***True Crime Media Consumption’s Effect on Jurors’ Criminal Justice Orientation (Still working on a better title….)***

Media’s influence in our lives has increased due to advancements in technology. News outlets keep viewers informed of current events almost as soon as they occur constantly feeding information about the latest occurrences of crime and punishment. This media influence can have unforeseen consequences, for example, media coverage of high profile cases while the trials are still occurring has increased making it difficult to avoid exposure to criminal proceeding (Staggs, 2017). As potential jurors are exposed to criminal cases, there is the potential for biases to form, causing conflicts between a defendant’s Sixth Amendment right to a fair trial and the media’s First Amendment right to freedom of the press (Meringolo, 2011). This phenomenon of pretrial publicity (PTP) consists of the coverage of criminal or civil cases by the media that is released prior to or during a trial that in turn affects the ability of jurors to be fair and unbiased (Ruva & Coy, 2020). There are ultimately two types of pretrial publicity: trial specific and general prejudices (Vidmar, 1997). Trial specific refers to publicity directly related to a current on-going trial, while general prejudices refers to crime related media that is more generic and applies to multiple cases or crime in general. While most research has focused on trial specific pretrial publicity, it has been suggested that general prejudice types of pretrial publicity also can significantly impact jurors. One area that could potentially impact general prejudices is exposure to True Crime Media.

The True Crime Media (TCM) genre consists real life criminal cases, crimes, and court proceedings (Seltzer, 2008). They are presented in a variety of mediums, from television to blogs, etc. and are often presented in a dramatic, macabre fashion designed to catch attention and entertain. Interest in TCM has greatly increased in recent years, and with this increase, it is important to understand how TCM and its potential for PTP may affect jurors’ opinions, orientations, and potential biases. One possible area that TCM could impact prospective jurors is in their Crime Control/Due Process Orientation (CCDPO; Liu & Shure, 1993).

CCDPO is a framework that governs lawmaking, court proceedings, and sentencing. Liu and Shure (1993) define individuals with due process orientations as having, “a commitment to fairness and egalitarianism in the application of the law through the mechanism of procedural regularity” (p. 344). Whereas, high in crime control believe that the suppression of criminal conduct is the most important aspect of the criminal process. According to Liu and Shure’s model, individuals fall on a spectrum between protection of individual rights and crime suppression referred to as their CCDPO. CCDPO has been shown to influence verdicts in a variety of different cases (Peters & Wilkinson, 2016).

The present study explored the relationship between TCM consumption and potential jurors’ CCDPO. It was hypothesized that the more TCM consumed, the more participants will lean toward crime control ideologies.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants consisted of 488 individuals aged 18 or over, from the United States. Participants were recruited using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing marketplace. Participants were paid at a rate of minimum wage for 15 minutes of work.

**Materials and Procedures**

After consenting to participate in the study, participants were presented with a question which stated, “Do you watch, listen to, or read about true crime (i.e., real world criminal activity, court cases, etc.)?,”. If participants answered yes to this question, the participants’ consumption habits of TCM were evaluated in a self-report questionnaire. This questionnaire was presented to assess their rate of consumption (1 = less than once a week to 5 = seven or more times a week). Participants whom answered that they did not consume crime media were assigned a zero.

Following this assessment, participants were presented with a measure of the competing goals of the justice system: Crime Control vs Due Process (Packer, 1964). The survey utilized was developed by Liu and Shure (1993), based on a scale developed by Fitzgerald and Ellsworth (1984). It is a measure of individuals’ viewpoints on the competing goals of the criminal justice system. It consists of two subscales: Due Process/Crime Control (DPCC) and Procedural Due Process (PDP). The DPCC focuses on broader ideologies while the PDP focuses more on specific issues of procedural regularity (Liu & Shure, 1993). Randomly placed within the survey were several attention check questions to eliminate bots.

**Results**

In order to analyze the impact of amount of true crime media watched on participants’ PDP and CCDPO, two separate linear regressions were performed. The first analysis on PDP was non-significant, *R2* = .002, *F*(1, 486) = 0.84, *p* = 0.359. True Crime Media did not predict participants views on PDP, *β* = 0.28, *SE* = 0.30, *t* = -0.92, *p* = .359, *95% CI* [-0.88, 0.32]. The second analysis on the other hand was significant, *R2* = .047, *F*(1, 486) = 24.16, *p* < 0.001. True Crime Media did predict participants CCDPO, *β* = -1.56, *SE* = 0.32, *t* = -4.92, *p* < 0.001, *95% CI* [-2.18, -0.94]. Increases in TCM consumption resulted in higher levels of Crime Control viewpoints.

**Discussion**

Overall, the hypothesis was confirmed. Higher amounts of TCM consumption predicted higher levels of crime control ideologies. It is important to note a few caveats. It is not clear from the current research how this TCM related difference in CCDPO would affect different types of crimes. In general, high crime control orientation tends to predict guilty verdicts; however, it is unclear if TCM would have a direct impact on verdicts in an actual trial. Also, it should be noted that many of the items in the Liu and Shure (1993) scales are heavily related to significantly aggressive crimes (for example serial murders). Given the tendency for TCM to focus on these types of sensationalized crimes, it is not too surprising that they are related to higher scores of this specific scale. Future research should examine what sort of effect TCM consumption would have on specific types of crime.

**Abstract**

This study examined the effect of True Crime Media (TCM) consumption on participants’ Crime Control and Due Process Orientation (CCDPO) as a measure of general prejudices type of pretrial publicity. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire assessing TCM consumption habits as well as a survey analyzing their criminal justice viewpoints. The CCDPO survey consisted of two subscales: Procedural Due Process PDP) and Due Process/Crime Control. Linear regressions indicated TCM consumption did not affect participants’ PDP viewpoints. However, results did indicate that an increase in TCM consumption resulted in higher levels of Crime Control orientation.