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CRIME VICTIMS AND THE MEDIA:
A COMPARISON OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE
IN THE LOS ANGELES TIMES FROM 1969 TO 1985

by

Cory J. La Bianca

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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in
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For Dad
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Cory J. La Bianca
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ABSTRACT

Crime Victims and the Media:
A Comparison of Newspaper Coverage
in the Los Angeles Times from 1969 to 1985

by
Cory J. La Bianca, Master of Science
Utah State University, 1987

Major Professor: Dr. Deni Elliott
Department: Communication

The purpose of this paper was to compare the newspaper coverage of crime victims in five mass murder cases covered by the Los Angeles Times over a 16-year period from 1969 to 1985. Specific cases studied included the 1969 Manson murders, the 1976 Cal State Fullerton murders, the 1977-78 Hillside Strangler serial murders, the 1984 San Ysidro McDonald's restaurant massacre and the 1985 Night Stalker serial killings. Coverage of each incident was analyzed, with particular attention paid to coverage of crime victims. Subtle but significant changes in the treatment of crime victims were reported. The Los Angeles Times was found to be a responsible and responsive newspaper and highly recommended as a model for other newspapers to follow in their treatment of crime victims.

(65 pages)
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Every year millions of Americans become victims of crime, and the U. S. crime rate continues to rise. In 1968, for example, 4.5 million major crimes were committed -- 13,000 people were murdered. And though the "war on crime" has been of major concern since the violent sixties (Inciardi, 1987, p. 15), recent figures show that more than 6 million people were victims of violent crime in 1984 (Herrington, 1985, p. 99).

But criminal assault is often only the beginning of the nightmare for crime victims. Reiff (1979) said, "Victims are not given the opportunity to recover from the criminal onslaught -- they are repetitively dealt social and emotional blows" (p. 75).

Crime victims, including victim-survivors such as family members and close friends, are often revictimized when ignored by society (President's Task Force, 1982). The "second wound," as Siegel (1985) calls it, occurs when victim-survivors are neglected by family and friends unable to cope with grief (Barkas, 1978, p. xi).

Revictimization may also occur when victims are faced with an insensitive legal system that seems supportive of the criminal's rights while indifferent to the victim's (President's Task Force, 1982). One victim, Robert Grayson from New Jersey, said:

To be a victim at the hands of the criminal is an unforgettable nightmare. But to then
become a victim at the hands of the criminal justice system is an unforgivable travesty. It makes the criminal and the criminal justice system partners in crime. (President's Task Force, 1982, p. 9)

The plight of the victim has only been given serious attention in the last ten years (Siegel, 1985, p. 109). The first group effort in the United States to help crime victims appeared during the 1970s, when political activists involved in the women's movement began to fight for fair and just treatment of rape victims. Gradually, that concern became an issue for victims of all violent crimes (Bard & Sangrey, 1986, p. 98).

In 1973, the First International Symposium of Victimology was held in Jerusalem and in 1976, the first issue of Victimology: An International Journal was published (Bard & Sangrey, 1986, p. 98). In April 1982, U. S. President Ronald Reagan assigned a new committee, the Task Force on Victims of Crime, to address the issue facing crime victims in the United States (Herrington, 1985, p. 99).

The President's Task Force reported (1982) that the neglect of crime victims in this country was a "national disgrace" (p. vii). In an address to the president, the final report said,

The innocent victims of crime have been overlooked, their pleas for justice have gone unheeded, and their wounds - personal, emotional, and financial - have gone unattended. (p. ii)

It was suggested that "The fight against crime and the
effort to restore the lives of its victims requires the concerted, cooperative action of every segment of society" (p. 99).

**Statement of the Problem**

The media also revictimize crime victims by objectifying and ignoring them in crime coverage. Sherizen (1978) found in a study of 1,000 crime stories published in Chicago newspapers that:

Victims of crimes were invisible, not appearing very often in the news account. Even when they did appear, they were presented only in terms of brief descriptions, which give their name, age, sex, occupation and/or injury. Once this basic information was presented, little else was mentioned. (p. 218)

Bard and Sangrey (1986) said that crime victims were ignored in news stories because readers want it that way.

The names of criminals become household words, but nobody remembers who the victims were . . . Presenting crime in this way allows us to ignore the victim's experience . . . the media generally leave the victim alone. Focusing on the victim would interject a cold note of reality: Crime means that innocent people get hurt -- people like us. (p. 6)

However, Sherizen (1978) did find one Chicago newspaper that portrayed crime victims as human beings. The Defender, a black newspaper, portrayed the victim . . . as a person in need of communal support . . . Victims were highly visible with the crimes against them being portrayed sympathetically with great details often appearing about their lives prior to and after the crime. The newspaper also gave their relationships with others, and the social
injustice resulting from the crime. The metropolitan 'white' newspapers seldom if ever provided this type of treatment. (p. 218)

Crime victims and/or victim-survivors need help to recover from the trauma of a criminal assault, and it takes others to nurture that recovery. Fattah (1981, 43) said, "The community as a whole has moral and social obligations to the victim and should spare no effort whatsoever in its attempts to alleviate the plight of the victim, to relieve his suffering and to make him whole."

The media, as an integral part of the community, should, therefore, respond to the moral and social obligations Fattah suggests. Elliott (1986, p. 32) also said that the media have a responsibility "to be sensitive to the needs of individuals who become story subjects or sources." This responsibility should include sensitive treatment of crime victims.

Victims' advocacy groups in Seattle, Wash. have been working successfully with the local media in the last few years to ensure responsible treatment of crime victims. The Families and Friends of Missing Persons and Violent Crime Victims reported that attitudes among the Seattle media were changing. Newspaper reporters were not simply ignoring crime victims any more, but were actually beginning to write about "their dreams and accomplishments" (No date, no page number).

However, not all U. S. journalists are covering crime
stories with this sensitivity toward the crime victim and crime victims continue to be revictimized by the media.

The purpose of this study is to consider if any further significant changes have occurred in newspaper coverage of crime victims between 1969 and 1985 -- a time that encompasses the victim movement's coming of age in the United States. The study will look at the problem through a systematic content analysis of newspaper articles, as well as through the eyes of crime victims and journalists.

The following questions will be addressed: Is there a trend toward a different treatment of crime victims today in newspaper coverage compared to similar coverage since 1969? If so, what is that difference and how does it affect crime victims and the media?

Scope of the Study

Newspaper coverage of crime victims today will be compared with crime victim coverage since 1969. Five notorious mass murder cases covered in the Los Angeles Times will be analyzed -- the 1969 Manson murders, the 1976 Cal State Fullerton murders, the 1977-1978 Hillside Strangler serial-murders, the 1984 San Ysidro McDonald's restaurant massacre and the 1985 Night Stalker serial-killings.
Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in the Review of Literature, the guided research and in the coding system used to analyze newspaper articles:

**crime victim** - A person who has directly suffered from a violent crime (i.e., murder, rape, robbery or assault).

**exploitive** - When a victim's misfortune is used to be sensational (See definition of "sensational" below).

**lurid** - Explicit and gruesome details of the crime and/or how a victim suffered. For example, using the words "mutilated body" would not be lurid, but describing each wound with colorful adjectives would be. In photographs, showing a body lying in the street would be lurid, but a body covered with a sheet would not be.

**negative aspects** - These include what the average reader would associate as unacceptable aspects of a victim's life. Examples are physically unattractive attributes, or memberships in groups such as the Ku Klux Klan or the Aryan Nation (as long as they are incidental to the murder).

**positive aspects** - These include what the average reader would associate as acceptable aspects of a victim's life. For example, physically attractive attributes, or involvement in the YMCA, accomplishments such as a college degree or successful career.
**revictimization** - When a crime victim is assaulted over and over again, not necessarily in a violent manner or by the same person or under the same set of circumstances, but always as a direct or indirect result of the original victimization.

**sensationalism** - When a newspaper headline, story or photograph arouses "a quick, intense, and usually superficial interest, curiosity, or emotional reaction" (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1970, p. 789).

**serial murderers** - Mass murderers who kill on different occasions.

**simultaneous murderers** - Mass murderers who kill their victims in one incident.

**sympathetic** - When a victim is shown in a favorable or compassionate light.

**victim-survivors** - Family members or close friends left behind when a crime victim dies.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of crime victims did not begin in the 1980s, during what has been called "the decade of the discovery of victims" (Siegel, 1983, p. 1268). Victimology has been gaining worldwide attention as part of a field within criminology since the early 1970s.

Victimology History and Literature

Studies about crime have traditionally focused on the criminal. Viano (1976, p. 2) said, "During the 19th and 20th centuries, few scholars discussed the victim's role in the criminal situation . . . it was not until the 1940s that a high-level interest in the victim developed."

Bakas (1978, p. 32) said the new interest was a result of the "mass victimization of Jews" during World War II. "The political discrimination in Europe in the 1940s may have had a far greater impact on the formation of victimology than any sociological concepts."

Pioneering studies on victims include Hans von Hentig's paper, "Remarks on the Interaction of Perpetrator and Victim" (1941), Benjamin Mendelsohn's "New Bio-Psycho-Social Horizons: Victimology" (1947) and the first book on the subject, The Criminal and His Victim, (1948) also by von Hentig (Viano, 1976, p. 3).

Theory began to work its way into reality with
English penal reform and Margery Fry's involvement in New Zealand. It was here, in 1963, that the first crime compensation tribunal was established (Viano, 1976, p. 3). The United States followed suit two years later when California became the first state to establish a victim compensation program (Carrington & Nicholson, 1984, p. 2).

In 1973 the First International Symposium of Victimology was held in Jerusalem and the first issue of Victimology: An International Journal was published (Viano, 1976, p. 4). The National Organization for Victims Assistance (NOVA) was established in Fresno, Calif. that same year (Carrington & Nicholson, 1984, p. 2).

Victims, (1978) by J. L. Barkas, was the first book about crime victims for general readership. Barkas, who became interested in the study of crime victims after his older brother was murdered, found from his own experience and further study that victims were ignored and mistreated by society. "... [M]y family and I learned that the violation committed by the criminal is only the first. victimization. There are others, almost as devastating perpetuated by society and the criminal justice system" (p. xi).

Barkas called crime victims "America's most forgotten and persecuted minority" (p. 4). He was unable to find much literature on crime victims and said that what he did
find dealt more with "the crime itself rather than the consequences of that unexpected encounter with violence or property loss for the victim" (p. 7).

Barkas suggested that "Much of the social discrimination and psychological suffering that crime victims feel could be minimized, and perhaps avoided, if anti-victim prejudices were eliminated" (p. 17).


The worst thing about becoming a victim is what happens after the crime . . . The traumatic effects of a violent crime are multiplied by neglect, lack of immediate remedial resources, and the failure of such support systems as the courts, the police, the legal profession, and for the poor the health, welfare, and other human service agencies as well. (p. 75)

Reiff said he wrote the book to help lift "the social fog that makes victims invisible," and added,

When the full impact of injustice to victims of violent crime is known; when people realize there are more victims of criminals than of fires, floods, and earthquakes -- they may want to do something to aid victims. (p. xiii)

The plight of the crime victim in the United States had finally become a topic for open discussion. In 1980, the World Congress of Victimology was held in Washington D.C. and in 1981 National Crime Victims' Week was established by President Ronald Reagan with the statement:
For too long, the victims of crime have been the forgotten persons of our criminal justice system. Rarely do we give victims the help they need or the attention they deserve. Yet the protection of our citizens -- to guard them from becoming victims -- is the primary purpose of our penal laws. Thus, each new victim personally represents an instance in which our system has failed to prevent crime. Lack of concern for victims compounds that failure. (Carrington & Nicholson, 1984, p. 2)

In 1982, the first true-story crime novel written from the victim's perspective, Victim: The Other Side of Murder, was published. Until that time, most crime stories were told "from the perspective of criminals" (Barkas, 1978, p. 24). Examples include the 1966 book, In Cold Blood by Truman Capote and the 1974 book, Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders by Vincent Bugliosi. Neither book said much about the victims.

Barkas' premise was:

The victims are seen either as bodies carried away by ambulance attendants or ill-defined and little-noticed characters whom the audience or reader can rarely sympathize with or know . . . When victims are given a larger role, they are usually unpleasant, or colorless characters -- a nagging wife, an 'unsavory' woman, a greedy husband -- or others who are similarly blamed for their fate or at least are considered no loss to the community when dead. (p. 24-25)

But Victim author Gary Kinder (1982) did something different. He told the story of the 1974 Ogden Hi-fi Murders not from the viewpoint of the two men who went to
prison for killing four people and seriously injuring two others. Instead, he told it from the experience of Cortney Naisbitt, one of two victims who survived.

As a vibrant 16-year-old youth, Cortney was shot and tortured in the basement of a store in Ogden, Utah. While he remained tied up and helpless alongside his mother and four other innocent victims, Cortney’s life was changed forever. He lived to tell his story. Kinder and a concerned public were ready to listen.

Cortney’s father and victim-survivor, Dr. Byron Naisbitt, was given the opportunity to express his bitterness about what happened to his family. And, again, people listened.

Well, who the hell’s looking after Cort? I would like to have the same amount of dough it cost for that trial and the expense it’s going to take to keep those boys in prison or whatever happens to them put in a trust fund for my son. But see, no one ever figures he had any right to be able to walk up and down this town and feel comfortable and free, and have a nice, normal life, unmolested and unchanged by anyone else . . . The state and the taxpayers are paying for those guys, and no one gives a damn about what’s happening to Cortney.

. . . I don’t know what the answer is, but I know that the perpetrators get taken care of, and the victims get ignored. (Kinder, 1982, p. 296-7)

The same year Victim was published, the U. S. Congress passed the Omnibus Victim and Witness Protection Act and President Reagan established the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime to study the plight of the crime
The Task Force members included Chairman Lois Haight Herrington and eight others. Hearings were held in Washington, D.C., Boston, Mass., San Francisco, Calif., Denver, Colo., St. Louis, Mo. and Houston, Texas where law enforcement officials, attorneys, judges, crime victims, and many others were given an opportunity to present their stories. One victim said,

The general feeling of being a victim or victim-survivor is one of an outcast. Ostracized from society, forgotten by family, friends, fellow workers. No one, or very few, bring [sic] the subject up. (President’s Task Force, 1982, p. 12)

Another said,

On February 5, I changed from a law-abiding citizen with a childlike belief in the justice system to a law-abiding citizen awakened to the reality of the world of crime, criminal rights, and the injustice for the victim. (President’s Task Force, 1982, p. 6)

And yet another said,

I will never forget being raped, kidnapped and robbed at gunpoint. However, my sense of disillusionment of the judicial system is many times more painful. I could not in good faith urge anyone to participate in this hellish process. (President’s Task Force, 1982, p. 5)

Police Chief Robert P. Owens of Oxnard, Calif., said,

For too long we have viewed the victim as evidentiary baggage to be carried to court along with blood samples and latent fingerprints. It is about time that we as police begin to view crime victims as our clients, as the aggrieved party in need of representation, reparation, and
The Final Report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime was published in Dec. 1982 and brought national attention to the plight of crime victims. The Task Force agreed with what others had been saying all along. "Somewhere along the way, the system began to serve lawyers and judges and defendants, treating the victim with institutionalized disinterest" (p. vi). The goal, now, was to "restore a balance to the scales of justice" (p. 119).

Numerous suggestions for change were made, including an addition to the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States as follows:

... the victim, in every criminal prosecution shall have the right to be present and to be heard at all critical stages of judicial proceedings.
(President's Task Force, 1982, p. 115)

The Office of Justice Assistance, Research and Statistics (OJARS) was established in 1983 to carry out the Task Force's recommendations (Carrington & Nicholson, 1984, p. 8). Since that time, many organizations such as the American Psychological Association have called for more research on crime victims and their families (Siegel, 1983, p. 1268). Today, thirty-nine states have victim assistance programs, and more is being done every day to solve the problem of re-victimization for crime victims (p. 2). "Through the cooperative effort
of victims' rights advocates in the public and private sectors, the rights of crime victims are gradually being extended to their rightful place" (Carrington & Nicholson, 1984, p. 1).

**Media Literature**

Although studies of crime news have appeared since the early 1930s, they followed the same basic trend as other studies of crime. Crime victims were ignored.

For example, Harris (1932) compared the amount of space given crime news to the front page and inside pages of the Minneapolis Tribune, Journal and Times (Star) in the years 1890, 1904-5 and 1921. The results showed that not much had changed through those years. Crime stories were appearing on the front pages of newspapers in 1921 at about the same rate as they had in 1890 (p. 50).

Davis (1952) studied crime news in Colorado newspapers from 1948 to 1950 and found that reports appeared to give a distorted representation of crime in the community. "... [T]here was no consistent relationship between the amount of crime news in newspapers and the local crime rates" (p. 133). Antunes and Hurley found the same results in a study of Houston, Texas newspapers in 1977.

... the distribution of crimes reported in the press is markedly dissimilar to the distribution of crimes known to police. Murder and rape are reported far out of proportion
to the frequency of occurrence while burglary, larceny and (in one paper) auto theft are substantially under-reported. (p. 758)

So, while researchers were looking at crime and the media, they were not looking at coverage of crime victims in the media.

Roshier's (1973) analysis of three national daily newspapers in the years 1938, 1955 and 1967 was the first to mention crime victims. The study found that crime news was "newsworthy" based on the seriousness of the offense and/or its unusualness. Sentimental or dramatic circumstances, either associated with the victim or the offender, were used in many articles which aroused feelings of either sympathy or rage. Also, Roshier found that involvement of famous or high status persons, either victim or criminal, made the events more newsworthy (p. 34-35).

Burgess (1975) was perhaps one of the first scholars to link problems of crime victims to the media.

A homicide, however, usually receives media coverage which may further complicate the grieving process. One family complained of getting 'weird letters and crank calls' because of all the publicity given the murder. (p. 394)

Burgess also mentioned another incident about a 19-year-old girl who was murdered. The family "felt on display because of media coverage and angry about everyone who was talking about them" (p. 397).

Sandman, Rubin and Sachsman (1977) found that stereo-
types were common in newspaper coverage of crime and
victims were more often than not ignored (p. 230).
Sherizen (1978) found that newspapers in the Chicago area
did not report much about crime victims, either. "Crime
victims were quoted less often than were the police . . ." (p. 218). But even when victims' names were mentioned in
news stories it wasn't always in their best interests.
"This information has been used by criminals to further
victimize the already victimized by robbing their homes
while they are in the hospital recovering from the origi­
nal incident (NY TIMES, 1975)" (p. 218).

Sherizen went on to suggest that readers should ex-
pect more from newspaper reports. "The nature of crime is
serious enough for citizens at large to question the role
of the newspapers as adequate suppliers of information
from which knowledgeable actions can be taken" (p. 222).

Graber (1980) found in a study of both print and
broadcast media that

Most of these crime stories read like
police blotter reports, peopled by
remote, impersonal, motiveless figures.
One rarely encounters flesh-and-blood
human beings who are involved in the
drama of crime and victimization.
The human conditions surrounding the
crime are usually skipped, except
when the crime is a freakish one or
involves an unlikely victim or a
socially prominent person. (p. 47)

Graber also reported that "... [I]nformation levels
about various public programs designed to help victims of
crime were spotty and generally low" (p. 53). Forty-
three percent of those contacted in surveys had heard about crime victim compensation, 14% had read how to get aid for abused children, and 10% had read how to get help for battered wives (p. 53). Stereotypes about crime victims were found to be common in this study. Victims were seen as "downtrodden," poor, weak, naive, addicted. However, two-thirds of the crime victims reported in Tribune articles were from the middle and upper class (p. 57). " . . . [T]he notion that victims are weaker than ordinary people, or that their exposure to crimes is exceptionally great, appears to be one defense mechanism for coping with the fear of crime" (p. 59).

Graber concluded that the media does not do an adequate job of informing their readers about crime, nor do they keep the public aware of the crime problem or help prevent crime or victimization (p. 125).

Heath, Gordon and Le Bailly (1981) showed similar findings in a study of news reports specifically about rape.

Most murders are news; most rapes are not . . . This differential reporting of rapes (deciding some are newsworthy and others are not) exacerbates the possibility that the media distort its [sic] presentation of rape to present accounts which will capture the reader's interest. (p. 50)

Schwengels (1984) compared newspaper coverage of rape to actual police reports to find out if the media played a role in perpetuating the myths of rape. The study showed
that the media in fact do seem to be perpetuating misconceptions about rape victims, "... including the misconception that rape occurs late at night in a dark alley when a stranger accosts a young, attractive woman" (p. 102). In reality, so states the article, most rapes occur between acquaintances. This misconception makes the victim look at fault. "... [I]t is implied that the victim's behavior has precipitated the rape, not the behavior of the assailant" (p. 103). Schwengels concluded, "A newspaper's failure to provide vital information to the public, especially to women, can lead to a frightening and mistaken view of all rapes" (p. 104).

Elias (1985) agreed with the stereotype and distortion theories of other researchers.

In both the news and 'entertainment, the media promote particular conceptions of crime and victimization. They convey official perceptions and definitions, sensationalized crime and violence, promote false or misleading stereotypes about criminals, victims and officials, superficially analyze crime and its sources, and transmit extensive violence into the public's consciousness . . . (p. 11)

Crime Victims Confront the Media

Studies about crime victims' and victim-survivors' interaction with the media began to appear in the 1980s.

Magee (1983) wrote about why the media avoid families who have suffered loss of loved ones due to criminal assault.
In the aftermath of murder we turn our attention to the murderer. There are reasons for this. The person accused of murder is alive, the victim is not. All the victim's family can tell us, we assume, is about their grief and their rage -- things we would rather not hear.

The utter senselessness of one human being killing another scares us all and it is probably only normal that we go to unusual lengths to avoid hearing directly from victim's families. But such avoidance only prolongs our state of ignorance and increases our fear.

One of the founders of Parents of Murdered Children, Charlotte Hullinger, said (Magee, 1983) victim-survivors can have important stories to tell.

... [V]ictim's families need to be understood as normal, ordinary people who have been forced to live through a horrible, extraordinary experience. Their stories, told from their own viewpoint, need to see the light of day.

Some victim-survivors actually want to tell their stories and are not afraid to interact with the media. Magee interviewed one such mother, Jean Lewis, whose son was shot to death in New Mexico in 1980. In a letter to the editor of the San Jose Mercury written in 1981, she wanted readers to understand how "society denies the victim and the victim's family rights or consideration in the aftermath of a murder" (p. 169).

Another mother, Lavada Gifford, whose son, Sean, was killed by the Freeway Killer in Los Angeles County in 1980, willingly cooperated with the media throughout her
ordeal. Her opinions of their treatment of her was "generally favorable" until one day outside the courtroom when reporters and cameras surrounded her.

She felt like she was going to be swallowed up by the lights and the noise. This time Lavada didn't want to look at anyone, be photographed, answer any questions. She just wanted to be alone . . . The reporters knew Lavada and knew that their readers and listeners and viewers wanted those tears . . . Lavada felt for the first time as if she were being used by the press. She had been so conscientious with them, and here they were pushing and shoving the one time she really needed to be alone. (Magee, 1983, p. 197-8)

Camille Bell, whose son was killed in the Atlanta Child Murders of 1979, became involved in a national campaign to find the killer. The media came to her son's funeral.

Local news coverage of the funeral was heavy, with some television stations running long film clips of the packed church in Mechanicsville. Camille didn't mind the press being there; they were discreet, and she felt that her own attempts to publicize Yusuf's disappearance had prompted much of the attention. She granted some interviews with the press in which she cried and talked as best she could about her son, his disappearance, and the mystery surrounding his death. (Magee, 1983, p. 208)

In 1985, crime victims and the media came together in two separate conferences to discuss the problems between them. The first was held Feb. 2, in Seattle, Wash. as a result of the local victims' advocacy group's involvement
with the press in the Green River serial murders. It was sponsored by the local Women-in-News organization.

Linda L. Barker, executive director of Families and Friends of Missing Persons and Violent Crime Victims, became a liason between victim-survivors and the media during the investigation of the Green River murders. She described her involvement as follows:

When a death notification was made, I accompanied the Green River Task Force to prepare the families for what would happen over the ensuing 48 to 72 hours. Included in my discussion with the families were their rights in the media. I gave them the option of speaking to the media or not speaking to the media. If they chose not to, I informed them that my office would release any statement they wished to make and that they need only inform reporters that they could contact me for any information regarding their family and the victim. At times we supplied victims with a phone answering machine to screen their incoming calls. After several families followed this procedure, the reporters got the hint. They knew I accompanied the Task Force on death notifications, they were aware of what my instructions to the families would be, and began saving themselves time by just calling me, which of course, was to their advantage. On the other hand, if the family wanted to talk to the media, I would set the appointments for the reporters, prepare the families, and stand by to monitor the amount of trauma the family was experiencing, as well as answered questions that the family may have had no knowledge of or have had forgotten in their time of grief. Ninety-nine percent of the reporters liked this routine: they knew what to expect. (Barker, personal letter, 1987)

Barker said that at one particular press conference a
reporter began to "grill" her and she blew up "about how unfairly the victims of the Green River killer were being treated." Barker said that was the "straw that broke the camel's back," and led to the Women-in-News Conference in February.

At the conference, a suggested code of ethics was presented to the media for consideration by Marlene Young, executive director of the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA). Also, participants at the conference drew up a list of concerns for future study and discussion (See appendix).

"It was heartening to see all major media in the Seattle area represented and to hear the open and frank discussion on difficult issues," Barker later wrote.

While the guidelines and codes discussed throughout the conference represent only a beginning in the effort to define a working relationship between the media and victims of crime, the conference organizers expressed hope that this dialog between victims and the media would be continued in the future and throughout the nation. (Barker, 1985, p. 4)

Barker, currently executive director of the Washington Victim/Witness Services, said the Seattle area has seen an "increasing interest from media personnel and communications students" since that conference. She said reporters and editors are making a concerted effort to understand the plight of crime victims and work with them.
I find that once a good reporter becomes aware of the pain inflicted on a victim by focusing only on the negative aspects of the victim's life, he or she will make amends to correct the situation and be more cognizant of a victim's feeling in the future.

Of course, there are those individuals in the media who feel that the First Amendment is their license to get a story at any expense and will forever fail to see the pain they inflict on innocent people. (Personal letter, Jan. 26, 1987)

Another conference, jointly sponsored by New York University's Department of Journalism and Mass Communication and the Victim Services Agency of New York, was held on Nov. 13, 1985 for different reasons.

The conference grew out of a belief that concern about the impact of reporting on victims and their families is not center stage in American newsrooms; yet victims' organizations are so concerned about that impact that they are pressing for federal and state legislation that would restrict information to the press and interfere with full coverage of crime news. (Cunningham, 1985, p. 2)

The conference was attended by approximately 250 crime victims, media personnel, social workers, police, attorneys and students. One victim-survivor representing Parents of Murdered Children, Odile Stern, spoke at the conference.

I read about bullet wounds in the back, in the arm. Cuts caused by razor blades on the chest of my daughter. A nude body. Scratches on the chest. Packs of detectives tracing drops of blood throughout the bushy area, and so forth.
Do these details add anything meaningful to our story? I think not... You read of graphic detail of crime; they do not add to the understanding or to the credibility of the story. They promote sensationalism and not good journalism. (Cunningham, 1985, p. 3)

Rape victim Sherry Price said,

We hope that with this type of dialogue, that people in the media will understand us. We don't want to stop you; we understand the need for news. That's real important. It helps us too. You're going to catch the guy that did this to me. You're going to make people more aware and possibly more sensitive. So we want to work with you. But don't ask questions such as "Why were you there? Why didn't you do this?" Blame. One of the biggest problems victims have to deal with, and it comes from the media as well as from close family. (Cunningham, 1985, p. 4)

Editor of the New York Daily News, Gilman Spencer, spoke about covering the McDonald's massacre in San Ysidro, Calif. in 1984.

There were many people there who were very much interested in sharing their pain and sharing their loss with a reporter and with the public. And there were other people who just wanted to be left alone. It's very important that you honor that and that you respect that, and that you leave. (Cunningham, 1985, p. 6)

Spencer went on to say that telling the victims' stories was important. "Only if we tell these horrible stories will we bring public pressure that will solve the problems of poverty, or racism and classism that create criminals, and it's only if we keep on reporting what's happening" (p. 6).
The same news media code proposed at the Seattle, Wash. conference by NOVA Executive Director Marlene Young was also presented at the New York conference, but nothing was decided about how it could be used (p. 14).

Spencer said in his closing comments:

I just want you to know that we will do our goddamndest to get reporters sensitized. I don't think they always know how to handle themselves in a threat, pressure situation, and that's where we can help them, and others can help them, and we will call on others for help. But it ain't a perfect world. (Cunningham, 1985, p. 19)

The first national symposium on Crime Victims and the Media was held at Texas Christian University on Nov. 18, 1986, sponsored by the TCU Journalism Department and funded by a grant from the the Gannett Foundation. Members of the media and crime victims gathered to explore the right of privacy for crime victims vs. the people's right to know. The major goal of the conference, according to TCU journalism faculty member Anantha Babbili, was to "explore the current status of policies and practices of various news organizations in reporting violent crimes and to analyze their effect upon both the victims of violence and the community" (TCU News Service, no page number).

According to Babbili, approximately 500 people attended the conference including an estimated 100 victims and victim-survivors, 60 media personnel, 15 law enforcement officials, 45 social workers and 15 victims' advocacy
group representatives (Personal letter, Jan. 27, 1987).

A pilot study by Gerald L. Grotta (1986), associate professor of Journalism at TCU, funded by the Sunny Von Bulow National Victim Advocacy Center, was done specifically for presentation at the conference. It asked questions, but did not look for answers, Grotta wrote. The study included 20 interviews with crime victims, victim-survivors, law enforcement officials, judicial officials and members of the news media (p. 2). All those interviewed agreed that "The news media should have more respect for the privacy of an individual unwillingly in the public eye because of a crime." They also agreed that the news media should not be regulated by government intervention (p. 3).

Most of the non-news media interviewees said they thought reporters were improving their treatment of crime victims but added that they felt most reporters and editors were "insensitive when dealing with victims and their families." One police representative said, "They love to capture that human anguish on camera which, to me, is immoral" (p. 6).

One newspaper reporter said things had changed in his five years of reporting. "When I started my career I didn´t have much direction in how to go about it. We were very wrapped up in the crime itself and didn´t think about the family. But I think that attitude has changed." Two newspaper editors agreed. One said, "In my opinion, there
is a great deal more sensitivity towards victims of crime and their families. I think we are much more likely now to think in terms of the victim at the same time we think in terms of the perpetrator." The other editor added, "Generally the news media are much more aware of victims than they were say five years ago" (p. 6).

In response to a proposed code of conduct shown to the interviewees, 19 out of 20 disagreed with it, but for different reasons. The news media representatives disagreed because they thought it was "too strong." The non-media interviewees disagreed because they thought it was "not strong enough" (p. 11). The study concluded that there is a lot more that needs to be done in the area of crime victims and media relations. "We have to define our problems much more clearly, more precisely" (p. 15).

Edmund B. Lambeth, professor and director of the University of Kentucky's School of Journalism, said in another presentation (1986) that an ethic for dealing with crime victims "has been building for years, albeit slowly, and incompletely" (p. 4). He mentioned, for example, that the Louisville Courier-Journal hired an ethics coach recently in an attempt to teach reporters and editors how to deal with ethical issues when doing stories. He also mentioned that universities across the United States, such as the University of Kentucky and Washington and Lee University, have been dealing with the ethics of journalism for years.
The new scrutiny of the media, a byproduct of many social forces of the past 20 years, is, by and large, healthy, I believe . . . However, I would feel better if militant critics confronted what often looks like their own myopia. Were they to focus more clearly, they might see, for example, that the friends of victims of crime have included the nation’s finest reporters. (p. 13)

Tom Nickell, editor of The Odessa American, wrote an editorial about what he learned at the symposium. "All victims and victims’ survivors have a right to be heard if they want to be heard. But they also have the right not to share their grief with anyone" (Nickell, 1986, p. 13B).

Linda L. Barker, the executive director of Washington Victim/Witness Services, said she was somewhat frustrated with the conference. "Any communication on the topic is successful, and no doubt it had an impact on media representatives," she said.

However, I felt at the end of the day that the 400 or so in attendance went away without any concrete outline for change. I felt that the curriculum focused too heavily on the ills of the media, without optimistic goal-setting for the future.
(Personal letter, Jan. 26, 1987)

Summary

The study of crime victims is still in its infancy. Only since the 1982 Final Report of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime has the subject received
national attention. The U. S. Congress passed the Omnibus Victim and Witness Protection Act in that same year, and in 1983 the Office of Justice Assistance, Research and Statistics (OJARS) was established to carry out the Task Force's recommendations. Today, thirty-nine states have victim assistance programs, and more is being done to solve the problem of revictimization for crime victims every day.

The media have also revictimized crime victims by objectifying and ignoring them. However, since 1985 three conferences have been held, bringing together crime victims, journalists and the general public to discuss the problems attendant to news media treatment of crime victims. Journalists, therefore, are becoming more aware of the plight of the crime victim and how media coverage affects them. This study asks: Is there a trend toward a different type of news coverage of crime victims? If so, how has the coverage changed since 1969?
CHAPTER III
PROCEDURES

This study compared local newspaper coverage of crime victims in five mass murder cases which occurred over a 16-year period in the Los Angeles area. A content analysis of newspaper articles from each case and interview responses from the Times Metro Editor and the reporter of the most recent case studied were used in the comparison.

Sample

Cases chosen to be studied for this paper occurred in the southern California area from 1969 to 1985. The Los Angeles Times home-delivered edition was used in the analysis because it is the only major newspaper covering the entire southern California region. Mass murder cases were used because they traditionally draw more attention than other types of crime cases and, therefore, provided more complete coverage to analyze.

Specific cases studied included the 1969 Manson murders, the 1976 Cal State Fullerton murders, the 1977-78 Hillside Strangler serial murders, the 1984 San Ysidro McDonald's restaurant massacre and the 1985 Night Stalker serial killings. These particular cases were chosen because they each involved mass murder and they occurred within the local circulation area of the Los Angeles Times.
Initial coverage of each incident was analyzed, with particular attention paid to coverage of the crime victims. The breaking news story, stories that followed in the days immediately after, stories about abduction of the criminal and feature articles which focused on either the criminal or victims were included.

All published articles about each incident in the simultaneous murder cases were analyzed over a one-month period from the time of the breaking stories. For the serial murders, all articles that appeared from the breaking stories until the time of the killer's abduction were studied.

**Basis for Analysis**

An analysis sheet (See appendix) was filled out for each article with answers to the following questions recorded:

1.) Location of article in the newspaper
2.) Column inches of the entire article and column inches devoted to victim mention
3.) Total number of photographs used in each article and number of photographs devoted to the victim and the victim-survivors. Descriptions of each victim and victim-survivor photograph were recorded including the type of photograph such as mug, body or environmental shots and whether the
photograph was sensationalized, lurid, sympathetic or exploitive.

4.) Did the article include the following basic information about the victims: name, specific address or geographical area only, age, gender or race?

5.) Was community involvement of the victim preceding death mentioned? If so, were positive, negative or both types of involvement mentioned?

6.) Were victims' relationships with others mentioned? If so, were positive, negative or both types of relationships mentioned?

7.) Did the article include lurid details of the crime?

8.) Did the article sensationalize the crime?

9.) How many articles in the series were written entirely about the victim?

The Times Metro Editor and a reporter of one of the most recent articles about crime victims found in the study were asked the following questions:

1.) Did the Los Angeles Times have guidelines for handling stories and photographs about crime victims at the time this article was written?

2.) Has the Los Angeles Times been approached by victims' advocacy groups about treatment
of crime victims?

3.) Do you think editors and/or reporters are dealing with crime victims differently now than in the past? If so, what are the differences? If not, why not?

A total of 184 analysis sheets were tallied for frequency distribution and percentage rates.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The length of time between the murders and the apprehension of the killer and/or killers was different in each case studied. So were the circumstances of the crimes. Therefore, the total number of articles written about each case varied.

The Hillside Strangler case took more than 1-1/2 years to solve. One hundred articles were written in the Los Angeles Times from the time police officers suspected a link in 10 deaths to the death of another young woman reported on Nov. 24, 1977 until May 10, 1979 when killers Kenneth Alessio Bianchi and his cousin Angelo Anthony Buono were behind bars. Thirteen women, including one 12-year-old girl, were strangled to death in that time.

The Manson murders produced 28 articles in the Times between Aug. 10 and Dec. 2, 1969. It took three months for police to solve the case and charge Charles Manson and his followers with the murders of seven people in two separate incidents that gained national media attention.

Only eight articles appeared from July 13 to July 29, 1976 in the Cal State University, Fullerton case when murderer Edward Charles Allaway was arrested within one hour of killing seven people on the CSUF campus. The San Ysidro massacre, considered the worst mass-murder case in United States history, was over at the scene of the crime.
when a police sniper shot James Oliver Huberty after he had killed 20 people, many of them children, in a McDonald's restaurant. Twenty-nine articles from July 19 to Aug. 9, 1984 followed. The Night Stalker case produced 19 articles from Aug. 13, 1985 when police first began to suspect a serial-murderer on the loose, until the capture by angry citizens of Richard Ramirez was reported on Sept. 1, 1985.

Content Analysis

The breaking news stories in every case appeared on front pages of the *Los Angeles Times*. The Hillside Strangler case produced 30. Every time another body was found, another front-page story appeared. The Manson case produced 16 front-page stories within three months.

The greatest number of column inches came out of the Hillside Strangler case, totalling 2,736 inches. Twenty-four percent, or 658 of those inches were devoted to victim mention of one sort or another. The Manson case produced 1,068 total inches with 425, or 40%, devoted to victim mention. This case produced the highest percentage of column inches devoted to victim-mention, more than any other case studied.

An analysis of the basic information provided in each story showed that the Manson case mentioned victims' names more than any other case with 93% of the articles doing so. However, it is perhaps relevant to note here that
most of that mention went to the Hollywood celebrities, e.g., Sharon Tate. The non-celebrities, the La Biancas who were killed the night after the slayings of Tate and four others, were mentioned less frequently, receiving only 6 percent of the total victim mention.

Specific addresses of the victims were only given in the Manson and the Hillside Strangler articles. Only geographical area was mentioned in the other cases. Age was the most consistent identifier of a victim in all articles, and although gender was never specifically mentioned in any article, names and/or circumstances of the crime alluded to the fact. Race was reported only when it was relevant to the case. For example, the Night Stalker case mentioned that many of the victims were oriental because police thought it was a possible lead to the killer.

Community involvement and relationships of the victims prior to death were mentioned more in the Manson articles than any others. The breaking stories included positive mention. For example, Sharon Tate was identified as "a star of 'Valley of the Dolls' and wife of Roman Polanski, director of 'Rosemary's Baby.'" Abigail Folger was identified as the "heiress to the Folger's Coffee family" and Jay Sebring as "a Hollywood hair stylist credited with launching the trend to hair styling for men" (Torgerson, Aug. 10, 1969, p. 1).

However, in later stories, mention of community in-
volvement and relationships of the victims became increasingly negative. In an Aug. 17 article, it was reported that hair stylist Sebring "proved his masculinity by becoming one of Hollywood's best Karate experts" and heiress Abigail Folger was reportedly "fascinated with the study of black magic." Neighbors of the Tate victims were quoted as calling them "rich hippies" and making the comment, "Live freaky, die freaky" (Torgerson, Aug. 17, 1969, p. 2B). Polanski felt it necessary to hold a press conference on Aug. 20 to defend Tate's reputation that he said was being blemished by the media (Torgerson, Aug. 20, 1969, p. 1).

By comparison, the Fullerton, San Ysidro and Night Stalker articles mentioned community involvement of victims that was 100% positive. For example, the Night Stalker victims were described in an article Aug. 25, 1985 as follows:

One of the victims was a student, another a special education teacher. Two were business executives and one a parking lot attendant.

Several were doting grandmothers, others lived alone. One contributed his time as a deacon in his church, another practiced meditation in his garden. One adored Glenn Miller records, another played the organ. One had been detained in a Japanese detention center in World War II. (Mc Graw, Aug. 25, 1985, pt. II, p. 1)

One San Ysidro article (July 20, 1984) told of pregnant mothers who died with their babies and newlyweds who died together.
Anna Wright paused in her search for a photograph of her 8-month-old nephew, David Wright Reyes, who was killed in the arms of his slain mother, Jackie Wright Reyes. She stared at the dozens of stuffed animals -- teddy bears, monkeys, a seal -- hanging on clear thread over her nephew's empty crib.

"See, she had everything for her baby," Anna said. "And Jackie was two months pregnant." (Gorman, July 20, 1984, p. 3)

They were newlyweds of a month, and Neva Denise Caine and Andrew Caine were on a romantic high . . . They held hands and were nearly inseparable. (Gorman, July 20, 1984, p. 3)

The Hillside Strangler articles mentioned both negative and positive community involvement of the victims. For example, it was said of one 18-year-old victim, "'If there are five people in the world who never hurt anyone, she was one of them . . . She was terrific!'" (Zacchino, Dec. 1, 1977, p. 3).

However, a Dec. 4, 1977 article implied that the victims had similar rough backgrounds. The headline read, "Hollywood a Common Tie in Lives of Six Victims" and the article went on to say:

Five of the young women were heavily involved in the Hollywood Street Scene . . .

All along Hollywood Blvd., 'street people' -- runaways, castaways, pimps, pederasts, prostitutes, parking lot attendants, waitresses -- believe the killer or killers may have known the young women. (Hurst, Dec. 4, 1977, p. 1)

The other victims' names were buried in the last para-
graphs on page 31 after this statement: "There is no apparent connection between Hollywood and the other four victims."

Every murder case produced articles written solely about the victims. A Fullerton article, for example, told of a victim-survivor who had gone comatose while watching the killings, though she had not been physically injured, herself. The headline read, "Girl, 17, Is Psychological Victim of Campus Carnage," with the following lead:

No one seeing 17-year-old Monica Silbas help her volleyball team win second place over the weekend would have guessed that for 36 hours last week she had lain, mute and still, on a hospital bed -- a reaction to the shooting rampage at California State University, Fullerton that left seven people dead. (Hoover, July 19, 1976, p. 1)

The Hillside Strangler produced six articles about the victims, with headlines that read:

Latest Slaying Victim Trusting but Careful: Friend Describes Stangled Girl as Loving, Generous (Zacchino, Dec. 1, 1977, p. 3)

Hollywood a Common Tie in Lives of Six Victims (Hurst, Dec. 4, 1977, p. 1)


2 Strangler Victims: Life Had Barely Begun (Stumbo, Dec. 9, 1977, pt. II, p. 1)

Girl Searched for Love but found Death Instead (Hurst, Dec. 18, 1977, p. 1)

Victim Described as Quiet Girl Who Loved to Dance (Hazlett, Feb. 19, 1978, p. 3)

These articles delved into the victims' lives prior
to their deaths. For example, the Dec. 9 article told about the two youngest victims, 12-year-old Dolores Cepeda and Sonja Johnson, 14. Dolores' classmates said about her,

She was really smart, she never goofed off . . . she was friendly, too, always nice to everybody . . . And Dollie was honest . . . One time, she walked clear to my house just to pay back a dime. (Stumbo, Dec. 9, 1977, pt. II, p. 1)

The Dec. 18 article reported about 17-year-old victim Kimberly Diane Martin,

When Kimberly Diane Martin was a baby, her mother deserted her.

A month before her ninth birthday, her father was shot to death during a quarrel with another man.

When Kimberly was 13, she ran away to search for the mother she had never really known. (Mc Graw, Aug. 25, 1985, p. 1)

The Feb. 19, 1978 article described Cindy Lee Hudspeth as a "quiet, attractive 20-year-old."

She neither smoked nor drank. She attended church regularly, worked hard to put herself through Glendale Community College and to support herself until she could continue her education.

If she had any excess in her life, it was her love for dancing. (Hazlett, Feb. 19, 1978, p. 3)

But the most complete and in-depth article found in this study was written about the Night Stalker victims. On Aug. 25, 1985, a 228-inch story with 6 photographs of the victims ran on the front page of the Metro Section
with the headline in bold print: "The Valley Intruder -- The Victims' Stories." Not only did this article tell about the victims' assault, but it gave each individual a separate side-bar with a photograph, and told about who they were and what ordinary, everyday activities they had been doing the day they died. For example, one side-bar read:

Dayle Okazaki, two weeks shy of her 35th birthday, spent the evening of March 17 at her parents' house, watching a television movie and chatting about her boyfriend and recent promotion to traffic supervisor with Los Angeles County . . . She loved skiing, shopping and planning parties . . . (Mc Graw, Aug. 25, 1985, pt. II, p. 1)

Another victim's story read:

On the morning of May 13, William Doi, 65, drove to a Ford dealership and placed a down payment on a family van. That afternoon he told neighbors about the vehicle and talked excitedly about touring the state. He suffered a heart attack three years ago, and his wife had suffered a stroke, but both were feeling better and were looking forward to "living it up." (Mc Graw, Aug. 25, 1985, pt. II, p. 1)

Lurid details of the crimes were reported in some cases, though not all. The Manson case produced the most lurid details about how the bodies were found, details of the wounds and vivid descriptions of bloodstains on walls. One example is the description in the breaking news story of how Sharon Tate's body was found.

In the living room, dressed in underwear -- bikini panties and a brassiere -- was Miss Tate. A bloodied nylon cord was
around her neck. It ran over a beam in
the open-beam ceiling and was tied
around the neck of Sebring, whose body
lay nearby. (Torgerson, Aug. 10, 1969,
p. 1)

This case was also the most sensationalized. Exam-
examples of sensationalistic reporting were found in such
headlines as: "Night of Horror -- Anatomy of a Mass
and "Tate Home -- Murder House Bears Evidence of Massacre"

Table 1

Analysis of Victim Information in Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manson N=28 Full N=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>26 93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific address</td>
<td>8 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical area</td>
<td>8 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>16 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>19 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>7 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>5 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both</td>
<td>7 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>23 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>12 52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>5 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both</td>
<td>6 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lurid details</td>
<td>4 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensational details</td>
<td>7 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim articles</td>
<td>2 7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages rounded up)
(Houston, Aug. 20, 1969, p. 3) and "Singer Cass Elliott's Ex-Fiancé Quizzed, Released in Tate Case" (Torgerson, Aug. 29, 1969, p. 1). Photographs of the bloodspattered living room at the Tate house were also considered sensationalistic (Associated Press, Aug. 21, 1969, p. 3).

Photographs of the victims and victim-survivors were analyzed separately from the articles, although they were calculated into the total column inches measured. The San Ysidro massacre produced the highest percentage of photographs of victims and victim-survivors with 65% of all photographs used being devoted to them. Many of the photographs, 40%, were lurid body shots. Body shots were also used in the Fullerton and Night Stalker articles. However, because the bodies were covered with sheets, they were not considered lurid for purposes of this study.

Except in the case of the San Ysidro photographs, mug shots were the most commonly used photographs of victims. No environmental shots were used in the Fullerton or Night Stalker cases but 29% of the Manson case photos, 13% of the Hillside Strangler photos, and 20% of the San Ysidro photos showed victims in a natural setting.

One of the photographs in the Manson articles was exploitive -- a photograph of Polanski standing on the front porch of his home with the word "pig" smeared in blood on the front door (Associated Press, Aug. 25, 1969, p. 3).

However, none of the victim or victim-survivor photo-
graphs in any other cases were considered exploitive. Although 70% of the San Ysidro massacre photographs were extremely graphic and lurid, they were not considered exploitive according to the definitions used in this study.

Table 2
Analysis of Victim Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Frequencies and Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manson N=28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total photos 28 - 11 - 80 - 23 - 20 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim photos</td>
<td>7 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mug</td>
<td>7 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environmental</td>
<td>2 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensational</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lurid</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither</td>
<td>7 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic</td>
<td>7 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploitive</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim-survivor photos</td>
<td>7 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic</td>
<td>5 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploitive</td>
<td>1 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither</td>
<td>1 14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages rounded up)
The Los Angeles Times does not have any guidelines about the reporting of crime victims, according to Metro Editor David Rosenzweig. "We have nothing that is in writing," he said in a telephone interview on March 18, 1987. "We just have to rely on our own good judgment." However, he did say there were basically two unwritten, general policies followed.

Editors and reporters of the Times always avoid identifying victims' addresses because they are irrelevant to the story and they also avoid identifying names involved in sex crimes to protect the victims, often children. "That is basically it," he said, but added that there are always exceptions.

He pointed to the Mc Martin Pre-School Case as one of them. In that case, a number of children had been allegedly molested by teachers and managers of the school. The Times initially refrained from identifying any of the parents to protect the identities of the children. But when some of the parents went public it complicated the issue. Rosenzweig said the paper eventually published the parents' names.

Rosenzweig agreed from his own personal experiences, first as a beat police reporter 20 years ago and now as Times Metro Editor, that the tendency in the past was simply to gather information from the police blotter to
write a crime story. "The impact on the victims wasn’t given a lot of heed in the old days," he said.

But today it is different. Rosenzweig, who was the Metro Editor at the time of the Night Stalker serial murders, said Times editors and reporters are giving thought to the crime victim. He said editors are very sensitive to the idea of not capitalizing on the family’s grief. "We don’t show dead bodies in photographs or intrude on gravesite services," he said. He also said he felt he must be doing an acceptable job in dealing with crime victims. "We don’t get many complaints."

Carol McGraw, the Times reporter of the Night Stalker story, "The Valley Intruder: The Victims’ Stories," said she wrote the story because Rosenzweig asked her to do it. "We just had an idea," she said without further elaboration. McGraw said it was quite common for her to write stories about crime victims, but she had never talked with any victims’ advocacy groups about treatment of crime victims (Telephone interview, March 17, 1987).

Rosenzweig also said he had never been approached by victims’ advocacy groups and didn’t believe anyone else at the Times had been either. However, if he were approached, he said he would not work with them because he felt it would be difficult to work with one specialty group without having to work with all the other groups "out there." He said journalists need to make independent
decisions about how to write stories and what to cover.

"We write about a crime because there's something unusual or compelling about it," he said. Not all crime stories get into the newspaper but when they do, the crime victim is an important part of the story.

"How could you do a crime story without thinking about the victims?" he asked.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

The Los Angeles Times has made subtle but significant changes in the treatment of crime victims since 1969. Perhaps these changes are most obvious when comparing the 1969 Manson articles to the more recent 1985 Night Stalker articles.

The Manson articles exemplified the "old journalism" style of coverage. For example, five of the victims were famous Hollywood celebrities, which in itself made the case newsworthy. That the "old journalism" formula was used is perhaps best illustrated in the fact that the non-celebrities, the La Biancas, were rarely mentioned though their deaths were similar to the Tate deaths. Also, the articles were quick to mention the negative aspects of the victims' lives. Abigail Folger's fascination with black magic and Jay Sebring's interest in karate to "prove his masculinity" are examples.

The Night Stalker articles were different. They covered in detail the positive aspects of the lives of the ordinary, everyday people who became innocent victims. Also, the Night Stalker victims were not presented as if they had somehow deserved what happened to them, but were presented as valuable human beings, struck down while participating in the daily routines of life.

Famous people will always make news. That is one of
the major reasons the Manson case received and continues to receive so much news coverage. But over the past 16 years, the Los Angeles Times news coverage has changed for all crime victims. Not only do "famous" crime victims get attention, but the "everyday" person who becomes a victim gets attention, too.

No longer are crime victims portrayed in the Times as having somehow deserved their misfortune, either. The impression was that because the Tate's lived "freaky" they had to die "freaky." However, the Night Stalker articles showed that bad things can happen to good people. The crime victims were presented in a more realistic light and as an integral part of the crime story.

This study found the Times to be a responsible and responsive newspaper. Though no written guidelines about dealing with crime victims exist, editors and reporters are using their own good judgment wisely. In 1969, they were not presenting crime victims in a realistic or sympathetic way, but by 1985 they were dealing with them compassionately while presenting a balanced crime story. This is the way crime stories ought to be written.

Crime victims and their families deserve to be treated with compassion by journalists so they are not revictimized. Certainly it is a journalist's duty to be responsible and responsive to readers, but a journalist must also be responsible and responsive to those people who become involved in news events.
The Los Angeles Times is treating crime victims responsibly, but what about other U. S. newspapers? Victims' advocacy groups are generally not satisfied with crime victim treatment. They are asking newspapers to establish a forced code of ethics for journalists and are also pushing for legislation to solve the problems they face with the media.

But legislation is not the answer and neither are forced codes of ethics. The answer lies in more education and awareness for journalists.

Journalists must realize that crime victims and victim-survivors are part of the crime story. They cannot be ignored or objectified. Journalists also need to know how to treat crime victims while covering these sensitive stories. ABC-TV's Jeff Greenfield perhaps said it best at the 1986 TCU conference. "Don't ask them how their son or daughter or husband died; ask them how he or she lived" (Nickell, 1986, p. 13B).

When their stories are told, crime victims and their families will feel that somebody out there cares about what happened to them and readers will get a more realistic view of crime.

The victims' advocacy group in Seattle, Wash. worked with local journalists to bring about awareness during the Green River murder case. But the Times has not worked with crime victims and does not have any written guidelines for dealing with them. How, then, has this
awareness for crime victims' needs come about?

Perhaps Times' journalists learned more about crime victims because of the national attention received since the 1982 Task Force Report on Victims of Crime. Or maybe young reporters who studied ethics in journalism classes brought a new understanding with them to the job. Ethics has become an important issue for the media in the last decade and as noted Los Angeles Times media critic David Shaw said, "By virtually any standard of measurement, the press today is more ethical -- more responsible -- than at any time in history" (1983, p. 8).

Whatever the reasons, the Los Angeles Times is doing an exceptional job in its treatment of crime victims. But while the coverage itself can be recommended as a model for other newspapers to follow in their treatment of crime victims, it must also be recommended that journalists, unlike those at the Times, be more consciously aware of how they reach that ideal.
Recommendations for Further Study

Understanding how one major metropolitan newspaper treats crime victims is only a beginning to an understanding of how all U. S. newspapers treat them. A study analyzing other daily or weekly newspapers in a replication of this one would, therefore, be a useful follow-up.

Further analysis of the Los Angeles Times is also needed. The home-delivered issues analyzed in this study were found to be progressively more sympathetic and understanding of crime victims over time. But what about the street editions -- were they perhaps more sensationalistic and exploitive of crime victims in an attempt to sell newspapers?

Further research is also needed about crime victims' and victim-survivors' reactions to present-day news coverage. Now that victims are no longer being ignored in news stories, how does that affect their privacy? Is the loss of privacy more important than the public's right to know? Analysis of the conference held in Nov. 18, 1986 at Texas Christian University on this subject is needed.

Also, according to those involved in the New York University conference held Nov. 13, 1985, the push for new legislation by victims' advocacy groups is of concern. Where do victims and journalists stand on this issue and what is being done about it?

The study of crime victims and the media is in its
infancy. Undoubtedly, there will be a need for more research in the future that has not yet even been considered.


Gorman, Tom. (1984, July 20). What kind of world is this where such innocent people get killed? After the madness, memories and haunting questions remain. Los Angeles Times, p. 3.


Nickell, Tom. (1986, December 28). Crime victim's rights are of growing concern. The Odessa American, p. 13B.


Texas Christian University. (1986, September). First-of-its-kind symposium on crime victims and media will be held Nov. 18 at TCU. [A press release].

Torgerson, Dial. (1969, August 10). 'Ritualistic slayings': Sharon Tate, four others murdered. Los Angeles Times, pp. 1, 18, 19.


Torgerson, Dial. (1969, August 20). 'No party ... that evening': Tearful Polanski tells of his 'truly happy' life with wife. Los Angeles Times, pp. 1, 29.


SAMPLE CODE OF ETHICS

Marlene Young, Executive Director of the National Organization for Victim Assistance, suggested a sample "code of ethics" for media to consider when dealing with victims. She emphasized that the code did not address all concerns but could be used as a basis for further thought. The following commitments were included:

"I shall:

"Provide the public with factual, objective information about crime stories concerning:

- the type of crime that has occurred;
- the community where the crime occurred;
- the name or description of the alleged offender if appropriate under existing state law;
- significant facts that may prevent other crimes.

"Present a balanced view of crime by ensuring that the victim and the criminal perspectives are given equal coverage when possible.

"When requesting to speak with victims, advise them that they may be interviewed 'off the record' or 'on the record,' if they desire such an interview; and advise them that they have a right not to be interviewed at all.

"When reporting conversations with victims, quote victims, families and friends fairly and in context;

"Avoid photographing or filming crime scene details or follow-up activities such as remains of bodies or brutality; instruments of torture; disposal of bodies.

"Notify and ask permission of victims and their families before using pictures or photographs for documentaries or other news features.

"I shall not:

"Photograph, film, or print for publication photographs of victims, graphic crime scenes, or victims in the courtroom without permission.

"Print or broadcast unverified or ambiguous facts about the victim, his/her demeanor, background or relationship to the offender."
"Print or broadcast facts about the crime, the victim, or the criminal act that might embarrass, humiliate, hurt, or upset the victim unless there is a need to publish such details for public safety reasons.

"Print, broadcast, photograph or film, lurid or graphic details of the crime.

"Promote sensationalism in reporting crime or criminal court cases in anyway."

(Reprinted from an article in NOVA Newsletter, Volume 9, Number 4, April 1985, written by Linda Barker titled "From the states: The media and victims of crime.")
The following ideas were formulated Saturday, Feb. 2, 1985, at a conference on the media’s treatment of victims of violence, sponsored by WOMEN IN NEWS (WIN) at Seattle University. They were drawn up by a forum of media professionals, the general public, and victims of violence. They are intended to stimulate discussion by everyone involved in news coverage of violent crimes: editors, news directors, reporters, photographers, news writers, assignment editors and media management.

1. In-service background session in newsrooms regarding how to deal with victims of violence and their families.

2. Have written guidelines for those involved in covering violent crimes, the victim and families.

3. Provide counseling for reporters who have undergone traumatic experiences covering highly impacting stories.

4. Use more quality control: e.g., regular peer evaluation, training managers to send out the right people for the right story and using professional victim advocates when making victim contacts.

5. Inform traumatized victims that they do NOT have to be interviewed.

6. Flag sensitive stories; i.e., let viewers, listeners or readers know you are excluding explicit details or sound or photographs because of the impact it will have on the victim/family, when no sound journalistic purpose would be served.

7. Emphasize WHY things happened, not WHAT happened. Give the story perspective.


9. Don’t focus on the victim or try to find information about him/her that would further victimize him/her.

10. Reporters should be in closer communication with their communities.
11. Develop ethical standards code for the news media, and have an advocate make certain the code is followed.

12. Professional journalism/media groups should be encouraged to discuss these issues with the various groups involved.

13. Emphasize more cultural sensitivity; e.g., understand the differences and important issues of the cultural groups in your community.

14. Don't glamourize offenders.

15. Have crime be a news specialty. Have a specially trained person cover such stories.

16. For discussion: Is the exploitation of crime really benefitting the public, and is it right that other important stories are sacrificed to allow for the coverage of these violent stories.

17. Journalism schools should be encouraged to teach more about victim concerns and how to deal with the facts without sensationalism.

ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE NO.

Case: ______________ Date of article: ____________

Location of article in newspaper: ____________________________

Total column inches of article: __________

Column inches devoted to victim mention: __________

Complete articles about victim only: __________

Total number of photos used in the article: __________

Number of photos devoted to the victim: __________

Type: mug body environmental (other)

Number of photos of victim-survivor: __________

Were the photos of the victim sensationalized or lurid?
Examples: ___________________________________________ no

 Were photos of the victim sympathetic or exploitive?
Examples: ___________________________________________ no

<table>
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<th>Basic information mentioned about victim?</th>
<th>name</th>
<th>specific address</th>
<th>geographical area only</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>race</th>
<th>(other)</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Was community involvement mentioned? yes no
Positive, negative or both aspects? pos neg both
Examples: ____________________________________________

Were relationships with others mentioned? yes no
Positive, negative or both aspects? pos neg both
Examples: ____________________________________________

Were details of the crime lurid? yes no
Were details of the crime sensationalized? yes no
Examples: ____________________________________________