

REB 23-052

Reactance Theory as it Relates to Publication Bans

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FGSR Summary

Publication bans (PB) are court-ordered prohibitions on the dissemination of specific information about a trial, offender, or victim. PBs in advance of trials are intended to keep prospective jurors from being tainted by pretrial publicity. Are mock jurors who are told about a PB and instructed to avoid certain media able to resist the urge? Reactance theory suggests that people who learn about a PB find it difficult to resist learning more about the case. 49 mock jurors read a vignette about a forthcoming trial and were told the case either had a PB, or it did not. Their adherence to the PB was measured via their selection of an article to read (trial-related or not). The effect of the publication ban on interest in reading about the case was non-significant, $t(47) = 2.202$, $p = .079$. Participants who were told about a PB were not more likely to choose the article related to the case than those who were told there was not a PB $\chi^2(2) = 3.325$, $p = .190$. What reasons would mock jurors give for their article choice? Would they disclose if the PB had an effect on their decision? Only 7 participants who were told there was a PB adhered to the ban and chose an unrelated article. Those 7 participants were also the only ones who answered no when asked if they chose the article that was the most interesting to them, indicating in an open-ended question that it was because of the PB. While the t-test and chi-square results were not significant, there were still 10 people who chose to ignore the PB. This is concerning as no one should be reading the prohibited media if a PB were to work effectively. There is very little recent research on this topic, therefore these results could set the stage for future research that has access to more resources to be done on compliance with PBs.