. Some sources refused to cooperate with news personnel. When we interviewed a news director from a television station in a large city he commented, "Sometimes [sources are willing to cooperate], sometimes they're not. It depends what their interests are in a particular story. There are many instances where the police cooperate with us so they get a story out."

Reporters rarely questioned the veracity of the information provided by officials and did not criticize the activities of the source organization. They were more concerned about keeping access to sources and organizational documents than about the reliability of information provided by officials. Loss of access to information affected not only the reporters' decision-making processes but also reporter-editor relationships, decisions about story assignments, and the images presented to the public.

Reporters' concern that sources might obstruct the flow of information was not unfounded. One reporter we interviewed had recently completed an investigative reporting series that criticized a local police department. After the stories were aired, he was denied access to organizational documents and had difficulty finding a police representative who would provide comment on camera. His investigative series also damaged the relationship of this police department with other persons employed by the same news organization.

Table 2 also presents the sources cited in the large number of typical drug stories. The reliance on police and court sources in drug stories is greater than in all other types of crime story, accounting for nearly 58 percent of the information. This heavy use of police and court sources reflects how official sources fulfill organizational needs in the construction of crime news.

Moreover, the fact that drugs are "victimless" crimes narrows the range of sources and perspectives provided in drug stories. When reporters construct crime stories involving victims, they frequently attempt to contact victims or family members for an emotional quotation. This emotion is sometimes directed at officials because of their handling of a case. Reporters rarely have access to victims in drug stories; victims accounted for only 1 percent of the source attributions. Defendants, who could provide alternative perspectives on drug incidents, are difficult to contact; reporters rarely considered them an important source.

Other sources are excluded from drug stories because they cannot meet the immediate needs of story production or provide responses consistent with expected frames. For example, experts such as criminologists and sociologists are rarely cited in crime stories; they accounted for only 2 percent of the source attributions in all crime stories and were cited even less frequently in drug stories (see table 2). Reporters are not likely to have easy access to such sources, and it is unlikely that these sources would state the information in a way that is consistent with the format needs of the news organization.

Politicians are not generally considered standard sources for comment on specific incidents. They accounted for only 3.8 percent of the sources cited when the sources from all crime stories were considered, and were involved even less when almost all of the specific crime categories were examined. These sources are rarely used because their involvement is beyond reporters' daily routines. Politicians, however, accounted for 6.4 percent of the source attributions in drug crimes in early 1990; this, in turn, encouraged politicians to make themselves available for routine coverage of drug incidents.

In several instances, when we observed activities at the *Tribune* and Nightly, politicians used an event such as an arrest or a trial to comment on the effectiveness of current drug policy. Some of these incidents received enormous amounts of attention (see "Sources Used in Celebrated Crime Stories"). Moreover, politicians used isolated incidents as opportunities to publicize policy efforts. When several individuals were arrested for selling drugs, the mayor held a press conference to discuss the incident and link the event to drug crackdown initiatives.

Table 3 displays the results of the sources cited in all types and specific types of policy story. Although politicians are rarely used as authorities in specific incident stories, they are the most frequent source cited in all types of policy story combined and in most individual categories. For example, politicians accounted for 26.6 percent of the source attributions in all policy stories, 45.9 percent in death penalty stories, 37.5 percent in stories about changes in the criminal law, and 20.3 percent in drug policy stories.

The media use political, police, or court officials to evaluate the quality of current responses to crime and to recommend specific changes in policy. Nearly 60 percent of the attributions in all types of policy story were sources serving in some official capacity. The explanation for such reliance—consistent with the organizational explanation for the news production of specific incident stories—is that they are available and willing to participate as news sources. Moreover, these sources involve themselves in the production of policy news stories because of the possibility of generating support for their own position. These sources promote specific policy issues by requesting coverage, and then frame what is discussed by participating as news sources.

To further illustrate officials' involvement in news construction, we examined the specific types of police and court sources used in incident and policy stories about crime and drugs. We expected that the upper echelons of the police hierarchy would take an active role in defining what was important about crime, drugs, and crime policy. In addition, we thought that the political members of the courtroom workgroup (prosecutors and judges) would take a more active role in policy news production than would other court sources. The results support both expectations.

When police sources are cited, the dominance of police chiefs, captains, and lieutenants is persuasive. Members of the command staff account for most of the information provided by police organizations; they are cited in at least 20 percent of the police attributions in all types of crime incident story. The upper levels of the police hierarchy accounted for 20.6 percent of the source attributions in drug incident stories. Police chiefs accounted for more than 13 percent of the source attributions in policy stories. We discussed source interactions with a television reporter, who emphasized his reliance on police officials in power:

I get most of my information by talking with people in charge. Every once in a while, I get a call from somebody who is not of officer rank, with a "tip." I then call the people in charge. They ask, "Where did you get that information?" Primarily the routine daily calls go to those in charge.

The highest ranks of the police involve themselves in the news production process to increase their control of the images of police departments. The bureaucratic structure of police organizations guarantees that only a limited number of sources—individuals with policy-making power—will have the most access to internal organizational information and can choose the information that is funneled to media personnel.

The division of labor in police organizations also "fosters unique accounting strategies" (Cavender, Jurik, and Cohen 1993:153). Information, reports, and statistical data about departments typically are released through spokespersons. These public relations employees, trained by the department in image building, work closely with other officials to represent the department's position favorably; they nurture their relationship with reporters to ensure that this image is presented prominently. *Tribune* police reporters

Table 3 Sources Used in Policy Stories

Sources	All Policy Stories	Criminal Law Changes	Drugs	Victim	Penalty	Police	Courts	Corrections	Other
Police	11.4%	5.1%	7.8%	16.7%	5.4%	42.1%	.0%	.0%	4.8%
Court	24.9	32.3	28.1	23.3	13.5	7.9	52.9	23.5	23.8
Defendant ^a	3.6	1.0	1.6	.0	.0	.0	23.5	.0	4.8
Victim ^b	6.6	4.0	.0	23.3	10.8	5.3	.0	.0	23.8
Politician	26.6	33.3	20.3	16.7	45.9	18.4	54.5	11.8	23.8
Witness	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Citizen	3.3	2.0	.0	.0	5.4	5.3	.0	.0	.0
Documents	4.8	4.0	7.8	10.0	.0	.0	11.8	17.6	9.5
Media	1.5	1.0	.0	.0	8.1	2.6	.0	.0	9.5
Experts	3.3	5.0	7.8	.0	2.7	.0	.0	.0	.0
Corrections	3.0	2.0	1.6	.0	5.4	.0	.0	29.4	.0
Other ^c	3.6	1.0	7.8	3.3	2.7	2.6	.0	11.8	.0
Not Specific ^d	7.5	9.1	9.4	6.7	.0	15.8	5.9	5.9	.0
<i>n</i> = 334			<i>n</i> = 99	<i>n</i> = 64	<i>n</i> = 30	<i>n</i> = 37	<i>n</i> = 17	<i>n</i> = 17	<i>n</i> = 21

n = Number of sources

^aCategory includes attributions to defendants and acquaintances of defendants.

^bCategory includes attributions to victims and acquaintances of victims.

^cIncludes attributions to school and church officials.

^dCoded as not specific when attribution was "sources say," "officials say," or "authorities say."

interacted daily with the spokesperson in his office, and Nightly reporters contacted him by telephone when they needed sound bites. The spokesperson was willing to be questioned by reporters to influence the type of coverage presented about the police department.

Prosecutors accounted for at least 25 percent of the court source attributions across all categories of incident crime. When all crime stories were examined, prosecutors accounted for 32.6 percent of the court source attributions, defense attorneys for 24.7 percent, and judges for 12.9 percent. Similarly, prosecutors and judges dominate court source attributions in policy stories. Judges accounted for more than 37 percent of the attributions to court sources in policy stories. This high percentage is impressive because judges are involved in the routine coverage of news only when they allow reporters to record courtroom comments. Judges were cited frequently in all types of policy stories, including more than 40 percent of the court source attributions in drug policy stories. (Most judges are elected officials, who can benefit from positive news coverage.) Prosecutors accounted for 34.1 percent of the remaining court attributions in drug policy stories, but defense attorneys for only 12.1 percent.

Sources Used in Celebrated Crime Stories

The findings on the types of sources presented in crime and drug stories indicate the possibility that officials use specific types of story to define the parameters of social problems. An additional method for examining sources' involvement in construction of social problems is to consider the authorities cited in celebrated drug cases. News space is not a luxury; stories thought to be most attractive to news consumers receive disproportionately large amounts of space. Because celebrated stories are rare events, compared with the traditional, routine "who, what, and where" crime story, the news organization expends valuable resources to cover all angles of these stories and constantly brings news consumers up to date. Because of the space and significance given to celebrated crime stories, they are also important for sources interested in generating public support for policy initiatives. We examine sources' involvement in celebrated cases using two lines of inquiry. First we discuss several local celebrated cases, combining the content and the observational results. Then we examine sources' involvement in two national celebrated cases.

While examining the media content and making observations, we were exposed to several celebrated local cases linked to the heightened interest in drugs. These local events received great amounts of space, were presented on the front page, often with a banner headline, and were revisited constantly as they progressed through the criminal justice system. Moreover, media personnel often were able to link these local scandals to a national drug story, such as a policy proposal or the arrest of a national figure. For example, a story about a federal investigation that resulted in the arrests of five Buffalo

police officers was juxtaposed with a story about President Bush's involvement in a Latin American drug summit (Herbeck 1990).

One way to study sources' involvement in the presentation of local celebrated cases is to examine the officials cited in different-sized stories. The size of a story (in column inches or in amount of time) can be used as a proxy for its importance. These data are rather crude, but they indicate that routine sources, such as police and court officials, were presented disproportionately in stories of all sizes. Moreover, these quantitative results show that as the size of a story increased, so did the involvement of high-ranking police officials and politicians.

We suspect that the percentage of source attributions to these officials significantly underrepresents the officials' involvement in construction of social problems. One limitation of examining sources' involvement in quantitative terms is that each attribution to a source is given equal value. This methodology overlooks the possibility that one source may influence the discourse of others or that an official contributes to the framing of social problems by leaking information to officials or other sources. This limitation can be addressed, however, by relying on other methodologies.

Three types of drug story received large amounts of space in the media organizations we examined: the arrest of a large number of individuals involved in a single incident, an innocent victim caught in the crossfire of a drug turf war, and the arrest or trial of a high-profile defendant such as a police officer. Officials linked these celebrated events to an issue, and framed them as supporting their drug policy position or used them to request additional funding. Local celebrated events were explained within a similar framework, regardless of the medium or the media organization considered.

Officials used the first two types of local celebrated incident to advocate a law-and-order response to drugs; they cited them as illustrating the need for additional resources to crack down on drug dealers or as examples of successful efforts. In agreement with the national response to the drug problem, local politicians across the country declared their own localized version of a war on drugs. When a significant arrest occurred or when a bystander was killed, the incident provided an opportunity to seek support for a policy position or to advocate the creation of a task force or special unit.

An example from our observations at the *Tribune* illustrates how politicians used their access to reporters and criminal justice personnel as an opportunity to comment on drug policy. A spokesperson from a suburban police department contacted one of the reporters about a press conference that had been called to announce a major drug bust. A man had been stopped for speeding, but the officer making the stop found a box of cash and a gun in the back seat, and (upon further investigation), a large amount of drugs in the trunk. At the press conference, attended by the mayor and the police chief, the drugs, gun, and cash were displayed for photographers and television news crews. The case was discussed in detail by several police representatives, but the story was always framed within the suburb's efforts to crack down on drugs. The mayor was quoted several times in the story.

In the third and last type of local celebrated event, political and criminal justice officials use their status as standard sources to respond to a scandal (see Cavender et al. 1993). In another incident that occurred during our observations at the *Tribune*, when we arrived at the court beat early one morning, we were told that 30 police officers had been arrested and were being arraigned on drug and gambling charges. At the federal courthouse, we encountered about 25 reporters and 10 videographers in the hallway outside the courtroom, waiting for people to exit. We spent the day with one of several *Tribune* reporters who were assigned to attend the arraignments and two press conferences about this case.

Officials speaking at both press conferences focused on positive attributes of the police department, reassuring the public that the department's position in the community's social control structure was not fundamentally flawed. At the first conference the mayor stated his support for the department and focused on its accomplishments. He also stressed his disdain for the behavior of these officers.

The second news conference was held at the offices of the FBI. Comments were made by the agent in charge of the investigation, the police chief, the director of public safety, and a U.S. attorney. In this second news conference, the police chief's initial comments framed how the newspaper and television organizations presented the incident to the public, and affected how other officials discussed it. In his opening statements, the chief stated that he no longer considered the arrested officers worthy of employment. He also claimed that they were not representative of the department. Most of the questions posed to the panel focused on his statement, allowing him to clarify his position and to discuss the department's efforts to respond to corruption. Moreover, the chief's initial comments provided the lead article in the next morning's newspaper.

The editorial staff coordinated the efforts of the reporters assigned to cover this case. Four stories detailed the investigation and how the combined efforts of the police department and the FBI resulted in the arrests. The primary minority voice presented was a union official; when asked to respond to the chief's statement, he reminded reporters that the officers had not yet been convicted.

Buffalo's police department responded similarly when five of their officers were arrested on drug charges. At the news conference announcing the arrests, a U.S. attorney said that the police commissioner requested the investigation. Moreover, the agent in charge of the sting operation was quoted as saying, "What we found was not a widespread drug problem in the department, but a very, very serious problem involving a fairly small group of officers" (Herbeck 1990).

To conclude this discussion, we present the content results from two national events. Each case is unique, but the results illustrate how relationships between officials and reporters, and access to the "symbolic landscape," provided opportunities to demonize drug use and gain policy support (see

Kraska 1993). One case was used to advocate a crackdown on drug crimes; the other illustrates efforts to respond to scandal on the national level.

In the first case, General Manuel Noriega was indicted for federal drug trafficking charges in February 1988, two months after George Bush began his presidency. On December 19, 1989, when almost two years of political and military pressure had failed to remove Noriega from power, the United States invaded Panama and legitimized the invasion by claiming that it was needed to bring Noriega to trial. Noriega evaded capture for 10 days by seeking refuge in the Vatican embassy, but eventually surrendered and was brought to the United States on January 4, 1990.

The second celebrated case involved Marion Barry. In his third term as mayor of Washington, DC, Barry was arrested and indicted by a federal grand jury on 11 drug and 3 perjury charges. The arrest was made in the Vista Hotel on January 18, 1990 as the result of a drug sting operation set up by federal drug agents. The evidence implicating Barry included videotape of Barry smoking crack from a crack pipe. Barry's case received news attention throughout the sample period, including stories about his arrest, the pretrial motions, and the prosecution witnesses' opening statements and testimony.

Twenty-eight stories about Noriega and 37 stories about Barry fell on the sampled content days, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the drug stories presented. Moreover, the stories about these two cases were generally larger than the other crime and drug stories presented. The stories about Noriega's case averaged over 16 column inches and the stories about Barry averaged over 15 column inches, whereas all stories of specific incidents averaged just over 12 column inches and all other drug stories averaged under 12 column inches.

The incident and defendant sources cited in the stories about these two celebrated cases are presented in table 4. These findings differ dramatically from those on the sources cited in routine crime stories: For example, political sources accounted for 16 percent of the source incident information and 15 percent of the defendant information in the Noriega stories. The presentation of Noriega's case in the news was unique in that it involved high-ranking officials, including President Bush, because of the events leading up to Noriega's arrest. Administration officials, Justice Department spokespersons, State Department officials, White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, senators, and President Bush were among the politicians quoted in the stories about Noriega that framed the discourse about his case.

These sources used Noriega's arrest to justify current drug policy and to win public approval for a law-and-order response to drug enforcement. In August and September 1989, four months before Noriega's arrest, President Bush had made drugs his primary domestic policy issue and had announced his program to fight them. The President then used the capture of Noriega to generate public support; he reacted immediately to Noriega's surrender and linked his arrest to the need to crack down on drug dealers: "His apprehension and return to the United States should send a clear signal that the United States is serious in its determination that those charged with promoting the

Table 4 Sources Cited in Celebrated Crime Stories

Sources	Noriega		High-Profile		Barry	
	Incident	Defendant	Incident	Defendant	Incident	Defendant
Police	1.1	.0	.0	6.5	2.0	2.0
Court	56.4	35.0	19.4	10.0	10.0	10.0
Defendant ^a	3.2	5.0	33.3	48.0	48.0	48.0
Victim ^b	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Politician	16.0	15.0	1.1	6.0	6.0	6.0
Witness/Jurors	.0	.5	5.4	4.0	4.0	4.0
Citizen	1.1	20.0	9.7	6.0	6.0	6.0
Documents	1.1	.0	2.2	4.0	4.0	4.0
Media	1.1	.0	2.2	6.0	6.0	6.0
Experts	2.1	5.0	1.1	6.0	6.0	6.0
Corrections	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Other ^c	1.1	5.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Not Specific ^d	13.8	10.0	19.4	6.0	6.0	6.0
	n = 94	n = 20	n = 93	n = 50	n = 50	n = 50

n = Number of sources
^aCategory includes attributions to defendants and acquaintances of defendants.
^bCategory includes attributions to victims and acquaintances of victims.
^cIncludes attributions to school and church officials.
^dCoded as not specific when attribution was "sources say," "officials say," or "authorities say."

distribution of drugs cannot escape the scrutiny of justice" (Rosenthal 1990:A1). Senator Dole expressed similar sentiments: "Noriega's arrest was good news for our war on drugs" (p. A1). Two months after Noriega's arrest, as approval ratings for President Bush soared, administration officials declared that the U.S. was succeeding in the war on drugs, and cited the arrest as evidence ("U.S. Cites Progress" 1990).

The source results for the Barry stories are very different. Although Barry's case involved a prosecutor with political motivations and high-profile defense attorneys who knew how to benefit from news coverage, Barry himself was the most frequently cited source in stories about his case.⁶ One-third of the source incident attributions and nearly one-half of the defendant attributions were direct quotes from Barry or his acquaintances. Barry alone accounted for 25.8 percent of the total source incident attributions about his case.

We believe that Barry was used frequently as a news source for two reasons. First, he had enormous media savvy, which he had developed as a politician in a city where competition for news space is fierce. Barry used his access to the news media, orchestrating news events after his arrest to influence public opinion about his case. He apologized for his actions to the city's children, voluntarily entered drug treatment, announced that he had become a born-again Christian, lashed out at the FBI for endangering his life by

allowing him to smoke crack, and reacted to the prosecution's case on the courthouse steps. Second, it could be argued that these two celebrated cases were in direct competition for the daily headlines, and clearly the Noriega case provided a better opportunity for generating support for national drug control policy. The Barry case was less politically appealing and created considerable risk for officials identified with his arrest. Questions of entrapment and racism were important themes in the news about his case.

Our research has identified two complementary processes involved in the representation of social problems in the news media. We will show how these processes can be explained by integrating the bureaucratic perspective of news production with the structuralist perspective. We conclude by elaborating on this integrated theoretical perspective and applying it to the presentation of drugs by the media.

Most crime news is produced through a process that satisfies organizations' bureaucratic goals. Media organizations present several crime stories daily: According to our research, print media present nine crime stories a day, on average, and electronic media four crime stories per day. The heavy demand for crime stories, coupled with the unpredictability of news, generates the need to simplify news production (Tuchman 1978). Efficiency is increased by placing reporters near sources, thus increasing their exposure to documents and to individuals willing to impart their official knowledge of crime. The research results presented here show that police and court sources are cited frequently in all types of crime, drug, and policy stories.

The reliance on these sources affects how crime, and criminal justice organizations, are presented in the news. Sources are willing to expose their organizations to media scrutiny in exchange for the opportunity to influence public opinion by framing issues within a narrow range of discourse. As sources they are given an accepted public forum to define what is important about crime policy. For example, the structured hierarchy of police organizations limits outsiders' access to organizational information and increases the organization's control over the dissemination of information. Police organizations use the upper echelons of the department in the news production process to ensure that the images provided are consistent with the department's goals. Reporters, however, do not blindly accept what the organizations say, but use the information selectively. The resulting images are the product of the interplay between reporters and officials.

The relationship that evolves from source organizations' structured involvement in the routine coverage of news is beneficial to those organizations because it provides strategic access to the media; it allows them to determine and support the traditional frames of events. The organizational features that produce crime stories, including the decentralized beat structure, the developed routines, and the reliance on official sources, all structure news media reporting so as to legitimize the system. This research has illustrated several important characteristics of media constructionism which ensure that the representation of crime supports the status quo.

First, media personnel are not likely to criticize the activities of the source organization because they treat as factual the information provided by official sources (see Fishman 1980). Moreover, the officials' ability to deny access or withhold information from reporters significantly shapes the reporters' decision-making process. Reporters are unlikely to criticize official sources because they fear losing access to information. Helen Benedict's (1992:10) study examining how the media cover sex crimes illustrates how "the habitual hurry and pressure under which reporters work render them particularly susceptible to manipulation." This manipulation is most likely to occur when public and political interest in a problem area is substantial, such as when specific issues or types of crime attract heightened media attention. In such cases, sources have the opportunity to expand the organization's power and to reaffirm their position as agents of social control. Celebrated cases provide officials with opportunities to bring attention to a social problem and to recommend policy initiatives.

Second, the reliance on these officials causes events to be framed in ways that reaffirm standard approaches to crime. Reporters are not likely to question officials' "bureaucratic accounts" because sources provide information consistent with their expectations (Fishman 1980; Gitlin 1980). By interacting with other reporters and with supervisors, reporters learn the established frames that help to legitimize accepted practices. These frames are reinforced by the way stories are reconstructed, where stories are placed, and how much attention is given to a specific crime incident. Moreover, even though officials or a specific individual may not receive attribution in every story about an issue they can still affect its presentation because others are forced to respond to the way officials expect issues to be framed.

Third, news organizations are structured so as to ensure exposure to a limited range of viewpoints. Media routines for the production of crime stories expose reporters primarily to high-ranking political and criminal justice officials. These sources are particularly highly motivated to manage the portrayal of crime news. For example, high-ranking members of the police hierarchy—either the police chief or the public relations spokesperson—dominated the representation of the police in the news. Other sources, such as experts, victims, and defendants, were rarely contacted by reporters because of their inaccessibility and their inability to provide information within expected frames. Also, experts were rarely cited in celebrated cases. Although both the Noriega and the Barry cases presented legal, moral, and political issues of interest to experts, most of the information cited in these stories was provided by politically affiliated sources.

Politicians, police chiefs, prosecutors, and judges participate as news sources when new or recurring social problems arise, because they receive attention and the opportunity to promote themselves or the institution they represent. These powerful sources are expected to comment on important social problems because of their position in an organization and in society. They are "recognized socially to be in a position to know" (Ericson et al.

1989:4). Tittle (1994:50) discussed how [elites] almost always find it necessary to create some sense in others that the elites deserve to be in powerful positions because they do, or have done, something good for the collectivity."

Moreover, a source's initial involvement in a celebrated case encourages continued involvement by others. The public, noticing the amount of space given to celebrated events, assumes that the issue and the person commenting on the issue are important. News consumers develop psychological relationships with these sources, increasing the sources' credibility and the expectation that they should continue to provide comment about the same and similar events (Reese, Grant, and Danielian 1994). The media access accorded to officials and the expectation of continued involvement allow officials to determine the scope of the debate and ultimately the interpretation and control of the topic (see Hall et al. 1978). Additional and contradictory stories about a topic might be presented; they will be framed according to what has been established, however, and the privileged access enjoyed by officials gives them an opportunity to respond.

Media coverage of drug cases illustrates clearly how the media routines that result from organizational needs allow politicians and law enforcement officials to accomplish system-legitimizing goals. Drugs are a well-established social problem; according to Best (1990:13), "most well-established social problems are owned by well-established claims-makers."

Drug abuse is a social problem that rises and falls in political priority. When it is popular, sources realize the potential to obtain organizational or individual benefits by defining themselves as authorities on the issue. Drugs historically have been used to further law-and-order approaches to crime. In the 1980s, politicians, including Presidents Reagan and Bush, paid an enormous amount of attention to drugs and defined the drug crisis in a particular way (Beckett 1994, 1995; Brownstein 1995; Kappeler et al. 1996; Reinerman and Levine 1995). Drugs have been framed as a criminal justice problem, with the implication that a law enforcement solution is the most effective.

Police and court officials accounted for a disproportionate amount of the information provided in incident and policy stories about drugs. The reports' reliance on these sources for drug stories is consistent with their frequent involvement in all types of crime story. In addition, politicians were involved in the social construction of this problem: We found that political officials increased their involvement in stories about drug crimes in general, in stories that received a large amount of space, and in stories about the celebrated arrest of Manuel Noriega.

The reliance on these news sources, coupled with the sources' understanding of standard media operating procedures, provided them with opportunities to determine how the drug issue would be framed for public consumption. Kappeler et al. (1996:9) discuss how drug wars exemplify the way crime myths are created, supported, and maintained. Drugs are an easy political target and offer an opportunity for bureaucratic expansion. Thus the crisis response that typically accompanies the heightened attention to the

issue can be easily predicted. Politicians pander to popular fear, frame the issue in the "most unyielding terms," and call for more law and more order—the safest political response (Kappeler et al. 1996:167). The message conveyed is the need for another war on drugs, with a crackdown on buyers and sellers regardless of the amount involved. Officials use dramatic examples, such as random acts of drug violence, to typify the problem and to establish consistency in the preferred response. Moreover, when a high-profile event occurs, officials can use it to reaffirm the accepted frames.

Alternative approaches such as drug treatment or drug education programs are much less likely to be presented and supported in the news, in the current political environment. Although a cadre of law enforcement officials, politicians, and economists have argued in support of drug legalization, this has not been presented as a viable alternative in the news media. Legalization was discussed in approximately 30 percent of the drug policy stories presented during the sample period. Legalization, however, was presented only in contrast to the preferred criminal justice response. The great majority of stories, including the celebrated events, were framed in language consistent with a need for law enforcement crackdowns, increased sentences, and zero tolerance.

The particularly important point about the ideological power of the news media is that these frames helped to support and reproduce elite interests. For example, the heightened attention resulted in policy initiatives. Public opinion about the seriousness of the problem peaked in 1990, at about the time when we conducted the content analysis. In 1985 a Gallup Poll survey showed that only 2 percent of respondents mentioned drug abuse as the single most important problem facing the country. In 1990, 38 percent of the respondents cited it as the leading problem (Gallup 1990). Such attention provides the opportunity to implement policy that addresses the problem in response to the way it was framed in the news media.

The sources involved in defining the drug crisis have made substantial financial and political gains. For example, the federal drug budget has quintupled since 1981 (Gardiner and McKinney 1991). According to a national report on drug statistics, the federal drug control budget was nearly 43 dollars per capita in 1991; in 1981 it had been less than 7 dollars. Over half of the available money (\$28.24 per capita) was used for law enforcement; the rest was distributed between treatment (\$6.91), prevention (\$5.85), and research (\$1.78) (U.S. Department of Justice 1992:128).

Moreover, treating drugs strictly as a problem of the criminal justice system, and advocating a response involving more arrests and longer sentences, had disproportionate effects on different social and racial groups. Amy Binder (1993:755) describes how the representation of events by the media is ideological—when officials in powerful institutional positions support frames that reinforce unequal social relations. According to research, drug wars have been designed to affect certain groups disproportionately (Currie 1993; Kappeler et al. 1996; Tonry 1995). Reinerman and Levine (1995:147), in examining crack cocaine, illustrate vividly how "drug scares typically link a scapegoated drug

to a troubling subordinate group—working-class immigrants, racial, or ethnic minorities, or rebellious youth." They conclude: "Crack was a godsend to the Right. They used it and the drug issue as an ideological fig leaf to place over the unsightly urban ills that had increased markedly under Reagan administration social and economic policies" (p. 170).

Our latest drug war was fought primarily in the inner cities, drug use was associated with the lower classes, and drug policy affected black communities disproportionately (Currie 1993; Tonry 1995). Researchers argue that the policy makers who designed our approach to drugs knew it would affect various groups differently. According to Michael Tonry (1995:123), "the War on Drugs and the set of harsh crime-control policies in which it was enmeshed were launched to achieve political, not policy, objectives, and it is the adoption for political purposes of policies with foreseeable disparate impacts, the use of disadvantaged black Americans as a means to the achievement of politicians' electoral ends, that must in the end be justified, and cannot." Officials attempted to justify the policy response to drugs, and to generate support for their position, by being involved in the social construction of the drug problem.

We conclude that news sources involve themselves in the news production process to further their own social control agendas. In our integrated theory of news production, we assume that the two processes identified are closely linked, and that the negotiations between reporters and sources determine what is presented about social problems in the news. Media organizations rely on official sources to fulfill daily production objectives. These routine stories are irrelevant in terms of their impact on public opinion, and the established news production process ensures that they rarely harm news sources. When public interest is focused on a specific social problem or a celebrated case that can be linked to a policy issue, high-ranking officials use their access to the news production process to frame social problems and to increase the *likelihood* that public opinion will coincide with their own beliefs. Other social problems might present different sources with opportunities to gain support and legitimacy.

Future research should examine how sources use specific types of stories to promote issue frames, how the relationship between reporter and source evolves by type of story, and whether this relationship varies by type of organization. With such knowledge we could comprehend more clearly the involvement of sources in the news production process and the social control functions of the news media.

Notes

¹ Medium-sized cities are those with 100,000 to 400,000 inhabitants and 5,000 to 50,000 index offenses per year; large cities are those with 400,000 to 800,000 inhabitants and 50,000 to 90,000 index offenses; extra-large cities have 800,000 to 1,500,000 inhabitants and register 90,000 to 150,000 index offenses.

² Each of the news organizations considered here has an interest in attracting a local audience; therefore this is a study of local media organizations. One would expect that the national offi-

cials' predominance is underestimated because local news presents only wire reports that contain comments from these officials.

³ Nearly 60% of the stories contained fewer than five cited sources. When a story included a large number of sources, we collected data on as many as nine sources cited: as many as three sources providing comment on the incident, three on the defendant, and three on the victim. In this article we discuss findings on source incidents. Only information that was attributed directly to a source was coded. If more than three sources provided information, we coded the first, third, and fifth sources. We chose the sources at the beginning of stories because we thought these sources represented those whom news organizations deemed the most important voices on a topic; we also wanted to capture as many of the voices cited in crime stories as possible.

⁴ These results are consistent across each news organization in the sample. Police and court sources accounted for 57% of the attributions in the *Albany Times Herald*, 56.1% in the *Buffalo News*, 53.6% in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 48.1% in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 48.7% in the *Dallas Times Herald*, and 48.3% in the *Detroit News*.

⁵ No specific amount of space is set aside for crime stories; events either increase or decrease the importance of crime. We argue that crime is an important news topic in general. The content results show that approximately 11% of all news stories were related to crime, the fourth most likely category to be presented. Production of these stories requires a substantial investment of organizational resources.

⁶ Although Mayor Barry was a politician at the time of his arrest, we coded his source results in the defendant category because of his role as a defendant.

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