

Press glorify crime? Yes, no, sometimes

SHOOT, STAB, rape, murder: Does the press glorify crime? That was the question. But like most questions, there isn't one simple answer.

On the asking end were members and guests of the Detroit Chapter of Women in Communications Inc. (WICI), gathered in the brick and glass atrium of the University of Detroit Law School.



Shirlee Iden

Responding were three reporters and one law enforcer, all of whom agonize over their roles in society more than most people realize.

Concerns centered on the different kinds of biases — such as over-reporting, sensationalism, sexism, and racism.

CRIME is part of America, both its big cities and its small towns, and the press is always going to seek out and exploit a crime story, said Bob Bennett, Channel 4 TV reporter.

"But that doesn't mean they glorify crime," he said. Bennett recalls a recent vicious murder which brought forth less-than-adequate punishment and led to scrutiny by the press and the reopening of the case on a national level.

We don't glorify crime, we work to report it accurately, he said.

ANOTHER OPINION was offered by David Grant, who for 12 years has reported on police and crime for a Detroit daily newspaper.

"Yes, we glorify crime, and we sensationalize it, and our stories enhance crime," he said.

"I wrote a story once about people being robbed in a funeral parlor, told the editor, 'I didn't think it should run. It did. We got a rash of funeral home robberies.' My job is not to make editorial judgments. I voice my opinion, but I don't control what goes in the paper."

GRANT ADMITS that people in the press have an unfounded power. "We can print a totally wrong story and ruin someone, but no one will read the retraction."

Sandy McClure has notched a lot of years as a police reporter for a Detroit daily.

Working in a shared office at 1300 Beaubien, just 10 feet from that of Detroit Deputy Police Chief Jim Bannon, her concerns are about the superficiality of what she, Bennett, and Grant report on.

"Anytime at all, we may have to go with what we have because we're close to deadline," she said. "Staffs are thinner than they should be. We need people to plow through reports and other skilled people to write the in-depth stories behind the stories."

McCLURE said crime reporters range from those who never verify anything to the careful researcher who talks to three separate sources, aiming at accuracy.

"A weakness in the way we report crime is that reporters who cover the police end of it are entitled to no information at all, by law," she said.

Bannon, a dapper cop with a Ph.D. and a recognized expert on domestic violence and assaults on police officers, contended the media doesn't sensationalize crime but glamorizes criminals.

"MY MENTOR was Ray Girardin, a former newspaperman," Bannon said. Girardin told him his philosophy was to deal with candor toward reporters on a bad story. "If I do that I get one headline for one day. If they make a mistake, I get headlines for days."

Bannon said he has a problem with reporters who fail to recognize they're not the news, the story is the news.

He recalled a story on vagrants being doused with flamethrowers and set on fire. After the first news report, we got an epidemic of this. But the media didn't report the repeat acts because they sensed responsibility."

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comment

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oral quarrel

Get tougher with Russia, callers say

Today's Oral Quarrel question asked our readers if they believed the moves that President Reagan made against the Soviets for shooting down the Korean passenger liner were harsh enough and what they would do if they were in the president's shoes.

Following are the answers:

I am a Republican, and I think he's a jerk. He should ban all air traffic to the Soviet Union. He's a jerk. Two hundred and sixty-nine people, and he doesn't care.

No, I don't think he cracked down hard enough at all. I think that he should have immediately stopped all of our trade agreements with the Soviet Union. He should not have sold them any grain and not have sold them anything else, and he should have immediately expelled their diplomats, and by the way I am a Republican, and normally I am all for him but this time he was too soft.

I think President Reagan cracked

down hard enough because if he did anything else there would have been a war, and I would have done the same thing because I don't want a war to happen.

No, that damn Reagan, that damn, liberal Reagan didn't crack down hard enough.

What did the United States do when Israel shot down the airplane with 166 people aboard? What did we do when they blew up that ship just off Israel when the identification was clear? And you have to realize when Powers was shot down and captured by the Russians, it was just two days before a peace meeting and this is exactly what happened this time. All the guys in Washington are a bunch of jackasses.

The president did not crack down hard enough on the Soviet Union. If I were president, I would make sure that any Soviet plane over United States territory would immediately be downed. An eye for an eye, that's the

way it should be handled.

It is clear that what the Soviet Union did in reacting to a passenger plane accidentally is sadistic and uncalled for. But I should point out that steps taken in the past do not help in changing their position towards the action nor does it evoke any action that would help the situation. Our actions, for instance, upon the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, particularly with the grain embargo, hurt us more.

If any trade sanctions should be imposed on the Soviet Union, it should be done with the joint cooperation with the majority of democratic countries elsewhere. And even if this provokes favorable action by the Soviet Union, it may not change the overall policy.

No, I don't think President Reagan was severe enough. I would secure all world powers to organize a pact to totally alienate the Soviet Union completely. They have mutilated the world around us unmercifully. There is nothing they have that we need that bad that we couldn't arrange with the other nations by ourselves. Let them blow

themselves to oblivion.

No, there is no way he can crack down hard enough. Reagan is just a political puppet for the people, and there is no way he can do anything to the Kremlin, and there is no way Reagan and the Russian situation is going to change, and I am sick of hearing about this jet, and I hope nothing like this will ever happen again.

I am really pleased with his approach. This is the type of situation that could be so dangerous, and if you had somebody who would just fly off the handle, it could be devastating. We certainly don't want another Louisiana, and I am happy he kept an even head on this.

There should have been an immediate embargo on the grain and technological aid that we have given to the Soviet Union. We subsidize the tobacco industry, and years ago we subsidized the farmers to eliminate their hogs. It would be advantageous to us.

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Next consider proper sitting position. The best way to sit is with your feet flat on the floor and your hips. This position takes a strain off the muscles which connect your hip to your back.

The third important habit to develop is to bend with your knees, not to stoop over with your back. Whether you are picking up a pencil or moving a chest, be sure to lift with your legs, not your back.

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