

Sensationalism, Jurification and The Serial Effect: Why Are People Invested in True Crime Media and How Does That Impact Cases?

Literature Review

This review examines the current literature regarding true crime, its history, popularity and related problematic aspects. It will discuss the impact of new media sources, such as Netflix documentaries and the effect their approach has on the audience. It will also investigate who is interested in true crime media and a brief overview of the psychology behind why they may be drawn to it.

The popularity of the True Crime Genre

True Crime is a broad genre, which focuses on stories relating to murder, serial killing and other violent crimes. These stories are frequently told in the format of fiction and non-fiction literature, podcasts, documentaries and films. The genre dates back to the 1500's, where stories were told in the form of ballads and pamphlets, before being seen in broadsides and penny dreadfuls in the 1800's (Dukes, 2021). In the modern day, true crime podcasts make up 24% of the top-ranked podcasts in America, with 34% of Americans saying they regularly listen to the genre, according to a 2022 survey (Naseer and Aubin, 2023).

Though Netflix do not release their viewing figures publicly, Sayles (2021) offers an overview of some crime genre statistics. True crime is also hugely popular on Netflix, with documentaries frequently hitting the "Top 10" list. From 2020 to 2021, the genre was the fastest growing, with an increase of 63% in series available. Most notable from this time was the release of *Tiger King*, which maintained its rank in the top 10 for 35 days when it was released in March of 2020. Following the success of *Making a Murderer* (2015, 2018), which had an average of 19.3 million views in its first 35 days of release, Netflix invested heavily in true crime. They proceeded to present several other docuseries, such as *I am a Killer* (2018) and *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel* (2021), both of which sat in the top 10 rankings for several weeks (Sayles, 2021).

True Crime Audiences

It is widely thought that the main consumers of true crime media are women. With 75% of true crime podcast listeners and 80% of CrimeCon (a true crime convention) attendees being women. Although men are more than twice as likely to be victims of homicide than women in the UK (Jones, 2023), and men are more likely to commit violent crimes, studies have shown that women show a higher interest in educating themselves on cases (Vicary and Fraley, 2010). In a 2010 study, Vicary and Fraley suggest that this could be because women fear being a victim of a crime more than men do. They found that women were more drawn to stories that described how a victim escaped murder than men were. Interest could also be linked to evolutionary psychology, which presumes that all human behaviours reflect the influence of physical and psychological predispositions that have helped humans survive and reproduce (Confer et al., 2010). Because humans have an instinct for survival, it could be theorised that they would be interested in learning about morbid events, such as murder, in order to avoid harm (Harrison and Frederick, 2020).

In a study on morbid curiosity, Harrison and Frederick propose that morbid curiosity could be linked to sensation seeking. They define sensation seeking as "*the need for various complex, novel and stimulating experiences*" (pp.6). These experiences can lead to physiological responses, such as accelerated heart rate and cortical responses, meaning that there may be a positive relation between sensation seeking and the consumption of true crime, or "morbid media". They suggest that men and women have different reasons for having an interest in true crime.

For men, it could be the evolutionary protective role, and for women, the desire for protection. Their study found that men and women were equally interested in serial killers and morbid topics, both in fiction and non-fiction/real-life. However, this study has limitations as it relied on self-reported answers to set questions on a five-point Likert scale (e.g. interest from 1-5) and the participants included 202 students, 77% of which were studying psychology. Therefore, it could be suggested that they may be more likely to be interested in the topic of serial killing than if the subjects were selected from the general population. Nevertheless, the theory linking to evolutionary psychology has been validated by other studies, such as that of McDonald, James and Roberto (2021, pp.1) who suggest “*women are equipped with a psychological threat management system*” in order to avoid being attacked.

In a 2021 study on female true crime audiences and the way they discuss true crime online, Maddalena quoting Stahl (2017) states:

Physiologically, fear is the most powerful and primal instinct humans possess, and when listening to gruesome crime stories, fear naturally causes consumers to feel a rush of adrenaline and become addicted to that feeling... humans tend to create terrifying images in their minds based on their deepest fears, so some listeners combine the two psychological factors and believe the stories could happen to them. (Pp5).

Therefore, this could validate the theory that an interest in true crime is linked to self-preservation. However, it has also been suggested that people could simply have an interest in the misfortune of others and the presence or absence of justice (Miller, 2022).

Transparency in Storytelling

True crime, like many other topics in documentaries, has been presented in a variety of ways, and how the story is told can shape the opinion the viewer makes. In an article entitled “*Stylistic choices in true-crime documentaries: the duty of responsibility between filmmaker and audience*”, Morton (2021) explored the impact of the objectivity of the filmmaker. They state that dialogue is hugely important as it is up to the filmmaker as to what they choose to reveal. In *The Staircase* (2014), for example, the film follows the trial of Michael Peterson, who was accused of murdering his wife Kathleen. Morton uses this documentary as an example of transparency shown through dialogue as it follows discussions with Peterson and his defence team, their appearances in court and their direct conversations with the documentary’s director. It does not claim to be objective as it focuses on Peterson’s side of the story, but is transparent in doing so. However, by following the trial process, this can lead to the “jurification” of the audience, which is problematic in this case as the viewer hears little from the prosecution and more from the defence. With the audience “jury” only hearing one side of the story, they are swayed more to side with Peterson. Upon doing further research outside of *The Staircase*, with both sides of the story, one could form a much different opinion of the defendant.

Morton goes on to compare *The Staircase* to the Louis Theroux documentary *The Night in Question* (2019). In this expository documentary, Theroux follows the case of a student who has been suspended from university following accusations of sexual assault (SA). Throughout this, he is transparent about objectivity and attempts to access opinions from multiple perspectives, speaking to the accused offender and victims of SA (although he was unable to get a statement from the subject’s alleged victim, he had read the police notes). Theroux does not try to sway the audience either way, rather he describes the way the interactions made him feel. The audience is therefore able to form their own opinions (Morton, 2021).

In an era where audiences can affect the outcomes of a case, it could be said that having an objective view of all sides of a case is important. When a documentary is just for entertainment, having a rounded view might not be as important, but when the public can campaign for cases to be reopened, and succeed in their endeavours (as was the case with Michael Peterson), the impact of transparency should be considered.

Impact on Audiences

When researching the topic of true crime media, the source material frequently discusses the subject of audience impact. With the ever-growing popularity of the genre, some research shows that it has given audiences the impression that crime, and serial killers in particular, are far more prevalent in society than they actually are (Russell, 2021). Part of this could be attributed to the FBI adjusting the classification for serial killers from a minimum of 3 victims with a cooling off period in between to 2 (Hodgkinson, Prins and Stuart-Bennett, 2017). This, therefore, creates the illusion of a higher frequency of serial killing than may be the case. Hodgkinson, Prins and Stuart-Bennett go on to say that the way the media sensationalise cases can warp the public's view on crime. They say that the way serial killers are shown in TV programs, such as *Mindhunter* (2017-2019) have given audiences a skewed version of who a serial killer is; a white, male psychopath who kills at random. They quote:

This distorted image of serial murder, moreover, increases the public's level of fear and their sense that society is under siege, partly because the crimes are so vicious, and partly because the victim selection of this type of serial murderer seems so random (Schmid, 2005, cited in (Hodgkinson, Prins and Stuart-Bennett, 2017).

Consumption of true crime can also lead to increased anxiety, paranoia and disturbed sleep (Smith, 2018). In a study by Rush (2022) a positive correlation was found between the consumption of true crime media, including news stations, podcasts and documentaries, and the effect it had on Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). They also discuss how those who consume higher amounts of true crime perceived themselves to be more at risk of victimisation.

Ethics

Documentaries can also have an impact on the families of victims. In an interview with radio station WUWM, clinical professor of psychology Stacey Nye explains that true crime media can exacerbate victim blaming and also cause erasure of victims (Cheng and Flynn, 2023). *"We know the names of the killers, we are much less likely to know the names of the victims."* She goes on to say that many victims who are highlighted in the media are white women, which minimises the number of women of colour, indigenous and trans women who are also victimised.

Another aspect of ethics to consider is the consent of family members in regard to telling their loved one's story. Chan (2020) discusses how producers from Netflix's *I Am a Killer* (2019) ignored pleas from family members of murder victim Robert Mast when his case was covered on the show. Whilst there is no legal obligation in the US to obtain permission from family members when featuring a case, it could perhaps be considered whether there should be a moral obligation to consider the impact on families. Although Mast's family contacted the executive producer Nick Parker, and he acknowledged that it was a "moral dilemma", the episode was still aired, causing emotional distress to those opposing it (Chan, 2020).

With true crime being a topic which involves many sensitive subjects, such as murder and rape, ethics surrounding the telling of these stories is frequently discussed in the literature. I will expand upon these issues later in the following essay.

Conclusion

From reviewing a wide range of sources, it is apparent that the majority of true crime media consumers are women. This could be explained by an evolutionary desire for self preservation, whether this consumption has a positive impact on the viewer or not.

Due to the popularity of the genre among this audience, platforms such as Netflix are continuing to produce this media to meet the demand, regardless of the associated ethical issues, such as justification, biased storytelling and the harm caused to loved ones of victims.

Essay

True crime is a broad genre that is popular across a multitude of mediums. From books to podcasts to documentaries, people have had a steady interest since the mid-1500's. Perspectives and portrayals have changed over time, but the interest has always been there. Over the last 10 years however, the view of the genre has evolved from one of a sensationalist guilty pleasure to more of a high brow interest. Modern documentaries show interviewees telling their stories on clean sets alongside b-roll of them going about their everyday lives, as opposed to the shock-inducing dramatisations of the 1980's and 90's. Instead of sinister scores intending to unnerve audiences, modern documentaries use music to evoke sympathy in the audience. With this new perceived legitimacy, audiences are more at risk of justification and becoming so invested in true crime cases that they seek to solve cases themselves from the safety of their homes. Two such examples of this impactful media are the *Serial* (2014) podcast and the documentary *Making a Murderer* (2015), both of which changed the future of true crime and the way stories are told. This essay will explore the evolution of true crime, why people are drawn to it, the "Serial Effect" and associated justification of audiences.

Origins of True Crime

True Crime has steadily been rising in popularity over the years, with it reaching the most in-demand documentary genre in 2021 (Sayles, 2021). However, this interest in real-life criminal cases is not new by any means. The style of story-telling has changed, from ballads in the 1500's, pamphlets in the 1600's, broadsides and penny dreadfuls in the 1800's, to the fiction and non-fiction media we see in the modern day (Dukes, 2021). There has always been an interest in crime-related stories. Audiences of this content have varied over time too. Whilst literacy was expanding from 1550-1700, and crime-related pamphlets were becoming more available with developing technologies, these were still only accessible to those with the means to purchase them (Burger, 2016). These stories were considered the origins of modern sensationalism. Early examples from Germany would deliberately evoke an emotional response from the reader, depicting detailed wood-cut prints of the crimes and detailed step-by-step narratives of murders, including assumed dialogue. They would often push a Christian doctrine, reminding the reader that criminals will inevitably be punished for their sins. Over half of these examples featured murders within families, adding to the shock factor and encouraging a sympathetic response from the reader, especially as the focus was largely on the victim, not the perpetrator. This is in contrast to later English accounts from the 17th century, which focused on the perspective of the repentant criminal (Wiltburg, 2004). This sensationalism continued into the 19th century with exaggerated broadsides and penny dreadfuls (8-16 page publications which were often aimed at children (Anderson, 2016)), (Dukes 2021). Crime was also popular in other literature at this time, including essays such as *A Visit to Newgate* by Charles Dickens and continued to be present in later fictional stories.

The way true crime stories have been told has evolved over time, but the topic has always been present. Whilst in the earlier sources it could be said that the judge and jury was a higher religious power, in the perceived sense that criminals would be expected to be punished for their sins in Hell, in the modern day, the wider jury could be the public consuming the stories.

Crimes on Screen

True crime is not just popular on the page, however, it has flourished across multiple mediums. Once film was born, crime stories were brought to life on screen and could be seen as early as 1903 with Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (although this has been contested as a Western). Other early films, such as D. W. Griffith's *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912) centred around gangsters. This continued through the American prohibition era of the 1920's, which could be representative of real-life fears in society. This theme continued through to the 1940's and '50's with Film Noir. Meanwhile, European films were more focused on the psychological interests

surrounding serial killers, reflective of the interest around Freudian theories (Rafter, 2006).. Popularity dwindled until the Modern Picture Production Code, or Hays Code (moral censorship guidelines which dictated what was appropriate to be shown on screen) was replaced in 1968 with the voluntary rating system in America (Filmratings.com, n.d.). These new guidelines gave filmmakers the freedom to depict whatever they wanted on screen, bringing a never before seen level of violence and gore.

In New Hollywood, *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) was the first film to depict this new found freedom, with evolved special effects technology, such as exploding electric squibs (blood capsules). This was the start of accurate violence being shown in film (Morrow, 2017).

From here on, crime in film only got bloodier and more extreme, with examples such as *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). In the modern day, crime and killers can still frequently be seen both in cinema and series, with Ted Bundy inspired film *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019) and the Netflix series *Dahmer* (2022). With horror making a fifth of the top 100 most in demand films in America in 2022 (Parrot Analytics, 2023), it is clear that crime-centred films will continue to be popular for the foreseeable future. It could be theorised that these dark topics in film have desensitised audiences and by the time the first true crime documentary was made in 1988, viewers were not as shocked as they would have been if crime was not common in popular films. They were therefore more able to look past the violent depictions to engage in the investigative element of a documentary.

The first true crime documentary was Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). This film, which investigated the murder of a police officer, was the first to impact a legal case (Bruzzi, 2016). During the process of making the film, Morris, who had previously been a private investigator, was able to identify through interviews that not only had the wrong man had been convicted of the crime, but that another key witness had in fact been the killer. The film resulted in the case being reopened and an innocent man regaining his freedom (Musser, 2015). *The Thin Blue Line* was praised for being innovative by using re-enactments of the events, although these were also seen as controversial for combining fiction with non-fiction (Walters, 2021). According to Morris, the re-enactments were a way of bringing the audience into the investigation (Butler, 2016). By placing the audience at the crime scene, it could be thought that their attention would be held and they could feel as if they too, were an investigator trying to solve the case. They could become more invested in a story they felt they were a part of.

These re-enactments were said to inspire those seen in *Unsolved Mysteries* (1987-1997, 1997-1999, 2000-2002) (which was later rebooted by Netflix in 2020) and *America's Most Wanted* (1988-2011) (Walters 2021). Whilst it has been criticised for being sensationalist or an example of "crimesploitation", *Unsolved Mysteries'* explicit dramatisations captivated audiences with their "television reality crime" style. Both *Unsolved Mysteries* and *America's Most Wanted* have been said to "deputise the home audience", encouraging the public to involve themselves in solving cases (Walters, 2021). This issue has continued to be present in contemporary true crime media, such as podcasts and documentaries.

The Impact of New Media and Jurification of Audiences

Whilst true crime had been popular for a long time, it grew significantly with the release of the first true crime podcast, *Serial*, in 2014 (Maddalena, 2021). *Serial* was highly successful, having been downloaded over 300 million times (Wendling, 2023). The podcast's first series, hosted by journalist Sarah Koenig investigates the murder of Hae Min Lee and the imprisonment of her ex-boyfriend Adnan Syed (*Serial*, 2014). During this investigation, the audience hears Koenig speak directly to Syed from jail, as well as to other key players such as attorney and close friend of Syed, Rabia Chaudry and others who knew Lee and Syed at the time of the murder. She also visits key locations and maps out heavily disputed timeframes (*Serial*, 2014).

Serial is frequently cited in the literature as the production to spike the contemporary interest in true crime, and as a result, the term "The Serial Effect" was coined (Sherrill, 2020). The name was

inspired by the similar “CSI Effect”, meaning TV shows such as *CSI* (2000) had a significant impact on juror’s expectations of forensics (Reetz, 2023). The distinction between “The Serial Effect” and “The CSI Effect”, is the element of truth in the depiction; the consumer is aware that *CSI* is a fictional production, whereas *Serial* investigates a real case, and is therefore perceived to deliver truth (Albrecht and Filip, 2023). Where true crime productions, such as *Unsolved Mysteries* (1987) had previously been viewed as salacious and sensationalist, *Serial* brought a level of legitimacy as it was thoroughly researched and hosted by a successful journalist. It became the benchmark for which similar media is frequently compared (Sherrill, 2020).

This “Serial Effect” links closely to jurification, i.e. putting the audience in the place of a juror. As Koenig approaches the investigation objectively, stating in the opening episode of the podcast

For the past year she has spent every day ‘trying to figure out where a high school student was on a particular day in 1999 – or if you want to get technical about it, and apparently I do, where a high school kid was for 21 minutes after school one day in 1999’. (Bruzzi, 2016).

She did not approach the story looking to prove any particular narrative. She had no personal link to the case, but had been requested to investigate it by Rabia Chaudry, an attorney and friend of the Syed family who believed Syed was innocent (Bruzzi, 2016). By the end of the twelve episode series, after examining all aspects of the case in great detail, she is still unsure of whether or not he committed the murder.

As a juror I vote to acquit Adnan Syed. I have to acquit. Even if in my heart of hearts I think Adnan killed Hae, I still have to acquit. That’s what the law requires of jurors. But I’m not a juror, so just as a human being walking down the street next week, what do I think? If you ask me to swear that Adnan Syed is innocent, I couldn’t do it. (Serial, 2014, pp 287).

By posing the statement in this way, placing herself in the position of a juror, even though she was not one, it could invite the audience to put themselves in the same position. It could be speculated that this jurification of the audience could explain why listeners become so invested in the case. Similar to Theroux’s transparent approach mentioned in the literature review, Koenig is honest about her conflicting feelings she navigates her investigation;

That’s my fear. That I’m going to get through all this and be like, “I don’t know.” I go up and down! Sometimes I am totally with him and then other times I am like, “I don’t know dude, this doesn’t, why can’t you remember anything? Why does nothing, I don’t know and that I just go back to why can’t you account for this day, of all days. (Koenig, 2014, pp167).

Whilst the literature, such as that in Vicary and Fraley (2010) suggests that women are drawn to true crime to educate themselves on survival, perhaps they become invested with stories like the one told in *Serial* because they feel like they were part of the investigation. By being taken through a year long investigation, step-by-step, with a transparent journalist, they feel like they were there with Koenig. In a 2021 study on female true crime audiences and their case discussions on social media, Maddalena (2021) suggests that women share and discuss true crime stories as an outlet and to relate to someone. Excerpts from Hae Min Lee’s personal diary were narrated on *Serial*, and they read much in the way any other teenage girl’s diary would. It could be theorised that female listeners of *Serial* were drawn to the case because they could place themselves in Lee’s shoes. If Hae Min Lee could be murdered by her ex-boyfriend, it could happen to them too.

Whilst *Serial* featured many guests who believed he could be innocent, Lee’s family refused to be featured, stating to reporters that listeners had been misinformed by the podcast and that “so few [were] willing to speak up for Hae” (Wendling, 2023). Syed was later cleared of charges in 2022 after DNA evidence showed he had not been involved (Wendling, 2023). Whilst all credit for reopening the case cannot be given to Koenig’s investigation, it did raise awareness and spurred several more media productions to cover it, including the 2019 HBO documentary *The Case Against Adnan Syed*, produced by Chaudry (Wendling, 2023).

This case was one of the first to use new media to make an impact on real-life cases and has been cited in the literature as revolutionising the way true crime is consumed (Walters, 2021). It paved the way for the success of Netflix's *Making a Murderer* (2016). This ten part documentary follows the case of Steven Avery, who was imprisoned for the 2005 murder of Teresa Halbach. He is portrayed as a working class man with a low level of education, who has been treated poorly throughout his life. He could be seen as relatable to many viewers, as an average man with bad luck.

Throughout the documentary, like *Serial*, the audience is shown archive footage and interviews. However, this production lacks the same (claimed) neutrality; the bias skews in Avery's favour (Bruzzi, 2016). 4 minutes in to the opening episode, the audience is shown a document of Avery's case against defendants including Manitowoc County, with highlighted sections saying "targeting Steven A. Avery", "personal hostility" and "obstruction of justice" (*Eighteen Years Lost*, 2015). From the outset, it is clear that the documentary makers, Moira Demos and Laura Ricciardi, believe Avery is innocent. However, as the documentary proceeds, it becomes apparent that the displayed document is in fact in relation to a previous offence he had been unjustly imprisoned for and had been subsequently released after 18 years. Whilst this builds engaging suspense for the audience and catches their attention from the offset, it could be said that this implants the idea of Avery's innocence from the opening. Clips of Avery claiming innocence and that he had always been treated badly, for example, being bullied in school, invokes a feeling of empathy, therefore setting the audience up to side with him when the case of Halbach's murder is introduced midway through the second episode (*Turning the Tables*, 2015).

In contrast to the clean sets seen in later Netflix true crime documentaries, interviews, such as with Avery's family members take place in their homes. These more intimate settings could provide another aspect of relatability to the audience, they are seen as everyday people as opposed to potentially staged actors. It adds perceived authenticity. This series did not utilise dramatisations, which had previously been a common trope in the genre, commonly seen in programs like *Unsolved Mysteries* (1987) and *Forensic Files* (1996) (Walters, 2021). This change in style could offer an explanation as to why it engaged audiences in a way that previous productions had not.

However, the first series of *Making a Murderer* received intense criticism for its biased approach. Throughout series one, a clear emphasis was put on the idea that the Manitowoc County police had planted blood DNA evidence in Halbach's car to frame Avery, a vital piece of evidence used to secure his conviction. In fact, this was the main argument from the defence. In an interview with The Wisconsin Law Journal, prosecutor Ken Kratz, who had taken part in Avery's trial, said:

'Making a Murderer' fooled millions of Netflix subscribers into thinking Wisconsin law enforcement officers planted physical evidence, leading to an innocent man's conviction for a murder he never committed. Since that time, attacks against police and prosecutors have become more egregious, and with such frequency as to cause a dramatic shift in public perception, with predictable tragic consequences. Efforts to defund the police, reform criminal justice procedures and skew the public safety narrative towards the accused have thrown many historically law-biding communities into chaos. (Schuster, 2023).

It later transpired that it was highly unlikely that the supposed planted evidence had been put there by officers. As shown in the opening of season two, the FBI were drafted in to investigate the allegations and found that the blood evidence found in Halbach's car was unlikely to have been used to frame Avery (*Number 18*, 2018). The documentary makers had also neglected to show all of the prosecution's evidence against Avery, such as his sweat, a form of DNA evidence which could not be planted, had been found on the victim's car. By this point, however, the public's trust in law enforcement had already been damaged. This level of damage may not have been so severe had *Making a Murderer* shown a more objective view and utilised a balanced view of the case.

The approach used by the filmmakers could be said to cause justification. The series was filmed over 10 years, giving a behind-the-scenes view of a trial that had not previously been seen. As Avery's defence lawyer Jerry Buting said when discussing the documentary;

That was the reason we agreed to participate in the first place. The public is given a sense of being jurors on this case; what would they do? That turns it into the ultimate reality show. (Ramaswamy, 2016).

However, by editing the show in such a way to not give the full scope of the evidence seen by the actual jury in the case, the audience 'jury' is not given the opportunity to judge the case fairly. As a result of the documentary, a petition to free Avery was signed by over 275,000 people (Ramaswamy, 2016). Had they viewed all the evidence, they may not have been so emotionally invested and convinced of his innocence.

Throughout this, Teresa Halbach's name is mentioned far less than Steven Avery's. In post-trial interviews with her brother Mike Halbach, he is almost painted as the enemy. Following the release of season one, in a statement to news station WQOW, they said;

Having just passed the 10-year anniversary of the death of our daughter and sister, Teresa, we are saddened to learn that individuals and corporations continue to create entertainment and to seek profit from our loss. (Wynne, 2018).

Despite a number of petitions calling for his freedom, Avery still remains in prison as of 2023.

Conclusion

True crime media is showing no signs of slowing down. With countless documentaries and podcasts available, creators will continue to feed the public's insatiable need for these stories. However, more outlets are discussing whether this obsession is healthy or ethical. Whilst consumers are passionate about learning more about these stories, more emphasis needs to be put on those that were lost, rather than the people who took their lives.

The way stories are told and the resulting justification and emotional investment from viewers is impacting not only the outcomes of trials by creating biased juries and loud audiences, but exacerbating the pain of victims families. There is also a risk of causing distrust in law enforcement. By using sweeping generalisations that police and the judicial system wish to convict those they *think* committed crimes, rather than following the evidence and highlighting cases where the police made mistakes, it could change the public's perception of law enforcement. Whilst the examples in the case studies seem to point to examples of persecution from the police, this is the minority, not the norm. In reality, an estimated 4-6% of convictions in the US are false (Georgia Innocence Project, 2022).

People may be drawn to these stories out of morbid fascination or an evolutionary need to protect themselves, but perhaps the creators of this media need to consider the impact their work has from a more objective standpoint.

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