Our stated ideal for a murder story was that it should be so understood and told that the murderer would not be hanged, not by our readers. We never achieved our ideal, but there it was: and it is scientifically and artistically the true ideal for an artist and for a newspaper, to get the news so completely and to report it so humanly that the reader will see himself in the other fellow's place.

Lincoln Steffens, 1931

While researchers have intensively examined how people feel about crime, and found that the subject is very much on the minds of most Americans (Garofalo, 1977a), few researchers have empirically examined the sources of information from which people gain their ideas about crime or the nature of the impressions presented to them from which they select their opinions. Even though direct experience with crime informs the opinions of some, the majority of persons base their opinions about crime on more indirect derived forms of knowledge.

From the limited research available, it is clear that the mass
media play a major role in the creation and dissemination of beliefs about crime (Conklin, 1975). The average person is quite aware of a number of details about crime. These details provide them with an ability and a willingness to discuss the causes of, the nature of, and/or the solutions to the crime problem. For the audience of the mass media, crime becomes knowable. From the mass media, the problem of crime is readily available, certain reasons for criminality are offered, the effectiveness of governmental responses to crime can be measured, and personal ideas of safety can be judged.

The mass media provide citizens with a public awareness of crime, but this awareness is, at best, based upon an information-rich and knowledge-poor foundation. The level of interest people have about crimes is not matched by the level of knowledge about crime which they are able to obtain from the mass media. Anyone interested in learning about crime from the mass media is treated to examples, incidents, and scandals but at such a level of description that it is impossible for them to develop an analytical comprehension of crime.

The nature of facts about crime found in the media limits rather than educates public opinion, acting as an important restriction on the public's ability to act as informed citizens. Public concerns, apprehensions, and reactions become part of the general response, which is based upon "cops and robbers" news stories.

In terms of its coverage of crime news, the mass media become an important part of the "complex nature of the screening and coding process whereby certain forms of rule breaking are picked out for attention" (Cohen, 1973). The mass media provide a distinctive social reality about crime (Quinney, 1970), identifying certain groups and their roles as crime fighters or crime doers. Meanings are provided for the populace by means of a body of sense-making elements, a structuring of "a common consciousness of what is, what is important, and what is right" (Gerbner, 1967).

Crime which is present in the mass media is not the same as crime-in-actuality. Printed crime stories are not a summary of all crimes which have occurred during the previous 24 hours. Nor do the mass media follow a priority listing of crime news by means of some inherent order, with the "most important" crimes getting major attention and lesser stories being buried or omitted. Rather, the mass media follow some rules which inform a selection of crime events.

The selection process from crime events to crime news is diagrammed in Chart One. It is true that the mass media cannot report all crimes that have been committed. Yet, the small number of crimes presented as crime news implies that some sorting out of the news takes place.

**Chart One.**

FROM CRIME EVENTS TO CRIME NEWS

ALL CRIMES COMMITTED

ALL CRIMES KNOWN TO POLICE

ALL NEWSWORTHY CRIMES

ALL CRIMES PRINTED AS NEWS

This chapter contains an examination of the process by which crime is selected from crime incidents and are reported as news. Specific attention will be paid to newspapers. This chapter will examine the selections, omissions, and commissions of crime news coverage, indicating the factors which structure decisions on crime coverage. By examining the production context (the ways by which crime events become newsworthy) rather than the audience context (the manner in which mass media information is received and used by the audience), we will suggest that crime news found in newspapers is a constructed reality. Only the crimes that meet the criteria established by bureaucratically and occupationally determined factors as well as meet the monopoly official source have over primary information are considered for selection as crime news.
The newspaper reader is offered certain crime news-worthy events prepared as news stories about crime. These news stories contain specialized images of crime, images which have little to do with the realities or complexities of crime. 

CRIME AS NEWS

Crime news differs from other news in terms of its relationship to the events which it represents. Newspaper accounts of sports, as a contrasting example, are quite thorough, offering several different forms of information to the reader. The sports section has some distinct relationships to the entire number of events which occur during a particular time period. Even though there is some selection as to what sports will be reported, the sports pages' readerships are able to expand their knowledge of sports.

Another contrasting example is that of international news. Newspapers capitalize the information about international news so that the reader is able to obtain the one or two facts which some consider the most significant. No attempt is made by the newspapers to create a full representation of all international news, with the exception of certain newspapers such as the New York Times (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Cohon, 1973).

Crime news provides another category of representation of events. Crime does not appear in a special section but generally is found throughout a newspaper, except in smaller communities where a police report is given. It is unclear as to the representational order which crime news coverage characterizes. Obviously not all crimes can be reported, but those crimes reported tend to represent a very specific sample of crime events. News about crime found in newspapers represent a manufactured representation which is structured so that it appears to represent sufficient information for the reader.

The reader of crime news is provided with crime stories given as fact but, in reality, what they read are designed realities. Selected from a limited range of cognitive and evaluative elements, and mediated by organizational factors and information limitations (Elliott, 1972), the crime news is presented to the reader as "all the news worth knowing about."

The role of the mass media treatment of crime information can be viewed most fruitfully in the context of its influences on communicative behavior (Mueller, 1970). The manner in which crime is selected, treated, and distributed by the mass media influences the information level of the citizenry in its understanding of crime.

The role of the media has been one of limiting or repressing this level of understanding. By presenting a large volume of materials, particular world views on crime have been established in the public's mind. This world view is insufficient to provide for an understanding of crime in its larger context but sufficient to make the media audience concerned about crime. The world view or public belief system developed by the media limits the perspectives of the audience to certain limited aspects of the crime phenomena and, in the process of limiting its coverage, certain features of considerable importance are excluded from comprehension.

The public may not only be immobilized by the violence found but the reasoning behind the media images being presented suggests a motivational explanation built upon individual decisions of good and evil, a nonpolitical explanation which minimizes societal factors (Murdoch and Golding, 1973).

Thus, the mass media, particularly the newspapers, become sense-makers to the world, providing stocks of knowledge, available concepts (categories), and interpersonal rules (relations) by which individuals can classify and interpret crime events. The mass media audience becomes informed but not knowledgeable, interested about details but dulled by overstimulation, concerned about understanding but limited in comprehending.

Our concern in this chapter is with the account construction of crime news (Chibnall, 1975). What follows will be an examination of the rules which inform the selection of crime events. It will be found that the process of collecting news stories imposes gatekeeper-type constraints to a larger degree than suggested by other mass media researchers who have overemphasized the control of news by accepting a simplified model of gatekeeping based upon a group of news decisions (Breed, 1955).

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRIME IN NEWSPAPER DEVELOPMENT

When a tabloid prints it [crime and scandal], that's smut. When the [New York] Times prints it, that's sociology. 

Adolph Ochs, founder of the New York Times; Quoted in Time, August 15, 1977

Kai Erikson (1966) notes that the major changes which occurred in the nature of trials and punishment in England and colonial America...
Social scientists have developed three perspectives on the crime news media: the self-reporting, structure, and media perspectives. Each of these perspectives operates within a framework which attempts to minimize conflicts between the roles of being a member of an organization and publication, and the role of being an employee, operating as a member of an organization and publication. Another perspective is that journalists are controlled by their news sources, determining their views of crime, thus they use newsgathering to construct accounts while minimizing conflicts.

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In many respects, crime reporters differ from their journalists peers. Unlike the typical reporter, crime reporters are more likely to cover crime stories on a regular basis. Crime journalists tend to have more formal education, with more than one-third of crime reporters having a bachelor's degree. Crime journalists also tend to work in larger, more traditional news organizations. According to a study by the Southern Methodist University, crime journalists have lower job satisfaction than their colleagues in other fields.

For the crime reporter, crime is a crisis that requires the gathering of information. Crime journalists must be able to analyze and interpret information from a variety of sources, including police reports, court records, and eyewitness accounts. They must also be able to write clearly and concisely, with a focus on the most important details.

Gathering the Facts: Containing Sources of Information

For the crime reporter, accuracy is the key to success. They must be able to verify information from a variety of sources, including police officers, eyewitness accounts, and public records. The crime reporter must also be able to question information that seems suspicious or incomplete.

The following are some tips for gathering the facts:

1. Verify information from multiple sources.
2. Check the credibility of the source.
3. Be cautious of information that seems too good to be true.
4. Use your critical thinking skills to evaluate the information.

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Crime News and Police-Generated Information

The police act as "printers" (McLachlan and Leter, 1974) of crime news, by helping to make crime occurrences available for crime reporting. In doing so, the police play a critical role in shaping public perceptions of crime and criminal justice. The police, however, are not the only source of crime news. Other sources, such as newspapers, radio, and television, also contribute to the flow of crime news.

The police's role in crime news production is complex. On one hand, the police have a responsibility to accurately report crime occurrences. On the other hand, the police are also responsible for maintaining public order and enforcing the law. This can sometimes lead to conflicts between the police's desire to keep crime news under wraps and their obligation to report crimes accurately.

One challenge facing the police is the information overload. With so much information available, it can be difficult for the police to know what information is important and should be reported. This is particularly true in cases where there is a large number of minor crimes that are not necessarily significant to the public.

Another challenge faced by the police is the potential for bias in crime news. The police have the ability to influence what crimes are reported and how they are reported. This can lead to a skewed representation of crime in the media.

In conclusion, the police play a critical role in crime news production. They have a responsibility to accurately report crime occurrences, but this can sometimes lead to conflicts with their obligations to maintain public order and enforce the law. The police also have the ability to influence what crimes are reported and how they are reported, which can lead to a skewed representation of crime in the media.

The police's role in crime news production is complex and requires careful consideration. Efforts should be made to ensure that the police are accurately and fairly reporting crime occurrences, while also maintaining public order and enforcing the law.
An Empirical Study of Crime News

Chicago was selected because of its large amount of crimes as well as the fact that the city's newspapers have made crime news a staple of their coverage. The findings, viewed as general patterns, have implications for other large American cities.

Selected students were provided with instructions on how to code Chicago newspaper articles. They were assigned to code crime articles in four Chicago newspapers for three months, starting with the January 1, 1975, and ending with the October 31, 1975, issues. Ten coding categories were selected for the coding sheet, which were

1. newspaper and date,
2. the crime reported,
3. identification factors (name, address, age, sex, race, business,
4. suspect identification factors (name, address, age, race, business,
5. area in which the crime occurred,
6. the number of victims, if any,
7. the number of victims, if any,
8. the number of victims, if any,
9. the number of victims, if any,
10. the number of victims, if any,

Over 1,000 crime stories were coded for the time period. Since each article may have several crimes, the total number of crimes coded reached 10,000. The codes were then analyzed to determine the relationship of crime to other factors. The findings, viewed as general patterns, have implications for other large American cities.
details could be quantified, the invisibility of the victim would be even greater. Criminals have always been the best at hiding the victims of crime, and representatives of the suspect (defense attorneys and support staff, family) were quoted, in a few select instances, to further victimize the already-victimized by Robbins. These victims were always the best at hiding the crimes of others, or the crimes committed by the criminals themselves.

Victims of Violent Crime

Table 3. Victims and Suspects Reported in Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Suspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By name</td>
<td>By address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>892</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>903</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>624</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of Information

Most of the sources cited directly or indirectly gave as the police. The police sources were quoted in detail, such as "this is what we have learned, and this is what we know." However, the information given was often not as detailed or accurate as that given by the researchers. While certain sources were found, such as "an expert in criminology," "a former police officer," etc., there were no clear sources for the data presented. The questions asked were often open-ended and vague, making it difficult to determine the accuracy of the information provided.
### Table 1. An INDEX OF NEWS SHRINKAGE OF CRIME INCIDENTS REPORTED IN NEWSPAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Crimes</th>
<th>Reported by</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Crimes</th>
<th>N of Crimes</th>
<th>% of Crimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder/manslaughter</td>
<td>1109</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault</td>
<td>1234</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
1. F.D.L. (Firearm Crime Log) and the (Good Guys), 1976. Table 6, Number of Crimes Known to the Police. 1975 Crimes and Torts 10,000 and Over, Population-Chicago, p. 55.
2. Only the city's police file was utilized. If the Chicago Crime was known, the number of crimes was considered. The majority of the articles were written on the same crimes.

### Victims and Suspects

Victims and suspects were invisible, not appearing very often in the news accounts. Even when they did appear, they were presented only in their own estimates. Interviews with victims and suspects were rare.

### Impact of Crime Reporting

The impact of crime reporting was significant. The media played a role in shaping public perception and influencing policy decisions. The increased focus on crime prevention strategies and the need for more comprehensive data collection were a direct result of the heightened public awareness.
not limited to the suspect alone, but were also given about the victim and the victim's background as well as the possible motivations for the crime and the nature of the crime committed.

Table 4. INFORMATION SOURCES REPORTED IN NEWSPAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public records</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecutor</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense attorney or suspect's family</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrections agent</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unofficial leak</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1971</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very seldom were nonpolice sources quoted or even mentioned in the articles. Public records were found to be the second source given, although this seldom appeared. Victims were almost never quoted as the source of information. An occasional neighbor was quoted—"He was such a good boy. I never thought he would do something like this." Other more immediate sources of information, such as attorneys, witnesses, or relatives of the participants in the crime were rarely included. Interestingly, in the occasional article where one of the more immediate sources was used for information, the article contained much more detail and insight into the crime and its participants.

The sources of information also influenced the contents of the story, as mentioned in the other findings. The emphasis on the details of the crime appeared to be exclusively from the police view of the act. The emphasis on the capture often contained great detail and the names of the arresting officers were usually given.

Emphasis and Presentation of the Stories

Not all of the crime news could be examined as content. Another approach taken was to look at the uses of the crime news. One such use was as filler for the newspapers. The decision to print certain crime events not only depended upon the nature of the crimes and the availability of the information from a source. Independent of this was the fact that the number of crime stories and the length or detail of each story was dependent upon the amount of "hard news" available that day. During periods when other important events were in progress, such as Viet Nam, Watergate, mayoral or presidential campaigns, the amount of crime news printed was substantially less.

Crime news also varied by page, depending upon the need for filling in dead space. Crime news often appeared on the obituary page, a page which varied day by day in terms of length and coverage and where pre-planning is not possible more than just prior to print time. The impossibility of planning an obituary page more than a day in advance makes some days seem "slow" for death notices, as well as the ease by which crime news could be found by reporters and edited to fit page layout requirements, resulted in crime news being used to complete the page, to topping off of the advertisements, movie features, and death notices.

A final comment on the positioning of the crime news has to do with the location and length of crime articles. Crime stories were found most often in the most important sections of the newspaper. Over 50% of the articles were on the first three pages, usually on the top of the page. Almost 13% of the articles were on the front page and 33% were on the top of the page. A large majority of the stories, over 70%, had a banner 2- to 4-column inch headline, with the majority of the banner headlines related to homicide. Approximately 35% of the articles were from 8- to 13-column inches long with 10% larger, 13-column inches or longer. Clearly, crime news was an important part of the daily news.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Experienced bank robbers feel their work is more difficult and the victim's situation more dangerous, by the tendency of the mass media to depict bank robberies as phony, "toy gun stuff". Robbers feel that they are now constrained first of all to convince their victims the event is "not a joke". This may require more brutal action on their part than they would otherwise need to use. They need to convince any potential 'heroes' among their victims that they cannot be subdued. TV dramas to the contrary. [Peter Lekemann, 1973]

The emphasis of this chapter has been on examining the process by which the information provided to people concerning crime is processed. It is the pool of information about crime from which people can select that has been highlighted. It has been found that the process of gathering crime news restricts the types of crime-related information which appears as crime news. Crime
news is a constructed reality, selected from a series of events which occur and, from which, crime-newsworthy events are written as crime news. Crime reporters are central to this process of restricting information. Viewing the nature of their relationship with the police, it is evident that gathering of crime news is based upon a monopolization of certain sources of information. Reporters support the police's version of crime. The police supply reporters with a constant stream of usable crime, and this information, fitting into the work requirements of the reporters, becomes the raw material from which crime news is written.

As indicated in the analysis of crime news contents, crime news is limited in a number of serious ways, of which the readership is unaware. To build an understanding of crime and crime control from such information is to have the answers built into the presentation. The nature of crime is serious enough for citizens at large to question the role of the newspapers as adequate suppliers of information from which knowledgeable actions can be taken.

NOTES
1. While the population increased 52% in a decade (1830-1840), the total sale of newspapers increased 187% (Hughes, 1940:12 fn).
2. Newspapers have such a reputation for using crime news to increase their circulation that the British police for a time thought that the 1969 kidnapping of the wife of a newspaper executive was an attempt to create a front page story that would increase the paper's circulation. Reluctance to believe that the abduction was real delayed police efforts to solve the crime, possibly contributing to the woman's death. (Dexter and Walker, 1973).
3. Chevalier (1973) found that 19th-century Paris, the media and popular novels aroused public interest in crime while they fulfilled the public's demand for information about crime. This interest led to the collection of official crime statistics, which in turn fed public fears of crime.
4. Few differences were found between the newspapers, except in the instances mentioned in the text.
5. Similar findings were reported in Davis (1952), ABA (1968), Hauge (1965), and Roshner (1973).
6. The coding was open to the usual difficulties of coding selection compounded by the use of student volunteers. In a random spot check, some variation was found, mainly in terms of the exact category of coding reported. Some crime stories contained multiple crime descriptions, and this may have been recorded in different ways by different coders.
7. A study of the Chicago Tribune in 1973 found that only 51 of the 215 murders in the city were covered by the Tribune with 12 murders mentioned on the first five pages. While only 20% of the murder victims during this period were white (according to police statistics), nearly half of the murder stories concerned white victims. On the first five pages, where reader interest is highest, two thirds of the murder stories involved white victims (Blake, 1974).

REFERENCES


