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## **Are murders equal in the eyes of the media?: A study of race, gender, class and quality of coverage**

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ARE MURDERS EQUAL IN THE EYES OF THE MEDIA?  
A STUDY OF RACE, GENDER, CLASS AND  
QUALITY OF COVERAGE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
Tobie Blanchard  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 1997  
May 2005

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my unborn child. Now that I have completed it, my attention can turn to you and the preparation of your arrival. You were my light at the end of the tunnel.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

My sincerest thanks and gratitude go to Dr. Tim Cook who's Media and Civil Rights class allowed me to pursue my interest in this topic. He encouraged me during the inception of this project and wisely guided me throughout it all. His vast knowledge, insight and encouragement were invaluable. It has been a privilege to work with him. I also would like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Eileen Meehan and Dr. Judith Sylvester for dedicating their time and expertise to this work.

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## ABSTRACT

Crime news is an important component of local news. A literature review suggested that the media's coverage of crime news can reveal vital information about media routines and biases. The main issue in this study is race and the media. The subtext of crime news and how the media cover different races when dealing with crime can speak to the larger issues of race and the media. The primary focus of this study was to examine how the media cover victims of murder, but more specifically to investigate any differences that may exist in how they cover White and Black victims. The study also looked for differences in coverage according to gender and social class. A content analysis looked at articles about homicide victims from *The Advocate*. Interviews with reporters were conducted to determine how these reporters approach and cover murders. Interviews with police media relations officers revealed how these officers disseminate information.

This study concluded that the media give White murder victims more prominent coverage than Black victims and female victims better coverage than male victims. The content analysis demonstrates that those who are most likely to be victimized, Black males, receive the least prominent coverage.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

On July 18, 2002, the front-page headline of *The Advocate* read, "Women's killings unsolved." Accompanying this article was a large, eye-catching color graphic titled "29 murders remain a mystery." The graphic had pictures of women who had been murdered and a map that included either where the women lived or where their bodies were found. I saw names like Hardee Schmidt, Kassie Federer and Gina Wilson Green. Green had been murdered nearly a year ago. Schmidt and Federer were murdered several years earlier. Even though these murders were not recent, the women's names and faces were very familiar to me. I also looked at the faces and read the names of Renee Newman, Joyce Williams and Sylvia Cobbs. These names and faces were not familiar. What was the difference between these two sets of victims? The first set was White. The latter set was Black.

Why was this? Did I, as a White woman, pay closer attention to the murders of people like me? Did the media give more exposure to the White women who were murdered? Did the police downplay the murder of Black women when disseminating information to the media? These questions have led me to this study. This study will look at the construction of crime news, and how the coverage of murder can speak to larger issues of racial awareness and inequality.

The civil rights movement started more than 40 years ago, yet the state of race relations and the struggle for equality remain important issues today. Frictions exist

between racial groups, but many individuals remain oblivious to these problems (Robinson and Ginter, 1999). Robinson and Ginter believe that racial distance and racial distrust characterize current race relations. Sigelman and Welch (1993) found in their study of interracial contact and levels of hostility that 26% of African Americans compared to only 5% of Whites estimated that White Americans share the same racial attitudes as the Ku Klux Klan. So are the media the culprits in this distorted vision of race relations? Kellstedt (2003) in his work on American racial attitudes found that the media have "exerted important influences on the trajectory of American public opinion" (p. 132). Entman and Rojecki (2000) explored racial problems through media images and found a disconnect between reality and Whites' sentiments toward Blacks. They point to media as part of the problem, saying that journalistic norms undermine the Black presence. In instances of conflict like the civil rights movement and race riots the media rely on authoritative sources like police and elected officials to tell the story so the plight of the African American is marginalized (Entman and Rojecki, 2000).

Entman and Rojecki found that "media productions offer a revealing indicator of the new forms of racial differentiation" (p. 3). Theirs was a broad sweeping and telling look at how the media portray Blacks. They looked at a variety of media and Blacks in general. The media have also marginalized women (Costain, 1992; Norris, 1997). So it would seem that African American women would be at a great disadvantage in terms of how the media portray them. These women also may be at a disadvantage when it comes to scholarly research. Research into racial representation within the news has for the most part ignored women of color (Meyers, 1997). This study will focus on media's coverage



of murder, paying close attention to the murder of Black women as compared to other groups to explore these larger issues of equality and race relations.

Crime is consistent and abundant, so the news media have a large number of crime stories from which to choose (Turnstall, 1971). Twenty-five percent of a newspaper is generally devoted to crime news (Graber, 1980; Surette, 1992). A hierarchy of crime exists with murder considered the most serious of crimes, and usually generating the most coverage (Meyers, 1997). This study will look to the media's coverage of murder for answers to questions about the current state of African American women specifically and race in general, and equality in the media specifically and society in general.

In order to do that, this study will look at local news. Entman (1990) observed that local news, by presenting the conditions and dangers within our own communities "in all likelihood help to construct the audience's sense of well-being and community threat in a way that the more distant and abstracted national news cannot" (p.335). Included in this study will be victims in the city of Baton Rouge murdered between September 2000 and August 2002. These dates were chosen because they are fairly recent, yet occur before the south Louisiana serial killer began receiving a large amount of media attention. This range will produce a good sample of victims to study, including several White female victims, who are considered "low-risk." The victims included in this study were all Baton Rouge Police Department cases. This study will include a content analysis of articles from *The Advocate* and a qualitative analysis using interviews, observations and an in-depth look at three "newsworthy" victims. Important to this research is the crime beat and how it is constructed, so the study will include interviews

with crime beat reporters to see how they view and cover crime news, how they decide what makes it into the paper, and why certain stories receive more coverage. Sources also are an important aspect of this study. To get a complete look at the factors that contribute to crime news, observation and interviews will be conducted with the Baton Rouge police department's public information officers. These officers are responsible for disseminating information about crime. This will expose how the police department works with the media, if officers give certain cases more weight and how they decide the amount of information they release to the media. The other qualitative component will be a look at media coverage of three victims who were murdered within this time frame. These three victims were murdered around the same time and received a large amount of coverage. Two of the victims were White and one was Black. The Baton Rouge Police Department handled one of the murders. The two other cases involved women from Baton Rouge whose bodies were found outside of the city limits.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Media and Race

In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Entman and Rojecki (2000) examine the racial subtexts of crime news. Their studies of television news in Chicago found that White victims outnumber Black victims. They say,

This pattern has been remarked on many times, and it probably involves class biases and journalistic norms. The media almost always pay far more attention to a murder victim on Park Avenue than to one on 125<sup>th</sup> Street. Sadly, a Black murder victim in a Harlem tenement conforms to expectations, so is less newsworthy than a White corpse in a midtown penthouse. The resulting emphasis profoundly imply that White life is more valuable than Black (p. 81).

They looked at how the media sustain racial differentiation. They argue this is in part because Whites control mass media organizations and Whites' majority status makes their taste most influential. But routines of journalism are also to blame.

The literature suggests the media play an important role in constructing, shaping and reinforcing perceptions of race relations particularly among White Americans (Schuman et al, 1997). Gandy (1998) found that news coverage is instrumental in the construction and reinforcement of a racial hierarchy "arraying racial or ethnic groups in terms of their values, their attractiveness, the legitimacy of their claims" (p. 82). The media ghettoize racial issues and racial authority figures. Schaffner and Gadson (2004) in their study on race and local television news coverage of Congress found that when local television stations covered African American members of congress, the coverage was race-oriented regardless of their legislative record on minority issues. They argue that this

leads to the stereotype that African American legislators are interested only in minority issues. While the literature explains how the media can contribute to racial inequality it does not always explain why. If the media conform to the notions of objectivity and have the proper resources such as access to sources and information, then it seems there would be equality in coverage.

Entman and Rojecki (2000) say that there are facts available to the media such as crime statistics and welfare budgets, and it is in society's best interest that the media use these facts. Why are the media not using these facts? Is it easier to reaffirm the public's stereotype of the single urban African American mother on welfare instead of giving the public an accurate picture of welfare recipients? The U.S. Department of Justice 2003 Crime Victimization report says that Blacks were victims of overall violence at rates higher than those for Whites. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports of 2003 showed that of the women murdered about 49% were White women and about 49% were Black women, but because Black women make up a lower percentage of the population they were at greater risk of becoming a victim. So if media coverage truly reflected what was happening in society, it would seem that there would be equal coverage of female murder victims regardless of race, but that is not the case. Research shows that the media do not give victims of crime equal coverage. Sorenson & Peterson (1998) conclude in their study on news media coverage of homicide that some homicides are more newsworthy than others. "Worthy" victims were those who were White, in the youngest and oldest age groups, women of high socioeconomic status, and those killed by strangers. Chermak (1995) said that murder and other violent crimes are the most newsworthy, but not every murder is newsworthy.

## **Victims**

Because crime often commands the largest percentage of local news produced, (Chermak, 1995) how the media cover crime can be a good barometer for racial images the media present. Victims are an essential component of crime news. Berns (2004) observed that victims are central characters in most stories about crime, violence and other social problems. The victim of the crime, such as who the victim is and if the victim's family members are willing to talk to the media, can affect story selection decisions and methods used by the media to put the story together (Chermak, 1995). Lipschultz and Hilt (2002) found in their study on crime and local television news that the news personalizes the coverage of crime by focusing on victims and their emotions, including fear. While the previous research has determined that the media devote a great deal of their resources and news space to crime news, the stories audiences see can be different from actual crime statistics.

Demographic characteristics of a victim and circumstances surrounding a killing, such as the location of the murder or whether a suspect was arrested, play a role in whether or how a crime is reported and can influence which crimes become news because these circumstances can make certain crimes more attractive to the media. Boulahanis and Heltsley (2004) conducted a study that suggests that newspapers overreport cases involving females and extremely young victims. Chermak (1995) also found that females are overrepresented in the news in comparison with their representation of crime statistics. He explained this by saying "society thinks females, like children, are more vulnerable and feels crimes committed against them are more newsworthy" (p. 130). Yet the literature does not adequately address which type of females makes newsworthy

victims. The literature does focus on Whites as victims in general but does not sufficiently focus on race and gender as contributors to newsworthiness. Research suggests that the media are more likely to present Whites portrayed as victims than Blacks (Romer et al, 1998; Dixon and Linz, 2000). Westin (2000) said that the conventional wisdom among many assignment editors is that White viewers will tune out if Black and Latinos are featured in segments. Entman and Rojecki (2000) found that racial representation on television actually does not appear to match crime statistics. Their study conducted in Chicago found that local news underrepresented Black victims and overrepresented White victims, even though Blacks in Chicago are more likely to be victimized. The average story featuring Black victims was 106 seconds long; those featuring White victims were 185 seconds long. Notes in their work indicate that this is true in international news as well with African victims of ethnic war receiving less attention than European victims (Myers et al, 1996). Sorenson and Peterson found that homicides of Hispanics and Blacks were substantially underreported in the *Los Angeles Times*.

This seems to be a consistent pattern in the media. One approach to explain it, presented by Romer et al (1998), uses the power relationship perspective. This perspective posits that Whites influence news content through the ownership of mass media outlets. This in turn leads to content that reflects White stereotyping of out-group members, and ethnocentric biases and behavior (Romer et al, 1998). They found that television news tends to overrepresent Whites as victims because of an ethnic-blame discourse in which people of color are blamed for the problems of Whites (Romer et al, 1998). Armour (1997) suggests that with the power relationship perspective, Black

perpetration of crime, particularly if Whites are victims, may be deemed highly newsworthy by news gatherers “who feel obligated to conform to ethnocentric discursive practices to maintain viewer interest.”

A contrasting perspective emphasizes the role of the newsgathering process in shaping media content (Dixon & Linz 2000; Graber, 1980; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). This news-structure-and-economic-interest explanation would predict that the misrepresentation of Whites as victims in the news results from reporting practices designed to generate and maintain a substantial media market (Dixon & Linz, 2000). Here the importance of formulaic news comes into play. Most news organizations share "production values" that are nurtured by the economic drives (Cook, 1998). Within these values are news routines that make only certain stories possible. Pritchard and Hughes (1997) observed “the competition for ratings between television news stations encouraged journalists and editors to focus on dramatic stories featuring victims to which the audience can identify.” Given that the majority of those audience members are White, the victims also tend to be White. Furthermore, because Black homicide victims may be seen as more typical than White victims, news reporters and editors may see the depiction of Black victims as being less able to capture high ratings than the portrayal of White victims and therefore inflate the depiction of White victimization at the expense of Black victims (Kaniss, 1991).

Researchers have found that social prominence is directly related to the access to the news media (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973). Gans said disorders in affluent places are more likely to be reported than occurrences elsewhere, and Roshco (1975) said the higher a person's "social ranking" the more prominent and extensive the coverage. While

Chermak (1995) found that the race of a victim is rarely presented in newspapers unless it helps explain why the crime was committed, Meyers (1997) suggests that the audience can often tell the race of the victim by photographs or images included in the story or assume the race by where the crime occurred.

The literature speaks in general about victims' race and quality of coverage but fails to look specifically at the distinction between gender and race. For example, while the literature suggests that a victim with a higher social ranking will obtain a greater quality of coverage, it does not look at whether female victims of different ethnicity but similar social ranking will receive the same amount of coverage.

### **Crime News & The Crime Beat**

The news media are a critical source of the public's information about crime (Graber, 1980). News media accounts of crime can affect the public's ratings of the importance of issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), define a social problem (Hubbard et al, 1975), shape public estimates of violence within society (Gerbner et al, 1980), and affect the public's fears about personal safety, satisfaction with law enforcement, and trust of others (Graber, 1980). While crime news is important, crime also is abundant; so many crimes are never presented in the media (Chermak 1995). The media make organizational decisions when determining which stories are included or excluded from presentation. Chermak suggests that there are four steps in the crime news production process. Source organizations control access to stories; news personnel select potential stories provided by the source organization; news and source organizations struggle to determine what information will be included in the story, and the crime story ultimately competes with other stories for news space.



There are many reasons for the prominence of crime news, especially violent crime. Given that celebrities, sports stars, politicians, or business figures are sometimes involved in crimes, crime news can span most sections of a newspaper (Chermak, 1995). The media favor stories about conflict, and crime news can easily deliver this conflict (Lotz, 1991). Erikson (1964) said that crime in papers provides readers with entertainment the way public hangings once did. Gans (1979) suggests that crime news delivered through any medium capitalizes on the public's fascination with gore and pathos. Violent crimes, such as murder and rape, which occur less frequently than other types of crime, receive more media attention than other crimes (Chermak, 1995).

News organizations go to great lengths to determine what type of news will attract the greatest audience. Koch (1990) set forth four rules that help explain why an event may be worthy of news coverage. He found that cultural rules help define events as newsworthy; social rules assign a weight to specific stories; geographic rules set boundaries which limit the distance a news organization might travel, and temporal rules govern the time frame within which an event occurs. There are characteristics of newsworthiness that influence the reporters' selection decisions of crime news (Chermak, 1995). One characteristic is the seriousness of the crime; the more serious a crime, the more newsworthy it becomes. Other characteristics include who participated in the crime, who participated in producing the crime story, the uniqueness of the crime, and the salience of the event (Ericson et al, 1991; Weaver et al, 1986). Also, arrest of the suspect and the charging of the suspect increase newsworthiness. Rarely do stories examine causes of crime, motive or effectiveness of the criminal justice system (Graber, 1980).

At the same time, crime news is an easy commodity for the media to deliver. Newsbeats become efficient and economical ways for the media to produce news. Officials such as police and city clerks do much of the newsgathering work for the reporter (Fishman, 1978). Today, most of the news comes from "routine channels" and not from solely the reporter's own work (Cook, 1998). Cook says that news production "involves collaboration and cooperation between officials and newsmen" (p.45). For crime news those officials generally are the police.

### **Police As Source Organization**

Previous studies prove that the media rely heavily on individuals, such as authoritative source organizations, who can provide necessary story elements. Cook (1998) defines an authoritative source as "an individual given a leading role in the narrative of a newsbeat" (p. 97). Journalists consider authoritative sources to be credible sources of factual information. More often than not, the sources do the leading, initiating contact with representatives of the news media, making themselves available, selling story ideas and seeking to "manage the news by putting the best light on themselves" and those they represent (Gans, 1979 p.117). Newsbeats help reporters stay in contact with those sources. Cook says newsbeats are organized around political and social institutions and allow reliable production of news. Through newsbeats, reporters can come to know where to get news and have expectations about who will provide them with information.

Source organizations can have a great impact on the outcome of the news. Turk (1986) argues that the sources of information upon which journalists rely ultimately have more to do with media content than the selection processes of journalists themselves. News is not necessarily what happens but what a news source says has happened because

news doesn't "happen" until there is an exchange of information between the media and their sources (Sigal, 1973). Through their privileged access to the media, police can shape public images of themselves, their work and the nature of the crime problem (Lawrence, 2000).

The need for credible information and official sources lead the media to the police on issues of crime. In crime reporting, police are the primary and most legitimate source of crime news (Meyers, 1997). The media establish relationships with criminal justice sources to fill their daily quota for crime news (Ericson et al, 1987). This limits the information provided in the stories because the information known by these agencies is biased and reflects their own perspective. Police will try to present the information so it reflects best on them and their image of crime solvers (Ericson et al 1986). Also they found that police sources account for 20% of the sources used in crime news. The police play a big role in shaping crime news. Kasinsky (1994) found that the media often work within the parameters of police discourse about crime.

Source organizations such as the police and the media can have both an adversarial and symbiotic relationship at the same time (Blumer and Gurevitch, 1981). They see their relationship as necessary. Police chiefs are both sources and critics of crime news. They deplore the emphasis on crime news, but seek to manage crime information (Skolnick and McCoy, 1984). The police have adopted a proactive approach to news communication. In the past few decades the police have become more involved with the news media. They have made an effort to control their environment through a proactive strategy of selectively disclosing knowledge about organizational activities and defining their public image (Kasinsky, 1994).

Ericson et al. (1989) found that the police are more open to the media so they can control the environment which reporters work in, protect their organization and legitimize their work. Chermak (1995) said the police use the media to further the objective of deterrence, invigorate a stalled investigation and as a public relations tool. He suggests source organizations benefit from the presentation of stories about murder. The police can justify additional spending and budgetary increases if the streets are perceived to be dangerous. Kasinsky (1994) found that "the dominant view reflected in the literature on media is that the police-reporter relationship is asymmetrical, in favor of the police," but she contends that police-reporter transactions are interdependent with controls on each side (Barak, 1994, p.208). She found that the police are controlled and restricted by the media to some degree, with the police believing it necessary to respond to the media to avoid negative coverage or denial of future access. Ericson et al. (1989) observed that the techniques reporters use to get police to respond to them are often similar to the techniques police use to interrogate citizens.

Earlier research found that a hierarchy of crime exists, with murder considered the most serious of crime (Meyers 1997). Sherizan (1978) found that almost 70% of all murders were reported in Chicago newspapers, only 5% of rapes and less than 1% of almost all other crimes became news. According to the U.S. Department of Justice crime statistics from 2003, murder occurred with less frequency than all other violent crimes, making up 6 percent of violent crimes committed. Chermak (1995) said source organizations usually are more willing to provide more information on murders because it cannot endanger the victim.

## Summary

Just as crime is an important part of the daily news, research on crime news has also been a very important scholarly topic. There is a rich literature on the subject. There has also been much said about race and the media. Where these two come together in the literature is often at the point of Black male criminals. The other side of this is Black female victims. How are the media covering them? Where the literature seems to be lacking is in looking at the intersection of gender, race and the construction of crime news. While other studies have looked at these different aspects independently there has been little research that examines how a victim's gender and race affect how the media and their sources come together to create crime news. As stated earlier, research into racial representation within the news has for the most part ignored women of color (Meyers, 1997). This study will rectify this. This study will look at the intersection of race and gender regarding crime news.

Much of the research also centers on urban city centers such as Entman and Rojecki studying Chicago and Meyers studying Atlanta. By using Baton Rouge, this study takes the research into a small city without a defined separate city center where African Americans would live. This, to an extent, may control for outside factors such as expectations about where crime is supposed to happen as in the example by Entman and Rojecki where a murder in Harlem conforms to expectations. Baton Rouge has received national attention recently due to the presence of two and perhaps three serial killers. The snipers that terrorized the Washington, D.C., area in the fall of 2002 are accused of a murder in Baton Rouge that occurred shortly before their murder spree in the D.C. area and shortly after the time range of this study. These incidences make Baton Rouge

interesting to study. This allows researchers to see how the media and police force operated before the onslaught of media coverage given to the serial killer and sniper cases. Also, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports of 2003 ranked Louisiana as the worst state for murder with 13 murders per 100,000 people proving that murder is a prevalent problem in Louisiana that the media should adequately address. In the end, this study will see what is at play here - in other words, who is to blame for the overrepresentation of white victims. Perhaps this study will answer the question of how the media and source organizations, in this case the police, work together to construct news about female murder victims.

### **Theory: Framing**

An important and telling part of a news story is the context in which the reporter puts the story. Two reporters could approach the same story in different ways. The way stories in this study are framed will be critical in understanding the divergence between Black and White victims. This study will analyze the frames reporters apply to their stories to see this difference.

A main tenet of the American media is objectivity. Yet research indicates that organizational processes, ideological beliefs and power relations mediate what gets selected, packaged, disseminated and received as news. Tuchman (1978) suggests that news is not a mirror of reality, but a “manufactured cultural product.” While making news, journalists also make framing judgments. Goffman (1974) was one of the first media scholars to employ framing analysis. He asserts that in order to negotiate, manage and comprehend a complex social world everyone practices framing. Goffman believed that people “don’t operate with a fixed set of expectations about social roles, objects or

situations. Rather, people have enormous flexibility in creating and using expectations” (Baran and Davis, 2003, p.274). He defined frames as a specific set of expectations that are used to make sense of a social situation at a given point in time.

Journalists make sense of the world by creating frames (Tuchman, 1978). Media frames can be understood in terms of how to interpret and organize experiences and give meaning to symbols (Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974). Berns (2004) said we might think of framing as a photographer deciding the composition of a shot. There are things the photographer will include and leave out, and another photographer may see the same scene and compose the shot differently. Frames can be organized and communicated verbally (i.e., radio, television), visually (i.e., television, newspapers), or in print (i.e., newspapers, the Internet). Conceptualized in this way, framing essentially involves selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality [to] make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition ... frames, then, define problems ... diagnose causes ... make moral judgments ... and suggest remedies" (Entman, 1993; p. 52).

Gitlin (1980) said “frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters.” Tuchman (1978) adds that two processes occur in the production of news. First, an occurrence is transformed into an event. Second, an event is transformed into a news frame. Frames, Gitlin adds, “enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely; to assign it cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences.”

Framing can be understood as an expression of power, particularly as it affects our recognition and understanding of social problems and political issues (Entman, 1993). Frames themselves do not determine what people think, but can make certain aspects of a problem appear more significant than others. Entman (1993) said, “The potential effects of frames are determined not only by what they include, but also by what they exclude.” A small number of frames are dominant while others are completely ignored. Berns (2004) suggests the media choose to frame social problems in ways that complement their own needs for seeking a large audience or pleasing a particular market.

### **Summary**

Framing is a powerful tool of the media. The media can apply a number of frames when talking about crimes. The media could apply a strictly fact frame to a crime story about murder or they could frame the story in terms of the positive life of the victim. Framing can play a role in defining the importance of the victim and the crime. The literature on crime news fails to explain how framing plays a part in the construction of crime news.

### **Hypothesis**

The literature provided theoretical background on issues this study will further explore. From the literature reviewed, certain conclusions are expected in this study. In general terms the literature suggests that the media will not treat Black victims and White victims equally. This study will pay close attention to the difference between gender and race of homicide victims. It will look at frames and quality of coverage to gauge equality of coverage. This study will explore the following hypotheses.



H1: The media will give more prominent coverage to White murder victims than Black murder victims.

H2: The race, gender and income level of the victim will affect the amount of coverage that a victim receives.

H3: Black female murder victims will receive less prominent coverage than other victims.

H4: The media will apply the "high-risk lifestyle" frame to more Black female murder victims. The media will apply the "fear" and "positive life" frames to more White female murder victims.

H5a: The police will emphasize cases featuring White victims to reporters more than they emphasize cases featuring Black victims.

H5b: Reporters look for more cases featuring White victims than they will cases featuring Black victims.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This study is looking at the intersection of race, gender and crime news. In order to test the hypotheses, the study will look at cases in the Baton Rouge area. According to the 2000 census, Baton Rouge has about 230,000 residents. Race is fairly evenly divided in the city with Blacks comprising 50% of the population and Whites comprising 46%. Being a small city, Baton Rouge does not have a defined city center where minorities reside like in larger cities. Louisiana has one of the highest murder rates per capita in the nation, and Baton Rouge has had a fair number of female murders in recent decades. Many of these female murders remained unsolved for years. Baton Rouge is a capital city, but a city like New Orleans where people expect high crime. Baton Rouge is a one-newspaper town, so it is a leading source of local news. This makes *The Advocate* a good paper to study. *The Advocate* is a family-owned newspaper that has been a part of Baton Rouge for more than one hundred years and has strong ties to the community. The family that owns *The Advocate* also owns one of the two television stations in town that has a news department. It is more concerned with local news than perhaps a chain-owned paper might be. Also, since a local family owns *The Advocate* it may provide a high-water mark for journalism and provide a hard test case for the hypotheses. It has a daily circulation of approximately 99,805 and 131,938 on Sundays.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study. The use of mixed methods allows the different types to strengthen the others while providing additional ways to learn about and answer the question posed by the research. A multi-method

approach is especially important in charting the complex process of communication, which Lasswell said could best be explained by the simple statement: "Who says what to whom in what channel with what effect" (Lasswell, 1948). Triangulating between the two methods reduces the disadvantages associated with each.

The quantitative method employed is a content analysis. Kerlinger (1986) defines content analysis as "a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables." Kolbe (1991) says a benefit of content analysis is it allows for "an unobtrusive appraisal of communications" (p. 244), but its downfall is its results are heavily dependent on the categories that the researcher uses in the analysis. To strengthen the study there will be a qualitative component. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) say advantage of qualitative research is "it allows a researcher to view behavior in a natural setting without the artificiality that sometimes surrounds experimental or survey research" (p. 48). Unlike the use of random people or samples in quantitative research, qualitative research requires the use of subjects and subject matter close to the issue in order to gain valuable insight (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997; Lacey & Luff, 2001). This element will consist of interviews with reporters and sources and a qualitative analysis of coverage surrounding three murder victims. These murders received a great deal of media coverage. This will help to show what victims the media find "ultra newsworthy" and why.

### **Content Analysis**

Corporal Don Kelly, a media relations officer with the Baton Rouge Police Department, provided a list of all the murders that occurred in the city of Baton Rouge from September 1, 2000 to August 31, 2002. This list contained the names, race, gender,

age, date of death, and location of the murder of 97 victims. Twenty-two victims were excluded from the population because they fell outside a specified age range. Victims who were ages 70 and over or ages 20 and younger were cut from the list. This was done in an attempt to keep this general age demographic of the population equal, since the media often deem very young and the old as more newsworthy victims (Chermak, 1995). Another theoretical reason for excluding those between the ages of 15 and 20, since they do not constitute the very young, is to account for the fact that young black men are more at risk of being murdered than young black women.

Using this population a search of *The Advocate* articles on Lexis Nexis was conducted for each victim. The search parameters included coverage following the two weeks after each homicide or the first story about the homicide if the story ran outside of the two-week span but within the two-year time frame. Only the two weeks after the homicide was used to control for the media attention surrounding the serial killer, which would have altered results. The first search conducted was using the victim's name and the search function on Lexis Nexis titled "Headlines, Lead Paragraphs, and Terms." When that search yielded twelve victims without any articles another search of the population was conducted using the "Full Text" search function. These two searches generated 104 articles. Four of the 77 victims either did not have an article about them or the date of the article occurred outside of the time frame for the study.

Quality of coverage is defined by several variables. These variables include the article's placement in the paper, the story's length, the amount and type of sources used, how the story was framed, whether a photo was included and whether the media followed up on the murder. Quality coverage for the purpose of this study is defined as stories

placed on the front pages of the A or B section, longer stories, stories which use more sources, stories that are framed around the positive aspects of the victim's life, the use of photos and subsequent coverage. Each article was coded for 13 variables. The variables included the victim's name, race, and gender, the placement of the story in the paper, the word count of each story, the number of sources used, types of sources, types of official sources used, the census tract where the murder occurred, the primary frame of the story, the secondary frame, whether a photo was included, and whether it was the first story about the victim or subsequent coverage. Most of the information needed for coding the articles was objective and easily obtained from the list provided by the Baton Rouge Police Department such as age, race, gender and where the crime occurred. Information included on Lexis Nexis provided with the articles, offered placement, word count and whether a photo or graphic accompanied the article. Using the information of where the crime occurred in conjunction with 2000 census information on the city of Baton Rouge, the researcher was able to obtain a census tract number that correlated with the location of the crime and then find demographic information, such as income level on the tract.

The literature review discussed the importance of sources and frames in understanding the role they play in the construction of crime news and in news content in general. To measure these two crucial contributors to news, the content analysis coded for the following sources. The articles were coded for five types of sources: "Official," "Family Member/Spokesperson," "Neighbor/Concerned Citizen," "Witness" and "Other." Operational definitions of each will follow. Each type of official source was coded. They included "Police Chief," "City Official," "Police Spokesperson," "Officer on

the Scene” and “Other.” Sources are an integral part of a story. They also can help to create frames.

The articles were coded for the following frames: “Murdered Victim/Details of Crime,” “Police Searching for Clues/Arrest Made,” “Positive Aspects of Victim's Life,” “Victim Missing,” “High-Risk Lifestyle,” “Fear,” and “Unusual Crime.” Operational definitions will follow. These frames were used as both primary and secondary frames.

#### Operational Definitions Sources:

An official source is anyone who functions as a spokesperson or has an official capacity regarding crime. Most often this is a representative of the police department, such as the department’s public information officer, an officer at the scene of the crime or the Police Chief. In other instances official sources could be a city official such as the mayor or spokesperson for a crime task force. Firefighters, prison officials or EMS workers also function as official sources.

A family member or spokesperson is a direct relative of the victim or someone speaking on behalf of the victim’s family.

A neighbor or concerned citizen is someone residing, working, or frequenting the area where the murder occurred.

A witness is someone who saw or heard all or part of the crime occur.

#### Operational Definitions Frames:

Murder Victim/Details of Crime: The story focuses on the fact that a crime occurred and the details of the crime.

Positive Aspects of Victim's Life: The story does not focus on the circumstances surrounding the crime, though they may be mentioned, but rather centers around the positive attributes of the victim.

Police Search for Clues/Arrest Made: The story does not focus on the circumstances surrounding the crime, but rather what the police are doing to solve the crime, suspects they are questioning or the fact that the police have made an arrest.

Missing: The story focuses on a person who is missing and suspected to be a victim of a homicide.

High-risk lifestyle: The story focuses on aspects of the victim's life that would have put him or her in danger of being a victim of crime. The story may allude to the victim living a life on the streets, or being involved in drugs or prostitution.

Fear: The story focuses on how this homicide has stirred fears in the community where it occurred.

For the statistical analysis, the variables of race, gender, income level and a dummy variable of "Black female" were used as independent and predictor variables. The dependent variables were number of words, sources used, frames, inclusion of a photo and follow-up coverage. The variables were examined using a variety of statistical approaches. Frequencies were run on race, gender, placement, frames, photo inclusion and story number to get some general information on the population. Then crosstabs and chi-squares were run on race and photo inclusion, race and story number and race and primary and secondary frames. The same categories were run using gender as the independent variable. Multiple regressions were run with race, gender, income level and

black female as the predictor variables. These were used against story number, photo inclusion, placement in paper, and word count.

Intercoder reliability test was conducted. A second coder was trained and coded a random selection of 10 or 9% of the articles. There was 100% agreement on 11 of the 13 variables. The two variables dealing with frames were more objective. Using Scott's pi to test reliability, there was 89% agreement on primary frames and 79% agreement on secondary frames.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

In addition to a content analysis, this study also employs qualitative analysis. The content analysis is able to look at the state of media coverage of murders. It answers what and how questions such as what is the state of media coverage, or how are the media covering murders? Qualitative analysis also answers these questions from the reporters' and police's perspective, but a very important component of the qualitative component is it can answer questions of why. Why do the media cover murders they way they do? The qualitative data includes interviews with a former and a current crime beat reporter at *The Advocate*, interviews and observations with the public information officer at the Baton Rouge Police Department, and an analysis of three murders that the media followed and covered in great depth.

The interviews with the reporters will give a different angle to how the media construct crime news about murders. These interviews will add insight into how the media operate and, importantly, why they operate this way. What the content analysis cannot tell us, the interviews can. For example, the content analysis cannot speak to how the media gather news. It can show numbers about what sources they frequently use, but



not speak to the relationship between the media and their sources, such as the media and police. By looking at how the media operate and the relationship with their main source, the police, one can get a better sense of who determines what murders are important - the reporters, editors, or the police? Interviews and observations with members of the police department's media relations office also can help answer these questions. An important component is how the media receive information about murders, or on the other side, how the police disseminate information. The police will give their own viewpoint about the relationship they have with the media.

The qualitative analysis also will include an in-depth look at coverage surrounding three murders. The three murders occurred within the time parameters of this study. The victims were all female, two were White and one was Black. The three resided within Baton Rouge, but the bodies of two of the victims were found outside the Baton Rouge city limits and therefore were not Baton Rouge Police Department cases. The other victim was included in the population of the content analysis. These three homicides received significant media coverage in the Baton Rouge area. This analysis will help explain what victims the media find particularly newsworthy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### **Qualitative Analysis: Reporter Interviews**

The interviews conducted with the reporters were done in short sessions, ranging from an hour to two hours, over several meetings at their convenience.

Josh Noel starts his day off with a round of phone calls. He calls area law enforcement agencies, fire departments, city constables and emergency medical service units. He is looking for a compelling and unique story. He covers the crime beat for *The Advocate* and has been on the beat for two and half years. Before Noel became the chief crime beat reporter, Melissa Moore worked on the beat and in that position for nearly ten years. She estimates that she covered more than 400 homicides while a reporter. Moore and Noel together had 18 bylines in the articles that made up the population. Fifty-six of the articles either appeared in the "Police and Fire Briefs" section or did not have a byline, and it is likely that they contributed to a significant number of those reports since there are no more than three reporters on the crime beat at any time, including the chief crime beat reporter and two "interns" that often work the overnight shift. Interns are paid staff employees of *The Advocate* serving on the crime beat for a two-year period.

Some of Noel's statements fell in line with the literature. He believes that a hierarchy of crime does exist, and murder is definitely at the top in Baton Rouge. "Death changes the complexion of crime news," he said. "Many other stories are routine such as fires and robberies." While crime occurs every day in Baton Rouge, murder does not. In the two-year time frame of this study, 97 people were murdered. The reporters apply

varying levels of salience to each murder. Noel often used the words "unique" and "compelling" when describing the type of story he was looking to develop. This is a story with interesting components that does not fit the norm, with a victim that is not a "high-risk" victim. Research confirms this type of outlook among journalists. Sorenson and Peterson (1998) said "if different kinds of homicides were covered in the news media in the proportion in which they occur, the general public might have an accurate sense of the scope and nature of the homicide that occurs in their communities" (p.1514). Some research suggests that cases the media cover are chosen for their deviance from the statistical norm and uniqueness of the event (Mawby, 1984). Journalists do have consistent criteria for assessing newsworthiness, and Noel said newsworthiness is determined case by case. He finds that newsworthiness usually has more to do with the circumstances surrounding the crime, such as how the murder occurred and if there were witnesses willing to talk, than the victim themselves, although reporters see certain victims as more newsworthy.

Noel and Moore both used the homicide of Charlotte Murray Pace as unique and compelling. Pace was a 22-year-old white woman from a middle-class family. She had graduated from an LSU master's program days before her death. Noel said an important component of determining the value of a story is the impact it could have on the community and the interest level it will generate. Again, he is looking for a story outside of the norm that will make people take notice and could in a way affect their lives. He noted that the Pace murder generated a great deal of fear not only in her neighborhood, but in the Baton Rouge community. He believes a victim such as Pace has a high level of interest and impact because she is not a typical homicide victim. Moore went further and

explained that Pace's murder had a high level of violence and the circumstances presents the scariest of murders for readers - a murder and sexual assault probably by an intruding stranger. She said police kept the murder in the news by canvassing the area where Pace lived and by holding meetings to talk with neighbors. Moore said these neighbors were accessible and willing to talk to the media giving the story a fresh peg.

Moore juxtaposed coverage surrounding Pace with the coverage of another female victim, Renee Newman. Moore covered this homicide about a month and half before the Pace homicide. Newman was a middle-aged Black woman and the sister of a police officer. She was not considered high-risk, and her murder remains unsolved. Yet the media did not follow her story. Moore said Newman did not have family and neighbors advocating to keep her murder in the news. Moore said early on police suspected that Newman knew her killer, and to a reporter those types of homicides are not as compelling. She feels reporters and readers are more interested in killings by a stranger because of the “this-could-happen-to me” factor.

So is race a factor when determining newsworthiness? Both reporters answered not exactly. They believe the overall importance of a victim has more to do with class than color. The higher the social status, the more important and newsworthy the victim becomes. This was demonstrated in the literature with researchers finding that social prominence is directly related to access to the news media. While looking at the socio-economics of a victim may be more of a short-hand method of determining newsworthiness than race, Moore noted that in Baton Rouge poor overwhelmingly means Black. So even though they point to class over color when determining the importance of

a victim, race could in fact be used as a proxy for class, making it a part of the equation when determining newsworthiness.

Both reporters said when a murder occurs their first reaction is to try to find and contact relatives of the victim no matter who the victim is. Moore said typically she would go to the crime scene, talk to people on the perimeter, talk off the record with the officers working at the scene and then talk on the record with the public information officer about what happened. She would then try to obtain information on potential relatives to talk with. The reporters found relatives of a White middle class victim were easy to get in touch with, but relatives of a poor Black victim were easy to get information from. Noel noted that he often finds it easy to get information from the mothers of poor young Black men. He said these women are usually grateful that someone is interested in the life and death of their child and are willing to talk. On the other end of the spectrum are middle-class White women. Moore said the relatives of these victims often lead stable lives and are easy to find and contact. Yet they are not always the most willing sources. She found that when income level increases, the willingness to talk to the media decreases. She said she did not like going to middle and upper class neighborhoods because she heard many "no comments" and had many doors slammed in her face. She said often poor individuals did not know they did not have to talk to the media.

Noel and Moore both said they put forth the same effort when they begin covering a murder. They followed a similar routine at the start of each story. Moore said she tried to apply the same level of importance to each murder by attempting to get as much information as possible, talking with relatives, but did not feel her editors did. Often

stories about poor black women that live “high-risk lifestyles” are regulated to the inside pages of the paper and may appear in a police brief section. Moore said police started using this term “high-risk lifestyle” to assess victimology. The police were not likely to label a victim a prostitute unless she had been arrested for prostitution. Noel said as a story progresses the approach can change. If an arrest is made closely following the murder and the case is wrapped up there is not always a need to continue to follow the story or to spend a great deal of time on it. Also he had a different take on his superiors. He said that his editors are not “taskmasters,” and he has a lot of leeway as far as what stories he follows-up on and what stories make it into the paper. Therefore, if he found a story to be interesting and worth spending more time on it, no matter who the victim, he felt he could follow-up on it.

Both reporters agree the newsroom is still largely a White man's world. When Moore started working at *The Advocate* in the early 1990s she said the city desk was all White and with her as the exception, all male. Women began infiltrating the city desk while Moore was there, but Noel says the newsroom, as a whole is still mainly White and male. He pointed out there are no Blacks in upper management. Moore said this is important because editors and reporters often react more strongly when “someone like me is murdered.” Something that happens to a hooker or to a poor Black person is not likely to happen to a reporter. She relayed a story about how she was trying to develop a piece on several homicides involving Black women who police labeled as living a “high-risk lifestyle.” She said while discussing the potential piece with an editor he told her “nobody cares about dead crack whores.” She believes often that is the general sentiment in a newsroom; some victims are just not newsworthy. Noel described another type of victim

that is generally not newsworthy - the 22 year-old male drug dealer, because this is a common victim and, therefore, not a unique story.

Noel said he does not have many disagreements with his editors and superiors, but one problem that arises is the placement of stories in the paper. He covered the first story of the murder of Pace. The story was put inside B and he thought the fact that a female LSU student was violently murdered in a student-populated area should have at least been a B1 story. It was a crime and a victim outside of the norm, a female killed in her home by an intruding stranger, with the added newsworthiness because it happened near the LSU campus. Moore said one of her biggest problems with superiors was the lack of support for the crime beat. She said even though crime was consistently a top issue in reader surveys, editors and upper management did not think it was as important as some of the other beats. She lost many battles over public information records because *The Advocate* refused to go to court in pursuit of public records. She said since the local television stations, one of which is owned by the same family that owns *The Advocate*, are not aggressive at pursuing public records on crime beat issues neither is the newspaper. Noel did not say there was a lack of support of the crime beat, but he did say there is not much collaboration between crime reporters and editors, and editors are not overly concerned about what he does.

There can be many influences in crime news. "Influences come from all angles," Noel said. He said reporters want to get all the information they can and get it accurately. Editors can, at times, make a murder more or less important by placement in the paper or not including follow-ups, even though he says these instances are rare. He feels sources such as the police do not push stories, but they do prevent news by not supplying

information. Moore said the amount of information she would receive about a murder often depended on the status of the victim. She found that the higher the victim's social status, the less information the police would release. This favors the poor and in turn Blacks in the prominence of coverage because with relatives as sources, more information would be available. Family members of victims or communities can influence stories by continually talking to the media and keeping the story in the news. However, both agreed that the police are the primary source when it comes to crime news.

Developing a good relationship with sources takes time. Moore said when she started on the crime beat it took her about six months to begin establishing trust with sources. Noel said it took him several months to get to know the right people to talk with, and to get tipsters and sources off the record to talk with him and supply him with good information. Moore said being a female put her at an advantage with police sources. Since she was the only "girl from the paper" as officers called her, they came to recognize her quickly. She said there was no "macho dynamic" between her and the officers that many male reporters experienced. Being female did not mean she automatically had their trust. She said she worked hard at developing positive relationships with these sources. When she was called about a homicide at 3 a.m., she would go out to the crime scene. She felt it was important for the officers to see her out there and willing to keep the same hours they kept. If the police stayed long hours at a crime scene, so would she. Even though she felt she did gain the trust of some officers, the public information officer (PIO) and police chiefs, these relationships were never perfect.



She categorized the relationship between reporters and police officers as "frequently adversarial, but generally respectful." Noel found the relationship frequently adversarial, also. He said the crime beat has the most confrontations with sources. "BRPD is very good at managing information," Moore said. She said they had a comprehensive media relations policy guide that dictated that almost all information must come from the public information officer. Moore said she often had a difficult time talking to witnesses because the police were very protective of them. She noted that she understood that they were trying to protect the case for the prosecution which could be jeopardized by reports in the media. She also said the police were "notorious for ignoring public information laws." Noel said he is constantly submitting public information requests to get records from the police department.

Noel perceived that officers generally distrusted the media, which hinders reporter-officer relationships. He believes officers do not always understand what the media are trying to do. He reported conflicts with police over trying to get information in a timely manner because police either did not understand the media's constant deadlines or did not respect it. Moore then said, "some officers felt if you are not with us you are against us." Moore claimed she had a genuine interest in understanding the work the police were doing beyond just trying to get a story. She conveyed to them that she was interested in how they conducted investigations and wanted to see an autopsy. She believes this increased her respectability and made them more understanding of what she was doing.

For Moore, the Baton Rouge Police Department was an efficient organization and all information went through the PIO. She rarely was able to talk on the record with the

officer conducting the investigation. She said in every circumstance she would rather talk to the officer actually doing the work than an information officer who comes on the scene later. Moore felt that the officer doing the work would have the best information, while the PIO would release a very controlled amount of information. This type of situation works out better for the police department since they are able to exercise more control over the media and the information that is released. She said officers on the scene could "guide her" with what type of questions about the crime to ask the PIO but could not always give her direct usable information. She relayed a story about a detective working a murder that occurred in his childhood home. She learned about this information and thought it made for a very interesting news peg, but said that was something the media relations officer may not have known or shared with reporters.

Both reporters felt the crime beat staff did a good job of covering crime as it occurred. Noel said *The Advocate* does not do a good job of examining the causes of crime. He felt in a city like Baton Rouge -- where crime and murder have become a central issue because of the number of unsolved murders -- those types of stories were necessary. He said the paper was "lacking in vision" and had a tendency to attack issues "haphazardly." Yet, this tends to be true of reporting in general since breaking news events tend to crowd out analysis and other less timely reporting. He wished *The Advocate* did a better job of stepping back and taking a better approach to community problems and uncovering trends. Last year one serial killer accused of murders in Baton Rouge was convicted. A second serial killer was arrested and the media speculated seriously that a third is responsible for other murders that occurred in Baton Rouge. Noel says this has to an extent changed the way they cover crime. He believes they are

examining the bigger issues about crime more often, than simply looking at news as it happens, but it takes a big issue to make those changes. According to Noel, another change brought on by the presence of serial killers is that the city and reporters are more sensitive to the murder of any woman. He believes women are beginning to get equal treatment in the press. "A woman killed in the park three years ago was buried in the paper; today that story could likely be on one A," he said. The victims of these serial killers were women from practically all walks of life. Yet, he does not believe this type of sensitivity and equal treatment will last forever.

### **Police Interviews**

Observations and interviews were conducted with the officers over the course of one workday. Unlike with the reporters, I was able to meet the officers in their offices and observe them going about their daily routine while talking with them and questioning them.

The way Corporal Don Kelly, the media relations officer with the Baton Rouge Police Department, starts his day is not all that different from Noel or Moore. He gathers information: he searches local papers for stories about the department, checks email and checks activity from night supervisors. He has been on the job for nearly 17 years and is assisted by a newcomer to media relations Officer L'Jean McKneely. "Anything that happens here, from A to Z, good or bad, goes through this office," McKneely said. He is surprised by the volume of information they handle and says working in media relations has given him a different perspective; from his position in media relations he can better see the inner workings of the department. Prior to coming to media relations, McKneely

served as a patrol officer. Kelly was a patrol officer at one time too, but before that he was a journalist.

Kelly said his previous experience in the media helped him early in his media relations career. He said he had a good understanding about what reporters needed and were looking for, and he easily could predict what would be a big story. He does not think he is losing his journalistic instincts but thinks the media have changed. He says reporters latch onto information that Kelly thinks would constitute a "non-story," and they ignore stories he believes are very newsworthy. He gave an example of a recent incident in which a shop owner was murdered during an armed robbery. Kelly thought this would be a big story, but it ended up in the police and fire brief section, with little follow-up. Kelly did not understand why the story did not receive more media attention.

Kelly has developed a very calculated and deliberate way of disseminating information. He likened managing information and the media to "herding cats" and said information release has to be well managed or he could lose control of his message. The department's Policies and Procedure Statements has a five-page section on media relations policies. This section defines terms such as public information, news media and media relations. It also outlines procedures such as who has the authority to speak for the department, what information can or cannot be released, how the department cooperates with the media and special considerations. Seven departmental positions have the authority to speak to the media on behalf of the department: the Chief of Police and Deputy Chief, officers in media relations, the Commander of the Uniformed Patrol Bureau, Chief of Detectives, legal advisor and Chief of Staff.

The policy also includes circumstances, such as non-fatal traffic accidents or misdemeanor calls, when field personnel could talk to the media. The policy also details what information that state law mandates must be released when an alleged offense occurs: a brief narrative of the alleged offense; the name and identification of each person charged with or arrested for the alleged offense; the time, date and location of the incident; property or vehicles involved; the names of investigating officers. Information that can be released includes the nature of the event or crime, injuries or damages sustained, the identity of a victim, requests for aid in locating evidence or suspects and the name of the officer in charge.

The policy also outlines special considerations in criminal matters. One is extending "every reasonable courtesy to news media representatives at crime scenes." The commanding officer at the scene or media relations officer could grant the media closer access than available to the general public. Other special considerations include the release of photographs or mug shots of individuals sought by law enforcement authorities, informing the media of arrests in major cases, and not unduly interfering with the media's efforts to get photographs or video of the suspect being transported through a public area. Kelly said officers do not usually breach the policies set forth in the section, but it has happened. If for example, an officer talks to the media without authorization, the result is the same as if he broke any number of other rules and policies put forth by the department. The offense usually gets the officer a reprimand from the chief.

Kelly and McKneely are planning for a media training session at the police academy. Their session has been cut back to 50 minutes. Previously they got several hours. Kelly said 50 minutes only allows them an opportunity to introduce themselves to

the trainees and go through some basic policy information. In the past he would do scenarios and put the trainees in situations where they acted as the PIO. Now, Kelly said, new officers have to learn how to deal with the media on the job and from their supervisors. He said these new recruits do not realize what a big part the media will play in their daily lives.

The day these interviews and observations took place was the first day on the job for a new police chief. The media relations office was getting media requests for photographs and interviews of the new chief and the two officers were preparing to meet with the new chief later that afternoon. Kelly has worked under several police chiefs and he says the chief is responsible for setting the tone of how the department handles media relations. According to Kelly, some chiefs are more "hands-on" when it comes to dealing with the media, while others step back and let media relations operate somewhat independently. Kelly believes the new chief will have a different philosophy about media relations than the previous chief, who was less hands-on with that department, and Kelly expects this chief to be involved in the process. Kelly did warn of the danger of a chief who is too involved and allows the media to contact him directly instead of going through the media relations office. Kelly said it could disrupt the management of the messages leaving the department. Kelly was concerned that he could lose his goal of good information management if he was taken out of the information equation in some circumstances.

Things happen fast in the world of the media, where every day is a deadline. Not so at the Baton Rouge Police Department according to Kelly. He said investigations are very deliberate and take time and no one does his or her job with haste. Yet when the

media request information, the department must respond quickly or face the consequence of the media putting out wrong information. McKneely compared the media to a hungry beast, which if he doesn't feed with factual information will go elsewhere for the information, which may not be factual. Kelly employs several methods to disseminate information. He writes press releases and talks to the media at scenes, but he said most things are handled over the phone. Usually reporters will hear about a crime on their police scanners before he has time to call and inform them of the occurrence. The media are usually on the scene of a murder when he arrives.

When a murder occurs, some information release is standard. As the media relations policy states, a general narrative of what happened and location of events and some identification of a victim always will be released. Depending on the time the murder occurs, Kelly may go out to the scene to manage the media. If it happens late in the evening and is a major event, like a triple homicide or the murder of a public figure he will be there. If it is not a major event, then the night captain on duty will handle the media. The night captain will fill out a standard form that releases basic information. The bottom of this form states that this is all the information that is available at this time and that media relations may have additional information the following day. This form is faxed to media outlets. Kelly will follow up with the media the next day if more information is available.

Different circumstances dictate how much information is released about a murder. The amount of information released is determined by the detective investigating the case and the media relations officer. Kelly said they must determine if the information will help advance or hurt the case, such as whether to release the description of a car for fear

that the suspect may dump the car. Kelly said detectives can be very guarded with information, and he must perform a balancing act of releasing enough information to keep the media satisfied, but not more than the detectives are comfortable with. He also must balance the integrity of the case with the need for public safety. Some additional information released may include items that could help generate tips or solve the crime.

Kelly believes victims do influence the amount of information the media is after. He said clearly race is a factor. While Black males are more often the victim of homicides, the media are looking for something outside the norm, but he believes socio-economics have more to do with it. He said when a murder occurs in Bocage (an affluent neighborhood in Baton Rouge) it will be much more newsworthy than one in (a poor neighborhood) Eden Park. He believes the media put more resources in covering a murder that occurred in a good neighborhood than one that occurred in a poor area of town. He said with added media attention, this in turn, gives the public the perception that the police are working harder on the case in the affluent area, when actually they are just responding to media requests.

The department works under the same guidelines and devotes the same amount of resources to each murder, Kelly said. He claims they truly believe each person, whether they are a pillar of society or a prostitute, was a human being deserving a thorough investigation of their murder and each murderer, no matter who they murdered should be caught. Even after the media have left and the public has forgotten about the case, if it has not been solved, detectives still devote long hours to solving it. Kelly said the unsolved murders of Black prostitutes got the same level of investigation as the high-profile victims of the serial killer. He said this was a prime example of the media treating



two similar sets of crime very differently. He said they make the same amount of information available and treat the murders similarly, but often the media will dictate the level of newsworthiness by demanding more information and keeping the story in the news. He said the media have the final say in what victims are newsworthy.

McKneely answers a call and his tone is very friendly and jovial. He sounds like he is talking to a buddy. He is talking to a reporter. The relationship sounds rather friendly, but apparently it usually is not. Kelly said his relationship with reporters has evolved over the years. Kelly said in the past reporters were his friends, he knew about their families, what they were doing on the weekend, and he enjoyed talking to and hanging out with them. Today he said the relationship is more distant. Reporters are now “just a voice on the phone.” The word adversarial kept coming up, but Kelly was hesitant to use it to categorize his relationship with the media. He said the personalities of reporters seem different today. They are interested in getting the story and getting out. He said it could be generational or the changing nature of the business, but he does not have the same rapport with reporters that he did early in his career. He did not generalize the media as good or bad because he felt competence is really on an individual level and that the local media consists of good reporters, producers and editors, but then there are bad ones.

Kelly sees the paper's crime beat as consisting of young reporters out of college. With Baton Rouge being a small to medium-sized market, the reporters from television are usually also rather young and inexperienced. He said young reporters get put into the crime beat because crime is easy to cover. It does not take great depth or understanding of complicated issues to work the beat, and usually reporters can be spoon-fed

information from PIOs without having to do a great deal of work or research. Kelly realized the crime beat is a good place for a reporter to gain experience. Unfortunately Kelly said he has to spend time training the reporters, but just as someone gets good at the beat, they usually get pulled off to cover a more complicated beat like the legislature and the cycle starts over again.

Young reporters do not understand the consequences of their actions according to Kelly. Many have a television crime-drama mentality of what the beat will be like. They don't consider how they could jeopardize the investigation if they print certain facts or put them on air. The crime beat is a day-to-day beat, and the reporters essentially can start fresh every day. Kelly said this means there is not a great deal of context to the stories because reporters on the local crime beat often are too inexperienced to be able to do stories about the context of crime or put issues into a big picture. He said he has pitched these types of stories to reporters, but they usually get ignored because the local media does not have enough resources to pull their reporter off the beat and spend a few months developing these big issue stories.

While some stories may get turned down, Kelly believes he definitely plays a role in constructing and influencing crime news in Baton Rouge. He said he could sit in his office and know what the lead story will be that night before the station knows. His influence goes beyond what will make it into a newscast or a newspaper. He feels he can influence how a story will be presented. One of his main objectives when writing a press release is to write in a journalistic style so that it will be changed very little by the time it hits the anchor desk. He will write the lead in a certain way to emphasize certain points, to make sure for example that police are looking for clues in the case or certain

information about a suspect will be the main focus of the story. Reporters are busy and sometimes lazy he said, so it becomes a win-win situation. The reporter gets a story with very little effort and Kelly gets the information presented according to his agenda.

This work can be very frustrating for Kelly. There are rewarding moments when he feels he has played a role in solving a case, but he often finds himself caught between guarded detectives and information-hungry reporters and he can please neither. He said his job is a lot like being an ambassador. There is a great deal of diplomacy involved, and he said the media have no idea how often he must go to bat for them against the detectives. At the same time, he said, the detectives do not realize his constant struggle to get reporters to understand the need to keep some information from the public. Other frustrating aspects of his job are being misquoted and the inaccuracy in reporting. When these things occur, he said his department often blames him for the mistakes even though he said he goes to great lengths to get the facts straight. He said unfortunately it seems as if reporters make up information to serve their sensational crime segments.

Kelly does exert influence over crime news, but ultimately the media have the last say. His methodical and standard procedures for disseminating information do not seem to favor one type of victim over another. Often Kelly is just responding to the information the media are after and does not push stories about certain victims more than others. He believes, and it seems from his work that, while he can determine an angle for a news story, he does not determine the newsworthiness of a victim.

The differences in the way the information was obtained could have influenced the conclusions and does bring limitations to this data. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to observe the reporters while they worked. As the content analysis will show, differences

emerge in how the reporters say they covered victims and what was observed through an analysis of newspaper articles about the victims. Perhaps observations would have allowed me to explain for some of these differences.

### **Quantitative Analysis: Content Analysis**

The 77 victims who were the basis of the content analysis generated 104 articles and four victims without articles. These 108 articles and non-articles were the population for the content analysis. Of the 77 victims, 82% of the victims were Black, and 19% were White. Seventy-two percent were male, and 28% were female (See Table 1).

Table 1

#### **Chi-square Test: Race and Gender**

Race	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
White	10% (8)	40% (12)	19% (20)
Black	90% (70)	60% (18)	81% (88)
Total	72% (78)	28% (30)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 12.703$	df=1	sig=.000

This fit with expectations derived from the literature that Black males were more likely to be victims of homicide. Relatively few articles appeared on the front page of *The Advocate*, which is reserved for what editors considers most important stories, whether international, national or local. Only 5% of the articles made it onto the front page – A1. 27% of the articles were on the front page of the metro section - B1, which features the other top stories of local news. This makes murder a specifically local story. Forty-three percent of the articles appeared inside the metro section. Eighteen percent were inside A, 3% were in another section of the paper, and 4% of the victims did not have articles about them. Visual images were not prevalent with these articles. Eighty percent of the articles

were not accompanied by a photo or graphic. The first story about a victim made up 65% of the articles and follow-up coverage of a victim made up 31%. Most murder victims received at least one story about their death, but few received follow-up coverage, which shows that the media usually cover a story once then move on to the next story. The other 4% is attributed to victims without articles. These four victims were all black males.

Few frames were routinely used in these stories. The primary frames that accompanied each article appeared in these percentages: 51% were the straight details of the murder that occurred; 30% show the police searching for suspect or arrest was made; 8% refer to highly unusual crime occurred; 5% present the positive aspects of victim's life; 1% indicate that the victim led high-risk lifestyle and 1% show that fear was generated by the murder. The remaining 4% were victims without articles. The secondary frames appeared in these percentages: 49% did not contain a secondary frame (this percentage includes the 4% without articles); 23% details of the murder; 21% were about police searching for suspects of arrest was made; 3% focused on the positive aspects of victim's life; 3% focused on fear generated by the murder; 1% was about the victim leading a high-risk lifestyle.

In order to test H1, H2, H3, and H4 a statistical analysis was conducted using crosstabs (with Pearson chi-square) and multiple regressions. In some cases crosstabs were more appropriate than multiple regression. Crosstabs were used with variables that were dichotomies such as photograph and story number (when coded for first story and follow-up coverage) because of the lack of variance, and when looking at nominal categories such as frames. Three different sets of crosstabs were run with race, then gender, and then gender split into subsets with race used as an independent variable. The

number of stories, whether a photograph was used and frames served as dependent variables.

The crosstabs revealed several significant findings. A White victim was more likely to have follow-up coverage than a Black victim (See Table 2). Half of the articles about White victims were categorized as subsequent coverage, whereas only 27% of the articles with a Black victim were follow-ups ( $p=.048$ ). Also, articles involving White victims were more likely to include a visual image (photograph or graphic) than articles with Black victims (See Table 3). Half of the articles about White victims had a visual image accompanying the story. Only 14% of Black victims had visual images with the articles ( $p=.000$ ). When follow-up coverage and photographs are used as gauges for quality coverage, whites are receiving better coverage. These results are in line with H1, which states the media will give more prominent coverage to White murder victims than Black murder victims.

Table 2

**Chi-square Test: Race and Story Number**

Story Number	Race		Total
	White	Black	
First Story	50% (10)	73% (64)	68% (74)
Subsequent Coverage	50% (10)	27% (24)	32% (34)
Total	100% (20)	100% (88)	108
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 3.902$	df=1	sig=.048

Table 3

**Chi-square Test: Race and Photograph**

Photo	Race		Total
	White	Black	
Yes	50% (10)	14% (12)	20% (22)
No	50% (10)	86% (76)	80% (86)
Total	100% (20)	100% (88)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 13.285$	df=1	sig=.000

The impact of race on frames that were used showed less significant difference (see Tables 4 & 5). The primary frames that reporters applied to each story were only slightly different between Blacks and Whites ( $p=.064$ ). The difference in secondary frames was much stronger ( $p=.011$ ). This is because many of the articles about Black victims did not have a secondary frame within the story, revealing that Black victims are more likely to have articles that are less complicated and more straightforward than articles about White victims. It was suspected that reporters would apply certain frames primarily to Whites or primarily to Blacks, and this proved mostly accurate. Four of the articles about White female victims had either a primary or secondary frame of fear. No articles about Black victims, male or female, contained this frame. Also the high-risk lifestyle frame was present in two articles about Black female victims, while no articles about White victims, female or male, contained this frame. The positive life frame was applied almost equally between White and Black victims. This verifies part of H2, which states the media will apply the high-risk lifestyle frame to more Black female murder victims, and the media will apply the fear and positive life frames to more White female murder victims.

Table 4

**Chi-square Test: Race and Primary Frame**

Primary Frame	Race		Total
	White	Black	
No story	0% (0)	5% (4)	4% (4)
Murder Details	45% (9)	52% (46)	50% (55)
Search Clues/ Arrest Made	35% (7)	29% (25)	30% (32)
Positive Life	15% (3)	3% (3)	6% (6)
High-Risk	0% (0)	1% (1)	1% (1)
Fear	5% (1)	0% (0)	1% (1)
Unusual Crime	0% (0)	10% (9)	8% (9)
Total	100% (20)	100% (88)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 11.931$	df=6	sig=.064

Table 5

**Chi-square Test: Race and Secondary Frame**

Second. Frame	Race		Total
	White	Black	
No Frame	40% (8)	51% (45)	50% (53)
Murder Details	25% (5)	23% (20)	22% (25)
Search Clues/ Arrest Made	15% (3)	23% (20)	21% (23)
Positive Life	5% (1)	2% (2)	3% (3)
High-Risk	0% (0)	1% (1)	1% (1)
Fear	15% (3)	0% (0)	3% (3)
Unusual Crime	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Total	100% (20)	100% (88)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 14.763$	df=5	sig=.011

Crosstabs using the same dependent variables with gender yielded two significant results. Articles with female victims were more likely than those with male victims to have a visual image accompanying them (See Table 6). The female victims were more



than three times more likely to have a photograph with the article about them than the male victims ( $p=.000$ ). Photographs or graphics take up valuable space in a newspaper and the fact that reporters and editors are allowing stories about female victims and White victims to take up that space demonstrates that they find these victims more newsworthy and deserving of the space. The literature does state that females are more sympathetic victims than men. A photograph or graphic accompanying an article about a female victim or a white victim would be likely to draw a reader to the article and make the article more significant.

Table 6

**Chi-square Test: Gender and Photo**

Photo	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	12% (9)	43% (13)	20% (22)
No	88% (69)	57% (17)	80% (86)
Total	100% (78)	100% (30)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 13.503$	df=1	sig=.000

The other significant finding had to do with secondary frames, revealing that there was a difference in the way reporters apply frames to stories about women and men ( $p=.021$ ; See Table 7). Stories involving female victims are more likely to contain a secondary frame.

Table 7

**Chi-square Test: Gender and Secondary Frame**

Second. Frame	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
No Story	52% (41)	40% (12)	50% (53)
Murder Details	22% (16)	31% (9)	22% (25)
Search Clues/ Arrest Made	24% (19)	13% (4)	21% (23)
Positive Life	2% (2)	3% (1)	3% (3)
High-Risk	0% (0)	3% (1)	1% (1)
Fear	0% (0)	10% (3)	3% (3)
Unusual Crime	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Total	100% (78)	100% (30)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 13.22$	df=5	sig=.021

Overall from these crosstabs, it appears gender does not have as great an effect on coverage as race does. The following tables demonstrate how gender did not effect whether a victim received follow-up coverage and the primary frames reporters applied to the story.

Table 8

**Chi-square Test: Gender and Story Number**

Story Number	Race		Total
	Male	Female	
First Story	69% (54)	67% (20)	68% (74)
Subsequent Coverage	31% (24)	33% (10)	32% (34)
Total	100% (78)	100% (30)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = .006$	df=1	sig=.797

Table 9

**Chi-square Test: Gender and Primary Frame**

Primary Frame	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
No Frame	5% (4)	0% (0)	4% (4)
Murder Details	50% (39)	53% (16)	51% (55)
Search Clues/ Arrest Made	31% (24)	27% (8)	29% (32)
Positive Life	4% (3)	10% (3)	6% (6)
High-Risk	1% (1)	0% (0)	1% (1)
Fear	0% (0)	3% (1)	1% (1)
Unusual Crime	9% (7)	7% (2)	8% (9)
Total	100% (78)	100% (30)	100% (108)
Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 6.309$	df=6	sig=.390

Race as an independent variable in the crosstabs shows that through the work reporters and editors are doing, Whites are more newsworthy victims than Blacks. White victims have more stories, photographs and complicated frames proving that more effort goes into producing and presenting articles about White victims. Just as more effort goes into producing stories about White victims, reporters put slightly more effort toward producing stories about female victims than male victims. Whites or females are less likely to be victims of murder than Blacks or men, so this confirms that reporters are seeking victims outside of the norm and giving them better coverage.

Another test split gender into subsets and looked at the relationship of race within each gender category. When using story number as the dependent variable a significant difference among females emerges ( $p=.018$ ), with White female victims receiving more follow-up coverage than Black female victims. There was not a significant difference among the males (See Tables 10).

Table 10

**Crosstab with Chi-square Gender: Race and Story Number**

Gender Male	Story Number		Total
	First Story Subsequent	Coverage	
Race			
White	9% (5)	12% (3)	10% (8)
Black	91% (49)	88% (21)	90% (70)
Total	100% (54)	100% (24)	100% (78)
Female			
Race			
White	25% (5)	70% (7)	40% (12)
Black	75% (15)	30% (3)	60% (18)
Total	100% (20)	100% (10)	100% (30)
Male Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = .190$	df=1	sig=.663
Female Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 5.625$	df=1	sig=.018

When photo is used as the dependent variable, more variation occurs among the stories about male victims ( $p=.015$ ). The difference among the female victims was less significant ( $p=.175$ ). Articles about White male victims were more likely to be accompanied by a photograph than articles about Black male victims (See Table 11). While there is more variation among the men, earlier findings show that overall, articles about female victims are more likely to contain a photograph or visual than images than articles about men.

Table 11

**Crosstab with Chi-square Gender: Race and Photo**

Gender Male	Photo		Total
	No	Yes	
Race White	7% (5)	33% (3)	10% (8)
Black	93% (64)	67% (6)	90% (70)
Total	100% (69)	100% (9)	100% (78)
Female			
Race White	29% (5)	54% (7)	40% (12)
Black	71% (12)	46% (6)	60% (18)
Total	100% (17)	100% (13)	100% (30)
Male Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 5.886$	df=1	sig=.015
Female Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 1.833$	df=1	sig=.176

The difference in the use of primary frames was significant in the male subset ( $p=.033$ ), but not in the female subset ( $p=.515$ ). When looking at secondary frames no significant difference emerges among males ( $p=.721$ ) or females ( $p=.090$ ). The following tables show how the frames were applied within each gender group.

Table 12

**Crosstab with Chi-square Gender: Race and Primary Frame**

Prim. Frame	Gender - Male		Gender - Female	
	White	Black	White	Black
No Story	0% (0)	7% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Murder	38% (3)	52% (36)	50% (6)	55% (10)
PoliceSearch	38% (3)	29% (21)	34% (4)	22% (4)
Positive	24% (2)	1% (1)	8% (1)	6% (1)
High-Risk	0% (0)	1% (1)	0% (0)	6% (1)
Fear	0% (0)	0% (0)	8% (1)	0% (0)
Unusual	0% (0)	10% (7)	0% (0)	11% (2)
Total	100% (8)	100% (70)	100% (12)	100% (18)
Male Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 12.153$	df=1	sig=.033	
Female Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 3.264$	df=1	sig=.515	

Table 13

**Crosstab with Chi-square Gender: Race and Secondary Frame**

Sec. Frame	Gender - Male		Gender - Female	
	White	Black	White	Black
No Frame	38% (3)	54% (38)	42% (5)	39% (7)
Murder	24% (2)	20% (14)	25% (3)	33% (6)
PoliceSearch	38% (3)	23% (16)	0% (0)	22% (4)
Positive	0% (0)	3% (2)	8% (1)	0% (0)
High-Risk	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	6% (1)
Fear	0% (0)	0% (0)	25% (3)	0% (0)
Unusual	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Total	100% (8)	100% (70)	100% (12)	100% (18)
Male Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 1.333$	df=3	sig=.721	
Female Chi-square Test	$\chi^2 = 9.514$	df=5	sig=.090	

Regressions were run using two sets of predictor variables. The first set included race and gender controlling for income level. The race variable was coded where White was one and Black was two. The gender variable was coded where male was one and female was two. Therefore a positive coefficient showed more significance for Blacks or females and negative coefficient showed more significance for Whites and males. The second set included a dummy variable of Black female controlling for income level. This allows looking for the unique comparison of Black women as compared to all others. All Black female victims were coded one with all other victims coded zero. In other tests, regressions were run selected for gender to see the unique relationship between Black and White females and also Black and White males. Each set of predictor variables were run against several dependent variables including story number (whether it was the first story or subsequent coverage), the amount of words per article, the placement of the article, number of sources used and the amount of family sources used. The scale for the dependent variable story number was no story was zero, first story was one, subsequent coverage was two. The scale for words was an exact count. The scale for placement was more prominent placement (A1) was five, B1 was four, inside A was three, inside B was two and other was one. Sources and family sources were an exact count.

The results show that a statistically significant difference exists in the amount of follow-up coverage among the races, but not in gender (See Table 14). Whites are more likely than Blacks to receive more follow-up coverage ( $p=.033$ ). Stories involving Black victims do not hold the attention of a journalist the way a story involving a White victim does. Again, this affirmed H1: the media will give more prominent coverage to White murder victims than Black female victims.

Table 14

**Regression: Story Number**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.948	.360		.000
	Race	-.299	.138	-.221	.033
	Gender	.009	.119	.008	.938
	Income	.000	.000	-.126	.198

a. Dependent Variable: Story #

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .029  
N=108

Number of words in a story as the dependent variable (see Table 15) reveals that White victims are more likely to have longer stories in the newspaper than Black victims ( $p=.011$ ). Gender did not have a statistical impact on the amount of words per article. While White victims hold the attention of reporters longer, they also take up more space in the paper per article for words. This regression shows that reporters are putting more effort into stories about White victims than stories about Black victims which are not getting cut and downsized by editors.

Table 15

**Regression: Race, Gender, Income and Word Count**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	416.826	134.257		.002
	Race	-134.309	51.563	-.257	.011
	Gender	76.450	44.498	.169	.089
	Income	.000	.002	-.023	.806

a. Dependent Variable: Words

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .096  
N=108



Race was not a good indicator of the placement of a story in the paper, but gender was (See Table 16). There was not a significant difference in where editors decided to place stories about White or Black victims. Articles about female victims, however, tended to get more prominent placing ( $p=.046$ ). The content that gets put on the front page of the paper or the front page of the metro section clearly represents what editors believe to be the most important stories. So while there is not a difference between Blacks and Whites, this does prove that editors give more prominence to stories with female victims than those with male victims.

Table 16

**Regression: Race, Gender, Income and Placement**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.666	.780		3.416
	Race	-.250	.300	-.085	-.835
	Gender	.522	.259	.205	2.018
	Income	.000	.000	-.053	-.548

a. Dependent Variable: Placement

Adjusted  $R^2 = .032$   
N=108

A look at sources revealed that both race and gender were significant at predicting the number of sources used per story (See Table 17). Just as in many other instances, stories with White ( $p=.000$ ) or female victims ( $p=.034$ ) were more likely to contain more sources. Reporters depend on sources for information and to shape the story. It takes time and effort to find and interview sources. The easiest source is the police. While police are the prominent source in most stories about homicides, a victim's relatives can be an

important component. Looking just at the number of family sources reveals that Whites ( $p=.001$ ) and less significantly males ( $p=.097$ ) are more likely to have more family sources quoted in these articles (See Table 18). This supports reporter Josh Noel's contention that mothers of male murder victims are more likely to talk to reporters.

Table 17

**Regression: Race, Gender, Income and Sources**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	3.740	.836		4.475
	Race	-1.409	.321	-.402	-4.389
	Gender	.596	.277	.196	2.152
	Income	.000	.000	-.129	-1.481

a. Dependent Variable: # Sources

Adjusted  $R^2 = .223$   
N=108

Table 18

**Regression: Race, Gender, Income and Family Sources**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.255	.316		3.968
	Race	-.399	.121	-.326	-3.283
	Gender	-.175	.105	-.166	-1.674
	Income	.000	.000	-.149	-1.580

a. Dependent Variable: Family

Adjusted  $R^2 = .084$   
N=108

The second set of multiple regressions was less revealing. Coverage of Black female victims did not differ significantly from other victims. The variables story

number, word count, the amount of sources and family sources did not show a significant difference between Black females and the rest of the population (See the following tables).

Table 19

**Regression: Black Female, Income and Story Number**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.398	.122		11.472
	BlackFemale	-.126	.140	-.088	-.905
	Income	.000	.000	-.090	-.932
					.000
					.368
					.353

a. Dependent Variable: Story #

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = -.004  
N=108

Table 20

**Regression: Black Female, Income and Word Count**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	232.308	47.323		4.909
	BlackFemale	46.092	54.183	.083	.851
	Income	.001	.002	.050	.510
					.000
					.397
					.611

a. Dependent Variable: Words

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = -.010  
N=108

Table 21

**Regression: Black Female, Income and Sources**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.593	.318		.000
	BlackFemale	.361	.364	.097	.323
	Income	.000	.000	-.026	.786

a. Dependent Variable: # Sources

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = -.009  
N=108

Table 22

**Regression: Black Female, Income and Family**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	.285	.110		.011
	BlackFemale	-.054	.126	-.042	.669
	Income	.000	.000	-.118	.226

a. Dependent Variable: Family

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = -.004  
N=108

While race in general did not predict article placement in the paper, articles about Black females ( $p = .009$ ) were placed more prominently in *The Advocate* than articles about the rest of the population in general (See Table 23). This is somewhat surprising since previous results suggested that White victims had an advantage over Blacks at becoming newsworthy. But at the same time female victims received better coverage than males, so perhaps Black females would have an advantage at being newsworthy. Since

placement is a good indicator of quality of coverage this does not fall in line with some of the literature and the hypothesis (H3) that suggests Black female victims will not receive quality coverage. This in and of itself does not serve to negate the hypotheses, but it does make it weaker.

Table 23

**Regression: Black Female and Placement**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.620	.258		10.138
	BlackFemale	.786	.296	.251	2.655
	Income	.000	.000	.003	.978

a. Dependent Variable: Placement

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .045  
N=108

To get a clearer picture of the role race plays within each gender category, another set of regressions were run with the same dependent variables, but in these cases they were selected for males and then females. As the dependent variable, words shows only a slightly significant difference between males ( $p=.074$ ), with white males receiving longer stories. Even less significant difference exists between females, with White females receiving longer stories (See Tables 24 & 25). While not as significant as earlier findings, this is similar to the findings when gender was not split into subsets by race.

Table 24

**Regression Selection: Male With Race, Income and Words****Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	456.300	140.246		3.254	.002
	Race	-124.110	68.406	-.205	-1.814	.074
	Income	.000	.003	.016	.145	.885

a. Dependent Variable: Words

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Male

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .017  
N=78

Table 25

**Regression Selection: Female With Race, Income and Words****Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	617.858	179.958		3.433	.002
	Race	-152.518	88.174	-.330	-1.730	.095
	Income	-.001	.003	-.081	-.425	.674

a. Dependent Variable: Words

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Female

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .033  
N=30

When placement becomes the dependent variable a greater difference emerges between White and Black males ( $p=.037$ ). Stories about White male victims are placed more prominently in the paper than those about Black males (See Tables 26 & 27). The significant difference drops when looking at the difference between White and Black females ( $p=.285$ ). This is similar to an earlier finding that used the dummy variable "Black Female" and showed that articles about Black Female victims received more

prominent placement in the paper than the rest of the population. Again this weakens H3 which implies that Black females will receive less prominent coverage than the rest of the victims.

Table 26

**Regression Selection: Male With Race, Income and Placement**

Coefficients <sup>a,b</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	4.563	.821		.000
	Race	-.852	.400	-.237	.037
	Income	.000	.000	-.120	.283

a. Dependent Variable: Placement

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Male

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> =.049  
N=78

Table 27

**Regression Selection: Female With Race, Income and Placement**

Coefficients <sup>a,b</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.112	.947		.034
	Race	.506	.464	.214	.285
	Income	.000	.000	.130	.514

a. Dependent Variable: Placement

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Female

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> =-.024  
N=30

The strongest difference comes in the number of general sources and family sources per story (See Tables 28, 29, 30 & 31). As with the previous sets of tables, the significant difference is among males. Articles focusing on White male victims contained

more general sources ( $p=.000$ ) and family sources ( $p=.000$ ) than stories about Black males. The cases for females were less significant with general sources ( $p=.072$ ) only slightly favoring White females. Family sources used in articles about females were even less significant ( $p=.813$ ).

Table 28

**Regression Selection: Male With Race, Income and Sources**

**Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.502	.728		6.181	.000
Race	-1.597	.355	-.460	-4.494	.000
Income	.000	.000	-.058	-.565	.574

a. Dependent Variable: # Sources

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Male

Adjusted  $R^2 = .197$

N=78

Table 29

**Regression Selection: Female With Race, Income and Sources**

**Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.839	1.390		3.481	.002
Race	-1.276	.681	-.353	-1.874	.072
Income	.000	.000	-.183	-.972	.339

a. Dependent Variable: # Sources

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Female

Adjusted  $R^2 = .056$

N=30



Table 30

**Regression Selection: Male With Race, Income and Family****Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.838	.361		5.086	.000
	Race	-.761	.176	-.440	-4.319	.000
	Income	.000	.000	-.151	-1.480	.143

a. Dependent Variable: Family

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Male

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> =.203

N=78

Table 31

**Regression Selection: Female With Race, Income and Family****Coefficients<sup>a,b</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.049	.251		.194	.847
	Race	.029	.123	.048	.238	.813
	Income	.000	.000	.009	.043	.966

a. Dependent Variable: Family

b. Selecting only cases for which Gender = Female

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> =-.072

N=30

How many words a victim gets per story is a good test of prominence. A large word count means the reporter puts effort into the story and perhaps sought out and included in the story more sources. A high word count could also mean that an editor saw the story as important and chose not to cut it or requested more words from a reporter. In order to test the impact of race, gender and income level on the overall length of a story above what one would expect from placement and sources, a more complicated regression equation was created using word count as the dependent variable and adding

placement and sources to the list of independent variables. As Table 32 shows the added variables weakened the variance among race and gender. Race was significant in the test that included only race, gender and income. Gender was more significant under those parameters as well.

Table 32

**Regression: Independent Variables and Word Count**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	11.914	122.088		.098
	RACE	-19.865	45.757	-.038	-.434
	GENDER	8.438	37.754	.019	.224
	INCOME	1.099E-03	.002	.055	.719
	PLACEMEN	50.136	14.490	.282	3.460
	# Sources	71.294	14.102	.479	5.055
	FAMILY	3.705	35.207	.009	.105

a. Dependent Variable: WORDS

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .422  
N=108

**Summary**

The interviews with reporters and public information officers suggest that crime news is a collaborative effort between the media and the police department investigating the crime. Both entities have a hand in shaping crime news and deciding what is news, but it seems the media have more say in determining what victims are newsworthy and which ones are not. The reporters say they are more interested in murders that fall outside the norm and indicated that reporters, who are largely white, react more to victims that are similar to them. While they cited class as a leading factor of newsworthiness, they

seem to indicate that newsworthy victims are middle-class Whites. The officers on the scene may play a role in guiding the media in their search for information, but the policies of the media relations office follows a strict and standard procedure for officially releasing this information.

H5 hypothesized as to how reporters would look for information and how this information would be disseminated. It seems H5b, which states reporters will look for more cases featuring White victims than they will look for cases featuring Black victims is a more accurate assessment of the situation than H5a, which states the police will emphasize cases featuring White victims to reporters more than they emphasize cases featuring Black victims.

These results from the content analysis suggest that the media do cover victims differently, with Whites and females overall receiving more prominent coverage. White victims received longer stories, more follow-up coverage, more sources, photographs and more complicated frames. Articles about female victims were placed more prominently in the paper, with more sources and photographs. This suggests *The Advocate* finds Whites and female victims in general to be more “unique and compelling” victims by giving them more prominent coverage. The results also show that Black female victims were not as marginalized by the media as first hypothesized. The coverage they received when compared to White women and the total population was very different. White female victims did receive more follow-up and were more likely to evoke a frame of “fear” from a reporter while a Black victim would be more likely to be labeled as living a “high-risk lifestyle.” Black females did receive better placement in the paper than the total population. A bigger variation emerges when looking at the difference in coverage

between White and Black males. White males received longer stories, better placement, more sources and photographs than Black males, suggesting that the Black male fits with the stereotype of a murder victim and is not “unique or compelling” to reporters and editors.

The results have served to affirm H1, which states the media will give more prominent coverage to White murder victims than to Black murder victims. Parts of H2 and H4 were affirmed. With H2, the race and gender of the victim did affect the amount of coverage the victims receives. With H4, reporters did apply the “high-risk lifestyle” frame to Black female victims and the “fear” frame showed up in stories about White female victims. The Positive life frame was applied equally. The null hypothesis of H3 was affirmed since it did not appear overall that Black female victims received less prominent coverage than other victims.

### **Newsworthy Victims**

*The Advocate* wrote just one article about the majority of victims in this study, revealing that news media coverage of murder tends to be very standard and routine with the frames of the story sticking to a narrative account of the murder and some identification of the victim. But there are some victims who garner the media attention and hold it over several weeks. The following qualitative analysis looks at three such victims.

Christine Moore was last seen on the morning of May 24, 2002. She was reported missing that evening when she failed to show up at a friend's graduation party. On May 29, *The Advocate* ran its first article about the missing 23-year-old LSU graduate student after police released a photograph of her car. Moore was Black and her death generated

more news articles than the deaths of most other victims in the content analysis, with several appearing on A1. The first article about her was short and relegated to the Police and Fire Briefs section, but within the week another article appeared. A reporter covered a candlelight vigil for Moore organized by members of an on-campus sorority. The article was short, but a photograph accompanied it. In the middle of June, bones were discovered. The story appeared on A1, had nearly 500 words and two photographs with it. The next day on A1 was the story identifying Moore as the victim in this case. The day after that a story containing the frame of fear ran inside B. The story was close to 500 words and was accompanied by a photograph. At this point Charlotte Murray Pace had been murdered.

Pace, a White female, was found dead in her apartment on May 31, 2002. The articles about Pace tended to be longer than most articles about a murder and some appeared on B1. None of the articles within the first two weeks appeared on A1. Pace was later linked to another murder (that of Gina Wilson Green, murdered in September of 2001). Police eventually linked her murder to a serial killer and significant coverage of Pace continued outside of the two week span utilized in this study. Twenty-nine other female victims were a part of this study; none received the type of coverage that she received.

Pace and Moore were both young females connected to LSU. Pace was a recent MBA graduate. Moore was a graduate student. Since they were students, it is hard to pinpoint their social status since student populated areas tend to have low income levels, but the articles about them do give clues. It was reported that Pace drove a BMW. An article about Moore, on the other hand, was about her family members setting up an

account for donations to help offset funeral costs. So the unifying elements about these two victims are their age, gender, connection to LSU and the fact that they were murdered around the same time.

Like Moore, Pam Kinamore was reported missing before she was discovered murdered. She was a White female in her forties and went missing July 12, 2002, a little more than a month after Moore and Pace were murdered. The first article about Kinamore was 450 words, appeared on B1 and was accompanied by a photograph. Significant coverage followed, with the story about her body being identified appearing on A1 with more than 1000 words. More articles followed, with many appearing on A1 and containing close to or more than 1000 words. The articles usually contained the frame of fear and a photo accompanied most. Kinamore was considered middle-class, owned her own business, and was abducted from her home in a middle-class section of Baton Rouge. Many elements make Kinamore a newsworthy victim. One article describes Kinamore and other victims like her as "hard working with stable families and lifestyles." The article went on to say, "their lives wouldn't seem to bring them into contact with criminals."

The circumstances surrounding her murder have elements similar to the Moore murder. Both were missing before their bodies were discovered in other parishes. But Moore's initial coverage was not as prominent as Kinamore's. The first story reporting her missing was short and in the Police and Fire Brief section. After the murder of Pace and the discovery of Moore's remains, then the coverage becomes more significant. The first story about Kinamore's disappearance, as stated earlier, appeared on B1 and contained 450 words. The story included quotes from family members. The differences between the

two victims are their race, age, and the fact that Kinamore was abducted from her home, and Moore was likely taken from a popular jogging area. So what contributes to the spike in coverage? It is hard to speculate, but what seems to be the biggest factor is that she is the third in a string of unsolved murders in which the victims are women who led "low-risk lifestyles." This corroborates what the reporter Josh Noel said, that it takes a big issue, for example a string of murders, to capture the attention of the media and garner coverage outside the norm. Would the Kinamore murder have received the same amount of coverage if it had not occurred so closely to the murder of two other "low-risk" women? Perhaps not, but she did have vocal family members who were willing to talk to the media. Also her family offered a reward for information that would lead to an arrest. These things help to keep a story in the news.

Perhaps Kinamore and Moore became "ultra newsworthy" because of circumstances that occurred before they were discovered murdered. Moore's remains were found after the Pace murder and the Kinamore murder followed. If their murders had been more isolated, like that of Gina Wilson Green's (another low-risk victim), perhaps coverage would not have been as significant. Of the three, Pace seems to be the one true "ultra newsworthy" victim in and of herself. Her murder prompted significant coverage before Moore was discovered murdered. Also reporters framed the stories about her in different terms than most other murders. The frames of fear and positive life were present in several articles, and both reporters used her as an example of a newsworthy victim.

In addition to these three victims that were "ultra newsworthy" there were four victims that appeared to be "non-newsworthy." The four were Black males killed in low-

income areas. Larry Benn was 29 years old. He was shot to death and police never cleared his murder. Eduardo Williams was 32, and his shooting was solved. Fifty-three year old Louis Johnson was beaten to death. Police did solve this crime and even though no article was found about his murder Kelly did seem to recall some media coverage about his death. Andrew Brumfield was 28 and his shooting was solved. Beyond the facts provided by the police on the homicide list, not much else can be surmised about these victims and why newspaper articles about their murders were not found or not written.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The heyday of the African American civil rights and women's rights movements are well in the past, but minorities still struggle for equality. The inequality today is not as obvious as separate water fountains for Whites and Blacks, but it is subtler. As stated earlier, Entman and Rojecki found that "media productions offer a revealing indicator of the new forms of racial differentiation." They found that there were many different ways the media marginalizes African Americans, from entertainment to news. Since crime news is one of the most important elements of the overall news and can be a guide for looking at how media operate in general, this study employed an analysis of the media's coverage of murder to see these differentiations. The main issue in this study is race and the media. The subtext of crime news and how the media cover different races when dealing with crime can speak to the larger issues of race and the media. Murder is generally the most newsworthy of crimes and how the media cover murder lends itself as the best example of which lives (and deaths) are newsworthy and which ones are not.

In Baton Rouge, murder is almost always news. Just about every murder at least gets a mention in the newspaper, outside of the obituary, of who the victim was and the circumstances surrounding the victim's death. In two years and 77 murders, only four victims did not have an article in the search. Beyond the basics of covering the murder, a difference does emerge in how the media handle these cases. Whites and Blacks do not receive the same quality of coverage.

The results from this study affirmed all or parts of H1, H2, H4, and H5b. White murder victims did receive more prominent coverage than Black murder victims; race and gender, but not income level affected the amount of coverage that a victim received; the media did apply the "high-risk lifestyle" to more Black female victims and the "fear" frame to more White female murder victims, but not the "positive life" frame; and reporters were looking for more cases featuring White victims than cases featuring Black victims. The null hypothesis of H3 was affirmed since Black female victims did not receive less prominent coverage than other victims.

The qualitative and quantitative evidence presented in this study is somewhat at odds with each other. Both sets of data do determine that all victims are not equal in the eyes of the media. Reporters, as the literature suggested, say they are more interested in stories that fall outside of the norm and the content analysis demonstrates that those who are most likely to be victimized, Black males, receive the least prominent coverage. Where the two sets differ is what aspect of a victim makes them more or less newsworthy. The reporters and the police point to class as one of the leading indicators of victim newsworthiness, suggesting that the high social ranking of a victim, the more media attention their murder will receive. Yet the statistical analysis revealed no significant findings related to income level, but several related to race. Perhaps poor in Baton Rouge, as Melissa Moore suggested, does usually mean Black, but there was no indication of a link to low coverage and low income in this analysis. How does one reconcile these differences? Could reporters be using social status as a guise to hide behind the fact that Black victims are receiving less prominent coverage than White victims? That question cannot be answered through this research, but it would be

interesting to look at in other communities. Perhaps what is behind the difference is that reporters may have a lack of understanding of their own work and the total work that goes into producing news. Work beyond their control, such as editing and placement, may be a bigger factor than they realize and can contribute to the greater difference in coverage within racial categories than within income levels.

While the media coverage of Black female victims may not be as bleak as first hypothesized, there is one inequality that exists and that is the use of frames, particularly the "high-risk lifestyle" frame. While it was not a frame used often in the stories in this content analysis (it showed up as a primary or secondary frame in 2% of the total articles), it was used exclusively for Black victims and is a frame that seems more prevalent today. It was used in a higher percentage in just the Black female category, appearing in 12% of the articles. It can be a problematic frame because in a subtle way it is putting fault on the victim and therefore can insinuate that Black females are more to blame for their murder, while White females are innocent victims. In an interview with reporter Melissa Moore, she talked about two White female victims within this study that the police had referred to as "high-risk." This frame did not show up in the stories about these victims, one of which even had follow-up coverage.

Then there is the fear frame. Again this was a not a frame used often (it was used as a primary or secondary frame in 20% of the total articles) but was applied exclusively to White victims and more so with White female victims (it was in 33% of the articles in the White female population). The fear frame puts some worth to the victim and depth to the story. The absence of the frame within the Black population implies that when a Black person is murdered there is no cause for great concern among the general

population. The reason behinds this can lie partially with reporters who choose not to interject concern and fear into a story and with sources who express fear in interviews.

Journalists operate within a set of norms and work within expectations of superiors to advance their careers and *The Advocate* is no different. Perhaps because of these norms and routines reporters lose sight of the inequities in their reporting of information and may not be overtly aware of how these routines can serve to marginalize certain groups of people. Reporters on the crime beat work very closely with the police, their main source for crime news, yet this relationship can be antagonistic. Both the police and the media look to the other for problems of bias or unfairness that exists in crime news. The routines and standard approach to the dissemination of information within the media relations office did not reveal an obvious bias toward a particular type of victim; however, the police at times may play a part in marginalizing certain victims, particularly those that are most likely to be victimized - Black males involved in high-risk behavior. Interviews with the police did not reveal this, but the reporters did say that when those types of victims are murdered it is not unusual for investigating officers to tell reporters that they will not be interested in this murder and will just want the basic information. So this could be the police setting the tone for the amount of coverage the murder will receive. Ultimately though, the media get to decide how much coverage to give a murder, how much information to pursue, how long to make the story, whether to include a photograph, and where to place this story. Previous researchers have demonstrated how in life in general the media marginalize Blacks. This study shows how they can be marginalized in death too.

## **Future Research**

This study just looked at one medium in a small to medium-sized market. A future study could incorporate television coverage of murder to look at a broader range of the media and the way people receive information of crime news. In this size market, a television station does not usually have a dedicated crime reporter. This could reveal interesting findings as to how these reporters who are not on the beat every day cover these issues. Also television often operates under stricter deadlines and time constraints. Where every minute is precious, it would be interesting to see how they allot those minutes when it comes to victims of crime. The two mediums could be compared and a more definitive statement about the media as a whole could be made.

An important aspect of this issue, not addressed by this study is how a misrepresentation of victimization affects readers. Gerbner (1969, 1990) said exposure to the news may lead to a cultivation effect where the viewers believe that the real world is similar to the television world. Dixon and Linz (2000) found that “White viewers who regularly watch television news may come to overestimate their chances of victimization.” In further research it may be interesting to conduct experiments with readers to see how they react to the articles used in this study.

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# APPENDIX A

## CODING SHEET

<p>Coding Sheet – Covering Victims _____</p> <p>1. Victim _____</p> <p>2. Race</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. White</li> <li>2. Black</li> </ul> <p>3. Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Male</li> <li>2. Female</li> </ul> <p>4. Placement in Paper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Other</li> <li>2. Inside B</li> <li>3. Inside A</li> <li>4. B-1</li> <li>5. A-1</li> </ul> <p>5. Number of Words _____</p> <p>6. Number of Sources Used _____</p> <p>7. Type of sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Official _____</li> <li>2. Family member/spokesperson _____</li> <li>3. Neighbor/Concerned Citizen _____</li> <li>4. Witness</li> <li>5. Other _____</li> </ul> <p>8. Type of Authoritative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Police Chief</li> <li>2. City Official</li> <li>3. Police Spokesperson</li> <li>4. Officer On Scene</li> <li>5. Other</li> </ul>	<p>9. Location of Murder/Body Census Tract # _____</p> <p>10. Primary Frame</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Murder Victim/Details of Crime</li> <li>2. Positive Aspects of Life</li> <li>3. Police Searching/Arrest Made</li> <li>4. Missing</li> <li>5. High Risk Lifestyle</li> <li>6. Fear</li> <li>7. Unusual Crime</li> </ul> <p>11. Secondary Frame</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0. No Frame</li> <li>1. Murder Victim/Details of Crime</li> <li>2. Positive Aspects of Life</li> <li>3. Police Searching/Arrest Made</li> <li>4. Missing</li> <li>5. High Risk Lifestyle</li> <li>6. Fear</li> <li>7. Unusual Crime</li> </ul> <p>12. Photo Included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ul> <p>13. Story Number</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0. No Story</li> <li>1. First Story</li> <li>2. Subsequent Coverage</li> </ul>
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## **VITA**

Tobie Blanchard earned a Bachelor of Arts in mass communication with a concentration in broadcast journalism from Louisiana State University in May 1997. After graduation, she worked as a reporter and anchor in commercial television. In 2001, she returned to Baton Rouge and LSU to work in communications for the LSU AgCenter. Currently she is a candidate for the degree of Master of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. She is married to Scott Losavio, and they are expecting their first child.