

Supplement to:

Ben-Menachem, Jonathan. 2026. "Clickbait Crime News? Metrics and Professional Authority in Local Newsrooms" *Sociological Science* 13: 685-711.

Appendix A1: Recruitment Outreach Template

Hi [NAME],

My name is Jon Ben-Menachem, I'm a sociologist at Columbia University working on a study about the process of producing crime news. I'm reaching out because of your relevant work at [NAME OF PUBLICATION]. I would love to include your experience in the study.

If you are interested in participating, I will invite you to be interviewed for approximately one hour by Zoom in the location of your choice. During the interview, we will discuss your experiences at work and your professional history.

Unlike interviews that journalists conduct during day-to-day work, social science research involves an expectation that all participants will be protected from any risks that could follow from participation. The only risk that this study might pose to you is that your comments provided in the interview could be linked to your identity or workplace. To mitigate this risk, I will not name participants or their workplaces in the final text of the study (unless you ask me to do so).

If you are interested in participating, I can send over a more formal account of what protections you are entitled to as a participant, and we can set up a time to speak.

Thanks, and looking forward to hearing back from you,
Jon

Appendix A2: First Iteration, Interview Guide—Reporters

- Tell me a little bit about where you're working now. What happened at work today (or recent day)?
- How many people do you work with on a daily basis, within the newsroom?
- Tell me a little bit about the path you've followed to get to where you are now, as a journalist—I'm interested in how you ended up in this line of work as well as the various places you've worked until now.
- Was there a moment when you decided to focus on crime journalism?
- Take a moment and think about a story you reported that you're particularly proud of. I'd like for you to walk me through that story from beginning to end focusing on the process of reporting it - your work experience - rather than the story itself.
- When did you first hear about the thing that turned into the story?
- How did you hear about it?
- What about it was interesting to you?
- What was the next step?
- If the piece wasn't assigned: How did you go about preparing the pitch? Tell me about how it went over—did you present it at a pitch meeting?
- If pitch is critiqued seriously: How did you address that criticism / rework the pitch?
- Once you had the go-ahead to work on the story, what was your next step?
- Who did you go to first? How did you know them?
- Tell me the history of that relationship. [For each source.]
- What did the sources tell you? What were the boundaries of those conversations?
- Did your editor push you to cut any sources you interviewed, or to seek out sources you hadn't thought about or had previously ruled out?
- Did you decide to cut a source who you'd interviewed?
- Was there a source you wanted but couldn't reach for some reason?
- Were any of your sources "experts"? Did you think about "expert" sourcing as being important to the story or for your readers?
- Apart from sources, did you do any research?
- Tell me about how you began to write this story.

- How did you think about the structure and framing at the time?
- Okay, so you turned in your draft. What do you remember about your editor's feedback? How did you address it?
- Now we've got this finished story about X. Think back to the beginning. Is this what you thought the story would be about? [Can call back to an initial source. Get them to reflect back with you. After all this happened, did it change the way you thought about interviewee 1?]
- Did anything go wrong in the process? If you could go back and write it again now, what would you do differently?
- How was the story received? (How did you know?)
- What made you bring up that story as an example of something you feel proud of?
- After you wrote that story, did you make an effort to do a follow-up, or otherwise keep doing the kind of work that makes you feel good about doing journalism?
- Let's do this again, but tell me about a story that you don't feel great about.
- Now, a similar question about the second story we explored in detail. What made this story stand out as a particular low point?
- Have you taken any steps to ensure you don't have an experience like this again?
- How do you usually find out about potential stories? Do you have any routines for finding out about newsworthy things?
- Take a moment to think about a time where you had a disagreement with a colleague or your editor about whether a story was newsworthy. This might mean you bristling at an assignment you didn't like, or your editor shooting down a pitch you particularly loved. Tell me more about that conversation.
- Did George Floyd change news judgment or how things are covered?
- Is there anyone you think I should speak to?

Appendix A3: Final Interview Guide—Reporters

- Tell me a little bit about where you're working now. What happened at work today (or recent day)? Was this a typical day for you?
- Do you usually work in the newsroom, or from home? How often do you leave to report in the field?
- How do you usually find out about potential stories? Do you have any routines for finding out about newsworthy things?
- Can you think of a source that you put a lot of effort into building a relationship with? I'd like to hear about that.
- I'd like to hear a little bit about your newsroom – do you have one main editor? What other reporters are on your team?
- I'm particularly interested in hearing about how reporters respond when they think law enforcement agencies are stretching the truth or outright lying to them or the public. Can you remember a time when you had to deal with something like this?
- How did you navigate that issue? Did it change anything about how you approached your job afterwards?
- Are there any other categories of sources you've started to build relationships with, like nonprofits or activists?
- Can you remember a time where you had a disagreement with a colleague about whether a story was newsworthy?
- Do you experience much competitive pressure?
- Does your newsroom cover every homicide?
- What does “news judgment” mean to you?
- What makes one thing news and another thing not news?
- How do you feel about “expert” sources? Do you have any sources like that?
- Why might you bring an expert into a story, or why not? What does an expert provide for your readers, or your story overall?
- Do you think crime reporting has changed over time?
- Did George Floyd change anything about how your newsroom approaches crime, or how you personally approach your work?
- I've heard from a few reporters about how the ownership of a paper - think mergers and acquisitions - can shift its approach to covering crime. Does this bring to mind anything in your experience?

- Let's talk about metrics. Do metrics come up in your day-to-day work?
- Do you spend much effort evaluating whether a story was widely read?
- Do you have performance evaluations or meetings where metrics come up?
- Is there anyone you think I should speak to?

Appendix A4: Final Interview Guide—Editors

- Tell me a little bit about where you're working now. What happened at work today (or recent day)?
- If their title isn't justice or safety related: How much of your working time is spent on crime or criminal justice topics?
- How many reporters do you work with?
- Who's your boss? I'd like to hear about that working relationship.
- From my conversations with reporters, I've learned that there's a lot of variety in terms of how stories get started. Do you assign a lot of stories, or do reporters more often come to you with pitches?
- (What's the breakdown?) What types of stories do you typically assign, compared to stories that are pitched to you?
- When you assign things, how do you first learn about the thing you'd like a reporter to cover? Do you have routines for finding out about newsworthy things?
- How do you decide what's worth assigning?
- How do you evaluate a pitch or story outline you receive from a reporter?
- Tell me about a time you had a disagreement with a reporter or another editor about whether a story was newsworthy.
- I'm particularly interested in hearing about how editors respond when they think law enforcement agencies are stretching the truth or outright lying to them or the public. Can you remember a time when you had to deal with something like this?
- How did you navigate that issue? Did it change anything about how you approached your job afterwards?
- Does your newsroom cover every homicide?
- Has George Floyd changed how you or your colleagues approach crime coverage?
- What about layoffs, ownership changes, or other types of staff capacity changes?
- Has your boss pushed crime and criminal justice coverage in any given direction? Do you have meetings with other newsroom leaders where the editorial focus of crime and criminal justice comes up?
- I've heard from a few reporters about how the ownership of a paper - think mergers and acquisitions - can shift its approach to covering crime. Does this bring to mind anything in your experience?
- Do you experience competitive pressures?

- How do you feel about “expert” sources?
- Why might you ask a reporter to bring an expert into a story, or why not? What does an expert provide for your readers, or your story overall?
- Let’s talk about metrics. Do metrics affect your work?
- Do you spend much effort evaluating whether a story was widely read?
- What kind of metrics do you pay attention to? (Clicks? Conversions?)
- Do you think reporters care enough about metrics? Too much? Too little?
- Is there anyone else you think I should speak to?

Appendix A5: Index Code List

- Accountability
- Beats
- Community ties, geography
- Competition
- Deadlines, filling space, routinization
- Editor discretion and management
- Editor-reporter relationships
- Event discovery
- Expert sources
- Follow-up
- Framing of coverage
- Homicide
- Impact
- Journalism professional norms
- Journalistic roles
- Layoffs mergers, etc.
- Metrics
- News business model
- News market or local features
- Newsroom editorial norms or policies
- Newsroom structure
- Objectivity, bias
- Personal politics, ideology
- PIO
- Place, space, shoeleather
- Professional / editorial capital

- Readers
- Scanner
- Social media
- Source credibility
- Source organizations
- Source relationship development
- Specialization
- Temporal change in crime beat
- Traffic (fatalities)
- Workday routines