

Chapter 5

THE PROBLEM WITH “ALL-AMERICAN GIRLS”: COVERAGE OF SLAYINGS BRINGS OUT BEST, THEN WORST, OF VICTIMS

Jacqueline J. Lambiase

Jacqueline J. Lambiase examines the 1993 murders of two Texas teenagers and how competition between two print media rivals—The Dallas Morning News and Fort Worth Star-Telegram—influenced the story’s coverage. Through case examination and accounts from a reporter who covered the story, Lambiase demonstrates how a readily accepted view of a person can easily swing to another easily digestible view and how media outlets—which are quick to embrace such descriptions because they connect well with readers—failed to tread a more complex middle ground where the actual truth resided.

Some stereotypes help writers and audiences alike make quick connections so that stories are told more economically. It is an old narrative tradition across many cultures. Homeric song singers used formulaic phrases such as “swift-footed Achilles” for reasons of both economy and rhyming schemes. In *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle trained future orators to think of audiences through stereotypes. He generalized by calling young men hopeful and impulsive, while old men were depicted as small-minded and fearful. In African and African-American narratives, the monkey, the lion and the elephant were consistently coded as tricky, proud and powerful, respectively. Jane Austen used stereotypes to help readers keep track of her many characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, but also critiqued the practice by showing the confusion and deferred happiness they can cause for her main characters. In MGM’s version of “The Wizard of Oz,” Dorothy’s severe Kansas

neighbor morphs easily into the Wicked Witch of the West because the stereotype of a thin and cranky spinster is just steps away from the cackle of a witch.

In journalism, stereotypes are part and parcel of formulas used daily by print and broadcast journalists. Throughout U.S. media history, the most familiar characterizations exhibit salience and power—from summer soldiers and sunshine patriots of the American Revolution to suburban soccer moms of the 1990s and heroic firefighters in 2001. Stereotypes help journalists get their work done efficiently. Columnist Walter Lippmann believed that stereotypes also helped audiences perceive ideas more clearly and with less clutter.¹ Much of a journalist's work consists of conveying a lot of information with few words or images. Widely used formulas and routines often guide such brevity. Such nonmoral professional values include:

- The lead, which relies on the five Ws (who, what, why, where, when) and one H (how) to pack many details into one or two sentences;
- Headlines, which contain a few, often overdetermined words used to draw readers into stories;
- Promos and teasers used to advertise upcoming broadcast or print news in an almost carnivalesque style; and
- Short news stories in text and broadcast versions, which combine to form a linear story that is oversimplified to fit broadcast segments often timed at a minute or less or print stories 15 column inches or less.

Deadlines and economic viability, plus management and editorial expectations, are also in the mix of pressures that journalists must overcome when stories are written and prepared for publication or broadcast. Sociologist Gaye Tuchman calls these professional news practices “ideology in action” because of their profound impact on content.²

Tuchman and other scholars suggest that reliance on news formulas and routines that generate stereotypes are problematic in two ways—they degrade both accuracy and fairness and they bolster existing power structures. Two examples from the past decade illustrate Tuchman's concerns.

The first is the news media's stereotyping of former football star O.J. Simpson, who was sexualized and portrayed as a threat to the dominant race—far beyond the scope of his murder trial—while his former wife Denise Brown Simpson served as symbol of “beauty and vulnerability” to represent American social order.³

The second concerns Hillary Clinton, who ultimately mastered the tightrope walk made necessary by press expectations of a modern and traditional first lady all-in-one. A *Time* magazine staff writer asserts that “to get the story—to ask the right questions, to be fair and accurate—the press should reconcile—or at least be more

flexible with—its clashing visions of the first lady.”⁴

This balancing act is a reality for many women beyond Hillary Clinton, for women throughout Westernized history frequently have been depicted in polarized ways. They are either purely feminine or unpurely not—with no middle ground available in this good-evil binary. It is this binary that threatens to oversimplify the lives of two female murder victims and two female suspects in this case study.

CASE NARRATIVE

This case focuses on the murders of two best friends—“all-American girls” as depicted by print and broadcast media in late 1993. It is a story that journalists and readers alike desire, because it contains all the elements of a best-selling thriller: apparent tragedy, mystery, attractive women, stunned and grieving friends and relatives, puzzled detectives and at-large killers. In this case, fiction and reality collide to produce a story fit for consumption by the most hardened news junkie.

Two college students are murdered, their bodies discovered in a vacant lot in Fort Worth, Texas, on an early Saturday morning in mid-November. The front page, above-the-fold headlines give readers the first particulars in two metropolitan newspapers: “Two FW roommates killed, left in field”⁵ and “2 students fatally shot in empty lot.”⁶ The three network affiliates that served Dallas-Fort Worth at the time used the tragic event at the top of their newscasts with photographs of the young women, footage of the murder scene and interviews with neighbors and friends. The murder victims were Channing Freelove, a 19-year-old university student, and her best friend since high school, 19-year-old Melanie Golchert.

In first-day stories in *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, the reporting was straightforward and predictable. A map in the *News*’ story pinpointed exactly where the bodies were found. The layout of the jumped portion of the story included three enlarged quotes—from a police officer, the man who found the victims’ bodies and a worried neighbor of the crime scene—to break up the gray textual presentation. The *Star-Telegram* story included a photo of Freelove, with a caption that says she “had gone out to celebrate her birthday.” It quoted sources in formulaic style, including an emotional college spokesman who called Freelove “popular” and said “we are angry at the kind of violence that’s around us” and unemotional police statements such as “They were fully clothed,” and “because of the extent of their wounds, they couldn’t have driven the car” after being shot.

Neighborhoodly bystander accounts filled the *News* story: “Martha Moss, a neighbor of Ms. Golchert’s parents when they lived in Fort Worth, described

Melanie as a pleasant and popular teenager” and Freelove was described by neighbors of her parents as having “a heart for people” since she wanted to be a doctor. These formulas of presentation overwhelmed *News* and *Star-Telegram* content, which revolved around sketchy police information, glowing bystander quotes and one parent’s sketchy comments (from Freelove’s father, who declined to add details to the official police account about lack of a motive).

In stories published Sunday, the *Star-Telegram* led with information about Golchert being a plucky basketball player in high school. Her coach was quoted as saying, “I thought she was going to have a great future.”⁷ It is on this day that newspapers and broadcast reports solidified their characterizations of the two murder victims as “all-American girls,” both of whom were universally praised by former coaches, teachers, friends and family. The *Star-Telegram* also reported that “no arrests have been made and police remain tight-lipped about their investigation into the killings.”

After Sunday’s reports, Fort Worth police began to release more details about their investigation. Among new information published Monday was that the women may have been drug dealers caught without money to reimburse a supplier. Another day passed, and police investigators added possible “lesbian jealousies” to the mix of motives they were exploring. In the two days following the stereotype of “all-American girls,” news reports began to rely on a second stereotype, that of “good teens running with the wrong crowd.”

At this juncture, print and broadcast journalists needed to consider how to present these new police hypotheses to their audiences, who previously had been told that these two young women were among the best and the brightest of their community. Questions to consider include:

- How can journalists possibly hope to represent accurately the lives of two young women who can no longer speak for themselves?
- How do reporters reconcile the dissonance among the voices speaking for the victims, including police sources, school authorities, former coaches, friends and family?
- How does a media outlet show restraint with reporting these provocative police theories while others are playing the story and the stereotypes to the hilt?
- What is a reasonable amount of coverage for such an event, since so few people are directly affected?

FACTS

A timeline of the murders and follow-up reporting has been developed so that changing characterizations of these young women may be traced, analyzed and reconsidered through the pyramid model. An analysis of the Dallas/Fort Worth news media is also included.

Double Murder Case

- Two young women are murdered, their bodies discovered in a vacant lot.
- Newspaper and broadcast reports offer details about the murders and ensuing police investigation and provide biographical information about the women that portrays them as “all-American girls.” This stereotype is based on their outward beauty from high school graduation photos, academic records and athletic abilities as shared by friends and school officials.
- Follow-up news reports begin to provide a different portrayal of the young women—that of potential drug dealers caught without money for a supplier.
- Other police speculation leads to news stories that hint about “lesbian jealousies” that may have led to a murder-for-hire plot that resulted in the young women’s slayings.
- Two women are arrested in the alleged murder-for-hire.
- These two female suspects quickly are labeled as lesbians through second-hand accounts and stereotyped by class—as high school dropouts and drug addicts living on society’s margins. These characterizations—a contrast to the glowing stereotypes reserved at first for the victims—were based on police speculation, accounts of acquaintances and unnamed sources who were close to the victims and said to be fearful about reprisals.

Dallas-Fort Worth Media Market

- Competition to cover the story was intense. The *Morning News* and *Star-Telegram* compete for readers in the eighth largest media market in the country—especially in suburban areas between the two cities.
- For eight days in a row, the story appeared on the front page of the *Star-Telegram*. For six of the eight days, it was the top story on that page.
- Network affiliates in the area often broke new story angles.
- National broadcast programs such as “Hard Copy” covered the murders and two publishing companies talked of rushing books to press about the case.
- Commentary about the murders was widely available—much of it about the dangerous world inhabited by young people and some of it about the media frenzy surrounding the case.

THE UTILITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Principles/Values

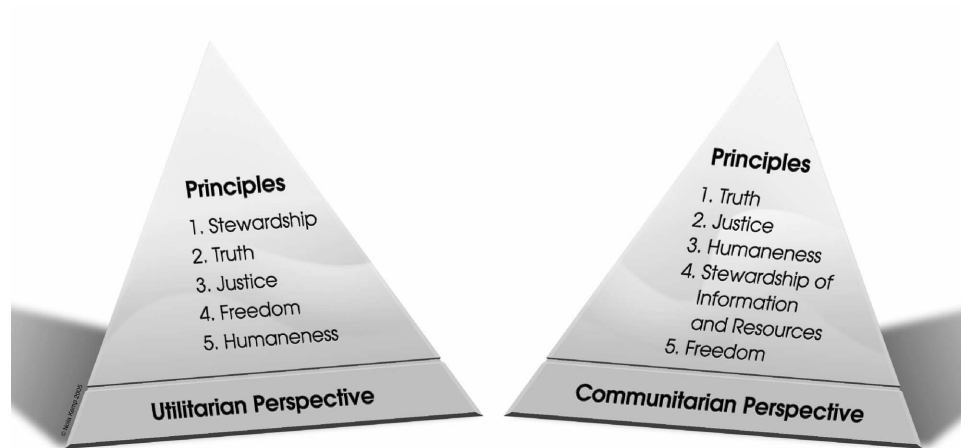
From a utilitarian standpoint, the principles involved in the Freeloove-Golchert murder coverage could not be more clear-cut. Using a nonmoral value, journalists strove for visual and compelling storytelling, while owners would be assured of high readership or ratings—therefore profits. In other words, occupants of the newsroom and boardroom could maintain their sacred distance from each other, yet arrive at the same end. Stories could be based on the speculation of authoritative police sources and, for balance, include the perspectives of acquaintances. The stereotype of “all-American girl” could be justified because it was positive. After all, on the first day of reporting the murders, not much else was known about the victims beyond their high school achievements and their recent status as college students.

Also justifiable in a utilitarian view is the second stereotype—that of young people running with the wrong crowd. This made the story seem “straight” or truthful, which is an important principle in this view, instead of “crooked” or chaotic.⁸ A sense of truthfulness would help an audience artificially make sense of alarming violence. As time passed and more facts came to light about the dead women, journalists would need to rely even more on police speculation and bystander comments to construct detailed stories about how two promising young women could end up dead as suspected drug dealers. The audience would be reassured by these stories, because the random violence could be transformed into the murder-by-acquaintance category, resulting in a kind of stewardship because news media could recast the story as something that wouldn’t happen randomly to people who are law-abiding citizens.

Once two other women were arrested in a murder-for-hire scheme, all members of the press found themselves caught in a dense mass of details. To successfully compete with other journalists, reporters would need to streamline their stories. Characterizations of the two suspects as “pathological fragments”⁹—high school dropouts and jealous lesbian lovers—would help audiences to understand possible motives. The search for justice also would motivate reporting in a utilitarian scheme. All of these formulaic ways of handling complex stories served utilitarian principles.

Utilitarian news reporting aspires to values that also benefit communities, such as timely reports of breaking events and exciting, satisfying stories. Staying competitive as a media outlet, of course, means profitability. But it also makes

Figure 5.1
UTILITARIAN AND COMMUNITARIAN PRINCIPLES

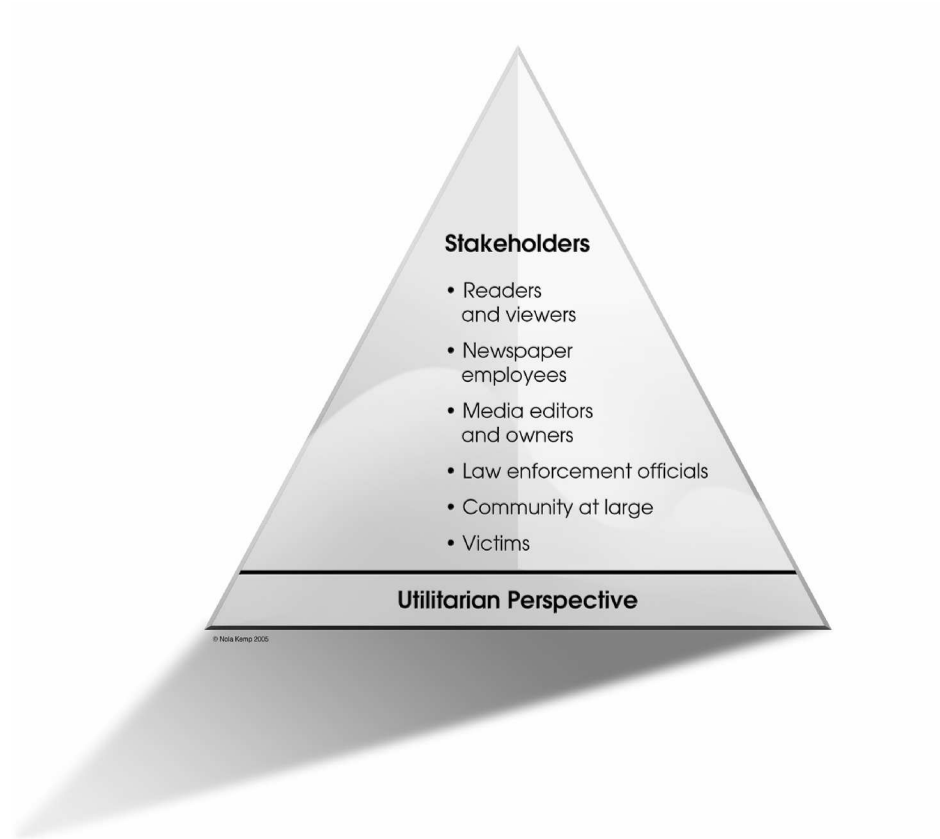


economic sense in a free-market society, where good products are seen to drive out bad products based on consumer preferences. A practical kind of stewardship is involved, that of news media attending to circulation figures and ratings while informing.

The principle of freedom, especially an unfettered kind of press freedom, would be important to the work of reporters and editors who aggressively pursue a story of major interest to readers. Under these circumstances, editors would assign many reporters to cover such a sensational murder, and reporters would use any means to uncover information pertinent to the unfolding story of suspects and motive.

Information from open police records, along with portrayals offered by a victim's or suspect's acquaintance, gives a certain balance and credibility to a reporter's work and also could be seen as serving the principle of stewardship. Not fully covering a huge story would mean that a media outlet and its reporters lose credibility, which is the media's calling card. These values can be considered nonmoral professional values that inform the practice of journalism in the United States. If lesbian jealousies are mentioned by police in press interviews or in an open police record, then it is the news media's duty to report that to citizens. Police reports are valuable because they help shed light on the process of a murder investigation and the search for motive. Although those sorts of reports might be viewed as sensational, an increase in circulation would prove that consumers value the information and should be allowed to guide content. In this context, consumers

Figure 5.2
UTILITARIAN STAKEHOLDERS IN PRIORITY ORDER



would be considered important stakeholders.

Stakeholders

Can victims be stakeholders? A utilitarian approach would question whether victims could be stakeholders and would assign them a low priority, below the imperative that readers and viewers be provided with information about violence in society. Jobs are at stake for beat reporters, who would be important stakeholders in the utilitarian view, if they miss important breaking news or new information. Editorships are also on the line during coverage of big stories. Ownership's stake in coverage of significant events would be profits, but also simple economic viability in a media market where newspaper and broadcast audiences increasingly turn to

cable and the Internet for news. Police and other official sources would be judged as effective or ineffective from media reports—especially concerning blame—with concrete implications that may include pay increases or election results. Finally, the community involved directly or indirectly would desire the fullest account of any event.

THE COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Principles/Values

Truth would be the most important principle in this case, primarily because speculation—even from authoritative police sources—usually is not reported without qualifiers or challenges. Even positive stereotyping would be questioned, since stereotyping usually skirts the truth in order to gain economy of expression or understanding or to hide complexities and bias. Although the murder story grew more complex almost daily, communitarian principles would allow all members of a newsroom to report both what is known and what is not known about victims and suspects.

Communitarian journalism also values timely and complete news products, but not at the expense of an accurate story each day of an ongoing event or investigation. Coverage would be based on a news outlet's usual standards, which should not be changed for sensational stories or those that garner national attention. This more careful reporting style values consistency, because people in stories should not be characterized in wildly different ways, depending on new information or on who is providing the information. A reporter adhering to a communitarian perspective defers easy stereotypes or resists them altogether, choosing instead to present accounts from first-hand or substantiated sources without drawing unnecessary conclusions—even positive ones.

This is where truth and justice intersect, because justice cannot exist without truth, and justice is not an easy principle to fit into newsroom routines and boardroom expectations. Placing blame would be deferred since “suspected” and “innocent” are ideally synonymous terms in American society. An audience's need to know would be balanced against the unnecessary incitement of fear or anger, especially in early stages of a story.

Humaneness would come into play concerning murder victims who can no longer speak for themselves and suspects who may not be able to afford eloquent and accessible representation. In a way, the communitarian approach allows humane

representation of news subjects, without regard to complexity or incompleteness. Sensational descriptions of victims or suspects that have no relevance would not be used or would certainly not be exploited for larger audience gains.

Stewardship would be important in terms of reporting responsible information to a larger community that is worried about random violence. In this approach, news editors and producers would be cautious about the placement of breaking stories in lead positions—except to announce that an event has occurred—and would allow follow-up reports to fill in details when these could be verified. While police records are good sources when investigations are in progress, all details from these reports should be reviewed and challenged for relevance, instead of reported intact. Journalists can distill better characterizations that do no harm to victims' reputations, families and communities and still report important details of newsworthy incidents.

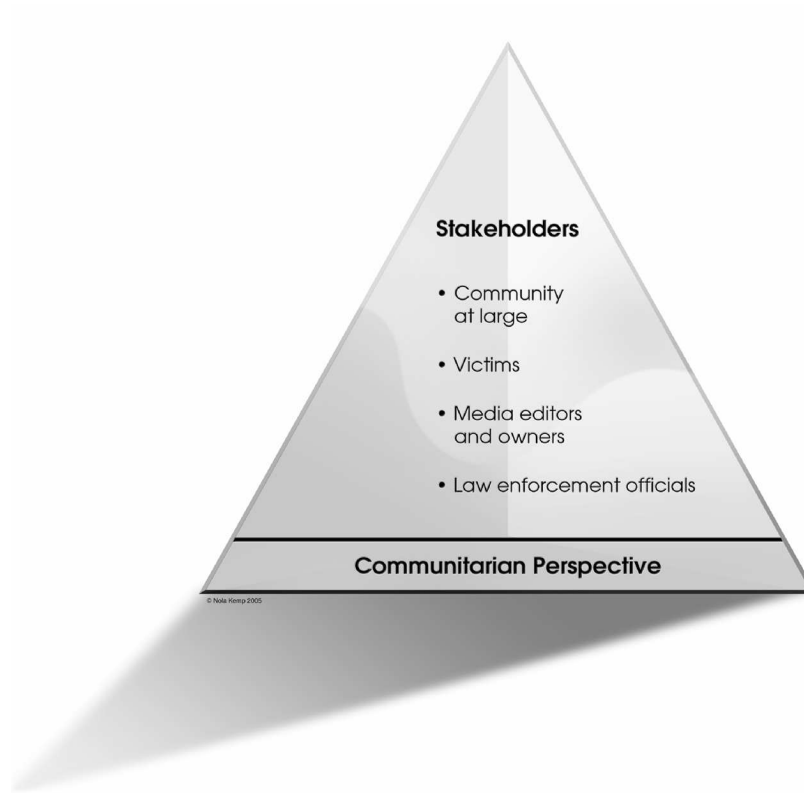
With the principle of freedom comes responsibility under the communitarian view. Using any means necessary to pursue a story—especially intimate details about victims' lives—would be shunned in favor of a more prudent and conservative pursuit of basic facts until the full story becomes clearer.

Stakeholders

Can victims be stakeholders? Perhaps in the communitarian model, victims might be stakeholders because they cannot speak for themselves and because they deserve justice. Their community of family, friends, classmates and neighbors would be a proxy for them, to be handled with care because of grief, shock and fear. Awareness of the community that surrounds victims, then, is one important way that the communitarian view provides a different frame to report the murders. All these people deserve consideration and humaneness as they experience grief or shock and while the facts are being sorted out.

Members of the news media, from ownership to reporters, are stakeholders in telling and publishing stories that are truthful and therefore add to news media authority and credibility. Stewardship comes into play when the relationship between media and audiences is considered, because audiences depend on the news media for accurate stories about danger in their communities. Police authorities may be stakeholders, but the news media must not become a clear conduit for an investigation's speculative information.

Figure 5.3
COMMUNITARIAN STAKEHOLDERS IN PRIORITY ORDER



CASE RESOLUTION

Throughout the first week of coverage and beyond, both newspapers and broadcasters played the story to the hilt in response to incredible competition in the local market and interest from national venues. On Nov. 17, the day after Frelove was buried—and four days after the bodies were found—the *Star-Telegram* ran two front-page stories that jumped inside to a broadsheet double spread. These inside pages included four more separate stories and an opinion column, along with photos. Both front-page stories concerned the arrests of two female acquaintances of the dead college students. The headlines on the first story were: “2 women jailed in slayings; Hired killers sought.”¹⁰ On the second story were the second-hand stereotypes, in headline fashion: “Suspect described as ‘wild,’

“and” ‘She is different,’ an ex-boyfriend says.”¹¹ The lead on the first story read:

The arrests yesterday of two acquaintances of Channing Freelove and Melanie Golchert has (sic) produced an account of bisexuality, drug dealing, a killing-for-hire plot and a mysterious gang member whom the women were headed to meet the last time they were seen alive, police say.

The lead on the second story called one of the suspects “a bisexual whose personality can range from ‘real nice’ to ‘cold and uncaring.’” So, not only were the murder victims’ characters picked apart by the news media—much like a rape victim’s past life might be scrutinized by a defense attorney—but the private lives of the so-called “murder-for-hire” suspects also were invaded. These characterizations remained unchallenged in news reports.

It is unfortunate, because both female suspects eventually were cleared of all wrongdoing and released from jail in early 1994. Yet no follow-up reports were published or aired about the rough, unfair treatment they received from police authorities or by the press.

In fact, the two “mysterious” male gang members who met with the two high school friends killed them in order to rob them, not because of drug deals gone bad, lesbian jealousies, or a murder-for-hire plot. The *Star-Telegram* reported this latest police theory of simple robbery on its front page, confirmed later in the trials of the two men (who eventually were convicted of the murders in late 1994). The *News* buried the story at the bottom of its second news section on December 2 with this lead:

Despite talk of spurned love and a frantic attempt to raise money to pay a drug debt, Tarrant County authorities say the slayings of two college students last month were simply a result of a robbery.¹²

After so much footage and ink, the motive to the murders was incredibly mundane. The coverage was anything but. And the “real-life” essence of the four young women—both victims and suspects—was neither good, nor bad, but in the messy in-between. No one covered that complex truth.

FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT

Jennifer Briggs Kaski, a Dallas-based freelance writer, worked as a reporter at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for 15 years, starting in the early 1980s and

through coverage of the Freeloove-Golchert murders. Pulled from her usual sportswriting duties and assigned to a team of more than a dozen reporters, she wrote several stories about the murder victims and contributed information to other stories.

Q: You have called this “what-a-story” style of reporting (Tuchman’s terms) a kind of freight train that’s difficult or impossible to stop. At what point does a story such as the double murder story turn into a freight train and why?

A: It usually turns into a freight train in an editor’s office, but then again, the tracks for this train are not centrally located—more like a tarantula train, if you will. Reporters get sent out like a pack of locusts, each lighting on his or her assigned tree. Each trying to make their angle powerful. There is some competition involved, especially among the young ones, which is why I think even the sidebars on stories like this get pumped up too, because the young ones are so hungry to compete with the big dogs.

Q: Provide insight into a team of reporters and editors working on a big story. How much do team members meet to discuss the tone of coverage and the amount? What sort of formulas come into play in these discussions? How much do team members watch how other media outlets are playing a story?

A: OK, so they all come back to the office or go home to write, whatever the case may be, and they call their editor, and the editor starts hearing all the different things coming in, and the editor talks to some other editor, like layout, or night-side city editor, and they start allocating space. Now they have devoted all these employees to this, it’s kind of hard to back off at all. Meanwhile, they are observing TV and radio reports, and that further gets them all going. It’s like, even if there is some doubt as to how much overkill should take place, they start looking at Channel 5 at 5 p.m. They see the TV going nuts with it, it increases the speed of the lead engine.

So it is actually a progressive—but quick—process that happens over the course of a few hours. Then there is also the obvious—the strange juxtaposition of circumstances—cute, upper-class soccer chicks, drugs, death, homosexuality, black guys and white girls, all kinds of juicy morsels. This particular story was before the public appetite was so severely whetted for this sort of thing, but the appetite existed nonetheless, and when people say the media did this or that or sensationalized, I just always say that if they really didn’t read it, it wouldn’t get written. But I bet you money, that if the (Fort Worth) *Star-Telegram* had gone a little lighter on this story, and the (Dallas) *Morning News* had hit it hard, rack sales would have gone to the News that day. And heads would have rolled at the *Star-Telegram*.

But believe me, the final line is, when you get that call in the morning that gets you out of bed, and it is an editor saying to get your butt downtown and explain such ‘juicy’ circumstances, you are flying out the door with a mouth full of spit because

you're salivating so hard, you can't swallow it all. It's like when I was covering the 1989 World Series and they had the big earthquake. For about 15 minutes I was scared—and that wouldn't be senseless. Then, to carry this poor train analogy further, it was as if in the fear and confusion at first, the train had come to a dead halt. But, you could feel your journalistic wheels slowly chugging and starting up again. Suddenly, you're finding other reporters from your paper (we send quite a few to a Series), and even though it would be hours before we reached our editors, we assigned amongst ourselves—'OK, the Nimitz (double-decker bridge) is down, Revo (columnist Jim Reeves), you head there, first. Jenn, you go to the Marina District, then head over to the Nimitz.'

Keep in mind, the city is completely dark, the Series telecast completely went out nationwide, we know our families are worried, but there is something that just takes over, to where, other than finding the last cold beer in town, being the first on the scene, getting the best stuff, is the most important thing. There is no swallowing that much spit, despite the literal chaos around. The personal train stopped again at the Nimitz structure, where people trapped inside were wailing and screaming. It was just so horrendous. Then, the wheels start slowly, and you're off, because this is great stuff, especially with writers with an excellent eye for detail. Of course, then we all go into therapy when we get home.

Writers don't really discuss a whole lot. We just sort of do it in the field. Even covering a big announcement for a Major League Baseball team. You hear what it is, then you just sort of talk real casually. 'Well, Gil (columnist Gil LeBreton), which way are you gonna go with this in your column?' Then somebody like me would say, 'Why don't I try to get so-n-so at home, and supplement that with stuff from here?' Then someone else says, 'OK, I'm gonna do the straight news,' etc.

Often when reporters are doing a big story, like the killings of those two young women, you end up calling each other a lot, saying, 'Hey did you talk to so-n-so, well I did, I'll give you the stuff when I get in.' And you are usually sitting in close proximity, or calling on cells, and e-mailing or whatever, your stuff that was good that didn't fit right in your own story, but might go in someone else's nicely. Many times the 'also contributed to' tag at the bottom has everything to do with that.

Q: How do police investigators and the information they provide on and off the record contribute to the sensational culture of a story such as this?

A: The only time a police investigator has ever contributed to making a story more sensational is when they: No. 1: want to be a 'big man' and leak something off the record, or No. 2: they know if some evidence could come out (that they aren't supposed to leak), it would help bring resolution to the case, or No. 3: when they're real jerky about it and it aggravates the reporter, and they get a real, 'screw you' attitude back and bird dog like crazy to get stuff around the investigator. Now the latter stuff is strictly my opinion, but that has been my experience.

Q: How do stereotypes come into play on a story such as this? Talk about not only the two murder victims, but also the two women who were suspects for a short time, but later exonerated of any connection to the murders.

A: On the story in question, the fact was that these were ‘normal’ girls who ended up at the center of what any good old Fort Worth Southern Baptist would call ‘seedy’ circumstances. It’s just a natural. Would it have been played up so if it was reversed and these were two ex-Paschal football standouts, with smiles carved out of cream cheese and abs from granite, who ended up dabbling in homosexuality and drugs and eventually ended up dead? If there was a difference, it would probably only be slight.

Now, if it had been two local high school football standouts, who then were super standouts at TCU in athletics, try national news at 6 p.m., or *USA Today*. So, while we realize that often the media do treat women as whores or virgins, it really depends on the circumstances. What I mean by that is, (to some people) two all-American football boys have the same virginal quality as a lovely young woman. However, once the truth comes out as it did in the case of these young women, I think the women come off a little ‘dirtier.’ People might feel sorrier for the guys—though any hint of a homosexual angle is gonna throw them in a dirty category in people’s minds, just because of how society is, for the most part.

This is not to say journalists think like this. As you know, the majority are probably pro-choice, pro-gay, pro anything that might have bothered their parents who voted for Nixon. But I think journalists get into the head of the public real well, and subconsciously, we may think like them, if only to write a story people will want to read twice.

ENDNOTES

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²Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

³John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 258.

⁴Tamala Edwards, “The Race for First Lady,” *Media Studies Journal* (Winter 2000), 55.

⁵Tony Hartzel, “2 FW Roommates Killed, Left in Field,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 14 November 1993, 1.

⁶Jack Douglas, “2 Students Fatally Shot in Empty Lot,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 14 November 1993, 1.

⁷Tim Madigan and Bill Teeter, “Slain Teens Described as Outgoing,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 15 November, 1993, 1.

⁸Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

⁹Clifford G. Christians, John P. Ferre, and P. Mark Fackler, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press* (New York: Oxford University, 1993).

¹⁰M. C. Moewe, “2 Women Jailed in Slayings; Hired Killers Sought,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 17 November 1993, 1.

¹¹Zack Smith, Robert Camuto, and M.C. Moewe, “Suspects in Death ‘Different’: Friends Tell of Drugs, Bisexual Lifestyle,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 17 November 1993, 1.

¹²Tony Hartzel, “FW Police Link Slayings, Robbery: Drug Theft, Not Failed Romance, Seen as Reason for Students’ Deaths,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 2 December 1993, 33A.

ACTIVITIES/QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER ENRICHMENT

Bring five copies of one news article about a murder from a recent print or online news source. Divide the class into small groups of five or fewer students. Ask each group to read all murder stories from all members, then ask the group to select two stories to dissect. Highlight descriptions of murder victims and murder suspects. Classify them as positive, neutral or negative stereotypes—whether in terms of race, class, gender, religious belief, disability or sexual orientation. Here are questions to consider as part of your informal discourse analysis:

- Are these descriptions necessary to understand the story?
- Do they add entertainment value?
- Who is the source of the stereotype (reporter, police, bystander?) Why is that source using the stereotype?
- Does your group generally agree on evaluating these characterizations as either stereotypical or neutral? Why or why not?
- How could the story be edited without the stereotypes?

Ask each group to report its findings to the class. Provide copies of the stories discussed to all class members, if possible.