

UNH expert sees holes in Avery probe

Peter Massey, a forensic science lecturer at the University of New Haven and a retired Hamden detective, weighed in on the Netflix hit "Making a Murderer" tomorrow in an Investigation Discovery TV special that the network says aims to better inform viewers in light of the outcry from people calling for the release of Steven Avery.

Massey's appearance on "Front Page: The Steven Avery Story" aired last Saturday.

The way Massey sees it, the most egregious error in the investigation chronicled in the hit Netflix documentary was the interrogation of the main suspect's nephew, the alleged accomplice in the 2005 murder in Wisconsin.

"In the end, I think the nephew, Brendan Dassey, has been wrongfully convicted and was railroaded into a forced confession," Massey said. "If you sat with him long enough he would have confessed to every high profile case and conspiracy. To a person, everybody who I have spoken with cringes watching this kid during the interview process. At best, I really do hope that an appellate court will hear his appeal and overturn his conviction and compensate him for what I believe to be a wrongful conviction."

Massey said he believes the main suspect, Steven Avery, did commit the crime. Though he said he is not convinced that the scenario presented by the prosecution, which was based in large part on information the nephew provided to the police, was really the truth.

More than 471,000 people have signed a Change.org petition asking for the release of Avery, alleging a police cover up and planting of evidence led to the conviction.

"Obviously the producers of the Netflix series are not impartial, and that coupled with improper police work and some questionable ethics adds a lot of fuel to the fire," said Massey. "But if you are talking about a cover up and a conspiracy you are talking about multiple agencies and tens of investigators in various locations, and every person would have to pinky swear not to say anything. Anything is possible, but a cover up is improbable."

Massey said the police did err in their interrogation of Dassey by giving suggestive questions, not using open-ended questions and asking follow-up questions based on what they wanted to hear. "He certainly told them what they wanted to hear," he said. "I think that is the most egregious part of the whole investigation."

Massey said it could be argued that the show sought to make the viewer believe there was a police conspiracy against Avery. Searching the home four to six times was not atypical, Massey said, and the pin-size hole in the top of the vile containing Avery's blood, which was extensively discussed in the Netflix series, was standard operating procedure.

"If there were two holes in the top, then we have a problem," he said.

Massey did say that in one of his classes, his students will further examine the discovery that only Avery's DNA – and not the victim's – was found on the victim's car key that was discovered in Avery's home.

"It opens the door for further investigation," said Massey.

"In the end, you have to strip away the emotion and look at the information that's presented," he continued. "If you are going to put your emotions in it, you are doing a disservice."