

Twitter Thread by [Alec Karakatsanis](#)



[Alec Karakatsanis](#)

[@equalityAlec](#)



THREAD. I've been studying how the New York Times uses sources. If you look at many of its articles together, something disturbing emerges: NYT relies on police and corporate sources to subtly shape how we see social problems and solutions. I try my best to lay it out below.

First, some background. Reporters and editors are constantly making choices about who to speak with to get story ideas about what to cover, who to interview to describe a problem, who to interview to tell us about the universe of potential solutions.

Importantly, sources ultimately quoted in an article often played a vital role behind the scenes. Many people don't realize that the people quoted in articles explaining what happened and what could be done about it are often the same people who brought the story to the reporter.

In this process, many reporters rely on police and allies (prosecutors, pro-police officials, punishment bureaucrats, consultants, and corporate profiteers) to decide which stories to cover and to tell us "the facts." But when you look across articles, the pattern is striking:

Let's take a look at a few examples from the New York Times. Here's one about "perceptions" of rising crime:

<https://t.co/8DussDKOQI>

What do you notice?

\u201cPolice officials.\u201d

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Professor

\u201cthe Police department\u201d

\u201cthe police department\u201d

\u201cofficials\u201d

Chief of detectives

— Alec Karakatsanis (@equalityAlec) April 8, 2022

Here's one about a supposed "cascade" of shoplifting: <https://t.co/3igtgiV3K6>

- store owner
- \u201claw enforcement officials and business owners\u201d
- \u201cofficials\u201d
- NYPD
- \u201csome workers\u201d
- \u201claw enforcement officials.\u201d
- eric adams
- legislators
- business owners
- NYPD
- owner
- \u201cmany small business owners\u201d
- owner
- store worker
- DA
- Legal aid
- Store workers

— Alec Karakatsanis (@equalityAlec) February 28, 2022

Or this one concocting a panic over supposed theft from trains: <https://t.co/yb1y2ASo7y>

- \u201cAuthorities\u201d
- LAPD Captain
- \u201cThe police\u201d
- LAPD Captain (twice more)
- Railroad corporation (twice)
- Railroad corp. spokesperson
- Association of American Railroads
- LAPD Captain
- Asst. prof. of "marketing"
- Railroad corp.
- Railroad spokesperson
- DA
- LAPD Captain (5 more times)

— Alec Karakatsanis (@equalityAlec) January 22, 2022

Or this one shaping the narrative after the police killed a girl trying on a dress in a Burlington Coat Factory:
<https://t.co/ASVpBdJWZV>

Here are the sources NYT chose to educate readers, in order:

- Spokesperson for cop union
- Lawyer for cop (humanizing, defending him)
- Person mentored by the cop
- New person mentored by the cop
- AG
- Professor (former cop)
- Lawyer for family
- Lawyer for cop (again, twice more)

— Alec Karakatsanis (@equalityAlec) January 4, 2022

What do these articles have in common? They empower government and corporate bureaucrats invested in massive investment in the profitable punishment bureaucracy as a solution to social harm as sources to tell us the story.

In article after article, 100s of times a month and 1000s of times during our adult lives, we are bombarded with a carefully curated selection of facts about the world. This cannot help but change our perception of reality. And people are invested in manipulating that reality.

So, whenever you read a news article, take a look at the sources the reporters and editors chose to present to readers to tell "the full story," in chronological order. Ask yourself these questions:

- Who benefits from their point of view being presented as news?
- Whose views were prioritized?
- Was anyone with an opposing viewpoint critical of the punishment bureaucracy included?
- How did the reporter choose which voices to quote and which to ignore?
- Where in the article were any sources challenging the narrative put forward?
- Which sources were granted anonymity and why?
- Did the reporter include any journalistic skepticism for claims made by police, or note whether the source has a history of dishonesty?

There are a lot of amazing journalists, including at major media outlets, who are intentional about the vital issue of who their sources are and who is allowed to shape public perceptions of what's important. But we must notice the implications of who controls news sources.

I've previously written about how what counts as news is one of the most important and overlooked issues in our society. Well, sources often determine what is news and what is said about it: <https://t.co/eEB6mSvEcZ>

If you want to read more about sources, with more analysis and lots more examples, I wrote it up in my free newsletter here. Also, I hope you like my paintings! <https://t.co/CENjsr19cN>

If you don't have time to read the entire article or thread, here is the conclusion about why this matters for all people who care about all forms of inequality and injustice:

When newsrooms rely on police sources so heavily in their coverage of safety, they give police and their corporate allies the power to shape the narrative about complex social issues. The ultimate goal, of course, is to persuade news consumers that systems of social control need even more power and resources to respond to what the police classify as “crime” and to distract people from thinking about other investments that would better address the root causes of violence and harm (i.e. solutions that would reduce inequality).