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**Review of *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of a Crisis*.  
David L. Altheide. Reviewed by Allan Brawley.**

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more fully. First, while one can construct rational arguments for why our current prohibitionist drug policy does not and cannot work and propose other policies that might well be somewhat better, there is always the political process which itself is often entrenched in moral claims. The book provides few insights into what it would take to change this process so that drug policy reform could possibly occur. At present politicians and the public support the zero-tolerance, abstinence approach to illicit drugs and overwhelmingly reject legalization with the exception of "compassionate use" of medical marijuana legislation that has passed in some states. What will it take for these public perceptions to change so that harm reduction approaches can gain better and stronger support? Another area that is problematic in the book is the brief inclusion of gambling and prostitution as "other vices." These few pages seek to draw a parallel between these behaviors and illicit drug use, but their brevity precludes a thorough assessment. Thus, it might have been better to eliminate these areas from the book. Sadly, there is also considerable redundancy in the book—the overview reviews several arguments in depth and the reader sees them again in later chapters of the book. Throughout the book, the authors constantly refer backwards and forwards to different chapters which is confusing and probably indicates more overlap than necessary.

Despite these limitations, the book is well written, and it provides a fresh perspective on several options for drug policy. It offers a reasonable approach to the often irrational arguments in this field which often claim moral certainty. One hopes that those in a position to develop and/or influence drug policy will read this book as it certainly gives a valuable perspective on these enduring issues.

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David L. Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of a Crisis*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002. \$26.95 papercover.

Why are those members of our society who are least likely to be victims of crime and violence arming themselves in unprece-

dented numbers, taking self-defense classes, wiring their homes with security devices and retreating to gated communities? According to Altheide and other media scholars, the mass media are the principal contributors to the discourse of fear that pervades the popular culture today. Certainly, there are real dangers that exist in our society that the prudent citizen is wise to be aware of and take all reasonable steps to avoid. However, the anxiety, distrust, and willingness to tolerate limitations to our freedom of movement and association that many of us manifest are attributable to an unjustified fear created by the workings of the mass media.

Altheide has spent his academic career examining how the mass media function, the values that underlie their operations, their formats and perspectives, how these various elements affect the messages they send, and the consequences for society of the dominant messages. This study builds on the work that he and others have done on the inter-relationships among popular culture, the mass media and social control. The specific research on which this book is based examines the nature of the social power or control that flows from the ability of the modern media (as well as those adept at working with the media) to define social situations in ways that have highly undesirable social consequences.

Using a computerized research methodology that track discourse in major media outlets from the 1980s into the 1990s, Altheide's research reveals ever-increasing uses of fear in stories newspaper and television and headlines. He describes how the "problem frame" has emerged in media news production, and how this has constituted a virtual "fear machine" that creates a belief that danger and risk pervade our everyday lives.

Altheide contends, along with other media scholars, that the mass media and popular culture, by marketing fear in both news and entertainment communications and by increasingly blurring the line between these two formerly distinct formats, have changed our social expectations and our daily lives in ways that are destructive to our communities, our well-being and our control over our lives. In the name of informing and/or entertaining the public, the media bombard audiences and readers with problem-oriented and often anxiety-provoking reports on a daily basis. Fear is no longer limited to specific objects or events. It

is experienced as the background environment or context that specific acts or events simply illustrate and reinforce.

Who benefits from the marketing of fear? Certainly, the large media conglomerates do by drawing audiences that they can sell to advertisers. Also benefiting is the "fear industry" that sells us security services and equipment. But, perhaps most importantly, the formal agents of social control, primarily the police and other law enforcement institutions are the primary beneficiaries. Law enforcement agencies are the primary source of information to the media regarding crimes and, increasingly, their viewpoint tends to dominate media perspectives on crime and violence and frame public debate of these and related topics. Who loses? Most obviously, the unprecedented number of people (primarily low-income and members of minority groups) who have received increasingly harsh treatment by the criminal justice system during a period when crime statistics, including for violent crimes, have gone down. The taxpayer has, of course, borne the cost of dramatically increased policing, processing and incarceration while other critical social needs like health care and education have been seriously under-funded. Especially serious, from Altheide's perspective, has been the costs to all of us resulting from the transformation that has occurred in our effective environment. Appropriate awareness of specific dangers has been replaced by a generalized fearfulness that pervades our daily lives. Altheide notes that fear is corrosive of justice. Its pervasiveness causes us to seek solutions that involve serious consequences for public policy, civil liberties, and the health of our communities. He believes that this state of affairs has to be changed and that this will require broad understanding of the processes that have gotten us into our present predicament. This book is his latest effort to promote such understanding.

This is a well-written account of the role of the media in distorting the public's understanding of crime and related social problems and in creating an exaggerated fearfulness on the part of the citizenry. It is a useful addition to the body of literature on the construction of social problems and provides a good example of the way in which careful research on media affects is carried out.

Scholars familiar with research on media depictions of crime and violence will not find a whole lot that is entirely new in this

book. However, this is an accessible and articulate presentation of important research that is part of a large body of scholarship with which more social workers, social scientists, policymakers and media professionals should be familiar. On a practical level, those of us in the social sciences and human services should actively seek out journalists and provide them with more accurate information on issues, convince them of the value of presenting different viewpoints, and alert them to the consequences of always using the problem frame. Altheide admits that this is easier said than done, since fear sells and the existing formats are familiar, effective, and profitable. However, it is a responsibility that we can ill afford to ignore.

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Carolyn Saari, *The Environment: Its Role in Psychosocial Functioning and Psychotherapy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. \$49.50 hardcover, \$22.00 papercover.

In her new book, Carolyn Saari sets out to integrate developmental and clinical social work practice theories to address, as she sees it, shortcomings in current thinking in sufficiently accounting for the influence of the social environment on human functioning. The problem, she writes, has been that:

"Clinical social work, as a profession, has always believed in the importance of the environment and has regarded theories of the "person-in-situation" or the "person-environment configuration" as necessary in order to understand human needs . . . Yet because paradigms of Western thought separated the individual and the environment into two quite different frameworks, it has been extremely difficult to find a viable bridge between these inner and outer aspects. Thus social work theories have espoused either an intrapsychic approach or a more social approach, with the advocates of each both criticizing and competing with those of the other . . ." (p. 2)

For Saari, it is the limited attention to environmental influences in psychoanalytic theory, specifically, that she seeks to address. Her approach to this problem is a novel one: to answer these