The purpose of this presentation is threefold. First, we propose a theoretical social-cultural learning model that links the news media’s sensationalistic response to school violence events through distorting public perceptions (i.e., thoughts) and reactions (i.e., behaviors). Second, we contend that a distorted public perception of school violence can result in overcompensating behaviors (e.g., ineffective zero tolerance programs, multiple false positives from profiling students) and contribute to the proclivity for copycats (i.e., students considering such violent acts due to knowing that others will observe their acts and be remembered). Third, suggestions will be provided on how to change this current phenomenon on both the individual and systemic-social level.

The News Media & School Violence: A Reciprocal Social-Cultural Learning Model

Sensationalistic Reporting

Considering violence as a solution;
Students feeling estranged/disconnected

Information
Restricting reporting specific details of cases;
Incorporate professional services in reports

Sociocultural Response
Deception; Glorification; Desensitization; Generalization; Responsibility Attribution

School Violence
Juvenile Crime

Moral Panic
Hostility towards specific youth groups (profiling students);
Heightened public concern; Overcompensation from authorities (zero tolerance policies)

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