

Framing Responsibility on Local Television News

A Report of the

Local TV News Media Project

The Center for Community Research and Service
and the Graduate School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy
University of Delaware

Funded by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund

by

Lisa M. Budzilowicz

Summer 2002



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Summer 2002*

The report was produced the

Local TV News Media Project

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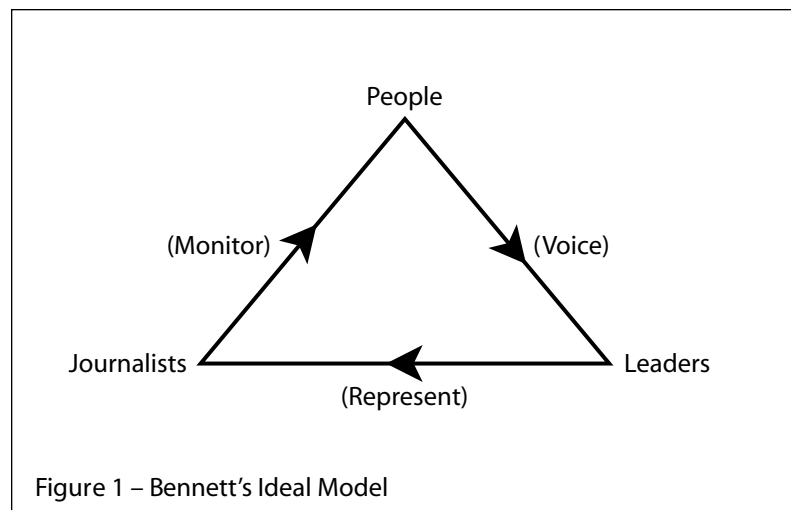
Chapter 1

Introduction

Two of the most important features of the type of liberal democracy practiced in the United States are the ideas that citizens have the power to participate in public discourse on issues that are of concern to them, and that they have the power to affect the decisions their leaders make about those issues. In order for citizens to participate in the democratic deliberation of public issues, it is necessary that they have sufficient information on the issue in question. Having complete and truthful information conducive to deliberation is important. Knowledge of the various viewpoints of an issue allows citizens to weigh each side with their own values and beliefs so that, when given the opportunity, they may choose and act upon the preferences that are most meaningful to them (Page, 1996). When citizens use that information to support their preferences in discourse with peers, each participant becomes more informed on the issue. And, when possible, the wealth of information that citizens may have regarding a certain issue gives validity to their arguments when they deliberate with political leaders. Much of the information citizens receive about public issues comes from the media.

The free press, provided for in the Constitution, has evolved into today's news organizations. The press delivers the majority of the information that people gather about public issues. The media are part of the democratic process, and their role is of great consequence.

W. Lance Bennett (1996) portrays the picture of American political power through information with two models that include the government, the people, and the media. One of Bennett's models is an ideal model, the other a real model. They are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 below.

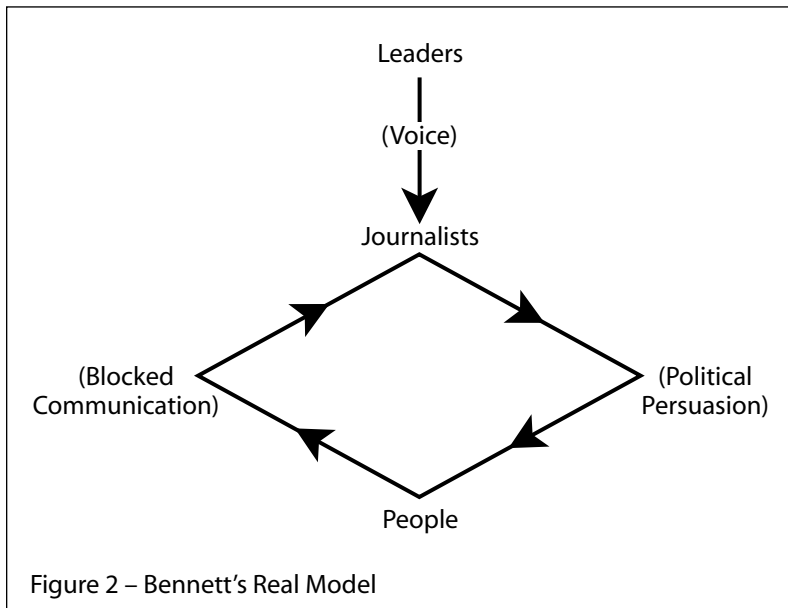


In the ideal model, people have the power and the government is obligated to take their views into strong consideration when running the political system. The media acts as a watchdog to report the actions of the government to the people. In this model, democracy functions according to its design.

In the real model, however, the distribution of information, and therefore power, is much less in the hands of the people than with the government. Political leaders access the media more easily than citizens do — through press releases, conferences, speeches, etc. — and they use these methods to transfer information in a way that generates support among

Local Television News

Television is the one form of media that is most accessible to Americans. Nielsen Media estimates that there are currently 102,200,000 television homes in the United States (Nielsen Media Research), meaning that almost every household in the United States has a television. Even without access to the various cable networks, viewers can turn on the television to be connected to their world. Unlike newspapers that are privately owned and operated, television stations use a limited and controlled resource, the public airwaves, and they are supposed to use that resource in part to serve the public interest. In the case of democracy, a service in the public interest would strive to create an informed citizenry by providing them with information that is useful in public discourse. As part of the Communications Act of 1934, there was an explicit requirement for broadcast stations to provide public affairs programming as a condition of keeping the license; this requirement was fulfilled by local television news programming. In 1984, this requirement was rescinded. The Federal Communications Commission justified this action by explaining that local television news programming was often too profitable to be cut from a station's lineup. However, the mere survival of local television news does not mean that it must or does continue to serve the public interest. This makes it difficult to argue that local television news should continue to operate in the public interest. However, there are several indications that there is an assumption that local television news is an entity that provides information that is useful for public discourse. First, surveys have shown that of all forms of mass communication, local television news is the most common source to which the public turns to gather information about their world and what is important to them (Yanich, 2001). In addition, citizens also view local television news as the most trustworthy source of information (pollingreport.com, 1998). While many people do access multiple sources, local television news is often the first place to which information-seekers turn (pollingreport.com, 1998), and therefore it has great influence on the quality and quantity of information gathered by the public. Since people are closest to



the public. The media, whether newspapers, radio, television, newsmagazines, or Internet news outlets, rarely turn to the public as a source when reporting on political issues. Thus, citizens seldom have the opportunity to respond to the messages sent to them from the government (Tuchman, 1978). Even so-called public opinion polls sometimes used in news coverage do not provide any additional information or leave room for arguments on public issues. In this arrangement, the citizens' powers of participation and influence are greatly weakened. The public may not receive information that is most conducive to deliberation; in addition, their influence in deliberative space is weakened by the structure of that space, i.e., lack of two-way communication between the people and the government through the media. These circumstances are detrimental to a properly functioning democracy. In order to more closely examine the discordance of power among the government, citizens, and the media, I will focus specifically on television news.

their governments at the local level, local television news stations should be especially attuned to informing citizens about public issues. The following research examines that proposition. While local television news uses a public resource and is the primary and most trusted source of information for the public, is its content conducive to citizen participation in public discourse? By examining the relationship between production choices and the resulting construction of news, I will show how a variety of pressures that most news organizations experience (local television news in particular) influence the content of the news. More specifically, I will analyze the way that crime stories are framed on local television news to show how these pressures, explained below, are manifested in news construction.

Pressures on Local Television News Organizations

Various pressures affect news organizations, and they may influence and change the way an organization presents information to the public. Three basic types of pressures exist: journalistic, economic, and organizational (Tuchman, 1978; McManus 1994; Patterson, 1997). Journalistic pressures refer to the notion of responsibility, where reporters and other news workers feel that it is their duty to present the public with information that serves their interests over the interests of their shareholders (Bettag, 2000). While this is a noble goal, the ideals of responsibility and objectivity often come into conflict with the economic and organizational pressures a news organization experiences.

Economic pressures come mainly from the companies whose advertisements sponsor the news organizations, as well as from station's parent companies. In this respect, the local television news broadcast may serve less in the public interest and more as an advertising mechanism for the various ownership interests. This circumstance arises as a result of those businesses whose stake in the news is purely advertisement. Sponsor pressure is especially fierce in smaller markets, where at least

two-thirds of stations surveyed reported sponsor interference with their news coverage, as opposed to only one-third of larger markets (Just & Levine, 2001). Local television news spots are some of the most lucrative for the stations. As discussed earlier, the Federal Communications Commission recognized that these large profits would deter stations from removing local television news programming from their lineups when it decided to rescind the public affairs programming requirement of broadcast television. However, those who pay for advertisements to run during this time see the public not as citizens, but as consumers. News organizations must attract viewers in order to attract advertisers that will pay for these spots. Local television news stations are then often compelled to make the news broadcasts entertaining as well as informative, and the resulting product is often more the former than the latter. Often referred to as “infotainment” (McManus, 1994), this form of news may also arise as a result of the pressures that exist within the organization.

Organizational pressures include time and staffing constraints. In the local television news atmosphere, news directors must decide which stories to cover and how many crew members to send out to collect information and video footage. The tight budgets set by the owners of the station's news department dictate that their resources, whether they include personnel or equipment, be used in a way that guarantees a usable story, one that will satisfy the requirements imposed on them by the above-mentioned economic forces. In addition, reporters and camera people must use their time wisely. They must gather, verify, and package all of the information and footage they collect throughout the day so that it is ready for the evening newscast. Due to these constraints, news workers often follow the same routines in reporting from day to day, because the patterns that they develop make it easier to complete the necessary work on time (Tuchman, 1978). While these patterns may make news

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production easier, the product of such formulas may suffer in quality.

The journalistic, economic, and organizational pressures on news organizations result in a conflict ultimately between the public interest and profit maximization. As local television news broadcasts often present stories in a manner that makes them easier to produce while satisfying profit maximization, it is obvious that the public interest concern may fall to the wayside. This phenomenon can be observed by examining the process of framing in local television news. While framing occurs naturally in the process of news production, the pressures on news workers have an effect on the type of frame used to present information to the public.

Framing Theory

Media effects research refers to the construction of news due to organizational and market pressures as framing (Scheufele, 1999). Framing a news story regarding a public issue creates a slant or spin that may affect the way the news consumer understands the issue, as well as the policies they prefer as a remedy.

Framing is inherently a part of news construction. Certain facts exist for each issue or event reported in the news, and newsmakers must choose which facts to include or exclude in their reporting. Crime stories in particular, which compose a plurality of stories in news broadcasts today, offer a prime example of how framing occurs in the news. David Papke (1987) illustrates how crime stories often dominated news of the 19th century as well. He focuses chiefly on how the framing of crime and criminals changed during industrialization in the United States. Papke saw that antebellum cultural work, specifically crime reporting, fiction, and memoirs, showed an active link between crime and politics, often by challenging the status quo, and was consequently able to draw conclusions about the meanings and significance of crime. Property and personal violence crime were the most frequently recognized types of crime in the traditional street literature of antebellum America. These criminals were given the

names of rogue and fiend, respectively, and information about their crimes and punishments was commonly distributed in pamphlets. The pamphlets often used embellished words, yet the readers did not worry about the facts involved — what they saw was more of a victory over the elites who made their lives difficult than a true report of important news. Readers saw the actions of criminals as representative of the boldness of self-reliant individualism. This type of reporting thus allowed readers to transcend the strapping moral codes of the time which were placed upon them by the upper classes. The framing of criminals as rogues and fiends in this period was not detrimental to the meanings of their crimes, because they appeared in the context of alternatives to the current social hierarchy. This mistrust of and struggle against the elites continued as the reporting mode of cultural work evolved from pamphlets to newspapers.

By mid-century, newspapers such as *The Sun* and *The Herald* had emerged just as new social classes were taking shape. The earliest of the papers were the voice of the working class, and they responded to the changing social hierarchy. They often pointed out the ability of the elite to pass through the criminal justice system with much less difficulty than those without the same monetary means; in this manner, the early papers were exemplary of the struggle between classes. However, as Papke has noticed, this changed by the end of the century. Other papers emerged to serve the elite, and instead of presenting news as entertainment, they presented it as purely informational. This does not mean that the earlier papers ceased to exist — their readership was still strong with the working class — but there were now two sources of crime reporting with competing frames. The situation became more tense as newspapers grew into major institutions; not only did some of them ignore the social and political aspects of crime, they condemned the actions of social disorder criminals, strikers in particular, because to support them would be to turn against the stability of institutionalization.

The overall theme within the evolution of crime reporting was that the stabilization of genres and news production methods resulted

in an overall loss of critical perspective in looking at crime and criminals over the course of the 19th century in America. Without any strong political meaning attached to crime reporting, criminals as well as the population at large lost the ability to contemplate crime as a phenomenon that both shapes and is shaped by social realities. Papke sees that this change is significant in looking at crime today, for the cultural work of the present is very similar to that which emerged in the late 19th century. Without the help of critical perspective in cultural work of the present, Papke feels that we cannot develop any political meanings for crime, and are restricted to the ideology that is presented through the status quo. In the early period of his study, he saw crime reporting linked to the social change of the time; it was greatly politicized and analytical, and allowed readers to question their place in the social order. By the beginning of the 20th century, however, crime reporting was framed in a way that perpetuated the status quo (Papke 1987).

Papke discusses the effect of framing the criminal on people who consumed the news at a certain period of time. Framing can be seen in this manner as an independent variable, changing the way that a viewer interprets a story and the meaning they place upon it. Framing can also be viewed as a dependent variable, one that occurs as a result of the news production environment. Scheufele (1999) provides a comprehensive model for the complex area of framing studies, and is perhaps the best source to obtain a useful operationalization of the concept. He places framing studies in the context of media effects research, which operates under the view that media play a role in the construction of reality. While there is not as yet a complete and universally accepted definition of framing, social constructivism is the basis on which media effects and framing studies are conducted. According to Scheufele's model, framing is a process-oriented phenomenon; as much as the environment of news production can cause framing to occur, the news workers' individual frames, developed from their own exposure to the media, may act upon their understanding of an issue and impact the way they construct the news. Framing occurs in the media when

a story uses a particular spin or angle that affects the way the viewer or reader processes the issue. When a news story is framed — when it is put into a context that makes it either more interesting to the viewer or easier to understand — it acts as an independent variable on the viewer's comprehension of the story. When framing is viewed as a dependent variable, it is an effect of the news production environment, such as pressures placed upon news organizations. My research addresses framing both as a dependent variable — as a result of the journalistic, economic, and organizational pressures mentioned above; as well as an independent variable, addressing the effect that news content could have upon the public's perception and understanding of issues and their use of that information in political discourse and the democratic process. The next section will discuss this type of framing more specifically in the context of crime coverage.

Framing Crime Stories

Previous research shows that crime stories compose a plurality of stories in local television news broadcasts. In addition, as a public issue, crime is covered more often than all other public issues combined (Yanich, 2001). Crime stories also have all of the components of news stories suggested by former NBC Evening News executive producer Reuven Frank:

Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end. These are not only the essential of drama; they are the essentials of narrative (Epstein, 1974, pp.4-5).

Crime stories exhibit all of these characteristics, and are therefore an appropriate example of framing on local television news as a whole. Iyengar (1991) conducted a comprehensive study of individual frames as a dependent variable. He examined the effects of media frames on individual opinions of several political issues: crime and terrorism; poverty,

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In the case of crime, opinions and attitudes were affected more by attributions of responsibility than by any other factor.

unemployment, and racial inequality; and the Iran-Contra Affair. Working under the assumption that people form their issue opinions in reference to whom or what holds responsibility for the cause and treatment of an issue, Iyengar examined the use of episodic (event-based) and thematic (issue-based) forms of presentation in news production on people's responsibility attributions on each issue. He found that the types of responsibility for crime and terrorism fell into three categories: individual, punitive, and societal responsibilities. He compared the effects of news framing on the attribution of responsibility with the effects of party identification, liberal-conservative orientation, and knowledge on the issue. In the case of crime, opinions and attitudes were affected more by attributions of responsibility than by any other factor. He speculates that none of the above-mentioned factors are as effective as attributions of responsibility because the two major party orientations (liberal-conservative) have not formed divergent views on most issues concerning crime. Therefore, opinions and attitudes on crime issues are more vulnerable to the effects of the news than to political leanings. Iyengar's results suggest that an expanded look at crime stories in local television news would be appropriate, considering the relatively strong effects of framing in crime stories on national news.

Since gathering and interviewing a group of respondents in order to conduct the same type of research designed by Iyengar would be beyond the scope of this research, I have chosen to take another approach. First, I will examine the dominant forms of presentation in the news as Iyengar has, coding each story either as dominantly episodic or dominantly thematic. In order to understand the link between forms of presentation and framing responsibility, I will then code each story for its respective frame of causal or treatment responsibility. The attributes will be defined as closely to Iyengar's description of each as possible, therefore allowing me to point out the demonstrable factors that respondents would find in crime coverage that places responsibility in either category mentioned above.

Research Questions

Below are the questions I hope to answer after considering the literature I have reviewed and the analysis I will be conducting:

1. What is the nature of crime coverage on local television news in terms of content and issue coverage?
2. What are the dominant frames of responsibility in local television news coverage of crime?
3. How does news production relate to framing responsibility for crime as a public issue?
4. What are the implications of the nature of crime coverage on local television news for citizen participation in democracy?

Hypotheses

There are several observations that I expect to be true after conducting my research. First, that local television news coverage of crime stories will be primarily episodic. This assumption comes from the ideas put forward by Tuchman (1978) that suggest that news workers, under pressure from their organizations, who are in turn pressured by their sponsors, will tend to develop routines in their daily news making processes. For crime coverage, this would entail being present in locations where a story is guaranteed to occur, most notably a courthouse. This information is significant for two reasons. First, such news coverage must inherently be episodic, because news coverage of trials at a courthouse is by definition event-based. Second, this information leads to another assumption about the nature of crime coverage on local television news, and that is that it will be primarily concerned with the realm of the courts as opposed to other factions of the criminal justice system. Other information about the general nature of crime coverage will also be addressed; however, making assumptions about these attributes, to be explained later (duration, place, mode, etc.) is not relevant because those assumptions could be true for news coverage as a whole. These attributes will, however, be considered

when addressing the entire nature of local television news coverage of crime.

The second group of assumptions I expect to be true concern Iyengar's attributions of causal and treatment responsibility. As Iyengar discovered, the episodic form of presentation increased individualistic attributions of causal responsibility over the other two possible attributions. Due to the nature of my content analysis, which will be explained later, I expect my findings to show that the dominant frame for causal responsibility will be individual dysfunction. In addition, since Iyengar's study showed that the dominant frame for treatment responsibility was that of punitive measures, I expect to obtain similar results. While Iyengar's conclusions were gleaned through a different process, I expect my results to be similar to his. Iyengar used the news to elicit responses from people in regards to their opinions on certain issues; my research is based upon looking for the demonstrable factors in the news that would likely lead respondents to come to those conclusions. Thus, I expect the majority of crime stories to focus on information that frames them so that individuals are causally responsible for the problem of crime, while punitive measures are suggested for the treatment of crime.

The third hypothesis I will test is the relationship between the dominant form of presentation and the frames for causal and treatment responsibility. Iyengar found that news stories that exhibited an episodic form of presentation were most likely to elicit an individualistic attribution for causal responsibility and punitive attributions for treatment responsibility. I expect the same to be the case for my research; in addition, I expect crime coverage that is thematic in terms of mode of presentation will be more likely to elicit societal attributions of responsibility for both causal and treatment responsibility.

The conclusions I hope to draw from my research are that the combined effects of journalistic, economic, and organizational pressures that news organizations experience have an effect on the content of the news that is produced. More specifically, these pressures that are placed ultimately upon news workers

lead them to develop recognizable routines in their daily news gathering, especially the repetitive use of sources that guarantees a story for the evening. For the case of crime, criminal justice sources are most easily accessed, and are conducive to the production of stories that are primarily episodic in nature, i.e., that they focus on the details of a specific case or event. These stories also fulfill other 'requirements' of news, that they are interesting enough to keep a viewer's attention, and have the qualities of fictional television drama. These aspects are most important to the sponsors who see news consumers simply as consumers, and not as citizens.

The content, then, of the news that is produced following these guidelines leads to several conclusions. First, that the information presented in local television news coverage of crime gives the viewer the impression that individual dysfunctions are responsible for the problem of crime, and second that punitive measures are the appropriate route for treatment of the problem. This information perpetuates the status quo of crime as an issue, specifically that individuals are responsible for their own actions, yet the state has the sole right to use punishment as a solution. There are many other opposing viewpoints that exist regarding the nature of crime as a phenomenon, as well as the options for treatment of crime and criminals. In addition, there is severe opposition to the continued expansion of the prison system. These opposing viewpoints, however, rarely if ever appear as topics in local television news broadcasts. The lack of discourse that appears in crime coverage of local television news is not conducive to citizen participation in public deliberation of such issues. While there is no longer a public affairs programming requirement for broadcast ownership of local television stations, local television news organizations do not make a claim to providing information other than what is useful for citizen participation in democracy. Through my research, I hope to show how the pressures experienced by news organizations, especially economic pressures, result in a news product that does not contribute to an informed democracy.

The episodic form of presentation increased individualistic attributions of causal responsibility over the other two possible attributions.



Chapter 2

Methodology

To apply Iyengar’s typology to local television news, content analysis will be used. Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing primary patterns in data to produce a systematic and objective description of the data (Krippendorff, 1980; Patton, 1990). The unit of analysis will be each individual crime story. Three specific aspects of framing in each crime story will be addressed: episodic vs. thematic forms of presentation, attributions of causal responsibility, and attributions of treatment responsibility.

Framing a story through an episodic mode of presentation occurs when the story is constructed with interest to one specific event, e.g., the reporting of a specific crime or arrest of a criminal. Thematic framing is used when the story addresses a larger issue, for example, a debate over corrections policies. Iyengar’s research shows that news presentation is primarily episodic, and that this type of story was more likely to bring about an attribution of individual responsibility for the causes of crime in his respondents.

Attributions of causal responsibility refer to the person or institution that is responsible for the crime that is being reported. Similarly, attributions of treatment responsibility refer to the person or institution that is responsible for resolving the problems of the crime. The responses Iyengar obtained from his study fit into three categories for both attributions — individual, societal, and punitive. These categories will be maintained for my content analysis.

Sample

The unit of analysis for this research is the individual crime story. My sample consists of approximately 300 stories from six different Designated Market Areas. The sampling rationale for my research is described below.

There are 210 Designated Market Areas (DMAs) in the U.S. as defined by Nielsen Media Research (NMR). According to the Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook (1999), “Each market’s DMA consists of all the counties in which the home market stations receive a preponderance of viewing. Every county in the US is allocated exclusively to one DMA — there is no overlap” (Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook 1999, B-154). These designations are made for the purposes of planning, buying, and evaluating television audiences across various markets (Nielsen Media Research, 2002).

The markets chosen for this research were the two smallest, two largest, and two medium sized markets (based on population size) used by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) in previous research. PEJ videotaped two full weeks of half-hour evening newscasts in 20 markets¹, excluding the news and weather

¹ The markets used in the PEJ research include: Albuquerque, Atlanta, Boston, Buffalo, Burlington, Chicago, Evansville, Jacksonville, Lansing, Los Angeles, Louisville, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York, Pittsburgh, Seattle, St. Louis, Tallahassee, Tucson, Washington D.C., and Wichita. These markets were selected by PEJ as a stratified sample on the basis of market size (which is determined by the size of the population in the market) and geographic diversity (Rosenstiel, Gottlieb, & Brady, 1999).

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spots, for the primary taping period. The sample included the top-rated news time slot in each city (typically either the 6pm or 11pm broadcast) thus representing the “most watched” news of each station. The first week of broadcasts, from March 9 through March 13, 1998, were non-sweeps week newscasts; the

Nielsen’s research could overshadow the effects of pressures that exist upon the news organizations on a regular basis.

The University of Delaware Media Project received all of the videotaped broadcasts from PEJ and digitized them so that they could be viewed electronically for further study. While the stories were digitized, they were entered into a database and given an exclusive identification number. They were coded initially to identify the types of stories presented on the news, and 18 different types were identified, of which Crime was one. There were approximately 2,100 crime stories identified in the sample of 7,700, and these represented the universe of stories from which my sample was chosen. After selecting only crime stories from the March week of broadcasts from six markets, 313 stories remained. All 313 of these stories, which represent every crime story from the sampled stations on the sampled dates, were included in my sample. Table 1.1 on the following page shows the breakdown of stories within each market and by station.

The mean number of crime stories per station for the large markets in my sample is 22; for median sized markets it is 15, and for small markets it is 12.7. It is evident that as the size of the market increases, it is likely for the number of crime stories covered in a newscast to increase as well. These trends will be kept in mind as an analysis is made upon the results. The following information will detail the nature of my sample by characteristics of the markets, stations, and station owners to show that the sample is representative of local television news stations as a whole.

2 A sweeps week is one of several throughout the year when Nielsen Media Research collects viewing data for each of the local television news markets. Standard sweeps weeks are those that include all 210 DMAs and occur for one week each in the fall, spring, and winter. The results obtained by Nielsen are translated into station ratings, the basis for which stations can charge advertisers for airtime commercials.

3 The total number of stories collected by the Project for Excellence in Journalism was approximately 10,600; however, 2,900 of these stories were not used because they were taped only for back-up purposes.

4 St. Louis was the only market within the PEJ study for which broadcasts from the FOX network were recorded.

DMA (size)	# of stories/station				
	ABC	CBS	NBC	FOX	TOTAL
New York (1)	WABC 31	WCBS 9	WNBC 27	N/A	67
Los Angeles (2)	KABC 26	KCBS 19	KNBC 20	N/A	65
St. Louis⁴ (21)	KDNL 24	KMOV 9	KSDK 22	KTVI 18	73
Buffalo (44)	WKBW 3	WIVB 15	WGRZ 14	N/A	32
Lansing (107)	WLAJ 10	WLNS 19	WILX 12	N/A	41
Tallahassee (109)	WTXL 13	WCTV 12	WTWC 10	N/A	35

second week, which ran from April 27 through May 1, 1998, were sweeps week newscasts.² Two additional weeks of backup broadcasts were taped during the weeks of March 16 through March 20, 1998 (non-sweeps), and May 4 through May 8, 1998 (sweeps). A July non-sweeps week was also substituted for one Chicago station due to a taping error. A total of approximately 7,700 individual news stories resulted from this sampling.³ The markets from which my sample was taken were chosen on the basis of size in terms of population within the market, and include New York and Los Angeles (largest), St. Louis and Buffalo (medium), and Lansing and Tallahassee (smallest). The stories were taken from the non-sweeps week broadcasts, the week from March 9, 1998 through March 13, 1998. This week was chosen because the sweeps-week broadcasts could likely exhibit the effects of additional pressures upon the news organizations beyond those discussed above. Specifically, the push for ratings as a result of

Table 2.2 below shows the size of each market in the sample by number of households, metropolitan area ranking, and estimated population, as well as the location of the market by region.

The rankings of each primary city in their metropolitan area, of which there are 276 as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, follow closely to their rankings as Designated Market Areas, of which there are 210. The DMAs are larger than the metropolitan areas to which they correlate, but this information serves only as a comparison to show that the sizes of the markets are representative of the entire population of markets that exist in conjunction with their metropolitan areas.

The markets are also diverse geographically. The two largest markets, New York and Los Angeles, represent the Northeast and Southwest regions, respectively. St. Louis and Buffalo, which were chosen to represent median-sized markets, are located in the Midwest and Northeast, respectively. The smallest markets chosen, Lansing and Tallahassee, respectively represent the Midwest and Southeast regions of the country. Although there are more markets in my sample from the Northeast and Midwest regions, the total number of markets within those regions is high as well. As a whole, the markets are geographically representative of the total number of markets. My sample includes markets that are geographically representative in terms of size as well.

Table 2.3 contains a profile of the stations in my sample according to the scores they received by the Project for Excellence in Journalism study. This information is intended to show that, according to journalistic standards, the quality of the stations sampled is diverse and representative of the entire possible range of scores in each area. The PEJ study rated the quality of 61 stations in 20 markets across several dimensions, which are shown in Table 2.3 (columns Ratings Trend through Viewpoints). All scores were given on a scale of one through five, with five being the highest. For Ratings Trend, the score was based upon the three-year trend in ratings for each station — sharply up, up, flat, down, or sharply down. The Topic

Range category measured the number of topics covered in each daily evening newscast by the total number of stories in that newscast; therefore, the greater number of topics covered, the higher the score. Story Focus referred to the significance of the story, with higher scores given for larger issues that affected many

Market	Size (# households)	MA Ranking⁵	Estimated Population⁶	Location
New York	6,874,990	1	20,196,649	Northeast
Los Angeles	5,234,690	2	16,036,587	Southwest
St. Louis	1,114,370	18	2,569,029	Midwest
Buffalo	621,460	40	1,142,121	Northeast
Lansing	237,860	90	450,789	Midwest
Tallahassee	230,300	136	260,003	Southeast

people, and lower scores for everyday events. Source Expertise rated the quality of sources used in the newscasts. Higher scores were given for stories that used expert and authoritative sources; the lowest score was given when no source at all was cited in the story. The Local Relevance category measured the connectedness of each story with the community it reached. Stories that affected large groups scored high, while those with no local connection received lower scores. Enterprise Level measured the amount of effort taken to produce a story. Those stories that showed initiative and valuable content scored high, while those taken from other major news sources did not. The Number of Sources category measured how many sources were used in a story as a basis for being fair and balanced in reporting. Similarly, the Viewpoints category noted how many points of view were represented in a story.

5 Metropolitan Area Ranking by Population Size for July 1, 1999, for metropolitan areas of which markets are also the primary city. Boundaries of DMAs and metropolitan areas are not contiguous; for comparison purposes only. Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau

6 Metropolitan Area Population Estimates for July 1, 1999. Population estimates are for the metropolitan area, not for the entire DMA. Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau

Table 2.3 – Station Profile

Market	Station	Grade	Ratings Indicator	Score	Ratings Trend	Topic Range	Focus Expertise	Source	Local Relevance	Enterprise#	Sources	View-points
New York	WABC	F	up	255.97	4	2	4	2	2	3	2	3
	WCBS	D	flat	280.94	3	2	3	3	1	3	3	3
	WNBC	C	up	329.66	4	3	3	3	2	4	3	3
Los Angeles	KABC	C	flat	306.84	3	3	1	5	1	3	4	4
	KCBS	D	up	295.91	4	2	2	4	2	5	3	3
	KNBC	D	up	264.43	4	2	1	4	1	4	3	3
St. Louis	KDNL	C	flat	332.83	3	3	3	2	2	1	2	2
	KMOV	F	up	230.84	5	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
	KSDK	C	down	322.82	1	3	3	3	2	3	3	4
	KTVI	D	down	298.74	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	2
Buffalo	WKBW	B	up	370.28	5	4	1	5	4	5	3	4
	WWIB	D	down	296.7	2	2	1	5	4	5	4	3
	WGRZ	C	flat	339.87	3	2	2	5	4	5	3	4
Lansing	WLAJ	B	flat	323.27	3	5	2	2	1	2	2	3
	WLNS	B	down	358.46	1	4	2	2	4	4	2	3
	WILX	C	up	332.34	4	3	2	2	4	1	2	4
Tallahassee	WTXL	B	up	393.63	4	5	3	3	3	4	3	2
	WCTV	A	down	421.96	1	4	3	5	5	5	5	3
	WTWC	B	flat	367.98	3	3	3	3	5	4	4	4

From Rosenstiel, Gottlieb, & Brady, 1999

The stations were given comprehensive scores according to their performance in these categories, as well as a grade corresponding to that score. These results were compared with the ratings and ratings trends of the stations to determine the relationship between ratings performance and quality.

Each market exhibits a range of scores, and the scores across stations in each market are similar. For example, the stations in New York fall towards the low end, averaging a D grade, while the stations in Tallahassee fall towards the high end, averaging a high B grade. These results will be compared with the results of my coding to observe how quality relates to dominant

forms of presentation and attributions of causal and treatment responsibility. Comparisons with specific dimensions will also be considered.

Table 2.4 on the next page shows the ownership profiles of each station in the sample as of 1998. This information will be used to show the variation across and within markets in terms of the influence their owners have in the markets in my sample as well as across the country.

There are a variety of owners who have a presence in my sample of markets, and some owners appear multiple times. The following table shows the number of other television stations

Table 2.4 – Station Ownership		
Market	Station	Owner
New York	WABC	ABC Inc.
	WCBS	CBS Inc.
	WNBC	NBC TV Stations Division
Los Angeles	KABC	ABC Inc.
	KCBS	CBS Inc.
	KNBC	NBC TV Stations Division
St. Louis	KDNL	Sinclair Broadcasting Group, Inc.
	KMOV	A. H. Belo Corp.
	KSDK	Gannett Broadcasting
	KTVI	Fox Television Stations, Inc.
Buffalo	WKBW	Granite Broadcasting Corp.
	WVIB	LIN Television Corp.
	WGRZ	Gannett Broadcasting
Lansing	WLAJ	Freedom Communications, Inc.
	WLNS	Young Broadcasting, Inc.
	WILX	Benedek Broadcasting Co.
Tallahassee	WTXL	Brian E. Cobb
	WCTV	Gray Communications Systems, Inc.
	WTWC	Guy Gannett Communications

From Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook, 1999.

owned by these entities, ranking the owners by number of stations owned to show the size of their ownership presence across the nation.

The highest number of stations owned by one corporation in the 1999 Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook was 50; Sinclair Broadcasting Group represents the next largest owner. The mean number of stations owned by each company is 17.3, and the median is 16. This is fairly representative of the range of ownership arrangements throughout the United States. It is important to note that an FCC rule (which has been only recently overturned) dictates that one entity cannot own enough stations to reach more than 35 percent of the national TV audience. This law limits the amount of influence that one entity can have upon the media-consuming public. However, as of February of 2002, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington D.C. required the FCC to justify why it bans any TV station or groups from reaching more than 35% of the audience. This means that in the future, owners of television, cable and radio broadcasting stations may have a larger influence upon the public, and that media ownership could be more concentrated.

Table 2.5 – Ownership Profile		
Owner	Total # of Stations Owned	Rank by # of Stations Owned
Sinclair Broadcasting Group, Inc.	40	1
Fox Television Stations, Inc.	31	2
CBS Inc.	26	3
Gannett Broadcasting	26	3
A. H. Belo Corp.	23	5
Benedek Broadcasting Co.	22	6
ABC Inc.	17	7
Young Broadcasting, Inc.	16	8
NBC TV Stations Division	15	9
Granite Broadcasting Corp.	10	10
Gray Communications Systems, Inc.	10	10
Freedom Communications, Inc.	8	12
LIN Television Corp.	8	12
Guy Gannett Communications	7	14
Brian E. Cobb	1	15

From Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook, 1999.



Chapter 3

Operationalization

Coding

As mentioned previously, each individual crime story will be observed and coded for three different variables. Table 3.1 on the next page shows a brief explanation of how each story will be assigned a particular attribute for

each variable. Stories must exhibit either an episodic or thematic form of presentation. For attributions of causal and treatment responsibility, a value of '9' will be given if the category is not applicable for a particular story.

Table 3.1 – Coding Scheme

Variable Name	Value Labels
Dominant Format (of presentation)	<p>1 = Episodic – Story takes the form of a case study or event-oriented report and depicts crime in terms of concrete instances that illustrate events.</p> <p>2 = Thematic – Story places crime in a more general or abstract context; directed at general outcomes or conditions.</p>
RespCaus (attribution of causal responsibility)	<p>1 = Individual – Cause of crime is attributed to individual dysfunctions such as character deficiencies or inadequate education and employment skills.</p> <p>2 = Societal – Cause of crime is attributed to social dysfunctions such as economic conditions, discrimination, racial inequality, poverty, or cultural institutions.</p> <p>3 = Punitive – Cause of crime is attributed to the ability to avoid severe punishment.</p>
RespTreat (attribution of treatment responsibility)	<p>1 = Individual – Treatment of crime attributed to individual self-improvement.</p> <p>2 = Societal – Treatment of crime attributed to improvements in underlying socioeconomic and political order, such as reductions in poverty and inequality, rehabilitative and educational programs, improved economic conditions, and heightened public awareness.</p> <p>3 = Punitive – Treatment of crime attributed to the imposition of stricter and more certain punishment against criminals</p>
From Iyengar, 1991	

The main area of focus in the story is the event of a single crime.

Dominant Format

For Dominant Format of presentation, there are two value labels. Iyengar's research shows that the episodic form of presentation is more common than the thematic form of presentation, appearing in 89 percent of all crime stories in his sample. Following is a detailed explanation of each form of presentation.

Episodic Presentation

An episodic story is one in which crime is depicted primarily in terms of concrete instances that illustrate events. The main area of focus in the story is the event of a single crime or activity related to that crime. A news report covering crime in this manner may take many different forms. It may give details on the occurrence of a crime event, investigations or arrests on the part of police, court appearances and trials, and sentencing or release from prison. A large percentage of episodic crime stories cover the events of violent crimes, even though these crimes comprise a much smaller amount of total crime than they appear to on the news. For example, Yanich (1998) showed that although murder comprised only .4 percent of total crime in the cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia in 1996, at least 50 percent of crime coverage in the same year focused on cases of murder. Coverage of a murder may range from a brief announcement of the discovery of the crime, to an advisement that the police are searching for a suspect, to a lengthy detailed account of the trial and sentencing of a particular criminal. These stories are often accompanied by footage of the crime scene, complete with yellow police tape, chalk outlines, and bullet holes illuminated by the flashes of light from patrol cars and ambulances. Footage of arrest and trial events are popular as well, showing handcuffed suspects being led to a courthouse or standing by while the press conduct brief interviews with their defense attorneys. These types of footage might not add much useful information to the story, but may make it more interesting or entertaining by likening the event to a television drama. The pictures are also useful in keeping viewers engaged in the story for the median of 34 seconds (of stories in my sample) it takes to report such an event.

Episodic crime coverage may also take the form of a "human interest" story that focuses on the experiences of people who were affected by the crime. Most often it is the families of victims of violent crime that are asked to tell their stories on the news, since this type of story has the potential to elicit much sympathetic emotion from the viewer. Family and friends of the suspects do appear in human interest themed crime stories as well, mostly to explain how their loved ones have been wrongly accused. Footage of either side, teary-eyed in their homes and surrounded by pictures of those they have lost to death or to incarceration need no narration from a reporter, because they serve the same purpose as the footage of the crime scene itself.

Following is a typical example of an episodic crime story. It is from the New York station WCBS, and aired in the first block⁷ of stories on the March 11, 1998 evening newscast for a duration of 87 seconds. The story was also covered by the two other major network stations, WABC and WNBC, on the same day.

This story focused on the events of a plea bargain in relation to a violent crime. From the reporter, the viewer obtains information about the identities of the suspects and victim involved in the crime, some details about the crime event itself, and an indication of the fate of the suspects. The footage provides little additional information that is useful, save perhaps for the exact location of the crime scene for those that are familiar with the area. This and other similar stories provide information about specific cases of crime, which may be useful in cases where warnings are due, yet they rarely address crime in a larger context. Thus in the case of local television news, the public receives a glimpse of the status of crime in their community, or a few extreme cases from other cities, but rarely is presented with information that can be used to address the problem of crime as a whole.

⁷ The block number of a story refers to the number of the segment of the broadcast, separated by commercial breaks, in which the story appears. Place number refers to the chronological position of the story in the broadcast. For further explanation of block and place, see page 33.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor: A stunning development in a gruesome Central Park murder. A baby faced teenager charged in the killing suddenly pleads guilty today in a deal with prosecutors. She pinned the murder on the boyfriend. News 2's [Reporter] has details.</p> <p>Reporter: The baby faced butchers, that's what they called [Suspect 1] and her boyfriend, then 15-year-old [Suspect 2].</p> <p>In a controversial plea bargain, [Suspect 1] has pleaded guilty to a reduced charge, manslaughter, in the savage dismemberment of real estate agent [Victim].</p> <p>Defense Attorney: I think both sides agree that if there were a trial there could be a reasonable likelihood that there would be a manslaughter conviction.</p> <p>Reporter: In court [Suspect 1] admitted without any emotion, "I struck Mr. [Victim] and caused Mr. [Victim] to fall over to the ground by kicking his feet out from under him."</p> <p>[Suspect 1] says she saw [Suspect 2] stabbing [Victim], but doesn't know what set off the fight between them.</p> <p>Her statements in court as well as her lengthy admissions to police at the time of the killing cannot be used against [Suspect 2], who is still charged with second-degree murder. The plea bargain says absolutely nothing about [Suspect 1] testifying against [Suspect 2], and her lawyer [Defense Attorney] says flatly, she will not testify.</p> <p>But the Manhattan DA says [Suspect 1] could still be subpoenaed to testify against her former boyfriend, who is scheduled to go on trial later this spring.</p> <p>[Suspect 1], who will be sentenced to 3 1/3 to 10 years on her manslaughter plea, could be out of jail before her 19th birthday. In Central Park, [Reporter], News 2.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor</i></p> <p><i>Close-up shot of female suspect in courtroom</i></p> <p><i>Shot of male suspect being led through the courtroom</i></p> <p><i>Shot of female suspect and others standing in courtroom</i></p> <p><i>Close-up of previous shot, focused on female suspect and attorney</i></p> <p><i>Picture of victim with station logo in background</i></p> <p><i>Shot of sit-down interview with suspect's attorney</i></p> <p><i>First close-up shot of female suspect is repeated</i></p> <p><i>Statement is transcribed on the screen, with station logo in the background</i></p> <p><i>Footage of police removing body from crime scene</i></p> <p><i>Location shot of reporter in central park</i></p> <p><i>Shot of female suspect walking through courtroom</i></p> <p><i>Shot of male suspect in courtroom is repeated</i></p> <p><i>Shot of female suspect standing in courtroom, judge seated in foreground</i></p> <p><i>Repeated shot with attorney</i></p> <p><i>First close-up shot of female suspect is repeated again</i></p>

A thematic crime story places crime as a phenomenon in a larger and more broad or abstract context.

Thematic Presentation

In contrast to episodic stories, a thematic crime story places crime as a phenomenon in a larger and more broad or abstract context. Stories of this nature address the general outcomes or conditions of crime, and appear most often in a policy context. The situation or particular aspect of crime that is being addressed may be local or national. Thematic stories are often broadcasted when either the U.S. Congress or a state government is introducing or debating a bill that affects the prosecution or punishment of a particular crime. Such abstract pieces may also appear when a community seems to be plagued with a particular problem, or if a study has recently been released which addresses the causes, symptoms, or possible solutions to a specific type of crime. Instead of interviewing local police, neighbors, or families of crime victims or suspects, as is the case in episodic crime coverage, thematic stories usually turn to professional sources. Legislative debates may be covered with footage of expert testimony at a Congressional hearing. Stories that address topics like the effect of crime on victims or the success rate of rehabilitative programs often include interviews with university researchers that conducted studies in those areas.

Thematic coverage of crime stories provides information about the general conditions of crime in an area or across the nation. Such stories may report on an increase or decrease in crime rates, rates of recidivism for certain types of correctional or rehabilitative programs, debates over the use of capital punishment, or discussions on the impact of the media entertainment culture on juvenile crime. These stories provide evidence of the existence or dynamism of crime and its repercussions. When focused on the legislative process of creating and modifying criminal justice policies, thematic stories can educate citizens on the public issue aspects of crime, instead of the events as they occur in their communities.

Below is an example of a thematic crime story. It is from the St. Louis NBC affiliate, KSDK, and aired in the second block of stories on the March 10, 1998 broadcast for 47 seconds. The same story also aired on St. Louis' ABC affiliate KDNL, and on New York's WABC on the same night. Also notable is that this story aired on CNN national evening news on the same night (Vanderbilt Television News Archive).

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
Anchor 1: The Internet is known as an educational tool and a storage site for the world's recorded knowledge.	<i>Desk shots of both anchors</i>
Anchor 2: But tonight the Internet is being called a virtual playground for child molesters.	<i>Head shot of Anchor 2</i>
Congress is taking the initiative in stepping up funding for agencies like the FBI to fight crime against children on the Internet. Another hearing on the subject was held to day in Washington.	<i>Footage of children looking at computer displays</i>
Freeh: Within minutes literally of an agent pretending to be a 13 or 14-year-old girl going into a designated chat room the screen literally lights up with respect to questions and solicitations and many of those are pursued in terms of our criminal cases.	<i>Head shot of FBI Director Louis Freeh at Congressional hearing</i>
Anchor 2: The FBI is now forming new units of so-called cyber police to deal with online crimes.	<i>Return to head shot of Anchor 2</i>

This story addresses the problem of crimes against children, and the role of the Internet in proliferating those crimes. A solution to the problem has been suggested, that Congress will increase funding to the FBI so that it can create units of cyber police to deal with the crimes. In contrast to an episodic story about child molestation, which might include details of a specific event in which the crime has occurred, there is no certain individual victim or suspect involved. While an episodic story might use footage of a crime scene, an interview with a victim's parents, or a look at the trial of an accused molester, this thematic story uses only a sound bite from a governmental source. Freeh's statement is meant to prove that the problem exists, and his presence at a Congressional hearing indicates that the problem is serious enough for strong governmental action to be taken against it. By addressing the issue of child molestation in a larger and more general context, this thematic crime story allows the viewer to understand a little bit more about the nature of the crime and its possible solutions more clearly than through the case-study format of episodic presentation. However, this story is still relatively short in terms of the amount of information that can be passed on to the viewer, and does not discuss more specific factors about the crime, such as how widespread the phenomenon of child predators on the Internet.

Attribution of Causal Responsibility

Attributions of causal responsibility refer to the way the story is framed to give meaning to the crime in terms of the person or institution responsible for a crime. Iyengar's study showed that three main themes appeared when he asked people to attribute responsibility for crime: individual, societal, and punitive attributions. Of all attributions of causal responsibility in Iyengar's study on the issue of crime, individualistic attributions comprised 38 percent, societal attributions comprised 48 percent, and punitive attributions of causal responsibility comprised approximately 10 percent (Iyengar 1991). The specific meaning I have assigned to these variables is as close as possible to Iyengar's interpretation, and is explained below.

Individual Causal Responsibility

Individualistic attributions for the causes of crime were more common in Iyengar's study when news stories used an episodic form of presentation. For my purposes as well, a crime story coded as exhibiting individualistic causal responsibility is one in which the problem of crime is blamed on the individual who committed it. These stories either specifically point out or allude to an individual's character deficiencies or inadequate education and employment skills. Such a story may discuss a suspect's drug use, personality disorder, lack of work ethic, or other dysfunction as motivation for that person to commit a crime. Other crime coverage may mention a criminal's prior offenses, coming to the conclusion that that person is unrehabilitatable.

Many stories do not make specific references to any particular individual motive, instead relying on sources to allow assumptions to be made. For example, a story covering a murder may contain a brief quote from a witness or someone who lives close to the location of the crime. These types of sources often pose questions such as, "how can something like this happen here?" or "how can someone do something like this?" These comments, while they do not blatantly blame an individual, allude to assumptions that the person who commits such a crime chose to do so due to their own dysfunctions. Other stories that make no mention of an alternative motive (i.e., a societal or punitive cause) will also be considered as attributing individualistic causal responsibility. If the story does not mention a particular societal or punitive cause, the viewer is left to assume a suspect's individual dysfunctions were the reason the crime was committed.

Below is an example of a crime story that attributes causal responsibility to an individual dysfunction. It is from the Los Angeles station KNBC, and aired in the second block of stories on March 11, 1998 for 57 seconds. This story was an out of market story (it took place in Seattle), and in addition to airing on the Los Angeles ABC affiliate that night, it also appeared on the evening news in several other markets.

Individualistic causal responsibility is one in which the problem of crime is blamed on the individual who committed it.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor: Look closely inside this bank. You'll see a very frightening moment during an armed standoff today near Seattle. It appears that the robbery suspect has a gun pointed to the head of a hostage, a terrifying experience.</p>	<p><i>Shot from outside of bank of suspect restraining a hostage at gunpoint</i></p>
<p>Investigators tonight say that armed standoff at a bank in Washington State today was apparently a suicide and publicity stunt. They say the armed man calmly waited for all of the customers to leave the bank, and then he took six employees hostage.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor inside studio</i></p>
<p>SWAT teams and FBI agents surrounded this bank in Auburn, near Seattle.</p>	<p><i>Shot of agents in camouflage outside of a building</i></p>
<p>The gunman inside eventually released two hostages.</p>	<p><i>Shot of strip mall where bank is located; camera zooms in on bank</i></p>
<p>Later the other 4 hostages made a daring dash for freedom when they were left alone near an exit. Investigators say the man may have had a beef to settle.</p>	<p><i>Shot of three women and a man running down a street</i></p>
<p>Police Officer: Until the investigation we'll determine exactly what he had in mind when he entered that bank, but it wasn't to rob the bank.</p>	<p><i>Shot from outside of bank</i></p>
<p>Anchor: Police say the 5-hour standoff finally ended when the suspect shot himself in the stomach.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of police officer</i></p>
<p>He is now listed in serious condition.</p>	<p><i>Footage of EMTs carrying suspect on a stretcher</i></p>
	<p><i>Return to head shot of anchor</i></p>

While this story does not mention the specific reason the suspect had for holding up a bank, it does allude to a problem he had. The anchor calls the event a “suicide and publicity stunt” and mentions that “the man may have had a beef to settle.” Whatever the problem was is apparently not important, since the story focuses on the man’s choice to put other’s lives in danger instead of using civil means to solve his problem. The man’s suicide attempt, which ended the situation, is another indication that he may have had a mental problem or some other dysfunction that led him to carry out such drastic measures.

As Iyengar indicates, episodic presentation in crime coverage is most likely to elicit

individualistic attributions of the cause of crime. This story is presented in an episodic format and, along with other similar stories, focuses on the events of a specific crime instead of crime as a public issue. This example highlights that correlation, focusing on the who, what, where and when of an event and almost ignoring the important questions of why and how. Eliminating an examination of the discreet causes of crime leaves the viewer to speculation, and likely to the assumptions that a crime was committed due to an individual’s problems instead of those of society or the criminal justice system.

Societal Causal Responsibility

Societal attributions for the causes of crime refer to a variety of social, economic, or political circumstances that produce crime. These circumstances include economic conditions that lead people to commit crimes out of need, hate crimes committed on the basis of racial or other biases, suits alleging some type of discrimination, breakdowns in a system meant to improve quality of life, or cultural institutions, which Iyengar defines as “the role of the mass media and entertainment industry in glamorizing crime and legitimizing the use of violence” (Iyengar, 1991, 29). Specific examples

of this type of story include coverage of protests in which people are arrested for supporting their causes, or some cases of police brutality where flaws in their investigation and arrest processes lead them to cause injury to a person who does not deserve it.

Below is an example of a crime story that exhibits societal causal responsibility. It is from the New York ABC affiliate, and aired as the opening story on the March 9, 1998 broadcast. This story did not appear on any other stations in my sample.

Societal attributions for the causes of crime refer to a variety of social, economic, or political circumstances that produce crime.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor: We have a disturbing story tonight about a foster mother arrested for child abuse and the fact that the child’s suffering could have been avoided. At issue, a shocking flaw in the way that Children’s Services screen foster parents.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor in studio</i></p>
<p>[Reporter] is live in Brownsville with more on this story.</p>	<p><i>Split shot of anchor and reporter on location</i></p>
<p>Reporter: This is a story about a two year old baby girl who didn’t fall through the cracks in the system, she fell through a chasm and as a result that two year old girl is in the pediatric intensive care ward here at Brookdale Medical Center with numerous and serious injuries. This is a child who was placed by the City in the care of a woman with a history of 19 convictions dating back to 1981 and yet the City approved her as a foster parent. Why? They didn’t know. According to the City they are prevented by law from doing criminal background checks on people who apply to become foster parents.</p>	<p><i>Shot of reporter on location in front of hospital</i></p>
<p>[Suspect] was arraigned tonight on charges of assault in the first degree and endangering the welfare of a minor, a two-year-old girl entrusted to her by the city’s foster care program. How [Suspect] became a foster care mother, after 19 convictions including an assault conviction, has the commissioner of Children’s Services frustrated and angry.</p>	<p><i>Footage of suspect being led by two men on each arm</i></p>
<p>Commissioner: The only thing that we are able to do under the law is check the state central registry which is our hotline, has there ever been an allegation of child abuse.</p>	<p><i>Interview with Children’s Services Commissioner</i></p>
<p>Reporter: [Suspect] is 35 years old. She has a criminal record that includes 19 convictions dating back to 1982 including one conviction for assault in July of 1991 for which she was sentenced to a year in jail. But the City is prevented by law from doing criminal background checks on prospective foster families,</p>	<p><i>Profile of suspect, including still picture from previous footage, and main points outlined in corresponding narrative</i></p>

continued on next page

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>something the City has been trying to change for years.</p>	<p><i>Interview with Children's Services Commissioner</i></p>
<p>Commissioner: Perhaps a case like this, that's such a dramatic example of the need for it, will convince the legislature that this makes a lot of sense.</p>	<p><i>Shot from outside courthouse</i></p>
<p>Reporter: It is a law that led to this report by the Assistant District Attorney at [Suspect's] arraignment tonight.</p>	<p><i>Repeated shot, in slow motion, of suspect being led in the arms of two men.</i></p>
<p>Quote, "[Suspect] woke up on the floor Saturday morning after drinking Friday night. She had no recollection of the previous night. A nephew who came by to visit noticed</p>	<p><i>Transcribed statement of ADA</i></p>
<p>the baby had bruises on her head, neck, back, legs, and arms, plus a black eye and swollen head. Family members brought the baby to Brookdale Hospital."Where she is in the hospital's pediatric intensive care ward.</p>	<p><i>Footage of suspect being led into Correction Department building</i></p>
<p>And about [Suspect], the woman approved by the City as a foster mother, well noting that [Suspect], who is pregnant, was unresponsive to questions and seemed disoriented at the hearing tonight, [Judge]</p>	<p><i>Transcribed statement of Judge</i></p>
<p>said this. Quote, "There is reason to question whether [Suspect] is competent even to stand trial, based on her behavior here."He ordered psychiatric tests.</p>	<p><i>Shot of project buildings</i></p>
<p>And at her home in the Tilden projects tonight, neighbors said they did not know her,</p>	<p><i>Shot of front door to building</i></p>
<p>nor did they know anything about her 19 previous convictions.</p>	<p><i>Return to shot of reporter on location outside of hospital</i></p>
<p>[Commissioner] said there is no way to know how many other foster parents may have criminal backgrounds. [Suspect] did not enter a plea at the arraignment. Her court appointed attorney [Attorney] told Eyewitness News she is upset, traumatized, and pregnant. Reporting live from Brownsville, [Reporter], Channel 7 Eyewitness News.</p>	

This story highlights a problem in the foster placement system that allowed a person unfit to care for a child to become a foster mother. While individual dysfunctions of the suspect were mentioned as well, this story put effort into exposing the limits on the system to prevent such a crime from occurring. The fact that Children's Services was prohibited from investigating the criminal backgrounds of persons applying to be foster parents is a fault of the policies that govern that system. If criminal background checks were allowed, a child would not have been placed with this

person and the abuse would not have occurred. Thus, the individual dysfunctions of the suspect are relevant only in making a case for increasing the level of care taken in placing foster children. Stories such as this draw attention to defects in the social or political system, not only the persons who deviate from the precepts of that system. The importance of crime coverage that focuses on the larger problems that lead to discrete events is that they reveal the possibility of solutions that work on a larger scale than those that punish individual acts of crime.

Punitive Causal Responsibility

Crime stories that are framed to illustrate punitive causal responsibility are those that blame the causes of crime on the ability to avoid severe punishment. Such a story may focus upon inadequacies or corruption of the criminal justice system, or to a group or individual's blatant disregard for the consequences of their actions. Stories that cover police brutality as an obvious abuse of power on the part of an officer are included here. Also, mentions of organized crime or instances where criminals believe they will not get caught are considered to attribute punitive causes of responsibility of crime.

The following story is an example of punitive causal responsibility. The story is from New York's CBS affiliate, and aired on March 9,

1998. It appeared in the first block of stories on this station as well as on the other two major network stations the same night.

This story mentions three times the increasingly "brazen" acts of those committing the string of crimes. The characterization of the criminals as brazen insinuates a blatant disregard of the danger of getting caught. In addition, the mention that police were waiting for them to strike again, and the suggestions of what to do so as not to become a victim indicate that there is nothing that can be done until the thieves are caught. Stories such as this underline problems in the criminal justice system, whether it is in the arena of the police, the courts, or corrections.

Crime stories that are framed to illustrate punitive causal responsibility are those that blame the causes of crime on the ability to avoid severe punishment.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor: Tonight residents in Bergen County are being warned about a team of burglars that's getting increasingly more brazen. They struck three times last night in Paramus alone. They've also hit homes in Oradell, Englewood, and River Edge.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor in studio</i></p>
<p>News 2 reporter [Reporter] is live of course in Paramus tonight with details.</p>	<p><i>Graphic of map of northern New Jersey; areas mentioned are indicated</i></p>
<p>Reporter: Cobbs County [police] are talking to each other by radio tonight, keeping in touch, waiting for the gang to strike again. They usually come in the front or back door, right into the place, usually right into the master bedroom for the jewelry and the cash. They've hit so many times, they've become their own crime wave.</p>	<p><i>Same as above with inset of reporter on location</i></p>
<p>Business is booming tonight for [Security Expert] and others who install home security systems in Bergen County.</p>	<p><i>Live location shot of reporter at police headquarters</i></p>
<p>A gang of bandits have been terrorizing three towns here since the first of the year.</p>	<p><i>Footage of a well dressed man walking up to a house</i></p>
<p>Thirty brazen break-ins in Paramus alone.</p>	<p><i>Night shot of a large suburban home</i></p>
<p>Homeowner 1: Kicked doors in, you know, took jewelry, whatever they can, and they kind of skadoodled, and no one heard anything, seen anything.</p>	<p><i>Similar shot of another home</i></p>
	<p><i>Close up shot of a third home</i></p>
	<p><i>Interview with a homeowner</i></p>

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Commentary:

Reporter: To give you an idea of how active these guys are we picked this street at random and found out that two houses on this cul-de-sac were hit recently, and another one on the next block. Everybody's talking about it.

Homeowner 2: You know, we moved out of a neighborhood because of certain situations like that, and here we are, confronted with the same situation.

Reporter: Last night the burglars became bandits when a resident on Blauvelt Avenue in Oradell

came home to face the muzzle of a handgun.

Men dressed in black took money and jewelry.

Police in Oradell, Paramus, and River Edge are on edge tonight, waiting for the gang to strike again.

Police Officer: Well these people seem to be a little more brazen each time they're out there, so as I said, anytime you see anything out of the ordinary they should call the police immediately, this way we can respond, cars, everybody's out there looking for them all over the county.

Reporter: It's bad for everyone, except the security experts, all units selling briskly —

alarms, motion detectors, radio backups in case the phone lines are cut.

Security Specialist: Because there's been so many, everyone's calling up, they're very anxious, and it's understandable.

Reporter: You've been busy?

Security Specialist: Can't complain

Reporter: Live picture now at Paramus headquarters, shift change as the next shift heads out into the streets to see what they can do to stop this rash of burglaries. These guys usually hit between five and nine p.m., though, so their prime time is over. The thieves tend to avoid alarms and the cops say the victims usually are careless, they leave lights off and make it obvious that nobody's home. The tips are obvious, leave a light on and make it look like somebody is home. Do that and you dramatically reduce your chances of becoming a victim. We're live tonight in Paramus, Bergen County.

Description of Footage:

Footage of reporter outside on street of a suburban neighborhood

Interview with a second homeowner

Daytime shot of a suburban neighborhood, panning from right to left down the street

Close up shot of one home

Shot of broken sliding glass door

Moving shot of neighborhood from inside a car

Interview with police officer

Footage of well dressed man walking up to a house

Close up shots of devices mentioned

Interview with security specialist inside a home

Shot of reporter inside home

Return to shot of security specialist

Return to live location shot of reporter at police headquarters

Attribution of Treatment Responsibility

Attributions of treatment responsibility refer to the assignment of a person or institution the duty of finding a remedy for the crime. The responses Iyengar obtained in his research for this category were the same as those for attributions of causal responsibility — individual, societal, and punitive attributions. In Iyengar’s study, less than 10 percent of respondents attributed treatment responsibility for crime to individuals. Forty-two percent attributed treatment responsibility to society, and 50 percent of the attributions referred to punitive measures (Iyengar 1991).

Individual Treatment Responsibility

As noted above, the attribution of treatment responsibility to individuals did not occur very often. This suggests that self-rehabilitation is not a predominant suggestion for resolving crime. Crime coverage that does suggest individual self-improvement include stories of those in public office who take it upon themselves to rectify an abuse of power, similar acts by ordinary citizens who commit lesser crimes, or mention of suicide by someone who wants to avoid more serious punishment.

The story below, which is an example of individual treatment responsibility, is from the Tallahassee station WCTV, the CBS affiliate, and aired on March 11, 1998 in the first block of stories. This story did not appear on any other stations in my sample.

Self-rehabilitation is not a predominant suggestion for resolving crime.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor: A Grady County sheriff’s deputy is without a job after being involved in an accident in which authorities say he may have been under the influence. [Reporter] is in Thomasville with details.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor in studio</i></p>
<p>Reporter: The trooper investigating the accident could not tell us whether there was alcohol involved, or whether he could smell alcohol on [Suspect’s] breath, but the trooper, the sheriff’s deputy, was given a blood alcohol test, and all criminal charges are pending on those results.</p>	<p><i>Shot of reporter inside another studio</i></p>
<p>Georgia State patrol officers say the driver, 27</p>	<p><i>Shot of side of the road where grass has tire tracks through it</i></p>
<p>year old [Suspect], a deputy with the Grady County sheriff’s department, lost</p>	<p><i>Shot of parked police car</i></p>
<p>control of the truck, crashed into these trees. Authorities say [Suspect] was given a test. The results are not back yet, but Tuesday</p>	<p><i>Shot of road, panning from right to left, and focusing on trees damaged from accident</i></p>
<p>afternoon, [Suspect]</p>	<p><i>Shot of letter of resignation</i></p>
<p>resigned from the Grady County sheriff’s department.</p>	<p><i>Close-up shot of police car</i></p>
<p>Sheriff: He did resign, told me he thought he violated the code of ethics to which he had taken an oath to fulfill. So I accept his resignation. He’s a good officer, I hate to lose him.</p>	<p><i>Interview with Sheriff</i></p>

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Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Reporter: Two other law enforcement officers were also in the truck, along with a nineteen-year-old girl.</p>	<p><i>Two quick shot of police cars from different angles; third shot of turfed grass</i></p>
<p>Anchor: Well [Reporter] based on the outcome of these tests, what could happen to the officer who was involved in this incident?</p>	<p><i>Reporter and Anchor talk to each other from different studios</i></p>
<p>Reporter: Well [Anchor], depending on the charges, they could charge him, obviously, with drunk driving, and violation of oath of office.</p>	

Societal treatment responsibility refers to the notion that crimes can be resolved by actions of the state.

The actions of the officer accused of drunk driving are considered a deed of individual treatment. The deputy took it upon himself to resign from his position, which the sheriff accepted. It is likely that this attribution of treatment responsibility does not occur very often because there are rarely situations where a person can get away with serving up his or her own punishment instead of going through traditional means of sentencing.

Societal Treatment Responsibility

Societal treatment responsibility refers to the notion that crimes can be resolved by actions of the state. Improvements in the basic socio-economic or political order, such as “reduc-

tions in poverty and inequality, rehabilitative and educational programs, and an improved economy” (Iyengar 1991, 30) are all examples of societal treatment responsibility. Also included here is heightened public awareness, such as the formation of neighborhood watch groups, or legislation intended to prevent similar crimes from occurring in the future.

Following is an example of a story that attributes treatment responsibility to society. The story is from Lansing’s NBC affiliate WILX, and aired in the first block of stories on March 10, 1998. The other major network stations in Lansing did not cover this story during the week my sample was taken.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor 1: Well the number of reported hate crimes went up in 1996 for the third year in a row. But law enforcement groups and community leaders say it may be that more people are reporting those crimes, and not necessarily that there are more hate crimes taking place.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor in studio</i></p>
<p>News 10’s [Anchor 2] stopped by the FBI conference earlier today where these groups talked about hate crime issues. Let’s start out, [Anchor 2], by talking about what exactly constitutes a hate crime.</p>	<p><i>Similar shot including both anchors</i></p>
<p>Anchor 2: There are a lot of definitions of hate crimes, which are also referred to as bias crimes. State police say the definition of bias is a pre-formed negative opinion or attitude toward a group of persons, based on among other things their race, religion, ethnic background, or sexual orientation. So a bias crime would be one committed by someone motivated by such a bias.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of second anchor in studio</i></p>

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Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor 2: The law enforcement officers and community leaders in this room are on the front lines of hate crimes. The officers investigate them, and the community leaders try to raise the awareness of their existence. The groups discussed hate crimes during a conference organized by the Detroit office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.</p> <p>Deputy: We need to work together, we need to continue to focus on hate crimes and the importance of gathering accurate statistics, and having active investigations when they do occur.</p> <p>Anchor 2: The number of hate crimes reported across the State continues to rise. For example, hate crimes against blacks rose from 178 in 1995 to 235 in 1996. Crimes against whites rose from 111 to 125, and crimes against gays rose from 39 to 48. Overall the number of crimes increased by nearly 200, or by about 37 percent. But the actual number of hate crimes could be much higher.</p> <p>Law enforcement groups are trying to improve the collection of those statistics, which haven't been kept for very long.</p> <p>FBI Agent: We in the law enforcement community didn't start collecting hate crime statistics until 1990, and the law enforcement community's been kind of slow in getting on board...</p> <p>Anchor 2: But besides improving their ability to collect statistics on hate crimes, law enforcement agencies are working with several groups to help their officers better recognize hate crimes.</p> <p>Triangle Foundation Rep: Right now we're involved with the Detroit Police Department and the Metropolitan Detroit Police Academy, working on their curriculum.</p> <p>Anchor 2: And [Triangle Foundation Rep] says his group is also working with other departments around the State, trying to help them to properly identify hate crimes, but it's very difficult, and they're a lot of issues at stake, and a lot of motivations, so it's not that simple.</p>	<p><i>Shots from inside conference</i></p> <p><i>Interview with police officer inside conference</i></p> <p><i>Animated graphics illustrating statistics mentioned</i></p> <p><i>Return to shots from inside conference</i></p> <p><i>Interview with FBI agent inside conference</i></p> <p><i>Location shot of Anchor 2 outside a police precinct</i></p> <p><i>Interview from inside conference</i></p> <p><i>Return to studio shots of anchors</i></p>

This story highlights the importance of accurate data collection in order to understand and prevent a specific type of crime. The collaboration of the FBI with community groups also attempts to bridge the gap in continuity of entities that must deal with crime, extending the reach of concern to include multiple means of resolving it. The combination of investigation and education or

awareness serves to better understand the problem so that a solution may be crafted. Other similar stories that address societal treatments for crime attempt to address the problems on a larger scale — actions taken by even a small local government or organization may be used as examples in other communities. These ideas serve to tackle problems above and beyond those of an isolated event.

Punitive measures of treatment refer to the use of stricter or more certain punishment against criminals.

Punitive Treatment Responsibility

Punitive measures of treatment responsibility were the most common response obtained in Iyengar’s study. These responses refer to the use of stricter or more certain punishment against criminals. This category includes focus on events preliminary to punishment, for example, searches for, arrests, or investigations of alleged criminals. For coverage of civil cases, the treatment is left up to the decisions of the courts, and therefore inherently falls under the definition of punitive treatment. In some cases, no specific criminal may be mentioned, but other ideas introduced into the story, such as the belief that someone must be punished, put these stories into the punitive category.

The story below is one in which treatment responsibility is attributed to punitive measures. It is from Buffalo’s WKBW, the ABC affiliate, and aired in the first block of stories on March 11, 1998. Both the NBC and CBS affiliates also covered the story on the same night, also in the first block.

This story covers the court proceedings of a man convicted on felony fraud charges. It gives some detail on the specifications of the crime he has committed, yet begins and ends on the sentencing aspect of the story. Crime stories that attribute treatment responsibility to punitive measures leave no room for further interpretation of the crime, or other events that may have led to that crime being committed. They perpetuate the status quo by framing the story in a way that suggests punishment is the best and most effective means of resolving crime.

Commentary:	Description of Footage:
<p>Anchor 1: Also making news tonight, former chief city court judge [Suspect], was in federal court today for sentencing on felony fraud charges.</p>	<p><i>Head shot of anchor in studio</i></p>
<p>[Suspect], seen here with his attorney, [Attorney], will spend two months in prison plus 60 days of confinement at an East Side halfway house. In a plea deal last November, [Suspect] admitted he filed</p>	<p><i>Shot of suspect walking through court building</i></p>
<p>\$25,000 worth of phony invoices on work that was never done at this Elmwood Avenue apartment complex he developed for disabled adults. The fraud also involved an \$800,000 loan from the City of Buffalo.</p>	<p><i>Multiple shots of apartment complex</i></p>
<p>The 71-year-old [Suspect] was also ordered to repay almost \$37,000 to the Buffalo Enterprise Development Corporation.</p>	<p><i>Return to shot of suspect in court building</i></p>

Chapter 4

Findings

Story Characteristics

For all the stories in my sample, there are some characteristics that should first be examined independent of my findings. The first four of these characteristics were part of the coding scheme for the preliminary round of coding; the last two were performed upon only the crime stories. These significant categories include Mode, Duration, Place #, Block, Sources, and Crime Type. An examination of these characteristics will provide a general idea of the types of stories that are included in my sample, as a representation of crime coverage on local television news. In addition, once my results are discussed, the characteristics of each type of story will be compared to the entire sample. This comparison will allow an analysis of how pressures and production techniques are manifested in different types of news reporting.

Mode

The Mode category, explained as primary mode of presentation, should not be confused with the category created as a part of this research called Dominant Form of Presentation. The mode of presentation refers to the production techniques used to present the story. There were nine possible modes of presentation, which are explained below.

Table 4.1 – Mode of Presentation

Mode of Presentation	Explanation
Read	Anchor talking head without any video, can have picture or graphics
Voice over/Anchor	Anchor reads over video; voice-over sound on tape: anchor reads over video with some sound bites from various sources
Package	Reporter was at location; narrates over tape
Live location report	Reporter is on location for events happening live
Live location report/ no action	Reporter is live on location after events have occurred, or at another location somehow relevant to the story (hospital, police station, etc.)
Live location report/ go to video	Reporter is live on location; reporter narrates over footage recorded earlier
Question/Answer, Panel Discussion, Speech, Other	Footage of planned events
Editorial/Commentary	Opinion piece
Reporter live in newsroom	Anchor sends story to reporter who is live in another location in studio

The shorter the story, the less content it contains and the less information the viewer receives on the issue in question.

Of the 313 stories in my sample, 212 (67.7 percent) of them were identified under the Voice over/Anchor mode of presentation. This presentation mode focuses on the visual aspect of the story, with the anchor narrating over the pictures that illustrate events, sometimes with sound bites from sources, such as those people that witnessed the event. Using this production technique relies upon the pictures to keep the viewer interested in the story by communicating information that the anchor or reporter does not have the time to describe during the short amount of time allotted to the story.

The next most common modes of presentation for the stories in my sample also relied heavily upon video footage to carry the stories. Thirty-nine stories (12.5 percent) used the Package mode, meaning that the reporter was at a location prior to the newscast where footage was filmed, and then edited the film to be narrated over for presentation. These stories are more resource-intensive than Voice over stories because they necessitate both a reporter and a camera crew to be on location to gather footage. Twenty-eight stories (8.9 percent) used the Live location report/go to video mode of presentation, which is very similar to the Voice over/Anchor mode, the difference being

that the narration is performed by a reporter from a location outside the studio instead of an anchor at a desk. This mode is often used when an event occurred hours prior to the newscast, but reporting from the location provides more visuals than does the anchor's desk. Twenty-five stories (8 percent) used the Read mode, in which the anchor reads commentary without footage, but often with a graphic rel-

evant to the crime. Read stories may have some footage, but the clips take up much less time on-screen than do head shots of the anchor. All of the above modes of presentation also rely on video footage or graphics to maintain viewer interest in the story. The remaining 2.9 percent of stories were either Live location reports, or stories told by a reporter Live in the newsroom.

Duration

The duration of a news story is significant for examination because the amount of time spent on a story is directly related to the amount of content it may contain. The shorter the story, the less content it contains and the less information the viewer receives on the issue in question. The graph below shows the distribution of story duration, in seconds, for my sample.

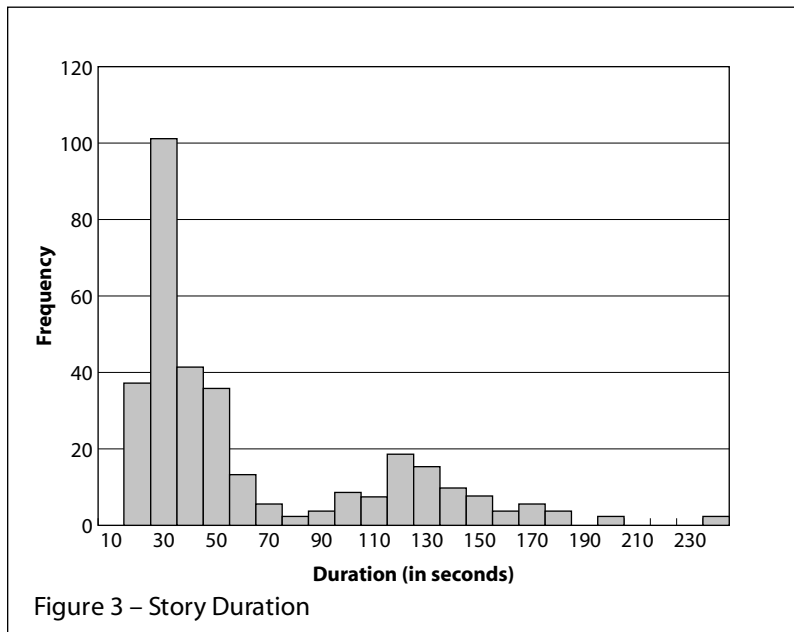


Figure 3 – Story Duration

The median duration of stories in my sample was 34.0 seconds. Thirty-one stories (9.9 percent) were what Mc Manus (1994) describes as “extremely brief” (213), with a duration of under twenty seconds. Sixty-five stories (20.8 percent) fell above one standard deviation (45.10) from the mean, fifteen stories (4.8 percent) were two standard deviations above the mean, and two stories (0.6 percent) were three

standard deviations above the mean. This information suggests that crime coverage on local television news consists largely of short stories that do not allow much content to be passed on to the viewer. Considering that half of the stories are under 35 seconds in length, that amount of time allows for little more than the details of who, what, when and where something happened for a particular story. It is almost impossible for most crime coverage to delve deeper into the meanings of crime in such a short period of time. Such coverage, then, does not provide information that is conducive to public discourse on issues related to and involving crime.

Place and Block

Place number refers to the chronological position of the story in the broadcast; while Block refers to the number of the segment of the broadcast, separated by commercial breaks, in which the story appears. The significance of these categories is closely related and will therefore be examined together. Since a news broadcast is an inherently sequential entity, in which viewers cannot choose what information they decide to expose themselves to (as is the case for newspapers and other print media), the order of stories in the broadcast is an important production consideration. News coverage that appears in the beginning of the broadcast must be interesting enough to keep the viewer tuned in for the rest of the broadcast. The first block of stories then is especially important. Typically the first five stories in the broadcast will always appear in the first block; stories six through ten may appear in either the first or second block, and stories placed eleven or higher will typically appear in the second block or later in the newscast. This distribution is based upon my sample, but is similar to that of the universe from which my sample was taken. The distribution also varies depending on the total number and length of stories in a newscast. For example, a station that airs very short stories will fit more stories into each block in between commercials. The tables below show the frequency and percentage of stories that appeared in each place and block within their respective broadcasts.

Table 4.2 – Story Placement

Place #	Frequency	Percentage
1	32	10.2
2	28	8.9
3	33	10.5
4	35	11.2
5	41	13.1
6	36	11.5
7	30	9.6
8	25	8.0
9	13	4.2
10	14	4.5
11 +	26	8.2
Total	313	100.0

Table 4.3 – Story Placement by Block

Block #	Frequency	Percentage
1	265	84.7
2	40	12.8
3	2	0.6
4	3	1.0
5	3	1.0
Total	313	100.0

News coverage that appears in the beginning of the broadcast must be interesting enough to keep the viewer tuned in for the rest of the broadcast.

Almost all (97.5 percent) of the stories in my sample appeared in either the first or second block of the newscast. Less than three percent aired in the middle or towards the end of the newscast. A large majority (84.7 percent) of the crime stories in my sample appeared in the first block. In regards to story placement, all stories that appeared in the first through fifth places were included in the first block, while 86 percent of stories in places six through nine also appeared in the first block. This information regarding the placement of these stories within local television newscasts suggests that crime stories, which are placed most often at the beginning of the broadcast, are used to attract viewers to the station and keep them interested so that they will watch the rest of the newscast. By using crime coverage more for entertainment than informational purposes, the possibility for deliberation on issues related to crime is diminished.

Sources validate the information and help the viewer to understand the story in a way that is meaningful to them.

Sources

The information provided by sources in news reporting is a large part of the newscast and is very important in shaping meaning of the news. Sources are essential to news stories — they validate the information presented by the anchor, and they help the viewer to understand the story in a way that is meaningful to them. Sources are a prominent aspect of framing because they validate the viewpoints of “authorized knowers,” those people whose knowledge is the cue from which viewers form their own opinions. Institutional, especially government sources, are most commonly accessed for this purpose. They are extremely reliable informants for the purpose of “truth” validation, and they are also fairly accessible to news workers. In fact, many news organizations put their reporters on beats that focus on a certain political area, for example, crime, local government, etc. The people who are put on these beats become acquainted with the officials who work in those areas, and frequently access their knowledge when they need to confirm all or part of a story they are planning to report (Tuchman, 1978). In addition, politicians are often more than willing to take advantage of opportunities to speak to the public through the news. While it may not be actual leaders themselves who appear on the news, their representatives make the same impact on viewers. As the public recognizes them as dependable sources of information, news workers turn to them more frequently.

The variety of sources mentioned or used in a newscast is an indication of the level of fairness given to different points of view on a story. A story that includes different points of view from various sources can be said to be more fair than is a story that uses only one source. Multiple points of view allow a viewer to identify with the one they feel most closely aligned to, while using only one source may seem to give validity to only one opinion, giving the viewer the options of jumping on the bandwagon or walking away from the story in complete opposition to its content. The use of sources in crime coverage also serves to validate that point of view to the audience as one of the most acceptable points of view. Thus, the use of sources specifically in crime

reporting validates the opinions of those who are asked to comment or give information on the story. Most crime stories, not surprisingly, use information given to them by the police. Law enforcement officials are easily accessible to the media, thus reporters often turn to them for information and quotes. They are also almost always guaranteed to have accurate and updated information regarding any crime event. Since police sources are a given in crime reporting, an examination of the use of other sources is therefore appropriate.

The Sources component of the crime coding involved noting a “yes”, “no”, or “n/a” for whether each type of source was cited in a particular crime story. The types of sources included criminal justice sources (e.g., police), sources from government, victims, suspects, eyewitnesses, family members of a victim, family members of a suspect, neighbors, defense attorneys, or other sources. Police or other criminal justice personnel were cited in a majority of the stories. Of all other categories of sources, 26 stories (8.3 percent) had a defense attorney as a source, 21 stories (6.7 percent) used government sources, 15 stories (4.8 percent) had a neighbor (someone who lived close to a crime scene), 12 victims and 12 family members of victims were mentioned (3.8 percent each), 11 suspects were used as sources (3.5 percent), 6 eyewitnesses (1.9 percent), and one suspect family member (0.3 percent) in addition to 38 sources defined as “Other” (12.1 percent) were used across all 313 stories in my sample. Excluding the criminal justice sources, this amounts to an average of 0.45 sources per story, or one non-criminal justice source for every two crime stories. Of the non-criminal justice sources, the most frequently mentioned were those also involved in the criminal justice process, i.e., defense attorneys and selected government officials. This finding indicates that the coverage of crime on local television news is based on the information given by those involved in processing the crime, and does not leave room for any particular meaning to be given to the crime by alternative sources. This narrow use of sources will be kept in mind when considering the framing of responsibility in my sample.

Crime Type

The category Crime Type refers to the particular type of crime event that is being covered in the story. There are five attributes in this category, which are explained below.

information may show enterprise in using minimal resources, it shows almost no initiative in covering stories that may address other issues in the public interest.

Table 4.4 – Crime Type	
Crime Type	Explanation
Crime Event	The occurrence or reporting of a crime event
Police	Actions by the police, i.e., arrest, investigation, etc.
Courts	Actions by the courts or agents of the courts (attorneys, etc.), i.e., bail, hearings, indictments, trials, plea-bargain, sentencing, etc.
Corrections	Actions by correctional organizations, including prisons, probation and parole agencies, programs that are alternatives to incarceration (half-way houses, furlough programs, treatment programs, etc.). Example of actions include taking offender into custody, releasing offender to other programs, carrying out death penalty, instituting new programs, etc.
Criminal Justice Policy/Issues	Not a story regarding a specific crime, but rather a story about crime and justice policy and administration

The plurality of crime stories in my sample were court stories, and comprised 40.3 percent of the total. The next most common type of crime story were those that focused on actions of the police (30 percent), followed by stories that discussed the immediate occurrence of a crime event (18.5 percent). The high frequency of court stories is likely a function of the ease news organizations have in getting information about the events occurring at courthouses, and planning ahead of time to get camera crews and reporters there to cover such stories. Unlike crime events or arrests, trial and other court-related activities are scheduled, therefore news crews can plan ahead to cover a story. News directors can assign reporters and camera crews to specific locations at specific times, thus getting the best use of their resources. While this method of gathering

information may show enterprise in using minimal resources, it shows almost no initiative in reporting techniques. The minimal use of sources additionally allows little meaning to be given to each crime story. This information indicates that crime coverage on local television news does not support the interests of citizens by informing them on public issues. Further examinations of my findings will help to support this assumption by shedding light on the ways that crime coverage becomes biased in terms of framing causal and treatment responsibility for the problem of crime, due to the production considerations discussed above.

To recap the characteristics of the stories in my sample, they predominantly appear in the beginning of the broadcast and may serve to attract viewers for the remaining half hour of the broadcast. These stories are relatively short in length and rely heavily on video content, thus keeping viewers interested but without contributing much significant content to the story topic. Court stories make up a considerable percentage in terms of story type, thus showing little initiative

Crime stories rely heavily on video content, keeping viewers interested without contributing significant content to the story topic.

The vast majority of the stories exhibited the event-oriented episodic form of presentation

Research Variables

Below is a discussion of the frequencies and percentages of each of the variables coded for this research. This section will also discuss the relationships between each of the variables, mentioning points that will be discussed further in relation to my research question.

Dominant Form of Presentation

As expected, the vast majority of the stories in my sample exhibited the event-oriented episodic form of presentation as their dominant form (see Table 4.5 below).

Table 4.5 – Frequency: Dominant Form of Presentation

Value	Frequency	Percentage
1 – Episodic	301	96.2
2 – Thematic	12	3.8
Total	313	100.0

Over ninety-six percent of the crime stories observed exhibited characteristics of this event-oriented form of reporting. In comparison to the entire sample of stories, those categorized as episodic were slightly more likely to appear towards the beginning of the broadcast, and more likely to cover crime, police, and courts stories than corrections or policy-related events. In comparison to Iyengar’s (1991) study of national news in which 89 percent of crime coverage was episodic, these results suggest that local television news is even more reliant upon the episodic news format than is national news. In addition, Iyengar’s sample consisted of coverage airing between 1981 and 1986, while my sample contained stories from 1998. This information suggests that the presentation format of crime news coverage changed to focus more on events than issues during this time period.

The thematic stories in the sample, when compared to the entire sample, have a median duration six seconds longer, with none appearing as the opening item and only 66.7 percent (compared to 84.7 percent) in the first block. Seventy-five percent of these stories were

presented using the Voice over/anchor mode, with no coverage using reporters live on location. The most striking difference between thematic stories and the entire sample is that they were exclusively policy (91.7 percent) or corrections (8.3 percent) stories, thus shying away from the typical settings and sources of most crime coverage.

Important to note is that the stations in the Tallahassee market accounted for eight, or two-thirds of those stories. Three stories each aired on the CBS and ABC affiliates, while two stories aired on the NBC affiliate. All three

stations aired a story about changes in the prison system regarding private prisons. Both CBS and ABC affiliates aired a story about the implementation of an Internet data-

base of prisoners in the State of Florida. The CBS and NBC affiliates each aired a story covering changes in legislation over the death penalty; the final story in this group focused on alcohol related boating deaths and aired on ABC. It is evident that certain events that occurred in this market led to crime news coverage that was best presented in a thematic format; it is also possible that sampling stories from a different week in which these events did not occur could show no thematic news coverage at all.

Without the Tallahassee stations in the sample, thematically presented crime stories comprise only four, or 1.4 percent, of the total number of stories. Of the four remaining stories exhibiting a thematic mode of presentation, one in New York and two in St. Louis covered a Congressional hearing in which FBI director Louis Freeh discussed the existence of child molesters on the Internet. All three of these stories, as well as CNN’s coverage of the event on the same night, used the same footage of Freeh addressing Congress. Since it is unlikely that these smaller stations had the means to send reporters to Washington to cover the

story, it is possible that the three local stations received the video feed from their respective networks. Additionally, the three local stations aired this story in the second block of stories during the newscast, with CNN airing the story in the fifth block (Vanderbilt Television News Archive), therefore suggesting that the story was used as a filler between the opening

stories of the newscast meant to grab the viewer's attention, and the closing stories that are advertised throughout the newscast. The final thematically presented story in the sample aired in Lansing, and discussed the accurate collection of statistics on hate crimes, as community leaders and law enforcement personnel attended a conference to discuss the issue.

After examining the content of the crime stories in my sample that were presented in a thematic format, it is evident that each station's coverage of those stories was related to specific events that occurred either locally or nationally. While it is possible that analysis of additional sample dates may yield a similar percentage of thematic crime coverage, it is important to recognize that since the issue-based thematic reporting discovered in my sample came as a result of concrete events, it is likely that the same would be true for other dates. This discovery suggests that thematic news coverage is not the result of initiative taken by the news organizations to cover issues of concern with the intent of enlightening the public. Instead, these stories stem from events that bring attention to certain issues (as opposed to concrete examples of those events) and provide supplementary information relevant to the issue. Few stories address legislative issues prior to Congressional deliberations, which would allow citizens to become educated on the issues and possibly have an impact on their representative's standing on those issues.

Attributions of Causal Responsibility

Table 4.6 below shows the number and percentage of attributions of causal responsibility from my sample of crime stories.

Table 4.6 – Attributions of Causal Responsibility

Value	Frequency	Percentage
1 – Individual	252	80.5
2 – Societal	45	14.4
3 – Punitive	13	4.2
9 – N/A	3	1.0
Total	313	100.0

The overwhelming percentage of attributions of causal responsibility were individualistic.

The overwhelming percentage of attributions of causal responsibility were individualistic. Only 14.4 percent of the stories in my sample were framed in a way that designated a societal cause for the crime being reported, and 4.2 percent blamed lack of adequate punitive measures as a cause of crime. For one percent of the stories in my sample, an attribution of causal responsibility for a crime was not applicable. Three stories were coded as '9', meaning that the story did not fit into the category of causal responsibility with the attributes that were assigned to it. All three stories were from the CBS affiliate WLNS in Lansing, and discussed changes in police administration, specifically, the appointment of new police chiefs and a new female sergeant. These particular stories did not address crime as a problem, therefore attributing responsibility to the cause of the problem was not relevant. However, they were included in the sample since the coding done prior to my sampling included such stories under a Policy category.

Attributions of Treatment Responsibility

Table 4.7 below shows the number and percentage of attributions of treatment responsibility in the stories in my sample.

Value	Frequency	Percentage
1 – Individual	11	3.5
2 – Societal	37	11.8
3 – Punitive	261	83.4
9 – N/A	4	1.3
Total	313	100.0

A majority of the stories in my sample exhibited characteristics of punitive treatment responsibility. Only 11.8 percent of the stories attributed treatment responsibility for crime to society, and 3.5 percent attributed responsibility to the individual. For 1.3 percent of the stories in my sample, no attribution of treatment responsibility was applicable. Four of the stories were coded as ‘9’ in this category because the stories did not address a means of treatment responsibility, or the variable was not at all relevant to the particular story. Three of the four stories were those mentioned as coded ‘9’ in the causal responsibility category — those that dealt with administrative actions in police departments, thus did not discuss a particular problem. The fourth story aired on KABC in Los Angeles and addressed accusations of abuse by the daughter of Larry Flynt against her father. This story did not mention any specific charges filed against him, nor did it mention any actions taken by any party to rectify the situation.

Relationships Between Variables

The results of my content analysis thus far are as expected. First, it is true that crime coverage on local television news is primarily episodic. Second, my findings show that individualistic attributions of causal responsibility dominate crime stories. Third, punitive attributions of treatment responsibility were most common. In order to discuss a possible relationship between dominant form of presentation and attributions of causal and treatment responsibility, these variables will now be considered simultaneously.

Form of Presentation and Causal Responsibility

The table below shows the frequency and percentage of attributions of causal responsibility for dominant forms of presentation, excluding the three stories for which attributions of causal responsibility were not applicable.

Dominant Form of Presentation	Attributions of Causal Responsibility			
	Individual n (%)	Societal n (%)	Punitive n (%)	Total n (%)
Episodic	249 (84)	37 (12)	12 (4)	298 (100)
Thematic	3 (25)	8 (67)	1 (8)	12 (100)

Of the 298 applicable stories⁸ classified as episodic for dominant form of presentation, 84 percent showed characteristics of individualistic causal responsibility, 12 percent of stories attributed responsibility to society, and 4 percent blamed inadequate punitive measures. One percent of stories did not cover a criminal justice issue for which an attribution of causal responsibility was applicable. Of the twelve thematically presented crime stories, 25 percent attributed causal responsibility to individuals, 67 percent to society, and 8 percent to inadequate punitive measures.

⁸ Three episodically presented stories (one percent of the sample) were given a “N/A” code for attributions of causal responsibility and thus excluded from this discussion.

Considering that both individual attributions of causal responsibility and the episodic form of presentation were most common in their separate categories, it is not surprising that the two variables together accounted for the majority (80 percent) of all stories. Crime reporting that covers event-oriented stories in an episodic fashion is more likely to discuss or allude to factors that place responsibility for the problem of crime upon individuals.

These 249 stories took on a variety of forms, including the popular cops-and-robbers stories, tales of gruesome murders, or events with bizarre twists and turns. Such coverage focused on the facts surrounding specific events, such as who did what, when and where. If available, they also discussed information relating to a possible motive for the crime. These stories were slightly shorter in duration than the entire sample, more likely to appear in the first block, and showed more police and crime event stories (though court stories were still the most common). This type of crime coverage is more akin to storytelling than to creating an informed citizenry.

The other two attributions of causal responsibility, societal and punitive, together comprised 16 percent of the episodic stories. These stories were more likely to be civil cases, as well as crimes that involved abuses of power or social problems that led to crime. Such coverage was sometimes placed into a context that related specific crimes to a larger phenomenon, but focused overall on the details of specific events. Both societal and punitive causal responsibility stories used more Package reporting than the entire sample. One possible reason that these stories appear less often is that more time and resources must be used in order to create such a report. These stories were closer to addressing a real issue than those that attributed causal responsibility to individuals at addressing crime as a social problem, but still did not provide much information that was conducive to citizen participation in discourse on crime.

The distribution of attributions of causal responsibility for thematically presented stories differs from that of episodic presentation. While the entire sample showed a higher frequency of stories exhibiting characteristics of individual causal responsibility, 67 percent of thematic stories assigned causal responsibility to society. As Iyengar's research indicated, episodic presentation was more likely to exhibit individualistic causal responsibility, therefore I expected thematic presentation to predominantly frame causal responsibility as a societal problem.

As mentioned above, the median duration of all three types of thematic stories was longer, by six seconds (18 percent), than that of the entire sample. In addition, none of these stories appeared as the opening story of the broadcast, and only 33 percent were in the first through fifth placements in the newscast, as compared to 54 percent of the entire sample. The dominant production mode was Voice Over; however, a higher percentage of package stories appeared here than in the whole sample, and no live location reports were used. In addition, 92 percent of the stories in this group were policy-related. In comparison to the dominant causal responsibility frame of episodic stories, these thematic stories were longer and used production techniques that consumed more resources, as well as covered topics that required more information to be presented to the viewer. The fact that none of these stories appeared in the opening slot indicates that they were not considered provocative enough to catch the viewers' attention. The time and resources used to make all of these stories is suggestive of why they do not appear as often as episodically presented stories — for the same or fewer resources used, news workers can create more stories that are more interesting by focusing on pictures and narrating over events as they occur, instead of offering more detailed or meaningful explanations.

Crime coverage on local television news is primarily episodic.

Individualistic attributions of causal responsibility dominate crime stories.

Punitive attributions of treatment responsibility were most common.

Episodic stories that attributed treatment responsibility for crime to punitive measures were the most common.

Form of Presentation and Treatment Responsibility

The table below shows the frequency and percentage of attributions of treatment responsibility for dominant forms of presentation, excluding the four stories for which attributions of causal responsibility were not applicable.

**Table 4.9 –
Attributions of Treatment Responsibility by Form of Presentation**

Dominant Form of Presentation	Attributions of Causal Responsibility			
	Individual n (%)	Societal n (%)	Punitive n (%)	Total n (%)
Episodic	11 (4)	27 (9)	259 (87)	297 (100)
Thematic	0 (0)	10 (83)	2 (17)	12 (100)

Eleven percent of episodic stories attributed treatment responsibility for crime to individual improvement or rehabilitation, 27 percent mentioned societal measures, and 86 percent suggested punishment as the treatment for crime. For one percent of the entire sample, an attribution of treatment responsibility was not applicable, because the story did not address an issue that required a solution. Those stories have been excluded from this discussion. Of the twelve thematically presented stories, none suggested that individuals should be responsible for the treatment of crime, 83 percent demonstrated society’s role as a remedy, and only 17 percent suggested punitive measures.

Episodic stories that attributed treatment responsibility for crime to punitive measures were the most common, and comprised 83 percent of the entire sample. Similarly to the findings relating causal responsibility to dominant form of presentation, it was not surprising that these two attributes together made up the majority of the sample. Crime coverage that is event-oriented and presented in an episodic fashion is overwhelmingly more likely to point to punitive measures as the solution for crime than to discuss individual rehabilitation or societal measures.

The 259 stories in this group were similar in topic range to those stories that attributed causal responsibility to individuals; in fact, 227 stories, or 72.5 percent of the entire sample, appeared in both groups. They were also slightly shorter than the entire sample, and slightly more appeared in the first block of stories. There were more Voice over and Read stories in this group, as well as fewer Package and Live location reports. Finally, these stories covered more crime, police, and courts stories, but only 3 percent of stories dealt with corrections or policy events.

Individual and societal attributions of treatment responsibility made up the remaining 11 percent of episodically presented stories. They were significantly longer than those that mentioned punitive attributions of treatment responsibility, and many more appeared in the opening slots as well as the entire first block. There were fewer Voice over stories in both categories, as well as many more Live location reports. For stories with individual treatment responsibility, there were no court stories and a much higher percentage (55 percent) of policy stories. Those stories that attributed treatment responsibility to societal actions also covered more policy stories than the entire sample, but were still dominated by actions of the police and courts. These stories were more resource intensive than the average story in the sample, which is an indication of why they do not appear as often in the broadcasts. However, the fact that many of the stories in both categories appeared in higher frequencies in the opening slot indicates that the use of additional resources was justified by presenting a story that would attract the viewer’s attention to the newscast as a whole. For those stories with individual treatment

responsibility, they were often either tales of murder-suicides, or “feel good” stories about someone who “did the right thing” when they were caught performing an illegal or troublesome act. These types of stories, compared to typical crime coverage, represent situations that are anomalies to everyday crime events, thus the out-of-the-ordinary aspects of them are meant to serve entertainment purposes instead of covering issues that are truly in the public interest.

For thematically presented stories, there were no stories that attributed treatment responsibility to individual rehabilitation. This is most likely due to the nature of each attribute, i.e., thematic stories do not focus on specific events, therefore there is no individual mentioned in these particular stories to which treatment responsibility could possibly be assigned. Interesting to note is that only two of the twelve thematic stories mentioned punitive measures for treatment responsibility. Both stories were longer than average, appeared only in the second block of stories, used the Voice over mode of presentation, and focused on policy issues. Both stories appeared on different stations in the same market (St. Louis), thus this information is not generalizable to every local television news story that falls into the same category.

The dominant attribution of treatment responsibility for thematically presented stories in the sample was societal. Ten, or 83 percent of thematic stories, alluded to non-punitive actions of the state as the solution to the problem of crime. These stories were slightly longer in duration than the entire sample, appearing only in the first or second blocks; however, none of these stories filled the opening slot of the newscast. Most of the stories used the Voice over mode of presentation, but there were a higher percentage (20 percent) of package stories here than in the entire sample. In addition, all but one of the stories covered a criminal justice policy issue; a single story covered a corrections issue. Like the thematically presented stories that blamed society for the cause of crime, eight of which also appeared in this category, those that held societal measures accountable for the treatment of crime were more resource intensive and longer in duration. As another indication of why this type of story does not appear in the news more often, none of these stories appeared in the opening slot, therefore indicating that they did not satisfy the requirements of an interesting opening news story. The following chapter will discuss the meaning of these results.

The dominant attribution of treatment responsibility for thematically presented stories was societal.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Appearance of Crime on Local Television News

This section will summarize my results regarding the nature of local television news in terms of its dominant form of presentation, and dominant attributions of causal and treatment responsibility.

The dominant form of presentation for crime stories on local television news was episodic. The heavy reliance on video footage as a production necessity likens crime coverage more to a television drama than to a public service.

As expected, the dominant form of presentation for crime stories on local television news was episodic. These stories are rather short in length, use minimal resources in terms of production techniques, and appear quite early

on in the broadcasts. Episodic stories are also most likely to cover court related events, actions of the police, or the occurrence of crime events, in order of decreasing frequency. This combination of characteristics has several important implications. First, their short duration means that minimal information on each topic can be passed on to the audience. For issues of high significance, this leaves the viewer with little information with which to make a decision regarding their point of view on the issue. However, being asked or prompted to make such a decision is rarely relevant once other factors of crime coverage are considered.

For example, the heavy reliance on video footage as a production necessity likens crime coverage more to a television drama than to a public service. In addition, the prominence of court related stories shows little initiative in covering crime as an issue. These stories, which appear so very often in the beginning of each evening newscast, serve the purpose of entertainment more so than information. Episodic coverage dominated every station in every market in my sample. This is the case regardless of the network with which a station is affiliated, the size of the market in which the station is located, or the quality scores given to each station by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Considering that my sample was representative of the sample constructed by PEJ, and that PEJ's sample was representative of local television news stations as a whole, it is appropriate to suggest that the dominance of episodic crime coverage on local television news stations in my sample would also appear on any other local television news station throughout the country. Further implications of this type of crime coverage are evident when examining the frames of causal and treatment responsibility that dominate episodic presentation.

Also as expected, it was found that the most common attribution of causal responsibility for the problem of crime on local television news was that of individual dysfunction. In addition, the most common prescription for crime was punishment. As mentioned earlier, over 72 percent of the entire sample observed were episodic stories that framed causal

combination of characteristics. It is important to note that the three stations with only a plurality of EIP stories represented the smaller-sized markets, and there were, on average, fewer crime stories from these stations to begin with. However, of the remaining stations in these two markets, the percentages of EIP stories were comparable to those of the large

and medium-sized markets. Therefore, attributing the difference in percentage of EIP stories to market size would be premature. Recommendations to further understand this finding would be to observe stories from different broadcast weeks for these markets, or to observe a sample from other small markets. In reference to the findings related to the large and medium-sized markets in my sample, the overwhelming dominance of the

The most common attribution of causal responsibility for the problem of crime on local television news was that of individual dysfunction. The most common prescription for crime was punishment.

DMA (size)	# of stories/station				
	ABC	CBS	NBC	FOX	TOTAL
New York (1)	WABC 22 (70)	WCBS 7 (77)	WNBC 21 (77)	N/A	50
Los Angeles (2)	KABC 22 (84)	KCBS 16 (84)	KNBC 15 (75)	N/A	53
St. Louis (21)	KDNL 19 (79)	KMOV 8 (88)	KSDK 17 (77)	KTVI 13 (72)	57
Buffalo (44)	WKBW 3 (100)	WIVB 13 (86)	WGRZ 9 (64)	N/A N/A	25
Lansing (107)	WLAJ 9 (90)	WLNS 7 (36)	WILX 5 (41)	N/A N/A	21
Tallahassee (109)	WTVL 8 (61)	WCTV 6 (50)	WTWC 7 (70)	N/A N/A	21
Total	83	57	74	13	227

responsibility upon individuals and treatment responsibility upon punitive measures. The table below shows the distribution of episodic/individual/punitive (EIP) stories for each station in the sample.

As the table shows, all save three of the stations in the sample produced a majority of stories that fit this typology. In addition, for the three stations for which this typology does not represent the majority of stories it does, however, represent the plurality of stories, i.e., more stories had all three of the characteristics under discussion than any other possible

EIP typology in these stations suggests that similar crime coverage would be found in other large and medium-sized markets. This generalization is significant, because large and medium-sized markets together reach a majority of the viewing public. For the 1998-1999 television season, Nielsen Media estimated that the 40 largest metered markets alone covered 60 percent of all U.S. television households (Nielsen Media Research). Therefore, the implications of the type of crime coverage seen by these millions of viewers are far-reaching and must be addressed.

Impact on Public Policy

Since alternative explanations or recommendations for the cause or treatment of crime are rarely offered, the doors for deliberation on alternatives have been closed.

There is one very significant point to be made after acknowledging the dominance of EIP stories in crime coverage on local television news. That is, that since alternative explanations or recommendations for the cause or treatment of crime are rarely offered, the doors for deliberation on alternatives have been closed. This statement cannot be immediately generalized to all issues covered on local television news; however, I will argue that this is likely the case.

It is unlikely that local television news workers significantly alter their information gathering and production techniques depending upon the type of story or issue they are covering. In fact, since crime is the most common public issue covered on local television news, it is possible that the production methods used to cover crime stories are carried over to coverage of other public issues. In addition, the dominance of crime on local television news, and the limited points-of-view represented in such coverage are an important finding regarding local television news coverage of public issues as a whole.

Crime stories are framed in a way that leaves little or no interpretation of the causes or treatments for crime. It is overwhelmingly obvious from my observations that individuals are largely held responsible for the causes of crime, despite the myriad existing social dysfunctions that may have precipitated that crime. In addition, more certain or severe punishment is seen as the most acceptable prescription for the problem of crime, despite such issues as overcrowded prisons and the existence of many other methods of treatment. With crime as a public issue disguised as an entertaining drama on local television news, it would not be surprising to find that other public issues are treated in the same fashion. From issues of transportation and the economy to health and the environment, it is simple to see how local television news coverage of these issues could be constructed so that viewers become ignorant or apathetic of the deliberative process that occurs behind each of these issues.

Considering that crime coverage is predominantly episodic, and that thematic coverage too arises from the recent occurrence of specific events, it is likely that local television news coverage of other public issues is primarily episodic as well. As was seen in my results, the episodic form of presentation corresponded highly to only one frame of causal responsibility and one frame of treatment responsibility. While the specific attributions of each type of responsibility would, by definition, differ for coverage of other public issues, it is likely that these issues as well would strongly implicate one cause for the problem addressed, and prescribe only one solution. This is troublesome for citizen participation in deliberation on public issues.

By design, there are three aspects of policy-making: recognition of a problem, definition and understanding of the problem, and an approach to address the problem. By covering public issues, the press has the power to force others to recognize certain social issues as problems. Secondly, framing causal responsibility in news coverage of social issues creates an understanding of the problem. The way a problem is perceived or defined in turn determines the way the problem will be addressed, i.e., the attribution of treatment responsibility will be defined and placed upon an institution capable of carrying out that treatment. Once a problem has continuously been recognized, defined, and addressed in the same manner by the same entity, that entity becomes a trusted source of ideas and solutions. The problem here is that the definitions and strategies for addressing problems of public concern that are suggested by the media do not deviate from those already in place. As Bennett (1996) pointed out,

Seldom does coverage offer the kind of analysis that gets to the roots of problems or points to workable solutions.

It is no wonder that politicians enter the picture at this point and harvest votes with simplistic proposals to build more prisons and hire more police. There is no incentive in this

system to engage in more critical or thoughtful discussion of society's problems. (5)

Bennett's reference to the dominant attribution of treatment responsibility for crime can be carried over to other social problems. Given that crime stories constitute a plurality of public issue coverage on local television news, there is no reason to expect that other public issues are treated differently. For example, Rachel Gussett (1996) discusses the media's influence on perceptions of environmental issues, with several important findings. First, when such issues appeared on the news, they were event oriented and did not make connections to a larger context. The stories she observed contained such views as man vs. nature and jobs vs. environment, thus streamlining the discourse on environmental issues inside the tension of two opposing groups. In addition, environmental news coverage focused on stories that could discuss the emotional or human peril sides of an event, instead of issues that merit citizen action but lack the dramatic qualities discussed by Reuven Frank (Epstein, 1974).

Gussett's analysis, combined with the small spectrum of ideas that exist regarding the causes or definitions of the problem of crime may be an indication of the way other public issues are addressed. As a result, the treatment for social issues is targeted toward fixing a problem that could very well be defined and addressed quite differently by different people. By suggesting singular causes and solutions to social ills, much media coverage ignores the fact that we are facing complex problems that require complex solutions. In addition, the idea of debating over such issues becomes irrelevant, because there are not two, let alone several sides to form such a debate. Without multiple points of view to weigh and consider, those who consume the news are not given significant enough information with which to participate in public discourse. The way that public issues are framed on local television news in terms of problem definitions and policy responses is very narrow, and very much

a function of the atmosphere in which such coverage is produced.

As indicated in the introduction of this paper, it was suggested that the economic and organizational pressures experienced by local television news organizations influenced the way crime would be framed. After comparing the characteristics of each type of story with forms of presentation and frames of responsibility, the above assumption is arguably true. First, it was shown that the dominant EIP crime stories are relatively short, thus explaining why little analytical information is contained in such stories. Most important to consider, however, is that the dominant mode of presentation for such stories, Voice Over, is much less resource-intensive in terms of personnel and equipment than are Package reports, which were seen most often in the longer, thematically presented stories. Finally, the dominance of court stories shows that the sureness of a story and a definite source were more important than covering a policy issue which may have a more important effect upon viewers than does a murder trial. If there are journalistic pressures among news workers to cover stories that are in the public interest as opposed to simply interesting, they are far outweighed by the time and budget constraints which result in the predominantly EIP stories I have observed. In addition, the appearance of these stories at the beginning of news broadcasts shows that news producers are catering to their advertisers by capturing the audiences' attention so that the advertisers can sell their products and services. If these market pressures continue to outweigh any desire to serve the public interest, the quality of information people receive from their local television news will not serve their needs in participation in public discourse. As a result, the effect of citizen participation in democracy will not be felt by the leaders chosen to represent them.

The next section will discuss several policy and research recommendations to consider in order to further understand and address this problem.

By suggesting singular causes and solutions to social ills, much media coverage ignores the fact that we are facing complex problems that require complex solutions.

Crime is presented on local television news more as an entertainment piece than a political issue.

Recommendations

Local television news rarely performs its role according to Bennett's ideal model — reporting on the actions of the government so that the people may keep it in check. Instead, local television news takes the role of storyteller, and intentionally or not, frames responsibility of political issues upon the entities that are traditionally recognized as holding such responsibility. In fact, crime is presented on local television news more as an entertainment piece than a political issue, thus most meaning is lost for perceptions of crime that differ from the status quo. Without identifying the event as part of a larger phenomenon, it is impossible to become adequately informed and politically active on the issue. Patterson (1997) argues that due to the limitations on the press as a political actor, it is not and should not attempt to perform the job of a political institution. Working off of earlier arguments made by Walter Lippman, Patterson explains that since the values of the press differ from (if not oppose) political values, journalists cannot be relied upon to help citizens sort out their own values as they relate to public policy. While issues of political concern are often based on chronic problems, the press is more likely to focus on what is novel, what can be personified, and what satisfies the pressures of the market of news organizations. As such, politics are more prominent in the news than are issues of governance; conflict and controversy that arise on a day's notice are more newsworthy than are long-term issues. Patterson argues not only that the mismatch of values between government and the press is not conducive to forming public opinion, but also that the interpretive nature of modern journalism does not allow political leaders to speak for themselves, therefore "weakening the bond of trust between leaders and led," (Patterson, 453) and that is a "defect in the practice of democracy" (Patterson, 445). While Patterson does not seem hopeful that the press can overcome its limitations to becoming an effective political actor, he suggests that the best the media can do is recognize their limitations and exercise restraint in pretending to overcome them.

Patterson argues that the press is limited in its ability to inform the public. Political institutions, as well, are not highly suited to providing information to citizens that they can use for political deliberation. The actions that political leaders take are often more geared towards increasing their popularity among constituents than educating them. Regarding criminal justice policy in particular, Morris (1997) points out, "Legislators... have politicized their interventions on crime control in ways which are almost uniformly counterproductive and are widely known to be counterproductive" (105) in order to gain voter support. This, combined with the media's tendency to continually display the sensational aspects of criminality, does not lead to criminal policy that is responsible either in its interpretation or treatment of the phenomenon. Yanich (2001) discusses the relationship between the actions of the press and the reactions of legislators as the "news coverage-public perception-policy response" (239) scenario, arguing that the media has an effect on policy-making, and that the role of the media should be addressed in the course of policy discourse. Much like Scheufele's (1999) discussion of the process-model of framing in the news, the cyclical relationship between the press's treatment of issues and the way they are dealt with by the government makes it difficult to find a place to intervene. Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, there are two problems that become obvious due to the nature of local television news. First, local television news is not supplying useful information, as it was created to do and as it claims to do. Second, people cannot rely upon the most accessed source of information for knowledge that is useful for deliberation on public issues and effective participation in democracy. Solutions for each problem are discussed below.

Regarding the first problem of the quality of news, there are several solutions. Since the recent changes in ownership and public interest requirements are possibly only the beginning of deregulation of the mass media, to rely upon the Federal Communications Commission to solve the problem would make no sense.

Rather, there are a few separate but important routes that can be taken. First and foremost, media literacy is something that should become part of the process of becoming an informed citizen. Teaching people to know that what they are seeing is not the complete truth, and that they can and must seek additional sources of information in order to weigh all sides of an issue is imperative. The public is not naïve; many people are fully aware that local television news does not educate as well as they may educate themselves or each other, but it is essential that all news consumers are aware of that fact, and become critical of the information they consume. Local television news is simply a very accessible link to the rest of the world, which is not always so easy to reach. This is why local television news should not be abandoned all together as a useful tool for knowledge. Other things can be done to improve the quality of local television news.

First, in depth, detailed studies such as that conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism that grade the quality of stations on a yearly basis would be quite effective. Measuring station performance across a range of characteristics would accomplish two things. One, it would put local television news stations in competition with each other over something more important than ratings — quality. Second, making this information readily available to all potential consumers of the news in each market would lead citizens to demand better of the news organizations that represent their communities. News consumers are the most critical part of a successful news organization, and most stations would sooner shut down their news departments than disappoint their viewers and suffer a drop in ratings. Unfortunately, this has begun to happen in several markets throughout the country. For example, in April of 2002 the ABC network affiliate in Topeka, Kansas closed its doors, leaving only two out of four of the market's network affiliates with news production departments (www.newsblues.com, 2002). This is why it is important to address the second problem mentioned, that many citizens are not able or

informed enough to access information that may serve their needs in getting results regarding issues or problems that are important to them. It is possible that, in the near future, citizens in some markets may find themselves with fewer options for local television news, and that they must rely on other sources to get information that is locally relevant to them. For many people this is not a problem. However, as is often the case for those most in need, some groups may find it more difficult to access the information they need.

Aside from newspapers, the World Wide Web may be the most promising source of easily accessible information available. Not only can Internet users inform themselves on topics of interest to them, they can access as many local or national news sources as they wish to discover the multifaceted nature of all social issues. While the traditional network Internet sources may be as one-sided as their television news counterparts, there are many sources that divide issues much further. From the conservative to the liberal, some may argue that these sources are biased. However, the significance of such sources is that together they raise more questions and address more issues than local television news stations can in a short evening broadcast. However, as mentioned above, some segments of the population may not have the resources to access such information. Most often those most in need of solutions to their everyday problems are least likely to have the resources to access such information. Thus, the issue of how to close the digital divide is something important to keep in mind when considering solutions to informing the public.

The nature of this study also raises some questions that may be addressed in further research. One project to consider would be to determine the influence of local television news coverage of crime on policy. More

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specifically, to examine past crime coverage over a period of time for changes in attributions of treatment responsibility, then compare these results with such policy results as the build up of the prison industrial complex. Such a project would determine the link between local television news and policy actions, possibly making a stronger case for the policy recommendations suggested above.

One final suggestion for further research would be to conduct similar analysis of coverage of other public issues on local television news, to see if in fact the construction and strategies to address social problems is as limited as it is for local television news. Iyengar's methods proved useful for this paper; it would be interesting to see how his research on the issues of poverty, unemployment, and racial inequality in national news coverage would translate to local television news.

Limitations of Research

There are several limitations to this research that should be mentioned. First is a limitation upon data gathering. This study was based on one previously conducted by another researcher, using different methods. It is beyond the scope of this research to use respondents in order to test the direct relationship between news coverage and issue opinions. However, the basic concepts of my research follow Iyengar's closely, and hopefully serve to clarify the reasons some of his assumptions proved to be true. As Scheufele (1999) has shown, media effects research examines framing in the news both as an independent and a dependent variable. While Iyengar looked at the effects of media frames on individual frames, it remains useful to examine such media frames as variables dependent upon other factors. My research works off of Iyengar's only to explain the content of local television news in terms of the environment in which it is produced.

Another limitation on the data gathering is that the sample of news stories was not from a "constructed week". By sampling a Monday newscast from one week, the Tuesday

newscast from the next week, and so on, the sample would be more representative of local television news as a whole. This type of sampling would lessen the possibility that one or several issues would dominate a market's coverage across the sample, as was evident when analyzing the content of the thematic stories in the sample. Despite this limitation, I believe the results gained from this research are valid and useful in addressing further issues.

A final limitation upon this thesis concerns the researcher's own constraints. Having two or more coders to conduct the content analysis would have been ideal; this arrangement would have allowed a check on inter-coder reliability as well as an assurance that individual biases did not influence the coding process. In addition, inter-coder reliability can only be assured through strict adherence to the coding instructions. However, as is indicated in the previous chapter, the explanations of each variable and their attributes are quite detailed and thorough, thus lessening the chances of bias or changes throughout the coding process.

Despite these limitations on the research, the researcher is confident that the research design is thorough enough to allow the study to be replicated under almost exact circumstances, dependent only upon the availability of a sample.

Conclusion

The purpose of my research was to examine the form and content of local television news coverage of crime, in order to determine its usefulness as a source of information that citizens can use to participate in deliberation on public issues. My results show that the way crime is constructed on local television news leaves little room for interpretation or analysis of crime as a social problem. As a result, I have concluded that local television news is not a useful source of information to use in public discourse. The suggestions and recommendations I have offered will hopefully add to this understanding, and work towards a solution for the problems I have addressed.

Chapter 6

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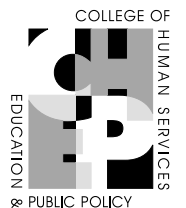
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