

A Viewer's Guide to the True Crime Genre: Our Role as the Audience

Why is True Crime Popular?

The true crime genre has always been popular. It is a genre that is easy to adapt into several different formats, allowing for it to stay relevant in society. The genre is mainly popular among women, which could be due to the fact that the true crime genre engages with fear. Many women will watch to increase their awareness of potential danger.

True crime media has several formats, but most follow the same narrative of good and evil. These shows will connect to the audience's emotions more so than actual fact, which

according to George Larke-Walsh in *Injustice Narratives* is not necessarily a bad thing. Injustice narratives are known to focus the most on emotions, resulting in critiques over its

dramatization of crime. The true aim, however, is to not only achieve "closure, capture and the reestablishment of order" (Walsh, 91) as most true crime series do, but to also critique the legal system. The emotion created allows for a connection

between the show and the audience, inviting viewers to sympathize and better understand the case.

True Crime: A Problematic Fave

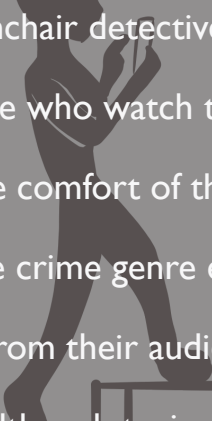
True crime has a formula that allows for them to be easy to make for larger companies and creates a platform for people on social media and podcasts to interact with one another.

The issue is that some creators of true crime media do not want to portray the truth. Shows will focus more on entertainment, creating an air of mystery, rather than

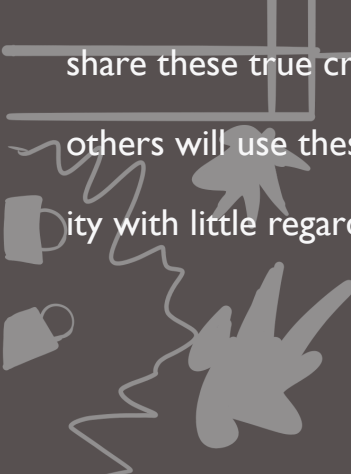
helping the audience to understand the truth. Shows will also be more likely to focus on the killer due to a fascination the audience has of being able to see evil from the safety of their homes. This is why today there are multiple versions of shows about serial killers.

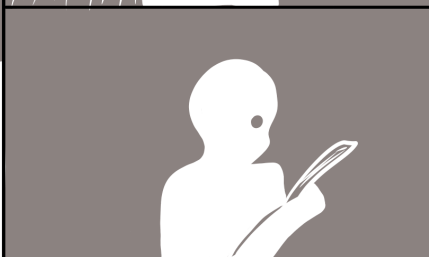
Shows also have a tendency to disregard the wishes of the families involved, usually not involving them in the creation of show.

From Armchair Detective to Internet Sleuth



Internet sleuths, or armchair detectives as they were originally called, are people who watch true crime and “solve” the mystery in the comfort of their homes. Some documentaries in the true crime genre even encourage this type of involvement from their audience, presenting both sides of a case (although typically these kinds of documentaries will try to persuade the audience to one side, similar to a jury) and allowing the audience to decide what they believe. Content creators can also pursue this type of engagement with their audience, but the intentions differ between creators. Some creators share these true crime stories in pursuit of justice, but others will use these platforms to pursue more popularity with little regard to the truth.





When An Internet Sleuth Becomes a Content Creator

Some internet sleuths create platforms for themselves with social media. These content creators will investigate a case and go on to share their theories with their platform. This in turn allows for their followers to share this information.

With the rise of social media, many people begin to use these platforms as their only source of news. Unfortunately, the content creators people will go to for information will not always aim for the truth behind a true crime case. Sometimes, content creators will consider the need to entertain and gain profit more so than the risk of harm towards the people they talk about. This is even more prominent with platforms from internet sleuths, who not only talk about cases but will share their theories, many times without having solid information about the case.

An Optimistic Look at Online Involvement

Sharing information about a case can have its advantages. Cases from injustice narrative documentaries question the system that convicted a suspect and can sometimes force a reexamination of the ruling. Sometimes this can lead to the release of an innocent person. Other times sharing cases can push people with information to come forward, helping to propel a case.

There are also the volunteers online, people who use their free time to help solve cases. One example is a group of volunteers that banded together online to solve the identity of a woman who was named Lavender Doe after her body was deemed unrecognizable. In 2019 this group of volunteers helped to return her name, Dana Lynn Dodd.

Sharing evidence can sometimes be beneficial to a case, and police sometimes even welcome the help of online sleuths to examine this evidence.

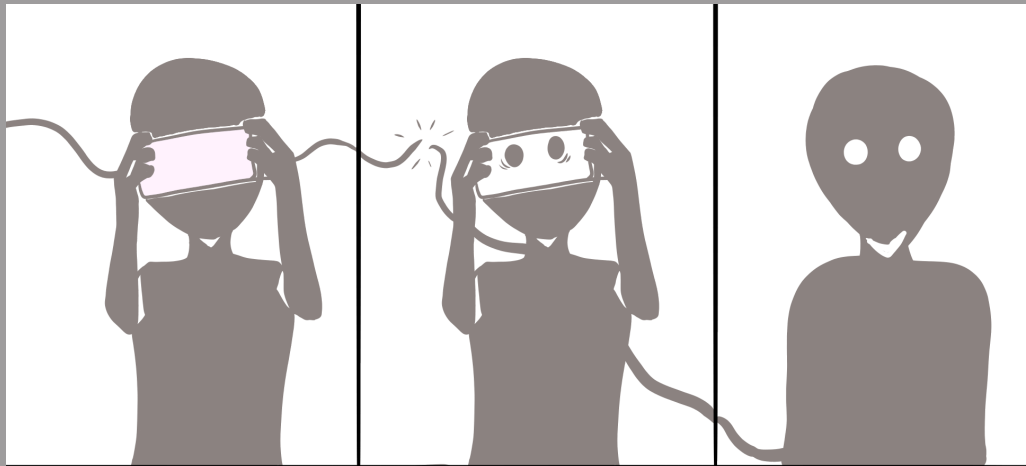
The Problem with Content Creators

It may not be the intention of all content creators or internet sleuths, but their theories do have their consequences. Their followers will take this information as fact and act upon it. This leads to false accusations and harassment.

The case of the murders at the University of Idaho is a good example of the consequences of internet sleuthing. One internet sleuth, Ashley Guillard, posted videos on TikTok with accusations towards a professor, Rebecca Scofield. Her accusations implied that the professor was involved in the murders because of a romantic relationship she had with one of the victims. These accusations were false, but the video had gained millions of views, boosting Guillard's fame but damaging Scofield's reputation.

Another example is of Brent Kopacka, who was suspected of the murders by the internet sleuths. They dug through all of his information, including his Facebook account. Even when the police had their suspect, the dissatisfied internet sleuths still continued to push for his involvement.

A lot of the theories from internet sleuths push innocent people into the public eye, leading to an increase in harassment. Some people become so terrified that they have to install security cameras. Also, the theories can be mixed with actual evidence, damaging the investigation.



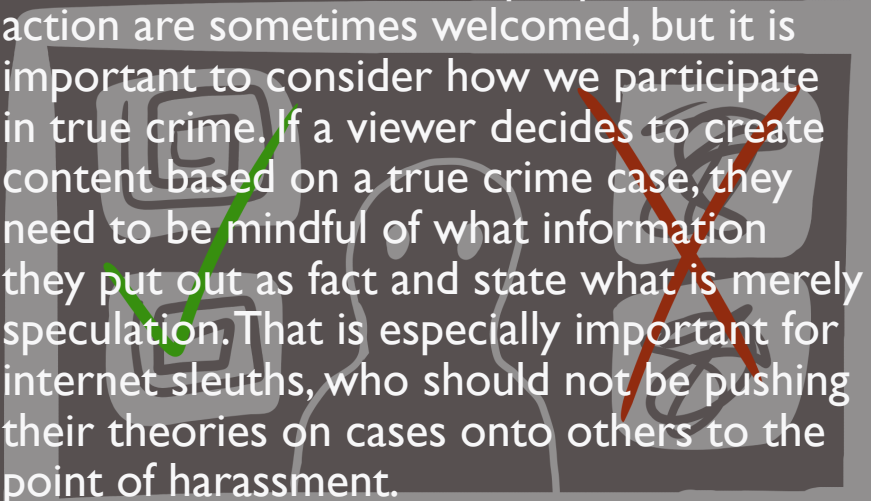
Is True Crime Bad?



Not Necessarily.



The issue lies with what we see and how we act on the information. As an audience, we have a responsibility to watch with care. The people portrayed in these types of entertainment are real people. Calls to action are sometimes welcomed, but it is important to consider how we participate in true crime. If a viewer decides to create content based on a true crime case, they need to be mindful of what information they put out as fact and state what is merely speculation. That is especially important for internet sleuths, who should not be pushing their theories on cases onto others to the point of harassment.





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