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The Importance of Court Reporting:

An analysis into how and why court reporting is surviving in British newspapers, particularly concerning the local sector.

Miriam Phipps-Bertram

U0666822

MA by Research

Media and Journalism

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This research was inspired by a two week work experience at the Newcastle *Journal* and *Chronicle*, in 2010. These newspapers covered both local and national court stories and it was interesting to read their coverage in comparison to the same story covered in local and other national newspapers.

Noticing a difference in the language and focus of certain court reports from newspaper to newspaper, I wondered of this happened on a regular basis. One case in particular which demonstrated significant differences in the way it was reported locally and nationally was that of Nigel Leat.

Primary school teacher, Nigel Leat, was convicted of over 30 sexual offences towards his pupils in June 2011. The charges included, “attempted rape of a child under the age of 13 years old, sexual assault by penetration, causing or inciting a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity, sexual assault of a child under the age of 13 with no penetration, voyeurism, possession of indecent photographs of children and possession of extreme pornographic images.” (Fitz, 2011)

The 51 year old, father of two, had worked at this particular primary school for over 14 years before being officially caught out. This was despite over 30 formal complaints having been made against him in the past, “Leat was only arrested in December 2010, when a schoolgirl told her mother he abused her ‘every day apart from when the teaching assistant was in the classroom’.” (Salkeld, 2012) Leat regularly filmed himself, using a video camera that was

provided by the school, sexually abusing his pupils and then saving them to his home computer.

His inappropriate behaviour was not only caught on film but was also noticed by several members of staff at Hillside, a few of whom took their concerns to the school's head teacher, "But those staff members who reported Leat's behaviour were told they should not 'insinuate things' and were bullied into silence, a report said" (Salkeld, 2012).

Initially denying all charges, Leat finally admitted to them all after police found the plethora of damning evidence which included homemade videos, over 30,000 indecent images and several indecent letters which he had written to his 'star' pupils, asking them to perform sexual acts on him.

Leat was given an indefinite jail sentence and it was assured that he wouldn't be released until he was no longer a danger to society, especially to young girls. BBC News Somerset Online (2011) confirmed that, "Leat was given an indeterminate sentence with a minimum tariff of 24 years, which the judge said was the punitive period of punishment for his offences. He will serve at least eight-and-a-half years before he can be considered for parole."

However, when this story went national, issues were unearthed concerning the school itself. The head teacher in particular, Chris Hood, was drawn into the firing line by the newspapers alongside the education body, Ofsted. Despite growing concerns from staff and parents it came to light that only 11 of the 30 plus incidents were ever recorded and none were taken to an authority outside of the school. When Ofsted handed in their report on Hillside First School, all appeared to be in order and it was branded 'good'. During the time that Leat was

abusing several children on a daily basis the Ofsted (2011, cited in Salkeld, 2012) report stated, “Pupils feel exceptionally safe and secure because they know that staff have their well-being at heart.”

As Hood failed to act on the several warnings of Leat's behaviour, he was eventually dismissed from his position as head teacher in early 2012. The *North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board* stated that if the accusations had been taken more seriously, most of Leat's crimes could have been stopped and prevented. The Chair of Leat's case review, Tony Oliver (2012, cited in Salkeld, 2012), described the school's approach to this situation as a form of bullying, “There was a culture which just did not empower people to voice their concerns. It could be interpreted as a culture of bullying.”

Leat's case is a-typical of the type of story which was published by the *Chronicle* and *Journal* newspapers during my time there and is an example of how a local story can be picked up nationally, but may not be printed for the same reasons. This case also demonstrates that although this case was covered both locally and nationally, the court reports focused on different aspects of the case, despite all newspapers having the same essential information. For example articles such as ‘North Somerset Primary School Teacher faces Lengthy Sentence for Sex Offences’ (Fitz, 2011) appeared in the local press and focused mainly on affect of the story on the local community and also the families involved in the case. However, articles which appeared in the national press, such as ‘Peado Sir Abused Kids after School Failed to Act’ (Coles, 2012), focused heavily on Leat and his appearance in court. The national press also picked up on the fact that the school had made several mistakes leading up to Leat's arrest which was the more scandalous aspect of the court case.

This research aims to delve deeper into the inner workings of modern day court reporting and also shed some light on its future, especially in the local sector.

Methodology & Research

Both qualitative and quantitative research was undertaken during this research including in depth interviews, content analysis and case studies.

Preliminary Research

Interviews were carried out in both the preliminary and the main research. Arthur Asa Berger (1988, p. 56-57), in *Media Research Techniques*, notes that the more a conversation flows the more likely subjects are to let information slip, which can often lead to uncovering issues not thought of previously, “When conducting a depth interview, you can adapt the situation changes. If a promising topic comes up, you can pursue it.” A semi-structured interview format was used which aided this technique, as issues arose I was then able to improvise and change my questions to follow that topic.

Susanna Hornig Priest (1996, p. 26) expands on this last point in *Doing Media Research: An Introduction*. As in-depth interviews are considered to be an ethnographic technique (the study of human society and culture, which takes into account the environment and surroundings of someone’s viewpoint) they often have a lack of structure, comprising of open ended questions and a conversational manner. These techniques allowed me to delve deeper into certain topics without the interviewee realising and the interview becoming disjointed.

The preliminary study explored the basics of court reporting through four interviews with journalists who were or still are involved with court reporting.

- Steve Stimpson, court reporter and acting news editor at the Ross Parry Agency
- Anne Lightfoot, retired court reporter
- Mick Smith, head of content at the *Chronicle*
- Lesley McNish, ex court reporter for the *Chronicle* and ITV

Many of the interviewees mentioned above noted that court reporting was still a major contributor to local and national newspapers alike, but stated that this may have been down to the fact that court can always produce an interesting story and can be used to fill blank space on a slow news day,

‘I think of newspapers as great, hungry monsters, which need to be constantly fed. The *Evening Chronicle* in Newcastle, for instance, will take about 130 stories a night, six nights a week. We know that if we go to certain places, if we go to court for instance, we will be guaranteed certain stories, which we can fill the paper with.’
(Smith, 2010, p. 97)

This focus led to a content analysis of the *Yorkshire Post*, which resulted in Graph 1 (Appendix B, p. 2). This graph shows a noticeable increase in the number of court stories that were reported in the *Yorkshire Post* over a period of 10 years.

Research was carried out using *Proquest* on *Metalib*, taking a week in October (19th-26th) throughout the years 2003 to 2013 and comparing the number of court stories present in the newspaper that week. October was the month chosen as this is when the High Court Judge usually sits at Leeds County Court (*Yorkshire Post*'s local court) and is considered the busiest court season (Appendix C, p. 3).

It is clear to see from this graph that the amount of court coverage included in the *Yorkshire Post* has more than doubled over the ten year period. However the expectation was for the

pattern to form in the opposite direction, with court reports dwindling as the years went on. This is due to the fact that all interviewees noted cuts in newspaper staff. The effects of this are discussed in Chapter Two.

Journalists are beginning to share the work load in the newsroom and in the court house. I witnessed much collaboration between resident court reporters and agency or freelance journalists on my work experience. What is also apparent, on the other hand, is that resident journalists, more on local and regional than national papers, are sharing the burden of court reporting amongst themselves instead of looking to agency reporters. There is then no specific court reporter at the paper itself. This is obviously a means to save money.

Lightfoot (2010) agreed with this theory, noting that this pattern emerged over twenty years ago,

This is what happened at the mail, incidentally. If they couldn't send, they would ask the local agency if they could cover for us. They would only be too pleased, because they were getting lineage at the end of the day. So yes, I would see a correlation between an increase in the work the agencies are doing for the local papers. That's an absolute definite, I'm sure that's right. (Lightfoot, 2010, p. 87)

The simple answer lies in the fact that court is an easy and accessible source of human interest stories, catering for every reader. This means newspapers can fill spaces easily without having to look for the story in the first place. Although this may appear to be the 'lazy' approach, it should be looked at as the more 'economised' approach. With a lack of staff and money behind them newspapers can find local, regional and national interest stories without wasting time.

Case Studies

Graph 2 was also collated (Appendix B, p. 3) looking into the change of topics of court which were reported in the Yorkshire Post, during the same week of October 19th – 26th, over a period of 10 years. My research highlights thirteen categories of crime in this part of the investigation. Although most of the categories analysed in this graph saw an increase in coverage, it was Violent and Sexual offence cases which saw the biggest change.

Case studies seemed the most efficient way to analyse why this topic appeared more consistently allowing for a more in depth and objective examination of it, as well as allowing me to draw issues related to this research from the texts with much greater ease than if I had started with in depth interviews. As Sharan Merriam (2009, p. 85-86) also explains, data is not simply out there for us to collect. Instead it is up us, as the researcher, to select and process the information first before deciding whether or not it is relevant to the study.

Robert K Yin (2009, p.8) notes that case studies are ideal for research which is asking the questions how and why. In this instance, this part of the research was looking into how coverage of sexual offences was being reported in both national and local media and why it may be seeing an increase.

Firstly, I felt it was appropriate to use local case studies. This was due to the fact that I would have full access to any newspaper articles I may need, along with a better chance of getting hold of the journalist who worked on the story initially. Although the court cases' background would be based in Yorkshire, I was essentially interested in a case which had also been published in the national press. Leat's case is not based in the Yorkshire area but it does encompass all the elements I was looking for in a case study.

As Leat's case went to court in 2011 it is a relatively recent story. I decided that the majority of my case studies would be from the past five years, at the most, as these court reports would give me the best insight into the current workings of court and court journalists. It would also give me the chance to make a comparison with a historical case, which I could still gain access to (i.e. within the past 15 years).

Another point is that the coverage of Leat's case started in local newspapers and caught the attention of the national press shortly after. This was one of the most important aspects I wanted to include in my case studies. The fact that the national press were interested in the court story would allow me to analyse why this happens to certain court cases and not others. It would also give me an insight into the differences between how court is interpreted in local papers compared to the national press.

These factors led to me to investigate the recent cases of Shannon Matthews and Anthony Dockerty and also the historical case of Sarah Payne. These studies encompass the requirements outlined above. The decision to use a historical case was purely for comparative purposes, to see if there have been any noticeable changes in the way that court has been reported over the past 15 years. I have also looked into a smaller case study of the court case surrounding sexual offender Nathan Whitehead. Whitehead's court story was only published in the local press and is an example of possibly why some sexual offence cases don't make it into the national papers.

Following on from this, I have also looked into the theories surrounding news values and gatekeeping. This will hopefully help to shed light on why certain court stories are published and not others. A more in depth discussion on this can be found in Chapter Two.

Analysing this data was a simple process of writing down key ideas and arising issues which were appearing throughout the evidence. Bill Gillham (2000, p.94-95) notes that this is not only a key stage in the development of the study but also a way to ensure that you are not missing any important point which may have been overlooked previously.

Interviews

My research focused on the following journalists:

- Lauren Ballinger, Newspaper journalist for the Dewsbury Reporter
- Nicky Harley, Court Reporter for the Hull and East Riding Newspaper
- John Davies, Freelance reporter for Crabtree's Press Agency

These were chosen for interview to further my research, as they are the journalists who worked on the local court reports for the case studies. What made this then interesting was their diverse background with the newspapers they worked for. Here we have opinions on the same issues from a resident court reporter to a freelance agency journalist, giving me a diverse range of answers. Carefully selecting these interviewees meant I had a better chance gaining the most useful information first off, rather than interviewing several people about the same case study and only landing upon relevant information every now and again. All three interviewees are currently involved with court and court journalism and so my historical knowledge of court came from my preliminary research.

Comparing the answers of these interviewees spurred content analysis into how these same stories were portrayed in different newspapers, especially between national newspapers and local newspapers. Using some of the methods outlined by John E. Richardson's (2007) in *Analysing Newspapers*, including Critical Discourse Analysis, I scrutinised both the headlines and the content of articles to determine their focus. Both national and local articles were included in this part of the investigation and what it revealed can be found in Chapter Three.

Further Research and Literature Review

The arising issues, which resulted from my journalist interviews, allowed for a debate to emerge. As the focus was on the future of court journalism, specifically with local newspapers and communities, it was believed appropriate to interview criminology experts on their opinion of the situation. This would provide a comparison between their views and those of the journalist's. The informants are as follows:

- Chris Cameron, Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Politics, University of Huddersfield
- Antony Whitehead, Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Politics, University of Huddersfield

However, finding willing participants to be interviewed on this issue was difficult. Many of the criminology experts I contacted were either too busy to be interviewed or were still involved with court life and felt therefore that it would be inappropriate to answer.

Two further interviews were also conducted:

- Anonymous Press Officer, North East and Yorkshire
- Anonymous Ex - Chief Inspector, Child Protection Unit, Sheffield

Both of these interviewees wanted to remain anonymous, due to data protection, as some of what we discussed is sensitive information. When conducting and analysing these interviews the fact that these interviewees would have strong opinions, on issues appertaining to the media, was taken into account.

This study is primarily brand new research and there is only a small amount of literature that was relevant to my findings. There have been a few studies which have touched upon a similar subject such as Chris Greer's, *Sex Crime and the Media* (2003). Greer looks specifically at how sex crimes are represented in today's media, a similar focus to my research. Greer also looks into newsworthiness and the media's responsibility to their audience; in terms of giving them a true representation of crime in their society.

Philip Sclesinger and Howard Tumber's chapter *Reporting Crime: The Media Politics of Criminal Justice* in Tumber's book *News: A Reader* (1999) is also a noteworthy work relevant to this research. This chapter looks into the production of media and how reporting on crime still provides much debate between criminologists and the journalists. Although the discoveries of these studies are influential towards this research, my conclusions will not be predisposed by their work for various reasons.

The authors of these books are from varied backgrounds, which could make their conclusions biased. Greer is a criminology expert and could subconsciously give a negative opinion on the media's involvement in reporting sex crimes.

The background research to these works does not involve cases in England as Greer looks primarily on newspapers in Northern Ireland, whereas Sclesinger and Tumber look at examples of work from the US.

Ultimately these studies concentrate on issues surrounding crime reporting rather than court reporting. There is a distinction between the two and this is explored further in Chapter Three.

Chapter 2 – The Current State of Court Reporting

Court reporting has featured in newspapers since their earliest days, even in the 18th century when news was delivered in pamphlet form; the general public have revelled in reading about those involved in local and national crime stories. Court journalism not only became a part of everyday life but by being named and shamed an element of public embarrassment also developed and soon became part of a criminal's sentence. This is known as “Open Justice”, in that the public can now see that justice had been done. Jon Smith and Joanne Butcher (2007, p.173), in *Essential Reporting*, note that the media became the public watchdog providing the community with the knowledge that justice had been served; whether that was sentencing the guilty or acquitting the innocent of any charges.

Court journalism, by definition, is essentially the facts of a court case brought forward to the public's attention. However, it can also be interpreted as a representation of the social structure of a local community, alongside a bigger national picture.

Graph 2 (Appendix B, p. 3) was produced to show a representation of the *Yorkshire Post's* court content, split up into thirteen categories of crime. The categories which saw the biggest increases were sexual violence and crimes which involved minors (under18). It was also noted that these categories would often merge. This pattern seemed to emerge nationally, for example in the *Independent*, as well as in local newspapers like the *Huddersfield Examiner* and these findings can be found in Graph's 3 and 4 (Appendix B, p. 4 & 5).

An increase in the reporting of this subject raised the question of whether or not court reporting is serving its purpose by presenting a true representation of crime in our society.

An augmentation this large of one subject, in comparison to the other subjects, could be an indication that court reporting is not providing its readers with an objective view.

Susan Pape and Sue Featherstone (2005), in *Newspaper Journalism: a practical introduction*, note that, "...[L]et's be realistic, court reporting remains a staple of newspaper coverage because...[the] readers lap it up." However, as mentioned by two of my interviewees, a number of local newspapers have now turned to publishing a summary of the daily or weekly events instead of reporting a full story as they are unable to be there at every hearing. For example, the *Huddersfield Examiner* has a section called "Court in Brief", which is published in its weekly paper and there is also a daily version which appears on their online publication. Smith and Butcher (2007) note that when a court story is published it is mostly down to luck of the court reporter being present in the right court room at the right time. However, even then it is still not guaranteed to make it to print,

Whether there is a reporter in court at all, whether they are in the right court when the case comes up, whether they think it is interesting and relevant to their audience, whether there are better cases around competing for their attention, and after all that, whether once it is written it gets past the news selection process back in the office. It may strike you as unfair that someone's court appearance gets publicity just because a reporter happened to be around on a thin news day, but that is the reality.
(Smith, 2007, p. 173)

Trinity Mirror and Johnstone Press have recently announced large job cuts which have hit local newspapers hard. Paul Linford, publisher for *Hold the Front Page*, has written articles about the abundance of job losses in the local sector. Articles such as 'Johnston Press reveals it cut 1,300 jobs in 2012' and 'Trinity Mirror set to axe 92 regional jobs in content-sharing move' are unfortunately not uncommon headlines. Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists, Barry Fitzpatrick (2013, cited in Linford, 2013) voices concern over the effect these cuts will have on local journalism. Fitzpatrick believes that although there is

reason to cut back on jobs due to company debt, there is also reason for apprehension that the quality of content in local newspapers will suffer in the long run,

The closure of district offices is taking reporters out of the heart of the communities they serve; this is doing a disservice to readers who want to know about their local news. While it is good that the group is making in-roads into the company's debt, the future of the group will be in real jeopardy if more job cuts are made. Readers will notice if quality falls as a result. (Fitzpatrick, 2013 cited in Linford, 2013)

Even more worrying headlines include 'Five Johnston Press daily newspapers to go weekly next month' (Linford, 2012) and 'Unwanted newspapers to close with loss of 19 jobs' (Linford, 2011). It appears that there are not only losses of jobs due to financial hardship but also losses of local and daily newspapers. Editor of the *Woking News & Mail*, Colin Parker (2011, cited in Linford, 2011) made a valid statement concerning the closing of his newspaper. Parker not only voiced his distress for the nine journalists who would lose their jobs in this process, but also for the readers – where will they get their local news and support now?

It is a shame these two newspapers, it seems, will be added to the list of local publications across the country that have ceased to exist. The papers have been at the forefront of holding to account local authorities, reporting on community events, and following the ups and downs of our town's football club. (Parker, 2011 cited in Linford, 2011)

Linking these factors to court reporting, Ballinger (2012, p.2) stated that major court stories, for example a high profile murder trial, will be covered by local newspaper staff but most court reports that feature in the paper will have come from an agency journalist. This is due to the fact that the paper simply cannot afford to send what little staff they have to court most of the time, unless it is worth it.

Versatility has become the objective but the nature of this change has also impacted upon the content published.

Despite a lack of journalistic court staff, court still provides an abundance of “cracking human interest stories” (Harcup, 2009), of which most of them would be interesting to a local newspaper as they will tick several of the news value boxes. Further scrutiny is required here but this can lead to such critics as Harcup (2007, p.54), in *The Ethical Journalist*, note that this can further skew our perception of crime in our local community and nationally, “Coverage of crime, for example, is skewed by the operation of news values that privilege the unusual, the dramatic and the tragic.”

As discussed in Chapter One of this study, there is a lack of literature which surrounds the analysis of court reporting and its significance within today’s media. Harcup (2007) notes this as a regrettable oversight and believes that reporting from the front line of crime (court) is part of our democratic duty. Harcup also notes that although crime stories are still a common sight in the media, a lack of understanding as to what makes court reporting news worthy has led to knowing very little of the context in which the stories lies, “[A]lthough crime stories are prevalent in much of our news media, there is little attempt at putting them in context.” (Harcup, 2007, p.89)

Although high profile cases such as Sarah Payne and the Soham murders are most likely to guarantee a series of follow-up articles or background specials, they do not add to our understanding of crime in the community or why the court case was reported in the first place. They simply continue to embellish fears in the public sphere.

On the other hand high profile court cases are something that the general public are interested in. For example, during the Sarah Payne investigation the public were involved with the

whole investigation and so it would only make sense to trail the court case which followed. Special articles relating to this case will also be of significance to many newspapers, as it will be of interest to many readers; hitting 4 or more of Harcup and O'Neill's news value categories, Magnitude, Relevance, Follow-ups and Media agenda.

Nevertheless similar cases such as the Soham murders can lead to contextualised reporting, allowing the public to fully understand the risks surrounding the crime being reported on. Harcup discusses that *Channel Four News* (2002, cited in Harcup 2007, p.89) reported a statistic at the height of the investigation of the Soham murders, which revealed the chance of a child being abducted and murdered by a stranger was one in 185,000. This is around the same chances as being struck by lightning. How often do we hear about such statistics?

In reality we tend to read the same sort of court report over and over and this repetition is noted by ex-crime reporter for the *Guardian*, David Krajicek (1998) who complains in 'The bad, the ugly and the worse' that there are too many articles which simply go through the motions rather than look at the bigger picture. Cameron (2012, p. 42) notes that the media purposefully continues to make court reporting newsworthy simply because it sells newspapers. The public is poorly educated on many crimes and therefore the media are able to influence public opinion, especially on court cases involving paedophilia and sexual offences, "Lack of properly informed public opinion about victims, sex offenders and their treatment under the criminal justice system means the media are likely to continue to be a considerable influence on public perceptions."

This opinion is agreeable to some extent. I believe, however, that journalists and the media are fully aware that they are unable to give an accurate picture of the types of crimes which

reach our court rooms. It is not that they are out there to purposefully deceive but that selection is based around news values. This is not only down to a lack of court reporters but also because many court cases are banal and uninteresting to read about. Danny Dorling (2006, cited in Harcup, 2007, p. 91), a professor in human geography at the University of Sheffield, notes that these types of cases simply don't make the headlines. "Most murders are shockingly banal. ... Such murders do not make the headlines."

Harcup (2007, p. 90) expands, and quite rightly notes that despite the fact journalists cannot report every single crime that happens - and they are certainly not expected to write a contextualising essay to go with every report published - they are not absolved from the responsibility that the general public are being given a distorted view, just because of the nature of the job, "The least we could do is to think about what we are doing."

Another example of how new values are individual to a newspaper or journalist is the transition of a court report from a local paper to a national. Many stories which feature in a local newspaper will not make it to the national stage. This is highlighted by Davies (2012, p.39) who notes that, even as a freelance journalist, very few of his stories are published in a national newspaper. Davies goes on to explain, "This is partly due to the fact that there are other freelance agencies with better contacts who "cherry-pick" the most sensational/serious cases. Also the nationals are only usually interested in cases involving "celebrities" or crimes of particularly gruesome or unusual nature."

Davies clearly states that nationals are looking for a certain type of story to fit their newspaper's credentials. By the time a story hits a national newspaper it can be up to around two weeks old. At this point it is up to the national newspaper as to whether it still has

relevance and enough news value to have continued coverage. That additional attention grabbing detail is often absent from such local stories as the death of a child in a road accident or an intentional fire in a warehouse and so they will be overlooked. Harcup (2009, p. 42) notes that, “This does not mean they are not news; it means that news values are relative.”

Over time court reporting has become a form of ‘gossip column’, especially concerning local newspapers whose readership has a closer connection to those being reported about.

However, there seems to be a blurred line in between what is seen to be reported in the public interest and what is considered to be just interesting to the public. Harley (2012, p. 20-21) says there has been an increase in the amount of sexual abuse and paedophilia cases which are now coming to court, “I’d say I’d had about 15 this week in court. I mean, going back a few years ago, you’d probably only have about 4 a week.” By contrast Ballinger (2012, p.8) says that there has been no change in the volume of sexual abuse cases being reported or coming to court in first place. This is most likely down to the fact that Ballinger only sees a court summary and may be missing certain details of hearings. This, however, may also be area and court specific. Harley’s area of Hull being a city, will most likely prosecute more sexual offence cases than that of Ballinger’s area of Dewsbury, a town with a smaller population.

Harley (2012, p. 21) also notes that there have been an increase in the number of historical sexual abuse cases coming forward. This could be an explanation as to why Harley has seen an increase in the amount of court cases surrounding sexual offending. On the other hand this also leads to another point that the media’s coverage of these subjects has possibly made them more socially acceptable and accessible. Harley (2012, p. 21) notes that victims of

sexual abuse speak out now, rather than 20 years ago, because the subject matter is more in the public eye than ever before, “I mean, yes it’s helped to make it more acceptable and for them, they feel like they’re not going to be vilified for coming forward and because they realise other people have.”

Gatekeeping might also be a reason why court reporting has become more focused on one subject. The concept of gatekeeping is quite simple in that it revolves around the thought of information having to pass through stages of elimination, or ‘gates’. Dr Kurt Lewin, cited in *The ‘Gatekeeper’: A Case Study in the Selection of News* by David Manning White (1950) reprinted in Tumber’s book, *News: A Reader* (1999) expands on this by stating that within these channels are rules to be abided by as well as ‘gatekeepers’, “[I]n the latter case an individual or group is ‘in power’ for making the decision between (if the information) is ‘in’ or ‘out’.” (Lewin, cited in Tumber, 1999, p. 66)

White’s study into the workings of a wire editor at a newspaper is highly regarded as the corner stone of the ‘gatekeeping’ theory. It discovered that the editing of news can be highly objective and not only relies on the ideals of the organisation it is being published in, but is also constrained by the opinions of the ‘gatekeeper’.

Pamela Shoemaker (1991), in *Gatekeeping* reprinted in Tumber’s book *News: A Reader* (1999) breaks down the process and discovers that there are more complex factors at work. Although ‘gatekeepers’ themselves have their own ideas, likes and dislikes, they are not at liberty to express them fully. They are bound to operate within the constraints of the communication organisation. In turn, the priorities of the organisation are continuously influenced by forces from the outside, for example the readers. Shoemaker (1991, cited in

Tumber, 1999, p. 76) analyses this process closer noting that none of these gates can escape the fact that they are tied to something even bigger – society, “And, of course, none of these actors – the individual, the routine, the organisation, or the social institution – can escape the fact that it is tied to and draws its sustenance from the social system.”

With this in mind it could be possible that on some levels editors and journalists alike are drawn towards stories surrounding sexual abuse and violence against minors, as they know this will help to keep their readership – as well as boost sales. Whether this is a conscious or subconscious decision is not clear. At a local level there may be a little more focus on the interest of their community. Both Ballinger and Harley mention that they see themselves and their publications as a type of neighbourhood watchdog. The national media don’t operate like this. They tend to only cover high profile cases, and will purposefully send a journalist or agency journalist to cover this particular case.

This, however, does not mean that local newspapers are happy with the way things are.

David Helliwell, (cited in Harcup, 2009) notes that there is some regret that there are a lot of, “cracking stories that we miss”. Helliwell also notes that if you find yourself moved by stories then so will most of your audience – and that’s the key, “Yes, even hard-bitten hacks can respond to stories with feelings of shock, surprise, outrage, sadness, joy or amazement at the human condition.” (Helliwell, cited in Harcup, 2009, p. 54)

Chapter 3 – Distorting the Truth?

Although court reporting is designed to provide a public service, as illustrated in Graphs 2, 3 and 4 (Appendix B, p. 3, 4 & 5) of my research, the media may be distorting reader's perception of local and national crime.

When following a high profile case such as Sarah Payne or Shannon Matthews, two types of journalism are used, crime reporting and court journalism. These are, however, fundamentally different. Crime reporting refers to the stories which will either lead to a court case or discuss the background of a case which has already happened. Court reporting informs readers of the court case on the unfolding daily events in the court. Both these forms of journalism are intertwined and sometimes one cannot function without the other.

There was a lot of crime reporting coverage during the investigation of both Sarah Payne and Shannon Matthews. The fact that the parents of both these children gave an insight in to their world by appealing publically via the media, gave these cases a human angle. Cases involving missing children had featured in the media, through cases such as Fred West and Myra Hindley. The media are all too aware that these cases strike a chord with the general public especially in the local media, as Davies (2012, p. 40) notes, "Cases of child abuse have always been significant ones as far as local papers are concerned as they often cause feelings to run high in the local community." With both the Payne and Matthews's case, the public were invited to take the journey with the victim's family and were provided with a plethora of information and even given access to the suffering of the relatives.

The Ex-Chief Inspector (2012, p. 60) interviewed for this research, was involved with the Child Protection Unit in Sheffield. The Inspector notes that the Payne murder served as a learning curve for the police and the media, “This case was an indication that the media could be utilised in high profile cases. They allowed the local and national police sectors to get a response from the public that we couldn’t have dreamed of, and is partly the reason why we now tend to encourage parents to speak publically – under supervision of course.”

There was an overwhelming response from the general public during the search for Sarah and also during the trial. In one day the police and media received in excess of 10,000 calls from people generously offering their support to the Payne family and also offering information they felt relevant to finding Sarah. This involvement continued on a daily basis. Police were ‘astonished’ at the amount of interest they received, which was probably due to the fact that a case such as this had never been so much in the public eye. “Last night, officers were astonished by the 'overwhelming' public response 20 times normal levels as the hunt for the missing eight- year-old enters its 13th day. One senior officer said: 'There has been a staggering response from the public. We have never known or seen anything like it.’ (Gysin, 2000, p.7)

Coverage of both Shannon Matthews and Sarah Payne’s investigation was very similar in both national and local newspapers. However at the point of trial, when court reporting came into play, the treatment was no longer unanimous and the case appeared to be conveyed using very different angles.

During the court case the national papers published articles which were very defendant focused, concentrating mainly on what had been said about Whiting in court and also

describing his actions. These articles were more than twice as long as those printed in the local media. They are very descriptive and often take a look back on previous events of either the court case or the investigation. Although these events were covered in the court that day, why the description of proceedings in so extensive is unclear. It is most likely due to the fact that national newspapers have to cater to a wider audience and cannot assume that their reader is a hundred per cent up to date with the court case.

Articles, such as ‘Killer ‘Grinned as He Took Sarah Payne’ by Stewart Payne (2001) for the *Telegraph*, used adjectives such as “scruffy” and “long-haired” to describe Whiting’s appearance in court. This article also commented on how Whiting, “never looked at Sarah’s father and other family members, sitting close by.” This type of description is very subjective and might influence public opinion, imprinting a distorted image on the mind of the reader as to what Whiting or another potential criminal could look like.

As Whiting had not yet been found guilty for these crimes, Sarah’s murderer is often referenced to as “The man”, for example in Sarah Hall’s (2001) article for the *Guardian*, ‘Accused in Sarah Trial ‘was Sweaty and Evasive’. This sort of generalisation is questionable and also appears in Payne’s article mentioned beforehand. Why not simply state ‘the person’? This is gender specific and conjures the opinion that only a man would commit such a crime. Although a man was seen driving away in a white van by Lee Payne, Sarah’s brother, this does not mean that a woman was not involved at an earlier or later stage.

Very little is mentioned of Sarah’s family’s reactions during the trial in the national articles. They are of course mentioned when they testify and also when it comes to describing previous events of the investigation.

These articles also very much hit the nerve of the taboo surrounding paedophiles, which was circulating in the newspapers at the time. Quotes from officials in the case such as “It was a sexually motivated homicide” (Langdale, cited in Payne, 2001) and “... [H]ad met a violent death.” (Langdale, cited in Payne, 2001) could possibly further implant worry in the minds of concerned readers, especially using such hard hitting language as ‘sexually motivated’. The fact that these quotes come from a professional, Timothy Langdale QC who prosecuted the case, means that the opinion is most likely upheld and reinforced in the mind of the reader as Langdale is an expert.

By sensationalising this case the national media created a moral panic and the impact lead to Sarah’s Law. The moral panic which ensnared Britain during the search for Sarah and after her murderer was convicted (especially after it was announced that Whiting had offended before) lead to a campaign led by Sara Payne, Sarah’s mother, to instil a system into Britain that would allow the public to know if there was a paedophile or sex offender in the area that they lived. Eventually the government agreed to run a trial of this scheme in 2008 in four areas, Warwickshire, Cambridgeshire, Cleveland and Hampshire. This Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme allowed concerned parents to enquire with the police as to whether someone who had been convicted or were suspected of child abuse would have access to their children. If police found it in the child’s interest, they would inform the parent’s confidentially of any details, however they are not allowed to pass these details on. Due to a resounding success this scheme is now available nationwide and continues to protect children all across the UK.

Ballinger (2012, p. 9) noted that Sarah's Law is always taken into consideration, not only when reading about a similar situation but when reporting on one too. The feeling that we are no longer safe in our own home essentially and that moral panic, which followed, has never fully disappeared from our newspapers, "Yeah I think, you know, people are still wanting to know if there's a paedophile living near them."

It has been likened to Megan's Law which is in force in the US, however Sarah's Law is not as problematic, as names, pictures and addresses are not publically disclosed under the UK version. Consistent monitoring of this law continues as, although it is currently providing a helpful service, it could cause more vigilante-style attacks or drive sex offenders underground.

This type of reporting indicates that court journalism could be demonising certain crimes over others. The increase in sexual and violent crimes involving minors, seen in graphs 2, 3 and 4 could be likened to the moral panic involving youth crime and "hoodies". Both of these types of crime have not suddenly started happening in society but the media has recently concentrated their efforts on these minority groups. As mentioned by Yvonne Jewkes (2004, p. 89) in *Media and Crime*, children have been defined by the media in two distinct categories – 'evil monsters' and 'tragic victims'.

Paedophilia is unfortunately a common crime in the grand scheme of our society, with an average of 6 children being murdered in sexually motivated circumstances (Jewkes, 2004, p. 97). Yet the public are still led to believe that these crimes are on the rise. As discussed in Chapter Two, and also mentioned by Jewkes, this perception of increase could be at random

thanks to a mixture of news values and gatekeeping. It could also be down to the public misinterpreting the information, which is further discussed in Chapter Four of this research.

The local coverage of this trial in the *Littlehampton Gazette* and the *West Sussex County Times* included articles which were much shorter and, although incorporated the facts of the court case, often steered away from Whiting's involvement in the trial. For example in the article 'Smiling Killer' for the *Littlehampton Gazette*, the testimony of Lee Payne was reported. It only mentions Whiting once and this is merely to tell readers that the case continues. This article, like so many other local articles such as 'Guilty as Hell' and 'For Sarah' (*Little Hampton Gazette*, 2001), also uses very emotive and softer language than the national articles. Words such as "paedophile", "sexual", "assault" and "violence" are rarely used due to the fact that the focus of the articles is not on the defendant but rather that of Sarah and her family. Much like the national articles the local newspapers do include events which have happened previously, however they are then connected to the suffering of the family. For example, during Lee Payne's testimony, the moment of Sarah's disappearance is a focal point but rather than link this to Whiting's possible involvement, the article focuses on earlier events which involve the children's mother, "The children's mother, Sara, warned the children to "stay together" before giving them permission to play on their own. But fate conspired to allow eight-year-old Sarah to wander out of sight for just moments long enough for her to be abducted." (*Littlehampton Gazette*, 2001)

The local coverage of this story mainly differs from the national probably due to the reason that national newspapers do not have to contemplate the local community and instead look at the bigger picture. Harcup (2007, p. 99) also notes this, and refers to an example cited in Pape and Featherstone's *Newspaper Journalism: a practical introduction* involving another

big crime story of recent years, the Soham murders. During the trial the *Ely Standard*, which was the local newspaper for the family of the victims, chose to keep the court case off the front page of the paper. Deputy Editor, Debbie Davies (cited in Pape and Featherstone, 2005, cited in Harcup, 2007, p. 99) admitted to initially wanting to splash the story all over the front of the newspaper, as it was one of the biggest stories ever for the small paper, “I created a scenario in my head where I could see the parents of the two little girls coming home from the court day after day and they did not want to see our billboards screaming at them.” This also relates to the fact that news values and gatekeeping are subjective in relation to both the organisation and the individual journalist. Despite Davies recognising that the ‘Soham murders’ was a very newsworthy court story, the decision to omit it from the front page was a personal choice.

Despite the media coverage being quite similar during the investigations, the Sarah Payne murder trial was very much different to the Shannon Matthews proceedings. In Dewsbury in February 2008, nine year old Shannon was reported missing. The search for her exceeded any like its kind before. The *Yorkshire Post* (2008) commented that it was the largest investigation since the Yorkshire Ripper in ‘Search for Shannon: Biggest Inquiry Since Yorkshire Ripper’. It all came to a head 24 days later in March 2008 when police discovered Shannon alive, concealed in the drawer of a divan bed base at the house of her step father’s uncle, Michael Donovan. He was arrested at the scene and questioned alongside the little girl herself. Police discovered that it was Karen Matthews, Shannon’s mother, who was behind the whole incident along with Craig Meehan, Shannon’s step father and several other members of her family. It appeared that this was part of a scheme to gain financially. *The Times* noted Shannon was drugged for several days to avoid her escaping whilst her mother put her plan into action, “The nine-year-old schoolgirl Shannon Matthews was kidnapped and

drugged in a “wicked” plan by her own mother and an accomplice to claim reward money, a jury heard today.” (Booth, 2008)

The Matthews trial came only one year after the disappearance of Madeline McCann, a three year old girl who had gone missing in Portugal whilst on holiday with her family. Madeline was from a wealthy background and, although her parents were under suspicion themselves, the police are yet to find the culprit and Madeline is still considered a missing person.

The national papers, once again concentrated heavily on the defendants, Karen Matthews, Craig Meehan and Michael Donovan. Headlines such as ‘Kidnap Trial for Shannon Mother’ (BBC News Online, 2008), ‘Shannon Matthews Mother Guilty of Kidnapping Own Daughter’ (*The Guardian*, Glendinning, 2008) and ‘Shannon Matthews trial: Mother Karen Matthews ‘pure evil’’ (*The Telegraph*, Anon, 2008) were typical examples. Due to the case having many parallels with the Madeline McCann disappearance the national papers found the contrast between the social classes of the two families made for great comparison, “I think there was that sort of, I don’t want to say “snobbishness”, but looking perhaps with a critical eye, at you know how she’s brought up her kids. What sort of conditions they were living in and that sort of thing.” (Ballinger, 2012, p. 6). Articles such as Beatrix Campbell’s (2008) ‘Who Do We Blame?’ for the *Guardian*, talked about how social class could have affected this trial and also how it may have had an effect on the outcome of the investigation,

No one thought Karen Matthews had abducted or killed her daughter - and yet she has been judged. Some commentators think they can say anything they like about this woman and even to her. She has spoken with reticent dignity, yet her class makes her available for blame. The McCann’s are official suspects. And yet - unlike Karen Matthews - they are presumed innocent. (Campbell, 2008)

Paul Stokes (2008) was one of many journalists to write about this association. ‘Shannon Matthews trial: Madeleine McCann case may have inspired Shannon Matthews’ kidnap’ has Karen Matthews at the centre of it and painted a picture of a woman desperate for her share of the money that’s out there.

As with the Sarah Payne case the national coverage looked at the bigger picture. The investigation into finding Shannon Matthews was the largest the police had ever conducted. The nationals picked up on this fact and articles such as ‘Shannon Matthews’ mother guilty of kidnapping own daughter’ for the *Guardian* reported that, “[T]here were 200 officers mobilised, 1,800 properties searched, 1,760 cars stopped and three-quarters of all the UK's police dogs used.” (Glendinning, 2008) The hoax that Karen Matthews conjured and the investigation which followed cost the country a lot of money, a fact a lot of the public would be upset and angered by. Although this information was the truth, it was not contextualised, as we are unaware of how much other trials cost in comparison.

The treatment of Karen Matthews in the national newspapers, throughout her trial, was much like that of a paedophile. The demonisation of her actions in the national media was most likely linked to her social class and status, with the press creating her status as a monster through the intense coverage of her trial. As Katherine Williams (2012, p. 422) states in *Textbook on Criminology*, “[I]t has become more common to classify the offender by the risk they pose rather than the crime they have committed, so analysing and punishing the person rather than the crime.”

Local coverage was different. Headlines in the local press included, ‘Shannon Matthews trial day 2 - Shannon was drugged and tied up in 24 day ordeal’ (Jackson, *Huddersfield Examiner*, 2008), ‘Shannon Still Not At Home’ (Anon, *Dewsbury Reporter*, 2008) and ‘Shannon Matthews trial Day 8: Shannon tether strap shown in court’ (Jackson, *Huddersfield Examiner*, 2008).

These articles compared to the national coverage were much shorter and focused on the local angle. Language surrounding the court case was very matter of fact in the local press. There was very little or no embellishment on the description of Karen Matthews and Michael Donovan and instead these articles looked at how the community were coping with the trial. Articles such as ‘Shannon Still Not At Home’ by the *Dewsbury Reporter* began with how the Moorside Estate collaborated to support each other. As local media often see themselves as a watchdog for the community, they could not afford to be as so forthcoming with the social comparisons and judgements, as the national press.

Ballinger (2012, p.7), who was the journalist covering the Shannon Matthews story for the *Dewsbury Reporter* noted that as a journalist for a local paper it was not appropriate to offer an opinion but rather report the facts. In relation to Shannon Matthews, Ballinger was more concerned with keeping the community up to date rather than passing judgement, “All we were trying to do was keep everybody up to date with what had been going on and not criticise at all. At the end of the day, that’s her mum, whose daughter’s gone missing and that’s the way we were looking at it at the time.” (Ballinger, 2012, p. 7) The *Dewsbury Reporter* doesn’t have a dedicated court reporter and so Ballinger was assigned to this court case due to its high profile. Ballinger (2012, p.2) noted for financial reasons staff numbers continue to decrease and, as the paper is unable to cover court on a regular basis, agency copy

will often be used, “We cover as much as possible, if we can’t get there and if an agency’s gone, we’ll use agency copy.”

Ballinger noted that a story such as this would probably be covered as a matter of course. There are many factors which make this case newsworthy for a local newspaper, which include the victim’s age, the locality of the story and also the twist of Karen Matthews being the guilty party. Another main factor included that the newspaper felt it had to be seen as helping the community. Ballinger said, “I think we felt at Dewsbury, that we had perhaps a responsibility to the community to help find her, because that’s a role a newspaper can help play.” (Ballinger, p. 5) As Shannon went missing locally, a lot of people from the surrounding areas volunteered to help find her; the amount of community spirit and collaboration was reported about more in the local media than it was in the national.

Although many local newspapers have now become a weekly publication, rather than a daily, for cases such as the Shannon Matthews court case they will use their website to keep their readers regularly updated (more often than not more than 3 times a day during the trial).

Ballinger (2012, p. 7) noted that even just 5 years ago the newspaper, the *Dewsbury Reporter* was not as involved with the website as it is now. The website was used to update readers the night Karen Matthews was arrested, “And in fact, the night that they announce that Karen had been; I think she’d been charged or perhaps just arrested or something, I had to go to the press conference and I was there until half past ten at night, so I put that straight on the website.” Local papers are most definitely under a lot of pressure to keep up with the daily and national newspapers and so it is no surprise that the internet has become such a useful tool; allowing them to expand their readership.

The case involving Anthony Dockerty differs slightly from the previous two case studies discussed in this chapter and has more similarities with the Nigel Leat case, analysed in Chapter One.

Dockerty was a secondary school teacher from Hull who sexually groomed one of his pupils, in 2011, using social networking sites and in person. This was reported to the police by another young girl who had also been sexually assaulted by Dockerty. She came forward after hearing he was up to no good again. After pleading not guilty to the allegations throughout his trial, Dockerty was found to be unanimously guilty by the jury. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison and will be forever be on the Sex Offenders Register.

The focus was primarily on Dockerty throughout the coverage of court, as due to Section 39 of the Children and Young Person's Act 1933 (CYPA) the identity of the 15 and 16 year old girls involved in the case were protected (Judicial Studies Board, 2009). As there were no missing person's involved in this story there was no national coverage or build up to the court case, until sentencing.

Locally, however, the case was covered from the first hearing. Harley, the resident court reporter from the *Hull Daily Mail*, covered the Dockerty case from day one. The *Hull Daily Mail* has a rare commodity in Harley as without her many local interest stories would go unnoticed. The reporting of this court case in the *Hull Daily Mail* was very different from every other local newspaper in the Yorkshire area. This case made the front page on seven

separate occasions in the *Hull Daily Mail*, whereas it was only published in the court in brief section of the *Huddersfield Examiner* and *Dewsbury Reporter*. This was a Hull case and the geographical proximity means that it may not have newsworthy to other local newspapers. However, I also believe that as Harley was able to be at court for all the details, a full package of facts could be provided and interesting pieces of evidence for the paper could also be unearthed, which is why it made so many page leads in comparison. This was discussed earlier in conjunction with the Sarah Payne case and it is noteworthy that this isn't common practice for court reporters today. Nevertheless, it does raise the question, would this case have been reported in other local newspapers in the surrounding areas when and if they had their own resident court reporter too?

Harley stated that this is the sort of case that would always be newsworthy to the *Hull Daily Mail* newspaper. A case involving paedophiles and sexual assault on minors is something the paper considers to be in the public interest and it still takes its role as the local watchdog very seriously, "So it's important that we report cases like that, because there might be more victims out there who will come forward when they hear that there are other people and they will be believed." (Harley, 2012, p. 18-19)

The national coverage of the Dockerty court case mainly surrounds the so called 'seedy' nature of the crime itself. Headlines included 'Britain's Sickest Teacher' (Macaskill, *The People*, 2011) and these articles often referred to the teacher being a frequent drug user and how Dockerty made his current partner dress up in various outfits; which in the grand scheme of things were quite irrelevant pieces of information to the serious nature of the court case. Unlike the national coverage of the previous case studies looked at in this chapter, however,

this court story was picked up primarily by tabloids such as the *Daily Mail*, the *People* and the *Sun* newspapers.

Harley (2012, p. 19) noted that the national papers will pick up a story like this, if they find it to have that “kinky” edge. One of the young girl victims was also willing to speak to the newspapers herself. She first spoke directly to the *Hull Daily Mail* and once the nationals knew about that, they saw this as an excellent opportunity to get the best angle for their articles.

The *Hull Daily Mail*, who consider themselves as a family newspaper, are not at liberty to treat this type of court case with such humour, “They (the national newspapers) took it as a bit of a laugh really; when really it’s a serious case and we wouldn’t have reported it in the same way they did.” (Harley, 2012, p. 20) Essentially Dockerty was a danger to the local community. He was in a position of authority and was trusted to look after the children in his care, not abuse them. This type of court case being printed in the local newspaper seems to make perfect sense and is of course in the community’s interest. Harley noted that she felt the same about cases of a similar nature, “I feel it’s important to put them in, even if it’s only a small piece.” (Harley, 2012, p. 19)

Chapter 4 – The Debate

Graph ‘A’

Although local newspapers are facing a declining readership, as well as in staff and revenue, their coverage of the courts increases, in particular cases which involve violence, sexual abuse and paedophilia (Graph 2, Appendix B, p. 3). Taking this information I was able to produce Graph ‘A’ (Appendix B, p. 6) which shows that the correlation has continued over the past 5 years, specifically looking at the three local newspapers in which my case studies were based and also the larger circulated newspaper, the *Yorkshire Post*. It demonstrates that, as discussed by all the journalistic interviewees in this study, court can produce an abundance of page leads and local interest stories. This includes such items as ‘fillers’. Many local newspapers will have small gaps to fill before they go to print and court can easily provide content to eradicate these blank spaces.

This can be seen in such cases as Nathan Whitehead whose case was only published in the local press. In 2011 Whitehead was ensnared by his own victim, who was able persuade him to admit to his wrong doings through text message. He had sexually assaulted and raped the young girl, whom he had close contact with throughout her life, from the age of 11 to 15. It was around a year before she gained confidence and managed to get the relevant evidence from Whitehead, when she decided to take it to the police. Whitehead pleaded guilty to all charges and was sentenced to serve 10 years and prison and will have to sign the Sex Offender’s register for the rest of his life. The *Huddersfield Examiner* also noted that in addition, “Judge Stewart also imposed an indefinite sexual offences prevention order which bans him from having contact with the complainant and restricts his unsupervised access to any child under 18.” (Anon, *Huddersfield Examiner*, 2011)

Whitehead's court case was covered by an agency journalist, Davies, who is currently a freelance reporter for Bradford-based Crabtree's Press Agency. Although Davies is not considered a court reporter he finds himself organising his day around the courts events, "As I have to cover eight courts on my own it takes experience, planning and occasionally good luck to make sure I am in the right place at the right time." (Davies, 2012, p. 39)

Davies (2012, p. 39) notes that not many of the court stories he writes up are picked up by the national press. This is mainly due to the fact that they use their own agency journalists and have already cherry picked the stories they wish to be covered. Davies is mainly utilised by local newspapers, due to the fact that they are unable to get to the court themselves. He also notes that although he is contracted to certain stories, as he is at court for some time he is also able to pick up a local interest story here and there, "Obviously I have my own list of stories I need to follow but often new stories can pop-up on the day and I have to be ready to respond to that." (Davies, 2012, p. 39) The case for Whitehead was one of these stories which Davies managed to stumble upon.

It is quite obvious to see why the *Huddersfield Examiner* would be interested in this particular story. As a local watchdog they will probably feel that it is their duty to make the community aware of Whitehead's wrong doing and also that justice has been served. The fact that he was also caught thanks to a little detective work from his victim also makes a good twist to the case. However, this was clearly not enough for the national newspapers. Davies (2012, p. 40) notes that this specific case was not sensationalist enough. Davies believes that

the national newspapers are looking for that something a little different. This includes being celebrity related, a story with details which are particularly gruesome or unusual or details which readers might even find distressing. In relation to the previous case studies discussed in this research, this includes the elements of very young missing children, murders, fraudulent appeals from parents, drugs and 'kinky' details.

Although much like the Anthony Dockerty case in that the local coverage had to again focus on the defendant due court restrictions banning them from naming the victim, Whitehead's case differed again from any of the case study examples used in this study. This is considered a historical case, as the victim had not come forward about the abuse until they were 16 and this was sometime after it had ceased. Harley noted that historical cases were becoming a more frequent occurrence in the court room, "The majority of the sex cases is more, sort of, family stuff where, dads or uncles have abused a daughter or something like that. Or even a son and they're all coming forward now and a lot of the abuse dates back to the 70s and 80s, some in the 90s. But people seem to be a lot more willing to come forward now." (Harley, 2012, p. 21) This could be a sign that topics such as sexual abuse and paedophilia are now seen as a serious crime by the public, than they were twenty years ago arguably thanks to media exposure.

Victims of childhood sexual abuse will have most likely seen or read about justice being served to many guilty men and women over the years, thanks to newspaper, radio and television coverage of court cases around the world. This treatment of the subject could possibly make them feel more comfortable coming forward now as they feel they will finally be believed. Harley (2012, p. 21) notes that the increase in coverage of this type of crime has

probably brought some criminals to light that may have otherwise continued to offend, “They feel like they’re not going to be vilified for coming forward and because they realise other people have.”

Davies (2012, p.40) notes that court stories are essentially human interest stories, hence why they feel they are so popular with the public. Graph A (Appendix B, p. 6) exhibits why. It appears that without court reporting a newspaper, such as the *Huddersfield Examiner* or *Dewsbury Reporter*, would be a collection of announcements and advertisements.

That statement, nevertheless, purely attributes to the fact that the evidence is there. The question still remains as to why local newspapers are using an increasing amount of court content in the first place. Why are these stories so newsworthy? This is where opinion begins to divide.

Criminology experts Whitehead and Cameron argue that they believe newspapers publish only make money, “First and foremost I feel the media report what they do, and in the way they do, principally to sell newspapers.” (Cameron, 2012, p. 42) In their perception, newspapers continue to poorly inform the public about certain subjects, such as sexual abuse and paedophilia. Whitehead noted their aggravation, specifically over the media’s over and misuse of the term ‘paedophile’. They felt that this word had been sensationalised and is now a label for all sexual offenders,

...[W]hat paedophile actually means is that your primary sexual focus is on children...[T]heir motivation for offending is not necessarily sexual. I do a lecture on the ‘myth of the paedophile’, and I think the press has got a lot to do with that. (Whitehead, 2012, p. 54)

Whilst newspapers are produced to make money, they might also have another function, “You don’t make money by telling people what they need to know do you? You make money by telling people what they want to hear.” (Whitehead, 2012, p. 55) Interestingly Ballinger states that sometimes certain stories from court are not published, simply because they are not interesting enough to sell the newspaper. Ballinger noted that there is some regret that this attitude is now common place, especially with concern to their agency counterparts, but they continue to try and produce the best court journalism they can,

...[S]ay if an agency covered that woman we were just talking about, then someone would want that copy, so I don’t think they don’t really need to go all out to make it fantastic. Whereas, just from my point of view, I always try and make like a really good court story that’s got proper, you know, all the information in it, that it’s legally sound and really interesting to read. (Ballinger, 2012, p. 11)

As an agency journalist, Davies provides a similar argument, although from a slightly different angle. The copy he produces from court is designed to be acceptable to a wide range of newspapers, however Davies (2012, p.39) notes that producing court reports is a livelihood and it is in his interest to produce an interesting a relevant story. Davies will often pick and choose facts from a court case, depending on the relevancy to the newspaper the copy will be sent to. Despite Davies fervour to produce a good piece of journalism, there is again the underlying point that he is motivated by earning a modest living.

The counter argument is that local newspapers invest so much effort in court coverage because they still want to fulfil their public service role in society. All three journalists unanimously agree that local newspapers still have a moral obligation to inform their community of issues such as sex offenders that have been convicted in their area. Harley elaborates by pointing out that she often has to fight for a story to be published. As Harley is present during most hearings of a case, she is sometimes subjected to very emotive

testimonials and evidence, which she feels should be put in the public domain, “I feel that it’s important, for them (the victims) as well, that you put the person in the paper afterwards. Because it is in the public interest and you can’t tell the public, to an extent what they’ve really done because it’s just too horrible.” (Harley, 2012, p. 23) As a freelance journalist, Davies (2012, p. 39) does not have the means to be able to persuade a newspaper to publish his copy, he has no control over editorial decisions.

The previous statement from Harley also pin points an argument surrounding the conscious decision to omit certain elements from a court report which, although may be interesting to the public, are not in their interest. From a sensationalist point of view, Harley (2012, p.24) reiterates that the selling of newspapers is not enough for them to print a court story, “From our point of view, even if people wanted to read it, I don’t think that alone would motivate us to do it.”

Cameron (2012, p.44) believes, however, that this attitude is subjective and that newspapers will publish and omit information as they see fit and in conjunction with their own morals, “I believe the media will only act in the public interest when it is congruent with their political and economic agendas.” As previously discussed in Chapter Two news values do not just concern the opinions of the organisation. The decision to publish a court story is also influenced by such aspects as their readership and also by society.

Whitehead (2012, p. 51) conveys the idea that court coverage and publication is completely random. He considers that the media presents the public with a distorted view of crime as, although court coverage is reported in abundance in today’s national and local newspapers, it is not publishing all cases which are accessible in court that day or week. Whitehead believes

that in order for the public to gain a true perception of crime in their area, they should know the details of all the crimes prosecuted, “Very often all sorts of stuff is picked and all sorts of stuff is not picked up, so on that level alone the public are getting a distorted impression of what is going on.” (Whitehead, 2012, p. 51)

Although a criminologist, Whitehead has been involved in the court process previously as he was once a probation officer. Working in the court has allowed him to realise what Harley, Ballinger and Davies have also made clear - all is not reported due to a severe lack of available staff at a local newspaper. Whitehead (2012, p. 51) does note that these random acts are down to a luck of the draw or whether a court reporter is present in the first place, “Well it just depends whether the local, paper employee happens to be in the court or not.”

Harcup (2007) notes in *The Ethical Journalist* that this selective nature of court journalism could lead to the demonising of certain subjects or types of people. Harcup discusses this further using an example taken from an interview of their own, conducted with Eric Allison a former offender turned court journalist. Allison recalls on a court story where a shoplifter had been reported on, “To suddenly be selective about one shoplifter ruined that woman’s life more than any fine that court could impose, no question about it.” (Allison, cited in Harcup, 2007, p.101)

This point links to what was mentioned by Cameron earlier, in that the public are being ill educated via the medium of court reporting and are receiving a distorted view of crime in their area and nationally.

Even with Harley's keenness to demonstrate that court reporters go the extra mile for a court story (2012, p. 24), I am not convinced that they portray a better representation of crime compared to any other local newspaper. There will surely always be that element of picking out a court story for its newsworthy components. As Whitehead notes, most crimes are considered 'boring' and would certainly not interest readers – so why publish them.

I mean all the literature in media and crime will tell you that we have a much distorted picture of this anyway as 98% of crime is desperately boring. And that sort of stuff doesn't get reported does it? There's got to be some excitement, there's got to be an angle. (Whitehead, 2012, p. 53)

Cameron (2012, p. 46), mentions that the media have helped the public to receive these subjects more readily as a by-product of their reporting. Exposure to these topics has allowed the public to openly discuss paedophilia and sexual abuse, but this does not mean they are discussing the facts.

Information concerning sexual abuse is more accessible and all the interviewees, at some stage, agreed that court reporting has helped to raise awareness of the severity of these crimes. Harley notes that sentences have increased dramatically over the past 20 or 30 years, "I think it was in the 80s, if a child was sexually assaulted then the maximum sentence was 2 years for raping a child and now, it's life." (Harley, 2012, p. 23) This is most likely due to the fact that these topics are more in the public eye and therefore readers want to see that justice is done.

Both Harley and Ballinger note that the court reporting still stands with an element of gossip to the local community. The public read such articles to gain information about people they possibly know. Ballinger notes that this is mainly why, along with a few key page lead pieces, the *Dewsbury Reporter* prints a court in brief section. (Ballinger, p. 3) Harley also

makes a point that the gossip component to court reporting is something which interests readers,

We've just started doing a court column with all the erm, with the cases that are on at the magistrates and the number of people who tell me they get the paper just to read it to see if someone is in it, is unbelievable! It sells more papers because people want to see who's been in court. (Harley, p. 16)

Ballinger also discusses an example of a local gossip case, involving a school teacher, whose story was published in the paper, "So I think there is an element of letting people know that a teacher at that school had done that but then also, you know, pure nosiness really." (Ballinger, 2012, p. 8)

Cameron and Whitehead argue that this 'gossip' side to court reporting has always been a reason for newspapers to print such stories as it helps to sell the newspaper in the first place. Cameron notes that a lack of public education in the subjects of paedophilia and sexual abuse, along with court procedures, has led to an impressionable audience. Cameron discusses that hearings in court are very mundane and matter of fact, allowing the media to have some artistic license when it comes to making them a little more readable and interesting.

Sentencing has become a part of this, and it seems that newspapers can easily influence their audience, "Sentencing is contentious and not well understood, leaving space to create coverage of 'lenient' or 'out of touch' judges and 'unjust' sentences." (Cameron, 2012, p. 49)

Whitehead (2012, p. 52) notes that due to their previous point of court reporting being random that the punishment is also random. This raises the question that this may not be fair on certain criminals as the effects are so unbalanced.

Both Cameron and Whitehead agree with the counter argument that this form of penance could also be seen in as a 'badge of honour', perhaps depending on the crime. Many offenders consider the reporting of their wrong doings as good publicity but as Whitehead suggests, there may some symbiosis between the media and these sorts of criminal,

So on one the hand you all these youths on council housing estates, trying to make a name for themselves and they've got kind of got an invested interest in having adjectives like 'heinous' applied to them. And the newspapers have an interest in applying them, so there's a little bit of symbiosis there. (Whitehead, 2012, p. 52)

To an extent this statement has some truth in it, as without these lawbreakers creating the crime, there would in turn be no court cases to report.

While it would be expected that those who are convicted of acts of paedophilia or sexual abuse would not want their name splashed all over the local newspaper due to the nature of their crime, Cameron suggests that, in certain circles, they too revel in the limelight, "Media coverage, that we may think of as shaming, may serve this purpose. Offenders have been known to send each other newspaper cuttings of their offences to enhance their credibility with each other and for sexual gratification." (Cameron, 2012, p. 48) Examples of this are mostly found in the US, where paedophiles are trapped and tracked down using social networking sites. The case of 19 year old student teacher, Luke Sadowski, was reported about the *Observer* in 2003. It noted that the police found, "[S]everal newspaper articles about paedophiles and child murders. One of the cuttings was covered in semen stains showing that Sadowski had masturbated over the stories." (Thompson, 2003)

Operations like this are also happening here in the UK.

Harley and Ballinger noted that media involvement in some cases may lead to a desensitisation of topics such as paedophilia. For example, in 2009, it was reported that a

‘female paedophile ring’ had been exposed. It concerned many areas of the nation, including Manchester, Liverpool, Plymouth and Portsmouth. Channel 4 subsequently made a national television programme surrounding those events, called *Cutting Edge: Breaking a Female Paedophile Ring*. The interest from the media was in the fact that these sexual offenders were not only female, but also mothers; a rare combination. This is also an excellent example of where the term ‘paedophile’ has been used incorrectly, as per Whitehead. These women, although involved with sexual child abuse, were not sexually involved with the children directly; therein lays the difference. They were tangled up in a larger paedophile ring, whereby they were making money from paedophiles by selling indecent images of children they had access to.

Ballinger argues that as a reporter, who is exposed to this sort of topic all the time, her opinion on this matter may not be the most reliable as they have become immune to these sorts of facts themselves, “[I]t’s difficult from a reporter’s point of view because you do sort of switch off to it after a while.” (Ballinger, 2012, p. 10) As the public are aware of it going on they want to continue to read about it, but it doesn’t necessarily shock them anymore. Cameron (2012, p. 44) makes the valid point that anything the media exposes the public to has the potential to create a fear or worry about that sort of crime, but as we read more and more about it we may come to accept it as an everyday part of life.

The subject of paedophiles in the local community is still quite a sensitive issue, hence why it is still such a ‘popular’ subject within today’s newspapers. Harley expresses a concern that, as a local newspaper, the *Hull Daily Mail* faces an internal dilemma. The newspaper does not wish to scare their community by constantly reporting about these subjects, but then again

they feel that they have a public service duty to fulfil, in allowing their readership to have access to such information,

We're very careful about printing too many as we don't want to scare people. But at the end of the day there are 15 a week at Hull, so it's tricky not to print them all. Which ones do you pick and choose the ones that are bad and which ones should go in and which ones should go in? From the reactions that we get from people, we get inundated with letters when they don't go in. So why shouldn't we put them in, as people are asking us to. (Harley, 2012, p. 22)

Harley also believes that people don't pay a lot of attention to how many court reports about sexual abuse are printed in an issue of the newspaper; the audience is concerned with the content and not the quantity.

Cameron makes a similar point concerning a lack of public interest to the bigger picture, which again also links to the lack of public knowledge on these topics. He implies that due to over exposure of these court stories, through media involvement, the public overlooks the victim and offender, seeing a general stereotype and simply see the crime without thinking about how it affected those involved, "Victims are neglected though – short term scrutiny is soon replaced with the next sensational story and the mid and long term effects of being a victim are often not reported." (Cameron, 2012, p. 47)

Although the media have seemingly got the control of the zeitgeist in one hand, they are also reacting to it as it changes and evolves. Local court reporting is following along the same path. It must adapt, not only to sell newspapers, which is the opinion of Cameron, Whitehead, Ballinger and Davies, but to also keep the readers informed of the societal changes happening in their vicinity, which Harley feels is a moral obligation.

Graph 'B'

The internet is now playing quite a large role in local newspapers. Further research on Graph A (Appendix B, p.7) on the volume of court reports which were published online on the website versions of the same four newspapers; *Huddersfield Examiner*, *Dewsbury Reporter*, *Hull Daily Mail* and the *Yorkshire Post*. Assuming that there would either be more or the same amount of court stories posted online, it was interesting to see that there was actually considerably less. Although it had increased year on year in correlation with Graph A (Appendix B, p.6), what could be the reasons for a difference in number published online?

A study into the future of British journalism from Professor John Lewis et al at Cardiff University (2006) noted that newspapers, both national and local, have admitted to showing a lack of interest in the online sector. Although it produces revenue from advertising, newspapers are yet to discover how money can be made from journalism. Lewis et al (2003, p. 10) also notes that online reporting has impacted on staff numbers, which could also be a reason why many papers are reluctant to invest more time in the internet, "In terms of overall editorial numbers, then, the internet has clearly had an impact – albeit fairly modest - on numbers of editorial staff."

This could also be a reason as to why it is difficult to keep up with the demand to update the website with the same coverage that is in the physical newspaper in the first place. Ballinger notes that despite the positive aspects of the website, it can sometimes be neglected, "The website is all well and good and helps us to keep our readers up to date but, erm, if it means that we'll be a man down, then it might not get updated until later in the day" (Ballinger, 2012, p. 7). Many newspapers, especially in America, have now got their own 'Internet

Information Reporter', who is a dedicated journalist to the newspaper's online needs. The NCRA (America's National Court Reporter's Association) outlines the growing popularity in becoming an internet reporter in today's media, "There are about 50,000 to 60,000 judicial, broadcast captioning, CART, and Internet information reporters in the United States."

(NCRA, 2012) However, as Harley notes, due to the relaxed access to courts in America their need for an internet information reporter is greater than here in the UK, "Because they can use television cameras, mobile phones and other stuff like voice recorders in their court rooms, it's a whole different game. They can upload it straight away, whereas we need to do the work first." (Harley, 2012, p. 26)

Davies notes that he often sees his copy in full in the newspaper but not necessarily online. More often than not the full story is not seen but may be still included in the 'court in brief' section, "I will frequently see a story which I covered, reported properly in the newspaper, but will only appear in the court summary on the website. I can only assume this is to cut corners." (Davies, 2012, p. 41-42)

Another point raised by Harley, is that despite the new and larger platform that internet court reporting provides a local paper, it also opens it up for further scrutiny. On one side it has been argued that court reporting on the internet can allow children and more sensitive members of the public to view unsuitable and uncensored information. Harley notes that this point of view could lead to further and new restrictions on court reporting. They argue however, that censorship of these subjects lies with the parent or guardian and should not hinder a journalist in their job,

I've been doing this job 8 years now and the most complaints we've received about our court reporting is from mothers or schools, about kids reading stuff on our website that they feel is inappropriate. Well, you want to tell them to sod off basically; there's worse thing on the internet than our court stories. Plus, we just don't have the time to censor all our content – people want their news and they want it now. (Harley, 2012, p. 22)

Another angle of this argument comes from the fact that some experts feel that excessive information posted online about court cases, on-going and closed, is that it could interfere with our judicial system. Joshua Rozenberg discusses this point on the *Guardian's* website, in 'The Twitter era of court reporting is here, despite the risk of prejudice'. Rozenberg notes that as our access to the internet on-the-go expands, using such applications as tablets, laptops and mobile phones, there may be a risk that juries could have their decision influenced by what they read online. Offenders on trial may have had previous convictions or may have been in the news before. The idea of a fair trial is that the jury must make their judgment based on what they have heard in court, not what they have read in articles, tweets and blogs. Conversely as the judicial system is powerless to stop such social platforms, the opinions and facts they read online could influence the jury's final decision.

Without relaxing our contempt laws, we must simply acknowledge that there is an increasing risk that juries will have read and seen things that are prejudicial to defendants they are trying. Judges must put much greater emphasis than they do now on explaining to juries why they are required to try cases only on the evidence they hear in court. (Rozenberg, 2011)

Harley notes that these 2 factors do hinder the *Hull Daily Mail* from omitting certain articles onto their website. I feel that this could heavily impact on their public service role, later on down the line. At the moment it is more than likely that their online readership is still pretty local, with the odd exception stumbling across an article or two. With this in mind, surely not publishing them on the internet, just to save an argument, is hindering the public from knowing about certain dangers, such as a paedophile in their community, "I know it

contradicts some of the answers I've given to you before, but sometimes we simply don't publish a court report online because we know we're going to get loads of calls asking to take it down. It doesn't make sense to me personally, as it's printed in the paper anyway!"

(Harley, 2012, p. 22)

Last but not least there may be another reason which was flagged up by both Davies and Ballinger. They noted that a local newspaper may publish less court reporting online, than they do in their newspaper, to keep their readers buying the actual paper. Online publications are usually free and so, although they often display advertising, they are not gaining any revenue from their audience. Newspapers such as the *Times* do have an option for a subscription should you want to read historical articles online. Ballinger states that small, local papers still rely on their regular readers and by keeping the majority of the content in the physical newspaper, it could deter people away from solely reading the website, "I'm not saying that we don't want people to go online but I am saying that we still want people to buy our newspaper. You know, we've got to keep them interested." (Ballinger, 2012, p. 7) This again links to the gossip element of court reporting and perhaps the 'court in brief' section is just sometimes not enough.

The reasons that have been discussed make a lot of sense but there is a sense of urgency from all three journalists, that newspapers are not making the best of their website, still. Davies notes that court reporting and the internet still have a long way to go, but the reality of it is that this shift may have to happen sooner than expected,

Court has not made a full transition to the online world, and I feel it's down to the fact that many of us are still quite old fashioned. Court still holds a great deal of nostalgia with a lot of journalists and, I may speak for myself when I say, we want to keep it as it is for as long as possible but there will come a point when it has to "upgrade". It's sad but true. (Davies, 2012, p. 41)

Chapter 5 – Police and the Media: Crime Management

Crime is newsworthy to the media especially concerning, as previously discussed, particularly violent or shocking crimes. This could be part of the reason why they are reported in local newspapers again and again. Matters which surround court are heavily restricted and so information can often be scarce. Journalists therefore rely heavily on their sources at court and this includes the police.

Trust between these two parties is often in question, with the media wanting more freedom and the police trying to rein them in. Garth Crandon, in 'The Police and the Media', concludes that the battle will continue for a long time to come, "[I]f the media cannot be trusted to act responsibly...[T]hen a completely open policy is unrealistic and unobtainable." (Crandon, 1992) Here Crandon, like most other theorists, greatly places the blame of the problems in this relationship solely on the media. However after speaking to both police and journalists about their current connections, the power seems to rest with the police and there is a lot of evidence to point towards some vast changes that have happened, perhaps only in the past couple of decades.

The survival of this affiliation is dependent on the co-operation of both the police and media to create the best court report possible, one which is legally sound and interesting to readers. Harley describes her relationship with the police, as anticipated. Harley claims to have an unchanged rapport with the forces and the staff at the courts and noted that they are often alerted by the officers themselves to stories which may be in their interest, "Now, they even come and tell me and I'm quite good friends with a lot of them. They come and say "Oh, you've got to come in this today; it's a really good story". So in that sense I've got fantastic

contacts at court and without that I don't think you could be a decent court reporter." (Harley, 2012, p. 17) Unfortunately this relationship is now a rarity and hails back to the 'golden age' of court reporting, which was described to me by Lightfoot. Police originally presented their own cases, they were very easy to get hold of and information was at hand all the time, "We got lots of information and lots of sources, and police in those days presented their own cases. So you probably had, in the court corridor, hundreds of policemen hanging around all to present their own cases." (Lightfoot, 2010) It is worth noting that both these interviewees are or have been resident court reporters for a specific local newspaper.

This nostalgic view of the police-media bond is quashed by Ballinger, the anonymous Chief Inspector and Police Press Officer, who unanimously bring this topic back down to earth. Due to the expansion of the media, not only on the internet but also on the television and cinematic screen, the police have, on the face of it, become very strategic in what they release to the media. The most effective tool they have created to do this is the Press Office, "Our press office is definitely a way in which we keep the media at arm's length. Sometimes there are stories which we don't need appeals for and therefore we won't need to release any information on it." (Anonymous, 2012, p. 57-58)

In spite of the Chief Inspectors vigour to keep the media in check, they did also mention that they would speak directly to some reporters who had 'earned the right' to be trusted by their constabulary. This category of journalist is represented by Harley in this study, who mentions that the police will often vouch for her when they are looking for more information, for example whilst interviewing victims, "[I] Interview the police; interview the victim – sometimes they set that up for you. They are more willing because the police officer has vouched for you and say that you're trustworthy." (Harley, 2012, p. 17-18)

This close relationship with the police and Harley is most likely down to the fact that they are at court all the time. Journalists in Harley's position are seen and heard on a regular basis, whereas local journalists such as Ballinger may be treated with less respect as they are not part of everyday court life.

Ballinger, notes that even as a local newspaper they are advised to talk to the police press office to gain any information they need, "Kirklees police have got a press office and they do like to go through there and, erm, it's difficult really because they have told us that their job isn't to help us out." (Ballinger, 2012, p. 4) Although Ballinger mentions that she has a good relationship with the clerks and court staff, she reiterates that her dealings with the Police directly are not as affluent as they could be. Ballinger believes that the attitude of those that work at court is different in that they still see themselves as members of the local community and in turn want to read about these cases in the newspaper too. This opinion holds a great deal of truth, as those who work in the court still live in the surrounding areas and the events that happen at their work place will also affect their outside lives.

While Ballinger may feel hard done by, she is treated much the same as other local journalists around the country. The Press Officer I interviewed mentioned that most of their day is consisted of talking to local journalists. They feel that this is their most important role and as they consider themselves as the voice of the police, they know how important their role can be when utilising the media, "The more contact, the closer the relationship and better the trust between both journalist and press officer." (Anonymous, 2012, p. 28) The press office is using the media to help with appeals for information, although they are contacted for other reasons, they will rarely contact the journalists directly unless there is something in it for the

police. Ballinger notes this as well, “There have been occasions where they hold stuff back, unless you ask them, and they’ll only really come to us if they want an appeal.” (Ballinger, 2012, p. 4)

One of the reasons behind this is that the police and press office are obviously more concerned about the victim and less concerned about the readership of a newspaper. Both the Chief Inspector and the Press Officer interviewed made this quite clear. Certain stories which include unusual or shocking elements will be pursued by the media, but if the police feel they do not need help in catching the criminal they will not contact the media about it (Anonymous, 2012, p. 59). Another example of this censorship is that when an appeal or press release is submitted to a newspaper, it may not include certain details which could affect the victim’s welfare. The Press Officer spoke of a case concerning a victim who lost their legs in an accident, but as this was not a detail which concerned the public interest, they simply said that they had been severely injured, “It’s gory details which we didn’t put out in our statement. Not because we are trying to hide this info, but our main concern is the victim and we putting out that info would affect their family and friends reading that in a paper. They printed it anyway.” (Anonymous, 2012, p. 34)

I feel this is where the real argument lies, in regards to the progression of a police-media relationship. The police and its press office clearly feel as though they are doing what is best for the public, but so do the media. What the forces see as necessary censorship, the media see as a hindrance. Both Ballinger and Harley state that they feel the police hold back information to ensure that the local communities don’t agitate the fear of crime in their area, but feel themselves that the public are already aware of the wrongdoing that happens locally and so the restrictions on certain material are a little futile. (Ballinger, 2012, p. 4) Harley also

argues that this obstructs the public service obligation, which allows a newspaper to inform the public of information they need to know. I would maintain that this may not be the case as some information may not be privy to the public regardless, but that it certainly adds to the argument that was presented by Whitehead in my previous chapter. By picking and choosing what should be released to the media adds to the fact that only random criminals are punished by being named and shamed in their community and possibly nationally.

This is a very good example of the 'gatekeeping' theory outside of the mass media, at work. Police and their Press Offices are extremely efficient at filtering information and any they feel is unnecessary will not make it outside of their organisation. Crandon notes this method of control is seen by the Police and the Press Office as being objective and not random (Crandon, 1992). Assuming that the role of 'gatekeeping' as a model of communication within the press office is very much the same as that of within a newspaper, I would say that this statement is misinformed. Press office 'gatekeepers' will be influenced not only by their own opinions but also by the opinion of the organisation and outside factors, which in this case will be the Police and the victims', as stated by the press officer I interviewed.

Ballinger also mentions that the police are afraid that the media may cause a 'moral panic'. Moral panics have been abundantly analysed by experts the world over. From *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* by Stanley Cohen to *Wikipedia*, everyone seems to have their opinion on the cause and effect of a moral panic. In terms of crime management it is difficult to determine whether or not the police have managed to control the outbreak of a moral panic surrounding court reporting and crime, mainly due to the fact that the 'fear of crime' has always been present in most communities. I would also argue that the interpretation of media is also down to an individual and is not necessarily a societal decision, as Frank Leishman et

al suggests. Some studies have also shown that it may not necessarily be the sheer amount of articles printed about a certain subject which leads to a panic but also that the media discourages any support for the law in the first place, “They (researchers) see the media as fomenting exaggerated concerns about crime with the consequence of undermining popular support for the law, thus legitimating undemocratic and authoritarian forms of policing and criminal justice.” (Leishman et al, 2000) It is most likely not the small local paper that is to blame and, as Leishman also notes, the recent mass expansion of the media, such as the internet and television, has allowed the public to be more easily influenced and to therefore feel more anxiety about certain subjects.

The media, however, have their own tactics. A lot of what has been discussed in this chapter boils down to the fact that the local media is trying it’s best to sell a newspaper. With a lack of information some newspapers are forced to gain information from unofficial sources. The press officer noted that they are aware of this and despite efforts to maintain some control, more often than not the media will print what it wants, “In terms of what media print - they are able to get certain info from sources or unofficials. Therefore in the long term we can navigate a story but the final print is down to the media.” (Anonymous, 2012, p. 34)

At first glance from the points raised in this chapter it could be said that the relationship between the police and the media is not healthy. Although both parties are acting in favour of their industry it could be disputed that neither have the needs nor best interests of the public in mind.

The creation of the police’s press office has certainly ‘put the back-up’ of many journalists whose relationship with the police is still needed. Harley again has represented what the

police-media relationship may have been like 20 years ago and has probably managed to get a foot in the door at the right time. Harley owes her unique journalism to her sources and is quite aware that she is lucky to still have such exclusive contacts, “[I]n that sense I’ve got fantastic contacts at court and without that I don’t think you could be a decent court reporter.” (Harley, 2012, p. 17) Ballinger, along with the majority of other local court reporters, may not speak so highly of her sources.

Harcup (2007) notes that thanks to such sources as the Press Office, some journalists have become comfortable and simply regurgitate information, given to them on a press release. Eric Allison, interviewed by Harcup, speaks highly of journalists such as Harley who have kept their relationship with the police healthy by not getting too cosy and also questioning them at the right times, “[M]ake it a healthy relationship and don’t jump into bed with them. It’s a cosy little club. Journalists are invited into that club, and the lazy ones join it. Basically, journalists should be outside the club.” (Allison, cited in Harcup, 2007, p. 103) This is not to suggest that other journalists such as Ballinger or Davies are not good at their job. Although this statement is agreeable it does not take into consideration the fact that some journalists now no longer get a look in with the police whilst court reporting, as they have no familiarity – I can imagine this would be an especially difficult task for freelance or agency court reporters.

Nevertheless a symbiosis has definitely revealed itself in that the media needs the police and the police needs the media, whether or not the motivation is to benefit them rather than to work together in unison. There is no question that the police utilise the media to their advantage when it comes to circulating an appeal, for example in the search for a missing child or for a criminal on the loose. This exploitation of the media is seemingly not an issue

and the media are fully aware of it but what they possibly will question is as to why they are approached with some information and not others. This may have led to some form of rebellion and it is now not uncommon for the media to get information from unsolicited sources; no matter how dangerous that is in terms of legality, they will run the risk if it gets them a good story.

What the media seem to have missed is that they too are a user in this allegiance already. As Crandon illustrates the police are strategically used to help a newspaper sell, especially local papers, “History shows that crime news was used particularly by the pamphleteers of the 17th Century where motivation was profit. This is still a prime mover in the shape and development of the media production.” (Crandon, 1992). The media withdraw information from the police to ensure they have the most interesting story to sell to their audience. Nevertheless, the police co-operating and releasing that information almost gives them the upper hand in this once again. As Crandon also notes the police recognise that a media audience crave a “murder-a-day”, or in the case of this study a “paedophile-a-day” and therefore react accordingly. Interestingly there is argument for a third control in all of this, the consumer. Their demand not only influences what the media prints but also in turn how the police respond to the media.

Contrary to the beliefs of the journalists interviewed, the press officer noted that they felt the police’s relationship with the media was more open and that a trust had been forged between key players. (Anonymous, 2012, p. 33) I would question this in terms of court reporting, as from what we have gathered in this chapter many journalists are not able to talk directly with the police as freely as they used to.

Keith Butterick (2011) notes an example where *Guardian* journalists Nigel Green and Duncan Campbell argue that this media-police relationship is continuing to deteriorate. Green (2008, cited in Butterick, 2001) and Campbell (cited in Butterick, 2011) suggest that the police, in a bid to control the media, are deliberately withholding information from journalists and that this is happening nationwide. Campbell (cited in Butterick, 2011) does, however, note that many individual journalists like Harley will still have established contacts. Nevertheless Butterick (2011) does offer the counter argument that the results of Rob Maunby's (2006) study show that 79% of police constabularies in UK maintained the policy that all officers were to liaise with the media.

These points raised by Butterick illustrate that the connection between the media and the police is being misinterpreted by both parties who are still battling to gain complete control. However, linking back to the ever decreasing amount of staff at a newspaper, it is more than likely that the police will be contacted by less and less familiar journalists in the coming years, only adding to the negativity surrounding this already strained relationship. The metaphorical bonds which have been made between police and such journalists as Harley, and even in some cases Ballinger, will be no longer.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The importance and future of local court reporting in newspapers is still a mystery. What can be concluded from my research is that it is still an influential part of everyday journalism in regards to both local newspapers and their communities.

Currently, court journalism is the invisible back bone for local newspapers, providing substantial, newsworthy and important human interest stories to their readership. However its contribution seems to be going unnoticed and is severely underappreciated as a form of journalism. Contributing factors, such as a loss of staff and an increase in agency journalism which were considered in Chapter Two, have lead to the responsibility of court reporting being passed from one journalist to another. As Ballinger notes (2012, p. 2) agreements between agencies and local newspapers are now in place, where court copy can be shared, simply due to the fact that there are not enough hours in the day to go out and get these stories via their own journalists. The loss of court specialists is a major hit to open justice, as Marcel Berlins notes in ‘Loss of court reporters is a blow to open justice’, for the *Guardian’s* online newspaper, “The demise of so many local and regional newspapers and the intense financial pressures, which have caused even the survivors to reduce drastically both staff and coverage, means that we knew far more about what was happening in our courts 50 or 20 years ago than we know today.” (Berlins, 2009)

The results of my research have shown that Berlins is not far from the truth. Although the increase in court reporting, seen in Graph 1 (Appendix B, p. 2), is an encouraging sign that newspapers can recognise that court is a source for significant stories, the fact that certain

subjects of crime receive more coverage than others is a cause for concern; as per Graphs 2, 3 and 4 (Appendix B, p. 3 – 5).

As we have seen from Chapters Two and Three, the theories of newsworthiness and gatekeeping show that the media are aware of what they are publishing. Ballinger and Harley (2012) note that such court stories as Shannon Matthews and Anthony Dockerty would always be covered as a matter of course, due to their subject nature. Both journalists state that such cases are published in the public's interest as they should be made aware of dangers in their neighbourhood and they still see themselves as a public watchdog, which is the main purpose of court reporting. As seen in Chapter Three however, coverage of the same story in a local newspaper differs to that in a national. It appears that once a story is picked up by a national newspaper, the angle of the court case is changed and factors which may only affect a small minority are blown out of proportion. This links back to a point made in Chapter Three whereby the national newspapers are creating societal monsters, such as Karen Matthews, who are a one in a million criminal but are being portrayed as someone who could quite easily live around the corner.

Although personal bias and opinions are a contributing factor to which stories get published over others, outside influences such as the readers are what the newspapers focus on.

Whichever stories sell, are published and for many local newspapers this is the underlying issue. Despite wanting to publish in the public interest, with finances and staff at all time low for small newspapers such as the *Dewsbury Reporter* and *Spensborough Guardian*, there is little room for court cases which, although help to give a better impression of crime in the area, do not interest the public.

As noted by both Whitehead and Cameron (2012), the random nature in which court subjects are now reported could be providing a distorted picture of crime, not only nationally, but also in readers' local communities. A lack of education on crime statistics is what can lead to moral panics, like the one we are currently facing regarding paedophiles in our society. This is also accentuated by sensationalised coverage in national newspapers.

Court reporting is ever changing and due to its journalistic merits, reporters are constantly pushing the boundaries to gain access to more court cases. For example, in April 2009, journalists were able to enter and report on cases which took place in family courts for the first time. Dominic Ponsford, noted in 'Family courts: more journalists must pick up the torch' for the *Press Gazette* that *The Times* had campaigned long and hard for family courts to be opened up to the press, resulting in them winning a British Press Award (Ponsford, 2009). This is both an example of how passionate papers are about their court reporting and the lengths they are going to, to expand a good resource of topical stories. Ponsford reiterates an example of how difficult, at first, reporting on the family court was, "Russell Jenkins reporting from Manchester found his case "impenetrable" and was told that he would have to apply to a High Court judge to see the court papers." (Ponsford, 2009)

Heavy restrictions surrounding the reporting of family court have deterred journalists from going there in the first place, and many see this as a 'shame'. Even judges themselves have spoken out against the lack of interest in family courts from journalists. Judge Lynn Roberts, from the Principle Registry of the Family Division in London, comments in Paul McNally's article 'Judge's concern over lack of family court reporting', in the *Press Gazette*, "It would be helpful if the public got an idea of what's happening on a day to day basis rather than the

spectacular celebrity cases. I think it would be very good for more people to understand how we reach these very difficult decisions.” (Roberts, cited in McNally, 2009)

This enthusiasm has pushed Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, into proposing that restrictions on family court should be relaxed, meaning that journalists will be able to report on matters from witness reports to child abuse allegations, all under similar orders that are present in a youth court. Straw, cited in McNally’s article ‘Jack Straw: Family court reporting rules to be eased’ for the *Press Gazette*, commented, “Family court play a very important role in our society, and the decisions they make need to be transparent so that the public who use them have confidence in them.” (Straw, cited in McNally, 2009).

The face of court reporting doesn’t stop changing there. As newspapers move forward into the digital era, the influence of the internet will continue to grow. Although it can be seen as a contributing factor to the decline in newspaper sales, this does not necessarily mean that online newspaper content will dramatically change.

This confidence in court reporting’s sturdiness within our press rises, not only from all the evidence gathered so far but also from the fact that court coverage has been a part of online journalism for a long time. Journalists, such as Stimpson, have already cottoned on to the fact that the fast pace of court news transfers well in to online newspapers. This is down to the fact that the court story is much more relevant, current and easily followed online compared to that of the printed word. However, this may also be a contributing aspect to the decline in newspaper sales. Due to newspapers still being unable to find a way to make money from their online newspapers, apart from advertising, much of their readership have moved to getting their news online instead; why pay for your news, when you can get it for

free? Stimpson notes that local papers often place their court coverage online the day before it is printed in the actual newspaper, effectively shooting themselves in the foot (Stimpson, 2010, p. 70). Despite this lapse in judgement, whether it will add to the issue of the internet killing off newspapers altogether is another matter. Nevertheless, it is uplifting to hear journalists such as Stimpson holding onto the hope that newspapers, local and national alike, will still be around for some time yet, “You’ve still got a lot of traditionalists in this country, who like their local papers. It’s just something that they’re used to, especially the older people, but as you see that generation die out, you may see it dwindling.” (Stimpson, 2010, p. 70)

Court could also be seen as altering itself through necessity. As seen in Chapter Five court journalists are now also facing tougher scrutiny from both the court and the police and are therefore being encouraged to challenge both public bodies. Courts are often put under pressure from defence and prosecution counsel, who apply to place certain reporting restrictions on their case before it faces trial. As these instances become more frequent, the Press Association are advising journalists to swot up on their legalities in order to challenge to challenge such restrictions. Such outlets as the *Press Gazette* provide journalists with a checklist on what to do in this situation, with the help of such legal editors as Mike Dodd, from the Press Association. Dodd notes examples such as, “A Section 39 order to ban the identification of a man accused of paedophilia offences to protect his family – object on the grounds that Section 39 does not allow a court to order anonymity for an adult.” (Dodd, cited in *Press Gazette*, 2008)

The relationship between the media and the police, on matters of court, will always remain strained. Unfortunately journalists like Ballinger, Davies and Stimpson have described the

harsh reality that the police are now, not in a position to trust them. This could possibly lead to the affiliation between police and court journalists growing further apart, until everything is liaised through the police press office. Both parties are exploiting the other to get the upper hand. It is understandable, as both the Press Officer and Ex-Chief of Police note that their job is solely to protect the victim and their family. However, this sometimes does hinder the media from doing their job as a public watchdog.

Ultimately, but hopefully not in the too distant future, local newspapers will most likely disappear altogether. At this point the sensible move would be to publish online, meaning that their court reporting will follow suit. This, in its own right, could be a constructive step for local court reporting. With less pressure and a wider audience to cater for, a larger variety of court case topics could begin to appear, as well as local interest stories. However, thanks to the internet being so easily accessible by children and others who are sensitive to certain information, there could be an argument to suggest that restrictions should be placed on what can be published online.

Nevertheless, for the moment local court reporting is still alive and is more than just an article; it is part and parcel of the community. As Harley (2012, p.15-16) notes knowledge of the local area can help to bring a court case closer to the reader's hearts. This can also mean that a one page lead could help to produce several follow up articles in the future; especially if it had also been picked up by the national newspapers, as seen with Shannon Matthews and Sarah Payne. Denis McQuail (1987) notes that the media often promotes a sense of belonging and membership in the community and calls it the 'positive centripetal' function. Court reporting lies firmly within this theory, in that knowledge of a crime can bring readers together through a mutual opinion on the subject. Despite the fact that the opinion may be

misinformed, the reader is invited to take part and feels they can relate to the story on a personal level.

Although this research has some negative results, there is always the positive underlying outcome that court reporting is still thriving in a long suffering industry. The basis of the ‘Get me a murder a day’ attitude is surviving, ascertaining that newspapers haven’t given up the fight to publish their ideals from the ‘good old days’ of journalism, “It would be a very brave or foolhardy news desk that decided they were going to try and produce a newspaper which did not contain any court reporting at all.” (Davies, 2012, p.41)

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Appendix A

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Transcription of Telephone Interview with Lauren Ballinger (Journalist for the Spenborough
Guardian and Dewsbury Reporter)

Miriam (M): So is court reporting erm, a prominent feature at your newspaper?

Lauren Ballinger (LB): It's important because we know that it makes interesting copy, and, you know it the type of thing people want to read about.

M: Yeah, and erm, at your newspaper I mean is there a specific court reporter or crime reporter?

LB: No we don't have any, anyone specific to do that.

M: And how come?

LB: Erm, well because of staffing reasons really. I mean, since I've been there, which is sort of five and a half years, we've never had a specific court reporter. Erm, and we've even less staff now so we just don't have the erm, the people really to, you know, devote one person specifically to that.

M: So do you use things like agencies and what have you?

LB: Erm, yeah. What we erm. We cover as much as possible, if we can't get there and if an agency's gone, erm we'll use agency copy. Erm, we have an agreement with one agency in Leeds that er, we can use anything that they've got and in return they can use our stuff, and sell it on. Erm, and we also erm, other Johnston Press papers, such as the *Yorkshire Post*, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, we use their copy because, with it being Johnston Press copyright, we're ok to use it.

M: And what do you think readers are losing out, erm from, and erm by not having a local court reporter?

LB: Well, I do think that if u sit in court, er, as a reporter you, there's things you'll pick up just by being there. Er, we get court registers every day but they give you just sort of brief details of basically what the offence is. Erm, but, erm, if you're in court you can sort of hear the details of what's, you know, the sort of the crime that's been committed and pick up things that you wouldn't have otherwise got without actually being there. So I think erm, you can lose out on some interesting stories, erm, and perhaps, you know, maybe pertinent details to the local area that an agency might not know. For example, erm, I don't know, they might not think it was important that say, somebody was a member of a group or something like that. But you know that's something that we might feature. Like a, you know, like a community group or something like that.

M: Yeah, and erm, I mean what do you think, erm, local readers gain from court reporting? So, I mean, is there an element, is there still an element of gossip?

LB: Yes, I think so yeah, because er, as well as sort of stories, we also do a roundup of what, you know, the sort of reports and we call it "the court report" and it'll just be a little paragraph on each person from that area who, erm, has sort of committed a crime. They might just be driving offences or not paid their TV licence, but I do think that, you know, people do like to read – well I know they do, because they tell us – they like to read that and say "Oh, you know, so and so has got done for not paying their TV Licence" or whatever.

M: And erm. Sorry, I just...Do you think that, erm, in the national press that they report court reports a little bit differently than what you do?

LB: I think so, because, erm, national I find, you know when I've read national papers, they tend to sort of sensationalise things a bit more and, you know, really sort of hype it up.

Whereas, I think, what we try and do is just try and stick to the facts. You know, I mean, we

haven't got the money to be paying off people if we report things wrongly, or, you just have to be so careful.

M: And do you still have, erm, a rapport with people at the court even though there's not somebody specific who still goes down there? So you are still able to get like, more information out of people than agencies are.

LB: Er, yeah I think so because, erm you know. Especially in Dewsbury because the magistrate's court is just over the road, you know you'd pop in and I'll speak to the clerks or the ushers or even the security guard, you know. Sometimes have a chat and I think once a lady who works in probation rang us up and said "Oh, you want to come over and do this." So, you know, because they know us and they see us, er, you know, they will sort of tip us off for stuff as well. And, because they live locally, erm, I know that they read our papers as well and I mean, I think other stories have come from that too.

M: Yeah, and in regards to the police, erm, do you still have a good relationship with the local police as well?

LB: Well, erm, Kirklees police have got a press office and they do like to go through there and, erm, it's difficult really because they have told us that their job isn't to help us out. You know, it's to er, you know, well I think. I think their job is to keep stuff out of the newspapers sometimes; they're really frightened about people's perception of crime, like the fear of crime. I think they feel like having too much crime in the newspaper makes people frightened of their areas. You know, that it's a bad area, and I think, well we all think at the newspaper that it's a bit short sighted really, because everybody knows that it goes on. But erm, they're not very, they can be quite unhelpful really. There have been occasions where they hold stuff back, unless you ask them, and they'll only really come to us if they want an appeal.

M: And has that changed, do you think, since the earlier days of court reporting? I know that, obviously you yourself haven't been at the paper for very long, but have you spoken to anybody there who has been there for quite some time and they've noted that it's changed?

LB: Yeah, you will hear sort of, members of staff who've been there longer or been journalists for a long time, saying, you know, they used to go and sort of have a cup of tea with the police, you know. Just go round and say "what's gone on here then", you know. They will sort of, I think, in the past they would have told you stuff. Erm, we did used to have a quite a good inspector at Dewsbury, and he'd say "Oh well, you know, I didn't say this, but this happened". But he got moved on quite quickly, and it was always my suspicion that it were because he got too friendly with the newspapers really.

M: Oh right. Erm, I'll talk a bit more specifically about the Shannon Matthews case now. So, what made that specific case appealing towards your newspaper?

LB: Well, erm, I think really, it's something that we would always cover, you know. A child that was so young who had run away, or well, you know could have run away, gone missing. Erm, I think we felt at Dewsbury, that we had perhaps a responsibility to the community to help find her, because that's a role a newspaper can help play. Helping out the community and that. Erm, and I think erm, really you know it was, with them all being local people who were involved, as well as, erm you know, sort of talking to the family and finding out how they were coping, it was also how the community was coping and how they were involved too. You know, just, sort of just trying to be part of it with them I think.

M: Yeah, exactly, and why do think it was picked up by the national press?

LB: Erm, I think, because she was only 9 years old, she was quite a young age to, you know, to run away. For example, that's really young. And then, you know, I think straight away

someone...some figure came out, or something that said, that you know, if a child that young goes missing, they don't believe that they're going to be alive after 24 hours. If things like that are coming out, I think, you know, the nationals are thinking "Oh, there's going to be a murder", you know.

M: At the end yeah.

LB: Could be quite juicy.

M: Yeah exactly. And, erm, why was this particular case picked up by the national press and not another one of a similar nature? So, say erm, you reported on a case where a little girl went missing, a lot of the time they don't necessarily make the nation press, erm, so why do you think this one did?

LB: Erm, I think that's probably down to her age really. I mean, erm, when they start getting into their teens they just expect that they've gone, that they've run away or whatever. But I think you know if it's a young child there's probably, you know, a suspicion that something, sort of, untoward has happened. And then, you know, Dewsbury as well had been in the press, quite recently because of the links to the suicide bombers. And erm, as well there was also the contrast of the Madeline McCann case, with her going missing too, because they were obviously a wealthy family, erm, intelligent, you know, I think they were both doctors. Er, and then you've got, with that a total contrast which is single, well she wasn't with the...Shannon's mum, she had 7 kids by 5 different fathers. Obviously, you know, [she] lived on benefits and that, and erm, I think there was that sort of, I don't want to say "snobbishness", but looking perhaps with a critical eye, at you know how she's brought up her kids. What sort of conditions they were living in and that sort of thing.

M: And as a local newspaper, did you try to derive away from that, when you were reporting about it?

LB: Yeah, because erm, you know I don't think it's anybody's place to criticise really. You know, she could have just been...well, you know, it's not really appropriate when a little girl's gone missing. All we were trying to do was keep everybody up to date with what had been going on and not criticise at all. At the end of the day, that's her mum, whose daughter's gone missing and that's the way we were looking at it at the time.

M: Yeah. Yesterday, you said that you were a weekly newspaper, so did you use things like your website to keep everyone up to date on it?

LB: Yeah, because erm, then really, I don't think we were as hot on the internet as we are now, you know. The website is all well and good and helps us to keep our readers up to date but, erm, if it means that we'll be a man down, then it might not get updated until later in the day. It's not something we're putting 100% into yet, I'm not saying that we don't want people to go online but I am saying that we still want people to buy our newspaper. You know, we've got to keep them interested. But we were using it each day that something happened, erm; we'd be putting on an update. And I mean there were updates every day, because the police would be going out searching or there's be press conferences or whatever. And in fact, the night that they announce that Karen had been; I think she'd been charged or perhaps just arrested or something, I had to go to the press conference and I was there until half past ten at night, so I put that straight on the website. Because we're competing with dailies then, you know, we wanted to do everything we could to try and do that.

M: Yeah, and do you think that you've seen an increase in reports on sexual offences throughout your time at the newspaper? Or do you feel it's been more of a constant – it'll always appear and it always has?

LB: Yeah I think, since I've been there at least, it's always been something that we would cover. Depending on the nature of it, you know, we always sort of, people who say they've got like 50,000 indecent images, we'd always go to court for something like that. Because they're the sort of things that people like to read and think "Oh, that's terrible", and be a bit, sort of scandalised or whatever. I think in my time, I don't think there's been a particular increase or anything like that, it just seems quite steady.

M: And do you think that these stories are being reported because it's still in the public interest to know about a paedophile you area? Or do you think it's more towards the fact that it's interesting to the public? Obviously you're trying to keep ratings up at the newspaper.

LB: Yeah, I think it is really more because it's interesting to the public, rather than of the public interest. Erm, I think, you know that there is an element of letting people know locally that this person, you know, has committed a sexual offence but also because people are nosy and they are just interested to know what's going on. Yet, in fact, when I was at the *Mirfield Reporter*, which is a sister paper of the *Dewsbury Reporter* a teacher there, got erm, convicted of sort of...he was trying to groom young boys on the internet. He pretended to be an 18 year old girl and he pretended, you know, "oh if you send me a picture I'll send you one back", that sort of thing. He was a local councillor as well. So I think there is an element of letting people know that a teacher at that school had done that but then also, you know, pure nosiness really.

M: Yeah, and I suppose if you were a parent yourself, you would want to know if this was happening. Erm and I think that all comes from what happened to Sarah Payne, and Sarah's Law and I think it's kind of escalated since then as well. Erm, do you think that reporting these [court stories] is sort of adding to the moral panic of paedophiles in your area and so on?

LB: What was that sorry?

M: Erm, ever since Sarah Payne and Sarah's Law came in, there seems to be a sort of moral panic surrounding it. Do you think that reporting on these still adds to it or do you think people are just as concerned as they were when it first came out?

LB: Yeah probably because that is often in the news, isn't it really. I can remember when that happened, because that was the whole *News of The World* thing, wasn't it? When they printed all these paedophiles living locally and that sort of thing? Yeah I think erm, you know, people are still wanting to know is there a paedophile living near them.

M: Yeah, and do you think that, you said it was less about it being in the public interest than it was about it being interesting to the public. Do you think this is because people are getting more desensitised to these story lines and they are just looking for sensationalism?

LB: To be honest, I find that quite hard to say really. As a reporter, it doesn't really bother me that much. Dewsbury Magistrates court, for some reason, seems to get all the people who have been, you know...it gets a lot of paedophiles for some reason; people who have making indecent images and that. So because I read them every day it's like "oh, another one, another one". The last time I felt particularly shocked, was when I saw, it's one that's happening at the moment actually, I don't know whether it's a brother and a sister but they've been making pictures in Batley.

M: Is it a Dad and a daughter?

LB: I don't know, because there is only 3 or 4 years in between them.

M: Oh right, ok.

LB: Somebody, like Miss Hanna and Mr Hanna they're called. And erm, there's only two, I think she's two years older than him and they've both been, it says, making indecent images but that can either be taking them or downloading them. So, god knows what they've been doing and nothing's happened yet but when I saw that I thought "Eugh, that's not very nice" but I don't particularly get upset when I hear it in court because, I don't know, I can switch off to it really. But I don't really know if I wasn't exposed to that all the time, I might, you know, I might be able to...it's difficult from a reporter's point of view because you do sort of switch off to it after a while.

M: Yeah, definitely and that's why I'm thinking with it being reported quite a lot, I wondered if people were also starting to get desensitised to it; they weren't as shocked anymore. But then, you do get stories, like the one you were explaining there, where there's a slight twist – they're brother and sister – and that's like a whole new level.

LB: Yeah I think probably, you know when it's sort of, I don't want to say run of the mill, but when it's like a typical person who's been downloading porn, they [the public] might not think it's very nice. But when there's the added sort of, if it's a brother and a sister. And then there was the woman, wasn't there? Who was taking photos of children in that nursery; there was a documentary about it on telly. There was a man who got all these four women involved and got them to take pictures of the nursery children. I think they were called little something...I can't remember what it was called.

M: I do remember the documentary, it was on quite recently actually wasn't it? And the whole angle of that was, erm, it was because it was a woman and you wouldn't totally expect a woman to do it, but why not? And I think that, that actually shows again that it goes from local news to national papers and then all of a sudden, it gets blown up into something that is completely different. It gets put in magazines and talk shows and. I mean, even

documentaries. So yeah, obviously all of the media is picking up that these kinds of stories are erm, interesting to the public.

LB: Yeah, because, like that's not particularly in the public interest, it could be somewhere that's 300 miles away from them but it's just something that's so horrible. I do think, you know, like when you say there's that added element of it being like, a woman involved or something, people get like really "Oh god".

M: Yeah, exactly, and yeah. So, moving a little bit away from that, do you feel that the art of court reporting itself, not necessarily how many are being published, but the actual art of it is dying out?

LB: Erm, I think...well...just my own personal thought on it, is really erm, if we're writing a court story...I don't know because I've never worked for an agency or anything like that but we're trying to sell papers and they're, you know, they know if they write something like...say if an agency covered that woman we were just talking about, then someone would want that copy, so I don't think they don't really need to go all out to make it fantastic.

Whereas, just from my point of view, I always try and make like a really good court story that's got proper, you know, all the information in it, that it's legally sound and really interesting to read. From the copy that we get from agencies, I don't think they put the same care into it.

M: Yeah, exactly. And do you think that erm, I mean as a local court reporter, is there a slight feeling of regret that you don't get to sit there and listen to all the little stories that might make interesting pieces and what have you?

LB: Yeah definitely. I mean, we all say, time and time again we would all love it if we had our own court reporter because then, you could just sit there for a day and you could pick all

sorts. And everyone is of the same mind about that. I think there may have been days at the *Dewsbury Reporter* when that happened, when you could just sit there and...it's like I said, you when we get the listings and there's no information on there just basic details, but if you did sit there, you could pick up on all sorts of little things. I think I told you yesterday about erm, a woman who erm, all it said in the list was that she'd not complied with a noise abatement notice, but it turned out she was playing music really loud and a police man had gone round and she shouted "Oi you bald bugger". In fact I've just remembered another one erm, same thing, not complying with a noise abatement notice but because a reporter was in court we found out that it was one person who had been playing a Mariah Carey song on repeat for about 2 days!

M: Ha ha, Brilliant. Erm, do you think that, in the end, I mean "in the end" as in it may be only a few years down the line now, that local papers will solely use agency copy for court reports?

LB: Erm, well, if things keep going the way they are with staffing levels. I mean, for example the *Spensorough Guardian* there's a news editors and two journalists and that's it. You've got to fill a newspaper with that. I mean, I don't know if you know much about it but our group is Dewsbury, Mirfield, *Spensorough Guardian* and *Batley News*, and in there we have about 9 change pages – so each individual paper has 9 pages and the rest of the paper is the same. They've done that because we just haven't got the staff to fill, you know, a full newspaper. You know, the way it's going, we're just not taking on. I mean, there's been recruitment since I've been there and we have taken on new people but it's always on a case by case basis – we've never opened it up to recruitment. And it just seems like, newspapers are in trouble anyway and I think we will end up...because it does take up so much time covering court, you could spend a day there and not get anything, like at crown court for example. So you do

spend a lot of time sitting waiting around, we just don't have the staff to go and do it. So, yeah probably.

Transcription of Telephone Interview with Nicky Harley (Court Reporter for the Hull and East Riding News and Hull Daily Mail)

Miriam (M): You said you were the court reporter for your newspaper, how long have you been doing that?

Nicky Harley (NH): For 8 years.

M: Right ok. Have you done it for any other newspaper?

NH: Yeah, I've worked on 5 papers, erm and this one for the last 8 years.

M: And is court reporting like, a prominent feature at your newspaper?

NH: Erm, they are very keen on it. Erm, at other papers if worked at they've not had court reporters, but obviously they have the role here and they're quite keen to keep it at the moment. So, erm, a lot of our stories are court related. They tend to go in the paper, so, erm, yeah, it is something that's quite important for the paper I'm on at the moment.

M: Right, ok. Brilliant. Are you the only specific court reporter at that newspaper?

NH: Yes.

M: Right, ok. And has there always been a court reporter there?

NH: Yes.

M: Right, ok. Have you seen a change in the way that, erm, court has been reported throughout your time there?

NH: Erm, in the sense that, if I want a story in the paper – what we call a page lead, which is like, you know, a big story with a picture to go with it –if you've got a really good story, a court story but it has no picture with it, then it won't go in the paper. Or it won't be the big

story; it'll just be a really tiny piece because you have to have pictures with all your court stories now. Erm, which is a bit tricky when people are in custody. Erm, and unless you've taken their picture before they've gone into court, because sometimes they are remanded, and so you don't get their picture. So it's a bit frustrating. In that way the job has changed. Erm, I'm just trying to think... we still do as much court as we did, for the last 8 years it's not really changed much really, just that we push boundaries a bit more with every story really.

M: Oh right, ok, brilliant. Is it only your court reporting copy that you use, or do you use agencies?

NH: Erm, if it's at the court of appeal, then we'll use an agency from the court of appeal in London - unless we've gone down our..., unless I've gone down there myself to cover it - because it's cheaper doing that. Erm, or if maybe, erm something's happened elsewhere in the country then the agency send us the copy but otherwise we wouldn't use any other copy, because usually we've covered it ourselves.

M: And have you seen an increase in the use of agency copy, since your time there?

NH: No, probably a decrease, erm, because I cover it really. Because I do it myself.

M: Ok, brilliant. And what do you think a reader can gain from a court report from a local court reporter, rather than that from an agency?

NH: Erm, you're writing for a local audience and you know the local landmarks. An agency reporter, this is made redundant, as they aren't just writing for that particular paper, they are writing for a number of papers, or for the national papers - and they're sending a general story out. Whereas I will be writing a story, for our local readers. For example, today, I did a story on erm, on a guy who'd erm, broken into a sewage treatment works in Hull. But, these treatment works, when we had all the flooding in 2007, a lot of people were involved and the

floods devastated a lot of the city. And because of the damage that this guy caused in his burglary, it stopped the pumps working, and in court they said that he had endangered the lives of the people in the city because if we had had a big flash flood, it wouldn't have been able to get the water out of the city in time. Er, so, because you know the background knowledge to it, and you know about Hull floods, I could put all this in and local people would understand. Whereas if you out some agency copier in there, they maybe wouldn't have realised that there was a lot bigger story to it than just some guy burgling a sewage treatment plant.

M: Yeah.

NH: In that sense, I would say that it's better because you've got good background knowledge and local knowledge.

M: There's sort of that familiarity with people reading their local newspaper isn't there?

NH: Yeah.

M: And do you think that there's still that, erm, sort of gossip element about local court reporting? Where someone might know who they're reading about?

NH: Erm, we've just started doing a court column with all the erm, with the cases that are on at the magistrates and the number of people who tell me they get the paper just to read it to see if someone is in it, is unbelievable! It sells more papers because people want to see who's been in court.

M: Yeah.

NH: Erm, and, er, I'm just trying to think...I can't remember what I was going to say, sorry.

M: No it's fine. It might come you later. Erm, and, do you think there's still nostalgia to local court reporting? So erm, do you still have a rapport with staff and other people at the court?

NH: For me, I probably get on better with the people at the court than I do with the people in the office. Because I work 9 till half 5, unless something big happens, I leave the office at half past 9, so I'm only in the office for half an hour; whereas I'm at court all day. So I see the people at court more than I do the people I work with. And for me, the best way of getting stories is to make friends with the ushers, the clerks and the barristers. And you ask them if they've got good stories or ask them what's going to be on in the court. Now, they even come and tell me and I'm quite good friends with a lot of them. They come and say "Oh, you've got to come in this today; it's a really good story". So in that sense I've got fantastic contacts at court and without that I don't think you could be a decent court reporter. You'd miss too much stuff because it's too busy for just one person to cover and obviously, we don't have the staff for us to be able to have more people down there. But erm, you rely on the contacts down there, otherwise you'd be missing stuff.

M: That's sort of what agencies miss out on isn't it? That whole...

NH: Yeah, well because they're coming and going, dipping in and out just for the big cases, they don't know the people, they don't have the contacts. I mean they only know about stories really because they're following up from what we've written in the paper.

M: And do you still have a good relationship with the police as well?

NH: Yeah, yeah, erm...it's the same thing really. They usually ring me or text me when they've got something good on in court, just saying "follow this case through". Or, for after the hearing, like with robbery cases I always grab the officer on the case. Interview the police; interview the victim – sometimes they set that up for you. They are more willing

because the police officer has vouched for you and say that you're trustworthy. If they do that, the victims are more likely to speak to you whereas, they might just say no otherwise.

M: Ah right, brilliant. And do you think that, although you've said that the relationship between the media and the police hasn't changed, do you think that it is no more the police utilising the media than the other way around?

NH: Yeah it has changed in that respect. They (the police) are a lot more scared to say stuff, in case they get in trouble. It does feel like all they want in the paper are positive stories because that's what they're being told. So then when we put court stuff in, it's not good because it's raising the fear of crime. Whereas we say, well no, sorry, it's important. Because this is happening, people need to know that this has happened on their street and maybe be a bit more careful. No point, we can't not put it in the paper because people need to know what's happening, you can't pretend it's not happening. On the other hand, I mean, some police officers are like that but a lot of my contacts are still down to earth, sensible people and help me out. You know, and they're happy to do a good story; when a bad guy's been jailed, they're more than happy to shout it from the roof tops.

M: Brilliant. We'll concentrate more on the Anthony Dockerty story. What made that particular story appealing and newsworthy to your newspaper?

NH: Erm, for us, erm, it was a sex case anyway. So we cover all the sex cases, when I say that I mean paedophiles and sex offenders. It was an important story for us because he was a teacher at a local secondary school, where I think there was over 1500 or 2000 pupils there. I mean, you'd have say 4000 parents then, who would need to know that this is happening. The school never sent anything out. Without us reporting it, the teachers and the parents' wouldn't know. And there might be other victims out there because he would have had access to a lot more students than just the 3 who were involved in the case. So it's important that we

report cases like that, because there might be more victims out there who will come forward when they hear that there are other people and they will be believed.

M: Yeah.

NH: And also for us, when we do cases like that, we put in helplines and stuff, where they can get help and things like that.

M: Are there other cases similar to this that have been picked up but not written about or published on the newspaper?

NH: Er, I wouldn't have thought so. If we'd covered any cases like this we've always put them in the paper because our policy is people need to know who they are really. Some sex offenders don't get a very long sentence and are released quite quickly and it's important that erm, we publish what they've done. We had a case this week when I was on holiday, so we missed the case and we've been inundated with phone calls from this man's work colleagues saying that "Is it true, because someone had said it was true but it hadn't been in the paper", so they weren't sure if it was or it wasn't. Then we said, "Yes it is, we'll cover it. We'll follow it up now." So we have done that. I feel it's important to put them in, even if it's only a small piece.

M: Yeah. Why do you think that the Dockerty case was picked up by the national media?

NH: Because it involved a school girl. She was willing to talk to us too, some of them aren't. And because she was willing to talk to us, they figured that they could probably pay her to talk to them as well. And they did, that might be why. But also because, I think it was because it was two students that had erm, that he had targeted and it was the extent of what he had done. And also some of the stuff he'd done was a bit erm, especially for the nationals, it was a bit, I want to say the word 'kinky' and they quite like that sort of thing. Like people

dressed up in nurses outfits and they (the nationals) quite like that sort of thing in their stories.

M: Has to have an unusual angle sort of thing?

NH: Well, I think it's more a bit, of just like a saucy story and they thought "ah a school teacher making school girls dress up and whatever" and they took it as a bit of a laugh really; when really it's a serious case and we wouldn't have reported it in the same way they did.

M: Yeah. So you, as a local newspaper, reported it from a different angle to the national newspapers?

NH: We're a family newspaper and you're writing for a family audience. I think the national's headlines would have been something like 'Saucy nurses outfits' and it's all done quite tongue in cheek, whereas we wouldn't have done that. I think I did write that in my piece, but it was sort of buried and we didn't make a big thing of it. Whereas they (the nationals) had pictures of like people in nurses outfits, that sort of thing. We wouldn't have gone along the sort of 'sexy' line because we're talking about a school girl who's been abused by a teacher. It's quite serious.

M: Yeah exactly.

NH: So we would have gone along the more serious angle and more on him being a danger to people really.

M: Yeah. Do you feel that there's been an increase in reports on sexual offences throughout your time at the paper?

NH: Yeah, there is and there has been. It seems now I have, i mean just today alone I think I had 6 in court today and this week I've had...I'd say I'd had about 15 this week in court. I

mean, going back a few years ago, you'd probably only have about 4 a week. Now, there does seem to be a lot and there does seem to be an increase in historic sex crimes. But I think because we report it and say what's happened, I think to the average person, it's becoming more normal, and more acceptable for them to come forward and say it's happened to them. The majority of the sex cases is more, sort of, family stuff where erm, Dads or Uncles have abused a daughter or something like that. Or even a Son, and they're all coming forward now and a lot of the abuse dates back to the 70s and 80s, some in the 90s. But people seem to be a lot more willing to come forward now.

M: Do you think this is sort of a knock on affect from Sarah Payne and the introduction of Sarah's Law, so people are more willing to come forward and give their story?

NH: I don't know if that's why. I've interviewed hundreds of sexual assault victims and I don't think they think like that. I think, for them, it's always personal and I don't think they look at the wider picture really – I think they just look at what's happened to them, and it's when they feel they're ready to come forward. I mean, yes it's helped to make it more acceptable and for them, they feel like they're not going to be vilified for coming forward and because they realise other people have. But I wouldn't say that, I mean...I don't know actually. I've had a couple come forward because they've found out that the person is working with children and they don't want that. They've come forward because they're worried. For example, there was a teacher called Mike Paige, who was a deputy head teacher of a secondary school, in Hull in a special school. A few weeks ago I did a story on him and it was a historic sexual abuse case and he also had loads of child porn on him. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced at court and in that case the guy had come forward to say that he had assaulted him because he found out he was a teacher.

M: Do you think that this topic of sexual abuse could still cause a moral panic amongst a community?

NH: I'm not sure. We're very careful about printing too many as we don't want to scare people. But at the end of the day there are 15 a week at Hull, so it's tricky not to print them all. Which ones do you pick and choose the ones that are bad and which ones should go in and which ones should go in? From the reactions that we get from people, we get inundated with letters when they don't go in. So why shouldn't we put them in, as people are asking us to. But then on the other hand, I've been doing this job 8 years now and the most complaints we've received about our court reporting is from mothers or schools, about kids reading stuff on our website that they feel is inappropriate. Well, you want to tell them to sod off basically, there's worse thing on the internet than our court stories. Plus, we just don't have the time to censor all our content – people want their news and they want it now. Because of this, and I know it contradicts some of the answers I've given to you before, but sometimes we simply don't publish a court report online because we know we're going to get loads of calls asking to take it down. It doesn't make sense to me personally, as it's printed in the paper anyway! I wouldn't necessarily say that people are panicking because the number of cases I've had where, in fact I've had an increase in erm, like Facebook grooming cases; people groom school girls and then on go Facebook, pretending that they're a little boy when they're not. I've had a lot of those cases. And its parents who, you'd think were erm, like one girl's parents one was a social worker and one was a journalist and you think, surely people who do those jobs for a living would be aware of that. They'd been very naive and let her go to some guys house that she didn't even know and that had never even met and this little girl was only 13! You think, well I wouldn't have done that with my kids, but no matter how many of these cases we put in the paper, I don't think many people pay that much attention.

M: So do you think that this type of story is being, not over reported, but do you think people are becoming desensitised to it?

NH: Yes. But I also think it's a reflection of the things like that we see on television now. We have TV programmes on things like that and because they are aware of it, because of the major cases like Ian Huntley erm and maybe the Sarah Payne case with Roy Whiting, people are aware of it and people want to read about it. They're a bit, they like stuff like that which, I don't know why – it keeps me in a job I suppose!

M: I see where we're going here. Although they have been sort of desensitised to the actual point of it, to the shock of obviously a child being sexually abused, it's now being brushed over. It's now more interesting to the public than in the public interest – would you say that's right?

NH: I don't know. I think it's still in the public interest. Because, for example, not sure but I think it was in the 80s, if a child was sexually assaulted then the maximum sentence was 2 years for raping a child and now , it's life. You think, well, that should be right for, you know. The cases that I have to sit through and hear, it's horrific. What I report in the paper is actually only around 10% of what's actually said in court and when you see the victims giving evidence, it's so sad. I feel that it's important, for them (the victims) as well, that you put the person in the paper afterwards. Because it is in the public interest and you can't tell the public, to an extent what they've really done because it's just too horrible. When you've listened to that you feel that you need to do something right, and it's in the public interest to do that. I mean, I know you said...erm...can you ask me the question again sorry.

M: Yeah, I said even though...erm, sorry I've forgotten now!...I said something about the public brushing over the point of it, so is it less now in the public interest and more just interesting to public? Sensationalised stories etc.

NH: No. From our point of view, even if people wanted to read it, I don't think that alone would motivate us to do it. From the paper's point of view I would say, that we'd have to do it in the public interest. At work it's sometimes a fight to get these cases in the paper, as they feel they're too horrible to report. I have to fight to get bits because, I'm the one that's been in court and I've heard what the witnesses have said. So I say, you know, we're letting this person down by not putting it in the paper and we really have to tone it down to get it in. But, no, I wouldn't say we put it in because it sensationalises it. It's definitely more for the public interest, and even then I have to push them to put it in sometime because they, work, feel that they're too horrible to be published.

M: Do you think there is a difference in local papers that still have specific court reporters, like yourself, compared to those local newspapers that don't have one which have to use agency copy? Do you think they think differently? You're saying you have to fight to put these stories in sometimes...

NH: Yeah I think they would, because they receive copy, they've not been in court. When you've been in court, you've heard all the evidence. If you've just got a story that lands in front of you, you'd say "Aw, I'm not bothered about that" or "Yeah, that's a good story, we'll put it in". You might just think "Aw it's another sex case. Not interested." Whereas, if you've been the person who's actually sat in court through it and you've heard a like a little four year old girl saying stuff, then you think "Well, erm, this is absolutely horrific, we have to put this in the paper" and I would fight for my stories. And also, I think, when you're in court there's a lot of legal argument and you get a lot of background to cases from the legal argument, which you can't write about when the court case is on, but you can as soon as the jury come back; as soon as it's over. It could be about someone, for example I did a murder case, a murder trial and it was all these accounts where he had tried to strangle loads of his partners and everything, and none of the other media knew that because they hadn't been bothered to

sit through the whole trial. So we had a great background package and we went and spoke to all the victims afterwards. We only found all this out because of the background legal argument. If you were just sat there, in an office just receiving that agency copy, just sent to you on the last day of the hearing, you wouldn't know all the background to the case. You wouldn't be able to interview all the victims in court, you wouldn't be able to interview the police officers at court and now, any evidence that's shown in court like videos, CCTV and photos, we're allowed to request it from the CPO afterwards. Well, if you weren't court, you wouldn't know that was available, erm, you wouldn't know who to ask and also, you have to be there on the day to take the photos back with you. So they miss out on all that as well. We were short listed for the National Press Awards in London this year, because we do packages of stuff like that. You've got the victims, you've got the evidence and you're providing a really good show for the readers so they get to see everything. If you just take agency copy you wouldn't know that unless that agency person had done everything you had done. I doubt they would do that because, I know the people I see don't do that, I mean, only I do it.

M: You're still quite unique being a court reporter at a local newspaper. I've been talking to other journalists and they share the responsibility, erm, do you feel the art of local court reporting is dying out?

NH: I think so, yeah. I can't imagine, erm, I mean for us I think we'll always have a court reporter at the mail, because they bring in such good stories when it comes to it. But erm, at other papers, erm, I don't know. I'd say it probably is, I mean, when I trained 10 years ago, I never, ever imagined I would be a court reporter; it was never what I wanted to do. I just sort of applied for the job and got it. I only applied for it because I was at our Bridlington office and I wanted to show a bit of initiative and I wanted to show that I wanted to progress in my career and they gave me the job, which I was a bit surprised at! But I've really loved it and

I've really got into it and I couldn't imagine doing anything else now. But I couldn't imagine other journalists thinking the same thing. You know, I never imagine I'd be doing this in 10 years' time.

M: It's depressing, because I studied journalism at university, obviously, and there isn't a module for court reporting which is a shame. I only stumbled across it at a work experience that I did at the Journal and Chronicle in Newcastle.

NH: Oh yeah, you did work experience there?

M: I did, yeah, and they just sort of sent me to court to just get rid of me, but afterwards, I was there every day and I loved it. I think, as you said, you can't imagine yourself doing anything else and I do believe that people fall in love with it. I take it you know short hand, just out of curiosity?

NH: Yeah, of course! To do court you need short hand because everything, the Magistrates court isn't taped but everything in Crown court is taped. So if you don't have it in your short hand notes, what they've said, they can check and they'll know what you've written is wrong. And then you could be pulled up in front of the judge for contempt. I've got 120 words a minute, but you need to have your shorthand because you need to be able to prove and you need to get it verbatim. I mean, court reporting's not that hard, but the short hand part is. The pressure of not getting it wrong – you have sleepless nights to start with! You get worried that you'll have messed up. Then once you get in to it and once you get the confidence, you're fine but initially it was a bit nervy. That's certainly the case for Britain anyway. In America because they can use television cameras, mobile phones and other stuff like voice recorders in their court rooms, it's a whole different game. They can upload it straight away, whereas we need to do the work first.

M: Short hand's not taught at university either, anymore. It's actually an extra. Do you feel any regret that other newspapers have a lack of time in court? Sorry, I mean, they're losing out on the local interest stories, do you they regret it, even?

NH: Yeah, I think it's because they haven't got the money and because they haven't got the staff, they can't spare someone to go to court every day, so it's easier for them to buy agency copy. But then, what we produce for our paper, I mean this week for example, I've had 3 front pages just with court stuff. So you think, well, it shows it's worth it as it's bringing in, you know, big stories and we're quite a big paper, so you're competing against other people so you need great stuff. I mean for court to get on the front so many times, it shows that it's worth it for us. It's beneficial and we wouldn't have had those stories because I know, I was the only one in court for them. So if I hadn't have been there for them, nobody would. There is a freelance who works at Hull and erm, but he's not always there so we would miss out and I think other people must be missing out on a lot but I don't think they can afford to do it because they haven't got the staff. The staff they have got, are sort of chained to a desk, ringing up people on the phones all day, instead of being able to get out of the office.

M: What do you think will eventually happen to court reporting? Do you think it will just purely become agency copy in the end?

NH: Erm, it might do yeah. Because people won't be able to...unless...in the end they won't be able to afford to have court reporters and when they find out about the big cases that the police tell them about and they get tip offs about, they'll go for the sentencing and hearings. But the rest of the time, they'd have to rely on agency copy to be sent to them, I would have thought. That's what they do now, already.

Transcription of Online and Email Interview with Anonymous (Press Officer for the
Metropolitan Traffic Police, North East and Yorkshire)

[19:45:23] **Miriam Phipps-Bertram:** what is your exact job role?

[19:46:28] **Anon:** press officer, north east

[19:46:49] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: What does this role entail?

[19:51:10] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: u still there?

[19:52:04] Anon: Day to day answering reactive media enquiries via phone and email for our respective areas. Speaking to our officers about over night incidents. Producing Witness appeals with and without CCTV for incidents, and sending to media. Managing up coming court cases - forward thinking to media interest. Crisis management for major incidents. Producing statements for incidents and sending messages to the public regarding safety advice. Maintaining reputation of the organisation to the public and media

[19:53:04] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Thanks!!

[19:53:23] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Do u have much contact with the local press in your respective areas?

[19:56:06] Anon: Everyday, this is one of the most important part of our role. To keep in contact with crime reporters with TV radio and press as we rely so heavily on these key contacts to publish appeals and CCTV images of people we aim to identify in their area. The more contact, the closer the relationship and better the trust between both journalist and press officer

[19:56:29] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: cool!

[19:56:57] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: And do you have the same relationship with reporters at national newspapers?

[20:00:29] Anon: With our appeals we usually need regional interest to ID them - nationals wouldn't pick up on a small scale assault but may if it was an unusual kind of incident. If it is a national operation or initiative which nationals would pick up on - we know who to go to because of previous contact through media enquiries. So yes a relationship, but not as tight. The head of department or more senior staff would have those close relationships with these journos.

[20:01:35] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: When writing up a press release on a court case, would you send the same copy to both the national and local/regional papers?

[20:04:38] Anon: If it was of national interest we would send the press release post sentencing to the nationals

[20:04:43] Anon: But

[20:07:34] Anon: There are court cases going on all of the time. To try and keep up with every case as a press office would be impossible. Therefore we look out for big cases, interesting cases and send media advisories to media before the sentencing to get them interested and hopefully get them to come. As I'm -Simon- in the north east it's hard for a national to come to the court. So they usually rely on their my press release or the words from a local agency who can easily get down to the court and report on it. We send all advisories to agencies too. A key agency for your area is Ross Parry

[20:08:45] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: One of my other interviewees from here mentioned Ross Parry too

[20:09:07] Anon: Yeah, I speak to them fairly often

[20:09:59] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Why do you think nationals are only interested in certain court cases? For example, the Shannon Matthews case

[20:11:27] Anon: Good question!!!

[20:12:34] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: do u want me to try and rephrase it?

[20:12:41] Anon: Ok so I think there's a few factors. Slow news days firstly.

[20:12:54] Anon: Yeah rephrase please

[20:13:54] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Why are you sent to cover certain court cases, for example stories such as Shannon Matthews, whereas similar cases might be disregarded?

[20:16:55] Anon: Shannon Matthews was massive news when she went missing, her family did lots of interviews with BBC and sky pleaing for her return. Therefore when it comes down to the court case - because nationals have already covered it and pretty much the whole world knew about it - it would get huge coverage.

[20:17:58] Anon: Some of those interviews may have been arranged through the press officer and the family, then again the press could have just knocked on her door and her family did the interviews there and then

[20:20:22] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: What do you think makes a sexual offence case interesting to the press?

[20:20:36] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: There must be so many that happen every daty

[20:20:54] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Why do some get reported and others put to one side?

[20:24:29] Anon: I think it depends. To start off with the victim is the main priority here. If the suspect is unknown and the police need witnesses to come forward a proactive appeal may be put out quickly to get people to come forward with info

[20:27:37] Anon: Then again, if the victim knows the suspect, and they are apprehended - and we don't need witnesses. Then an appeal wouldn't be necessary. To consider the community we want to reassure the public they can go about their daily life. Wording is very important in sexual appeals.

[20:28:22] Anon: I think also sensationalism

[20:29:03] Anon: A sexual or inappropriate touching somewhere is not as interesting for the press as a rape

[20:30:55] Anon: Or like the guy in pimlico who was found in a suitcase - thought to be a sex game gone wrong or something? I really don't know too much about it but it maybe worth research and looking into. That was picked up again because of it's unusual circumstances

[20:31:28] Anon: Or again a celebrity. If they were just touched, not even a serious sexual assault that would be picked up

[20:32:19] Anon: It's all about what is newsworthy

[20:36:39] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: you talked about sensationalism

[20:37:08] Anon: Yup

[20:37:12] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Do you think that these types of stories are still reported in the papers in the public interest?

[20:37:56] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Or do you think that they're reported about because they increase readership and are interesting to the public instead?

[20:39:03] Anon: Honestly? I haven't a clue!

[20:39:11] Anon: You're doing the ma

[20:39:18] Anon: You tell me

[20:42:19] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: I'm not looking for the real answer - just your opinion

[20:46:15] Anon: No but really I don't know. From experience we've given info about an incident that a journo has asked about and given the simple facts and not disclosed the full unnecessary gory details. For example, if someone is hit by a train and loses their legs but survives, we confirm the details that a person aged whatever was hit and as a consequence was taken to hospital for treatment because those are the facts. If they had there legs taken off it isn't necessary. Then in tomorrows paper, the headline was something like person has legs sliced in train horror because someone who witnessed it has told them that. The victim is the main concern

[20:47:26] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Cool

[20:47:45] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Have you found yourself being more and more involved with sexual offence cases?

[20:47:53] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Or has it been consistent?

[20:49:22] Anon: Consist, haven't seen an increase at all

[20:50:01] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: Thanks

[20:50:14] Miriam Phipps-Bertram: What is your relationship with the police?

[20:51:05] Anon: I am the police. Press officers are a way for the police to speak to their communities publics and stakeholders through the media. We have close relationships with senior officers h

[20:51:13] Anon: To get key info quickly

At this point, this interview had to be cut short, due to the Press Officer having a previous engagement. The rest of the interview was conducted through email. See below:

1. Do you think the relationship between the press and the police has changed from the past?

You may know yourself, but may have heard from more senior members of staff.

I think from what I understand the police have become a lot more open with the media and a trust has formed between key players of police forces and the media. Look up the crime reporters group or something like that. Where police and media talk in a forum about policies etc.

2. Do you think that it is more the police utilising the media to their advantage?

I think the media are an extremely useful tool for police to put out messages to their communities and publics. As for taking advantage, we cannot control what they publish. We can give accurate information and stats but the overall article is what the media decide to publish.

3. Is this to avoid moral panics?

Communities are our main concern. We want people to feel safe and secure. Moral panics may form from a 'fear' that is unnecessary and raises issues in the future.

4. Do you think your role plays a major part in controlling the media?

I believe we control legally what information we can issue regarding an investigation or ongoing court case. In terms of what media print - they are able to get certain info from sources or unofficials. Therefore in the long term we can navigate a story but the final print is down to the media.

5. Does it always work or have there been times when the media have got their hands on information that the police did not want to digress?

I think the example of someone losing their legs is a good example here. It's gory details which we didn't put out in our statement. Not because we are trying to hide this info, but our main concern is the victim and we putting out that info would affect their family and friends reading that in a paper. They printed it anyway.

6. Do you think as time goes on that the police will have a tighter rein on the media?

With many media outlets losing journalists and crime reporters especially on local papers decreasing many young journalists starting off may not have the same knowledge of forces as the older specialised journos have. They may also not have as much experience of the legality of reporting on investigations what can and can't be said. As for whether this will give a tighter rein on stories I really don't know. Hopefully with frequent communication and understanding between the two, stories will be presented fairly and in the public interest

Transcription of Email Interview with John Davies (Freelance Reporter for Bradford-based
Crabtree's Press Agency)

Below is the set of questions which I sent to John Davies via Email:

- Have you always been a freelance journalist?
- If you have worked for a newspaper, were you there court reporter?
- What drew you to court reporting in the first place
- How important do feel court reporting is to newspapers?
- Is your work picked up more by local or national papers?
- Have you seen a change in court reporting during your time as a free lance journalist?
- Do you have to change the way you write a court report depending on the type of newspaper? I.e. Local or National
- If so, how and why?
- Do you feel that, as you've been at Bradford Crown Court for some time, this gives you a better rapore with the court staff?
- Do you still have as good of a relationship with the police as you did at the beginning of your career?
- Are they less or more inclined to give information to journalists than they were in the past?
- If so, why? / If not, why not?
- Why was the Nathan Whitehead case of interest to the Huddersfield Examiner?

- Why was this case published in the Examiner and not another of a similar nature that may have happened recently?
 - i) Have there been any examples of other court reports of sexual offences (especially those involving minors) written up and not published?
 - ii) If so, why?
- Why do you think the Nathan Whitehead story wasn't picked up by the national press?
- Do you think there is a formula for what makes a story translate from a local to a national newspaper?
- Do you feel there has been an increase in reports on sexual offences making it to the national newspapers through your time as a freelance reporter?
- If so, do you think that that it as a knock on affect from Sarah Payne's case in 2000, which consequently resulted in Sarah's Law?
- Do you feel that these types of cases are still in the public's interest?
 - iii) Will these types of stories have a consistent impact on society?
- Or do you feel that these types of stories are being over reported – appealing to what is interesting to the public and their need for sensationalist story lines?
 - iv) Are newspapers, instead, responding to the pressure of trying to boost readership numbers?
- Do you agree that the public are becoming desensitised to these court reports?

- Do you feel there is regret amongst court reporters that there is less interest in the smaller more local stories?
- Do you think court reporting is experiencing a transition from experienced court reporters to using agency staff?
- Do you think this will mean that the quality of the reports will diminish?
- Will agency copy eventually replace court reporting altogether?

Below, are John Davies's answers:

I have been working as a freelance reporter for 25 years and joined the Bradford-based Crabtree's Press Agency straight from journalism college.

Initially my interest was in sports reporting and Crabtree's at that time covered football, rugby and cricket matches as well as the courts, inquests and council meetings.

In the 1980s a local paper was more a paper of record, as well as providing information and entertainment to its readers, so it was necessary for all kinds of meetings, events and sporting activities to be covered by a combination of staff reporters and agency staff.

Crabtree's during my time has employed up to six staff covering all kinds of stories in the Bradford area for both the local papers and the nationals, but over the years interest in some aspects have diminished significantly.

The use of press releases from councils and other agencies has led to only very limited coverage of public meetings and events and over time my personal interest has moved more towards the crown court work which I have done almost exclusively over the last decade or so.

Court reporting itself has been affected by the use in many local papers of so-called "court in brief" columns which are simply a list of details about court cases usually heard in the magistrates.

The vast majority of my work these days involves covering important cases at Bradford Crown Court for the local media such as the Huddersfield Examiner, the Yorkshire Post, Halifax Courier and Yorkshire Evening Post and it is essential that I am at court on regularly basis to maintain my contacts with court staff, barristers and other parties to ensure that I am aware of all the significant cases being dealt with.

As I have to cover eight courts on my own it takes experience, planning and occasionally good luck to make sure I am in the right place at the right time to get all the stories I need to earn a modest living.

Obviously I have my own list of stories I need to follow but often new stories can pop-up on the day and I have to be ready to respond to that.

I think that was the case in the Nathan Whitehead sentence. It was a Huddersfield area sentence so I had to check it out and discovered that the case involved child abuse.

Although I have been told many times over the years that newspapers don't want too many court stories it is self-evident that every court story is also a human interest story.

In respect of the desire that justice should be seen to be done it is very often the case that I might be the only member of the public sitting in court for a particular case so it is essential that I report the details accurately and fairly.

As a freelance I have no control at all over whether any story gets into the paper and my income depends entirely on how many stories they use.

From an economic point of view I have to ensure that the report is both interesting to read and is sufficiently serious/unusual or relevant to the local area for it to make it into the paper.

Very few of my stories reach the nationals. This is partly due to the fact that there are other freelance agencies with better contacts who "cherry-pick" the most sensational/serious cases.

Also the nationals are only usually interested in cases involving "celebrities" or crimes of particularly gruesome or unusual nature.

The Whitehead case was unusual in the sense that the victim herself had played a role in helping to bring him to justice which is probably why the Examiner gave it some prominence, but the nationals would only have been interested if the girl had done more "detective work" to track down and catch her abuser.

The nationals would also probably have wanted various contact details for the girl and her family.

Cases of child abuse have always been significant ones as far as local papers are concerned as they often cause feelings to run high in the local community. I feel it is important that such cases are reported locally as it gives people the chance to read the relevant facts of the case as well as the sentences handed down. Without such accurate reports there is a danger that rumour and speculation could cause more problems for those affected by such cases.

The vast majority of child abuse cases will never make it into the national papers however.

That probably means that when one does it is usually accompanied by particularly distressing or sensationalist details.

Obviously for the any national newspaper to consider using a story it has to stand out among stories submitted from all over the country so by definition they are nearly always sensational or out of the ordinary.

Over the years the number of staff at Crabtree's has declined through retirement and people moving on and that has coincided with a decline in the number of experienced court reporters.

Although local papers encourage their own staff to cover courts when possible they usual have several other jobs to do as well and they do not always get the grounding needed.

In the current economic climate with papers cutting back on staff to the minimum it seems impossible that the courts could be covered properly without the use of freelance reporters to supplement their own staff. For example, I will frequently see a story which I covered,

reported properly in the newspaper, but will only appear in the court summary on the website.

I can only assume this is to cut corners.

Court has not made a full transition to the online world, and I feel it's down to the fact that many of us are still quite old fashioned. Court still holds a great deal of nostalgia with a lot of journalists and, I may speak for myself when I say, we want to keep it as it is for as long as possible but there will come a point when it has to "upgrade". It's sad but true.

It would be a very brave or foolhardy newsdesk that decided they were going to try and produce a newspaper which did not contain any court reporting at all.

Transcription of Email Interview with Chris Cameron (Senior Lecturer in Criminology and
Politics at the University of Huddersfield)

My research has been based around the social impact and importance of court reporting, and looks specifically at sexual offence and abuse cases; especially those involving young children and minors.

My interviews with local journalists raised a debate. Some state that they have seen an increase in the amount of sexual offence cases they are reporting, and others say that they have seen no change at all.

We might assume that the same amount of crime was being committed a decade ago, but going unreported due to the nature of the subject, for example female paedophiles.

The same journalists stated that they had seen an increase in the amount of historical cases coming forward.

- Do you feel that the media has helped to make certain subjects more socially acceptable? i.e. sexual abuse to very young children

First and foremost I feel the media report what they do, and in the way they do, principally to sell newspapers. In this respect it is essential to them to continually open up new topics for reporting. Sex sells as does novelty, and the sexual abuse of children fits very well with here with other 'newsworthy' topics. As a by-product, the public profile and to a lesser extent public understanding has increased. Lack of properly informed public opinion about victims, sex offenders and their treatment under the criminal justice system means the media are likely to continue to be a considerable influence on public perceptions.

- Do you feel that without the media, these crimes would still be seen as "taboo"?

The media have raised the profile of issues such as child sexual abuse. There is a section of the public that may feel able to discuss this more readily – although I have reservations about the extent to which this is a well-informed discussion much beyond the agenda set by the Tabloid press.

- Do you feel that, in this case, the media is doing a service to the public and reporting in the public interest?

The media claim to report ‘in the public interest’ but very frequently their reporting is formulated around their perception of what the public is interested in and therefore will buy. If reporting does not accurately and fully inform the public (and it often does not) it is difficult to sustain the argument that it is doing the public a service.

- Do you think that the media, especially local newspapers, still have an obligation to report on the court's events?

The media will report court events to the extent they feel the events are newsworthy. If there was a public consensus that reports of court activities were essential they would be published, in a similar way that the proceedings of Parliament are available to us. There is no obligation upon the media beyond their remit to sell their product.

- Do you think that having their face in the paper, still contributes to the criminals punishment?

The role of the media in ‘shaming’ criminals is a potentially powerful one, both in terms of being an individual and general deterrent. It is, however, limited by the extent to which the offender feels shame. It is worth bearing in mind that for some offenders having a picture in the paper or on TV is a ‘badge of honour’ to be shared and appreciated by other offenders. For others it becomes ‘life defining’ and it increases their propensity to offend.

- Could this be one of the results of the public being subject to over exposure to court reports?

Firstly exposure to any form of media may cause sensitisation that is; we (the public) worry about and get fearful, as a result of crime reporting. Alternatively, it may cause ‘desensitisation’ as we become accustomed to reading about offending and accept it as just another inevitable part of our lives.

- Do you feel that, if some of the journalists I interviewed are right and the increase of crime and court reports is on the increase, the public could become desensitised to certain subjects?

As above, it is a possibility. It is also a convenient reason to continue to report ‘novel’ crimes in the continued pursuit of sales.

- Could this be forcing the media to report on more and more unusual stories to “shock” their readers?

If the public are desensitised the media have a responsibility to recognise this and it’s potential for social harm. They are in no way forced to produce ever more shocking stories except to sell their product.

- Do you think that the media, in this case, is pandering to the public and reporting what they find interesting, rather than what is in the public interest?

I believe the media will only act in the public interest when it is congruent with their political and economic agendas.

- Do you think that defies the point of court and crime reporting?

Only if you believe there is a point of court and crime reporting beyond selling media products.

- Do you feel that court reporting and crime in the media is experiencing a transition in its position in society?

Crime reporting has changed greatly over the last century or so. It now occupies more physical space in the media. It has become nationally and internationally available and reports in greater detail on more types of crime. It is increasingly available through the new media technologies such as the internet, Smartphones, I pad etc making it even more accessible both in terms of where and how soon we can access reporting. The opportunity to share news and comment upon it are increased by new social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The potential for crime reporting and its extension through new technologies is one potential transition.

- I have noticed a lack of literature surrounding the social importance of court reporting – which is what mainly drove me to do this research. I find this strange due to how much it is used in today's newspapers, especially to create page leads on a slow news day! Do you feel that it is over looked as a form of journalism, due to it being over used?

Court reporting will remain a secondary activity for mainstream academia (so well done for exploring this topic and adding to our understanding) whilst ever public attention is focussed by the media on ever more sensationalised offences and 'novel' offenders. The literature (unfortunately) follows what is seen as significant and influential in terms of media and audience effects.

- Do you feel that the media has a “blasé” approach to court reporting, compared to a decade (and beyond) ago?

Following from the comments above, if the media set an agenda of 'the crime and the criminal' (because that is what is seen to sell) it follows that court reporting will be assigned a lower priority. In this sense it may become 'routine' and 'ordinary'.

- Do you think therefore, that this attitude has had an affect on the public's perception of crime?

I think court reporting has relatively little impact on public perception of crime as it is overwhelmed by reporting of 'the crime and the criminal'. The effect is potentially best seen around sentencing. It is often only when 'extraordinary' sentences (often related to leniency) are imposed that a story becomes newsworthy and this may undermine public confidence in the Criminal Justice System.

Elaboration:

In your first answer you stated that *Lack of properly informed public opinion about victims, sex offenders and their treatment under the criminal justice system means the media are likely to continue to be a considerable influence on public perceptions.*

- Can you elaborate? Do you feel that victims are over looked?

There is a lack of basic understanding of sexual offences, offenders and their victims demonstrated in public discourse. There is thus a real danger that the media, in the form of cinema films, television drama and newspaper reportage will fill this gap with stereotypes and those representations of victims and offenders that are newsworthy rather than accurate. As such, the media may do the public a disservice by distorting their understanding and missing an opportunity to contribute more fully to public safety.

Victims and increasingly their families have in recent years been subject to media attention. The extent to which they are 'on the agenda' for media coverage still relates to news values –

the image of the 'innocent victim' or 'precipitating victim' and their traumatised families are particularly newsworthy. Victims are neglected though – short term scrutiny is soon replaced with the next sensational story and the mid and long term effects of being a victim are often not reported.

- Many Journalists would argue that their reports are restricted by the law itself; that the justice system is too over bearing on what they can report in the first place. Do you feel that if the law loosened its reign on the media, it would allow newspapers to inform the public with more knowledge on crime in their area and across the nation?
- Or would this amount of access cause more moral panics?

Can you please elaborate on this opinion . *If reporting does not accurately and fully inform the public (and it often does not) it is difficult to sustain the argument that it is doing the public a service.*

The media are often restricted in what they report but they also set their own agenda and report the more novel aspects of a crime in a sensationalised manner to sell their products. Unless a particular aspect of a crime is newsworthy and aligned with news values it is unlikely to be given coverage whatever freedom is granted to the press.

Moral panics arise when the media sensationalise, over report and link unrelated crime cases together, with the effect of distorting public opinion and heightening fear of crime. Moral panics are unlikely to arise as a result of the (unlikely) reporting of mundane, everyday facts that may lead to a more informed public discourse of crime.

Do you feel that the media ill informs the public on subjects such as sexual abuse?

- *It is worth bearing in mind that for some offenders having a picture in the paper or on TV is a 'badge of honour' to be shared and appreciated by other offenders. For others it becomes 'life defining' and it increases their propensity to offend.* I agree with this statement, however do you feel that a sexual offender would fall under this category of criminal?

Yes. Sex offenders do not always operate in isolation and as such may develop sophisticated networks of contacts with other similar offenders. Their status within such networks depends on mutual trust – proving themselves in some way to others. Media coverage, that we may think of as shaming, may serve this purpose. Offenders have been known to send each other newspaper cuttings of their offences to enhance their credibility with each other and for sexual gratification.

- Do you feel that some criminals are proud to have their picture in the paper, due to the over exposure of crime in newspapers?

I feel some offenders are not shamed by their pictures. For a minority, they are proof to others of their criminal status. This happens regardless of over exposure of crime in the media although over exposure may exacerbate this effect.

- *I believe the media will only act in the public interest when it is congruent with their political and economic agendas.* Do you feel that, instead of court/crime reporting influencing the public in most cases, that instead newspapers follow social patterns and report on what is the “popular and fashionable” crime of the moment?

There are two aspects to your question that are not necessarily connected. Crime reporting has a profound effect on the public. It distorts public perceptions of crime and increases fear of crime. Newspapers set the agenda for the public to follow and therefore create the 'popular and fashionable' for their audience. I don't think the public demand stories from the

media –I do think the media seek always to write stories that sell and thus by definition are popular.

- *The effect is potentially best seen around sentencing. It is often only when ‘extraordinary’ sentences (often related to leniency) are imposed that a story becomes newsworthy and this may undermine public confidence in the Criminal Justice System.*

Can you please elaborate?

I refer here to reporting of the activities of courts. What happens in court is often given scant coverage because courts deal in matters of fact, which are often mundane and everyday and therefore don't sell media products. Sentencing is contentious and not well understood, leaving space to create coverage of ‘lenient’ or ‘out of touch’ judges and ‘unjust’ sentences.

- With this opinion, how do you explain the interest in such stories as Shannon Matthews and Sarah Payne – where the newspapers covered the story for weeks?

Both these cases featured a prolonged period of investigation and aligned well with news values as they provided many sources of speculation and many opportunities to sensationalise the stories. This made them eminently newsworthy - until the next big story came along.

Transcription of Telephone Interview with Antony Whitehead (Senior Lecturer and
Criminology Expert in Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Huddersfield)

Miriam (M)

Antony Whitehead (AW)

M: Do you feel the media has helped to make certain subjects more socially acceptable?

AW: How do you mean, certain subjects?

M: Like certain subject of crime such as sexual abuse or domestic violence, or anything like that.

AW: No, quite the opposite.

M: Ah right, ok, can you elaborate on that?

AW: Erm, yes, it's created fault devils and moral panics, reference Cohen. *laughs*

M: Yeah.

AW: What's his face? Geoffrey Pearson, 'History of respectable fears'. It's created new monsters.

M: I totally know where you're coming from on that, like...

AW: Well I have a friend who was unwise enough to have an affair with one of the editors for the *Sun*. You know they have a meeting every Monday morning?

M: Yeah.

AW: And, the first thing on the agenda is, 'Who is our enemy this week?'

M: Oh Lord, how lovely *laughs*

AW: There's some information for you.

M: Well, aren't we just lovely people us Journalists? Do you feel that without the media that these sorts of crimes would still be seen as taboo; so they wouldn't be talked about?

AW: Well, we don't know because we have a media. So it's impossible to say what things would be like if we didn't have a media.

M: Do you feel that, in the case – well you obviously don't *laughs* - do you feel that the media is still doing a service for the public and reporting in their interest, as court reporting is supposed to be?

AW: No, I think it's random, and I know because I used to be a probation officer and I used to work in court. And what stories which do get picked up and what stories don't is largely random. It depends of there is a reporter in the court, because, as you'll know every case goes through Magistrates Court?

M: That's right, yeah.

AW: Every criminal case. And you'll know from your own background that, erm, you know about 'stringers' don't you?

M: Yes.

AW: Yeah, well it just depends whether the local, erm, paper employee happens to be in the court or not. Very often all sorts of stuff is picked and all sorts of stuff is not picked up, so on that level alone the public are getting a distorted impression of what is going on.

M: Exactly. And do you feel that with that lack of local court coverage now, and it leaning more towards the use of agency copy, that it going to continue to be like this?

AW: It increases the reformisation, I would think, yeah.

M: So do you think that the media still has an obligation to report on court events or do you think that...

AW: Well, the whole point of the courts is that it's a public venue, and that's why places are set aside for the media. You know, there's a sort of bench in the court room where the media can go and sit. Usually, it's next to the probation officer *laughs*; except when they are prosecuting.

M: Yeah *laughs*. So, with this all in mind, when newspapers first began court reporting was designed to be part of the criminal's punishment. Do you think that this still stands today?

AW: Yes, but its random punishment, because the reporting is random; it depends whether the press picks it up or not. So, if you consider it as being part of the punishment, then you've got to ask yourself, 'well is it fair that it's so uneven?'

M: Yeah definitely. And on the flip side, would you say that being reported about in the paper is now also seen as a badge of honour for some criminals?

AW: Ooo, that's a very very broad question isn't it?

M: It is I suppose, yeah. Obviously it depends on the type of case.

AW: Well, I interviewed the editor of the Liverpool Echo, because I did some research on gangs in Liverpool. And he said that, 'all the fluffy bunnies in the world wouldn't sell newspapers'. So on one the hand you all these youths on council housing estates, trying to make a name for themselves and they've got kind of got an invested interest in having adjectives like 'heinous' applied to them. And the newspapers have an interest in applying them, so there's a little bit of symbiosis there. So in certain cases, I think, yeah.

M: So do you think, in those cases, it could be a result in the public being over exposed to certain court reports?

AW: Well, they're not over exposed, they're just exposed to...I mean all the literature in media and crime will tell you that we have a very distorted picture of this anyway as 98% of crime is desperately boring. And that sort of stuff doesn't get reported does it? There's got to be some excitement, there's got to be an angle. So it's not whether the media is good or bad at this or that, the point is that it's random and, erm, very partial.

M: Yeah. Do you feel that, if the journalists I interviewed are correct, that there is an increase in the reporting of crime and court, that the public could become desensitised at some point?

AW: Erm. That's an impossible question to answer. I mean, how on earth would you begin to answer that? On what basis can you answer that? I simply don't know is the honest answer!

M: Do you think...well those questions are actually now irrelevant...erm, do you think that instead of reporting what is in the public interest, the media have turned to just pandering to the public and reporting what they find interesting?

AW: Yes, but I don't think that's something that's happened recently. I think that was always the case and if you want an example of that then think about the White Chapel murders, think about Jack the Ripper. 'Murder most Foul', I mean, I think that's where the *News of the World* got it's readership from originally. Just before it became 'Vicars and Knickers' and now it's moved onto paedophiles. I think it's not only the press's reaction to the zeitgeist, but the press also created the zeitgeist and, yeah, it's whatever will sell. I do think that the media has had a very distinct effect in terms of generating myths about sexual offending, by using the term paedophile to represent all child sex offenders. Reality is that not all child sex

offenders are paedophiles. The term is used loosely, what paedophile actually means is that your primary sexual focus is on children.

M: Sorry, I'm confused.

AW: The term is used loosely, what paedophile actually means is that your primary sexual focus is on children but most sex offenders, one, aren't strangers and it's usually family, it's usually father or stepfathers and two, they are not primarily sexually focused on children. And, three even, their motivation for offending is not necessarily sexual. I do a lecture on the 'myth of the paedophile', and I think the press has got a lot to do with that. But, you know, you can go back and compare this all to the Mods and Rockers when three deck chairs were kicked over on Brighton beach in 1967. And then you can go back to the anti-garrotting panics in the 1860's, when newspapers were carrying adverts for anti-garrotting collars and the reality was there were only 6 robberies in London in the whole of that year; street robberies that is. So, yeah, I think the press create demand and they create the monster and then they feed it. You know, like with dangerous dogs. All dangerous dog and dog attack stories are reported and then everyone is looking with suspicion at the dogs. *laughs* everyone is then looking in the wrong place.

M: So, in that case, I'm looking to see if court reporting has any social impact. Do you feel that court reporting is influencing society or is it following social trends? Say for example, paedophilia didn't have as much focus 10/20 years ago as it does today.

AW: No, paedophilia was regarded as a joke 10 or 20 years ago. You know, 20 years ago, you've got erm, say St. Trinian films on telly and Timmy Edwards the spanking headmaster and all that kind of stuff. And they were funny, but suddenly they stopped being funny and suddenly become sinister. So, I don't know to what extent the media creates social trends and

to what extent it responds to them. There's definitely a symbiosis between the two of them I think, but if you tease that one out, you should get a PHD.

M: Yeah *laughs*, I'm trying! So do you think court reporting is experiencing some sort of transition, in its position in society? So instead of providing a public service like it was designed to, do you see it as forming a new side to the gossip column?

AW: Hmm, I don't see a transition, I see continuity. I think the press has always told the public what it wants to hear. I mean, you don't make money by telling people what they need to know do you? You make money by telling people what they want to hear, that's how politics works. That's how the media works and there's a relationship between the two.

M: I've noticed throughout my research that there is a major lack of literature surrounding the relationship between society and court reporting.

AW: Yeah, I've never come across any.

M: Exactly. I find it strange because court reporting takes up such a large proportion of British newspapers. Would you agree if I was to state that it's overlooked as a form of journalism?

AW: I would. I think that when it is considered, it's considered in terms of media effects rather than in terms of what's reported on and what isn't. What's missing is the random nature of what is getting reported and isn't. I think there is a great big gap there. As a probation officer I've known all sorts of cases that, you know, from a media perspective would be really sensational. But they simply never got reported, because they've not been picked up in the first place.

M: I think that's mostly down to a lack of court reporters.

AW: Yeah, so, what I'm saying is that it can't be representative in the first instance because the media simply doesn't have access to all the information that available from the court.

Then there's the second issue about what is picked out but you know, the lack of literature is...the main area for the lack of literature is the random nature of what the media pick up.

M: Yeah, this is what you said in the beginning. So do you think that this has an effect on the public's perception of crime? So what is randomly picked up...

AW: I think people tend to believe what they read in the papers. Well, people aren't stupid and they are aware that the media manipulate, the media have angles and that the media make up stories, but erm, in my experience, I've noticed that people read newspapers quite naively.

They're not generally aware of how facts are manipulated into a story and are given an angle, they kind of generally take the story as being because it has factual information in it.

Transcription of Face to Face Interview with Anonymous (Ex-Chief Inspector with the
Sheffield Police Child Protection Unit)

Miriam (M): What was your exact job title?

Anon (A): I was a Chief Inspector with Sheffield Police, specifically involved in the child protection unit.

M: What did your job entail?

A: As a senior member of staff I was responsible for the co-ordination several teams of constables, sergeants, inspectors and police staff. I also managed the child protection unit, which was my main role. As a Chief Inspector you are given other responsibilities though like look after funding, monitor operations erm, identifying risks within operations erm...oh and, of course, liaising with the media. Well, not directly, but supporting those who do, so we get the best out of it.

M: You said that you don't deal with the media directly. Who does that then?

A: Like all police departments these days we have our own Press Office. It just allows us to have a better control over what is submitted to the media, as those that work in the press office are very well trained PR people. There are officers who will speak directly to the papers, if they feel they can trust that journalist, but generally, to keep a cap on things, we leave it to the professionals. They know what material we want publishing and what we don't, and that's the key to it all really – keeping control.

M: Can you elaborate on what you mean by “better control” please?

A: Yeah, sure. With certain cases, like a sexual abuse case, we don't want the media to have certain information. Our press office is definitely a way in which we keep the media at arm's

length. Sometimes there are stories which we don't need appeals for and therefore we won't need to release any information on it. We tend to know when a case reaches the court, if it will attract media attention so by the time the journalists come knocking at our door for information we're already prepared with a statement or press release. Sometimes the media aren't too happy that we've not given them much, but, hey, that's their problem. Our main concern is for the victim and the victim's family and not how many papers this story will sell. If we don't feel that the information is relevant for the public to know then we won't put it in. End of.

M: Can you give an example please?

A: Of where we didn't give information?

M: Yeah, if that's ok?

A: Course, yeah. Erm...so obviously names and personal details are never released for legal reasons when dealing with a sexual abuse case, but for example erm, say the victim was a small boy and he had been raped by a man, that sort of detail isn't needed; the public don't have a right or a need to know that. All the press need to know is that the victim was sexually assaulted. A lot of journalists will respect that, but then there are a few who will go out of their way to get this information from unofficial sources – and that's playing a dangerous game.

M: You mentioned before that there are police officers who talk directly to journalists. Is this common place?

A: It depends really. I would say that it isn't very common but that's not to say that it hardly ever happens either. I mean, you're talking even just 15 or 20 years ago, and we would speak to journalists directly every day, but that's because you knew them. These days, it seems to be

a different person phoning up all the time. That's why we had to set up the press office really, because you're not sure you can trust every journo you talk to, especially when it comes to court. Plus it means that all the press are given the same information but then you're coming back to the control issue. You still get the odd familiar name, and you tend to find that some officers will happily speak to them without going through the press office, but it takes a lot to build up that sort of trust.

M: The journalists that you speak to directly, do they tend to be local court reporters?

A: Definitely. There seems to be less and less of them though. With national papers, although there's never been that much of a rapport you still knew a few names, but now, when it comes to talking to any newspaper you tend to just hear from an agency or free-lance journalist. Not much in the way of hearing from a resident court reporter these days.

M: Why do you think that the local and national media are interested in certain stories such as the Shannon Matthews or Sarah Payne case, and not others?

A: From our point of view, they only followed it through to court because of all the hype beforehand. As I mentioned before, we can use the media to set up appeals for missing children or for suspects. The media love that sort of thing, because they know the public will be gripped and therefore it'll sell newspapers; and that's what they're all about. I can see from a local point of view that, for example with the Shannon Matthews case, that it's of interest to their readers in many respects and it increases awareness in their area but in relation to the nationals it's just the sell, sell, sell mentality.

M: In terms of cases such as Shannon Matthews and Sarah Payne, would you utilise the media to help yourselves?

A: Definitely. The media is a great tool when it comes to trying to find a criminal. The more coverage, the better. However, this is not to say that we tell all but we definitely give the media enough information so they become interested. Our relationship with the media is certainly a two way street and if giving the media what it wants means we get coverage, then yes, we will involve them. This is something that the police had to learn, however and involving a press office into our service definitely helped. For example, the Sarah Payne case was an indication that the media could be utilised in high profile cases. They allowed the local and national police sectors to get a response from the public that we couldn't have dreamed of, and is partly the reason why we now tend to encourage parents to speak publically – under supervision of course.

M: You say you encourage people to speak publically about these stories, but obviously we don't see these sorts of appeal every day. Do you release information of every crime?

A: No. We do have information readily available via our press office on pretty much every crime and court case going, but again it is censored information. There are stories we know that the press simply won't be interested in and then there are the stories we know they'd love to get hold of but we don't want them to have the details.

M: Can you elaborate please?

A: Yeah, erm...so, like I said before, the example involving a young boy. We know that this type of story would appeal to the press due to the shocking details. But with it being such a sensitive subject, we want to protect the victim and their family and having the story splashed all over the front of a newspaper can be quite distressing. Nine times out of ten, the media will pick this sort of story up eventually as it will go to court, and although they will come to our press office for information, we will only give them the basic facts – they don't need to know the gory details.

M: You say that a story involving a paedophile or a sexual assault on a minor would be interesting to the media. Do you think this is relatively new?

A: It's not a new crime, but it does seem to interest the media more now that it did say 15 or 20 years ago.

M: is there a reason why, in your opinion?

A: To be honest, no. I think the media are very aware of what sells newspapers. The details of cases involving paedophiles and sexual abuse are shocking and well, pull at your heart strings essentially. Stories like Sarah Payne luckily don't happen every day, but they are not uncommon and I think this is where the media get it very wrong. A lot of the general public worry about crime in their area and hearing about this type of story over and over again, simply aggravates their worries.

M: This is how moral panics start.

A: Exactly. I understand that the media have newspapers to sell and so on, and yes, a lot of court cases will not be of interest, but maybe they should think before they publish. It would make the police's job a lot easier and it would mean that we wouldn't have to be so cautious all the time.

Transcription of Phone Interview with Steve Stimpson (Acting News Editor and Court Reporter for the Ross Parry Agency)

Miriam (M): How long have you been involved with court reporting?

Steve (S): For four years now.

M: Have you always been part of the Ross Parry agency?

S: Yeah, this has been my first and only job yeah.

M: How do you think agency court reporters compare to that of newspaper ones?

S: Much more selective. Much more selective, especially in terms of local reporters. We usually cover our cases along with other local reporters. We head down to like, Leeds, Bradford, Hull and York crown courts. We always find at least one court reporter there. But we're a lot more selective. We don't sit in courts every morning like the reporters, the court reporters on local papers do. We just tend to keep track of ones, of cases we're most interested in, and then go along specifically for them. So ours is very selective court reporting really. Stuff that we think is has a chance of getting national coverage.

M: The stories that you cover, are they your choice or have you been told by other papers to go and...

S: It is completely our choice but it can be a bit of a mixture. Because we work predominantly work for national papers, who pay us to do certain things, they can ask us to go along and cover certain cases that they've heard of, or that they think will be good. Generally what it is, is that we keep track of all cases that we think are any good, whether it's through the police or through cuttings in local papers or through our own contacts. Then we'll keep track of the court cases that way and do them on spec, we then cover the court cases and send them out to the nationals and the locals that we syndicate for as well.

M: Over the time that you've been involved with court reporting, has it changed in any way?

Do you cover fewer stories or more or...

S: Certainly not from our point of view but in terms of what I notice from other papers, erm...ours tends to be a set thing. We've always done it, there are always national papers, and there'll always be agencies to get to places to where national papers can't get to. So in the four years I've been doing it, it's not changed that much. It's obviously a seasonal thing with court; you get more cases at certain times of the year.

We are close with a lot of papers in Yorkshire, we have deals with most of them and we are friendly with others. We tend to see them quite a bit and we are in to doing more work for them, simply because they haven't got the staff levels especially with court reporting in the local papers. This means they are asking us to do a bit more for them than they used to do. We get a lot of calls at the start of the week, asking if we are covering certain cases because they haven't got the numbers available that they used to. Looking at what local newspapers are doing, then yes, there seems to have been a down slide on their behalf.

M: Is there a specific court that you cover, or do you get sent wherever?

S: Well, we cover specific courts, we cover all the courts in Yorkshire, but in terms of the reporters here we tend to have to do everything. It just depends who is available at what time. We have to be up to speed on absolutely everything, so we aren't pigeon holed to one court like a local reporter would be. We're a Yorkshire agency so I could be asked to go to Leeds one day and I could be asked to go to Hull the next day. Then of course there are the magistrate's courts as well, and it all just depends on who we have available. We don't send one specific person to one specific court, that's usually the job of a lot of the locals (newspapers) obviously.

M: Are there certain papers that ring up more than others?

S: Not generally, it all depends on what the case is. National papers have different markets that they go for, so obviously we get more calls of tabloid newspapers than we do from broadsheets. Simply because there is a much broader range of stories that tabloids will cover compared to broadsheets. With your broadsheets you tend to get stuff that involves rich people or health stories, or where banks have been slammed. That's the type of things they tend to go for. Occasionally we will get a call from them to cover a certain court case for them, but generally tabloids have a much wider breadth of what they will take into their paper. This is anything that involves celebrity, death by dangerous driving, murder. Anything is covered by the tabloids, if the angle is good enough for them.

M: Are there any extra restrictions placed on a story which includes a public figure or celebrity?

S: They can do, but it's all done on a case by case basis. So any court, if they have sound reason can impose a restriction on you, as a reporter. There are all sorts of orders which can be thrown down, whether it is a contempt order, which can stop you publishing certain things at a certain time or a postponement order which means you can't write anything until after a certain date. Then you get other orders where you can't name young offenders, but in terms of celebrity it would all depend on whether the judge thought it would impede justice. If it would, he would slap an order on it, but it is very rare. It is usually more common in high court cases and private cases. Like with the John Terry case that's been happening over the weekend, they tried to get a gagging order on that but it eventually failed. It got one for a day and then failed. That's where you would usually get celebrities protected a bit by judges, but with criminal cases you really have to stick to the criminal side of things. They've got certain times when they can place restrictions on the press, and when none of them are met then even

if they're a celebrity, they can't be sheltered from that. Unless there is a specific reason. Say their celebrity status would impact on them getting a fair trial, then that's when a judge would think about it. However, it is quite rare to do that.

M: Is it easy to stay objective when you're writing a story on certain cases?

S: To come across as impartial? Well you don't have to. When it's over you don't have to.

When you're covering the opening of a case, whereby there's been no verdict, then you have to be impartial, you don't have a choice. Your job is to make the story readable to a wide audience, so you will sit there for the prosecution opening and pick out the best bits. If that makes the defendant sound worse than if it were to have a defence next to it, which is usually the case as you do your prosecution before your defence, then as long as you put in certain things which let the reader know that you're not implying that guy is guilty, then you can get away with it. Any time there is not a verdict, you have to be impartial. So all you're restricted to is what is said in court. If everything that is said in court is 'having a go' at the defendant then that's fine, you are covered by absolute privilege, so you're just writing what you have been told. At the end of a trial or at a sentencing, you a little more leeway in what you can say because he or she has already been found guilty.

M: What makes a case interesting enough for a newspaper to ring you to cover it?

S: It all depends on what they're interested in. Obviously, a lot of the things are topical, so if for instance you've got something that's going on in the media, or if the newspapers have got any campaigns going. Like the mail have got one right now, which is campaigning for dignity for the elderly, they might ring up because they've heard of a case where old people in a care home were being abused by staff. So certain campaigns that they are running will determine what cases they are interested in that day, or that month. If there is something in the news like 'Broken Britain' or knife attacks then they might come to us and say, "Can you

cover this GBH case at Leeds Crown Court because it involves a knife?" There are certain times in national papers where certain topics are in vogue and that will determine what they want us to do. Obviously with my job, as the news editor now, is to be aware of what is topical and what certain papers are after at certain times, I can then think of cases that might be of interest to them. It works both ways. You've also got general stories, where you know someone will be interested in it, so either a paper will ring us and say, "This looks interesting, can you go and cover that?" or the more likely scenario is that we think that probably would be interesting and then we go to the court case and then we tell the national about it and get them interested in the story, so we can get it into their paper. That's usually the way round that we do it, but as I said, they can come on and suggest a story that we might do for them.

M: I have looked at dates from 2003, to today and looked at how many court stories were included in the *Yorkshire Post*, and despite court reporters being made redundant at local newspapers, as well as regional and national newspapers, the amount of court stories being reported has nearly doubled. Do you think this has anything to do with the increase in freelance and agency journalists?

S: Possibly, but I would advise you to look at something else as well as the *Yorkshire Post*. The reason being, the *Yorkshire Post* classes itself as being a national newspaper. It is a bit skewed with the *Yorkshire Post*, they do have a lot more court cases in their paper than they do in a lot of the locals. Because they also take the best bits from everywhere else in the country, as well as local stuff. They also include bits from London, which is agency covered, or press association, or whatever it might be; they will take a higher percentage of that than any other local will. The locals only have a page dedicated to UK news, whereas the *Yorkshire Post* has quite a lot. You do have days where less than half the stories are Yorkshire stories in the *Yorkshire Post*, so you might want to look at papers which aren't as national orientated. I do agree however, that even in local papers, you will find more court than you

did do. I would suggest this is because of an increase in agencies or agency copy, but relates to the fact that they are losing workers. So there is a lot less staff on the locals that I work with, the stuff that they get given by agencies is the stuff that is relevant to their newspaper but they just can't get to. It's not that there is so much more agency work going in papers, well it is but it's not because of the rise in agencies, it's more because there is less local workers now. Simple fact of the industry now.

M: So it's more of a collaboration?

S: Certainly on our part. We're very collaborative with the local papers, whereas we would sift through their papers looking for stories we could do up for the nationals, we're also supplying them because they've got less staff. Say we do the *Yorkshire Post* for instance, say there is anything from another area of Yorkshire which we have done, and we can then give to them, which could fill a space in their paper. Like I said before, if they are struggling staff wise to cover a court case, we'd somehow try and help them out. More and more often we have to give them court cases, so there is more agency copy in the *Yorkshire Post* for that reason as well.

M: Do you think court reporting is being encouraged to journalists? As a journalism student, we aren't taught court reporting. Do you think this is a more learn on the job skill?

S: It's true, when we went to college; they only took us for a day really. I think this is the main reason, as it is a practical thing. It's very dangerous as well. If you're a college student, and you are covering court practically and you do something that is legally unsound even if your just writing it internally for your own college, if that got out then you are still open for getting sued. Unless you are properly up on your court law, then it is very dangerous. It is generally a practical thing. I know here (Ross Parry Agency) it is. Here court is a staple of what we do. Most of our days revolve around court. We will prioritise court cases over

anything else, and so when people come to work here we're very, very quick getting them involved with court. Really quick, because it is a practical thing. Then of course, you've got the news editor there to ensure everything goes swimmingly in the legal side, so the reporter can just concentrate on becoming a better writer if court. Obviously, more and more over time they will get more experience of how it works legally and make less and less mistakes on that front. That's the way we do it. In terms of local papers they all tend to still have the one court reporter, but I would agree, it's probably not as encouraged as I think it should be.

M: Do you think as a result of this court reporting is becoming more integrated into journalism?

S: There are certainly less specialists, that's for sure. When I was doing my work experience about five years ago, the paper I was on had two court reporters and now it has none. Again, you might be right in the sense that there are less court specialists and journalists have to be all rounder's now so they have to be good enough in court, but able to do the normal stories alongside that, which is what we do. We all have to be proficient at court but we all have to be able to everything else as well. Any facet of journalism, we all have to be good at. It's become a lot more like that on locals too. You've now got a lot more locals abandoning court reporters and just sharing out the responsibilities of covering court. In a specialised way, I would say yes there is less emphasis on court reporting but in terms of practically what is put out through all the papers, it's still top standard court reporting. It's just that there are very few specialists out there. The *Yorkshire Post* have one, he's at court all day, but the *Evening Post* lost theirs, for instance, and now they share it out between them.

M: Do you think the internet has anything to do with journalists becoming more versatile? Made them aware that they must be multi skilled in order to survive?

S: Most definitely. You see it through colleges; most colleges now are gearing their courses towards that. The internet is something that causes one or two problems for some journalists. It's all about how it's going to kill tradition and newspapers are eventually going to die off. On the plus side, you have to be very versatile as a journalist, because online demands are a lot bigger. Certainly compared to print, all you have to do there is think about your word limit, but with online stories you have a lot more space to fill. The internet has made, certainly the colleges more aware that they have to do more to be versatile, but in terms of papers and our agency we're generally doing that in the first place. That's why it's helped online journalism to get as big as big as it is getting. Because we were already doing that to start with, certainly at our agency, because we've always been all rounder's. Our copy translates to the web quite simply.

M: Do you think that all court reporting is going to end up being derived from agency journalists in the future?

S: It all depends on how the industry goes. I don't think it will do no. I don't think there are enough agencies first off. We generally all tend to stick to a patch and you'll find that very few cross over. You normally have an agency that covers a specific region, a few overlaps here and there, but generally that's the way it works. There are usually a few freelance's which operate in each area, although I don't think there's enough altogether to fill local papers. I do think the number of court reporters will continue to go down. The industry is in such a precarious position, on the print side of things that they will continue to tighten the purse strings as it were. A lot of locals have already culled; we've cut down as well, and now we're beginning to deal with working with this amount of staff, so this is how it will stay. Simply because, this is how they got there in the first place, giving to many reporters too much money. That's one argument anyway.

M: Do you see a major change in court reporting over the next ten years?

S: You can see it all now. If you go online, and look at the local paper's websites, the court reports for that day will be online that day, and not in the paper till the next day. That's one way you could argue that they're shooting themselves in the foot really, because they are not getting the newspaper sales to do it; people read it online the night before. In our point of view, the output of the nationals isn't going to change, certainly in my career. It's always been a set format with agencies to nationals; the difference will be from agency to local and locals themselves, dealing with it. There's already a drive towards getting things online quicker and quicker. Which I personally believe is hampering their own sales. In terms of the output and the standard, I don't think it will decline in that sense, and we'll still see a fair share of court reporting in the newspapers, as much as you do now. However, they might be more online, I would say. Whether it kills off papers is another matter. You've still got a lot of traditionalists in this country, who like their local papers. It's just something that they're used to, especially the older people, but as you see that generation dies out, you may see it dwindling. It's impossible to tell, you can only theorise really.

Transcription of Face to Face Interview with Anne Lightfoot (Retired Court Reporter)

Miriam (M): How long were you involved with court reporting?

Anne (A): From the 1960's. I went into journalism in 1960; it was something I had wanted to do since I was knee high to a grasshopper. I did two years secretarial work before I actually applied onto our local evening newspaper. I got a job as a copy taker. Literally a copy taker, assistant copy taker with the promise that, if I showed promise and talent and ability etc and a feel for the job, then I would be taken on as a junior reporter after six months. And that's exactly what happened. In those days, it was before computers, before any kind of new-fangled technology, it was the old style of printing newspapers.

In those days, you would go out with a reporter onto certain little jobs and then come back and do your own little report. Anyway, they soon started sending me to court, and court reporting in those days was a fairly simple affair. We had a stipendiary magistrate at the Hull Magistrate's court; he's a paid magistrate; and the other courts, there were perhaps two or three other magistrate's courts running. Derek (husband) who was mostly a court reporter, then again he was a very experienced all round reporter, he would take me to court and he would be in the more senior court, the stipendiary magistrates court, and I would be cutting my teeth in the other courts. In those courts they used to deal with less serious cases, perhaps for instance driving without due care or without lights or being drunk and disorderly. All sorts of cases like that, which are very minor.

A big thing in those days was, if cases made it to crown court, you could have three goes at the cherry. Assume somebody was charged with murder, assuming it was a murder hunt first and foremost and you were looking for the murderer, when your covering something like that you will use anything and everything you can get your hands on. Whatever you can get out

of the neighbours, out of the police who want to keep the thing running to catch their culprit, and all the rest of it.

But as soon as a charge is imminent, today the reporting stops, as you know, but in those days it was before the 1967 Criminal Justice Act and therefore there were no rules governing what you could say before the court. So when I say you could have three bites of the cherry, you could print all and everything when your man first came to the court or woman, because there are a few women murderers. You could have another go when it came to the next remand and also when it came to the state of committal proceedings. In those days when they came to committal proceedings, they would call all the witnesses and then magistrate would, presumably, find that there was a primer – facier case to answer, then the man would be committed. As each of those witnesses came, then you would be able to do a full report of whatever they were saying and then when it came to trial, you'd get the third bite of the cherry. You'd be able to report it all over again. So if you get the idea, there was plenty of room for lots of words.

It was in the early days when we had maybe five editions running, and if anything really came up at five o'clock in the afternoon, early evening, they would stop everything and re-print. There really was a sense of urgency etc. There used to be a copy boy who would go down to the court, this place and that place and woe be tide you if you didn't have a thick little thing of copy there for him to take back; not for tomorrow's paper, or next week's paper, but for that day's paper, for the next edition out. So, you really were on the go all the time, working for the next edition. Which isn't the case these days, I mean the *Hull Daily Mail* these days is a morning paper; it comes out very early in the morning. It was, once upon a time, a very fast evening paper.

This strains from court reporting, but it all goes to say that you really cut your teeth in those courts and of course you couldn't report everything. What you did in those days was, much the same as you do today, you pick the best out of the cases. The best cases came out of the stipendiary magistrate's court. Now I eventually graduated to that, they used to let me in charge of all of that. One of the first things, in your email your email you said about the 'art' of court reporting, and it really is an art, and there are protocols and things that you have to do; but I would say, disregarding for the moment court reporting itself, one of the things you have got to do is be aware and know people, find out who they are. Get onto first name terms with them. Talk to people; understand what you're doing and why you are doing it.

What's very important is to get to know people, and why I say that is because as the years went by I became very, very well known in the job as a court reporter, and people would side look me and say, "Get yourself down to number four court" or number three court, whatever because there's just been someone arrested. I think we have had someone who has been strangled in Woodcock Street the other day, and they're before the court this morning. That's the kind case in point I'm on about. So, that's the benefit of getting people to know who you are and you to know people, they know they can trust you. Keep that trust, don't ever breach that trust. If they tell you something that is confidential and they're giving you the background to something or other, keep that, it's vital. On the same basis of course, if you find it out from elsewhere of course you use it.

Be aware of who is who. I can think of another incident. We had a chief crown prosecutor called Lesley Bell. He was very upright, portly, forgive me because he's now dead, pompous appearing, but a very nice man. It was easy to be afraid of him if you weren't aware. Anyway, he was a good lad, and I saw him appear and thought, "Oh yes, what are you appearing for?" There was nothing in the court list to give anything away. I saw him, wandering round, and then I saw him go up towards one of the juvenile courts, or the

matrimonial courts, well one of them. What it was, was a front page lead in effect, it was couple who had given birth to a Spina Bifida baby, and they wanted to let it die. The local authority wanted to take charge of the baby, and give it a chance of life by giving it operations etc. It was only because I followed Lesley Bell around that I found that out. That was going to be slid away somewhere very, very quiet, but I got it and it was a front page lead. So much so, that the nationals were wanting it. That's instinct as well.

Protocols. Now I'm not so sure about how much you know about court reporting.

M: I've looked at books, but I feel it's not something you can read about, and that it's something you have to...

A: ...experience, yes. Courts operate the same wherever they are. They have to work in exactly the same way. You bring somebody before them, and a charge has to be put to them. Very often they will give the address at that particular stage. Everything you hear, as you probably know already, in a court is covered by privilege. So, if you've been accurate in everything you do, you're ok, if anything goes wrong, you're not at fault. If however, you get something from someone else outside the court, and you inject that in, that's not covered by privilege. So you could end up with problems. Protocols, if the oath has been taken for instance, you shouldn't really be moving around the court. If you were in a crown court, a judge would probably take you to task. Less stringently in a magistrate's court, but hey will still pull you up, if they think your over doing it a bit.

You need to be well dressed as well. I know we're in a far more relaxed dress code today, but I think you still need to be reasonably smart when you're in court. It's not somewhere you can look as if you're going out for a Sunday stroll.

M: You mentioned sources before. A lot of literature mentions that you shouldn't get too close to your sources, is it easier said than done?

A: Well, what you do is you build up a trust and don't breach that trust. In a way, keep everybody at arm's length, because that same police man that you are very 'pally' with, if he goes and dips his finger in the till, or assaults somebody, your then going to be doing to him when he brought before the court. He'll trust you, if he thinks you're a good person to talk to, the right person to give a little bit of background to, they'll trust you. You breach that trust in any way, when they've said "don't say this, it doesn't come from me", and you accredit it to them, you'll have lost a good contact.

Don't get too close in that, they think that you are really "pally wally" and you'll do anything that they want and all the rest of it. There's professionalism about it and I can, without any false display of modesty, say that I was respected in the courts. I really was and my last day in court told me that above all else. They did that, that and the other speech for me and the judge wanted to invite me to lunch, but I had already accepted an invitation from the company to have some sort of a do. Through the years, people would come to me and tell me or point me in the right direction.

Court reporting, you don't embellish, you have a strict code to be accurate, to be balanced and to be fair to both sides. If you drop a clanger and I've dropped clangers down the years, don't just hide it and pretend it didn't happen, and hope nobody saw it. Admit to it and see how best you can put it right. For instance if you spot it before anybody else has, try and get it altered in that day's paper if you can. Go to your news editor and say, "I've dropped the ball here", and point it out to them before they come running to you. Defence being the best form of attack. Very often, if it's gone through all the editions and someone comes howling on the phone to you, admit to it straight away, "Oh I'm ever so sorry," and because the

chances are that they'll come all guns blazing at you, you have got to then soften them. Listen to what they have to say, and then to say, "Well I'm going to see how I can set it right," and in the best way. Very often, it's well to do another story and see if you can get a different angle and see if you can use their angle somehow or other, which will appease them a bit. Your news editor won't want to make some blatant apology, "We've got it all wrong," so disguise an apology in another story if you can; unless it's absolutely imperative that you have to go into print with an apology.

Don't get too pally with people, who can't have a professional approach, but contacts, contacts, contacts. You need your contacts. You need to know who each of the officials is in court, what their role is and how much you can rely on them for the information. Prosecutors and defence council are always very good. Now, for me, you could say, in the early days it was very easy because of what I've just told you about the way the court operated then. We got lots of information and lots of sources, and police in those days presented their own cases. So you probably had, in the court corridor, hundreds of policemen hanging around all to present their own cases. Now that changed and you had a court liaison officer, somebody who presented all the cases, which is probably what you have now. Then it changed again, it just wasn't a policeman who did the prosecuting, it was the crown prosecution service. That is all various stages of where I was at. So in the early days there were a lot of people to mix with to find out who they are. Whether it be such a lowly driving without due care, I always used to make a point about giving the policeman a name in his evidence in the court case. That chuffed him no end, because he saw his name appearing there. People could see he was doing his job and it used to give you a little fillip because he used to come to you. It all helped to build up contacts. Use names whenever you can, always use names.

Use your contacts; ask the prosecutor if there is anything that he considers decent that is coming up. If you know of a particular solicitor, have they anything decent coming up? He

too likes his name in print, and likes to show other people that he's worth while representing them. Always be looking for stories that are not necessarily court case related, you might pick them up in the court and they might develop, but not necessarily as a court report.

Follow through, not everybody follows through court cases. They think, "I've done that and that, now forget about it." It's harder today to keep track on court cases because, when I first started most of the cases were dealt with there and then. Done. Gone. Next batch up and that was it, but today you have solicitors involved, legal aid involved and it's a remand from one week to another. There's some fantastic percentage, something like 95/98% of cases which come before the courts are dealt by the magistrate, so it's only a small percentage that go to the crown court. That's true, because over the years too, as the laws have changed the cases that you can opt to be tried one way or the other have changed and the magistrates are getting a lot of what used to go to crown court. People are thinking these days also, that "I'll go to crown court and take my chances with a jury" and then they may plead guilty at the end of the day anyway.

M: What makes a story newsworthy to a newspaper, and warrant a follow up?

A: The follow up part, I will just say if somebody has been remanded in custody, and charged say of rape, you would probably follow up on a rape charge anyway. Say unlawful wounding or burglary, they can get lost in the system, and as far as the public are concerned, a man has been charged with burglary. Nobody knows if that then has been dropped, whether that went through to crown court, whether it was dealt with after a fair few remands by the magistrates or what happened. So to my way of thinking, you are morally obliged if you start a court case, to follow it through. Now, in the haste of doing the many, many jobs that maybe isn't always possible. If it's a rape case, and the man is not identified at the start of the hearing, then it may well be that it gets lost in the light of day because nobody knows which

name to follow, and doesn't recognise it on the eventual court list. If somebody is acquitted at the end of the day, you should really say that, if you've said he's accused of it in the beginning. So that's what I'm saying, you really do have a moral responsibility that's not always possible to follow through on.

Anything will make news at the end of the day and if that little court case, whatever it is, is the best story of the day, if your news editor decides he wants that to be front page lead, he will find ways of building that up. Not every court case, by any means is a front page lead, or even a main lead, or even a good lead, it depends on the newsworthiness of what's going on that day. Court reports, as important as they are, and I believe that court reporting is extremely important, it has to take its course with everything else that is struggling for apace in a newspaper, therefore you have to find the best pick.

Is it the burglar who terrifies the elderly woman half out her mind? Is it the funny little story of the burglar where the whole job goes hopeless on him and the little old lady, who catches him, and offers him a cup of tea, because she feels sorry for him? Is the pet that gets killed in the fire that's caused by an arsonist? Pick out the unusual bit of it. If you think about how you would cover a normal story is the best way of doing it. You're trying to find the best line of the day. Now, because you've got policemen all trained and a justice system, all trained to find the link of evidence from (a) the crime to (b) him being in the dock, and hopefully eventually wheeled off because he's guilty. You can't do that because you would be doing "I was proceeding in a northerly direction down the street..." so think of it another way. Think of a 'shooting in the street', which is a graphic example. Think if you saw that shooting in the street, think how you would come home and tell somebody. You wouldn't say, "Oh mum, I was walking down car lane and I saw a crowd of people around so and so and I heard some bangs and I walked up to it and so and so, and so and so said to me..." You'd say, "Mum, guess what, somebody's been shot in the street up there..." and that's your intro isn't it? A

man was shot in the street as people stood by and watched, you'd come to the 'nitty gritty'. It's the same in a court report, think of what that 'nitty gritty' of the court report is. If a man knifed another man in a club, in an argument over a girl, "Somebody's going to be scarred for life..." Cover it in the same realms as you would for a normal report, it goes for court reporting as well.

Court reporting is important because it tells the community, how wrong doers in the community are being dealt with. People should see, since newspapers and pamphlets began in the very early days of printing, scandals etc, and people's misdoings have always been reported. No more so than today, but in another way, no more less than today because there are so many cases going before the court today. Papers just can't find the staff to send, there's so many staff doubling up on this, that and the other job, they just don't have dedicated court reporters, as you were touching on before. The local people who have to compete for all the local news, they just don't have time to be able to send somebody out to every court. Now, as I said when I first started, court reporting in my days in the sixties was easy because generally speaking you had a court dealing with criminal cases, one dealing with civil cases and Derek and I would be doing the 'nitty gritty'. Picking out the best, or submitting it all sometimes, then the newspaper would pick out the best of what it thought. At the end of the day, there might have been six or seven or eight courts going on, as well as the stipendiary magistrate's court, as well as a committal court. One reporter would probably there, not only picking that up, but they would probably have to go across to the crown court as well, and we'd have three or four or five courts running there and pick out the bones of each. Very dangerous in many ways because you're relying on evidence you're not hearing. That's when your contacts still come in, because you need a friendly solicitor from the defence who will give you a line of defence. This is if you need to cover that case, for good reasons I've already said before, if it's being covered in certain stages, you really need to cover it at the

end of the day. You need something from the Prosecutor, who will just give you a quote. In the crown courts, you need to obviously cultivate your barristers, who are representing. Generally it's barristers who represent, although again the law has changed and you can get solicitors and barristers these days in either court, representing whom so ever. You really need those contacts to be extremely good.

Talk to people; get to know who they are. Make sure you name people. In all court reporting, whether it's in the magistrate's court, whether it's in the civil court (which we've not touched on yet), county court is where you're dealing with civil matter whether it is matrimonial or whatever. These days they've just started opening the family courts to the press. You need people to talk to you; you need a good understanding of what goes on in there, the protocol, and what you can and what you can't do. It is vitally important, but it's a good specialism to be in.

M: Agencies are more selective with the court reports, and today journalists from all walks of court reporting collaborate to gain the best story. Was it the same back in the early days?

A: Yes and no. The agencies work on the basis that they want to farm their stories out to whom so ever. That's why they've got to be selective because they've got to farm it out to the nationals or whoever's ordered it. It's got to be worthwhile and that's why they won't cover everything on a daily basis. They cover things because they're commissioned to do so or because they know they can send it, it's their bread and butter. We've always had a freelance in Hull and we used to work with him, in that we would have good working relationships. If we had to be another court, and he was covering another because he had to be in there, we'd ask him later on. We'd also be aware of, ours, god rest his soul because he's now dead, and he was still working up until his 90s, he was deaf, so you didn't trust his hearing. He was good at his job, but I ways made sure; I did another check. If we had good

national stories, our murder cases seemed to attract good national coverage because they were way out one's usually, so you'd have the 'pack come in'. Now, the nationals, all they want to do is come in, get their story and then out again to the next one. That's no good for a local person who lives in the community, and they want to make sure they keep their contacts good. On the other hand, you can work well with them and swap information with them, if you have a good working relationship with them. It's very often worthwhile to do that, if you want to make sure that your note was absolutely accurate. You need good short hand notes in court incidentally, and you probably realise that. Sometimes if you haven't been able to read something, you just maybe might check it, just to make sure they've got the same thing.

I never made a point of relying upon them anymore than I needed to. I never minded helping people, and I would provide addresses. The other thing that always difficult to get in court cases, courts still operate differently as in some will give out addressed and some won't, and getting addresses is absolutely vital. It's vital because you might have people, and this has happened, of the same name with a similar address, living in the same area. Even in the same street if it's one of these long main streets and there is nothing worse than having to reprint a retraction, "John Smith...was not John Smith who appeared before." Again, news editors don't like having to reprint retractions, so better to get it right first off. Style wise, if it was a long road, and there might be more than one Smith in that road, we used to put the exact address in. So addresses are always important.

We'd never mind actually working with the nationals, but what we didn't do, if we could help it, is to let them have our cuttings. All they would do is snatch the information on it and some sneaky ones might even try to keep the cuttings. I was always, jealously guarded my own cuttings. That's the other thing incidentally; when you're following courts through, sometime very often you would take a bunch of cuttings with you to court. You've got it as an aid,

because what matters at the end of the day is what's been said in court, during that trial, if it's gone to trial, but not necessarily what you had earlier. The charges might alter, and do you've to be very, very careful that what you've started off with is what you finish with, or rather what you finish with is accurate. I think I might have an example from about the 1980's.

M: When did you retire sorry?

A: I was 62, so 2002.

M: So quite recently really.

A: In the scheme of things yes. That's another thing, if you've got a good memory, and you're with a paper for a long time, I recognise these days that a lot of people jump from one source of media to another, and you don't generally speaking now get a lot of people who are there for a long time. Having said that, if you've got a memory you can dig into that memory, and I always kept cuttings. If got files somewhere, that next time I have a clean out, I can safely say I no longer need them. In our job, no information is ever discarded, you never know when it's going to pop up, and that's also the case with court reporting. We had a really nasty accident out in the sticks, to the East of Hull, in a notorious accident black spot. Underage kids had stolen a car, gone out into the sticks, had crashed into a mobile vegetable van, one or two of those lads dies certainly. It was a horrific incident. Baring in mind they were underage, so when they appeared, as they did eventually, at the court only one of them at that stage could be named. I followed them through as they got older and they continued committing offences, and there was one of them in particular, I think cars were his thing.

M: Is it hard to stay objective when writing such stories?

A: Not at all. You have to remain objective; you're not subjective to anything. In fact, in my young days of reporting and even as I got older, people came to you in the corridor and would

say, "Can you keep this case out?" It didn't matter who it was, I would say, "No I can't, if I'm in the court it's then up to the editor which cases go in. I shall probably be covering it and then it's up to him. I can't keep anything out." In fact, if someone asked me to keep it out, I would feel honour bound to do the report and submit it, and see what would happen. I would not lay myself open to people saying, "Have a word with her, she'll keep it out for you." The press, above all things, has to be independent and fair to all sides.

In the old days, it would be mostly, you did the court case and that was it, unless there was any reason to go back to them. Over the years, people wanted more people stories, which is the case today, very often, it might be a court case, but it's the interview that you hang that on. You want the story behind the story today.

There is public interest in people's names appearing in the paper. I wonder sometimes whether or not you glorify some wrong doers. However, it is the fact of being in the paper which is the deterrent and very often, it's the thing that scares people if they've been shoplifting, is it going to be in the paper? That's the scary bit for them. We went through a stage of not sending reporters to court, except for particular cases, and we would then buy from the court a list of cases and those lists were very carefully compiled with the name and address, the charge and the fine or whatever. It was just a string of people appearing before Hull magistrate's court, and it was just lists of. The magistrate's wanted it in and the courts wanted it in, but I think it got a pain for the papers at the end of the day because it meant somebody going to pick those cases up, somebody going through them to put them into a writable form for the paper, somebody with an authoritative eye, which was very often me or another senior reporter, to go through all of them and make sure that it checked out and made sense. Then finally for it to be submitted. It was a lot of labour and counterproductive for a lot of papers, so they stopped doing it in the end. Plus, I suppose, it was getting expensive for them to buy these lists, but justice has to be done and justice has to be seen to be done.

People do like to read of other people's misery. Whether it's on a list of names and pick out of that list of names who you might know, or what's somebody been doing? That's another aspect of how things have changed over the years. There's still an art in doing all of that, because you have to make sure you get it accurate.

M: Shorthand isn't taught on many University courses these days, along with court reporting itself. Do you feel this discourages younger journalists for heading towards court reporting?

A: Let me put it this way, I went to commercial college and I learned it through that college. I applied it in 'Dear Sir' letters, and did it the business way, and then I came into the job and it was absolutely invaluable for court reporting. I could not have covered a court without my shorthand. It isn't just for court reporting, it's for committee reporting, anything where you go to a public meeting. How can you take down accurately anything people are saying, unless you have a short form of saying it? You need shorthand; it's an absolute essential for the job of a reporter. It's vital for that because, people speak faster than they used to do. I don't know whether it's part and parcel of the fact that we have so many things we have to fit into our lives etc. There are various MP's who speak very fast, now you consider writing down a political speaker who you have to produce a page lead on, without a single quote because you've had to paraphrase everything that he'd said. Not good, you need a good shorthand note.

M: With the restrictions in court, shorthand becomes even more vital because you can't take recording equipment in there.

A: Absolutely, yes. I can see a day when maybe tape recorders will be needed, but they're not at the moment. Inquests, another type of court, must be covered, and to ensure you are accurate with the verdict you must have good shorthand. If you did everything in direct speech, it's quite boring, you need quotes.

In our job, you need a good working relationship with people and you've got to be a good listener. Never accept the first answer, be curious, just like I was with Lesley Bell as I was telling you about earlier. If your instinct is telling you something, you follow it, because you do get an instinct in the job. Look for the story behind the story that you can follow through afterwards. It's not just a matter of slavishly following what you hear in the court; there very often is another story to be had. Always look for the picture story, because in a court there are always two sides to everything and you have to be balanced to both sides. Even if the case is thrown out, give both sides.

M: With that picture story, is it easier to get it when a celebrity or public figure is involved?

A: No, the ordinary man in the street has just as much appeal. The famous person gets all the publicity anyway, they only have to open their mouths and they get quoted left, right and centre. They are before the cameras and they can perform for the cameras anytime. It is the man and the woman in the street who has an equal say in my book and they have stories to tell as well. Those are the stories that matter. The celebrity ones are 'easy peasy' and write themselves.

M: Is there any extra restrictions placed on a story involving a celebrity?

A: No the rule is the same. You have to be fair and accurate and balanced, just like you would with any story. You would purposefully libel someone; those rules must be kept in mind since you're going into print. Always check, check, check again. Just because something is true, doesn't mean you can rush into print with it, the truth can be the greatest libel actually. So you have to aware of that, I know newspapers have their own lawyers now. I told you earlier that the 1967 Justice Act was what gagged newspapers, if you will, because after the charge, you could then only report on seven facts, unless the solicitor asked for reporting restrictions to be lifted, for his own very good reasons. Perhaps to bring forth

witnesses, but generally speaking, from 1967 onwards, you've never been able to report when it gets to somebody appearing before the court, more than seven facts. However, papers now push it to the nth degree, and in cases of particular public interest, they might ask for reporting restrictions to be lifted; which is at a judge's discretion, and things can be lifted. Or, if a case has had a particular notoriety in the area, the events team can ask for the case to be taken outside the area because there's likelihood that any jury will be prejudice, when it eventually came to trial. In juvenile courts, they are not named, although again it's up to the magistrate's discretion. If, in particular notoriety cases, they can say, "We feel the public is best off by these people being named." So it is possible to go outside what is the 'norm', actually it was a juvenile court that brought my first ever front page lead in the early 1960's.

M: What papers did you work for?

A: I worked for the *Hull Daily Mail* as a junior, from my very, very first days; I was about 19 when I first went. I was indentured with them, served three years with that, and in that I took the sorts of things that we need. You know, newspaper law for journalist's, I already had English Language, English Literature at A Level, I think I had to take RSA stage three, and we did day release classes for local and central government, current affairs of course and me and two others (who came in the same year) all went over to Bradford, to sit our proficiency test. I had other qualifications, like shorthand and one or two other things; I was the very first one to pass the full certificate. I stayed with them until 1974, when Derek decided that he wanted to go and work on the *Norwich Evening News* and although he was the one who applied for the job, they ended up interviewing me and taking me along with them. For 14 months, we worked in the Norwich area. Derek, who didn't like his job, came back via working in Scunthorpe, the *Scunthorpe Star*. I only came back in about 1978 when there was a vacancy, and as soon as there was a vacancy, they had me back again. Then I stayed with

the *Hull Daily Mail*, until I retired. So I did 40 years for the mail, and those 14 months away in Norwich, which I quite enjoyed as a rest cure.

I did property reporting, I did crime reporting and Derek's been a crime reporter as well.

Bear in mind all those contacts I had in the courts, and all those old 60's days, all of those who were young PC's in those days, grew with me in the job. They all became Inspectors, Chief Inspectors, Superintendents, you name it. So we were all growing old together, if you like.

M: I have looked at dates from 2003, to today and looked at how many court stories were included in the *Yorkshire Post*, and despite court reporters being made redundant at local newspapers, as well as regional and national newspapers, the amount of court stories being reported has nearly doubled. Do you think this has anything to do with the increase in freelance and agency journalists?

A: It could be agencies, bearing in mind what I said earlier about them having to earn their bread and butter; they can earn their bread and butter from the local papers. Local papers are now struggling with its staff; they are getting in people who are no longer journalists, people who fancy they can write a bit and taking them on without knowledge. Some of them to become skilled up, others to be soaked up, and may become good reporters, bearing in mind that I came off the street and learned. It could well be that they are just very, very grateful to be taking in court work, because it saves them having to spare a member of staff to go and do the 'nitty gritty' themselves. If they've got a good working relationship, which is what happened at the mail, incidentally. If they couldn't send, they would ask the local agency if they could cover for us. They would only be too pleased, because they were getting lineage at the end of the day. So yes, I would see a correlation between an increase in the work the

agencies are doing for the local papers. That's an absolute definite, I'm sure that's right. It frees up the staff for whatever else is needed.

M: As journalists become more versatile in their skills...

A: I'm anticipating you here, but the idea of reporting when I came into the job, and I suspect for many, many years later, was that you were an all round reporter. You learn the job and it may be influenced by the reporters you go out with. I have a friend, who is local from around here; his medium was not court reporting, he said he'd be lost if you put him in a court, well he would do it because he knows how to do the job but it wouldn't mean as much to him as sending him to a good, meaty council meeting. His forte was council work, so first of all you become an all round reporter able to go out on an accident, an inquest, go an interview Mrs so and so who's had a near escape from the satellite that came out the sky, or whatever. You can turn your hand to anything; you can do and interview anybody in any circumstance, but sometimes you have an aptitude for something better. From the beginning I was always interested in crime, police and court work, so that became my natural forte. I was the crime reporter, I was the court reporter and I did all and everything else as well.

M: With all the factors which are diminishing local papers, the internet etc, do you think court reporting will become a lost art?

A: I think it will always be a very necessary, doesn't matter how small as long as it's there, part of the media. Whether it's on the internet, it's this old business; people want to know who's been doing what and what happened to them. People are nosey, but if something's been happening, a spate of crime in the area, and somebody has been burgled and it is known that somebody has been picked up for it, interviewed and gone before court, they want to know what happened to him. We all glue ourselves to any notorious court case that's coming along, doesn't matter who it is or what it is, we get tuned into it. Court reporting will always

have an important part to play. It's an absolute necessity, for people to do jobs like that, for justice to be done by the piers, which is what it's all about, has been from day one. It's always been part and parcel of our justice system, that your piers are your jury, are the people who judge you. I don't mean to hand you down punishments, but decide your guilt or innocence. People who are on your level, and so you have a duty to do that. Newspapers, which are supposedly, although I think that this is disappearing, newspapers, are organs of record. I think court reporting is disappearing, but I don't think it will ever disappear because I'm sure we have to recognise that covering the courts and what justice is been dealing out to the wrong doers in our society. It's important, and I think it should remain important and I think it would be a very sorry day if newspapers decided that they were no longer going to even dip their finger in the water. I think that would be a very sad day for justice because it's got to be done; it's got to be seen to be done and not everyone can go into the courts so they can't see it. We're the means of people seeing it has been done.

Transcription of Phone Interview with Mick Smith (Head of Content at the *Chronicle, Journal and Sunday Sun, Newcastle Upon Tyne*)

Miriam (MPB): Have you ever done any court reporting yourself?

Mick (MS): Absolutely, yes, years and years of it. I've been in this game for an awful long time and I started in 1984 when I left university. I started off as a court reporter, with a news agency in fact, and they took me on straight from university, and probably thought, "oh he's going to be good at this," but I wasn't. I did it until I came to the news desk, so I covered courts for about ten years or something like that. Everything from youth court, which used to be called juvenile court back in the day, to crown court.

MPB: How would you describe that experience?

MS: I think that there is great theatre, especially in the higher courts, you've got people in wigs and crusty old judges and well spoken barristers and so on. There's a great sense of theatre, especially from the crown courts upwards. It's one of the few places in newspapers where you're guaranteed a theatrical stage show, which are filled with human emotion. You're dealing with cases which have an impact on people's lives invariably, in an adverse manner. So, it brings to bear, that real first account of crime and it impacts upon people.

MPB: As a newspaper, do you feel any responsibility towards the inclusion of court reporting?

MS: Yeah, I think that we're duty bound to. There's an element of public service journalism involved in court reporting and it's been said before that journalists are on the front row of history. I prefer to think of us on the front row of a peep show, but we are the public's eyes and ears and the golden rule of British justice is that it's done and that it's seen to be done. People don't go to court and we got to court on their behalf, and I think it's essential that we

continue to do so.. Miscarriages of justice must be exposed, and I think the national press is the place to do that.

MPB: If there wasn't a sense of duty, as you said, do you think the newspaper would still include court reporting?

MS: I think so. I think the very nature, when you think about it, the very nature of news is, a large element is that thought of "Gosh that could happen to me." So, dispensing with the public service aspect of journalism, I think you're guaranteed with court cases, that sense of fear of what has happened to someone, could also happen to you. So you get that ability to report that front line sort of fear. So I think newspapers, when everything is said and done, will continue to report that if there wasn't that public service element to it.

MPB: Are court reports a major source of front page leads and stories?

MS: Yes, they are a source. I haven't done an audit on how much but as journalism in this country gets the belt tightened increasingly, you get fewer and fewer staff, so where you turn to, to source news, you tend to look at your certainties. You know if you send a reporter to court, you're guaranteed something, and so there is that danger that you become too court bound almost, you put too many court stories in the paper, because you're guaranteed stories from court. There is this theatrical element to it which you capture and print, and then you're guaranteed a story from court. There is a danger that you can cover them too much.

MPB: What kind of stories would you say are newsworthy to your newspaper?

MS: The essential element of news is people. People are news and in a court story you will have one person do something to another person. So immediately, you sort of have the quintessential elements of news there. You've got people involved, you've got that fear factor that I mentioned before. News comes from the most unlikely of sources in court, what

could be the most ‘piddling’ of charge could have behind it a terrific story which you are always looking to explore. A murder in fact could be very ‘mundane’ and boring, and yet the really minor charge, I don’t know a shoplifting one or something, could have an incredible story behind it. It’s not easy to say, with any degree of certainty, that this is the type of story you look for in court, the news can come from, any court room.

MPB: What kind of story would warrant a follow up?

MS: In an ideal world, you’re looking at all of them, but because of the nature of the British justice system you get in court stories and in court reporting, you get the primary colours of the story, it’s very broad brush strokes. So, you are told X did Y and it lead to C, and this is why, which is all well and good for a jury, but for a newspaper reader you’d want to know a little bit more about it, and so we’d always try and get the story behind the story as it were. So, X did this to Y, and this was the outcome, so we’d like to speak to Y and in an ideal world, we’d like to speak to X as well. Find out why X did this and what exactly were the implications for Y and explore the actual story behind the broad brush strokes.

MPB: Are there any court stories which the paper would purposefully avoid?

MS: Yes. Back in the day for instance, you may be too young to remember, but the Mary Bell case; I’m too young to remember in fact. The Mary Bell case in the sixties in Newcastle, she was found guilty of the man slaughter of two children, but Mary Bell herself was a child. Then, the vast majority of the national press ignored that story as being too horrific to be reported. Now, Mary Bell was given lifelong anonymity, and about ten years ago that anonymity was being questioned and that story received more coverage than the original story. It was considered very unsavoury, a child murdering two others, it was virtually unheard of. Today, this wouldn’t be the case, but there are still issues where we all shy away from, stories where we’ll say we’ll cover it as a matter of public record but we will not go

into depth with. They involve, as you can imagine, some of the more unsavoury stories, such as bestiality, and we won't cover these because we're a family paper. So there are cases like that, where you think, no we're not going cover that in any great depth. It would be on taste and decency grounds rather than anything else.

MPB: Are there any types of court stories which have become more popular over the past few years? For example, domestic violence.

MS: There are ones, because of the shifting nature of reporting generally, newspapers are organic and they must change and develop, or they'll wilt on the vine and die. So you've got to move and things in the past, ASBO stories for instance, they didn't exist until about five years ago so now newspapers will cover teenagers getting ASBO's. One of the great benefits of ASBO's is that they like to name and shame those responsible, that's what they're there for. Juveniles, who before we have not been allowed to identify before, we now can if they are given an ASBO, which in the past we wouldn't have been able to do so. They've been very popular, and so like much of the rest of the media, we've been covering a lot more ASBO type stories. There's also an appreciation amongst organisations and authorities, such as local authorities, councils and town halls, the media can help them. So for instance if they are doing a crack down on rogue tenants and they are serving them with court orders, they now know it's in their best interests if the media and so forth are involved with this sort of case. We're encouraged to do so by them, which in the past we wouldn't have automatically done so. We'll cover a lot more stuff like that, which in the past may have slipped under our radar.

MPB: Has court reporting changed for you at all over the past years?

MS: Yes and no. Yes in that I think the media as a whole and I think us here in Tyneside in particular are a lot more robust and rigorous in that we will now challenge, much more

readily, orders which are made wrongly by the court which in the past we wouldn't have. I think this is a great testament to the papers here on Tyneside. Front line reporters now know that Section 39 orders on certain people appearing in court don't necessarily apply here, and report staff now challenge such orders. That's one of the great changes, which is for the best. We continue to cover court intensely because it is a primary source of news, we do this a lot more than we once did. Where we would have just reported a simple court case in the past, we now delve beyond that. So yes, it's changed dramatically.

MPB: Do you still have a resident court reporter?

MS: Yes, we cover countless courts every day, we cover two crown courts, Newcastle and Durham on a daily basis, whenever they're sitting. We have two reporters at Newcastle and one at Durham. We have countless magistrates' courts, which again we cover on a daily basis, and the same goes for youth courts as well. We employ agencies to cover the High court and the court of appeal as well, so we invest a lot of resources in covering court.

MPB: Why use agency court reporters?

MS: It's easier than sending someone down to London and sitting in the court of appeal, it's more economic. If it's a really big story which we want to staff ourselves, we will still send a reporter down to anywhere in the country, but generally it's more economic to get an agency to look after London based court stories for us.

MPB: Using agency court reporters, do you think you lose some of the smaller human interest stories by doing this?

MS: Yeah, without a doubt. It's why, in an ideal world, we would prefer to staff these things ourselves. If you've got one of your own reporters in there, you've briefed them full and they understand what is expected and what to do and how the paper wants these issues treated.

With all the will in the world, agencies don't have firsthand knowledge of the paper they are covering it for; the nuances of the paper, the house style of the paper, and even if you've briefed them as best as you possibly can, it's never the ideal solution. You've just got to bite the bullet sometimes and say, "We can no longer spending X amount of money to send someone to London for a couple of days to cover this case." Where someone else will cover it for a fraction of that.

MPB: When you get new journalists into the paper, do they ever say that they want to cover court specifically?

MS: It remains enormously popular because, as I say, you're guaranteed stories from them and you're sitting there watching the drama unfurl in front of you. There's never a dull moment, as I say, court is theatrical and to be fair it's not enormously taxing, it can be disturbing, but you know that there is a story coming to you, then you can go and get the story behind it. So, it remains a very popular job. You've got to incredible short hand, it really does have to be first rate, and you've got to have people skills to develop contacts.

MPB: Do you feel it's something that has to be taught on the job?

MS: I think it is. You've got to brush up on your law as best you can, your *Mcnae's*, but yes I think it's something you've got to it through and learn. It's the way I learned, and I do believe it's probably the best way, watching the court mechanics in action.

MPB: With cut backs at newspapers, do you think that journalists have to become all rounder's even more so than before?

MS: Yes, quite possibly. However, I think a good journalist, they are a chameleon. They are someone who can be one moment, a court reporter, and the next a house reporter, so there is already an aura of that anyway. I'd like to think that, although I haven't been there for years,

I could still go to court and do a decent job and I think my short hand it still up to it. I know how the court system operates and the mechanics of it. So I think any reporter can handle court and any other assignment which is thrown at them really.

MPB: Do you think the internet has anything to do with staff cut backs and decreases in newspaper sales?

MS: Yes, but I wouldn't see it as a threat. I do think there is an opportunity there, and I think newspapers are slowly but surely grasping that opportunity of the internet. One of the things why journalists will always be required, regarding anything on the internet, is people do want to read the facts. They do want to read if there's been a murder and they want to know what the outcome is, and that can only be provided by you or I as a trained journalist. Be that providing that information on radio or TV or in a newspaper, or online. What they do not want is some scatty online report from someone with no training whatsoever, and that's why journalists will always be needed because we are there to advocate the facts and disseminate them. The threats that the internet imposes will never get rid of journalists, because we are needed for that reason, people trust us.

MPB: Do you think court reporting will be affected as newspapers move online?

MS: No, I don't think so. I think people will turn to us for our online reports of court cases, but they will be provided by journalists rather than some blogger with no journalistic experience.

MPB: I have looked at dates from 2003, to today and looked at how many court stories were included in the *Yorkshire Post*, and despite court reporters being made redundant at local newspapers, as well as regional and national newspapers, the amount of court stories being

reported has nearly doubled. Do you think this has anything to do with the increase in freelance and agency journalists?

MS: Yeah, I think it would but I suspect more so, it's to do with what we were talking about before about the reliability of news and the guaranteed stories from court. I think of newspapers as great, hungry monsters, which need to be constantly fed. The *Evening Chronicle* in Newcastle, for instance, will take about 130 stories a night, six nights a week. We know that if we go to certain places, if we go to court for instance, we will be guaranteed certain stories, which we can fill the paper with. We know that if we go to a council meeting, likewise, we'll get a certain amount of stories; with certain jobs we will be guaranteed certain stories. So I suspect that the *Yorkshire Post* knows that if it covers court, be it themselves or through agencies, they will get the stories to fill the *Yorkshire Post*. I suspect it's a sign more of cut backs in their editorial staff, rather than a sudden discovery that court stories are great. They are trying to fill the paper as economically as possible.

MPB: Do you think you will rely solely on agency journalists in the future?

MS: No I don't think so, I'd like to think we won't. We appreciate the benefits of having your own staff covering court cases, and I think it would be a dreadful day if that's what it came to. The *Shields Gazette*, one of our rivals for instance they rely upon agencies to cover Newcastle Crown Court for them, which I think is a great shame; I understand the reasons why, but I think it's a great shame. I don't think it will happen here, and I'd like to think we would do everything to stop it happening.

MPB: Do you see any major changes in court reporting in the future?

MS: Yes. I think it will continue to evolve as it has in previous years. New laws will come in and challenges will be made. It's always evolving and changing and that's reflected in the

way we are able to report court cases. I think it will be an exciting time for reporters covering court cases, because there is now a bit of a bounce back from the Human Rights Act, and our right to report is overshadowing other's right to privacy.

Transcription of Phone Interview with Lesley McNish (Ex Print and Television Court Reporter)

Miriam (M): Why did you get involved with court reporting in the first place?

Lesley (L): I worked in a district office, and I worked for a regional evening newspaper, and we had five editions daily, but this was back in the day when newspaper readership was still quite high. We had five local editions every day and night, and the deadline was one o'clock. Then I moved through to the Newcastle office, which was the regional office, there were only two of us in the office. Soon it became part of my daily task, and it was one of the main sources of stories.

M: How long were you involved with court reporting in newspapers?

L: About 12 years in newspapers. Then, probably for TV, 13 years? 25 years in all, quite a long time. The first time I went to a crown court was in 1984, when Newcastle Crown Court was up in Kenton, and it looked like prefabricated huts. They still used the old hall, but that only had two courts so until they built the one up on Quayside, it was in Kenton, where the driving school is.

Really it wasn't that I chose to go into it, it was just a part of the job. I think, back then, most reporters worked in a district office in the city centre, or say if you worked for the *Evening Chronicle* it was part of your normal routine. I think most of the newspapers had designated court reporters, ours didn't, but I became it. I think that it was always understood, that if you worked in the Newcastle District Office, that one of us would cover court. It was part of the job and I got it because the guy I worked with, who was the chief reporter, to make a little extra money he would sell a lot of stuff to the nationals, freelancing on the side. That went on in a lot of district offices, and as long as you did your job, they used to turn a blind eye to it. He used to cover everything but court for the nationals, so I got it.

If you had a good court case, it didn't have to be a murder, but again it's changed because murder used to be a big thing 20 years ago, whereas in the last decade, I've heard myself saying, "We're not going to bother with that one, with that murder, because it's a bit 'fish and chippy'," which is like a domestic or any elements to make it that little bit unusual. Today there are more murders and it's like you've become conditioned to them, they maybe aren't as newsworthy as they used to be. Sometimes you don't know what you're going to get, until you're actually in their covering a case. Sometimes, you can have the most boring burglary case, but there is something quirky and funny that's part of the evidence and you only find that out if you are sitting in that court or you get a nod and a wink from either a barrister or a police officer; usually the court clerks are quite good. This is what's so important when covering court, because people trust you, and the longer you're at court every day, those very people do trust you and they do give you the nod and the wink.

Many of the officials want you there in court. You're part of the audience, part of the justice system. The role of a court reporter is part and parcel of that. We not only bring the wrong doers to light, but we also help the victims. If you've got a murder case and it's covered properly and fairly, and everything is reported well, then you become the victim's representative because the victim's didn't and still don't have a voice in court. Today, they do have more say because there is victim support now, the barristers consult with their families etc now, throughout a case. They never used to though, and the press were a very important voice for the family, if they felt justice hadn't been done and things like that. That's another important part of the case afterwards, working with the families.

The role of a court reporter can go beyond just court. Obviously, it depends who you work for, because some of the newspapers would just say, I know that my friend who worked for the *Journal* for years and she was a court reporter, and sometimes she would get frustrated because they would pass the background of a case onto someone else. They're the ones who

spend the time building up a rapport with the family outside of the court room. Whereas she would just get stuck with sitting in a court room. I think there is a danger if your just covering court, you can become a bit isolated and a bit stuck in a rut sometimes. It's an easy job once you've been doing it for a long time, everything is handed to you on a plate. You don't have to rake around very much.

Another key element is your shorthand, a lot of reporters today don't have shorthand, especially TV reporters who they send to court. I don't know how they managed to cover a case. It is vital, you're protected by privilege but if you've got a full verbatim note, than you can show the judge that maybe you just misheard something, and it's clearly there in your shorthand. You can't take notes in the public gallery, you have to be within the body of the court, which again a lot of the younger reporters don't know. You are not protected by privilege at all if you take notes in the public gallery. That's just the rules, that's what the rules are. So that's why, if you go to court and there aren't enough seats for the press, you have a right as a journalist to ask for a chair to be brought in so you can sit within the body of the court.

M: Many universities don't teach court reporting as part of their journalism courses. Do you think that this is going to lead to court reporting being a lost art?

L: No, I don't think you can teach court reporting as such. I think what is needed is to teach shorthand, you need to practice and be good at that, and I think that you need to go to court as part of the course to see how it works. The best learning curve is just to do it. You'll make mistakes, I remember the first time, and I'm still mortified when I think of it now. I hadn't a clue about how crown court worked, I just used to follow the older ones around and keep an eye on what they do and I remember I followed a barrister once after a court case because I wanted to ask him some questions. I knocked on the consultation room's door, not even

knowing what it was and he opened the door and I asked him this question and then realised the defendant was sitting in there with him! I didn't know you couldn't knock on a consultation room door. Now I know that you wait. The protocol and things, you can't really teach somebody that and it's just about getting the nose for the job. You can learn the law, which you need to know inside out, and you need to have your shorthand, it helps to learn the protocols and learn how a court works and you get that by going down and sitting in court yourself.

Perhaps newspapers these days aren't placing much emphasis on court reporters. I know my friend who is the court reporter for the *Journal* has taken redundancy (Hilary Clixby) and I know they were just sending random, odd people down. Now the problem with that is, you will never build up the trust or get the same rapport if say, you were there every day. The chances are, without that trust, you'll be sitting in the press office completely oblivious. You'll have a court list and you'll look at it and think, "It's crappy burglary, it's crappy motoring offence" but what you wouldn't know, hypothetically, is that the motoring offence has incredibly newsworthy circumstances surrounding it, either in a funny way or in a horrific sort of way. There might be more to it, but the charge is quite minor.

Papers don't cover magistrate's court every day either now and in the magistrate's court, that's the start of many cases. You can pick them up there, but it doesn't tend to happen anymore because you don't have people sitting in the magistrate's court all day. They just don't have enough staff and that's the problem, newspapers have cut back on the staffing too much.

M: Do you think an increase in agency journalists is jeopardising the amount of local interest stories?

L: They're completely missing the local angle. The agencies are going to put out one version of the story, one version suits all. That's for the nationals, right down to the local newspapers and they have deals now and contracts with the local papers, but they're also interested in making money. If there is a good national story, which they know is going to sell they're going to concentrate on that.

M: Do you think that all court reporting will result solely in agency coverage?

L: I don't know, because there is a limit to the courts which the agency journalists can go into and cover on their own in a day. Say if you have eight court rooms in a court, with crime in them every day, and on plea days you can have ten cases listed in each court. Plea days are often the most lucrative for a journalist because you get the story, they put their hands up, they plead guilty and they're done with. So there's no way that one agency reporter can cover everything. However, what happens now is, if an agency knows of a good story in a particular court, they will inform the news desk, give them the nod and the wink and the paper will probably send down their own person, to cover it in the way that they want it covered.

M: Did you collaborate with agency reporters?

L: Yes. In court there is rarely that competitiveness that goes on outside of the court room, because you work together as a team. You have to, or wouldn't be able to cover everything. You agree to which courts you would be covering and you would say, "Right, we'll all take two courts each," and you'd be running between the two and then at some point you would compare notes. If you picked up a good story, you would just give it to them and vice versa. I think that is being lost because of the strangers who are coming down. Again, you're not going to be so willing and trust a stranger. A lot of the younger ones coming down have that competitive streak and they'll take from you, but they won't give.

M: What makes a court story newsworthy to a newspaper?

L: Anything. It's like any other story, what makes any story good and interesting is hard to say really, it would depend on the circumstances. If it's of public interest, if it's something quirky or funny. It just depends, it's the unexpected sometimes, it's the unusual and sometimes if it's a quadruple murder say, then it's the sheer weight of the case. It could be the legal implication in something, like the guy who's fighting to ban knife crime. It's all about recognising that there is a case there, you're not just covering it for the sake of covering it. Then again you do sometimes, because when you work for a newspaper and your editor says to you, "I want four page leads from you today and a couple of fillers," you would probably go to court and try and get a couple of page leads from there. We would do that every day, but usually court was a good source of page leads. It's not a case of being lazy, you're just filling your quota.

M: I have looked at dates from 2003, to today and looked at how many court stories were included in the *Yorkshire Post*, and despite court reporters being made redundant at local newspapers, as well as regional and national newspapers, the amount of court stories being reported has nearly doubled. Do you think this has anything to do with the increase in freelance and agency journalists?

L: It could well be yes, and it's also a very easy source of good news stories for newspapers. If a newspaper has fewer staff they can be guaranteed to get good stories via a crown court; and they'd be very silly not to cover it, not to take those stories whether they're coming via an agency or via their own staff. That's probably why, it is an easy source of guaranteed good stories.

When it comes down to the type of societal issues however, there is a dramatic change year on year. Take murders for example, today there are probably more of them, but it comes back

to my analogy at the beginning with the murders, where I would hear myself say, 'oh, I'm not going to bother with this one on court one, because it's too fish and chippy'. This is just another way of saying its everyday; couple of drunks fighting or a domestic violence case that's gone wrong. I know it's awful but there's no interest, because you had so many of that type of murder, it was just boring. They were mundane; there was nothing that made them stand out from the other murders. Twenty years ago there wasn't a murder every day, but now there are more murders and most of them you can predict.

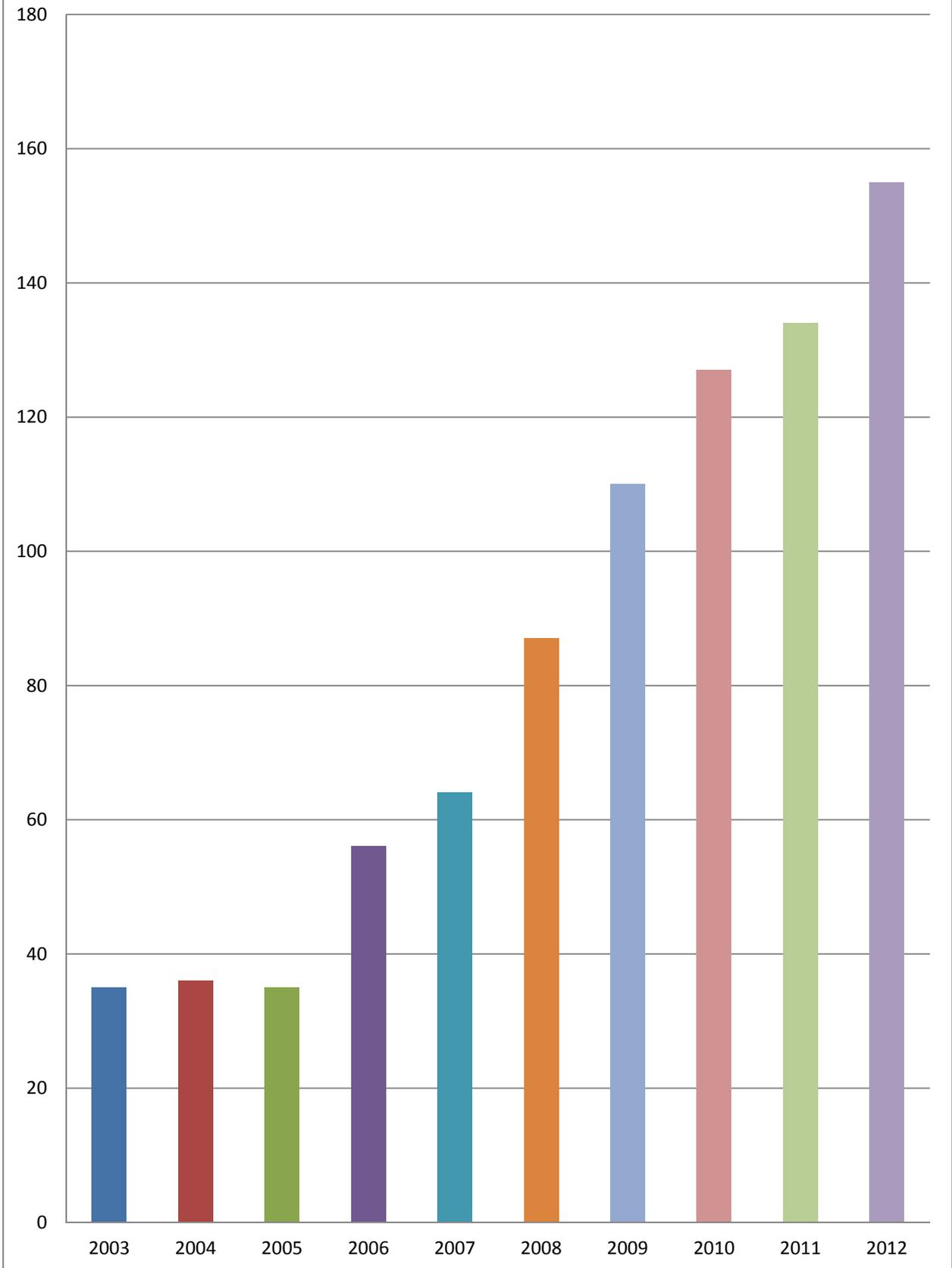
M: What changes do you see to court reporting in the future?

L: There's bound to be a change. But how and what, I don't know. The industry is on a bit of a cross roads at the moment, what with the internet and everything else. Newspapers have declined so much and cut back their staff so much, just in the last year and the industry is just all over the place. I don't know in what direction everything will go yet. Yes, I do think the job will change again, I think it's been changing gradually over every decade and if you look back, it's a different job. I'm sure you could look at any job in the next decade and say, "Yes, it will be very different." Will there be any jobs in the media in the next decade?

Appendix B

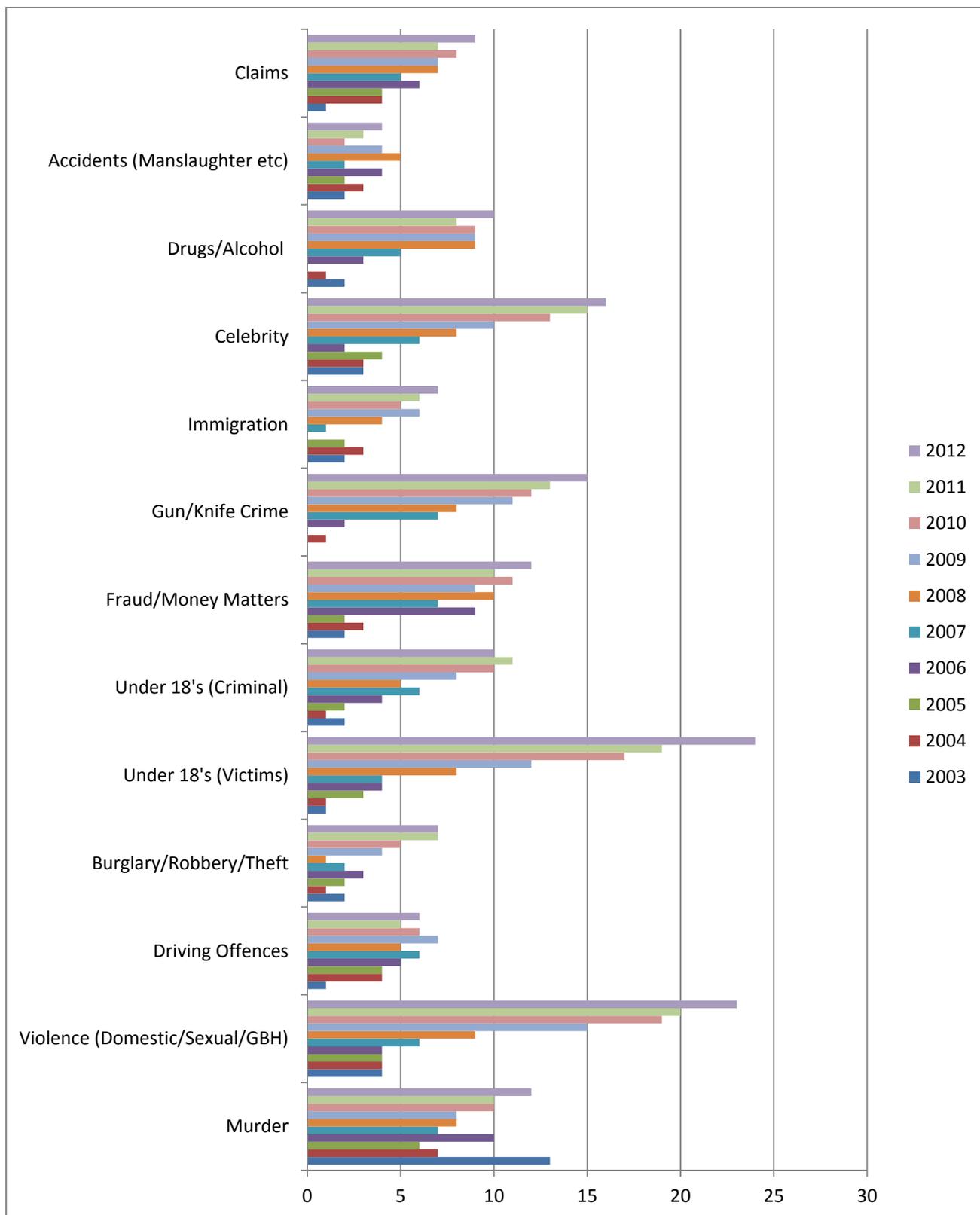
GRAPH 1

A graph to show the amount of court stories printed in the Yorkshire Post 2003-2012 during the week of 19th -26th October



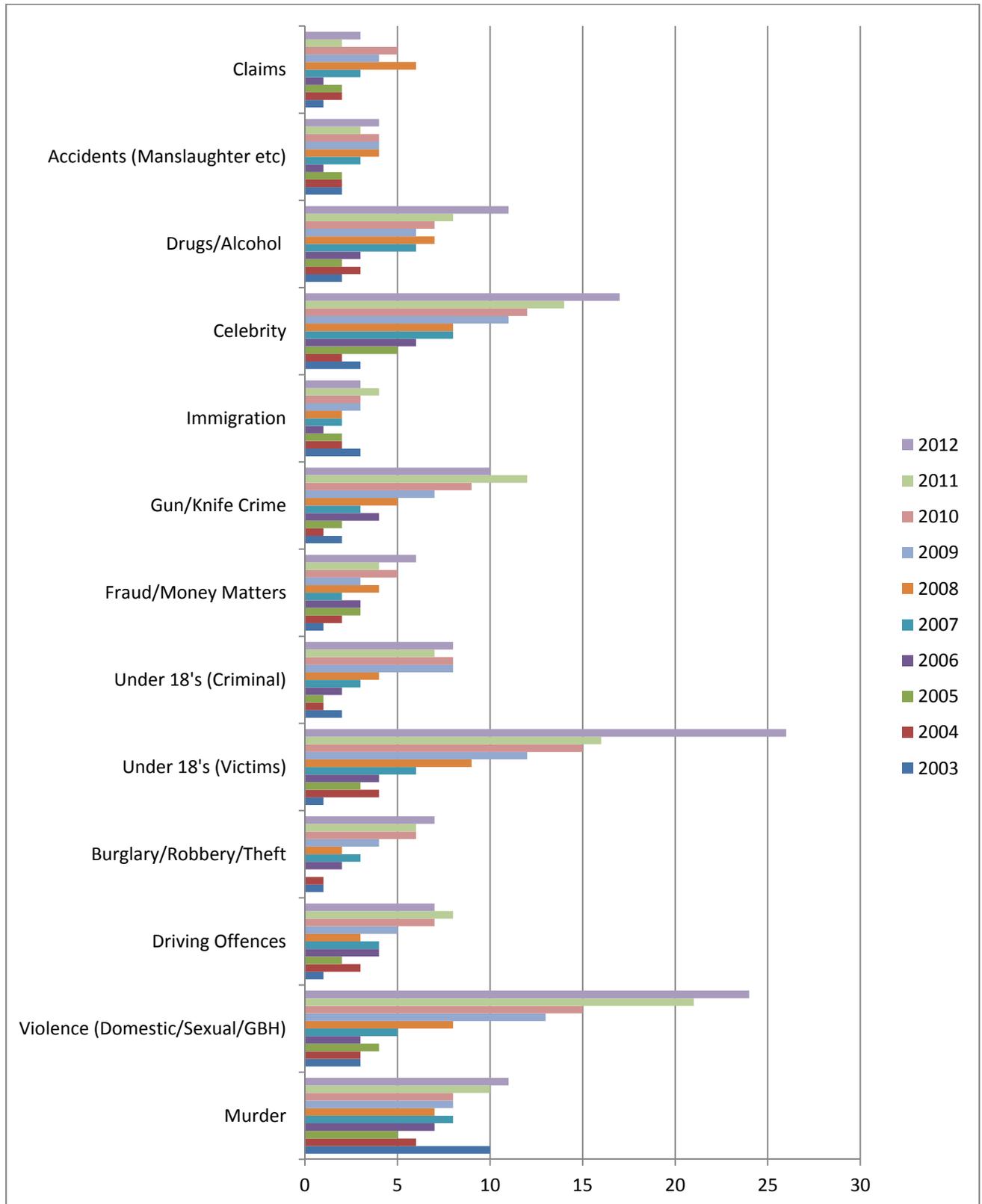
GRAPH 2

A graph to show the change in crime topics published in the Yorkshire Post 2003-2012 during the week 19th-26th October



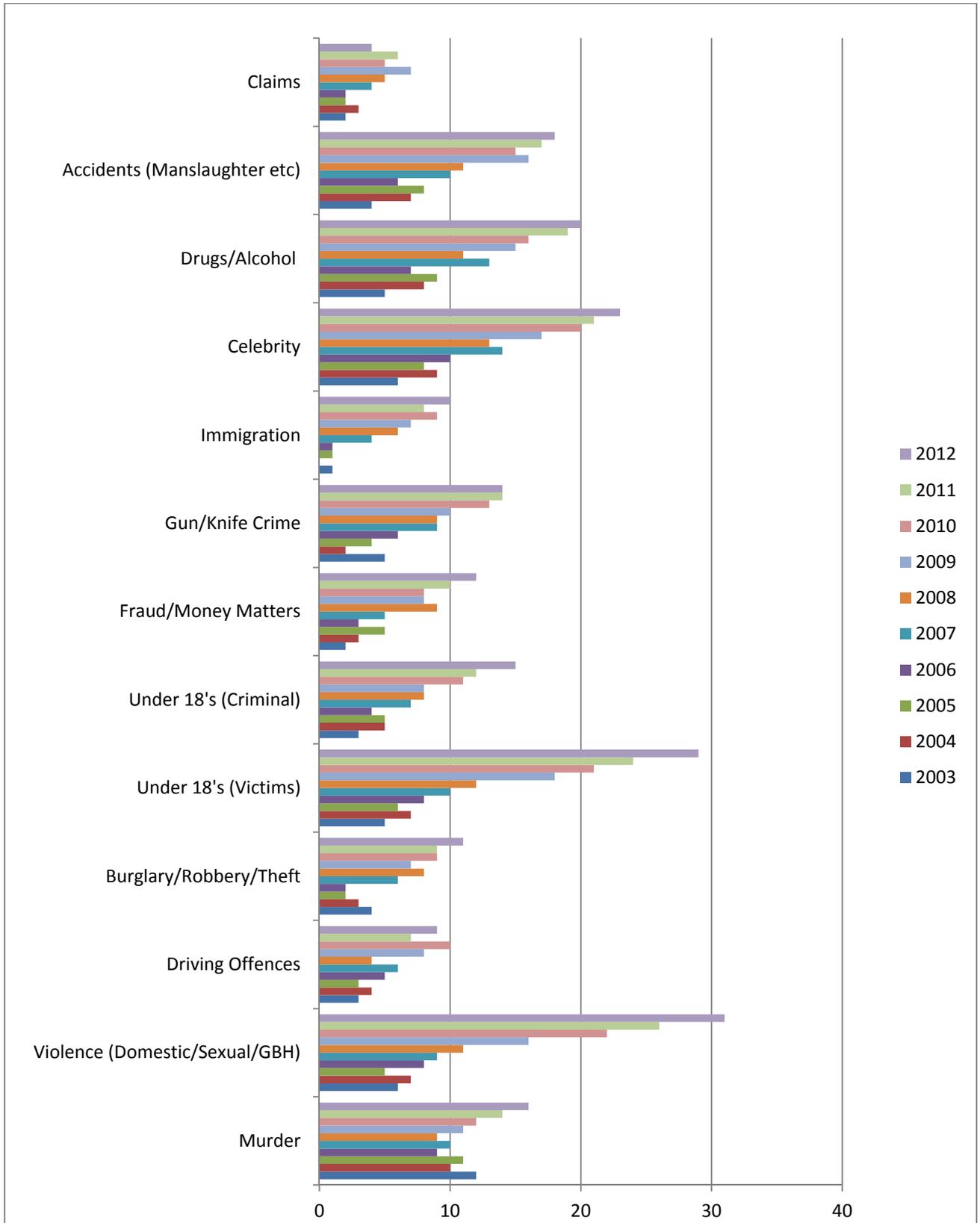
GRAPH 3

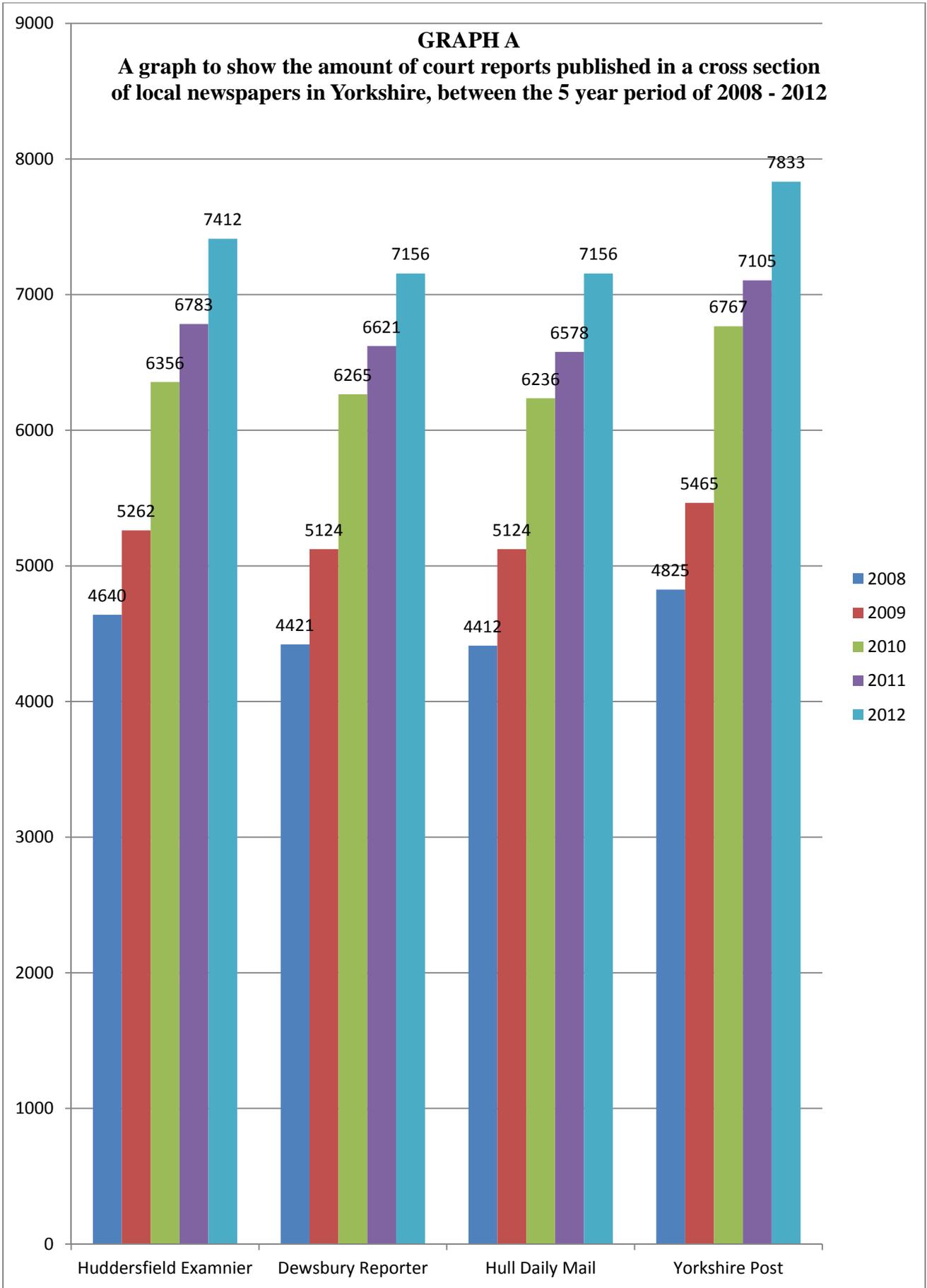
A graph to show the change in crime topics published in the Huddersfield Examiner 2003-2012 during the week 19th-26th October

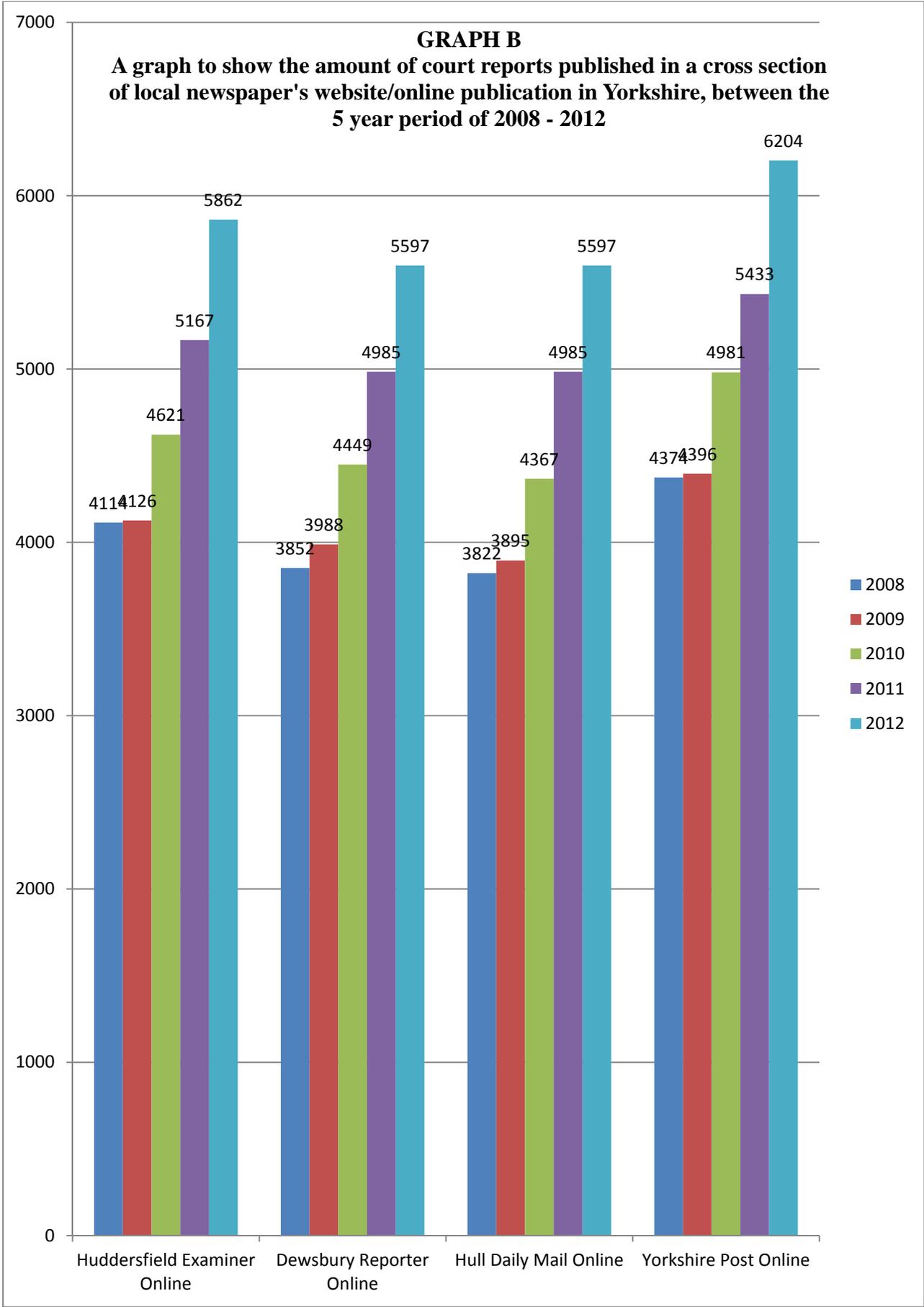


GRAPH 4

A graph to show the change in crime topics published in the Independent 2003-2012 during the week 19th-26th October







Appendix C

Email From Leeds County Court in regards to Court Seasons

Court Seasons

From: **Miriam Phipps-Bertram** (miriam_phipps_bertram@live.co.uk)

Sent: 29 January 2010 13:32:52

To: enquiries@leeds.countycourt.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sirs,

I am a student at the University of Huddersfield, doing a case study on the courts around Yorkshire. I was wondering if courts, such as that of Leeds County Court, were busier at certain times of the year than others? Do they have seasons?

I look forward to your reply,

Yours Faithfully,

Miriam Phipps-Bertram

Do you want a Hotmail account? [Sign-up now - Free](#)

RE: Court Seasons

From: **Leeds County, Enquiries** (enquiries@leeds.countycourt.gsi.gov.uk)
Sent: 03 February 2010 09:56:54
To: 'Miriam Phipps-Bertram' (miriam_phipps_bertram@live.co.uk)

Hello, there are various periods of the year when High Court Judges sit at Leeds District Registry; these periods would tend to be busier as more cases are heard. More often than not, this period lies in October. Please let me know if there is any type of work that you would like to observe and I could let you know when the periods are.

Leeds County Court
1, Oxford Row
Leeds
LS1 3BG

0113 306 2800

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