

# Media and crime

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# Lesson 1.

The media is both the main source of information about crime, the most important arena for the public debate on legal issues and an actor who can run campaigns on criminal policy issues, being a "people's court"

A collective name for very different activities: journalistic news media, entertainment media, social media.

## Lesson 2.

Crime journalism is *not a simple mirror* of crime development

Factors such as news values, the commercialization of the media market, politicians' need to look active and efficient, the ideas about crime and crime policy at the time in question: all play a role.

## Lesson 3.

The police are the main source of journalism on crime. If they, as well as journalists, are affected by so called tunnel vision, the media can contribute to miscarriage of justice.

But journalists can also reveal miscarriage of justice, however, such arduous journalism requires resources - and therefore too little is done in the age in which we live when serious journalism suffers of tight economic conditions.

# Crime news are popular

- As fiction, as “real life”, as news stories: infotainment, pod-casts
- Information? Scrutinizing? Populism?
- What defines news?
- Divergence, deviation from the expected, from the “normal”
- Crime news fits into media dramaturgy

# Well suited to be dramatized

- Personalized
- Fictionalized
- Series: the system of justice facilitates the chain of news
- What defines a new story?
- Deviation from the expected, from the normal

# Media content is produced through various choices

- Different media live under different conditions
- All journalism is incorporated into a media framework
- Editorial environment, individual journalist, audience perception.

## Behind the exposure?

- Commercial news values
- Comes in contact with existential questions
- Creates the conflict between good and evil



# It forms our opinions

- Crime news consumption forms our understanding of crime and deviance, legal processes
- Media content about crime also informs politicians and contributes to crime policies
- Media have always shown an interest in crime, through history

# The importance of serious crime journalism

... because of the legal rights of the individual

- and the necessity of knowledgeable and competent journalists who can report about crime and crime development
- and scrutinise the legal system including the police

# Complex interplay

- Between media and deviance and crime
- Between the institution of journalism and various of society's other institutions
- Better understood by applying a sociological and historical perspective

# Media, crime and source criticism

Source-critical problems in legal processes and in crime journalism are also relevant for source review in other areas.

Incorrect identification, false testimonies, false criminal reports and false acknowledgments

# The struggle of the right to criticize

- In Sweden during the 1800: about the right for reporters to participate at trials
- The role as the third (fourth) estate
- The rise of the ethical regulation, the self censorship

# Changes in Swedish crime policy

- Over the course of the 20th century until today: extensive social changes
- Crime levels have increased quite dramatically
- Liberalisation of legislation, ceased in the mid 1980's
- A first phase preferring use of treatment
- A second phase of sharpening of criminal sentencing, still ongoing

# Swedish Crime reporting: a historical development

- Crime stories in four dailies during 1915 – 1995, a longitudinal study
- A series of contextualised, cross-sectional studies
- 1955, 1975, 1995
- The discourse related to young offenders and societal responses
- Media treatment of the juvenile crime issue is analysed in relation to crime policy documents
- Several methods are used

# Findings

- The interest for crime shows variations over time, no straight development curve
- And increased number of pictures
- There is NO correspondence between crime reporting and crime statistics - for several reasons...



# Patterns in crime news

- Patterns seem to be consistent over time
- Violent crime is overrepresented
- Sex crime (today) a category in favour
- Crime against property is underrepresented
- Male dominance: in media as well as in crime statistics, with some variations in time - depending on cultural changes?

# Compared with international research findings

- The findings varies dependent on the definition of crime news, the media and the market
- Between 5-25% of the total editorial content
- More crime in populars than in qualities



Criminals and the police  
in 1950-, 1970-  
1990th and 2010th  
news



# 1950th: "The people's home"

- After WW2, the welfare state
- "The Black sheep"
- Media at the time: radio and the press
- The young generation a concern, young boys especially
- Biology and social environmental
- A male world, not much space for the victims
- Lack of good institutions

# 1950th: the efficient police

- The capable police:
- Energetic, fast, effective
- Exposes themselves to great risk
- Cooperate with the journalist: a symbiosis
- First female police officers in 1957
- Criminal investigation makes progress
- Announcements to the villains in the papers

Just passed their examination 1950th



# The question at this period: why do they commit crime?

- Rising crime curves and welfare curves in parallel ...
- But strong faith in a prosperous future
- Research will give us all the
- answers
- Optimism about treatment

# 1970th: class society

- Welfare is built, but the institutions get criticized
- Injustice causes crime, crime is defined as "social problem"
- Institutions and correctional treatment is seen as a problem
- Media at the time: tv (2 channels), radio, press
- "Raggare" (member of a gang of youth who ride about in big cars)
- The drama at Norrmalmstorg, drugs



# The drama at Norrmalmstorg August 1973

- First live broadcast crime incident in Sweden
- Jan Olsson & Clark Olofsson in the bank
- Stockholm Syndrome: the hostage establishes a relation to the offenders



# Criminals become celebrities....



# The question at this period: how to humanize the treatment of offenders?

- The question of class, social conditions determine
- Demands for reformation of institutions
- Demands on new treatments
- Equality a question:

No correlation between female offenders of serious crimes in the press and crime statistics

# 1970th: a tough and a tired police

1. repression, expressions of power and oppression

2. suburban heroic social workers

Investigations about the police organisation, more female police officers

And two kind of roles for journalists:

1. Crime reporter

2. Critique of social conditions

Journalism's scrutiny task is formulated in various investigations

# 1990th: back to punishment

- Effective sanctions?
- Preventive measures?
- Back to the ideology of punishment
- Youth crime, violence, racism
- Ethnic stereotypes
- Youth gangs conquers the cities
- Cause of criminal behaviour: from structures to the individual

## 1990th: the insufficient police

- Combats Mc-gangs, neo-Nazis,
- skinheads, immigrant gangs, football
- hooligans
- Under-dimensioned and powerless
- Zero tolerance: the model
- Citizens fear and the needs of the victims
- Too few police officers – and rotten eggs

# Examples of lack of correlations

- 1950th: the crime curve points upwards, at the same time an implicit optimistic belief in the future and solving the crime problem

Research will do it!

- 1970th and female violent offenders: discussion about women's place in society– caused also attention toward women and crime

# 2000<sup>th</sup>: globalisation and fragmentation

- Sensations, scandals, spectacle
- Global (transnational) threats
- Infotainment-genres: soup operas, reality program, real-crime
- The victim and the ever expanding group of victims, the personal becomes public
- Media court and media judge

Social media and net forum, a fragmented public



# 2000th: the improved police force

## Two pictures

- 1) Self-critical, modern, open, flexible and good at changing itself: demands resources and development
- 2) Ineffective, hard to reform

**Organized crime**, global network,  
international gangs, terror threat

**Technique** (DNA, surveillance cameras),  
expanded control of citizens

Tv-program: Wanted, The Murders, Crime of the week

# Victims perspective

- Crime victim in the centre
- Crime authorities have
- emerged
- Crime question as arty politics
- Mediatization, adaption to media's production, format
- Symbolic legislation

# **”Shootings in Central Malmö – man shot”**

(Malmö, 13 June 2016)



# Crime one of the most important questions during the Swedish election in 2018

- Migration and crime get connected
- Study about the reporting of shootings in the big cities:
  - Normalisation of murder with guns
  - Measures discussed:  
Police mobilization, monitoring, surveillance, increased punishment

# Media's different roles

- Megaphone for the police
- Critique of the judicial system
- People's court
- Politicians channel
- Social media: lack of responsible publisher

# Literature



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