Reframing Public Safety

Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr.
Dean, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs
Senior Fellow, FrameWorks Institute

Eric Lindland
Senior Researcher
FrameWorks Institute

Wednesday, May 4, 2011
The mission of the FrameWorks Institute is to advance the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by identifying, translating and modeling relevant scholarly research for framing the public discourse about social problems.
What is a Frame?

“The way a story is told – its selective use of particular values, symbols, metaphors, and messengers – which, in turn, triggers the shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of their world.”

-FrameWorks Institute
“But I Just Want to Provide Services”

- **Prioritization** of public and charitable dollars is affected by framing of issues

- **Relevance** of services and specific approaches affected by way problem has been defined by media

- Ability to **prevent** social problems will be affected by public discourse
“But I just want to do grassroots organizing”

- Political Opportunities
- Mobilizing Structures
- Resources
- Framing Social Construction of Meaning

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“Movements are engaged in ‘meaning-work’ ...the struggle over the production of ideas of meaning... The failure of mass mobilization when structural conditions seem otherwise ripe may be accounted for by the absence of a resonant master frame.”

Snow and Benford (1998)
“Finding some familiar element causes us to activate the story that is labeled by that familiar element, and we understand the new story as if it were an exemplar of that old element.”

“Understanding means finding a story you already know and saying, ‘oh yeah, that one.’”

“Once we have found [the] story, we stop processing.”

“People approach the world not as naïve, blank-slate receptacles who take in stimuli …in some independent and objective way, but rather as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who have stored their prior experiences as an organized mass. This prior experience then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms these expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time.”

But more like this...
The Swamp of Cultural Models

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The Questions We Ask

- What do you want to drop into the swamp (policies)?

- What’s in the swamp (cultural models)?

- What are the reframing challenges (what happens when you drop messages into the swamp)?

- How can you reframe the issue (how to navigate through the swamp and use good ecologies in mind)?
Strategic Frame Analysis™

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Chart the Landscape
- Media Content Analysis
- Reviews of Experts and Advocates Materials

Convening of Experts and Advocates
- Cultural Models Interviews
- Peer Discourse Analysis

Simplifying Models Research
- Experimental Tests of Frame Effects

Redraw the Maps

Expose the Gaps and Traps

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The Expert View

Incarceration rates in the U.S. are too high.

- U.S. has highest total and per capita incarceration rates in the world.
- Incarceration rates have grown in parallel with rise of for-profit prison industry.
The criminal justice system is biased.

- There is a specific bias against young men of color, who are disproportionately targeted, arrested, and punished within that system.

- There is also a disproportionate negative impact on those with immigrant status.
The juvenile justice system largely treats youth as adults.

- Adult procedures and policies in sentencing and rehabilitation are simply aged down and applied to juvenile populations.

- The expanded law enforcement presence in schools has contributed to the criminalization of juvenile behavior.

- Services addressed specifically to the needs of youth and children, and informed by a developmental perspective, are insufficiently available.
Current policy fails to address systemic, ecological, and community factors as important determinants of crime.

- Lack of access to quality health care, including mental health and addiction services.
- High drop-out rates in under-resourced schools.
- High rates of unemployment and a general lack of economic opportunity.
- The fraying social fabric in communities and families where many men cycle in and out of prisons and are denied the rights of citizenship upon their release.
The Expert View

The criminal justice system lacks accountability.

- Both prosecutors and law enforcement officials who engage in misconduct are often not held accountable for their actions.

- Too much prosecutorial discretion.
The Expert View

The criminal justice system is poorly managed.

- Policies and practices are not grounded in evidence.
- Poor data collection, analysis management and access.
- Alternative strategies are not being considered that are cost effective and have better results in lowering rates of crime and recidivism.
The criminal justice system is used as a proxy for social services.

- The size of the criminal justice system has led some policymakers to view and treat it as a social service delivery system.

- The criminal justice system, specifically prisons and jails, is tasked with addressing many of the social needs of the country.
Emerging Themes
“…we are innovative, we are really smart, we’re doing amazing things in our communities. We need to start honoring them and giving them the resources and – research and development resources that they need, and not wasting our money on the stuff that we don’t need, which is prisons.”
Solutions

Shrink the System, Streamline Coordination

“...we have a constitutional right to counsel, people aren’t getting it. They’re never going to get it, if the system stays this big. The only way it’s going to happen is if you shrink the system...”

Ensure Competent Counsel

“... the provision of competent counsel is as more often than not, not provided. It’s either you don’t get counsel at all, which we’re finding is disturbingly happening in really disturbing numbers or you get counsel that is so handicapped by lack of resources... So here you have one of the major safeguards of the system that is sort of irreparably damaged.”

Eliminate the War on Drugs

“I was going to say eliminate the war on drugs.”
“Defective Tool”

Policymakers treat the criminal justice system as a social service delivery system of convenience.

- Lack of access to mental health facilities, failing schools, and a lack of community development solved by higher levels of incarceration.
“Defective Tool”

“It’s not that we rely on incarceration as sort of – which I think is true as the priority punishment, but that we rely entirely too much on the criminal justice system to sort of address a whole host of issues that don’t necessarily need to be even brought in, you know, mental illness, drug addiction, drug use, the list goes on and on. And that we rely on the criminal justice as the problem solver…”

“…to frequent use of the criminal justice system as the delivery point for social services or intervention.”

“Immigration has become part of the criminal justice system. The deportation system appears to be an effective system for dealing with it. Apparently, we believe we can arrest our way out of immigration.”

“We have come to an over-reliance on the criminal justice system to address social problems –from mental health to addiction to poverty.”

Expert Interviews
What About the Public?

• How does the public define and understand the concept of “public safety”?

• What would “smart on crime” mean to the public?

• How does the public think about racial bias in the system?

• How does the public understand fairness?

• Does the public believe that the system can be better managed?
Expert Materials Review and Convening

- Review of criminal justice materials from over 60 advocacy organizations to recreate the best approximation of a “public safety” core story.

- October 2010 convening of expert advocates to discuss challenges and help refine the expert core story.

Cultural Models Interviews

- 20 one-on-one interviews with members of the American general public in three locations

- Separate analysis by three researchers to identify underlying cultural models.

How to develop communications strategies to bridge this gap?

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What is public safety?

Police

Fire

Rescue

Transportation
What is public safety?

Police

Fire

Rescue

Transportation

Crime?
What is public safety?

Police

Fire

Rescue

Transportation

Criminal justice system?

☑ Only partial intersection between public safety and the criminal justice system in public thinking.
Relative to crime, who is responsible for public safety?

- Government
- Communities
- Individuals

✅ Distributed model of responsibility must be carefully navigated in communications.
How to judge crime?
Cultural Models of Judgment

How to judge crime?

Actors  Actions  "Fairness"
Cultural Models of Judgment

Actors

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Cultural Models of Judgment

Rational Actor Model

Actors
Rational actor model presents a challenge to communicators because it mutes attention to both developmental and systemic factors.

“Age of reason” = full accountability
How to judge crime?

Cultural Models of Judgment

Actors  Actions  “Fairness”

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Cultural Models of Judgment

Actions

[Image of two human figures with one holding a gun]

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How to judge actions?

A “Violence Threshold”

Violent

Non-violent

✓ Structures support for more appropriate sentencing for non-violent crime.
How to judge crime?

Cultural Models of Judgment

Actors  Actions  “Fairness”
Cultural Models of Judgment

“Fairness”
Cultural Models of Judgment

What is fair?

Consistency Model

Contextual Model

- Consistency model has mixed implications.
- Contextual model is more promising -- focuses attention outward.
- Communications must be careful when invoking ‘fairness’.

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What is the criminal justice system?

Ideal vs. Real

Police
What is the criminal justice system?

Ideal vs. Real

Courts ≠
What is the criminal justice system?

Ideal vs. Real

Prisons ≠
Implications of *ideal* and *real* modeling of the criminal justice system

- Proximity of ideal and real conceptions of policing is potentially problematic.

- Moving from “a few bad apples” perspective to one of a need for systemic reform is a communications challenge.

- Communicating a reform agenda bumps up against a view that the ideal/real divide as unbridgeable and efforts to improve the system are futile.
How to improve the criminal justice system to improve public safety?

From Causes to Solutions

Cause

Solution

Individualist Models
Deal with individuals

Ecological Models
Address people’s ecologies

Developmental Models
Address developmental influences
From Causes to Solutions

Individualist Models

Rational Actor

“Rotten Egg”

Mentally Ill
Rational actor model sets up one clear solution—deterrence through surveillance and punishment.

- Increase number of police.
- More Neighborhood Watches.
- Punish crimes more severely.
How to improve the criminal justice system to improve public safety?

From Causes to Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Solution</th>
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Ecological Models

Address people’s ecologies

- Improve public resources.
- Town hall meetings to improve policy to meet local needs.
- Increase support services.

☑ Ecological model highly promising - sets up systemic/policy solutions to crime and public safety issues.
From Causes to Solutions

How to improve the criminal justice system to improve public safety?

Cause          Solution

Individualist Models

Deal with individuals

Ecological Models

Address people’s ecologies

Developmental Models

Address developmental influences
Mixed implications: Implicit understanding that early events shape later outcomes holds promise for policy communications. Model can, however, reinforce the “family bubble” and a focus on personal morality.
Cognitive "Holes"

Immigrants as criminals?

Race?

Juvenile system requiring reform?
Cognitive “Holes”
Map the Overlaps

1. Sensitivity to Ecological Factors
2. Developmental Awareness
3. Recognition of Bias
4. View of Government as Problem and Solution
5. Importance of Violence Threshold
6. Call for Redirected Focus
Map the Gaps

Public Safety & CJS

Causes of Crime

Rates of Incarceration

Pattern of Bias

Critique of System

Solutions

Experts

Total criminal justice system shapes public safety

Systemic & ecological factors

Too high b/c of flawed policies & profit motive

Young black men & immigrants are targeted

System lacks fairness, accountability

Qualitative approach to address efficacy & bias

Public

Police shape public safety

Individualist & ecological factors

Higher b/c of effective policing & population growth

Wealthy buy their way out of court

System not fair, or punitive enough

Quantitative increase of deterrence effects

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How to bridge the gap?

How to communicate expert knowledge to the public?

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Bridge the Gaps

Strategic Frame Analysis™

Experts

- Total criminal justice system shapes public safety
- Systemic & ecological factors
- Too high b/c of flawed policies & profit motive
- Young black men & immigrants are targeted
- System lacks fairness, accountability
- Qualitative approach to address efficacy & bias

Public

- Police shape public safety
- Individualist & ecological factors
- Higher b/c of effective policing & population growth
- Wealthy buy their way out of court
- System not fair, or punitive enough
- Quantitative increase of deterrence effects

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The courts need to make sentencing more fair for more people.

Yeah, more consistent, mandatory sentencing!
Individuals need to be supported in making better decisions.

Yes, let’s make punishments more severe across the board so people will think twice before deciding to break the law!
An expanded police presence is an important part of the solution.

Yeah, more police on the street and the problem is solved.

Communications Traps

The Policing Trap

Advocate

Public

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The current system is broken and needs a complete overhaul to fix it.

The system is so flawed... there really is no hope.
Addressing child development is a key component of improving public safety.

Good idea. Parents need to do a much better job developing proper morals in their kids.
Reframing Public Safety

What Do We Know?

✓ Key Components of Experts’ Core Story

✓ Architecture of Public Thinking

✓ Traps in Public Thinking and Gaps with Expert Thinking

✓ Some Cultural Models Show Promise for Shifting the Discourse

What Do We Need to Know?

✓ Social Life of the Dominant Frames

✓ Patterns of Media Coverage that Make Dominant Frames Difficult to Dislodge

✓ How Effectively Can Frames Shift Public Thinking and Fill Cognitive Holes

✓ Determining the Most Effective Dissemination Pathway

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Strategic Frame Analysis™

Chart the Landscape
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Expose the Gaps and Traps
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Redraw the Map
- Simplifying Models Research
- Experimental Tests of Frame Effects

Research Strategy
Preliminary Recommendations

• Recognize and Avoid the Traps in Public Thinking

• Employ the Promising Features of Public Understanding

• Define the System and Explain Problem as Systematic

• Address the Importance of Programmatic Quality

• Focus on Filling the Holes with Descriptive Communications

• Establish Consequences of Inaction - But Avoid Crisis