



## Case Study: The Media and the Trial of Paco Larrañaga

In 1997, sisters Marijoy and Jackie Chiong waited in the rain outside of a shopping mall in Cebu, Philippines, for their father to pick them up. But when their father arrived, they were no longer there. They were never heard from again. Two days later, a body was found and identified as Marijoy's. The autopsy indicated that she had been gang raped and thrown over a cliff. The people of Cebu were horrified and demanded justice for the Chiong sisters. Under pressure to produce suspects, law enforcement officials began making arrests.

### Clip 1: "Paco's Arrest" (length 4:56)

1. The local newspaper grouped pictures of the arrested suspects together and labeled them "The Chiong Seven." Who benefits from presenting the suspects this way?

How might it bias the community against the suspects?

2. How did the media describe Paco Larrañaga after his arrest?

Why do you think this description was repeatedly used?

How might this description have affected public opinion of Larrañaga?

### Clip 2: "The Prosecution's Star Witness" (length 4:33)

Police lacked evidence that would connect the suspects with the crime until Davidson Rusia came forward and said that he was the eighth member of the gang who had kidnapped, raped and killed the Chiong sisters. In exchange for testifying against Larrañaga and the other suspects, Rusia would not be prosecuted for his part in the crime. The trial could then move forward.

1. Before the defense had presented its case in the trial, a re-enactment of the crime based on Rusia's testimony for the prosecution was produced and broadcast nationally. How was Rusia portrayed in the program? How were Larrañaga and the others portrayed?

In your view, is such a program meant to educate or entertain the public? Explain.

How might such a broadcast influence the outcome of a trial?

Should media outlets be prevented from airing such broadcasts, or is the right to do so intrinsic to their right to free speech or their duty to keep the public informed? If you were a regulator, what guidelines would you offer to govern the broadcast of such re-enactments?

**Clip 3: “The Verdict”** (length 4:35)

1. Why do you think Larrañaga’s family believed that the media and public wanted a conviction?

How might pressure from the media and the public influence how a judge runs a trial and determines a verdict?

2. Describe the scene after the verdict was read. Do you think the presence of cameras in the courtroom influenced people’s behavior? Why or why not?

**Evaluate:** In your view, did the media influence the fairness of this trial? Explain.