

“Youth Crime out of Control”: Is it reality or media hype?

**A Tasmanian perspective on the print media’s
portrayal of Youth Crime and Ashley Youth
Detention Centre.**

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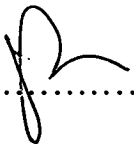
*A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the degree of
Masters of Criminology and Corrections*

*School of Sociology and Social Work
University of Tasmania*

November 2011


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Abstract

As an employee at Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) I have been a keen follower of the Tasmanian media's portrayal of crime generally and youthful offending and AYDC specifically, for 17 years.

During that time I have literally read hundreds of Tasmanian media stories relating to youth crime or AYDC and from that had developed the anecdotal view that the Tasmanian print media's reporting of crime, youth crime and AYDC is generally biased. In order to test that hypothesis I reviewed every Tasmanian newsprint article written on youth crime and AYDC during the period July 2007 to June 2009. In all there were 267 articles from the three Tasmanian newspapers. To the best of my knowledge this is the only study of its kind conducted in Tasmania.

In examining those articles I formed the view that not only were they inflammatory but they were intentionally so. This begs the question as to why journalists who are meant to report the news without fear or favour, and who are required to work within a code of conduct (Appendix 1) would intentionally be pushing the view that crime is out of control, that it is not safe to walk down the street after dark and generally instil fear into people?

To try and make sense of why newspapers would deliberately set out to mislead and in turn frighten their readers and by osmosis the general population we need to understand a little of the history of newspapers particularly in relation to what they believe sells papers. It is also helpful to know who owns the papers and what their motives are in printing them. It is not always about just selling papers and making a profit. Understanding the theories of media influence and ways in which bias can be introduced are important to understanding how public opinion can be formed. There is no doubt the media play a part in forming our views on most things, including crime, and while the reporting is balanced and our views reflect that, all is fine, however, when our views are being skewed by biased reporting we become fearful when we need not. We devalue ourselves and our society by alienating and ostracising people based on what we read in the paper. In fact this can occur for whole sections of the community such as young people, aborigines, people with mental health issues and other marginalised groups.

The findings support the original hypothesis that Tasmanian newspapers are biased in their reporting of crime, youth crime and towards AYDC. In relation to reporting crime, youth crime and AYDC Tasmanian newspapers are not only biased by the number of negative articles they print in comparison to balanced articles but they also publish articles that highlight the bad and often omit or diminish any mitigating circumstances. Because articles are inflammatory and biased readers are left more fearful of crime than they need be and young people in particular are seen to be more violent and dangerous than is the case. The research also highlighted the regional view each paper took. This meant that issues took on greater significance based on proximity rather than severity or importance.

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Introduction

It is generally accepted that what we know about the world, apart from our own experiences is shaped by the media. Very few of us have had first hand experience of war or terrorism, very few of us have been the victim of a serious crime or even witnessed a serious crime however, every day of the week we witness war, terrorism, plane crashes and shootings in the media. The reality of these events and our responses to them are experienced vicariously through the word pictures created by journalists and the visual and auditory realism of television reports (Field nd). The media generally has full control of what is and isn't reported and as such are able to influence the reading, viewing or listening public. The Media Awareness Network (2011) has listed eight areas that allow for news stories to be influenced by media outlets. They are; bias through the selection of stories, through placement of the story, by the size and tone of the headline, through the choice of photos, captions or camera angle, through the use of names and titles, through the use of statistics, the source of the story and by word choice or tone.

This is not to say that all media reporting is biased or sensationalised. Johnson (2000) draws a distinction between "quality journalism and tabloid journalism"; Quality journalism in the contemporary media is journalism that is addressed to an upper-middle class, white collar audience. The well established broadsheet newspapers such as the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* are considered to produce quality journalism. Erikson, Baranek and Chan (1991: 35) describe it as a news ideology whose purpose "is to translate and generalize, not to choose this opinion or that. In other words, news naturalizes the (fairly narrow) terrain on which different sectional ideologies can contend-it constantly maps the limits of controversy". On the contrary, tabloid journalism is meant to be sensationalist, and trivial and, as such have little serious influence over upper-middle class white collar audiences. The assumption that a more simplistic program will have a greater appeal to the public has contemporary roots in the success of tabloid newspapers in Britain (Johnson 2000). The same can also be said for television, or the radio, there is some quality journalism however like newspapers the majority is sensationalised to increase the number of viewers or listeners (Johnson 2000). This is particularly true with youth crime and particularly youth crime involving aborigines, immigrants and other disenfranchised and marginalised groups (White and Alder 1994). A study conducted in Western Australia found that 87 per cent of newspaper articles that identified young people as aborigines were primarily about crime while in NSW there have been concerns in regard to the reporting of young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. "The New South Wales Ethnic Affairs Commission, in a report on fights between young people in Marrickville and Bankstown, was highly critical of what it saw as superficial and selective reporting by the media which presented the conflict in racial terms" (Cunneen and White 2002: 91).

In Tasmania there are three daily newspapers, The Mercury, The Examiner and The Advocate. All three papers format and reporting style would be termed "tabloid journalism". The Mercury is printed in Hobart and as such is referred to, and statistically reported on as a capital city daily newspaper, however, the reality is it is a regional paper servicing Southern Tasmania. The Examiner services Northern Tasmania and The Advocate services North-West Tasmania. Each tends to report the

news regionally and as such have developed a parochial following that is generally counter productive to the state as a whole. This is particularly so between The Mercury and The Examiner. Any suggestion, that one part of the state is “getting a better deal” or “preferential treatment” to the other can once again raise old wounds. Both papers thrive on this parochialism and “champions the cause” for their respective regions. A recent example is the question of where Australian Rules Football will be held in the state. The Examiner in support of its region, champion the cause for Aurora Stadium, which is in Launceston (Edwards 2011). The Mercury argues that Bellerive Oval in Hobart should be the venue (Stubbs 2011). If it is not about football it is rock concerts or world title fights. These examples highlight the problem of parochialism and regional reporting. As such we find that what may be front page in one region will, for example, be on page five in another. Another compounding rivalry is that The Mercury is owned by News Limited and The Examiner and The Advocate are owned by the Fairfax Corporation.

In this day and age we tend to take newspapers for granted and generally give little thought to how and why they came about. The Encarta Dictionary describes a newspaper as a publication containing news and comment on current events, together with features and advertisements that usually appear daily or weekly and is printed on large sheets that are folded together. Mitchell Stephens (nd) writes that the first newspapers were a European invention first printed in the early 1600s. The printed newspaper spread rapidly and by 1620 Frankfurt, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin and Amsterdam all had a printed weekly newspaper. The first printed newspaper in England was printed in 1621. At first newspapers printed whatever information was supplied without any checking and as such the news could be conflicting. To make the stories more readable a system of editing was introduced in England in 1622. The ideal of freedom of the press was first put forward by John Milton in 1644. This freedom was generally controlled by the governments of the day. Currently Australian newspapers are guided by a Statement of Principles (Appendix 2) from the Australian Press Council. Even so, this does not stop newspapers from using crime, violence, emotion and sex to sell papers; it has been going on since the start of the penny press in the early 1800s and continues to this day.

Many see the print media as being somewhat benign but there is ample evidence to show the print media can have a big impact on how we think and act. Bernard Schissel (1997:19) quotes Kellner in his book *Blaming Children: Youth Crime, Moral Panics and the Politics of Hate*:

Radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood: our notion of what it means to be male or female: our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of “us” and “them”. Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths and resources through which we insert ourselves into this culture. Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the power of the forces that be and show the powerless they must stay in their places or be destroyed.

Some may see this as histrionic but there can be no doubt the media has influence. To explain this influence a number of theories have been developed to explain how and why the media impacts on us. The most common and well known view is that people, particularly young people can become desensitised to violence as a result of media exposure to violence (The Australian Psychological Association of Australia 2000). But not only can the print media influence individuals through desensitisation they can also influence the majority of people through constantly following a theme almost to the point of it being a mantra. For example the idea that crime is more prevalent by highlighting instances of crime rather than the fact that generally we are safe to walk the streets or that the hospital system is unsafe once again by highlighting exceptions such as a person who has a long wait for an ambulance when generally ambulances arrive in a timely manner (Bryan 2011).

In relation to crime most people have a strong opinion and generally, that opinion is shaped by what they have heard, seen or read in the media and in combination with their beliefs and attitudes solidifies their position on the matter. This is supported and encouraged by those with a vested interest in portraying crime as “crime is out of control”. For example the media portray crime as ‘out of control’ in order to sell newspapers or increase the number of viewers or listeners and police use crime ‘out of control’ to increase police numbers or to condone poor police practices (Grabosky and Wilson 1989). Politicians use the “get tough on crime” mantra to assist their election prospects (Wilson 1998). Whilst academics provide ‘expert opinion’ and at the same time improve their public exposure as do the clergy and other right thinking individuals (Poynting and Morgan 2007).

In relation to young people it would appear that every generation of youth is seen as being lawless and out of control. The following is taken from Pearson (1983: 12) and is a collection of quotes from the English Conservative Party’s Annual Conferences of 1958 and 1978. In 1958 the Conference heard about “this sudden increase in crime and brutality, which is so foreign to our nature and our country”. “Is it not a fact”, asked one delegate, “that our wives and mothers, if they are left alone in the house at night, are frightened to open their doors?” There were calls to bring back flogging “to deflate these cocksure young men”. At the 1978 Conference, twenty years on, the delegates again highlighted the issue through statements such as; “the leniency shown in the past by the Courts of this country”; the “lack of parental control, interest and support”; the “sex, savagery, blood and thunder” in films and television; and the “smooth, smug and sloppy sentimentalists who contribute very largely to the wave of crime”.

The broad public view that “crime” generally and “youth crime” in particular are out of control is not supported by the facts. Crime rates are not soaring nor is crime worse than ever and the idea that criminals are getting away with more crime and receiving lighter sentences is not supported by the data. Data from 2002 to 2005 show a drop in reported crime while serious crime has also dropped (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). At a time of decreasing levels of crime prison numbers are increasing (O’Toole and Eyland 2005) and many sentences, particularly for serious crime, are also increasing (Walker, 1989).

The talk of crime generally invokes some sort of response which is often seen as a ‘fear of crime’. The fear of crime is an abstract concept that can vary from person to

person and between situations (Enders, Jennett and Tulloch in Lee and Farrell 2009). It is this abstractness that challenges legislators and police. It is easy to make and enforce laws that address crime and deal with offenders, however making people feel safer is far more difficult. Enders, Jennett and Tulloch (2009) conducted a study of the fear of crime in the Sydney suburbs of Bondi and Marrickville. Their research did support the view above, that the fear of crime is personal and situational however they found that building a sense of community helps reduce people's fear of crime. This can be done through such things as community activities and community policing.

Newspapers also play an important part in shaping the views of the community, particularly in relation to crime. When newspapers continually report crime in an unbalanced and sensationalized way they can make people fearful and this can impact negatively on their quality of life.

Sensational media coverage of crime would not be an issue if it was seen as mere entertainment with no further consequence but it is not just entertainment. It has the capacity to influence policy; Buttram in (Cunneen and White 2007:82) states that:

Current policy is flawed by political expediency and 'knee jerk responses to perceived problems ... talk back radio is a principal medium for propagating the urban myths about juvenile crime. Members of parliament are regularly invited to discuss law and order issues on these shows and are commonly badgered by the hosts and radio audiences to give a commitment to toughening the government's stance toward youth lawlessness.

It is easier for successive governments to adopt "a get tough on crime stance" inflamed by sensationalized media reporting than deal with the underlying social issues (Cunneen and White 2007) such as poverty and social exclusion.

The Media's portrayal of Crime

So why does the media target crime?

In the introduction to the book *Youth, Crime and the Media* (Bessant and Hil 1997) the authors clearly put the media's agenda in relation to young people with this statement, "Australia's media is full of 'bad' news about young people. Official inquiries and expert opinion feed media reports that young people today are more offensive, disagreeable and worse off than ever before". While the media's portrayal of young people is generally negative its portrayal of youth criminality is not only negative but inflammatory, "Violent youth crime on the rise"(The Australian, 19 July 2008), "A potent mix of alcohol, Face book and You Tube has been blamed for a spike in the thuggish behaviour of Australia's youth"(9news, 8 July 2008) and "Rampant teen boozing has fuelled a dramatic surge in youth violence in Victoria, according to crime research"(Herald Sun, 10 July 2008).

Many studies have confirmed the media has a preoccupation with juvenile matters particularly matters pertaining to juvenile crime. A study conducted in Western Australia between 1990 and 1992 looked at 2613 newspaper articles and found that 63 percent of those articles related to crime while only 2 percent dealt with high achievement and 1 percent with homelessness (Cunneen and White, 1995).

The media are a business, their owners and shareholders expect they make a profit, and to make a profit they need to sell newspapers or attract listeners or viewers. It is not responsible, balanced journalism that sells papers or attracts listeners or viewers instead it is 'bad news' that attracts attention from the public (Johnson 2000, Rushe 2006, Cunneen and White 1995, Bessant and Hil 1997). The 'bad news' stories include riots, particularly if they include a demonised group such as indigenous youth, youth gangs taking over the streets, musical or party phenomena like raves and rock and roll, drug and to a lesser degree alcohol abuse, hooning, racial clashes and crime (Cunneen 2008, Poynting and Morgan 2007). From time to time young people will be involved in all of the above and therefore leave themselves open to 'bad news' stories. This is an opportunity for the media to claim that young people are lawless and then imply that the general public are at risk from these young people. This can then create what Stan Cohen, terms a "moral panic" (Poynting and Morgan 2007). Cohen first described this phenomenon in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1973). The book was "an analysis of the furore surrounding the clashing of youth subcultures, the mods and the rockers, at the English seaside in the late sixties" (Poynting and Morgan 2007).

Who are the print media in Australia?

In the past 15 years the ownership of the print media in Australia has been concentrated into a few hands. In 1926 there were 26 capital city newspapers published daily, these 26 newspapers were owned by 21 independent owners (Jolly, 2007). In 2011 the number of capital city newspapers has been reduced to 12 and 11 of them are owned by two organisations. News Corporation under its Australian

subsidiary News Limited owns seven of the twelve and John Fairfax Holdings own four.

Table 1: Shows the media ownership and circulation of Australia’s metropolitan newspapers in 2006. (Jolly, 2007)

| National/State Paper | Newspaper | Owner | Daily Circulation in 2006 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| National | The Australian | News Limited | 131,538 |
| Queensland | The Courier Mail | News Limited | 216,075 |
| New South Wales | The Daily Telegraph | News Limited | 396,497 |
| Victoria | Herald Sun | News Limited | 554,700 |
| South Australia | The Advertiser | News Limited | 195,903 |
| Tasmania | The Mercury | News Limited | 48,886 |
| Northern Territory | NT News | News Limited | 21,172 |
| New South Wales | Sydney Morning Herald | Fairfax | 212,078 |
| Victoria | The Age | Fairfax | 201,000 |
| Canberra | The Canberra Times | Fairfax | 36,027 |
| National | The Financial Review | Fairfax | 86,182 |
| West Australia | The West Australian | Seven West Media | 205,610 |

When elected in 1996 the Howard Government deregulated media ownership because “At that time, the views earlier espoused in America that media ownership regulation was anachronistic and that business and the public would benefit from a deregulatory regime, were iterated” (Jolly, 2007: Executive Summary). As a result of the deregulation of the print media ownership laws by the Howard Government and the ensuing takeovers by Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited and John Fairfax Holdings now sees 89 per cent of the Australian capital city and national print media owned by two companies. News limited own 68 per cent and John Fairfax Holdings 21 per cent.

In Tasmania, Fairfax own The Examiner and The Advocate while The Mercury is owned by News Corporation (Independent Australia, 2011). The Mercury is based in Hobart. In 2006 it had a week day circulation of 131,000 and its readership generally covers the southern region of Tasmania. The Examiner, which is based in Launceston and whose readership covers the northern region of Tasmania had a week day circulation of 99,000 in 2006. The Advocate, which is based in Burnie and covers the north-west region of Tasmania, had a week day circulation of 61,000 in 2006 (Press Council, 2009).

Therefore the total week day circulation of newspapers in Tasmania is 291,000, The Mercury’s circulation comprises 45 per cent of that total, The Examiner’s circulation share is 34 per cent and The Advocate’s circulation share is 21 per cent.

There is ample evidence to demonstrate that media reporting of crime is biased for the primary purpose of increasing sales so how has that transpired?

How “Jack the Ripper” started it all!

The Ripper murders committed in London’s East End towards the end of the 18th Century precipitated the media’s preoccupation with crime. The murders were particularly ghastly and occurred at a time when the mass-circulation of newspapers was just commencing. A reform to the Stamps Act in 1855 meant that newspapers were able to be sold for as little as a halfpenny (wikipedia 2009).

There had been equally horrific multiple murders in the East End in 1811 and 1828 however they did not become common knowledge whereas the Ripper Murders of 1890 were covered extensively by the media and therefore gained a far wider audience. The media soon realised that crime sold newspapers, Sherwood (2009:2) stated that the media “coverage demanded general concern. It was an inherently sensational event providing all the suspense of a novel, with each new slaying comprising a chapter. This crime transformed into theatre, with the reading public acting as audience”.

It was a letter received by the London Central News Agency signed “Jack the Ripper” that gave the media the “hook” they needed to draw the reader into the “theatre”. Many believe the killer’s nickname was an invention by the media to “make for a more interesting story that could sell more papers” (wikipedia 2009:11). This has since become standard media practice with a number of serial killers being dubbed with a nickname, for example, the “Boston Strangler”, “Son of Sam” and a recent English one the “Yorkshire Ripper”.

Prior to the mass media’s portrayal of “Jack the Ripper” the majority of people only knew local news, which was normally passed on by word of mouth. With the introduction of the mass media people had access to information from outside their area which they were unable to check so therefore, they had to accept what the media said was true. Since then a number of theorists have examined the impact the media has on society and from that a number of theoretical explanations have been put forward to explain the effect media exposure has on both individuals and the community as a whole.

Theoretical explanations for media reporting.

A number of psychologically based theories have been proposed to explain the complex links between media exposure and its effect on readers, listeners and viewers. Most of these have been developed as a result of a growing concern that media violence has a negative impact on young people. These provide a theoretical explanation for the impact of the media on society both at an individual and collective level.

Cultivation theory is an attempt to understand and explain the influence of the media as a source of broadly shared images and messages about the world and its people in that it cultivates specific value systems, ideologies and perspectives in such areas as materialism, consumerism, ethnocentrism, individualism, capitalism and social responsibility. It can also shape how we think about ourselves and others through age, gender and class (The Australian Psychological Society 2000). Therefore “cultivation

theory holds the view that the popular media, such as television, has the power to influence our view of the world and it is primarily responsible for our perceptions of day to day norms and reality” Infante, Rancer and Womak in (Field nd: 3)). This is a powerful statement that goes to the heart of this paper. Grabosky and Wilson (1989:1) make the point that “we hardly need labour the point that the news media are an extremely powerful influence in Australian public life. To a great extent, they set the agenda for public discourse”.

Social learning theory and social cognitive models address the way individuals model the behaviour they are exposed to by the media. A classic example is that children, in particular, can ‘act out’ violent behaviour they are exposed to by the media and if continually exposed to violent behaviour will become desensitised to violence and disinhibited from behaving aggressively (The Australian Psychological Society 2000). Strasburger (2005:2) states “there are more than 1000 studies linking exposure to media violence to real-life aggressive behaviour”. Strasburger goes on to state “the connection between media violence and real-life aggression is nearly as strong as the link between smoking and lung cancer, and stronger than the connection between lead and IQ, homework and achievement, calcium and bone mass, and exposure to asbestos and cancer”. There are also links between the media and increased teen suicide (this is taken from American and European studies, to the credit of the Australian media suicides are generally not reported as suicide), an increased risk of earlier sexual initiation, an increase in learning problems as a result of passive viewing and an increase in Australians who are overweight or obese through passive viewing and the influence of advertising (Strasburger 2005).

Desensitisation comes from prolonged media exposure to violence that “may lead to a reduction in emotional responsiveness to real world violence, to an increased acceptance of violence in everyday life, and to the development of callous attitudes towards victims of crime” (The Australian Psychological Society 2000:17). Strasburger (2005:2) believes that media desensitisation to violence leads to the belief by many that “violence is an acceptable solution to every day problems”.

Berkowitz (in The Australian Psychological Society 2000) uses the term cognitive priming as an adjunct to Social Learning Theory, describing it as the immediate and short-term effect of media exposure. For example you may read a newspaper article about an indigenous man who has raped a woman. In the short-term you might find this disturbing however your views on indigenous men generally would not change. If on the other hand you were being constantly exposed to events like this your view regarding indigenous men would probably change.

The social-development model takes the view that cultivation and social learning theories are one dimensional and that the reader or viewer is passive in their decision making when in fact they have a range of views gained throughout a person’s life that will filter the raw media data (The Australian Psychological Society 2000). An example is where a person is aware, possibly through personal experience or study, that what is being reported is an exaggeration and/or a generalisation.

In the following statement The Australian Psychological Association (2000:9) makes the point that the media are not a passive entity randomly reporting the news:

It is widely acknowledged that the media are not a simple mirror of society reflecting the world out there. If this were so, journalists would simply need to point their camera or tape recorder in a random direction and let the tape roll. Rather, active decisions are taken at every stage of the process of producing and transmitting media material, regarding what should be included and what should be omitted, and how and when the content should be presented. It can be argued that the media have the potential to play an active part in shaping and framing our perception of the world, and indeed in affecting the nature of that world.

As such they are able to shape the attitudes, values and beliefs of their audience.

In relation to crime what is reported and why?

The majority of crime reporting by the media pertains to what is termed 'street crime' such as theft and assaults. "Meanwhile, the destruction of the environment, domestic violence, white collar crime, and occupational health and safety crimes tend not to receive the same kind of coverage or treatment by the mainstream media outlets"(White and Haines 2007: 8). As a result the media portrays a sensationalised view of crime that is individualised, random, bizarre, and violent (White and Perrone 2007). Nicholas Cowdery, a QC and former NSW Director of Public Prosecutions in his book *Getting Justice Wrong* (2001) makes the point that bad news sells papers by comparing the media reporting of legal and illegal drugs. Even though legal drugs, tobacco, alcohol and therapeutic drugs cost the community \$22 billion and 24,400 lives annually, as against illegal drugs which account for 700 deaths and an economic cost, including property crime and law enforcement of less than \$2 billion. It is the illegal drugs which receive the greatest media attention.

Cowdery (2001: 30) states

Yes illegal drugs are a problem. Their use is often unpleasant and usually destructive and it brings unattractive and unwanted behaviours. But let us keep them in perspective. Let us not encourage the witch-hunts conducted by talkback and tabloids with their vested interests in looking at the world in black and white. Stories about goodness do not sell, except in churches and at award ceremonies. Stories about evil are lapped up. They are easy sensational fodder for talkback. And nasty drug stories are open to the stroking of other latent prejudices and fears. Illegal drugs are sold by people of all ethnic backgrounds.

The view that crime and youth crime in particular is reported in a biased manner by the media is well documented (Cowdery 2001, White and Haines 2007, Cunneen and White 2002, Cunneen and White 2007, Bessant and Hill 1997 et al).

The sources for most news reporting of youth crime are often limited to the official version of events. The two major sources of information for stories relating to crime come from the police and the courts. Sercombe in (Cunneen and White 2007) suggested the reason for this is the information is always available, it is cheap, and it is easy to get. The connection between journalists and the police is often a "symbiotic

relationship" (White and Perrone, 2007) that allows journalists access to information they consider newsworthy while allowing the police to push their mantra crime generally and youth crime in particular being out of control. It also ensures that any transgression by police does not make the papers or the incident is minimised. An example of this can be found on page three of the Examiner (Dawtre, 2011) on the 23 June 2011. The major story on page three comprised of an article titled "Manager guilty of porn movie charges" the story included a large photo, 12 centimetres by 22 centimetres, of the manager leaving the court and 46 centimetres of four centimetre type while beside it was an article titled "Officer charged with assault" relating to a charge that a Tasmanian Police Officer had "capsicum sprayed" a 13 year old boy. This article had a small photo, four centimetres by five centimetres and 10 centimetres of four centimetre type.

Figure 1: News article "Manager guilty of porn movie charges" The Examiner Thursday June 23 2011

THE EXAMINER, Thursday, June 23, 2011 - 3

Manager guilty of porn movie charges

By ZARA DAWTREY
Court reporter

THE manager of a Launceston adult shop has been found guilty of possessing hardcore pornographic movies with the intention of selling them.

Magistrate Tim Hill yesterday rejected the man's defence that he only had the movies on site at the York Street shop because he was "in between houses".

Geoffrey Allan Taylor, 45, had pleaded not guilty to one count of selling an unclassified film, one of selling a film refused classification — namely Military Rubber — and one of selling an X-rated film.

The matter was heard in the Launceston Magistrates Court yesterday.

Detective Senior Constable Peter Roberts testified he went to the Adult Basement in April last year to investigate, prompting Taylor to produce a black box filled with DVDs and a separate collection of their covers.

Listing such titles as Older Man Perversions, Huge Ladies Collection 3 and Big Beautiful Chubbies, Detective Constable Roberts told the magistrate that 44 DVDs turned out to be unclassified.

A movie must be classified before it can be sold in Australia.

The sale of X-rated movies is illegal in Tasmania.

Movies refused classification are also banned from sale nationwide.

Taking the stand to testify in his own defence, Taylor said he had not intended to sell the movies, and that they were purely for his own use.

He said he kept the numbered discs stored separately to the correspondingly-numbered cases in the locked blacked box because he did not want his teenage son watching the movies.

He said the shop went to considerable effort to remove hundreds of free X-rated DVDs that came with adult magazines from X-rating-friendly Canberra.

He told Mr Hill he bought a box of DVDs from the Evandale Market a couple of years ago, describing the selection as "a mixed bag" of music, films and pornography.

"Huge Ladies 3? A very mixed bag," Mr Hill offered.

Police prosecutor Kim Hibble told Taylor he did not believe his story, suggesting the discs and cases were numbered because that was normal practice in the DVD sales and rental industries.

"If you go into Sanity or Myer and pick out, say, Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, you take the case to the counter and the sales staff get the corresponding disc out and put it in that case," he said.

Taylor said he also kept the discs separate to their cases to make them easily transportable.

"So when you go visiting,



Launceston adult shop manager Geoffrey Allan Taylor leaves the Launceston Magistrates Court yesterday after being found guilty. Picture: PHILLIP BRIGGS

Officer charged with assault

A still from online footage of the incident.

A TASMANIA Police officer who used capsicum spray against a Burnie 13-year-old has been charged with assault.

An internal investigation into the Australia Day incident — revealed by The Examiner — saw the report referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Deputy Commissioner Scott Tilyard yesterday confirmed the DPP had since advised that the 25-year-old Burnie-based constable should be charged.

The officer will be charged by summons with two counts of common assault.

The officer has been assigned to non-operational duties, which means he will not have operational contact with the public pending the outcome of the court proceedings," Mr Tilyard said.

A review of the guidelines relating to the use of OC spray is almost complete and the recommendations will be considered shortly.

B1 and B2 back in safe territory

ADELAIDE — After three days in the hands of thieves the ABC's Bananas in Pyjamas have been returned to the broadcaster's Adelaide headquarters.

A 24-year-old man and a 23-year-old woman were charged with aggravated serious criminal trespass, theft and property damage after B1 and B2 were taken from the ABC's Collinswood building.

This highlights the issue that young people do not have the means to defend themselves, the press are unlikely to be pursued in court by poor young offenders

regardless of how biased or unfair their treatment was. Cunneen and White (2007:81) state that:

Young people themselves are in a particularly disadvantaged position in terms of having their own opinions or matters heard in the media. They have neither official legitimacy, nor the institutional means of making their views known.

The majority of the literature reviewed indicates the media portrays youth offending as being out of control and often uses inflammatory language to fuel that view. Hogg and Brown in (Cunneen and White 2002) refer to this as “law and order commonsense” which makes a number of assumptions that include;

- **Crime rates are soaring:** the Australian Bureau of Statistics Crime (ABS) and Safety statistics for 2005 indicate crime rates are falling. In the 12 months prior to April 2005 the ABS found the overall household victimisation prevalence rate was 6.2 per cent in comparison to 8.9 per cent in 2002 for crimes against the person the victimisation prevalence rate for 2005 remain unchanged from the 2002 figure of 5.3 per cent. The Tasmanian household crime victimisation rate for 2005 was 4.5 per cent the lowest in Australia and down from 9.5 per cent in 2002, while the personal crime victimisation rate for 2005 was 4.6 per cent down from 5.0 per cent in 2002.
- **Crime is worse than ever:** the prevalence of serious crimes such as robberies and assaults decreased between 2002 and 2005. Figures for Australia showed a 0.1 per cent drop from 4.8 per cent in 2005 to 4.7 per cent in 2002. While in Tasmania the prevalence was 5.0 per cent in 2002 and 4.4 per cent in 2005. In addition 88 per cent of victims reported that a weapon had not been used and 77 per cent reported not being injured.
- **The criminal justice system is soft on crime:** at a time of decreasing crime statistics the number of people being incarcerated is increasing dramatically. The Australian prison population increased by over 50 per cent from 15,866 in 1993 to 23, 555 in 2003 (O’Toole and Eyland 2005). The increase was even higher in Tasmania where the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) figures show the total prison population in Tasmania increased by 70.9 percent from 265 in 1993 to 453 in 2003. In that period the percentage of the Tasmanian prison population on remand increased from 13.6 per cent to 21.6 per cent while the Australian figures for the same time went from 12 per cent to 20.5 per cent. This would indicate that Magistrates were taking a much harder line in relation to granting bail.
- **The criminal justice system is loaded in favour of criminals:** the majority of people incarcerated either in the youth justice or adult systems share some, or in some cases, all of the following family and personal factors, low socio-economic status, unemployment, family dysfunction, substance abuse, abuse of/by individual family members, learning difficulties and underachievement, homelessness, disadvantage, isolation and an inability to make friends, low self esteem and inappropriate anger responses (Stranger 2002). Whitney (1994 in Stranger 2002:21) encapsulates this..... “some will be reacting to utter chaos in

their family life, broken relationships, endemic poverty, poor housing or homelessness, a culture of unemployment and feelings of alienation". If anything the justice system is loaded against those involved in criminality.

- **There should be more police:** the Productivity Commission's *Report on government services 2006* showed there were a total of 45,201 full-time sworn officers based through out Australia in the 2004-05 period. This is a rate of 225 sworn officers per 100,000 persons up on the 2000-01 figure of 220 sworn officers per 100,000 persons (Australian Institute of Criminology 2006).
- **Police should have more powers:** police powers vary across jurisdictions which in itself can put people at odds with the law in each state. But generally police have the power to question you and ask your name and address, they have the power to search you and depending on the circumstances this could be a pat-down search a strip search or in some cases an internal body search, they can arrest and hold you, once arrested you can be interviewed. You can be photographed and put before an ID parade. They are able to fingerprint you and take body samples for DNA testing. By way of consequence they can warn you and apply "on-the-spot" fines for such things as graffiti, being drunk or offensive in public, shoplifting, talking or texting on your mobile phone while driving, careless driving and police ordering you to move away from a public place. The complexity of police powers is such the Victorian Legal Aid Commission have issued the booklet "Police powers: Your rights in Victoria" (2010). The booklet comprises 25 pages and is a general guide to help you when you deal with the police.
- **Courts should deliver tougher penalties:** most offenders sent to prison are burglars, thieves and motorists. Of the more than 23,000 sentenced offenders received into prison each year only about one in ten are likely to remain in custody for more than one year, most have been convicted of property offences (almost one third) or driving offences (almost one quarter). Fewer than one in six is a violent offender. Murderers serve an average of ten years in prison followed by long periods under community supervision. (Walker, 1989). Weatherburn and Grabosky (nd:3) make the following observation "the imposition of ever-tougher penalties and the appointment of ever-more police should not be thought of as the best means of getting value for our crime control dollar. Like headache tablets, an appropriate dose of police and penalties can be relied upon to provide some relief from the pain and suffering caused by crime. Consumption beyond the prescribed dose, however, does not necessarily deliver more relief".
- **Greater retribution against offenders will satisfy victim's demands:** Strang and Sherman (1997:1) make the point that "All over the modern world, victims are the forgotten players in the drama of criminal justice, exploited for their evidence but otherwise abandoned. Victims say that little attention is given to the repair of the harm they have experienced personally, or to the psychological and emotional consequences of victimisation". To give victims a greater say in the process many jurisdictions have introduced a process known as conferencing. This is a process that brings the victim and the offender together in a controlled environment in order to get an outcome that is beneficial to both

sides and also addresses the reasons for offending (Strang, 2001 and Zehr, 2002)

The reality is that youth crime in Australia has remained relatively stable over the past 30 years (Cunneen & White 2007, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research New South Wales 2008). Statistics also demonstrate that the majority of youth crime is generally comprised of property crime such as burglary and motor vehicle stealing and minor assaults. Very few young people are involved in serious offences such as murder and rape (Warner 2000, White and Alder 1994). Another important point is the majority of youth crime is committed by a minority of offenders (Mukherjee 1997, Cunneen & White 2007). This is supported by Warner (2000:3) who states that by “using data on crimes cleared and court appearance, it is possible to be quite clear, that contrary to many media reports, youth crime tends to be relatively minor in nature. Most young people do not offend seriously. Very few become serious and persistent offenders”.

Mukherjee (1997:2) made the following comment in a paper *Juvenile Crime: Overview of Changing Patterns* delivered to the Australian Institute of Criminology Conference in Adelaide.

Each year in Australia one out of every 20 juveniles is arrested for a property or violent crime. If we follow a cohort of juveniles from age 10 we would expect at least 30 percent of them to have a minimum of one arrest record by the time they cease to be a juvenile; a large majority of these will not have another arrest record. For those that have an arrest record each successive arrest record puts them in higher risk until they become chronic or persistent offenders. Research shows that by the time a juvenile has five arrest records the risk of his/her arrest for a subsequent offence increases to over 90 percent. This is not a particularly encouraging situation. The encouraging part is that only a fraction of youth population, 6 to 7 per cent, is expected to join the chronic or persistent offender group that is usually responsible for a substantial part of all crimes.

We can therefore take it that 93 to 94 per cent of young people transition through to adulthood without becoming chronic or persistent offenders. Mukherjee (1997:2) goes onto say “it is generally agreed that a small number of offenders commit a disproportionately large number of crimes”.

Rather than being the perpetrators of crime many young people are victims of crime. It is the people aged between 15 and 24 who are most likely to be a victim of a crime while people over 65 are least likely to be the victim of a crime against the person (Youth Action and Policy Association 2011). Figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) support this claim. Victimization rates for young people are much higher than those for elderly people the victimisation rates show that 9.9 per cent of people aged 15 to 19 years and 7.9 per cent for people aged 20 to 24 years were victims of a crime, compared to rates of 2.3 per cent for people aged 55 to 64 years and 0.8 per cent for those aged 65 and over (Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006).

Knowing that crime rates are lower than reported how are the media able to convince their audience that crime is “out of control? The answer is they write stories that contain bias.

Forms of media bias.

Every news story is influenced by the attitudes and background of its interviewers, writers, photographers and editors (Media Awareness Network 2011). This can lead to some form of bias in reporting regardless of how fair or even-handed a publication would like to be. This doesn't mean that all bias is deliberate but rather more a reflection of the reporter's views, however there are clearly areas of society that attract media attention that is biased. There are a number of ways that bias can be built into a story that can give it more significance or credit than it deserves. In an effort to highlight this issue The Media Awareness Network (2011) have identified eight 'journalistic techniques' that allow bias to 'creep in' to the news:

- Bias through selection and omission – an editor is able to choose which stories they will publish or not publish. They can also choose which parts of a story they will include or exclude. An example is the case of Kenneth Blake and Khristy Fisher who were both jailed on the 26 of August 2011 in the Launceston Supreme Court for causing harm to their one month old child. Blake received four years as the perpetrator and Fisher six months for not intervening. In The Examiner's reporting of the event journalist Zara Dawtrey (2011) outlines the injuries caused in graphic terms using quotes from the judges Comments in Passing Sentence (Crawford 2011) such as, "in a bad mood" to explain the motivation, and "considerable force must be expected" to explain the injuries. What Dawtrey did not write, and this was also included in the Comments in Passing Sentence was that both perpetrators were the victims of violent and broken homes. As a result of the initial reporting of the case Judge Crawford stated "they experienced harassment and social ostracism following their crime becoming public knowledge. Blake was assaulted, windows were smashed and a house defaced. Time in Prison may be difficult, particularly for Blake".
- Bias through placement – stories on the front page of a paper or at the start of a news bulletin are deemed to be more important than those placed further back and that influences a reader's or viewer's view on it's importance.
- Biases by headline – most readers scan the paper looking at the headlines and read those that attract their attention or raise an interest. Headlines can convey excitement where little exists or attract attention by approval or condemnation.
- Bias by photos, captions and camera angles – pictures of people can be flattering or unflattering and often the picture will be chosen to support the story.
- Bias through use of names and titles – terms such as "terrorist" or "freedom fighter" are clearly biased in the same way the term youth and now teen has become a term of bias. "Teen gets 8 years for hatchet attack" (Advocate 2009) "Brutal teen gets 8 years" (Mercury 2009).

- Bias through statistics and crowd counts – rarely are accurate counts of those attending an event given particularly if it is an unlawful gathering. Generally news articles will use such terms as hundreds or thousand ‘of people attended’.
- Bias by source control – a story may have bias built in to it by its source. For example police would have us believe crime is on the upsurge in order to increase their budget and police numbers, companies put out press releases that support their company as does the government and other agencies. Unless there is some sort of research done by the media outlet to provide balance then often what you have is the reporting of “vested interest”, this is commonly referred to as “public relations”.
- Word choice and tone – often the media will use words that are used to evoke emotion from the reader, words such as, spree, brutal, out of control are used to describe perpetrators while victims are often referred to as “a loving father” or “a mother of two”.

Another form of bias is the de-humanisation of young people by treating them collectively. This comes as an unexpected by-product of attempts by legislators to suppress the names of young people who find themselves in court. To address this suppression and retain what the media see as “newsworthy” the media use generic terms for young people such as youth and teen to describe young people individually and louts and hooligans when it is more than one. As a result all young people can be seen as perpetrators. When an adult offender is charged with a serious offence they are named and often a picture of the perpetrator is displayed.

Another area of bias can be termed the ‘ripple effect’ of the media. We all know that when we throw a stone into the middle of a pond it creates waves that move towards the ponds edge at the same time diminishing in size. The same happens with news stories. A good example is the ‘Brutal teen gets 8 years’ reported in December 2009. The crime occurred on the 15 March 2009 at a waste water treatment plant on the banks of the River Derwent which is on the outskirts of Hobart (see Figure 2). A 15 year old boy lured a 15 female school friend to the treatment plant and attacked her with a hatchet striking her on the head a number of times and then leaving her there. She was found some 24 hours later and survived her injuries. The young man was charged with, and found guilty of attempted murder for which he received eight years jail. He will be eligible for parole after serving four years of the eight year sentence. As he is under 18 years of age he is serving his sentence at Ashley Youth Detention Centre which is near Deloraine in Northern Tasmania.

Figure 2: Map of Tasmania indicating the positions of Hobart, Launceston and Burnie.



The case was heard in Hobart's Supreme Court and the findings were reported in all three Tasmanian regional newspapers. The Mercury (Hobart) which is closest to this particular event reported the findings on its front page with the large heading "Brutal teen gets 8 years" the front page also included a picture of the presiding judge, Chief Justice Ewan Crawford, and included 11 centimetres of six centimetre column. The article continued onto the second page with the heading "Brutal teens gets 8 years for hatchet attack on girl" and with 25 centimetres of four centimetre column (Mercury 2009). The Examiner (Launceston) ran the story on page five with the major heading "Eight years in custody for boy who attacked girl with axe" and the sub heading "Unprovoked attack described as a chilling crime a horrific one". The story also contained a picture of the Chief Justice and another of the treatment plant. It also included 45 centimetres of four centimetre column (Examiner 2009). While the Advocate's (Burnie) reporting was on page six with the heading "Teen gets 8 years for hatchet attack", it did not include a picture and included 24 centimetres of four centimetre column (Advocate 2009).

Another good example is the reporting of a riot at Risdon Prison on December 13 2009 that was front page in the Mercury, page six in the Examiner and wasn't reported in the Advocate until the 15th of December 2009. This phenomenon does not just apply to individual cases but it also applies to organisations. Ashley Youth Detention Centre receives more media attention from its local newspaper, the Examiner, than the other two newspapers.

Examples of media bias can be found in the following article which was printed in the Mercury on the 17th of August 2007. The article was chosen at random to demonstrate the point that some form of bias will occur in a news article. The example news article relates to an escape by two young people while they were being escorted back to AYDC after completing a cultural program on Clarke Island. Clark Island forms part of the Furneaux Group of islands which are approximately 20 kilometres off the North East tip of Tasmania. Clark Island is known to Aboriginal people as Lungtalanana (Wikipedia 2011) and was returned to the Aboriginal people in 2004.

Figure 3: News Article 'Hunt for Ashley pair' taken from The Mercury Friday August 17 2007

Friday, August 17 2007

Mercury

Hunt for Ashley pair

Tim Martain **Teenagers flee when van stops**

TWO 17 year old boys remained on the run in Launceston last night after escaping from a vehicle taking them to the Ashley Youth Detention Centre at Deloraine. The teenagers jumped out of a van on the Bass Highway near Prospect about 10.55am as they were being taken to the detention centre/ Tasmanian Police said West Launceston was searched after a sighting of the youths but neither was located.

The teenagers were returning to the detention centre after a two-week visit to Clark Island. The Clark Island activity is of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's Lungtalanana community rehabilitation program for young Aboriginal offenders. Custodial Youth Justice Manager Bill Smith said the boys were being driven back to the centre from Launceston Airport when an incident arose in the van, causing it to stop. "Once the vehicle stopped they were then able to exit the vehicle and make off" he said. Mr Smith said such incidents were always taken seriously and the facts of what had occurred were still being established. "It will require some analysis but all standard procedures have been followed" he said.

Ashley Youth Detention Centre has a history of escapes but Mr Smith said what occurred yesterday was different. "Escaping during transport is a very different event to escaping from custody or absconding during some outside activity" he said. Of the many hundreds of escorts like this that we do each year, there are relatively few incidents in the vehicles" A handcuffed youth escaped custody while on his way to court on August 18, 2005 and five youths escaped the centre on November last year. Authorities finally recovered all five boys after 12 days. The last breakout occurred when a gang outside the centre helped two inmates escape. The latest drama follows a State Government inquiry in February over the centre's breakouts. The escaped youths are not considered dangerous but police urge anyone with information to phone Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

In this article the first form of bias is one of selection. The Mercury could have chosen not to include the article. In the article itself some of the language could be considered inflammatory “Hunt for Ashley pair” is the heading “Teenagers flee when van stops” is the sub-heading then there is “on the run”, “history of escapes” and “The last breakout occurred when a gang outside the centre helped two inmates escape”. The article concludes with the statement “The escaped youths are not considered dangerous”. The opportunity to include indigenous young people was not missed by including their attendance at the “Lungtalanana community rehabilitation program for young Aboriginal offenders,” an “activity” of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. The article makes it sound like a holiday for young indigenous offenders by describing it as a “two week visit to Clark Island”. Thus further reinforcing the public perception that the judicial system is soft on crime.

The Police provide the majority of the information for the story and even though the general tone of the article is one of general alarm and that people need to be vigilant the article concludes that “the escaped youths are not considered violent” this is then followed by “but police urge anyone with information to phone Crime Stoppers” the obvious question then is, if they are not considered dangerous then what is the urgency? It would be far better to conclude with a simple request to ring Crime Stoppers if you sight them and therefore allay community fear rather than heighten it.

Therefore in this news article there is bias by selection, bias by headline, bias through the use of names and titles, bias by source control and bias through word choice and tone.

The Issues with Media Reporting

As mentioned earlier, if biased reporting of crime and for that matter anything written by newspapers was a benign exercise by publishers to sell newspapers, and there was no harm caused, then newspapers could write whatever they liked with impunity. However, that is not the case media reporting has the ability to create what is termed a “moral panic”, it can create fear where none should exist, it can label and damage people and it has the capacity to create “copycat” crime and educate offenders to improve their criminal activities.

The media and moral panics:

The term moral panic is used to describe the anger and outrage directed at certain groups in the community, “largely created by negative representations and images of those groups in the media” (The Australian Psychological Society 2000:32). Who go on to say, “the media continue to play a crucial role in the creation of a moral panic by depicting crime in a sensationalist format and presenting news in a manner that gives priority to attracting viewers rather than accurate reporting of events”. Scapegoating certain groups such as youth serves to draw attention away from wider issues and lessens the chance of meaningful debate (The Australian Psychological Society 2000).

Cohen found there were seven quite distinct phases to the development of a moral panic. The first is the catalyst or a precipitating event. In the book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1973) it is the clash between two groups of young people, the rockers and the mods. In Australia a similar moral panic involved the boddies and widgies between 1955 and 1959 (Moore 2004). The second phase of a moral panic involves the media defining the community threat through exaggeration such as “youth crime out of control”. The third phase draws in what Poynting and Morgan (2007: 2) term the “moral entrepreneurs, the right thinking guardians of respectability-politicians, clergymen, community representatives of various sorts-in pronouncing upon the problem”. The fourth phase is the planning for a response to the problem, this phase draws in the experts such as academics. The fifth phase is the official response to the initial issue and involves “various arms of the state-police, judiciary and welfare agencies in particular” (Poynting and Morgan 2007: 2). In the sixth phase the threat subsides and the moral panic moves off the front page of the paper. The seventh phase deals with any lessons, if any, that can be learnt and what can be done to lessen or deal with any similar or subsequent moral panic (Poynting and Morgan 2007).

Australian moral panics

Hil in (Bessant and Hil 1997) says that “Moral Panics over juvenile crime are a recurrent feature of most liberal democratic states” and that

At such times politicians, community leaders, police commissioners, criminal justice practitioners and a host of “experts” embark on a search for solutions to the “crime problem”. He goes on to say that the “problem” is represented “in terms of a natural disaster or epidemic, juvenile crime

assumes an apocalyptic presence that threatens to engulf the law-abiding majority.

In the book *Outrageous! Moral panics in Australia* edited by Poynting and Morgan (2007) separate writers provide a chapter on 17 Australian Moral Panics. Twelve of the 17 relate to youth criminality and four of those target marginalised groups, aboriginals and migrants.

- George Morgan describes the death of a 12 year old aboriginal boy killed in a motor vehicle being driven by his 14 year old friend while being pursued by the police. The Western Australian Premier of the time took the view that this type of incident had more to do with out of control youth than a colonial legacy of mistreatment and abuse. It is far easier and more palatable to blame a few young people than deal with the outrages of the past.
- Chris Cunneen follows up with the media's reporting of the Redfern riots, once again the catalyst was a police chase that culminated in the death of a young aboriginal youth. The Redfern Riot occurred in February 2004 after the death of TJ Hickey. Seventeen year old Hickey was riding his bicycle in Redfern, an inner city suburb of Sydney when he impaled himself on a metal fence. At the time there was a police operation in Redfern however Hickey was not being pursued by the police when he had the accident. In fact he was not a part of the police operation. Many simplistic causes for the riot were put forward such as drugs, alcohol and even the hot weather but as Cunneen (2008) put it "The death of TJ Hickey sparked a riot, but did so in the context of constant complaints of police harassment, particularly of Aboriginal youth. Part of this harassment derived from a renewed focus on "zero tolerance" style police operations and the use of public order legislation that clearly targets young people". The government response was to announce the building of a six million dollar seven story police station, increase police numbers from 170 to 226 and form a 46 member fulltime riot squad (Cunneen 2008).
- Murray Lee documents the "Macquarie Field riots". As in the "Redfern riots" the pre-cursor to the "Macquarie Fields riots" was a police chase, in this case it ended in two fatalities. Dylan Raywood aged 17 and Matt Robertson aged 19 were passengers in a stolen car being pursued by police when it crashed killing both young men in the outer western working class suburb of Macquarie Fields in February 2005. When the accident occurred local residents came out and started pelting the police, probably in anger at past provocations from police. Similar clashes with police occurred over the next four days (Green Left, 2005). The "delinquent youth" image, throwing Molotov cocktails at police is the one portrayed by the media. For many it would bring back memories of the "Redfern Riots" only this time it is Disadvantaged Youth V Police instead of Aborigines V Police. The "Macquarie Field riots" demonstrate how and why poorly resourced and poorly policed areas are primed for these explosive events (Lee in Cunneen and White 2007). Lee goes on to document the response by authorities as that normally used to address a "moral panic", as in the "Redfern Riots" the official response was to increase the police presence rather than address the underlying issue of isolation and social exclusion.

- Rob White talks about the 19th century “push” larrikins of Sydney. The “push larrikins” were street gangs of the time. Each tended to comprise between 20 and 80 members being young men generally between the ages of 15 and 25. They usually got about causing trouble and acting with disrespect to the general population. An interesting comparison between the raves and pushes of the 19th century and gangs in the early 21st century is made by Kylie Smith (2008:2) in her paper “The larrikin subject: hegemony and subjectivity in late nineteenth century Sydney”

In the course of some earlier research, I had come across references to gangs in Sydney from the mid 1800s and when the events of early 2000....Macquarie Fields, Redfern Riots.... Were reported, I was struck by the similarities in the language used to describe them and there participants. That is, most descriptions seemed to have no sense of socio-historical context-not only were the participants abstracted out from their social circumstances, but they were taken out of the broader history of white Australian society more generally. In newspaper reports, gangs became the manifestation of some new scourge of criminality specific to the present, as though Sydney had an unblemished, non-criminal past and these events were some kind of pathological aberration, rather than part of a long history of “gangs” in the city.

- On the 11th December 2005 approximately 5,000 mainly young white Australian men gathered at Cronulla a beachside suburb of Sydney to “reclaim” the beach. This followed a fight between three surf life savers and four young men of Lebanese background the previous weekend. The fight started over racial taunts and ended with two of the surf lifesavers being brutally bashed. The “Cronulla riots” as they became known caused a “moral panic”. In this case young white Australian’s fuelled by alcohol attacked anyone they came across appearing to be “of middle eastern appearance”. The riot was motivated by racism and was whipped up by “a frenzy of commentary in tabloid newspapers and on talk back radio, as well as anonymous calls urging action to “reclaim our beach” spread via SMS text messaging. One such text read: “Come to Cronulla this weekend to take revenge. This Sunday every Aussie in the Shire get down to North Cronulla to support Leb and wog bashing day” (Johansen and Glow 2007:1).
- Tanja Dreher talks about the demonization, by the media, of Cabramatta in the 1990’s as the “heroin capital” and home to “Asian gangs”. At the same time the Melbourne media were claiming that there was a “heroin epidemic” in the western suburbs of Melbourne.
- Another well documented “moral panic” was around “ethnic gang rapes” in Sydney between 2000 and 2002. The first involved the gang rapes committed by a group of Lebanese-Australian youths and then a less well documented case of the K brothers who were of Pakistan-Muslim background. Both cases came after a decade of media coverage and public debate in Australia over “ethnic crime gangs”, ‘invasions” of asylum seeking “boat people”, the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 and the terrorist bomb

blasts in Bali in October 2002 (Poynting, Noble, Tabar and Collins 2004). The Australian media were able to join them together using the common thread they all involved people they broadly identified as of “middle Eastern” ancestry, centred on those who are Arabic-speaking and generally but not always of Muslim faith.

All of these “moral panics” have many similar ingredients; young people, criminality, groups of young people and minority or marginalised groups. And when badly handled by the media has the potential to create a fear of crime.

“Fear of crime can be just as damaging as crime itself”

The Government’s Safer Australia Strategy “Tackling Crime-Towards a Safer Australia”(1995:9) makes the point that, the “fear of crime can be just as damaging as crime itself, and can seriously harm the quality of life of many, especially women and the elderly. Research with American custodial officers found that the threat of inmate violence against staff was their most reported workplace fear. The reason the threat of violence was seen by officers to be a greater stressor than actual violence is that the threat is always there as against actual violence which can be dealt with as and when it occurs (Finn 2000).

Current research makes it clear the fear of crime arises not only from actual experience of crime, but also from a range of factors, including media representation. Queensland Police (nd:1) make the point that “when the fear of crime is proportionate to reality, people are aware of the risks associated with various personal violence offences, this level of fear or concern can encourage increased home and property security thereby minimising the risks of becoming a victim”.

However, when the fear of crime becomes disproportionate to the reality of becoming a victim then this can have a devastating effect on a person’s lifestyle through;

- Restriction of lifestyle - the fear of crime may cause people to place restrictions on their lifestyle such as barricading their homes and not going out other than when necessary.
- Poor Quality of life - they may stop doing activities they previously enjoyed like going to the park or going out of an evening. This has the potential to socially isolate people.
- Decreased Confidence - when going out people may show a lack of confidence which can be picked up by a perpetrator and in turn make them a victim of assault. Additionally in the event of an attack they are less likely to protect themselves therefore increasing the likelihood of being harmed.

In a case study conducted by Green et al (2002: 10) at an English housing estate it was found there was a significant association between fear of crime and health status. Feelings of safety when out alone after dark are the most consistent predictor of health status. Green goes on to say the “Fear of crime erodes quality of life and is associated with poorer health”.

The self fulfilling prophecy that young people are bad

If you tell someone often enough they are “bad” or “stupid” or “dangerous” or “violent” then that person is likely to believe the “label” and “to act out the stereotypical behaviour associated with it” (Cunneen and White 2007: 39). This is particularly so for young people who are more impressionable than those who are older. Cunneen and White (2007) argue “that if a young person comes to court and is labelled as an offender, this process of public labelling and stigmatisation creates a new identity for the young person and, as a consequence, that individual will become committed to the roles and behaviour of the delinquent”.

Research conducted by Bolzan (2003:vii) on behalf of the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme found that while most young people held positive views of themselves and their peers they felt that many young people were “pressured, vulnerable, needing mentors, needing to belong and being financially disadvantaged”. Most of the young people interviewed by Bolzan (2003:vii) “believed that community perceptions of them were predominately negative, and some groups felt more harshly judged than others, in particular indigenous young people, those of ethnic background, those not at school and those who were unemployed”. The young people “believed that such negative perceptions were based on the fact they looked different, often because of the kind of clothing they wore, and judgements made on the basis of superficial evidence rather than on knowledge or understanding”.

They also blamed false and sensational accounts of young people in the media. An interesting aspect of Bolzan’s (2003: vii) research was the finding that some “young people also reported positive experiences in which they felt affirmed and valued by adults. In every case, such positive attitudes were experienced in the context of meaningful relationships with adults who knew them well, for example parents, other relatives and teachers”.

Copycat Behaviour and Improving Criminal Knowledge

There is evidence to show the media has the capacity to influence members of their audience to carry out what are termed “copycat” crimes. This is where the viewer, listener or reader, repeats a crime they have discovered through the media.

Grabosky and Wilson (1989) state that “Quite rigorous social science studies have demonstrated the existence of “copycat” effects, known formally as contagion phenomena or imitative behaviour. Research suggests there could be a link between the degree of media publicity attached to a homicide, suicide or terrorist incident”. This is particularly so for younger people who are less “worldly” and more prone to act on impulse without considering the consequences of their actions. Studies have shown that the number of suicides have increased after news reports of suicide particularly, if the method of suicide is described.

Other examples of copycat behaviour can be found where similar shootings have occurred in completely different countries, for example, many aspects of the mass murder in Hungerford in the UK were similar to the Clifton Hill massacre in Australia and there is a hypothesis that the Port Author massacre may have been triggered by

the mass murder in Dunblane in Scotland which occurred just weeks before (Browne 1996).

Surette in (Doley nd: 1) states “that for a crime to be considered copycat not only must there be an aspect of the original crime incorporated in its undertakings (such as in the choice of victim, motive, or technique) but, more significantly, there needs to be a yoking mechanism between the crimes”. However, for every account of copycat crime there is another that denies it’s existence which is a position supported by the justice system “which has so far refused to hold the media liable for acts performed by media consumers” (Doley nd:2).

Sometimes it is difficult to discern between what is a copycat crime and what is improving criminal knowledge. In this regard most researchers are of the view that offenders are more likely to pick up techniques rather than criminal tendencies, from observing others (Surette 2002). More detailed coverage of criminal acts allows existing criminals to change and improve their criminal techniques rather than encourage “copycats”. In this way they are able to undertake their existing criminal acts in a more educated and potentially sophisticated manner (Dolbey nd). A good example of this is the burning of stolen motor vehicles to destroy any DNA that may have been present.

The real problem is getting the balance between freedom of the press, the public’s right to information and keeping people safe, often from themselves. The issue is probably less about what is said rather than how it is said.

To test the hypothesis that “the reporting of youth crime and AYDC by Tasmanian newspapers is biased” this paper will look at both statistical or quantitative data as well as the quality of what is reported through discourse analysis. The statistical data will look at the degree of bias by rating newspaper articles as biased or unbiased and then use straight comparison. A number of articles will then be selected to be assessed using the principles of discourse analysis (de Wet, 2001).

Discourse Analysis

Jacobs in (Walter 2006) states that discourse analysis “is a method of research used to highlight the importance of language in particular texts” and that “the aim of discourse analysis is to provide a critical understanding of how language is deployed by making explicit the political context in which texts are situated”.

Discourse analysis’s roots “go back to classical rhetoric, most contemporary approaches find their roots between 1965 and 1975 in the new structuralist or formalist approaches to myths, folktales, stories and everyday conversations in anthropology, ethnography, semiotics, literature studies and micro sociology” (de Wet, 2001:99). Terre Blache and Durheim (in de Wet 2001:100) define discourse analysis as “the act of showing how certain discourses are deployed to achieve particular effects in specific contexts”. This definition identifies three separate aspects; Firstly, the discourse in the text or what is the underlying message, secondly the effect the media is attempting to create and thirdly the context in which the message is seen. The work of Cohen in “Moral Panics” is a good example of discourse analysis. By analysing the media reporting of the seaside clashes between the Mods and the Rockers in the 1960’s Cohen was able to show the three elements of discourse analysis. Firstly, that the reporting or discourse followed a certain pattern or theme, in this case the view these young people were violent and out of control, secondly that this was the effect the media were trying to have on the reading public and lastly the message was contextually the same.

Discourses are broad patterns of speech or systems of statements within the text, often these will include recurrent terms or phrases. Each discourse has a particular theme that is not only portrayed by what is said but how it is said. Often it appears as a mantra such as “youth crime out of control”, people on the dole are “dole bludgers” or boat people are “arriving in waves”. The truth is that only a small minority of young people are involved in crime, most people on Centerlink benefits are victims of circumstance and would prefer to work while Australia has taken a little more than 20,000 or just 0.2 of a percent of all the world’s asylum seekers (ABC News, 2011).

The second part of discourse analysis is to examine the effect the article has on its reader rather than its accuracy. Terre Blache and Durnheim in de Wet (2001:100) believe “the authors of texts often want to do a number of things simultaneously: convince the reader that the author of the text is a good person; advance a particular ideology; tell the truth; or motivate the reader to act in a particular way. These aims can be either explicit or implicit”. Often this can be politically motivated or designed to cause embarrassment or promote a cause.

While the analyst may wish to highlight one article or text it is important that the analyst “examine how discourses operate in the body of a text, and this aim is achieved by showing how discourses relate to other discourses, and how they function on different occasions” (de Wet, 2001:100). According to Zeeman in (de Wet, 2001:101) “it is impossible for a discourse analyst to be neutral, because he/she is part of a social, cultural and historical context. The analyst is therefore also part of the text’s context, and has to account for his/her role relative to the text and how to analyse them because they want to achieve certain effects”. Therefore it is important the analyst minimise any bias they may have.

Walters (2006) outlines the four tasks in undertaking a critical discourse analysis. The four tasks are the selection of the text, social practice by setting out the political and ideological context, the textual analysis, and the discursive practice. When conducting a critical discourse analysis it is important to explain how and why a text was selected for analysis as this allows the reader to form an opinion in regard to any form of bias by the researcher. The second task of social practice provides the reader with the political or ideological context the researcher may be influenced by. The third task of textual analysis relates to efforts by the writer to give the discourse legitimacy by quoting academics or experts, they may also incorporate credible organisations such as universities or even include their qualifications. The final task of discursive practice relates to the way the discourse is constructed or the tone of the discourse, this could also include the language used.

The following articles were chosen because:

- they both discuss offending generally rather than a specific offence
- both articles use statistics selectively; and,
- both articles highlight the issue of self interest.

Figure 4: News article: “Call to cut jail rate for youths” The Examiner, Wednesday 17 June 2009.

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| Wednesday, 17 June 2009 | Examiner |
| <h1 style="margin: 0;">Call to cut jail rate for youths</h1> | |
| <p>SALLY GLAETZER</p> <p>(Paragraph 1) YOUNG Tasmanians end up in custody at a higher rate than the national average and the State Government should do more to keep them out of jail, welfare agencies say.</p> <p>(Paragraph 2) Mission Australia said four in every 10,000 young Tasmanians were placed in custody, compared with just three in every 10,000 nationally.</p> <p>(Paragraph 3) “I think that’s cause for concern,” Mission Australia state director Noel Mundy said yesterday.</p> <p>(Paragraph 4) Mr Mundy said his organisation’s U Turn program had great success reducing car theft by young people, but similar programs were needed elsewhere around the state.</p> <p>(Paragraph 5) “Programs involving music or art.....we just need more options,” he said. Expansion and creation of services would slash offending rates among young people and save the Government money.</p> <p>(Paragraph 6) Human Services Minister Lin Thorpe said later this year she would announce an early intervention framework aimed at diverting young people from detention.</p> <p>(Paragraph 7) Ms Thorpe suggested mission Australia’s statistics were out of date and said Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data showed Tasmania’s rate of two per 1000 10 to 17-year-olds in custody was below the national rate of 2.2 per 1000.</p> | |

(Paragraph 8) “I have said on a number of occasions I plan to do exactly what Mission Australia are calling for, and that is to turn the curve in young people ending up in detention,” she said.

(Paragraph 9) A Hobart doctor who helps teenagers with mental health issues yesterday urged the State Government to ensure Moonah’s Chance on Main diversion program stayed open.

(Paragraph 10) Nicola Beamish said many teenagers were unable to cope in mainstream schools and would have no options if the few alternative services were closed.

(Paragraph 11) “My concern is that as we go into these difficult economic times we’re going to start pruning these services for the people who need them most,” Dr beamish said.

(Paragraph 12) Ms Thorp said the funding problem was a federal matter “there is no identifiable budget or grant program available in Youth Justice Services to provide funding for Chance on Main,” Ms Thorpe said.

The article commences with a “motherhood statement”. A motherhood statement is “a feel good platitude, usually by a politician, about a worthy concept that few would disagree with, without any specified plans for realisation” (Wiktionary 2011). In this case it is the view that politicians should do more to keep young people out of jail.

To support this claim the article quotes statistics supplied by Mission Australia that have no references to support them. Mission Australia has a vested interest in portraying the theme that youth detention and by extension youth crime is higher in Tasmania than the national average. Their interest is to increase funding from the state government to support their programs and it is highly likely this article was initiated by Mission Australia possibly through a media release. This is a common practice in newspaper journalism and is often referred to as public relations journalism. In a study conducted by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) in 2010 the ACIJ found that nearly 55 per cent of news stories analysed over a five day working week, across ten Australian hard-copy papers were driven by some form of public relations.

In paragraph three Mission Australia’s state director, Mr Mundy states “I think that’s cause for concern” when in fact four in 10,000 is barely discernable from three in 10,000 and would hardly be a reason for concern.

In paragraph four Mr Mundy claims that the U Turn program “had great success reducing car theft by young people” without providing any evidence or supporting testimonials. Mr Mundy goes on to say, in paragraph five, that the “Expansion and creation of services would slash offending rates among young people and save the government money” Mr Mundy provides no evidence to support this claim nor does he indicate how the government will save money.

In paragraph six the Human Services Minister, Lin Thorpe, states she will “announce an early intervention framework aimed at diverting young people from detention”. The announcement does not include a timeline nor does it include any detail as to how this is to be achieved. The Minister then goes on to question Mr Mundy’s statistics in paragraph seven using statistics of her own which appear to be incorrect

before making a motherhood statement of her own in paragraph eight when the Minister says “I have said on a number of occasions I plan to do exactly what Mission Australia are calling for, and that is to turn the curve in young people ending up in detention.”

In paragraph nine, ten and eleven the writer draws in an “expert” in this case a doctor who works with young people with mental health issues. In what context is unclear but it is suggested they may have a link to education.

In paragraph twelve the Minister states there is no state funding to be had and that funding in this instance was a federal matter.

In analysing the article it is most likely an approach by Mission Australia to the newspaper in a public relations capacity to push their cause, at the same time requesting funding from the Government. Mission Australia uses unsubstantiated statistics, unsubstantiated claims, an expert with a tenuous link and motherhood statements to make the claim that crime is more prevalent amongst young people in Tasmania than nationally and that programs, any sort of program will help address the issue. The Minister on the other hand disputes the statistics, suggests she has already thought of it, will implement some sort of program at a time to be announced and finished by saying any funding would be a federal responsibility. The casual reader would be well within their rights to think, what was the point of this article, however they are more likely to be left with the view that crime committed by young people is more prevalent in Tasmania than nationally, that organisations such as Mission Australia are trying to do something about it and the government will not fund what appears to be a simple and easy solution to the problem.

Figure 5: The following article relates to the reporting of crime statistics for Northern Tasmania for the Financial Years 2009/10 and 2010/11, thus allowing a simple comparison between the two sets of statistics. The Examiner, Saturday 16 July 2011.

Saturday, 16 July 2011

Examiner

High-visibility patrols aimed at reducing alcohol-related crime

Rise in public assaults

By ROSEMARY BOLGER

(Paragraph 1) NORTHERN police say a decrease in the amount of time police spend on patrol is not to blame for an increase in assaults and offensive behaviour in public places.

(Paragraph 2) Crime statistics for 2010-11, release by Tasmanian Police this week, show crime in the North dropped more than 10 per cent including an 18 per cent reduction in serious crime offences.

(Paragraph 3) Northern District Commander Richard Cowling said the overall results were pleasing.

(Paragraph 4) However, there were 22 more assaults in public places compared with the previous 12 months. Launceston recorded 245 incidents, an increase of 43.

(Paragraph 5) At the same time the number of hour's police spent on the beat in the Northern region a month declined from 8104 hours in 2009-10 to 7435. Last month the figure was down to 7052 hours.

KEY STATS FOR THE NORTH

| | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|--|---------|--------------|
| Total Crime | 7702 | 6825 (- 877) |
| Serious Crime Offences | 137 | 112 (- 25) |
| Public Disturbances | 1666 | 1750 (+ 84) |
| Vandalism | 853 | 840 (-13) |
| Public Noise | 1955 | 1793 (- 216) |
| Vehicle Complaints (Hooning) | 2833 | 2438 (- 395) |
| Offensive Behaviour | 1526 | 1561 (+ 35) |
| Public Place Assaults | 276 | 298 (+ 22) |
| Home Burglaries | 431 | 417 (+ 14) |
| Business Burglaries | 284 | 261 (- 34) |
| Average police patrol hours Per month | 8104 | 7435 (- 669) |

(Paragraph 6) Commander Cowling said police were spending less time patrolling in cars and more time on foot. In particular, the police had targeted the mall.

(Paragraph 7) He blamed the increase of public assaults and offensive behaviour on an increase in "pub activity"

(Paragraph 8) He said police were focussed on reducing alcohol-related crime and were tackling the problem with high-visibility patrols such as Operation Unite, a national operation targeting drunken violence on city streets.

(Paragraph 9) Police and the state government also launched the Good Mates Guide this month.

(Paragraph 10) He named reducing the number of home burglaries, serious crime and stolen vehicles as priorities for the year ahead.

(Paragraph 11) About 4400 fewer people were breathalysed in the North, but Commander Cowling said this was due to a change in strategy.

(Paragraph 12) He said police were increasingly targeting quieter streets, which meant fewer people were breathalysed but sent a message to drivers that they couldn't avoid police by taking back roads.

(Paragraph 13) Commander Cowling acknowledged that budget cuts would force police to continually assess their resources.

(Paragraph 14) The Liberal Part said an \$8 million cut to Tasmania Police's budget would result in higher rates of crime.

(Paragraph 15) But Police Minister David O'Byrne accused the Liberal Party of running a scare campaign.

The headline in the above article talks about an increase in public related assaults and that a rise in policing will be used to reduce alcohol related crime. The article is derived from an analysis of the annual crime figures for the Northern Tasmania Police area for the financial year 2010/11.

The first paragraph firmly puts the tone of the article by attempting to link an increase in public related crime to a decrease in the time police spend on patrol.

The second paragraph refers to the most important aspects of the data. That crime generally had decreased by 10 per cent and that serious crime was down by 18 per cent. This is a significant decrease however it is not referred to at any other time in the article nor does it appear in the headline.

In paragraph three an expert, in this case the local Police Commander is drawn into the discussion and makes the passive observation “the results overall were pleasing”.

The discussion in paragraph four returns to the subject of public related assaults and their increase but it also quotes a figure for Launceston that is not in the data included in the article. It appears to have been added selectively to support the headline.

Paragraph five re-iterates the figures in relation to hours that police spend on patrol and also quotes the figure for the previous month, which in this case is the month of June in the 2010/11 data set. Once again it appears to be selected to support the argument that the police presence is diminishing and therefore crime could increase.

The police commander goes on to say in paragraph six that police are patrolling on foot rather than in cars and he blamed the increase in public assaults on an increase in “pub activity” whatever that may mean. The commander then goes on to talk about a couple of different programs designed to address particular types of offending.

The article finishes with self interested views of the police budget cuts. The police commander takes a politically correct stance by stating that he “acknowledged that budget cuts would force police to continually assess their resources”. The Liberal opposition party claimed that cuts to the police budget would result in higher crime rates while the Police Minister accuses the Liberal opposition of running a scare campaign.

A 10 per cent decrease in crime generally and 18 per cent for serious crime should have been something to celebrate. It should have been reported as a positive and a reminder to all that we live in a safe community and given that crime reporting is generally headline news it would be fair to ask why a lessening in crime should not also be on the front page rather than page 17 in Saturday’s paper. It would seem more appropriate for the article to have a headline that indicated crime was down by over 10 per cent, in fact 11.4 per cent, rather than “pick out” one aspect of the statistics, in this case, Public Place Assaults that increased by 22 or less than eight per cent. The data shows that crime figures have reduced at the same time as the hours police spend on the beat decreases. This could be cyclic but it could also be explained by some of the strategies mentioned in the article such as more community policing with police getting out and about on foot and targeting crime in a more strategic way through programs such as Operation Unite and the Good Mates Guide. The idea behind these programs is that people take responsibility for their behaviour rather than having it managed by the police.

In both articles we can see the three elements of discourse analysis firstly, that the reporting or discourse followed a certain pattern or theme, in this case the view that

crime/youth crime is out of control and that the government is doing nothing about it by either failing to fund programs or by cutting police numbers. Secondly, this would appear to be the message the writer is attempting to portray to the reader and lastly the context is to sell papers, create fear and by extension embarrass the government.

Both articles appear to have been written in a way that would persuade readers to believe that crime is more prevalent than it actually is. Data in both articles is used selectively to support the mantra that "crime is out of control". In the second article positive data is either downplayed or excluded all together with only figures supporting the mantra being used. The analysis supports the hypothesis that the media portray crime in a biased manner.

Tasmanian Media Data

The majority of the literature I have reviewed in relation to the media's portrayal of crime is from mainland Australia and the greater majority of that provides opinion but very little in the way of research. Apart from an analysis of over 2000 media articles in Western Australian and referenced in Cunneen and White (1995) I have been unable to find any empirical research that supports the commonly held view that the media reports crime in a biased and inflammatory manner.

There have been whole books written on the subject of biased media portrayal of crime, for example; Grabosky and Wilson's (1989) book "Journalism and Justice How Crime Is Reported". As with most books on this subject it includes a great deal of discourse analysis and reports from journalists and others involved in the media field but does not include any form of statistical data. By using a comparison of basic data it was found that the hypothesis, "that the Tasmanian print media's reporting of crime, youth crime and AYDC is generally biased" is supported by the data.

Method

Materials

In order to test the hypotheses that the Tasmanian print media's reporting of crime, youth crime and AYDC is generally biased 267 articles from the three Tasmanian newspapers The Mercury, The Examiner and The Advocate were reviewed.

The articles reviewed were printed in the period July 2007 to June 2009 and were collected by the Administrative staff at AYDC, simply on the basis they referred to youth offending or to AYDC. No weight was given to the severity of the offence, the degree of public outcry, where the article was placed in the newspaper or how big the headline was.

Procedure

The 267 newspaper articles were firstly classified as either being general youth offending or related to AYDC. Of the 267 articles reviewed 190 related to general offending issues and 77 related directly to AYDC.

General Youth Offending Articles

The 190 general offending articles were first divided into regions and then examined using a simple discourse analysis where they were categorised on the basis of being biased or unbiased. An unbiased article would not contain inflammatory or emotive language such as "spree" or "out of control" and would use data or research to support the story, a biased article would contain inflammatory and emotive language such as "inferno" and "desecrate" and would not apply any data or research to support the article.

AYDC Articles

The 77 AYDC articles were also divided on the basis of being unbiased or biased on the same basis as for general offending articles. In that unbiased articles would be factual and not inflammatory while biased articles were not researched or balanced and included inflammatory language.

The unbiased articles were further broken down into generally unbiased to AYDC, unbiased to the AYDC School, unbiased to the AYDC School/funding (these are articles which are driven by the funding provider i.e. politicians) and finally, unbiased government articles, this is where the government has attempted to put a “positive spin on things” often to counter a previously printed unfair or damaging article.

Results

General Youth Offending

In the general offending category The Mercury produced 80 articles or 42 percent of the total, The Examiner 56 or 29.5 per cent and The Advocate 54 or 28.5 percent.

The Mercury printed 27 unbiased articles or 30 per cent and 53 biased articles which equates to 70 per cent.

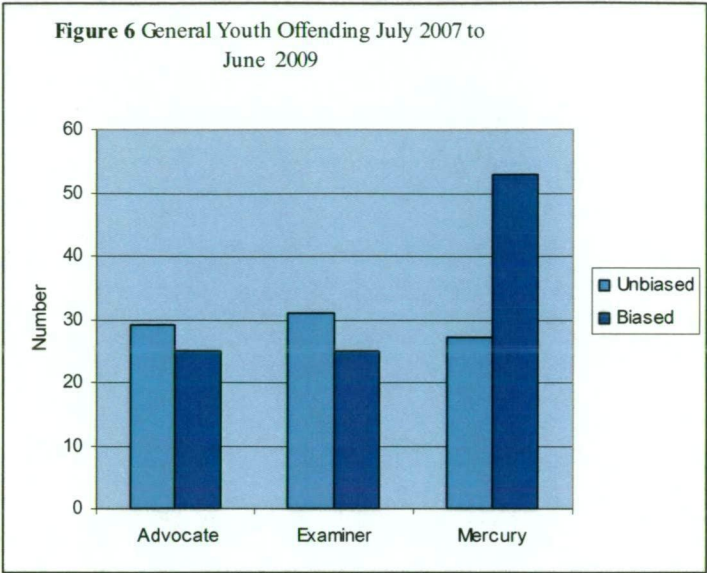
Of The Examiner’s 56 articles, 31 or 55 per cent were deemed to be unbiased while 25 or 45 per cent were assessed as being biased.

The Advocate produced 54 articles, 29 or 54 per cent were considered to be unbiased while 25 or 46 per cent were considered to be biased.

Of the 190 news articles 103 or 54 per cent were deemed to be biased and 87 or 46 per cent were seen as being unbiased. There is a significant difference between the percentage of biased articles written by The Mercury (70 per cent) in comparison to The Examiner (45 per cent) and The Advocate (46 per cent). An obvious explanation could be that The Mercury is owned by Murdoch’s News Limited and The Examiner and The Advocate are owned by Fairfax Ltd. The difference is probably no accident or aberration but more likely a reflection of the sensationalised journalistic style demanded by the Murdoch Press as was recently seen in the News of The World “phone hacking” revelations (Chandrasekar, Wardrop and Trotman 2011)

Table 2 General Youth Offending July 2007 to June 2009

| <u>Newspaper</u> | <u>Unbiased</u> | <u>Biased</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Advocate | 29 | 25 | 54 |
| Examiner | 31 | 25 | 56 |
| <u>Mercury</u> | <u>27</u> | <u>53</u> | <u>80</u> |
| | 87 | 103 | 190 |



Ashley Youth Detention Centre

The figures for AYDC are more damning than those for youth offending. So in total there were 13 or 17 per cent of unbiased articles and 64 or 83 per cent of biased articles

In relation to the biased articles The Mercury tallied 21 or 32 per cent, the Examiner 28 or 44 per cent and the Advocate 15 or 24 per cent. There was only one balanced or unbiased article relating to AYDC and that was editorial comment from the Examiner, there were six unbiased articles relating to the AYDC School, one from the Advocate, two from the Examiner and three from the Mercury. There were three unbiased AYDC School/Funding articles and they were all from the Examiner while the Examiner ran two unbiased government stories and the Advocate one. As with the articles relating to general youth offending biased stories heavily outweighed unbiased stories.

Table 3 Unbiased Media Coverage July 2007 to June 2009

| Newspaper | Unbiased | Unbiased School | Unbiased School | Unbiased Government |
|-----------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Advocate | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Examiner | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Mercury | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3 |

Figure 7 Unbiased Media Coverage July 2007 to June 2009

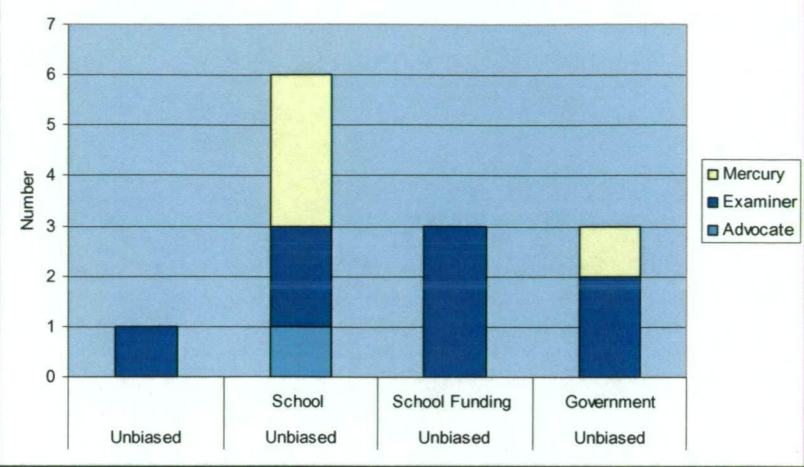
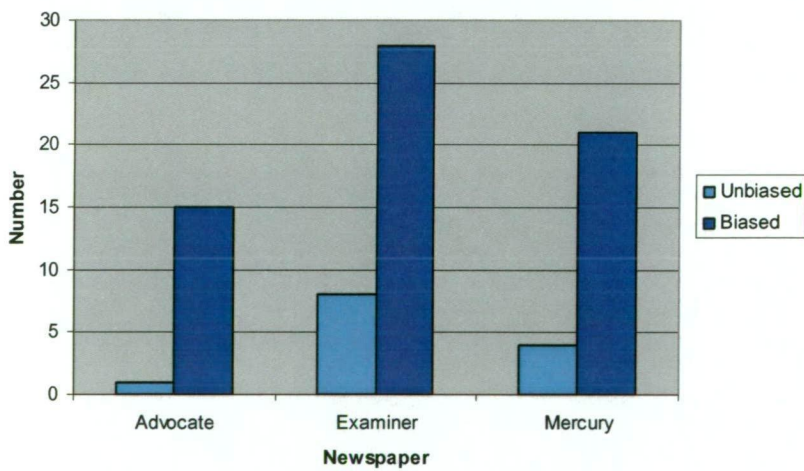


Table 4 Biased Media Coverage July 2007 to June 2009

| Newspaper | N | % |
|-----------|----|----|
| Advocate | 15 | 24 |
| Examiner | 28 | 44 |
| Mercury | 21 | 32 |

Figure 8 Biased Media Coverage July 2007 to June 2009



During the period July 2007 and June 2009 there were two escapes, each involved the escape of two young people and both were while the young people were being transferred to AYDC. The two escapes generated 19 articles or 25 percent of all articles written about AYDC during that two year period. The articles in the Examiner were by far the most inflammatory and included two front page stories. This highlights the issue of “the ripple effect” where the further an incident is from the reporting newspaper the less media attention it attracts. From the data we can conclude that the Tasmanian media portrays youth crime in a biased way and their reporting of AYDC is particularly biased. Over a two year period that involved the

analysis of 190 newspapers in to youth offending to find that over half the articles have been written in an unfair and biased manner should be a matter of concern to all. The analysis supports the hypothesis that the media portray crime in a biased manner.

Conclusion

This study supports the generally held view that the media presents crime generally, youth crime particularly and AYDC in a biased and inflammatory manner. There are exceptions to this, for example broad sheet newspapers that collect the majority of their funding from advertising and TV and radio programs that are funded by the government such as the ABC and SBS. Those that rely on selling newspapers or attracting listeners or viewers use inflammatory reporting to increase their attraction to the audience. They know that 'bad news' stories have the greatest impact and attract the most attention. They know that criminal behaviour is a good 'bad news' story particularly if it includes marginalised and demonised groups like young people, aboriginals and migrants.

This is why opinions in relation to the myth that 'youth crime is out of control' are solidified even when it flies in the face of the facts. This opinion is also supported by a number of community dignitaries like the police and politicians, academics, the clergy and other right thinking individuals. Little is said for the vested interest these people may have for supporting the "youth crime is out of control mantra".

The introduction of the mass media in the late 18th Century and its ensuing furore over the case of "Jack the Ripper" has set the tone for the reporting or perhaps, more accurately, sensationalism of crime and in turn youth crime more than has ever been seen before.

A number of theories have been espoused to explain the impact of the media and to different degrees explain why the media report in the way they do, however the bottom line is that crime, particularly sensational crime stories sell newspapers or attract viewers and listeners which in turn keeps owners and shareholders happy.

Media ownership in Australia has been distilling down from the early 1900s but it has now become a serious problem with the deregulation of media ownership by the Howard Government in 1996. This deregulation now sees the majority of the news print media fall into two sets of hands, Fairfax and News Limited. This allows them to set the agenda on what is reported, pretty much without question, at not only a local, state, and federal level but in the case of News Limited, a global level. As a result we now see newspapers not only setting their agenda through editorial comment, which is perfectly legitimate, but also through the way they portray the news. While "crime is out of control" is an enduring mantra there are others that are topical such as the "invasion of boat people", "ethnic crime gangs", 'race rapes" and "Islamic backed terrorism" which on one level are designed to increase sales, however, on another and more insidious level they have the potential to undermine the government of the day and therefore influence the balance of power. There is plenty of evidence to show that the Liberal-National Coalition enjoyed substantial support from the press, particularly Rupert Murdoch's News limited after the 1996 deregulation of Australian media ownership. Poynting et al (2005) make the point that the Liberal-National Coalition benefited immensely from the issues of boat people and the threat of Islamic backed terrorism being whipped up by the tabloid press, talkback radio and opportunistic politicians, with a subsequent increase in racial attacks in public places across Australia. The second half of 2001 saw one such crescendo, leading up to the federal

election in November, during which both the refugee crisis and the insecurities caused by international terrorism were exploited by the Liberal-National Coalition government in their successful bid to return to office, against earlier expectations”.

An issue with this type of reporting is that it further marginalises and demonises groups who do not have the resources and skills to fight back. They are able to be pilloried with impunity to the point that it may trigger a “moral panic” to which the response invariably makes the situation worse as we saw with the official reaction to the Macquarie Fields and Redfern Riots by adopting more punitive police practices. To alleviate the problem of crime in such areas as Macquarie Fields and Redfern successive governments need to address the root causes of the problem such as poverty, poor housing, draconian policing practices, poor public perception as a result of biased reporting and poor or no services.

The media also inflame the “the crime out of control” mantra by affirming Hogg and Brown’s (2002) idea of “law and order commonsense”. This is the view that crime rates are soaring, crime is worse than ever, the criminal justice system is soft on crime, the criminal justice system is loaded in favour of criminals, there should be more police, police should have more powers, courts should deliver tougher penalties and greater retribution against offenders will satisfy victim’s demands. The evidence does not support any of these suppositions and by continuing to push these views the media make members of the community more fearful than the reality would dictate.

The fear of crime can be debilitating for many particularly for those who feel the fear of crime more acutely, for example women and the elderly. It seems somewhat hypocritical that newspapers promote community events designed to create community cohesion when the general message being portrayed by the media is crime is out of control and it is not safe to go out after dark. This has the potential for people to place restrictions on their lifestyle by remaining at home and not going out, it also has the potential to affect their quality of life by excluding themselves from activities outside the home possibly resulting in social isolation and the health effects that flow from that. The fear of crime may also make them more timid in public which could make them more prone to attack.

Two unintended products of reporting crime are that it can produce copycat crime and improve criminal knowledge. There are many examples of copycat crime some of it catastrophic however it is a difficult balance between a paper’s right to print the news and the public’s right to be informed. Whereas improving criminal knowledge could be curtailed through a more responsible approach to reporting the intricacies of criminal activity.

An interesting sideline to the research is the “ripple effect” which is the issue of the news diminishing in affect the further it gets from the source. While this phenomenon occurs throughout the world it is heightened in Tasmania as a result of all three newspapers having a regional approach. As a result state-wide issues relating to medical services, schools and police services are being fought out in the media on a regional basis rather than a more effective state-wide basis which can create a costly duplication in services. All other states of Australia have one or more capital city newspapers that have a state-wide focus and Tasmania would benefit from having a genuine capital city newspaper.

The analysis of two articles relating to general crime issues using discourse analysis found both articles were written in an inflammatory manner designed to support the “crime out of control” mantra even when the news article relating to crime figures for Northern Tasmania showed a drop in crime. The problem for newspapers that rely on sensationalising the news to sell papers is they lock themselves into the mantra even when it flies in the face of the facts. It is a bit like telling a lie. Once told you have to stick to it or be seen to be a liar. This is the same for papers. Once they take a stance on a subject they become unwilling or unable to confess to the truth and continue the myth in defiance of the evidence. The media also refuses to accept any responsibility they may cause through copycat crime or educating criminals nor do they accept any responsibility for making the community more fearful of crime than is reasonable.

The data showed that all Tasmania newspapers report crime in a sensationalized way. Over two thirds or 70 per cent of articles by The Mercury that related to youth crime were written in an unfair, biased and inflammatory manner while approximately 50 per cent of articles written by The Examiner and the Advocate were unfair, biased and inflammatory. These biased articles show no balance, contain inflammatory language and apply little insight, thought or research by the writer. The major source of information for the majority of news articles relating to offending comes from the courts and the police both of whom have a vested interest in the “crime out of control” mantra. The data in relation to AYDC is even more damning with only 13 unbiased articles being written as against 64 biased articles. Approximately one quarter of these articles relate to escapes from custody so this further perpetuates the myth that crime is out of control and we are all unsafe as a result.

The truth is that the data and research indicate that crime rates have remained stable or decreased over the past thirty years. Youth crime is predominately property crime and the majority of offending is committed by the minority of offenders.

The saddest part of the media’s ‘youth crime is out of control’ mantra is it stifles reasoned argument, criminalises young people and makes the rest of society fearful.

Key Points:

The key points to be taken from this research are;

- That all three Tasmanian daily newspapers report youth crime in an inflammatory manner. Approximately 50 per cent of articles relating to youth crime by The Examiner and The Advocate are biased and inflammatory while 70 per cent of those produced by The Mercury are biased inflammatory.
- That all three Tasmanian daily newspapers report on AYDC in a biased fashion with over 80 per cent of articles written being biased.
- That Tasmanian newspapers present crime in a way that is likely to make readers more fearful of crime than the reality would dictate.
- That all three Tasmanian newspapers portray young people in a negative manner in relation to crime.

Points for further discussion:

- That the regional focus of all three newspapers creates parochialism that is detrimental to the state of Tasmania as a whole.
- That news is deemed less important the further it gets from its source.
- That the biased reporting of crime in Tasmania has a detrimental effect on communities.
- That newspaper should take some responsibility for copycat crimes and improving criminal skills even though it may not be intentional.
- Should the justice system, particularly police and the courts hold perpetrators of “vigilante” acts such as in the case of Fisher and Blake (Crawford, 2011) for their actions?
- What part could the government play through regulatory bodies such as the Children’s Commissioner particularly in relation to the way young people are portrayed in the media?
- Pursue the idea that not revealing young offender’s names can be detrimental to all young people.
- That any form of custodial institution is reported on in a negative and biased way.

Appendix 1

Australian Journalists Association: CODE OF ETHICS.

Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities. MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to

- **Honesty**
 - **Fairness**
 - **Independence**
 - **Respect for the rights of others**
1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.
 2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.
 3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternate attributable source. Where confidences are accepted respect them in all circumstances.
 4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
 5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.
 6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.
 7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.
 8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.
 9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.
 10. Do not plagiarise.
 11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist the compulsion to intrude.
 12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

Guidance Clause

Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public-interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.

Appendix 2

Australian Press Council: General Statement of Principles

General Principle 1: Accurate, fair and balanced reporting

Publications should take reasonable steps to ensure reports are accurate, fair and balanced. They should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers either by omission or commission.

General Principle 2: Correction of inaccuracy

Where it is established that a serious inaccuracy has been published, a publication should promptly correct the error, giving the correction due prominence.

General Principle 3: Publishing responses

Where individuals or groups are a major focus of news reporting or commentary, the publication should ensure fairness and balance in the original article. Failing that, it should provide a reasonable and swift opportunity for a balancing response in an appropriate section of the publication.

General Principle 4: Respect for privacy and sensibilities

News and comment should be represented honestly and fairly, and with respect for the privacy and sensibilities of individuals. However, the right to privacy is not to be interpreted as preventing publication of matters of public record or obvious significant public interest. Rumour and unconfirmed reports should be identified as such.

General Principle 5: Honest and fair investigation; preservation of confidences

Information obtained by dishonest or unfair means, or the publication of which would involve a breach of confidence, should not be published unless there is an over-riding public interest.

General Principle 6: Transparent and fair presentation

Publications are free to advocate their own views and publish the bylined opinions of others, as long as readers can recognise what is fact and what is opinion. Relevant facts should not be misrepresented or suppressed, headlines and captions should fairly reflect the tenor of an article and readers should be advised of any manipulation of images and potential conflicts of interest.

General Principle 7: Discretion and causing offence

Publications have a wide discretion in publishing material, but they should balance the public interest with the sensibilities of their readers, particularly when the material, such as photographs, could reasonably be expected to cause offence.

General Principle 8: Gratuitous emphasis on characteristics

Publications should not place any gratuitous emphasis on the race, religion, nationality, colour, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness, or age of an individual or group. Where it is relevant and in the public interest, publications may report and express opinions in these areas.

General Principle 9: Publication of Council adjudications

Where the Council issues adjudication, the publication concerned should publish the adjudication, promptly and with prominence.

Note 1 “Public interest”

For the purposes of these principles, “public interest” is defined as involving a matter capable of affecting the people at large so they might be legitimately interested in, or concerned about, what is going on, or what may happen to them or to others.

Note 2 “Due prominence”

The Council interprets “due prominence” as requiring the publication to ensure the retraction, clarification, correction, explanation or apology has the effect, as far as possible, of neutralising any damage arising from the original publication, and that any published adjudication is likely to be seen by those who saw the material on which the complaint was based.

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