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AN EXAMINATION OF PRINT MEDIA ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES
IN THE REPORTING OF HOMICIDE IN THE *HOUSTON CHRONICLE*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines media process in print media behavior in the reporting of homicide cases that occurred in 2001 that were investigated by the Houston Police Department. Content analysis was conducted using HPD press releases and news items published in the *Houston Chronicle*. Victim, offender, and circumstance information were obtained from the HPD. The study uses OLS and Logistical regression analysis to examine the effects of victim, offender, and social context measures on a variety of dependent measures, including whether a news item appeared in print, the number of news items that appeared in print, the number of words published, and media attention scores that combine measures of number of words, page placement, and the use of photographs with the news items. Additionally, news theme measures and information availability measures are examined to determine their effects on media outcome measures.

The findings suggest victim traits such as female victims and multiple victims are the most important factors in predicting a variety of media outcomes. Robbery-related homicides, stranger homicides, homicides involving female suspects, those involving younger victims, and those involving minority suspects are also found to be important predictors for certain media outcome measures, but not for others. A domestic context and homicides emanating from arguments that escalated were found to decrease measures of intensity of coverage for certain models. Other models suggested that the use of a knife or cutting instrument in the homicide decreases intensity of coverage while assault-based homicides increase the intensity of coverage. Certain informational constraint measures were also found to be important predictors of media outcomes. News theme

measures are significant predictors of intensity of media attention score. The implications of the findings are interpreted in the context of Barak's (1994) "Newsmaking Criminology" framework. Suggestions for future research are provided.

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endeavors and received my first academic appointment, my father, as a proud father is likely to do, reminisced about a day at the bus stop when he explained to my brother and I the importance of educational attainment. He told me about this. I, being rather sentimental about these kinds of things, tried hard to recall the day. I could not. But then I realized the nearly impossible chore of recalling one day, among many, in which one or all of my parents had said similar things to me. It is truly a remarkable situation when one gets to the point that they are not motivated by material things and wealth, but are instead motivated by the fact that one gets to what one wants to do, while getting paid. It is a truly liberating thing. My parents helped me get there – it is for this that I am eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recent commentary concerning the presentation of crime in the media suggests that media have their own particular interests in terms of the way that the organization presents crime (Chermak, 1998). In this regard, media interests generally are capitalistic in nature and largely concern the most appropriate means of selling newspapers to the general public or obtaining high ratings and market share (in the case of television entertainment media or network news). Scholars have also suggested that media interact with a variety of different social institutions (Barak, 1994) and that these interactions influence mass media presentation of crime. The pursuit of media interests and the interactions of media with other social institutions in the culture serve as primary mechanisms through which crime becomes presented in particular patterns or frameworks by the media. Media self-interests and media interactions with other social institutions in society and the dominant culture serve as motives and constraints on the media in terms of how images of crime and criminal justice are presented to the general public.

One method of understanding the motivations and constraints behind media behavior is the study of media processes and decision-making. The study of media processes and decision-making is the focus of the current research. Media process, as it is conceptualized in this research, refers to considerations of the methods and motivations through which media gather, package, and present information to the general public for

consumption. Media constraints and motivations in the presentation and selection of news are important because of their potential to shed light on issues concerning how media come to present certain images of crime that are consumed by the public. *The purpose of this research is to examine the process through which media select and present news items to the public for consumption. This research examines these processes by considering how homicide news items are selected for coverage by print media and places this general inquiry in the context of organizational factors that are inherent in the news organization's working environment.*

The study of media processes in selecting crime news to present to the general public is an area that has been relatively neglected by both criminologists and communication scholars. Most of the research that has been conducted to date which concerns media presentation of crime has used simple content analysis to either report the prevalence of media portrayal of crime relative to other types of news items or describe the actual content of the media depictions of crime. The problem with such analyses is that they fail to consider why certain crimes are selected over other crimes for coverage or more intense coverage. Another problem with these types of studies is that they fail to consider the processes through which crime news items are packaged and the process through which information is collected by members of the mass media (Chermak, 1995, 1998).

Understanding media process and motivations behind the selection of news is an important area of concern for several interrelated reasons. First, prior research examining the prevalence of crime in the news media has suggested that the mass media focus a disproportionate amount of attention to issues concerning crime and criminal justice

(Barkan, 1997; Beirne & Messerschmidt, 1995; Ericson et al., 1989, 1991; Gilliam et al., 1996; Graber, 1980; Jerin and Fields, 1994; Lichter & Edmundson, 1992; Lichter et al., 1994; Lotz, 1991; Surette, 1998). This disproportionate focus on issues of crime has taken the form of both entertainment media (Barkan, 1997; Beirne & Messerschmidt, 1995; Graber, 1980; Lichter & Edmundson, 1992; Lichter et al., 1994) and news media (Barkan, 1997; Beirne & Messerschmidt, 1995; Ericson et al., 1989, 1991; Gilliam et al., 1996; Graber, 1980; Jerin and Fields, 1994; Lichter & Edmundson, 1992; Lotz, 1991).

Second, prior research has found that the mass media present a distorted image of the empirical reality of crime that has been measured through the use of official crime statistics, victimization surveys, and self-report surveys. Mass media focus disproportionately on certain types of crime, particularly violent crime (Abbott & Calónico, 1974; Beckett and Sasson, 2000; Cohen, 1975; Combs & Slovic, 1979; Doob, 1985; Einstadter, 1979; Fedler & Jordan, 1982; Graber, 1980; Humphries, 1981; Jaehnig, et al., 1981; Marsh, 1991; Sheley and Ashkins, 1981). Other research has found that crime in the news does not correspond with the official crime rate or changes in the official crime rate. For example, Davis (1951) found that there was no relationship between the amount of crime in newspapers and local crime rates. Chiricos et al. (1991) found that in the mid-1990s, as the rate of violent crime declined, television and newspaper coverage of crime increased by more than 400%.

Research has also suggested that media presentation of crime presents fragmented images of crime in the sense that it abstracts crime from its “historical foundations and structural circumstances” (Humphries, 1981, p. 195). In this regard, media presents fragments of versions of crime as “universal or natural features of the social world”

(Humphries, 1981, p. 195). Research has suggested that crime presentation in the media has produced fragmented images of the empirical reality of crime that focus disproportionately on crime occurring between strangers relative to crime between intimate partners, acquaintances, and relatives (Beckett & Sasson, 2000; Durham, et al. 1995; Rude, 1999). Media coverage of crime has also been found to over-represent victims that are white, female, elderly, and affluent (Beckett & Sasson, 2000; Chermak, 1995; Chiricos, et al., 1997a; Durham et al., 1995; Elias, 1993; Romer, et al., 1998). Media have been found to disproportionately portray criminal offenders as minority individuals (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Romer et al., 1998) and present minority offenders in more threatening roles (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002), while whites are more likely to be portrayed as defenders, or law enforcers (Dixon & Linz, 2000a).

Although there is research focusing on how media portray crime, much of the past research has relatively ignored the question of why mass media present crime in ways they do. In this regard, this research proceeds largely by taking a similar position as that of Cohen (1972) when he developed the concept of “moral panic” to explain the social reaction of society to youth disturbances. Cohen suggested that in certain instances, media and other social institutions (such as agents of social control, lawmakers and politicians, and action groups) present certain issues in a way that mischaracterizes their actual threat to society. Research suggests that mass media do this by directing public attention to threats of violence and types of crimes that are more rare than other types of crime that occurs more frequently. Cohen maintained that when a threat to society is portrayed in a way that is disproportionate to the actual threat, the gap between the

perceived and actual threat needs to be explained. This research ultimately works toward explaining this gap (in the media reality and the empirical reality) by focusing on media processes, motivations, and constraints in the reporting of homicide news.

Understanding media processes, motivations, and constraints is inherently important to scholars in the fields of communication and journalism because these are issues that these scholars study and on which they generally focus their attention. But understanding these issues is important to criminologists as well. One reason that these issues are important to criminologists concerns the effects of media presentations on public opinion and personal reactions to crime. Research has reported an association between entertainment and news media crime consumption and a “mean world view” (Gerbner, et al., 1978, 1979, 1980), individual assessments of the amount and seriousness of crime (Busselle, 2003; Davis, 1951; Gebotys, et al., 1988), a retributive justice perspective (Barrile, 1980; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000), fear of crime (Chiricos, et al., 1997b; Einsiedel, et al., 1984; Eschholz, et al., 2003; Gordon & Heath, 1981; O’Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987), negative attitudes about African-Americans and other minorities (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000), and acceptance of subsequent security and preventative measures (Marks, 1987). For example, fear of crime has been shown to be strongly associated with the proportion of sensational local crimes covered and the amount of local homicide stories that are covered in the first fifteen pages of the newspaper (Heath, 1984; Liska & Baccaglioni, 1990; and Williams & Dickinson, 1993).

The degree to which the media and other social institutions (through the media) influence public perceptions and opinions is an important consideration in assessing the effects of media on support for public policy approaches in responding to crime. More

recent and more methodologically sound public opinion research has reported that the general public are more progressive in their opinions about the acceptance of different public policy approaches to crime than they are typically thought to be (Applegate et al., 1997; Cullen et al., 1998, 2000 Flanagan and Longmire, 1996).¹ However, the research also suggests that the public has a first impulse to be rather punitive toward certain types of criminal offenders, particularly those that commit violent offenses (Cullen et al., 2000).

Public opinion research suggests that violent crime serves as a divide between public support for punitive approaches to crime and those that are more progressive in nature. The general public is inundated with images of violent crime and with images that place crime in certain contexts that may not conform to the empirical reality. The potential exists for the general public to use violent crime and the types of crime that they view in various forms of media as frames of reference or as “narrative script”² (Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000) when considering various policy approaches. In other words, people have a tendency to “use knowledge gained from the media to construct an image of the world and behave based the perceived reality of that image” (Surrette, 1998, p. xiii). Media influences on public opinion about crime also have the potential to be even more

¹ Cullen et al. (2000) argue that methodologically sound public opinion research rejects the general question approach of most polls, such as the Gallup poll. Instead, the methodologically superior research provides respondents with a scenario in which to apply the questions or asks more specific questions of the respondent. The research suggests that general polling questions produce more punitive responses, whereas more specific questions and scenario-based methods produce more progressive responses.

² Gilliam and Iyengar (2000, p. 561) discuss the process in which people can use certain images of crime as a “narrative script.” The narrative script produces comprehension of an occurrence by distilling experiences and knowledge. Constant and repetitive portrayal of crime in a certain context can lead the reader or the viewer to cognitively perceive crime in a stereotypical fashion and can develop into a situation in which individuals fill in missing information based on script-based inferences about what must have happened.

potent, given the general public's limited knowledge of the criminal justice system (Roberts, 1992; Roberts and Salans, 1997).

Assuming (based on the research findings) that the images presented by the media are biased, if the media serve the types of functions that Surette (1998) and Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) have suggested, there are other damaging public policy implications as well. Politicians and legislative bodies have generally used "get tough" rationales to advance more punitive criminal justice policies (Olivares et al., 1996) while maintaining that these types of policies are what the general public desires. As discussed earlier, there is evidence suggesting that the public's first impulsive response to crime is to get punitive. If these punitive tendencies that are used by politicians to advance "get tough" approaches are induced at all by images of crime that are continuously reinforced by media, as suggested by the literature on audience effects, then media has an indirect effect on public policy. Therefore, "get tough" and other types of panacea approaches to crime, such as boot camps and scared straight approaches that have been found to be largely ineffective in reducing recidivism (Gendreau et al., 2000; MacKenzie et al., 2001), make their way into public policy and receive much attention. This can happen at the expense of other policy approaches, such as cognitive behavioral and interpersonal skill approaches that are more applicable to the typical criminal offender and more effective at reducing recidivism (Antonowicz and Ross 1994; Andrews et al., 1990; Lipsey, 1999; Redondo et al., 1999).

Understanding media processes, motives, and constraints facilitates a greater understanding of how media outcomes are produced. By understanding media process, motivations, and constraints that facilitate media decision-making about what types of

crime stories and crime contexts to report and how intensely they are reported, criminologists will have a more thorough understanding of the *why* of media reporting that can supplement the prior research that has been produced concerning *how* media present crime. Barak (1994) suggests that an understanding of these processes will begin to provide criminologists with the necessary information to address media distortions relating to crime. The possibility also exists to facilitate a more empirically valid image of the typical crime, victim, offender, and social context of the offense for public consumption. The collateral implications of a more empirically valid image of crime could begin to produce a more cohesive understanding between public vision of the criminal justice system and legislative behavior in creating public policy to respond to crime.

There are several mechanisms through which these effects have the potential to operate. First, empirical research concerning the motives, constraints, and processes of media reporting and their effects on crime reporting could be used as a tool to educate the media. A second possibility is that the empirical information could be used to educate the general public and make the public better consumers of mass media information. However, before these strategies can be put in motion, it is important to first empirically examine media motives, constraints, and process to better understand them and to provide Newsmaking Criminology scholars with empirically valid information to facilitate in the implementation of these strategies.

This research proceeds in Chapter 2 by reviewing the principles of Newsmaking Criminology and establishing this perspective as a framework for the remainder of the research. Chapter 3 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature concerning homicide

coverage in print media. Chapter 4 presents the proposed research method for considering the effects of media processes, motives, and constraints on print media outcomes. Chapters 5 and 6 present the research findings and a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 2

FRAMEWORK: THE “NEWSMAKING CRIMINOLOGY” PERSPECTIVE

The previous chapter introduced the topic of the current inquiry as one that seeks to explore media processes, motivations, and constraints that influence media decision-making. This influence on decision-making takes place in terms of which crime news items are selected for coverage and which items are selected for more intense coverage. This chapter focuses on framing the current inquiry examining media decision-making regarding news selection processes. This research is grounded in the overarching perspective of “Newsmaking Criminology,” as conceptualized by Barak (1994). The current chapter highlights the main principles of the perspective, distinguishes the perspective from Marxist and traditional conflict and hegemony perspectives, and explains the applicability of the perspective to the current research.

The “Newsmaking Criminology” Perspective

The period of time from the 1960s to the present has witnessed an incredible upsurge in the amount of scholarly inquiry that has been devoted to debunking myths relating to crime and criminal justice (Kappeler et al. 1996) and presenting systematic explanations for the behavior of the media in their reporting of crime (Chermak, 1994,

1995). This general movement toward an understanding of news processes and news distortion has been termed by Barak (1994) as a scholarly movement toward “Newsmaking Criminology.”

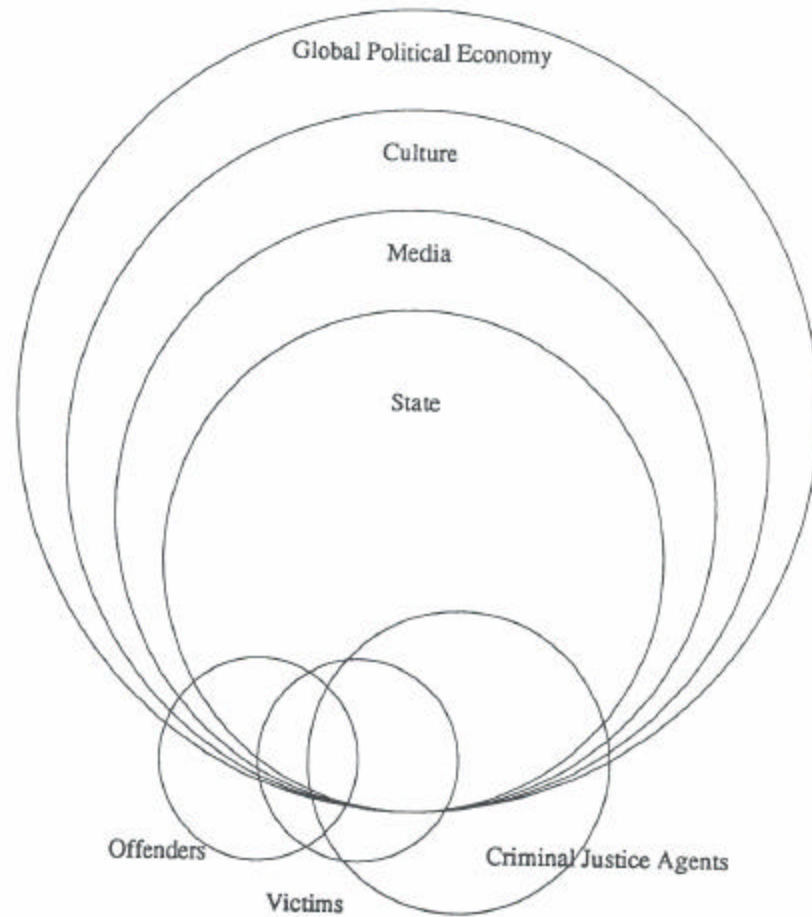
Newsmaking Criminology is defined generally as “the study of and interaction with crime and justice news construction” and “consists of a scrutiny of the dynamic between the production of crime news stories and the wider social order” (Barak, 1994b). According to Barak’s (1994) account, there are several principles associated with this broad perspective. First, crime stories produced by various news organizations in the United States reveal as much about U.S. culture and values as they do about crime and justice administration. Similarly, Surette (1992) maintains that an understanding of the, “dynamics of a society can be gained by examining the points of contact between society’s primary information system – the mass media – and its primary system for legitimizing values and enforcing norms – the criminal justice system” (p. 6).

In this regard, Barak (1994) contends that the formulaic expression encompassing media, media processes, and public perceptions of crime is:

PERCEPTION OF CRIME = MEDIA x (CULTURE + POLITICAL ECONOMY).

This expression essentially suggests that the production of crime as a cultural and social problem and how we perceive victims, offenders, and criminal justice agents are the result of social interactions between citizens, journalists, and sources of information that exist within the political and structural context in which the media operate. This system of interaction between citizens, journalists, and sources of information is further documented in Figure 2.1 from Barak’s (1994) outline of the “Newsmaking Criminology” perspective.

FIGURE 2.1 - Barak (1994): The Interactive Processes Between the Global Political Economy, Culture, the Media, the State, Criminal Justice Agents, Victims, and Offenders in Crime Perceptions



**FIGURE 1.1
Media, Process, and the Perception of Crime**

Second, crime news emerges from struggles that are resolved by the prevailing, but not necessarily the dominating, relations of power – in this regard, crime news is a reflection of power that relates to the interpretation of reality. This power over the interpretation of reality, however, consistent with previously mentioned principles concerning the interactions of citizens, media, and the prevailing political and structural system, emanates from organizational constraints placed on the news agency by these interactions. Therefore, viewed in this manner, news media should not necessarily be thought of as producers of social and cultural forces, but instead should be viewed primarily as conveyors of information that is produced by cultural, social, and political forces in society. Similarly, Graber (1997) has commented that:

Every news organization has its own internal power structure that develops from the interaction of owners, journalists, news sources, audiences, advertisers, and government authorities. In most news organizations today, the internal power structure is slightly left of middle America, yet predominately supportive of the basic tenants of the current political and social system (p. 96).

This second principle is not interpreted in this research as meaning that mass media organizations do not have their own interests and do not actively pursue these interests. As will be seen in later chapters, the media do have interests that they pursue actively. One of these interests that can be identified is the profit motive. News organizations compete with one another for market share and make decisions that are reflective of their interests in the capitalistic economy. The second principle simply means that media organizations are not viewed by Barak (1994) as producing social and cultural outputs, but instead are viewed as simply reporting news that emanates from the society and culture because of their desire to produce a marketable product that citizen's of the United States are perceived as interested in purchasing.

But this pursuit of self-interest on the part of the news organization is also very much in line with one key element of capitalistic hegemony – the notion that a necessary social good is withheld unless a seller can profit from presenting it to the general public. Capitalistic hegemony generally refers to the process by which ideas and arguments are continually manufactured and reproduced in society that are supportive of and nurtures the existing system of capitalism. If, prior to generating the news, staff of the news organization ask themselves, “will this news item sell to the general public?” then notions of capitalism are entering the equation in the news selection process. The implication is that not only are news items that can potentially (according to the perception of the journalist and news editors) sell nearly exclusively presented to the public, news items that are perceived as having little journalistic value are excluded from the public.

Third, adherents of the Newsmaking Criminology perspective are able to distinguish themselves from other analysts of media processes due to their “knowledge of the social, political, economic, and cultural complexities of crime and justice” (Barak 1994, pp. 6). Because they are experts in crime and justice, Newsmaking Criminologists “are in a better position than other analysts of media to assess ‘newsworthiness’ of crime news, to deconstruct the selection and presentation of crime news, and to help reconstruct an alternative crime news” (Barak 1994, pp. 8). Thus, the final principle of Newsmaking Criminology is that adherents of the perspective actively work to deconstruct media distortions of ‘the reality of crime’ and seek to accurately present the true (empirical) nature of crime to the general public. Through deconstruction of media processes, criminologists can work to ensure that accurate information is presented to the public about crime and justice, offenders and victims, and about what works and does not work

in public policy responses to crime. In this regard, study of media process can inform and alter public understanding of criminal justice issues.

Distinguishing “Newsmaking Criminology” from Marxist Explanations of Media Behavior

Conflict theories are those theories that “focus attention on struggles between individuals and/or groups in terms of power differentials” (Lilly et al., 132-133). However, different conflict theory perspectives have conceptualized power and its processes in different ways. Marx and Engels (1992) and Bonger (1969) focused on the exploitive nature of capitalism, the political economy and the division of labor as sources of power used by the dominant social class to control other classes of people. Moreover, according to this type of conflict perspective, “manipulating the minds of people is capitalism’s most subtle means of control” (Quinney, 1974: 98). Other conflict theorists, known as conflict pluralists, have conceptualized conflict and the role of power as a normal aspect of life and as more evenly dispersed amongst several powerful groups (Bonger, 1969; Chambliss & Steidman, 1971; Vold, 1958), operating in a more integrated social system.

Marxist-based conceptualizations locate bases of power in polarized social class conflict and contend that a dominant class, as a result of power differences in society, is in control of managing social perceptions of other, lower, classes of individuals. This perspective maintains that the dominant class has at its disposal the private ownership of the press and other forms of news media as a mechanism of controlling public perception. Conflict pluralist theorists acknowledge the dispersion of power in society but maintain

that there are many different social institutions that exist in a given society that have power to persuade.

According to this second perspective, diverse social institutions, including the media, special interest groups, politicians, government officials, and private interests, all have power and compete for the ability to shape public perception about a particular issue. Illustrations of this perspective are found in the gun control debates that surfaced in the 1980s and early 1990s (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001)¹ and the more recently emerging debate concerning the responsibility of tobacco companies in the cancer deaths of their long time consumers. Thus, a major question that has persisted in Marxist and pluralist conflict perspectives is the issue of the extent to which a dominant class shapes public perception versus contentions that power is more evenly dispersed resulting in a situation in which public perception is shaped by competing social institutions with differing interests.

Some scholars have contended that media distortions are an indication of the existence of ideology and power in the mass media that emanates from the dominant views of the most powerful political and economic groups in society (Abercrombie et al., 1980; Hall, et al., 1978; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In essence, this view maintains that the political and economic power of the most dominant social groups in a society ensure the reproduction of their viewpoints and discourses and such power of discourse results in a situation in which the views of the politically and economically powerful groups in society are incorporated by mass society as their own views.

¹ Callaghan and Schnell (2001) found that media framed the gun control debate differently than politicians and special interest groups, such as the NRA. Media framed the issue as a “culture of violence” issue, whereas politicians and special interest groups framed the debate either as “sensible legislation” or as “feel good” laws, depending on the side of the issue that the politician or interest group supported.

Some critical media scholars have argued that this type of hegemony thesis is incomplete in the sense that it does not provide adequate attention to the actual process of communication and the conflictual processes that are at work within media and other central institutions (Kasinsky, 1994). Consequently, several alternative views have developed, one of which is that of Barak (1994). While the Newsmaking Criminology perspective generally “presupposes that there is no such thing as ‘objective’ news reporting and interpreting – the presentation of crime and violence in the mass media, for example, cannot be disconnected from the prevailing ideologies of the day” (Barak, 1994a), Barak’s (1994) perspective also makes a break from the Marxist perspective that has been advanced by many critical scholars of the mass media.

Barak (1994) contends that throughout society there exists a diverse array of individuals and groups of individuals who maintain divergent perspectives about crime and the criminal justice system (i.e., the media, government officials, politicians, the general public) and who influence the behavior of the media. These different perceptions are influenced by the various interplays by and between criminals, apprehenders, victims, policy-makers, enforcement agencies, criminologists, and the press. Mass communication of these different perceptions, according to the Newsmaking perspective, creates cultural awareness of crime and the administration of justice. As opposed to the Marxist perspective, cultural evaluation of crime and criminal justice issues is not a product of an all-powerful elite group, nor are they the exclusive product of moral and social entrepreneurs. Instead, media behavior is viewed as the ultimate end product of a dynamic of interactions that take place by and between media representatives, government officials, and special interests. In this sense, what emerges as media output

is the end result of interactions that occur within what Barak (1994) refers to as the “Global Political Economy” which encompasses the existing culture, media, the states, offenders, victims, and criminal justice agents.

Similarly, Bailey and Hale (1998) have maintained that the media’s role in the news production process is one of “playing field” for the social construction activities of claimsmakers. Claimsmakers are promoters, activists, professional experts, and spokespersons that are involved in promoting specific claims about a phenomenon (Best, 1991). Again, inherent in this perspective is the notion that instead of promoting the ideological message of a dominant social class, the media serve as a filter for a variety of claimsmakers who are competing for media attention. However, empirical research has suggested that media are not simply passive conveyors of the claims of claimsmakers, but also can promote their own themes and agenda (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001).

In the chapter that follows, the theoretical and empirical literature will be reviewed that pertains to the reporting of homicide in the print media. The theoretical contributions of Chermak (1995), Fishman (1978; 1980), Prichard and Hughes (1997), and Black (1976) will be considered and a more concise theoretical account of news organization decision-making will be presented. The limited literature that examines the presentation of homicide in print media will be reviewed and the limitations of the past research will be identified.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 presented the topic of the research as one that concerns media processes, motivations, and constraints that are related to media decision-making concerning whether a news item is covered and how much coverage a news item receives. Chapter 2 placed this inquiry within the general framework of Newsmaking Criminology as developed by Barak (1994). This chapter identifies four different concepts from the literature that serve as either motivators or constraints in explaining media decision-making in terms of whether a homicide is covered and to what extent it is covered. The current chapter also reviews the multivariate and qualitative literature concerning each of these four concepts. The four concepts include: the role of perceived “market demand” by journalists and news editors, the generation of news themes in the production of news, the role of competing news items, and lastly, the role that official sources of information play in the decision-making processes.

Market demand concerns the demographic (victim and offender) and situational variables that journalists and editors use in making assessments of the newsworthiness of the homicide incident. The news theme concept concerns whether a potential news item can be linked to other potential news items as part of a thematic package to appear in news output. The third concept, competing news items, concerns the quantity of other important competing news items with which the homicide item has to compete for space

in the news. Lastly, the concept concerning the role of official sources of information concerns the mass media dependence upon official sources of information in the news production process.

According to the respective conceptual frameworks, one would expect a homicide to be covered by the media and to be more intensely covered by the media if journalists and news editors perceive the story as one with which readers can readily identify or are interested in knowing about. Further, one would expect that coverage of a homicide would be more likely to occur and be more intense when the homicide can be linked to some broader crime theme that has been established in the newspaper, when there are fewer important competing stories that readers are likely to care about, and when the news organization has easy access to information. This line of inquiry is relevant to the “Newsmaking Perspective” that was established by Barak (1994). The “Newsmaking Perspective” contends that media outcomes leading to general public perceptions of crime are products of complex dynamic interplays occurring between media, the general public, offenders, victims, and criminal justice agents, who are operating within the structural constraints of the global political environment. The following section reviews the theoretical perspectives of Chermak (1995), Fishman (1978), Prichard and Hughes (1997), and Black (1976) in the context of the four organizational constraints that form the basis of the current inquiry.

Theoretical Perspectives

Chermak's Analysis of Organizational Constraint

Chermak (1995) examines how the various participants involved in the news production process construct crime news. He defines the news production process as one of taking the limited number of crimes that are made available to the police (these crimes are limited because of underreporting) and condensing them down into a limited amount of news space. This selection and presentation of crime news is a highly discretionary activity and discretionary decisions are made by both the criminal justice agency releasing the information and the news organization reporting the information.

Chermak (1995) identified four primary steps in the news production process. First, source organizations (the police and other official agencies) are in control of the level of access that reporters have to the crimes known to the source organization. Second, news organization personnel select news items to be presented in their accounts of the daily news from amongst the crimes that are known to the police about which information is released to journalists. Third, news organizations and source organizations struggle amongst themselves to determine what is to be presented in a story. Fourth, the news item that is produced by the journalist competes for space with other potential stories as news editors determine if and how a selected story is to be presented to the public. Thus, according to Chermak's (1995) analysis, there are two important

organizations that play a role in the final production of the news – source organizations and news organizations.

The Role of Source Organizations.

Source organizations play a role in the production of news through the degree to which information is made available to representatives of news organizations. The source organization decides the nature of the information to be released, the format of the information, the details of the items that are highlighted or discarded, and the timing of the release (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1989).

Police and other official source organizations have a variety of motivations in terms of managing the release of information and management of the media. Police have become more open to the media so that police organizations can better control their environment, prevent organizational liability, and more stringently legitimize their work (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1989). Various criminal justice agents also use media outlets as a means of advancing their own objectives in case management. For instance, as part of his qualitative interview with news organization staff, Chermak (1995) discussed one instance in which a prosecutor invited several members of the media to a shock parole hearing and later implied that the presence of the media may have deterred the elected judge from reducing the defendant's sentence, in fear that he could be perceived as being soft on crime (see discussion on p. 19-20). Police also use media for such functions as to push along a stalled investigation and as public relations tools (Chermak, 1995).

The mechanism through which source organizations control the media production process can be explained by two factors: the need for the news organization to operate as efficiently as possible and the concept of professional reciprocity. First, news organizations have an organizational imperative, which demands that news items be produced as efficiently as possible. The creation of news is a business that is predicated on the need to quickly produce news items with the fewest obstacles as possible.

Because of this mandate, news organizations typically rely on official sources of information (Welch et al., 1998), such as police blotter reports, arrest documents, and official memoranda, which facilitates the efficient production of the crime news. The need for efficiency applies in local stories and in more regional or national stories relating to crime in which media rely on Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) wire reports (Chermak, 1995). In this regard, easy access to official documentation allows reporters to meet deadlines, meet the format requirements of their media, and satisfy the heavy demand for news items concerning crime and justice with minimal organizational cost and complications (Chermak, 1995).

Second, the willingness of journalists and news editors to go beyond the information provided by official sources or critically assess information provided by these sources is governed by the principle of reciprocity. In this regard, journalists are not frequently tempted to criticize the organization that provides them with information which, in turn, facilitates their efficient production of the news. Chermak (1995) cited many instances of this professional reciprocity in operation. Police organizations provide physical space for news organizations and access to official police documents, thus adding to the efficiency of the press. Court reporters are provided easy access to

documents and in some cases, are given relatively unrestricted movement in the courthouse. Therefore, reporters are often unwilling to criticize criminal justice sources for fear of losing their relatively unrestricted access to police and court documents and when they do criticize police and official sources, they carefully weigh the costs and benefits of doing so.

Media Response to Perceived Market Demand.

Even though news media, in their presentation of crime and justice, are governed by information availability and reciprocity considerations, Chermak (1995) also acknowledges the profit motive that exists which influences journalistic and editorial decision-making. Much of this profit-driven concern of the news organization translates into actions by news organization staff to increase profit share in the form of what one staff member referred to as the public's "insatiable appetite for crime." (p. 23). In a similar manner, Graber (1980) argued that even though crime news may very well be excessive, the current research on audience preferences, if accurate, justifies the excessive crime coverage on the basis of satisfying a strong consumer demand for crime news.

An additional organizational consideration that influences journalist and news editor decision making is producing news items that do not necessarily reflect the reality of crime, but instead, serve to increase newspaper readership and network news ratings (McManus, 1994), or in other words, "what is newsworthy" (Kanis, 1991). Thus, as

Friendly and Goldfarb (1967) argue, in situations in which networks and newspapers must compete for market share, “the usual weaponry is the reporting of crime” (p. 36).

Past research has worked to identify the factors used by journalists and news editors in the assessment of newsworthiness (Cohen & Young, 1981; Erickson et al., 1987; Hartley, 1982; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2002) and Chermak (1995) has summarized these factors into five main criteria. First, news organization staff assess newsworthiness as a function of offense seriousness in that particularly violent or heinous crimes and crimes that are more unusual are more likely to be reported. Second, characteristics of the offender and victim, such as age, gender, and occupation are used to assess newsworthiness. Third, characteristics of the incident producers (i.e., the journalists and the editors) can influence judgments of newsworthiness. Fourth, uniqueness of the incident affects these judgments, in that extraordinary incidents that supply an element of shock, humor, or surprise are more likely to be reported. Lastly, event salience is an important consideration. For example, incidents that are more locally based or affect local individuals are more likely to be reported because consumers of the media can identify with the street or location in which the event occurred or with the individual victim.

Fishman: The Generation of News Themes

Fishman (1978) approached the study of media processes from a social constructionist perspective. Fishman’s (1978) qualitative analysis of the news construction process considered how mass media news accounts are produced and how

they are produced in a manner in which they create and re-create the social occurrences that they report. Most of Fishman's analysis focuses attention on media reporting of a "crime wave" of deviance committed against the elderly that occurred in New York City in 1976. He further described how the "crime wave" was a function of news reporting processes, not objective increases in the rate of crime committed against elderly citizens.

The initial idea for the analysis emanated from several of Fishman's conversations with other journalists, and in particular, one reporter who had been researching a feature story on crimes against the elderly during a period of increased media attention on the issue. The journalist mentioned that he had found police statistics suggesting that crimes committed against the elderly had actually been decreasing during the period in question, despite increased media attention to the issue. The reporter eventually would ignore the statistics because he perceived the statistics to be unreliable and incomplete and because the issue appeared to be too big to pass up in terms of attention that had already been devoted to the issue. Subsequent observations led Fishman to conclude that a crime wave is little more than a theme in crime reporting that is heavily and continuously reported by media outlets.

Fishman (1978) conceptualized a "news theme" as the continued and heavy coverage of numerous occurrences which journalists report as a single topic. In this regard, a "news theme" is a technique that journalists, and especially news editors (Reisner, 1992), use as a method of organizing and unifying the news into a thematic framework. This framework serves to provide news organizations with a presentational order. Moreover, "news themes allow editors to organize an otherwise confusing array of (daily) events into packages or groups of interrelated news items" (Fishman, 1978: p. 5).

According to the “news theme” conceptualization, isolated events are reported as trends or overarching broader concepts or groups of stories that can be placed near one another when they share some common elements. A “news theme” pertaining to crime can range in content from violent crime, homicide, and rape, to more specialized types of crime, such as crime committed by juveniles or crime committed against elderly offenders.

An example of media presentation that is consistent with Fishman’s “news theme” conception has been summarized by Fishman (1980) focusing on identifying the processes by which media isolated incidents concerning juveniles and elderly individuals and used them to construct a broader overarching theme of “crime against the elderly.” Fishman (1998) summarized an actual package of news segments that included the following items that were strongly suggestive of a theme of “crime against the elderly”:

- Police apprehend juveniles who mugged an elderly couple in Queens;
- Police and citizens in Queens meet to discuss crimes against the elderly;
- Feature segment on Senior Citizens Robbery Unit;
- Police seize guns and drugs that were intended for warring gangs;
- Two members of a youth gang are arrested for robbery at knifepoint;
- ROTC cadet arrested in stabbing death of another cadet;
- NYC audit finds city police have been mishandling funds; and
- NYC and police union working on contract at the same time that laid off firemen and subway cops will be rehired (Fishman, 1998, p. 58).

According to Fishman’s (1978) rationale, this news package is heavily laden with notions of both offenses committed against the elderly and offenses that are committed by juvenile offenders. By constructing the news in a thematic manner with crimes against the elderly and crimes committed by juvenile or gang offenders as focuses of the

news package, the news organizations can either purposely, or inadvertently, provide the impression that elderly are at high risk of victimization. The package also gives the impression that much of the potential elderly victimization is perpetrated by youthful offenders. Together, these two situations result in both heightened public perceptions of the risk of crime and public fear. The local media concluded that that the city was in the midst of a crime wave. However, police data indicated that the crime wave was a fabrication created by the media reporting of isolated incidents in a thematic manner.

The most important point of Fishman's (1978) analysis is that the thematic organization of news items in the production process can influence the reader or viewer's perception of the issue, especially concerning perception of the prevalence of the problem. If, for instance, one news item was independently produced about a crime that was committed against an elderly citizen and was then reported with a series of unrelated news items, the story might not merit much attention from the general public, politicians, and government officials. However, because media often present news in a more thematic manner, a story concerning an actual crime could receive much more attention if it is embedded within a package of other news items that are explicitly or implicitly interconnected (i.e., crimes against the elderly).

Despite these potential ill effects on public perception, the use of "news themes" has a very functional role in the news organization process. News editors and journalists need to use the "news theme" process in an effort to sift through and eliminate much of the massive amounts of copy that they receive in a given day. Editors and journalists proceed in the development of news themes by attempting to identify top news stories for the day, whether it is for the front-page edition, the local edition, or some other edition.

News organization staff scan various sources of news, sift through reams of wire service news, read press releases that are sent to the station, and scan police dispatches in constructing the news for a given day. Organizations also rely heavily on one another in the construction of “news themes”. For example, Fishman (1978) noted that when journalists see that other journalists are reporting on a certain news theme, they are more apt to report on the theme and they use other journalistic reports as a means of confirming their initial judgment on the validity of a theme.

Fishman (1978) also noted the importance of official police sources in the crime wave/“news theme” process, especially in terms of maintaining an ongoing crime-related news theme. Once an initial crime wave is developed in news reporting, Fishman (1978) argued that police and official agencies are important mechanisms in sustaining coverage of an ongoing theme. Through his analysis of the “crime against the elderly” theme, Fishman found that once the theme was developed, police officers actually called reporters whenever they became aware of a new mugging or murder of an elderly person. This served to keep the theme alive in the media and allowed the theme to be picked up by other news organizations in the area. This ongoing attention to the “elderly crime” theme in the news media eventually led to commentary and “get tough” responses¹ by government officials.

The content and conclusions of Fishman’s (1978; 1980) analysis of the role of news themes and the responses of the general public and government/political officials to media reports is very similar to the “moral panic” concept established by Stanley Cohen. Cohen (1967; 1972) was concerned with what he regarded as disproportionate reactions

¹ The Mayor in the city promptly “declared war” on crimes against the elderly, expanded police resources, expanded the plainclothes police operations, and created a new accounting procedure in the police department to make information about criminal occurrences more readily available to the press.

by many social institutions to certain social events and conditions. In this regard, Cohen developed the term “moral panic” to refer to a situation in which a “condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (Cohen, 1972: p. 9). Furthermore, when a moral panic occurs, certain criminal or deviant events that occur, in and of themselves, are not as important as is what they seem to represent (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1998), thus, the importance of how the media present issues through the use of themes in the news. Once a societal threat (such as crimes against the elderly) has been identified by media, the issue becomes commented upon by politicians, action groups, and legislators through media outlets.

The general concept of the media use of “news themes” is one that has been examined by other communication researchers as well. For instance, Reisner’s (1992) qualitative analysis of the news production activities of news editors in their construction of the front page supports the “news theme” contention of Fishman (1978). One of the strongest trends noted in the analysis is that stories were more likely to be selected for the front page if they are part of an ongoing recent story. In this regard, news themes have a history (Reisner, 1992) in that potential news items that can be linked to stories that have recently been printed are of more value (from a thematic standpoint) to news editors than potential news items that cannot be linked to past news items. The analysis found that “on days when the editors reported stories that were developments of recent front-page stories, senior editors routinely selected short-form story descriptions as front-page material .. unless a story had been downplayed (deintensified) in the story description” (Reisner, 1992; p. 984).

The scholarly literature suggests that the manner in which news organizations package news items contributes to sensationalism in news reporting. Grabe et al.'s (2001) analysis of differences in the presentation of news items by *Hard Copy* and *60 Minutes*, found that packaging of news items, not just news item content, is an important feature of sensationalism by media organizations. The Grabe et al. (2001) analysis compared the video maneuvers, decorative effects, and audio manipulations of the two news organizations and found marked differences in how the two separate news organizations “sensationalized” news items through news packaging. In much the same way, the construction of news themes can be regarded as an issue of organizational packaging of news.

Instead of using graphic and audio methods to sensationalize criminal events, “news themes” possibly promote sensationalism in a more covert manner by presenting isolated incidents as evidence of a broader underlying concept (such as violent crime or crime against the elderly). In this regard, news themes potentially reinforce sensationalistic misperceptions about the prevalence, social reality, and context of criminal events, especially given the news organization’s profit objectives (Grabe et al., 2001) and need to respond to organizational perceptions of market demand.

Prichard and Hughes: Four Forms of Deviance

Similar to the research of Chermak (1995) and Fishman (1978; 1980), Prichard and Hughes (1997) have taken important strides in rectifying the relative absence of theoretical explanations of why certain crimes are covered more extensively by the

media. Similar to the current analysis, these two scholars focus their attention on the reporting of homicide by print media. They contend that journalistic decision-making can be explained by the notion of deviance in that the degree to which a particular crime event deviates from normal occurrences, the participants of the criminal event deviate from cultural and social norms, and the behavior that is associated with the homicide is deemed to be unhealthy or perverted. More specifically, these authors have developed four categories of deviance that focus on the social context of the criminal event that contributed to media decisions about whether and to what extent to report the event.

Within the framework set forth by Prichard and Hughes (1997), statistical deviance generally refers to the extent to which the criminal event is unusual. The notion of statistical deviance would suggest that the most unusual criminal events (i.e., murder or rape) are far more likely to receive extensive coverage than the more typical criminal events, such as property offenses. Status deviance, refers to degree to which a person or a group is different in terms of the established benchmarks of society, such as wealth, power, success, and privilege. Cultural deviance refers to the extent to which an act is considered unhealthy, unclean, or perverted, as construed by mainstream society. Examples of cultural deviance provided by the Prichard and Hughes (1997) include involvement in drugs and gangs, or the murder of an individual who has characteristics that are generally considered to be especially innocent or vulnerable.

The final component of the theoretical explanation proposed by Prichard and Hughes (1997) is that of normative deviance. Normative deviance refers to a situation in which an act or a behavior violates formally established norms of behavior. In its simplest form, normative deviance can be viewed simply in the context of whether a

behavior is against the law. However, the authors suggest that a more appropriate way of viewing normative deviance is to consider violations committed against the established norms in a more gradational context. Because some criminal events are more serious than other criminal events and because punishments for criminal behavior are not uniformly applied across all types of illegal behavior, perceived severity of offenses is used in the determination of newsworthiness of a crime. Consequently, a journalist, knowing that a rapist, if convicted, stands a greater chance of receiving a harsh prison sentence than an offender who has committed a robbery, will use this information in determination of newsworthiness.

Prichard and Hughes (1997) acknowledge the possibility of overlapping forms of deviance. For example, the murder of a child under the age of eight can be construed as both statistical deviance (children under the age eight make up a relatively small portion of all homicides) and normative deviance (a child murder violates the sanctity of childhood innocence and vulnerability). The authors further explain their deviance typology by noting that status deviance and cultural deviance differ in the sense that status deviance refers to deviance in the context of a deviant personal characteristic of an individual, whereas cultural deviance refers to a characteristic of an action or a behavior. A noted difference between cultural and statistical deviance is that statistical deviance is evaluated relative to other incidents, whereas cultural deviance is evaluated relative to perceived dominant ideas.

The theoretical position Prichard and Hughes (1997) fits into the notion of capitalistic hegemony presented in chapter two in the sense these authors contend that social goods are advanced to the level of journalistic importance if they are perceived as

profitable. If the potential news item is not viewed as potentially profitable, it is withheld from the public or downplayed in the presentation of the item to the public. The four forms of deviance are used by Prichard and Hughes (1997) as measuring rods of newsworthiness based on perceptions of profitability.

The Applicability of Black's "Behavior of Law" to Media Behavior

Many of the ideas presented by Chermak (1995) and Prichard and Hughes (1997), taken together, suggest that the context in which the event occurs is used by media staff in their assessments of newsworthiness. Events that are unique and unusual in character, that are perceived as perverted or unclean, occur locally and involve known local figures, and involve relatively violent circumstances, are more likely to be reported by media due to their increased market value. These aspects of the situational and contextual circumstances that lead to assessments of newsworthiness are relatively straightforward.

From a theoretical standpoint, what is less straightforward is the role of personal characteristics of the victim and offender that are used in assessments of newsworthiness. Perhaps the most concise theoretical statement that could be applied in explaining the importance of personal demographic and background characteristics is Black's (1976) micro-level theoretical explanation of the "Behavior of Law." Black contends that the law behaves in a predictable manner in terms of the amount of law that is available and applied to cases involving particular offenders and victims with specified characteristics. In this regard, the *seriousness of an offense* (in terms of the amount of law that is applied

to a given case) *is a function of the interaction of the demographic and situational characteristics of the offender and the victim.*

Black's (1976) theory, classifies victims and offenders on five separate dimensions: stratification, morphology, culture, organization, and social control. Stratification is defined by Black as the unequal distribution of wealth and power in society (on the basis of such factors as status, race, gender, etc.). Morphology refers to the distribution of people in relation to one another (such as differences in victim-offender relationships and social integration into society). Culture is the symbolic aspect of life in terms of such factors as ideology, values, and morality (the degree to which a person is enmeshed into the culture and the degree to which a person can be considered conventional). Organization generally refers to the capacity of the individual to organize, or in other words, mobilize resources. Lastly, social control refers to differences in the degree to which the individual is governed by formal versus informal processes of social control.

Black (1976) uses these concepts to argue that the location of the victim and the location of the offender on each of these dimensions interacts with one another to determine the seriousness of the offense in terms of the amount of law that will be applied to a given set of circumstances. For instance, socioeconomic status of the victim and offender is one indicator of stratification. According to Black's account, offense seriousness, as it pertains to victim and offender characteristics, is gradational.

Therefore,

- In terms of the amount of law that will be applied to the circumstances, the most serious offenses are those cases that involve a higher socioeconomic status victim and a lower socioeconomic status offender;

- The second most serious offenses are those cases that involve a higher socioeconomic status victim and a higher socioeconomic status offender;
- The third most serious offenses are those cases that involve a lower socioeconomic status victim and a lower socioeconomic status offender; and
- The least serious offenses are those cases that involve a lower socioeconomic status victim and a higher socioeconomic status offender.

Black (1976) makes similar predictions about the behavior of law relating to the remaining four dimensions of his theory. In essence, Black contends that criminal occurrences that involve higher status victims with more powerful positions of status in the social hierarchy, victims that are more socially integrated into the existing culture, victims that are more conventional and have more resources at their disposal, and are governed by informal rather than formal mechanisms of social control, are deemed to be more serious in terms of the amount of law that is applied to the case. Conversely, those cases that involve lower status victims with less powerful positions of status in the social hierarchy, victims that are less socially integrated into the existing culture, victims that are less conventional and have few resources at their disposal, and are governed by formal rather than informal mechanisms of social control, are deemed to be less serious in terms of the amount of law that is applied to the case.

While victim characteristics are more important, offender characteristics can serve to either aggravate or mitigate the seriousness of a criminal occurrence. As in the previous example involving the socioeconomic status of the victim and the offender, it is seen that according to Black's framework, cases that involve higher socioeconomic status victims are the most serious, but an instance that involves a lower socioeconomic status offender committing a crime against a higher socioeconomic status victim would be

deemed more serious and have more law applied to the case than one involving a higher socioeconomic status offender and victim.

Even though Black (1976) applied his framework to describing how the process of law behaves, it also can be applied to media behavior. A case can be made that Black's framework has even more applicability to media behavior than the behavior of law. The behavior of law is conditioned by constitutional principles, rules of court, and judicial review that, in theory, serve as protection against overt forms of discrimination on the basis of victim and offender characteristics. On the other hand, media behavior is less regulated. Media behavior is largely guided by journalist and news editor perceptions of what sells (i.e., a profit motive). Therefore, at least on the basis of profit motive, the behavior of media would appear to be influenced more by victim-offender characteristic interactions. This is especially true if it is perceived that the general public cares more about or is more apt to relate to crimes that are committed against victims with certain specified characteristics by offenders with certain specified characteristics.

A Unified Statement of the Theoretical Principles

The theoretical perspectives that have been reviewed in this chapter can be more concisely summarized into four basic factors that influence print media decision-making concerning the presentation of homicide in print media. First, the imperative that media cater to the interest of the general public in terms of what they care about, what they are interested in, and what they relate to influence crime and justice presentation in the media. Second, media imperatives relating to need for concise, thematic presentation of

the news influence the presentation of crime and justice issues. Third, media are constrained by limitations in terms of the information that is made available to the news organization by official sources. Fourth, media are constrained in their presentation of news by space limitations – in weeks and on days in which there are important national and local news items that compete with crime news for space in the newspaper, the volume of crime coverage will be necessarily limited.

What follows is a more concise statement of the theoretical explanations of news organizations' presentation of homicide that incorporates the principles of "Newsmaking Criminology" into the line of reasoning. This more concise statement will serve as the rationale for the analysis that will follow in chapter 5.

- First, media outcomes are the result of a system of dynamic interplay by and between various social institutions that operate within the current sociocultural and sociopolitical environment. These social institutions include, but are not necessarily limited to, political and government officials, media personnel, special interest groups, criminal justice agents, offenders, and victims. Each of these institutions has power to sway public perception. Each institution competes and cooperates with others in the fulfillment of their unique interests in terms of media presentation of crime.
- Second, media are best conceptualized as a social institution that both objectively serves as a mechanism of transferring the perspectives of other social institutions to the general public and as a social institution that maintains its own unique interest in reporting crime. Media actively pursues its own interests through content selection and the editorial process.
- Third, the result of the dynamic interplay by and between the aforementioned social institutions and the pursuit of media's own organizational interests results in a variety of organizational constraints that are placed on the news organization. These constraints determine news selection, intensity, and placement of the news. Examples of these constraints include limitations on source availability, the need of the organization to report news in thematic frameworks, competing news items, and the need of the news organization to respond to perceived market demand.
- Fourth, market demand variables include those situational and demographic (victim and offender) variables that Chermak (1995), Black (1976), and Prichard

and Hughes (1997) contend are used by journalists to assess whether the general public will identify with the potential news item, will be interested in reading the potential news item, or will arouse the emotions of the reader. Some potential ways that a homicide news item could be construed as interesting to a news organization's readership is if the offense is rare (statistical deviance), is unhealthy, unclean, or perverted (cultural deviance), or involves a member of society that generally operates in accord with norms that are outside of the typical norms of society). Such factors include age, race, ethnicity, and gender of the victim and the offender, the number of victims and offenders, victim-offender relationship, whether a weapon was used and the type of weapon used, and the social context of the offense. Market demand factors are largely the outgrowth of popular culture of which media, politicians, government officials, and special interest all contribute.

- Fifth, homicide occurrences that can be tied to a news theme of crime, violence, or murder, are more likely to be covered. The need to generate news themes in the production of the news is a largely an internal organizational constraint that is a response to the nature of the news organization work environment. News managers literally have reams of print copy to sort through and organize for any edition of the paper. In order to present a coherent edition, news managers must sort through the news and develop commonalities and themes from among all of the potential news stories.
- Sixth, homicides are more likely to be covered and more likely to be intensely covered when official agencies release information concerning the homicide to news organizations. Information constraints result from the dynamic interplay between official agencies and media organizations. The proposed relationship between police agencies and media organizations is a reciprocal relationship. Media organizations rely on official agencies for information, but official agencies also rely on the media as a means of conveying information to the public.
- Seventh, homicides are more likely to be covered and more intensely covered in situations in which there is little by way of competing news items of important local, regional, national, and international news items that the homicide must compete with for column inches.

Empirical Evidence Concerning Organizational Constraints

Empirical research examining the presentation of homicide in the print media have been relatively rare and have, for the most part, been devoid of much theory. This

section reviews the empirical evidence that has been generated concerning two of the four organizational factors that both restrict and guide journalistic decision-making. First, this section reviews the quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence that has been generated concerning “market demand” factors, or in other words, the factors that authors of previous research use in their arguments that certain demographic and situational variables form the basis for journalist assessments of the newsworthiness of stories. Second, the empirical literature that has examined the role of informational limitations will be reviewed. A review of the research uncovered no empirical examinations of crime presentation in news that focused attention on the creation of news themes or the impact of competing news items.

Examinations of “Market Demand” Variables

Quantitative Analyses:

More recent approaches to the analysis of the factors determining the behavior of the media with regard to its reporting practices has deviated substantially from the simple content analysis discussed in chapter 1. The more recent research has been multivariate in nature. These analyses have included offense-based, situational, and demographic factors. Moreover, the more current research has focused much needed attention on clearly articulating outcome variables that are the subject of the analysis. In this regard, a general distinction has been drawn between news prominence and news framing (Kanis, 1991; Taylor & Sorenson, 2002). News story prominence generally refers to the

visibility of a news item and aspects of the media reporting that “signify the relative importance of the story compared to others in the paper; for example, where the story is placed, how long it is, and does it contain photographs?” (Taylor & Sorenson, 2002). The framing of a news item, on the other hand, refers to “the process by which someone packages a group of facts to create a story” (Taylor & Sorenson, 2002). News framing generally refers to the language used in the story, sources and opinions cited, and background information that is provided in the news item. Table 3.1 summarizes the findings of prior research that examined market demand related factors and how they impacted print media coverage of homicide.

Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener (1994) conducted a content analysis and implemented a multivariate approach in analyzing the factors relating to homicide selection for reporting in the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* for 684 homicides committed in Chicago in 1987. The analysis focused attention on two dependent variables – whether the homicide was reported by the newspaper and the amount of coverage that the homicide incident received. Independent variables incorporated in the analysis included factors that the authors deemed to be linked to the “human interest” norms of crime reporting. The factors analyzed included the demographic variables of race/ethnicity, gender, and age of the victim. Situational factors included in the analysis were whether the homicide was committed against multiple victims, whether the homicide was interracial, whether the homicide was committed by use of an unusual method, whether the homicide occurred in the context of a domestic dispute, and whether the homicide was cleared by arrest. The analysis further used census data to include two measures of neighborhood characteristics in which the

Table 3.1: Research Examining Crime Story Appearance and Salience

Variable	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<i>Dep. variables examined</i>	Incident reported?; amount of attention received (minimal, moderate, major attention)	Average story length; number of news items published, proportion of items on front page; and published photo	Number of news items appearing and number of words printed	Size of the story in inches; attention score	Some coverage versus none	Prominence (section of paper, page in section, number of words, placement, and photo)	Whether a particular homicide case had been reported in a particular newspaper or not
<i>Type of crime examined</i>	Homicide	Homicide	Homicide	Homicide, other violent, victimless, economic, misdemeanor, other crimes, and property offenses	Homicide	Homicide	Homicide
<i>Sample</i>	684 homicides occurring in 1987 in the city of Chicago - <i>Chicago Tribune</i> and the <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>	100 homicides during 1994 in Milwaukee County for which an identifiable suspect was arrested	106 homicides occurring in Indianapolis, IN in 1995; 227 articles	Data from six newspapers - 2 extra large urban centers, 2 large urban centers, and 2 moderately sized cities	9,442 willful homicides that occurred in Los Angeles County between 1990 and 1994	1,241 homicide cases reported in the L.A. Times from 1990 to 1994	2,685 homicides in England and Wales from 1993 to 1997 and 1,066 cases reported in <i>The Times</i> , <i>The Mirror</i> , or <i>The Mail</i>

Variable	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<u>Victim Variables</u>							
<i>Age of victim</i>	Primarily non-significant - a story was more likely to appear in only one of the papers if the victim was a child - elderly victims did not increase likelihood of a story - victim age not related to story prominence	Significant - younger (under 18) or older (62+) resulted in statistically higher average story length, number of items published, proportion of items on front page, and photo published	Not examined	Non-significant	Victims under the age of 14 and over the age of 65 were more likely to receive coverage than victims age 15-24	Not examined	Significant - cases involving younger victims were more likely to be reported in all three newspapers; cases involving older victims were more likely to receive coverage in one of the newspapers
<i>Gender of victim</i>	Primarily non-significant - a story was more likely to appear in only one of the papers if the victim was female - victim gender was unrelated to story prominence	Significant - female victims had a significantly higher average story length and number of items published	Controlling for victim race and # of victims, females receive 163 more words than male victims	Non-significant	Cases involving a female victim were more likely to receive coverage	Not examined	Significant - cases involving female victims more likely to be reported in all three newspapers

Variable	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<u>Victim Variables Continued</u>							
<i>Ethnicity of the victim</i>	Blacks and Hispanics were significantly less likely than others to have their homicides reported in both papers - race of the victim was unrelated to story prominence	Significant - when whites were involved significantly more likely to have higher average story length, number of items published, and proportion of items on front page - victim race explained the majority of variation for race	Controlling for victim gender and # of victims, white victims receive on average 207 more words than African-American victims; controlling for victim gender and # of victims, white victims receive 3/4 of an article more than African-American victims	Not examined	Cases involving black or Hispanic victims less likely to receive coverage	Non-significant	Primarily non-significant - in 1 of the 3 newspapers indicated an effect (Black and Asian victims less likely to be reported)
<i>Education of the victim</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	>HS graduate cases received more coverage	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Social status of the victim</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant	Higher income victim cases more likely to receive coverage	Not examined	Significant (occupation) - victims with higher occupational status more likely to receive coverage

<i>Variable</i>	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<u>Offender Variables</u>							
<i>Age of suspect</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Significant - offenses committed by older defendants received significantly more attention and story length - in one instance, younger offenders received significantly higher story lengths	Cases involving offenders over the age of 65 more likely to receive coverage than those involving offenders under 24	Not examined	Significant - cases involving younger offenders were more likely to be reported in all three newspapers
<i>Gender of suspect</i>	Not examined	Significant - males had significantly higher average story length, number of items published	Not examined	Significant - stories concerning female offenders resulted in significantly higher story lengths	Non-significant	Not examined	Primarily non-significant - in 1 of the 3 newspapers, cases involving a female offender received more coverage
<i>Ethnicity of the suspect</i>	Not examined	Significant - white offenders significantly more likely to have higher average story length, number of items published, and proportion of items on front page	Not examined	Not examined	Cases involving black offenders were more likely to receive coverage	Not examined	Non-significant

<i>Variable</i>	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
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Offender Variables Continued

<i>Education of the suspect</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Social status of the suspect</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined

Circumstance and Social Context Aspects of Homicide

<i>Number of victims</i>	Significant - news items were more likely to occur and received higher prominence in both papers examined for cases with multiple victims	Not examined	Controlling for victim gender and victim race, homicides involving multiple victims receive 4 words more and 1 article more than single victim homicides	Significant - stories concerning instances of numerous victims receive more attention and larger story lengths	Cases involving multiple victims were more likely to receive coverage	Not examined	Significant - as the number of victims increased, the probability of coverage increased in all three newspapers
<i>Number of suspects</i>	Primarily non-significant - cases involving multiple offenders were more likely in only 1 of the papers - number of suspects was not related to story prominence	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant

<i>Variable</i>	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<u>Circumstance and Social Context Aspects of Homicide Continued</u>							
<i>Circumst. of the homicide</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Significant for all three newspapers - sexual homicides (mutilations or attack), jealousy and revenge killings, robberies and thefts, and irrational or motiveless killings more likely to be reported
<i>Minority neighborhood</i>	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Victim lived in poor area</i>	Primarily non-significant - news items were more likely to occur for homicides committed in areas with higher census tract family income for one of the papers - census tract income was not related to story prominence	Non-significant - census tract income	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined

Variable	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<u>Circumstance and Social Context Aspects of Homicide Continued</u>							
<i>Location of the crime</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Interracial homicide</i>	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined		Not examined	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Victim-offender relation.</i>	Non-significant	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined	Stranger and gang killings more likely to receive coverage	Instances involving gangs were more likely to be reported in section A	Significant - police officer as victim, commercial homicide, prostitute-client, stranger homicide, husband-wife, and offspring-parent more likely to be covered
<i>Method of killing (unusual?)</i>	Primarily insignificant - unusual method of killing was a significant predictor of whether a story appeared in one of the papers examined - unusual method of killing was not related to story prominence	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant	Non-significant	Not examined	Significant for all three newspapers - enhanced coverage for homicides involving strangulation or suffocation, shooting, neglect, and arson/burning

Variable	Johnsone et al (1995)	Prichard and Hughes (1997)	Weiss and Chermak (1998)	Chermak (1998)	Sorenson et al. (1998)	Taylor and Sorenson (2002)	Peelo et al. (2004)
<u>Circumstance and Social Context Aspects of Homicide Continued</u>							
<i>Risky behavior by the victim</i>	Not examined	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Prior criminal record for suspect</i>	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined
<u>Informational Constraint Variables</u>							
<i>Police inform. ban</i>	Not examined	Primarily non-significant - only significant relationship was for photo published (if police info ban in effect, less likely to publish a photo)	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined
<i>Solved by the police</i>	Non-significant	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined	Not examined

homicide occurred. These measures were the percent of black and Hispanic residents residing in the tract and the average annual family income of the tract in which the homicide occurred.

In terms of the dependent variable concerning whether the homicide occurrence was selected for coverage in the newspaper, the strongest predictors were those relating to the characteristics of the homicide event. Homicides involving multiple victims and those involving unusual methods were significantly more likely to be reported by the newspapers. Concerning individual-level characteristics, homicides involving black and Hispanic victims were significantly less likely to be reported. In homicides reported in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, homicides that involved women and those homicides that involved children were significantly more likely to be reported. The authors further noted that homicide occurrences involving female victims and male offenders were more likely to be reported. Only one of the variables concerning the effects of neighborhood characteristics was significantly related to whether a news item appeared. Homicides that occurred in more affluent neighborhoods (based on average income of the neighborhood) were more likely to be reported. The authors interpreted the results to mean that homicide occurrences that have a high “human interest” norm in that the circumstances conform to the “Doyle criteria” and can be reported as a human interest “story” are deemed to be the most newsworthy.¹

¹ Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener (1994) used the "Doyle Criteria" as an indicator of newsworthiness. The Doyle criteria, which surfaced in a 1976 interview with Pat Doyle of the New York Daily News, maintains that a human interest story is one that 1) involves a socially “prominent” or “respectable” citizen who is involved as either an offender or as a victim; 2) the victim is an innocent or an overmatched target; 3) the murder was either particularly shocking or brutal, involved multiple victims and/or offenders, or in which a particularly brutal method of killing was employed; and 4) the narrative generates mystery, suspense, or drama.

The findings relating to story prominence did not provide much support for the underlying notion that newspaper selection of homicide instances for reporting differs across demographic, social, and incident characteristics. The number of victims involved in the homicide incident was the only consistent predictor of story placement and the length of the story as it appeared in the daily newspaper. Interracial homicides, however, were significantly more likely to receive more coverage in one of the newspapers examined – the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Prichard and Hughes (1997) conducted an analysis of 100 homicides committed and a subsequent analysis of newspaper coverage of homicide in two Milwaukee, Wisconsin daily newspapers for homicides committed in 1994. The authors used four dependent variables in the analysis. These variables included the average length of the news story, the number of news items published, the proportion of the news items that appeared on the front page, and whether the newspaper published a staff generated photograph accompanying the news item. Independent variables in the analysis included demographic variables (white participants, female suspect, female victim, victim a child or a senior citizen, and a race by gender interaction), census tract income, and whether a police information ban had been initiated. Also included as independent variables were measures of victim-offender relationship and whether the victim had been engaged in any type of risky behavior (i.e., drugs, gambling, prostitution, and gang behavior) during the commission of the homicide.

The findings of the analysis revealed that the most important predictors of the four measures of newsworthiness used in the analysis were whether the victim in the offense was a child or a senior citizen and whether the victim in the offense was white.

The child/senior citizen variable was a significant predictor for all four dependent variables and all four variables produced regression coefficients that were in the predicted direction. The measure of participant race (white participant) produced statistically significant regression coefficients for the variables average story length, number of news items published, and proportion of the news items appearing on the front page. Each of these three coefficients for the variable “white participants” was in the predicted direction with homicides involving white participants more likely to receive prominent news coverage.

Homicides involving a female victim were found to receive significantly more coverage in terms of both average story length and the number of news items published. In contrast, homicides committed by a female suspect were significantly less likely to receive coverage in terms of both average story length and the number of news items published. The race by gender interaction variable, which coded homicides with female victims and white participants high, maintained a statistically significant relationship with both average story length and the number of news items published. However, the relationship was not in the predicted direction, thus indicating that news items concerning white females were deemed less newsworthy. The enactment of an information ban by the police department, which serves to prevent official sources from disclosing information to reporters, significantly limited newsworthiness of a homicide occurrence with respect to whether a photograph concerning the homicide was published. The variables documenting census tract income level, suspect-offender relationship, and whether the offender was engaging in risky behavior at the time of the incident failed to

maintain a statistically significant relationship with any of the four dependent measures of homicide newsworthiness.

Weiss and Chermak (1998) examined the coverage in the *Indianapolis Star* of the 106 homicides committed in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1995 that were investigated by the Indianapolis Police Department (IPD). Homicide data were collected from the IPD and media data were collected through Lexis-Nexis searches to identify relevant news articles through searches of the victim and suspect names. News items were searched for the period beginning in January of 1995 and extending through June of 1996. Independent variables used in the analysis included only demographic characteristics of the victim (race, gender, and age), suspect gender, and number of victims. Dependent variables included the number of articles printed about a case and the number of words printed about a case. Findings of simple descriptive statistical analyses suggested that in general, homicides that involve multiple victims, African-American suspects, female suspects, white victims, and female victims were deemed more newsworthy and thus, received more intensive coverage. However, higher order analyses that controlled for the effects of other variables in the analysis suggested that the effects of victim gender and number of victims diminished while the effects of victim race remained relatively strong.

These findings were interpreted by the authors as support for the devaluation hypothesis, which has been a consistent finding in death penalty research (Arkin, 1980; Baldus, et al., 1990; Bienin, et al., 1988; Ekland-Olsen, 1988; Gross & Mauro, 1984; Keil & Vito, 1989; Nakell & Hardy, 1987; Paternoster, 1983, 1984; Radelet, 1981; Radelet & Pierce, 1985; Ralph, et al., 1992; Smith, 1987). When applied to media research, the devaluation hypothesis contends that news media treat murders of African-Americans

and other minorities as being less important than murders that involve white victims. While providing important exploratory findings concerning the effects of race of the victim, this research is limited due to the absence of other important control variables, such as social context factors.

Chermak (1998) conducted a multiple regression analysis of crime story salience through content analysis by examining data collected from six newspapers (the *Detroit News*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Albany Times Union*, and the *Buffalo News*). The news organizations were selected from a list of cities that had at least one newspaper and a circulation of 50,000. The cities were categorized by medium, large, and extra large distinctions depending upon population size and crime rate. Two medium, two large, and two extra large city newspapers were then selected for inclusion in the study.

The analysis focused on two dependent variables. First, the overall size of the news item was measured in column inches devoted to the story. Second, an attention measure item was employed, as conceptualized by Budd (1964). The attention score is a measure of prominence that scores a story with one point for the presence of each of the following five indicators: 1) the story had a headline of two column inches or more in width; 2) the story carried a headline more than half of the number of columns of the page; 3) the story began above the top fold of the page; 4) the story occupied at least three quarters of a column; and 5) the article appeared on page one. The scoring of the attention score was set up so that stories that received more prominence had higher scores than those stories that had lower prominence. Independent variables incorporated into the analysis included type of crime and crime situations (murder, other violent,

victimless, misdemeanor, other crimes, property, number of crimes, weapon, home, street, other location, and public building), defendant variables (gender, age, occupation and status, and criminal history), and victim variables (gender, age, occupation, number of victims). Occupation variables were included in the analysis as measures of social status.

The findings of the analysis suggested that seriousness of the offense is an important factor relating to attention given to a story and size of the story. The analysis found that criminal occurrences with higher numbers of crimes and victims, murder stories, stories discussing drugs/prostitution/gambling, stories discussing the crimes of older adults, and crimes committed by female offenders received significantly more space and attention.

The analysis also explored the possibility that the size of the city mediated the relationship of crime/defendant/victim variables with size of the story and attention received. The number of victims was the best predictor of attention and size of the story in medium, large, and extra large jurisdictions. In terms of the largest cities involved in the analysis (Dallas and Detroit), victimless crimes (drugs, prostitution, and gambling) received significantly more attention than property offenses. In large cities (Cleveland and San Francisco), victimless crimes, crimes involving a female defendant, and crimes involving an older defendant received significantly more attention. In large cities, cases involving a female defendant also received significantly more newspaper space. In the medium sized cities (Albany and New York), cases involving murder, misdemeanors, and older defendants received significantly more attention.

Sorenson et al. (1998), conducted a content analysis of 2,782 news items appearing in the *Los Angeles Times* between 1990 and 1994 that concerned homicide. The analysis focused on news item prominence as a dependent variable. The content analysis of the news accounts of homicide were compared with official information from the 9,442 homicides that occurred in Los Angeles County for the same time period. The authors used general linear regression to determine the effect of victim, incident, and suspect characteristics on subsequent print media coverage of homicide. The authors found that even when multiple variables are taken into account, some homicide incidents are more likely to receive media coverage and that media coverage was more likely for those homicides involving a female, a child, an elderly victim, a victim who was a stranger to the offenders, and homicides that occurred in wealthier neighborhoods. The authors of the study further reported that homicides that were committed against Black or Hispanic victims, victims with less than a high school education, those committed within the context of an intimate relationship, and homicides committed with non-firearm weapons were less likely to be reported by print media.

Taylor and Sorenson (2002) focused on news item prominence as a dependent variable but also extended their analysis by examining news item framing as a second dependent variable. The analysis used victim-suspect relationship and victim ethnicity as independent variables to examine measures of both prominence and framing. News item prominence was operationalized through the use of five measures: section of the paper, location of the section (front vs. back), placement on the page (top vs. lower), number of words (more vs. fewer), and whether there was a photograph accompanying the news item. News item framing was operationalized as the presence or absence of victim

background, suspect background, issue background, the use of a hook, the focus of the news item, genre, and tone. News framing was considered by the authors because the presence or absence of these framing methods can “contribute substantially to readers’ thoughts, feelings, and ideas about blame and responsibility for an issue” (Taylor and Sorenson 2002).

The authors developed several different measures of news framing. A *hook* was defined by the authors as the presence or absence of a catchy human-interest element, not factual elements. This human-interest element generally appeared in the first two or three sentences of the article. The *focus* of the news item was categorized by the authors as either episodic or thematic. Episodic news items focus mainly on describing one episode (i.e., one homicide) that has occurred, whereas a thematic news items places a certain news item within a broader social and/or contextual theme, such as “child abuse” or “gang violence”. *Genre* was coded as either factually based or opinion-based news item. News items were coded as opinion-based when they were dominated by quotes from pertinent sources of information or when the news item was mainly an issue narrative. *Tone* was classified as either emotional or non-emotional. News items were coded as non-emotional if feelings were not conveyed in the coverage of the news item, whereas news items that conveyed personal emotion and raised issues of feelings such as sadness were coded as emotional.

The Taylor and Sorenson (2002) analysis is also unique in terms of their use of a matching method of sampling. The sample of articles that were used in the analysis was selected by stratifying 2,782 homicide articles on the basis of the two independent variables used in the analysis, victim ethnicity and victim-offender relationship,

respectively. A sample of news items reporting on Hispanic victims of homicide were selected and stratified on the basis of whether the victim was a child or an adult and on victim-offender relationship category (i.e., acquaintance, gang, intimate, and stranger). The sample of news items reporting Hispanic victim homicide occurrences were used as index cases for both child and adult victims and for each of the respective victim-offender relationships. The rationale for doing so is that Hispanic homicide cases represented the largest category of offense victims in the dataset. News articles for the Asian, Black, and white strata were chosen on the basis of victim-offender relationship and publication date (to ensure the matched cases were as close as possible in time to the index sample of cases). The authors used stories with white victims and victims whose assailants were strangers as reference groups because homicide occurrences involving white victims who are murdered by strangers tend to be more represented in news depictions of homicide.

The authors reported that victim ethnicity was not statistically associated with either of the two dependent variables in the analysis, story prominence or story framing, controlling for the effects of the victim-offender relationship. The authors did note that a few of the findings that relate to victim ethnicity are of substantive interest and approach statistical significance, however, none of the victim ethnicity dichotomous variables (Asian vs. white, Hispanic vs. white, and Black vs. white) for any of the five prominence measures or the seven framing variables reached statistical significance at the .05 level.

Victim-suspect relationship, which was operationalized through the use of four variables (acquaintance vs. stranger, child vs. stranger, gang vs. stranger, and intimate vs. stranger) was significantly related to several of the dependent variables in the analysis. In comparison to stranger homicides, news items for homicides involving child victims

were 6.5 times more likely to discuss the offender's background ($<.05$), and were more likely to address thematic issues (usually child abuse) and to be printed on the top half of the page ($<.10$). In comparison to stranger homicides, intimate homicides were less visible and less likely to have a descriptive and humanistic story frame. Intimate homicide coverage was less likely to have photographs ($<.10$), less likely to be emotional ($<.05$), less likely to be opinion dominated ($<.05$), and less likely to use a hook to draw the reader into the story ($<.05$) than stranger homicides. Gang homicide articles were almost ten times more likely than stranger homicides to discuss a relevant background issue ($<.05$) and six times more likely than stranger homicides to be printed in the first section of the newspaper ($<.05$). None of the variables examined were statistically significant for acquaintance homicides.

While some researchers have incorporated various location and neighborhood characteristics Derek Paulsen's study (2002) offered a more thorough examination of the role of neighborhood in the news production process. Specifically, the study examined whether the coverage of homicide in the *Houston Chronicle* is truly representative of where crime occurs, or whether media coverage of homicide presents homicide occurrences disproportionately in certain areas of the city. The study relied on hot spot analysis of homicide occurrences (areas of the city in which actual homicide was concentrated) and a hotspot analysis of crime coverage (i.e., which areas of the city news coverage tended to focus).

Paulsen (2002), based the foundation of his research methods on data collected from interviews with Houston Chronicle editorial staff. Based on this interview data, the analysis plotted three different types of crime coverage, relative to the hotspots of actual

homicides in the city using a GIS program. Celebrated articles were those articles that were published within the first 15 pages of the front section and represented the most prominent articles in the eyes of the editorial staff. Local covered stories were those items that were published in the second half of the front section or were published in the second section, but were not printed in the “crime column.” Crime column articles were those articles that were published in the crime/local column. Celebrated articles were considered to be the most prominent, followed by local articles, and then by crime column articles.

Paulsen (2002) reported that the celebrated coverage hotspots focus more on the actual hotspots within the city center, while less celebrated hotspots tend to focus on the periphery of the city. This finding was explored further by the author and it was determined that celebrated hot spots that are concentrated in the center of the city (consistent with actual hotspots) are consistent with a concentration of statistically deviant homicide incidents (those that involve multiple victims/offenders, female victims, and young victims). Therefore, it was concluded that this finding may be due more to the fact that more statistically deviant homicides occur in the city center rather than the location in and of itself.

Paulsen’s (2002) analysis further explored the merit of the hypothesis that an important factor determining intensity of homicide coverage concerned the characteristics of the neighborhood. Census tract data were used to examine the effects of neighborhood variables (family poverty, male employment, vacancy, same home for five years, public assistance, youth population, black population, and homicide rate) on the proportion of the homicides in the neighborhood that were actually covered by the *Houston Chronicle*.

The analysis reported statistically significant findings for home ownership for 5 years, and public assistance. Neighborhoods with higher proportions of residents owning a home and residing in their current home for 5 years or more had a higher portion of the total homicides in the area reported by the paper. Neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty had a lower proportion of their homicides reported. This suggests that the residential stability of the neighborhood influences coverage of crime.

The findings of the Paulsen study speak directly to the issue of market demand as it was conceptualized in the theoretical literature review summarized early in this chapter. The concentration of statistically deviant homicide hotspots is very similar to the concentration of celebrated coverage hotspots. Characteristics of the neighborhood have some influence on reporting decisions, primarily through the residential stability of the neighborhood. Neighborhoods that are more residentially stable likely are comprised of individuals that are more centrally located within society and are not on the periphery of society. Therefore, the types of individuals residing in these neighborhoods are likely to be who the editorial board and journalists of news agencies target as their primary readers.

The research of Peelo et al. (2004) provided a significant advancement in media research examining the presentation of homicide in print media. The analysis considered a large sample of homicide occurrences (N=2,685) over a lengthy period of time (1993 to 1997) that were reported by three different print media outlets. An additional advancement to this body of literature is that the analysis considered homicides and subsequent media coverage for jurisdictions that were not located within the United States (England and Wales). All of the prior published literature had examined only

relatively large United States jurisdictions and media outlets. The analysis also considered a more complete range of independent variables.

Despite these advances, the Peelo et al. (2004) analysis is substantially limited in that the analysis only considered one dependent variable, whether a news item was published. The analysis is further limited, in this regard, considering recent commentary urging researchers to consider a broader range of dependent variables to measure the intensity of coverage and not just whether a news item appeared in print (Chermak, 1995). The analysis relied on data from the Homicide Index, a computerized Home Office database of all initially recorded homicides. The database search revealed 2,685 initially recorded homicide cases, of which 2,396 were classified as murders, 282 were classified as manslaughter cases, and 7 were classified as infanticide cases. Reporting of these cases in print media was examined in three national newspapers, *The Times*, the *Mail*, and the *Mirror*. The *Mail* represented what the authors described as “a middle-brow right of center newspaper” (p. 260) and the *Mirror* represents “a tabloid left of center newspaper” (p. 260). The analysis recorded information on the basis of a wide range of range of victim, offender, and situational variables.

Multivariate logistical regression analysis indicated that victim variables and situational variables relating to the case are more important in assessing newsworthiness decisions of print media than are offender variables. Circumstance (sexual homicides, jealousy and revenge killings, robberies and thefts, and irrational or motiveless killings), number of victims, victim-offender relationship (police officer as victim, commercial homicide, prostitute-client, stranger homicide, husband-wife, and offspring-parent), victim age (young), female victim, higher occupation status of the victim, and method of

killing (strangulation or suffocation, shooting, neglect, and arson/burning) were significant predictors of coverage in all three newspapers examined. Cases involving a female suspect, occurring in certain police regions, young suspects, and involving victims who were born in certain countries were significant predictors of print media coverage in two of the three newspapers.

The analysis was also able to speak to differences in reporting practices (in terms of homicide coverage) across different newspapers. Only 14% of the total homicides committed were covered by all three newspapers, and only 39% of the homicides were covered by at least one of the newspapers examined. Moreover, 60% of the homicide occurrences were not reported in either of the three newspapers examined. Nine percent of the homicides were covered by two of the three newspapers and 16.8% of the cases were reported by only one of the newspapers. Therefore, the authors concluded that only a minority of homicides are covered by national news outlets. There was little difference between the three newspapers in terms of the percentage of the total homicide cases that the newspaper covered with the *Times*, the *Mail*, and the *Mirror* covering 28.2%, 20.0%, and 24.5% of the total cases, respectively.

Despite general similarities in the level at which newspapers present homicide cases to the general public as news, the analysis also recognized general differences across newspapers in terms of their presentation of homicide. In this regard, the authors of the analysis identified two different levels of distortion – a general level and a more specified level that is unique to certain newspapers. For example, the analysis found that at a more general level (based on a comparison of the date from each of the respective newspapers considered), all of the newspapers were more likely to cover homicides that

involved suffocation and less likely to report homicides that involved poisoning.

However, in contrast, one newspaper was more likely to cover shooting homicides and one of the newspapers was less likely to cover shootings. Therefore, distortions of homicide may not only be generalized in nature, but the most important elements of media distortion could also be specific and unique to certain newspapers and types of news organization.

A final important point noted by the analysis is that prior examinations of the effects of age (especially those that treat age as a dichotomous variable) may mask a curvilinear relationship between victim and suspect age with media outcomes. Prior research has generally conceptualized victim age in terms of an expectation of more coverage for young offenders and older offenders. The Peelo et al. (2002) analysis suggests that the nature of the effects of age on media outcomes may be better assessed by measuring age as a dichotomous measure. More specifically, the analysis found that homicides that involve infants are less likely to be covered, whereas homicides that involve children between the ages of 4 and 14 are more likely to receive coverage. The analysis further reported that the likelihood of coverage declines from age 15 to around the age of 59 and then increases at the age of 60.

Qualitative Analysis:

Empirical research examining media processes and motivations for coverage have also used qualitative interviews of journalists as a method of research. For example, as a component of their previously reviewed analysis, Pritchard and Hughes (1997) conducted

qualitative interviews of five reporters in Milwaukee working for either the *Sentinel* or the *Journal*. Interviews were conducted with three white males, a white female, and a black male. The interviews focused on how reporters learn about homicides, their sources of information, factors that determine story length, types of homicides that are deemed newsworthy, and reasoning that might suggest why homicides involving whites would be more apt to receive more extensive news coverage.

The interview data suggested that reporters maintain a great deal of freedom in their assessments of the newsworthiness of a particular news item. Moreover, in terms of individual assessments of newsworthiness, three general themes consistently emerged as important factors in assessing the newsworthiness of a homicide. First, the majority of the focus is on victim factors and not on factors that concern the offender. Second, homicides that involve victims that can be easily characterized as “innocent,” such as child victims and victims who are not engaging in any type of “risky” behavior during the homicide occurrence, were generally deemed by the reporters as items that would generate substantial news interest.

Third, there was not a great deal of agreement amongst the reporters concerning the role that race plays in assessments of newsworthiness. Although all of the reporters contended that race, in and of itself, was not a factor in the selection of newsworthiness, the reporters presented two explanations of why race may seem to be an important factor. Some journalist comments suggested that one reason race may appear to be important is that minority homicides and those that occur in certain geographic areas are so common that they cease to become newsworthy. Some of the reporters also suggested that homicides involving minority offenders could be deemed as not newsworthy due to risky

behavior in which the victim was engaged at the time of the incident. The qualitative results further suggested that reporters openly acknowledge that they considered the types of people who were most likely to read the newspaper as they assessed the general newsworthiness of homicides. In explaining this tendency, one of the reporters explained, “If the reader could say ‘that could have been me that was killed,’ then that has more news value” (p. 63).

This statement is a rather important one given the use of the “market demand” conceptualization of the past research findings concerning demographic and situational variables that is being used in the current analysis. As this statement (and the context of the statement) implies, journalists and news editors who construct the daily news, would be more likely to include a news item in the news package if the item is one with which an organization’s readership would readily identify. Therefore, in terms of demographic characteristics, one would expect that stories involving victims with demographic characteristics similar to those of the paper’s readership to receive more coverage.

Examinations of Informational Constraint

Scholars have maintained that political leaders and law enforcement upper-level managers have the ability, through their positions in the governmental hierarchy, to offer the media primary and ideological definitions of crime (Welch et al., 1998). In this regard, it has been contended that members of the media serve the function of propaganda managers who operate within the state’s ideological mechanism (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) and control perceptions of crime through their influence on the media.

This perspective maintains that state managers filter conceptualizations of crime and that because of various propaganda techniques (Kappeler et al., 1996), “state managers and other media together determine what is socially thinkable” (Welch et al., 1998). Journalists and other media managers are, in many regards, defenseless against this process because of their need to maintain a reciprocal relationship with official criminal justice agencies as a method of promoting their interests in efficiently producing the news (Chermak, 1995).

Content analysis research conducted by Welch et al. (1998) provides findings that are suggestive of the potential effects of over-reliance on official sources of information. These authors conducted a content analysis of expert news quotes concerning crimes that were reported in *feature* news articles appearing in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* over a three-year period. The authors reported that there were glaring dissimilarities in the content of politicians and practitioner statements referenced by print media relative to those of professors and researchers. Politicians and practitioners were more likely to be quoted on issues relating to crime control and make utilitarian statements as to the nature of crime causation, whereas professors and researchers were more likely to be quoted on issues of crime causation and attribute crime to personal pathology and social factors. If journalistic news sources for reports of crime are more likely to be of the practitioner variety and sources from criminal justice agencies are more likely to be quoted on statements concerning a crime control ideological slant, a biased understanding of the crime issue(s) could potentially be generated for public consumption.

Despite the acknowledgement of the influences that official sources of information can potentially have on media outcomes, this factor has been virtually ignored in empirical research. Only two of the multivariate analyses of print media outcomes concerning reports of homicide examined variables relating to media use of official agency sources of information. Johnstone et al. (1995) examined the effects of whether police solved the case. This variable relates to media reliance on official sources of information in that as police gather more and more information about a given offense, including identifying the perpetrator of an offense, media will have more potential information to publish, which may mean more and more intense coverage of the homicide. This analysis reported that whether the police solved the homicide was not a significant predictor of either news item appearance or the intensity of the coverage.

Prichard and Hughes (1997) examined the effect of a police information ban on various print media outcomes. This variable recorded instances in which the police placed explicit information restrictions on police staff in terms of the release of information to media outlets. The analysis found little support for the notion that information limitations affect the nature of media reports. Of the four dependent variables measured by the analysis (average story length, the number of news items published, the proportion of news items printed on the front page, and whether a photo appeared with the news item), a police information ban was found to be statistically related only to whether a photograph was published.

Conclusions from Past Research

Five basic conclusions concerning the nature of scholarly inquiry examining news selection and production processes are warranted. First, the most important “market demand” variables that influence media outcomes appear to be the number of victims, age of the victim, age of the offender, educational level of the victim, ethnicity of the victim, and victim-offender relationships (stranger- and gang-related homicides). Second, number of victims, ethnicity of the offender, social status of the victim, and location of victim residence (lived in poor area) variables have produced inconsistent or mixed results. Third, method of homicide, social status of the offender, minority neighborhood, risky behavior of the victim, the prior criminal record of the offender, and location of the crime variables were found to be unrelated to coverage.

Fourth, the relatively few studies that have been produced examining the effects of information constraints placed on media by police information sources have produced mixed or tentative results. The limited multivariate research that has been produced has suggested that whether police solved the crime has an insignificant effect on media outcomes. The effect of a police information ban was found to have a largely insignificant effect, with one study finding a significant effect for the police ban variable for one media outcome measure. Fifth, there are theoretical reasons and qualitative findings that suggest the generation of news themes in crime coverage has an influence on media decision-making. However, the concept of a news theme in crime coverage is one that has not been empirically examined in the quantitative multivariate research. Similarly, there are theoretical reasons to believe that competing news items of local,

national, and international importance can influence news organization decision-making. The concept of competing news items has not been applied to any examinations of homicide reporting.

Limitations of Past Research

There are several important theoretical and methodological limitations of the prior research examining the presentation of homicide by the print media. First, much of the existing research has failed to develop or follow a comprehensive theoretical framework in examining journalistic decision-making concerning which homicides to report and which homicides to ignore (Prichard & Hughes, 1997). Some authors, such as Prichard and Hughes (1997), have attempted to remedy this situation by better conceptualizing the explanatory mechanisms to account for news manager assessment of newsworthiness of a homicide incident (i.e., the four forms of deviance). However, even this past research that specifically set out to remedy the situation, failed to sufficiently take into account a broader framework in its attempt to explain journalist decision-making. The current research addresses this limitation by establishing the broader framework of Newsmaking Criminology as a guide in studying media decision-making.

Not only is the past research deficient in terms of failing to develop a framework, it is also limited in that it ignores a wide range of factors that serve as competing explanations of news organization decision-making. The prior research has narrowly focused attention on the traditional approach of examining demographic and situational factors as correlates of media outcomes. The past research has not examined the role of

the generation of news themes, the role of competing news items, and has virtually ignored the role that that information availability potentially plays in the decision-making process. A review of the existing research focusing on print media and homicide coverage uncovered little research that measured these concepts as independent variables. This research also takes several strides to remedy this limitation of the research by developing multiple measures of both news themes and informational constraints.

A third limitation of the past research in this area concerns the measurement of certain key variables. Prior research has failed to systematically incorporate interaction terms into prior analyses in the measurement of race and ethnicity of the victim and offender. Past research has simply measured race and ethnicity of the victim and offender as separate variables or as whether the homicide was interracial, without considering the perspective of Black (1976) in his conceptualization of the Behavior of Law. Black's (1976) propositions, when applied to the behavior of media, imply that the race/ethnicity of the offender, in conjunction with the race/ethnicity of the victim, matters in media outcomes. The current research addresses this limitation of the past research by examining victim-offender race and ethnicity interactions and their impact on media outcomes.

Past research has also utilized relatively weak measures of informational constraints. Research has measured both whether the police solved the case and whether a police information ban was established to limit the information that the press is permitted to release. While these measures are certainly valid, they may not be the best measures to tap into the link between official agencies and media in terms of information that is passed from police agencies to media outlets. For instance, it is difficult to

precisely specify the predicted effects that police information bans may have on media coverage of crime events. Police information bans are generally established in relatively high profile cases. Therefore, even though established by the police department to protect the integrity of the investigation, the media may be more motivated to search for information sources on their own, given that many cases that result in a police information ban are high profile in nature. Whether the police solved the case may not be an appropriate measure either, for a variety of reasons. In some situations in which the police have not solved a case, they may solicit information from the general public through the media, thus, potentially resulting in more stories and more press coverage. In other cases, an unsolved case may mean little subsequent coverage. The current analysis addresses these potential limitations by including information from police press releases in the analysis (in terms of whether a press release was issued prior to a news item and the type of information contained in the press release).

A final limitation of past research concerns the general approach of the research methods of past research. Research has failed to adequately examine media processes in the day-to-day decision-making of news editors and journalists. In doing so, prior research has failed to account for certain nuances of the media production process. For example, past research has paid little attention to the temporal and sequential ordering that is involved in the police agency-news organization relationship. As previously established, media sources rely heavily on official agencies for information. In many situations, police agencies release information to the press in cases that are incomplete or are currently under investigation. When this occurs, the news agency often receives information about a victim and potentially about the social context that is associated with

the homicide. In many instances, the news organization will run a story without offender information or without complete information as to the social context of the homicide. As a result of the methods used by past research, this gap in information available to the journalist is often ignored.

For instance, suppose that a homicide occurs and the police only inform the press that the victim is a white male, somewhere between age of 20 and 25, who was fatally shot during a convenience store robbery at the victim's place of employment. The press has limited information about the victim but has access to rather complete information concerning the social context of the offense. Generally, convenience store robberies that result in homicide create fairly substantial media interest. Assume that the following day, the media reports on the incident, informing the public that a homicide occurred during a robbery, asking for the public's help in solving the case, and providing several quotes from co-workers about the dangers of working at convenience stores. A homicide occurred, information was released to the press, and a news item was generated.

Next, suppose that three months later, acting upon an anonymous tip, the police make an arrest in the case, but for one reason or another, the arrest is not reported by the media. The police now have full demographic information about the offender that become part of the official police records. A researcher who uses this offender information would be introducing error into any analysis of media coverage in relation to the media coverage of the homicide that was printed prior to the arrest of the suspect. The news article was printed prior to the news organization having this information and therefore could not have influenced media decision-making. This is a problem of temporal ordering. Existing research has failed to address this potential problem.

The current research will attempt to address many of these limitations of the prior research and analyze decision-making of mass media personnel. In the chapter that follows, the research design for the current analysis is reviewed. The research design that is presented allows for the comparison of both homicides that are reported by the media and those that are not reported. Furthermore, the proposed design draws from a variety of information sources in the collection of the data for the analysis. The design includes two phases, the second of which allows measurement of important concepts that have previously been unexamined in the literature. These conceptions that the design incorporates more appropriately allow for examination of the media processes that have been identified by past research as important considerations in explaining media decision-making.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that are related to print media decision-making in reporting homicide incidents. The research question of interest is: what are the contributions of the various measures that relate to “market demand”, news themes, and the availability of information in explaining variation in media outcome measures? Not all of the measures identified in the preceding chapter as important considerations in the news production process, such as location variables and competing news items, are included in the current analysis. This represents a limitation of the analysis that will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. The media outcome variables that are examined in this research are those that pertain to whether the news organization published a news item, the number of news items published, the average number of words devoted to the homicide, whether a photograph appeared in the coverage, and the placement of the news item in the paper. Consistent with the arguments presented in the preceding chapters, this research takes a multivariate approach and uses a variety of different media outcome measures.

Before proceeding to an in-depth identification of dependent and independent variables, statistical operations, and the hypotheses under consideration, this chapter first establishes the parameters of the analysis. The research will be reported in two separate phases. The first phase will consider the effects of traditional demographic and social

context variables on media outcomes and in doing so will closely follow the methods and procedures of past research. The first phase of the analysis examines the homicides that occurred in the Houston, Texas area in 2001 as the units of analysis.

This first phase uses aggregated measures as dependent variables. It is necessary to use aggregated measures in the first phase of the analysis because of multiple news items that were published in the newspaper of interest concerning the respective homicides. For instance, one of the measures used in the analysis is the average number of words per story, which represents a mean score by aggregating all of the news items that appeared in print into one basic measure. This first phase of the analysis is necessary because it allows for a comparison of the findings of the current analysis with the findings of prior research that followed similar procedures. But more importantly, aggregation of the independent variables in the analysis also allows the researcher to consider the homicides that were committed during the period of time in question as the units of analysis, allowing both homicides that were reported and homicides that were not reported in the print media.

Whereas aggregation of the dependent variables works well for the traditional demographic, social context, and some measures of information constraint variables that are currently under evaluation, aggregating the dependent variables in this way does not lend itself well to analyzing the effects of independent variables such as news themes and some measures of information constraint on media decision-making. These types of measures require, instead, that each news item be considered separately in the analysis. The measurement of news themes provides an ample illustration of this point. The premise that generation of news themes is an important consideration in media outcomes

maintains that a news item is more likely to appear if the news item can be tied to a broader overarching theme relating to crime. Using aggregate measures of the dependent variables (because of multiple news items concerning particular homicides) to examine the effects of news themes and certain source limitation measures would mean that the independent measures would need to be aggregated as well. Doing so would result in the loss of too much information as measures of these independent variables would no longer be meaningful. In essence, the decision-making of journalists and news editors could no longer be assessed on a day-to-day, news item to news item basis, which is how journalists and news editors predominately operate.

Therefore, a second phase of the analysis considers individual news items as the units of analysis. The importance of conducting a two-phase analysis is that phase one of the analysis allows all homicide occurrences in Houston during the period in question to be considered, even those cases that were not reported by the press. The second phase of the analysis allows the independent variables that have been previously excluded by prior research to be included in the analysis as competing explanations of media decision-making. Moreover, the second phase allows these measures to be included in the analysis in their proper context, or in other words, as the day-to-day decision-making process that news media engage in during the news production process.

The second phase of the analysis deviates from phase one in terms of its heavy reliance on competing explanations of media decision-making that have not been examined by prior research. In so doing, phase two places a premium on discerning the type and nature of information to which the news organization had access prior to the publication of the news item and how access to information affects decision-making.

Because of its emphasis on informational constraint, the phase two analysis focuses narrowly only on those news items that report information at the police/investigational stage of the criminal process. This parameter on the analysis is necessary because the analysis considers informational sources released by the Houston Police Department and did not record data concerning the availability of information at trial or sentencing stages. A second primary emphasis of phase two is measurement of news themes and how other news items published on the same day build on organizing concepts that are used by media in their reporting practices. The remainder of this chapter identifies the various data sources that will be used in each phase of the analysis, identifies the independent and dependent variables that will be used in both phases of the analysis, and identifies the limitations of the research methods.

Data Sources and Methods

This research draws from two primary sources of information – data from the Houston Police Department concerning deaths investigated as homicides and media reports published in the *Houston Chronicle* concerning the homicides investigated by the Houston Police Department. Two types of data were requested and supplied by the Houston Police Department. First, it was necessary to obtain demographic and social context data from the police agency concerning the investigated homicides. Toward this end, correspondence was sent to the Media Relations Division of the Houston Police Department requesting victim and offender information, victim-offender relationship, and circumstances or motives surrounding the homicide occurrence. In terms of victim and

offender information, the police agency was asked to supply name, gender, race, and age information. Second, all press releases issued to media agencies by the Houston Police Department for the homicides in question were obtained via the HPD website. The press release documents provided key informational source information used in phase two of the analysis. Content analysis of the press releases were performed to discern the type of information known by the press concerning the specifics of the homicide relative to the date of the news item that appeared in the *Houston Chronicle*.

The *Houston Chronicle* was selected as the representative print news organization of interest for this study. Searches of news items reported in the *Houston Chronicle* concerning the local instances of homicide were conducted by using two databases as search engines, the Lexis / Nexis online “Major Papers” service, and an online database created and maintained by the *Houston Chronicle*. Each respective homicide was searched first by victim name and then by offender name. Because of the various nuances of media database searches, a comprehensive approach was developed for searching the databases. For the Lexis/Nexis searches, victim and offender names were searched by using up to four different variations on the names provided. In the event that only a first and last name was provided, the first and last names were entered into different cells so that the search would pull all stories that referenced the first and last name of the individual in question, regardless of the temporal positioning of the names in the news item. In instances in which a middle name was provided, this method was repeated using first and middle name and then using middle and last name. The last

method entailed using just the last name of the offender. In the event that this last method revealed many hits, the last name and the term “murder” were searched.¹

The database maintained by the *Houston Chronicle* was searched by using a total of six different approaches. The database had a particular feature that allowed the user to specifically search for names by enclosing the name in quotation marks (i.e., ‘John Smith’). In situations in which first, middle and last name was provided, all three names were enclosed in quotations and searched. A second approach involved enclosing first and last names in quotation marks. The third and fourth approach involved searches using first and middle and then middle and last names in quotation marks. A fifth approach used first and last name and middle initial (‘John D. Smith’). A final approach used the first and last names but did not enclose them in quotation marks. This approach was typically helpful in situations where only first and last names were provided with no middle initial or middle name. This was necessary because enclosing the first and last names in quotation marks would have limited the hits to stories where the first name was followed immediately by the last name with no middle initial or name. It was not assumed that the name of the individual would appear in the news item precisely way that it was provided by the police agency. It is also important to note that the procedures outlined here were exhaustive in that all procedures were applied to every name. Every relevant approach was applied to every name.

The news items used as sources of information from the analysis are not limited to stories generated by the news organization at certain stages of the criminal justice process, nor were the news items used limited to certain types of articles. Instead, a

¹ The term “murder” was developed as a way of narrowing the scope of the last name searches after it was discovered that the Lexis/Nexis typically references homicide cases using the term as a key reference term.

comprehensive search was conducted of all news items referencing the victim or offender name. The only restrictions that were implemented in this regard were follow-up articles that occurred after final disposition and revealed no further information in terms of the offender, victim, or circumstances surrounding the incident.²

News items were restricted during the search to the time period between January 1, 2001 through March 25, 2004. The news items used in the current analysis were not written by just one writer, or even a handful of journalists, for that matter. The short articles that were quick, informational pieces about the homicide were generally written by an unidentified staff writer and the remaining articles were written by numerous journalists under the employ of the *Houston Chronicle*.

The city of Houston was selected over several other major cities for this analysis for one main reason. It was considered necessary to collect information from a variety of different sources. In order to conduct the second phase of the analyses, it was necessary to collect homicide information about all homicides committed in the jurisdiction, media reporting of homicide cases in the jurisdiction, and police information that was released to the press. The city of Houston was selected as the jurisdiction of interest primarily because the city police department made available to the public all of its press releases concerning homicides and other major crimes via the internet categorized by date and street location of the incident. Combined with the information that was gathered from the *Houston Chronicle* and the Houston Police Department data, the city was determined to be the most appropriate venue given the broad approach of the current analysis.

² This restriction was implemented because of one particular homicide, the case of Andrea Yates, that has widely reported in the local, regional, and national media.

Dependent Measures

The first phase of the analysis considers the effects of demographic, social context, and informational constraint factors on four media outcome variables. First, the analysis considers a basic measure of whether a news item concerning the homicide was printed at all by the *Houston Chronicle*. This variable is measured by coding homicide occurrence as a 1 if a news item was printed and as a 0 if no news item appeared. The final three dependent variables concern the intensity of the coverage. The analysis codes the number of news items that were printed in the paper that concerned the particular homicide of interest as a continuous variable. Next, the analysis measures the amount of print coverage devoted to the homicide occurrence by measuring the number of words dedicated to the homicide. The number of words included in each of the respective news items that are devoted to the particular homicide will then be averaged into a final measure that will be incorporated into the analysis.

Lastly, the analysis uses an aggregate measure of media attention that incorporates whether a news item appeared, the length of the news item in words printed, page placement, and the use of graphical depictions in the news item. Attention scores are important because they allow the researcher to consider the importance of each aspect of news reporting (measured as dependent variables) in conjunction with one another. Logically, if a story appeared on page one of the newspaper, was accompanied by a photograph, and met a certain criteria in terms of the number of words that appeared in the article, the news item was likely deemed to be more important than a news item that maybe appeared on page 2 of the front section, was accompanied by a photograph, but

Table 4.1: Summary of Measurements for Variables Considered in All Analyses

Dependent Measures – Phase 1

News item appeared concerning the homicide	0 1	No Yes
Average number of words (per news item) devoted to the homicide		Interval variable
Number of articles that appeared concerning the homicide		Interval variable
Did a story appear on page of the front section or page 1 of the Metro section?	0 1	No Yes
Did a photo or other graphic appear with a news item?	0 1	No Yes
Attention score ¹		Interval variable ranging from 0 to 6

Dependent Measures – Phase 2

Number of words in the news item		Interval variable
Did the news item appear on page one of the front section or page 1 of the Metro section?	0 1	No Yes
Number of photos accompanying the news		Interval variable
Attention score ²		Interval variable ranging from 0 to 3

Independent Measures – Victim and Offender Demographics

Victim Measures

Gender of the victim	0 1	Female Male
Age of the victim		Interval variable
Victim under age of 21	0 1	Victim not under age of 21 Victim under the age of 21
White victim	0 1	Non-White Victim White Victim
Hispanic victim	0 1	Non-Hispanic Victim Hispanic Victim
Minority victim	0 1	Non-Minority Victim Minority Victim

Table 4.1 Continued: Summary of Measurements for Variables Considered in All Analyses

Offender Measures

Gender of the offender	0	Female
	1	Male
Age of the offender		Interval variable
Offender 40 or older	0	Offender not 40 and over
	1	Offender 40 or older
White offender	0	Non-White Offender
	1	White Offender
Hispanic offender	0	Non-Hispanic Offender
	1	Hispanic Offender
Minority offender	0	Non-Minority Offender
	1	Minority Offender

Situational Aspects of Homicide

Number of Victims/Offenders

The number of victims		Interval variable
The number of offenders		Interval variable
Multiple offenders	0	Multiple offenders not involved
	1	Multiple offenders involved

Victim/Offender Race Interactions

Minority victim/Minority offender	0	Did not involve Min. Vic./Min. Off.
	1	Involved Min. Vic./Min. Off.
Minority victim/Non-minority offender	0	Did not involve Min. Vic./NM Off.
	1	Involved Min. Vic./NM. Off.
Non-minority victim/Non-minority off.	0	Did not involve NM. Vic./NM Off.
	1	Involved NM. Vic./NM. Off.
Non-minority victim/Minority offender	0	Did not involve NM. Vic./Min. Off.
	1	Involved NM Vic./Min. Off.

Victim/Offender Relationship

Stranger homicide	0	Not a Stranger Homicide
	1	Stranger Homicide
Acquaintance homicide	0	Did not an Acquaintance Homicide
	1	Involved Acquaintance Homicide

Table 4.1 Continued: Summary of Measurements for Variables Considered in All Analyses

Victim/Offender Relationship Continued

Domestic homicide	0	Did not involve a domestic vic./off. relat.
	1	Involved a domestic vic./off relat.
Unknown relationship	0	Vic./off. relationship was unknown
	1	Vic./off. relationship was known

Weapon Used

Firearm used	0	Firearm was not used in homicide
	1	Firearm was used in homicide
Knife/cutting instrument used	0	Knife/cutting instrument not used
	1	Knife/cutting instrument used
Assault ³	0	Did not involve assault
	1	Involved assault
Other weapon	0	Did not involve some other weapon
	1	Involved some other weapon

Context Measures

Robbery related homicide ⁴	0	Homicide was not robbery-related
	1	Homicide was robbery-related
Argument-related	0	Homicide did not result from an argument
	1	Homicide did result from an argument
Domestic – child killed	0	Did not involve a domestic child-killing
	1	Involved a domestic child-killing
Domestic – murder/suicide	0	Did not involve a domestic murder/suicide
	1	Involved a domestic murder/suicide
Non-domestic murder/suicide	0	Did not involve a non-domestic murder/suic.
	1	Involved a non-domestic murder/suicide
Person-related robbery	0	Did not involve a person-related robbery
	1	Involved a person-related robbery
Business-related robbery	0	Did not involve a business-related robbery
	1	Involved a business-related robbery
Drug-related robbery	0	Did not involve a drug-related robbery
	1	Involved a drug-related robbery
Drive-by shooting	0	Did not involve a drive-by shooting
	1	Involved a drive-by shooting

Table 4.1 Continued: Summary of Measurements for Variables Considered in All Analyses

Context Measures Continued

Kidnapping	0	Did not involve a kidnapping
	1	Involved a kidnapping
Police officer killed	0	Did not involve a police officer killed
	1	Involved a police officer killed
Self-defense	0	Did not involve self-defense
	1	Involved self-defense

News Theme Independent Variables

Number News Items Published Same Day

News theme – same day as homicide item – crime in general – number of news items ⁵	Interval variable
News theme – same day as homicide item – specific instances of interpersonal violence no loss of life – number of news items ⁶	Interval variable
News theme – same day as homicide item – specific instances of interpersonal violence w/ loss of life – number of news items ⁷	Interval variable

Number Words Published Same Day

News theme – same day as homicide item – crime in general – number of words ⁸	Interval variable
News theme – same day as homicide item – specific instances of interpersonal violence no loss of life – number of words ⁹	Interval variable
News theme – same day as homicide item – specific instances of interpersonal violence w/ loss of life – number of words ¹⁰	Interval variable

Source Constraint Independent Variables

Press Release Information Provided

Victim name in press releases?	0	Victim name not included
	1	Victim name included
Victim gender in press releases?	0	Victim gender not included
	1	Victim gender included
Victim age in press releases?	0	Victim age not included
	1	Victim age included

Table 4.1 Continued: Summary of Measurements for Variables Considered in All Analyses

Press Release Information Provided Continued

Victim race/ethnicity in press releases?	0	Victim race/ethnicity not included
	1	Victim race/ethnicity included
Suspect name in press releases?	0	Suspect name not included
	1	Suspect name included
Suspect gender in press releases?	0	Suspect gender not included
	1	Suspect gender included
Suspect age in press releases?	0	Suspect age not included
	1	Suspect age included
Suspect race/ethnicity in press releases?	0	Suspect race/ethnicity not included
	1	Suspect race/ethnicity included
Social context information in press releases?	0	Social context information not included
	1	Social context information included

Information Scores

Aggregate victim information score ¹¹	Interval variable ranging from 0 to 3
Aggregate offender information score ¹²	Interval variable ranging from 0 to 4

Control Variable

Trial/Sentencing Stage	0	Article not published during stage
	1	Article published during stage

¹ The attention score for the dependent variables in phase 1 of the research is a summed total of 6 dichotomous measures, including: whether a news item appeared in print for the homicide in question; whether a news item appeared on either page one of the front section of the paper or page one of the Metro section of the paper; whether the average number of words per article met or exceeded the value falling at the 25th percentile (62 words); whether the average number of words per article met or exceeded the value falling at the 50th percentile (96 words); whether the average number of words per article met or exceeded the value falling at the 75th percentile (151.125 words); and whether a photograph appeared for any of the news items.

² The attention score for the dependent variables in phase 2 of the research include the following: whether the news item concerning the homicide appeared on either page one of the front section of the paper or page one of the Metro section of the paper; whether the number of words in the news item met or exceeded the value falling at the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles, respectively; whether a photograph appeared with the news item; and whether more than one photograph appeared with the news item.

³ Assault homicides are defined here as those that involved the use of a blunt instrument or hand-held weapon other than a firearm or a cutting instrument and homicides that involved the use of personal weapons (hands, fists, etc.).

⁴ Robbery is defined broadly as any homicide related to a drug-related robbery, a street robber, a residential robbery, or a business-related robbery.

⁵ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of articles) that were devoted to crime in general. This includes stories dedicated to actual instances of crime, reports of crime in a general sense (for example, reports of increases/decreases in the crime rate), white-collar crime and fraud, and national/world news briefs that focus on crime.

⁶ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of articles) that were devoted to *actual instances* of interpersonal violence (occurring either locally, regionally, or nationally) that did not result in the loss of life. This includes actual cases of assault, sexual assault, robberies, and attempted homicide that did not result in the loss of a life.

⁷ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of articles) that were devoted to *actual instances* of interpersonal violence (occurring either locally, regionally, or nationally) that did result in the loss of life.

⁸ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of words) that were devoted to crime in general. This includes stories dedicated to actual instances of crime, reports of crime in a general sense (for example, reports of increases/decreases in the crime rate), white-collar crime and fraud, and national/world news briefs that focus on crime.

⁹ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of words) that were devoted to *actual instances* of interpersonal violence (occurring either locally, regionally, or nationally) that did not result in the loss of life. This includes actual cases of assault, sexual assault, robberies, and attempted homicide that did not result in the loss of a life.

¹⁰ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of words) that were devoted to *actual instances* of interpersonal violence (occurring either locally, regionally, or nationally) that did result in the loss of life.

¹¹ The aggregate score is an additive variable that is composed of whether victim name, gender, age, and race/ethnicity were released by the Houston Police Department in the press release.

¹² The aggregate score is an additive variable that is composed of whether offender name, gender, age, and race/ethnicity were released by the Houston Police Department in the press release.

did not meet a word limit criteria. For phase one, the attention score will be composed of six items: whether a story appeared in the paper for the homicide; whether a story appeared on page 1 of the front section or on page 1 of the Metro section; whether the number of words in the stories concerning the homicide met or surpassed the, 25th, 50th, and 75th percentile score, respectively, for the average number of words reported for the homicides in general, and whether a photograph was printed for the news item.

These components of media outcome are incorporated into the media attention score for a variety of reasons. First, this type of media information is readily available. The “Major Papers” aspect of the Lexis/Nexis service and the *Houston Chronicle* database provide summary information for each article concerning the number of words contained in the article, placement of the article, and information concerning the number of photos that accompanied the article. Each of these measures can be used as an indicator of media decision-making and can furthermore be used as an indicator of the importance that the news editors and journalists of the *Houston Chronicle* placed on the homicide occurrence. For most of these measures, such as whether a story appeared and average story length, the rationale of the measure is rather obvious. For other measures, such as story placement, some explanation is in order.

In the current examination of the *Houston Chronicle*, it became apparent that a number of news items related to homicides that occurred in the city of Houston appeared on page 1 of the Metro Section of the paper. Therefore, two aspects relating to placement of a news item are whether a news item for the homicide appeared on page 1 of the front section of the paper and whether a news item appeared on page 1 of the front section or on page 1 of the Metro section. The second measure is designed to tap into

items that were deemed important, but maybe not important enough to replace another news item on the first page of the front section. The measures are combined into one measure of whether a story appeared on page 1 of the front section or on page 1 of the Metro section in order to increase the variation in the measure. Page 1 stories focusing on local incidents of Homicide were rare in the *Houston Chronicle* and combining these two measures increases the number of items coded as 1.

To further illustrate the importance of taking into account front page placements in other sections of the paper, it is important to consider that the city of Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States, therefore, the *Houston Chronicle* serves an important function of delivering international, national, regional, and local news to its readership. Because homicides committed in the city of Houston generally are of more local interest, and given that international, national, regional, and local news items compete for front-page space, it is important to consider front-page placements in other sections of the paper. This allows for a broader definition of news item importance and allows for a greater understanding of the context of news decisions that occur for major news organizations in major markets. As an extreme illustration, a homicide that occurred on September 11, 2001 may have appeared on page 1 of the September 12, 2001 edition of the paper, but for the terrorists acts that occurred in Washington, D.C., New York City, and Pennsylvania. Considering front-page placement on the Metro section of the paper, a section that is dedicated more to local news items, facilitates this broader definition of news item importance.

The four dependent variables considered in phase one represent a range of variables that have the capability to tap into *different aspects of media processes and*

decision-making. For example, the independent variables that predict the length of a story (in terms of intensity) may not be the same predictors of overall media attention that taps into story length, page placement, and the use of visual effects in reporting the news. This possibility is evidenced by the findings of Prichard and Hughes (1997) in their analysis of homicide coverage in Milwaukee newspapers.

Phase two of the proposed research generally uses the same types of dependent measures as phase one but uses disaggregated measures of the various concepts. Because phase two of the analysis uses media news items as the units of analysis, phase two does not consider whether a news item appeared as a dependent variable of interest. Two measures of the intensity of coverage are employed. The first measure is of the number of words published in the news item. Similar to phase one, phase two also uses an attention score that is composed of the number of words that appeared in the news item, page placement of the news item, and the use of graphical or photographic items to accompany the story. The attention score has a point added if the number of news items published meets or exceeds the number of words located at the 25th percentile of the distribution of scores for number of words published. Similarly, the attention score adds additional points if the news item meets or exceeds the values located at the 50th and 75th percentiles, respectively. A point is added to the attention score if the news item was published on either the front page of the paper or on the front page of the Metro Section of the paper. A point is added to the attention score if the news item had a photograph published. Additionally, a point is added to the attention score if the news item had two or more photographs published. When all potential point values are taken into

consideration, the attention score for phase two of the analysis ranges between a value of 0 and 6.

Independent Measures

Phase one of the analysis approaches media decision-making by considering many of the same types of variables as previous research reviewed in chapter 3. Phase one considers the effects of various demographic and social context variables on assessments of newsworthiness by journalists and news editors (i.e., the affect of “market demand” variables). Additionally, phase one of the analysis takes a broader approach in the sense that informational constraint measures are considered as explanations of media decision-making. Phase two of the analysis considers the effects of “market demand” variables, news theme variables, and source limitation variables on media behavior. Market demand variables are measured similarly in both phase one and two of the analysis. Table 4.1 reports the measurement schemes for all of the measures that are included in the descriptive, zero-order, and multivariate analyses reported in the following chapter.

Responding to Market Demand

The analysis considers variables that are conceptualized as indicators of news organization need to be responsive of market demand in the sense that news organization staff holds perceptions about the types of news that both interests the public and allow the

public to identify with the circumstances described in the news item. Market demand items considered in the analysis include those factors that news organization staff use in assessing the “newsworthiness” of a particular homicide. Most of these items have been identified by the media outcome research reviewed in the previous chapter.

The number of victims and the number of offenders, respectively, are measured as continuous variables that denote the actual number of victims and offenders, respectively. The number of victims and offenders include all victims and offenders involved whether they are actually murdered or directly involved in the murder. Therefore, the analysis considers a homicide occurrence that resulted in at least one fatality and other non-fatal injuries as involving multiple victims. Victim and offender demographic variables used in the analyses include gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Gender is coded as a dichotomous dummy variable with female participants coded as 1 and male participants coded as zero. Age is measured as a continuous variable. Both victim race/ethnicity and offender race/ethnicity will be measured as a series of dichotomous variables. These dichotomous variables operationalize race/ethnicity in terms of white non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and minority characterizations (see Table 4.1). Minority victims and offenders include African-Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, and other minority groups. It was necessary to collapse these racial/ethnic classifications into one category due to the relative absence of these minority groups in the data.

Consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Black (1976) with regard to the “behavior of law”, race/ethnicity of the victim and race/ethnicity of the offender will also be treated as interaction terms through the use of a series of dichotomous variables to

provide a partial test of Black's propositions. Four interaction terms are used in the analysis. First, situations involving a minority victim and minority offender are measured. Second, homicides involving a minority victim and a non-minority offender are measured. Third, situations involving a non-minority victim and a non-minority offender are measured. Fourth, the analysis measures situations that involve a non-minority victim and a minority offender. Non-minority classifications are identified in the analysis as white, non-Hispanic and Hispanic participants.

The race/ethnicity interaction variables take this form as a result of both theoretical foundations and limitations of the data. In general, homicide, similar to most forms of crime, is committed by offenders against victims who are of the same race and ethnicity. Therefore, the majority of the homicide incidents included in this analysis are of the within-race variety. This creates a problem in measuring victim and offender racial interactions due to the small number of homicides that occur between races. This may explain why past research has only presented interracial versus intraracial measures of victim and offender racial interactions and why past research has provided only partial tests of Black's theory applied to media behavior. These variables are also used because they provide for at least a partial test of the application of Black's theory to news reporting. When applied to the process of news reporting, Black's theory would predict that the most important and intensively covered stories are those that involve non-minority victims killed by minority offenders, followed non-minority victims that are killed by another non-minority offender. The theory would further predict that these types of homicides would be deemed more important than homicides that involve

minority victims murdered by non-minority offenders and minority victims who are murdered by other minority offenders.

A potential problem with this approach is combining white, non-Hispanic individuals with Hispanic individuals and treating this group as a non-minority group. However, like most large urban areas in the United States, the racial and ethnic population of the city of Houston is relatively diverse compared to the population of the United States in its entirety. Moreover, given the geographical location of the state of Texas and the recent movement of the Hispanic population to more prominent position in terms of sheer numbers, the categorization used in the analysis may be much less problematic than it originally appears. The population of the city of Houston is comprised of a substantially lower white population in general and the portion of the white population that is of non-Hispanic origin is lower in Houston relative to the general U.S. population.¹ The city of Houston is also comprised of a proportionately larger African-American and Asian population than the U.S. population in general.²

The implication of the demographic characteristics in the city of Houston is that it becomes much more difficult to establish the racial/ethnic group in the city that would occupy the most prominent position in the status hierarchy in terms of the Hispanic and white, non-Hispanic population. For the purposes of this research, it is presumed that white, non-Hispanic individuals in Houston hold a higher level of prominence in the status hierarchy, followed by the Hispanic population, followed by the remainder of the

¹ The white population for the U.S., the state of Texas, and the city of Houston, respectively, is 75.1%, 71%, and 58.7%. The proportionate white, non-Hispanic population for these three aggregate units is 69.1%, 52.4%, and 42.1%, respectively. The proportionate Hispanic population for these three aggregate units is 12.5%, 32.0%, and 32.9%, respectively.

² The African-American population for the U.S., the state of Texas, and the city of Houston, respectively, is 12.3%, 11.5%, and 18.5%. The Asian population for the U.S., the state of Texas, and the city of Houston, respectively, is 3.6%, 2.7%, and 5.1%. The “other race” population for the U.S., the state of Texas, and the city of Houston, respectively, is 5.5%, 11.7%, and 14.2%.

population, which is aggregated into the minority category for the purposes of this analysis (i.e., African-Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, and other racial categories). It is further assumed that because of the racial make-up of the city of Houston, the gap between white, non-Hispanics and Hispanics is not as extensive as it potentially is in other areas of the United States.

Other variables considered under the broad category of “market demand” include victim-offender relationship, type of weapon used, and the social context in which the homicide occurred. Research focusing on media reporting of homicide has identified stranger-based homicides as a victim-offender relationship that is likely to be reported by print media (Sorenson et al., 1998; Taylor & Sorenson, 2002). Therefore, stranger-related homicides are treated as a dichotomous dummy variable in the analysis with the value of 1 representing stranger-related homicides. The perspective of Black (1976), when applied to the behavior of media would suggest that stranger-based homicides would be more likely to be reported intensively than would homicides that involve domestic disputes between family members, spouses, or intimate partners. Therefore, the current analysis codes domestic relationships as a dichotomous variable. Homicides committed by acquaintances of the victim is coded as the final relationship-related “market demand” independent variable.

A series of dichotomous variables were developed to measure the impact of the use of different types of weapons on media outcomes. This series of dichotomous variables measured whether a knife or other cutting instrument, a firearm, or some other weapon, respectively, was used in the commission of a crime. Assaults that result in death (i.e., the use of hands, fists, and hard or blunt objects) and homicides that result

from other weapons are coded as two additional weapon-related variables. Variables were also developed to measure the impact of other social context factors in addition to victim-offender relationship and type of weapon used in the homicide.

Based on the findings of the prior research, it is expected that the most important “market demand” explaining the variation in each of the dependent variables would be victim factors (i.e., the number of victims, victim ethnicity, victim age, victim gender). Based on the theoretical perspective of Black (1976), it is expected that victim-offender racial interactions and victim-offender relationship would be significant predictors of media outcomes, with homicides involving a white victim/minority offender and homicides involving strangers and as more likely to obtain media attention. It is also expected that homicides that involve robberies receive more intensive coverage. Domestic homicides are expected to garner less media attention.

Construction of “News Themes”

A final set of independent variables that are examined in phase two of the analysis are those variables that relate to news organization need to present news in thematic processes (Cohen, 1978; 1980). Generation of news themes is measured through six separate variables. The variables record the number of news items and the number of words, respectively, that are devoted to other news items concerning crime, violent interpersonal crime, or homicide on the same day that the particular news item

concerning the local instance of homicide in question was published.³ The first three variables measure the number of news items that are devoted to crime in general⁴, actual cases that involve interpersonal violence or robbery that did not result in the loss of life⁵, and actual cases that involve interpersonal violence or robbery that did result in the loss of life⁶, respectively. The remaining three variables use the same basic framework but counts the number of words rather than the number of news items. News items that focused on international crime, terrorism, or specific instances of crime that occurred in other nations were not included in the counts. These types of news items were not included largely because crime that people are most concerned about are criminal occurrences with a likelihood of effecting the individual. Mass political murder, or other similar news items, that occur in other countries are more distant and the effects of this type of coverage on the perceptions of the reader are less well developed in the prior literature.

Cohen's (1978; 1980) discussions of the role of news themes suggests that coverage of a particular homicide would be more likely to occur if the homicide can be thematically linked to other potential news items. By measuring the number of news items that appeared on the same day that the homicide story appeared and the number of

³ This variable was constructed on the basis of searches of the Lexis/Nexis database to retrieve news items that were printed on the same day as a news item in question concerning a local instance of homicide. The terms used in the respective searches included "homicide", or "murder", or "crime."

⁴ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of articles or words) that were devoted to crime in general. This includes stories dedicated to actual instances of crime, reports of crime in a general sense (for example, reports of increases/decreases in the crime rate), white-collar crime and fraud, and national/world news briefs that focus on crime.

⁵ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of articles or words) that were devoted to *actual instances* of interpersonal violence (occurring either locally, regionally, or nationally) that did not result in the loss of life. This includes actual cases of assault, sexual assault, robberies, and attempted homicide that did not result in the loss of a life.

⁶ This variable involves a frequency count (of the number of articles or words) that were devoted to *actual instances* of interpersonal violence (occurring either locally, regionally, or nationally) that did result in the loss of life.

words that are devoted to crime, violent crime, and homicide, this research is able to present a measure of news theme construction and will be able to draw a distinction between various degrees of intensity of the news theme relating to crime, violent crime, or homicide. For example, in terms of the number of news items that appeared on the same day as the item concerning a local homicide of interest, if one homicide registered zero related news items, compared to another homicide that registered two other news items, it could be concluded that the first news item was not tied to a theme, whereas the second homicide was potentially tied to a theme. If a third homicide occurrence that was reported by the *Houston Chronicle* registers four related news items, it could be concluded that the theme for the third homicide was more intense than that of the second homicide. Furthermore, by measuring total number of news items and total number of words, respectively, the research will have two different measures that will tap into the intensity of the news theme relating to crime, violent crime, or homicide.

The measures of news themes are further divided into separate categories of general crime, crimes of interpersonal violence not resulted in the loss of life, and interpersonal violence that did result in the loss of life. This research approaches the measurement of news themes from a purely exploratory standpoint. News themes have not been quantitatively measured in prior research as competing explanations of media decision-making. Local instances of homicide and the intensity of coverage could conceivably be tied into more intensive coverage of crime in general or could simply be tied into news items of actual cases of interpersonal violence that does not speak to crime in the general sense, but instead to actual cases of criminal behavior that involves names of victims and offenders and actual social circumstances. An even more conceivable

scenario would be that local instances of homicide that are covered would be more intensively covered if the case could be linked to other stories of actual interpersonal violence that resulted in the loss of life. These three qualitatively different conceptualizations of news themes allow the research to more fully explore the dimensions of news themes and how they potentially work in practice.

Information Constraints

A second set of independent variables that are examined in the current research concern information constraints placed upon the news organization by official police agencies, in this case, the Houston Police Department. Information constraint measures are used in both phase one and two of the analysis. Several measures of source limitations will be employed at each phase. For phase one, four measures will be used. Each measure concerns whether information was available from the police agency with regard to certain aspects of the case. Unknown race and gender of the offender, unknown victim-offender relationship, and unknown social context/motive each are measured as dichotomous variables with the value of one signifying unknown information and the value of zero denoting cases in which information was known by the police agency. Coding the informational constraint variables in this manner will create negative relationships with media outcome variables if the data supports the theoretical contention that when certain types of information are unknown to the police agency, media outlets have less information to report, thus reducing media attention on the homicide case.

A novel approach of the current phase one analysis concerns how missing data are handled in the analysis. Phase one data that were recorded as having no substantive attribute for offender race and age, victim-offender relationship, or social context measures were not handled as missing values. Instead, these cases were handled as unknowns and unknowns are used in the analysis as relevant occurrences that have the potential to influence media outcome measures. In this regard, unknowns are handled as conceptually important occurrences that serve as indicators of information availability.

First, whether a press release was issued within a 48-hour period preceding the news item is measured as a dichotomous variable, with the value of one signifying that a press release was generated and zero signifying that no press release was generated. The 48-hour time frame is established as a way of giving the news organization adequate time to report on the information contained in the press release, taking into account competing schedules of police and news organizations. No information is available concerning the time of day that the press release was issued, so the 48-hour time frame allows a degree of lenience for press releases issued late in the day when much of the news organization planning for the next edition of the paper has been concluded. This measure is justified in the current research based on the notion that when the police force issues a press release, it is likely that the police have become privy to more and new information for the media to potentially share with the general public. More information that becomes available over a period of time should translate into more stories and potentially more intense coverage of the homicide by the print media.

The analysis does, however, recognize the difficulty in assuming a simple linear relationship between press releases issued and the amount of, and type of, coverage by

the media. For example, police departments frequently take a pragmatic approach in the issuance of press releases in the sense that police departments frequently issue press releases when the department is requesting information from the public concerning a particular case or when the department is searching for a suspect. Therefore, multiple press releases by police departments may mean that they are seeking information instead of meaning that they have more information to share with the media and the general public.

For this reason, the analysis also considers the influence that specific types of information released by official police sources have on media behavior. To assess these effects, content analysis of police press releases concerning homicides is conducted. There are several types of information, besides whether the case was solved, that could be released by the police that have the potential of influencing media behavior. These types of information include the name and characteristics of the victim (age, race and gender), name and characteristics of a suspect, and the social context of the offense. This research codes each of these three factors as 1 if the press release contains the respective information and 0 if the press release does not contain the information (see Table 4.1). These variables are used to create final victim, and offender information availability scores. These aggregated victim/offender information availability scores are additive in nature. A point will be added to the score for each based on the availability of information – name, gender, race/ethnicity, and age. In theory, higher scores should correlate with more intense coverage because of the release of more information by the police. The social context information availability variable is measured as a dichotomous

measure with values of one indicating the presence of information and zero signifying the absence of information.

Control Variable: Stage of the Proceedings

The stage of the criminal justice process is measured as either police/investigation stage, trial stage, or sentencing stage. Phase one and two of the analysis incorporates stage of the proceeding as a control variable. For both phases, stage of the proceeding is handled as a dichotomous measure with the value of one indicating that the homicide (phase one) or news item (phase two) was covered, or covers the trial or sentencing stage of the criminal justice system. During data collection, it became apparent that the stage of the criminal justice system that the news item covers is an important consideration in the reporting process. The majority of the news items cover the police/investigation stage of the criminal justice process. Generally speaking, the trial stage and sentencing stage of the criminal process is reserved for print media coverage of only sensational, attention garnering types of crimes, such as the murder of a police officer or a multiple murder involving children. The stage of the criminal process is an important control variable for this analysis because stories that report on trial and sentencing stages of the criminal process tend to be more detailed and, therefore, tend to have greater length and intensity. Table 4.1 provides a summary of all of the measurements and coding strategies developed for the analysis.

Statistical Analyses

The following chapter reports descriptive, zero-order correlation and multivariate analysis results. Table 4.1 provides a summary of measurement schemes used to develop the measures for the descriptive, zero-order, and multivariate results. Following the methods used in the more recently evolving research considering the decision-making processes of news organizations and their staff members, this research employs regression analysis to determine the correlates of the respective dependent variables controlling for other variables in the analysis. For phase one, binary logistical regression analysis is used for the dependent variable recording whether a news item appeared for the homicide. This statistical procedure is appropriate for these variables because the dependent variable is measured using a dichotomous dummy variable.

In phase one the metric dependent variables measuring the average number of words that appeared per article, the number of stories that appeared for the homicide, and the overall media attention score, each measured as a continuous quantitative variable, are analyzed using Ordinary Least Squares procedures. Similarly, for phase two of the analysis, the dependent variables measuring the number of words in the news item and the number of photographs that coincided with the news item are analyzed using Ordinary Least Squares procedures. Because of the number of independent variables considered in the analyses, the independent variables are considered in stages that lead up to a final multivariate model. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 report descriptive statistics for the measures that will be used in phase one and two of the multivariate analyses, respectively.

Limitations of the Measures and Methods

As with any research design, there are several limitations to the current research design. A primary limitation of the current research concerns the sources of information used to construct the database. Homicide data were obtained from the Houston Police Department. Official information gathered from police agencies are not always reliable due to a variety of reasons, including record-keeping practices. Furthermore, any research relying on official data are bound by the definitional policies and practices of the police agency with regard to recorded information. This potentially affects the weapon use and victim-offender relationship. Social context information was recorded from press release narratives, so the research was not bound by the circumstance and motive data provided by the police.

A more serious limitation with regard to the sources of the data used in the analysis concerns the media data. Searchable databases for media items are governed by precise rules and nuances for obtaining relevant data. Any deviation from these rules and nuances may fail to produce all of the news items that are published by the news organization. Failure to obtain all of the news items published potentially skews the data collected for the dependent variable. To remedy this validity threat, two different databases were searched for news items in an effort to be as comprehensive as possible.

Another of the more glaring limitations of these methods concerns the validity of many of the measures. Past quantitative research analyzing media outcomes in terms of homicide coverage has not measured such constructs as news themes or source

Table 4.2**Descriptive Statistics for Measures Used in Phase I Regression Analyses**

<u>Dependent Measures</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Percent/Mean</u>
Number news items published	248	1.82 (SD 3.02; Range 0 to 34)
Average words published	249	125.14 (SD 136.13)
Media attention score	249	2.53 (SD 1.68)
Article appear in print?	249	82.3
<u>Independent Measures Appearing in the Analyses</u>		
Female victim	52	20.9
White victim	35	14.1
Victim age	247	32.33 (SD 14.41)
Male offender	199	79.9
Female offender	25	10.0
White offender	22	8.8
Minority suspect	109	43.8
Domestic context	47	18.9
Stranger homicide	55	22.1
Assault	29	11.6
Other weapon	18	7.2
Min. Susp./Min. victim	82	32.9
Min. Susp./NM victim	34	13.7
Number of victims	249	1.16 (SD .56)
Robbery-related homicide	47	18.8
Social context unknown	91	36.5
Gender or race of susp. unkn.	44	17.7
Victim-offender relation. unkn.	88	35.3

Table 4.3**Descriptive Statistics for Measures Appearing in Phase II Regression Analyses**

<u>Dependent Measures</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Percent/Mean</u>
Number words published	352	209.26 (SD 303.61)
Media attention score	352	1.86 (SD 1.66)
<u>Independent Measures Appearing in the Analyses</u>		
Female victim	109	31.0
Victim 20 and under	64	18.2
Female suspect	82	20.9
Suspect 40 and over	26	7.4
Minority suspect	141	40.1
Firearm	222	63.1
Knife or cutting instrument	49	13.9
Assault	46	13.1
Other weapon	32	9.1
Stranger homicide	99	28.1
Domestic context	59	16.8
Acquaintance	75	21.3
Min. Susp./Min. victim	87	24.7
Min. Susp./NM victim	56	15.9
Number of victims	352	1.22 (SD.59)
Robbery-related	92	26.2
Multiple offenders	93	26.4
Argument	45	12.8
Social context unknown	90	25.6
Offender information availab.	343	2.35 (SD 1.62; Range 0 to 4)
Crime theme	346	2035.31 (SD 1361.85)

limitations, so the approach followed in the current design for these measures is new. Moreover, with at least one of the untested constructs, news themes, the original work presented the construct in the context of a more qualitative-based research endeavor. It is possible that the best, and for that matter, the only way to gauge news themes is through qualitative methodologies allowing the researcher to directly interact with the media decision-maker to determine his or her thought processes in packaging the news for presentation to the general public.

An additional problem with the news theme measures entails the subjective nature of the process involved in coding the data. The terms searched using the Lexis/Nexis database were purposively broad and were designed to pull as many possible news items from the database as possible. As a result, the searches retrieved news items that were not necessarily relevant to the process of creating news themes. Many of the news items did not focus on crime directly. For example, many items in the sports pages mentioned the terms searched. Another more concrete example was several items that focused on popular fiction authors and their most recent releases of books that dealt with crime. These types of news items generally were not added to the number of articles or number of words that were construed as possibly contributing to a news theme. Generally, news theme articles had to either address a particular incident at the local, state, or national level or had to discuss a crime problem in more general terms (i.e., increases or decreases in crime rates). Specific news items were assessed in these terms and were fairly subjective. A final limitation concerning the news theme measures is that they do not measure potential news themes that develop over the course of week, a month, or some

other extended period of time. Instead the news theme measures are limited to news items that appeared on the same day as the homicide story at issue.

In addition to these potential problems in measuring some of the more obscure constructs proposed in this research, some of the remaining measurement techniques used have potential limitations. Most of these limitations concern lack of variation in the measures and small sample sizes for certain attributes of the variables measured. For instance, the analysis collapses many of the measured attributes for the measure of weapon use, race/ethnicity measures, victim-offender relationship, social context measure. It is necessary to collapse some of the weapon use and victim-offender relationship measures due to the relative absence of some of the original measures in the database. For example, while it may be meaningful to compare media outcomes concerning marital intimate partner homicides with intimate partner homicides where the couple is not married, independently there were not enough of these cases in the database to do so, therefore, these measures were collapsed.

Another similar example concerns social context data. In general, there were three different types of robbery situations that were represented in the Houston data – robbery involving breaking and entering into a residence, street robberies, and robbery that involved a business, generally a convenience store. Business-related robberies where a clerk or an employee was murdered received relatively extensive coverage, but there were so few of these robberies that “business robbery” could not be used as a separate categorical variable. The same can be said of residential robberies. Therefore, in constructing the “robbery homicide” dichotomous variable for the analysis, store robberies, residential robberies, and general street robberies were collapsed into this one

measure. Collapsing variables such as these always has the potential of negating and reducing information in ways that misrepresent reality. Another problem concerning the social context measure concerned an inability to collapse certain attributes that were rare, therefore certain attributes of the original measure had to be excluded from the analysis. Examples include drive-by shootings and deaths that resulted from traffic altercations.

The dependent variables used in the analysis may be limited relative to the measurement and methods that other recent analyses have employed. In perhaps the most comprehensive method of measuring media outcome, Chermak (1998) calculated an attention score. The attention score considered the length and width of the headline, whether the story carried a headline of more than half of the number of columns on the page, the placement of the news item in terms of whether the item appeared above or below the fold, the proportion of the column that the news item occupied, and whether the article appeared on page one. While the current analysis does develop an overall attention score, Chermak's attention score may be a more appropriate approach in the because he includes components of headlines (in column inches and width), area of placement (in terms of appearance above or below the fold), and column space occupied. These types of measures are not available via the search engines used in the current research.

Despite these potential limitations, the dependent variable measures used are as comprehensive as possible given the limitations of the measures that can be derived from the two databases searched. The research takes into account many of the aspects of news reporting that has been identified in the prior empirical studies. Taken together, phase one and two contain or incorporate measures of placement, whether a news item was

reported, a measure of number of words reported, the number of articles that appeared in print, and a measure of photographic materials that accompany a news item.

Coding procedures utilized in content analytic procedures are a constant internal validity threat and this analysis and this analysis is no different. However, this particular threat to internal validity is limited to only a few of the measures included in the analysis. The majority of the information drawn from the police press releases and the media reports of homicide are fairly straightforward in terms of coding procedures. Victim and offender demographic data known to the police at the time of the press release represent examples of variables with straightforward coding processes. The press release either reported this information or it did not report it. Likewise, page placement, number of words contained in the story, and photograph data used to construct the final dependent variables were straightforward data to code from the press reports of the homicide.

Other variables that were coded from the press release and media reports were more problematic. Whether the press release contained social context data is one example of a variable that presented coding problems. Although most of the press releases were easy to judge in this regard, some press releases required a judgment call on the part of the researcher. Similarly, the variables denoting the different social contexts of the homicide, required judgment calls. The major problem encountered concerned overlapping social contexts and the cases that were coded as arguments. These problems were handled by considering the *dominant* social context that was suggested by the press release and coding the data accordingly.

A final limitation of the proposed research design is that the research is limited because the data considered in the analysis is derived from one city, for one particular

year, and from one newspaper. This substantially limits the external validity of the empirical findings in terms of generalizability of the findings. The ideal situation in any research endeavor involving media coverage would be to conduct an analysis over a broad range of time, using several jurisdictions and multiple newspapers from each jurisdiction. However, the nature of the current research design makes this type of ideal analysis difficult because of unique characteristics of police organizations and news organizations. The city of Houston is an ideal setting for this type of research because the Houston Police Department provides open online access to data concerning what information the police had access and when they had access to it. These data can easily be used in conjunction with media data to document the temporal order of the police agency-news agency relationship. Similar data in other cities may not be so easy to access or may not even be available.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Houston Police Department investigated a total of 249 separate homicide instances in 2001 that accounted for a total of 263 deaths due to homicide. Searches of the Lexis-Nexis database and the *Houston Chronicle* database using victim and offender names as search terms retrieved a total of 593 relevant news items covering these local instances of homicide at the police/investigation, trial, or sentencing stage of the criminal justice process. The 593 news items represent coverage of the 249 instances of homicide that appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* between the dates of January 1, 2001 and March 25, 2004. The majority of the news items cover the investigation stage (n=393) of the criminal justice system, including police investigation up through grand jury indictment. The remaining news items cover the trial stage (n=133) and the sentencing stage (n=67) of the criminal justice process.¹

This chapter reports the findings of two phases of analyses concerning media coverage of the local instances of homicide investigated by Houston Police Department in 2001. Each reported phase begins by reviewing the descriptive statistics of the data

¹ Follow-up news items focusing on the criminal justice system have been excluded from the analysis. These news items include those that feature the crime several years or months later as an update or remembrance of the case after the adjudication stage of the criminal process and those that make brief references to the case after adjudication because of some type of similarity to a new case. Another example of this type of excluded article is one that featured errors made by the HPD crime lab that mentioned a 2001 case briefly as one case that involved errors made by the lab.

used in the respective phases. Next, an analysis of the zero-order correlation coefficients for each phase is reported, as well as multivariate models that incorporate variables indicating a zero-order relationship with the dependent measures of interest in each phase.

Phase I Descriptive Statistics

Phase one of the analysis considers the effect of victim and offender demographic characteristics, situational (or contextual) factors, and informational constraint factors on various measures of media intensity (whether a news item appeared in print, page placement, story length, the use of pictures and graphical depictions to accompany the news item). The phase one analysis uses the actual homicides as the unit of analysis so that homicides that received substantial coverage can be compared with homicides that received much less coverage *or no coverage at all*. This section briefly describes the characteristics of the 249 homicides and the aggregate measures of the news items that are included in phase one of the analysis.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 denote the basic descriptive statistics for homicides committed in Houston in 2001 and the corresponding characteristics concerning reporting of homicides that were investigated by the HPD in 2001.² Consistent with national homicide trends, most of the homicides committed in Houston in 2001 involved a crime

² Some of the descriptive percentage data reported in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 do not total to 100%. This is the result of overlapping characteristics of the homicides and reports of the homicides. With respect to many of the measures reported, the attributes of the measures are not mutually exclusive. For instance, some homicides involve a female victim and a male victim or a male offender and a female offender. In these instances, the homicide occurrence and reporting data calculates the homicide case and media news items as involving a male and as involving a female. Therefore, if the percentage of the cases involving a male victim is added to the number of homicides involving a female victim, the total exceeds 100%.

Table 5.1

Phase I Descriptive Statistics - Actual Homicides and Media Reports of Local Instances of Homicide: Victim and Offender Variables

	<u>Homicides Committed</u>		<u>Homicide News Items Excluding Yates</u>		<u>Homicide News Items Including Yates</u>	
	N	%/Mean	N	%/Mean	N	%/Mean
<u>Victim Variables</u>						
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	199	79.9	314	70.4	461	77.7
Female	52	20.9	147	33	294	49.6
<i>Race</i>						
White	35	14.1	71	15.9	218	36.8
African-American	100	40.2	161	36.1	165	27.2
Hispanic	105	42.2	201	45.1	201	33.9
Asian	9	3.6	22	4.9	22	3.7
Unknown	2	0.8	----	----		
<i>Race</i>						
Minority	109	43.8	183	41	183	30.9
Non-Minority	140	56.2	272	61	419	70.7
Unknown	2	0.8	----	----		
<i>Age</i>	247	32.33 SD 14.41	446	31.91 SD 15.27	593	24.89 SD 18.03
<u>Offender Variables</u>						
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	192	77.1	318	71.3	318	53.6
Female	25	10	63	14.1	210	35.4
Unknown	42	16.9	101	22.6	101	17
<i>Race</i>						
White	22	8.8	24	5.4	171	28.8
African-American	109	43.8	199	44.6	199	33.6
Hispanic	76	30.5	91	20.4	91	15.3
Asian	7	2.8	13	2.9	13	2.2
Unknown	44	17.7	127	28.5	127	21.4
<i>Race</i>						
Minority	116	46.6	212	47.5	212	35.8
Non-Minority	91	36.5	112	25.1	259	43.7
Unknown	44	17.7	127	28.5	127	21.4
<i>Age</i>	189	28.18 SD 11.38	249	29.3 SD 10.99	396	31.78 SD 9.30

Table 5.2

Phase I Descriptive Statistics - Actual Homicides and Media Reports of Local Instances of Homicide: Situational/Circumstance Variables

	<u>Homicides Committed</u>		<u>Homicide News Items Excluding Yates</u>		<u>Homicide News Items Including Yates</u>	
	N	%/Mean	N	%/Mean	N	%/Mean
<u>Weapon Used</u>						
Firearm	164	65.9	275	61.7	275	46.4
Knife/Cutting Instr.	37	14.9	54	12.1	54	9.1
Assault	29	11.6	65	14.6	65	11
Other Weapon	18	7.2	48	10.6	195	32.9
Weapon Type Unk.	1	0.4	4	0.9	4	0.7
<u>Victim-Offender Relationship</u>						
Stranger	55	22.1	148	33.2	148	25
Domestic	47	18.9	72	16.1	219	36.9
Acquaintance	57	22.9	87	19.5	87	14.7
Other	2	0.8	2	0.4	2	0.3
Unknown	88	35.3	137	30.7	137	23.1
<u>Victim-Offender Race Interactions</u>						
NM Off/NM Vic	82	32.9	105	23.5	252	42.5
Min. Off/Min. Vic	82	32.9	111	24.9	111	18.7
NM Off/Min. Vic	9	3.6	7	1.6	7	1.2
Min. Off/NM Vic	34	13.7	107	24	107	18
Unknown/Missing	46	18.5	127	28.5	127	21.4
<u>Number of Victims and Offenders Involved</u>						
# Victims	249	1.16	446	1.25	593	2.18
		SD .56		SD 1.58		SD 1.70
# Offenders	208	1.76	355	1.72	500	1.51
		SD 1.31		SD 1.22		SD 1.07
<u>Situational Aspects of the Homicide</u>						
Argument - Unknown						
Reason	41	16.5	51	11.4	51	8.6
Domestic Dispute	37	14.9	59	13.2	59	9.9
Domestic - Child Killed	11	4.4	33	7.4	180	30.3
Domestic - Murder/Suicide	3	1.2	7	1.6	7	1.2
Person Robbery	31	12.4	74	16.6	74	12.5
Business Robbery	7	2.8	30	6.7	30	5.1
Drug-Related						
Robbery	9	3.6	12	2.7	12	2
Traffic Altercation	3	1.2	20	4.5	20	3.4
Drive-by	8	3.2	2	0.4	2	0.3
Non-domestic						
Murder/Suicide	4	1.6	1	0.2	1	0.2
Kidnapping	1	0.4	19	4.3	19	3.2
Police Officer Killed	2	0.8	37	8.3	37	6.2
Self-Defense	1	0.4	3	0.7	3	0.5
Unknown Context	91	36.5	98	22	98	16.5

Table 5.3

Phase I Descriptive Statistics - Media Variables (Dependent Variables)

Story Appearance:

Percent of Homicides with at Least One Printed News Item	82.3%
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Number of Articles Published:

Median of Stories Per Homicide that Appeared in Print	1
Average Articles Published	1.823
Range	0 to 34

Number of Words:

Average # Words	125.135
25th Percentile	62
50th Percentile	96
75th Percentile	151.125
Standard Deviation	136.131
Range	0 to 879.5

Page Placement

Percent of homicides with at least 1 frnt page article	4%
Percent of homicides with at least 1 Metro frnt page article	5.6%
Percent of homicides with at least 1 frnt page or Metro frnt page article	7.2%

Photos and Graphics

Percent of homicides that had at least one photo or graphic appear	12.4%
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Media Attention Score

Average	2.534	
Standard Deviation	1.68	
0	44	17.7%
1	14	6.8%
2	60	24.1%
3	61	24.5%
4	41	16.5%
5	9	3.6%
6	17	6.8%

committed against a male victim (n=199, 79.9%), whereas only 20.9% (n=52) of the homicides involved the murder of a female victim. Homicides in Houston in 2001 typically involved an African-American victim (n=100, 40.2%) or a Hispanic victim (n=105, 42.2%). Fourteen percent of the homicides involved a white victim and only 3.6% (n=9) involved an Asian victim. The average age of the victim in the homicides was 32.33, with a standard deviation of 14.42 and a range of age of 1 to age 79.¹

The descriptive statistics describing the characteristics of the offender in the homicides were very similar to the characteristics of the homicide victims, with one general exception: there were many more cases with missing information. This is to be expected because police agencies generally have more reliable information regarding victims than for offenders. Police agencies always have unsolved cases that limit the data available concerning offenders of crime in general, and homicide in specific. The vast majority of homicides were committed by African-American and Hispanic male offenders. Male offenders were involved in 77.1% of the homicide instances, whereas female offenders were involved in 10% of the occurrences. African-Americans and Hispanics were involved in 43.8% and 30.5%, of the homicides, respectively, while white offenders were involved in 8.8% of the homicides and Asian offenders were involved in 3.8% of the incidents. The average age of the offender in the sample is 28.18. Due to potential problems stemming from missing information, these offender statistics must be interpreted with some degree of caution; missing or unknown data were recorded for 16.9%, 17.7%, and 24.1% of the homicide instances, respectively, for each of the gender, race, and age measures for offenders.

¹ The average age of the victim was calculated by computing the average age of the victim in each homicide. The average age of the victim for each homicide was then averaged to obtain the final value.

Homicides in Houston generally involved the use of a firearm during the commission of the act (n= 164, 65.9%). Firearm as a weapon of choice was followed by a knife or cutting instrument (n=37, 14.9%) and assault with the use of hands, fists, or some type of hard, blunt instrument that was used to beat the victim (n=29, 11.6%). Missing or unknown information also plagued the measure of victim-offender relationship used in the analysis. Just over one-third of the cases had missing or unknown data recorded for this variable. For the homicide instances that had information available, there tended to be relatively equal variation for each of the respective values of the measure. A small plurality of the homicides were committed by an acquaintance of the victim (n=57, 22.9%), followed closely by homicides committed by strangers to the victim (n=55, 22.1%), and individuals that had some type of domestic relationship to the victim (n=47, 18.9%).

Homicides in Houston also tended to involve murder committed by an individual against another who is close to them in terms of their group representation in society. Due to small numbers of cases that involved some minority groups, it was necessary to collapse the race/ethnicity variables in constructing victim/offender race interaction measures. As discussed in chapter 4, four basic measures of race were developed – minority victim, minority suspect, non-minority victim, and non-minority suspect. These basic measures were transformed to victim and race interaction measures. Most of the homicide cases involved either a minority murder of another minority (n=82, 32.9%) or involved a non-minority murder of another non-minority individual (n=82, 32.9%). Most of the homicides that were committed across minority status involved a minority offender murder of a non-minority individual (n=34, 13.7%). Only 3.6% of the homicides

involved a non-minority murder against a minority individual. Forty-six cases (18.5%) had data missing for either victim or offender race, thus resulting in an unknown value for the interaction measures.

Houston homicides typically involved a single victim murdered by a single offender, although cases involving multiple offenders were a little more common than cases involving multiple victims. The number of victims ranged between 1 and 5, with the one case that involved 5 homicide victims being the case of Andrea Yates that generated a substantial amount of local, regional, and national attention. The average number of victims per homicide incident for the sample is 1.16 victims. The number of offenders involved in Houston homicides in 2001 ranged from 1 to 10, with an average of 1.76 offenders.

Table 5.3 reports the descriptive statistics for phase one of the analysis. Most homicides occurring in Houston in 2001 were covered by the *Houston Chronicle* in the sense that at least one news item about the homicide appeared in print. Of the 249 homicides, 82.3% received some coverage in the newspaper. The median number of news items that appeared in print for the homicides is 1. The number of news items that appeared in print ranged between 0 and 152. Three particular homicide instances accounted for a disproportionate share of the homicide stories generated by the *Houston Chronicle*. The first case was that of Joana Rodriguez, the mother of a small child who was kidnapped along with her child. The mother was murdered but the child was returned unharmed to the family. The case generated 20 separate articles that appeared in print. The second case, that of Alberto Rodriguez, involved a police officer slain in the line of duty and generated 34 separate articles. The third case was the well-known case

of Andrea Yates, who drowned each of her five young children. The Yates case generated 152 news items from the point that the murder became known to the police and the final court disposition. The Yates case also resulted in a substantial number of news items that appeared after the final court disposition that were not included as part of the analysis.

In terms of page placement, only a small number of the homicides were deemed newsworthy enough to receive front page coverage. Four percent of the homicides received some coverage on the first page of the front section and 5.6% received coverage that appeared on the front page of the Metro section. Seven percent of the homicides received front-page coverage in either the front section or the Metro section of the newspaper. A photograph or some other type of graphic depiction (generally in the form of a map highlighting areas of significance to the homicide) appeared for 12.4% of the homicides. The average number of words (per news item) that appeared for the homicides is 125.14 and the average number of words (per news item) that appeared ranges from 0 to 879.5. The average media attention score for the homicides is 2.53 with a range of 0 to 6 and a standard deviation of 1.68.

One exploratory approach to examining *potential* relationships between the independent variables of interest in the analysis and media reports of homicide is to compare the victim, offender and social context of actual homicides that were investigated with characteristics taken from news reports of homicide. Data from tables 5.1 and 5.2 suggest that media reports of local instances of homicide do not necessarily correspond with data from actual homicides. The media reports data are reported both by excluding the highly reported Andrea Yates case and by including the case. For the

purposes of using the data as an exploratory tool, consider the middle column that excludes the Yates case. Comparing the data in this column with data from the first column suggests that female victims are over-represented in media reports of homicide and that African-American victims are slightly under-represented while Hispanic victims are slightly over-represented in media coverage.

The data in Table 5.1 further suggest that male offenders are under-represented, whereas female offenders are over-represented in media coverage. White and Hispanic offenders are slightly under-represented in media coverage, whereas African-American offenders and cases in which the offender race is unknown are over-represented in media coverage. Data from Table 5.2 suggests that homicides committed through the use of firearms or knives or other cutting instruments are under-represented, while homicides involving assaults with hands or other objects and those involving unknown weapons are over-represented. Stranger homicides are over-represented in media coverage, whereas homicides involving domestic relationships, acquaintance relations, and unknown victim-offender relationships are under-represented in media coverage. Of the four victim-offender race interaction variables examined, all of the interactions are under-represented in media coverage with the exception of the minority offender/non-minority victim interaction, which is over-represented in media coverage. Data on the average number of victims suggests that the average number of victims is slightly higher in media coverage than in actual homicides.

In terms of the available situational and circumstance data, it appears that homicides emanating from simple arguments are under-represented in media coverage and robbery homicides, especially those that involve personal robbery or robbery of a

business are over-represented. Drug-related robberies are slightly under-represented in the media data. Also of interest, homicides that result from kidnapping, traffic altercation, and those involving police officer victims are over-represented in the media data. However, these three attributes of the situational and circumstance measure have so few cases that is difficult to even draw exploratory conclusions. The kidnapping that produced 19 news items involved only one case, similarly, only two cases fell under the category of police officer shooting and one of the cases actually involved the shooting of a security guard. For this reason, not all of the situational attributes are used to create dummy variables to enter into the regression analyses that follow.

Phase One Regression Analysis

For phase one, four separate regression analyses were conducted using four different dependent variables: whether a news item appeared in print for the homicide, the number of news items that appeared in print, average number of words that appeared in print per news item, and lastly, the overall media attention score for the homicide (incorporating whether a news item appeared in print, average story length, the use of graphics, and page placement). Variables were entered into the models based on findings produced from an analysis of zero-order correlations that appear in Table 5.4. To be included in each respective regression analysis, independent variables have must produced a statistically significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficient at the .10 level of probability or lower.

Table 5.4

Phase I Zero-Order Pearson Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	
1. malevic	---	-.93*	-.25**	-.12^	.25*	-.12^	.06	-.07	-.02	-.28*	.09	.16**	-.16**	-.01	.25*	-.10	-.16**	-.13**	.12^	-.32*	.06	.10	.17*	-.08	.04	-.06	.14**	.16**	.17*	-.04	.07	-.05	-.02	-.07	-.07	
2. femvic		---	.22*	.13**	-.24*	.16*	-.07	.09	.01	.34*	-.06	-.17*	.15**	-.01	-.23*	.09	.12^	.16**	-.11^	.38*	-.09	.13**	-.17**	.12^	-.05	.08	-.01	-.16**	-.18*	.06	-.12^	.08	.17*	.22*	.16**	
3. vicage			---	.11^	-.19*	.11^	-.02	-.14**	.07	.26*	-.09	-.11^	.09	.06	-.14**	.15**	.04	.00	.05	-.03	.03	-.01	.12^	.03	-.05	.08	-.14**	-.07	-.11^	.26*	.07	-.01	-.13**	-.01	.01	
4. whitevic				---	-.35*	-.33*	.11^	.06	-.15**	-.01	.36*	-.07	.02	-.16**	-.12^	.03	.03	.11^	.06	.19*	-.03	-.18*	.15**	-.26*	-.08	.41*	-.01	-.03	-.15**	.02	-.04	.04	.16**	.12^	.13**	
5. hispvic					---	-.74*	-.04	-.12^	.12^	-.17**	-.15**	.58*	-.52*	.12^	.22*	-.11^	-.13**	-.08	.09	-.25*	-.16**	.27*	.53*	-.58*	-.17*	.06	.06	.20*	.10	.14**	.03	-.05	-.04	-.07	-.09	
6. minorvic						---	-.04	.08	-.01	.17**	-.10	-.53*	.51*	-.01	-.12^	.09	.08	.01	-.12^	.11^	.17*	-.16**	-.64*	.80*	.22*	-.30*	-.02	-.17**	.01	-.13**	-.01	.05	-.06	.01	.03	
7. maleoff							---	-.30*	-.83*	-.16**	.14**	.30*	.30*	-.80*	.05	.01	-.04	-.07	.20*	-.03	.23*	-.36*	.32*	.20*	.11^	.16**	.09	.11^	.11^	.02	-.22*	.10	-.08	.13**	.24*	
8. femoff								---	-.15**	.11	.04	-.08	.20*	-.16**	-.10	.05	.05	.06	-.08	.28*	-.02	-.16*	-.04	.17*	-.07	.06	.05	.09	-.08	-.07	-.19*	.09	.22*	.09	.08	
9. offsexunk									---	-.14**	-.30*	-.42*	.97*	.03	-.10	.04	.04	-.16**	-.22*	-.19*	.50*	-.32*	-.32*	-.09	-.18*	-.13**	-.04	-.08	.02	.35*	-.16**	-.06	-.16**	-.26*		
10. offage										---	-.06	-.18**	.16**	-.08	.03	.04	.02	-.24*	.23*	.10	-.09	-.14^	.20*	-.10	-.06	-.02	-.26*	-.04	-.14^	.01	.01	.05	.10	-.01		
11. whiteoff											---	-.08	-.23*	-.14**	-.04	-.09	.06	.08	-.06	.07	.10	-.08	.25*	-.19*	.40*	-.08	.06	.15**	.05	-.01	-.01	.03	.19*	.05	.08	
12. hispoff												---	-.55*	-.31*	.05	.04	-.05	-.08	.17*	-.08	-.09	.01	.87*	-.46*	.01	-.16**	.06	.19*	.08	.11^	-.11^	-.06	-.07	-.08	-.07	
13. minorityoff													---	-.43*	-.02	.04	-.01	.02	-.01	.17*	.20*	-.32*	-.60*	.75*	-.14**	.43*	.02	-.06	-.01	-.11^	-.17*	.16**	-.01	.15**	.21*	
14. offraceunk														---	.02	-.08	.03	.03	-.17*	-.22*	-.18*	.49*	-.33*	-.33*	-.09	-.19*	-.13**	-.02	-.09	.01	.35*	-.14**	-.07	-.16**	-.25*	
15. firearm															---	-.58*	-.50*	-.39*	.14**	-.22*	-.05	.13**	.00	-.04	.01	.04	.10	.15**	.07	-.02	-.03	.07	-.10	-.05	.05	
16. knifecut																---	-.15**	-.12^	-.11^	.17*	.01	-.05	-.02	.10	.04	-.07	-.06	-.15**	.06	-.05	-.06	.08	-.04	-.04	-.06	
17. assault																	---	-.10	-.04	.08	.01	-.09	.01	-.02	-.01	-.04	-.10^	-.01	-.06	-.05	.14**	-.13**	-.01	.03	-.05	
18. othweap																		---	-.04	.06	.03	-.05	-.01	-.03	-.05	.07	.03	-.07	-.12^	.14**	-.02	-.07	.24*	.09	.02	
19. stranger																			---	-.26*	-.29*	-.39*	.15**	-.09	-.05	.13**	.11^	.21*	-.01	.26*	-.14**	.09	.03	.18*	.25*	
20. domestic																				---	-.26*	-.36*	.02	.23*	-.09	-.07	.03	-.30*	-.21*	-.21*	-.24*	.09	.15**	.13**	.08	
21. acquaint																					---	-.40*	-.10	.19*	.10	.03	-.04	-.05	.22*	-.02	-.12^	.05	-.05	-.05	.02	
22. unrelat																						---	-.05	-.30*	.04	-.07	-.08	.13^	-.01	-.03	.43*	-.21*	-.10	-.22*	-.30*	
23. raceinter1																							---	.50*	-.14**	-.19*	.10	.11	.07	.12^	-.11^	-.07	-.06	-.03	-.04	
24. raceinter2																								---	-.09	-.23*	-.04	-.19*	.06	-.13**	-.16**	.15**	-.04	.06	.13**	
25. raceinter3																									---	-.08	-.06	.23*	.03	-.02	.03	.03	-.02	-.02	-.02	.13**
26. raceinter4																										---	.01	.19**	-.08	.06	-.06	.06	.05	.16**	.17*	
27. numbvic																											---	.14**	.01	-.06	-.07	.10	.45*	.39*	.27*	
28. numboff																												---	.01	.08	.01	.04	-.03	-.01	.09	
29. argument																													---	-.19*	-.34*	.04	-.05	-.10	-.06	
30. robbery																														---	-.32*	.11^	.02	.14**	.22*	
31. uksoccon																															---	-.33*	-.11^	-.25*	-.38*	
32. artappear																																---	.11^	.42*	.70*	
33. numstory																																	---	.45*	.28*	
34. numwords																																		---	.80*	
35. attscore																																			---	

* p<.01

** p<.05

^ p<.10

Table 5.5

Phase I Variables Included in Multivariate Regression Analysis (By Dependent Variable) - Zero-Order Significance Based on .10 Criteria

Whether an Article Appeared in Print

Involved a minority offender
 Involved an assault with blunt instrument or personal weapon
 Involved a minority suspect and a minority victim
 Involved a robbery
 Social context of homicide unknown
 Race or gender of offender unknown
 Victim-offender relationship unknown

Number of Stories Published

Involved a female victim
 Age of the victim
 Involved a white victim
 Involved a female offender
 Involved a white offender
 Involved weapon other than firearm, knife/cut instrument, or blunt instrument or personal weapon
 Involved a domestic context
 Number of victims
 Social context of homicide unknown

Average Words Published Per News Item

Involved a female victim
 Involved a white victim
 Involved a male offender
 Involved a minority offender
 Involved a stranger homicide
 Involved a domestic context
 Involved a minority suspect and a non-minority offender
 Number of victims
 Involved a robbery
 Social context of homicide unknown
 Race or Gender of offender unknown
 Victim-offender relationship unknown

Attention Score

Involved a female victim
 Involved a white victim
 Involved a male offender
 Involved a minority offender
 Involved a stranger homicide
 Involved a minority suspect and a minority victim
 Involved a non-minority suspect and a minority victim
 Involved a minority suspect and a non-minority victim
 Number of victims
 Involved a robbery
 Social context of homicide unknown
 Race or Gender of offender unknown
 Victim-offender relationship unknown

Zero-Order Pearson Correlation Analysis

The zero-order Pearson Correlation coefficients for the independent variables of interest in the analysis and the dependent variables of interest in the analysis is suggestive of support for two of the theoretical perspectives identified in the chapter three literature review. The correlation coefficients suggest potential relationships between a variety of market demand variables and source constraint variables with the measures of media outcome. With regard to market demand variables, significant zero-order coefficients are observed between the number of articles that were published (a dependent variable of interest) and female victim, victim age, white victim, female offender, white offender, cases that involved unusual weapons (classified here as “other weapons”), and domestic relationships.

Significant zero-order relationships were observed between the average number of words per news item published (a dependent variable of interest) and female victim, white victim, male offender, minor offender, stranger relationship, domestic relationship, number of victims, victim-offender race interactions that involve minority offenders and non-minority victims, and robbery homicides. For the final metric level dependent variable used in the analysis, media attention score, significant zero-order correlation coefficients are observed for the market demand variables of female victim, white victim, minority offender, stranger homicide, the number of victims, victim-offender race interactions that involve minority offenders and non-minority victims, and robbery homicides. All of the correlation coefficients were positive with respect to the

independent variables, thus indicating that when the respective characteristic is present, media attention is more intense.

In general, with respect to the market demand conceptualization presented in chapter 3, the majority of the correlation coefficients were in the expected direction (with respect to the respective independent variables). There were three notable exceptions. First, the correlation between the white offender variable and the number of articles published finding was contrary to prior research findings suggesting that media disproportionately focus attention on crime involving minority offenders. A second notable exception is the finding of significant positive correlation coefficient between domestic offender-victim relationship and the number of articles that appeared in print and a positive correlation between domestic victim-offender relationships and the average number of words per news item. This finding is contrary to the theoretical perspective of Black (1976) suggesting that the closer in relationship the victim and offender are, the less important the crime, in terms of how society reacts to the offense. The final exception involved the victim-offender race interaction variables. A significant positive relationship is observed between cases involving a minority offender/non-minority victim and both number of words and the attention score variable, which is consistent with the theoretical perspective of Black (1976). However, contrary to the perspective of Black (1976), for the attention score variable, a positive correlation coefficient is also observed for each of the two measures of intra-racial race interactions.

The significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients for the respective independent variables of interest and the binary dependent variable (whether a news item appeared in print for the homicide case) included both offender and social context

measures. Homicides involving minority offenders were statistically more likely to be covered. In terms of the social context measures and their zero-order association with whether a news item appeared, cases involving assault-types of methods, homicides committed during the commission of a robbery, and homicides involving a minority suspect and a minority victim are more likely to receive coverage.

The second perspective summarized in chapter 3 that received preliminary support based on an analysis of zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients is the contention that informational constraints influence media outcomes. Informational constraint is measured in phase one through four variables: unknown gender of the offender, unknown race of the offender, unknown victim-offender relationship, and unknown social context of the homicide. The significant Pearson zero-order correlation coefficients between each of these variables and each of the metric media outcome variables and the binary variable whether an article appeared were negative in direction. This suggests that missing offender and context information for homicides (i.e., when police, and then subsequently media, do not have this information) decreases media attention that is focused on the homicide.

With regard to the informational constraint variables, significant negative correlation coefficients are observed for offender gender unknown, offender race unknown, and victim offender-relationship unknown (separately) and two of the metric dependent variables (average words and attention score). Significant negative zero-order correlation coefficients are observed for unknown social context and each of the three metric variables to be used as dependent variables in the analysis to follow (number of articles that appeared, average words, and attention score). Significant zero-order

correlation coefficients are also observed for each of the four information constraint measures and the binary dependent variable (whether a news item appeared). Table 5.5 provides summary information of all of the variables that evidenced a significant zero-order correlation coefficient (and will be used in the multiple regression analyses that follow) for each of the respective dependent variables.

Multivariate Analyses – Metric Predictors

A series of multiple linear regression analyses are conducted in order to determine the relative strength in predicting the *number of articles published per homicide* using victim, offender, social context, and informational constraint variables that evidenced statistically significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients with the number of articles published variable. Table 5.6 presents the results of this series of regression analyses. The findings are generally presented in five different models. Model 1 enters only the trial/sentencing stage measure, Model 2 enters only victim characteristics and trial sentencing stage, Model 3 enters victim and offender characteristics and trial sentencing stage, Model 4 enters victim, offender, social context measures and trial/sentencing stage, and lastly, Model 5 enters victim, offender, social context, informational constraint variables and trial/sentencing stage.

At each separate stage (or model), predictors that fail to maintain a statistically significant relationship with number of articles published, controlling for the effects of other independent predictors, are dropped from subsequent analyses. This procedure is followed due to the number of independent variables considered in the analysis relative to

the number of homicides examined so that as much of the variance to be potentially explained by predictors in subsequent models is preserved. The dummy variable trial/sentencing stage is entered in each model as a control variable because homicide cases that generally are covered past the investigation stage typically produce more news items.

For Model 2 predicting number of articles published with female victim, white victim, victim age, and stage of the proceedings, the overall prediction model is determined to be statistically significant ($F = 24.252, p = .000$). As evidenced by the R^2 value of .275, a moderate amount of the variation in number of articles published is explained by a linear combination of the variables. The addition of the victim variables to Model 1 does not represent a substantive increase in explained variation by the victim variables (the R^2 value for Model 1 is .261). Only two of the variables in the model (female victim and stage of the proceedings) have a statistically significant contribution to make to the prediction of the number of articles published. The positive value of the standardized regression coefficients (beta weights) for female victim (.143) and stage of the proceedings (.509) indicates that homicides involving a female victim and were covered at the trial or sentencing stage of the proceedings have significantly more articles published.

Model 3 predicts number of articles published using female victim, female suspect, white suspect, and stage of the proceeding measures. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 25.520, p = .000$). As evidenced by the R^2 value of .284, the incorporation of the offender variables that produced significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients (female suspect and white suspect) to the variables

Table 5.6

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Phase I Variables Predicting # of News Items Published (N=248)¹

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	b (Standard Error)	β (Standard Error)	b (Standard Error)	β (Standard Error)	b (Standard Error)	β (Standard Error)	b (Standard Error)	β (Standard Error)	b (Standard Error)	β (Standard Error)
<u>Trial.Sent. Stag.</u>	4.40 (.468)	.514*	4.36 (.475)	.509*	4.27 (.465)	.498*	4.26 (.464)	.498*	4.12 (.464)	.482*
<u>Victim Variables</u>										
Fem. Victim			1.07 (.422)	.143*	.814 (.408)	.109**	1.06 (.435)	.142**	.830 (.403)	.111**
White Vic.			-510 (.488)	-.058						
Age of Victim			-.001	-.07						
<u>Offender Variables</u>										
Female Susp.					1.31 (.550)	.128**	1.53 (.565)	.150*	1.17 (.553)	.115**
White Susp.					-.333 (.586)	-.031				
<u>Situation Variables</u>										
Other weapon							.268 (.648)	.022		
Domestic Hom.							-.559 (.462)	-.072		
Number Victim							.732 (.320)	.122**	.685 (.320)	.114**
<u>Information Availab.</u>										
Unk. Social Cont.									-.594 (.346)	.095^
Intercept	1.184		1.521		.938		.0085		.374	
Model F Statistic	88.342*		24.252*		25.520*		18.393*		22.553*	
Deg. of Freedom	247		245		247		247		247	
Model R	.514		.536		.544		.560		.564	
Adjusted R ²	.261		.275		.284		.297		.304	

* p < .01

** p < .05

^ p < .10

¹ The case of Andrea Yates was excluded from the analysis as an outlier. The case generated 152 articles and in terms of the number of articles published generated substantially more coverage than any other homicide committed in 2001.

maintaining a significant relationship with number of articles published in Model 2, add little to the explained variation of the dependent variable. Three of the four variables in the model maintained a significant relationship with number of articles published controlling for the effects of the remaining independent variables in the model. The positive value of the beta weights for female victim (.109), female suspect (.128), and stage of the proceedings (.498) indicates that homicides involving female victims, female suspects, and those that advanced to the trial or sentencing stage have significantly more articles published.

Model 4 predicts the number of articles published using female victim, female suspect, homicides committed with an unusual weapon (not a firearm, knife, or physical assault), domestic relationship, number of victims, and stage of the proceedings. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 18.392$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .297, relative to the R^2 value observed for Model 3, suggests that the social context variables that produced statistically significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients with number of articles published add little to the explanatory power of the model. The beta weights for each of the significant predictors of the model, female victim (.142), female suspect (.150), number of victims (.122), and trial/sentencing stage (.498) were in the positive direction, thus suggesting that homicides that involve female victims, female suspects, higher numbers of victims, and produced news items at the trial or sentencing stage have more news items published.

Model 5 predicts number of news items published using female victim, female suspect, number of victims, unknown social context, and trial/sentencing stage as independent variables in the analysis. The overall prediction model is statistically

significant ($F = 18.392$, $p = .000$). As indicated by the R^2 value of .304, the addition of the only informational constraint variable that produced a significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficient with news item published, unknown social context, add little to the explanatory power of the model. The beta weights for this final model indicate that all five variables entered into the model have significant effects on number of articles published controlling for the remaining variables in the analysis. Female victim (.111), female suspect (.115), number of victims (.114), and homicides that are covered at the trial/sentencing stage (.482) have significant positive effects, thus indicating that homicides involving female victims, female suspects, more victims, and are covered at the trial or sentencing stage have more articles published about them. Unknown social context has a significant negative effect (-.095) on news items published in that in situations in which the social context of the homicide are unknown, there are statistically fewer news items published about the homicide.

Generally, when dealing with an excess number of independent variables relative to the number of cases used in a particular analysis, there are two basic ways of reducing the number of independent variables down into a final model that is more concise usable. Developing a criteria in terms of zero-order correlation coefficients, as was used in this analysis, is one method (which was judged to be the best method of proceeding based on the nature of the data used in the analysis). A second method of reducing the number of independent variables down to a more manageable model is to run a complete regression analysis with all potential measures and then run a more condensed analysis using only the predictors that emerge as significant in a reduced model.

Proceeding in this manner, a separate regression analysis was run that included all measures as predictors of the number of news items published, followed by a more condensed model. The full model was marred by multicollinearity problems but the predictors were similar to the final model produced in the manner previously described, with two exceptions. The number of victims measure (which was significant in Model 5 previously described) was not significant in the full model and the white victim measure (which was not significant in Model 5) was a significant predictor of the number of news items published. In the reduced model, female victim, female offender, unknown social context, and trial/sentencing stage of the proceedings were the significant predictors of number of items published, whereas white victim was not significant. The relationships were in the same direction as was noted in Model 5. A model was also explored that entered all of the predictors in which a significant zero-order correlation was observed (rather than entering the measures in stages). Proceeding in this manner produced the exact same significant predictors of number of news items published that were reported in Model 5.

A second series of regression analyses are conducted in order to determine the significant predictors of *average number of words per news item* (reported in 5.7). As with the preceding set of regression analyses, five different analyses were performed, with each successive stage introducing variables that produced statistically significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients for average number of words, beginning with victim variables, then moving to offender, social context, and informational constraint variables, respectively. Model 2 used multiple linear regression to predict average number of words with female victim, white victim, and trial/sentencing stage. The overall

Table 5.7

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Phase I Variables Predicting Average Number of Words (Per News Item) Published (N=249)1

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β
	(Standard Error)		(Standard Error)		(Standard Error)		(Standard Error)		(Standard Error)	
<u>Victim Variables</u>										
Trial.Sent. Stag.	118.12	.306*	106.63	.276*	102.30	.265*	88.89	.230*	91.57	.237*
	(23.40)		(23.49)		(23.50)		(22.26)		(21.60)	
Fem. Victim			58.78	.176*	59.18	.117*	53.03	.159*	56.20	.168*
			(20.24)		(20.43)		(19.75)		(18.52)	
White Vic.			18.28	.047						
			(23.79)							
<u>Offender Variables</u>										
Male Susp.					24.57	.076				
					(20.57)					
Minority Susp.					21.20	.078				
					(17.23)					
<u>Situation Variables</u>										
Stranger Hom.							36.60	.112^	26.30	.080
							(19.02)		(19.59)	
Domestic Hom.							28.70	.083		
							(21.45)			
Min S./NM V.							36.54	.092^	34.93	.088
							(21.76)		(21.81)	
Number Victim							93.77	.385*	92.13	.379*
							(13.16)		(13.12)	
Robbery							27.82	.074		
							(22.02)			
<u>Information Availab.</u>										
Unk. Off Gen/Race									13.08	.037
									(22.77)	
Unk. Social Cont.									-38.72	-.137*
									(16.98)	
Unk. Vic/Off Relat.									-12.29	-.043
									(19.57)	
Intercept	108.058		94.875		69.168		-30.353		-1.169	
Model F Statistic	25.471*		11.978*		9.996*		15.568*		14.361*	
Deg. of Freedom	248		248		248		248		248	
Model R	.306		.358		.375		.558		.569	
Adjusted R ²	.090		.117		.127		.291		.301	

* p < .01

** p < .05

^ p < .10

prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 11.978$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .117 suggests that the variables used in the analysis account for only a moderate amount of the variation in average number of words and provides little by way of improvement in the variation explained by Model 1. Female victim and trial/sentencing stage maintain statistically significant effects on the dependent variable controlling for the other victim variables in the analysis and the positive beta weights, .176 and .267, respectively, indicate that homicides involving female victims and homicides covered at the trial/sentencing stage result in a more words per news item.

A third model adds male suspect and minority suspect variables to the statistically significant independent variables that are retained from Model 2. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 9.996$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value increases from .117 in Model 1 to .127, thus suggesting that the additional offender characteristic variables add little to the explanatory value from Model 2 to Model 3. As with Model 2, the only statistically significant variables when controlling for the effects of other predictor variables in the model were female victim and trial/sentencing stage. The regression coefficients, .177 and .265, respectively, for these variables were positive, and thus, evidence the same directional relationship with average number of words per news item from Model 2.

The fourth model retains female victim and trial sentencing stage from models 2 and 3 and incorporates the social context measures of stranger homicide, domestic relationship, minority suspect/non-minority victim, number of victims, and robbery homicide to the analysis in predicting average number of words. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 15.568$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value for the model is

.291 and represents a fairly substantial increase from .127 observed for Model 3, suggesting that social context variables are important considerations to story length. Female victim and trial/sentencing stage remain significant predictors of average number of words, and the beta weights, .159 and .230, respectively, indicate a positive relationship. Stranger homicide, minority offender/non-minority victim, and number of victims (regression coefficients of .112, .092, and .385, respectively) are also statistically significant predictors of average words published. The relationships are positive and indicate that stranger homicide, those that involve a minority offender and non-minority victim, and those homicides involving more victims have significantly more words published about them.

The final model in this second series of regression analyses, Model 5, incorporates female victim, stranger homicide, minority offender/non-minority victim, number of victims (all retained from Model 3), informational constraint variables (unknown gender or race¹, unknown victim-offender relationship, and unknown social context), and trial/sentencing stage to predict average words. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 14.361$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .301 indicates that the addition of informational constraint variables add little in terms of explained variance over Model 4. Female victim, number of victims, and trial/sentencing stage (beta weights of .168, .379, and .237, respectively) remain statistically significant predictors of average words printed. In the final model, the effects of stranger homicide and minority offender/non-minority victim are reduced to non-significance controlling

¹ Unknown gender and unknown race of the offender were combined into one measure for the purposes of this analysis. The variable was dummy-coded as a 1 if either offender race or offender gender were unknown. The variables were re-coded in this way because unknown gender and unknown race have a zero-order Pearson correlation coefficient of .97 and presented collinearity problems.

for informational constraints. However, the only informational constraint variable to produce statistically significant effects controlling for the other predictor variables in the analysis is the measure of unknown social context. The beta weight for this variable is negative in direction (-.137), indicating that homicides with unknown social context, have significantly fewer average words published.

Similar to the previous set of analyses for the dependent measure number of news items published, alternative methods of conducting the analysis were explored. A model was estimated that entered all potential variables into a regression analysis simultaneously. Much like the full model for the number of news items published outcome measure, proceeding in this way resulted in many problems with multicollinearity in the form of low tolerance values. However, the same independent variables that emerged as significant in Model 5 also emerged as significant in the full model (number of victims, unknown social context, and trial/sentencing stage). Because the female victim measure approached significance ($p = .104$), it was also incorporated into a reduced model along with number of victims, unknown social context, and trial/sentencing stage) whereby all of the measures were significant predictors of the average number of words published per article. All were significant in similar directions as noted in Model 5.

An additional set of regression analyses were run for the metric outcome variable number of words published that incorporated all independent measures that indicated a significant zero-order correlation coefficient. But instead of entering the variables in stages, the variables were all entered simultaneously. This model indicated some problems with multicollinearity as some tolerance values were below .70. The same

measures that emerged as significant in Model 5 emerged as significant in this model that entered all of the measures simultaneously. Additionally the measures from this model that emerged as significant were entered into a more condensed model where all of the measures were significant and in the same direction as noted in Model 5.

For the final metric dependent variable, *attention score*, five different models were produced in a manner similar to those for the number of words and average story length media outcome measures (reported in Table 5.8). Model 2 used female victim, white victim, and trial/sentencing stage as predictors of the media attention score. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 13.936, p = .000$). The R^2 value of .135 indicates that victim variables and the control variable account for a moderate amount of variation in the overall media attention measure, but this does not represent a substantive improvement in variation explained from Model 1 (R^2 value of .126). Female victim and trial/sentencing stage are significant predictors of the media attention score controlling for the effects of other victim variables in the analysis. The beta weights of .111 and .336, respectively, are positive in direction and, therefore, indicate that homicides involving female victims and those that have news items published in the trial/sentencing stage have statistically higher media attention scores.

Model 3 predicts media attention score with female victim and trial/sentencing stage (retained from Model 2) and offender variables with statistically significant zero-order correlation coefficients (male suspect and minority suspect). The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 14.711, p = .000$). The R^2 value for the model is .181 and represents a moderate improvement in explained variance over Model 2. Female victim and trial/sentencing stage, retained from Model 2, maintain a significant

Table 5.8

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Phase I Variables Predicting Media Attention Score (N=249)

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β
Trial.Sent. Stag.	1.74 (.283)	.359*	1.60 (.287)	.336*	1.47 (.281)	.309*	1.23 (.273)	.259*	1.23 (.269)	.258*
<u>Victim Variables</u>										
Fem. Victim			.456 (.247)	.111^	.472 (.213)	.114^	.497 (.230)	.121**	.360 (.227)	.087
White Vic.			.274 (.291)	.057						
<u>Offender Variables</u>										
Male Susp.					.644 (.246)	.161*	.383 (.237)	.096		
Minority Susp.					.413 (.206)	.123**	.563 (.197)	.168*	.457 (.203)	.136**
<u>Situation Variables</u>										
Stranger							.555 (.234)	.137**	.521 (.249)	.129**
NM S./Min V.							.685 (.495)	.076		
Number Victim							.783 (.163)	.261*	.732 (.161)	.244*
Robbery							.681 (.271)	.146**	.331 (.286)	.071
<u>Information Availab.</u>										
Unk. Off Gen/Race									-.001 (.292)	-.002
Unk. Social Cont.									-.084 (.223)	-.231*
Unk. Vic/Off Relat.									-.006 (.251)	-.019
Intercept	2.286		2.169		1.534		.535		1.371	
Model F Statistic	36.645*		13.936*		14.711*		13.465*		13.789*	
Deg. of Freedom	248		248		248		248		248	
Model R	.359		.382		.441		.557		.585	
Adjusted R ²	.126		.135		.181		.287		.317	

* p < .01

** p < .05

^ p < .10

positive relationship (beta weights .114 and .309, respectively) with attention score. Male suspect and minority suspect also are positively (beta weights .161 and .123) associated with media attention score.

Model 4 incorporates the statistically significant predictors of media attention score from Model 3 and social context variables that have a statistically significant zero-order correlation with the attention score (stranger homicide, minority suspect/minority victim, non-minority suspect/minority victim, minority suspect/non-minority victim, number of victims, and robbery homicide). Including minority suspect, minority offender/non-minority victim, and minority offender/minority victim measures simultaneously into the same model presents multicollinearity problems. Therefore, three different models were estimated individually using each of the respective measures. The most appropriate model (based on variation of the dependent measure explained) was the model using the minority suspect measure and the substantive findings between the three models were very similar. Therefore, Table 5.8 reports the findings for the model incorporating the minority suspect measure.

The overall prediction model was statistically significant ($F = 13.465$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .287 for the model represents a relatively substantial increase in the explained variation from Model 3. Female victim and trial/sentencing stage remain significant predictors of attention score (beta weights of .121 and .259, respectively). Stranger homicides (.137), minority suspect (.168), number of victims (.261), and robbery homicides (.146) are positively related to media attention score. In this regard, homicides involving stranger relationships, minority suspects, more victims, and homicides committed in the context of robbery have significantly higher attention scores.

The final model includes statistically significant variables from Model 4 and informational constraint variables (unknown offender gender or race, unknown victim-offender relationship, and unknown social context). The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 13.789$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .317 for the model represents little improvement in terms of explained variation. With the exception of the female victim and robbery variables, all of the variables incorporated into Model 5, remain significant even after controlling for the effects of informational constraint variables. Additionally, unknown social context is significantly associated in a negative direction ($-.231$) with the media attention score. Therefore, when the social context of a homicide is unknown, the media attention score is significantly lower.

When compared to alternative methods of analyzing the data, the findings for the media attention outcome measure are less stable than those for the first two metric predictor variables examined. When a full model is estimated using all possible predictors, similar to the data presented in Model 5, the number of victims, unknown social context, and trial sentencing stage are significant predictors. Unlike the data presented in models 1 through 5, homicides that arise out of simple arguments that escalate into murder have significantly lower attention scores. Moreover, two measures, minority offender and stranger homicides, are not significant predictors when all measures are entered into the model. But again, the full model is plagued by problems of multicollinearity. When the significant measures from the full model are entered into a condensed model, all four of the measures (the number of victims, argument, unknown social context, and trial/sentencing stage) are significant.

A regression analysis that was generated with all of the independent variables in the analysis that indicated a significant zero-order correlation for the attention score but did not include the variables in steps was quite similar to the results from Model 5. The stranger homicide, number of victims, unknown social context, and stage of the proceedings measures were statistically significant in the model. Additionally, unlike Model 5, male suspect and the non-minority offender/minority victim term was significant (in the positive direction). The minority suspect measure that is significant in Model 5 was not significant in this model until the all of the race interaction terms were removed (because of collinearity with the minority suspect measure), then it had a significant effect controlling for all other variables that indicated a significant zero-order correlation. When these seven measures (including the minority suspect measure for the stated reasons) were incorporated into a separate and condensed model, the same measures that emerged in Model 5 were significant, whereas the measures of a male suspect and non-minority suspect/minority victim were not significant (consistent with the models presented in the table).

Logistic Regression Analyses

A final series of logistic regression analyses were conducted using the predictor variables that have a significant zero-order correlation coefficient with the dependent measure of *whether a news item appeared in print* (reported in Table 5.9). The logistic regression analyses follow the same general procedure as the previous OLS regression analyses. One notable exception concerned the use of the trial/sentencing stage control

variable. The variable was not used as a control variable in the logistic regression analysis because the dependent variable, whether a news item appeared in print, is not a media outcome measure of intensity of coverage as were the metric predictors used in the previous analyses. In essence, even though there is a statistically significant zero-order correlation coefficient between trial/sentencing stage coverage and whether an article appeared in print (.161, $p < .05$), there is no theoretical justification suggesting that trial/sentencing stage could cause a spurious relationship between other independent variables in the analysis and whether an article appeared in print.¹ Moreover, this significant zero-order correlation coefficient is likely attributable to the structure of the variables in the sense that all of the cases in which the trial/sentencing measure is coded as a 1, the dependent measure (whether a news item appeared) is coded as a 1 by default. This is the case because every homicide that was covered at the trial/sentencing stage was covered in general and therefore noted by the variable measuring whether an article appeared.

A significant zero-order relationship with whether a news item appeared is not observed for any of the victim characteristic measures. Only one of the offender characteristic variables, minority suspect, has a significant zero-order relationship with whether an article was published. For the logistic regression analysis Model 1 in Table 5.9, minority suspect is entered as the only predictor variable. The regression coefficient for minority suspect is statistically significant in the positive direction (.879), thus

¹ For each of dependent variables number of news items, average words printed, and media attention score, the justification for trial/sentencing coverage as a control variable is that cases covered at the trial or sentencing stage have reported more information, which could have the effect of increasing both the number of articles printed and the length of the articles. The number of articles published and average words are used to construct the metric dependent variables for the OLS analyses, therefore stage covered is an important control measure.

Table 5.9

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Phase I Variables Predicting Whether an Article Appeared in Print (N=249)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	b (Odds Ratio)	SE b	b (Odds Ratio)	SE b	b (Odds Ratio)	SE b	b (Odds Ratio)	SE b	b (Odds Ratio)	SE b
<u>Variables</u>										
<u>Offender Variables</u>										
Minority Susp.	.879** (6.00)	.359	.971* (7.04)	.366			.707^ (1.87)	.422		
<u>Situation Variables</u>										
Min. S./Min V.					1.04* (5.99)	.423			.638 1.87	.466
Assault			-.857^ (3.57)	.454	-.842^ (3.45)	.453	-.748 (2.04)	.496	-.711 (2.04)	.497
Robbery			1.17^ (3.38)	.637	1.17^ (3.41)	.635	.290 (.166)	.703	.286 (.166)	.701
<u>Information Availab.</u>										
Unk. Off Gen/Race							.385 (.180)	.504	.202 (.180)	.476
Unk. Social Cont.							-1.41* (9.56)	.446	-1.39** (9.55)	.450
Unk. Vic/Off Relat.							-.575 (1.35)	.433	-.512 (1.35)	.441
Intercept	1.191		1.147		1.253		2.207		2.310	
-2 log likelihood	225.821		217.975		218.659		200.048		200.927	
Model Chi-Square	6.427**		14.274*		13.590*		32.201*		31.322*	
Deg. Of Freedom	1		3		3		6		6	
Cox and Snell R ²	.025		.056		.053		.121		.118	
Nagelkerke R ²	.042		.092		.088		.200		.195	

* p < .01

** p < .05

^ p < .10

suggesting that the odds of an article appearing significantly increase if there is a minority offender involved in the homicide. As evidenced by the Nagelkerke R^2 value of .042, minority offender, by itself accounts for only a small portion of the variation in whether an article appeared in print.

Models 2 and 3 enter offender characteristic and social context factors and models 4 and 5 enter offender characteristic, social context factors, and informational constraint measures. Models 2 and 3 and also models 4 and 5, respectively, are similar to one another with the exception that some of the models enter the minority suspect variable (models 2 and 4) and the others enter the minority offender/minority victim measure (models 3 and 5). It was necessary to prevent these two measures from being entered simultaneously into the same model because of collinearity problems between the measures of minority suspect and minority suspect/minority victim. For both models 2 and 3, the social context measures assault and robbery are significant controlling for the remaining variables in the analysis. Homicides involving assault murders are significantly less likely to have an article published, whereas robbery murders were significantly more likely to have an article published. The race measures of minority suspect and minority suspect/minority victim, in models 2 and 3, respectively, are significant controlling for the remaining variables. In Model 2, cases involving minority offenders are more likely to have an article published and in Model 3, cases involving minority suspects/minority victims are more likely to have an article published. The model summary statistics indicate that models 2 and 3 improves the variation explained in the dependent variable to .092 and .088, respectively.

The final models, 4 and 5, in a similar fashion, alternated the minority suspect and minority suspect/minority victim measures. Models 4 and 5 also take the additional step of entering for information constraint measures. In Model 4, minority suspect remains a significant predictor of whether an article appeared controlling for the additional information constraint measures. The only information constraint measure that has a significant effect is unknown social context. When the social context of the homicide is unknown, an article is significantly less likely to appear. In Model 5, controlling for the effects of information constraints, minority suspect/minority victim is rendered an insignificant predictor of whether an article was published. Similar to Model 4, the only information constraint measure that has a significant influence on whether an article appeared is unknown social context. When the social context was unknown, an article is significantly less likely to appear in print. The addition of the information restraint variables improves considerably on the model's overall predictive ability. The Nagelkerke R^2 values for models 4 and 5, respectively is .200 and .195.

Further analysis revealed that the finding that homicides that are committed by minority suspects and those in which social context information is available were more likely to receive any coverage at all in the paper. However, this does not come without qualification. When all of the measures are entered into a logistical regression model, including the minority suspect measure and the race interaction measures, minority suspect does not emerge as a significant predictor of whether a news item is published. The same held true for an analysis that included all of the variables that indicates a significant zero-order correlation coefficient but did not enter the variables in stages. However, for both of these models, once race interaction measures are removed from the

analysis due to their correlation with the minority suspect measure, minority suspect emerged as a significant predictor of whether a story is reported or not.

Additionally, for the full model with all of the independent variables included, white suspect, the use of a knife or a cutting instrument, homicides that resulted from arguments that escalated, and unknown social context were significant predictors (whether the race interaction measures were included or not). When these five measures (including minority suspect) were entered into a condensed regression analysis, similar to Model 4 noted above, cases involving a minority suspect were significantly more likely to receive coverage in the paper. Cases where the social context of the homicide was unknown were significantly less likely to be covered. Additionally, homicides that originated from an argument that escalated into murder were significantly less likely to be covered. The model that simultaneously incorporated the independent measures that indicated a zero-order correlation with article appearance in the paper indicated that the only significant measure was unknown social context. Therefore, the finding that unknown social context reduces the likelihood that an article will appear is stable, whereas the findings that minority suspect increases the likelihood of coverage and argument as the social context reduces the likelihood of the coverage much less stable and dependent on the procedures used in the analysis.

Phase One Analysis Conclusions

The phase one analysis warrants several conclusions about the nature of media coverage of homicide by the *Houston Chronicle*. First, whether the case is covered in the

trial or sentencing stage is a significant predictor of each of the metric media intensity measures and advances to the final model as a significant predictor for each of the outcome measures. This finding suggests the importance of considering the final stage of the criminal justice proceeding covered by the press in media outcome research. Some of the effects of the final stage of the criminal justice proceeding that is covered by the press may have something to do with information availability. Cases that are covered at trial and sentencing stages have an offender that has been identified and generally the social context of the homicide is known. The stage of the proceeding variable is used here as a control variable and not as an informational constraint variable because it is recognized that many cases may actually advance through the criminal justice system to these two stages but may not be considered newsworthy enough for coverage. In these situations, information is available and not a constraint on media, but the media may not be moved to report on the information. In this regard, the stage of proceeding measure is a measure of media behavior that could be the result of “market demand” types of assessments of newsworthiness. The measures used as informational constraints, on the other hand, are measures of the characteristics of the homicide case and can be adequately discerned from “market demand” measures.

Second, the most important predictors of media outcome variables are homicides that involve female victims, cases that involve higher numbers of victims, and whether the social context of the homicide is known by the police and subsequently, the news organization. The number of victims and unknown social context variables are statistically significant predictors of all three metric media outcome final models. The female victim measure is a significant predictor of two of the dependent measures and

approached significance in the final model for the third dependent measure, media attention score.

Third, the analysis found fairly strong support for the “market demand” theoretical framework as outlined in previous chapters. However, much of the support for this framework is limited to two variables, female victim and the number of victims involved in the homicide circumstances. An additional qualification to the support found for the “market demand” conceptualization is that for some of these measures, support was obtained in the analysis, but support was only obtained for certain media outcome measures and not for others. For instance, stranger homicide is found to be a statistically significant predictor in the final model of media attention, but not for the other outcome measures. Other “market demand” predictors are found to be statistically significant in models 2, 3, and 4 that controlled for other “market demand” items, but were rendered non-significant when informational constraint measures were entered in the final model.

The analysis only found support for one type of victim measure included in the models – female victim. Of the three metric media outcome measures, victim age only related to one metric media outcome variable (number of news items published) in terms of the zero-order Pearson correlation coefficient and the victim age measure dropped out of the regression analysis at Model 3. Thus, victim age is not a significant predictor of number of news items published controlling for female victim in the sample. A statistically significant zero-order association is observed for the white victim variable and all three metric outcome variables but white victim is not a significant predictor of any media outcome measure once female victim is controlled in the regression analysis. Neither of the remaining two victim race variables (Hispanic victim or minority victim)

obtained zero-order significance with any of the media outcome measures to meet the criteria for inclusion in the regression analysis.

In general, offender characteristics are relatively unimportant to media outcomes in the sense that no offender measure produced consistent results across all of the metric predictors. Only two offender measures, female suspect (number of news items published) and minority suspect (attention score), advanced in the regression analyses to the final model and these offender characteristics only advanced to the final model for one metric outcome measure of interest, respectively. Significant zero-order associations were observed for the white suspect measure (number of news items), but the predictor variable failed to advance in the series of regression analyses to the final model. This means that in these situations, controlling for victim and social context variables, offender characteristics are generally rendered non-significant.

Of the 15 social context variables considered in the analysis, only eight of the variables met the criteria for inclusion in the regression analysis (i.e., a significant zero-order Pearson correlation coefficient with the respective media outcome variable of interest). The weapon used variable has little effect on media outcomes. The least concrete weapon measure, "other weapon", is the only weapon variable to be included in the regression analyses and it is included in the regression analysis for only one media measure (number of news items published). The variable did not maintain its effects controlling for victim, offender, and other social context measures. Acquaintance relationship, number of offenders involved, simple argument as a social context leading to the homicide, and the minority offender/minority victim measures did not obtain significant zero-order associations with any metric media outcome measures.

Domestic relationship, non-minority offender/non-minority victim, and non-minority offender/minority victim variables were observed as having significant zero-order correlation coefficients with media outcome measures but did not maintain their significant effects controlling for victim, offender, and other social context variables. In terms of the number of news item models, the number of victims involved in the homicide was the only social context measure to maintain significance controlling for the effects of victim, offender, social context, and informational constraint measures. For the average number of words published per news item series of regression analyses, stranger homicide, minority suspect/non-minority victim, and the number of victims involved maintain significance after controlling for the influences of victim, offender, and social context measures. Only number of victims involved maintains significance once informational constraint measures were incorporated in the final model. Stranger homicide, number of victims, and robbery homicides are significant predictors of media attention score controlling for other victim, offender, and social context measures. Once informational constraint measures are included in the final model, stranger homicide and number of victims maintained significance, whereas robbery homicide is rendered as a non-significant predictor.

Fourth, only one of the three phase one informational constraint measures, unknown social context, is significantly associated with media outcome measures in the current sample. Unknown social context is significantly associated with each of the metric predictors of number of news items published, average words published, and media attention score, controlling for the influences of victim, offender, and social context measures. Unknown gender or race and unknown victim-offender relationship do

not meet the established criteria for inclusion in the regression analyses for number of items published. These two variables met the inclusion requirements for both average words and attention score but do not achieve significance controlling for the effects of victim, offender, and social context measures. To summarize the findings of phase one for the metric dependent measures, homicides that involve female victims, higher numbers of victims, and stranger victim-offender relationships receive statistically more coverage. Homicides where the social context of the homicide is unknown receive significantly less coverage. Robbery homicides and homicides that involved minority suspects who murder non-minority suspects receive significantly more intense coverage until the final model when informational constraint measures are incorporated.

Lastly, while the findings for each of the three metric predictors were generally consistent with one another, these findings are quite different for the logistic regression analysis using whether an article appeared as the outcome of interest. Many of the variables that remained as consistent predictors for models 4 and 5, respectively, in Tables 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8 for the metric outcome variables, did not even evidence a significant zero-order correlation coefficient with whether an article was published. Additionally, the race of the offender appears to be important in the prediction of story appearance relative to intensity of the coverage. One consistent finding, however, is the relative importance of the information constraint variable, unknown social context. Each series of models indicated that when social context information is unknown about the homicide, a news item is less likely to appear in print and the intensity of the coverage is significantly decreased. But in general, the differences between the significant predictors of any news coverage (whether a news item appeared) and intensity (the metric predictors

in the analysis) may suggest that these two concepts are governed by separate and distinct processes.

Therefore, the data indicate that whether the homicide is reported by the *Houston Chronicle*, is determined largely by the race of the suspect and the availability of information concerning social context, although the evidence for the impact of the minority suspect measure is certainly questionable and less compelling than the social context information measure. There is also some evidence using the other procedural methods to reduce the number of variables in the final models which suggests that homicides that result from escalated arguments are less likely to receive coverage, but this evidence is even more limited than the evidence for the suspect race measure. There is also some evidence from the alternative regression models explored that homicides resulting from arguments have a significant negative impact on whether a homicide was covered by the paper. When the intensity of the coverage is considered rather than just whether any coverage occurred, the significant factors become more diverse. The factors predicting the number of news items published include female victim, female suspect, the number of victims, unknown social context, and coverage at the trial or sentencing stage of the proceedings.

Similarly, the significant predictors of the average number of words per news item include female victim, number of victims, unknown social context, and coverage at the trial or sentence stage of the proceedings. So it appears that race of the suspect and the amount of social context information available to journalists impacts whether a homicide receives coverage, while the intensity of coverage in terms of the number of news items that appear and the number of words dedicated to the coverage additionally

depends on the gender of the victim and number of victims involved – who was killed and how many were killed or injured. Additionally, the data suggests that the number of items published depends on the gender of the suspect as well. When the additional elements of page placement and the use of photographs that accompany the news items are factored in along with the average length of the news item, two additional factors emerge as significant in explaining media intensity of coverage.

Minority suspect and stranger homicide measures emerge as significant factors. This finding suggests that additional emphasis by the media on the crimes of minorities and crimes committed by strangers are communicated to the public through page placement and photographs in conjunction with story length. However, the data also indicated that the effects of the minority suspect measure for the attention score is conditioned by whether the race interaction measures are included in the regression analyses (this creates multicollinearity problems), and once these interaction measures are removed, minority suspect measures are generally significant predictors. The data also suggest that the effect of stranger homicide on increasing the media attention score is less stable than other measures in the analysis. The measure did not emerge as significant when all measures in the analysis were entered into a regression analysis simultaneously.

Phase Two Descriptive Statistics

Tables 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, and 5.14 report the descriptive statistics for phase two of the analysis. Phase two of the analysis considers news items that appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* as the units of analysis, and in doing so, seeks to assess a broader

array of factors that have been theorized as contributing to media behavior in reporting crime news. The tables reporting the descriptive statistics for phase two, similar to the phase one analysis, report information that first includes coverage of the Andrea Yates case, and then excludes the case. The Yates case had over forty news items published during the investigation stage (the stage that is the focus of phase two), thus, for certain measures, the Yates case has the potential to skew the descriptive and regression analysis results.

Generally speaking, the descriptive statistics for phase two of the analysis suggest nothing more than that of the descriptive statistics for phase one with respect to the nature of the coverage in the *Houston Chronicle* as it concerns victim and offender characteristics and situational aspects. For certain attributes, news items tend to somewhat mirror the representation of homicide in official statistics, but other attributes, for instance, homicides involving female victims, are over-represented in coverage at the investigation stage of the proceedings. Therefore, the remainder of this descriptive section will focus attention on news theme and informational constraint measures that could not be included in phase one and the dependent measures.

On average, local instances of homicide published in the *Houston Chronicle* were accompanied by 11.09 other news items focusing on crime in a broader context, 6.63 additional news items that focus attention on instances of some type of interpersonal violence, and 5.55 additional news items that report other instances of homicide, respectively. The local instances of homicide were accompanied in the paper by an average of 4,350 words focusing on crime in a general sense on the same day that the news item appeared. The average words accompanying the news item for other instances

Table 5.10

**Phase II Descriptive Statistics - Media Reports During Investigation
Stage: Victim and Offender Variables**

		Including Yates		Excluding Yates	
		N	%/Mean	N	%/Mean
<u>Victim Variables</u>					
<i>Gender</i>					
	Male	295	75.1	254	72.2
	Female	150	38.2	109	31
		445		363	
<i>Race</i>					
	White	96	24.4	55	15.6
	African-American	138	35.1	138	39.2
	Hispanic	144	36.6	144	40.9
	Asian	20	5.1	20	5.7
	Unknown	---	---	---	---
<i>Race</i>					
	Minority	158	40.2	158	44.9
	Non-Minority	240	61.1	199	56.5
	Unknown	---	---	---	---
<i>Age</i>					
		393	29.33 SD 16.80	352	32.32 SD 15.13
<u>Offender Variables</u>					
<i>Gender</i>					
	Male	230	58.5	230	65.3
	Female	82	20.9	41	11.6
	Unknown	99	25.2	99	28.1
<i>Race</i>					
	White	61	15.5	20	5.7
	African-American	130	33.1	130	36.9
	Hispanic	73	18.6	73	20.7
	Asian	11	2.8	11	3.1
	Unknown	125	31.8	125	35.5
<i>Race</i>					
	Minority	141	35.9	141	40.1
	Non-Minority	131	33.3	90	25.6
	Unknown	125	31.8	125	35.5
<i>Age</i>					
		202	31.15 SD 10.49	161	29.92 SD 11.43

Table 5.11

Phase II Descriptive Statistics - Situational/Circumstantial Variables

	Including Yates		Excluding Yates	
	N	%/Mean	N	%/Mean
<u>Weapon Used</u>				
Firearm	222	56.5	222	63.1
Knife/Cutting Instr.	49	12.5	49	13.9
Assault	46	11.7	46	13.1
Other Weapon	73	18.6	32	9.1
Weapon Type Unk.	3	.8	3	.9
<u>Victim-Offender</u>				
Stranger	99	25.2	99	28.1
Domestic	100	25.4	59	16.8
Acquaintance	75	19.1	75	21.3
Other				
Unknown	117	29.8	117	33.2
<u>Victim-Offender</u>				
NM Off/NM Vic	125	31.8	84	23.9
Min. Off/Min. Vic	87	22.1	87	24.7
NM Off/Min. Vic	6	1.5	6	1.7
Min. Off/NM Vic	56	14.2	56	15.9
Unknown/Missing	125	31.8	125	35.5
<u>Number of Victims</u>				
# Victims	393	1.61	352	1.22
		SD 1.29		SD 1.59
# Offenders	302	1.59	261	1.68
		SD 1.14		SD 1.20
<u>Situational Aspects</u>				
Argument - Unknown	45	11.5	45	12.8
Domestic Dispute	51	13	51	14.5
Domestic - Child				
Killed	61	15.5	20	5.7
Domestic -				
Murder/Suicide	7	1.8	7	2
Person Robbery	59	15	59	16.8
Business Robbery	21	5.3	21	6
Drug-Related				
Robbery	12	3.1	12	3.4
Traffic Altercation	20	5.1	20	5.7
Drive-by	1	.3	1	.3
Non-domestic				
Murder/Suicide	1	.3	1	.3
Kidnapping	9	2.3	9	2.6
Police Officer Killed	13	3.3	13	3.7
Self-Defense	3	.8	3	.9
Unknown Context	90	22.9	90	25.6

Table 5.12

Phase II Descriptive Statistics - News Theme Measures

	<u>Including Yates</u>	<u>Excluding Yates</u>
<u>Crime Theme Measures (n=387)</u>		
<i># Articles / Crime in General</i>		
Average # Articles	11.09	11.02
Standard Deviation	4.5	4.66
Range	2 to 23	2 to 23
<i># Articles / Interpersonal Violence</i>		
Average # Articles	6.63	6.62
Standard Deviation	2.84	2.93
Range	1 to 16	1 to 16
<i># Articles / Interpersonal Violence Resulting in Death</i>		
Average # Articles	5.56	5.5
Standard Deviation	2.5	2.57
Range	1 to 14	1 to 14
<i># Words / Crime in General</i>		
Average # Words	4350.11	4178.47
Standard Deviation	2346.34	2336.44
Range	170 to 13673	170 to 13673
<i># Words / Interpersonal Violence</i>		
Average # Words	2164.79	2035.31
Standard Deviation	1398.24	1361.85
Range	170 to 6491	170 to 6491
<i># Words / Interpersonal Violence Resulting in Death</i>		
Average # Words	1844.01	1691.29
Standard Deviation	1291.68	1210.92
Range	86 to 6325	86 to 6108

Table 5.13

Phase II Descriptive Statistics - Information Availability Measures*

	<u>Including Yates</u>	<u>Excluding Yates</u>
<u>Information Availability Measures</u>		
Victim Name		
Information available	95.9 (n=329)	95.9 (n=329)
Not available	4.1 (n=14)	4.0 (n=14)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Victim Gender		
Information available	99.7 (n=342)	99.7 (n=342)
Not available	.3 (n=1)	.3 (n=1)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Victim Age		
Information available	95.6 (n=328)	95.6 (n=328)
Not available	4.4 (n=15)	4.4 (n=15)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Offender Name		
Information available	53.1 (n=182)	95.9 (n=329)
Not available	46.9 (n=161)	4.1 (n=14)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Offender Gender		
Information available	73.8 (n=253)	71.9 (n=253)
Not available	26.2 (n=90)	25.6 (n=90)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Offender Age		
Information available	53.9 (n=185)	53.9 (n=185)
Not available	46.1 (n=158)	46.1 (n=158)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Offender Race		
Information available	60.1 (n=206)	60.1 (n=206)
Not available	39.9 (n=137)	39.9 (n=137)
Missing data	(n=50)	(n=9)
Victim Information Score	(n=343)	(n=343)
Mean	2.91	2.91
Standard Deviation	.3478	.3478
Range	0 to 3	0 to 3
Offender Information Score	(n=343)	(n=343)
Mean	2.35	2.35
Standard Deviation	1.62	1.62
Range	0 to 4	0 to 4
Press Release Issued W/I 48 Hrs.		
News Item Published W/I 48 Hrs.	72.1 (n=246)	72.1 (n=246)
News Item Not Published W/I 48 Hrs.	27.9 (n=95)	27.9 (n=95)
Missing	(n=52)	(n=11)

*For many of the information availability measures, the (n) and the descriptive statistics are similar for the Yates and without Yates calculations. This occurs because there was a limited number of press releases issued concerning the Yates case, relative to the number of articles that were published.

Table 5.14

Phase II Descriptive Statistics - Media Variables (Dependent Variables)

	<u>Including Yates</u>	<u>Excluding Yates</u>
<u>Number of Words:</u>		
Average # Words	270.61	209.26
25th Percentile	85	83
50th Percentile	119	109.5
75th Percentile	271.5	182.75
Standard Deviation	376.49	303.61
Range	35 to 2904	35 to 2904
<u>Page Placement</u>		
Percent of news items published on the front page	9.4 (n=37)	4.8 (n=17)
Percent of articles published on page 1 of the Metro section	8.1 (n=32)	5.7 (n=20)
Percent of articles published on either the front page or page 1 of the Metro section	17.6 (n=69)	10.5 (n=37)
<u>Photos and Graphics</u>		
Percent of news items that had at least one photo or graphic published	22.4 (n=88)	18.2 (n=64)
Percent of news items that had at least two photo or graphic published	10.7 (n=42)	7.1 (n=25)
<u>Media Attention Score</u>		
Average	2.02	1.86
Standard Deviation	1.66	1.66
0	22.6 (n=89)	17.7 (n=44)
1	24.4 (n=96)	6.8 (n=14)
2	24.2 (n=95)	24.1 (n=60)
3	8.7 (n=34)	24.5 (n=61)
4	6.9 (n=27)	16.5 (n=41)
5	4.1 (n=16)	3.6 (n=9)
6	9.2 (n=36)	6.8 (17)

of interpersonal violence and homicides was 2,165 and 1,571, respectively.

Unfortunately, there is no comparative base with regard to the measurement of news themes in the extant literature.

As expected, the information availability measures, suggest that the news organization is typically privy to all types of victim information. For well over 90% of the news items published concerning the investigation stage of the proceedings, the news organization had access to victim name, gender, and age, via a press release prior to the published news item. Similarly, the victim information score, which ranges in value from 0 to 3, was fairly high (an average of 2.91). Offender information was less likely to be available to the press, via press release, at the time that the news item was published. In just over 70% of the published news items concerning local instances of homicide, offender gender was available. In just over 50% and 60% of the news items, offender age and offender race, respectively, was available prior to the date of the news item. The offender information score (2.35), which ranges in value from 0 to 4, further suggests that news organizations are more likely to have access to victim information than offender information prior to the date of the news item.

The final measure of information availability, whether a press release was issued within 48-hours of the news item, is suggestive of media reliance on police agencies during the investigation aspect of the proceedings. Over 70% of the investigation stage news items had a press release issued within 48-hours of the date of the news item. The majority of the press releases were dated prior to the news items, although a few of the press releases were released on the same day that the news item appeared.

Media measures used as dependent variables in phase two suggest that the typical news item has either 209 or 270 words published, depending on whether the Yates news items are considered. Similarly, consideration of the Yates case increased the proportion of the news items that appeared on page one or page one of the Metro section and the number of photos that appeared with the news item. Therefore, the average overall media attention score is higher when the Yates case is included in the descriptive analysis than when the case is excluded.

Phase Two Regression Analysis

Zero-Order Pearson Correlation Analysis

The zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients produced for the two dependent variables of interest revealed sharp contrasts between those correlation coefficients generated including the news items reporting the Yates case and those that were produced excluding the Yates news items. In terms of victim characteristics that are associated with the measure of the number of words printed in the news item including the Yates news items, cases involving female victims and white victims received significantly more coverage, whereas, cases involving male victims, older victims, Hispanic victims, and minority victims received significantly less coverage. When the Yates news items are excluded from the analysis, the only victim characteristic measure that produced a significant zero-order coefficient is female victim. The same basic trend is observed for the zero-order coefficients produced for the media attention score dependent measure.

Including the Yates news items, cases involving female victims and white victims received significantly more coverage, while cases involving older victims and minority victims received significantly less coverage. Excluding the Yates news items, the only victim measure that produced a significant coefficient is female victim.

The same basic trend also occurs for the zero-order coefficients produced between offender characteristics and each of the two dependent measures, respectively. In terms of the dependent measure of the number of words printed in the news item, when Yates news items are included, female suspect, offender age, and white suspect are significantly associated with number of words in a positive direction, whereas, male suspect and Hispanic suspect are negatively associated with the dependent measure. When Yates news items are excluded from the zero-order analysis, only female suspect and minority suspect have a significant association with number of words printed. For the dependent measure of overall attention score, including Yates news items, female suspect, offender age, white suspect, and minority suspect are positively associated with the dependent measure; excluding the Yates news items, male suspect, female suspect, and minority suspect are significantly associated with the attention score.

Differences are also apparent concerning circumstance and social context measures. For the weapon measures, firearm and knife/cutting instrument measures, respectively, produce significant negative coefficients for each of the dependent measures of interest whether the Yates news items were included or not, with one exception. Firearm used is not associated with the overall media attention score when the Yates news items are excluded. Similarly, other weapon used (besides firearm, knife/cutting instrument, or assault with an instrument or hands) received more media attention in all

variations of the zero-order analysis, with the exception of number of words when Yates news items are excluded. Homicides involving assault with an instrument, personal weapons, or hands are significantly associated with both of the dependent measures when Yates news items were excluded but not when they were included.

As expected, the domestic nature of the Yates case produced differences in the zero-order analysis when Yates news items were included versus excluded. When Yates items were excluded, domestic relationship (as it is measured in the current analysis) is negatively associated with each of the two dependent measures, thus suggesting news items that concern domestic cases receive less coverage. When Yates news items are included, domestic relationship is still significant, but in the opposite direction, suggesting that domestic cases receive more coverage. In all variations, stranger homicide is positively associated with the dependent measures and acquaintance homicide is negatively associated with the dependent measures with one exception; stranger homicide is not significantly associated with number of words when Yates news items are included. Homicides that involved simple arguments as the social context are negatively associated with the each of the dependent variables whether Yates news items were included or not. Robbery as the social context of the homicide is only associated with the overall attention score when Yates items are not included in the analysis.

The measure of victim/offender race interaction that involved minority offenders and non-minority victims is positively associated with the overall attention score both when Yates items are included and excluded. The minority offender/non-minority victim measure is positively associated with number of words printed excluding the Yates news items. The non-minority offender/non-minority victim interaction term is positively

associated with number of words and the overall media attention score when Yates items are included in the analysis, but not when they are excluded. The minority offender and minority victim interaction term is positively associated with each of the two dependent measures when Yates news items are excluded, but not when they are included in the analysis. The final market demand items that are considered in the analysis are the number of victims and the number of offenders involved. The number of victims involved produced a significant positive zero-order coefficient for both dependent variables regardless of whether Yates is included. Number of offenders is negatively related to number of words printed when Yates cases are included. Number of offenders involved is positively related to the overall media attention score when Yates items are excluded.

Zero-order analysis of the influence of news theme measures in intensity of news coverage suggest that number of words dedicated to each of the conceptions of news themes used (i.e., general crime, interpersonal crime, and homicide) may be better measures of news themes than the number of news items that appear. The only measure of news themes that counted news items appearing on the same day as the news item of interest that is significant is the measure of number of news items dedicated to crime in general. This significant relationship observed is limited to the measure of media attention score when Yates items are included and excluded. The measures of the number of words dedicated to crime in general, interpersonal crime, and homicide, respectively, printed on the same day as the news item of interest is significantly associated with both dependent measures when Yates items are both included and excluded.

Most of the measures of information availability are associated with the dependent measures in the expected direction. As more information is available to the press concerning the homicide, intensity of coverage increases. Unknown social context is negatively associated with each of the two dependent measures whether the Yates cases are included in the analysis or not. Similarly, whether the offender's name, race, age, and gender is available is associated with both dependent measures. The offender information score, an additive measure of each of the characteristics, is positively associated with each of the dependent measures regardless of whether the Yates items are considered, thus, suggesting that as information about the offender increases, intensity of the coverage increases. The information availability measures for the victim characteristics proved to be of little use, largely because the measures were basically constants with well over 90% of the cases recording information for each of the characteristics. Table 5.15 provides a list of all of the variables that indicated zero-order significance with dependent variables of interest that are included in the regression analyses to follow.

Multivariate Analyses

The analysis of the zero-order correlation coefficients underscores the necessity to account for any effects that coverage of the Yates case could potentially have on the analysis when using news items as the unit of analysis. In the multiple regression analyses of news items printed in the investigational stage of the proceedings, coverage of the Yates case is excluded. The rationale for doing so is twofold. First, the Yates case

Table 5.15

**Phase II Variables Included in Multivariate Regression Analysis (By Dependent Variable) -
Based on .10 Zero-Order Criteria**

Number of Words Published

Involved female victim
Involved victim 20 and under
Involved female suspect
Involved suspect 40 and over
Involved minority suspect
Involved the use of a firearm
Involved the use of a knife or cutting instrument
Involved killing with blunt instrument or personal weapons
Involved a stranger homicide
Involved a domestic context
Involved an acquaintance
Involved minority suspect and minority victim
Involved minority suspect and non-minority victim
Number of victims
Involved an argument that escalated to murder
Unknown social context
Offender information score
Crime theme measure - interpersonal crime (number of words)
Crime theme measure - other homicides (number of words)

Attention Score

Involved female victim
Involved victim 20 and under
Involved female suspect
Involved suspect 40 and over
Involved minority suspect
Involved knife or cutting instrument
Involved blunt instrument or personal weapons
Involved weapon other than firearm, knife, or personal weapons
Involved stranger homicide
Involved a domestic context
Involved an acquaintance
Involved minority suspect and minority victim
Involved minority suspect and non-minority victim
Number of victims
Involved multiple offenders
Involved an argument that escalated to murder
Involved a robbery
Crime theme measure - crime in general (number of news items)
Crime theme measure - crime in general (number of news items)
Crime theme measure - interpersonal crime (number of words)
Crime theme measure - other homicides (number of words)
Unknown social context
Offender information score

was such a high-profile case that, as suggested by the zero-order analysis, the case has the potential to disproportionately influence the outcomes of the analysis with respect to certain measures. Moreover, the Yates case, because of its status as a high-profile case, is not representative of general coverage of homicide in the paper.

A second rationale for excluding the Yates news items from the analysis concerns how the stage of the proceedings was operationalized. Trial coverage is conceptualized as beginning during the actual trial. The Yates case received substantial coverage leading up to the trial (i.e., the investigational stage) that had little to do with actual police activity during the investigation, but had more to do with general legal strategies of attorneys involved and features of the insanity defense. In this regard, in their entirety, the Yates coverage during the investigational stage is qualitatively different than the coverage that other cases received during the investigation stage.

Table 5.16 reports the findings of the series of regression analyses examining the effects of the independent measures on the number of words printed in the news item. Model one includes victim and offender characteristics that produced a significant zero-order correlation coefficient with the dependent variable. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 6.661$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value for the model is .061, thus suggesting that together, victim and offender characteristics account for little of the variation in the dependent measure. Female victim and minority suspect are the only two predictor variables in the model that have significant independent effects on the number of words printed in the news item (beta weights .153 and .137, respectively). The direction of the effects for both variables are positive, thus suggesting that news items

reported for homicides involving female victims and minority suspects, respectively, have significantly more words printed.

Model 2 retains the female victim and minority suspect measures from model one and includes situational and contextual measures for which a significant zero-order correlation with the dependent variable is observed. Because of multicollinearity problems between measures of minority victim, minority offender/non-minority offender, and minority suspect/minority victim, three separate regression models were generated using each of the measures, respectively. The model incorporating minority suspect with no consideration of victim/offender interaction effects is judged to be slightly the better of the three models and is therefore reported in Table 5.16. The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 6.076$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value for the model is .115, which represents a modest improvement in the explained variation from Model 1.

Three variables, female victim, minority suspect, and number of victims (beta weights of .122, .122, and .147, respectively) maintain significant positive effects on the number of words printed. The substantive interpretation of the findings for female victim and minority suspect are similar to that of Model 1. Additionally, news items for homicides that involved higher numbers of victims received more coverage. News items for homicides involving firearms, a knife or other cutting instrument, domestic relationships and acquaintance relationships (beta weights of -.196, -.142, -.174, and -.113, respectively) are negatively associated with number of words printed. In this regard, homicides involving firearms, knives or other cutting instruments, and domestic and acquaintance relationships, receive significantly less coverage. Stranger homicides and

Table 5.16

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Phase II Variables Predicting Number of Words Published (N=352)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β
<u>Victim Variables</u>						
Female Victim	100.48 (35.49)	.153*	79.84 (37.17)	.122**	81.68 (37.66)	.123**
Victim Age	-1.60 (1.10)	-.080				
<u>Offender Variables</u>						
Female Susp.	82.98 (52.92)	.088				
Minority Susp.	84.90 (33.12)	.137**	75.65 (33.25)	.122**	23.34 (38.44)	.037
<u>Situation Variables</u>						
Firearm			-123.40 (41.40)	.196*	-135.55 (43.57)	-.211*
Knife/Cut Instrum.			-124.07 (53.52)	-.142**	-135.52 (54.67)	-.153**
Stranger Hom.			10.75 (41.08)	.016		
Domestic Hom.			-141.17 (47.27)	-.174*	-178.17 (47.45)	-.216*
Acquaintance			-83.34 (43.95)	-.113^	-112.38 (41.94)	-.145*
Number Victim			75.00 (26.71)	.147*	71.04 (27.19)	.139*
Argument			-39.32 (48.39)	.043		
<u>Crime Theme</u>					.001 (.012)	.063
<u>Information Avail.</u>						
Offender Inform.					22.14 (13.08)	.116^
Unk. Social Cont.					-51.74 (42.65)	-.071
Intercept	186.263		201.344		180.057	
Model F Statistic	6.661*		6.076*		6.088*	
Deg. of Freedom	351		351		336	
Model R	.267		.371		.397	
Adjusted R ²	.061		.115		.132	

* p < .01

** p < .05

^ p < .10

homicides that result from simple disagreements are not related to the number of words published in the sample controlling for the effects of the other measures in the model.

Lastly, model three incorporates the news theme and informational constraint measures into the analysis. Similar to the race and victim/offender race interaction measures incorporated in Model 2, the news theme measures are plagued by problems of multicollinearity. Four models were generated using each of the four respective news theme measures that produced a significant zero-order association with number of words printed in the news item. The substantive findings of the four different models were very similar, with one exception. The model incorporating number of words published on the same day concerning other homicides did not produce a significant effect for the measure of offender information availability whereas the remaining models did; the measure approached significance but did not achieve significance.

Because of the substantial similarities between the models, only one model is reported in Table 5.16. The model incorporating the number of words published concerning other instances of interpersonal violence is reported because the measure is broad in the sense that it includes other cases of personal violence that does not result in homicide and because the measure is also restrictive in the sense that it does not include other instances of crime that were not of a personal nature (i.e., theft and white-collar offenses).

The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 6.076, p = .000$). The R^2 value for the model, .132, suggests that the addition of the crime theme and information availability measures adds little to the explanatory power of the model. All of the variables that are significant predictors of number of words published in model

three are significant and in the same direction with the exception of the minority suspect measure. The addition of the crime theme and information availability measures render the independent effects of minority suspect on number of words printed insignificant. None of the crime theme measures have significant independent effects on the intensity of coverage. In terms of information availability, unknown social context has no independent effects on the dependent measure, whereas, the offender information scale is significantly associated with number of words in a positive direction (.116). This finding suggests that the more information that the news organization had about the offender in the homicide, the greater the amount of coverage in terms of words printed.

The findings presented in the models for number of words published were much less stable than the findings presented in phase one. Only two of the seven measures reported as significant in Model 3 emerged as significant factors when all of the variables in the analysis were entered into a regression analysis simultaneously. Additionally, only two of significant Model 3 measures were significant when all of the measures that indicated a significant zero-order correlation were simultaneously entered into a model instead of entered in stages. These two measures were the domestic context measure and the number of victims measure. Both measures were significant in the same direction as indicated in Model 3. Moreover, following these other two methods, three other variables were significant and remained significant in a reduced model. Cases involving an offender over the age of 40 and cases involving an assault with a blunt object or with personal weapons, including hands and fists, had significantly more words published. Cases that emanated from arguments that escalated into murder had significantly less

words published. However, as with these additional methods in phase one, the models that led to the condensed models had considerable multicollinearity problems.

The second series of regression analyses uses the independent variables of interest as predictors of the *overall media attention score*. As with the previous series of regression analyses, Model 1 enters victim and offender characteristics that had a significant zero-order relationship with the media attention score as independent variables. Exploratory analysis suggested that even though a significant zero-order correlation was not observed between the interval victim age measure and the media attention score, more intense coverage of cases with victims 20 and under existed. For this reason, a dichotomous dummy variable is entered into the analysis coding news items as a one if the average age of the victims was 20 or under.

A similar modification is made for the offender age and number of offenders measures, but for different reasons. As previously suggested, missing information is more likely to be a problem for offender characteristics because many cases go unsolved or are solved much later than the date when the offense becomes known to the police. Up to this point in the various series of regression analyses, offender characteristics have not presented problems in terms of missing data because zero-order correlation between the *interval quantitative measures of offender age and number of offenders*, respectively, and the dependent variables of interest have not been statistically significant. Therefore, these interval quantitative offender measures have not been entered into any regression analysis. Missing data for the categorical offender measures have been coded as unknown data and then subsequently used as indicators of information availability to the media in previous regression models.

Table 5.17

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Phase II Variables Predicting Attention Score (N=352)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β	b (Standard Error)	β
<u>Victim Variables</u>						
Female Victim	.475 (.188)	.133**	.646 (.189)	.180*	.611 (.171)	.169*
Vic. 20 or Under	.528 (.220)	.123**	.734 (.232)	.171*	.764 (.220)	.172*
<u>Offender Variables</u>						
Off. 40 and Over	.439 (.340)	.069				
Minority Susp.	.755 (.177)	.223*	.596 (.169)	.168*	.319 (.189)	.094^
<u>Situation Variables</u>						
Knife/Cut Instrum.			-.397 (.235)	-.083^	-.618 (.223)	-.130
Assault			.314 (.258)	.064		
Other Weapon			.102 (.313)	.018		
Stranger Homicide			.331 (.216)	.090		
Domestic Hom.			-.290 (.250)	-.065		
Acquaintance			.006 (.228)	.002		
Number of Victims			.792 (.136)	.284*	.815 (.131)	.294*
Multiple Offenders			.145 (.198)	.039		
Argument			-.260 (.251)	-.052		
Robbery			.766 (.212)	.194*	.795 (.210)	.198*
<u>Crime Theme</u>						
					.001 (.000)	.115**
<u>Information Avail.</u>						
Offender Inform.					.138 (.062)	.132**
Unk. Social Cont.					-.344 (.228)	-.087
Intercept	1.286		.117		-.195	
Model F Statistic	11.973*		10.421*		16.016*	
Deg. of Freedom	351		351		336	
Model R	.346		.535		.553	
Adjusted R ²	.110		.259		.287	

* p < .01

** p < .05

^ p < .10

For this series of regression analyses, a significant zero-order correlation is observed between both offender age and number of offenders, respectively, for the media attention measure. Using these variables in the form of interval quantitative measures would mean that the number of cases in the analysis would reduce from 352 to 161. Such a substantial decline in the number of cases in the analysis has the potential to adversely affect the results of the analysis. Therefore, offender age is re-coded as two separate dichotomous measures, one identifying cases whether the offender is 20 and under, and one identifying cases where the offender is 40 and older.¹ Number of offenders is re-coded as a dichotomous measure that indicates news items covering cases involving more than one offender.

The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 11.793$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value for the model, .110, suggests that the victim and offender characteristics together explain a moderate amount of the variation in the dependent measure. The only measures that maintain significant independent effects in the model were the victim characteristics female victim and victim under the age of 20 (beta weights .133 and .123, respectively). Thus, news items covering homicides involving female victims and victims 20 and under are more intensively covered by the *Houston Chronicle*.

Model 2 incorporates the female victim and victim 20 and under measures with situational and social context measures. Similar to the series of regression analyses for the dependent measure of number of words printed, entering the minority offender,

¹ These two measures were constructed based on an understanding of theory and the distribution of the data for the original measure. Previous findings suggest that in samples where the age of the offender is important, young offenders and/or younger offenders receive more intense media coverage. The age of 20 and under is used as an age threshold because the age of 21 is generally recognized in all contexts as an age of adulthood. The age of 40 is used as the threshold for older offenders because it is the age in the dataset that allows for somewhat sufficient variation to conduct a meaningful analysis.

minority offender/minority victim interaction measure, and the minority offender/non-minority offender measures into the same multiple regression model presented multicollinearity problems. Therefore, three different regression analyses were conducted with each of the three variables entered separately. The three models are very similar to one another in terms of their substantive findings. Only the model incorporating the minority suspect measure is reported in Table 5.17 because the model was slightly better than the other models in explaining variation in the dependent variable.

The prediction model for Model 2 is statistically significant ($F = 10.421$, $p = .000$). The situational and social context measures contributed substantially in increasing the R^2 value from .110 from model one to .259 in model two. Female victim and victim 20 and under (beta weights of .180 and .171, respectively) maintain their significant effects on the overall media attention score. Additionally, the minority suspect, number of victims, and robbery measures (beta weights of .168, .284, and .194, respectively) have significant independent effects on the media attention measure. News items that involve cases involving minority suspects, more victims, and robberies, respectively, are more intensively covered. News items that concerned a homicide committed with a knife or a cutting instrument had significantly lower media attention scores (beta weight of -.083).

The final prediction model for overall media attention score adds news theme and information availability measures to the variables that produce significant independent effects from Model 2. Incorporating all three news theme measures into a model predicting media attention score presents multicollinearity issues, therefore, similar to

Model 3 predicting number of words printed in the news item, three separate models were estimated incorporating each of the news theme measures independently. The three models were very similar in terms of their substantive findings. Model 3 reports the findings of the model using the number of additional words printed about other instances of interpersonal violence.

The overall prediction model is statistically significant ($F = 16.016, p = .000$). The addition of the news theme measure and information availability measures only made a moderate contribution to the R^2 value, increasing the value from .259 in Model 3 to .287 in Model 3. All of the independent variables retained from Model 3, female victim, victim age 20 and under, minority suspect, number of victims, knife or cutting instrument, and robbery, (beta weights of .169, .172, .094, .294, -.130, and .198, respectively), maintain their significant effects on the dependent measure. Additionally, the crime theme measure and the offender information score are significant predictors of overall media attention score. As the number of words printed on the same day as the homicide news item that was dedicated to other instances of interpersonal violence increased (.115), the overall media attention score increased. Similarly, as the number of known characteristics (.132) about the offender increased, the overall media attention score increased as well.

The findings for the attention score measure are much more stable than the findings for the number of words published as examined in phase two, but are still less stable than the findings for phase one. In examining all of the measures used in the analysis in a complete model, and then in a separate regression analysis examining all of the measures that indicated significant zero-order correlations in a complete model, five

of the eight measures that were significant from Model 3 emerged as significant predictors. These measures included female victim, victim 20 and under, the number of victims, the crime theme measure, and the offender information score. Each of these measures remained significant in reduced models. In addition, cases of assault indicated a significant positive effect and cases with a domestic context, cases that emanated out of simple arguments, and cases where the social context of the homicide was unknown had a negative effect on the overall media attention score. As with the other complete models and models that did not enter the independent measures in stages, the models had problems of multicollinearity.

Phase Two Conclusions

Three independent measures produced consistent findings across both dependent measures in the models reported in the previously noted tables. News items that involved a female victim, higher numbers of victims, and more offender information are significant predictors of both more words printed and higher overall media attention scores. The argument measure produced consistent results in the alternative regression analyses that were conducted and suggested that homicides resulting from simple arguments have a negative influence on the media outcome measures. Concerning victim characteristics, only gender (female victim) and age measures are entered in the regression analysis. The victim age measure is not a significant predictor of number of words printed controlling for female victim and other offender characteristics. The dichotomous measure of victim age did advance to the final model predicting overall

media attention score and is a significant predictor. These findings support the market demand framework in the sense that females and younger persons are generally perceived by society to be more vulnerable and innocent, therefore, when an offense is committed against them coverage tends to be more intensive.

Similar to phase one, offender characteristics are of little consistent importance in the prediction of the dependent measures. The only offender characteristic measures to produce a zero-order correlation with at least one of the dependent measures are female suspect, minority suspect, and offender 40 and over. The only offender characteristic measure that advanced to a final model in the reported tables as a significant predictor is minority suspect (for the attention score measure). News items concerning minority suspects received significantly higher media attention scores. However, because of issues concerning collinearity, it is difficult to discern whether minority suspect or the minority suspect/non-minority offender interaction term is influencing the media attention score. Because the respective models incorporating these variables are so similar, it is likely that the minority offender term is what drives the effects. On each occasion that female suspect or offender 40 and over is included in regression analyses, the variables failed to obtain significance controlling for other offender variables and victim characteristics when the variables were entered in stages to avoid multicollinearity problems. It should, however, be noted that when other methods were utilized, news items concerning offenders over the age of 40 were found to be significantly longer in terms of words published.

Circumstance and social context measures contributed to much of the explained variation for the measure of the overall attention score, but did not contribute as much to

the model predicting number of words printed. In terms of the prediction of the overall attention score, ten measures were entered in model two. Two of the measures, number of victims and robbery as a motive for the homicide, maintain significant independent effects in the final model. Furthermore, one of these measures, the number of victims, is a measure that has been consistently found to be associated with media outcomes in prior research. In contrast, robbery as a motive in the homicide has not been examined as a predictor in past research. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support the market demand conceptualization. Homicides with higher numbers of victims or that were committed in the context of a robbery situation have elements that are likely perceived by journalists and editors as interesting to the general public either for their sensational or identifying qualities. The alternative regression models employed also suggested that the argument, domestic context, and knife/cutting instrument measures have negative impacts on the attention score, whereas the assault measure has an effect in the positive direction.

The findings regarding the words printed dependent measure also lend support to the market demand conceptualization. News items that concern cases involving multiple victims are significantly longer in number of words published. Domestic and acquaintance relationships receive less coverage in the media. Thus supports the contention of Black (1976) concerning relational distance (when applied to media behavior). Black contends that incidents involving strangers are perceived to be more serious than those that involve family or individuals who are acquainted. This is a market demand finding because of the fear that people tend to have concerning stranger offenses relative to potential offenses committed by individuals who are closer to them in

relations. If individuals tend to be less fearful of acquaintances and domestic relationships, according to the market demand framework, then media would be expected to emphasize stranger offenses and downplay offenses committed by acquaintances and in domestic relationships.

Other findings concerning circumstances and social context for the measure of words printed are more difficult to interpret theoretically. News items concerning homicide committed by firearms and knives or cutting instruments receive fewer words printed. This finding is potentially explained by the concept of statistical deviance identified by Prichard and Hughes (1997); because homicides committed by firearm or cutting instruments are relatively common, these situations are not covered as extensively in the media.

The alternative methods used to discern variables to obtain for more condensed models suggested that two other context measures may be important to news organization decision-making. First, the finding that cases that involve murder through the use of blunt instruments or personal weapons lends some support to the notion of statistically deviant cases that catch attention. This is a relatively unusual method of killing that media uses to present a sensational tone to their coverage of crime. Second, the finding that cases which involve simple arguments and disagreements (that are not part of a domestic dispute) receive less coverage may be an indication that news organizations see little news value in these cases. This is even more likely given that arguments that had a sensationalistic element to them (for example, cases of arguments by virtue of “road rage”) were not included in the measure of arguments as a social context.

Some support for the news theme and information availability frameworks also emerged in phase two. All three measures of news themes measured in terms of number of words printed (crime in general, interpersonal crime, and homicide) are significant predictors of the overall media attention score. The crime theme measures counting the number of articles published on the same day as the news item are not significant predictors. Therefore, the analysis suggests that measuring news themes in terms of number of words may be more productive than measuring news themes in terms of the number of news items printed. However, the analysis does not suggest that any one conceptualization of news themes (i.e., crime in general, interpersonal crime, or homicide) is superior in terms of the measurement of news themes. Support for informational constraints that the news organization is under emerged in the form of the offender information availability scale, as this measure is a significant predictor of both dependent measures. The availability of social context (circumstance) information is not a significant predictor of either dependent measure in the analysis that entered the variables in stages. However, the alternative methods indicated support for the notion that the absence of social context information means less coverage in the media.

Summary of Findings

This chapter provided a broad analysis of print media decision-making with respect to homicide coverage. The analysis considered aggregated outcome measures (phase one) that considered all homicide cases in 2001 covered at all stages of the criminal justice system. The analysis also considered print media coverage of homicide

in the context of how media organizations truly function on a day-to-day basis operating in accordance with the information that is readily available to the news organization (phase two) during one particular stage of the proceedings (i.e., the investigational stage).

The findings of phase one and phase two are summarized in Table 5.18.

Variables designated as indicating a strong relationship with the respective outcome measures are those that were found to be significant in the final models presented in the prior tables noted in this chapter and produced similar findings in at least one of the alternative models that entered all of the variables or all of the measures that indicated a significant zero-order correlation simultaneously. Findings designated as moderate are those that were significant in at least one of the methods employed but was not consistent over all of the methods employed. Weak findings are those that evidenced a zero-order correlation with the dependent variable of interest but failed to indicate significance in any of the final models. The measures that are indicated as having no relationship with the dependent variables of interest are those measures that evidenced no zero-order correlation coefficient and failed to indicate significance in any of the final models.

The phase one analysis suggests that with respect to the number of news items published and the average length (in words), the most important factors are female victim, number of victim, and unknown social context. The same can be said of the prediction of media attention score, with the exception of female victim, which is not a significant predictor, and the minority suspect and stranger homicide measures, which are significant predictors of the attention score measure. This suggests that minority suspect and stranger homicides do not influence decision-making until page placement and the use of photos are incorporated into the dependent measure. Additionally, the availability

Table 5.18

Summary of Phase I and Phase II Regression Analysis Findings

Factors:	Phase I				Phase II	
	Art. Appear	# News Item	Avg. Word	Att. Score	# Words	Att. Score
<i>Victim Factors</i>						
Female victim	No Relation	Strong Positive	Strong Positive	Weak Positive	Moderate Positive	Strong Positive
Younger victim	No Relation	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive	Strong Positive
Older victim	No Relation	Weak Negative	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
Minority victim	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
White victim	No Relation	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation
Hispanic victim	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
<i>Offender Factors</i>						
Female suspect	No Relation	Strong Positive	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive	Weak Positive
Younger suspect	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
Older suspect	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Moderate Positive	Weak Positive
Minority suspect	Strong Positive	No Relation	Weak Positive	Strong Positive	Weak Positive	Moderate Positive
White suspect	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
Hispanic suspect	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
<i>Circumstance or Context Factors</i>						
Firearm	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Moderate Negative	No Relation
Knife/cut instrument	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Moderate Negative	Moderate Negative
Assault	Weak Negative	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Moderate Positive	Moderate Positive
Other weapon	No Relation	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive
Stranger homicide	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive	Strong Positive	Weak Positive	Weak Positive
Domestic context	No Relation	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	No Relation	Strong Negative	Moderate Negative
Acquaintance	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Moderate Negative	Weak Negative

Table 5.18 Continued

Summary of Phase I and Phase II Regression Analysis Findings

Factors:	Phase I				Phase II	
	Art. Appear	# News Item	Avg. Word	Att. Score	# Words	Att. Score
<i>Circumstance or Context Factors</i>						
NM Susp./NM Vic.	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation
Min. Sus./Min. Vic.	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	Weak Positive
NM Sus./Min. Vic.	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive	No Relation	No Relation
Min. Sus./NM Vic.	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	Weak Positive
Number of victims	No Relation	Strong Positive	Strong Positive	Strong Positive	Strong Positive	Strong Positive
Multiple offenders	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	No Relation	Weak Positive
Argument	Moderate Negative	No Relation	No Relation	Moderate Negative	Moderate Negative	Moderate Negative
Robbery	Weak Positive	No Relation	Weak Positive	Weak Positive	No Relation	Moderate Positive
<i>Information Availab.</i>						
Unk. offender gender or race	Weak Negative	No Relation	Weak Negative	Weak Negative	Not Examined	Not Examined
Unk. social context	Strong Negative	Strong Negative	Strong Negative	Strong Negative	Weak Negative	Moderate Negative
Unk. vic-off relation.	Weak Negative	No Relation	Weak Negative	Weak Negative	Not Examined	Not Examined
Offender Info. Score	Not Examined	Not Examined	Not Examined	Not Examined	Moderate Positive	Strong Positive
<i>News Theme</i>	Not Examined	Not Examined	Not Examined	Not Examined	Weak Positive	Strong Positive
<i>Trial/Sentencing St.</i>	Not Examined	Strong Positive	Strong Positive	Strong Positive	Not Examined	Not Examined

of social context information and the minority suspect measure determine whether a news item appeared in print.

Likewise, the phase two measures produce divergent findings with respect to the dependent measures (words printed and overall media attention score). Female victim, number of victims, and the offender information score are significant predictors for both measures. With respect to the number of words printed measure, the type of weapon and measures of the victim-offender relationship emerge as significant predictors. In contrast, when measures of length in words, page placement, and the use of photographs are simultaneously considered in the attention score measure, the predictors become more diverse than any of the models reported in the analysis. News items that involve female victims, victims under the age of 20, minority suspects, more victims, are robbery-related, and are not committed with a knife or a cutting instrument receive more coverage. Additionally, the news theme and offender information score measures are significant predictors.

The findings are somewhat suggestive that media attention scores that combine elements of story length, page, placement, the use of photos, and whether an item was printed, are better measures of media outcome than measures that disaggregate these elements of news coverage. The independent variables explain more of the variation in the dependent measure of media attention score than any of the other dependent measures considered for both phases, although the difference in phase one is not nearly as pronounced as it is in phase two. For phase two, the value of the R^2 term at each successive stage of the series of regression analyses is double for the attention score measure relative to the measure of words printed. Moreover, for both phases of the

analysis, the attention score measure produces a broader and more diverse set of significant predictors than the other measures.

A final consideration concerns the different approaches in phase one and phase two. The final models for the phase one and phase two dependent measures account for roughly an equal amount of variation in the dependent measure, with the phase one models accounting for more of the variation than the models in phase two. However, a case can still be made from strictly a methodological position, that the phase two approach is more appropriate than aggregating measures as with phase one. The methodological superiority of phase two is evident, again, because the approach considers practical aspects of the nature of news reporting. It takes into consideration when press organizations obtain access to information and other news items that are being reported at the time of the news item of interest (i.e., media processes in constructing the news).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The findings reported in Chapter 5 suggest some measure of support for each of the three theoretical frameworks examined in the analysis, market demand, news themes, and informational constraints placed on the news organization. This concluding chapter will discuss the implications of these findings, especially as they pertain the broader framework of “Newsmaking Criminology”. The chapter then concludes with suggestions for future research to examine crime in print media as well as network news media and other forms of mass media.

Implications for the Newsmaking Criminology Perspective

The Newsmaking Criminology framework seeks a more precise examination of news processes in the construction of crime news that is disseminated to the public. The construction of and dissemination of crime news is assumed to reveal insights about social tendencies and values that exist within the larger culture. Additionally, the emergence of crime news in the mass media is regarded as produced by continuous struggles and interactions of citizens, members of the mass media, and the prevailing political and structural systems. Therefore, according to this perspective, mass media

should not be entirely viewed as a social institution that pursues its own interests and produces culture. Instead, it should also be viewed as an institution that responds to cultural forces and the constraints that are placed upon the news organization by such forces as public sentiment and the actions of official agencies.

While the contention that the news organization both pursues its own interests in reporting the news and responds to culture and environmental constraints instead of necessarily producing culture may seem a bit contradictory at first glance, it is not, especially with regard to the coverage of crime. News organizations are capitalistic in their pursuit of crime news coverage in the sense that crime as a news topic represents an issue that is relatively simple and does not provoke much by virtue of direct controversy. It is likely that journalists and news editors realize that from a cultural standpoint, the general public tends to show much interest in crime that appears in print media and network news.

News organizations are generally responsive to this cultural tendency by reporting heavily on crime that occurs in society. In other words, crime is an easy news issue for media organizations – the public shows an interest in crime news and, generally, at least at the initial reporting stage, crime news coverage is one-sided and non-controversial (it is difficult to find many citizens, politicians, or mainstream interest groups that support the commission of crime). Viewed from this perspective, news organization emphasis on crime is basically popular with news organizations for self-promotion reasons in the sense that crime is an easy sell to the general public.

More importantly with regard to the current analysis, news executives also recognize that certain types of crimes or crimes that involve certain types of victims,

offenders, and social circumstances generate more interest than others. At least with regard to crime news, the organizational interests of the news organization seem to merge with cultural and social constraints that are placed upon the news organization. Because crime, and especially certain types of crime, can be regarded as such a simple and non-controversial issue for news organizations to cover and because certain types of criminal occurrences elicit more dramatic social responses, news organizations focus a disproportionate amount of attention on certain types of crime. The factors that peak intensive media coverage of homicides include female victims, younger victims, higher numbers of victims, those involving minority suspects, and homicides committed in certain contexts (robbery and stranger homicide). The point is that this disproportionate coverage is best explained as the constraints of mass media in responding to society, culture, and environmental constraint rather than print media necessarily working to create cultural images of crime.

But it is also apparent that in responding to what society and culture deems as important, news organizations are also, by default, denying the public an accurate understanding of the nature of crime by emphasizing capitalist principles and ideals in terms of how the news organization works proceeds in manufacturing crime news. First, consistent with the discussion presented in chapter two, by providing more intense coverage of crimes that are sensational and that involve rare or emotionally arousing situations (those involving female victims, victims under the age of 21, stranger homicides, and multiple victims), news organizations are making decisions about what is newsworthy on the basis of their perception of what sells and simultaneously disregarding news topics that are perceived to not be marketable to the public. Focusing

intensively on assessments of “newsworthiness” (based on profitability) is a way that capitalist principles are hegemonically produced by the news organization. In this way, news organizations report homicide news in an inaccurate manner that potentially misinforms the public, and thus, does a disservice to the community in which the news organization purportedly serves.

Recently, one journalistic commentator, Bonnie Anderson (2004) writing on the current state of network news coverage, used the term journalistic “infotainment,” in reference to the movement from a concern with the production of quality and accurate news to news coverage that sells. Although arguably print media organizations have not been influenced by this trend to the degree that network news has been (because of the visual nature of network news), print media organizations must also sell their product and are not immune to this movement toward “infotainment.” The basic point of the “infotainment” argument is that news organizations are moving more to a type of news coverage that has inherent entertainment elements and, in doing so, are sacrificing quality news programming for programming that does little to increase the public’s understanding of the social issues that are covered.

This tendency of the news organization to reinforce the stories that sell to the general public by focusing more intense coverage on profitable news items not only leads to some stories being covered more than others, but also leads to certain news items that are de-emphasized by the media. In this regard, what is not covered intensively is just as important as what is covered intensively by the media. The phase two analysis suggests that homicides that involve a domestic context are relatively ignored by the media. Additionally, homicides that involve victim-offender relationships whereby the offender

and the victim were acquaintances received significantly less coverage. Homicides that originate out of relatively simple arguments (not involving domestic contexts) that escalate into murder are less intensively covered by the media.

There is also a certain degree of evidence suggesting that capitalistic principles in society are defended by the news media in terms of the finding that homicides that involve robbery receive significantly more coverage. Robbery, of course, involves physically taking certain possessions from another individual without their consent during a face-to-face encounter. But more importantly, the action of taking the property is illegitimate. It violates strongly held capitalistic assumptions about the legitimacy of certain methods of property ownership and the acquisition of wealth. In this regard, the media examined in this study is possibly acting as a defender capitalistic ideas and assumptions about the acquisition of property.

There is also evidence from the study, albeit tentative and anecdotal at this point, suggesting that the media may simply be effective conveyors of information that is provided by police agencies. In this regard, the news organization, in their coverage of crime, is subscribing to a capitalistic tendency to produce goods and services that are profitable at as low of a cost as possible. Information on crime news, and especially homicide news, is a low cost, high reward endeavor for news organizations. News organizations have an information source that readily collects, processes, and reports information to the news organization – official agencies. And many police departments in larger urban areas, such as Houston, have public relations departments that handle this task for the police agency and while doing so, work to protect the police department from liability and criticism.

In the majority of the news items examined, the media simply conveyed the information presented to the news organization by the police agency. Only in a few of the cases did the media go further in their analysis of the cases than what the information presented to the media suggested. When this did occur, it was largely for cases with a sensational element. For instance, one case in particular involved a Hispanic woman that had disappeared while traveling (her body was eventually found). The media had little official information to present to the public likely because the police had no information to provide concerning the context and reason for her disappearance and death. But the *Houston Chronicle* ran a 2,000 plus word story after interviewing people that knew her and obtaining their own information. Moreover, the paper actually advertised their feature story in a short blurb printed in the days that preceded the publication of the news item. The news item was presented in almost a narrative and short-story format emphasizing the information that had been gathered.

That the media nearly exclusively reported the information that is provided to them by the police organization likely occurs for pragmatic reasons that have a basis in the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the media and official reporting agencies. However, even if accurate, this alone does not diminish the consequences of having media rely fairly exclusively on official agencies for information. Official agencies have agendas and local norms that likely influence the content and presentation of information to the press. And even though privately owned corporations, news organizations have a greater responsibility to the public that goes well and beyond entertaining the public with what the staff of the news organization thinks the public cares about and beyond the information that official agencies are willing or able to

release to the press. Instead, the news organization has an obligation to report about the empirical reality of crime and other social phenomenon.

The analysis also found evidence for other types of organizational constraints that are separate and distinct from those that concern media responsiveness to social and cultural environments. The generation of news themes concerning crime by the media in their reporting tendencies influences the intensity of the coverage of local instances of homicide. This is an important finding because prior published research has yet to examine the generation of news themes quantitatively or in this context. Similarly, the current analysis found support for the notion that unknown social context significantly reduces the intensity of the coverage and more demographic information about the offender significantly increases the intensity of the coverage. These three measures are of considerable importance in the analysis because they represent indicators not of social or cultural constraint in assessing newsworthiness, but instead, are measures of organizational constraints that concern the *processes* of how media collects information and then organizes and synthesizes information collected on crime.

While this is certainly evidence of an organizational constraint within which the news organization must work (i.e., the availability of social context and offender information), this finding also has a raises additional questions. For instance, is this finding simply the result of the availability of information by the police agency that was provided in full content and context to the news organization or does this finding provide evidence of the media use of filtered evidence that was provided to the news organization. In other words, is the amount of information available a real reflection of the information that was available to the police agency at the time or is the offender

information measure simply just a measure of the information that the police agency was willing to release to the press in pursuit of their own self-interest?

The current data are not able to definitively provide an answer to this question. The data does not provide insights as to any gap between the information available in the police press releases and the actual information available to the police when the information was released. While purely speculation, it likely represents both. It is likely that for a good number of cases, especially low profile cases, all available information are released when it becomes available. In other cases, especially high-profile cases, it is likely that the information released through the press release represents information that has been filtered by the police agency. The only thing that the current examination reveals is that the amount of information available concerning social context and offender demographics influences the media outcome variables under consideration here. The question of what the information released by the police agency actually represents is a question for future research.

The organizational constraint interpretation advocated here is one that would likely be disputed by many Marxist and radical scholars. These scholars would accurately contend that the findings suggest that print media, through their coverage of crime, shapes public perception and common understandings of crime. Moreover, a segment of Marxist and radical scholars would also maintain that public perception of crime is shaped in certain ways for ideological and political reasons and conceptualize media organizations as simply an extension of the government and dominant class. It is this conceptualization of the media that should be rejected. A rejection of this element of the Marxist/radical perspective is not to suggest that media distortion is not real and does

not produce real effects and consequences. Nor is it to suggest that dominant and prevailing social systems have no effect on media coverage. Indeed, the values of dominant political, social, and cultural systems do have an impact. For instance, it has been noted that capitalistic principles concerning the value of certain pieces of news over others influences media assessments of newsworthiness.

Another implication of the findings concerns the affect that print media coverage of crime may have on readers in terms of influencing public perceptions and opinions concerning crime. Assuming that consumers of print media use depictions of crime gleaned from newspapers as a mechanism to gauge reality, the general public is being misinformed in several respects. The findings suggest that print media tend to emphasize homicides involving female victims and crimes involving multiple victims. Moreover, findings concerning some of the dependent measures suggest that media focus more attention on stranger homicides, robbery homicides, homicides involving minority suspects, and homicides involving minority suspects/non-minority offenders.

Each of these factors represents some element that would serve to reinforce common perceptions of crime. Regardless of the reasons that media present homicide in the way that it does, reinforcing common perceptions of crime likely influences how readers think about appropriate responses to crime. For instance, devoting disproportionate attention to crimes involving female victims, multiple victims, stranger offenders, robbery homicides, and homicides committed by minorities, implicitly reinforces their frames of reference concerning crime. If this type of coverage continuously reinforces this frame of reference, the coverage of crime is likely to produce the need for harsher criminal justice responses to criminal behavior. In this regard,

individuals that support harsher criminal justice responses to violent crime are likely influenced by what media emphasized, thus presenting a biased perception of the reality of crime.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current examination of media reporting of crime has been rather broad. This research presented a broad framework (Newsmaking Criminology), identified several theoretical perspectives that relate to the framework (market demand, news themes, and informational constraint), used a specific sample to examine the theoretical perspectives, and then interpreted the findings on the basis of the broader framework. As such, there are important recommendations for future research that relate to each of these successive steps.

First, future media research should continue to be grounded in the Newsmaking Criminology perspective. It is a perspective that allows for an examination of media depiction of crime by examining both how media is responsive to dominant social and cultural demands and how media is constrained by the political and economic environment within which it operates. This perspective also allows for examination of how the news media used the dominant ideas of the social and political economy to justify its business practices, especially in the context of making journalistic decisions about coverage and presentation of crime on the basis of what types of stories sell to the general public. It is time that criminologists who study media behavior come understand mass media both as an independent social institution and as an institution that is

necessarily enmeshed in a social, political, and cultural environment that both influences and is influenced by social, political, and cultural factors.

Second, research that approaches the study of media behavior from this broad perspective should seek a more thorough understanding of all potential factors that serve to influence the reporting behavior of journalists and news editors. The current analysis has considered a broader range of factors than most prior research, ranging from victim and offender characteristics to news process constraints and has interpreted the findings in as constraints on the news organization that affect behavior. In this regard, the current analysis has been primarily concerned with how media responds to social, cultural and organizational constraint. This analysis does not speak to the various ways in which mass media make decisions based on the furtherance of their own organizational and political objectives aside from media interests in selling newspapers to the public by catering to how media perceives what the general public to be interested in. Media decision-making concerning crime in the context of the furtherance of certain political objectives is a media topic that is in much need of methodical and unbiased scholarly and empirical consideration.

Third, media researchers should strive to be more rigorous and thorough in designing and implementing their research methods. Also, whenever possible, triangulated methods should be employed that utilize both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The current analysis, for instance, was heavily laden in quantitative data, but on several key issues, a qualitative base was missing that could have provided rich, detailed examples to ground the quantitative findings in the theories and broader perspectives advocated in the research. Another methodological consideration that

should inform future research involves the collection of media news items through database searches. Researchers conducting similar media research should always search numerous databases for news items and should also search databases by using many variations of the victim and offender names, or conceptual topics of the research to ensure that all news items are retrieved.

This third recommendation also includes paying closer attention to competing theories and variables suggested by those theories in explaining media behavior. For example, the location of the homicide is an important market demand item that has been examined by past research but was not examined in the current analysis. Future research should attempt to consider both the location of the homicide and the neighborhood of the residence for both the victim and the offender in examining how location influences coverage. Additionally, future research should begin to consider an additional media process measure not incorporated in the current analysis: the influence of coverage of other news topics on the same day as the crime news item appeared (in terms of the intensity of the news item covering crime). It would be expected that as coverage of important competing news items increase, the topic of crime would become less a less important news item. Research should explore this possibility.

Fourth, media research should seek to further expand and conceptualize the factors examined in this research. In this regard, there is much work to be done. The influence of circumstance and social context measures, missing from most of the past research, were examined in the current analysis. However, in many situations, the attributes of the measure had to be aggregated due to small numbers of cases assuming many of the attributes of social context. While the aggregated measures made sense

theoretically, the possibility exists that aggregation of the attributes distorted the findings. For example, the aggregated robbery measure included personal/street robberies, drug-related robberies, and robberies of businesses that resulted in homicide. These three types of robberies have separate and distinct features (in terms of how news organizations view them in assessing newsworthiness) that could produce different results, provided that there were sufficient sample sizes of each attribute. In this regard, future research may need to develop ways of over-sampling when assessing circumstance and social context effects.

Additionally, measurement of news themes in media research should be continuously developed and assessed. The operational definitions of the generation of news themes used in the current analysis were developed by considering broad definitions (general crime) and more specific definitions (homicide in specific). But during the process of conducting the word and news item counts, it became apparent that news themes could be operationalized as even more specific than the certain type of crime being examined (in this case, homicide). For example, with respect to the one case in the analysis that concerned the murder of a local police officer, the news theme, instead of interpersonal crime, or even homicide, was actually shootings involving police. Or in the example of the Andrea Yates case, coverage of crime in the newspaper turned to domestic incidents of crime or even other cases involving an offender who was the mother of a young victim. Therefore, research should work to better conceptualize precisely how news themes work in terms of their effect on coverage of local incidents of crime.

Fifth, research should broaden its approach in examining media decision-making pertaining to crime and justice issues. Similar examinations that have been used in the past by media researchers to examine print media should be employed to examine local and national network coverage of crime. This is a vital necessity in media research, especially given the likelihood that local and national network news broadcasts are consumed by more consumers of media than print media. Moreover, local and national news broadcasts have a broader capability to influence society and tap into emotional responses than print media due to the range of visual and audio techniques available to broadcast media. Research should also begin to compare and contrast print media coverage of crime with network news coverage of crime to determine if these two separate and distinct forms of media employ similar decision-making processes in the coverage of news.

Similarly, research methods should examine print media decision-making using a wider range of newspapers, both within the same jurisdiction (for example, when a large metropolitan area has two or more newspapers) and in different jurisdictions simultaneously. Future research should also examine media coverage of crime in different newspapers that are situated in jurisdictions with differing social, cultural, and political environments and of different size jurisdiction. Media research that takes these types of broader approaches will be of considerably more value because the research will be able to account for social, cultural, and political variations that potentially condition the effects of independent variables on media outcomes.

Lastly, in a much more broader sense, research grounded in the Newsmaking Criminology framework should also expend efforts to examine the validity of the

principles and underlying assumptions of the perspective and not just on the theories subsumed by the perspective. For instance, an important underlying assumption of the current research, as it pertains to the market demand aspect, is that journalists and news editors assess newsworthiness in terms of their expectations of what the public is interested in reading about and identify with. Only a few research studies have scratched the surface in terms of examining this assumption. Similarly, the current research assumes that news coverage of crime reinforces beliefs on the part of the general public that, in turn, influences judgments of the general public about crime, appropriate responses to crime, and causes of crime. In this regard, it is just as important to assess these assumptions as it is to assess straightforward coverage of crime by the press.

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