

Crime Reporting & Communities

- Stereotype: 'If it bleeds, it leads'
- Term: Police blotter/crime blotter
- Newsworthiness: Timeliness, proximity, prominence, impact, conflict, oddity, human interest, shock value
- More newsworthy, more coverage – but majority of crime stories are relatively minor
- Many crimes not publicized at all
- Question: Is this crime important to the community?
- Cultural context – does this happen all the time?
- Who all is affected by this crime? Victims, suspects, relatives, onlookers, police, neighborhood, etc.

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- Victims and families – how much about them should be published? Does it depend on the nature of the crime?
- Willingness to cooperate with media varies greatly
- Search for suspects – reporters need to be careful to avoid creating assumption of guilt – many examples
- Once suspects arrested, how are they portrayed?
- Coverage can fall back on racial, cultural stereotypes
- Major difference between being arrested & charged
- Cultural context and narrative of the crime – how does suspect fit into what has been reported?

Optics vs. Reality

- Optics – how situations & people look to outsiders
- Is situation being reported with understanding of cultural contexts (geographical, social, ethnic, religious, etc.)?
- Every community has layers of relationships, alliances, conflicts, long-standing issues – may be part of story
- Audiences for story may differ inside & outside area
- Law enforcement in area – good or bad reputation?
- ‘Outside’ media can miss these elements – but so can poorly informed local media
- Discerning audiences – look for elements in coverage that convey cultural understanding

Courts & Trials

- Court system in America designed to be slow but fair – innocent until proven guilty
- Sometimes media coverage can alter public perceptions
- Public's view vs. the actual judicial system – how much does average viewer know about how trials work?
- Narratives/stereotypes in the public mind – media coverage can feed into these – can drive ratings
- Can turn judicial process into soap opera – sometimes lawyers, families etc. contribute to this
- Long trials – can either lose or heighten public interest
- Verdicts often treated as cliffhangers – but often not the actual end of the process

How should audiences approach crime and courts coverage?

- How important is this story to you?
- If you decide to follow the story, try to learn more about the actual crime itself, from multiple news sources
- Try to look at allegations/charges with an open mind
- Be aware of long-standing media narratives
- Learn the terminology and processes
- Try not to get too obsessed with one story
- Focus on reality rather than optics
- Remember the human