

## University of Lynchburg Digital Showcase @ University of Lynchburg

---

Undergraduate Theses and Capstone Projects

---

Spring 3-29-2013

# Mass Media Distortion of Violent Crime in the United States and Its Effect on Public Peace of Mind

Robert S. Arold  
*University of Lynchburg*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalshowcase.lynchburg.edu/utcp>

 Part of the [Other Communication Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Arold, Robert S., "Mass Media Distortion of Violent Crime in the United States and Its Effect on Public Peace of Mind" (2013).  
*Undergraduate Theses and Capstone Projects*. 105.  
<https://digitalshowcase.lynchburg.edu/utcp/105>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Showcase @ University of Lynchburg. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Theses and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Showcase @ University of Lynchburg. For more information, please contact [digitalshowcase@lynchburg.edu](mailto:digitalshowcase@lynchburg.edu).

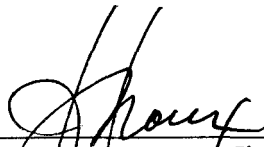
Mass Media Distortion of Violent Crime in the United States and Its Effect on Public Peace of Mind

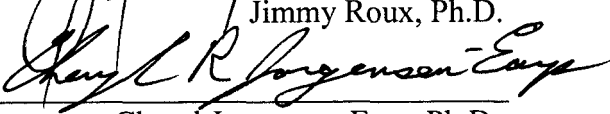
Robert S. Arold

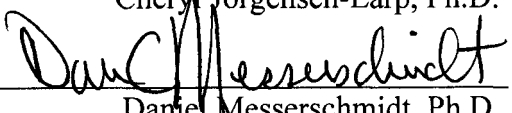
**Senior Honors Project**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements  
of Communication Studies Honors**

29 March 2013

  
Jimmy Roux, Ph.D.

  
Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp, Ph.D.

  
Daniel Messerschmidt, Ph.D.

**“MAN IS THE SYMBOL-USING, SYMBOL-MISUSING ANIMAL; INVENTOR OF THE NEGATIVE, SEPARATED FROM HIS NATURAL CONDITION BY INSTRUMENTS OF HIS OWN MAKING, GOADED BY THE SPIRIT OF HIERARCHY, AND ROTTEN WITH PERFECTION.”**

**-KENNETH BURKE (1897-1993)  
AMERICAN LITERARY THEORIST & PHILOSOPHER  
(BURKE, 1966, P. 16)**

**CONTENTS**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>6</b>
The Mass Media as a Business	6
Media & Culture	8
A Fear-Driven Public	9
Distortion of the Offender and the Victim	11
Influence on Public Opinion and Policy	12
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Results &amp; Discussion</b>	<b>15</b>
Overview of Subject Characteristics	15
Quantitative Analysis	17
Gender	17
Grade Level	17
US Residency	19
Race	19
Exposure to News Media	20
Preferred News Medium	23
Preferred News Source	25
Qualitative Analysis	26
Perceptions of Media	26
Perceptions of Violent Crime	28
Exaggerations and Distortions by Media	29
Media's Influence	30
Behavioral Changes Resulting from Violent Crime Reports	32
Limitations of Study	33
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>34</b>
Response to Research Questions	34
Heuristic Value of Research	35
<b>References</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>41</b>
Sample Survey	41

### ABSTRACT

In a society where violent crime is rampant, the media have varying effects on public peace of mind all over the United States. News reports are viewed via television broadcast, print publication, and with other convergent components that evolve with technological developments; the factors of each medium can determine the viewer's perception of a given story. Through extensive research and survey results of students at a mid-Atlantic liberal arts institution, this study explores the relationship between media coverage of violent crimes and the public's response to such coverage by answering several questions: (1) do the United States mass media distort our perception of the reality of violent crime? (2) Does the medium of communication used for violent crime reports determine how alarmed a viewer feels? (3) Do viewers believe the media operate as any other businesses? (4) Do males and females respond differently to violent crime reports in the media? (5) Is the public's trust in distorted mass media an effect of people's immersion in the American culture? And (6) is violent crime distortion in the media and its effect on the public constant among all news sources? A quantitative-qualitative mixed-form analysis of viewer attitudes toward media and culture will seek to reflect how the distortion of violent crime by the media could affect and even manipulate the public.

### INTRODUCTION

Mass media sources communicate with their respective audiences in a way that fits the standard communications model, consisting of a sender, receiver, medium, and feedback mechanism. Yet, the mass media industry practices an extremely unique method of communication (Robinson, 2013; Jan, 2009). The sender, a media source, is a multifaceted organization with complex or somewhat ambiguous missions. The receiver is a large audience in

an impersonal environment to which senders communicate. The medium, or how the message is communicated, relies on a multitude of elements working together to successfully operate, and the feedback mechanism causes indirect and delayed communication from the receiver back to the sender. These inimitable circumstances set mass media apart from all other communication forms (Robinson, 2013; Jan, 2009).

Mass media cover considerable amounts of crime each and every day. Crime coverage is a major function of the media; however other major functions of the media, arguably more important, are accuracy and reliability in reporting newsworthy events. A subtle irony exists in that, while a reporter's credibility means everything to the journalistic profession, news media as a whole are claimed as being invalid due to over-reporting certain topics and underreporting others. The celebrated philosophy, "if it bleeds it leads," might explain the substantial imbalance in news stories pertaining to violent crime versus news stories pertaining to other forms of crime. This imbalance could be why "news media [is] dying by its own hand rather than by changes in consumers' readership methods" (Tiernan, 2012, p. 3).

This study seeks to answer six main questions: (1) do the United States mass media distort our perception of the reality of violent crime? (2) Does the medium of communication used for violent crime reports determine how alarmed a viewer feels? (3) Do viewers believe the media operate as any other businesses? (4) Do males and females respond differently to violent crime reports in the media? (5) Is the public's trust in distorted mass media an effect of people's immersion in the American culture? And (6) is violent crime distortion in the media and its effect on the public constant among all news sources?

Answers to these questions will effectively uncover the true roles of mass media, regardless of what roles media claim to uphold.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies regarding the effects of television media coverage of violent crime on the United States public have suggested that television media distort the reality of violent crime all across the country. According to MacGillis (1983), “the media ... may bear a measure of responsibility for the public’s sense that crime is engulfing society” (p. 26). They do so by portraying an incident seldom to happen as being far more common than it actually is (Callanan, 2005). Such distortion by the media leads people to believe two major misconceptions: that United States crime rates are increasing, when in fact they have been decreasing since the early 1990s, and that most crime is violent in nature, when in fact statistically there are many more property and white collar crimes committed every year than violent crimes (Barkan, 2012). In fact, only a third of all crime in the United States is violent (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002). Nevertheless, these beliefs are so often perpetuated by media because it remains rare for people to encounter crime (Callanan, 2005). Similarly, “the likelihood is small that crime stories involve others we know,” making the easiest and most convenient option to believe what the media report (Romer, 2003, p. 90). The inaccuracy of official statistics reported by media, however compromises “the ability of the public to make reasonable inferences” (Warr, 1980, p. 458).

### **The Mass Media as a Business**

Generally, “individuals rely on the mass media for information about the world and they unquestioningly adopt the beliefs and perspectives promoted by the media” (Callanan, 2005, p. 57). According to Noelle-Neumann (1977), credible public opinion requires an informed, rational, and responsible public; many people believe that they meet these criteria, but when a mass public relies on one source for all its information, bias overwhelms society, leaving citizens

at the mercy of their news media. Barkan (2012) asserts that “if so many people rely on the media for their knowledge about crime, it is important that the media depict crime accurately” (p. 27). However, why do crime statistics and details of police reports vary so greatly from how the media portray crime? According to Lipschultz & Hilt (2002), the answer is simple: “Mass media organizations are like any other business: they exist to make money. As such, the people at the top of these organizations are involved in the management process” (p. 32). If media outlets treat reporting strictly as a business, then it is important to realize that viewer ratings are the primary goals of effective decision-making when deciding what and what not to report; local television news now is greatly concerned with commercialism and marketing (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002). The long-term goal of any business is to maximize total profit (Dolan, 2010), and in the media industry, that goal is achieved by means of ratings boosts. As a result, not only is “news treatment of victims ... overwhelmingly sympathetic,” but “media exaggeration of crime is considerable” (Wayne, Henderson, Murray & Petley, 2008, pp. 81-82). So too, reporters in local television newscasts act as neighbors to their respective viewers in an effort to relate to the average viewer on a day to day basis (Yanich, 2001). Gerbner (1998) said that culture is manifested by the efforts and promotions of a business, thereby suggesting that American culture is a byproduct of our national and local media outlets.

Gerbner (1998) also believed that the general public tends to depend more on television than on any other means of socialization; however, due to advances in technology and social media, as well as a decrease in overall public concern, “the dominance [local television news] once held is slipping, as evidenced by declining local TV news ratings in most markets” (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002, p. 149). In addition, Gilliam (2000) believes, “as the amount of news time has increased, so too has competition between stations. The drive for audience ratings



pushes local news organizations to favor an 'action news' format." If violent crime, referred to as "action news," generally attracts more public attention than property and white collar crimes, then it becomes a business decision for television news managers to cover a homicide as opposed to an incident of vandalism. Gilliam (2000) theorizes that "news stories about crime dominate local news programming because they meet the demand for 'action news.'" Because of this, "heavier viewers of local television news rated crime-related risks more severely than lighter viewers" (Romer, 2003, p. 100). Dixon (2008) agrees that "attention to crime news [is] positively related to crime concern" (p. 116). Nevertheless, Noelle-Neumann (1977) believes that the social environment is all around us, through formal and informal media. Media are everywhere; though television and internet are the most common forms of media nowadays, the effect of media on culture makes isolation from media influence virtually impossible.

### **Media & Culture**

Gilliam (2000) describes local television news as "America's principal window on the world," but there is much debate over one particular question regarding news reporting: is the media a product of the public eye, or is the public eye a product of the media? Callanan (2005) suggests that "the influence of media is a reciprocal process complicated by both media form and audience characteristics" (p. 57). A rather common criticism is that United States television media have done a great injustice by reporting violent crime without social, historical, or statistical perspectives (Barkan, 2012; Warr, 1980). However, are the media truly to blame? Is the culture dependent on what the media report, or is the nature of media reports dependent on what attracts the culture? Lipschultz & Hilt (2002) believe that "cultural rules help define events as newsworthy," while "social rules assign a weight to specific stories" (p. 29). In other words,

“cultural rules would guide an assignment editor’s decisions about covering an event. Social rules would guide a producer in the placement of the story within a newscast” (Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002, p. 29). Barkan (2012), on the other hand, notes that “[An] ... effect of the media’s overreporting of crime is greater public concern about crime” (p. 32).

The “two-step flow” of communication is a phenomenon that allows media influence on a culture to thrive. “Two-step flow” is the idea that “ideas often flow from [media outlets] to the opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population” (Troidahl, 1966, p. 610). When news stories are absorbed by opinion leaders, who follow media closely, three main effects are possible in the second step of the “two-step flow,” only one of which is a positive effect: an effective recap of the facts in a news story, a manipulative presentation of bias in an effort to persuade others to adopt similar beliefs as the opinion leader, or a generally ill-informed synopsis that yields ignorance in less active media consumers.

### **A Fear-Driven Public**

Warr & Stafford (1983) define fear of victimization as “a function of the perceived seriousness and perceived risk associated with that offense” (p. 1034). Given the implications of crime reports in the news, including a growing concern about victimization, what can make a person attracted to a news story that ultimately instills fear and terror to an entire mass public? According to Gruenewald, Pizarro & Chermak (2009), “It is nearly impossible to escape crime imagery in the news media” (p. 262); so what makes such heinous imagery desired by the viewers, and why do tragedies boost ratings? According to Wayne et al. (2008), crime-related news stories operate similarly to the tabloid industry in that they exaggerate facts to dramatize a situation, making it more appealing to the viewer. Generally, the public eye is drawn to the

misfortune of others; television news outlets understand this and search for precisely “what is sensational about the human condition” (Yanich, 2001, p. 238). For instance, consider programs that Callanan (2005) describes as crime infotainment: programs such as *America’s Most Wanted* and *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. These programs break the mold established by traditional television news in order to entertain the public, while informing them of past and present criminal threats (p. 74). Of course, infotainment programs in general are not new to the public. They have always existed in the age of modern-day technological and media advancement (Surette & Otto, 2002). No longer is it “easy for the media consumer to determine what was news and what was entertainment,” because the journalism field has deviated from its original form, which was “meant to be informative, not entertaining” (Surette & Otto, 2002, pp. 443-444).

The infotainment industry boomed in the rise of Yellow Journalism during the late nineteenth century (Surette & Otto, 2002). Similarly to the news media, infotainment program production is a business, which seeks to maximize profit via ratings boosts. On the other hand, it differs from local television news in that there is a wider pool of crimes to choose from on a national level; therefore, infotainment programs are likely to profile more heinous and uncommon crimes than local television news have to cover. Increased coverage of uncommon crimes by infotainment programs yield a public belief that the crimes are more common than they actually are, meaning that such programs might distort the reality of violent crime trends more so than do local television newscasts.

Though correlation between crime media and viewers’ fear of victimization may or may not be apparent, establishing a causal relationship is far more complicated (MacGillis, 1983). Callanan (2005) advocates the Cultivation Hypothesis, that “the media communicates a very

narrow and homogenous view of the world. Over time, with repeated exposure to television, individuals' beliefs about the world more closely mirror television reality, no matter how inaccurate television portrayals might be" (p. 78). Signorielli (2003) agrees, suggesting "those who watch more television ... are more likely to overestimate their chances of being involved in violence ... [and] those who spend more time watching television tend to believe that they are living in a mean and dangerous world" (p. 55). Cultivation, as used by Gerbner (1998), describes how "viewer conceptions of social reality" are determined by the amount of television viewed, as well as the nature of the television programs viewed (p. 180). Eschholz, Chiricos & Gertz (2003), on the other hand, found no relation between fear and amount of television media viewed, challenging Gerbner's Cultivation Hypothesis (p. 410); yet, they found relationships between television exposure and fear most consistently in "women, non-victims, low income, and [young] respondents" (p. 411).

### **Distortion of the Offender and the Victim**

Crimes themselves are not the only things widely believed to be distorted by the media; according to Callanan (2005), "the portrayal of crime victims and offenders is also misleading" (p. 55). Barkan (2012) supports this point with the notion that the media portrays victims as particularly virtuous people, when often victims are also perpetrators of high-risk criminal activity and "may even have contributed to their own victimization" (pp. 30-31). It seems accurate that, on average, those who are most likely to experience crime are criminals themselves, because consistent exposure to and participation in a crime-ridden environment elevates the risk that criminals themselves may become victims. However, if the media focus on crimes in which the victim is particularly virtuous, then it attracts human interest by means of

pathos, ultimately boosting ratings. Another pathos appeal, commonly used by television news media, is visual elements, most commonly photographs. According to Yanich (2001), “pictures that convey instantly recognizable symbols of the pathos of the human condition are the most coveted” by the viewing public (p. 237). On the other hand, focus on virtuous victims yields a public belief that crimes are more likely to happen to purely innocent people than to agents of crime, meaning that such stories might distort the reality of violent victimization trends, causing fear by the average viewer.

### **Influence on Public Opinion and Policy**

Davison’s (1983) “third-person effect” is the idea that an individual tends to overestimate the magnitude of mass media influence on others; more specifically, Davison hypothesizes that people tend to believe that they are more resistant or unaffected by information from the media than are those around them. The “third-person effect” could be dangerous because viewers might underestimate their levels of fear that result from violent crime in the media or not realize such levels of fear until they are in a compromising situation.

Media perceptions of crime and subsequent fear by the public account for only a small portion of the issue; Barkan (2012) explains that a rise in fear and overall concern of crime by the public can ultimately lead to major changes in public policy. Nevertheless, Callanan (2005) believes that “it does not upset the prevailing ... support for ‘law and order’” (p. 56). She explains that research on causality of media influence on public policy is “scant and inconclusive,” but still “very much debated” (p. 57). Yanich (2001) believes that, to be more certain, media bias and distortion should be examined closely when addressing new policies, so that public policy is not established as a result of influence by an exaggerating source (p. 239).

Because urban areas are more densely-populated, crime is more likely to occur there than in rural areas; as a result, news outlets are more likely to broadcast coverage of crime that takes place in the city. Lipschultz & Hilt (2002) claim that because crime is a primary focal point of local television newscasts, viewers of local news tend to observe an excessive amount of crime coverage. Heath & Petraitis (1987) found that news audiences report a heightened fear of urban areas. Consequently, avoidance is a major behavior triggered by the feeling of fear (Kohm, Waid-Lindberg, Weinrath, Shelley & Dobbs, 2012), meaning that fear instilled by the media also has the potential to manipulate trends in residence, travel, and public views toward major metropolises.

According to Gerbner (1998), television media stand out in their portrayal of stories through “a coherent set of images and messages” (p. 178). Consequently, television media, compared to newspaper media, have more opportunity and incentive to distort perceptions, due to heavier competition in the television news industry. Because newspapers provide the reader more detail about violent crime, the crime itself is portrayed more accurately (Callanan, 2005). Similarly, newspapers are more tangible in nature, meaning that the reader can easily reread without any additional effort. Newspaper publications also make more effective use of graphed and charted data, reflecting crime trends, while television news often focuses more on pictures of the victims, suspects, and crime scenes, as well as any video or audio recordings taken by bystanders (Callanan, 2005). Understandably so, “newspaper salience is associated with lower levels of fear” than those with television news salience (Kohm et al., 2012, p. 89); it is harder to make print words come to life when the words are written according to a journalistic stylebook. Nevertheless, Sheley & Ashkins (1981) claim that “newspaper and television presentations of crime trends will display greater similarity to each other than either will to police statistics” (p.

494). From this, it can be said that researchers believe news media, regardless of form, can and do distort the reality of violent crime stories; it remains simply a question of how much a media outlet does so.

Television news “provides a relatively restricted set of choices for a virtually unrestricted variety of interests and publics” (Gerbner 1998, p. 178). In short, the news media industry is one that knows how to manipulate and therefore does so often, virtually every newscast. Recognition of this fact is crucial to understanding just how much reporters of violent crime can be trusted. Yanich (2001) says “the use of crime news to examine the relative safety of a community may seem contradictory” (p. 237), a thought that many of the other researchers mentioned above would agree with. My personal study will allow for firsthand discovery as to how the media affects public peace of mind with regards to violent crime.

Despite viewers who fall victim to Davison’s “third-person effect” and thus believe that they are immune from the information they see in the media, mass media outlets have a way of haunting their viewers’ subconscious feelings.

## METHODOLOGY

One hundred twenty-two anonymous surveys were distributed to undergraduate students at a private mid-Atlantic liberal arts institution. These students were attendees of required general education courses, as well as of higher-level courses in the institution’s College of Humanities & Social Sciences; these classes were chosen based on the researcher’s convenience. The anonymous survey consisted of twenty-seven Likert scale-style questions ranging from “1,” meaning “strongly disagree,” to “5,” meaning “strongly agree.” A sample question is “I am more likely to pay attention to crime news than to news reports unrelated to crime.” Seven selected-

response questions measuring independent variables gender, grade level, condition of residency in the United States, race, number of hours spent watching or reading news each week, preferred news outlet, and preferred news source. Five open-ended questions conclude the survey; two open-ended questions requested responses in list form, and the remaining three open-ended questions requested responses in short-answer paragraph form.

Upon completion of the survey administration, quantitative data was divided and processed based on the seven independent variables. For independent variables gender and condition of United States residency, an independent samples T-test was used to find significance; for independent variables grade level, race, number of hours spent watching or reading news, preferred news outlook, and preferred news source, a one-way ANOVA was used to find significance. Significance was reported at the level  $p \leq .05$ . Qualitative data was then divided and processed based on themes and trends determined by the researcher. Surveys would be deemed “unusable” if it seemed obvious that questions were not taken seriously by participants; fortunately, that was not an issue in the study: of the one hundred twenty-two surveys administered, all were used.

For reference, the survey has been provided as an appendix.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

### **An Overview of Subject Characteristics**

Forty-nine males (40.1%) and seventy-three females (59.9%) responded to the anonymous survey about the effect of violent crime coverage in the media. By grade level, the group of participants was comprised of forty-nine freshmen (40.1%), twenty-two sophomores (18%), twenty-four juniors (19.7%), and twenty-seven seniors (22.2%). One hundred seventeen



subjects reported as having lived in the United States more than half of their lives (95.9%), three subjects reported as having lived in the United States less than half of their lives (2.5%), and two subjects chose not to respond (1.6%). By race, the group was comprised of ninety-five Caucasian or White subjects (77.8%), ten African-American or Black subjects (8.2%), five Hispanic subjects (4.1%), six Asian or Pacific Islander subjects (4.9%), three subjects who classified themselves as “other” (2.5%), and three subjects who chose not to respond (2.5%). Of the total number of participants, fifty-two subjects reported as watching or reading news less than one hour per week (42.6%), forty-six subjects reported as watching or reading news between one and two hours per week (37.7%), eighteen subjects reported as watching or reading news between three and four hours per week (14.8%), and six subjects reported as watching or reading news more than four hours per week (4.9%). Forty-nine subjects prefer television news media (40.1%), four subjects prefer newspaper news media (3.3%), five subjects prefer radio news media (4.1%), sixty-one subjects prefer Internet news media (50%), and three subjects prefer “other” news media (2.5%). Finally, by preferred news source, twenty-eight subjects prefer FOX news (22.9%), twenty-seven subjects prefer CNN news (22.1%), nineteen subjects prefer NBC, MSNBC, or CNBC news (15.6%), five subjects prefer CBS news (4.1%), thirteen subjects prefer ABC news (10.7%), ten subjects prefer local news outlets (8.2%), sixteen subjects prefer “other” news sources, most common write-in response being BBC news (13.1%), and four subjects chose not to respond (3.3%).

**Quantitative Analysis:****Gender**

There was no significance by gender in any of the Likert scale questions; none of the items even reflected near-significant trends. This might be because male and female respondents view media coverage of violent crime similarly to one another.

The absence of statistically-significant trends for the independent variable gender is fascinating for two reasons; not only does that suggest that both genders view and respond to news similarly, but it undermines any sociological evidence of gender schemas or trends whatsoever. While some of the items on the survey were designed to show, if any, a statistically-significant trend among gender (i.e., “I feel vulnerable after watching or reading news reports about violent crime,” “I actively take caution ... after hearing about violent crime ... in the news,” etc.), not a single trend in gender was detected by the results of the survey.

**Grade Level**

There was significance by grade level in four of the twenty-seven Likert scale questions (see Table 1). Compared to juniors ( $m=3.08$ ,  $p=.033$ ,  $df=72$ ), freshmen reported less interest in print news ( $m=2.43$ ,  $p=.033$ ,  $df=72$ ). Upperclassmen reported a greater tendency to watch or read news by themselves (senior  $m=3.63$ ; junior  $m=3.75$ ,  $p=.048$ ,  $df=72$ ), as well as a greater tendency than freshmen to discuss current events with others (freshmen  $m=3.06$ ; senior  $m=3.89$ ,  $p=.004$ ,  $df=75$ ). In addition, seniors reported greater tendency than sophomores to believe that culture influences media (sophomore  $m=2.64$ ; senior  $m=4.30$ ,  $p=.024$ ,  $df=48$ ).

Though significance was not determined, other response trends worth noting are upperclassmen reporting greatest enjoyment in watching or reading the news (senior  $m=3.30$ ;

junior  $m=3.38$ ,  $p=.073$ ,  $df=118$ ), and seniors reporting greatest tendency to attribute their outlook of crime to what they see or read in the news ( $m=3.07$ ,  $p=.069$ ,  $df=117$ ).

The table below more clearly illustrates the statistical trends in responses based on grade level:

**Table 1: Significance in One-Way ANOVA Test: Grade Level**

Item	Survey Question	p	df	Grade Level	Sample	Mean Response
18	Print news intrigues me.	.033	72	Freshman	49	2.43
				Junior	24	3.08
26	I watch or read news by myself.	.048	72	Freshman	49	3.08
				Junior	24	3.75
27	I discuss current events with others, based on the news I watch or read.	.004	75	Freshman	49	3.06
				Senior	27	3.89
33	I believe that our culture heavily influences the media.	.024	48	Sophomore	22	2.64
				Senior	27	4.30

By grade level, it is quite apparent that news is more interesting to upperclassmen than to first-year undergraduate students. This might be because college is a time in which people begin to break apart from the sheltered life of adolescence and form their own ideas and opinions about the world, as mature young adults. The first year or two of college entails a desensitization of sorts, but by junior or senior year of college, students are more acquainted with the idea of informing themselves as a matter of civic duty. While not always true, often students become more trusting of the details outlined to them by credible news sources, thus perpetuating the amount of discussion that a given current event provokes.

**US Residency**

By condition of residency in the United States, it is no surprise that a statistically-significant trend was not found; there were simply not enough respondents who have lived in the United States less than half of their lives. From the trend that was reported, however, it can be said that those who have lived abroad a majority of their lives are less trusting of United States news coverage; this might result from other nations' negative perceptions of the United States and the American culture. Nevertheless, more subjects are needed in order to prove or disprove such a theory.

**Race**

Significance by race was determined in two of the twenty-seven Likert scale questions (see Table 2). African American and Black subjects report a much greater tendency to believe crime-based shows are accurate ( $m=3.70$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $df=116$ ) than did Caucasian and White subjects ( $m=2.67$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $df=116$ ). Asian and Pacific Islander subjects reported greater likelihood to pay attention to crime news over other news ( $m=3.67$ ,  $p=.041$ ,  $df=8$ ) than did subjects who did not report their race ( $m=1.67$ ,  $p=.041$ ,  $df=8$ ).

Though significance was not determined, one other statistic worth noting is African American and Black subjects' belief that violent crime in the United States is increasing ( $m=4.00$ ,  $p=.059$ ,  $df=116$ ) more so than do Caucasian and White subjects ( $m=3.41$ ,  $p=.059$ ,  $df=116$ ), even though both demographics responded in agreement.

The table below more clearly illustrates the significant statistical trends in responses based on race:

**Table 2: Significance in One-Way ANOVA Test: Race**

Item	Survey Question	p	df	Race	Sample	Mean Response
15	I believe that crime-based shows such as <i>America's Most Wanted</i> or <i>Law &amp; Order: Special Victims Unit</i> are accurate reflections of what violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) looks like.	.002	12	No Response	3	1.33
				African American/Black	10	3.70
23	I am more likely to pay attention to crime news than to news reports unrelated to crime.	.041	8	No Response	3	1.67
				Asian/Pacific Islander	6	3.67

By race, it seemed as though African American and Black respondents are more susceptible to exposure to crime and violence simply because of how they responded relative to Caucasian and white subjects. This trend could stem from any number of circumstances: geographical location of most African American and Black United States citizens, media portrayal of minority citizens, etc. might all factor into the patterns uncovered here. Minority races are more likely to agree that violent crime in the United States is increasing, perhaps because a greater proportion of minority races live in areas where violent crime is more likely to occur, such as in urban regions with larger populations.

**Exposure to News Media**

Significance by amount of exposure to media was found in over a quarter of the Likert scale questions, or seven of the twenty-seven items (see Table 3). Those who watch or read news

more than four hours per week reported greatest enjoyment in exposure to news reports ( $m=4.17$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $df=121$ ). Those who watch or read news less than one hour per week were the only subjects who on average disagreed with the items “television news intrigues me” ( $m=2.98$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $df=97$ ) and “print news intrigues me” ( $m=2.17$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $df=115$ ). Although everyone else on average agreed with those two items, overall they seem to agree more strongly with the item “television news intrigues me”. Additionally, those who watch or read news less than one hour per week reported the lowest mean in watching or reading the news alone ( $m=2.81$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $df=115$ ). The group of subjects who watch or read the news less than one hour per week was the only group to disagree, on average, with the statement “I discuss current events with others, based on the news I watch or read” ( $m=2.75$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $df=117$ ). On the other hand, those who watch or read news an hour or more per week not only reported feeling more adequately informed, but they also reported being more likely to attribute their outlook of crime to the news they watch or read.

Though statistical significance was not determined, there are two other statistics worth noting. Those who watch or read news the least in a given week, less than one hour, reported the greatest excitement in news reports about violent crime ( $m=2.65$ ,  $p=.074$ ,  $df=117$ ). The same group of subjects reported greatest likelihood to pay attention to crime news over news reports unrelated to crime ( $m=3.19$ ,  $p=.090$ ,  $df=118$ ).

The table below more clearly illustrates the significant statistical trends in responses based on how many hours per week they watch or read news:

**Table 3: Significance in One-Way ANOVA Test: Number of Hours Per Week Watching or Reading News**

Item	Survey Question	p	df	Hours Per Week	Sample	Mean Response
8	I enjoy watching or reading the news.	.000	121	Less than 1	52	2.33
				1-2	46	3.46
				3-4	18	3.67
				More than 4	6	4.17
17	Television news intrigues me.	.002	97	Less than 1	52	2.98
				1-2	46	3.70
18	Print news intrigues me.	.000	115	Less than 1	52	2.17
				1-2	46	3.00
				3-4	18	3.33
26	I watch or read news by myself.	.000	115	Less than 1	52	2.81
				3-4	18	3.78
				1-2	46	3.78
27	I discuss current events with others, based on the news I watch or read.	.000	114	Less than 1	51	2.75
				1-2	46	3.83
				3-4	18	3.89
28	I consider myself adequately informed after watching or reading the news.	.000	114	Less than 1	52	2.56
				1-2	45	3.31
				3-4	18	3.61
29	I attribute my outlook of crime to news reports.	.011	96	Less than 1	51	2.45
				1-2	46	2.98

By amount of exposure to the news per week, many of the statistically-significant trends are to be expected, such as that those who watch or read more news report greater enjoyment in watching or reading the news. The results also reflect that television news is found to be more intriguing than print news. Nevertheless, with any form of news medium, the more intriguing someone finds the news, the more the person chooses to watch or read the news. Consequently, the more someone watches or reads the news, the more that the person has to contribute to discussion of current events, thereby increasing the frequency by which current events become desired conversation topics. On the other hand, those who seldom watch or read news tend to be

the most excited by violent crime coverage; furthermore, those who seldom watch or read the news are more attentive to crime news than to news reports unrelated to crime. These two findings can mean one of two things: either people who seldom watch or read the news have a shallow outlook of the purpose of news media, or the reason why people seldom watch or read the news is that all they see is violent crime. Either way, people who seldom watch or read the news cannot and do not consider themselves as adequately informed as do those with more frequent media exposure.

### **Preferred News Medium**

Significance by preferred medium was determined in five of the twenty-seven Likert scale questions (see Table 4). Subjects who prefer Internet news reported higher vulnerability after watching or reading about violent crime ( $m=2.89$ ,  $p=.019$ ,  $df=121$ ) than did subjects who prefer television news ( $m=2.45$ ,  $p=.019$ ,  $df=121$ ). Additionally, though all means are low, those who prefer Internet news also reported as being more inclined to believe that crime-based shows are accurate ( $m=2.92$ ,  $p=.017$ ,  $df=65$ ). To be expected, subjects who prefer newspaper news are more intrigued by print news ( $m=4.00$ ,  $p=.033$ ,  $df=52$ ) than are subjects who prefer watching news via television ( $m=2.45$ ,  $p=.033$ ,  $df=52$ ). Subjects who prefer “other” news are also more attentive to crime news ( $m=3.67$ ,  $p=.032$ ,  $df=6$ ) than those who prefer newspaper news ( $m=2.50$ ,  $p=.032$ ,  $df=6$ ). Though both groups answer in agreement, subjects who prefer radio news more strongly agree that there are more violent crime reports than property crime reports ( $m=4.80$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $df=53$ ).

Though significance was not reported, there are two other statistical trends worth noting. Firstly, those who favor television news reported greater belief that the general crime rate in the



United States is rising ( $m=3.76, p=.057, df=117$ ); secondly, those who find television news most favorable also believe that reading the news requires more effort than watching the news ( $m=3.65, p=.057, df=117$ ).

The table below more clearly illustrates the significant statistical trends in responses based on the subjects' preferred news medium:

**Table 4: Significance in One-Way ANOVA Test: Preferred News Medium**

Item	Survey Question	p	df	Preferred Medium	Sample	Mean Response
13	I feel vulnerable after watching or reading news reports about violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.).	.019	121	Newspaper	4	1.75
				Other	3	2.00
				Television	49	2.45
				Internet	61	2.89
				Radio	5	3.40
15	I believe that crime-based shows such as <i>America's Most Wanted</i> or <i>Law &amp; Order: Special Victims Unit</i> are accurate reflections of what violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) looks like.	.017	65	Radio	5	1.40
				Internet	61	2.92
18	Print news intrigues me.	.033	52	Television	49	2.45
				Newspaper	4	4.00
23	I am more likely to pay attention to crime news than to news reports unrelated to crime.	.032	6	Newspaper	4	2.50
				Other	3	3.67
30	I see more reports about violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) than I see reports about property crimes (i.e., vandalism, theft, etc.).	.003	53	Television	49	3.45
				Radio	5	4.80

By preferred medium, it is interesting that those who follow news media containing auditory or visual components feel more vulnerable after watching reports about violent crime

than do people who strictly read print news. This might be because convergent media make stories seem more vivid or real to the viewer. For the same reason, crime-based television shows seem like an accurate portrayal of violent crime to those who follow more convergent media outlets. The idea that convergent media make stories seem more vivid might also account for why followers of more convergent media are more likely to pay attention to crime news over news reports unrelated to crime. As a result, it is the assumption of these same people that the crime rate in the United States is increasing when, in fact, it is not.

### **Preferred News Source**

Significance by preferred news source has been determined in one of the twenty-seven Likert scale questions. FOX news fans reported the highest excitement toward news reports about violent crime, even though on average, all groups disagreed with the statement ( $m=2.86$ ,  $p=.030$ ,  $df=43$ ).

Though significance was not determined, there is one other trend worth noting: NBC, MSNBC, and CNBC fans reported the highest level of depression resulting from the news in general ( $m=3.32$ ,  $p=.089$ ,  $df=111$ ), while CNN watchers reported the lowest level of depression resulting from exposure to the news ( $m=2.48$ ,  $p=.089$ ,  $df=111$ ).

The table below more clearly illustrates the significant statistical trends in responses based on the subjects' preferred news source:

**Table 5: Significance in One-Way ANOVA Test: Preferred News Source**

Item	Survey Question	p	df	Preferred Source	Sample	Mean Response
21	News reports about violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) excite me.	.030	43	Other FOX	16 28	1.88 2.86

By preferred source, many of the responses were similar enough to suggest that even though there is a significant data trend, it might not be as relevant to the study. FOX News, which is commonly regarded as being a more conservatively-biased news source, might structure violent crime reports in a way that better engages viewers. However, respondents who prefer FOX news still, on average, disagreed with the notion that news reports about violent crime are exciting. NBC News affiliates might portray newsworthy events in a more intriguing and engaging way, causing viewers to sympathize with victims of crime, thereby increasing depression linked to news-watching in viewers of NBC News affiliates.

**Qualitative Analysis:**

**Perceptions of Media**

Item 35 reads, “List three words associated with your perception of the media.” Because one hundred twenty-two total subjects participated in the study, the item could have contained as many as three hundred sixty-six possible responses. Of the possible three hundred sixty-six, a total of three hundred forty responses were reported. Of the three hundred forty responses, there were one hundred forty-three different words reported. The top twenty words associated with perception of the media, based on this study, are as follows:

**Table 6: Most Frequent Responses about Perceptions of Media**

Response	Frequency
Biased	30
Informative	19
Exaggerated	15
Interesting	9
Influential	9
False	7
Opinionated	7
Inaccurate	6
Entertaining	6
Distorted	6

Response	Frequency
One-sided	6
Boring	5
Lies	5
Fabricated	5
Business	5
Annoying	5
Violent	5
Depressing	5
Negative	5
Money	5

There are three particular responses worth noting, all of which capture a tone suggesting disapproval of news media:

Subject 10: "IT'S BIAS AS FUCK"

Subject 77: "bull shit"

Subject 121: "Rape-lovers"

Of the one hundred forty-three words reported, thirty-eight words described media in a positive light (26.6%), seventy-three words described media in a negative light (51%), and thirty-two words were neutrally associated with media (22.4%). Of the three hundred forty responses given, ninety-six responses were positive (28.2%), one hundred eighty-four responses were negative (54.1%), and sixty responses were neutral (17.7%).

**Perceptions of Violent Crime**

Item 36 reads, “List three words associated with your perception of violent crime.” Because one hundred twenty-two total subjects participated in the study, the item could have contained as many as three hundred sixty-six possible responses. Of the possible three hundred sixty-six, a total of three hundred thirty-three responses were reported. Of the three hundred thirty-three responses, there were one hundred thirty-six different words reported. The top twenty-two words associated with perception of violent crime, based on this study, are as follows:

**Table 7: Most Frequent Responses about Perceptions of Violent Crime**

Response	Frequency
Scary	16
Wrong	14
Murder	13
Bad	13
Dangerous	12
Depressing	11
Unnecessary	10
Violent	8
Terrible	7
Common	7
Hurtful	7

Response	Frequency
Increasing	7
Negative	6
Sad	6
Rape	6
Death	5
Disgusting	5
Disturbing	5
Harmful	4
Harsh	4
Blood	4
Gruesome	4

There are two particular responses worth noting, both of which provide subjects' insight on violent crime:

Subject 91: "Human nature"

Subject 108: "Killer always is more known than victims."

Of the one hundred thirty-six words reported, ten words give positive description to violent crime (7.4%), eighty-nine words give negative description to violent crime (65.4%), and thirty-seven words were neutrally associated with violent crime (27.2%). Of the three hundred thirty-three responses given, fourteen responses were positive (4.2%), two hundred thirty-seven responses were negative (71.2%), and eighty-two responses were neutral (24.6%).

### **Exaggerations and Distortions by Media**

Item 37 reads, "Do you believe that the media exaggerates or distorts violent crime stories in an effort to attract viewers? Explain why or why not."

Of one hundred twenty-two total subjects, ninety-six subjects reported that they believe the media exaggerate or distort violent crime (78.7%), sixteen subjects reported that they do not believe the media exaggerate or distort violent crime (13.1%), three subjects reported other (i.e., "it depends") (2.5%), and seven subjects chose not to respond (5.7%).

Three main themes arose in responses from subjects who reported that they believe the media exaggerate or distort violent crime:

- The media does so to attract viewers.
- There might not be distortion, but excessive coverage exaggerates the seriousness of an event.

- The media operates as a business, and all businesses are out to make money by any means necessary.

Two main themes arose in responses from subjects who reported that they do not believe the media exaggerate or distort violent crime:

- If they do, it is not noticeable enough to report.
- Media give facts and leave judgment to the viewers.

Three subject responses to this item that stood out are as follows:

Subject 38:

“No, crimes are becoming more violent, there is no need to exaggerate.”

Subject 78:

“To a degree, yes. Media is just like a business itself and viewers/ratings come into play and lead to greater profit. They may distort things or create more of a story to attract viewers”

Subject 99:

“Yes, it is an entity that feeds off the fear of its viewers.”

### **Media's Influence**

Item 38 reads, “How influential is the media on your perception of violent crime? Explain.”

Of one hundred twenty-two total subjects, forty-six subjects reported that the media are not influential at all (37.7%), thirty-six subjects reported that the media are somewhat influential

(29.5%), twenty-eight subjects reported that they media are very influential (23%), and twelve subjects chose not to respond (9.8%).

One main theme arose in responses that media are not influential at all:

- Subjects with this response often added that they do not watch the news often.

Two main themes arose in responses that media are somewhat influential:

- A surprisingly common response was simply, “eh,” which could mean any number of things.
- Information that media provide is generally useful, so it is worthwhile to pay attention to the news.

One main theme arose in responses that media are very influential:

- Media provide subjects’ only window into the world of violent crime, so they blindly accept what information they obtain from the news.

Three subject responses to this item that stood out are as follows:

Subject 10:

“I know the media is trying to influence me, so I don’t listen.”

Subject 48:

“My main source of information about violent crimes is the media so whatever they say is what I know.”

Subject 111:

“It helps me understand what is going on in the world around me, but it doesn’t scare me.”



**Behavioral Changes Resulting from Violent Crime Reports**

Item 39 reads, “What types of behavioral changes have you made as a result of watching or reading a violent crime report in the news? Provide as many examples as you can.”

Of one hundred twenty-two total subjects, sixty-two subjects reported that they changed their behavior as a result of violent crime in the news (50.8%), forty-three subjects reported no change in behavior (35.3%), and seventeen subjects chose not to respond (13.9%).

Most common behavioral changes reported include precautionary measures such as locking doors, carrying pepper spray, carrying a pocket knife, walking in groups, taking self-defense classes, being aware of surroundings, seeking well-lit areas at night, and carrying wallets in secure jacket pockets. Other less-reported behavioral changes include turning off the news and discussing news reports with others.

Two major themes arose in responses reflecting no behavioral change:

- Subjects believe that they will never be a victim of violent crime.
- No behavioral changes occur because precautionary measures are already taken.

Three subject responses to this item that stood out are as follows:

Subject 7:

“None! I still don’t lock my car. Despite the fact that the ‘it won’t happen to me’ mentality is incorrect, I’d rather ere on that side than be paranoid.”

Subject 18:

“None, I’m a person who thinks nothing will happen to me.”

Subject 96:

“Not many [changes], I already do things out of habit.”

**Limitations of Study**

Though this study was effective in finding significant trends based on the seven independent variables outlined, there were many factors that limited the study's success. Research rules and regulations often inhibit most authentic responses from being gathered; however, for the sake of protecting subjects' identities, regulations are necessary.

Additionally, because the survey was lengthy and therefore time-consuming (see Appendix), the subjects might have been less thorough or sincere during the open-ended portion at the end of the survey, which might have resulted in responses that do not reflect the subject's opinion as accurately as it could have otherwise. Had the open-ended items been placed first, then perhaps the responses would have been more thorough, though Likert scale results might have been less thorough.

Time restraints resulting from strict research deadlines prevented more subjects from participating; had more time been allotted, more data would have been gathered, yielding greater significance in survey items.

This study only involved college undergraduate subjects; therefore, responses were generally limited to young adults' perspectives. If the study took place in an environment where subjects were of all ages, then it is likely that survey data would more accurately reflect views of the entire United States population.

Finally, researcher error should be considered when viewing results of quantitative survey data. Similarly, researcher discretion should be considered when reviewing the qualitative analysis, as some trends were based on subjectivity.

## CONCLUSION

### Response to Research Questions

The results show that United States media distort our perception of the reality of violent crime. The constant focus by media on violent crime and neglect of nonviolent crime creates two enormous illusions to the public: (1) that violent crime is more common than it actually is, and (2) that violent crime is more common than nonviolent crime. These startling misconceptions perpetuate fear in viewers' discussions of current events, which ultimately accounts for a culture of doubt and suspicion. The results also show confident recognition of this distortion by most subjects, even though a simple majority of the subjects also reported that media reports of violent crime are influential.

Additionally, the results show that the more convergent news medium will instill the greatest fear in its respective viewer. The most convergent news media are television and Internet, which both use visual, auditory, and textual means to report. Because one hundred ten subjects reported television or Internet as their preferred news medium (90.2%), a vast majority of them must be alarmed by violent crime reports in the news due to how the media have conditioned them to feel. Over half of the subjects also reported behavioral change as a result of how the media made them feel.

Do viewers believe the media operate as any other businesses? The quantitative results show no indication that viewers of United States news media regard the media industry as a business like any other; however, the business side of mass media is a prevalent theme reported in open-ended item 38. That provides a basis for further research regarding perceptions of news media as a money-making industry.

The study results fail to show differences in male and female responses to violent crime in the media. That provides evidence that viewer responses to violent crime by both genders are far more similar than they are different. Between genders, the data shows no difference in emotions felt as a result of reports in the media. Further research is necessary on reactions and responses between genders; just as there are trends in male and female violent crime rate, so too there must be trends in male and female reactions to violent crime.

Is the public's trust in distorted media an effect of people's immersion in the American culture? The results of this study are inconclusive; however, there is evidence that a trend might exist. Further study and additional survey items are necessary in order to verify a trend.

Finally, the results of survey item 9 reflect a greater rate of depression among viewers of NBC News and NBC News affiliates, as well as a greater rate of excitement by violent crime among viewers of local news and FOX News. The statistics show that there are substantial differences in the reports of different news sources and subsequent emotions felt by the viewers. Every news source is different; as a result, the precise emotional connection of viewers to the content of each source will inevitably vary.

### **Heuristic Value of Research**

Just as technology is ever-changing, so too is media; therefore, as media evolves over time, so too can the research methods used to analyze the effect of media on the public.

One direction that research might expand is in the comparison of violent crime reports by credible news sources to word of mouth news or information shared via online social networks. From such research, one might form conclusions regarding how information changes depending

on who spreads it by what means. As a result, readers might think twice about the information they are receiving from others and its credibility.

Another direction might encompass the amount of time that violent crime is highlighted in the news depending on the time of day; for instance, one might look at how much violent crime coverage is in a morning newscast versus in an evening newscast. The researcher then might explore the ratings of a given newscast, comparing mornings to evenings over a wide range of sources.

Any number of possibilities can arise from the results produced by this research. As long as media and violent crime exist, so too will possibilities and approaches of further research. As said by Barkan (2012), “public opinion about crime and punishment is often an elusive target. But it is also a fascinating target” (p. 45).

**REFERENCES**

- Barkan, S. E. (2012). Public Opinion, the News Media, and the Crime Problem. *Criminology: A Sociological Understanding* (5th ed., pp. 22-47). Boston: Prentice Hall.
- Burke, K. (1966). *Language as symbolic action*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1-24.
- Callanan, V. J. (2005). Media and Public Opinion of Crime. *Feeding the Fear of Crime : Crime-related Media and Support for Three Strikes*. LFB Scholarly Pub. 53-89.
- Davison, W. (1983). The Third-Person Effect in Communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 47(1), 1-15.
- Dixon, T. L. (2008). Crime News and Racialized Beliefs: Understanding the Relationship Between Local News Viewing and Perceptions of African Americans and Crime. *Journal Of Communication*, 58(1), 106-125.
- Dolan, E.G. (2010). The Theory of Monopoly. *Introduction to Microeconomics*, 4(1), 257-282.
- Eschholz, S., Chiricos, T., & Gertz, M. (2003). Television and Fear of Crime: Program Types, Audience Traits, and the Mediating Effect of Perceived Neighborhood Racial Composition. *Social Problems*, 50(3). 395-415.

- Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation Analysis: An Overview. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1(3/4), 175-194.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Signorielli, N., & Morgan, M. (1980). Television Violence, Victimization, and Power. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 23(1), 705-716.
- Gilliam Jr., F. D., & Iyengar, S. (2000). Prime suspects: The influence of local television news on the viewing public. *American Journal Of Political Science*, 44(3), 560.
- Gruenewald, J., Pizarro, J., & Chermak, S. M. (2009). Race, Gender, and the Newsworthiness of Homicide Incidents. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37(3), 262-272.
- Heath, L., & Petraitis, J. (1987). Television Viewing and Fear of Crime: Where Is the Mean World? *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 8(1/2), 97-123.
- Jan, M. (2009). Globalization of Media: Key Issues and Dimensions. *European Journal Of Scientific Research*, 29(1), 66-75.
- Kohm, S. A., Waid-Lindberg, C. A., Weinrath, M., Shelley, T. O., & Dobbs, R. R. (2012). The Impact of Media on Fear of Crime among University Students: A Cross-National Comparison. *Canadian Journal of Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 67-100.

Lipschultz, J., & Hilt, M. L. (2002). *Crime and Local Television News: Dramatic, Breaking, and Live From the Scene*. L. Earlbaum Associates.

MacGillis, D. (1983). Americans on Edge. *Crime in America: the ABC Report*. Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Co. 23-29.

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1977). Turbulences in the Climate of Opinion: Methodological Applications of the Spiral of Silence Theory. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 42(2), 143-158.

Price, T. (2010). Many Media Mistakes, but Few Corrections. *The CQ Researcher*, 20(35), 832-833.

Robinson, M. G. (2013). *Culture* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from Lynchburg College. Secret Identities: Superheroes as Cultural Icons.

Romer, D., Jamieson, K. H., & Aday, S. (2003). *Television news and the cultivation of fear of crime*. *Journal of Communication*, 53(1), 88-104.

Sheley, J. F., & Ashkins, C. D. (1981). Crime, Crime News, and Crime Views. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45(4), 492-506.

Signorelli, N. (2003). Prime-Time Violence 1993-2001: Has the Picture Really Changed?. *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47(1), 36.



Surette, R., & Otto, C. (2002). A Test of Crime and Justice Infotainment Measure. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30(5), 443-453.

Tiernan, J. (2012). Dying By Its Own Hand. *American Journalism Review*, 34(2), 3.

Troldahl, V. C. (1966). A Field Test of a Modified "Two-Step Flow of Communication" Model. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 30(4), 609-623.

Warr, M. (1980). The Accuracy of Public Beliefs About Crime. *Social Forces*, 59(2), 456-470.

Warr, M., & Stafford, M. (1983). Fear of Victimization: A Look at the Proximate Causes. *Social Forces*, 61(4), 1033-1043.

Wayne, M., Henderson, L., Murray, C. & Petley, J. (2008). Television News and the Symbolic Criminalisation of Young People. *Journalism Studies*, 9(1), 75-90.

Yanich, D. (2001). Location, Location, Location: Urban and Suburban Crime on Local TV News. *Journal Of Urban Affairs*, 23(3/4), 221-241.

**APPENDIX**

**Sample Survey**

This is a survey about the effects of violent crime coverage in the media. The following survey is anonymous. Please respond with answers that most accurately reflect your opinions. Thank you for your participation.

Please indicate the most appropriate answer by circling one option for each statement below.

1. I am a:
 

<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>
-------------	---------------
2. I am a:
 

<b>FRESHMAN</b>	<b>SOPHOMORE</b>	<b>JUNIOR</b>
<b>SENIOR</b>		
3. I have lived in the United States over half my life:
 

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
------------	-----------
4. I would identify myself as:
 

<b>CAUCASIAN/WHITE</b>	<b>AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK</b>
<b>HISPANIC</b>	<b>ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER</b>
<b>OTHER: _____</b>	<b>NO RESPONSE</b>
5. I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week watching or reading news reports.
 

<b>LESS THAN 1</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>	<b>3 - 4</b>	<b>MORE THAN 4</b>
--------------------	--------------	--------------	--------------------
6. My preferred outlet of news is:
 

<b>TELEVISION</b>	<b>NEWSPAPER</b>	<b>RADIO</b>
<b>ONLINE</b>		
<b>OTHER: _____</b>		
7. My preferred news source is:
 

<b>FOX</b>	<b>CNN</b>	<b>NBC/MSNBC/CNBC</b>	<b>CBS</b>	<b>ABC</b>
<b>LOCAL NEWS: _____</b>		<b>OTHER: _____</b>		

Please use the following Likert scale to circle the most appropriate response to questions 8 -34.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

8. I enjoy watching or reading the news.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
9. In general, the news depresses me.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
10. I believe that the media is an accurate portrayal of current events.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
11. I believe that the crime rate (i.e., violent crime, property crime, white collar crime, etc.) in the United States is increasing.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
12. I find that news reports focus too much on violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.).
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

13. I feel vulnerable after watching or reading news reports about violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.).  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
14. I believe that the violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) rate in the United States is increasing.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
15. I believe that crime-based shows such as *America's Most Wanted* or *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* are accurate reflections of what violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) looks like.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
16. I am more likely to pay attention to a news story if there are photograph or video components.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
17. Television news intrigues me.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
18. Print news intrigues me.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
19. I believe that media ratings are more dependent on violent crime coverage (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) than on coverage of other newsworthy events.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
20. Reading the news requires more effort than watching the news.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
21. News reports about violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) excite me.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
22. Violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) in the news does not particularly affect my peace of mind.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
23. I am more likely to pay attention to crime news than to news reports unrelated to crime.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
24. I actively take caution (i.e., lock doors, carry pepper spray, etc.) after hearing about violent crime (i.e., homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) in the news.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
25. I believe that news sources operate as any other business does.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
26. I watch or read news by myself.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
27. I discuss current events with others, based on the news I watch or read.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
28. I consider myself adequately informed after watching or reading the news.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5
29. I attribute my outlook of crime to news reports.  
 1                    2                    3                    4                    5

30. I see more reports about violent crime (i.e. homicide, rape, assault, armed robbery, etc.) than I see reports about property crimes (i.e. vandalism, theft, etc.).

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

31. I believe the media distorts violent crime statistics.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

32. I believe the media distorts details of violent crime-related stories.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

33. I believe that our culture heavily influences the media.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

34. I believe that the media heavily influences our culture.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Please respond to the following open-ended questions (questions 35-39). Feel free to use the back of this page, if necessary; if so, please write the number of the question you are answering next to your response.

35. List three words associated with your perception of the media.

1.

2.

3.

36. List three words associated with your perception of violent crime.

1.

2.

3.

37. Do you believe that the media exaggerates or distorts violent crime stories in an effort to attract viewers? Explain why or why not.

38. How influential is the media on your perception of violent crime? Explain.

39. What types of behavioral changes have you made as a result of watching or reading a violent crime report in the news? Provide as many examples as you can.