

B o x 2.2 Linking Satanic Cults to Serial Homicide and Bullying to Terrorism

Phillip Jenkins provides an example of an attempt to link satanic cults to serial murder:

Estimates about the numbers of victims varied greatly, but one commonly cited figure suggested that some fifty thousand ritualistic sacrifices occurred each year. In 1988, for example, the American Focus on Satanic Crime (a work especially targeted at law enforcement professionals) suggested that Satanists are connected with "the murders of unbaptized infants, child sexual abuse in day-care, rape, ritual abuse of children, drug trafficking, arson, pornography, kidnapping, vandalism, church desecration, corpse theft, sexual trafficking of children and the heinous mutilation, dismemberment and sacrifices of humans and animals. [They are] responsible for the deaths of more than 60,000 Americans each year, including missing and runaway youth."

In another example of linkage, the lyrics from a public service announcement song by Ian Victorian strive to link bullying to terrorism.

Choose Freedom from Bullies

*Let me tell ya something about bullies
They can show up anywhere, anytime, and any place
It ain't always about size, looks, or race necessarily
Bullies use intimidation and threats to terrorize others
They don't give a damn about you or your momma
Terrorists use the same tactics too
Always tryin' to steal the freedom from you, you, and you*

SOURCES: Phillip Jenkins, *Using Murder* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994, 197) quoting Alan Peterson, "The American Focus on Satanic Crime," foreword. http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1077521/choose_freedom_from_bullies_ian_victorian_psa_anti_hatecrime_ad/

accepted. If the dominant social construction becomes "crime is out of control," then those who have made that claim have been successful. When President Obama stated that mass shootings by individuals who should not have access to guns is out of control, he was forwarding a claim about the world that also suggested a response to the claimed condition of the world. Passage of new laws and policies directed against the "easy access to guns in America" would indicate the success of the president's social construction effort of a social problem, an effort that had previously failed to gain traction. To further enhance their likelihood of success, claims makers also frequently make use of pre-established constructions, or frames, to advance their claims.

Frames

In the social construction of the crime-and-justice arena, prepackaged constructions, or **frames**, include factual and interpretative claims and associated policies. A frame is a fully developed social construction template that allows its users to categorize, label, and deal with a wide range of world events. Frames simplify one's dealing

with the world by organizing experiences and events into groups and guiding what are seen as the appropriate policies and actions. Regarding crime and justice, pre-existing frames make the processing, labeling, and understanding of crimes easier for the person holding that frame's view of reality. If a crime can be quickly placed into a pre-established frame, it will be seen as another example of a particular type of crime needing a particular type of response. A senseless murder, for example, might become "another predator killing that resulted from a lenient criminal justice system." Such crimes can be quickly cognitively dealt with and tied to a policy position. You do not have to spend a lot of time understanding a crime that has been fitted into a crime-and-justice frame. The cause of the crime, explanations for why it occurred, and what needs to be done are already built into the frame. Certain U.S. crime-and-justice frames have deep historical roots; criminologist Theodore Sasson describes five long-standing crime-and-justice frames that compete today in the United States.¹⁷ All five frames offer explanations of crime, point to specific causes, and come with accompanying policies. These frames are summarized in Table 2.1.

Faulty Criminal Justice System Frame. The first frame holds that crime results from a lack of "law and order." People commit crimes knowing they can get away with them because the police are handcuffed by liberal judges and the prisons are revolving doors. The only way to ensure public safety is to increase the swiftness, certainty, and severity of punishment. Loopholes and technicalities that impede the

TABLE 2.1 Crime-and-Justice Frames

Frame	Cause	Policy	Symbols
Faulty system	Crime stems from criminal justice leniency and inefficiency	The criminal justice system needs to "get tough."	Aurora Colorado "Dark Knight" shooting, "handcuffed police," "revolving door justice"
Blocked opportunities	Crime stems from poverty and inequality	The government must address the "root causes" of crime by creating jobs and reducing poverty.	Stealing sneakers, black-on-black crime, dead-end, low-paying jobs
Social breakdown	Crime stems from family and community breakdown	Citizens should band together to re-create traditional communities.	Urban riots, Steubenville Rape case, "family values"
Racist system	The criminal justice system operates in a racist fashion	African Americans should band together to demand justice.	Driving while Black, shooting of Trayvon Martin, "profiling"
Violent media	Crime stems from violence in the mass media	The government should regulate violent imagery in the media.	"Life imitates art," copycat crimes, violent video games, Grand Theft Auto, Aurora Colorado "Dark Knight" shooting

apprehension and imprisonment of offenders must be eliminated, and funding for police, courts, and prisons must be increased. The faulty system frame is symbolically represented by the previously convicted, repeat rapist or by the image of inmates passing through a revolving door on a prison.

Blocked Opportunities Frame. This frame depicts crime as a consequence of inequality and discrimination, especially in unemployment, poverty, and education. People commit crimes when they discover that the legitimate means for attaining material success are blocked. Unemployment, ignorance, disease, filth, poor housing, congestion, and discrimination all contribute to crime waves that are seen as sweeping the nation.¹⁸ "If you're going to create a sink-or-swim society, you have to expect people to thrash before they go down" is an example of a claim associated with the blocked opportunity frame.¹⁹ To reduce crime, government must ameliorate the social conditions that cause it. Blocked opportunities are symbolically portrayed through references to dead-end jobs held by inner-city youth, such as flipping burgers at McDonald's.

Social Breakdown Frame. This frame depicts crime as a consequence of family and community disintegration, skyrocketing rates of divorce, and out-of-wedlock births. Social breakdown has both conservative and liberal versions. The conservative version attributes family and community breakdown to "permissiveness," which is exemplified by protest movements and government-sponsored welfare. The liberal version attributes family and community breakdown to unemployment, racial discrimination, and the loss of jobs and income. An example of a social breakdown claim was made by then President Bill Clinton: "In America's toughest neighborhoods, meanest streets, and poorest rural areas, we have seen a stunning breakdown of community, family and work at the heart and soul of civilized society. This has created a vast vacuum into which violence, drugs, and gangs have moved."²⁰

Racist System Frame. The racist system frame focuses on the criminal justice system rather than on crime. This frame depicts the courts and police as racist agents of oppression. In this frame, police resources are seen as dedicated more to the protection of white neighborhoods than to reducing crime in minority communities. Minority offenders are seen as more likely than whites who commit comparable offenses to be arrested, convicted, and sentenced to prison, and the death penalty is administered in a racist fashion. In radical versions of this frame, the basic purpose of the criminal justice system is to suppress a potentially rebellious underclass. An example of this claim was offered by then Undersecretary of State Nicholas B. Katzenbach: "We have in these United States lived under a dual system of justice, one for the white, one for the black."²¹ The racist system frame has been symbolized by the beating of motorist Rodney King, the trial of O. J. Simpson, and the Trayvon Martin shooting.

Violent Media Frame. It is not surprising in a culture swamped in media that a frame reflecting concerns about the media exists. The media violence frame depicts crime and social violence as a consequence of violence on television, in the movies, in popular music and in video games. It is argued that violence in

the mass media undermines respect for life. To reduce violence in society, this frame directs us to first reduce it in the mass media. It is forwarded by claims such as the following: "By the time the average child reaches age 18, he will have witnessed some 18,000 murders and countless highly detailed incidents of robbery, arson, bombings, shooting, beatings, forgery, smuggling, and torture."²² The media violence frame is symbolically referenced by allusions to violent visual media, video games, and musical lyrics. Theodore Sasson notes that despite being perceived as the least important general explanation of crime and violence, media violence is seen as at least a partial explanation of violent crime by nearly all Americans. Violent media is not seen as the most important source of our cultural violence, but there is a broad consensus that the media substantially contribute to violent crime.

How Frames Influence Crime-and-Justice Policy. All five frames are supported by some portion of the public, and the frames are not mutually exclusive. People often simultaneously support more than one frame, applying one frame to one set of crimes and criminals and another frame to other events. Crime-and-justice claims makers can guarantee a level of support if they can fit their social construction within one of these frames. Analogous to a political candidate running as a Republican or a Democrat, and thereby being assured of the votes of loyal party members, these five established frames are resources that can be tapped by criminal justice claims makers to forward individual claims and policies. By fitting their claims and desired policies within one of these pre-existing frames, they tap into a pool of public support. Many crime-and-justice events can be differently constructed using different frames. For example, O. J. Simpson's murder trial was symbolic for two frames: Those who thought him guilty of murder saw his acquittal as evidence that the criminal justice system is faulty and must be tougher; those who saw him as innocent saw his arrest and prosecution as an example of a racist criminal justice system. Similarly, the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was used as support for the social breakdown frame, with the shooter portrayed as coming from a dysfunctional family; the media violence frame, with the shooter portrayed as under the spell of violent video games; and the faulty system frame, with the system blamed for not recognizing a dangerous youth and preventing his acquisition of weapons.

The five frames jockey with one another for influence over how criminality is understood in society, which criminal justice policies enjoy public support, and how new crimes and criminals are perceived. The process through which crime-and-justice frames fall in and out of favor is closely tied to the social construction competition that is constantly being conducted in the media. In addition to being part of their own frame, by focusing on certain types of crimes or giving access to specific frame promoting claims makers, the media can boost frames ahead of one another.²³ As will be discussed in later chapters, although all five frames get some media play, recent crime-and-justice content and portraits tend to favor the faulty system and social breakdown frames over the other three. In addition to these fully constructed frames, less comprehensive social construction tools, known as narratives, are also available to claims makers.