
Jae Hong Kim

jkim3611@gmail.com
Independent Researcher.
M.A., University of Wisconsin-
Madison, USA.

Joseph Abisaid

joseph.Abisaid@loras.edu
Assistant Professor of Public
Relations. Division of
Communication & Fine Arts.
Loras College. USA.

Submitted
March 10, 2015
Approved
June 16, 2015

© 2015
Communication & Society
ISSN 0214-0039
E ISSN 2386-7876
doi: 10.15581/003.28.3.97-113
www.communication-society.com

2015 – Vol. 28(3),
pp. 97-113

How to cite this article:

Kim, J.H. & Abisaid, J. (2015). The influence of community structure on crime news coverage: structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and local crime news. *Communication & Society* 28(3), 97-113.

The influence of community structure on crime news coverage: structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and local crime news

Abstract

This study examines patterns of local newspaper crime coverage in terms of the community structure model, which is derived from the research of Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien. A total of 32 metropolitan statistical areas and primary metropolitan statistical areas, classified into four different categories of community according to the structural characteristics of structural pluralism and ethnic diversity, were selected for inclusion in this study. Crime news reports from the major newspaper of each selected community were analyzed based on the types of crimes (violent crime vs. property crime). These data were then compared to FBI crime statistics. In terms of the results, ethnic diversity was found to be a more important factor than structural pluralism in explaining the high proportion of violent crime coverage and the lesser amount of reportage of property crimes, as well as the discrepancies between the newspaper crime reports and the FBI crime statistics.

Keywords

community structure, structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, crime news, FBI crime statistics, local newspaper

1. Introduction

From a sociological point of view, *pluralism* reflects power distribution and power alignment. That is, the more pluralistic a society becomes, the more the power structure decentralizes in that society. Implicit in the idea of power distribution among many civic, political, and social groups is the sense that such pluralism reflects equality, equilibrium, and democratic values. Undeniably, as current media technology develops, the concept of pluralism can also apply to the current mass media through the many channels for communication.

In addition to pluralism, the concept *structure* is also crucial to understand the performance of media. The role or functions of media in a society can be understood in terms of diverse social structures (e.g., political and economic systems, cultural norms, ideologies) with which the media organizations interplay. Understanding mass media alongside other organic social systems or structures helps to better understand a

particular form of the media's repetitive activity (e.g., media's maintaining the stability or equilibrium of a society) (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982).

Many scholars have made an effort to understand the role of media in terms of structural perspectives (e.g., Demers, 1994, 1996; Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1973; Dreier, 1982; Hirsch & Thompson, 1994; McManus, 1995; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1973). Although many ways exist for interpreting mass media performance from diverse structural perspectives, this study focuses on local newspaper performance within the framework of *community structure*: that is, how different types of community structures tend to lead the flow of information regarding a certain issue or event into local, community newspapers.

To date, much research has focused on how crime news is reported by the news media and what effect this has on viewing audiences. Attention is especially directed toward the news media's overrepresentation of violent crimes (e.g., Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002; Maguire, Sandage, & Weatherby, 1999; Roshier, 1973; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). Many scholars have demonstrated that inaccurate media representations influence media consumers' perceptions and cognitions in terms of the micro-level cognitive psychological perspective. For instance, crimes portrayed in the media have an influence on the public's perceptions of the social reality of crimes (Chiricos, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). In addition to research based on the cognitive psychological perspective, overrepresentation of violent crimes and crisis-oriented events in the news media has been studied in terms of macro-level analysis based on ideology, news values, market logic, and commercial considerations (e.g., Bennett, 2003; McQuail, 2000).

Although several studies have investigated the relationship between community structure and media representation at the macro-level, across a diverse array of social issues, such as environmental risks, gender, leadership diversity, and social movements (e.g., Armstrong, 2002, 2006, 2008; Dunwoody & Griffin, 1999; Gandy, 1999; McCluskey, Stein, Boyle & McLeod, 2009), no study to date has considered the relationship between community structure and media representation of criminal events. In light of community structure and the performance of local media in journalism and media studies, the purpose of the present study is twofold: It aims (1) to answer how types of crimes are represented in the local newspapers in relation to characteristics of community structure, and more importantly, (2) to conduct an inter-reality comparison between the types of crime coverage in the local newspapers and actual FBI crime statistics in relation to characteristics of community structure.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Community structure

Community Structural Pluralism and the Function of Mass Media. The intellectual roots of community structure as a sociological phenomenon can be traced to a group of scholars at the University of Minnesota (Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue, & Clarice N. Olien). The Minnesota group primarily contributed to revealing the associations between the structural characteristics of communities and the performance of the press. They considered "community" as crucial to most media organizations (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). They indicated that newspapers actually "mirror the conditions of [community structure], including power conditions, and power alignments," instead of delivering an accurate picture of society itself or dedicating themselves to the public's needs (Tichenor & al., 1980: 80).

According to these scholars, "while community structure may be characterized in several ways, a basic factor is the degree of *pluralism*—defined as the degree of differentiation in the social system along institutional and specialized interest group lines,

in a way that determines the potential sources of organized social power” (Tichenor & al., 1980: 16). For instance, more pluralistic communities are characterized as having larger populations and a greater number of businesses, churches, schools, voluntary groups, and competing interest groups. These communities have a *decentralized* and *diversely distributed power structure* (Tichenor & al., 1980). Conversely, less pluralistic communities have smaller populations, lower degrees of differentiation in interest groups and occupations, and a *centralized distribution of power* (Tichenor & al., 1980).

In general, in smaller and less pluralistic communities, local media organizations such as newspapers and radio stations behave as community supporters by conferring legitimacy on the prevailing power structure, such as the local government and a few influential elites (Donohue & al., 1973; Tichenor & al., 1980). Media organizations in less pluralistic communities act to maintain community stability and consensus by selective dissemination and selective withholding of information (“*distribution control*” process) (Donohue & al., 1973; Tichenor & al., 1980). From this perspective, “censorship” is an instance of the distribution control process (Donohue & al., 1973). Therefore, in smaller and less pluralistic communities, media organizations are more likely to avoid conflict or controversial issues that might threaten or destabilize the centralized local power structure (Donohue & al., 1973; Tichenor & al., 1980).

On the other hand, in the more differentiated and pluralistic communities, because of the decentralized power structure created by the large number of competing interest groups, mass media play the role of communication broker between competing interest groups who use media reports to keep track of one another. In these types of communities, mass media not only tend to report conflict and sensitive issues, but also perform a “feedback” or “regulatory” role for other subsystems and/or for the total social system by paying attention to the social conflicts and setting the agenda for public discussion of social problems (“*feedback control*” processes, which are also known as part of the “*watch-dog*” role of the press) (Donohue & al., 1973; Tichenor & al., 1980). Therefore, understanding the power distribution of a community is crucial to understanding the behavior of media organizations in that community.

From the perspectives of the “*distribution control*” and “*feedback control*” functions of mass media, in less pluralistic communities, for instance, newspaper stories about local environmental risks were reported in ways that downplayed associations between the environmental risks and potential health effects, thereby privileging local government interpretations to avoid community conflicts (Dunwoody & Griffin, 1999). On the contrary, newspapers in more pluralistic communities were more likely to focus on debatable aspects of environmental risks and to lay blame (Dunwoody & Griffin, 1999). In addition, Demers (1996, 1998) found that corporate newspapers were highly critical of mainstream groups in their editorial sections. He concluded that corporate newspapers located in more pluralistic communities experienced higher levels of social conflict and increased criticism from the dominant social groups and value systems within the community.

Beyond Traditional Community Structural Pluralism: Multiple Dimensions of Structural Pluralism. The original community structural pluralism scholars in mass communication developed structural pluralism as a single unidimensional concept by only examining the difference of structural elements within a community. Other scholars, however, have proposed that one dimension does not adequately capture the complex characteristics of community and, thus, have suggested that the traditional structural pluralism concept needs to be multidimensional (e.g., Armstrong, 2006, 2008; Hindman, Littlefield, Preston, & Neumann, 1999; Jeffres & al., 2000). For instance, community pluralism scholars have proposed that structural factors, such as ethnicity may play an important role in the community power structure (e.g., Hindman & al., 1999; Jeffres & al., 2000). Hindman et al. (1999) explicated community structural pluralism based on two dimensions: structural

pluralism and ethnic pluralism. In structurally pluralistic communities, ethnic minority groups have both a high degree of interaction with other groups and a high degree of cohesion within their own groups. That is, ethnicity is a crucial element of cultural and social power distribution. And thus, in light of Hindman et al.'s study, rather than simply merging ethnicity into indicators of an overall traditional structural measure of power distribution, ethnicity would be better represented as its own dimension. In their research on the relationship between the community structure and newspaper editors' perception of ethnic minorities, regardless of the level of traditional structural pluralism, the greater the percentage of ethnic minorities in the community, the greater the percentage of editors who include ethnic minorities in their list of local power actors and crucial news sources (Hindman & al., 1999).

Studies conducted by Armstrong (2006, 2008) supported for the multi-dimensional conception of community power structure. She added another dimension called leadership diversity. Her study was based on the idea that the composition of leadership structure within a community would have an influence on the power distribution within that structure. For her study, leadership diversity, conceptualized as the degree of the existence of ethnic and minority leaders in communities, was measured based on the level of gender and racial diversity within the community leadership structure. Based on confirmatory factor analysis, she found community power structure and leadership diversity are distinct dimensions of community pluralism and suggested that 2-dimensions are more suitable for capturing the power distribution within communities. In sum, studies of community structural pluralism in mass communication scholarship have shifted from a unidimensional conception to a multi-dimensional conception to provide more diversified and differentiated characteristics of a community under observation (Nah & Armstrong, 2011).

2.2. Local crime news, market size, and community structure

Criminal Events in Local News and in Reality. As Graber (1993) demonstrated, crime news, by one estimate, accounts for about 14% of local news coverage, and the lion's share of that coverage focuses on sensational events. Moreover, over time, the media's presentation of crime trends in both television and newspapers appeared to be unrelated to the actual trends in police crime statistics (Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). Newspaper crime reporting, nonetheless, was found to better approximate the true distribution of crime than television crime reporting when compared to official police statistics (Sheley & Ashkins, 1981).

As Antunes and Hurley (1977) maintained, crime is not only a rare event, but it is also extremely unlikely for the average person in the U.S. to be the victim of a serious violent crime in any given year. Although very few people experience crime firsthand (especially violent crime), public concern about crime does not correlate with the reality of its occurrence. In light of Roshier's (1973) conclusion, derived from a comparison of crime news as reported in three British national dailies with official statistics about crime, "...the newspapers do give a distorted impression of the relative frequency of different types of crime and...this distortion is in the direction of over-representation of more serious offenses" (p. 33). Implicit in his conclusion is the idea that "the process of crime news selection gives a biased picture of the occurrence of crime, and the bias is constant over time and between newspapers" (Roshier, 1973: 34). According to Davis (1952), in his examination of the relationship between the number of column inches of crime news in several Colorado newspapers and crime rates in the state, no relationship emerged between changes in the column inches of crime news and changes in state-wide crime rates. Also, in the examination of the representation of criminal events in Houston's two daily newspapers, Antunes and Hurley (1977) concluded that the distribution of crime news reported in the

Houston press was inversely related to the distribution of crimes known to the police. That is, “[m]urder and rape [were] reported far out of proportion to their frequency of occurrence, while burglary, larceny and (in one paper) auto theft [were] substantially underreported” (Antunes & Hurley, 1977: 758).

Crime News, Media Market Size, and Community Structure. Although coverage of breaking and sensational crime news can be explained in terms of diverse factors, such as commercial consideration and news values, a consideration of the media’s over-representation of crime events related to market size is equally important. In general, in large and major media markets (e.g., Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City), local news stories are more sensational and concern human interest news compared with the smaller and more homogeneous markets and communities. In light of Carroll and Tuggle’s (1997) study, market size was found to be related to news judgment. Based on a study of late evening newscasts in 25 markets, they found that large market stations were more likely to send reporters into the field to cover sensational stories compared with small market stations which were more likely to be reliant on network feeds for sensational and human interest news. Based on Maguire, Sandage, and Weatherby’s (1999) content analysis of crime stories reported on nightly newscasts from a national network (NBC), a big city television station (WGN of Chicago), and a small town channel (WGEM of Quincy, Illinois; under 40,000 population), on average, WGN newscasts broadcast about three times as many crime stories as NBC, and about five times as many as WGEM. They also found that the crime stories reported on WGN were even more likely to describe violent offenses than the national newscast; WGEM was much less likely to report violent crimes and much more likely to highlight drug offenses.

Although past researchers examined crime news representations in terms of market size (i.e., big city vs. small city), in a sense, media market size can be understood in terms of community structure. As Jeffres et al. (2000) mentioned, greater system size leads to greater structural pluralism and greater diversity. Thus, based on Jeffres et al.’s notion, large and major media markets in the U.S. can be understood to have high structural pluralism and high ethnic diversity. Moreover, the researchers asserted that ethnic diversity or differences are crucial force for coverage of conflict issues in newspapers. Community structure is one of the approaches useful for explaining the patterns of media portrayals. Therefore, synthesis is possible for two crucial elements: community structure (measured in terms of community structural pluralism and ethnic diversity) and crime news representation which may explain the influence of community structure on media portrayals of crime in local news.

The Present Study. Based on past studies, in communities characterized as having large populations, a number of non-agricultural businesses, many civic and political groups, as well as substantial ethnic minority populations (i.e., communities that are structurally pluralistic and ethnically diverse), media organizations compete intensely with one another for their business. Therefore, one might anticipate that in these types of communities, the sensational and violent crimes which draw more public attention will have greater coverage than property crimes.

Conversely, in structurally less pluralistic and ethnically less diverse, relatively homogeneous and small communities, mass media are more likely to avoid negative and sensational issues which disturb community cohesion and peaceful relations among community members. Based on the characteristics of crime news and previous research on the relationship between community structure and press performance, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁-A: Newspapers in more structurally high pluralistic communities will cover more violence-oriented crime news than property-oriented crime news compared with structurally low pluralistic communities.

H1-B: Newspapers in more ethnically diverse communities will cover more violence-oriented crime news than property-oriented crime news compared with communities of low ethnic diversity.

In general, as supported by FBI crime statistics, violent crimes do not occur very often compared to property crimes. On the basis of the previous hypotheses, a fair assumption is that in structurally pluralistic and ethnically diverse communities, such crime news coverage patterns (i.e., more violence-oriented crime news coverage than property-oriented crime coverage) will create a high discrepancy between the proportion of violent crime news coverage and the proportion of violent crimes appearing in FBI crime statistics, all of which suggests the following hypotheses:

H2-A: Newspapers in more structurally high pluralistic communities will have more discrepancy between the proportion of violent crime news coverage and the proportion of violent crimes in FBI crime statistics than in structurally low pluralistic communities.

H2-B: Newspapers in more ethnically diverse communities will have more discrepancy between the proportion of violent crime news coverage and the proportion of violent crimes in FBI crime statistics than in communities of low ethnic diversity.

3. Method

The purpose of the present study is to examine patterns of local newspaper crime coverage (violent crime vs. property crime) in terms of the community structure model. Therefore, a quantitative content analysis method was adopted to analyze the newspapers' coverage of crime.

3.1. Time frame

To measure the characteristics of the community, the year 2000 census data were used.¹ In addition to the year 2000 census data being used for measuring community structure, the year 2000 local daily newspaper from each community was chosen for content analysis of crime news reports to make equivalent the time frame with the year 2000 census data. Our year 2000 newspaper content analysis data were collected before Internet news became a staple of how news readers accessed news content. Also, during the year 2000 no serious national or international event, such as the September 11th terrorist attack, or the recent political conflict in the Middle-East, or the current worldwide economic crash, occurred. A reasonable assumption is, therefore, that the trend of newspaper coverage of social events or issues during that year was not biased towards a few specific national or international events or issues. Finally, the year 2000 FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) were used for this study. Since one of the purposes of this study is to compare the trends of local crime coverage in a given community's newspaper with the actual FBI crime statistics in terms of the different types of communities, the year 2000 crime statistics had to be used to make equivalent the time frame with the year 2000 local newspaper.

3.2. Independent variable

Since the unit of analysis of this study is the community, as a single entity, the overarching independent variable is community structure. As mentioned, although studies of community structural pluralism in mass communication have shifted from a single unidimensional conception to a multi-dimensional conception, operational definitions of the concept have

¹ For this study, the year 2000 State of the Cities Data Systems (SOCDS) Census data of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) were used to measure community structure.

demonstrated broad differences depending on the research topics and contexts (Nah & Armstrong, 2011). That is, no consistent or congruous way exists among researchers for measuring community structural pluralism based on past studies (see, e.g., Appendix of Jeffres, Cutietta, Sekerka, & Lee [2000: 183-184] and Table 1 of Nah & Armstrong [2011: 865-866] on this subject). For instance, to measure community structural pluralism, the traditional community structural pluralism studies conducted by Tichenor et al. (1980) used the following indicators: city population, county population, county per-capita income, labor force not in agriculture, and distance from a major metropolitan area. However, due to the lack of clear operational definitions, there has been dearth of consistency as to what indicators are being used to measure the characteristics of community (Nah & Armstrong, 2011).

For this study, operationally, community structure was measured in terms of two dimensions: structural pluralism (based on the traditional structural indicators) and ethnic diversity. Structural pluralism was measured based on: (1) the population in the metropolitan statistical area, the primary metropolitan statistical area, and the New England county metropolitan area, (2) the percentage of workers employed in nonagricultural jobs, (3) the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher, and (4) the median income. Ethnic diversity was measured based on the percentage of the population comprised of non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics (all races), and non-Hispanic other races.²

Both structural pluralism and ethnic diversity were measured based the SOCDs Census data. More specifically, based on the Census data, the level of structural pluralism and ethnic diversity of communities in the U.S. was measured in terms of the standardized Z-score and ethnic minority population percentage respectively. First, after calculating the structural pluralism Z-score ranking based on a total of 343 communities (metropolitan statistical area, the primary metropolitan statistical area, and the New England county metropolitan area), the 343 communities were split into three equal size groups. And thus, it was possible to make each group contain one-third of the total 343 communities. Based on the Z-score ranking, the three groups were classified into communities as being low, medium, and high structural pluralism. Likewise, to measure the degree of ethnic diversity, the 343 communities were split into three equal size groups based on the ethnic minority population percentage ranking. Such that each group contained one-third of the total 343 communities. Then, the three groups were classified into communities as being low, medium, and high ethnic diversity. However, for current study, the community areas measured having any medium degree of structural pluralism and ethnic diversity (e.g., communities having medium structural pluralism and high ethnic diversity; communities having medium structural pluralism and medium ethnic diversity, etc.) were excluded.

Therefore, the joint composition of the two dimensions (i.e., structural pluralism and ethnic diversity) made it possible to identify the characteristics of the community as being in one of the following four categories: (1) high structural pluralism and high ethnic diversity, (2) high structural pluralism and low ethnic diversity, (3) low structural pluralism and high ethnic diversity, and (4) low structural pluralism and low ethnic diversity. Then, eight communities in each category were selected based on the availability of year 2000 microfilmed local daily newspapers. A total of 32 communities were therefore selected from the four categories (see Appendix A).

² Regarding ethnic diversity, in relation to the power distribution of organized community groups, Hindman et al. (1999) operationalized it based on the percentage of the following indicators: Blacks, American Indian/Eskimo/Aleutian Islanders, Asian/Pacific Islander, Other, and Whites of Latino/Hispanic Heritage.

3.3. *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable in this study is the amount of crime coverage in local community newspapers. To compare the portrayals of crimes in newspaper coverage with the year 2000 FBI's UCR, crimes reported in the FBI's UCR were coded from local community newspapers. Following the FBI's UCR, crimes were classified into two types: (1) violent crimes and (2) property crimes.³ Violent crimes include criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crimes include burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft.⁴

3.4. *Newspaper collection and article coding*

Based on the total of 32 communities, only one local daily newspaper was selected from each community. *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*, which lists all local and national daily newspapers and weekly newspapers published and circulated in the U.S., was used in the selection of local daily newspapers.⁵

For the content analysis, a total of 14 issues from a local daily newspaper in the year 2000 were systematically selected from January to December for each community's local newspaper.⁶ A total of 446 newspaper issues (874 crime reports) from a total of 32 local daily newspapers, published and circulated in the 32 local community areas under consideration, were analyzed using the microfilmed newspapers.⁷

As briefly mentioned above, newspaper crime reports were coded based on crimes taking place during the year 2000. Because the number of crimes reported in the newspapers and the year 2000 FBI's UCR were compared, only crimes committed during the year 2000 were coded. In the case of crime stories which involved a given trial (e.g., pre-trial), those which included the crimes were coded, as long as the crimes were committed during the year 2000, and the framing of the crime was equally weighted with that of the trial report. However, a trial solely framed from legal issues were excluded, because those reports were trial or legal cases, rather than crime reports. Also, to create equivalence and make comparisons with the FBI's UCR, crime cases were coded strictly in terms of the county boundaries defined by the FBI's UCR. Although crimes from the police log and any similar types of reports were also coded, they were not considered hard crime news or typical news coverage. For this study, crimes from the police log and other crimes that are beyond the FBI's UCR categories (e.g., simple harassment, drug possession) were excluded for analysis. Overall, newspaper crime content was coded in terms of four categories: violent crimes (number of homicides, rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults),⁸ property

³ The U.S. criminal justice system considers violent crimes and property crimes the most serious.

⁴ Although arson was also included in the index of the FBI crime statistics, sufficient data were not available to estimate totals for this offense.

⁵ Obtaining hard copies of year 2000 local daily newspapers from local public libraries or newspaper companies was difficult; only microfilmed newspapers were available from local public libraries and main newspaper microfilm repositories in the U.S.

⁶ First, January 20 was randomly selected, and 26 days of interval was used to select at least one newspaper issue per month. Using the interval of 26 days made possible random and impartial selection of the total for 14 days.

⁷ Because of missing microfilm and problems of quality, a few days were dropped from the study. In the case of a local daily newspaper that was not published on Sunday, the next day of issue (Monday) was used as an alternative.

⁸ Krippendorff's alpha was used to assess inter-coder reliability. See, Krippendorff, 1980. Krippendorff's alpha for homicide = 1.00. Krippendorff's alpha for rape = .65. Krippendorff's alpha for robbery = .90. Krippendorff's alpha for aggravated assault = .78. To measure inter-coder reliability, a total of six microfilmed local daily newspapers were randomly chosen from the initial samples of microfilmed local daily newspapers. Then, from the total of six microfilmed local daily newspapers, six issues were randomly selected from each microfilmed newspaper. Therefore, a total of 36 issues of microfilmed newspapers were coded independently by two coders to test inter-coder agreement. The total number of crime news articles commonly coded between the two coders was 64 (7.32 % based on the total of 874 crime news reports from the 32 community newspapers). Coder A coded a total of 71 crime

crimes (number of burglaries, thefts, and motor thefts),⁹ other crimes,¹⁰ and types of crime news reports (i.e., typical crime news coverage vs. police log).¹¹

4. Results

The hypotheses proposed in the previous section are classified into two broad parts which analyze the following: (1) the proportion of violent crime coverage in the newspaper (H1-A and H1-B) and (2) comparison between the proportion of violent crime coverage in newspapers and the proportion of violent crimes in the FBI violent crime statistics (H2-A and H2-B) in terms of the different types of community structure (see Appendix B for a brief presentation of univariate results).

4.1. Structural Pluralism, Ethnic Diversity, and Newspaper Violent Crime Coverage

H1-A and H1-B predicted that newspapers in more structurally pluralistic and ethnically diverse communities will cover more violence-oriented crime news than property-oriented crime news. Regarding H1-A and H1-B, a two-way ANOVA was run in order to distinguish the independent effects of structural pluralism and ethnic diversity as well as the interactive effects between structural pluralism and ethnic diversity.

As the results of the ANOVA test (see Table 1) show, structural pluralism had no significant effect on violent crime news coverage, $F(1, 31) = 1.01$, n.s. However, ethnic diversity had a significant main effect on violent crime news coverage, $F(1, 31) = 10.01$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .26$. H1-B, therefore, is supported, as a positive relation emerged between ethnic diversity and the proportion of violent crime coverage.

Table 1. Effects of structural pluralism and ethnic diversity
on the proportion of newspaper violent crime coverage

Source	SS	df	F	P	η^2	
Main Effects						
Structural Pluralism	.041	1	1.008	.324	.04	
Ethnic Diversity	.406	1	10.011	.004	.26	
Interaction	.043	1	1.062	.312	.04	
Structural Pluralism						
		Low		High		
Ethnic Diversity	M	SE	N	M	SE	N
Low	.61	.07	8	.47	.07	8
Hi	.77	.07	8	.77	.07	8

Note: N = 32

news articles. Coder B coded a total of 67 crime news articles. Although Coder A coded more crime news articles than Coder B, a total of 64 crime articles were coded in common (86.49% agreement between Coder A and Coder B; unitized reliability). Then, Coder A conducted all coding for this content analysis.

⁹ Krippendorff's alpha for burglary = .90. Krippendorff's alpha for thefts = .87. Krippendorff's alpha for motor thefts = 1.00.

¹⁰ Krippendorff's alpha = .96.

¹¹ Krippendorff's alpha = 1.00.

**The influence of community structure on crime news coverage:
structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and local crime news**

In addition, no significant interaction effect appeared between structural pluralism and ethnic diversity $F(1, 31) = 1.06$, n.s. In sum, although both structural pluralism and ethnic diversity were predicted to have significant effects on the proportion of violent crime news coverage, the findings show a significant main effect only for ethnic diversity on violent crime news coverage. Together with the results of the test of H1-A and H1-B, the conclusion is that ethnic diversity is more influential than structural pluralism regarding violent crime news reports.

4.2. Structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and the inverse relationship between newspaper crime coverage and FBI crime statistics

Hypotheses 1-A and 1-B examined the patterns of violent crime reporting in terms of community structure within the boundary of newspaper content. H2-A and H2-B examined the discrepancy between the proportion of violent crime coverage in the newspaper and the proportion of violent crimes actually reported to the FBI agency in terms of the characteristics of the community. Because the proportion of violent crime reports in the newspaper was compared with actual FBI crime statistics, testing H2-A and H2-B is more meaningful than testing the previous hypotheses, which looked only at newspaper content. To test H2-A and H2-B, a two-way ANOVA was run on the difference in proportions between newspaper violent crime reporting and violent crime in the FBI's UCR.

Table 2. Difference between the proportion of violent crime coverage in newspapers and the proportion of violent crime in the FBI's UCR for structural pluralism and ethnic diversity

Source	SS	df	F	P	η^2
Main Effects					
Structural Pluralism	.059	1	1.490	.232	.05
Ethnic Diversity	.232	1	5.835	.022	.17
Interaction	.025	1	.633	.433	.02

Ethnic Diversity	Structural Pluralism					
	Low			High		
	M	SE	N	M	SE	N
Low	.53	.07	8	.39	.07	8
Hi	.65	.07	8	.62	.07	8

Note: N = 32

As in the case of the results of testing H2-A and H2-B, structural pluralism did not have a significant main effect in causing the discrepancy between newspaper violent crime coverage and FBI crime statistics $F(1, 31) = 1.49$, n.s. However, ethnic diversity had a significant influence on the discrepancy between newspaper coverage and FBI crime statistics (see Table 2). As Table 2 indicates, ethnic diversity had a significant main effect $F(1, 31) = 5.84$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .17$. Therefore, similar to the first set of hypotheses, H2-A was not supported, but H2-B was supported. In addition, no significant interaction effect between structural pluralism and ethnic diversity was found, $F(1, 31) = .63$, n.s. In sum, before testing H2-A and H2-B, both structural pluralism and ethnic diversity were predicted to have

significant effects for causing the discrepancy between the proportion of violent crimes reported in the newspaper and the proportion of violent crimes cited in the FBI crime statistics. Only ethnic diversity, however, appears to have a significant effect.

5. Summary and discussion

Both structural pluralism and ethnic diversity were predicted as having a relationship with violent and sensational crime news coverage. It was theorized that in highly pluralistic and ethnically diverse communities, mass media are more likely to cover sensational and controversial issues. In particular, in communities characterized by, for example, large populations, high proportions of nonagricultural businesses, and substantial ethnic minority populations, such as New York City, Houston, and San Francisco, media organizations exist that compete intensively with one another for business from advertisers. In these types of communities, sensational and violent crime news, which draws more public attention, would have greater, more thorough, and more frequent coverage than would property crimes. On the other hand, in structurally less pluralistic and ethnically less diverse communities, media would be more likely to avoid negative and sensational issues within the communities which disturb community cohesion and peaceful relations among community members.

Given the results of this study, clearly, ethnic diversity is a more important factor than structural pluralism in explaining the higher rates of violent crime coverage than property crime reporting. More importantly, ethnic diversity is a crucial factor causing the discrepancy between the patterns of newspaper crime coverage (i.e., more violent crimes) and actual FBI crime statistics (i.e., more property crimes).

There are several different ways in which the results can be explained. First, it could be interpreted as a product of journalists' biased views toward ethnic minorities. The relationship between communities with high ethnic diversity and higher proportions of violent crime reporting compared with property crime reporting may not necessarily reflect journalists' racial biases toward ethnic minorities in particular crime cases; however, the coverage-related phenomenon might indirectly reflect prejudices that journalists, working in ethnically diverse communities, might have the idea that communities with large numbers of ethnic minorities are not safe. Perhaps communities with higher racial diversity have populations with a higher aggregate fear of crime, and journalists, as members of the community, might reflect this.

Second, the high proportions (and over-emphasis) of violent crime reporting may indicate a social and power imbalance between different ethnic groups in the community. Although the population of ethnic minorities continues to increase, Caucasians are still the dominant ethnic group in American society. In addition, media industries are still predominantly owned and controlled by a small handful of wealthy Caucasians (Jewkes, 2004). In a sense, as mass communication scholars have already stated, mass media tend to support the dominant political powers and social values in a society. This parallels the notion that journalists' performances are influenced by outside forces, as the bottom line for today's media company is more and more commercially, rather than publicly, oriented.

Future Research. Some limitations exist for the present study, but they may point the way to meaningful future research. First, although the current results are based on eight communities per community category, increasing the number of community samples in order to generalize the results more concretely is necessary. Second, ethnic minorities within a community need to be examined in a more sophisticated manner. That is, the key element is the role of ethnic minorities within communities, not merely an aggregation of those members. Simply considering ethnic minority based on the sheer number of ethnic minority population does not automatically mean that the influence of ethnic power (e.g.,

leadership) does exist within a community. One can simply assume that although several different races may reside within one community, they may not be cohesive or commingle (Armstrong, 2006).

The current study considered only ethnic diversity in terms of the sheer number of ethnic minority population within communities. And thus, the question remains whether consideration of only the percentage of the ethnic minority population appropriately reflects the status or power of ethnic minorities in their communities. As mentioned in Jeffres et al.'s (2000) study, whereas structural pluralism focuses on the distribution of power within the system, diversity refers to heterogeneity in terms of ascriptive characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, race, gender). According to Simpson (1995), pluralism cannot be simply presumed in diversity, and she also suggested, "heterogeneity describes the existence of multiple societal components sharing one set of social institutions; pluralism describes the situation of multiple cultural enclaves, each with its own set of social institutions" (p. 462).¹² Therefore, along with consideration of the census measure of ethnic minority populations, future studies should measure another dimension of power or status of ethnic minorities by taking into account variables such as, ethnic minorities' community leadership, the number of ethnic minority civic organizations, and percentage of businesses owned by ethnic minorities, all of which reflect the power status of ethnic minorities.

Third, in terms of community samples selected in each category, structurally low and ethnically high communities are most common in Texas and California (see Appendix A). Because of the difficulties in getting microfilmed newspapers from more geographically widespread communities, this study had no alternative but to choose microfilmed newspapers which were only available from communities having low structural pluralism and high ethnic diversity. Therefore, a more meaningful selection might include communities from more widespread geographical areas in the U.S.

Finally, conducting research on the public's perceptions of crimes in terms of the community structure perspective (i.e., to explore how people from the different types of communities perceive social reality regarding crime issues) is worthwhile. For instance, based on the results of this research, the assumption might be that people living in more ethnically diverse communities feel greater fear about crime than others do, because these people are more likely to face violence-oriented crime news in their areas. In a sense, this might result in a more sophisticated study on the "Mean World Syndrome" based on the cultivation hypothesis (Gerbner & al., 2002).

¹² Implicit in this idea is the notion that "if a society were strictly heterogeneous, members of that society would share the same set of societal institutions; if a society were strictly pluralistic, members of the society would have different sets of social institutions for different ethnic groups" (Simpson, 1995: 462).

References

- Antunes, G.E., & Hurley, P.A. (1977). The representation of criminal events in Houston's two daily newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly* 54, 756-760.
- Armstrong, C.L. (2002). Papers give women more attention in ethnically diverse communities. *Newspaper Research Journal* 23, 81-85.
- Armstrong, C.L. (2006). Revisiting structural pluralism: A two-dimensional conception of community power. *Mass Communication & Society* 9, 287-300.
- Armstrong, C.L. (2008). Exploring a two-dimensional model of community pluralism and its effects on the level of transparency in community decision making. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85, 807-822.
- Bennett, W.L. (2003). *News: The politics of illusion* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Carroll, R.L., & Tuggle, C.A. (1997). The world outside: Local tv news treatment of imported news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 74, 123-133.
- Chiricos, T., Padgett, K., & Gertz, M. (2000). Fear, tv news, and the reality of crime. *Criminology* 38, 755-785.
- James, D.F. (1952). Crime news in Colorado newspapers. *American Journal of Sociology* 57, 325-330.
- DeFleur, M.L., & Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (1982). *Theories of mass communication* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Demers, D. (1996). Corporate newspaper structure, editorial page vigor, and social change. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, 857-877.
- Demers, D.K. (1998). Structural pluralism, corporate newspaper structure, and news source perceptions: Another test of the editorial vigor hypothesis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 75, 572-592.
- Demers, D.P. (1994). Structural pluralism, intermedia competition, and the growth of the corporate newspaper in the United States. *Journalism Monographs* (Whole No. 145).
- Donohue, G.A., Tichenor, P.J., & Olien, C.N. (1973). Mass media functions, knowledge and social control. *Journalism Quarterly* 50, 652-659.
- Dreier, P. (1982). The position of the press in the U.S. power structure. *Social Problems* 29, 298-310.
- Dunwoody, S., & Griffin, R.J. (1999). Structural pluralism and media accounts of risk. In D. Demers & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Mass media, social control, and social change: A macro social perspective* (pp. 139-158). Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.
- Editor & Publisher International Year Book*. (2002). New York: Editor & Publisher Co.
- Gandy, O.H., Jr. (1999). Community pluralism and the "Tipping Point": Editorial responses to race and related structural change. In D. Demers & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Mass Media, Social Control, and Social Change: A Macro Social Perspective* (pp. 159-181). Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation process. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp. 43-67). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Graber, D.A. (1993). *Mass media and American politics* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Hindman, D.B., Littlefield, R., Preston, A., & Neumann, D. (1999). Structural pluralism, ethnic pluralism, and community newspapers. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 76, 250-263.
- Hirsch, P., & Thompson, T. (1994). The stock market as audience: The impact of public ownership on newspapers. In J.S. Ettema & D.C. Whitney (Eds.), *Audience-making: How the media create the audience* (pp. 142-158). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**The influence of community structure on crime news coverage:
structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and local crime news**

- Jeffres, L.W., Cutietta, C., Sekerka, L., & Lee, J.-W. (2000). Newspapers, pluralism, and diversity in an urban context. *Mass Communication and Society* 3 (2&3), 157-184.
- Jewkes, Y. (2004). *Media and crime*. London: Sage.
- Keefe, S.E., & Padilla, A.M. (1987). *Chicano Ethnicity*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content Analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lipschultz, J.H., & Hilt, M.L. (2002). *Crime and local television news: Dramatic, breaking, and live from the scene*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Maguire, B., Sandage, D., & Weatherby, G.A. (1999). Crime stories as television news: A content analysis of national, big city, and small town newscasts. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 7, 1-14.
- McCluskey, M., Stein, S.E., Boyle, M.P., & McLeod, D.M. (2009). Community structure and social protest: Influences on newspaper coverage. *Mass Communication and Society* 12, 353-371.
- McManus, J. (1995). Market-based model of news production. *Communication Theory* 5, 301-338.
- McQuail, D. (2000). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nah, S., & Armstrong, C.L. (2011). Structural pluralism in journalism and media studies: A concept explication and theory construction. *Mass Communication and Society* 14, 857-878.
- Roshier, B. (1973). The selection of crime news by the press. In S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds.), *The manufacture of news: A reader* (pp. 28-39). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Sheley, J.F., & Ashkins, C.D. (1981). Crime, crime news, and crime views. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, 492-506.
- Simpson, J.C. (1995). Pluralism: The evolution of a nebulous concept. *American Behavioral Scientist* 38, 459-477.
- Tichenor, P.J., Donohue, G.A., & Olien, C.N. (1980). *Community conflict and the press*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Tichenor, P.J., Donohue, G.A., & Olien, C.N. (1973). Mass communication research: Evolution of a structural model. *Journalism Quarterly*, 50, 419-425.

APPENDIX A

Local Daily Newspaper in Each Community

Communities Having High Structural Pluralism and High Ethnic Diversity and Selected Newspapers

1. Detroit, MI PMSA: *Detroit Free Press*
2. Phoenix-Mesa, AZ MSA: *The Arizona Republic*
3. Columbia, SC MSA: *The State*
4. Newark, NJ PMSA: *The Star-Ledger*
5. San Francisco, CA PMSA: *San Francisco Chronicle*
6. Albuquerque, NM MSA: *Albuquerque Journal* (Monday-Saturday), *The Sunday Journal* (Sunday)
7. Houston, TX PMSA: *Houston Chronicle*
8. New York, NY PMSA: *Daily News*

Communities Having High Structural Pluralism and Low Ethnic Diversity and Selected Newspapers

1. Burlington, VT MSA: *The Burlington Free Press*
2. Cedar Rapids, IA MSA: *The Gazette*
3. Manchester, NH PMSA: *The Union Leader* (Monday-Saturday), *New Hampshire Sunday News* (Sunday)
4. Pittsburgh, PA MSA: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
5. Rochester, MN MSA: *Post-Bulletin*
6. Iowa City, IA MSA: *Iowa City Press-Citizen*
7. Des Moines, IA MSA: *The Des Moines Register* (Monday-Saturday), *Des Moines Sunday Register* (Sunday)
8. Madison, WI MSA: *Wisconsin State Journal*

Communities Having Low Structural Pluralism and High Ethnic Diversity and Selected Newspapers

1. Amarillo, TX MSA: *Amarillo Daily News*
2. Waco, TX MSA: *Waco Tribune-Herald*
3. Killeen-Temple, TX MSA: *Temple Daily Telegram*
4. Modesto, CA MSA: *The Modesto Bee*
5. Bakersfield, CA MSA: *The Bakersfield Californian*
6. Salinas, CA MSA: *The Californian*
7. Corpus Christi, TX MSA: *Corpus Christi Caller Times*
8. El Paso, TX MSA: *El Paso Times*

Communities Having Low Structural Pluralism and Low Ethnic Diversity and Selected Newspapers

1. Eau Claire, WI MSA: *Leader-Telegram*
2. Glens Falls, NY MSA: *The Post-Star*
3. St. Cloud, MN MSA: *St. Cloud Times*

**The influence of community structure on crime news coverage:
structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and local crime news**

4. Wausau, WI MSA: *Wausau Daily Herald*
5. Great Falls, MT MSA: *Great Falls Tribune*
6. Medford–Ashland, OR MSA: *Mail Tribune*
7. Lima, OH MSA: *The Lima News*
8. Redding, CA MSA: *Record Searchlight*

MSA: Metropolitan Statistical Area

PMSA: Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area

Note: National newspapers were excluded (e.g., *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*). In the primary metropolitan statistical area or metropolitan statistical area in which more than one newspaper is published and circulated, only one local newspaper was randomly selected.

APPENDIX B

Newspaper Crime Coverage vs. FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): Violent Crime, Property Crime, and Proportional Difference

Communities Having High Structural Pluralism and High Ethnic Diversity

	Local Newspaper		FBI UCR		Percentage Difference*
	Violent Crime Coverage N (%)	Property Crime Coverage N (%)	Violent Crime N (%)	Property Crime N (%)	
Detroit, MI PMSA	24 (83)	5 (17)	33,782 (16)	175,379 (84)	67
Phoenix- Mesa, AZ MSA	33 (79)	9 (21)	18,117 (9)	182,447 (91)	70
Columbia, SC MSA	17 (85)	3 (15)	4,219 (14)	25,796 (86)	71
Newark, NJ PMSA	35 (55)	29 (45)	11,394 (15)	63,206 (85)	40
San Francisco, CA PMSA	24 (92)	2 (8)	9,195 (14)	58,441 (86)	78
Albuquerque, NM MSA	11 (58)	8 (42)	6,694 (13)	43,116 (87)	45
Houston, TX PMSA	23 (92)	2 (8)	29,909 (14)	180,370 (86)	78
New York, NY PMSA	38 (70)	16 (30)	79,320 (25)	240,998 (75)	45

*Percentage of Violent Crime in the Newspaper minus Percentage of Violent Crime in the FBI UCR

**The influence of community structure on crime news coverage:
structural pluralism, ethnic diversity, and local crime news**

Communities Having High Structural Pluralism and Low Ethnic Diversity

	Local Newspaper		FBI UCR		Percentage Difference*
	Violent Crime Coverage N (%)	Property Crime Coverage N (%)	Violent Crime N (%)	Property Crime N (%)	
Burlington, VT MSA	3 (38)	5 (62)	281 (4)	6,552 (96)	34
Cedar Rapids, IA MSA	4 (33)	8 (67)	386 (5)	6,710 (95)	28
Manchester, NH PMSA	26 (65)	14 (35)	277 (6)	4,304 (94)	59
Pittsburgh, PA MSA	24 (71)	10 (29)	7,430 (13)	49,643 (87)	58
Rochester, MN MSA	4 (40)	6 (60)	288 (9)	2,777 (91)	31
Iowa City, IA MSA	1 (17)	5 (83)	441 (13)	3,004 (87)	4
Des Moines, IA MSA	9 (33)	18 (67)	1,004 (5)	17,503 (95)	28
Madison, WI MSA	18 (78)	5 (22)	906 (7)	12,659 (93)	71

*Percentage of Violent Crime in the Newspaper minus Percentage of Violent Crime in the FBI UCR