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## **Introduction**

Certain crimes seem to embody the mood of the times; entering the public consciousness in such a way that they almost become public property. In recent times in Britain, crimes such as the killings of Stephen Lawrence and James Bulger in 1993, the shootings in Dunblane in 1996, the deaths of Sarah Payne in 2000 and of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in 2002, have all reached this prominence and have been the focus of extensive and extended popular and media attention.

This work aims to examine how particular 'serious' and 'tragic' crime events seem to act disproportionately on how certain crime problems are more broadly conceived and crucially the role of the mass media in that process. However, the present study is also interested in the notion of identity, the construction of victimhood and the processes by which some may come to acquire a collective stigma and sense of 'spoiled identity' at a community level, in the wake of sustained and pervasive media attention. Many serious crimes typically involve a range of harms to multiple victims, not only to individuals or immediate groups, but often to whole communities and societies. This appreciation leads to a consideration more specifically of how extensive and on-going media coverage of high profile crimes may affect those concerned on a broader level, not only the primary victims but on a wider scale those that live in the location where the crime took place or who are otherwise connected to the events.

The endeavour to explore the notion of being a 'victim' as a process of identity construction embraces the agency of social actors in the

construction of their social world. This thesis suggests that we can further our knowledge and understanding of 'victims' through an exploration of 'victim' as a (collective) identity, rather than through the extrapolation of theories, arguments and politics on the basis of taken for granted assumptions about a transient concept.

In an attempt to address these central concerns, this thesis introduces and explores the concept of the 'victim community' and sets out to more deeply understand the role and the influence of the media in the construction and representation of such identities. This study suggests that a 'victim community' can be considered as a collective of those who belong or are physically located at a site where a serious and high profile crime has taken place. A victim community in the physical sense may be constructed or shaped both by the media itself and its role in coordinating and articulating a social reaction in the wake of certain significant and highly mediatized crimes. As a consequence, some of those within the victim community may come to acquire a collective sense of stigma and spoiled identity. This work is interested in the role and influence of the media in the identification, construction and on-going representation of victim communities and so of necessity, the research is confined to those places where serious and high profile, highly mediatized crimes have taken place. However examining these extreme cases may allow an exploration of their existence and forms in other cases where they may be presented in a more subtle form, but not necessarily any less effectively.

This thesis empirically examines two such cases, namely that of the school shootings, which took place in Dunblane in 1996, and the murders of

schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in 2002 in Soham. What follows for contextual reference is a brief description of the crime events and the communities in which they occurred.

### **Dunblane**

Dunblane is a small cathedral city in Perthshire, Scotland. Almost at the centre of Scotland it is within commuting distance to both Glasgow and Edinburgh and is five miles north of Stirling, on the Allan Water. A diminutive city with around nine thousand population, many more people live there than work there. Dunblane is a town with an ancient history. A Roman road passed through en route to Perth, and it seems likely that a Roman fort was built on the high ground now home to Dunblane Cathedral. It is thought this site was chosen in around AD600 by the Celtic missionary St. Blane for the site of an early monastery, giving rise directly to the name by which the town is now known. For many centuries the focal point of Dunblane has been the cathedral, which dates back in part to the 12th century and is one of Scotland's few surviving medieval churches. Like many Scottish towns with access to the power afforded by fast flowing water, Dunblane saw a boom in textiles in the early 1800s. The arrival of the mainline railway from Stirling to Perth in 1848 transformed the town and brought increasing prosperity for the town as large villas were constructed for wealthy Victorian commuters. Mainline railways allowed visitors to come into Dunblane but also allowed others to live in Dunblane and work elsewhere.

Since the early 1970s the town has grown extensively and is now a sought-after commuter town. Much of Dunblane's attraction in this regard is

because of its transport links and also its schools. Dunblane has a secondary school and three primary schools. The secondary high school consistently returns some of the best results from a state school in Scotland, encouraging not just middle class commuters but also many families with school-age children to relocate to Dunblane. Dunblane is also close to the University of Stirling's campus at Bridge of Allan and is a popular residential location for academics working locally. The rapid expansion of the town has caused some social problems. Dunblane is a small city, with narrow winding streets not suited to large volumes of traffic. Accordingly Dunblane seems to have a shortage of local amenities with for instance, only two 'town' sized supermarkets. As a result, the city shops may suffer economically from the choice that many people seem to make, preferring often to shop at other nearby towns and cities.

### **The Signal Crime**

On 13 March 1996, forty three year old unemployed former shopkeeper and former Scout leader Thomas Watt Hamilton armed with four guns and hundreds of bullets killed sixteen children and one teacher at Dunblane Primary School. At around 9.30 am that morning Thomas Hamilton travelled to Dunblane from his home in Stirling (just a few miles away) and parked his van beside a telegraph pole in the car park of Dunblane Primary School. He cut the telephone wires at the foot of the telegraph pole, although these served not the school but a number of adjoining houses. He then entered the school by a door near the gymnasium (Cullen, 1996).

The school day had started at 9am and on 13 March all primary 1, 2 and 3 classes had attended assembly from 9.10 am to 9.30 am. They consisted of

about 250 pupils, together with their teachers and the school chaplain. They included Primary 1/13, which was a class of 28 pupils, along with their teacher Mrs Gwen Mayor. This class had already changed for their gym lesson before attending assembly. At the conclusion of assembly Primary 1/13 with Mrs Mayor made their way to the gymnasium. The children had been instructed to go to the centre of the room, away from the equipment. Mrs Harrild, a physical education teacher had been talking to the class teacher Mrs Mayor for a few minutes. As she was about to attend to the waiting class she heard a noise behind her that caused her to turn round. This was probably Thomas Hamilton entering the gym; he had a pistol in his hand. He advanced a couple of steps into the gym and fired indiscriminately and in rapid succession. Mrs Harrild was hit several times and she stumbled into the open-plan store area that adjoined the gym, followed by a number of the children. Mrs Mayor was also shot several times and died instantly. Mrs Blake (a teaching assistant in attendance) was then shot but also managed to reach the store, ushering some children in ahead of her. After firing further indiscriminate shots at the remaining children, Hamilton then left the gymnasium through the emergency exit. In the playground outside he began shooting into a mobile classroom. A teacher in the mobile classroom had realised that something was wrong and told the children to hide under the tables. Hamilton also fired at a group of children walking in a corridor, injuring another teacher. Hamilton then returned to the gym where he fired shots at a group of children who had either been disabled by the firing or who had been thrown to the floor. He stood over them and fired at point-blank range. He then turned a gun on himself, killing himself instantly. Thomas Hamilton killed or wounded all but two people in Primary One (a class of five and six year olds). Fifteen children died at the scene along with



their class teacher. A further eleven children and three adults were rushed to the hospital as soon as the emergency services arrived; one of these children was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital (Cullen 1996).

### **Soham**

Soham is variously described as a small market town; the second largest within the district of East Cambridgeshire. This wider district covers approximately 65,000 hectares of the eastern part of Cambridgeshire County. East Cambridgeshire shares boundaries with Norfolk in the northern-east and Suffolk in the south-east. Most of the District's western limits are defined by waterways: the Bedford levels, the River Ouse and the River Cam. The main urban centres are the market towns of Ely (the largest), followed by Littleport and Soham. Soham itself is situated almost equidistant between Ely and Newmarket, with the city of Cambridge sixteen miles away and London almost seventy miles due south. The town of Soham has a long history with evidence of a settlement existing in Soham since the Stone Age, although documented history began in the year 630 AD. The present day town has three unique commons as well as horse fens and charity lands, which are all derived from strip farming methods and land rights that go back to the medieval period. These Commons are still protected by law against housing or any other form of development. Soham does not currently have rail links although a campaign has been mounted by many in Soham to rebuild the town's railway station, which was destroyed in 1944 when a train carrying bombs for the D-day advance caught fire.

Although often described as a 'village', Soham is a small town, certainly for the vast majority of residents; it is most accurately described as a town.

Research and data from the local government website of population by geographical residence, indicates Soham as the second largest settlement within East Cambridgeshire with a population of 9,102 in 2010.

### **The Signal Crime**

On the 4 August 2002, Soham became the centre of international media attention after the disappearance of two local ten-year-old schoolgirls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. Almost two weeks after they first disappeared, the girls badly decomposed bodies were found 15 miles away in a remote patch of woodland close to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk.

Shortly before the murders, having spent the afternoon and early evening at Holly's family home at around 18:15, Holly and Jessica left the house without telling Holly's parents, Kevin and Nicola Wells. They apparently went out to buy some sweets and were seen on their walk through Soham by several witnesses and were also caught on CCTV crossing a car park near the local sports centre. On their way back home they walked past the rented house in College Close, which was home to Ian Huntley (caretaker at Soham Village College) and his girlfriend Maxine Carr (who had been a teaching assistant in Holly and Jessica's class at St. Andrew's Primary the previous term). Huntley asked them to come into the house. It is thought he said that Maxine Carr his girlfriend was in the house as well, although in fact she had gone to visit family in Grimsby. Shortly after Holly and Jessica entered 5 College Close Ian Huntley murdered them. Over the following two weeks, a huge search was conducted, first by family and the neighbouring community, however this quickly transformed into the biggest police hunt ever mounted in the United

Kingdom. Within hours, journalists and media companies from around the world began to arrive and base themselves in Soham.

Almost two weeks later on 17 August 2002, the bodies of the girls were found in a ditch near Lakenheath in Suffolk, forty-five minutes' drive from Soham. On the evening of the same day Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr were arrested. On 3 November 2003 at the Old Bailey in London, Huntley was put on trial for the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman and Carr for assisting an offender. At the trial, Huntley pleaded guilty to manslaughter of both girls but was convicted of their murders by two, eleven-to-one majority jury verdicts on 17 December 2003. Huntley immediately began serving two concurrent life sentences with a minimum of 40 years before parole would be considered. Carr who had provided a false alibi for Huntley to police during the investigation was cleared by the jury on two counts of assisting an offender but convicted of perverting the course of justice. She was sentenced to three and a half years in prison and released on probation on 14 May 2004. On her release she was given a new identity under the witness protection program and granted an indefinite order by the High Court to protect her new identity and whereabouts from being publicly known.

In addition to examining these cases in detail through qualitative interviews with a range of community members in each site, this work will examine and consider the impact of new media in the facilitation of the notions of both victim and community in late-modernity. The condition of late modernity is often described as concerned and fearful, producing an anxiety that comes with the loss of a sense of belonging, in which case people may seek to establish new identities, which may, if only on a temporary basis, make them

feel part of a wider community. A victim community in a symbolic sense therefore, may be considered more of a late modern community of choice, enabled by new media technologies to achieve a sense of community, albeit without the attached sense of stigma. In some senses new media technologies<sup>1</sup> may offer a part solution to the perceived problems of dislocation in late-modern society; by fostering such a sense of identity and community across space and time. Therefore in order to explore how victim communities may occur, in both a physical and symbolic sense, it is necessary to understand how the various elements of victim identity, community, late modernity and new media technology culminate and combine.

Chapter one reviews the current literature around victimology, including an analysis of the theoretical boundaries and limitations of existing understandings of the notion of the victim. Whilst considering the impact of victim identity at a community level, this first chapter also explores key themes within the sociological literature regarding labelling and stigma and how such notions may be refracted to scrutinize victimisation at a community level. In order to explain and understand the socio-cultural conditions in which the phenomena of victim communities may arise, chapter two examines the literature of late modernity as it relates to three key areas of discussion: the politics of victimisation, the notion of community in late modernity and the impact of new media technologies. The third chapter is an examination and review of media theory as it relates to the construction of crime news. Moving from theory to method, chapter four

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<sup>1</sup> Here we refer to new media technologies as those that deliver on-demand access to content irrespective of time or place, and well as the possibility of interactive use, creative participation and community formation around the media content.

details some of the methodological and practical issues involved in conducting both the empirical fieldwork and the media analysis whilst also offering a validation of the reflexive account of the many influences throughout the research process. Chapters five to seven attempt to bridge the gap between the 'macro' and the 'micro'. Chapter five gives a detailed analysis of press media reporting of each of the serious crime events and seeks to situate this within the wider debates regarding media theory and of researching crime and the media in the late modern context. Having examined how the serious crimes were represented in the U.K. press, chapters six and seven provide detailed case studies of the two research sites (Dunblane and Soham), by telling the story through the lived experiences and responses of those in the communities involved. Chapter eight takes us back to theory and discusses the implications of the present study for the theoretical literature on victimology, media and 'late modernity'.

# **Part I**

# **Theory**

## **Chapter One**

### **Victims, Community and Identity: a review of the literature**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter seeks to examine the many and varied theoretical perspectives that may have something to contribute to our understanding of the concept of 'victim communities'. In setting the stage for a fully informed examination and exploration of this subject, this initial chapter reviews the wide range of interdisciplinary literatures as they relate to the varied and contested notions of the victim, identity and collective social relations. Reviewing the victimological literature, this chapter explores the journey of the victim within and without academic criminology, including an analysis of the

theoretical boundaries and limitations of existing knowledge around the notion of the victim. A review of the interdisciplinary literatures concerning community is also considered, with a particular focus on the impact of victim identity at a community level. The chapter also seeks to explore the key themes within the sociological literature of stigma, labelling and spoiled identity and how they relate to our understanding of victimisation at community level, as these issues have hitherto been primarily considered in relation to the individual.

### **Victimology and Victim Identity**

There is a substantial gap in our existing knowledge about certain ‘victims of crime’. Although victims now attract an unprecedented level of attention, both as a subject of criminological inquiry and politically, particularly as a focus of criminal justice policy, the exploration of victim communities or the notion of communities *as* victims; how their identity is constructed, represented and contested is an area yet to receive consideration in any meaningful way. Indeed, much criminological research and criminal justice policy draws from a group that has been officially defined as victims, at the neglect and marginalisation of those who are affected in a less direct way. The ‘victim’ as a concept cannot be taken for granted and experiences of being a victim are no doubt variable (Rock, 2002). However, this thesis seeks to examine and interrogate the notion of ‘victim’ communities and as such this chapter will consider the relative strengths of those theoretical perspectives focusing on the victim and victimology; asking what role this theory plays in our understanding of the concept of ‘victim communities’.



The academic study of victims of crime can be traced back to the theoretical and empirical work of Von Hentig (1948) and Mendelsohn (1963), both of whom were exploring the relationship between the victim and the offender (Walklate, 2003). Since then developments in social research and social theory and acknowledgment of the victim by policy makers and practitioners (Walklate, 1989) have combined to inform the growth in victim studies. This exploration into victimology has been broadly underpinned by three key theoretical perspectives, firstly from a positivist or administrative stance and then from those with a more radical outlook. However, it is the body of work termed 'critical' in this field that this chapter seeks to consider.

The term 'critical' has been expressed in a number of ways by different writers relating to victimology. The critical victimology that emerged in the 1990s focussed on ways in which labels such as 'victim' were applied, how such concepts were defined and who had the power to apply such labels (Kearon and Godfrey, 2007). One version is offered by Miers who from an Interactionist stance, claims that whilst many groups and individuals claim the label (of victim), 'the key questions for a critical victimology are, who has the power to apply the label and what considerations are significant in that determination?' (1990: 224). Whilst conceding that an understanding of the processes of acquisition of a victim label is a vital area of concern for victimology, some question whether this emphasis on the labelling process itself, constitutes a critical victimology. Mawby and Walklate (1994) use the term critical victimology to draw attention to the importance of understanding social mechanisms and processes that result in the patterning of criminal victimisation that we see, as well as that which we do not; so incorporating an understanding of other forms of victimisation rather than

the more conventional forms of street and household crime. In short a critical victimology demands an understanding of the structural dimensions and the processes of criminal victimisation that is 'socio-economically and culturally situated' (Davies, 2007); or, put another way, conceives a meaningful relationship between individual action and the social conditions of and for action. In developing their theory of a 'critical victimology' Mawby and Walklate (1994) identify the tripartite influence of state, citizen and service in the development of a state sanctioned narrative. Critical victimology is therefore helpful in the examination of the concept of 'victim communities' in this respect, as by combining aspects of positivism and radicalism as it does, a critical victimological perspective encourages a re-conceptualisation of the victim that looks at experiences of individual victims (or collectives in this case) and most crucially, the influence of socio-political powers acting upon them and critiques the victim's construction as a 'consumer' of victim services (Goodey, 2005). A critical understanding of this notion is crucial to this work arguing that the 'victim as consumer' image, which emphasises independence from the social processes of creation and forefronts obligations of the individual rather than the state, only serves to obscure and reinforce the inequalities of power. The state cannot necessarily be regarded as neutral but guided by underlying mechanisms, particularly when considering the question of power and who is best situated to apply or deny the status or identity of 'victim'.

Irrespective of the auspices under which the question regarding the power to label sits, it is crucial that it is explored and analysed, particularly with regard to the notion of communities of victims where those involved may not be recognised as conventional recipients of the label or identity.

However, it is not only the problematic use of the term 'victim' that needs examination but also the interactive processes and mechanisms underpinning the establishment of that label. In this way both radical and critical victimologies variously propose the need to include broader understandings of both the victimisers and the victims so that hidden, neglected and voiceless victims are brought within the remit of public concern and public policy (Davies, 2003). This is a welcome and relevant area of investigation for the current study regarding the construction, identification and representation of victim communities.

Although the victim of crime today is often noted as a key player (if not always a key influence) in discussions on crime, crime control and prevention, some authors have noted there are still areas for address and concern (Davies et al., 2003). Some of these are recognised as the hidden victimisation of certain groups, the contentious debates around victims' rights and victimisation perpetrated by the state and big business (Ibid.). Whilst not denying the importance of these specific issues, they serve to highlight that not only is there a problematic gap in the current victim study literature, but also in the issues identified as areas of concern and in need of redress, particularly in this case the failure to recognise, acknowledge or explore the notion of 'victim communities', with particular regard to the legacy of serious and high profile crimes.

Whilst the study of victims of crime has for some time been gathering pace within criminological theory, the notion of 'victim communities' is notable by its relative absence. In order to begin consideration and exploration of the concept of victim communities both on a physical and symbolic level, it is

crucial to examine and explain what it means to be a victim and the various processes by which that notion may be constructed, negotiated and contested. As has been identified, there are a number of problematic gaps in the bodies of literature regarding victims (Rock, 2002) and part of what follows will attempt to give consideration to those omissions, with particular regard to the ambiguous and temporal nature of the 'victim' label and of collective identity. This may encourage a greater understanding of the processes and influences in the construction and in particular the representations by various media of 'victim communities'.

### *Searching for the Victim*

Until the late 1970s, victims were almost wholly ignored in both criminology and the criminal justice process. Much of this early 'victim-free' criminology seems to have been located in what Young (1999) has termed, the 'golden age' of the post war period within the First World. Here Young (1999) contrasts what he terms the inclusive world of the 1950s and 1960s (comprising social embeddedness and a desire to assimilate the stranger and the deviant), with the more exclusionary order of late modernity, which he argues generates both economic and ontological insecurity and an exclusionary tendency towards the deviant. Although there is no doubt that this is a contested perspective (see Yar and Penna, 2004), with the major policy concerns in the immediate post war years particularly in Europe, centred on protection and how to rebuild societies, the post war period in Britain can in some ways be thought of as a time of consensus (Mawby and Walklate, 1994).

The 1950s saw the volume of recorded crime in England and Wales small and declining, although there were particular fears about offences of violence (Pearson, 1983). As prosperity, education and employment increased, coupled with the conception of the welfare state, the volume of crime was expected to continue to fall. In a way that seems inconceivable in today's late-modern and media saturated society, crime at the time was regarded as a minor social problem and one which could be dealt with by the experts (including criminologists) who would, through education and a 'civilising process' of politicians and the public, manage the reforms of welfare, control and rehabilitation (Rock, 2002). There was almost no talk of victims during this time. Indeed if victims *were* ever recognized it was as people far removed, often imagined to be angry and seeking retribution and therefore potentially harmful to the amelioration process. More often in this respect victims were viewed as best bought off with criminal injuries compensation in the short term, so not to interfere with needed reforms in the long term (Rock, 2002). If victims did emerge they were rarely allowed their own voice, more often they were spoken to or spoken for and as such acquired an extraordinary and remote appearance.

However, by the late 1950s recorded crime rates were on the increase although within criminological academia at the time and for decades to come, many would remain sceptical about the state and its recording and counting practices. For many criminologists and penal reformers, crime remained an exaggerated problem fashioned primarily by bureaucratic processes for administrative, political and populist ends (Hall et al, 1978). Whilst the sceptics were by no means united in one voice, those who voiced misgivings about the state-ratified depiction of the social reality of crime;

those sceptics who rejected the conventional themes of the politics of law and order, by association and inadvertently, may have also rejected talk of victims, or certainly only included them within their own definition and criteria of eligibility. It seems then that invoking the victim, for many, may have given rise to a culture of repression or malicious blaming. This notion is more recently expressed by Garland as 'the interests and feelings of victims - actual victims, victims' families, potential victims and the projected figure of the victim are now routinely invoked in support of measures of punitive segregation' (2001: 11). However, as a result of facing 'facts' and criticisms originating from outside of the discipline, criminology rediscovered the victim. In order to explore the notion of victim communities within late modernity, the history and background to how and why criminology (re)considered victims relevant requires further examination.

### *Re-emergence of the victim*

At the time one of the issues under consideration was the incontestable rise in crime that was taking place in the West. The annual total of recorded offences in England and Wales was ten times greater at the turn of the millennium than in the early 1950s: over five million, compared with around half a million (Maguire, 2002). During this time and even allowing for the appropriate warnings regarding reporting tendencies and counting rules, crime rates were on the increase and it became more difficult to talk of crime as an exaggerated social problem. An additional concern may have been the increasing accounts of violence during the 1960s, particularly from America. Several of these incidents prompted inquiries, reports and crime commissions to be published. Whilst not directly affecting the willingness to

engage with victims and victimisation per se, one of the said crime commissions, the President's Crime Commission in 1967, led to the permanent establishment of national crime surveys in the United States in 1972 and then onwards in other contexts in the early 1980s to the United Kingdom (Coleman and Moynihan, 1996). From the beginning these surveys were able to examine aspects of victimisation that had not previously been practical. Victimisation surveys were able to illuminate more clearly the scale, depth and distribution of crime and in particular its disproportionate impact on working class and ethnic minority groups (Ibid.). National surveys such as the British Crime Survey (BCS) were able to explore new facts about the demography and geography of victims as well as their anxiety about crime and encounters with the criminal justice system.

As these issues developed, the type of victim (within and without academic criminology) became important, in particular vulnerable populations such as women and children. Offences committed against such vulnerable victims, such as child abuse, were 'discovered' by police, social workers and other professionals (Lea and Young, 1984) and crimes against women, particularly domestic violence, rape and incest were transformed from private troubles into public issues predominantly by the feminist criminology of the 1970s and early 1980s (Smart, 1977). Further consideration of the victim within academia may have been sustained by Christie's introduction of the notion of the 'ideal victim' (Christie, 1986). For Christie (1986) the ideal victim is most usually vulnerable, unconnected to the offender, blameless, respectable and has sufficient power to claim the 'ideal victim' identity status (although not so much power that their 'idealness' is jeopardised by their lack of vulnerability). This notion is significant both in the re-emergence of the

victim and for the questions considered by this thesis as it raises important questions around the social construction of the victim.

Christie (1986) argues that the ideal image of a victim provides a representation of the victim (and correspondingly the offender), which is out of kilter with messy social realities (Green, 2007). Christie's construction of the ideal victim is firmly located in the attributes of the victims themselves; the ideal victim as a public status, 'not the person or category most perceiving herself or himself as a victim...nor those in the greatest danger of being victimised' (1986:18). It is here that Christie turns his attention to the notion of 'non-ideal' victims, one category being those who are victimised without knowing. Christie describes how information received latterly for this group or category may enable them to come to see themselves as victims. This is a helpful concept in our examination of victim communities, both as non-ideal victims and as those who may be both constructed and represented as victims to others (via mass media coverage). For those who may be described as a victim community, such information received after the fact may enable them to collude in the representation of themselves as victims where they eventually come to see themselves as such.

At the same time that these issues were developing, the status of the victim was being highlighted and championed in other areas. Concurrently declarations of victims rights were formulated by bodies such as the Council of Europe and the so-called 'victims movement' in the United States which declared that its members were the forgotten party in the criminal justice system causing them to be doubly victimised, once by the crime itself and then again through the states response (Shapland et al., 1985; Elias 1993).



Another important issue in rediscovering the victim concerns the significance of the public in police effectiveness. Contrary to the previously held view of the police as efficient detectors of crime and self-reliant enforcers of the law, research such as that undertaken by Reiss (1971) showed police work as an activity that was most heavily dependent on the observations of victims, witnesses and bystanders at the scene (Rock, 2002). The environment of declining detection rates and rising crime rates contributed to the growing 'politicisation of the victim' (Garland, 2001). The emphasis therefore developed towards helping victims to cope with the effects of crime; a new era of multi-agency co-operation and the traditional conception of 'community' were encouraged, where victims became part of the informal social control in the 'fight against crime'. Throughout all of this there was a key change in the relative weight accorded to the notion of 'victim', particularly by the mass media as they constructed narratives about crime and punishment (both factual and fictional) from an increasingly victim-centred perspective (Reiner, 2001). Finally and more recently the reparative movement, ideas around victim-offender reconciliation and notions of restorative justice have increased the prominence and helped in the criminological 'rediscovery of the victim'.

The cumulative effect of the factors discussed above, have conspired to bring splintered images of victims and victimisation to the forefront of criminological attention (Rock, 2002). As Lucia Zedner notes, 'Victims, once on the margins of criminological research, are now a central focus of academic research' (2002: 419); as a consequence new areas of study are illuminated. For example earlier assumptions about the impact, quantity and spread of crime have had to be replaced, not only by an understanding of

crime's deep, on-going and pervasive effects, but also by a consciousness of its capacity to confuse stereotypes of who the victim and the offender may actually be (Rock, 2002). We know for example that victims in the traditional sense are recruited often from much the same demographic and geographical populations as offenders and witnesses (Smith and Gray, 1985). However, while victims have come to attract an extraordinary level of attention, the exploration of how victim communities are constructed, represented and contested, is an area that has yet to be considered.

### *Limitations of knowledge about victims*

Notwithstanding the developments within the victimological literature it is clear there are still some gaps in our knowledge and a number of areas that would benefit from empirical research. The first gap in our knowledge is associated with collectivising the term 'victim'. The idea of a victim means quite different things to different audiences, including those to whom the concept may be applied. Each identifiable representation of what it is to be a 'victim' has been shaped by the historical, political and academic context. Those who have championed each representation often had contradictory purposes, interests and methodologies that shaped the way the topic of victims was considered. Rock argues that this created areas within criminology that obscured the 'scholarly understanding of who and what victims are' (2002: 12). The victim as a concept cannot be taken for granted and experiences may be variable. A second area of limitation to the current knowledge is around the representation and connotation of the 'victim' label. In feminist analysis for example, the female victim is said to require support and is best described, not in the language of victimisation but that of

survival (Kelly, 1988). Another source of difficulty has been methodological (Rock, 2002). Victim surveys, for example, are constructed to collect an anonymous set of responses in a limited social context and cannot appreciate complex social relations that develop over time. Consequently they tend to camouflage the more existential elements in the representation and development of victimisation.

These are problematic gaps in the current literature and study of victims. The most pertinent omissions concerning this study include the problem of identity and the examination of what it means to *be* a victim. A deeper understanding of how people cope with the experience of crime and what sense they come to make of it and what information allows them to acquire or construct a victim identity is crucial to the exploration of 'victim communities'. As Rock pertinently notes there may be a 'void that has yet to be filled by an adequate description of the victim as a situated, reflective self in interaction with others' (2002: 13). It is this gap in the literature that this work and research aims to partially complete as significant throughout these issues and underpinning victim identity in this context, is the notion around the collective identity (and representation) of victim communities.

A victim may be described as one who is defined in some way by the criminal or crime-like actions of another. This definition may be voluntary or involuntary, applied immediately or gradually, it may have consequences or not, but importantly 'victim' is a socially manufactured identity, dependent to varying degrees on others who shape the larger social, interpretive environment where it is positioned. As has already been discussed, the term 'victim' means different things to different people, including those to whom

the label may be applied and the 'other' audiences. It is in this regard that the many and varied constructions of what it means to be a victim can be considered as necessarily temporal and ambiguous. As Rock (2002) notes not all those who are wronged against will develop into full-blown victims. For some, possibly those whose experience is confined to a fleeting and definable episode, the label of victim may not carry with it significant weight or consequences. Indeed, we know that some victims remain unaware or unconcerned that they have been transgressed against (Hough and Mayhew, 1983). For some the identity of victim is one to be accepted and embraced as becoming a victim may have its rewards; sympathy, attention, the receiving of validation, being treated as blameless, the ability to give meaning and control to a disturbing experience or financial compensation. This 'victim' identity is often stereotypically represented in mass media reporting of crime for example, by reference to and in direct opposition to the image or description afforded to the offender. 'Innocent victims' (which could be like 'us') are positioned in binary opposition to 'evil offenders' (them). For others however the designation of the victim label is not appealing, more something to be refrained from and even rejected. Alternative frames of reference may be considered more desirable; patient, claimant or survivor. The movement surrounding 'Rape Crisis' centres, offering emotional support and legal and medical advice to women who have been sexually assaulted or raped, object strongly to the term 'victim' to describe women in these situations as it takes away their power. They deliberately use the term 'survivor' to differentiate their response from others associated with the status of 'victim' (Zedner, 2002; Davies, 2007; Smolej, 2010). Although often ambiguous and contradictory in nature, to many the term 'victim' tends to intrinsically infer weakness, loss and pain and most significantly conveys some form of

stigmatisation. Rock notes that it is to be presumed that most people in 'everyday life would not willingly court (these circumstances) or eagerly build an identity upon them' (2002: 14). In a similar vein, Goffman's seminal work on stigma describes this status as 'a deeply discrediting attribute ... constituting a special discrepancy' (1963: 13); not an identity to be readily sought, as if one is in possession of a less desirable attribute than is expected of them, this person is then reduced in our minds and in this way becomes tainted or spoiled. This is an important issue that is returned to later in this chapter.

It seems then, that victim identity is over different times and circumstances, accepted and encouraged by some, while desisted and rejected by others. However, there is a further issue regarding victim identity that is not addressed in the current literature and needs further exploration. When examining the notion of 'victim communities' an additional level of victim identity becomes apparent. There may be a refraction of victim identity embraced by those who are not directly affected by the crime event but nonetheless feel the need to attach themselves to the events, to be part of the community and to feel involved in some way, even vicariously in the crime event that has taken place. Given the ambiguous nature of the 'victim' label these individuals may indeed be eager to build part of their own (albeit temporary) identity on those stigmatized foundations of loss and pain. In this way, whilst all those wronged against may not develop into 'fully blown victims' (Rock, 2002), it may be that there are a group who although they have not been wronged themselves, may seek to be seen as victims; as part of a victim community of choice. This desire on one level for a victim identity alludes to the discussion around the use of the term 'secondary

victim'. Although discussed in detail further in this chapter, some writers suggest there is increasing competition in some senses for this privileged and moral title in late modern society (Rock, 2002).

There is unsurprisingly some disparity around the status of the secondary victim, not only with regard to who has the power to regulate admission and acceptance of the identity but also around who is entitled to claim the victim identity for themselves. The relatives of particular murder victims may be seen by some as valid in this instance but for these and other groups acknowledgement about who is a casualty of crime is uneven and ambiguous. In her fascinating study on the consequences of crime for relatives of serious offenders, Rachel Condry (2007) considers the wider question of victim identity by examining the stigmatising experiences of a group of relatives of those accused or convicted of serious crimes; those family members who may or may not be ascribed the identity or status of 'secondary' or 'other victims of crime'. Other groups who may be considered here are offenders injured by their victims<sup>2</sup> or emergency staff who attend serious crime scenes.<sup>3</sup> We have already suggested that victim status or identity cannot be taken for granted; it is a subjective category and so inevitably is a contested concept. Those whom we most readily consider as conventional or primary victims are more likely to have their status ascribed or confirmed by the state; they are more likely to have directly suffered a harm generally understood as a crime. Yet if we apply the label of victim more willingly to some types of people than others then it follows that there must be a hierarchy of victims. The higher up the hierarchy, the more 'ideal'

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of Tony Martin, a Norfolk farmer, who killed a 16-year-old intruder to his property in 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Police officers and paramedics attending Hillsborough football ground, at Sheffield in 1989 or the London terrorist bombings which took place in July 2005.

the victim; the more innocent, the more deserving (Christie, 1986). These are the victims who may gain our sympathy more easily than others and concomitantly we are often more willing to ascribe them victim status. This manoeuvring for inclusion and exclusion indicates the temporal and transient nature of what it is to be a victim; it is consistently tested and assessed. The issue is further complicated as the negotiation of one as victim (by those with various powers to condemn and reward) is often only secured at a perceived cost to another, reinforcing again distinct binary notions; 'the victimisation of one can entail the criminalisation of another' (Rock, 2002: 16). So the application or acceptance of a victim identity has important ramifications and significantly, it establishes (intentionally or not) a frame of discourse where different identities may be transformed.

In late modern society, David Garland notes the importance of the contemporary and increasingly political imperative that victims 'voices must be heard, their memory honoured, their anger expressed, their fears addressed' (2001: 11). As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the political rhetoric around victims routinely seems to rely on taken for granted assumptions, conjuring a picture of the victim as a deserving figure whose suffering must be expressed. Furthermore, this rhetoric around the victim is mutually exclusive and used in diametric opposition to the status of the offender. Any expressions of concern for the offender and their needs signals an automatic disregard for the victim and the appropriate level of respect they should be shown. Garland calls this a 'zero sum game', the rights of one competing with those of the other (2001: 179); where being 'for' the victim necessarily means you must be polarized in opposition 'against' the offender. In other words, as the offenders' perceived worth tends

towards zero, so the victim's interests expand to fill the gap (Garland, 2001: 180). Becoming a 'victim' then, may be more than it at first seems (Rock, 2002). It is an emerging process of signification, possibly involving the intervention and association of others whose meaning and impact may change over time, punctuated by transitions, and lacking a fixed end state (2002: 17). Such a process has been described by Goffman as a 'moral career', that is 'the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person's self and in his framework of imagery for judging himself and others' (1961: 119).

The experience and impact of being a 'victim', of accepting, claiming or even rejecting that identity is necessarily variable, ambiguous and temporal. Existential or moral careers can fluctuate in importance in one's life; they may develop gradually over time but alternatively, the impact of the event and the subsequent identity experience may be unexpected and traumatic, as in the case of a rape or murder. In this regard, important and difficult times may be eased by an abundance of pre-existing narratives, laying out much of 'how to be a victim', these texts may be supplied by counselling and therapy (Furedi, 2004), the mass media in the form of films, television programmes (Crimewatch for example) and newspaper reports, survivors campaigns and support groups such as Victim support. Such is the amount and conventionality of these pre-ordained forms that questions have been asked as to the authenticity of the victim experience. It is here where the understanding of victims begins to lessen and the conceptual void around the issues of victim identity begins.



Although there has been much work on each area individually, it seems there is an identifiable neglect of a unifying analysis of both crime and victimisation as a process involving people in interaction, deploying meanings and changing identities (Rock, 2002: 19). What is interesting particularly in relation to victim communities and others who may seek to attach themselves to a collective victim identity, are questions of when and how people decide that they have been a 'victim' on some level, of an act identified as a crime and what they mean by that? What is the significance of being a victim (at various levels) and if and when is this considered a problem? How are these identities selected, defined and endorsed? When, where and how would a victim seek support, take action or call upon outsiders and most importantly, is the label and identity as a victim an enduring and significant one? In summary, when does a person understand themselves to have become a victim (actual or symbolic) and what are the processes and consequences involved in this for themselves and others? Identical criminal acts, of violence say, may be viewed very differently by those involved in the actions, as crime is quite clearly context-dependant. Less is known about the experience and construction of victim identity and there is a need to examine forms of 'victim talk' that are bound by the necessity of space, time, relations and purposes. Whilst some have argued that the need for this examination would 'reasonably apply to heavily victimised populations' (Rock, 2002: 21), this thesis suggests that in addition, such scrutiny is also much needed in the neglected area of research around communities as victims. How and in what ways have some become exposed to victimisation? How different or similar are their experiences? What do their careers as victims look like (as a consequence of serious and high profile crimes in particular)? And do they define themselves as victims?

Examining such questions will extend the current literature to include an empirical regard of those who have experienced, either directly or indirectly, high profile serious crime events. In this sense it is crucial to try to make sense of how victims *and* offenders construct themselves, the situation and one another in order to move away from the polar oppositions too readily cast by the media and politicians of the regular and often indignant 'us' versus the offenders, the evil outsider 'other'. However, this exploration must take place against the wider social theory and as such it is the relationship between self, culture and structure that partly underpins this discussion; the victim/offender dichotomy is an example of late modern reflexive society, where people have the capacity as individual agents to recognize forces of socialization and as such alter their place within the social structure of society.

### *Secondary victims*

Returning to the earlier discussions around who qualifies to be a 'victim' and in which circumstances, there seems to be a general acceptance of the significance and legitimacy of 'primary' victims. However, as Howarth and Rock (2000) argue there is a more guarded and partial acceptance of the importance and associated authority of 'secondary victims'.

Secondary victims are described in this sense as those who are indirectly harmed, those who are the families and friends of the primary victims and also the witnesses of crime; this is an area of crucial importance to the exploration of victim communities. Howarth and Rock argue that increasingly there is a growth in new groups (of secondary or hidden victims)

who come forward to claim the label or title of victim for themselves (2000: 58). As an example of such a group, which it is argued thus far remain relatively neglected in academic criminology,<sup>4</sup> Howarth and Rock introduce their work on 'Aftermath', an organisation representing the families of serious offenders, who are deeply affected by the repercussions of the crimes of their family member. Set up in 1998 Aftermath's 'foundational ideal ... is that offences have many victims' and in that sense, the family of a serious offender must also be regarded as his victim' (2000: 61). Aftermath was a self-help organisation where support and help was offered to members by other relatives of serious offenders. As an organisation it relied solely on funding from charitable sources, it had difficulty gaining recognition and legitimacy (itself a revealing indication of the moral and social marginality of its membership) and finally reached the point of closure in 2005 (Condry, 2007). A concrete example of this status of 'secondary victim' in practice can also be seen with the subsequent experiences of the immediate families of the young offenders Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, found guilty of the murder of toddler James Bulger in 1993. For many years after the trial and conviction of the two 10 year olds, their parents and siblings had to move house many times and have their identities protected from the public and those in their new neighbourhood. In many instances the relocation was instigated as their identities were discovered and mediated and so their lives as close family members of the guilty offenders were made unbearable.

When considering such issues, it is interesting to explore whether victim communities associated with high profile and highly mediatized crimes, may be considered one such 'new group' of secondary victims. In addition the

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<sup>4</sup> However, acknowledgement must be given to Restorative Justice as a perspective that does engage with both wider victimisation and community, albeit in a different context, as part of a wider victimology.

question of acquisition or application is a fascinating one; is the label and so called status of 'victim' one that is claimed by an individual or group as it is argued is the case with 'Aftermath' members or one that may be given and if given, who has the power to award and apply that status? Here also lies the crucial question of acceptance or resistance on the part of the recipient of that label. It is this area and level of examination that is not yet considered in the theoretical and empirical work around the concepts of victimhood and identity at the community level.

### *Hidden Victims*

Some groups or individuals of secondary victims could also be described as 'hidden victims' that is; those affected by the crime but not routinely recognised as such or ascribed the accordant status. An interesting issue here lies around the dichotomy or distinction between 'hidden victims', such as the Aftermath families, and those who actively want to attach themselves to the victim status but are only vicariously affected by the crime event and often only informed via the media; a level of (symbolic) victim community. Conversely for other levels of victim community there may be parallels with hidden victim collectives, such as the Aftermath families. On one level such groups may feel a certain amount of stigma by association and guilt, respectively questioning how they let this happen, could they have prevented the crime in any way and how did they not notice what sort of person was in their midst? This is particularly pertinent when considering witnesses as hidden victims. Again, in the case of the murder of toddler James Bulger in 1993, the police investigation and subsequent criminal trial revealed 38 people who saw James and his abductors walking the route from the Bootle

shopping centre where he was first taken, to the railway line some two miles away where he eventually met his death. This group of witnesses became known as 'The Liverpool 38' and some have spoken since of their on-going sense of shame and guilt that they did not intervene and in their minds potentially change the outcome of events (Morrison, 1997).

Another parallel that may be considered between some victim communities and families of serious offenders such as those associated with Aftermath is the seeming urgent need for information to aid comprehension of what happened. Often every sign and detail is perused for meaning to restore a measure of control, structure and direction to confused lives (Howarth and Rock, 2000: 67). Similarly, Howarth and Rock indicate that there are very clear parallels between the self-definitions taken on by the Aftermath members and those adopted by victims and survivors proper (2000: 70). Both have lost control. Both have to acknowledge information that is impossible to accept, understand and assimilate and both have feelings of stigma and guilt and admit to a profound sense of bereavement and loss (Ibid.). In this way the 'victim' status is acquiesced purposefully by the members of Aftermath, it will be interesting to consider if the same is true in some sense for the members of victim communities where a serious and high profile crime has taken place. The authors go on to suggest that it could well be argued that this status has indeed been earned in some cases but that the identity is often withheld in practice. Like members of Aftermath, those communities associated with serious and highly mediatized crimes are simultaneously 'survivors of a traumatic ordeal and the other victims of crime' (2000: 71).

This subject of secondary and hidden victims and the discussion around 'the other victims of crime' raises a number of questions and implications for the theory in this area. Firstly it is clear that serious crime affects almost all those whom it touches; not only the actual victims and survivors themselves but also secondary victims and witnesses, and increasingly it is claimed those who are associated with the event in different roles such as police officers, jurors, offenders themselves and even the offenders immediate circle (Howarth and Rock, 2000: 72). Although current literature around this topic does not extend to this concept, it may also be the case that other local people are stigmatized by association with a serious offence creating another level of victim and in addition, that a wider victim community is affected vicariously and via the media representations of the serious crime event and its consequences. Secondly, it is also apparent that the effects of serious crime may alter for many their taken for granted identities and relations, thus threatening the meaning which people attach to themselves and their world. If the ripple effects of serious crime cause confusion in this way, then claiming the status of victim with all that entails, may satisfy a need to regain meaning and control in the lives of previously hidden victim communities.

The apparent proliferation of groups attaching themselves or aspiring to victim status may be useful and interesting for criminological study. An analysis of this area may raise important and interesting questions not only about procedures for establishing moral identity but also about the reach of crime; the complexity of its impact and effects, the multiple consequences it inflicts and the diversity of responses that it elicits (Rock, 2002). This has particular relevance in a broader sense for the level of a victim community:

those who can only attach themselves to the event via new media technologies and who can only have been 'harmed' indirectly and vicariously via the media. There are two main areas of interest here that this thesis sets out to address. The first is with regard to the amount of claimants or those who ascribe to the secondary victim status. If over time, too many groups or individuals make claim to the title of victim, does that make the sought after status any less meaningful? The second concerns the notion of a possible 'hierarchy of victimhood' and the state sanctioned status of 'victim' that has been discussed above. We know of course that some groups of secondary victims are 'officially' recognised by the state and the criminal justice process and by association indicates to a wider society that some 'victims' are seen as more morally deserving than others. For example, are people such as the Aftermath families so indelibly linked with the crime event and the offender that they are seen as less worthy of sympathy and understanding than other victim groups? As has been discussed, Christie's (1986) notion of the 'ideal victim' as innocent, passive and fearful is stereotypical and is almost certainly not the lived reality of victimisation. Typically people may define themselves and are defined as survivors or something else entirely. In this way the authenticity of the term victim may be called into question. It is this notion of how victims present themselves (or how they are enabled or encouraged to present) that is of particular interest in relation to victim communities.

In exploring the subject of the impact of media representations of high profile and serious crimes, the notion and status of the offender may be as important as that of the victim(s). Christie states that 'ideal victims need and create ideal offenders; the two are interdependent' and it is this binary

opposition of ideal victim and offender that provides an oversimplified picture of reality and allows society to continue as usual for the rest of us (1986: 29). This is a key theme for this current work. In addition, Christie goes on to argue that it is social conditions that enable these creations and conclusions; that fragmented societies with isolated individuals are the ultimate conditions for creating ideal victims and offenders. This would seem an effective point then to conclude our discussions of victimisation and turn to considerations of wider structural issues and more specifically the equally contested concept of community in late modern society.

### **Community and Identity**

An important aspect in the development of victimological perspectives has been the research into actual victims of crime. For both the early positivist work and the more recent radicalism, officially recorded statistics and victimisation surveys have been of central importance. As has been discussed, victim surveys and to a lesser extent, officially recorded crime statistics, provide important information about the frequency, extent and nature of victimisation although they are less enlightening about its impact (Zedner, 2002). As a consequence, more qualitative research in this area has tried to rectify the problems associated with information gathered traditionally from victim surveys, by focusing on particular types of crime or specific victim groups e.g. burglary victims, victims of rape and violence, child victims and the elderly as victims (Ibid.). However, it seems that the current literature in this area does not cover in any meaningful way, the effects of crime on a collective or 'community of victims', particularly those



affected by serious and high profile crimes where the media coverage is extensive.

### *Notions of Community*

As with the notion of 'victim', the term 'community' is also a complex one to define; as a concept it is flexible, temporal and contested. It is also difficult to identify what being part of a community means for any individual. The idea of community is one whose popularity conceals a multiplicity of meanings. The notion of community in the traditional sense, as something that refers to a place or a neighbourhood with which one feels some sense of identification is often said to be waning in late modern society. Indeed Bauman notes that the term 'community' today:

'stands for a kind of world which is not...available to us, but which we would dearly love to inhabit and which we hope to repossess' (2001: 3).

However, what is clear around this notion is the way in which new social groups have begun to appropriate the term 'community' and the new cultural meanings that seem to have gathered around it. The concept of 'community' today has different meanings, on different levels to different people. As such, for the concept to be of value in today's society it may have to refer to something far more differentiated than the historic notion of a *Gemeinschaft* community based upon ties of blood and soil that Tonnies (1887) first introduced into the lexicon of the social sciences towards that end of the last

century (cited in Hoggett, 1997). Community has come to take on several different meanings in contemporary society.

During recent decades within academic studies the history of community has seen both surges and declines in popularity. A rejection of the study of community in the 1960s led to its replacement with the study of 'locality' during the 1980s, which re-emphasised the importance of 'place'. The notion of 'locality' as a geographical area, profoundly shaped by its role in the spatial division of labour, became a key term at the precise expense of 'community' (Hoggett, 1997). However, the importance of the idea of community for this particular study is that it also has conceptual significance. Utilising Benedict Anderson's notion of an 'imagined community', its imaginary dimension is as important as its structural determinants (Anderson, 1983). Misguidedly or not, one's perception of community is often depicted by physicality and dominance, either as something lived in, something lost, as shorthand for exclusion or marginalisation or something that can be oppressive. However, the term 'community' can also be harnessed as a resource of resistance signifying commonality of all kinds, something that has just been constructed, the uniqueness of identity or as a basis for struggle (Hoggett, 1997). This is particularly pertinent given the emergence of the global information society, where as Castells (1991) notes there may be seen to be a decoupling of the sense of community from the sense of place. Identity and belonging play an important part when considering the conceptual space within which all forms of community can be understood. Much work in this area has drawn attention to the way in which social identities, derived from one's membership of groups and communities, are both given and constructed

(Hall, 1990). In even the most oppressive circumstances, people do not just necessarily accept the identity they are given. Identities are constantly shifting and mutating as the groups and communities such identities draw from and contribute to change over time. By linking identity to imagined community, we can begin the process of revealing and examining the unseen terrain of 'elective groups' and 'intentional communities' for example cyber communities, which are such a significant feature of modern day contemporary life. In some sense then 'place' can now become reconceptualised as an identity one chooses as much as one which is accepted as fate (Hoggett, 1997).

The interrelationship between community and identity then must be examined on a broader level within the context of late modernity where the human condition is increasingly characterised as being in a state of anxiety (Spalek, 2006). It is argued that traditional social associations based on family or social class have been eroded, while the expansion of less secure employment for example has led to an increasingly mobile labour force that contributes to a dislocation of peoples from their local communities (Young, 1999). Central to these economic and social transformations is the anxiety that is associated with the loss of a sense of 'belonging', where people look to establish new identities which can, it is argued, make them feel part of a 'wider community', whilst still be being part of a 'fluid' society (Bauman, 2001). It is here and in this way that the traditional bounded notions of community and belonging seem on the surface incapable of explaining the fluid nature of late-modern society. This is a contested issue that will be fully explored in the following chapter, however it is important to identify here the basic notion that although late modernity is frequently said to be

characterised by fragmentation, surveillance, regulation, dangerousness and risk, all of which are said to mitigate against the traditional notion of 'community' (Greer, 2004), it may be that it is precisely those 'negative' characteristics that fuel the need for people to feel unity, a sense of social cohesion and connection to a notion of a 'community'; whether that be on a physical or symbolic level.

Turning to other relevant disciplines that explore the notion of community, many still focus primarily on the physical geographical nature of the concept, on sources of community activism and often on the nature of interface between communities and public agencies. There are however, some interesting points from within such discussions that may be relevant to the study of victim communities in late modernity. In his work examining contested communities, Hoggett argues that the idea of community is 'saturated with power', and as such community is a continually contested term (1997: 14). The series of small area case studies within this edited collection provide vivid accounts of the many ways in which meanings of community are fought over by different groups. A common strand running through the case studies seems to be the heterogeneity and complexity of such communities. In addition Hoggett notes that as new kinds of non-place or symbolic communities emerge for some, the dispossessed may find themselves locked into physical place more and more (Ibid.). With reference to the locality and physical nature of community, a central theme of these exemplified cases is the importance of sentiments and emotions in community life; very few sites convey the 'warm glow' that community is often thought to signify. In contrast, fear comes through as a powerful sentiment; anger, jealousy, pride and longing fuel the process of boundary construction which

distinguishes insiders from outsiders, those who can be trusted and those who cannot. This is one of the interesting issues raised by this literature that this thesis will seek to explore empirically.

Within criminology and sociology more specifically, studies on the theme of community have remained on the agenda. Community has been examined and researched in some cases as a way of understanding the existence of criminal activity, explaining crime patterns and as a result the appeal to community has also played a major part in crime prevention policies (Hope, 1995). However, discussions of community in academic criminology have also tended to focus around the physical and not the social or symbolic fabric in which communities are found. Many such approaches see the notion of communities and victimisation in a physical and static sense and often do not address other levels or forms of community that may be present. This thesis then may have the potential to contribute to the explanation of why the notion of 'community' can be understood and experienced in so many different ways.

### *Victimisation and Community*

When examining the notion of community together with the (collective) victim identity and level(s) of victimisation, it is pertinent to consider criminological academic work undertaken in this area. In the first instance, acknowledgment must be given to works emanating from the influential Chicago School of Sociology, more particularly the contribution of Shaw and McKay (1942) through their work on juvenile delinquency in urban areas. This body of work was in turn significant in the development of

environmental criminology, concerning the study of crime, criminality and victimisation as they relate to 'places' and to the way that individuals and organisations shape their activities spatially (Bottoms and Wiles, 2002). Within this focus on environmental influences, a particular essay by Albert Reiss (1986) drew attention to the importance for criminology of changes in local communities, suggesting that we might speak in terms of local areas having 'community crime careers' (cited in Bottoms and Wiles, 2002: 645); stigmatized estates that may have led to a collective 'spoiled' identity. In such works, we can identify parallel areas of research, historically and contemporarily, relating to the stigmatization of place or community.

More recent work such as that by Evans and Fraser (2003), although focusing primarily on crime prevention, does attempt to examine the inequality or differentiation of crime victimisation at a group or community level. We know of course that some individuals and social groups are more at risk than others of victimisation. The research is equally clear that the burden of what we commonly think of as 'regular' crime does not fall equally on all communities or areas, and is geographically focused (Zedner, 2002). This premise is taken up by Evans and Fraser who argue that on the basis of common characteristics such as low status urban areas, low quality housing, above average concentration of children, teenagers and young adults within the population, it is the 'neighbourhoods themselves that can be seen as victims of crime' (2003: 84). Victims of crime are more commonly considered as individuals or more rarely as institutions, but less likely still are neighbourhoods or communities accorded that victim status. Evans and Fraser (2003) do attempt to broaden the conditions for the validity of that status by looking at how some communities in high-crime areas can be

regarded as victims. However, work in this area within both criminology and victimology is again broadly centred on communities as physical geographical areas and often single-mindedly concerned with the issue of crime prevention. It seems there is little consideration in any of the current literature on communities of victims on either a physical or symbolic level, which are not inhabitants of a high crime area but may happen to have been stigmatized by association with a serious and high profile mediatized crime.

Evans and Fraser's work is relevant in that it does touch on these issues, but unfortunately does not go on to develop them in any meaningful way. Their work sets out to examine, 'the relationship between victimisation, crime and neighbourhood by considering appeals to community' (2003: 80). Within this they do acknowledge that the term community has many complex meanings but do not develop the concept any further. Their own conceptualisation is of community as a vehicle for crime prevention interventions. In this instance the notion of community can be viewed in one of two ways. Firstly as a set of attitudes which may promote more 'social' behaviour through an enhanced sense of community; secondly and more significantly, the idea of community emphasising the core institutions such as family, school and work which are critical to thriving 'real communities' to withstand crime through informal social controls (Evans and Fraser, 2003: 81). Interestingly Evans and Fraser do briefly address the idea of 'virtual' communities of victims, referred to as groups of people who by virtue of the risk of victimisation may be considered as communities of victims, even though they do not share a geographical location; however this notion and its ramifications are not considered any further.

Instead by drawing on the influential works of Wilson and Kelling (1982), Evans and Fraser (2003) discuss the relationship between crime and locality. Drawing on the aforementioned thesis of 'broken windows' they describe the situation where a locality acquires a high-crime reputation, where it can be difficult then to attract new residents and those more capable or driven 'community orientated' residents may leave. This can mean neighbourhoods may quickly find themselves in a downward spiral of decline where fear of crime is high and those witnessing crime and disorder do not feel able to intervene. It is under these circumstances according to Evans and Fraser (2003) that neighbourhoods themselves can be seen as victims of crime. These are descriptions of the ramifications of bad reputation and labelling. This is important as communities of victims as well as those of offenders, can suffer from a negative reputation as this thesis argues. This also influences the attitudes of those seen as 'belonging' to the community in question, as the perception of stigmatization can remain long after the original forces which created the label have disappeared<sup>5</sup>. This concept has several direct parallels, which have not been considered in the literature so far but are central to this work; the notion that victim communities may acquire a collective sense of stigma and spoiled identity following a high profile and highly mediatized crime that has taken place in their locality.

With reference to earlier positivist works within victimology, Evans and Fraser (2003: 85) also refer to feminist criticisms of much crime prevention advice directed towards women. In general this seems to focus on individual victimisation-avoidance strategies; this approach can lead to 'victim blaming' where the victims of crime are seen as in some way responsible for their own

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<sup>5</sup> See Damer (1974) for an ethnographic account of the effects of stigmatisation, labelling and a bad reputation on community.



victimisation (Stanko, 1990). An equivalent concept can be considered when exploring the notion of victim communities where those belonging to this group feel in some way accountable for what happened, that the perpetrator is someone from their own community, how could they not have known or noticed? In this way victim blaming is seen to be taking place at a community level (Walklate, 1989). Further, how is this label resisted if that is the case, or is the community compliant in this representation? These are all pertinent questions that this empirical work will attempt to address in a way that the current available literature has not. The subject of reputation and labelling at a community level then, is a significant issue and one to which this chapter now looks at in more detail.

### *Labelling and (Community) Identity*

The notion of labelling focuses on the importance of the nature of social reaction. American sociologist Howard Becker (1963) first used the term 'labelling' to describe the intense effect on a person of naming them as deviant. Labelling as a social assertion which would transform the doing of the deviant act into a core part of a person's identity, a symbolic reorganisation of self that affects their future performances and their own self-identity (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1969). The Labelling perspective turned other, more positivist sociological theories on their head. Rather than viewing crime as a given and society as essentially consensual regarding core norms and values, the labelling perspective argues that crime is a social process and as such it involves different perceptions of what constitutes 'good' or 'bad' persons or behaviour; crime is not an 'objective' phenomenon, rather an outcome of specific types of human interaction (Schur, 1971).

For many labelling and social interactionist theorists, the starting point is the notion that people lack a strong sense of self, of who they are or what they can/cannot do, and rely on constant processes of social exchange. As an interactionist perspective labelling focuses on how people typify, or label one another, how people relate to one another based on these typifications and the consequences of those social processes (Rubington and Weinberg, 1978). From a labelling perspective then, crime and criminal behaviour are conceived as social processes and depend as much on context and social reaction to give them meaning, as on the nature of the actual behaviour. The focus of particular concern for the labelling perspective revolves around the nature of the interaction between 'offender', 'victim' and criminal justice 'representatives'. In essence, what counts as crime is determined by the activities of those working within the criminal justice system and thus depends on who is doing the labelling. Official designations of 'crime' are thereby conferred by those who have the power to label (Cicourel, 1976). So for labelling theorists a key area for analysis is the relationship between the offender and those who have the power to label (Christie's (1986) notion of the 'ideal victim' would seem resonant here).

Exploring this notion of power is vital for the current examination of the concept of 'victim communities' in two ways. Firstly, it may be illuminating to analyse this important relationship regarding power from another angle, namely that of the status of secondary or hidden victims. The crucial issues of who gets labelled by whom and what the consequences of this labelling are, seem more than pertinent when applied to communities of victims as well as the more traditional 'outsider' or 'offender' recipients. It is here that

the question of who has the power and position to identify and label is a key concern regarding victim identity and when ascertaining which groups are assigned the official status of 'victim', from whom and why. Of primary importance to labelling theorists is the notion of secondary deviation which is said to occur because of social or official reaction to primary deviation, the person concerned experiences a fundamental reorientation of self concept and thus behaviour; they come to see themselves as they have been labelled (Lemert, 1969). In addition and crucially for this work the notion of vulnerability is significant here, more specifically how it relates to the likelihood or not, of responding positively or negatively to official social reaction. Vulnerability may obviously be an important element of victim identity and this will be further explored later in the research.

Secondly and more broadly, it is as consequences of the power relationship and especially of the labelling process itself, that stigmatisation can occur. As conceived by Becker, negative effects can arise from labelling, where the person labelled takes on the role as prescribed (Becker, 1963). In effect, the labelling perspective points to the impact of labelling in the social and psychological development of offenders. The stigma that is attached by the process of labelling sticks; it affects how others see them as well as how they see themselves. As Becker has argued, one result of this form of stigmatisation is that not only will those who have been negatively labelled go on to engage in deviant activity, but they will also seek out the company of others who have similarly been cast as outsiders (Becker, 1963). For labelling theorists, the likely negative outcomes from the application of the label as 'deviant' overshadow the need to intervene in the first place, as they argue that the criminal/deviant activity of many, and particularly the young,

is generally transitory in nature (Schur, 1971). This notion of temporality is an interesting point to consider with regard to the status of victim communities, more specifically the transitory nature of communities of grief enabled by new(er) media technologies; imagined communities of choice. Whilst the focus of the labelling perspective as discussed, centres around the core relationship between the deviant so labelled and those 'officials' that have the power to attach that label, it may be interesting to consider how the concept of victimisation and more specifically, victim communities may be explored from within this perspective. There may be something to be gained from examining the effects of labelling at a community level, not of offenders but instead with groups of victims; victim communities.

There are then many issues raised by the labelling perspective that are pertinent and relevant in an exploration of victim communities; how and when this identity is constructed, represented and contested. At the same time it is essential not to over simplify the labelling process. As Plummer (1979) has argued, the process of acquiring labels is a subtle one. It may be techniques of labelling used more generally in society (by families and schools for example) that are instrumental in a persons identity long before they receive any 'official' sanction or label from a criminal justice representative or agency. Nor should we simply imagine that it only takes one event and a person is labelled for life. However, the question for this work regarding the labelling and representations of victim communities centres around issues of power, primarily of the media, as an official labelling force. Taking the lead then from labelling theorists who focus on the importance of the impact of labelling by the 'official' criminal justice system on the deviant, the exploration at the heart of this work seeks to

refract this notion to examine the influence and power of the 'official' media constructions and representations of victim communities in places where serious and high profile crimes have taken place; the official version or label of victim identity.

It is clear that the labelling perspective is not primarily concerned with crime as such, rather with any form that comes to be seen as deviant. It is in this way that labelling focuses more on what rules and labels tell us about society rather than the effects of criminalisation on the individual. From a group or community perspective it is the attachment of a negative label that can act to stigmatise particular communities and/or vulnerable sections of the population. It is questions such as why societies react the way they do, penalizing different acts in particular ways across times and cultures, which may be of some interest and importance to the study of victim communities.

There are of course many who have highlighted wide-ranging problems and perceived weaknesses of the labelling perspective. Not all of these discussions are relevant to this work. However in the first instance even under the terms of the labelling perspective itself, it is not always clear what gives certain people the capacity to reject the label they are given. While some seem to succumb to labels and easily move into deviant identities, others reject the labelling process even after repeated contexts where 'labelling' has taken place. There is quite clearly considerable variability in how people respond to the labelling process and it will be interesting to explore how this manifests itself in the context of victim communities and the circumstances of compliance with or rejection of the 'victim community' identity. As well as this issue of acceptance or rejection of the label, another

well versed criticism centres around the question of power. Although the labelling perspective raises the importance of power and competing interests in society, Taylor et al. (1973) argue labelling and interactionist enquiry more generally need an analysis of the wider social structure and power distributions within society as within the perspective, the explanation of how power is wielded is limited to the immediate institutional level. This thesis seeks to locate discussions of victimisation and those around labelling within the wider structural issues. The question of who has the power and position to identify and label is a key concern. Other issues pertaining to the negative effects of labelling on a potential victim community might be where those 'closest' to the event or tragedy may additionally feel stigma or a sense of spoiled identity by association to a crime event or locality.

#### *Community, stigma and spoiled identity*

The notion of stigmatization, as detailed in Goffman's (1963) classic study (to which all later studies of stigma refer), goes some way to explaining why some (perceived) deviants are subjected to marginalisation and social exclusion and are the recipients of hostile reporting and censure by the media. However, this body of literature may also be useful and relevant when refracted to examine the associated notion of 'victim communities', their media construction and subsequent representation. Thus far, writings concerning stigma and the concept of spoiled identity have primarily been considered in relation to an individual's deviance. This thesis suggests that this literature also has real resonance when examined on a level in relation to victimised groups of individuals or communities.

Stigma is described by Goffman as 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963: 9). Originally the term stigma was used as a reference to the visual signifiers of the moral status of the bearer; a cut or burn to the body often indicated a criminal, slave or traitor; a blemished person who should be avoided (1963: 11). However, over time the term stigma has more often been used in relation to the disgrace itself, rather than the bodily evidence of physical disorder and shifts have occurred and continue to occur in the kinds of disgrace that arouse concern (Goffman, 1963). In order to develop this literature to examine what relevance stigma may have on the examination of victim communities and their media representations, is it both necessary and helpful to examine the structural preconditions of stigma as indicated by Goffman (1963). Routines of social intercourse allow that for any social setting one has a preconceived idea, both of the type of person they would expect to encounter in that setting and in the range of attributes they naturally expect that person to possess. Goffman describes these expectations as unconscious 'demands' and it is these that constitute a person's 'virtual social identity' (1963: 12); that which we ordinarily expect them to be. However, this person has an 'actual social identity' (Ibid.) and if in reality he/she is in possession of a less desirable attribute than one expects, this person is then reduced in our minds and in this way becomes tainted or spoiled. Such an attribute is a stigma; constituting a special discrepancy that may exist between one's virtual and actual social identity. However, it is important to note that while stigma normally refers to a deeply discrediting attribute, its use is dependent on context, as an attribute that stigmatizes one may confirm the usualness of another (1963: 13).

Turning to the significance of stigma, Goffman notes 'we tend to impute a wider range of imperfections on the basis of the original one' (1963: 15). Therefore, it is argued that the stigma assumes more importance and becomes the defining attribute of a person. Thus, the label of stigma may be seen as the 'master status'. The interesting question with regard to media coverage of serious and high profile crimes and the construction and representation of victim communities, is how the process of stigmatization may be applied not just to communities as well as individuals but also to actual localities. Places where serious and high profile crime events have taken place may become stigmatized and 'place-laden'; the serious crime event that occurs in a place often becomes universally known by the name of the physical locality where it happened. The killing of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman became known as the 'Soham' murders and the fatal shooting of sixteen primary school children and their schoolteacher on 13 March 1996 is known as 'Dunblane'. Like 'Hungerford', 'Lockerbie' and 'Aberfan' before them, these physical places as well as those who live in these communities may be labelled, identified and stigmatized by the crime event that took place in their locality.

When referring to the stigma of individuals, Goffman notes that one who has been stigmatized will feel unsure of how the rest of 'normal' society will identify and receive him (sic) (1963: 24). With regard to the possible stigmatization of groups or more specifically victim communities, the awareness of inferiority, anxiety or insecurity of a collective spoiled identity, represented and disseminated via the media may be as a result of the knowledge that the community cannot reverse or fix that identity or stigma in the eyes of the rest of the world; 'thus in the stigmatized arises the sense



of not knowing what others [...] are 'really' thinking about him' (1963: 25). Context is again important when considering what Goffman terms the 'usual scheme of interpretation for [actions and] everyday events' (1963: 26). Within this any minor accomplishments by the stigmatized become remarkable and noteworthy because of their circumstance, thus further enhancing their difference and stigma. Conversely minor failings and indiscretions of one who is stigmatized may be interpreted as a direct expression of that difference. It may be valuable at this point to return to a discussion earlier in the chapter around victimology and identity and in particular the feminist preference for a language and rhetoric of 'survival' over and instead of that of 'victim'. In such a way, surviving may be usefully considered as an alternative to a 'spoiled' victim identity.

Another related concept that Goffman briefly discusses is the idea of an invasion of privacy with relation to those who are stigmatized. An example of this is where strangers feel able to strike up conversations (or communications, in a new media age) with a stigmatized individual in whom they express a curiosity, a prior experience or offer help or sympathy that may not be needed or wanted. Although Goffman is primarily referring to those with a physical difference, the same principle can be transferred to discussions of stigma and spoiled identity among groups and communities who have suffered a trauma; those associated with the event or the locality. As such, the implication is that advances at will from strangers towards the stigmatized are encouraged or normalised, providing they are sympathetic to the plight of that individual. It is in this context we may consider those from afar who seek to attach themselves to a tragic event or the websites of condolence that often spring up in the immediate wake of some serious and

high profile crime events; exploring the use of new technologies and their impact on the recent emergence of 'victim communities'.

One possible reaction to this situation by those who are stigmatized is what Goffman terms 'defensive cowering' (1963: 28). Here a feeling of inferiority as a direct result of the particular associated stigma encourages a physical or emotional retraction when in a mixed social situation. This response is well illustrated by the response of a forty-three year old man in an early study of the German unemployed:

'How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out I cast my eyes down because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can't be compared with an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger. I instinctively avoid meeting anyone'

(Zawadski and Lazarsfeld 1935, cited in Goffman 1963: 28).

With regard to responses to stigmatization, it will be interesting to ascertain how and if distinct communities of suffering and other levels of victim community do 'retreat' and turn in on themselves, seeking support from each other whilst 'defensively cowering' from the outside world and particularly against the media. In addition, if this is one response to such intensive scrutiny, it will be interesting to examine if this confirms or exacerbates the perceived parochial nature of the community in the eyes of outsiders or of wider society, i.e. does this process become a self-fulfilling prophecy for the 'community' in question? These questions are not addressed by the current literatures regarding stigma or those examining

issues of victimhood, identity or community. Another interesting area of examination, similarly unaddressed yet of importance to this work, is the notion of potential collusion on the part of the community itself. An examination of how the community see their own collective identity and how they respond to the mediated representations of themselves (and possibly their locality) will add a further dimension in this under researched area.

### *'Others', identity and stigma*

Goffman (1963: 31) also discusses the interesting issue of what he calls 'sympathetic others'; those ready to adopt and share the same standpoint in the world as the stigmatized individual or community. There are said to be two levels here; firstly those who share the stigma are a case in point. From their own position of having or experiencing this stigma they may provide instruction on how to get through certain obstacles and situations and offer moral support; 'a communality of behaviour' (1963: 32). There are also others, who Goffman calls the 'wise' (1963: 41) whose special situation has made them privy to the life of the stigmatized and they are almost given courtesy membership to the stigmatized group.

Another relevant issue for victim communities may be the notion of stigma by association. Goffman indicates that each time someone with the stigma makes a spectacle of themselves (either good or bad) these events can be covered by the mass media and communicated in wider society. This is an issue that will be considered at an empirical level within this study. A further associated concept here is what Goffman labels 'courtesy stigma'. Those who

are related in some way to the stigmatized situation are obliged by association, to share some of the discredit and the stigma although, 'the problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity' (1963: 43). This notion neatly translates and has direct resonance for the levels within victim communities. It may be reasonable to assume that the amount of stigma associated with each tragic event has far more intensity and attachment for those most closely involved. On one level this may be the family and very close friends of the victims involved; for the immediate level of victim community this is courtesy stigma. On an intermediate or meso level, those less close to the immediate victims and living in the neighbourhood or wider area may experience stigma by association, where they share some of the stigmatization or spoiled identity but the intensity of the discredit (or suffering) is less than for the immediate or micro level of community.

Goffman (1963: 43) notes that in general the tendency for a stigma to spread from the individual to their close connections provides an opportunity for those relations to be severed or avoided; thus a disassociation with the stigmatized. Whilst this may be true for some, for others this is certainly not the case. Within late modern society this attachment and association can be for many, vicarious and via the media. On a macro level, some of those in the wider communities seemingly unconnected with potentially stigmatizing events seem to actively seek out connections and relationships with those most directly involved and affected, albeit often from a distanced position (Giddens, 1990) via new media technology. With specific regard to victim communities, this may amount to a form of 'grief tourism', where individuals feel compelled and want to identify with and belong to a community or event

this is not really theirs. The associations are made but without the attached sense of stigma and spoiled identity. In this way these connections and associations with the stigma and those stigmatized may be seen to be actively sought out and desired rather than avoided or rejected. This point by Goffman (1963) regarding the disassociation with the stigmatized is also made very clearly by Paul Rock (2002). As has been detailed earlier in this chapter, in his work concerning victim identity Rock argues that the status of victim is one that is so stigmatized that it is naturally and understandably avoided. Yet this seems not to be the position in all cases. For many, including those that visit and leave their thoughts and emotions in both physical and virtual books of condolence for example, the direct association with the crime event and its identity and aftermath is precisely what *is* sought; to be involved in some way, to be or feel part of it, although presumably without the attached sense of stigma and spoiled identity.

Stigmatized individuals or communities also undergo learning experiences and changes in perception of 'self' related to their stigma; what Goffman entitles a 'moral career' (1963: 45). Goffman describes four patterns of moral career available to the stigmatized, two of which may have resonance for victim communities. The first pattern is one of protection. Although Goffman primarily describes this in relation to a stigmatized child, it does have currency outside this definition and for the study of victim communities. A family or close local community may form a protective capsule around the stigmatized where they manage the situation and conceptions of self by a sustained means of information control. Potentially damaging or hurtful information is kept away from the subject, while a positive image of self may be encouraged. The second relevant pattern of

socialization is illustrated by one who becomes stigmatized later on in life. Although this situation does not require a reflexive reorganisation of one's view of the past, it may present problems when individuals or communities are faced with having to re-identify themselves in light of the serious crime event that has occurred within their community. For those present in the community at the time, this re-identification may be almost immediate, for others (possibly children at the time or those who move into the locality after the event) 'the contagious moral blemish' (Goffman, 1963: 48) may come a little later, if it comes at all.

Whichever moral career is illustrated by the stigmatized, Goffman argues that it is likely the experience of this process will offer them new contact with others who possess the stigma also (1963: 50). In this way those who have been through similar trauma and suffering and importantly feel that they possess/have possessed a similar stigma, lend support and experience of how to practically and emotionally manage that status. In the later stages of a moral career this identification and affiliation to a stigmatized status may not be a smooth process; shifts and cycles of acceptance are likely to occur. Crucially it is this often fluid relationship of the stigmatized to the informal and formal communities of their 'own' that is most interesting in discussions on the moral career of the stigmatized. Goffman contends that when reviewing their own moral career the stigmatized individual retrospectively singles out particular experiences which both acted as a turning point and later as a means of accounting for their current position or beliefs (1963: 53). With respect to victim communities, the isolating experiences of mourning and grief is where these communities may learn about themselves, arrive at a new understanding of what has happened to

them; what it means for them in the future and ultimately how they will cope and move forward.

Within the study of stigma, social information refers to the individual characteristics of a person, rather than the moods or feelings at any particular time. This information is reflexive (conveyed by the person it is about) and embodied (conveyed through bodily expression in the presence of those who receive that expression). In analysing how people manage information they convey about themselves, we see the need to consider the issues of how one deals with being seen 'with' particular individuals, which may be used as a source of information concerning one's own social identity; the assumption being that you are what the others are. This has obvious resonance for those who find themselves part of a community where a high-profile crime has taken place, as members 'belong' to the community they may become associated themselves with the stigmatized event. Further, Goffman also discusses the concept of 'sheltering' in a group or community setting (1963: 69); where stigmatization may be tolerated and accepted by those who are close to it and may understand its associations. For example, communities living near a drug-treatment centre or a psychiatric hospital may be more understanding and have a higher tolerance of those that need to access those facilities. In spite of this it is important to point out that conversely familiarity may also breed contempt; a 'not in our backyard mentality'.

There is another interesting concept addressed by Goffman that has relevance to discussions around stigma and communities of victims. On examining issues of personal identity and biography, Goffman describes how

something like a serious personal accident or witnessing a serious crime event, turns that part of the unmemorable everyday life of an average person into a point that will be remembered and reviewed by themselves and by others. In contemporary life, the mass media of course play a central role in this turning of a 'private person' into a 'public figure'. On an individual and a community level, it may be true that the image available to those who do not know the situation personally is based on a selection of facts which may be true, which are then inflated and used as to compose the full picture of that person/community (Goffman, 1963: 90). There is of course much more that can be said on the concept of stigma and spoiled identity. However, the review above has illustrated that much of these writings and issues have great relevance to the examination of victim communities. Although Goffman's (1963) work in particular focuses on stigmatization as it pertains to the individual, on further exploration it seems there is much that could be said and questions that could be asked with regard to stigmatization on a group or community level.

As has already been discussed, victim identity is a contested status particularly in relation to secondary or 'hidden' victims. In their work focussing on the families of serious offenders, Howarth and Rock recognize how 'Aftermath' members are shaped by some very special features of the experience which they have undergone, specifically a 'radical, reductive and undignified transformation of identity' (2000: 68). For the families involved with Aftermath, their offending relatives have been turned into monsters and 'it is to (those) monsters that they are now tied' (ibid). It is interesting to examine to what extent this notion may have resonance for those involved on a victim community level. Drawing heavily on Howard Becker's (1963)



work concerning labelling and 'master status', this new identity may infer guilt and shame by association. As has been discussed previously, Becker (1963) notes that a label defines an individual as a particular kind of person; it is not neutral. A master status is a label that overrides all other statuses of the individual. Aftermath members for example acquire the 'master status' of 'rapist's mother' or 'murderer's son' (Howarth and Rock, 2000: 68). Continuing with Becker's concept, others see and respond to those concerned in terms of that label and tend to assume that they have the negative characteristics normally associated with such labels. In addition, Becker (1963) notes that since an individual's self concept is largely derived from the responses of others, they will tend to see themselves in terms of the master status label that has been applied to them. Cooley (1922) describes this concept as 'the looking glass self'; by this he means that we build our identity primarily as a result of how others act and respond towards us. Through examination of these issues we can begin to formulate how these 'victim communities' and those within them may come to be (or see themselves as) defined by the crime that was committed in their locality.

### **Summary**

It is clear that the study of the concept of 'victim communities' encompasses a wide range of diverse and often competing literatures. This chapter has identified and explored some of the key subject areas that may be able to help shape this notion of a 'victim community'. It has examined four areas of literature, which can be broadly conceived under the headings of victimology, community, labelling and stigma. This chapter has demonstrated there is much to be gained from locating an emerging analysis

of the notion of victim communities within these bodies of work regarding notions of victimhood, victim identity and the notion of community. This under researched area will benefit greatly from a reorientation towards a more interdisciplinary engagement with such varied theoretical perspectives. It is also clear that there are substantial gaps, both in our knowledge and understanding of victim communities and of victim identity more generally and in addition, how these issues would benefit from being located in discussions of wider social and structural issues. More specifically the notion of what it means to be a victim and the notion of community in a traditional sense needs to be refracted and reassessed in the late modern environment. This among other things will allow a more nuanced examination of the formation and importance of changing notions of victimhood, identity and community, including those not bounded by space or place.

This work does not imply that victim communities are necessarily a new phenomenon or that they do not, or did not exist before the late-modern age and the onset of mass media production in all its various present-day forms. This work suggests therefore that the label or identity attached to a 'victim community' can be both an internal and an external state; it can exist, physically or symbolically, with or without media (re)construction and representation. However as a key element of this work, we will examine how and why the media plays such a central and significant part in propelling certain crime events into the public sphere with sufficient vigour and emotional intensity to shape public fears of victimisation, often invoking the strongest public reaction locally, nationally and sometimes globally. It is clear then that for a more complete and comprehensive overview of the concepts and literatures pertaining to this area of study concerning victim

communities, there is a need for a more detailed examination of their place within the wider late-modern literature, in order to locate and un-pack some of the issues raised by this chapter. It is to this literature and to those discussions that the next chapter turns.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Rise of the Victim Community**

#### **Introduction**

In order to begin to explain and understand the socio-cultural conditions in which the phenomena of victim communities may arise, this chapter will examine the late modern cultural condition as it relates to three key areas of discussion; the politics of victimisation, the notion of community in late modernity and the impact of new media technology. Contemporary western society is often described and the human condition often characterised as being in a state of near constant anxiety and fear. As Furedi suggests, 'It is not hope but fear that excites and shapes the cultural imagination of the twenty-first century' (2002: vii). By way of partial explanation for this fear

and anxiety, some suggest that traditional bonds or connections are eroding around once social affiliations (Furedi, 2002) and a reduction in secured employment is leading to an increasingly mobile labour force dislocated from its local community (Young, 1999). Central to these social and economic transformations it is argued, is the anxiety that comes with the loss of a sense of 'belonging', in which case people may seek to establish new identities which, even if only on a temporary basis, make them feel they are a part of a 'wider community' in some sense. Therefore in order to explore how victim communities may occur, it is necessary to understand how the various elements of victim identity, community, late modernity and new media technology culminate and combine.

An area crucial to the understanding and exploration of 'victim communities' suggested in the previous chapter is the political context of the question of victim identity and status. The concept of the victim as innocent, passive and fearful is stereotypical and is not generally representative of the lived reality of victimisation. People may define themselves and be defined as survivors or something else entirely. In this way the authenticity of the term victim can be called into question. As has been established by the work of David Garland (2000, 2001) and many others (e.g. Christie, 1977; Shapland et al. 1985; Elias, 1993; Williams, 1999) it is clear there is much debate about the legitimacy of the victim and their participation and rights within the criminal justice system. The emotive power of the victim can be seen as politically instrumental, not only in the construction of the state as protector, fostering a cohesive unity in which government legitimacy and popularity are heightened, but also when giving consideration to the media's emotional force on popular opinion. An examination of these and related issues are

essential when addressing the concept of victim communities or 'communities of victims' in late modernity and it is to the discussions around the 'politicisation of the victim', which we now turn.

### **The Politicisation of the Victim**

In focusing on social control in late modernity, primarily in the United States and the United Kingdom, David Garland (1996; 2000; 2001) is concerned with what he sees as significant transformations with regard to crime policy and crime control that have taken place in recent decades, that have their roots in a seemingly new collective experience of crime and insecurity. In attempting to explain elements of contemporary social control, Garland (2001) cites a number of important indices of change, which he argues combine to produce the current late modern arrangement. This thesis suggests that an analysis of these theories is significant to the study of victim communities on a number of levels. It has resonance, not only for our understanding of the issues around community in late modernity, but also with regard to the social construction of 'victim' identity and an examination of the importance given to the figure of the crime victim, which according to Garland is at 'the centre of contemporary penal discourse' (2001: 144) (see also Downes and Morgan, 2002, for the move to political centre stage for all matters related to law and order). For Garland, late modern society is a place where the majority of the populace accept as customary high rates of crime, increased surveillance of society and ever more numbers of people imprisoned in state and privatised prisons (2001). Some of the discussions which follow from this proposition are fruitful in the exploration and study

of collective victimisation and more specifically, victim communities in late modernity.

Essentially and in brief, Garland's argument states that the contemporary field of crime control displays a predicament. For many people living in this age of late modernity, an increased fear of crime, the acknowledgement of high crime rates as normal social fact and the limits of the ability of the criminal justice system to control crime and deliver security, mean the threat of crime has become a routine part of late modern life (2001). According to Garland, the current field of criminal justice and crime control shows evidence of two distinct and contradictory responses to this dilemma. Both would seem to have resonance for this current study of victim communities. The first group of responses are described as 'adaptive strategies', stressing prevention and partnership, where political actors and officials recognise the predicament and attempt to adjust to it. The second distinct group of responses are described by Garland (2001) as the 'sovereign state approach', where enhanced control and expressive punishment are stressed, thereby encouraging faith in a punitive 'law and order' stance to crime control. Elsewhere Garland has referred to these schizophrenic criminological discourses as the criminology of 'self' and 'other'. The criminology of the 'self' characterises offenders as rational and normal, just like us and appeals to allay disproportionate fears and to promote preventative action. Whilst the criminology of the 'other' denotes the threatening stranger, an excluded outcast and functions to demonise the criminal, invoking popular fears and resentment and promoting support for state punishment (Garland, 1996). According to this position, the criminology of the 'other', invoked by the sovereign state strategy is one of 'essentialized difference' (Garland, 2001:

135), a criminology trading in stereotypes and anxieties often in the wake of sensational high-profile crimes, it is a 'politicised discourse of the collective unconsciousness' (Ibid.). It is this area of Garland's work together with the rise of a politically symbolic victim that has most resonance for the growth of victim communities.

Turning first to the relevance of adaptive strategies in this context, one example of such a response has been to redefine the measures of state success, by concentrating on the consequences (rather than the causes) of crime. This is most obvious in the emergent field of victim policy, where the aim of serving the victim has become part of the redefined mission of all criminal justice agencies. It is this issue of the 'return of the victim' that is most significant to this thesis regarding the notion of victim communities and for Garland is central to the current debate around crime control and criminal justice (2000). This concurs with the discussions in the previous chapter concerning victim identity and victimology, where it was noted that victims and victimisation are increasingly central within many areas of the academic criminological enterprise. Simultaneously within politics and marking a significant break with past practice within the rhetoric of penal debate, it is argued by Garland (2000, 2001) that the symbolic figure of the 'victim' has become central. The victim is in a sense a representative character speaking for us all, whose experience is taken to be common and collective, not individual and atypical. At the same time mediated images of real victims serve to personalise the problems of security and safety; the feeling that 'it could be you' has become a defining feature of contemporary culture. As a result as Garland (2001) suggests there is a new collective meaning of victimhood and a revised relationship between the sense of what



it is to be an individual victim, a symbolic (or collective) victim (as constructed and represented by the media) and the institutions of crime control and criminal justice.

The decline of the rehabilitative ideal within penal policy is another example of an 'adaptive strategy' as it pertains to this work. This is noteworthy in relation to setting the tone for contemporary crime control and policy; rehabilitation is no longer the ideology of the system but more importantly it has been replaced largely by incapacitation, retribution in punishment and the management of risk. These processes can be linked to the emergence of an 'actuarial regime' referring to the governance of populations through statistical analysis of risk (Feeley and Simon, 1992). Here the danger is conceptualised as a risk that individuals must manage rather than any pathological disposition of the social system; as such risk is socially constructed (Spalek, 2006). In addition, Garland suggests within that area of contemporary criminology which informs policy, control based theories have largely replaced those of welfare, which in themselves traditionally emphasised poorly adapted, under socialised individuals in need of measures enhancing social reform, education and job creation. Much of this contemporary criminological thought Garland argues, increasingly views crime as normal and as such a routine aspect of modern day society (2001: 15).

A further adaptive response which can be seen as relevant in the exploration of the phenomenon of victim communities is the relocation and redefinition of crime control responsibilities by the state, with the focus increasingly moving towards 'community' solutions. For Garland 'community', 'has

become the all-purpose solution to every criminal justice problem' (2001: 123). There are many levels to community involvement in this regard, but the predominant message is that the state alone can no longer be held responsible for controlling and preventing crime. The focus here is the pluralistic nature of social control; with the victim and community at its centre; the responsibility for crime control (that is the effects of crime rather than addressing it per se) lies with all of us as individuals, organisations and communities; the notion at the heart of the 'Big Society' thesis invoked more recently and repeatedly by David Cameron PM. However there is an obvious disparity between the rhetoric of national crime debates and the reality of what is happening locally on the ground. At the local level, new multi-partnership inspired infrastructures are often orientated towards crime prevention, security, harm/loss/fear reduction, which is quite different from the traditional national 'criminal justice' goals of prosecution and punishment. Partner and inter-agency working at local level enhances community involvement and encourages communities to take some responsibility and control; to in some way police themselves (Garland, 2001). Thus the issues of victimisation and community as pertinent to this work can be seen as instrumental and conflated in so much as the notion of what it means to be a victim and the ever contested concept of community are both at the centre of these suggested adaptive strategies.

The second line of policy responses by state authorities according to Garland's argument are described as 'denial and acting out', or the 'sovereign state strategies' (2000, 2001). These responses stress enhanced control and expressive punishment and may be deeply contradictory to the adaptive responses described above. Here the political agenda is to restore public

confidence in the criminal justice system and (disregarding all evidence to the contrary), encourage faith in the re-emergence of punitive sanctions, expressive justice and a 'law and order' stance. This retributive discourse (where punishment is openly embraced) focuses specifically on invoking victims, potential victims and an outraged public which may lead in turn to increased support for new laws and penal policies. An example of a denial strategy at work can be seen in Michael Howard's 1993 'Prison works' speech. This was in fact a political endorsement of the power to punish and a denial of its limitations, which has resulted in a sharp and sustained rise in prison numbers that is still identifiable to the present day.

The suggestion of 'sovereign state strategies' as described by Garland (2001) as relevant to this work regarding victim communities, can be illustrated by the ascendancy of public opinion over the expert practitioner with regard to crime policy (see also Tonry, 2004). The current theme of populism in penal politics, claiming the authority of the people and of 'common sense', seems to be an important point of convergence for all major political parties. There seems to be little political disagreement that penal measures should now be 'tough, smart and popular with the public' (Garland, 2001: 14). As a partial consequence, the pursuit of a 'law and order' approach has significantly contributed to a sustained increase in both imprisonment rates and length of sentences over recent decades, even whilst crime rates themselves were falling. Imprisonment seems to have obtained popularity with much of the public for its ability to incapacitate and therefore provide protection to individuals and communities and deliver retributive punishment to its inhabitants. Further to this, there is an identifiable and associated increase in the emotional tone and temperature of contemporary crime policy. Here

'fear of crime' is a cultural theme in itself, confirmed by public opinion that crime rates are increasing and that the criminal justice agencies can do little about it (Roberts and Hough, 2005). The new discourse of crime policy invokes an angry public, demanding strong measures of punishment and protection, principally of themselves as potential victims (Feeley and Simon, 1992; Laster and O'Malley, 1996). This notion of us all as potential victims is a significant area of interest to the notion of victim communities that will be further explored as the thesis develops.

Other policy measures may also be described as 'acting out'. These are designed to be expressive, cathartic actions, where the very fact of acting brings a certain amount of release and gratification. Laws relating to paedophile registers, mandatory sentences and 'three strikes' were used in the United States to denounce crime and reassure the public, although their capacity to control future crime is questionable. Such laws are often passed in the midst of public outrage following sensational and uncommon crimes, often against innocent 'ideal' victims. The 'ideal victim' is a mechanism through which these more punitive responses to crime and disorder are implemented; what Ashworth calls 'victims in the service of severity' (2000: 186). An example of this can be seen in the case of Megan Kanka, a seven year old from New Jersey who was murdered in 1994 by a neighbour who was a twice-convicted sex offender. Following vociferous campaigning instigated by the Kanka family, legislation was passed by Congress in 1996 requiring states to release the relevant information to protect the public from sex offenders. Similar high profile cases followed and a proposed version of 'Megan's Law' was attempted in Britain in 2001 under the name 'Sarah's Law', following the murder of Sarah Payne in 2000 by Roy Whiting (a

convicted sex offender). These examples illustrate the new power and status of the crime victim as 'sanctified', where the individual victim is invoked to such an extent by media commentators and politicians that laws or proposed laws are able to be named after them. In this way the use of an 'ideal victim' (Christie, 1986) allows the exceptional to be treated as the normal, intense media interest may encourage or fuel concern, politicians must be seen to respond, which further amplifies the media interest and those in power then respond uncritically to public and media demands. These forms of 'acting out' attempt to demonstrate that the state is in control and is acting decisively; that something is being done. However, this more expressive form of crime control does seem to involve a manipulation of collective emotions. The media may also play an important part here with regard to the nature of the coverage of particular crimes and issues that seem to act as catalysts for many of these policies. Whether for political gain or to give an expression to public feeling, the media coverage of such events and policies, favours reassuring a worried, collective (victim orientated) public, whilst downplaying the complexities and the long term nature of effective crime control.

It is clear then, that Garland's work in this area has implications for the exploration of victim communities, particularly with regard to the political manipulation of the notions of victim and community and the formation of organisations to enable preventative action on the part of those communities (Garland, 2000) and of victim status and identity, resulting in the emergence of more expressive modes of protection and punishment. This would seem to suggest that as with many of the adaptive responses, a feature of the sovereign state strategy (of denial and acting out) is that it purports to give a

special place to victims, although in truth that place is occupied by a politicised, socially constructed image of the victim rather than victims themselves. As has been noted above, the feelings of victims are now routinely invoked by politicians and officials as a source of legitimacy and support when introducing new punitive measures. The 'once forgotten actor' (Zedner, 2002) victims are now often centre stage, both politically and in the media. The suffering victim has become a valued commodity, illustrated by members of the public who are often placed alongside politicians announcing new mandatory sentencing laws or at party conferences where they are seen to be given a voice, albeit a carefully stage managed 'on message' one. However, this new political imperative; where victims must be protected, their voices heard, their anger expressed and memories honoured also contains a large element of exploitation (Garland, 2001). Interestingly, Garland identifies this form of 'sanctification' of victims, as one which itself tends towards a 'zero sum' relationship with offenders (2001: 143). In other words, to show any compassion for offenders or their rights, or of their ability to reform, can easily be interpreted as an insult to the victims and their families. So, the symbolic figure of the crime victim has taken on a key role of its own: they are representative of us all, their experiences are personalised and assumed to be collective and typical. Additionally and by way of the media, this symbolic figure of the victim is presented to the audience highlighting their own fears and angers, which may enable feelings of identification and reinforcement on their part, which may then be turned to political or commercial use (2001). Garland goes as far to say that 'the centre of contemporary penal discourse is (a political projection of) the individual victim and his or her feelings' (2001: 144).

It is clear from the above discussions that one of the central aspects of the debate around contemporary crime and social control is the (symbolic) 'victim'. Of equal resonance to this thesis is the important role played by the media in late modern society. Garland suggests there is something particular to our contemporary culture that encourages a collective and emotive expression of feelings, often outrage and anger manifesting political discussion of crime in the same direction (2001: 145). It is argued that these sentiments and feelings should not be dismissed merely as primitive or punitive instincts. These responses and attitudes are grounded in our social organization and as such are conditioned and articulated by the cultural and political practices of contemporary society. This work suggests that this is one area where the influence of the mass media is of crucial importance. However, it should also be recognised that the notion that public support for increased punitive measures is a shallow and solely media generated phenomenon is misleading. There is a broad intellectual consensus across the literature that the media, including factual and fictional programming, is an important definer of public knowledge, particularly relating to crime and that this may lead to many myths and misrepresentations around the subject area. However as Garland (2000) has suggested, it would be naïve to infer from this that audiences of both the media and politics are able to be spoon fed views which they accept without question. Public support for policies, much like consistently high audiences for crime stories on television and in the newspapers, may only be possible with certain social, psychological and cultural conditions already in place. It is here that Garland's work regarding social control in late modernity as discussed is essential to the understanding of the rise of victim communities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an alternate perspective see Wacquant (2009) who asserts a critique of Garland's thesis suggesting

A vibrant force in social change and in attitudes towards crime control is the impact of television, specifically its emotional force regarding popular perceptions of crime (Garland, 2001). Whether we are referring to factual or fictional television, its affinity to crime as a theme has transformed perceptions of crime, of what it is to be a victim (a continuing central theme for crime discourse in the media) and the sense of distance from crime traditionally enjoyed by many. The huge increase in the prominence and popularity of television crime shows over the last forty years may have had some part to play in the suggested normality of high crime rates in contemporary society (Garland, 2001). The plethora of media representations must give some shape to and have an impact on our experience of crime, although this is also affected and guided by the values and structures of the media itself. Further, the media's selective coverage of certain types of crimes, often committed by a certain 'type' of offender against a particular 'type' of victim, tends to distort public perception of the crime problem itself. This privileging of 'victim discourse' over 'system discourse' in the media encourages the public to respond to crime as an 'emotional human drama' (Garland, 2000: 363) and promotes the view of criminals as more abundant, menacing and dangerous than they typically are.

The empirical research conducted for this thesis is directed specifically towards an analysis of newspaper rather than televisual representations. The theoretical and methodological reasons for this are detailed in the following chapter, however it is important to recognise the pervasiveness of a whole range of media (from new media technologies to more traditional forms such



as television and radio). These may be collectively read, watched or listened to delivering a powerful united force on the public's consciousness on many issues including crime, punishment and criminal justice. As has been indicated previously, this thesis does not argue that the media have directly created or are solely responsible for our interest in crime; the media have not produced contemporary political popular punitiveness. Rather, the media may have connected with sensationalised and reinforced our collective experience of crime. Garland's point on this seems to be that this public experience is a new one and in addition, one that has become institutionalized (2001: 158). The media representations of crime and punishment increase the relevance of crime in everyday life. Much public knowledge and opinion about crime and criminal justice is based on such mediated, collective representations; leading to a culturally given experience of crime, rather than accurate information based on the real thing itself (Roberts and Hough, 2005). Of interest in this regard are societies' responses and adaptations to their changing social and cultural environments regards crime. According to Garland (2001) a large part of the response for many people who relied on the state, were demands to the state for better provision, security and increased effectiveness on the part of the criminal justice agencies. However, Garland also notes that those less dependent on the state, the middle classes for example, were in a position to develop private responses of their own. One major development in this area was the rise of the 'victims' movement'. Starting life as a variety of local self-start initiatives, this grass roots movement was soon discovered by the media and by politics. The issues of victims and victims' rights became highly politically significant and eventually the victim movement became a government subsidised association.

The cumulative consequence of these cultural effects and responses may change how people think and feel; may affect their priorities and values. According to Garland (2001) a 'collectively raised consciousness of crime', or fear of crime has become institutionalized and written into the routines of everyday life. This it is argued is integral to both the text of our news programmes and the narratives of our factual and fictional television entertainment pertaining to crime (Sparks, 1992). Garland's important point here for this thesis is that once established this view of the world is hard to change. It is not affected by yearly changes in recorded crime or any 'real' reduction in rates of criminal victimisation. Our attitudes become quickly settled social facts, impervious to criminological research or official data (Roberts and Hough, 2005). For Garland, the culmination of the above, 'the development of the crime complex of late-modernity', leads people to become conscious of, and emotionally invested in crime: the new salience of crime in our everyday lives. Daily social practices necessitate us to identify ourselves as potential victims and to think, feel and act as such. This 'victim centric' posture may encourage for many, a greater condemnation of the offender, with little compassion or understanding and a reduction according to Garland, in the moral willingness needed for reintegration. The feeling is increasingly 'something must be done' and 'someone should be blamed' and it is this sentiment that fuels political action (2001: 164).

It is clear that the elements of change and the distinct response strategies discussed above do have resonance for the study of victim communities, particularly in relation to the increasingly central position of the (invoked) victim in criminal justice, the increase in importance of public opinion and

populism for crime policy and significantly the invocation and involvement of local 'communities', orientated towards (self) security and public protection. On this note as Zygmunt Bauman observes, increasingly a 'safe existence' in late modern society can no longer be relied upon to be supplied by the state:

'Safety ... in a relentlessly individualised and privatised world must be a "do-it-yourself" job. "Defence of the place", seen as the necessary condition of all safety, must be a neighbourhood matter, a "communal affair".

(Bauman, 2001: 112).

### **Late Modern Culture and the Risk Society**

In this chapter exploring the rise of victim communities we have thus far considered the issue of the politicisation of the victim and in doing so have begun to address some of the wider social theory as it pertains to victim identity in the late modern condition. As an exploration of this work has suggested, it may be shifts in social practice and specific cultural sensibilities within the late modern order in particular that have enabled these contingent changes to take place. The focus on victims' issues within criminal justice agencies and structures and the status of victim identity more generally reflects wider social change. Society has, in post war years it is argued become more open and vulnerable (Giddens 1990). Society and everyday life have changed in ways that increase crime opportunities,

weaken traditional social controls and relax some of the ties that bind individuals to communities as we think of them in the traditional sense. Whilst recognising the significance of these broader cultural shifts, this thesis seeks to consider alongside them the notions of what a collective victim identity or community identity means in late modernity, more specifically how community or social relations are understood from the late modern perspective. To address more directly the notion of what community means in late modernity, an examination of the broader late (or post) modern literature is essential. Preceding any detailed analysis of the literature relevant to the notion of victim and community identity, we may first consider the broader concepts and foundations of such social and cultural theory.

Describing contemporary western society as being in a state of 'post' modernity is a contested notion. Frequently postmodernism is presented as a decisive break with what went before (Jewkes, 2004). Yet many eminent thinkers in the area (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000) seem to prefer the image of an extension of modernity or at least a more diffuse and shapeless condition. As Giddens (1991) describes, not a 'post-modern era' but a radicalised modernity produced by the extension of the same social forces that shaped the previous age. This concept of radicalised modernity can be identified as similar to Bauman's (2000) notion of 'liquid modernity'. Liquid modernity is Bauman's term for the present condition of the world as contrasted with the 'solid' modernity that preceded it. In a similar fashion, others have described late modernity as an open and permeable 'fluid' society of strangers (Garland, 2000). Part of this contemporary experience of late modernity as Giddens (1991) argues, is the influence of distant events on

the more proximate as routine practice, which would seem to have direct significance for the exploration of victim communities in this context. One of the key socio-cultural conditions which may have an impact on the rise of victim communities in late modernity is the conceptual and technological concept of 'nearness at a distance'. The victim communities of late modernity (certainly those which can be described as symbolic in nature) may be constructed and represented by those involved in the serious crime or locality, or conversely by those who have never met or who were hitherto unconnected, without ever meeting or having visited the locality where the serious crime event took place. For Giddens (1991) this is the defining property of late modernity; that we are disembedded from time and space. In pre-modern societies, space was the area in which one moved and time was the experience one had while moving. In late modern societies however social space is no longer confined by the boundaries set by the space in which one moves. One can now imagine what other spaces look like, without ever having been there. It is this commentary by Giddens (1991) on virtual space and virtual time where these discussions become particularly pertinent to victim communities and how they may be understood in the late modern age.

In addition and importantly for this work, Giddens (1990) also suggests that it is the media who are frequently conceptualized as playing a central role in the articulation of the 'shapeless' condition of late modern society and the associated risk, particularly because of their seeming obsession with among other things, crime. The mass media are also central for Giddens (1991) in what is referred to as 'modern reflexivity'. As one of our main providers of information, the media it is argued, do not merely reflect the social world but are a contributor to its shape, or more accurately as Jewkes notes, 'a

prism, subtly bending and distorting the view of the world it projects' (2004: 37). Giddens (1991) argues that it is this mediated experience that influences both self-identity and the basic organization of social relations and as such this is a key area of exploration in understanding the socio-cultural conditions in which victim communities may arise.

### *Theorising late modern community*

To further explore and understand the rise of the victim community, the themes of how community identity is constructed, symbolised and negotiated in late modernity require examination. As such this chapter moves to further explore how the notion of social relations are conceived and represented from the late modern perspective. For some theorists on a wider theoretical level, the late-modern world is best described in relation to the concept of fear. This is what Ulrich Beck (1992) has referred to as the risk society; where we are surrounded by an increasing number of man-made and natural risks that threaten our safety and which we only partially appreciate. Giddens (1990) portrays this as the notion of ontological insecurity which is depicted as a new element of precariousness and uncertainty that is built into the fabric of everyday life. More recently this broader circumstance of risk and insecurity has been expressed as reflexive modernity (Beck et al, 1994); where reflexivity refers to the capacity people have to reflect on their social conditions and so have the ability to transform them (Green, 2007). However, others argue that in addition it is this very process of ongoing reflection and transformation that for some leads to increasing anxiety and uncertainty (Bauman, 2001). In this way the notion of attachment to community or an identity, for some can be seen as fragile and tenuous. Moreover, the awareness of such a state; the reflexivity of the situation may

increase the original feelings and operate as a kind of 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.

This concept of reflexivity (Giddens, 1991; Beck et al., 1994) then seems to denote the ever-increasing power of social actors or agency to reflect on the rules and resources in regard to structure from which it is set free. For Giddens (1991) reflexivity in modernity involves a shift in trust relations, where trust is no longer a matter of face-to-face involvement but instead a matter of trust in expert systems. For Scott Lash (1994) the concept of 'reflexive modernity' as detailed by his colleagues (Beck et al., 1994) is a theory of agency, cognition and individualism. However, Lash goes on to suggest that this theory is better reconstructed and is also helpful when it is read counter to its stated purpose; in the context of its unspoken assumptions, or as Lash denotes, in terms of its 'doubles' of structure, aesthetic and community (1994: 119). There are parts of Lash's analysis that may have relevance to the notion of how social relations (or community) are understood from the late-modern perspective. Lash seems to agree with the idea that in late modernity, traditional social structures are retreating with regard to their importance but at the same time contends that they are being displaced by an 'articulated web of global and local networks of *information and communication structures*' (1994: 120, emphasis in original). For Lash life chances in reflexive modernity are questions of access, not to production structures but instead of access to and a place in the new information and communication structure. This is an area which will be further explored later in this chapter.

Another central element of reflexive modernity as detailed by Beck and Giddens (Beck et al., 1994) is that of 'individualisation'. However, in his 'counter' reading Lash argues the attention should be on the 'shifting ontological foundations of this recurrent phenomenon of community in late-modernity' (1994: 111). According to Lash (1994) the basic elements for a collective to be a community in late modernity, must be rooted in shared meanings and routine background practices. Communities are not, it is argued a collective of those with shared interests. In Lash's analysis those with common interest, political parties and social classes for example, are not communities; sections of society may have these or other connections and strong communal sentiment but according to Lash are not communities. In a similar vein, neither are communities about shared properties. Groups of individuals can share sets of properties or characteristics but yet according to Lash (1994) remain completely atomized in regard to one another. With direct regard to this thesis's exploration of the notion of victim communities in late modernity, Lash (1994) also states that even those individuals or collectives sharing a perception against a perceived menace do not have enough shared meanings and practices to *be* a 'community'. Here Lash recalls the concept of an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) and suggests that groups of people who read the same newspapers or watch the same soap opera share *only* an imagined community without the collective meanings, practices and obligations of a 'real' community. This is an interesting theoretical area for this work regarding the notion of victim communities in the late modern age. Lash's inference of what defines a 'real' community raises questions around the concept of validity, issues that are as significant here as they were in the discussion held in the previous chapter regarding the status of the victim and the rights of some above others to 'claim' or



accept the identity of victim. An exploration and examination of such issues seems just as pertinent here in the context of a collective or a community identity.

As suggested, one of the key areas of literature for this thesis is the notion of reflexivity and agency on the part of social actors. Lash (1994) argues that modern communities are reflexive because one throws oneself into them, rather than being born or 'thrown' by others and they also may be widely stretched over time (Anderson, 1983) and over 'abstract' space; 'real' modern communities which are also reflexive, share practices, meanings and obligations. For Lash (1994) then, late modern community is a matter of shared meanings and not just shared interests; it is more likely to be chosen and is therefore more reflexive. When considering imagined communities, or 'neo-tribes' (Bauman and May, 2001), Lash conceives of them as associations of fragmented individuals and not tribes or communities in any sense, thus suggesting a deficit in any sort of convincing notion of community as described by others. Bauman in turn criticises Lash's position on this and goes on to explain in more detail the concept of neo-tribalism as way of establishing belonging and identity through the emergent understanding of the 'local' in relation to the 'global' (Bauman and May, 2001). Bauman claims that the collapse of meta-narratives and constant fluidity of local and national identities caused by flows of migration, has led to a certain amount of disorientation and insecurity in late modernity. Traditional, locally-based communities (with strict regulations of inclusion and exclusion) it is argued, are not as important as they once were. Neo-tribes have emerged to meet the need for distinctive belonging based on ethnic, political or other affiliations, but are also based on desire and fear. The crucial difference is that neo-

tribalism is based on individual acts of self-identification and choice, often resulting in 'concepts' and reflecting identities of fashion, leisure, life-style, or ethnic-religious origin within diasporas or global networks. Bauman's terminology suggests that far from creating greater tolerance and diversity, the processes of post-modern globalisation create situations of polarity and segregation (Bauman and May, 2001).

Much of the debate about community in the postmodern era is regarded as abstract in nature. However, the central idea of postmodern community for some key thinkers in this area (Blanchot, 1988; Nancy, 1991) is that community is something experienced as loss and therefore as an absence in people's lives which is desired but never fulfilled. Similarly, for Bauman community stands for the kind of world which we would love to inhabit but is not available to us; a paradise lost (Bauman, 2001). For Bauman the notion of community is closely tied to the concept of security. From this position he argues that the late modern idea of community, although much sought after, remains elusive. Bauman argues that to miss community, means missing security and 'gaining community, if it happens would soon mean missing freedom'. (2001: 4). Insecurity as argued by Bauman (2001) affects us all, absorbed as we are in our 'fluid' and unpredictable world of uncertainty and flexibility. Such fragmented lives require individuals to be adaptable; to be constantly ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability. For Bauman (2001) the notion of community in contemporary society seems to promise an answer to the acute problem of (in)security but in reality it only delivers illusion and nostalgia. As noted by Delanty (2003), against community and its false

promises of security, Bauman instead argues for an ethics of post modernity, built on individual autonomy, where exclusion of the other is not the price to be paid for self identity. It could be argued then that people are and remain increasingly fearful and anxious in late modernity. This may be because one's expectations are not achievable or because society is more aware of the vast array of potential dangers that might cause harm. Some would identify fear and anxiety regarding one's safety in relation to a wide host of potential threats but much of this fear is directed at individual perpetrators, and not at the wider social and economic structures of late-modern society; it is easier to believe that a dangerous and different 'other' is responsible for our increasing fear and insecurity. For commentators such as Bauman, this fear of crime (our safety) is a deflection of the wider insecurity brought about by the socio-cultural conditions of late modernity (2006). The shift towards an increased personal responsibility for our safety is a consequence of wider social, political and economic conditions, where the conditions of late-modernity encourage fear to shape how we interact with the world around us.

### *Situating community in late modernity*

Much of the discussions above have on a broad level, examined the shifts in social practice and some of the wider social changes traditionally associated with the age of late modernity. In attempting to understand the socio-cultural conditions that have given rise to the notion of victim communities, this chapter has thus far considered the politicisation of the (symbolic) victim, and has reviewed the relevant wider post modern literature as it pertains our understanding of the nature of community in late modernity. It

is clear that the notion of community, as with much of prior discussions around notions of what it means to be a victim and the claims to victim identity more generally, in the late modern context are contested notions. What now needs to be considered is the specific impact that these broader social and cultural changes may have had on the notion and rise of the victim community and how they are constructed and represented in the late modern age.

As has been suggested in some of the discussions above, the increasing individualism of late modern society is accompanied by reminiscence for some and a sense of longing for the idea of community, often as a source of belonging and safety in an increasingly insecure world (Bauman, 2001). From the notions of a spatially bounded locality such as traditional villages and tribes, through to virtual communities which take social relations beyond the traditional categories of place (Delanty, 2003); community is a contested notion and is evident in a variety of forms. The idea of community as it pertains to this work should be understood as a variable mode of belonging that is both communicative and symbolic, rather than a static and actual institutional arrangement and in addition, a social notion that is able to be sustained in traditional, modern and post-modern times. Clearly community cannot be defined exclusively in terms of tradition. Thus there are different types of community, and as König (1968) suggests the difference between modernity and tradition is not the 'passing of community, but the coming into being of a new type of community' (cited in Delanty, 2003: 40), where 'communities' are conceived less as groups to which people 'belong' and more as points of reference to be used in particular settings and situations.

*Symbolic community, communitas and liminality*

This concept of community, with regard to victim communities in late modernity, makes reference to the broader notion of the symbolic community (Turner, 1969; Cohen, 1985). This is an area that will be examined in more detail as this chapter proceeds, with particular regard to virtual victim communities and new media technology in the late modern age, however there are ideas that require some introduction here. According to Victor Turner (1969), community is best understood as 'communitas'; a particular kind of social relationship distinct from everyday, mundane experiences of social relations that is *not* able to be defined by elements of community in the sense of a fixed and spatially orientated grouping. For Turner, community is symbolic in the sense that it creates powerful links between members of a social group or society; a theory which stresses the binding nature of communitas (1969). This is a useful concept when considering the collective victim identity of a community where a high profile and serious crime has taken place. Linked closely with communitas is the concept of liminality; those 'between' moments of time such as carnivals, rituals or pilgrimages in which normality is suspended. As an expression of communitas, Turner argues that liminal states are marginal and transitory, they are 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial' (1969: 95). Thus liminality, when things are in a state of change or flux, is often connected with those moments of 'symbolic renewal when a society or group asserts its collective identity' (Delanty, 2003: 44). In the present context, this element of Turner's work is interesting in that liminality is examined not only in symbolic terms but also as an expression of communitas. These discussions are particularly pertinent to the notion of (symbolic) victim

communities and grief, and as such will be considered in detail further in this chapter.

Based on Turner's (1969) work emphasizing the binding nature of *communitas*, Anthony Cohen (1985) suggests a slightly different account of community based on the symbolic construction of boundaries, defining community in terms of certain kinds of awareness groups have of themselves in relation to other groups. According to Cohen (1985) it is the symbolisation of boundaries that enables a community to differentiate itself from others; maintaining the existing order by boundary construction. In addition Cohen argues that community is a symbolically constructed reality which accordingly allows different interpretations as to the meaning of *communitas* (Delanty, 2003). Interestingly for the study of victim communities, Cohen argues that 'people can participate within the "same" ritual yet find quite different meanings for it' (1985: 55). This is significant for this thesis as it shows community as a form of consciousness. As such community can be seen as fluid and open to change from without and within, and not a rigid, static moral structure, as community can be conceived of as a resource from which people can draw. This particular theory of community as suggested in various forms by Turner (1969) and Cohen (1985) is obviously contingent and useful for the exploration of victim communities, particularly when considering the question of social relations in late modernity and the different manifestations of the term 'community'.

However, as illustrated by Delanty (2003) the notion of community as symbolically constructed does contain frailties particularly in relation to the notion of victim communities. In the first instance Delanty (2003) identifies

the connection between community, power and violence which is often underestimated in the literature and also that violence itself is often in some way the marker of the boundaries of a community, 'defining the separation of self and other' (2003: 48). Intriguingly and in direct relation to some of the virtual expressions of sympathy that have appeared following a serious and highly mediatized crime, some of the most powerful expressions of community are often encountered specifically 'where there has been a major injustice inflicted on a group..., who consequently develop a sense of their common fate' (2003: 48). The second relevant weakness with the theory of symbolic community is that it overemphasises the exclusive nature of community. Many examples of community, particularly in late modern society explicitly virtual and cyber communities, suggest social movements that are able to cut across boundaries rather than merely confirming and reinforcing them. As Turner notes the collective 'bonding' experience of 'communitas' is itself characterised by equality as the breakdown of ordinary social codes, classifications and practices inherent in liminal phenomena, offers the possibility of homogeneity and comradeship (Turner, 1969). One important dimension of community then, is that it is often expressed in symbolic forms rather than being exclusively a fixed institutional arrangement; a form of social interaction that is concerned with meaning and identity rather than simply locality. In such ways it is clear that community cannot be defined in terms of tradition alone, as it clearly also exists in late modernity.

What links much of the discussion above is the suggestion that contemporary communities are groupings that are increasingly willfully constructed, they are as Delanty describes, 'products of "practices" rather

than of “structures” (2003: 130); more accurately they are created rather than reproduced. ‘Post modern community is neither traditional nor modern; it is sustained by its own reflexivity, creativity and awareness of its limits’ (Delanty, 2003: 141). Late modern notions of community emphasize the fluidity of attachments between the self and other, encouraging a view of community as open and not closed. Late modern community is then a new kind of grouping, which while rejecting both tradition and society, can be understood as beyond unity and identity. Whilst much of this discussion regarding community in late modernity is obscure and abstract, one important and highly relevant insight for this thesis is that what may be characteristic of contemporary small groups, which can be seen as embodying community in late modernity, is their temporality and liminal nature. For some, the locality of these ‘in-between’ spaces and situations can be seen as constituting a certain kind of socialisation based on temporary groupings. This area of theoretical discussion can be seen to have direct relevance to this work addressing the exploration of the various levels of ‘on the ground’ victim communities and also in relation to the virtual communities and blogs that appear on-line in the aftermath of many serious and high profile crimes.

### **Community and New Media Technology**

Having considered the impact and context of the broader socio-cultural conditions of late modernity as they relate to the notion of victim communities, this section of the chapter turns now to the issue of technology within late modernity and the opportunities that new media



technologies more specifically afford the concept and practice of community and present day social relations. One aspect of contemporary kinds of socialisation is that they occur in a mediated form, as opposed to being a direct form of social interaction; they are facilitated by new technologies of communication. It is here that discussions concerning the structural conditions of late modernity are relevant to this current exploration of victim communities, in particular the area of social change regarding the growth and impact of new media technologies.

The 'mass' media first established itself in the 1920s and 1930s through broadcast radio, but it was the television revolution of the 1950s in both the United Kingdom and America, that transformed the media's impact not only on popular tastes, but also affected more generally 'social relations and cultural sensibilities' (Garland, 2001: 85). The materialization of a single, accessible information system had some key consequences. National identities and relations became available to those who previously may have been shaped by more local structures of social class and ethnic group. Experiences of exclusion, deprivation and disadvantage may have become more readily apparent and were possibly made less acceptable by the mass media. Simultaneously, previously localised issues and problems of risk to a particular victim group for example, were able to be represented and increasingly came to be perceived as problems for everyone. Television in particular also had an affect on other cultural aspects of life. News broadcast on television had the capability for the first time, to bring a sense of immediacy and intimacy to the viewer, leading to a new emphasis on the emotive and the personal. Increasingly, issues and personalities were subjected to unrehearsed media encounters while authorities and

institutions were also subject to more 'back stage' reporting and closer scrutiny. There are of course arguments for more positive elements to such developments; these changes in the media function and the closer attention to what 'happens behind the scenes' has helped the media in many regards to develop a somewhat greater level of transparency and accountability, for those in authority and for many of our social institutions (Garland, 2001).

Concurrently, we return to the examination of the frequently discussed consequence of social and cultural change that has taken place over the last few decades, as Garland describes 'the emergence of a more pronounced and widespread moral individualism' (2001: 88). As this work has explored, during this time (although most profound, it is argued, through the 1980s) the grip of the traditional family and community structures became for many, less persuasive. As a result, the balance of power can be seen to have shifted between the group and the individual. As the traditional notion of 'community' retreated and seemed to lose its social grip on the individual, new communities of choice emerged, bringing people together in new and different ways. Technology and the growth of electronic media had its part to play here. If it is the case that the influences of traditional forms of community have declined for the individual in recent times, new forms and ideas about community have established themselves in people's daily lives. The growth in content and scope of the internet has facilitated new and different types of community to form. Moreover, information and communication technologies have created powerful new expressions of community that outreach notions of how community has traditionally been considered. However, there is an argument that the forms of community and belonging that new media technologies allow and encourage, may not be able

to exert the same degree of control as their predecessors; they are not local, face-to-face, nor necessarily grounded in a shared sense of place or kinship: the traditional elements of what a 'community' means for many. Instead people may relate to these groups in a fragmented fashion, clocking in and out of them as they please, rather than traditionally obtaining and basing ones whole identity as belonging to a particular (normally physically located) group. Equally and importantly these 'communities of choice' may operate as sites of exclusion as well as inclusion. Although for some commentators distance and advances in technology mean that the boundary between insider and outsider can no longer be drawn or sustained with certainty. In this way, community if ever achieved will necessarily be fragile and vulnerable (Bauman, 2001).

### *Theorizing Virtual Communities*

As has been suggested above, discussions around the notion of modern day community cannot be contemplated without some thought of the role played by technology in reshaping social relations (Delanty, 2003). Communities mediated by technology, or 'virtual communities' are enabling new kinds of social groups, offering opportunities for many to establish various expressions of membership, identity and belonging (although it should be noted that they can also take on more traditional forms). Technology for many of us is part of everyday life. Mobile phones, electronic communications and the Internet are among the most social forms of technology, eradicating as they have the problem of distance for interactive communication. However, the area for consideration for this thesis is how, and to what extent recent information and communication technologies have

(re)shaped contemporary notions of community. One important point in this regard, noted by Delanty (2003) is the inadequacy of the dichotomy of the descriptions of 'real' and 'imagined' community. Information and communication technologies are a development of the print cultures that Anderson (1983) discussed whereby communities had to develop the cognitive capacity to imagine themselves, as the kinds of community formed by modernity could not be sustained by traditional face-to-face processes alone. The virtual community may be more usefully thought of as a late modern community; one beyond unity where the ties that bind may be seen in contrast to organic communities of tradition. The internet enables people, most frequently strangers, to come together in a social way that is often based on anonymity. The virtual community can also be usefully thought of as the 'sharing of information in a communicative context outside of which it does not always exist' (Delanty, 2003: 171). However, the internet can also be seen as sustaining and supporting more traditional personal and community relations. Late modernity has introduced distance in many peoples' everyday lives which often makes it difficult for traditional face-to-face community to be a reality; the separation of home and work, friends and family scattered and extended, in this way people may increasingly rely on other forms of communication to sustain their realities. Although the arguments and literature around virtual communities is largely underdeveloped and often vague (Delanty 2003), there are some key positions advocated that need to be critically discussed to provide a basis for the evaluation and impact of information and communication technologies and their resonance for the exploration and examination of victim communities.

Howard Rheingold produced the first major and seminal study of the virtual community in 1993. Rheingold viewed the Internet as an 'alternative reality' with the capacity to transform society and in particular the notion of belonging. The internet was viewed in an affirmative way by Rheingold (1993), a place to which people could escape the 'real' realities of their lives. Although, rather than complementing existing relationships, it offered a new and completely different level of interaction for those involved. Rheingold's argument was distinctive in that his assumptions suggested that the internet delivers communities that otherwise do not exist in every day life. A second key theorist in this area suggests a slightly different theory, where virtual communities are seen as real, as well as being located in reality. For Manuel Castells (1996; 2001) the relationship between the real and the virtual is less oppositional and more reflexive and complex, where virtuality is a part of the 'real' world; a form of social reality. Castells' theory suggests that with the declining importance of geographical locality as a means of organising social relations, community comes to be shaped by other factors including the changing nature of work as well as wider social and cultural change. Castells (2001) suggests it is these elements that may be the major factors in the transformation of community. In addition Castells argues that most on-line communities take the form of supporting existing relations but rarely create new ones, other than those that require the simple sharing of information. It is clear from the above discussions that elements of these theories are useful in this exploration and examination of victim communities in late modernity in that they define networks of otherwise diverse people who are able to communicate, allowing them to add a new, additional dimension to their existing relationships. However, other key thinkers in the area would disagree. Craig Calhoun (1991; 1998) for example states that virtual

communities have only a limited capacity to unite those of difference. Calhoun's argument is that virtual communities must be seen as the vehicle for indirect forms of social relationships, but the Internet itself does not necessarily create or promote networks. For Calhoun (1998) and as relevant to this thesis, community should be understood as a system of social relations and involves belonging in the sense of sharing something, rather than something to be defined by place. In this way his argument differs from the key position of Castells described above, in that virtual community does not necessarily create new social realities. Rather they strengthen already existing ones, particularly as a means of linking people with similar taste, as Calhoun (1991: 103) states:

'Indirect relationships do not eliminate direct ones, but they do change both their meaning and their sociological significance'.

In summary then to this discussion around community and new media technology, Calhoun's approach would seem to be most helpful in the examination of victim communities in late modernity. Suggesting that community must be theorized in terms of social relationships of belonging, helps to ground the concept of the virtual community. This more differentiated view of the impact of new media technologies offers the possibility for the expression of a variety of forms of social belonging rather than the creation of something new altogether. This clearly indicates that virtual communities are able to exist alongside more 'traditional' spatialised communities; their virtuality makes them no less real and their difference lies in their ability to make communication the essential feature of belonging (Delanty, 2003). This however, does not necessarily relegate place as an

irrelevance, new media communication does not take place in a social vacuum but in social networks which may serve to enhance local forms of belonging rather than undermining them. This is an important point that will be returned to later in this thesis.

Whilst the discussions above are necessary and provide a useful commentary on how aspects of community are understood in late modernity, the work of this thesis is more specifically concerned with the exploration of some of the connections between crime, late modern culture and community, particularly how they are played out in the media. Investigating the changing nature of community, the importance and resonance of crime in late modernity and the ways in which some people actively use new media technologies to establish connections and forms of online community will be helpful in the analysis and exploration of victim communities. As has been discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the notion of what it means to be a victim and also with the concept of community, the role of the media in late modern society continues to be increasingly complex and open to contest.

One of the key changes to which at least part of this complexity can be attributed is the growing primacy of the visual, and the notion of the spectacle, not just within crime news reporting (Hall, 1973; Greer, 2007; 2010) but also in the media more generally, across both factual and fictional genres. Whilst this is an area that is covered substantively in the forthcoming media analysis chapter, this relevant issue benefits from a brief introduction at this point. The growth of technology and in particular, advances in digital media has altered the face of visual news and entertainment. The blurring of the lines between 'real' and 'representation' have made it increasingly

difficult to distinguish between 'fact' and 'fiction'. This drive towards 'infotainment' (Osborne, 2002) and the growth of 'reality' programming; the blurring of the boundaries between the represented and the real, is reflective of some of the central themes of late modernity. It is not only 'game show' reality programmes such as Big Brother that create confusion between reality and entertainment for the audience, but also the 'real' footage of the kind captured by the CCTV or video/phone cameras taken by witnesses as a criminal event (or as the aftermath) unfolds. Such footage and images may become graphically and emotionally linked in the public's collective consciousness and have contributed to the spectacle of crime and violence in the postmodern era (Jewkes, 2004). Indeed as Jewkes goes on to point out, many of the most shocking events of the last few years have entered and stayed long in the collective memory precisely because news reports were accompanied by images of the crime event, victim or the offender (Ibid.). It has become nearly impossible in late modern society to separate the real from the mediated, when every real crime that comes to public attention becomes inseparable from the media discourses and images that communicate them.

In addition to this important element of the media when considering the notion of victim communities, another crucial area of analysis is the centrality of those media forms and representations within two specific areas. Firstly media representations of deviant behaviour play a powerful part in creating exclusive 'other' identities and the subsequent demonisation and stigmatisation of groups of individuals or whole communities (Greer and Jewkes, 2005). However, it must also be noted that the media can be a vehicle for marginalised interests, voices and alternative discourses (under certain



conditions) and can, in some circumstances, be celebrants of diversity. Secondly and simultaneously the media and new media technologies in particular provide new ways to be social, and in an uncertain physical world, they can present for some a unique form of belonging and of collective identity (Greer, 2004).

### *Crime, community and late modernity*

Whilst community in the traditional form is threatened by late modern society, it is precisely the isolating nature and influence of such conditions that may make the need for unity and belonging themselves so vital (Bauman, 2001). Although the media itself may play a role in the 'fragmentation' of late modern society, it is from this perspective that the role of media forms and representations is of crucial interest and importance to the formation and rise of the victim community. As has been previously discussed, contemporary western society has seen distinct and substantial changes with regards to social, economic and cultural organization in recent decades. The globalization of manufacturing, coupled with an increased growth in the service sector, threaten the continued existence of many traditional forms of industrialised labour (Young, 1999). For some these new market opportunities have increased prospects whilst for others they have meant greater than ever marginalisation, both economically and socially (Ibid.). However, several of these new markets and economies that have replaced the more traditional form of labour, struggle themselves with job instability, rationalisation and short term contract practices. In many ways this could be seen to contribute significantly towards an overall and pervasive climate of anxiety and insecurity, where planning for the future

becomes difficult for many of the population (Hall and Winlow, 2004). As Bauman has noted, the contemporary human condition is specified by 'freedom of unprecedented proportions - but at the price of similarly unprecedented insecurity' (2001: 159). It is here that the traditional concepts of community, those based around geographical and physical boundaries, shared values, beliefs and identities, seem less applicable and less relevant in the late modern landscape, as earlier discussions have detailed.

At the same time, crime consciousness and the fear of crime are prominent in contemporary society, yet crime is not an issue that can be examined in isolation. Definitions and attitudes towards criminality interact closely with changes in the wider cultural, economic and political climates. As the previous discussions of post modern theory have indicated, changes such as increased surveillance of public spaces and the monitoring of people more generally in all aspects of their lives, may lead to the establishment of economic and social boundaries, where some are included and others excluded. In this way individuals and whole communities of people become demonized and stigmatized on the basis of their look, attitude or their perceived 'risk' factor; anxiety and fear (real or imagined) of those who are 'unknowns' can become heightened and more prominent in everyday lives.

### *Media, 'other' and identity*

Such constructions are formed, placed and made sense of within frames of reference that are to a large degree, provided by the mass media. A sense of collective identity is formed via the media representations and constructions of deviance and of 'other'; with a sense of what we 'are not' a shared popular

culture generates an inclusive 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). A particularly important way that this feeling of social cohesion and identity is provided, is by the mass media framing and portrayal of deviant and idealised identities; put simply the feeling of 'them' and 'us'. The importance and power of these constructions lies in their ability to simplify reality producing binary oppositions, which are ultimately exclusionary in nature. All media forms, including newer media technologies, deliver the opportunity for the verification of the idealised 'us' by the identification and stigmatization of the deviant 'them'. Through a process of alienation and demonisation the media (and society) establish the 'otherness' of those who deviate as a way of reinforcing our own innocence and normality. Ultimately the inclusive imagined community is constructed in direct opposition to those defined as 'other' (Greer, 2004).

Many forms of media seem particularly interested in such cultural changes. This may be seen as more of an obsession for the tabloids and some of the other popular press. The traditional notions of 'community', law and order and the concept of a past 'golden age' of society (normally associated with the apparent consensus of the immediate post-war years) are frequently referenced. Newspaper stories and articles are often accompanied by language, which romanticises the past, whilst ignoring that which was damaging, unfair and prejudiced about this time (Greer, 2004). This would appear to encourage an undercurrent of feeling of comparative decline in moral values and an overall loss of respect and deference, which, for these media in particular seem to create a condemnatory social environment. Central to this supposed problem of social and moral decline are the constructed and varied categories of 'deviant others' and 'idealised victims'.

Greer (2004) notes how the deviant 'other' category can be divided into 'absolute other' (most allegedly serious and dangerous offenders) and 'stigmatized other' (those whose transgressions fail to conform in some way with 'the proper way of doing things', asylum seekers, single mothers, benefit scroungers for example). The key point as Greer (2004) identifies, is that these deviant categories are themselves imaginary constructions, continuously reproduced by a reactionary media which then becomes self-perpetuating in its position against marginalised individuals and communities (Ibid.). The effect of this type of all-encompassing and unremitting disapproval, delivered via such binary simplifications in the popular press cannot be underestimated (although there are media outlets attempting to present alternative viewpoints).

Such stigmatization of deviant and marginalised groups is not a new concept in the media, although by comparison as this thesis suggests, the increasing focus and centrality of victims of crime is a relatively new phenomenon. As has been explored earlier in these discussions, crime victims are increasingly fore-grounded in media discussions, in politics and policy making, reflecting the wider cultural and political concerns over the last two decades (Garland, 2000, 2001), in particular Reiner and colleagues suggest that the focal nature of crime victims is one of the most significant changes in representations of crime and control since 1945 (Reiner et al., 2000). In almost all forms of present day media narratives and discourses, both factual and fictional, audiences are actively encouraged to identify and empathise with victims of crime, to the extent that they are invited to 'be there' with the victim and to feel 'what they feel'. To some extent this may be a reflection and reinforcement of people's fears and anxieties regarding personal safety.

However, in late modernity this invitation to empathise also encourages joining in the condemnation, demonisation and the punishment of the offender (increasingly portrayed as absolutely evil and beyond understanding). These expressions of demonizing the 'other' and identifying so strongly and closely with the victim(s) may be seen in some ways, as a broader expression of unity with the victims themselves. These expressive and emotive responses are also part of the way in which people negotiate problems of crime, anxiety and uncertainty in the late modern world. It is these responses that raise further important and interesting issues for this thesis regarding victim identity, collectivism and community.

### *Media and collective identity*

The ways we interact socially when considering issues of community and identity in late modernity are different from the past and are constantly evolving (Beck et al., 1994; Bauman, 2001). In a context and climate of relative uncertainty in some areas of life, it may not be surprising that some will congregate around issues, which offer some sense of unity and cohesion. Crime may be an obvious example and within that high profile crimes even more so. As was discussed in the previous chapter, certain crimes are viewed as so heinous and universally shocking that they can act as a focus for the mobilization and expression of collective feelings; some seem to even take on an almost sacred status in the public psyche, sexually motivated murders of children being a case in point (Jewkes, 2004). Although all crimes of this nature can be thought of as horrific not all, indeed only a small minority, seem to capture the attention of the media for anytime or the public imagination in any depth and some of these crimes, as discussed by Jewkes

(2004) barely register at all. An important if not defining feature of those cases that do attract sustained media attention and seemingly unified public outcry, is the 'idealised' status of the victim. It is these cases, where the journalists feel they can communicate the binary notions of 'guilt' and 'innocence', of 'evil' and 'goodness' that feature heavily in the media discourse. High profile and highly mediatized crimes such as the killings in 2002 of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman can provide a focal point which allows people to express collective feelings of empathy and anger. Simultaneously, it is argued by some that these mediated events offer a sense of membership and collective belonging, supporting the binary representations of 'idealised victims' and 'deviant other' identities (Greer, 2004); a sense of collective community identity. Empathising with the victim and denouncing the 'other' are both articulated and reinforced in mediated discourses.

By way of illustration from the empirical research conducted for this thesis, the killing of two young school friends in Soham, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, by school caretaker Ian Huntley attracted unrelenting media coverage and collective public outcry (as the latest modern day 'folk devil' media interest in all aspects of Huntley's life remains pervasive). However, where other equally tragic events that had gone before (the murder of 8 year old Sarah Payne in 2000, by convicted sex offender Roy Whiting for example) were characterized by vigilante style responses concerning suspected paedophiles in the community, the Soham case inspired a semi-official nationwide minute's silence. As with other similar crimes, those in the immediate physical and geographical community left flowers, queued to sign books of condolence and gathered in groups at significant places within the

locality to remember the loss 'as a community'. However, messages of sympathy and anger were also being felt from much further afield. When tragic events such as this occur and become highly mediatized, international on-line books of condolence can appear almost instantaneously where sympathy, outrage and a wider sense of identity and empathy may be expressed. In an increasingly mediated world, people are perhaps becoming more dependent on such media images, characters and depictions to produce the resources to help establish identities and trust.

### *Media, grief and imagined community*

Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of 'imagined community' suggests that all communities, even the earliest villages with face-to-face contact, are imagined. The challenges of life in late modernity, characterised for some by anxiety, fragmentation and exclusion, combined with advances in, and growth of new media technologies makes the concept of imagined community particularly interesting and resonate to the examination of the victim communities in late modernity. As has been noted previously, social engagement within new media technologies can be immediate and networks of virtual interactions can be created without the traditional constraints of physical/geographical boundaries (Rheingold, 1993). New media technologies allow the opportunity for some to establish membership and identity in new and distinct ways, creating innovative forms of collectives; virtual imagined communities. In this world of virtual communication issues around crime, fear and uncertainty can merge with the creation of imagined communities, centred around identity, emotionality and collective expression (Greer, 2004). Of particular interest in this context are the global internet books of

condolence, concerning the high profile murders of 'idealised victims' by 'deviant' or 'absolute' other perpetrators. In addition are the creation of on-line discussion boards in the wake of these murders, many characterised by calls for excessive punitive justice and often threats of violence and death to the offenders (Valier, 2004). Some of the comments directed towards Ian Huntley after conviction include: 'he will get what's coming to him'; 'he's an evil bastard and deserves to be executed' (The Petition Site, 2011). However, as with more traditional forms of print media communication, messages communicated in cyberspace, are open to discussion and debate. As such there are also on line discussion boards, presenting alternative voices and discourses, which challenge the vengeance and violence purported by the aforementioned sites. These expressions of challenge to anger and retribution can be seen as an extension of the arguments discussed in earlier sections by this work pertaining to Garland's notion of the 'zero-sum game' (2001). In this way if you are 'for' the victim you cannot be seen to understand or empathise with any element of the deviant other.

Of particular interest to this research regarding the media representations of victim communities, are the virtual books of condolence and the memorial websites which centre on the feelings of united sorrow, loss and caring for the victims and their families. It is here where the macro level of imagined victim communities are created, identified and structured around collective emotionality and identity. Passions run high and can be expressively emotional on these condolence sites, with many virtual communications emphasizing the deep sense of loss that the 'strangers' contributions claim to feel: 'words cannot describe the anguish and pain I feel', 'I feel a true sense of this tragedy that has befallen you', 'everyday we weep when we see



the images of Dunblane' (Dunblane Primary One, 1996). What is interesting for this thesis and given the discussions so far, is why in certain circumstances in a society where people are purportedly less likely to engage and interact in a physical space, some may wish to share virtually in the loss and pain of those to whom they have no relationship and presumably no knowledge of, until the crime or event was presented in the media.

Taking part and becoming involved emotionally in some way in the sorrow and grief that surrounds some victims of high profile and highly mediatized crimes, may be one way of demonstrating feeling and humanity in what is for some an often otherwise fragmented society. This issue of demonstrative participation is also important on a physical level, in that those of the media audience, who express a desire or indeed go to the locality where the significant crime event took place, may want to cross the boundary between media production and reception. Those signing condolence books and laying flowers with messages for other members of the public to read, are effectively taking centre stage. In this sense these people desire to experience something real and it may be significant that they want to join with other people in an explicitly socialised space. As a consequence, the motivation for visitors to the locality may not be such a matter of media effects but of media inadequacy; its inability to overcome time and space to provide physical proximity to a first-order social or sacred experience. Hence, by taking part in such public displays of grief and emotion, participants are effectively actors in what is purely a 'symbolic reversal' of the media's power (Couldry, 1999). It will be interesting for this work to see if these virtual (or physical) shared expressions of suffering and loss have any benefit for sections of the immediate physical community who had

direct links with the victims and the crime event itself. Obviously this is an area of the work that has yet to be considered, as whilst the discussions above and proffered by Greer (2004) are interesting and helpful in many ways, it would seem equally beneficial and pertinent to apply such thoughts and theory in a practical and empirical setting.

For many people death and grief are taboo subjects. However, this is neither true for all, nor across time. Collective public shows of grief and emotion are not uncommon historically in western society; indeed large outpourings of national grief and emotion were familiar in response to the death of famous figures up until the twentieth century. Many pieces of journalism reporting the event of the death of Admiral Lord Nelson in 1805 for example, described a nation with 'tears gushing from every eye' (BBC News, 2011). Charting the changes in attitudes towards death in Western society from the Middle Ages, Phillippe Aries (1976) suggests that in more modern times, and particularly following the Second World War, death has become more sequestered from everyday life (cited in Turnock, 2000). Whereas once people died in and around their family, death is more likely now to take place in separate and distinct institutions, away from public life. This it is argued, is a partial cause of death being an unmentionable and uncommunicated topic for many. However as has been suggested, more recent conflated social and cultural changes often associated with late modernity are emerging and contesting the notion that it is socially unacceptable to grieve in public. In such ways it seems that through much of recent history, there have been elements of public displays of emotion, yet in late modernity newer media technologies as the mode of communication have increased the

scale and the mediated nature of those collective and public expressions of emotions and grief.

There are other related issues raised regarding the idea of collective involvement in grief and mourning that are relevant to the rise of the victim community. For some simply feeling upset about a serious crime or event, may not be enough (Appleton, 2002). Others argue that it is this type of collective experience and expression of sharing grief that may encourage and produce an environment where grief is traded competitively by the virtual or imagined community (Greer, 2004). This notion of grief as a commodity can be seen on a physical level when considering the array of wristbands and ribbons that now adorn so many. By sporting such a symbol, one can publicly and symbolically demonstrate support for a plethora of causes, issues or charities (for example, 'Make Poverty History' (white) and Breast Cancer Awareness (pink)). These expressions may be worthy in their own right but what in addition may the wearing of a bracelet or ribbon signify? May it, as well as meaning something to the bearer, be another vehicle for illustrating to others what we are feeling and to which causes or issues we would like to be seen to be affiliated? After all, there are also wristbands which signify the wearer's support, sympathy and alliance with 'Manchester United', '(I love) Hip-Hop' and 'Make Chavs History'.

It could be argued that the communication associated with such public symbols is a way of directly demonstrating to others the nature and scale of ones support for a cause. For many, these bracelets and ribbons are worn obviously and for others. Thus we may question whether for some it is not enough to merely support or give charitably in other less obtrusive ways to a

cause which one feels is worthy, rather the importance may lie in being *seen* to be supporting. This is also visible in the laying flowers at the scene of a crime event, accident or place synonymous with the victim. The significance of the practice is not just to mark the geographical location where the person died, but also because the image of the flowers will be displayed synoptically (Mathiesen, 1997), to many more as well as the passing physical audience. The alliance and often common grief indicated by wristbands, ribbons, flowers and ever lengthening and ever more frequent minutes of silence could be considered for consumption by others; a symbol of the competitive public consumption of grief and emotion. In addition in high profile cases such as those researched for this thesis, there is a complex crossover between media and social processes, where the construction of public grief is also complemented by the media which construct and legitimise an arena for ritual performance and transformation. At such sites of mourning which have evolved or been constructed as sacred places, tourists, visitors, locals and mourners alike are transformed into participants in a collective ritual experience. These people are transformed not just for television and press cameras, but also for themselves and for other participants. In this way depictions of public grieving can be seen as prescriptive and normative.

Finally this process discussed could be seen as some kind of formulaic response to tragedy, a somehow distant way of being closer, of reaching out to others and overcoming in some ways the late modern fragmented and individualised existence; achieving a feeling of community and belonging. In this way, in the late modern society of uncertainty, imagined communities are created in response to particular high profile and serious crimes, as they may provide for some, a sense of belonging and identity, however liminal

and temporal that may be. However, as suggested some of these expressions of shared interaction are mediated experiences of grief and sorrow. These may be a way for some to touch a stranger's life without having to undergo their own life being touched back, where the physical social interaction is removed and faceless and as such at home in late modern society (Greer, 2005). The condolence sites set up in the wake of high profile and mediatized crimes may engender in a truly global sense for some a sense of identity and collectivity, albeit a vicarious, fragile and fleeting experience of community. These are all interesting and engaging issues for which there does not seem to be any research and as such are issues that will be considered empirically as this work progresses.

Simultaneously, it is also suggested that these elements of expression, visiting the website, leaving a message, participating in a minute's silence, provide only a temporary respite for the members of the imagined community; grief is consumed and then discarded (Greer, 2004). As the key characters involved in the tragic crime event become less interesting to the media, sites of condolence (both virtual and 'real') close down and the 'imagined community' disperses. As has been suggested by some theorists above, the suggested characteristics of late modern society, of fragmentation and social (physical) disengagement, may make it harder for traditional forms of community and collectivism to operate and flourish (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990, 1991). However, such conditions also have an impact on notions of personal identity and belonging. Individuals have to fashion for themselves a sense of identity using a variety of sources, this includes the media as well as other material culture as tools and resources; a form of bricolage to construct their own identities. Although, as Giddens notes the

changing and risk-filled nature of the late modern world implies that identity formation is a never ending and reflexive enterprise (Giddens, 1990). However, newer media communications may provide a means for some of achieving a new and for some a different sense of community, identity and belonging in this age of supposed uncertainty. One way this can be seen to occur is via imagined communities which form in the wake of serious, high profile and highly mediatized crimes involving (usually) ideal victims and absolute deviant others.

Concepts of community, whether geographical or imagined, are inscribed with notions of identity and membership; of inclusion and exclusion. In this context the notion of community emerges from the collective agreement of virtuous identities via the identification and labelling of the deviant identity of others. This is not a distinction made solely on the basis of victim or offender. Virtual imagined communities only develop around particular types of ideal victim. As has been considered above, those who do not match the news value profile, because of background or image, will not generally attract the required level of media attention or public/political outcry (Jewkes, 2004; Greer and Jewkes, 2005). Notions of exclusion also apply to victims who do not 'tick the right boxes' not just those 'absolute other' vilified offenders. Therefore some such imagined communities can be seen as primarily formed around the polar narratives utilised and established in news media discourses and in this context, form part of a wider process of inclusion/exclusion where whole groups and communities may be marginalised on an arbitrary basis (Greer and Jewkes, 2005). In a physical world where notions of community, identity and membership have changed fundamentally, vicarious participation in the loss and suffering of those

directly affected by a serious and high profile crime may serve to create a sense of community and belonging for participants. The role of new media technology in this sense, may help to achieve a sense of identity, belonging and community; enabling people to experience a notion of community in a world where the notion of community is such a contested concept.

### **Summary**

In attempting to identify and explore the rise of the victim community, this chapter has located issues relating to victim identity within broader discussions of the wider late modern social and structural condition. As such to explore how victim communities may arise, it has been contingent to investigate how the notions of victim identity, community and new media technology culminate and coalesce in late modernity. This chapter has identified as a key factor, the increasing significance of the centrality of the symbolic, politicised and socially constructed image of the victim in contemporary culture. Utilising an analysis of David Garland's work on conditions of contemporary social control, it is clear that some of the distinct response strategies described by Garland (2001), to the 'late modern crime complex', do have resonance for the rise of the victim community.<sup>7</sup> This chapter asserts that elements of the 'sovereign state approach' and 'adaptive responses' can be helpful in explaining the pervasive feeling for many in late modern society that 'we are all victims now' (Mythen, 2007). This arrangement is heightened by the media manipulation of collective emotion around crime, the increase in the importance of public opinion for

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<sup>7</sup> Although this position has generated far-reaching criticisms (see Wacquant, 2009).

crime policy and culture more generally and significantly, the invocation and involvement of a sense of belonging to a local 'community' orientated towards security of self and public protection.

The notion of what it means to be a victim and the notion of community in a traditional sense need to be refracted and reassessed in the late modern environment. As such this chapter has considered the notion of community as it is conceived and practiced in contemporary society. The much discussed conditions of late modernity are characterised for many by 'existential anxiety' (Giddens, 1990; Bauman 2001), and are further heightened not only because of the increasingly fragmented lives that people lead, but also because individuals no longer lead lives that are structured around notions of a divinely constructed world to help give them a sense of meaning and safety in an uncertain world (Bauman, 2001). Central to such associated social and economic transformations it is argued, is the anxiety that comes with the loss of a sense of 'belonging', in which case people may seek to establish new identities, which may, if only on a temporary basis, make them feel they are a part of a 'wider community' in some sense. It is clear from the explorations of this chapter that community exists in many forms, both physical and virtual and so a more differentiated, and arguably more inclusive approach to collective social relations is needed. Here no one type of community is any more real than another and communities sustained by virtuality can enhance as well as emanate from traditional local communities (Delanty, 2003). As has been clearly indicated throughout this chapter, there are multiple forms of community which as well as being oppositional may also complement each other. What is equally apparent is that in order to gain understanding into the complex connections between



crime, media, culture and community, they must be considered in the context in which they take place; the media saturated late modern world.

The impact of new media and communication technologies have transformed and reshaped social relations in the traditional sense and have given rise to new expressions of community. A development in new forms of vicarious and temporary communities of interest; moments of grief or protest, illustrate how the growth of the victim community is driven by the salience of the symbolic victim and new and mass media. It is this specific of late modernity that illuminates the victim community more clearly in explanatory terms. Whilst such advances in communication are a new mode by which some achieve a sense of belonging and community, simultaneously the role of the (newer) media in late modernity can also serve to blur the lines between the real and the represented (Baudrillard, 1983). This chapter has considered how in some sense grief has become more conspicuous, collective and commodified. This may be a symptom or a way of overcoming for some, the fragmentation of late modern existence. Within this arrangement an experience of victimisation can cause great distress, not only for those involved directly but also the wider audience who become aware of the serious crime event, as this brings into the open the vulnerability of human beings and the disorder that can engulf their lives (Spalek, 2006).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Media Theory and the Construction of Crime News**

#### **Theorising the Media**

Together with the qualitative empirical interview data from the community members, this thesis also seeks to explore the nature and influence of the media representations of the serious crimes committed and any contemporaneous effect on the communities in which they took place. As such this chapter seeks to prepare for the situation of that analysis within wider debates and discussions regarding media theory and the more specific vagaries of researching crime and the media in the late modern context.

There is a perennial debate around media influence, which stretches far beyond academia (Kitzinger, 2004), regarding not only the question of media influence and power and how an audience makes sense of what they see and read, but also how best to investigate that process. Within media research there is a traditional gap between bodies of work that prioritise the power of the media text (Chibnall, 1977; Gitlin, 1980) and those that focus on the power of the audience (Hall, 1973/1981; Morley, 1980). Some of these divisions are also reflected in study design and methodology of the research. For example, although not exclusively, many of the studies, which emphasise the power of the media, have traditionally been based on quantitative and experimental work, while those whose emphasis is on the activity of audiences' favours in-depth qualitative research (Kitzinger, 2004). The history of this debate regarding media influence and audiences is characterised by a series of swings from one side of the spectrum to the other. Some periods have emphasised the media's impact, at other times it has been argued that the media's power is weak and other social factors carry more weight (Ibid.).

### *Power of the media*

In brief, much of the arguments considered by early media researchers can be described as 'functionalist' in that advocates are interested in what the media 'do' to people. Broadly speaking, this research conceives the relationship between media and audiences as mechanistic and unsophisticated, a process by which the media 'inject' values, ideas and information directly into the 'passive' receiver (Jewkes, 2004). However, there are elements of this broad 'effects' research conducted more latterly, which

can be seen to be more useful for this current research study. Notions of 'agenda-setting' (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and 'framing' (Goffman, 1974) are developed which suggest that although we may not be able to measure the media's impact on what people think, it is possible to identify their impact on what people think about. Framing in particular was developed to examine the nature of the coverage, rather than the amount of media attention given to any given issue. Using quantitative techniques measuring the extent of media attention to diverse social issues, researchers were able to show this correlates with the salience of these issues for the public. Also that public concern and policy attention rises and falls in response to shifts in media coverage (rather than changes in actual size of problem in the real world). Experimental researchers such as Iyengar and Kinder (1987), for example produced doctored videotapes of news reports by inserting extra coverage of particular issues. Comparing research participants who viewed these tapes with a control group they found that the respondents who viewed the extra coverage rated those issues as more important than those who had not (cited in Kitzinger, 2004: 14).

Erving Goffman is a key contributor to the notion of 'framing'. In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974) argues a framework is something that 'allow[s] its user to locate perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms' (1974: 21). Other approaches from various disciplines (sociology, psychology, linguistics) would describe 'frames' as 'cognitive windows' from which stories are 'seen', or 'maps' helping us to navigate multiple realities. It is not simply a question of bias, or of what is said or left unsaid; frames are about how an account organises

reality (Kitzinger 2004). Editorially this would include the 'angle' that journalists adopt in their approach to a story.

Within the approaches that favour the power of the media message, ideas about how stories are framed are central to many classic studies of news coverage. In his seminal analysis of crime reporting, Steve Chibnall identifies 'ideological frameworks' as 'structures through which the subjective reality of things is fashioned and meaning is imposed on the social world' (1977: 13). Other groups, such as the influential Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) explored inferential frameworks in economic and industrial reporting. Most of this work focuses on analysing media texts and examining the claim-making activity of various stakeholders (Kitzinger, 2004). However, far less research in this area is concerned with addressing people's responses and any studies that have attempted to do so, usually adopt a survey method or an experimental approach. Although such work is important there does seem to be a lack of in-depth understanding of how media framing may operate on, or interact with, audiences in a broader cultural context. My own research approach and design regarding the elements of media 'framing' of victim communities will attempt to determine how social framing of specific highly mediatized crime incidents affects both the community themselves and public understanding of those crimes. The approaches outlined above all focus, in some way on how the nature of the media message can influence people. Throughout the same time period other approaches were developing which focused on the power and activity of the audience.

*Power of the audience*

In opposition to the studies described above, other researchers sought to reconceptualise media influence, seeing it no longer as a force beyond an individual's control but as a resource that is consciously used by people (Morley, 1992); what do people do with the media? However the most radical and influential break came in 1970s with a new model of understanding text-audience relations that focused on how people interpret or 'decode' texts. This involved rethinking the fixed message transmitted from producer to receiver, to a way that emphasised the social and symbolic processes involved in encoding and decoding a text. This emphasis has led to an increasing interest in 'active audience' studies which explore how people responded to the same media output in different (sub)cultures and the skills that people bring to their cultural consumption.

Although the foundations of those studying audience reception processes were usually located in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, it should be acknowledged that parallel interests had already been established across continental Europe (Kitzinger 2004). The French linguist and philosopher Roland Barthes (1968) had argued that texts should no longer be seen as messages dispatched by their authors but as sites of multiple writings, since their socially active meanings were constructed in their destination and not their origin (cited in Kitzinger 2004: 19). It was Stuart Hall's (1981) paper (although first published in 1973) 'Encoding/Decoding' that became the key intervention in the debate within media studies. This paper proposed the need to see the communication process as a whole, from production to reception. Hall (1973/1981) argues

that all texts are 'polysemic' and there is no necessary association between the message encoded by the author and that decoded by audiences. Hall (1973/1981) clearly sees texts as carrying a 'preferred' meaning but proposes three positions from which decoding's might be constructed in practice: the dominant, the negotiated and the oppositional. The distinction between encoding and decoding highlights the possibility that meaning does not lie in text alone. Paying attention to the processes of decoding allows questions concerning the audience diversity. In other words 'where people are coming from' is important. People are not voids who approach a text or discourse without any pre-existing identity, experience or resources. Therefore in order to understand the role of the media, Hall (1973/1981) argues it is vital to discover how different groups (such as victim communities) respond to and interpret any particular text, to explore what they bring to bear on their interpretation and the discourse to which they have access.

Research into how people engage with media technologies was also taking place at this time in parallel with continued research into audience reception processes. In particular research concentrated on how people might read cultural products differently depending on their own pre-existing cultural resources and skills. For example, comparative research highlighted how the same media output could be read differently in diverse cultures. Italian theorist Eco purported that advertising could serve as a revolutionary message in depressed areas. As such:

'For a Milanese bank clerk a TV ad for a refrigerator represents a stimulus to buy, but for a peasant in Calabria the same image means a confrontation of a world of prosperity that doesn't belong to him'

(Eco, 1986: 141).

Much of this work disputed the traditional analysis of media content and is a challenge to Hall's (1973/1981) notion of audience decoding, breaking with the notion that there is even a preferred meaning built into the text at all. At times some parts of this broad research seems to suggest that questions of media influence are too hard to research, such is the dependency of the production of meaning on what people bring to their engagement with the media.

As with many other notions discussed within this thesis, the terms 'media' and 'audience' are diverse conceptualisations themselves, and taking into account the diversity of the approaches outlined above it is not surprising that theorising about media influence has been described at times as inconsistent and inconclusive (Livingstone 1999). Too often research into active audience is summarised by reference to its more extreme and radical supporters, while studies regarding media influence are often simplified under the effects tradition (Kitzinger, 2004). Despite the necessary brevity to the discussions above, there are core issues on which agreement can be found. Commentators on both sides, for example, now often seem to agree that the constraints in which a text are produced, and how people read them are important and that the power of audience activity should not be exaggerated (Kitzinger 2004: 26). The research approach and design for this thesis regarding media representations of victim communities will attempt to utilise both bodies of work, those which prioritise the power of the media text and those which focus on the power of the audience (Kitzinger, 2004).



### **The Construction of Crime News**

Although not examining the manufacture of crime news reporting explicitly (Galtung and Ruge, 1965/1973; Chibnall, 1977; Jewkes, 2004), news values, the lack of neutrality in media reporting and the production of media content as a social construction are important factors that certainly require consideration in any analysis of media reporting. As Noaks and Wincup have commented on the use of documentary sources in qualitative research, there are inherent difficulties to be recognised in separating the 'construction of (documentary sources) from the evidence that we can take from them' (2004: 19). This chapter will go on to formulate a brief theoretical discussion of news values and newsworthiness, specifically in the construction of crime news regarding victim communities in preparation for the analysis of the media articles in question.

Even a cursory examination of the literature and research in this area of crime reporting suggests an increasingly complex interaction between media representations of crime, criminal behaviour and criminal justice. With degrees of variation according to market and medium, mass media news and entertainment are saturated with narratives and images about crime. These stories disproportionately feature the most violent and most serious crimes, often without any sense of analysis or structural context. The emphasis is on crime as the result of individual choice and 'evil' intentions, deflecting attention away from any links to social structure or culture (Sasson, 1995). In addition any inspection of crime news reporting also shows that crime news exhibits a very different pattern to both the 'reality' of crime and the account

reflected in the official statistics (Jewkes, 2004), indeed crime news has been said to present a picture of criminal offending and victimisation which is the 'direct inverse of that portrayed by official criminal statistics' (Greer, 2010: 202). As has been discussed above, there does seem to be some evidence that media images may have an influence on criminal behaviour, but overall their direct effect is small relative to other factors; people vary in their interpretations of representations according to demographic, generational and other life-course factors (Livingstone et al., 2001).

As examined extensively in previous chapters, the oft defining contemporary social conditions of late modernity serve as a useful introduction and an interesting point from which to study crime news construction, particularly with regard to specific crime events, the perpetrators, the victims and the various levels of community that may be real, invoked or (re)presented. The study of media representations and crime news more generally certainly concludes that from which ever theoretical standpoint, media images are only one version of reality. Media images, including those of crime news, are a version of reality that is culturally determined and dependant firstly on the process of production of news making itself, and secondly on the assumptions made about the audience by media professionals; the process we have referred to as 'agenda-setting' (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Specifically this concerns the selection of news items, the priority of some over others, the choice of tone and accompanying image. The existing research suggests agenda-setting is not a random or personal process. Editors and journalists will select, produce and present news according to a range of professional criteria, used as benchmarks to indicate a story's 'newsworthiness' (Jewkes, 2004). It is important to note that this is not to say

that alternative definitions do not exist or that other non-mediated influences are not as important. Yet if a story does not contain at least some of the characteristics reckoned to be newsworthy, it will not appear on the news agenda.

### *News values*

News values have been comprehensively researched and written about for four decades (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Chibnall, 1977; Wykes, 2001; Jewkes, 2004) but remain vital to a proper investigation of media representations or theorising of the role of the media (Wykes, 2007). News values that set the media agenda then, are the value judgements made by media professionals regarding the perceived public appeal and public interest of a (crime) news story. News values however do not amount to a journalistic conspiracy, they are much more subtle than that. They are better described as the various technical pressures and occupational conventions of journalism, which are actually concerned with journalists sharing the same ideological values as much of their audience. It is this normalisation of particular interests and values (Wykes, 2001); this shared ethos that enables potential news stories to be graded and selected accordingly.

The literature in this area is much rehearsed and there are numerous applications of the concept of news values (including Hall et al., 1978; Ericson et al., 1987; 1991), although two original studies are of particular note. The first attempt to identify and categorise the news values that commonly determine and structure reported events was made by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Although their focus was on news reporting more generally, the views in this influential study are clearly relevant to the study of crime

news. In particular, Galtung and Ruge were the first to recognize that incidents and events were more likely to be reported if they were unexpected, close to home and negative in essence (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Published twelve years later, 'Law and Order News' (Chibnall, 1977), although primarily concerned with journalistic priorities in the post Second World War period, remains the most influential and relevant study on news values in crime reporting.

For the most part many of the key journalistic imperatives identified by Chibnall (1977) still apply today. However, when analysing contemporary crime news reporting, with particular regard and focus on the media representations of specific crime events and victim communities, it is clear that the twenty first century in which we live is a very different society to that which existed thirty or forty years ago. As Bronwyn Naylor (2001) has stated, news values are culturally specific and so echo in part the social and historical moment in which they are found. With regards to crime itself for example, we have seen a massive increase in prison numbers and current news reports often detail many 'new' crimes - joy-riding, identity theft - crimes not even considered decades ago. Conversely non-violent crime such as property offences are now viewed as so commonplace that they are rarely mentioned in the national media at all (Jewkes, 2004). At the same time and as described in detail in previous chapters, the late modern media landscape has also changed in such a way that it is almost unrecognisable, with a proliferation of television channels, an explosion in the number of daily/weekly newspapers and magazines and the ability for so many to receive news content via the Internet or web sources. In addition the structures and control of media ownership have altered; all media output

even the news, is now part of a market driven landscape, which is increasingly dominated by ever-looming deadlines (Jewkes, 2004). Simultaneous to these changes the site of politics in Britain can no longer be seen as the ideological battlefield it has been described in previous decades. A more centrist politics is currently delivered to an arguably more sceptical, sophisticated and media aware audience. Furthermore, some commentators argue that the pressure on the media in the current climate to produce ordinary events as extraordinary verges on the post modern (Osborne, 2002) and that what has in the past been described as ‘news gathering’, in the new millennium has taken on the same “constructed-for-television” quality that postmodernists refer to as “hyper simulation” (Baudrillard, 1983), a process by which the notion of objective truth is replaced with presentation; there is no longer any meaningful difference between the two. These significant changes to the conditions and landscape of contemporary society over recent decades, particularly with regard to new media technology, leads some to argue that a reassessment of the criteria that structure the news may be needed (Jewkes, 2004).

As such, before presenting the analysis of the sampled news reports (discussions in Chapter 5), this section continues by saying something about why these crime events in particular made such quality stories for the media. Even though it is important to remember that different values may determine the selection and presentation of events by different news media (Jewkes, 2004), there are certain fundamental news values which appear to remain constant irrespective of time, place and cultural shifts; among them immediacy (prioritisation of the present over the past), personalisation (personalities rather than structures) and dramatisation (dramatic over the

mundane). Both of the cases examined for this research of course easily reach the thresholds required on these three counts and also fit very neatly with other professional and cultural assumptions that underpin a journalist's judgement about what is news and what is not. As media and society change, so too can the primacy of certain criteria that influence the selection and production of events as news. It is suggested here that there are three key criteria, when taken in combination, of primary relevance when considering the two cases in question in this study. The first of these is the notion of 'risk. As previous discussions in this thesis have alluded to, the notion of risk characterising late modern society is a pervasive one. The idea that we are all potential victims in current risk obsessed and more retributive times means that crime stories have become increasingly victim-centred. The second criteria of increasing contemporary importance is 'children', as Yvonne Jewkes (2004) notes, whilst it may have been true for Stuart Hall and colleagues writing in 1978 to argue that any crime could be lifted into news visibility if it had an association with violence, more than thirty years later the same could be said of a crime where children are involved. The inclusion of children at the centre of a crime story whether as victims or offenders can be seen to be an important contemporary news value. In support of this position, some have argued that the focus on children means that almost any deviant behaviour associated with children automatically crosses a higher threshold of victimisation than would have been possible if adults alone had been involved (Jenkins, 1992). Of course this assertion is by no means uncontested. As Jewkes herself suggests, the involvement of children does not always guarantee news coverage of a story. Sexual abuse of children within the family for example remains so low down the media agenda that it is rendered almost invisible, as opposed to the statistically less likely

scenario but more common media representation of sexual abuse of children occurring at the hands of an 'evil stranger' (Jewkes, 2004: 57).

Thirdly, there is a growing primacy of the visual and the notion of spectacle within crime news reporting and the manufacture of crime news (Hall, 1973, Greer, 2007; 2010). Technological developments along with a shift towards a more image-focused and visual culture mean that 'image' is an increasingly important element in perceived newsworthiness (Greer, 2010: 227). Indeed, the availability of the right image or press representation (the class photograph of Primary One or the image of Holly and Jessica in matching Manchester United shirts a short time before their disappearance) can lift the crime (victim and/or offender) to iconic status. It is therefore suggested these more contemporary news values, in combination with many other fundamental professional imperatives that need to be considered when reflecting on the media analysis that is to follow in chapter five. This exploration is particularly relevant when examining media representations of victim communities in the news, given this study's exploration of some of the contemporary connections between crime, culture and community and more specifically how they are played out in the media.

Up to this point, the central aims of the first three chapters have been to identify, explore and analyse the interdisciplinary literatures and theoretical boundaries and limitations as they relate to the contested notions of the victim identity, collective social relations, conditions of late modernity, the impact of newer media technologies and of related media theory with regard to the notion of victim communities. However, an exploration of such discussions has identified gaps and limitations in these positions; in addition

much of the narrative is abstract in nature and presented on a general level, without examining how people in contemporary society experience these situations. The next section of this thesis therefore takes us from the 'grand theory' to the 'real world', by examining the lived realities of those living in the locality where a serious and highly mediatized crime has taken place and begins by detailing some of the methodological and practical issues involved in conducting fieldwork and media analysis of this nature.



# **Part II**

# **Method**

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Context and Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis and research sets out to explore the relationship between crime, the media, identity and community. The types of crimes of particular interest are those that are widely recognized as particularly serious and tragic events. It is the significance and resonance of such crimes, which for many reasons, attract large amounts of sustained media coverage and seem to capture the collective public imagination on which this research is focused. Here then the question of the media is central, alongside the crucial theme of community in late modernity. Serious high profile and highly mediated crimes may offer an opportunity in late modern society for congregation around an issue that in turn fosters for some, a sense of collective unity and cohesion (Greer,

2004). This thesis suggests that communities may form or be constructed in the wake of high profile crimes, some of which may feel a shared sense of stigma by physical proximity or attachment to the event. By examining high profile and highly mediated crimes, this thesis explores the notions of identity, the construction of victim communities and the processes by which some of these communities come to acquire a collective stigma and sense of spoiled identity. There is a need at this point to be explicit about the relationship between late modernity, new media and this fieldwork, which is conducted largely on more traditional forms of media and community. In brief, the empirical focus on print media and traditional forms of (physical) community was chosen as the best way of accessing those people who were influenced by new and mass media and who shaped and developed new forms of community (or division) in response to it.

This chapter details some of the methodological and practical issues involved in conducting a media analysis and also fieldwork of a sensitive nature and how I as the researcher reconciled myself to entering and blending into this unfamiliar and sometimes unreceptive environment. This chapter will also discuss some of the established methods used to try and uncover the truth of the 'lived experience' of one who belongs to, or finds themselves as part of a community where a serious and high profile crime has taken place. When undertaking such empirical research there are many stages to negotiate including ethics, access and other practical and emotional issues; all of which will be discussed here.

As with almost all methodological choices, there is a tension between getting rich and valid material on the one hand, and scale and representativeness of

data on the other (Reiner, 2000). However, this research is broadly interpretative in its concerns; interested in meaning, how it is constructed and how individuals interpret the dynamic and constantly changing world; offering a commitment to understanding the meanings human beings attribute to their actions. As such this work engaged with qualitative methods, aiming to make sense of and interpret phenomena and explore the meaning people bring to such situations. As a research strategy, this approach traditionally encompasses several methods of analysis, including observation and informal interviews which when used in conjunction, can serve to provide a holistic and inclusive description of cultural membership (Lindlof, 1995). This research study concerns the views and interpretations of participants, individuals' subjective feelings, opinions and lived experiences and as such a qualitative method of study was the natural choice. Qualitative methods (primarily semi-structured interviews) were used as the experience of these potential 'communities of victims' had not been researched previously (and seemingly rarely if ever, acknowledged in the existing literature); as such they may feel silenced at best or marginalised at worst. The aim was therefore to concentrate on the private discourse of individuals involved who as a collective, had not had their voices heard, in order to challenge more public and often stereotypical and simplistic discourses of those who were 'recognised' as victims. As Stanley and Wise have suggested, 'the best way to find out about people's lives is for people to give their own analytical accounts of their own experiences' (1983: 167).

With reference to the background of the research approach and the methods chosen, this thesis takes the view that such qualitative research is partly autobiographical, reflecting the researcher's personality and psyche as well

as those of the respondents participating in the interpretative dialogue. Thus I am in broad agreement with Jennifer Hunt who argues that 'fieldwork is in part, the discovery of the self through the detour of the other' (1989: 42). There is no doubt that the research process is a complex enterprise and it is increasingly common for some social science researchers to locate themselves within the research process by employing the concept of reflexivity to produce 'first person' accounts. More recent attempts to understand the role of the researcher within postmodernist and feminist perspectives have emphasised that the research process must be an inherently personal, political and partial endeavour (Ferrell, 1998). Thus, it can be suggested that the self is always present and affects every aspect of the research process from the choice of project to the presentation of 'findings' whether acknowledged or not (Stanley and Wise, 1983). On a personal level I feel that issues of reflexivity and reflection are an extremely important part of research and that researcher identities need to be made explicit throughout the research process. These issues will be discussed in more detail as the chapter progresses, but first we turn now to some of the more practical challenges encountered in the field.

### **Access**

With any academic research it is vitally important to have practical access to the sample population, yet in some situations this can be difficult. For this research I originally proposed and identified three places as research sites; Bootle in Liverpool, Dunblane in Scotland and Soham in Cambridgeshire. The

reasons for these particular sites were two fold. Firstly, all of these sites have experienced serious crime events which have been amongst some of the most high profile crimes of recent times; the killing of James Bugler in Bootle in 1993, the school shootings at Dunblane in 1996 and the more recent murders of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells in Soham in 2002. All three sites therefore have had experience of what has been termed a 'signal crime' (Innes, 2003) and the proposal was to explore whether these highly mediatized crime events had left a tainted legacy for the wider community, which has permeated the collective memory. Secondly, I was keen to give a comparative edge to the research. The inclusion of a more recent 'victim community' such as Soham, in contrast to a place such as Dunblane or Bootle, where the serious crime in question is not quite so 'new' in the collective memory (although this can be a temporal state) would give an element of longevity and temporal analysis to the understanding of the subject, adding value and depth to the findings.

In what can be described as the 'pre-research' phase, in the first instance I gathered as much relevant secondary data as I could on the proposed research sites including national and local newspaper articles covering the events (over a prescribed time period) in preparation for the media analysis of the crime events.<sup>8</sup> My first approach therefore was to use this material to identify and locate any potential contacts from within each community. Following this with investigation and where it was possible (in some cases those identified had left the area) I then sent an introductory letter to those people identified, explaining who I was and the purpose of the academic research, detailing briefly the issues I was hoping to explore. At this point I

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<sup>8</sup> The discussions of which are contained in Chapter Five of this thesis.

did not have a firm idea of the size of the intended sample but hoped that via these 'primary definers' (Hall et al., 1978), a type of networking system of recommendations may emerge, where the number of participants to the research would 'snowball'. As others have illustrated, from these first contacts, information about the research disseminates and such research can often develop its own momentum (Sharpe, 2000). My own experience was a little different, although I did manage to engage an initial contact at one site who effectively acted as my champion or sponsor. This individual did much to ensure that I was introduced and at least accepted in the first instance by some others in the community and their recommendations no doubt helped to encourage more to participate in the research. However, this was not always the case and there were several instances when those who were recommended to me declined to take part in the study.

Gaining access is unpredictable; particularly where the research is seen as sensitive in nature, because as John Johnson (1975) argues the one thing needed to ensure successful access is a detailed theoretical understanding of the social organization of the setting one is attempting to enter. In other words, 'that which is most likely to secure access can only be gained once the researcher is actually inside the setting' and has carried out the fieldwork (cited in Lee, 1993: 121). In addition the warning from much of the literature on this topic was heeded and as such I was careful not to address the issue of access as one that only takes place at the initial phase of entry to the research setting. Instead, as I found, it is an on-going and implicit process, which needs to be continually renegotiated, often on a personal and one to one basis. Access had to be revisited not only each time I made a new contact but also when revisiting those who had not previously responded or when

returning to participants at a later date. The concept of access can be helpfully thought of as a journey where social access is the 'process of 'getting along' through establishing a research role, building a rapport with participants and securing their trust' (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 63). Although physical access is a likely precondition of the social (Lee, 1993), the latter should not be taken for granted and can remain problematic. As literature on this topic notes, past experiences of research (or in this case, previous experience of the media) often makes group members cynical and they may assume the worst about an outsider (Lee, 1993). This was something that was particularly resonant given the nature of this research subject and the intense media coverage of the serious crimes both at the time and subsequently. As a prospective outsider attempting to enter these communities I was acutely aware that I may be considered as part of that interest and assigned a negative 'role' on that basis.

Finally, this section regarding access returns to the practical realities of this research project. As briefly detailed above, letters were sent out to identifiable contacts in all three potential research sites, yet initial responses were received back from only two of the research locations. The introductory letter addressed to the members of the community of Bootle received no replies. After much investigation and persistence I did manage to speak to two of those identified in the initial stages, and to whom I had sent letters, but neither were prepared to speak or be interviewed about the serious crime that happened in their community. Although not made explicit, the reasons behind these decisions were explained to me by those involved as variously 'still too raw'; a continuing painful event that is engrained on the community psyche. As part of the on-going process of negotiating access, I made several



trips to Bootle to try and gain an understanding of the 'place' and although it was certainly not orchestrated, there was a distinct feeling, from my admittedly brief dealings, of community resistance to the idea of research or indeed intrusion of any sort. Although it may well be an interesting and useful part of the research process to look at the reasons why people chose not to participate in research, or the reasons why 'access' was not granted, as Raymond Lee (1993) suggests there is little other incentive to do so as so often the pressure to move on to another research site (with more willing participants) is too great. Such was the case with this research project and as the substantive chapters which follow indicate, the empirical research for this thesis was revised to be conducted at two research sites: Dunblane and Soham.

### **Ethics**

At this point it would be useful to explore the ethical and practical dimensions of conducting research on a sensitive and emotional issue. Obviously researching communities in and around serious and high profile crimes such as these is an extremely sensitive and occasionally problematic activity. Such research material requires consideration of the political and cultural context within which the research is undertaken and received. It is of course true that ethical practices should permeate all stages of the research process and by reflecting on potential problems that may occur, methods of how to minimise the effect on research participants can be devised.

*Informed consent and confidentiality*

Achieving informed consent is generally promoted as a fundamental guiding principle for an ethically informed approach to social science research.

Informed consent can be described as:

‘research conducted in such a way that participants have a complete understanding, at all times, of what the research is about and the implications for themselves in being involved’.

(Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 45)

Such a wholly transparent approach may be commendable but is often difficult to achieve in practical situations, as it may discourage certain potential participants willingness to reveal sensitive information. As others have argued sometimes the researcher has to balance the competing questions of consent and validity (Jupp et al., 2000). However, part of the rapport and trust that a qualitative researcher aims to build with participants involves privacy and confidentiality; something which participants need to be aware of and understand from the very outset of the fieldwork. In addition it is important for the researcher to be aware that as with the issue of access, continuing consent should not necessarily be assumed and where relevant should be renegotiated at each stage of the fieldwork.

By adopting an ethically based approach this research routinely gave all research participants assurances regarding confidentiality and although this was more important to some than others, all individuals have been anonymised. This of course was not possible when considering the

community more generally and the notion of place. Community members had understandable concerns about how the image of their area may be negatively affected by the research attention, but they understood clearly that by their very nature, these were locations where serious and extremely high profile crimes had taken place and as such may already have negative connotations for others. Therefore the inability of the researcher to disguise the location of the research sites was explained fully to the participants in terms meaningful to them and an understanding of this issue was agreed before any data collection took place. In this regard I am in agreement with Loader et al. (1998) who suggest that research, which is grounded in a sense of place, cannot credibly anonymise place names.

In addition, particular resonance was felt with Hancock's writings on conducting research in high crime communities where there is a call for researchers to be 'mindful of the sensibilities that exist in a community and consider their implications' (2000: 378). Not only then does research conducted within a community need to be conscious of the attitudes to the research, but also aware of neighbourhood collectives and sensitive to how that may cut across the willingness of some to be involved in the research or not. This was certainly an important dimension of my own research, as I often had requests from participants enquiring as to what opinions others I had spoken to had given. There was a distinct concern from some to know whether they were 'on' or 'off' message with others who had participated in the research and almost all were at pains to insist they were not speaking on behalf of the community as a whole. Whilst it was reiterated throughout the research process and to all participants that I was simply interested in their thoughts and experiences as individuals as part of a community, it

transpired in one of the research sites that others had fallen into this 'trap' before with interviews given to the media and it had become almost a local 'taboo' to be talking about community issues, as or on behalf of the community.

### *Sensitivity and Neutrality*

Defining what constitutes 'sensitive' research is not as straightforward as it sounds. A relatively broad and safe definition may be to say that a research topic is sensitive if it involves potential cost or harm to those who are or who have been involved; harm or cost that goes beyond the incidental or merely onerous (Lee, 1993). Of course, it should be recognised that there are different ideas of harm for different people and at different stages of the process. With particular regard to the research for this thesis I was reminded of what can be described as the 'messy realities' of social research. This thesis explores a subject matter that is sensitive and certainly emotional in nature for those who chose to participate. As such, as the researcher I had to be constantly aware of the sensitivity of the situation with specific regard to issues of intrusion and vulnerability; it is particularly important to be aware that research about emotional and sensitive issues may bring forward vulnerable people as others have suggested (Stanley and Wise, 1983; Finch, 1984). Paying attention to the sensitivity of the research and the issue of intrusion in particular, I aimed to reduce the extent that this may have been a significant factor for my participants by careful consideration throughout the research process of methods, the nature, breadth and depth of the questions, the impingement on the time of those involved and by warning participants of the potential sensitive nature of the content.

Another issue that required ethical consideration and sensitivity during the research process, as previously indicated, were the frequent requests from participants as to whom else I had spoken to during the course of the fieldwork. I found the situation difficult when respondents enquired in this way but strict notions of anonymity and confidentiality had been promised and were adhered to at all times. I dealt with this by talking in general terms of the 'many people who had kindly agreed to participate', 'all kinds of people across many sections of the community'. Given the nature of community relations at one of the research sites in particular, confidentiality from other members of their own community was a particularly important issue.

Staying neutral when conducting research of an emotional nature is also difficult. When conducting value free research is an aspiration, as it is for this thesis, the seminal writing of Howard Becker (1967) on the subject of neutrality has a certain resonance. In sociologically based qualitative research there is usually a concerted effort to be neutral that sees the researcher attempt to comply with the recognised guidelines for such methods, indeed this is usually a demand placed on them by those overseeing or supervising the work. Becker suggests that while the urge to see neutrality as a natural desire and an attempt to 'stick to the rules' in reality it is probably never achievable (Becker, 1967). Ethnographers and qualitative researchers have historically become caught up in the relationship between themselves and the subjects; our real selves and personalities become entwined with others in the dynamic, namely the researched (Piacentini, 2007). Indeed this can be seen as a positive element as it can break down barriers between the researcher and the participants. In

'Whose side are we on?', Becker (1967) firmly believes that qualitative research cannot be totally value free. Whilst ethics is undoubtedly a vital component of robust research, Becker suggests that in order to produce authentic and quality data one must take sides, particularly if researching a 'powerless' or subordinate group. Due to the individual and 'hands on' nature of much qualitative research there is little chance that the researcher will not have some sympathy and maybe attachment to the group that is being researched. This may put in jeopardy the 'value free' stance attempted by the researcher to the extent that Becker (1967) firmly believes that all research is unavoidably contaminated by the researcher's beliefs. Although individual biases and values could be minimised, they cannot be completely eradicated. Being sympathetic and maybe even taking one side or another, could certainly distort the data to a degree but it does not make it unusable. Historically the qualitative researcher or ethnographer invariably leaves ones individual mark on the data collection process. On first reading and prior to commencement of this research, Becker's (1967) idea seemed relatively abstract but there is certainly much truth in the idea that 'totally value free' research is almost impossible due to the human nature of the researcher and the enforced familiarity with respondents over time, due to the lengthy face-to-face interviews. The experience of my own fieldwork confirms to me that Becker's theory does hold true in this regard.

### **Relations in the field**

Qualitative research can and has taken place in a vast variety of situations and there is much variation within each type of setting that is relevant and

has bearing on the nature of relationships that are possible with the participants in these settings. As such, generalizations when discussing relations in the field are necessarily subject to multiple exceptions. Therefore what follows can only be a discussion of the methodological and practical considerations as they relate directly to this research study. When in the field, on a superficial level my position and identity within the communities I was researching could be easily identified as one of university postgraduate researcher; thus for many and in the first instance I was obviously an 'outsider'. However, as other social science researchers have noted, defining the 'insider-outsider' status is often more complex than this. When analysing their own research methods and consequent data representations, Jewkes and Letherby (2001) acknowledge the complex issue of identification and suggest that regardless of the researchers' actual status, respondents often transfer onto them definitions and images that belong to their own culture and experience. For example, while conducting research among long term male prisoners, Yvonne Jewkes notes how, at a superficial level she was no doubt defined by her 'outsider' status, yet on a personal level, she found that individual respondents in her study assigned her different identities based on notions of her professional status, her social power and her gender (2002). Jewkes (2002) further notes that whilst these could not necessarily be described as 'insider' identities, they did seem to indicate a transitional state somewhere between the two. It is important to remain aware then that the insider-outsider status of the researcher is not a simple issue and that people in the field, like the researcher, will seek to place or locate the ethnographer within their own experience (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Within research relationships, as in any encounters between strangers, signs of power; social, economic or cultural can weigh heavily in setting the tone

for interaction (Lindlof, 1995). In the formation of these (transient) relationships, my own position may have been viewed as a 'friendly stranger' (Cotterill and Letherby, 1994) who unlike a friend does not exercise control. Therefore the relationship exists for the purpose of the research and is returned to pre-fieldwork status soon after the fieldwork is over.

My own research experience certainly leads me to believe that insider-outsider status is an important issue. As much of the literature in this area suggests, encountering suspicion about a researcher's presence in the field is not uncommon. I am aware that my initial attempts to enter the field, across all sites in the first instance, were often thwarted or certainly made more difficult because of the doubt of some in the community as to my intentions. Due to the nature of the research subject and my interest in the role of the media in the representations of community, many of my potential respondents were suspicious that I was in fact part of the media myself. My greatest (and on-going) hurdle in this respect was to convince participants of my interests in their own views and day-to-day experiences rather than the more media driven voyeuristic elements of the crime itself. In this regard I worked extremely hard throughout the research process and through the field work stage in particular, to encourage the view that my interest in their community and these issues was intellectual in nature and more importantly, genuine.

### *Emotional Work*

In recent feminist literature and elsewhere (Hunt, 1989) there has been an acknowledgement of the 'emotional work' involved in fieldwork and this is not limited to 'insider' research. The emotional work involved in this study



manifested itself in several ways and as the research progressed it was certainly the case that some of the participants were keen to make emotional and intellectual connections with myself as the researcher. During the course of this research project I spoke (and wrote) to some people who told me things that they had not discussed before and I was frequently surprised by how unfailingly candid many people were in their responses to me. For some respondents, it seemed talking to an 'outsider' had a therapeutic effect. I am not however, suggesting that the researcher/respondent relationship was in any way a counselling relationship in these instances. I never gave the impression that I had any counselling skills and even if that had been the case, I acknowledge, like others that counselling is not part of the research exchange (Cotterill and Letherby, 1994).

For my own part I can say it was often difficult not to be moved by some of the stories of those who were close to the actual events. There have been times when I have found my emotional engagement with some of the research material theoretically complex and difficult to process on a practical level. In order to 'do' something with my emotions and feelings I relied on the experiences and ears of colleagues and I personally feel this 'informal' therapy' was crucial. I certainly believe that emotional involvement and experience plays an important role in the formation of knowledge and in my own experience, the emotional work involved in researching a sensitive issue, particularly at a community level, has actually added value to the research process and the thesis as a whole.

As is suggested in the discussions above, establishing and maintaining field relations can be a stressful as well as a rewarding experience and the

researcher must learn to recognise and cope with their own feelings in order to sustain their position in the field. In addition, insider-outsider status is not a simple issue and the role of the qualitative researcher is a privileged position, requiring sensitivity but it is also a transitory role requiring both parties to acknowledge their differences and to accept that the relationship is likely to terminate when the fieldwork is completed. Like Jewkes and Letherby (2001) I believe that involvement with the issues under research did not disempower me intellectually, as I am still able to be critical and analytical about this issue, just as my respondents often were. Yet involvement at whatever level does make a difference and it is important to acknowledge this. Involvement in research is complex and it seems that even when there were (temporary) connections between myself and some of the respondents, my status as a 'stranger', made it an easier process. So whatever the involvement with the issue and with the respondents, my experience caused me to remain an outsider.

This discussion has highlighted many elements to consider of a practical and emotional nature when in the field. Emotional involvement and experience can certainly play a part in the formulation of knowledge. Although not essential to the research process, the ability to draw on one's own experience and resources can allow connections to be made and rapport to be developed between researchers and researched at a crucial early stage of the fieldwork. In this way the role of the researcher, in the research process as a whole including in generating the data collected must be recognised (Hammersley, 1992). There is a vast amount of literature on the role of the researcher and one of the most pertinent themes to emanate is that establishing a research role takes time and one needs to adopt different roles throughout the

research process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). For these reasons and in order to be 'accepted' researchers need to be adaptable in how they manage their role within the fieldwork setting. In my own experience this role adjustment was not an overt or conscious decision, rather an acute awareness of the level of sensitivity that was needed to manage relations in the field.

### **Grounding the theory**

The Grounded Theory approach was first developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, and is considered theoretically oppositional to the hypothetico-deductive theory; an approach developed from the natural sciences and one which is underpinned by deductive rather than inductive logic (Bottoms, 2000). Hypothetico-deductive theory develops a possible theoretical explanation through empirical observation and research then proceeds on the basis of testing the original hypothesis (Layder, 1998). Conversely, a theory is 'grounded' by applying a series of systematic tests, where it must conform to the following criteria; fit, in that the theory fits the data; understanding, meaning those in the field will understand the language and context of the theory; control, so the researcher is in control of the data; generality, the theory will be applicable in a variety of contexts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The theory is therefore derived from analysing the data, specifically from the phenomenon under observation, rather than from the testing of previously formulated or constructed hypothesis, it is a process of discovery and one of comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). More importantly for this current research is that Grounded Theory recognises the

subtlety of the means of data collection and the sensitive nature of dealing with the respondents, thus allowing the researcher to develop an insight into the phenomenon and give the research some individuality, which is certainly one of the aims of this thesis.

A major consideration in Grounded Theory is that the data is collected in a sensitive way that ensures quality. The nature of the topic under consideration meant that participants in my research required sensitive handling and how they were interviewed was central to the data collection process. The way that process is carried out is vital to ensure quality data. Whilst accepting that most interviews are a mixture of active, but mainly passive listening, Grounded Theory advocates an attempt to remain neutral but sensitive to the process. Becker's (1967) idea of taking sides; that some of the researcher's personal beliefs and ideas may influence data collection and analysis (researcher bias) is apparent and largely unavoidable, but can be minimised.

The fieldwork phase of this thesis proposed a general theoretical framework, rather than a specific research question, considering if the concept of a 'victim community' could be identified in cases where a serious and high profile crime had taken place that had been covered extensively by the media. The intention was to explore the lived reality of the members of the community where this serious and high profile crime had taken place. I did not have preconceived ideas about what their views and thoughts may be. My aim was to begin the fieldwork with as open a mind as possible and as I collected the data, interesting points and theories would emerge. It is important to understand that different people experience life in different

ways, and for research to be meaningful in this context, this understanding must be accepted. One advantage of such a grounded approach is that it allows a study of the local and specific realities of the participants, without imposing value assumptions sometimes present in other forms of research. However, it is important to note points of contention around this as a research position. Like much qualitative research generally, Grounded Theory is frequently criticised for not being able to relate with aspects of the real world, although it is recognised that an internal logic and therefore validity can exist in such unique research environments (Hammersley, 1992). It has been suggested by others that Grounded Theory, by reference to 'the discovery of theory from data', falsely assumes that there are facts that can be 'theory neutral' (Bottoms, 2000: 43). My own research experience suggests the formation and content of a semi-structured interview, however loose and inductive, is drafted in the first instance by the researcher. As such the associated areas of interest and discussion by their very nature, are those that the researcher feels important or interesting. This is not necessarily a problem yet it is important to acknowledge this from the outset. This element of the media-crime relationship is of extreme interest to me and as such I have views and ideas on the topic. That is not to say that I presumed to know or predict the views and feelings of the community members that I spoke with, but I feel it is important to identify that as the researcher I may have unconsciously, made assumptions in relation to the areas of questioning that were of interest to me. Notwithstanding, the direction of this study was always dictated by the data and any new theories were generated inductively in the tradition of qualitative research. Although not necessarily modelled on the approach this research certainly shares some elements and aspects with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Grounded Theory.

In this way Layder's (1998) Adaptive Theory is useful here, in that the researcher should always be aware of existing theoretical frameworks within the subject matter, but also be adaptive to new theories that further shape the data and alter the perception of the original framework (Layder, 1998; Bottoms, 2000). The important point would seem to be to know that theories exist and be responsive in interpreting data and flexible in methodological approach, making sure in this case that the empirical research and analysis remains focussed on the lived day-to-day experiences of the participants.

The empirical chapter that immediately follows is a detailed analysis of the nature and influence of media representations of the serious crimes committed, and the on-going effects of this on the communities in which they happened. For the thesis as a whole, this data is read and analysed in conjunction with the empirical interviews with community members, as such a defence of this multi-method approach to data collection is required.

### **Approaches to Data Collection**

Numerous advantages are put forward in the literature for combining research methods, the overarching one being that it increases the validity of findings (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). It is argued that by bringing together different methods with their own strengths and weaknesses each may counteract the other (Maguire, 2000). This process of combining methods and data sources has been termed 'triangulation', defined as 'the use of different methods of research, sources of data or types of data to address

the same research question' (Jupp, 2001: 308). However, researchers should not be naïve in this regard that simply utilising a triangulation of methods will increase the validity of their findings. Here I find agreement with Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) when they claim that researchers need to resist the temptation to assume that the aggregation of data from different sources will produce a more complete picture. For most qualitative researchers multiple versions of reality are acknowledged and consequently this thesis adopts the position that any differences between data are as significant and enlightening as the similarities (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). The research and analysis for this thesis advances therefore, on what can be termed 'methodological pluralism' (Walklate, 2000), reflecting a position, which recognises that:

'different research techniques can uncover different layers of social reality, and the role of the researcher is to look for confirmation and contradictions between those different layers of information' (2000: 193).

So although this conflation of methods seems to be a healthier approach to criminological research more generally, this can only be the case if the researcher adopts a pragmatic and theoretically coherent approach to their data collection. A multi-method approach should only be followed if it adds value to the study by enhancing understanding to the issue of interest (Jupp, 2001); some combinations of methods do not work well because they are founded on different assumptions about the social world and how it can be explained.

**Media - Method and Sample**

This chapter now turns to a description of the methods and sample used to analyse the press reports studied, using a selective combination of content analysis and at times, elements of Critical Discourse Analysis. Content Analysis is an approach commonly used in the examination of documentary materials. Although for many this represents a more quantitative approach, such as counting the number of times a particular word is used, here it is utilised from a more qualitative stance, exploring the newspaper reports for cultural meanings and insights to the research questions that these texts may provide. Following others who have used content analysis in this way (most notably Ericson et al, 1991; Wykes, 2001) the perspective for this research views news and media reporting as not only reflecting but also actively constructing our 'sense of social reality to which it refers' (May, 1997: 168) or as Wykes more specifically describes crime news as 'the site of our national conscience and moral codes' (2001: 1). Whilst recognising that when adopting a strategy utilising content analysis it is important that the approach is rigorous and methodological, with attention paid to the frequency and regularity of particular forms of content (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 128), under the distinguishing auspices of a qualitative umbrella, this research study strives to go beyond 'mapping the profile' of the media reports to achieve an interpretive and more qualitative understanding of meaning and impact on those within the communities in question.

By the same token, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is presented as an analytical framework for studying language, specifically in relation to power and ideology (Fairclough, 1995). Power in this sense is used in regard to any differentials between participants in the discourse events and also



conceptualised in terms of the unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed (Fairclough, 1995: 1). Within CDA Fairclough (1995) identifies three separate forms of analysis and attempts to map them onto one another; combining micro, meso and macro-level interpretation. This current research analysis recognises and seeks to utilise elements of this approach, by not only considering the text at the micro-level but with an awareness of engaging with the text's production and consumption at the meso level but importantly at the macro-level; a concern with the inter-textual understanding, trying to locate the broader social conditions that may affect the text and language used. In this way elements of CDA will be considered in this press analysis in combination with some of the more traditional elements of content analysis as it relates to press and media analysis.

Although recognising that there are many terminological problems when attempting to define media discourse (Bell and Garrett, 1998), for the purposes of this study, although focusing centrally on the more traditional view of text as words, this thesis is also keen to recognise a more inclusive and broader definition. Within discourse analysis 'text' may be written or spoken (transcribed) discourse. This thesis recognises that texts in contemporary society are multi-faceted, that is those texts whose primary form is language (press reports) often incorporate other semiotic forms; not only do they include photographs and graphics but increasingly the design and format of the news page is becoming more important in the consumption and evaluation of written texts (Fairclough, 1995; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998; Greer, 2010). Although these issues are not central to the analysis of the media report for this study, it is salient to be aware of and

have consideration for other forms of text that are co-present with language, particularly in relation to how they may interact.

### *Methodology*

The significance of the symbiotic relationship between crime and the media does not need reiterating here; it is now a well rehearsed position to suggest that the relationship between media images and popular consciousness is complex and increasingly difficult to unpack (Reiner *et al.*, 2000; Sparks, 1992). In essence, how media represent social phenomena is central to how we, as media consumers, with little direct experience ourselves, make sense of them and their place in our every day lives (Ericson *et al.*, 1991; Sparks, 1992; Greer, 2003). It is under these auspices that the media analysis element of this research was conducted. However, before proceeding to specify the sample used in more detail there is a need to recognise a certain amount of concern in some recent literature regarding the 'current orthodoxy within crime and media research' (Greer, 2010: 2). Chris Greer suggests that the established direction of most crime and media research has potentially 'negative consequences' for this area of scholarly interest (*Ibid.*). As such and before continuing, a discussion of such potentially problematic issues that may be associated with researching crime and the media should be addressed.

Chris Greer's (2010) first point of issue with the direction of much contemporary crime-media research is the imbalanced nature of the research approach, favouring the criminological over adequate consideration of the media. On this point and in defence, whilst this thesis has attempted to take

account of the two disciplines both methodologically and empirically, the aim is to take a balanced approach but this is ultimately research conducted by a criminologist with an interest in the media and not the reverse. Although hopeful of making a contribution to what Greer has termed the emerging field of 'media criminology' (2010: 5), rather than a thesis addressing the media's influence on crime per se, this is primarily a criminological focused research study concerning notions of identity, victimhood and community in the first instance, encompassing a subsequent examination of the nature of the role the media plays in the representation of those identities. In addition for Greer (2010) is the fundamental problem of the distancing between the researcher and the object of enquiry, as evidenced on one level by the growing reliance by researchers in this area on on-line searchable newspaper databases at the obvious expense of the importance of the visual. Although utilising such newspaper search databases for part of the media data collection in this chapter, great attention has been paid to 'read' these texts in context considering elements for analysis, as far as is possible of image, style, colour and position. This underlines the importance of the visual for crime newsworthiness, for as Greer suggests 'crime stories are increasingly selected and 'produced' as media events' on the basis of their visual, as well as their 'lexical-verbal' potential (2007: 29).

The second element of separation for Greer (2010) occurs at the level of production and the distancing from the social processes of media production. There is of course a need here to recognise the partiality of this current research work where the focus is of course on the end product of news journalism at the expense of the many influences of production on

crime news representations. The reasons for this strategy are two fold. Firstly and in a wholly practical sense, the range and limits of this thesis had to be drawn somewhere, with both time and financial constraints in place. Whilst conceding that an examination and consideration of influences within media newsrooms may be desirable and of benefit to any future research conducted in this area, this was not the central remit of the work and was not manageable in any practical sense and ultimately would have taken the study in an altogether different direction. In addition and as has been discussed previously, this was not the focus of the area of research. At the level of consumption of the text, Greer (2010) also laments the lack of empirical engagement with media consumers. Of course, this is an area that this work seeks to research directly, as evidenced from the empirical discussions, which are to follow in the subsequent chapters. Finally, Greer's (2010) third proposed negative consequence to flow from the current orthodoxy within crime and media research concerns the nature of the theoretical and methodological framework constraining much of the research findings in this area. This is not the intent for this work which hopes not simply to reiterate that 'the media distort crime' but seeks to explore, understand and explain the media representations of the specific victim communities.

With this in mind it is worth repeating that the essence of this study aims to explore the notions of identity and victim community, with the subsequent media representation of those communities and the crime events that took place, whilst important to the overall analysis are not the central element of investigation. We also need to be clear about the reasons for choosing to look at printed media rather than other forms of media in the exploration of

victim communities. As has been suggested in the previous chapter, in addition to the context and pressures of the research timescale, the most commonly accessed form of media, to which we had on-going access, is the more traditional form of print. As with much of the established research literature on crime and the media more generally (Reiner *et al.*, 2000), this thesis chose to focus on the press as the media in question. Press reports are easier to get hold of and to analyse in 'hard copy' format than other 'traditional' media such as film, radio or television programmes or newer media forms. Significantly the focus of this analysis is on the language, the reporting and its impact on the communities in question, rather than the medium through which those issues are communicated. Although recognising and accounting where possible for the multi-faceted nature of late modern texts, more traditional forms of print media and community are the preferred forms in this case, through which to research and explore the influences of newer media and new forms of community (or division) which are shaped and developed in response. As such I have chosen to explore and examine them through the news print media and analyse them in the nature described below.

The overarching aim of this thesis and as background to the media analysis that is to follow is to explore how a serious crime event affects the community involved in ways that may encourage them to form and carry with them a sense of stigma and spoiled identity and how far, if at all, their experiences are influenced by the media. In addition, and as a consequence of new media technologies, these crimes may speak to a wider national or global community who also experience the event as trauma, but second-hand and vicariously via the media.

*Sample*

The following chapter then will move to analyse selective press coverage of the two serious and high profile crimes in question, namely the school shootings that occurred in Dunblane, 1996 and the murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham, 2002. Before detailing the particulars of the newspaper samples used, an introduction to the background to the media coverage of each case is contextually useful at this point.

On 13 March 1996, Thomas Hamilton walked into Dunblane Primary School armed with four guns, where he shot and killed sixteen children and one teacher, injuring many more pupils and other teachers. Within minutes of the shootings Thomas Hamilton turned a gun on himself and died immediately. In this case much of the media coverage and the sources used in the immediate days and weeks that followed the crime were more centred on the victims, their families and (in part) the wider community as a whole. More latterly the media coverage regarding Dunblane shifted substantively to cover the public inquiry into the shootings and the subsequent findings, *The Cullen Report* (Cullen 1996), which was published in October of that same year. As a consequence of the nature of the crime in Dunblane and its outcome, or rather the outcome for the perpetrator, much of the media coverage relied heavily on reporting and analysing events surrounding the aftermath of the crime itself and the inquiry that followed, as such comments were very often sourced from those involved in these processes.

On 4 August 2002, two ten-year-old schoolgirls went missing from their homes in Soham. The hunt for the missing girls quickly became the largest

police hunt ever mounted in the United Kingdom. Almost two weeks later the bodies of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman were found 15 miles away in a remote patch of woodland close to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk. On the same day Ian Huntley, a caretaker at the local secondary school, Soham Village College was arrested for their murders. In contrast to the immediacy of the events in Dunblane, the serious crime event in Soham involved in the initial stages, a fourteen-day police investigation and search for the schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, who went missing from Holly's house in Soham on the evening of Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2002. As a result a vast proportion of the early days reporting and media coverage concerned statements and requests for information from the police and other criminal justice agency officials. As was the case with the media coverage of Dunblane, over time the focus of much of the reporting shifted to the impending trial, sentencing and detainment of the perpetrator Ian Huntley (and of his girlfriend at the time of the murders, Maxine Carr). It is the very different context and nature of the two crimes on this level that dictates the obvious divergence in how the media chose and utilised sources; whose voices are therefore seen to be privileged over others at this time.

The sample of reports used in this study incorporates analysis of both local and national news coverage, allowing an examination of the extent and nature of the differences of national media coverage compared to the more community based and presumably more limited resources of local newspapers, which may then give them a distinct approach to covering each particular case. For each crime event three newspapers were selected. Two national newspapers were used across both cases, *The Guardian* (a 'left'-of-centre broadsheet with a circulation of 220,000) and the *Daily Mail* (a

distinctly 'right'-of-centre mid market tabloid, with an average daily circulation approaching 2 million). In addition to these, the most prominent newspaper local to each area was also included in the analysis. For Dunblane this was the *Stirling Observer* (a local paid for paper with a circulation of around 11,500) and for Soham, the *Ely Standard* (free local paper, circulation approximately 7,500). This selection of print media was felt to offer a broad range of socio-political standpoints, spanning the spectrum of what can be termed 'liberal', 'populist' and 'local' news outlets. In each of the newspapers analysed, all stories with a headline that contained key words specific to each case were selected (Dunblane keywords: 'Dunblane', 'Hamilton'; Soham keywords: 'Soham', 'Holly and Jessica', 'Huntley', 'Carr', 'missing schoolgirls', 'caretaker'). The articles with headlines containing any of these keywords were selected over the period of one calendar year from the date that the crime took place. Following a search to identify and eliminate any peripheral stories (i.e. stories where the keywords were mentioned but were totally unrelated to the general theme of the article) and a system of cross-referencing to eliminate duplication, the final search produced a total of 477 articles.<sup>9</sup> The analysis that follows is therefore based on that resultant core of articles, with 244 concerning Dunblane and 233 articles relating to Soham (a quantitative overview of the full corpus of news coverage analysed is detailed in Appendix 2). Finally it should be noted that this archive is not all encompassing and cannot be said to be a sample or representation in the statistical sense. However, it is intended to provide a snapshot of how the national and a relevant local newspaper portrays the crime event in the crucial days, weeks and months after the crime had taken place.

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<sup>9</sup> The data base that was compiled in order to order, code and analyse the 477 articles is included in Appendix 1



**The Fieldwork Phase**

As has been previously indicated, during the pre-research phase I initially travelled several times to the research sites to get a 'feel' for the place and the communities and to gather any background and local community information that I felt would be instructive. From some of that information and together with the newspaper articles collated for the media analysis I was able to identify some in the community to partake in this study. Initial contact was by letter, explaining the aims and process of the research, as well as details and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality (issues which had become highly visible during the background and pre-research phases across all sites). From these preliminary contacts and after further communications, a handful of interviews were arranged with participants at the two remaining research sites. At the end of each these interviews and where appropriate, each participant was asked if they felt they could recommend anyone else in the community to take part in the research. The overall response rate to requests for participation were felt to be relatively low and while the numbers of community members who participated did reach the target set, many within the community declined to take part in the research study before having a fully informed understanding of the details of the research aims and process. This in itself gives an interesting indication of the level of emotion and stigma attached to the locality at a community level. As a consequence then, the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters is as a direct result of the empirical research from fieldwork interviews examining two serious and high profile and highly mediatized crimes that have taken place in Britain in recent years; the killings of schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham in August 2002 and the shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1996.

The main body of fieldwork and interviews were carried out between January and November 2006. Most of the empirical data for the substantive analysis has been drawn from 39 semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with local residents and members of the community across the two sites (18 in Dunblane and 21 in Soham; details of which can be found in Appendix 3). The interviews were almost always conducted on a one-to-one basis (although there were two occasions, one at each site where participants preferred to be interviewed together; a husband and wife in Dunblane and a mother and daughter in Soham). By the same token most of the interviews were face-to-face although there were two participants who were more reluctant or unable to meet and in both these cases these interviews were conducted by telephone and notes were taken both at the time and directly after. In all cases, where possible the loose structure of the interview centred around the funnelling of questions, placing the most sensitive topic areas within other more regular topics. This was to allow time, where needed for respondents to process any difficult emotions and thoughts through the interview and before its end. There were also incidences of supplementary telephone conversations and even letters from participants who after the initial interview, wanted to supplement their original thoughts and emotions. Almost all the face-to-face interviews were conducted in participant's own houses. All the interviews were audio recorded on mini-disc with the full and on-going consent of those who participated. I also chose to take notes contemporaneously and in addition to the recordings where I was able to note other non-verbal communications or particular environmental situations. Given the sometimes emotional and sensitive nature of the research, interviewees were reminded throughout that at anytime they could

turn off the recording device if they felt more comfortable. Although this situation never arose, it was important that the participants felt able to control the eventual output of the interview in this way. Although, as previously mentioned, some of those I initially contacted did decline to be interviewed, of those who agreed in principle fulfilled their promise; no participants refused to be recorded. The interviews themselves lasted on average between one and one and a half hours, (the shortest being 20 minutes and the longest over 2 hours) thus amounting to around 83 hours of transcribed research data in total. This transcription procedure began early in the data collection process and facilitated two important functions. Firstly, reading, re-reading and transcribing the data personally encouraged familiarization, reflection and analytical focus of the data and secondly I had the opportunity to identify and explore emergent findings as the collection of data proceeded. The data was subsequently organised and coded to produce categories in line with areas of thematic interest. The physical task of coding was undertaken manually and the data was colour coded, with some segments of text being particularly rich in data that produced several overlapping codes.

### **Summary**

There is always the risk of the researcher altering what is said or done in a specific situation by her very presence (Jewkes, 2002). It is interesting and poignant then to look at the purpose and scope of this chapter. Why is it important for some researchers to discuss and analyse research methods and reasons for their use, when for others this is simply not an issue. Many

substantial and influential studies, even those employing ethnographic methods, have been written and published with very little discussion in this area. Often elements of context have not informed a substantial part of the text in accounts of research. Where they have been provided, they are sometimes tucked away in a short appendix or are often highly generalised accounts. Although as noted by Davies (2000) within more recent mainstream publications, descriptive accounts of research processes have become more prominent and transparent, many empirical accounts only pay lip service to many of the issues discussed in this chapter. Whilst factually describing methods employed, timescale of the research stages and where the research took place, these accounts give no description or discussion of the more personal reasons for, or elements of the research. This does not allow the audience to consider the research process in its entirety. With no reflexive account there is nothing of the authors personality or identity within; no recognition of self. This thesis suggests that this leaves the audience in a weakened position as it becomes more difficult to analyse and consider the representativeness and validity of the research project without this information. Whether these are key issues for all is a decision of the individual author, but a reflexive awareness of the many influences on data collection, presentation and of the research process as a whole, is preferable for this researcher.

In readiness for a discussion of the empirical research and data, the first three chapters of this thesis have provided a substantial literature review, which has attempted to give theoretical background to the issues under consideration. This current chapter concerning research methods has presented an insight into the practical process of conducting research on a

sensitive issue at a community level. I do not suggest that this work is representative of all who are part of physical communities in the aftermath of a serious and high profile crime, nor is it necessarily indicative of others experience of research with emotional communities. I do hope however that this work will have value in explanatory terms and that it may be relevant to other researchers who find themselves in similar situations. In conclusion to this chapter on research methodologies, it should be stated that what follows in the substantive findings chapters below are, of necessity a distillation of my findings, although one which aims to capture the essence of the research experience in the indicated communities. Having detailed the journey from theory to method and assessing the practical realities of utilising different yet complementary research techniques, this thesis now moves to analyse the first set of empirical data gathered; the media representations of the serious crime committed and their contemporaneous effect on the communities in which they took place.

## **Part III**

# **Two Case Studies of Victim Communities**

## **Chapter Five**

# **Media representations of Victim Communities in the U.K. Press**

### **Introduction**

As has been discussed in some detail in the previous chapter regarding methodology, the primary data sources for this thesis are the qualitative accounts of participants from within the communities where the specific serious and high profile crimes have taken place. This data involves an in-depth qualitative analysis and interrogation of and interaction between the media representations and everyday ways of knowing about such key social issues and crime events. That same chapter also details the associated methodological and practical issues of that research. However, together with

this qualitative empirical data, this thesis also seeks to explore the nature and influence of the media representations of the serious crimes committed and any contemporaneous effect on the communities in which they took place. As such this study aims to combine the data from the interviews with community members, with a detailed analysis of media reporting of each of these serious crime events. This chapter seeks to situate this analysis within the previously discussed wider debates and discussions regarding media theory and the more specific vagaries of researching crime and the media in the late modern context. The aim of the analysis is in simple terms, to understand and explore press representations of the particular serious crimes in their wider context; the resultant images of and potential effects on the identities, localities and communities in question and the relevance of wider changes in late modernity.

It is clear that the significance of media representations for the study of crime and deviance is in part attributable to the fact that the majority of the public still derive their image of crime from mass media accounts. Within criminological research, the media can provide a source of data for research; with its interpretive accounts of crimes and subsequent criminal justice proceedings as utilised by this study, or the media can be the object of criminological study in its own right. Whilst much of the debate has focused on the potentially 'criminogenic consequences of the mass media' (Reiner, 1997: 189), this thesis seeks to refract this notion in a different direction; to examine how the media may construct and represent particular serious



crimes and their subsequent victims on a collective level, as 'victim communities' and the consequences of doing so <sup>10</sup>.

### **Whose 'Voice' represents the Community?**

News stories about crime and justice can be seen as performing a role of bringing communities together and of mobilizing common responses. Indeed it is the crimes that are most sensationalised by the media as a consequence have the strongest hold on our national culture and identity. But who are the sources and voices to whom the media turn, to represent the community on a national, or in these cases, at a local wider victim community level. As Hall *et al.*'s (1978) analysis of the social production of news and in particular the theory of 'primary definition' have suggested, the media in these situations often appeal to the 'elite' knowledge of control agencies and other professionals, who in turn collectively establish an initial and privileged definition or interpretation of the topic in question, thus setting the parameters for future discussion and debates. To a point, this media research sample would seem to support this proposition. As what follows illustrates, it is indeed certain 'powerful' and 'privileged' elite sources that seem to dominate (although not monopolise) the media coverage of the serious crime events in question. Yet, there are many influences on this process and as others have identified there are problems with Hall *et al.*'s (1978) analysis, not least that although undoubtedly significant this was a theory developed without empirical research with journalists or sources (Greer, 2010). In addition as previous discussion in this thesis has indicated,

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<sup>10</sup> The database compiled in order to order, code and analyse the full range of media articles utilised is detailed in Appendix 1.

in any media analysis attention needs to be paid to the communication process as a whole and the flow of information between media and source is more complex than the original notion of primary definition suggests (Schlesinger et al. 1991).

Within the sampled media coverage of the serious crime event that occurred at Dunblane the 'privileged' voices taken to represent the wider community were often those of the police service, local authority and council members and politicians at both a local and national level. On this notion of 'whose voice represents the community' there were obvious differences when examining the local newspaper against the national papers. *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* relied far more on the police and national members of parliament as the sources that were called on to speak on behalf of the community than the *Stirling Observer*, who whilst reporting on what MPs had to say about the issues, centred more focus on local community leaders, campaigners calling for gun control and friends and family close to the victims.

The question of who is given the voice to represent the wider community, in the case of Dunblane is a particularly interesting one. As will be illustrated in the chapters that are to follow, those who were chosen (or who presented themselves) in this role, both by the national and the local press (who should be closer spatially and culturally to the place and crime event in question) to represent the views of the wider community of Dunblane, caused much consternation and problems. Within a proportion of the wider community, many at times felt they were not being adequately represented as a collective by those who were being used as regular sources by the media. This notion

of a 'united community divided' became a fairly prominent issue within the analysis and will be returned to in the examination of themes that follows. Overall in the case of Dunblane, both *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* gave more space to voices of the police, council/local authority officials, MP's and those in the medical profession (much of the latter was as a result of coverage of The Cullen Inquiry (1996)). The research found that 54 per cent of voices sourced in *The Guardian* can be attributed to the above sources and 48 per cent for the *Daily Mail*. The national broadsheet also gave seemingly equal weight to the voices of the gun lobby and the anti-gun lobby, 9 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. The *Daily Mail* gave more weight to the seemingly political divide surrounding this issue, with many of their sources coming from the Conservative right, allied for the most part with those supportive of the 'right to shoot'. This was in stark contrast to the local newspaper *The Stirling Observer*, which gave a strong voice to the anti gun lobby and particularly the Snowdrop Campaign (founded and fought by mothers local to the area but not directly involved in the crime event themselves) with 10 per cent of those voices cited, yet little or no voice to those critical of that stance who were supportive of gun clubs and the right to shoot more generally, who only registered as one quote within the entire research sample for the local newspaper. This is indicative of the relative importance of discourse practice employed by news print media of giving a voice to oppositional perspectives. In this case it may be that the press's need to maintain an image of an open forum for public discussion and therefore giving more equal access to different perspectives and voices is more important for the national newspapers (or their assumed audience) than the local paper which is closer to the crime event and presumably more protective towards those affected by it - the wider victim community. In this

case, it could be seen that power in relation to the control of discourse is seen as the power to maintain certain discursive strategies with particular dominance over alternative positions (Fairclough, 1995).

Again in the case of Soham, the national media in particular privileged the voice of the police and other criminal justice agencies, with 43 per cent of the cited voices evident in *The Guardian* (although as discussed above, this was in part due to the nature of the initial search and investigation). Community leaders and council officials featured less prominently as sources for this serious crime event as a whole, across both national and local media in this research; 10 per cent, 12 per cent and 15 per cent for *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail* and the *Ely Standard* respectively. Members of the 'community' (often anonymous) were cited in both papers - but were marginally more likely to be given a voice in the national broadsheet (14 per cent in *The Guardian*, 10 per cent in the *Ely Standard*). The *Daily Mail* was the exception here, with almost a quarter of their reports (24 per cent) citing sources as community members, or those associated with the case in another way; witnesses or those who had known the schoolgirls or their families (or indeed those close to the accused in the case).

Across both cases and in equal measure within both local and national papers church leaders (although exclusively of a Christian persuasion) were often given as representative, as the 'voice' of the community, 5 per cent for Dunblane and 7 per cent for Soham. This is an interesting point in itself given the increasing secularisation of late modern society. However, as others have identified (Gilliat-Ray, 1998), not only after serious crime events such as those as the subject of this research, but also following major

accidents and disasters associated with place, (or represented as such) churches and local places of worship are often at the centre of efforts within a community, acting as a focus for collectively and variously coming to terms with, remembering, celebrating and moving forward. It is in such a context that the question of how the media choose to represent the wider victim community and whose voices they allow to articulate that position should be considered.

This of course gives increased resonance to the study of the notion of a wider victim community in the wake of a high profile and serious crime. Notions of community, whether referring to the physical and traditional or the imagined and virtual are essentially about identity, belonging and membership. It is how those communities are represented by a more traditional form of media production to which this chapter now turns, by way of examining the themes that were recurrent within the texts and images of the national and local media coverage of the serious crime events in Dunblane and Soham.

### **Newsworthy Themes**

Having looked at the voices presented in the media as representing the wider victim 'community', we now move to discuss the newsworthy themes and the dominant discourses in news reporting around the two cases in point. The current sample of news reports across both cases produced areas of 'newsworthy themes' which can be drawn together under three main headings, namely a 'sense of place', the 'social impact of media portrayals'

and victim communities and 'the culture of crime'. The analysis of victim communities and how they are represented by the news print media in question will now be addressed under these identified themes.

### **A 'sense of place'**

The dominant news theme across both cases was the 'sense of place' which made up a quarter (25 per cent) of news stories within the sample overall.

#### *'Just not that sort of place'*

Within this 'sense of place' news theme many of the reports focused on the issues of community and how this sort of crime had happened in the least expected place. The dominant message from many of the reports set up the locations of Dunblane and Soham as 'just not the sort of place' where such a serious crime would or could expect to be perpetrated:

People here imagined a world of violence as a world elsewhere: it was on video, it was New York or Africa, in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh perhaps. It was miles away, in other worlds, and very little of it, they used to say, could be found in Dunblane. (*Guardian*, 14 March 1996)

This is not the USA, after all, not some crack-infested hellhole, but a conservative Scottish town we are talking about. (*Guardian*, 14 March 1996)

You hear about things like this in places like Miami or Brooklyn but not in a village like Dunblane, a well-balanced community. (*Stirling Observer*, 15 March 1996)

Here the notion of 'story placing' is evident; 'where journalists employ descriptions of place (geography, landscape and community) to frame their news reports' (Kitzinger, 2004: 103). A sense of place is routinely built into the practice of news, and more specifically, crime news reporting. The geographical and social placement of the story is framed by the descriptions and visuals used to conjure up ideas about the location (including associated landscapes, cultures and peoples) where the crime event occurred (Kitzinger, 2004):

The sense of safety for young parents and retired couples was reinforced by it's (Dunblane) air of quiet prosperity, not to mention delightful countryside on the edge of the Highlands...The Allan Water, crossed by a 15<sup>th</sup> Century bridge and noted for it's fishing, provides pleasant walks in the town for the toddlers to feed the ducks. (*Guardian*, 14 March 1996)

Thus, conveying a sense of place to the audience draws on the notions of 'physical space' and 'symbolic place'. Descriptions and images of place are used to provide context for the audience. A headline or a photograph can be used to symbolize a physical space, the village of Soham or the continent of Africa for example, or a symbolic place or even a concept such as anti-social behaviour. These images of place introduce atmosphere but can also be used to lend authority to reports, inviting the audience to 'be there' and to 'see

with their own eyes'. However, it is also important to remember that representations of place are more than simple, physical geography, they evoke ideas and values about the social context of events and as Goffman (1990: 11) suggests, convey ideas about 'the natives' and as such the symbolic importance of this on the audience should not be underestimated. Significantly, in this research sample, descriptions of the place from which the victim was taken, or where the crime took place play upon and play out ideas about how safety and danger can be mapped against the world around us. News reports of crime are consistently criticized for too often, relying on stereotypes about who commits crime and where it happens. However, our beliefs and notions about where crime or more specifically, violent crime is likely to occur bare little relation to the reality of the situation. This is particularly true when considering violence against women and children (Cream, 1993). Violence such as this most commonly takes place in the privacy of the home, although it is the public space (the street, park, and dark-alley), which is more often feared. Journalists and reporters use polemic and exclusive narratives such as rural/urban, familiar/strange and inner city/countryside to conjure up a physical and symbolic, sense of security and threat. It is ultimately the exclusive nature of these texts that infers a sense of certainty to the narrative. It is again this notion of ideological polarization that we need to examine in more detail as this chapter progresses. These issues around the texts and images of geographical space and symbolic places i.e. landscape, location and place, are all part of how we come to acknowledge and frame communities of victims.



*Insider/Outsider*

Other newsworthy themes that were significant in number and context within the 'sense of place' were those concerning the notion of insider/outsider. This concept was apparent primarily when discussing the perpetrators of the crimes. Intertwined with ideas about the location and landscape of the sites, were ideas about the type of people who lived there, the nature of community relations and the community's collective reaction to the serious crime that had taken place. With references across both cases it is clear that even though in some ways the perpetrators of both crimes can be easily defined physically and symbolically as 'outsiders' there is also the suggestion in some media reports that they came 'from within' the communities where they committed their respective crimes. As such they are positioned less as outsiders and more like one of 'us'.

Thomas Hamilton did not live in Dunblane, but in the town of Stirling a few miles away. However, in some media reports it is suggested, on a generic level that he came from 'within' the community. This most likely results from Hamilton having spent much time over the years in Dunblane, from where he ran many of his boys clubs (although it should be noted that reporting of Hamilton as a potential 'insider' was restricted exclusively to the national newspapers, with no recorded instances of describing him thus by the *Stirling Observer*):

Loner in our Midst (Headline: *Guardian*, 15 March 1996)

It would be easier for us if Thomas Hamilton was simply a madman who came out of nowhere (Headline: *Guardian*, 15 March 1996)

By the same token, although born in Grimsby, Ian Huntley moved to Soham with his then girlfriend Maxine Carr in 2001. With the exception of the *Daily Mail* (whose articles seem to focus heavily on Huntley's background and his life before he came to Soham) at various times within the news media sample, Huntley has also been described an insider, someone who came from the community, a 'Soham man'. Many reports filed after the arrests of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr on 17 August 2002, focused retrospectively on the role of Huntley as caretaker of Soham Village College where many of the public meetings and police/press briefings were carried out as the search for the schoolgirls continued:

In the days that followed (the girls disappearance) Huntley played a prominent role with the press, helping to set out the chairs and tables for the police and bereaved parents in the college hall. He cried when he spoke of the girls' disappearance and had a 'missing poster' of the pair displayed prominently in the window of his house. (*Daily Mail*, 18 August 2002)

Almost all reports throughout the sample consistently refer to Huntley (and Carr) and their respective positions as caretaker of the college and teaching assistant to the girls in their class at the primary school situated on the same site. The repetition of suggestion acts as reinforcement to the notion of perpetrator as 'insider' notion to the community; one of 'us' after all. After Ian Huntley was charged with the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, one anonymous member of the community noted 'evil has been at work in the heart of the town' and the thought that the girls had been

murdered by someone in the village was 'chilling' (*Guardian*, 19 August 2002). Speaking outside the church after Sunday service following the arrests and the same day discovery of the bodies suspected of being Holly and Jessica, Rev. Tim Alban-Jones, the vicar of St. Andrew's Church, Soham said:

There is a mood of shock and stunned disbelief, especially at the thought that it might have come from among us...we can't believe this has happened to us - and the whole town feels in some way violated. (*Guardian*, 19 August 2002)

In some ways this is not surprising; however the notion of deviant as 'other' goes much further and deeper than this. The binary notion of the perpetrator as insider/outsider can be delineated differently across physical and symbolic boundaries. In the physical sense, one of the most prevalent messages in contemporary media in the United Kingdom, imparted with varying degrees of subtlety is that people commit crimes because 'they' are not like 'us'. As noted elsewhere by Greer and Jewkes (2005) this notion is illustrated more explicitly when considering media representations of the most serious or unusual offences that tend to seize the public imagination, often eliciting levels of collective outcry and public protest. It is here that media representations (in all their forms) construct the 'outsider' status of perpetrators as unequivocal and incontestable (Greer and Jewkes, 2005). The perpetrators of these most serious offences may be portrayed in the physical sense in terms of their 'absolute' otherness, the 'evil' monsters in our midst. However it is in the also in this physical sense that the media at different times allow us to entertain a useful corrective to this and to consider for a

moment the counter narrative that the perpetrator of this horrendous crime may actually come from within 'our' own community:

Thomas Hamilton (however) was not a stranger. Though he was widely known locally as an oddball, nothing would have made Dunblane secure from him. (*Guardian*, 15 March 1996)

In an article asking the audience to address the possibility that Thomas Hamilton, notwithstanding the horror of the crime he had committed is in fact 'one of our members', Andrew O'Hagan writes:

We will discard this terrible killer now as we must, we will damn him to hell, as we are compelled to do, by ourselves, by each other, in the very name of decency...but as we do it we will also, in our way, repress what fears we have about our citizenry, ourselves and the circular nature of modern violence. (*Guardian*, 15 March 1996)

Another article warns against simply dismissing Hamilton as a 'monster', which in essence lets the media and us as a society 'off the hook':

'Monster' is a one-off Disneyworld creation...Hamilton was for real and came out from among us to kill. (*Guardian*, 18 March 1996)

In this way it is the symbolic nature of insider/outsider dichotomy; the absolute 'other' with whom we actively establish and maintain maximum distance and towards whom we are most punitive and vindictive (Greer and

Jewkes, 2005). As Ericson et al. (1987) have observed one of the best ways of defining what we are is by defining in others, what we are not. It is in this way and by claiming the greatest social detachment between 'them' and 'us' that media representations of crime, deviance and control serve as one of the primary sites of social inclusion and exclusion in late modernity.

*United community divided*

The binary notion of insider/outsider was also apparent when it came to issues of community and identity within the news media reports. In particular this was a theme found in the news reports covering the disappearance and search for missing schoolgirls in Soham. On requesting help from and giving information to the local residents at a community meeting, police officers urged the 'tight-knit' community to:

Look at the behaviour of your friends, relatives, neighbours, anything. Think about how they are behaving. Are they doing anything differently? That's the important thing...It has never been police policy to set neighbour against neighbour, or to ask someone in the community to spy on their neighbours, but...talk to each other and think about the neighbour on your right-side, the neighbour on your left-hand side...are they a family you can vouch for...Look at all your neighbours in your mind and ask yourselves 'Can I vouch for them, am I quite certain they have nothing to do with this abduction?'.  
(*Guardian*, 16 August 2002)

(*Guardian*, 16 August 2002)

Here the 'united community' of Soham, the imagined community presumed to be united in a single response, were being asked to look to their

neighbours and consider that the supposed 'outsider' may have come from within; dividing a united community. A sense of collective anxiety and cultural unease is provoked by (our) failure as a community and society to protect young people from the 'monsters' and 'others' in our midst (Jewkes, 2004). In some ways the research sample analysis of both Soham and Dunblane appear to have generated narratives within the media about the nature of community and identity.

This theme is also apparent within the news reports for Dunblane, although with a slightly different focus. The effects on the wider community of the school shootings in Dunblane were a staple for the news reports on a local and national level. However, many of the reports themselves seemed to focus on the stresses and strains of community relations; a community united in grief, yet the issue of the money that had been donated following the crime proved as time went on to be a divisive factor in community relations according to media reports; another facet of the united community divided. In the days following the shootings, almost all the media narratives concerning the wider effects on the community tended to focus on the united nature of the grief and support that the community was showing to the parents and families of the dead and injured. Also on wider level the media were reporting how 'the world' was grieving with (headline: 'The whole nation unites in sorrow', *Stirling Observer*, 20 March 1996), and thinking of the community itself (headline: 'The support and care is worldwide', *Stirling Observer*, 20 March 1996). However this theme of a community united was soon to co-exist with a narrative that suggested a more discordant feeling within some sections of the community; 'Money talks 'too soon' for grieving Dunblane' (headline: *Guardian*, 9 May 1996). Almost immediately following

the news of the fatal shootings in Dunblane an enormous amount of money flooded in from well wishers around the world. Several funds were set up to deal with this and various reports signalled that in total over £100,000 was received during the first week alone, with the figure reaching £1 million in only six weeks. The final figure donated is generally thought to have been in the region of £6.2 million across all three funds. This money, to whom it was donated and what it should be spent on featured as a theme relatively soon after, particularly within the local press. Who was to have the say in how the money was spent seemed to be the most divisive issue at stake. Less than two months after the serious crime in March 1996, the media were reporting that the community were 'strained and tense' (headline: *Stirling Observer*, 8 May 1996); the article continues; 'what to do with the money and offers of help that have rolled in from all over the world is perhaps the (community's) biggest concern at the moment'. On discussing the issue of the funds being separate or if they could be merged together, one local resident and trustee of one of the trusts commented:

The school fund is different in that much of the money donated was done so on the understanding that it went specifically to the school. While that is understandable, the feeling of the families is that all three (funds) should be merged and used according to what the community wants. Whatever happens...I sincerely hope that we can come to an agreement as to what the fund should do. Everyone should agree what should be done with the money... (*Stirling Observer*, 29 May 1996)

Further articles continue to frame this issue as divisive within the 'united' community, referring to 'mounting pressure from some members of the local community and further afield' and to members of the community who have 'voiced concerns about plans on how to spend the school fund'.

### **Social Impact of Media Portrayals**

The second major newsworthy theme identified in the press analysis can be collectivised as concerning the social impact of media representations on victim communities. Across both cases themes within this area accounted for 17 per cent of the sample of news reports overall. If we look at cases and newspapers individually we can see that in the case of Soham this theme featured far more heavily in the national broadsheet *The Guardian* (22 per cent) than in either of the national tabloid (15 per cent) or the local print media (8 per cent). The pattern is similar for Dunblane, although the differences much less striking, accounting for 20 per cent of the articles within the *Guardian*, 17 per cent in the *Stirling Observer* and only 12 per cent of articles identified in the *Daily Mail*.

Almost all of the articles under this heading are in some way related to or have something to say about the media itself. The nature of the role played by the media in the tragic events themselves was a recurrent theme, with examples across all of the research samples. There seem to be two broad themes within the media's role, firstly the media as 'a force for bad'; namely the intrusion into the community both from the media themselves and from unwanted visitors, the consequence of which held the potential for the



community to experience a form of double victimisation. In addition the media are a strong influence in the way the crime event and the community are remembered, including tarnishing the place name and forging links with other 'tragic towns' and finally the wider mass media as a contributor to increased levels of violence within society on a broader scale can all be identified. Simultaneously within the news reports and in almost binary opposition, was the recurrent theme of the media as 'a force for good'; featuring the media's symbiotic relationship with the police, the media as a direct and effective resource for investigation and the medias role in aiding and enabling the community to move forward. Each of these themes will be examined in turn.

### *Media Intrusion*

Such was the scale of the local, national and international media coverage of the cases of Soham and Dunblane that on some occasions the media offer a reflexive account of their own part in the problems that beset these communities when such serious and ultimately high profile crimes take place, as exemplified by a headline from the *Guardian*: 'Pool of Tears; Coverage of the Dunblane tragedy raises serious questions about media intrusion' (headline: *Guardian*, 30 September 1996). This was a particularly pertinent issue in the case of Dunblane in the weeks ahead of the first anniversary of the killings: 'Dunblane parents' plea to world media...let us grieve in peace' (headline: *Stirling Observer*, 14 February 1997). However, due to the nature of the length of the police search and investigation into the initial disappearances of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman the issue of media intrusion was a much more common narrative interwoven into the media

reports concerning the community in Soham. Many reports and headlines in the national broadsheet the *Guardian* make reference to the anxiety and distress felt by the community regarding the constant media presence in the town and the incessant coverage of the case (although less so in the initial days as the intense media coverage during the search was viewed by many in the community as a 'necessary evil' in the hunt for the two girls). However, following the arrest of Ian Huntley on the 17 August 2002 and the discovery of what turned out to be the bodies of the two missing girls on the same day, the mood within the community towards the constant media presence soon changed:

The people of Soham have had their daily lives turned upside down by the presence of the media in the last fortnight...but perhaps now I may invite you to consider that media representatives should withdraw from this community for a while to allow it to come to terms with its terrible loss (*Ely Standard*, 18 August 2002)

In the quote above it seems to be the omnipresent nature of the media that causes anxiety and problems for the wider community; 'stay away' pleas to the media and the public alike were a constant narrative as time progressed in both Soham and Dunblane. Around the one year anniversaries these pleas became more numerous and heartfelt:

We are obviously very grateful for people still thinking about us and remembering us one year on. But in fact it would be the kindest thing if they could do that from where they are. (*Guardian*, 4 August 2003)

People in Soham are desperately hoping that the town will not be put under the media spotlight again and are hoping people will just quietly remember ... but stay away. (*Ely Standard*, 31 July 2003)

Another element to this notion of media intrusion is evident when considering the thematic construction of the reporting of these serious crime events. An important part of that is an interrogation of whose voices are given privilege over others, particularly as representative of the various levels of victim community associated with each of the serious crime events. As a number of other studies concerning crime and the mass media have shown, ideological strategies in news reporting are often developed on order to legitimate relationships of power and dominance (van Dijk, 1998). Van Dijk goes on to argue that ideological discourse is often polarised involving 'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation' (1998: 61). In the current sample of press news reports, media representations of victim communities are based on a similar strategy of ideological polarisation. Generally speaking the notion of the perpetrator, of the deviant 'other' or 'outsider' (both feared and loathed) is situated in discursive opposition to and as the means of maintaining an idealised self or 'insider' (individual and communal). However, this notion of binary opposition is sometimes also utilised by sources (or media representation of such) and directed towards other 'outsiders', those not from the place of 'Dunblane' or 'Soham', these may include those who come 'in support' (sometimes referred to as 'grief tourists') or even refer to the media itself as the following headlines demonstrate:

Dunblane Official Attacks Media 'Harassment' (*Guardian*, 26 August 1996)

Fury at Idea of Coach Tour for Ghouls (*Guardian*, 12 July 1996)

Unwanted Visitors (*Stirling Observer*, 27 March 1996)

Now Leave us in Peace (*Stirling Observer*, 23 October 1996)

Public told to leave Soham alone (*Guardian*, 26 August 2002)

Stay away plea by Soham's Vicar (*Ely Standard*, 31 July 2002)

It is in these ways that this media analysis has much to say about the self and other. Often language and imagery used in the news reports called to mind a (united) community that was grieving and should not feel victimised again in any other sense. Related to this and a bi-product of the theme of extensive media coverage and intrusion is the notion of 'Grief tourism'. In recent years interest in the media's willingness to present the atypical as typical serves primarily to exacerbate audience anxieties and deflect attention away from more commonplace offences such as street crime and corporate crime (Jewkes, 2004). As a consequence media interest has focused on the collective outpouring of grief witnessed in relation to certain criminal acts, which has resulted in them occupying a particular symbolic place in the popular consciousness. It is suggested that this coming together of individuals to express collective anguish is a 'gesture of empathy and solidarity with those who have been victimized' (Jewkes, 2004: 28). A more post-modern reading would see it as a voyeuristic desire to be part of the hyperreal; to take part in a globally mediated event and say 'I was there'.

Four months after the shootings in Dunblane, a Derby based tour company announced plans to run a sightseeing trip to the primary school in Dunblane:

'Fury at idea of coach tour for Ghouls' (headline: *Guardian*, 12 July 1996). As well as the school, potential attractions were to include the Gloucester home of convicted murderers Fred and Rosemary West and the street in Hungerford, Berkshire where Michael Ryan shot and killed 16 people in 1987. On the idea of becoming a kind of 'Disneyland' the community in Dunblane were united in condemnation of the tours. However, a spokesman for the tour company said:

It is not to satisfy people's gratuitous, morbid curiosity, but more along the lines of helping them come to terms with what has happened by actually being there. (*Guardian*, 12 July 1996)

This notion of 'grief tourism' was also apparent in news reports covering the crime committed in Soham. In the *Daily Mail*, a regular columnist notes:

We have already seen...the disturbing appearance of coachloads of tourists taking a detour from Ely Cathedral specifically to gawp at the unremarkable, in fact painfully ordinary, small town where this terrible thing occurred. (*Daily Mail*, 31 August 2002)

In an article entitled 'The Soham peepshow' (headline: *Guardian*, 29 August 2002), writer Catherine Bennett points the finger of accusation at *The Sun* newspaper when considering the arrival of 'murder tourists in Soham', proposing that with their sentimentalization of the news coverage 'the wonder is not why so many picked Soham for their bank holiday pilgrimage, but that anyone was callous enough to stay away' (*Guardian*, 29 August 2002). Members of the community also felt at a loss on witnessing 'the

coachloads of tourists' who 'put up deckchairs in the graveyard (where tributes had been laid) and ate fish and chips while looking at the flowers'. (*Guardian*, 27 August 2002). The quotes above lend weight to the notion of appealing to the consensual ideas of an 'imagined (or symbolic) community' (Anderson, 1983) the media stigmatise offenders and sanctify those victims deemed particularly vulnerable or tragic, thereby encouraging the 'ritualisation and commodification of grief, where grief becomes something to be conspicuously consumed and then discarded' (Greer, 2004: 116).

### *Tragic towns*

Within the broader theme identified as the 'media as a force for bad', another notion with unambiguous links to 'grief tourism', inscribed with issues of collective involvement and identity is how the crime itself and the community in which it happened are remembered by the rest of the nation/world, courtesy of representations created and framed by the media. As has been suggested, the media and more specifically the printed press do not determine public opinion; rather they help to define the boundaries of social reality. The media do however play an important part in creating a new identity for a place that previously had been a plurality of communities. Soham and Dunblane for example may have had, before the notorious crime took place, many different and competing associations. However, now and via the media, they are synonymous with and a coded reference for the serious crime events that took place in their respective communities. This construction involves the use of particular representational and rhetorical frameworks by the media, drawing on one tragic crime event to evoke images and with which to brand the next event or current crisis (Innes, 2004; Peelo, 2006). This is demonstrated in the following headlines:

Dunblane massacre: Slaughters: Dunblane joins roll of Carnage:  
Sixteen deaths at Hungerford head catalogue of other killings  
(*Guardian*, 14 March, 1996)

Targets of Fear: Hungerford was bad; Dunblane was even worse  
(*Guardian*, 19 March 1996)

These examples were typical of many on this issue; adding Dunblane to the list of 'tragic towns' may seal the fate of those living and connected to the community for many years. The ramifications of this 'stigma by association' could be identified some years later with reference to the emergence on the world tennis stage of Andy Murray (who is from Dunblane and was present at Dunblane Primary School at the time of the attack). During interviews in 2004 Murray (then aged seventeen), said that on entering a tournament, he often listed his hometown as Stirling rather than Dunblane in an attempt to escape the connection that still exists in the minds of most people. (*Independent*, 29 June 2004)

More examples can be found that make reference to both Dunblane and Soham, joining a long list of 'tragedy', conjuring images and memories of places such as Hungerford, Aberfan and Lockerbie. One Soham resident stated:

Like Lockerbie, Dunblane and Hungerford, Soham will now be synonymous with tragedy. We're on the map now, and it's for all the wrong reasons. (*Guardian*, 19 August 2002)

Speaking a year after the anniversary of the girls' disappearance the local vicar of Soham, Rev. Tim Alban-Jones talked of how the little known market town was now etched on the nation's consciousness:

Since the tragic events we find we don't need to explain where our town is anymore. On the surface it has been business as usual, but an outsider would not have to probe too deeply to discover that the scars run deep. (*Guardian*, 4 August 2003)

The use of the place name in a monolithic and uniform manner (Dunblane/Soham) denies ambiguity or opportunity for alternative readings and assumes that there is one universal meaning of what 'Soham' was. This may result in limited growth in the understanding of the issues for the wider victim community in particular and how better to deal with them. However, as other researchers have shown, although the media produce a dominant reading of the crime event, this does not necessarily have a direct linear effect on how such interpretations and messages are received and consumed by the audience (Kitzinger, 2004). In fact, the fragility and flexibility of such metaphors must be recognised; 'Soham' or 'Dunblane' may be interpreted differently by some at different times and in different places: providing both a temporal and geographical challenge.

### *The 'effects' argument*

Another enduring strand within the research sample was the theme of the media as a cause of increased levels of violence in society more generally.



This of course brings the discussions back to one of the most persistent debates concerning the mass media; to what degree do media images bring about negative effects in their viewers? This was identified as a particularly strong theme for the *Daily Mail* within the sample, where a larger number of the articles concerning Dunblane in particular often made specific or implicit reference to the notion of violence on film and television in particular, as evidence of a more violent society in general, as the following headlines illustrate:

Dunblane fails to silence the guns of horror on TV (headline: *Daily Mail*, 4 March 1997)

Dunblane anger over TV soap gun siege (headline: *Daily Mail*, 1 March 1997)

For many lay observers it is often a common sense notion that society has become more violent since the advent of the modern media industry. However, as Pearson (1983) demonstrates, the history of respectable fears goes back several hundred years and public anger and fear at perceived crime waves has become more intensely focused with the introduction of each new media technological development. Some further examples of headlines centring on this issue include:

'Natural Born Killers' video held back; deaths halt film centred on couple's murder spree (*Guardian*, 14 March 1996)

Dunblane massacre linked to blood spilled in the movies  
(*Guardian*, 22 March 1996)

The article accompanying the first headline above goes on to suggest that following the serious crime event in Dunblane, new questions are being asked over the impact on society (or on certain sections of society in particular) of cinema violence. Meanwhile, although the article following the second headline actually goes on to suggest that censorship cannot be effective in today's society and is not the answer, the language used in the headline strongly insinuates otherwise.

The final element under the auspices of the media 'as a force of bad' that emerged from the sample of newspaper reports, concerns the urges of restraint that were needed to discourage the media attempting to gain and publish information that would prejudice any forthcoming trial (this was obviously apparent as a theme only in reports concerning Soham, as the only case with the hope of a criminal trial). In the weeks that followed the arrest and subsequent charging of Ian Huntley, the voices of anxiety over the nature and extent of the media coverage of the murders intensified. Various warnings were issued to the media by Cambridgeshire police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the coroner for the case and from Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General at the time. All media organisations were urged to 'exercise restraint and caution in reporting details of the case' to ensure that the defendants receive a fair trial (*Guardian*, 27 August 2002). After it was felt that previous advisory notes had been flouted, the team investigating the murders issued a further warning stating that 'continued further publication

is viewed both by the investigation and prosecution teams as serious, since it flagrantly ignores the advice (given)'. (*Guardian*, 27 August 2002)

There is of course a dichotomy here, as suggested above, with the duality of various themes within the media reports running simultaneously, where the media is considered as 'a force for bad' as explored in the examples above and with the theme in binary opposition to this notion, namely the media as 'a force for good'. It is towards this media theme to which we now turn.

### *Media/Police relations*

The nature of the relationship between the media and the police may be usefully described as symbiotic. The most compelling area of analysis as it relates to this work is around the nature of the relationship with the police as news sources and how the police and the media use each other as investigative resources, as Reiner (2000b) suggests crime reporting seems increasingly to emphasize a 'cop-sided' view, (see also Marsh and Melville, 2011). In other work regarding specific criminal incidents that have a lasting effect on crime reporting, Martin Innes describes such a 'signal crime' as a serious or high profile crime that impacts not only the immediate participants but also has an effect on wider society which results in a change in beliefs or behaviour (Innes, 2003; Peelo, 2006). Innes argues that in some such major crime cases, the police and the media go on to form a symbiotic relationship. As is clear in the case of the abduction and murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham, the police employed media focused and 'public' strategies of investigation (including press conferences with family, reconstructions etc.) that the media were extremely keen to cover,

dovetailing as they so neatly do with the media's own institutionalised news values. In this way, Innes describes these particular media stories as 'co-productions'. The quotes identified below illustrate this perfectly:

Cambridgeshire police are anxious to maintain a heightened media interest, and a reconstruction is being planned, to be filmed this afternoon and broadcast tomorrow, a week after Holly and Jessica's disappearance. (*Guardian*, 10 August 2002)

Police take care about the timing and nature of the information released...since the girls vanished the force has run daily press conferences with senior officers on hand. New nuggets of information have been drip-fed, fresh photographs handed out and the families have been encouraged to make appeals. (*Guardian*, 10 August 2002)

In an even more candid way the explicit nature of the symbiotic relationship between the media and the police was exposed. In an article published in the *Guardian*, a senior spokesman for the Cambridgeshire force said:

One of the peculiarities of this investigation has been how very close to the operational strategy the media strategy has been. They have completely dovetailed...the media strategy has been a very distinct operational tool at the hands and disposal of the senior investigating officer. (we)...have planned carefully what we've done and when we've done it for a specific operational outcome. (*Guardian*, 26 August 2002)

This quote clearly illustrates the police understanding in this case of the dynamic of their relationship with the media and that using the media during criminal investigations while the story is ongoing and 'hot' holds manifest benefits. In another way but with direct regard to the Soham case again, the media were reflecting on the ways in which they themselves were covering the case, with specific reference to the rewards for information that were being offered by various media groups. In this case:

Cambridgeshire police had expressed reservations about the rewards, but officers know they have to keep the story in the headlines. (*Guardian*, 10 August 2002)

Another element that underpins police cooperation with media may also serve to manage public perceptions of policing through positive portrayals of how the police investigate serious crime via the media. This of course is a particularly important weapon in the 'battle for hearts and minds' of the public. However, this communication can cause problems for the police and their public perception, particularly if the 'high profile' case is not solved. Therefore, in detailing to the wider audience how the police have defined a situation, the media in this direct way contribute to establishing how this event is to be publicly remembered.

There was however a very different and counter element to this theme evident in the sample of press reports published in the *Daily Mail*, which often seemed to be highly critical of the police handling of the cases,

particularly during the search for the missing schoolgirls in Soham. Consider the following headlines as examples:

Rigid mindset that hides vital clues: Holly and Jessica. (headline: *Daily Mail*, 14 August 2002)

Why were police so slow to react; two witnesses had crucial leads. But detectives insisted they were swamped with information (headline: *Daily Mail*, 14 August 2002)

All-night search, then police swoop; Despite public criticism over the progress of the inquiry, local officers already had suspects in their sights (headline: *Daily Mail*, 18 August 2002)

Again, in the Soham case the *Daily Mail* continued their focus on this element of the theme with their extensive coverage (by comparison to the other print sources sampled) of a related story involving two police officers working on the Soham case who were subsequently charged child pornography offences. The following headline is one example of many:

Holly and Jessica police in court over child porn probe; Hidden by a blanket, Soham detective who read poem at cathedral tribute joins colleague in the dock (*Daily Mail*, 15 September 2002)

Much was made in the reports of the fact that one of the men facing charges, Detective Constable Brian Stevens, had been the family liaison officer

assigned to support the Chapman family soon after the girls' disappearance. The same article went on to report:

He [D.C. Stevens] became extremely close to them and they specifically asked him to read the poem in tribute to Jessica, entitled Lord of Comfort, at the service of celebration and remembrance at Ely Cathedral. (*Daily Mail*, 15 September 2002)

By dwelling on and reinforcing the nature of the relationship of this police officer to the Chapman family the newspaper in question seems to insinuate that the charges brought against the officer are somehow worse than they otherwise would have been. In such a way the betrayal committed is to be felt by us all, on behalf of and 'with' the victims themselves.

With all of the above in mind it may then be more useful in this way to describe relations between the media and police as a symbiosis of sorts, and as Martin Innes (2003) suggests, there are many occasions where the priorities and desires of the media may be in direct opposition to those of the police. The Soham case seems to illustrate both sides of this point perfectly; how fine the line is between a police-led media story and a media-driven police investigation and ultimately how difficult it is to be sure about who if any has the upper hand in such pressurised circumstances.

### *Moving the community forward*

Another newsworthy theme apparent in the media analysis suggesting the media are a 'force for good', is evident with regard to how the media help or enable the victim communities to move on or to move forward by

'decamping' (both physically leaving and/or downgrading the coverage). There are many examples within the research, across both sites, which suggest that the media recognised that their presence in a community restricted the opportunity for a move towards recovery. In an article reflecting on the media role only a few days after the shootings at Dunblane Primary School, Jon Snow writes:

...the greatest service we (the media) can do now is to pull back and let the community and the families grieve and find a place for their loss for their lives to come. (*Guardian*, 18 March 1996)

Equally in the case of Soham, although the media had no doubt played a useful part in the investigation, it was very quickly apparent that once the bodies of the schoolgirls had been found and the arrests of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr had been made, the dynamic of the media presence in the community changed almost immediately.

In addition, there were many reports within the newspapers analysed detailing how the media and others would not be returning to the communities where the crimes had taken place on or around the first year anniversaries. This was often explained with direct reference to not disturbing the residents and allowing them to continue to move forward as a (united) community, without the 'hindrance' of outsiders; without the media. Here the communities are viewed as entities in their own right; their strength and determination to move forward from the serious and high profile crime that has happened in their midst, comes from them, without help or attention from 'outsiders'. In this way the community may be described as a



'distinct community of suffering', where those who experience the event in a particular way, become inward looking, seeking support from their own members and closing ranks against the outside world, including the media. This links strongly with some of the themes discussed in the initial chapters, including Turner's (1969) notion of 'communitas', describing a form of intense social experience and bonding of a particular kind of social relationship, distinct from the everyday experiences of community. The fact that the media, in some way recognise this and 'withdraw' from the community (notwithstanding practical and commercial imperatives) is one way that the media can be seen as a 'force for good' in these situations.

### **Victim Communities and the 'culture of crime'**

A third newsworthy theme identified within the media analysis, refers to the response by 'victim communities' and wider society in general to the media coverage of the serious and high profile crime. This theme can then be divided into two very distinct and often contradictory strategies of reaction. Drawing on David Garland's (2000; 2001) analysis of criminal justice and crime control, the analysis of media content shows likewise evidence of two discrete responses to the serious, signal event that has taken place. In both cases discussed here, the first group of responses can be allied to Garland's (2001) 'sovereign state approach' where expressive gestures and elements of 'acting out' can be identified encouraging faith in a more punitive society. The second distinct response thread can be classed as 'adaptive strategies' stressing, risk, security and prevention, where political officials, agencies and others attempt to adjust to the recognised predicament.

*Sovereign state – ‘acting out’ and ‘expressive’ gestures*

This notion of the ‘sovereign state approach’ was a recognised theme across both cases however, it is interesting to examine why it was a far stronger theme with the articles concerning the Soham case, particularly at the national level. Although only accounting for 7 per cent of the articles analysed overall, this theme was apparent in almost 29 per cent of the articles in the *Guardian* and 22 per cent in the *Daily Mail* covering the case of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. Much of what can be defined as the ‘sovereign state approach’ can be identified within the articles as an increase in the punitive mood of both the public and the criminal justice system. This theme manifested itself on many occasions as fear and loathing from the general public ‘us’, with the obvious focus of such outrage and emotions, the ‘other/outsider’ offender. As the following headline illustrates:

Caretaker faces third charge in Soham case: Crowd of 300 hurl abuse as man accused of killing Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman makes first court appearance. (*Guardian*, 11 September 2002)

This notion of public and ‘expressive’ gestures was more explicit within the report that followed this headline:

As a police convoy of a blacked out police van and three cars left the building the crowd, wielding placards calling for capital punishment, erupted in cries of “Kill him, kill him”, and hurled eggs, tomatoes, coins and plastic bottles of water. (*Guardian*, 11 September 2002)

There are many examples within the sample of media reports of crowds expressing anger and revenge towards those accused of the crime that took place in Soham, with many articles talking of 'mob-rule' taking over the community and the 'British' public more generally. This climate of increasing punitiveness from the public within the press reports seemed to be mirrored by politicians. Within the media analysis this theme of the re-emergence or increased focus on more punitive sanctions within the criminal justice system was evident in several ways. In the first instance this was apparent through reports on and discussions of the state of the prison system as a whole, but more specifically the conditions of detention of the two accused in the case. Shortly after his arrest for the murders, Ian Huntley was sent to Rampton high security hospital in Nottinghamshire for a period of intensive assessment as to his mental state and to determine if he would be fit to stand trial. Some of the media articles analysed at this time often made reference to the 'holiday camp' nature of the hospital as compared to life in prison. Families of other victims were reported criticising the lifestyle that patients led in the hospital, with patient care reported to cost two thousand pounds per patient per week (*Guardian*, 21 August 2002). Other articles reinforced the 'easy' lifestyle enjoyed by Huntley:

Huntley joins gym at Rampton (headline: *Daily Mail*, 15 September 2002)

Huntley goes to Rampton disco (headline: *Daily Mail*, 6 October 2002)

However, counter positions to this were sometimes reported within the national broadsheets. In an opposing position to the reported wider punitive mood, the *Guardian* reported that:

...high security hospitals could maintain positive relationships with patients by avoiding reading their case notes and reminding themselves of the patients' history of suffering. (22 August 2002)

Returning to the more punitive mood of the public and the criminal justice system, much was made in the sample of press reports of the apparent 'freedom' that Ian Huntley had on his return to the prison system whilst awaiting trial. On 9 June 2003 Ian Huntley attempted to commit suicide inside the special close supervision unit in Woodhill prison. It was reported that he had hoarded his anti-depressant pills and then taken them in an attempt to overdose. Within the analysed sample, the press coverage of this incident indicates the surrounding and continuing punitive mood as seen (not least) by politicians. James Paice MP, constituency Member of Parliament covering Soham and a Tory front bench Home Affairs spokesman said:

I find it quite astonishing that a man who was apparently on suicide watch was able to obtain the means with which to kill himself. I want to know what happened, how it happened and who is responsible. (*Guardian*, 10 June 2003)

The punitive indications from the rhetoric in the quote above suggests that Ian Huntley should not be allowed to escape his certain punishment; that he should not be able to cheat the public or the criminal justice system by dying before his time. In these various forms and via a myriad of different instances (including references to the climate of fear and suspicion around children and the procedural problems associated with the backlogs of the Criminal Records Bureau) the increased punitive mood of the public in general was reported and garnered by the media coverage. This would seem to lend weight to the 'sovereign state approach' where such posturing is an attempt to restore public confidence in the criminal justice system and encourage faith in punitive sanctions, expressive justice and a 'law and order' stance. This retributive discourse (where punishment is openly embraced) focuses again on invoking victims, potential victims and an outraged public which may lead in turn to increased support for new laws and penal policies (Garland, 2000; 2001). It would seem understandable that this theme, although present in some forms throughout the analysis is found predominantly in the (national) coverage of the Soham murders. For in this case, the expression and focus of loathing and anger has a tangible outlet; the punishment and revenge on the 'other' perpetrator of this crime. This same outlet was not available to the victims and families of the Dunblane killings or the community as a whole on a wider level. There is therefore a notable lack of examples of this type of expression of fear and anger within the media reports concerning Dunblane. Although anger, fear and resentment were apparent within the community, no central focus was evident in the same way; Thomas Hamilton, the certain guilty party in the crime was dead.

Simultaneous to the theme of expressive gestures and acting out associated with what can be identified as the 'sovereign state strategy' as detailed above, there runs in tandem a theme within the analysis that can be described as 'adaptive strategies', focusing on risk, security and prevention.

*Adaptive Strategies – 'risk', 'security' and 'prevention'*

Appearing alongside (often literally) news reports that can be identified as entailing a sovereign state approach, articles featuring elements of 'adaptive strategies' were relatively commonplace across all media for both cases. Within the press analysis the theme overall was identified in 14 per cent of articles and was particularly prominent in the coverage of Dunblane in the national broadsheet, where it was present in 14 per cent of the articles but interestingly this was also apparent in the coverage of Soham by the *Ely Standard*, achieving a dominant 15 per cent of references in the articles sampled. At the same time this theme featured less heavily in the mid-market tabloid the *Daily Mail*, with 8 per cent of articles making reference. Within the broader theme of 'Victim communities and the culture of crime', 'adaptive strategies' as a response can be differentiated by a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' approach. In this case a 'top down' approach is recognized by initial or very early questions and solutions being offered from 'primary definers', local councillors, politicians and criminal justice professionals for example, providing solutions and appropriate reactions for the community (both immediate and wider society). Examples of these forms of adaptive strategies are apparent in the press reports with reference to the increased protection of children in schools and community groups in particular. The issues of school security, the validation of those working with children, the

increased surveillance of children were key themes within the media reports analysed. In the case of Soham, the primacy of the visual seemed important within the media reports. From very early on in the case of the missing schoolgirls (as it began) the importance of image was recognisable within the media coverage and for the investigation. From the now iconic last photographic image of Holly and Jessica in their matching Manchester United football shirts, standing in front of a kitchen clock, to the rather grainy CCTV footage entailing the last known images of the girls crossing the car park of the local sports centre, these mediated images that come into the public realm become inseparable from the reality of the crime that has taken place (Jewkes, 2004). This notion identified with image and the visual continued in the media reports as time went on. The local newspaper introduced this as a theme within many of its reports as the following example indicates:

The number of CCTV cameras in Soham is to be extended to include Soham Village College and the caretaker's bungalow ... back in the summer parents of children at St. Andrews Primary School in Soham complained that security was lax and called for more CCTV cameras in the area. (*Ely Standard*, 13 March 2003)

Later in that month the same newspaper reported that Soham Village College itself had:

...stepped up security with 16 newly installed CCTV cameras throughout the school, 4 externally and 12 internally. (24 March 2003)

This increased protection of children and school security were also dominant themes in the press coverage of Dunblane. Much was made in the media reporting of the school shootings concerning police and local authority dealings with the perpetrator, Thomas Hamilton and the boys clubs that he had led in the local area over a number of years (many of these clubs had been held in the school where the shootings took place and local council buildings in the near vicinity). The public enquiry set up after the shootings in Dunblane (The Cullen Inquiry) covered in great detail all areas and circumstances in and around the life of Thomas Hamilton, including his dealings with young boys in the area who were or had been members of one of his many youth clubs over the years. Much of the discourse within the media reports was concerned with safety and security of children and of opportunities missed by the authorities, as the headlines below indicate:

Gun attack on nursery school fuels fears of new Dunblane (*Daily Mail*, 10 October 1996)

Warning signs on the route to horror went unheeded (*Guardian*, 17 October 1996)

School must cut dangers: Safety without fortresses (*Guardian*, 17 October 1996)

Clubs: Body to be set up: National accreditation proposed (*Guardian*, 17 October 1996)



In part some of these calls for action from the 'top down' are from those who have to be seen to be 'doing' something in the wake of such a high profile and serious crime. The idea that something is being done acts as a reassurance for those who feel their security threatened, whether that fear is real and physical or a vicarious experience via the media. In addition, what most of the above is based on in some shape or form is a climate of fear; a cyclic climate of fear where official adaptations and responses to public anxieties may be seen to reinforce each other. What these crimes indicate vividly to society is a failure to protect these children, or young people in general, provoking a sense of collective anxiety and cultural unease.

Within this newsworthy theme of 'adaptive strategies' of a top down nature, the focus on official reports and public inquiries was evident across both cases but in particular for Dunblane. The Cullen Inquiry was set up in the wake of the Dunblane shootings by the then Conservative government led by John Major and began taking testimony on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1996. Just over three months later Lord Cullen produced his findings and report (Cullen, 1996), detailing proposals primarily concerning firearms legislation but also indicating suggestions for school security and the vetting and supervision of adults working with children. Coverage of the inquiry and the subsequent report within the press sample for Dunblane was prominent, with over half of the articles in this area commenting on the issues raised. This theme within the sample drew heavily on the notions of 'risk' and 'prevention', as if suggesting that 'the' something that could be done, as a way of helping the community and society more generally, was to be able to conclude what had happened and why.

Another newsworthy theme identified as an 'adaptive strategy' within the press samples, that may in some way bridge the gap between 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches, is the issue of resources. This encompasses the size and scope of the search and investigation for the Soham case and for Dunblane, focusing particularly on the cost of the Cullen Inquiry with questions often asked as to who will finance it. In the case of Soham there were many articles discussing the cost of the case for the police as the following quote indicates:

Multi million Soham bill: Police authority officials estimate that the cost of the Soham murder inquiry...could be between £5 and £10 million pounds. (*Guardian*, 31 October 2002)

This issue of resources and cost was a theme not only apparent after the case had concluded but can also be identified as the investigation into the search for the missing girls continued. As quotes from the Soham newspaper the *Ely Standard* illustrate:

Over 300 officers and support staff are currently working on the investigation, some have been working 18 hour days throughout...The incident room has received over 7000 calls...The website has received in excess of 120,000 hits. (*Ely Standard*, 14 August 2002)

A total of 426 people officers and civilians are now working on the case, some doing 20-hour shifts... Officers have now studied more than 800 hours of CCTV footage and have received 14,000 items of

information since the girls went missing. Twenty one police forces are involved in the hunt. (*Ely Standard*, 15 August 2002)

Articles of this nature, particularly in the newspaper local to Soham often referred to the fact (even at the end of an article otherwise unconcerned with cost and resources) that this murder investigation is believed to be the largest in police history. The effect on the wider communities involved by the culmination of the repetition of this type of narrative from the media may be an encouragement to believe that the authorities are 'doing something' on their behalf, illustrated by the fact that they are spending a lot of money and resources 'doing it'.

This element within the analysis was similar in respect to Dunblane. Articles in the local newspaper focused on the community's 'special problems' and the question of who was to pay for the on-going costs of the resources and support that the community were being afforded, as the quote below illustrates:

Last week Stirling Council prepared to submit a further bill for £820,000 to the Scottish Office to help pay for the ongoing cost (of the Dunblane tragedy). The Scottish Office has already paid out £4.5 million in the wake of the tragedy...the extra services that we are still providing for the people of Dunblane will remain until there is clear evidence that the community no longer has a need for them. (*Stirling Observer*, 26 February 1997)

Equally however, this issue of resources within the sample of press reports can also indicate a more grounded or 'bottom up' approach from the wider community themselves. Questions as to how resources were used in the communities and if they were used or financed in the best way, do also come from those within the community, rather than necessarily 'primary definers' in the guise of the state or state officials (Hall et al., 1978).

Within the sample of press reports analysed for this study, by far the most prominent example of a 'bottom up' approach identified within the broader theme of adaptive strategies is that of people power associated with the gun control campaigns set up or mobilised in the wake of the shootings at Dunblane. Several groups can be identified but one or two tended to gain most media coverage in the months and years after the shootings had taken place. *The Snowdrop Campaign* was a petition started by local woman Anne Pearston, whose children had previously attended the Dunblane School, and two other local mothers and was supported by the parents of the children who were murdered there. Widely credited as one of the most successful single pressure groups, by the beginning of July 1996 and only four months after the shootings, the Snowdrop campaign had collected seven hundred thousand names on a petition, which they presented to government, calling for a complete ban on private handgun ownership. This issue as forwarded by the Snowdrop campaign and other gun control pressure groups such as the Gun Control Network (which included academics working in this area and some of the parents of the victims of the Dunblane shootings) quickly became a 'hot' political issue and the momentum that these groups had created was carried forward into daily political life in Britain at the time, as the following extract from a press report demonstrates:

In a further blow to the government, the chief organisers of the Snowdrop Petition warned they will now begin discussion with the Labour Party, an alliance that could have implications for the general election...Anne Pearston again hinted that she may stand against the Scottish Secretary, Michael Forsyth, in his vulnerable Stirling seat. (*Guardian*, 17 October 1996)

In conclusion to this section concerning the newsworthy themes around victim communities and the culture of crime, we may consider the repercussions of the conduct for social control and how the comparative emotive coverage provided to these cases (and a small number of others like them) may have played an important role in the politics of criminal justice more generally and the desire of some sections of the public to call for better and more forms of security (Garland, 2001).

### **Summary**

This chapter has attempted to explore the influence and nature of the press representations of the serious crimes committed, with specific reference to the effect on the communities in which they have taken place. In addition, this discussion situates the media analysis within wider debates of media and social theory in the late modern context. One of the three main themes identified within the press sample focused on the 'sense of place'. Media representations and narratives could be seen to be offering a false or misleading impression regarding certain types of crime, offender and

location. The portrayal of places where serious crime events happen are in part constructed and framed by the media. The media establish a situation in which the images and language may mystify and obscure certain readings, while others enter the public discourse. The media and subsequent dominant public discourse appear to represent serious crime events that take place in a location, in a very specific manner: creating and sustaining stereotypes and myths. The argument here is that the media construct and present offenders and victims in binary opposition, via a 'them' and 'us' rhetoric. Victims are constructed in direct opposition to offenders, so the media portrayal of the victim is dependant on the demonisation and exclusion of the offender and the media's presentation of the victim is stereotypical. Some victims then may be seen to serve the parallel purpose of causing society to reflect upon the uncertainty of fate, on the ambiguous nature of safety and the supposed randomness of disaster and tragedy. In this regard, this thesis is interested in how a collective sense of inclusive identity (physical or symbolic) in the wake of high profile and highly mediatized crime, is defined, constructed and lived on the basis of 'who we are not'; we define what we are by clearly indicating that which we are not. The media rhetoric, images and representations of the offender as individualised, as 'not one of us', enables the community and/or audience to disassociate themselves from the outsider and provides a hate figure onto which cultural anxieties and loathing may be projected. As a result other competing readings of events are largely silenced, allowing conventional explanations of what happened and why to go relatively unchallenged (Cream, 1993).

Two other dominant themes identified included the social impact of the media representations on the community themselves and the nature and

extent of the various responses by society on a broader level to the 'late modern crime complex' (Garland, 2001). Research on media content, both factual and fictional, repeatedly reports the dominant themes of crime, deviance and control. More specifically, there is a focus on serious violent crime and murder (Reiner, 1997; 2002) and a promotion of 'fear of crime' by the media (Ditton et al., 2004). The significance of this pattern is also noted by Garland (2001) considering ways, which a small number of serious crimes provide focal points for formulation of popular discourses concerning crime. Audiences may interpret this as an index of the state of society and social order; a 'warning signal' that may result in demands for increased or better forms of social control via legislative and policy reform. It is here as Garland (2000; 2001) suggests that adaptive strategies form part of the cultural response to the 'normal fact' of high crime rates. Detailed media coverage of small number of serious 'signal crimes' (Innes, 2003) such as those included in this study, plays a role in fostering the development of the 'late-modern crime complex', where previous fears and concerns about dangers that beset us have become channelled and articulated through the crime problem. In this context, the prolonged and widespread attention paid by the public to these signal crimes forms the basis for the development of collective memory. These memories that grow up around signal crimes, function to subsequently frame the production of each new signal crime, which in turn reverberates with meaning for their audiences. This may in some cultural contexts and circumstances encourage a further expansion of social control (Innes, 2003).

In conclusion then to this discussion it is pertinent to return to and examine the very nature of the relationship between crime, the media and community.

The chapter above has restricted itself to an analysis of print media (for the reasons stated), however, as has also been discussed throughout this thesis, changes and advancements within new media technology have more latterly enabled a proliferation of opportunities creating virtual networks and communities, neither bound by geographical borders nor conventional restrictions of space and time (Rheingold, 1993). As a consequence, the opportunities to be social and the ways in which to do so are more numerous and proliferate (Greer, 2004). In short, advancements in new media communication technology, particularly in relation the notion of active audiences have led to a proliferation of self organised media content and production by 'ordinary' people; what may be considered as the fragmentation of primary definition. The producers of texts, image and representation in these more novel modes of communication are not the elite, powerful media owners of newspaper groups or television channels, but ordinary members of the public producing self-authored web pages and blogs. New electronic media communications allow the global flow of images (short clips and films recorded on camera phones to be shown on *You Tube*), texts and meaning on which new forms of collectivism and community may be established.

Any conclusions so far, could easily be that the media overwhelmingly promotes an image of a (physical) place and a (symbolic) community in a particular way. However, to say that the media 'promotes' a particular representation, presupposes their effect on their audiences. The way people including the victim communities themselves, respond to such imagery may be rather more complex. It is for this reason that I have spoken to members of these communities in turn and sought to give them a voice. It is to this



element of the empirical research to which the thesis now moves. This thesis seeks to interrogate how the immediate victim community and the wider national or global community, who may also experience the crime event as trauma, but without the attached sense of stigma, respond to imagery and narratives attached to each particular serious crime. Media messages are complex ideological discourses, which help to construct and define 'reality'; a reality, which is supercharged with attachments to and identities with people and places. Therefore, having considered a media analysis of the two cases in point, the focus of this work now turns to the other main body of empirical work undertaken, the substantive qualitative interviews with the members of the 'victim communities' of Dunblane and Soham.

These following two chapters set out to frame the key theoretical debates identified within the established literature and in light of those perspectives, will explore the empirical research data in relation to them. Earlier chapters of this thesis have examined in much detail some of the established and more recent literature regarding notions which are central to this work, including the social construction of victim and community identity, the increasing centrality and politicisation of the 'victim', notions of stigma and spoiled identity, the role of media and of new media technology in providing a sense of 'community' in late modernity, together with the more contingent social conditions of late modernity. Whilst recognising that much has been gained and learnt from considering these diverse areas of literature together, almost exclusively these narratives have hitherto presented an often detailed, but ultimately abstract examination of the central issues. This thesis hopes to make a valuable contribution to this theoretical body of knowledge and take it further by seeking to interrogate, understand and explain these

central notions through the lived reality of those who have experienced the culmination of these conditions.

The primary aim of the following two chapters therefore is to identify and address the main themes as acknowledged in the grand theory and established literature as they pertain to the rise of the 'victim community' in late modernity. It is at this point that we leave the grand theory and turn our attention to the real world in an attempt to bridge the gap between the 'macro' and the 'micro' by empirically testing aspects of these wider theoretical positions. By telling the story of the people of two places which have suffered a serious and high profile crime; by considering and exploring the real lived experiences and responses of those in these communities, this work aims to identify and explore what effects these issues and developments have had on the communities involved.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Dunblane: The Victim Community**

#### **What Kind of 'Place' is Dunblane?**

Dunblane is the second biggest town (by population) in the Stirling Council area. However, for Council information and census purposes, Dunblane (population 8,940) is almost always considered with and alongside its smaller town neighbour, Bridge of Allan (population 5,120) (Mid-Year Population Estimates, Stirling Council Area, 2009). The demographic information detailed below is therefore based on the statistics for the ward within Stirling Council, which comprises both Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. Geographically the area described as Dunblane and Bridge of Allan covers less than ninety-two square kilometres, with a resident population of 15, 647 contained within 5,903 households. The vast majority of the housing stock

is owner occupied (77.1%). There seems to be relatively little social housing, with rented properties from the council and other housing associations accounting for just over ten per cent of the overall housing stock.

The population breakdown of the resident area by age is as follows: under 19 comprise 27.4%, 58.1% are aged between 20-65, and 14.5% are aged 65 and over. The largest group are those aged between 25-44 (24.2%), this figure seems to be in line with other wards within the larger Stirling Council area. The gender split of the Dunblane population is approximately fifty-fifty. As with many other small cities and towns across the United Kingdom, Dunblane is not a particularly culturally or ethnically diverse location, with over ninety seven per cent of residents describing themselves as 'white' (Mid-Year Population Estimates, Stirling Council Area, 2009). Other common factors often used to describe or signify populations within a geographical space include social class, economic activity and levels of educational attainment. Within the geographical area of Dunblane and Bridge of Allan, of those people described as of working age (16-74), 53.2% are designated economically active; this includes part-time workers and those who are self-employed. 13.4% of the population is retired. People's social class is delineated according to the work they do, as such 67.2% of the population over 16 and in households are described as ABC1. With regard to educational attainment, those residents whose highest level of qualification is a first or higher degree and those with a professional qualification account for 38% of the population in the area. This is considerably higher than the average for the Stirling council area as a whole (26.6%) and may be accountable in part to the location of the Stirling University campus site at

the Bridge of Allan and the subsequent influx of academics living and working in the near locality.

In a further attempt at defining the people and place of Dunblane at this rather dry factual and data information level, some details were extracted from a 'Quality of Life' survey conducted on behalf of Stirling Council on over 500 residents (respondents) in the appropriate council area. The most recent survey of this kind was conducted in 2002, and although it is not focused on the residents of Dunblane alone, the Stirling Quality of Life Survey, does at least investigate and give an insight into local peoples perceptions and community priorities for the future. In overview and summary, the report indicates the factor that most affected the different aspects of the quality of life for the respondents of this survey was the issue of crime and community safety, with 90 per cent stating it was very important and the other 10 per cent, ranking it fairly important. However, many of the participants in this survey did feel that the neighbourhood in which they lived rated well in terms of friendliness (84% very or fairly good) although less positively regarding community spirit (57% very or fairly good) (Mid-Year Population Estimates, Stirling Council Area, 2009).

Anecdotally within the empirical research conducted, although many residents spoke of Dunblane as a beautiful and peaceful place to live, they also spoke of the decline in use of the city centre shops and the divisive effects that had on the economy and the type of living conditions for the community of Dunblane as a whole. Although on many levels this data is not detailed or specific, this survey and the other information gathered above does serve to highlight, albeit on a small scale, the general feelings of

some of the resident populations in and around the Dunblane area and does give a sense of place of how Dunblane is viewed by those who live and work there.

*Political consequences of the serious crime*

In the area of politics the impact of the Dunblane shootings was swift and far reaching. A short time after the incident at Dunblane on 13 March 1996, a resolution by both Houses of Parliament established the need for a public inquiry into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding events at Dunblane. Lord Cullen's Report on the shootings at Dunblane Primary School was published on the 16 October 1996. The Cullen Report (1996) made a total of twenty-eight recommendations concerned mainly with tighter control of handgun ownership but also regarding other changes in school security and the vetting of people working with children under eighteen (Cullen, 1996). Lord Cullen recommended a restriction rather than a ban is placed on the availability of self-loading pistols and revolvers of any calibre held by individuals for target shooting. The Conservative government of the day (this was to be the last few months of John Major's premiership) adopted a different position, proposing a ban on the possession of all high-calibre handguns (above.22). Much public support had been garnered on this issue and in an attempt to pressurise the government to introduce a full ban on all handguns, Ann Pearston, a friend of some of the bereaved families of the Dunblane incident, founded a widely supported campaign named the Snowdrop Petition which gained some 705,000 signatures. This campaign was partially responsible in successfully pressing Parliament, into introducing a ban on all cartridge ammunition handguns with the exception of .22 calibre single-shot weapons in England, Scotland and Wales (the .22s

would remain legal, though they would have to be kept at gun clubs under the most stringent secure conditions). Many of the families of the victims of Dunblane were active in the lobbying campaign as was the Gun Control Network, also set up in the aftermath of the shootings, and whose members included parents of victims at Dunblane and of the Hungerford Massacre (where gunman Michael Ryan shot and killed 16 people, wounded 15 others and then fatally shot himself on 19 August 1987). However, for many on both sides of the argument this position adopted by the government was seen as a compromise; not a complete ban on handguns as the gun control lobby had wanted, yet too much of a restriction for those who supported continued gun ownership. Following the 1997 General Election, the Labour government of Tony Blair introduced the Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1997, banning the remaining .22 cartridge handguns in England, Scotland and Wales. Other changes recommended by The Cullen Inquiry concerned security in schools. Security, particularly in primary schools, was improved in response to the Dunblane massacre, but was also probably shaped by the proximity of two other violent incidents which occurred at around the same time: the murder in December 1995 of Philip Lawrence, a head teacher in London, and the wounding of six children and a nursery teacher, at a Wolverhampton nursery school in July 1996.

As a case study then, this chapter has briefly considered Dunblane as a physical community, whilst the previous chapter of media analysis of this crime event has detailed how the media represented and responded. It is time now to turn attention to the empirical data gained from time spent with those who lived in this place, through this event and subsequently, to

explore and examine the impact on the victims and the community to which it happened and to see how these people responded to this tragic event.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Victim Community of Dunblane**

#### *Initial impact – a liminal experience*

Ever since the assassination of President J. F. Kennedy in Dallas on 22 November 1963, it has become a cliché of popular memory to recall where you were when you heard that an historic event has occurred or that someone important had died. This is not only the case for vicarious media viewers/listeners to the event, similar evocations and responses were also recalled by some of those taking part in this empirical research. By the very nature of the crime event that took place at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996, there was much focus from the respondents on the brute and blunt force of the initial impact of discovery of the crime. Although this was not the strongest or most frequently referred to theme from the research participants as a whole, it was apparent that this was an important theme in the experience for some of the community members of Dunblane. Although conversely and interestingly, it seemed much less of an issue for the victim community in Soham, with a comment ratio of more than two to one in Dunblane. By identifying the elements of initial shock and disbelief one can begin to recognise the concept of ‘place’ and like the media coverage analysed in the previous chapter illustrated, some in the community itself could not believe that such crime could happen in a ‘place’ like this:

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<sup>11</sup> An overview of the interviewees on which the following analysis is based in detailed in Appendix 3



I wasn't in Dunblane...but I heard on the radio about some shootings in Dunblane and my first reaction was to think 'oh, there is somewhere else in the world called Dunblane', because it couldn't be here.

(Church Leader 2, Dunblane)

For others the shock and disbelief that this could be happening in their community soon turned to raw emotion. Many community respondents who were not potentially directly involved with the event (i.e. parents without primary school children) turned to the media for more information:

We could not think about what happened, then it started to sink in...we could hear it and see it, the sorrow became tangible, as the emotion took over, anger came to the fore.

(Community member 14, Dunblane)

The research showed that many people within the community turned to television for news and information. Part of the initial shock and impact of the news of this serious crime event in their community was the need for verification and to simply confirm the news they could not believe they had heard. At this point, it could be suggested that that even at that time, pre-widespread use of the internet in a world increasingly dominated by the visual, as a medium involving moving images, sound and colour, televisual information may have more authority in these instances than other mediums such as radio. However, what is also interesting is the fact that many within the community turned to televisual media or the media per se for

verification and details of what had happened, rather than face-to-face contact with those in their own community.

Other research in a similar area however suggests that often the opposite is true. In a study examining the reactions to the death of J.F. Kennedy in 1963, Sheatsley and Feldman (1965) suggest that on hearing of his death more than half of the U.S. public had felt the urge to pass on the information personally and quickly (cited in Turnock, 2000). They argue that when people are uncertain they look for cues from others about how to behave and this drove their need to seek reassurance from those around them that things were going to be okay (Ibid.). However almost thirty years later much may have changed culturally, both in the world of social networking and with regard to new media technologies. There may be several reasons why in the case of Dunblane, television was referred in preference to personal communication however, it is suggested here that one reason may be the effect of 'picture power' (Corner, 1995). Corner argues that public confidence in television is partly dependent on the viewer being able to see events and persons for themselves. 'Real' footage or images are increasingly used in television news broadcasts to visually highlight the authenticity and immediacy of the event (Jewkes, 2004). The suggestion then that those in Dunblane who turned to the technology of television for information and verification rather than personal contact with others, also corresponds with recognition of the increasing importance in late modernity of the 'visual' as a defining feature of contemporary news (Greer, 2010; Jewkes, 2004).

However, within this initial impact and the feelings of shock and disbelief among the community, even at these very early stages of the process, some

respondents did indicate a powerful sense of community and belonging, a feeling of a community bound together that was somehow out of the ordinary, as the quote below illustrates:

At the time I remember feeling that what had happened had sharpened all our instincts, I felt I was part of something larger than it really was. The bonding together...it was like the spirit of the Blitz sort of thing...it was really powerful.

(Community member 11, Dunblane)

This response has direct resonance with Turner's notion of 'communitas', where he describes this type of bonding experience to which people aspire as a particular kind of social relationship distinct from everyday mundane experiences of community (Turner, 1969). This relationship it is argued is characterised by equality as the breakdown of ordinary social codes and practices offer the possibility of 'homogeneity and comradeship' (Turner, 1969: 96).

All of these elements and emotions contained within this initial stage of discovery and shock may have something to say about the notion of being a victim and more specifically the ambiguous and transitory state of victimhood. Yet they may also reveal considerations on the notion of community and allow deliberations on how community is to be more broadly understood from the late modern perspective. Although, there are many variations on the theme, within the grand literature there is a general consensus that late modern society has brought changes that weaken traditional social controls and relax some of the ties that bind individuals to

communities as we think of them in the conventional sense (Giddens, 1990). In addition, Giddens (1990) portrays this as the notion of ontological insecurity, which is depicted as a new element of precariousness, and insecurity that is built into the fabric of everyday late modern life. This notion is also present in Bauman's (2000) 'liquid modernity', describing the present condition of the world as contrasted with the 'solid' modernity that preceded it. There are certainly interesting questions raised by the established writings and literature in this area with reference to the concept of validity regards what can be defined as a 'real community' or an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) in late modernity. Clearly community in late modernity is a contested notion and the research exemplified above indicates the shock of the immediacy of what had happened in Dunblane, what had happened *to* Dunblane for the residents, may have jettisoned them into a collective victim identity without the chance to understand or reflect on the situation in which they found themselves. Consider the following quote from one of the research participants on this issue:

We all wanted to believe the media portrayals we were seeing at the time; a tight-knit community that were sticking together. To be honest, this was probably the first time the 'community' had come together; because of the event.

(Community member 7, Dunblane)

However, what is clear is that this early feeling of 'communitas' that was obviously felt by some in Dunblane was to very quickly transform, leading to the notion of a collective identity for the community that had somehow changed fundamentally.

*A changing sense of community*

Just as the notion of victimhood can sometimes be described as a transitory state (Rock, 2002), so too can the notion of community. As has been discussed in detail the evolving concept of community in late modernity is a contested and sometimes divisive issue and this certainly seemed to be the case for some of the community residents of Dunblane. For one respondent, born and bred in Dunblane, what happened on 13 March 1996, led him to (re)consider the very nature of the community itself:

Dunblane is like the rest of central Scotland now...they are all commuters. I hadn't thought about it before but it's an odd life now. Those who just live here, who work and shop somewhere else, there's no community spirit at all. That's the way Dunblane's going...there are so many incomers coming, it's changing quite a lot.

(Community member 8, Dunblane)

For many of the Dunblane participants in this research, much of the recollections and musings regarding the nature of their community focused heavily on this issue of 'incomers'. The term 'incomer' seemed in most cases to refer to anyone who had not lived in Dunblane for at least ten years but more specifically it seemed to be directed at those 'commuters' who lived in Dunblane, but worked, shopped and essentially lived 'outside' of the community space. For many who commented on this topic, the problematic nature of the effect of the 'incomers' was two-fold. In the first instance, the problem was financial; the small businesses in Dunblane suffered

economically when the incomers spent their money and time elsewhere in other towns and cities, as the quote below illustrates:

The community was much smaller then, with a village type feel. People used the High Street as a focal point. It's less of a community than it was twenty years ago.

(Community member 11, Dunblane)

Secondly and relatedly the incomers were mostly those who had moved to Dunblane after the tragic crime event at the school; it seems to be the residence of more and more of those who did not live through the tragedy, which is fundamentally changing the nature of the community of Dunblane. This point is clearly made by the two respondents as detailed below:

The nature of community at the time the tragedy happened....as very strong community ethos that people were feeling was being lost because of the number of incomers.

(Church Leader 1, Dunblane)

The nature of the population is transient now. It's a dormitory town; the sense of community has lessened even more as the population keeps growing.

(Community member 11, Dunblane)

The concept of community whether described in a physical/geographical sense, or symbolic/imagined sense is inscribed in some way with notions of identity, belonging and membership; notions of inclusion and exclusion. As

already suggested, so often society is able to say what it is by virtue of what it is not, thereby returning to earlier binary notions of 'us' and 'them' or 'insider/outsider'. A sense of collective identity is formed partly via the media representations and constructions of deviance and of 'other'; with a sense of what we 'are not' a shared popular culture generates an inclusive 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). The changing nature of community then, for some of the residents in Dunblane is a direct reflection and some would suggest characteristic of late modern society. For many theorists the way we interact socially when considering issues of community and identity are no doubt different from the past and are constantly evolving (Beck et al, 1994; Bauman, 2001). As argued by some, traditional social and community attachments are being eroded and a tendency towards a reduction in secured employment in western societies is leading to an increasingly mobile labour force which in turn dislocates people from their local communities (Young, 1999). The complexity and temporality that surrounds the term and experience of community in late modernity is clearly illustrated by one of the Dunblane contributors:

Community is what we feel is being lost in this time: who we are, our roots and a sense of responsibility to those around you. It's increasingly harder to describe Dunblane as a place with a common identity.

(Community member 14, Dunblane)

However, the negative impact of a changing community was not always the case, for others and with direct reference to the serious crime event, there was a positive element to the arrival of new people within the community:

For a while it felt different to live here but not now. Dunblane has changed so much and there are many people here now that were not here when it happened...they have come into Dunblane with an absence of memory, I think that's good for us.

(Church Leader 2, Dunblane)

For some then the nature of the collective community of Dunblane seemed to be changing. A number within the community felt this as a loss but for others the changes were positive and forward looking. This small town community was in some ways united and this was certainly the media representation of Dunblane as the news of the crime was reported around the world. For others however, this media representation of their community was not one that they recognised; division was to be found amongst the unity.

### *United community divided*

There is something about the term 'community' that makes me wince, the assumption that all within feel the same about everything. The community of Dunblane do not have a common identity.

(Father of Victim 1, Dunblane)

Any cursory examination of news content after almost every serious crime event or disaster will almost certainly make reference to a form of 'close-



knit' community who will rally around those most affected helping and supporting them as much as possible (as the analysis of the media in the previous chapter clearly illustrates). Undoubtedly many of those involved in such situations are kind and caring, but that does not necessarily constitute close-knit; a term which implies everyone pulling together in the same direction:

I think it was the case that the community came closer together after that (shootings at the school) for a while, and then it fragmented again fairly soon afterwards.

(Community member 15, Dunblane)

For some in Dunblane the community of the town were not united as the media or common sense would have us believe or assume; Dunblane was a place of several communities operating on different but simultaneous levels. In the first instance we have the very notion of a victim community as contested. This thesis encourages a re-conceptualisation of victim identity that looks at the experiences of individual victims (or collectives in this case) and most crucially, the influence of socio-political powers acting upon them; the social construction of victimhood. This thesis suggests that the notion of what it is to be a victim needs then to be situated within wider social and structural issues, particularly when considering the question of power; who is best situated to apply or deny the status or identity of 'victim'. This key theme is reflected in more theoretical writings concerning the notion of secondary or hidden victims, as discussed in the first chapter of this volume (also see Howarth and Rock, 2000; Rock 2002). Pre-existing and often binary notions about who it is who can *be* a victim often deny wider groups of

individuals or collectives who may be affected by crime in a less direct way, the opportunity to accept or resist the victim identity and status. It is this temporal and more ambiguous view of victimhood that this work seeks to explore in relation to victim communities. Overlaid on this contested notion of a victim community, within the community of Dunblane, some of those most closely affected felt they were (or should have been) clearly a community of victims within a victim community. Although on another level and in addition to this, the research indicates that there were even visible divisions within this community of victims, within the 'victim community'. The seemingly endless binaries were revealed by a father of one of the victims:

We sought support from our close family but also from the parents whose children had died. I noticed a separation between the parents of the injured children and us (bereaved parents). We did get support from each other but there were differences within the group.

(Father of victim 2, Dunblane)

In another way this micro-level community of those most closely connected with the crime, at times felt that the representation to the outside world was that it was the physical community of Dunblane itself that was most devastated by the terrible crime that had happened within the town. Some commented that they felt at times that the wider community's grief was greater or of more importance than that of the individuals directly affected. On one hand this may have something to do with the high profile nature of the crime and the extensive victim-centred media coverage, encouraging us all to feel with and for, the primary victims of the crime. This however may

have had the unintentional effect of causing those primary victims to feel relatively undervalued in the process. Simultaneously the saturation of media interest in the town and coverage of the 'close-knit' community may have indeed encouraged others in Dunblane to feel that this crime had happened to them and in a wider sense to their town. In both these situations these comments and reactions have something interesting to say about the importance of the ownership of tragedy and grief (this issue of the commodification or the fetishization of grief is recurrent across both research sites and will be returned to later in the concluding chapter). It is possible that the answer for the levels of involved community lies in a combination of the two factors above, but whichever will out, this feeling of a 'united' community but separate from each other was a divisive issue for many of the research participants in Dunblane as another such resident demonstrates:

There are some sections of the community of Dunblane that are closer now, because of what happened here, but not the community as a whole.

(Community member 9, Dunblane)

One of the most divisive issues in this regard for many of the Dunblane participants was the amount of money that was donated from around the world and how it should be used. As has been extensively detailed in a previous chapter, following the media coverage of events in Dunblane, an immense amount of money was sent and it was reported that in the first week alone over £100,000 was received, with the final figure thought to have been in the region of £6.2 million.

It is often thought of as a very practical response to tragedy; to give money. For some social thinkers' this is a surprise; media reports and representations for the most part are unable to move or stimulate an audience into action (Bauman, 1993). Considering this notion of the moral compulsion of the media (Tester, 2001), Bauman paints a picture of a world in which we all read the newspapers and watch the television but generally speaking we are all quite bored with what they have to say (Ibid). Yet this total state of apathy may overstate the case somewhat. The social actors (audience) who read and watch the news are not always left indifferent, sometimes something happens; a disaster or a 'signal crime' (Innes, 2003) is presented, that moves or inspires us (Tester, 2001) and sometimes one response to that tragedy is to give money. In the same way that virtual members of the 'global village' may wish to express their condolences to or with victims of high profile, mediatized crimes by vicariously leaving messages on condolence websites or 'guest book's' expressing the pain and suffering they feel for those they had previously never heard of, so too others may express and feel validated in their sadness and solidarity by sending money to the place where the tragic crime took place. In such ways some people may acquire a sense of community; a sense of belonging and membership in a world where the notion of community may have fundamentally changed (Greer, 2004).

However, the empirical research indicates that for some, the receiving of money in this regard was not always welcomed in the way no doubt expected by the donors. Certainly in the case of Dunblane the financial aspect of the tragedy seemed very quickly to create a problem for the community on

various levels. One participant in particular stated that various groups within the community were told (by community leaders in places where serious and tragic events had previously attracted high profile media attention) that they would have to very quickly prepare for the issue of donated money as it was a way that people would want to express their solidarity. On how this issue affected the community as a whole, he commented:

That money and solidarity galvanised the community and then it fragmented again really quickly as people had very different ideas about what should be done with it. This issue of money was really divisive, it split the community. Those divisions are there, beneath the surface now but still there. Scratch the surface and it will emerge.

(Community member 18, Dunblane)

Other residents of Dunblane expressed similar observations:

The only good thing that came about was that it brought everyone together...initially. But the problem came for some when the money came in, it divided them, they had a huge problem then.

(Community member 8, Dunblane)

For others still, money was a divisive issue, both in whom the money was meant for and how the money was spent, but also in relation to the vast amount of money that was sent and received. For some the giving of a gift in the form of money did not help the community; for some it was not what they wanted or what they felt was appropriate:

The amount of money people gave was a complete embarrassment. It made people feel uncomfortable. I think they did it because they felt guilty. It's an odd thing...why would people give money...what can you *do* with money?

(Community member 8, Dunblane)

For other research participants however, such gestures of sympathy and solidarity were appreciated and accommodated, even though they often recognised that the money itself still had a discordant effect on the community identity:

Expressions of sympathy are hugely helpful at the time, it's great that other people are thinking about you...the money was something else; there are still question marks about how it was spent, even ten years on.

(Community member 7, Dunblane)

### *Dunblane as a focus for grief*

A dominant theme running through the Dunblane research site and expressed often and in many different guises by the participants, is the concept of the physical community, the place where the serious crime event took place, as the focus for widespread national and international grief and more specifically in what ways that may change the notion of community for those involved. Linking directly with themes identified in the media analysis of 'media intrusion' and 'tragic towns', many participants talked of how they understood the feeling of those from their own community of needing to 'do

something' that is no doubt also felt by others on a wider level who are not personally or geographically involved in the crime event. For some it would seem a straightforward and uncomplicated expression of sympathy; participating in the grief and suffering of a (far removed) tragic event is one way of outwardly expressing the depth of feeling one has and the fact that this empathy is expressed towards strangers serves to amplify that expression of feeling further (Greer, 2004). Yet as one resident illustrates in the quote below, knowing others from afar are thinking of you and the fact that the physical community is a focus and centre for this outpouring of emotional empathy does not always have the expected or desired effect:

It's understandable but very difficult to deal with practically...the amount of letters and toys we received for the children was overwhelming, this was very difficult to deal with on a community level.

(Church leader 1, Dunblane)

For others the impact on their community as the physical point of reference and focus for this wider sense of grief was even more strenuous and problematic. In addition the extent and nature of the media coverage contributed to and enhanced those sentiments:

We had difficulty dealing with all that because it was raw emotion. All those tributes...we watched and listened to the international media coverage and I think it wrecked some of us. Tributes of flowers and toys, it is a visible tangible expression of emotion, but to be the recipients of that emotion has a tremendous effect on the community.

(Community member 10, Dunblane)

Others in Dunblane seemed to feel a little differently regarding the impact of the national attention received. For some of these participants the outcome of the extensive media coverage affected them in different way that at first glance seemed to be more positive. However, this more constructive observation of the impact of the media coverage was tempered quickly by the effects of the inevitable end to the intensity of the media coverage of Dunblane and of the crime that had taken place there. As the following quote reveals:

There was the feeling that we had the goodwill of the rest of the world and people really felt buoyed by that I think. But the community definitely felt isolated after the event had dropped out of the media - we needed a national support group to help deal with the wider community feelings and emotions. This (serious crime) did *not* just happen to those directly involved.

(Community member 7, Dunblane)

There are two interesting elements to the above quote. Firstly, a positive element that the media seems to give to some in the community by their coverage and also with their physical presence in the community itself. What



is more often referred to as the 'intrusive' nature of the media was seen as a positive and of benefit to some of those who were part of the physical community of Dunblane. The media are most certainly a powerful tool and their potential for good can often be understated. The media in all its various forms, both 'old' and 'new', reaches a massive audience on a daily basis and is the site of exchange for news, messages and important information. For some victims of crime, both primary and secondary, this can aid the recovery on an individual or collective level by allowing them to utilise the media. As others have discussed, some who have been victimised (and witnesses) may derive comfort from media interest and for some, talking to the media can help them to feel that they are doing something to help with the profile or the investigation of a crime (Mulley, 2001). However, the second notion contained in the quote above refers to the crime 'happening' to the physical community as a whole. This interesting theme that focuses on the relations between crime, place and community is one that is considered and developed further in the following analysis chapter. In addition to this however, the expression in the quote above also indicates a notion of ownership over the crime event and the subsequent emotions that are evoked. In fact several of the residents in Dunblane told of similar feelings as the quote below illustrates:

We did receive thousands of letters from around the world, particularly people sending money...I think it makes people feel better, like they are doing something. I think there is an element of belonging and wanting to be involved somehow in the tragedy.

(Church leader 1, Dunblane)

In an example that dutifully illustrates both these issues of the relations between media-crime and sense of place, and also ownership of tragedy, one participant to this research told the following story:

I was at one of the funerals and I spoke to an elderly man outside. I had noticed him earlier he had been around the church and in the vicinity for hours; it seemed he was crying the whole time I spoke to him. He told me that he and his wife used to holiday in Dunblane for many, many years and he thought of it as such a happy place. He could not believe that the shootings had happened here and he said he just had to come back and express his sorrow. But he was so upset, it was really moving.

(Community member 11, Dunblane)

Within this story told above, there is reference again to the notion of a 'sense of place' both at a physical and symbolic level (as discussed in detail in the previous chapter). Within the media these issues around the texts and images of geographical space and symbolic places i.e. landscape, location and place, are all part of how we come to acknowledge and frame crime events, where they happen and just who they happen to. The geographical and social placement of a story is framed by the descriptions and visuals used to conjure up ideas about the location (including associated landscapes, cultures and peoples) where the crime event occurred (Kitzinger, 2004). The effect of this of course may have meaning for the audience, which they will no doubt use differently and in their own way, as the ways in which people respond to a media discourse are non-uniform and complex.

Thus, conveying a sense of place to the audience draws on the notions of 'physical space' and 'symbolic place'. Descriptions and images of place are used to provide context for the audience. These images of place, as well as introducing atmosphere can also be used to lend authority to reports, inviting the audience to 'be there' and to 'see with their own eyes'. However, it is also important to remember that representations or descriptions of place are more than simple, physical geography, they evoke ideas and values about the social context of events and as Goffman (1990: 11) suggests, convey ideas about 'the natives' and as such the symbolic importance of this on the audience should not be underestimated. Consider the following quote:

It seemed like the world was grieving, although I try not to overstate that, but what I saw was an outpouring of grief from all over the world.

(Police Officer 1, Dunblane)

The media and the tool of story placing in particular then can be seen to have some significance when considering 'place' and 'community' as an (inter)national focus of grief after serious crime events, such as that which occurred in Dunblane. How the wider audience come to regard the community and more specifically the people within it is defined solely in most cases via the media. Intertwined with ideas about Dunblane as a physical space, were ideas about the people who lived there and the nature of community relations. At times this emotional involvement from those in the wider media audience was none the less personal for its vicarious state. The quote below demonstrates this theme in action:

My sister had five or six phone calls from abroad at the time. She didn't know them at all, they had looked her name up in a telephone book and because they shared the same surname as her...they actually phoned her up and asked 'Are you affected, do you have any relatives affected?'

(Community member 8, Dunblane)

As the discussions above indicate, that the community of Dunblane and its' people were a focus for national and international grief was a comfort to some, but for many such vicarious attachment to and involvement from others much further afield from the tragic events that took place within the community were a source of frustration and negative emotion. This wider audience of course were completely reliant on the media for their notions of the crime event, the offender, the victims and the community where/to which it happened. This subject of the media was a dominant issue for many of the participants in the Dunblane research and within that the intrusive nature of the media was a significant theme.

### *Life through the media lens*

I was almost ambushed by some in the media. I was identified by my dog-collar and I spoke briefly at the time to a CNN reporter who wanted me to bring her to the home of a family that were directly involved - any family! She was very persistent and I almost had to physically fight her off.

(Church Leader 1, Dunblane)

The above quote is an example of the situation that several of the respondents found themselves in, during the first few hours and days of the intense media interest and coverage of the events at Dunblane Primary School. As was identified within the media analysis regarding this issue, media intrusion was certainly a major concern for many of the wider community and those most directly affected alike. The omnipresent nature of the media in Dunblane caused anxiety for many in the wider community; to the point where very quickly after the events of 13 March; 'stay away' pleas to the media (and the public) were a constant narrative and increased as time progressed. The following quote gives voice to these feelings and emotions:

It was obscene the number of folk that came here. We are talking about hundreds and for six months or more. They were stopping folk on the streets with no respect for individual grieving...horrendous...they could have been stopping someone who had lost a child.

(Community member 8, Dunblane)

Some of the most shocking elements to emerge from the research data often concerned the behaviour and particularly the intrusive nature of the media interest in the story and in the wider community. On several occasions stories detailed the deceptive nature of some of the media and exemplified the extent that some were prepared to go to, to 'get the story'. One respondent gave an example of how, some months after the incident in a not uncommon scenario, a group of prospective parents had come to look around Dunblane

Primary School. The group in question were given a tour of the school, as was the custom. Then in smaller groups or couples, the visitors were given the chance to talk to some of the older pupils about the school environment and their lives there. On this occasion it later transpired that one of the couples in question were journalists from a national newspaper who had used the time with the pupils to quiz them about what happened on 13 March earlier that year and to take photographs of some of the classrooms within the school. This level of intrusion did not only occur months after the shooting but respondents also gave examples of high levels of media intrusion almost instantaneously as the incident unfolded. Consider the quote below by a police officer involved in the aftermath of the shootings:

They (the media) would send flowers with a business card to the parents, asking for exclusivity on their story. We had to install telephone monitoring equipment in all the parents' houses, they were all issued with personal alarms and we had uniformed officers outside each house. Sometimes the media requires to be policed.

(Police Officer 1, Dunblane)

This last sentence is interesting in that it alludes to the symbiotic relationship between the media and the police as identified in the earlier media analysis. Indeed the same participant (who had a senior role in the police service and in the management of the media during the incident and throughout the aftermath) gave other examples of how problematic the intrusion of the media became and correspondingly the police approach for dealing with and 'containing' the media en masse. Primarily there was a

certain and definite strategy; from the very beginning the police strategy at Dunblane was to divert the press away from the bereaved parents:

...that was my main role...to look for alternative storylines that are headline grabbing that the media will run...everyone who I put up before the media was fully briefed on what they could say, from Head teachers to MP's.

(Police Officer 1, Dunblane)

What is interesting here is that whilst we might say understandably, the police strategy with the media was one of containment and diversion from those most closely involved with the serious crime event, the consequence of such an approach may have indeed been that which was felt as media intrusion affecting the wider community members. The police media strategy of 'feeding the beast' in this case seemed to have direct resonance for the wider community who then themselves, became in a more intense and direct way, 'the story'. Correspondingly and in an indirect way it might be said that the participation of the police in such ways may contribute to an incident achieving an extremely high and sustained public profile; in establishing an incident as a 'signal crime' (Innes, 2003).

The impact of media intrusion on the wider physical community was identified by many respondents as a negative emotion. However in addition, some observations commented on the rapid advance of late modernity and the developments in new media technology since the crime had taken place in Dunblane and deliberated how much worse the media coverage and intrusion would have been had the crime taken place only a few years later:

If it happened today the media would be far worse, the internet would have taken over. But the media at the time wasn't the same. We weren't used to seeing bad things day in, day out, all day long - not like today showing everything that happens as it happens.

(Community member 12, Dunblane)

The late modern age is one of media saturation. The media play an increasingly central role in everyday life; news is available twenty-four hours a day at the push of a television or computer button (Greer, 2005). This rapid and inexorable development of information technologies has shaped modernity transforming the traditional relations between time, space and identity (see Greer, 2004; Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1991). The omnipresent and ubiquitous nature of the media may be a part of the media intrusion, which has been seen to have impacted on so many of the community where the serious and high profile crime has taken place.

However, the nature and intensity of the media coverage was not always recounted by the research participants in a negative light and as others have suggested, reporting criminal victimisation can be a fluid and dynamic process (Greer, 2007). Criminal victims and their subsequent representation in the news can change from case to case and over time. Barely six months after the shootings in Dunblane, the British Executive of the International Press Institute produced a report, or rather a collection of accounts of those who were connected with reporting the events in Dunblane. These invited memoirs may be seen as an example of 'reflexive learning' where the media recognise and contend that there are occasions where they should go about



their business in a different way and draw lessons from past experience. This then may serve to highlight a more positive element of media interest, the variability of news representations and the dangers of utilising blanket generalisations about the discrimination of the media (Greer, 2007). In addition, some of the community members involved in the research also had some more positive comments to make about the nature of the media and their coverage of the events in Dunblane. One such response is detailed below:

The media has a genuine responsibility when something like this happens to communicate and share what has happened to the national and overseas communities...so in some senses they did a good job, just for a while we did feel that the whole world cared for us and that was not unimportant.

(Church Leader 2, Dunblane)

However, further comments made by the same contributor betrayed a simultaneous feeling of disappointment and friction regarding their treatment by the media and the representation of events:

Sometimes you felt quite close to them (the media) and that they were genuinely with you and sometimes you just felt exploited.

(Church Leader 2, Dunblane)

There is also a temporal nature to this concern. Many respondents detailed their concern about the intrusion of the media on a large scale for the forthcoming ten-year anniversary; there was a strong feeling of 'not wanting

to be back on centre stage again'; for some this was another form of secondary victimisation (an issue discussed further in the following chapter). Feelings and comments around this issue can be seen to engage another theme, which may be most usefully in the case of Dunblane, viewed as a bi-product of the intensive and intrusive nature of the media coverage, namely stigmatisation of place and by association.

### *Stigmatisation and 'tragic towns'*

As has already been explored in previous chapters, most of the traditional literature in this area considers the notion of stigma from an individual perspective (Goffman, 1959/1990; 1963) alone. However, this research seeks to explore stigmatisation from a group or community perspective where the connections of a community with a negative label can serve to stigmatise particular communities, places or collectives within a population. As such these traditional notions within the literature of stigma and spoiled identity have been utilized and refracted to examine the hitherto subdued concept of how these may work on a collective level with those who may have been labelled and stigmatized as a 'victim' community where a serious and high profile crime event has taken place. Stigmatization in this collective form was a prominent and reoccurring theme for many of the respondents in this study. Many times over, participants claimed to have denounced their belonging or knowledge of the place where they lived. The following quote illustrates these feelings and emotions plainly:

When I go on holiday now I do not say I am from Dunblane, I say Stirling now to avoid being interrogated. Saying you are from Dunblane is a conversation stopper.

(Community member 12, Dunblane)

Many discussions with participants around this topic of stigmatisation indicated that for some the stigma of association with the name or place of Dunblane where the crime occurred was centred on emotions such as embarrassment, self-consciousness or fear for future generations of residents in the town. However there were others who seemed to have ulterior motives for not wanting the stigma of association, as implied by the following quote:

Some people do not want the name of Dunblane associated with this. Some of that is selfish; it's down to property prices. Some people just want it to go away but that's never going to happen.

(Police Officer 1, Dunblane)

From whatever concern these feelings of stigmatisation arise, it is the media's pivotal role in late modern society which turns this essentially private role into a public one; the impact of collective victimisation, public labelling and stigmatisation. It is interesting and important then to question how the media representations; the repetition and standardisation of the media response and narrative is built into how each victim community, and that of the next 'tragic town' deals with their serious crime event. Some respondents in this study frequently referred to other communities who had not only suffered tragedies themselves in the past, but also and more

specifically to those who had undergone such specific and intense media scrutiny and as such were deemed synonymous with their corresponding crime or tragedy. Often help from these aforementioned places and communities was offered and taken by some in Dunblane and in this way the actions of affected communities may be described as a formation of a subculture of sorts:

We consciously took a decision for the first year that we would not officially acknowledge the first year anniversary. We were actually advised that by the people of Lockerbie. They had got locked into an annual commemoration and didn't know how to get out of it.

(Church leader 2, Dunblane)

For other victims in the community, namely those who were affected more directly by the crime event, this notion of stigma by association of name or place was conversely seen as a positive referent and as a potential catalyst and reinforcement for change. Therefore for some the stigma of place as presented and reinforced by the media was an encouragement for others not to forget what had happened in their community, although within the research this was only the case for those most directly and closely affected by the crime event itself:

It doesn't feel tainted (Dunblane). It will always be place laden but that can be a good thing, people will not forget what happened here and how it happened.

(Father of victim 1, Dunblane)

For those most closely associated with events, not forgetting what had happened in their community and constructing patterns for prevention and change in the future were uppermost in their minds and continue to prevail. However, in almost direct opposition, there were voices in the community encouraging the community themselves, the media and the world at large to look forward and to 'move on'.

*Moving on – back to the future*

On a personal level it never goes away, the emotions and memories live with you. Organisationally a lot of lessons were learned, personally it was crippling, just crippling.

(Community member 10, Dunblane)

Another key theme within the research that was certainly more pertinent to Dunblane than to the residents of Soham is the issue of 'moving on'. Again, this issue can be seen to directly relate back to the discussion of ownership over the tragedy. The comments and thoughts of the research participants seem to suggest that for some within Dunblane it was important to quickly put the awful times behind them and to move forward; to reassert the identity of Dunblane as the place it had been before the events of 13 March 1996. Some of those taking part in this research had given quotes and interviews to certain media outlets at the time on this issue, although with hindsight most now realised how their comments may have sounded to those in the community who were more directly involved in the tragedy:

The community were divided about moving on. Some foreign media outlets wanted me to give an interview shortly after it happened, to show that 'life went on' and questioned me about what it was like now and how we were going to move things forward, which I did. Imagine how that must have sounded to the parents who had lost a child...

(Community member 7, Dunblane)

For some in Dunblane then, moving forward or moving on may indicate a desire to be back in the situation as it was before, back to the collective experience of community that existed in whatever format before the serious crime event occurred; what some may describe as the constant but elusive search for community (Bauman, 2001). Such a period as this may be described as liminal and transformative, in the sense that things are in a state of change or flux (Turner, 1969). In this regard the notion of attachment to community or a collective identity for some can be seen as fragile and tenuous, which in turn may lead to feelings of increased anxiety and uncertainty. Alternatively and for others there is evidence within this research of a more straightforward and rather more late-modern concern regarding the image and representation of the wider community and place. Although this in itself was not an overt theme within the research, there were several instances of comments regarding others attitudes and behaviour towards 'putting this behind us' and moving on. Much of the tension and divisiveness was around the focus of these comments that were concerned with the effect of the serious crime event on the tourism industry within Dunblane and the more personal loss of wealth and/or status with the possibility of falling house prices in the future. The following two quotes illustrate the emotionality of this issue:

The on-going media coverage and interest means that some people who want to can never forget and they feel disgruntled by this.

(Community member 17, Dunblane)

There was a point where it got to the point of a 'moving on brigade'. There were some people who represented the community in the media that made some very upsetting comments about 'moving on', we (bereaved parents) were furious about that. They had no right.

(Mother of victim 1, Dunblane)

In contrast to this however others, whilst sympathizing with the plight of those most closely involved with the crime and the direct victims, suggested that for some moving on was an almost impossible task:

You never forget but some people are pretty much stuck in a time warp, not very many but some are still stuck with the emotion, stuck in the trauma and the tragedy, some have never really got out of it, psychologically

(Community member 11, Dunblane)

As for some of those who were directly involved with the crime event, not moving on is a deliberate act which tends to function on several levels. Emotionally as the quote above suggests, some people are 'stuck in the trauma' and will never 'get out'. As for those who participated in this study who lost their children in the tragedy, they do not want to psychologically 'move on' and leave their children as they see it. Yet on another level some

actively use that emotionality to their advantage, as the quote below clearly illustrates:

The media interest in me is still as a father of a victim, although this allows me to say a lot about Gun Control to those who would not normally have been interested, they are only interested if it's in the context of Dunblane.

(Father of victim 1, Dunblane)

However for many people in the wider community, whatever the emotions or the rights and wrongs (as it is seen) of the concept of 'moving on', on a collective level, it is not an easy task or one that many necessarily have control of. The quotes below are indicative of many thoughts and responses on this issue:

I would say this happened to the whole community in that even today you get the trigger factor. Folk here still have problems that in one way or another can be traced back to what happened, so the ripples are still working their way out.

(Community member 15, Dunblane)

The feeling of the community was to minimise the effects as best we can and just try and move forward. Some wanted to get beyond this stage and get our town back. So there was a tension between honouring properly what had happened and forgetting it. This tension was a reflection of the struggle the community had by being in the spotlight.



(Church Leader 2, Dunblane)

This final quote in conclusion illustrates from an empirical and practical level, the confluence and interdependence of the areas of central interest to this research namely the issues of crime, community identity, victimisation and the media in late modern society. This and the other themes discussed above were those that became apparent as significant in the research site of Dunblane. There were other important subjects and topic of interest that arose that were also apparent in similar form in some of the research conducted in Soham and as similarities or connections for 'victim communities' they will be discussed further in the concluding chapter. For now, this study turns to the analysis of the empirical findings in the next chapter; from the second research site Soham.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Soham: The Victim Community**

#### **What Kind of 'Place' is Soham?**

Soham is situated in the extreme South-East of the county, adjoining the county of Suffolk and The Isle of Ely. It is itself a large parish of reclaimed fens and meres, which is now highly productive agricultural land, particularly noted for root crops and fruit. Soham is a town with a long history; it was 630 AD when St. Felix of Burgundy 'The Apostle of the East Angles' is said to have founded an Abbey on the site. When the Vikings made destructive progress across East Anglia during the 9th Century, they destroyed Soham Abbey stealing its' treasures, although unlike its later counterpart at Ely, Soham Abbey was never rebuilt. For many centuries the

main route to the nearby city of Ely was by boat across Soham Mere and over the Fens. Soham was a prosperous port and trade centre during this period with excellent water links to the Great River Ouse, River Cam and out into The Wash. The Mere had an abundance of fish and eels, which formed a major part of the local economy which continued until windmills were introduced to reclaim the land for farming.

Geographically the most populated settlement in the locality is Ely (18,480) followed by Soham (9,102) with the third largest being Littleport (8,130) (East Cambridgeshire Annual demographic and socio-economic information report, 2010). The information utilized here has been extracted from the most recently available East Cambridgeshire Annual demographic and socio-economic information report (2010). This report does not discuss Soham specifically as a remote geographical area, but rather the district of East Cambridgeshire more generally with Soham contained within. Although this larger area totals a population of more than eighty thousand, the containing wards of Soham North and Soham South do between them constitute a large geographical area within and also account for more than ten thousand of that population. Therefore, whilst more specific information regarding Soham cannot be isolated and detailed in the way ideally sought by this thesis, a representative illustration may be drawn from the information gathered on the wider population of East Cambridgeshire. As such a useful snapshot of the data may be examined in the summary below.

The 2008 population estimate for East Cambridgeshire was 79,400. The population of this area is forecast to increase by 2.5% over the next 13 years. With regard to age and population the proportion of children and young

people (aged 0-19) is forecast to decrease within East Cambridgeshire while the proportion aged over 65 is forecast to increase significantly. The number of households was estimated at 34,300 in 2008 representing a 15% increase since 2001. By 2021, households are forecast to increase by a further 10%. Average house prices in East Cambridgeshire have increased by 66% since 2001, yet the percentage of affordable dwellings has increased, from 7% in 2001/02 to 24% in 2008/09. Those who may be described as economically active in East Cambridgeshire comprise 88% of the working age population and the unemployment rate for the area is 4.4%. The East Cambridgeshire Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has recorded a 6% reduction in total crime since 2007/08. In 2001 28% of East Cambridgeshire's adult population had no qualifications and 20% were educated to degree level or higher. Within this report a smaller 'quality of life' survey was conducted with some of the residents of East Cambridgeshire, 87% of who said they felt satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

The present day small town is the centre of a prosperous farming and urban community. It has many of the modern services and amenities that would be expected for a town of this size. Typical of the region, Soham stands in low-lying countryside; it is typically 'fen' in this regard. Soham was officially twinned in 2006 with the French town Andrezieux-Boutheon, near Lyon.

#### *Political consequences of the serious crime*

Along with some other significant high profile 'signal' 'crimes, this case in Soham had a political impact. After the convictions, the Government called

for a national inquiry to be conducted. The Bichard Inquiry was formally opened on 13 January 2004 and the findings were later published in June 2004 (Bichard, 2004). Humberside (from where Huntley and Carr originated) and Cambridgeshire police forces were heavily criticised for their failings in maintaining and sharing intelligence records on Ian Huntley. The inquiry also recommended a registration scheme for people working with children and vulnerable adults. It also suggested a national system should be set up for police forces to share intelligence information. The report also said there should be a clear code of practice on record-keeping by all police forces (Bichard, 2004).

This crime like Dunblane before it was one that seemed to ‘capture the mood of the times’ (Innes, 2003: 51) and became a focus of extensive and extended media reporting. The media’s role in this sense has been particularly important in articulating and coordinating a social reaction to these cases, which goes far beyond the immediate concerns of the cases themselves (Innes, 2003). Each of the two cases examined in this research study have been accompanied by widespread public concern that they signal something is wrong with society that requires some form of corrective response. So it is to the community themselves to which this thesis now turns, to the experiences of those who lived through the crime event; an exploration of the impact that this serious crime and its subsequent reporting had on these wider victims and their community<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> An overview of the interviewees on which the following analysis is based is detailed in Appendix 3.

## **The Victim Community of Soham**

### *Offender identity: an inside job*

As identified within the previous media analysis the issue of identity was also an important theme for the research participants in Soham. With regard to the themes that were recurrent through the Soham research yet significantly less important in Dunblane, the subject of the 'offender' was certainly the most referenced. As has been alluded to in previous chapters this may have been due to circumstance, in so far as the mediatisation of the serious crime event in Soham took place over a period of time; a search for missing girls, their supposed abduction, evolving into a murder investigation where suspects were subsequently apprehended, charged, tried and guilty verdicts returned. In short there was a focus and outlet for emotions that could be specifically directed at the offender; the perpetrator of the crime. This opportunity was denied in the case of Dunblane, where the certain perpetrator killed himself, thereby denying others a living focus or outlet for their anger and emotions around the crime.

As Ericson et al. (1987) have observed one of the best ways of defining what we are is by defining in others, what we are not. For many of the members of Soham, for whom this issue of the offender was significant, there was in the first instance, a clear cut delineation between being a Soham insider (us) and the deviant outsider (them) as the following quotes demonstrate:

He wasn't local, so we have to get that clear. He wasn't born and bred in Soham as many people are, so he wasn't local.

(Community member 10, Soham)

There was a definite feeling that ... almost ... thank goodness they weren't Soham people. They had only just landed here. It was very difficult but they were outsiders, we didn't really know them.

(Community member 8, Soham)

For many participants in the research that commented in this area, there was a distinct clamour to distance the perpetrators of the crime, previously viewed by many as insiders and part of the 'community' of Soham, as distinct outsiders and 'absolute others' who are portrayed as being *in* society but not *of* it (Greer, 2004: 111, emphasis in original). Some in the community had almost revised their version of past reality, choosing not to recall or overtly recognise that Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr had lived happily and relatively unnoticed as part of the community in Soham for almost a year before the murders of Holly and Jessica; further still that Ian Huntley had premeditated his criminal act, as one resident commented:

This monster had come into our community, into our school apparently with ease and destroyed two of our innocent children.

(Community member 15, Soham)

In exploring this notion of the offender as 'outsider', the impact of media representations and the notion and status of the offender may be as important as that of the victim(s). Victim identity and status is perhaps most usefully thought of as a social construction (Spalek, 2006). Within this ideal victims are those who are most readily given the legitimate status of victim, this includes those who are perceived as innocent, defenceless and worthy of

sympathy and compassion. Within the differential status of particular types of crime victims in media and social discourses; a 'hierarchy of victimisation' (Greer, 2004), child murder victims such as Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman are at the top. In this regard Holly and Jessica were archetypal 'ideal victims' (Christie, 1986). They were young, bright and photogenic, from loving and stable middle class family backgrounds and as such they were accorded 'ideal victim' status. Many criminologists have highlighted the dangers of stigmatizing victims and creating victim stereotypes in this way. As has been noted, Christie (1986) states that 'ideal victims need, and create ideal offenders; the two are interdependent' and it is this binary opposition of ideal victim and offender that provides an oversimplified picture of reality, which may allow the victim community concerned the ability to cope with and make sense of what has happened within their community and allow wider society to continue more or less as usual. This was certainly the case for one community participant who made the following comment:

He was an outsider who lived here. I think if he had been a Soham man it would have been almost impossible for us to come to terms with that. The fact that he was an outsider made it easier for us to process.

(Community member 6, Soham)

Further accounts on this subject of the offender and his (and also on many occasions that of Maxine Carr's) 'outsider/other' status, centred on how the community had felt let down by Ian Huntley and on occasion Carr, who had previously seemed to many such a 'normal and well liked girl'. This leads again to a reflection on their positions and status within the community



before the crime event, as one can presume that it is hard to be 'betrayed' or let down by those who are not considered in some way part of the community or environment in the first place. The following two quotes are examples of such accounts:

I remember talking to him (Huntley) and he was a cool customer. They were talking about events (in the press conferences) and he was there listening to it. He let the town down.

(Community member 3, Soham)

He had been welcomed into the community in a sense, him and his girlfriend...it was a betrayal. To do something like that to members of this community was unbelievable, if he had just been passing through, it would not have seemed like such a violation of the community.

(Community member 2, Soham)

Words such as 'violation' and 'betrayal' as used above indicate the depth of feeling and emotion attached to this subject for many within the communities involved. In this way it is the symbolic nature of insider/outsider dichotomy; the absolute 'other' with whom we actively establish and maintain maximum distance and towards whom we are most punitive and vindictive (Greer and Jewkes, 2005). This discourse of emotion and depth of feeling was also cemented by the threat of display of practical action by the community towards the perpetrators:

When Huntley was first caught there was a very strong feeling in the town. Normally mild mannered people who wouldn't hurt a fly were

saying, 'give him to us, we will finish him for you' and I really think they would have torn him apart.

(Community member 13, Soham)

This level of expression and such threats of violence are also found in the wider physical community (illustrated by the expressions of anger and loathing from the unconnected many who travelled to see Huntley at various court appearances) and in the macro communities of cyberspace, as well as in the micro level of victim community in which the crime takes place. In addition to the many global books of condolence and commemorative websites which are established in response to highly mediatized murders of 'ideal victims' by 'absolute others', there are also in parallel and stark contrast, often online discussion boards and petitions calling for excessive punitive justice and frequently threats of violence and even death to the perpetrators (Valier, 2004). This was certainly the case in respect to Ian Huntley and in addition the expressions of anger and loathing came full circle and back to the physical community of his residence after he was sentenced.

Ian Huntley has survived several violent attacks whilst in prison; of these at least two were committed by fellow life prisoners. On 14 September 2005 Mark Hobson (serving life for a 2004 quadruple murder) scalded Huntley with boiling water. In another incident in March 2010, Huntley was taken to hospital, with reports claiming that his throat had been slashed by another inmate. The prisoner who wounded Huntley was later named as fellow life sentence prisoner and convicted armed robber Damien Fowkes (BBC, 2010). It seems that as well as in the directly affected 'victim community',

communities and collectives in other senses can also demonstrate and 'act out' the fear and loathing of the 'outsider/other'. This may be one of the results then, by claiming the greatest social detachment between 'them' and 'us' that media representations of crime, deviance and control serve as one of the primary sites of social inclusion and exclusion in late modernity.

### *Community identity*

Most of the people in Soham are not Soham people, we are not excluded on that basis but it's just different.

(Community member 19, Soham)

As has been widely noted in previous discussions much of the debate about community in the postmodern era is truly abstract in nature. However, for many key theorists in this area (Blanchot, 1988; Nancy, 1991) the idea of community in late modernity is something which is experienced as loss and therefore as an absence in people's lives. Correspondingly Bauman proposes community as a paradise lost (Bauman, 2001) and it is here the notion of community and security are intertwined. Insecurity on many levels as argued by Bauman (2001) affects us all, absorbed as we are in the 'fluid' and unpredictable late modern world of uncertainty and flexibility. As is also suggested in some of these discussions, the increasing individuality of late modern society has been accompanied for some by a reminiscence and a sense of longing for the idea of community, often as a source of belonging and safety in an increasingly insecure world (Bauman, 2001). One participant vocalizes this concept in the following quote:

The complexion of Soham is changing, the idea that everyone knows everyone else is gone and never to return. You have to accept it and move on.

(Community member 3, Soham)

However, one issue within this notion of community identity that was a robust feature of the research conducted in Soham was more specifically the composition of that community identity. In the first instance, and as was similarly indicated in Dunblane, there are many identifiable levels of community within the collective of Soham:

There are communities within Soham, but there isn't a community of Soham.

(Community member 16, Soham)

In addition to this, throughout the empirical research particular to the locality of Soham, was a form of community identity amounting to a tiered system or hierarchy of belonging; where some are more readily given and accept legitimacy as a 'Soham' person. The quotes below are informative in this regard and illustrative of this topic:

'Community' in Soham is based around those who have lived here for generations and the people who have moved in 'new'. I have lived here 35 years and have family connections going back much further than that, but I am still seen as a foreigner. And sometimes I still feel like an outsider.

(Community member 15, Soham)

I am an outsider; you have to be born here to be a true 'Fenny'. I am an Essex girl not a Soham girl, I know that's how it's always going to be. That doesn't mean they won't accept me but that's how they identify me.

(Community member 16, Soham)

Although for many of the participants, the community of Soham was in some senses based on a notion of belonging, for many of the 'new', their belonging and identity was built on different, shifting foundations, as the quote above explicitly explains; acceptance is granted but tainted by difference. Levels of inclusion and exclusion are sought as some community members enjoyed a higher status in the community discourse by virtue of their perceived longevity of association with the physical space and on that basis their status as community members and potential victims, their experiences and views may be taken more seriously than others.

This hierarchical concept also stretched to those who were seen as legitimate recipients or rightful beneficiaries of the support and counselling provision that was provided for and within Soham for some time after the serious crime event. On one occasion a research participant in Soham gave a detailed

account of a woman who had moved to Soham some months after the serious crime had taken place in August 2002. Not long after her arrival she attended a local 'counselling surgery' that had been set as support for the local community. Most interestingly however, the woman in question was not seeking support for how the crime event had left her feeling but she sought counselling and help for her emotions around *not* being involved in the community at the time of the crime and as such felt she had 'missed out' on something; on the supposed collective, community experience. She felt isolated from the community in this sense; an 'outsider' to the emotions of others and the community as a whole, whom she felt had experienced the tragedy as a collective of which she was not part:

She basically walked in and asked for professional help. She said she felt left out that she hadn't experienced 'the tidal wave of emotion' that the rest of the community had. Can you believe it? It sounds bizarre to say it now, but it's true. She really wanted help because she *wasn't* part of it.

(Community member 4, Soham)

The experience of the woman described above and the reaction of the community member to her situation is particularly interesting as it suggests and indicates simultaneously the notions of a hierarchy of victimhood and a hierarchy of community as discussed above in, the sense that some are seen as less deserving than the primary and tangible, physical victim (community). This returns us to the much broader notion of identity and of what is meant when we refer to 'community' in late modernity.

*Community through tragedy*

At this point it is pertinent to remind ourselves that community is a contested concept and its many expressions are varied, from the notions of a spatially bounded locality such as traditional villages and tribes, through to virtual communities which take social relations beyond the traditional categories of place (Delanty, 2003). In addition it is suggested by this thesis that notions of community, be they physical or symbolic may also be temporal and ambiguous. Accordingly, for some of the members of the Soham research cohort, it seemed that the collective, inclusive sense of community identity only came into being specifically *because* of the serious crime committed within their locale. Some of the research participants described a feeling of community, but only in relation to the aftermath of the serious crime as the following quote reveals:

Soham is a dormitory town; there is little sense of belonging to a community. However, I think there is a good community spirit, the events that happened showed that.

(Church Leader 1, Soham)

On further examination this issue emphasizes and supports the reflexive nature of the social actors involved in the process. Some people resident in Soham themselves, identify a (level of) community that was sparked by the crime event, which continued through the serious crime and its immediate repercussions but then afterwards disappeared again, almost as quickly as it was created:

The community feeling is back to normal now, not close but back then it was like a bunker mentality, dig in and keep the rest at arms length.

(Community member 12, Soham)

Yet for others, no matter how tangential and temporal this feeling of new found community may have been, it was none the less powerful and affecting. Emotions ran high and for some feeling part of this community for however long, elicited feelings of belonging and collectivism which spread far wider than the physical boundaries of time and space as the participant below identifies:

As a community we felt that one of our own families had been attacked, even if we didn't know the girls families. Even previous residents of the town and friends from around the world rang to express their solidarity.

(Community member 2, Soham)

For some theorists this element of closeness at a distance is the most defining property of late modernity; that we are disembedded from time and space (Giddens, 1991). In late modern societies social space is no longer confined by the boundaries set by the space in which one moves. New forms of closeness and proximity are generated which are neither bounded by geographical borders nor traditional restrictions of space and time (Rheingold, 1993). As such, others who were never or who are not now connected with the physical space or those living within can imagine or recall the feeling of belonging or of community by association. Further, one can



now imagine what other spaces look like, without ever having been there. It is this commentary on issues of virtual space and time that becomes particularly pertinent to this work on victim communities and how they may be understood on a broader level in the late modern age.

On an additional level, it is clear that the focus for the feelings of collectivism and belonging are centred on the crime event itself. As Delanty had suggested some of the most powerful expressions of community are often encountered specifically where there has been a major injustice inflicted on a group, who as a result develop a sense of their common fate (2003). This closeness (to the 'victims' and to the 'community') expressed by the community member of Soham in the previous quote above may be most usefully viewed as a form of 'symbolic community', in the sense that it demonstrates powerful links between members of a social group or society. This is what Turner (1969) has described as *communitas* and liminal experience where normality is suspended. Turner (1969) argues that such liminal states are marginal and transitory and as such liminality occurs when things are in a state of change or flux and is often connected with those moments of symbolic renewal when a society or group asserts its collective identity (Delanty, 2003). The situation described here by the residents of Soham would seem to be an example of liminality in action.

***Community closing ranks: keep calm and carry on***

Throughout the research in Soham the issue of community in its various guises was a dominant theme running through many of the discussions. There were instances such as those explored above, where the closeness of

the community seemed more intense as a direct result of the impact of and the responses to the serious crime event that had taken place. One resident described Soham in the following terms:

Soham is a bit like an island really; it's quite insular and inward looking.

(Community member 17, Soham)

For some that collective feeling of closeness and almost intimacy in the community as a direct result of trauma encouraged some community members to turn in on themselves; to pull together and close rank against the outside world in this time of trouble and need. The following quotes were indicative of many comments on this topic:

There were huge amounts of people coming in and offering support, which was helpful in some ways but not in others. I remember one person said, 'this is a Soham problem and Soham must sort it out'.

(Church Leader 1, Soham)

We wanted to close the door to the rest of the world and deal with it ourselves; we didn't want all these other people here.

(Community member 15, Soham)

The agency and reflexivity of some of the community members was again apparent in discussions on this area, as a number of the residents indicated there was a temporal and transient element to the community turning in on

itself. Notions of community, whether relating to the physical and traditional or the imagined or virtual are in essence comments and reflections on membership and identity (Greer, 2004). Community in this case, derives from the collective affirmation of the inclusive insider identity through the distancing from the exclusionary outsider identity of all others. This notion is clearly articulated in the quote below:

I know whilst it was happening local people pulled together...if you walked down the street and were recognised as not from Soham, people wouldn't have been rushing to help you. We didn't want strangers around; we wanted to be left alone. People felt they would have liked to put up their defences and push everyone else away.

(Community member 2, Soham)

Here it seems that in a late modern age characterised for some by uncertainty, people tend to congregate around those issues, which may offer them some sense of unity and cohesion. However for others in the same situation it was apparent that inclusive unity and the community closing ranks against 'others' and the outside world was a transient and temporal state, which disappeared some time afterwards when the community reverted back to the status quo; back to a society of 'lightly engaged strangers' (Young 1990, cited in Greer, 2004). As one participant stated:

That initial closeness of the community has gone back to normal; we have a lot of people here now that didn't live through it. It was almost us against the world, we felt very attacked by the world, although a lot of it was supporting us, it didn't feel like it at the time.

(Community member 2, Soham)

There are important elements within this notion of the 'community closing ranks' that seem to have resonance with the next major theme identified within the Soham research in particular, namely that of secondary victimisation.

*Secondary victimisation: the media circus rolls on*

Traditionally within criminology and much of victimology, victims of specific crimes are affected by the crime itself (primary victimisation) or by the way in which others respond to them and the crimes committed (secondary victimisation) (Carrabine et al, 2004). Although this phrase 'secondary victimisation' is more commonly and traditionally used with reference to the treatment of primary victims and the subsequent exacerbation of their situation by the criminal justice system (see Shapland et al, 1985) and other expert systems (medical services for example), it is also constructive to scrutinise the media as such an 'expert system'. The media have the power to socially construct the idea of the victim and this is significant for this work on two levels. Firstly the media has the ability in part to create and attach the status of *secondary victim* (to be accepted or resisted) to those who can be identified in a wider sense with the serious and high profile crime in question, as the inclusive nature of the comments in the following quote illustrates:

To be honest it hasn't stopped, you can pick up any paper and see Ian Huntley or Maxine Carr, some little story ... so it's never really gone, our pain is on going.

(Community member 17, Soham)

Secondly, as Kate Mulley (2001) states, media interest can often be experienced as a form of secondary victimisation and can make those involved as direct or indirect victims feel harassed, lacking control, vulnerable and with their privacy violated. Secondary victimisation is therefore experienced in this sense via on-going media coverage of those collectives who are identified with the serious and high profile crime in question as well as the primary victims in a traditional sense. For some of the participants in the Soham research, this victimisation and vulnerability was a pertinent issue, as the following quote exemplifies:

They have been back many times since. My husband had a microphone shoved in his face even though he tried to get away, he didn't even know what it was about this time. We don't want to keep hearing about it, we have to get on with our lives don't we?

(Community member 19, Soham)

In addition the issue of secondary victimisation through the on-going and pervasive media coverage of the serious crime event was also felt by some in the community, more particularly through the continuous references to the murders even when the primary story was based on another or even substantively different topic. In these cases the media would in some way

make tenuous connections or links back to the serious crime event that took place in Soham. The result for some within the community was a certain feeling of secondary victimisation as a direct result. Consider the two quotes below:

One of the real problems is that the media keep returning to the subject. We have had the trial, the police officer involved in child pornography, the failure of the police forces sharing information, the Richard Inquiry, 'her' problems with identity and 'his' problems in prison....each time any of these things is mentioned in the news *that* photo comes out again and it all comes flooding back.

(Community member 2, Soham)

We had another murder since, next door to me here...a rented house and some bloke murdered his girlfriend and of course the media were straight round. Now a tin pot little murder, serious as it is would not normally get reported like that - but because it was Soham...

(Community member 3, Soham)

Many research participants in Soham held the opinion that the media for a large part were to blame for this form of additional or secondary victimisation; they were the conduit through which the rest of the world could continue to view the community of Soham. Here we can identify a direct link between the themes recognised in the earlier media analysis and the real concerns of the Soham community. Many talked of the media 'inviting the world' into Soham; the media had opened a revolving door which could (or would) never close and this was the primary cause of the

community's ongoing feelings of victimisation. For some this was a deeply felt issue, both for the community as a whole and also as illustrated particularly by the second quote below on a distinctly personal level:

The scars are healing but every time it is referred to in the papers or on TV it feels like someone is trying to pick off the scab.

(Community member 2, Soham)

Every time we had a development in the case they all came back again to talk to me. Once you are identified that's it, they (the media) all want you.

(Community member 8, Soham)

It is clear then from the many examples extracted from the Soham research data, that the media can inflict secondary victimisation on some victim collectives by exacerbating their feelings of violation. This can occur in a number of ways, not only by searching for and reporting anything negative about the victims, the community or the offender, but also with the frequency and regularity to which the story is returned to. In addition, such feelings of violation by the media can also be identified in the way and context that such crime stories are presented; in conjunction with an image or photograph for example. The quote from a community member below alludes to this issue in a broader sense:

It didn't stop when they caught Huntley, they kept coming back. A lot of the time it's the newspapers scrapping for a story, like when

Huntley had benefits in jail ... it's become a story that shouldn't be that big.

(Community member 16, Soham)

For others still the notoriety via media coverage of the serious crime in Soham, did not allow for the normality of circumstance to play itself out. The insinuation is that without the continuous and intrusive nature of the media coverage, 'Soham' may have 'dropped off the tragedy radar' and resumed its status and place in the unmediatized world which it had previously inhabited:

We just want to be able to fade away and in any other circumstances that would have happened, it just hasn't happened for Soham and I don't know why.

(Community member 15, Soham)

In a broader sense then the theme of media intrusion is a significant issue that will be considered in greater detail further in this thesis. However, it is important at this point to recognise that media representations are in this way implicated in the how we think about ourselves and relate to one another. Media portrayals can play a part in reconfiguring people's memories and transform the ways in which experiences may be interpreted. Whilst this concept is reminiscent of agenda setting theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), which asserts that the while the media may not tell people what to think, it can tell them what to think about, this notion goes further suggesting that the media representations in this sense can have a real impact on peoples' own sense of identity (Kitzinger, 2004).



One of the more direct effects of the extensive multi-media coverage of the crime in Soham in August 2002, is the impact on the community of what can be usefully described as 'grief tourists'; those with only mediated knowledge of the victims and the crime event, who travel often great distances to express their sympathy and grief in or with the community. This outpouring of tangible emotion is the theme to which this analysis of the Soham research now turns.

*Grief tourism: tangible emotion*

For a while Soham became a place where everyone wanted to visit, people took detours to come here.

(Community member 17, Soham)

As has been previously discussed it is true to say that whilst stories about crime and justice more generally perform the role of bringing communities together and mobilizing common responses, there is a clear selectiveness in the mediated constitution of the type of both victims and offenders who capture the public imagination (Jewkes, 2004). By drawing on the consensual values of an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) the media serve to stigmatise some offenders, sentimentalise certain victims and sanctify those regarded as particularly tragic (Jewkes, 2004). The discussion around news values in the media analysis chapter of this thesis has helped to illuminate the reasons why some very serious crimes invoke such a strong public reaction and remain so long and so intensely in the collective public memory.

As the discussion around the research theme of secondary victimisation by the media illustrates, as a window to the rest of the world, the media highlighted Soham to that global collective; for some of that wider audience the reaction was to expressively and outwardly participate in sharing the suffering and grief of the 'victims' by direct action. This demonstration of collective emotional involvement in mass mourning has been likened by some commentators to a 'grief roadshow' (Appleton, 2002), contributing to the ritualisation and commodification of grief.<sup>13</sup>

As has been identified within the previous chapter exploring the media coverage of the events in Soham and Dunblane, media representations of how these events were affecting the 'wider/global' community described a nation united in shock and grief. Whilst it is clear that some were participating in public mourning, by signing a condolence book or laying flowers for example, the vast majority of the public did not take part in any such displays. What is clear is that most of the people who did involve themselves had never met the two girls or their families; thus all previous knowledge and experience of them was mediated. To explore the actions and effects of those who did participate then may tell us something about the media involvement in constructing 'public' responses to serious and high profile crime events and the construction of public events and rituals. It is possible, that for some who felt the need to participate in public displays of grief, emotion and sympathy that they simply may have wanted to be a part of, or were drawn to be part of, a wider collective experience of *communitas* (Turner, 1969). However, these expressions of sympathy and solidarity (if that is what they were) seemed to have a very different effect on the physical

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<sup>13</sup> This topic is returned to in greater depth in the final chapter.

'victim' community involved. Some started to question the motivation of the travelling mourners:

People were travelling hundreds of miles to bring tributes, flowers and cuddly toys, to wander around and read the messages. It all seemed a lovely supportive gesture at the start but it did get a bit out of hand and I one did wonder whether it was all support or simply prurience.

(Community member 2, Soham)

The sheer number of tributes became a problem very quickly. The whole churchyard was filled with flowers and the porch with cuddly toys. Visitors started arriving as early as 5a.m. and some stayed 'til well after dark.

(Community member 19, Soham)

One of the big problems we had was the house that the caretaker lived in...it's gory... people were visiting Soham to see the house that Ian Huntley lived in.

(Community member 3, Soham)

Indeed after a time the sheer number and intensity of the visitors on the town's collective emotions and in a more practical sense, on its infrastructure actually became a burden in both senses for many in the community rather than the perceived gesture of support and empathy that may have been intended. The quote below is indicative of many on this subject:

It was overwhelming and it became a serious problem in the town. We had bus trips turning up here; they were adding us on to the traditional tourist routes. They would turn up here, go to the chip shop, come over to the churchyard to walk around and look at the flowers. They weren't all like that but there were many who thought it was a sight seeing trip.

(Community member 15, Soham)

It has been suggested that within this coming together of individuals to express collective anguish and to 'gaze upon the scene of crimes' is a gesture of empathy and solidarity with those who have been victimized' (Jewkes, 2004: 28). However a more post-modern reading may be to see this action of involvement as a voyeuristic desire to be part of the hyperreal and to take part in a highly mediated event and say 'I was there'. The quote below was indicative of many that can be seen to express this sentiment:

Some people came and took photos of their children standing next to the flowers (in the churchyard), it got to me.

(Community member 8, Soham)

In some ways this notion of direct action via 'grief tourism' could also be seen as another element of secondary victimisation, caused in essence by the media although delivered explicitly by the vicarious involvement of others. A bi-product of extensive and often emotionally charged media representations may be in effect an 'embarrassment of riches', products of empathy given by the collective mass mourners; the flowers, the cuddly toys, the donated money. This is a notion that will be further developed later in this thesis.

*Stigmatization and 'tragic' towns*

One thing is for sure – this has put Soham on the map.

(Community member 19, Soham)

As has been noted in previous chapters, although it would go too far to say that the media determine public opinion, they certainly help to define the boundaries of social reality (Ericson et al., 1991; Sparks 1992; Greer, 2003). In the cases examined for this research, the media seem to play an important part in creating an identity of place that is centred around and focused on the serious crime event that has taken place. Through the media, the name Soham has become a coded reference for the murderous event that took place within the community. The stigmatizing effect of the particular representations and rhetorical frameworks used by the media in this case is most keenly felt by those who belong to, live and work within the community itself. Many times over, participants in this study claimed to denounce their identity with or knowledge of the place where they lived. The following quotes illustrate these feelings and emotions plainly:

I think most people prefer not to mention...I know when I am asked to provide my address and mention Soham, there is usually a pause and then they say 'Oh, isn't that where ....' and my heart sinks.

(Community member 2, Soham)

People have said it will take us centuries to get away from this. Aberfan was forty years ago, it will be generations before the name of Soham stops being something nasty.

(Community member 20, Soham)

In addition, many respondents from Soham who had something to say on this issue often directly linked this feeling of stigmatization to the quality and quantity of the coverage given by the media to the serious crime event that happened in their locality:

In the whole scheme of things there was no need for it to have gone so global. It was certainly nothing like Dunblane or Hungerford, but because of the huge amount of reporting, Soham has now taken its place alongside both of those two massacres.

(Community member 11, Soham)

Since the tragic events...we residents of Soham don't find the need to explain where our town is anymore. Thanks to the intensity of the media coverage which included street maps and aerial photographs, many people know all about the location, the layout and geography of our little town.

(Church leader 1, Soham)

It's not so bad now it's dropped out of the news more. But still and for a long time afterwards it almost became each individuals defining feature, you became 'that person from Soham'.

(Community member 2, Soham)

This latter quote is particularly interesting, as it seems to indicate elements of labelling. As detailed in earlier chapters the labelling perspective focuses on how people label one another, how others communicate based on these typifications and what the consequences are of these social processes (Rubington and Weinberg, 1978). The key questions considered by the labelling perspective with regard to 'victim communities' are of power and of secondary deviance. In this instance these can be reconfigured where those who are so labelled (as a victim community) experience a reorientation of self in such a way that they come to see themselves as they have been labelled (Lemert, 1969). Taking the lead then from those labelling theorists who focus on the importance of the impact of labelling by 'official' systems on the subject, this research is seeking to explore and refract this notion to examine the influence and power of the 'official' media constructions and representations of victim communities where serious and high profile crimes have taken place; the official version or label of collective victim identity. Thus in this example, the stigma that is attached to the victim community by the process of labelling via the media representations sticks, it affects how others see those involved as well as how they see themselves.

The mention of other physical locations (by place name) where serious and particularly highly mediatized crime events had taken place was notable in much of the research data in this area. Many respondents from within these communities did feel that for better or worse, their community and themselves as individuals and as a collective by association were part of a legacy, of a list of 'tragic towns' whose names were known because of, and defined by, the crimes that had taken place within. Although there were a

few that seemed unfazed by this inclusion, the majority did feel that this was a legacy of stigmatization that had only negative consequences:

You only have say to 'Soham' and it conjures up a whole pile of negative images - the same as Dunblane, Lockerbie and Aberfan.

(Community member 14, Soham)

We know how Soham is going to be remembered. We know the names of Hungerford and Dunblane and we know what they conjure up and we know Soham conjures up a disaster area. I think it will take a long time to get rid of that, I'm not sure it will ever go.

(Community member 17, Soham)

Across the Soham research the references from individuals to other towns and places where high profile and serious crime events had taken place were plentiful. As many of the quotes given above clearly illustrate, references to past crime events including Aberfan<sup>14</sup> and Hungerford seem to weigh heavily in the present for those in the community. This issue was also a strong element to the research findings in the previous chapter analysing how the media represent and construct a narrative and image of a 'victim' community by drawing on and referring to past serious crimes and disasters that are also denoted as synonymous with crime and tragedy; thus a litany of tragic towns is created.

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<sup>14</sup> Where a mudslide disaster on 21 October 1966 killed 144 people, including 116 school children.



*Grief at a distance: vicarious emotion*

The whole tragedy in Soham worked on three levels. The most important level is the families who have both lost a girl and that is really where it should stop, but because it grew as it did, it came to the community level and we were involved...because of the media coverage the whole town were involved. And then you have the national and international level as well, where it's slightly more difficult to understand.

(Church leader 1, Soham)

One of the most important parts of the contemporary experience of late modernity, as argued by Giddens (1991), is the influence of distant events on the more proximate as routine practice. This conceptual and technological concept of 'nearness at a distance' may be seen to have a substantial impact on this work and the notion of a victim community. The victim communities of late modernity (certainly those which can be described as symbolic in nature) may be constructed and represented by those involved in the serious crime or locality, by the mass media or by those who have never met or who were hitherto unconnected, without ever meeting or having visited the space where the serious crime event took place. When discussing the more ethereal or symbolic gestures of grief, empathy and support that the community of Soham received, several respondents commented on the probable reasons why some feel the need to send condolences to the town as a collective and physical entity. On discussing the many pieces of artwork that had been received from well-wishers, one resident of Soham commented:

I think it probably benefits them as much as anyone else and yes I do think that it may also be showing just how much you care. It was nice to think that people cared but, but we didn't want them to keep telling us. It's a two-way thing. Everyone felt that they wanted the support but we didn't want to see it.

(Community member 8, Soham)

For some others in the community the strain of being a national focus was showing itself in a tangible way and on a collective level. Some of the respondents intimated that they did not want to be associated with Soham the physical place and that the world focusing their attention on them at that time was too much to bear:

We couldn't cope anymore. It was better not to be in Soham and it was a relief to get out. Many people didn't go into Soham then, we just wanted to get out, especially for the children, we needed to get them out and keep them occupied.

(Community member 16, Soham)

Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman went missing on the evening of Sunday 4 August 2002. By the following morning the police were dealing with many in the local community, some who had not started their working week, all who had made themselves available to search for the missing girls. With reference to these early hours and what subsequently turned into many days of the search in and around Soham, one community member describes the feeling of many residents who wanted something meaningful to 'do':

It was frustrating not to be able to do anything. People want to do something. If you see something like this on the television you feel you want to do something. I'm sure that's why people give money normally to these tragedies, people want to do something and it is an act that you can do to help.

(Community member 9, Soham)

In this above quote it is clear that the participant understands the feeling of needing to 'do something' that is no doubt felt by others on a wider level who are not personally or geographically involved in the crime event: the moral compulsion of the audience (Tester, 2001). This sentiment may be apparent on several other levels, not least within the political arena, where we are able to discern the politicisation of the victim (Garland, 2000; 2001) in action. So often in the immediate aftermath of serious high profile crimes (where the often sanctified victim has captured the public imagination) we see politicians vying to outdo each other in their attempts to capture and articulate the public mood; to produce the most significant grief gesture, often in the form of ever increasing minutes of silence. This can be described in some senses as a form of 'compassion inflation'<sup>15</sup>. In this way it can be suggested that the changing nature of expressive public mourning and collective grief is not only more common in late modernity but also is becoming increasingly competitive and the suffering (symbolic) victim becomes a valued commodity, utilized for the manipulation of collective public emotion and support.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, victims of the Asian tsunami in 2004 were honoured with 3 minutes silence, yet the deaths of Princess Diana in 1997 and the Queen mother in 2002, prompted one and two minutes respectively.

However, as other Soham residents illustrate in the two quotes below, understanding the need of others who wish there was something they could 'do' and being the recipients of that vicarious emotion is not always helpful. Knowing that distant others are thinking of you and that the physical place and community is a focus and centre for this outpouring of emotional empathy and co-opted grief does not always have the expected or desired effect:

It didn't help at the time. I suppose it was nice to know that people were thinking of us but they kept coming and stuffing it in our faces in a way.

(Community member 11, Soham)

You have to think that it's more about people wanting to do something for themselves without thinking about what impact it may have.

(Community member 4, Soham)

This last quote is interesting as it begins to attend to the conspicuous nature of compassion. The question here addresses what the purposes of these gestures of recreational grief are. Public expressions of emotion such as planned silences and signing (physical or virtual) books of condolence and emoting publicly with strangers may for some turn them into better people, be seen as better people by others or as other writers have suggested, just make them feel better about themselves (Appleton, 2002). In this way grief can be usefully thought of as a commodity; something which has a relative value and which can be traded. However, another element to this notion of

expressive grief is the more cultural effect of collective belonging, where more extravagant public displays of grief for strangers can be undertaken as part entertainment and part spectacle. The collective outpouring of grief that has been witnessed in relation to Soham, Dunblane and other certain violent or criminal acts has resulted in them occupying a particular symbolic place in the popular imagination. It has been suggested by some that the 'coming together' of individuals to express collective anguish in a gesture of empathy and solidarity with those who have been victimised, is a sign of the desire for community; a hearkening back to pre-mass society collectivity (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001). Conversely this compassion may be more conspicuous and voyeuristic in nature, in line with what many would perceive as recognisable characteristics of late modern life.

The aim of this current and the previous chapter was to take us from the 'grand theory' to the 'real world'. Although not mutually exclusive this thesis is attempting to empirically test aspects of wider theoretical positions by considering and exploring the real lived experiences and responses of those who found themselves part of a victim community and the subsequent impact on that community where a serious and high profile, highly mediatized crime has taken place. The last remaining chapter of this work takes us back to that theory: to address the implications of the concept of 'victim communities' for the existing literature and begins by addressing the significance of the commonalities and differences found within the research analysis chapters.

# **Part IV**

# **Back to Theory**

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Back to Theory**

#### **Introduction**

The previous empirical chapters have addressed the central aims of this thesis. The central area of investigation posited at the outset of this work attempted to illuminate and explore a part of the media-crime nexus. In very broad terms this can be described as seeking to examine the notions of victimisation and identity in late modernity whilst considering the nature and impact of the role of the media in that dynamic. As such the empirical research was informed by the following central questions: Do serious and tragic crime events act disproportionately on how certain crime problems are understood more broadly and what is the role of the media in that process? Do these highly mediatized crimes create victim communities that acquire a collective sense of stigma and spoiled identity? And do new media

communications provide a means for some of achieving a sense of identity, community or belonging in the late modern age?

In an attempt to address these questions we introduced the notion of 'victim communities'. In addition, we set out to understand the role and influence of the media in the construction and representation of such identities and communities. Subsumed within these areas of investigation are the main findings and key themes identified and discussed in the previous empirical chapters. In addressing the central research questions, the case studies of the crimes that took place in both Dunblane and Soham delivered interesting themes of commonality but also some exceptions within the research data. Identifiable areas of commonality from the empirical research including the print media analysis, are the media constructed narratives of how to 'be' a victim community, the notion of secondary victimisation through the media, via on-going media coverage and the transmission of vicarious emotion on both a physical and symbolic level. Other common themes identified included the importance of place to identity in times of crisis, questions regarding the ownership and commodification of grief and the nature and role of community in late modernity. As well as these common themes, the empirical data also illuminated issues that were place and context specific to one crime, locality and community in question. The most striking distinction between the two research sites from the outset was the marked difference in how the offender(s) of the crimes were identified and discussed by the research participants and to a certain extent how they were represented in the media coverage. Most interestingly much of that debate (or lack of, in the case of Dunblane and Thomas Hamilton) was concerned with the establishment of a deliberate and unequivocal delineation of the offenders as



'outsiders' and 'absolute others' to the community and to 'us' the wider audience, even though they were thought of in some senses to have been part of the 'community' previous to the crime event. These commonalities and exceptions within the empirical research raise certain issues for the theoretical literature, which will be considered in what follows.

The aim of this thesis has been to tell the story of two communities of peoples who have had cause to experience on a broad level, a serious and highly mediatized crime. This is an area of investigation and exploration that does not fall neatly into a recognised and delineated body of theory and research, rather it cross-cuts and dissects several other well established disciplines, which have thus far not been connected in a way that addresses or explores these concerns. Essentially, the two research sites of Dunblane and Soham are collectives that have not been empirically or theoretically studied, yet who are groups who have been victimised. It is the nature, impact and effects of that victimisation, the characteristics of social relations and identity in late modernity and the role of the media (and new media technologies) in that complex process of victimisation that this thesis has sought to interpret and more deeply understand. Exploring such a rich diversity of literatures and coalescing these with empirical qualitative research, the thesis has shown how one serious crime event can affect a group of people, in complex ways. As such this thesis will now briefly consider the implications of these findings as they impact on the literatures previously reviewed.

**Revisiting the Literature**

As well as the criticisms previously identified within the more traditional theoretical perspectives of victimology there are also other related bodies of work, which Rock (2007) has referred to as 'miscellaneous' victimological ideas (2007: 51). These have begun to consider and to map formerly unexplored victim populations, not only primary but also secondary victims and others more distant still (2007: 52). In this way the terms, framework and the social relations contained within the study of victimology are not fixed but emerging and contested as the work of this thesis regarding victim communities of serious and high profile crimes clearly illustrates.

The work contained in this thesis attempts to fill some of the conceptual gaps within the victimology literature (as illustrated in chapter one) and to challenge some of its central assumptions in two principal ways. Firstly, this thesis argues for the exploration of victimisation from a very different perspective than those analysed above. This thesis does not consider victimisation only in the traditional administrative sense of the impact of crime on general patterns of victimisation, nor does it regard victimisation primarily as a wider structural condition of oppression by the state. Instead it is concerned with the hitherto under-explored broader concept of societal reaction to the notion of victimisation and in addition how that may amplify the conditions for victimisation more generally. This standpoint raises issues for victimology literature more broadly, which is certainly incomplete or flawed in this area. Put succinctly, by examining and exploring the notion of victim communities through the media lens, this thesis seeks to examine the nature and impact of the social reaction to victimisation and harm. In this way this approach bears some helpful comparison with the fundamental

underpinnings of the labelling perspective, in that such theorists were less concerned with crime itself but rather more interested in societal reaction to crime, or more specifically deviance, and how that reaction amplified the conditions for deviant behaviour.

Secondly this thesis, whilst recognising that many often discordant and diverse theorists working within and without victimology have reasoned for the inclusion of a wider conceptual vision of the 'victim' or of 'victimhood', fundamentally contests even these boundaries. As has been indicated above, whilst more contemporary work within victimology has focused on the nature of and impact of victimisation itself, still the groups attracting the main focus of such enquiry are often those more conventionally thought of as victims, even if until more recently they have been considered largely invisible (the homeless or the elderly for example). Even given the inclusion of what are variously described as 'secondary' or 'hidden' victim groups, the often narrow and exclusionary definition of the concept of victimhood is contested by this work which argues for the further extension of the parameters of the concept to include consideration of those who have thus far not been regarded as a victimised collective. As we have recognised, there are parallel areas of research and theory within criminology, such as restorative justice, which do engage with issues of community and wider victimisation as part of a wider victimology. However, for the victim community of serious and high profile crimes, little is known about the experiences of victimisation for such specific groups of individuals. In this way this work seeks to help usher a move away from simple stereotypes of victimisation and vulnerability, epitomised by Christie's 'ideal victim' (1986) and toward a more nuanced appreciation of crime and its effects.

Earlier examinations of late or postmodern theory have tended to challenge its broad and all-encompassing nature. Much of the theory and literature in this area is certainly abstract in nature and what is suggested in theory is concluded with very little or no empirical data or research with which to back up such wide ranging and sweeping claims. In addition for many, late modern thinking heralded the end of the notion of binary oppositions, the supposed end of dichotomies such as insider/outsider, us/them. This thesis has examined some of the issues contained within these wider theoretical debates and through the qualitative empirical research conducted suggests that the reality for those participants in that process is something quite different to some of the abstract conclusions of the post modern theorists. This research study found that some of the oft discussed characteristics of late modernity; fragmentation, fear, pluralism, uncertainty and the notion of a risk society (Beck, 1992) can actually be a force and play some part in the creation of new forms of community; plurality and difference for example may lead to fragmentation yet they also produce other unions and new points of connection. Our position therefore, suggests notions of community can be formed via division and exclusion rather than inclusion alone. One other important dimension of community in late modernity is its reflexive composition. Unlike traditional communities, community today is more likely it is argued, to be chosen and is therefore reflexive (Lash, 1994). This proved to be an important and significant factor throughout the empirical research for this thesis. The participants in this research were knowledgeable social actors, to varying extents, as the research has shown they were both aware of their social conditions and able to transform them. It is in the elements discussed briefly above that this thesis suggests something fundamentally

different from the grand theory of late modernity. As such, in some ways this work is both an affirmation of late modern theory and simultaneously a direct challenge to it. The broad ranging nature of the discussions within late modern theory are dissected with compelling empirical research data, detailing the lived reality for those who form part (or not) of late modern communities of victims, in places where serious and highly mediated crimes have taken place.

A second key area of interest for this thesis within late modern theorising is that of the mediatisation of society more generally and also more specifically the advances and impact of new media technologies in shaping social relations. New media technologies are often cultural in the sense that they are increasingly embedded in forms of social life; technology has intermeshed with everyday life, it has become 'socialized' (Delanty, 2003: 169). In this way new media information technologies can be seen to be shaping new forms of community.

Some of the inherent weaknesses or criticisms of the theoretical accounts (discussed in chapter two) are apparent in the work of Craig Calhoun (1991; 1998), for whom virtual communities only have a limited capacity to unite that which is different. This proposal suggests that the Internet produces communities of similarities more than strengthening local networks of diverse people; in essence not much new is produced. A certain strength of Calhoun's argument that community must be theorized in terms of social relationships of belonging, grounds the concept of a virtual community. This claim of the virtual community as a supplement to existing forms of community, which are themselves already despatialised, is supported by

some of the research findings of this thesis. In addition what is also recognized and reinforced in this thesis is the notion that people in late modern society are connecting in globalized networks rather than exclusively in local communal groups and using new technologies. However, this does not relegate place as an irrelevance, new media technologies do not facilitate communication in a social vacuum but in social networks, which tend to enhance local forms of belonging rather than undermining them. Given the plurality of levels or types of community uncovered by the research for this thesis and the lived realities with regard to experiences of social relations and the impact of new media technologies, the grand theory relating to community and collective identity in late modernity will be much enhanced with consideration alongside the contribution of the empirical research findings of this thesis.

In part, this thesis has sought to address and explore the increasingly central position of victims within the disciplines of both media and crime. In doing so we have engaged with the complex processes by which 'victim communities' consider the everyday impact of the selective representation of crime, offenders and victims on their own and wider popular crime consciousness. As such this thesis argues that the reality for the participants in this study with regard to the influence of media representations, does not lie solely with the disciplinary role of media stories about crime, where the media act as a subtle form of social control, encouraging exaggerated fears and as such can reproduce order as well as representing it (Ericson et al. 1991). The reality of study in this area of the media-crime relationship is that it is important precisely because it is complex and hard to understand. The more interesting reality is that we do not all respond to or interpret

media representations in the same way. Neither do media representations themselves exist within a cultural and political vacuum, sealed off from wider society; rather they are simultaneously a direct source for and a product of society.

On this basis this thesis argues that whilst the media coverage of these specific crimes may have had a role in some of the calls for more punitive responses from the audience and society at large, the lived experience for those individuals and collectives involved was of a far more reasoned response and in particular one which was again differential. In practice the media representations of the crime/offender/victims and the lived reality of the experience held different meanings for and had a differential impact on those involved. Audiences are individual knowledgeable social actors and the notion that blanket responses to particular media representations of a crime and deviance provoke a response or impact that can be usefully considered uniform was not upheld by this study.

In summary then, this work has identified a group of people who have not hitherto been the subject of theoretical or empirical study who can be identified as a group who have been victimised. Across all subject areas and disciplines examined in this thesis, the notion of the victim is increasing in importance. Victims and victimisation have become an increasing source of political, policy and academic concern and the process by which this has happened is revealed as complex and contested. Victims now form the focus of a substantial area of inquiry within criminology (Zedner, 2002; Walklate, 2007). Reviews of relevant research indicate that representations of victims are increasingly central in both factual news and fictional media narratives

(Reiner, 2001), with contemporary narratives not only inviting, but actively encouraging people to identify and empathise with victims of crime (Smolej, 2010). The notion of the victim is also a current political preoccupation both in utilising victims to garner support for particular policies and also in the rebalancing of the criminal justice system to take better account of the victim of crime more generally. Given the fundamental significance of victim in such areas of political, legal and cultural debate, this thesis argues that by considering victimisation and harm from a different perspective this empirical qualitative study will shed new light on a previously unrevealed and under-researched group, thereby adding to the omissions and flaws within the current literature and grand theory in the areas identified above.

### **The Ironies of Public Sympathy**

The widespread expressions of grief and support offered by so many in the wake of serious and high profile crimes, such as those that occurred in Soham and Dunblane, are meant and hopeful of delivering a feeling of collective involvement and solidarity, particularly for the audience of such gestures of empathy and compassion. However, this thesis argues that the impact of such media generated and communicated intense and emotional expressions of grief and public sympathy is differential for those for whom it is intended; whilst it is helpful for some it is certainly not useful to or appreciated by all. Whilst the emotion and sympathy floods in to these 'victim' communities from members of the 'global village' (Castells, 1996) this does not necessarily have the intended or desired effect.



As this research has demonstrated, gestures of public sympathy have both physical and symbolic dimensions. In the case of Dunblane the physical culmination of worldwide sympathy was the vast amount of money donated, which in itself created divisions within the 'united' community of those affected as the relevant analysis chapter has clearly explained. For Soham it was the sheer amount of flowers and cuddly toys which were the tangible tokens of others expression of sorrow and grief from afar. Simultaneous to these physical displays both serious crime events were the subject of global online books of condolence and commemorative 'guestbook' websites established in memory of the victims, and Soham in particular was also the subject of vengeful petitions and on-line discussion boards calling for vigilante style justice to be meted out to Ian Huntley (and in some cases, Maxine Carr). Such communications are often established in the case of serious and high profile murders of 'idealised victims' by 'absolute others' (Greer, 2004: 115). Although within the research there was certainly a positive feeling for some in the community derived from such physical and/or virtual displays and expression of sympathy and emotion, often even those most closely associated with events thought to question why distant others would engage in such ways; contemplating whether it was to make themselves (the donor) feel better in some way. In addition any positive benefits of such solidarity from unknown others was generally temporal and ephemeral in nature. More often those in the wider community and even those most closely connected to the victims in some senses, did not appreciate or feel anything more than a superficial and fleeting benefit from the collective expressions of emotion and sympathy from afar.

For some this expression of compassionate empathy with the victims of highly mediatized and serious crimes, participating in the suffering and sharing the grief may be one way of expressing outwardly and demonstrating one's depth of feeling (Greer, 2004). As the author notes, the geographical diversity and quantity of such contributions to condolence sites and memorial guestbooks would seem to support such visions of cyberspace as a medium for shaping new forms of community (Rheingold, 1994 cited in Greer, 2004); ones based on support, sympathy and understanding. Greer also goes on to suggest that these virtual expressions of 'shared suffering' may be a source of strength and support to those who knew the victim (ibid.). The empirical research conducted for this thesis however, suggests a slightly different and more complex picture than the theory in this area supposes. There were of course some positive aspects to the collective empathetic mass mourning as some of the participants illustrated. Across both research sites people spoke of an awareness and appreciation of the 'feeling of goodwill' from the rest of the world towards them and that knowledge was a comfort to them as a community; that others were thinking of them and sharing somehow in their grief, was for some, a valued expression of support and solidarity, however temporal both the feelings and its effect may have been. However for others, the predicament of their community as a focus for national and international grief was a source of negative emotion and frustration and this could be seen to occur on both emotional and practical levels. The evidence suggests that much of this negative emotion was intertwined with emotions around the media as conduit and also the intrusive nature of those media representations of the serious crime, the victims, the offender(s) and the community in which it took place.

The expressions of public sympathy articulated by so many and on such a global scale were paradoxical in the sense that they were for some a source of solidarity and an expression of belonging and collective identity from distant others to their plight. The ironies of widespread public sympathy were then in the nature and expression of that emotion. The supposed intentions of empathy, solidarity and support were not received in the ways they were probably conceived. In particular the physical gestures of money, cuddly toys, and flowers seemed to cause more problems (both practically and emotionally) for many within the communities. Not only this but as the research has demonstrated these public gestures of sympathy did cause actual division within the communities studied and were in some cases the flashpoint for the formation of other communities from within. As we saw in Dunblane the amount of money donated caused different groups to emerge to deal with the issue and all had different ideas and agendas as to how it might best be managed and spent. Similarly, in Soham some research participants felt 'their' crime was being taken over by distant others and forces/emotions beyond their control. At a very direct and personal level in Soham, the parents of Holly Wells expressed their own annoyance at others in the community, who had formed the 'Gold Group' (members of local community including clergy, educational psychologists, Council representatives, headmasters and others, who were privy to sensitive information and met to consider issues such as how to mark the anniversary of the deaths) who the Wells' felt were misrepresenting the case as a community tragedy (Wells, 2005).

*The gift of giving*

This question addresses whether the gift of giving is more about the giver than the receiver and in this context the media constitute the medium for such compassion (Tester, 2001). The media are the vehicle which keep the audience and the suffering victims apart from one another and consigned to separate bounded spheres; money or gifting may be a way of bridging that gap, a way of the audience 'helping' but at the same time, discharging responsibility without really making a connection at all; what Tester (2001) refers to as a 'free gift'. However, Mary Douglas contends that the problem with the free gift is the 'donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient' (Douglas, 1992: 155). This has resonance with the rather more late modern version, enabled by new media technology of precisely the virtual or imagined communities who establish themselves in the wake of such serious and high profile crimes, usually murders, often of (idealised) child victims. In this late modern age of uncertainty, collective involvement in mass mourning may be understandable; that so many may want to feel that they can empathise, help and support those who are suffering some distant yet proximate tragedy. Yet as is indicated by Greer this is 'closeness at a distance', it is a late modern climate where people want some level of contact and a notion of solidarity and belonging with those who are victimised or suffering, but not too much; not so much that they need to get involved or feel any attached stigma of spoiled identity (2004: 116). This would seem to be the case in so far as this research can ascertain but the interesting part of this notion is the paradoxical nature and the differential impact of such expressions on the lives and experiences of those involved, as this research has clearly demonstrated.

The notion of 'symbolic closeness' from afar is also considered by this work as a form of facilitated 'mediated watching' which is described as a key feature of contemporary societies (Lyon, 2003). At this point it may be useful to utilise a theme in the sociological and criminological literature on surveillance; namely that of 'synopticism', where the many observe the few (Mathiesen, 1997; McCahill, 2003). This synoptic trend (as opposed to panopticism where the few observe the many) is evidenced in the advancements in technology and the development of the mass media and exemplified by the explosion of 'reality television' programming that has taken place in recent years (McCahill, 2003). In addition the acceleration of the synoptic gaze can be partly attributed to the proliferation of video cameras and technology, where there is a desire to watch and to be watched in an ever increasing number of ways; in late modernity the drive is increasingly not only to look, but to be looked at (Jewkes, 2004). In this way the popularity and proliferation of reality television, the increasing use of video or camcorder footage and the explosion of web based social networking and sharing sites such as Facebook and You Tube are a perfect example of the desire to watch and to see the unseeable in this case, the synopticon spectacle of the many watching the few; 'scopophilia' in action. For the members of the victim communities however, it is again the social impact of this trend towards synopticism and scopophilia that has most impact on their lives and their experiences of victimisation. As Lyon notes such scopophilia can be seen as a sort of voyeurism that reduces the rights of the watched (2003: 21). Whilst those appearing in reality television shows have given their consent and presumably even crave mass viewing, others who appear on electronic screens, such as victims of serious crimes, have not. This would indeed seem to be the case for the various forms of media

representations of the victim communities of Dunblane and Soham, who felt this notion of being watched and studied as another indirect form of victimisation.

This same question of why people want to look or read, or attach themselves to such events is also usefully addressed from another standpoint as illustrated by Jack Katz's (1987) explanation of crime newsworthiness. In contrast to other significant work in this field (Chibnall, 1977; Jewkes, 2004) Katz offers an interpretation from the perspective of the consumer, an argument based on the fact that most newsworthy crimes do not offer the news value of novelty and only a sense of unexpectedness. Katz (1987) suggests that individual stories of political scandal rarely seem to surprise, rather for many they confirm what they have known all along, yet they attract substantial media interest and remain distinctly newsworthy sites of crime. Informed by a critical appreciation of Durkheimian sociology, Katz suggests that a more helpful approach to newsworthiness may be to consider crime news as serving readers interests in performing a 'moral daily workout', in this way considering crime's 'symbolic value in articulating the normatively expected' (1987: 67). Although the media landscape has changed almost beyond recognition since the time of Katz writing, most notably with the increasing focus on the victim (Greer, 2010), Katz's thesis still allows us to raise pertinent questions about the changing nature of the problems people are facing in late modern society. By conflating these rather disparate but important concepts around giving, symbolic closeness, the love of looking and the function served by these attachments for an audience to an event such as a serious and high profile crime, this thesis has highlighted how new media technology in late modernity can provide a means of

communication or sense of belonging for the wider and vicarious audience to the crime. However, in contrast to the established literature relating to this area, this research has shown that both the physical and emotional impact of this closeness at a distance, often has a negative and detrimental effect on those most closely associated with the serious crime event and the place where it occurred.

This thesis is concerned with explaining and understanding the lived reality for those who considered themselves part of a collective that became victimised following a serious and high profile crime taking place within their community. With reference to the impact of the widespread public grief and mass mourning that followed these tragic events in Dunblane and Soham, the explanation and understanding is on two levels; the emotional and the practical; both the consequence of highly mediated communications. However, there is also a well-documented culture of fear (Furedi, 2002) surrounding the advance of new media technologies as communication technologies. For writers such as Furedi the culture of fear and the notion of risk have become an ever-expanding part of life in West in the twenty-first century (2002). From this perspective society's obsession with the universal theoretical risks in the shape of disease, stranger danger, and terrorism for example, encourage us to live in fear, whilst simultaneously distracting society from dealing with the 'old-fashioned' dangers that have always threatened our lives (Ibid.). This culture of fear is characterised by rising fears about crime and moral panics about rare acts of violence and sexual perversion (Furedi, 2002: 32) which are then used to carry political interest and at times pave the way for new legislation. Furedi suggests that such a society obsessed with risk endlessly produces 'faux' victims, where we are all

exposed to the prevailing compensation-orientated victim culture; as such there are no longer degrees of victimhood: we are all (equally) victims (Furedi, 2002).

However, whilst helpful on several levels in the examination of victim communities, Furedi's vision is none the less a totalising one, and one which alongside Ulrich Beck's (1992) risk society thesis imagines a relatively undifferentiated public. This thesis has demonstrated in several areas the degree of difference in levels of vulnerability and exposure to different types of crime, as well as the differential impact and effect that crime and its representations has on individuals and collectives. For this diversity to go unrecognised and to be flattened or subsumed into an undulating landscape where degrees of victimhood are not recognised, then indeed, we may all be (faux) victims now. As Mythen has posited, 'if everyone is a victim of crime then nobody is' (2007: 473). This thesis has further demonstrated and reinforced through the empirical, the way in which similarly harmful events receive uneven attention indicating that who counts as a victim is a contested issue (Mythen, 2007). This has resonance then for how late modern notions of risk and fear are mediated in a truly global sense via newer media technologies. As has been noted the media are identified, currently and historically as an important source of information about crime and a prominent vehicle through which certain forms of victimisation are rendered visible. Yet although the media may set the agenda on certain issues and reinforce existing cultural values, it is not the only driver affecting people's perception of deviancy and victimisation, the media and particularly new media technologies are not a one-way instrument of communication.



This discussion again raises questions for victimological theory. As counter balance to the political advances of the universal victim, victimology may benefit by expanding to include a greater and more diverse appreciation of the ways in which people experience victimisation by reflecting on the connections between 'perceptions of crime, media representations and the political economy of risk' (Mythen, 2007: 479).

### **Current gaps in the Victimological Literature**

As has been explored and referred to throughout this thesis, the many perspectives that fall under the title of 'victimological' literature and theory contain inevitable failings and gaps within and between the issues and topics given analytical deliberation. Many of these points have been considered elsewhere in this thesis and do not require reiteration but there are other areas that will be helpful and informative to explore here. The very nature of the focus of study for this thesis, victim communities encourages those working within victimology to think about the absences and newer presences on the victimological stage (Walklate, 2007). This thesis and the empirical research findings offer important glimpses into a hitherto hidden (or ignored) form of victimisation.

The term victim was originally used within a very specific context, namely in relation to the ritual practice of sacrifice. However, more contemporary acknowledgements of the word 'victim' include use in contexts including war, disease, natural disasters and crime (Furedi, 2002). In reality the notion of victim status is extremely complicated and at particular points in time,

victimhood is associated with particular types of characteristics, which in turn may be valued by wider society or may be the defining quality around which persons labelled as victims are stigmatized (Spalek, 2006). In essence these factors influence how victims perceive themselves and the extent to which individuals and collectives accept the label of 'victim' and all that goes with it or actively oppose a label that they feel has been imposed on them. In general terms then much of the established victimology literature, particularly administrative victimology, does not adequately recognise and explore victimisation other than that largely associated with crime as it is conventionally understood, nor does it incorporate an adequate understanding of agency on behalf of those involved. It is here that this research has sought to shine a light on the previously ignored or under-explored concept of victimisation identified as victim communities and more broadly the nature and role of societal reaction to that form of victimisation.

Further explorations into the victimological literature reveal that even within the groups attracting the main focus of inquiry (namely 'conventional' victims) a further delineation of terms of reference are used in relation to victimisation in the form of direct or indirect victims, or primary, secondary and tertiary victims (Spalek, 2006). Primary victims are described as those who directly experience the crime or harm; the immediate casualties of crime (Rock, 2007). Secondary victims are generally considered to be those who are indirectly harmed, those who had a family connection to those casualties as in the case of significant others of murder or rape victims and other more distant still (Rock, 2002).<sup>16</sup> Any wider circle of people who are affected by a

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<sup>16</sup> Although this definition does not extend to the significant others of the offenders in such cases (see Condry, 2007).

particularly shocking or high impact crime or event are categorised as tertiary victims.

However, this thesis illustrates that there are other unrecognised victim populations, such as the victim communities in question that require exploration and understanding. Further, this thesis argues that such ranking terminology of primary, secondary and tertiary suggest that there is some form of hierarchical structure to the levels of trauma and suffering experienced by those so labelled (Spalek, 2006) but it cannot be assumed that primary victims suffer more, as so much of the relevant literature seems to suggest. This empirical research has shown that secondary and tertiary victims can also face significant emotional and psychological and sometimes physical pain and stigma. However, for some theorists in this arena the appreciation and validity of victim status has become overcrowded. Rock (2007) notes this area has become 'swollen with groups newly identified or clamouring for recognition' (2007: 52). However this thesis strongly argues that such collectives and populations that have been victimised in such ways whether via the media or elsewhere are valid and important (and previously unexplored) sites of empirical research and debate for those interested in victimisation and media-criminology more broadly. It is clear that social relations, the terms and framework of victimological theory and research are not fixed in this sense but emergent and contested as my research and this thesis demonstrably illustrates.

Another key area where much of the grand theory and literature around victimisation is found to be narrowly focused is across the concept of secondary victimisation. As had been discussed previously this term is more

commonly used with reference to the treatment of primary victims and their subsequent (often inadequate) treatment by the criminal justice system, which is seen to intensify their situation (see Shapland et al. 1985). Whilst there has been some work within this area that focuses on media interest in primary victims as a form of secondary victimisation (Mulley, 2001), this thesis demonstrates that such high levels of media interest in such cases as Dunblane and Soham has the on-going and pervasive effect of secondary victimisation on those collectives who are identified in a wider sense with the serious and high profile crime in question. This is an area that although alluded to in the theory has not been empirically researched until now. Therefore an expansion of the victimological literature in this sense can foster a greater appreciation of the ways in which people experience victimisation. As this study has clearly illustrated it is incongruous to assume that we are all victims or that victims of similar crimes attribute the same meanings to them, moreover, the risks and fears associated with being or feeling like a victim are not simply as a result of being on the receiving end of criminality (Mythen, 2007).

By the same token where the relevant victimology literature does attempt to examine the nature and effect of media interest in victims more generally, it does so in at the expense of a broader and more inclusive notion of who is a victim of crime. Much of these discussions centre on the idea that the media wields a 'double-edged sword' when it comes to the coverage of crime victims. On the one hand secondary victimisation in the form of media attention can further traumatize victims; once in the public eye media coverage can often be voyeuristic and unsympathetic. However, as some have suggested the role of the media in these situations can also be a positive one

(Mulley, 2001). Victims may find dealing with the media a therapeutic process at a time when they are suffering sadness and loss. Additionally, being or becoming a victim is viewed by this thesis as a process not a proscribed or contained journey. Acquiring the status of victim (or not) involves being party to a range of processes and interactions including identification, labelling and recognition (Mythen, 2007). As John Tulloch, victim and survivor of the '7/7' bombings in London 2005 suggests, some victims of crime can find themselves passed through various victimological phases in the media, from heroic survivor to political agitator (Tulloch, 2006). This raises questions therefore about how victims are ascribed roles and what the ramifications of these victim identities are for our understanding of the nature and causes of such serious and high profile crimes. These discussions, which begin to introduce issues around secondary victimisation and the role of the media, which can be both positive and negative, are highlighted, explored and supported empirically by this work. There was much evidence across both research sites of both the negative and positive elements of the media in the process of victimisation for the collective communities of Dunblane and Soham. However, empirical research of this sort with 'victims' of crime must be the starting point for theorising and literature in this area. The concept of engaging with the media audience and those effected directly by it, is imperative to readdress the balance within media criminology where the 'orthodoxy within ...is to assume and sometimes theorise media influence, but seldom to research it directly (Greer, 2010: 3).

### **Victimisation and Amplification**

This thesis argues for a concern and examination of the hitherto under-explored broader concept of society's reaction to the notion of victimisation and how that may amplify the conditions for victimisation more generally. The notion of deviancy amplification, associated initially with Leslie Wilkins (1964) points to the way in which the transmission of information (about deviance) may lead to both distortion and exaggeration and in turn to an adaptive behavioural reaction, whereby the reaction by agents or agencies of social control may lead to an escalation, rather than a diminution of deviancy (ibid.). This concept has clear resonance with many of the propositions of a labelling approach in which the key factor in deviancy creation is considered to be social reaction rather than individual behaviour (Kitsuse, 1962; Becker, 1963). Such theoretical ideas around deviancy have famously found expression, although in a slightly altered form, in some of the work of Stan Cohen. In *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972/2002), a study of the moral panic associated with the Mods and Rockers in Britain in the mid-1960s, Cohen argues that relatively minor scuffles between these groups of youths were exaggerated by media reports and magnified by subsequent police and judicial attention and targeting. Cohen (1972/2002) illustrates how a sequence of events may lead to a spiral in which the behaviour of a particular group becomes subject to public attention, and that this may lead to a reaction, which in turn may foster more behaviour of the kind that was the initial focus of public hostility. In this case it is argued that the deviance was initially amplified through social reaction, which in turn produced an actual amplification in real levels of deviancy as the youths concerned took on aspects of their new publicly defined personas (Cohen, 1972/2002). However, relating this notion to the concept of victimisation and that of victim communities in particular, were we to replace the supposed 'deviant'

group with the notion of a victim community and the agents or agencies of social control with that of the media would the same analysis hold true?

The findings of the research data would seem to suggest an answer in the affirmative. A transmission of information (about victimisation) may lead to both a distortion (presenting a united community) and exaggeration (public sympathy) and in turn to an adaptive behavioural reaction (community subsumes and colludes in their own representation and adapts their behaviour accordingly) leading (via media coverage and representation) to an escalation of victimisation. In such a way the theory and literature surrounding the notion of deviancy amplification has been usefully commandeered and applied to aid the understanding around the notion of the formation of a victim community and one possible route to the amplification of its victimised identity.

### *The litany of tragic towns*

This refraction of the literature around deviancy amplification has shed some light on the otherwise shaded appreciation of the concept of victim communities. However, this process may also have relevance when we turn the focus more directly to the nature of the media representations and narratives that feature heavily in such cases as Dunblane and Soham. As the empirical research chapters for this thesis have shown, often the constructions of each crime and community are created by and contained within a cyclically reproduced, reactionary media narrative, which in itself becomes self perpetuating (Greer, 2004). This process then may lead to a standardisation of a narrative around these type of events which encourages a legacy, a litany for the next mediatized victim community to follow; for the

next collective who suffer a serious and highly mediatized crime in their midst. As each serious crime and its subsequent media construction is represented and narrated to the wider audience, it becomes more ensconced as the narrative for the next becomes more entrenched. As such, the people and communities involved are trapped in the given and accepted rituals of the last tragic town's tragedy, as communicated and mediated to the local and wider global audiences by the mass media.

With an examination of such process this thesis offers important insights into a hitherto ignored or hidden form of victimisation. However and in addition within this area of media constructed narratives this work goes further to suggest that there is some empirical evidence proposing that these narratives are best viewed as co-productions. In this way the current victim community themselves collude with the media in some senses to help construct a well versed narrative of a 'tragic town', learning from or utilising what had been constructed and gone before, the media use and often provide the material for the construction of the a 'collective memory'. The concept of 'collective memory' aims to describe ways in which social groups or communities manufacture shared understandings of their shared pasts according to present concerns (Halbwachs, 1992 cited in Innes, 2003). This notion is significant in so far as it allows memories of significant crimes, alongside other events to become essentially memory aids for reading the present. In late modernity the mass media reporting and representation of particular high profile crimes, the victims, offenders and wider community have formed the basis for the manufacture of collective memories around these numerous crimes (Innes, 2003). Importantly to this work, the recollections of these crimes past span time and place; they exist over time



and at the global, national, local and parochial levels. This process of symbolic reconstruction of past events as a reflection of the situated present, allows in essence the collaborated construction of a narrative, founded on an impressionistic collective memory that serves as an extension of how to be a 'victim' community. There is however an invariable tension here, as in much social science between the victim communities as being 'trapped in accepted rituals' and the victim community members as 'knowledgeable social actors'. One of the distinct commonalities between the events in Dunblane and Soham were the stigmatising effects of the particular representations and rhetorical frameworks rehearsed by the media when telling the stories of the communities involved. Often those involved felt part of a legacy, a traumatized collective of tragic towns who would forever be remembered and synonymous, often on an individual but always on a collective level, with the serious crime event that happened in their community. The media as such can be viewed as the conduit by which the community becomes locked into the legacy of stigmatisation and that collective memory.

Together with certain aspects of the labelling approach, the concept of deviancy amplification with regard to victimisation does draw attention to the unintended consequences of public perception and social reaction particularly when considered alongside the empirical work of this thesis. As the research findings clearly demonstrate in both the cases of Dunblane and Soham, many in each community felt strongly that it was the extent and nature of the media representations of themselves and their community, that led in some senses to an escalation of feelings of victimisation directly via the social reaction that the media both encouraged and delivered. By vicariously participating in the suffering of others in such tragic

circumstances, distant others may envisage on others and garner a sense of community themselves, a sense of belonging and membership whose collective actions may have a profoundly detrimental affect on those whom they wish to bestow compassion and empathy.

When applied to deviancy the wider validity of the concept of deviancy amplification to less publicised forms of transgressive behaviour is less clear. However refracted in a way that focuses on the implications for victimisation, this form of amplification does suggest that although other complex processes are at work, social reaction may have an important part to play when examining the consequences for those caught up in the media representations of victimisation in late modernity.

### **The Late Modern Victim Community: Invention or Recycling?**

When turning its attention to the post modern literature and grand theory this thesis argues that in some sense we may need to abandon the distinction between the real versus the imagined community, just because community is imagined does not mean it is not real. Traditional territorial kinds of community are seemingly different from the new expressions of virtual communities, but these can also be reality-creating forces. Such new kinds of community, including notions of victim community do have the power to define new situations and therefore construct social reality. This proposition leads again to a consideration of postmodernism, more specifically in this instance Jean Baudrillard's (1983) notion of hyperreality, in which media domination saturates to such an extent that distinction between image and reality no longer exists. Contained within this literature

is the contention that far from modern society, where it was possible to distinguish between the represented and the real, the post modern world has seen a shift towards societies that are structured around simulation (as opposed to 'modern' society which was structured around production), thus in a post modern world, the notion of a copy and an original disintegrates, the copy comes to represent and ultimately constitutes the real (Baudrillard, 1983). This part of Baudrillard's work represents a post modern theorisation of media, identity and social reality and as such may have relevance for the notion of a media narrative or trope in these cases, where the concept of what it is, or means to be a victim community is not only represented by the media but constructed by them in collusion with the community itself and as such becomes a reality. In this way how to react in the wake of a serious and highly mediatized crime in a collective sense comes from and is represented by previous media narratives in such a reciprocal and authoritative fashion, that for some that representation of the community becomes the real; the image becomes reality, a mediatized hyperreality. In essence what Baudrillard advocates is the dissolution of reality. However, this thesis argues that authors on this point, such as Baudrillard (1983), overstate the completeness of the break with modernity; the proposition that the postmodern 'society of simulation' has surpassed and moved beyond the society of production denies the possibility that the two may remain closely interconnected (Greer, 2010).

This thesis suggests that the abstract nature of the grand theory renders its influence partial; the impact of these ideas and notions has differential consequences or outcomes for those who experience the lived reality of the process. This thesis argues that whilst recognising in some senses the

usefulness of the concept of 'simulation', there is much more useful significance in recognising and exploring the 'hybridity' of reality; the increasingly blurred distinction between the virtual and the real, where binary oppositions between such become increasingly harder to define rather than necessarily opposing concepts in themselves. The recent 'reality' television phenomena of such programmes as 'The only way is Essex' and 'Made in Chelsea', where real-life and televisual production for consumption become fused in the minds of the participants and the audience are evidence of 'hybridised' reality in action. In such programmes virtual realities are increasingly becoming 'real'. From within the empirical research conducted it is clear that only for some within the victim community does the simulation come to replace the reality; only for some does the mediatized representation of themselves and their community and narrative of what it means to be a victim community become the 'real'. Many others within the victim communities neither recognised themselves, their experiences nor their community as that which was (re)presented to them and the wider global audience. As the research for this thesis has clearly illustrated, the representation of these victim communities as unified collectives in the traditional sense of community, does not recognise the empirical reality of the various and different levels of community that are formed as a result of these conditions. In addition to those who recognise and in some ways collude with the mediatized notion of a 'victim community' there are others who *choose* to form other collective associations within; communities of choice, as the research clearly illustrated there were no doubt communities within communities in both the research sites. This process of choice however, inevitably created and led to feelings of division and difference among those living within and closely connected to the community;

insiders/outside, us/them. In contrast then to much of the postmodern literature around the notion of community, this thesis argues that such differing levels of community, enabled by choice did indeed contain binary notions that served a useful function of helping those involved to construct their own identity within the otherwise 'homogenised' victim community (co)-created by the media and recalling the more traditional notion of what community 'should' be. Although, for many what characterises these communities of choice is their temporary, possibly ambiguous and no doubt liminal nature, the feeling of belonging garnered from within, means they were none the less incredibly powerful and meaningful collective group experiences for those involved. It is by viewing these forms of association as 'liminal' communities based on sometimes temporary groupings, that this work begins to explore, in a way that includes a sense of the postmodern, our criminological questioning of the boundaries between the virtual and the real, thus seeking new lines of enquiry and developing new directions in criminological research concerning notions of victimisation.

Relatedly this work does not argue that victim communities are solely a late modern phenomena. Rather, contingent conditions of late modernity have changed the ways in which this concept can be expressed and delivered. Virtual or imagined communities may be described as existing not as a physical presence but as a shared understanding of interrelatedness among its participants, in this sense community is based on on-going communication (Rheingold, 1993). Although the Internet and newer media technologies are the latest medium to facilitate the construction of community, they are certainly not the first. Benedict Anderson (1983) theorizes that newspapers were an earlier medium used to help establish

what he termed 'imagined communities'. Like virtual communities, Anderson conceived that imagined communities emerged because of the intervention of mediated communication. As he explains, the national identity that led the British colonies to form the United States was due in part, to the communication fostered by colonial newspapers. Differences among the quite separate colonies at the time made unity a problem that had to be addressed if they were to free themselves from British rule. Thus, the newspapers and their message of unity, helped to create and foster the ideals of an imagined community of Americans that could be adopted by people who lived in geographically disparate places (Anderson, 1983). Like virtual communities in late modern society, a participant's sense of belonging to such a community was based on mediated communication and not immediate interaction. This research regarding victim communities in late modernity has illustrated that those working in this area need to work to refine our understanding of what this online community or collective experience will emerge to be, without being bound by previous conceptions of what community has traditionally meant.

### **'Place' and the Grounding of Identity**

Much postmodern theorising suggests that in some form the notion of place is diminishing in its' importance to ones own sense of identity. Whereas the 'community' of the post-war period was characterised by a sense of solidity and permanence, well rehearsed positions describing the mesmerizing image of late modernity refer to social dislocation and a 'fragmented world where space and culture no longer collide' (Young, 2007: 175). Writers such as

Anthony Giddens (1991) may be guilty of generalising and exaggerating a trend which may be true for some, in some places, at some times when he writes that 'in the sense of an embedded affinity to place community has indeed largely been destroyed' (1991: 250). The empirical research conducted for this thesis illustrates a very different picture and suggests like Young (2007) that community and identification with neighbourhood is still very prevalent for some. The argument proposed here is that for some place is still a very important part of self and community identity, in late modernity particularly and more specifically in times of trouble or crisis. As has been clearly identified in the empirical chapters many participants spoke of discovering a new sense of community in the physical sense, a sense of community that they themselves identified expressly with locality and place, which was formed specifically through the tragedy that had taken place. From the research conducted in Soham in particular we are able to identify a level of community that seemed to be sparked by the crime event and was reinforced by the subsequent sustained media representations that followed. Although many in this situation admitted that this newfound feeling (or this level of) community might have been tangential and temporal in some senses, it was for those concerned still powerful and moving. This thesis argues further that it was the 'shock and awe' of the serious and high profile event, as constructed and represented by the a supercharged conductor tool in the shape of the media, that to a large part gave life to a collective identity or level of community where those involved in a wider sense felt in some way victimised. So although it may be true to say that contemporary community may no longer be *bounded* by the notion of place (Giddens 1990; Bauman, 2000) the reality for many of those involved in such experiences is much more differentiated than the grand theory suggests. In late modern society

we are able to belong to multiple communities and communities of choice, yet the concept of place far from being an increasing irrelevance, for some is still extremely important in relation to notions of identity and community, most particularly in times of crisis. This thesis clearly illustrates instances of community emerging and growing in the liminal spaces created by the serious and high profile crimes that have taken place.

A further issue and challenge to the grand literature of a postmodern form is the nature and impact of the role of the media in all its guises, as it pertains to the notion of community in late modernity. This thesis argues and the research has shown that such extensive and pervasive media coverage of serious and high profile crimes such as those of Dunblane and Soham, whilst playing a large part in creating the subsequent 'victim community' have consequently turned the potentially private role of that collective into a public one. Traditional media reporting (television, radio and print) of these crimes are the window to newer media technologies and other vicarious attachments that go some way to creating a role for the collective as a victim community. However at some point the media and the coverage of the crime moves on. In this late modern age the 24/7 news mediasphere (Greer and McLaughlin, 2010) presents the 'place' and those contained within as 'community' in the traditional sense, as based on and identified by locality, a process which has in itself encouraged a reorganisation of identity and self on a collective level for some. This was evidenced within the empirical research in the cases of those who were once part of the community (of Dunblane of Soham) who were now geographically (and socially) distant, making contact with that 'place', whether returning physically or virtually, and identifying themselves as 'belonging' to that locality. As such one of the



problems with the relevant established theory in this area is that it does not adequately consider how far the formation of a 'victim community' when they do happen and in times of crisis may in fact be a reflection of older modernity; where traditional community notions are recomposed, where community is grounded in some senses in traditional social relations.

In such a way this research strongly asserts that for some experiencing such an event, the attachment to place and that feeling of physical belonging is still extremely significant to identity. Further, identity is about belonging, it is 'about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others' (Weeks, cited in May, 2011). Although this is not the case for all and the impact is no doubt differential, many in the community are left tainted and stigmatized by the sustained and omnipresent media coverage and in addition may suffer further secondary victimisation or stigmatization by supplementary media coverage of related events in the future. This process encourages an ideal or pre-ordained conception of what belonging to a victim community should be or how to behave and present in such circumstances (see the previous discussion of 'tragic towns'). This mediated notion of a single shared response creates an environment in which expectations are raised, where those involved come to expect too much of themselves and others, ultimately causing friction and division. Explorations of both research sites divulged levels of community that were indeed based on such boundary constructions and in such a way can be seen as contested communities where fear, anger and pride are the hallmarks of such collective identities (Hoggett, 1997). In some ways this is reflective of the unease that can be felt around victims, as Rock remarks, 'victims do have something of the uncomfortable "other" about them' (2007:

41). The elements of this research with those most closely connected to the primary victims and events of both Dunblane and Soham recounted how often people would cross the road in an attempt to avoid them, a course of action driven through with fear and embarrassment they believed, due to their position as bereaved victims. Both division and unity thus create the sense of community in late modernity and in such a way new manifestations of community within a society need to be recognised and explored where changing modes of communication produce both fragmentation and the possibilities of new social bonds. By exploring and emphasising the significance of place in relation to identity in late modernity, this thesis goes some way to filling the conceptual void around this element of victim and collective identity.

On a wider level this concept of a collective victim identity, belonging and its association with place can be seen quite literally in the experiences of many within the research when they talked of claiming (or reclaiming) the tragedy and the community for themselves. This has resonance with the impending discussion regarding the consumption of grief and the ownership of tragedy in relation to celebrating the culture of victimhood. As has been identified, others from outside who tried to 'feel' what the 'community' was feeling, and who were wanting to share quite so closely in their suffering; the ritualization of public mourning, were quickly distanced and identified as those who were not to be granted that level of (inclusive) victim status by the community themselves. Even given the levels of division within the respective victim communities there is clearly a hierarchy of victimhood at work evaluated by those very people experiencing the victimisation. In this way again this work challenges the established postmodern literature and

demonstrates empirically that the supposed 'modern' societal binary notions of 'insider'/'outsider', or 'them'/'us' are able to be identified, at times may be seen to flourish and indeed provide a useful function throughout such collective liminal experiences of upheaval or crisis (Turner, 1969).

### **The Commodification of Grief: Grief as Entertainment**

The concepts of ownership of the tragedy and the ritualization and the commodification of grief pose a fundamental question with regard to victim status and self identity and as such have emerged as strong thematics within the empirical research. Another theoretical orientation within criminology that would seem to offer an understanding and exploration of this notion is cultural criminology, which, whilst seeking to establish the insights of cultural studies within criminology also importantly operates from the postmodern proposition that style is substance, and that meaning resides in representation (Ferrell, 2006). As a position from which to analyse this empirical research then, a cultural criminological approach is interesting and helpful in that it allows a consideration of how crime is realised but also how it is represented in our culture and constructed through moral and discursive frameworks.

For some of those writing and researching under the cultural criminological umbrella, the focus of concern considers the changing representations of crime and criminal behaviours within cultural texts, the shifting notions of acceptability and the commodification of crime (Presdee, 2000; Schofield, 2004). In *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime*, Mike Presdee

(2000) proposes that the insatiable popularity of crime and deviance as subject matter within such media as literature, film and television illustrates how crime has become a commodity, enabling audiences to consume and experience criminal behaviour and acts as pleasure and entertainment. However, this thesis argues that it is not just criminal acts and behaviours that are commodified by the media as suggested by Presdee (2000), but also the public responses to them. It is the cultural conditions of contemporary late modernity that allow phenomena which provoke feelings of anger, shock and disgust from many, to simultaneously become intermingled with feelings of fascination, intrigue and pleasure, often stimulated via a sensationalist media approach. These public responses are commodified via sustained media coverage, fuelling sensationalised stories, debates and sometimes media (often tabloid-led) campaigns.

The notion of commodification can also be utilised when referring to the notion grief and more specifically the grief felt or represented by victim communities. As with other crime related behaviours, serious and high profile crimes, particularly those concerning murders of (idealised) children and the public responses to those crimes have been objectified and commodified to be consumed through a variety of media. In recent years it is the proliferation of 'real-life' crime documentaries that illustrate most clearly the media commodification of crime (Schofield, 2004). Whether packaged as 'crime reconstruction' or more in-depth documentaries focussing on one particular crime or offender, such programmes package real instances of crime as entertainment and dramatic spectacle whilst often purporting to be a useful public service. By the same token and further highlighting the blurring of the line between entertainment and reality, 'real footage' of the

kind captured on CCTV or increasingly on video/phone cameras by witnesses and bystanders to criminal events is increasingly used by broadcasters to visually highlight an event's immediacy and 'authenticity' (Jewkes, 2004).

Such images have often served to graphically contribute to the 'spectacle' of crime in the postmodern era. Many of the most high profile and shocking events of recent times have entered the collective psyche with such force and impact precisely because the news reports were accompanied by images of the victim at the time or immediately prior to the serious criminal incident. Consider for example the photograph of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman taken just before they went missing and the final rather grainy CCTV footage of them on their walk that evening as they passed through the car park of the local Sports Centre in Soham; or the iconic image of Dunblane Primary School 'Primary One' class taken weeks before the shootings in March 1996. Such footage of still and moving images, shown and played almost endlessly over various media appeals to the voyeuristic elements in all of us, whilst at the same time reinforcing our sense of anger and horror at what is to come; in essence a 'commodification of crime' and an empirical example of how grief can be consumed as entertainment.

The trans-disciplinary approach advocated by cultural criminology (most notably the central inclusions of cultural and media studies) is perhaps its greatest strength as it reflects the multi-mediated nature of much criminality in late-modernity. Yet whilst cultural criminology focuses on criminal activities or 'everyday popular cultural undertakings ... (which) are regularly recast as crime' (Ferrell, 1995: 7), it can also be advanced usefully to examine how in some cases the representations of victim communities are traded and

consumed as entertainment and the consequent effects for those who find themselves caught up in this process on all sides and as such may have much to offer the exploration and study of victim communities. This thesis argues that in late modernity, it is the shifting standards of acceptability of certain cultural forms and expressions in the realms of popular culture that may allow or encourage public displays of compassion and sentiment, such as wide spread grieving and vicarious emotion to be expressed and consumed. However this shift in acceptability is conflated in late modernity by the emergence and advancement of new media technologies, which present and encourage opportunities to express sentiment and communicate in new and novel ways (Greer, 2004). In such cases grief and emotion over tragedies and serious high profile crime events such as those that took place in Dunblane and Soham are therefore sentiments to be consumed and traded competitively.

Therefore from a theoretical standpoint, this thesis utilizes and further advances the cultural criminological approach by suggesting that it is not only criminal behaviour and transgression that are commodified and traded by the media but also the public responses to those acts, the offenders and the primary and wider victims concerned. Where cultural criminology is concerned with the social construction of crime and criminal behaviour(s), this thesis argues that it may also facilitate a more nuanced way through which the social construction of the victim and victimhood can be interrogated and theorised. In addition and on a practical and empirical level, the research for this thesis goes some way to addressing the stated lack of empirical engagement with audiences in cultural criminology (Ferrell, 2006). Whilst this was not explicit or a stated objective at the outset of the project,

this work can certainly claim to be looking and attempting to explore and understand beyond the traditional boundaries of the(ir) field.

**Conclusion**

This thesis has been an attempt to tell the story of two places and their communities that each suffered a serious crime that subsequently became highly mediatized. The central aims of this study at the outset sought firstly to locate those stories within an analysis addressing and questioning the often 'given' notions of victimisation, community and identity in late modernity, whilst secondly considering the nature and impact of the role of the media in that dynamic. The notion of a 'victim community' was introduced as a collective of those who belong to a site where a serious and high profile crime has taken place. Such a community may be characterised and influenced both by the media itself and its' role in coordinating and articulating a social reaction in the wake of certain significant and highly mediatized crimes. As a consequence, some of those within the victim community may come to acquire a collective sense of stigma and spoiled identity. Returning to this notion, we can say that although not solely a late modern phenomenon, the conditions of late modernity and the acceleration of advancements in technology and developments in mass media have changed the ways in which this concept can be expressed and delivered. For victim communities, it is the social impact of some of the conditions of late modernity that have the greatest impact on their experiences of victimisation. Broader, less traditional notions of 'community' in late modernity are often described as temporal, not least because they may be constructed or facilitated by new media technologies. At the same time this research has shown the internalised identity for the 'victim community' becomes permanent, in so far that the label and associated levels of stigma and spoiled identity are more difficult to displace.



The final question remains then, what are the implications of this study for the existing theories; what do these stories tell us about crime, media and victimisation in late modern society? Returning to the research findings, three central messages are clear.

Firstly, by considering victimisation and harm from a different perspective we have demonstrated the considerable impact of mediated societal reaction on a victimised community and established how this plays a significant part in the formation of identity in late modernity. In addition the mediated nature of victimisation does create for many an attached sense of stigma, which is difficult (though not impossible) to resist precisely because of its mediated nature. Secondly, with an appreciation of the differential impact of the media in that we all use, interpret and respond to this plethora of formats and their representations in diverse ways, this study has identified further, a complex relationship of collusion and co-production on the part of the audience who are both source and receiver of such information and representations. Finally and with an inclusive nod to the intricacies of the relations above, this thesis argues that in late modernity, the conception of community although ambiguous and evolving is fundamentally, like identity about belonging. Community, victimised identity and belonging are multidimensional and are connected in contrasting senses to different people, social contexts, times and places. Thus far from an irrelevance place within the specific content of this research is a significant factor for individual, community and cultural identities in late modern society. Much of the post-modern literature suggests that to an extent, community has become 'disconnected' from traditional notions of 'given' identities such as

family and place. Newer visions of communities of choice show themselves to cut across social boundaries as well as reinforcing them. As such place, kinship and community all remain vitally important in late modernity but they are created, destroyed, constituted and given meaning in ways that are anything but traditional, although they may 'feel' and 'provide' much of the same form of intimacy and conflict that traditional community may have offered.

### *The Final Word - Future Directions*

As with many empirical studies of this nature, the precise focus and nature of the thesis developed and changed over time. As such there are matters of interest and lines of enquiry that may be significant for future research across several broad themes. The first specifically concerns the reasons why one of the proposed original empirical sites Bootle, did not manifest itself as an accessible research location. An analysis of why people chose not to participate in research is interesting and useful, particularly in this expression, as a collective entity focussed in a geographical location. The second area concerns less high profile crimes, those which for whatever reason do not attract as much public and media attention as the focal crimes of this thesis. How the community identity manifests itself in these cases, where the social reaction delivered via the media is not such a significant force, would be an interesting adjunct to this research, further expanding knowledge of the processes involved in victim identity construction. The third line of potential enquiry set into motion by the current research, on a broad level, is an engagement with the social processes of media production, with particular regard to the representational resources available to report a crime event. It has become increasingly difficult in contemporary society to separate the real from the mediated; where every crime that garners wider public attention, becomes inseparable from the images and media discourse used to communicate it (Jewkes, 2004). The study of media content may have greater explanatory potential when 'the *process* of production is considered as well as the *product* that results' (Greer, 2010: 3, emphasis in original). Thus this approach would seek engagement with the processes of production and content, to develop a deeper appreciation of the factors that shape the news product and the production process. On a more specific level

and as an extension to this research, are the virtual communities and various new media technologies as sites of alternative news media sources, where the producers of content are numerous and often unidentified; invoking a blurring of the boundaries between the virtual and the real. It is through such research and critical engagement that the understanding and explanatory value of media criminology will be enhanced.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Notes on media articles database**

Throughout the research I accumulated a wide collection of field notes, transcripts of interviews with the research participants, newsletters and numerous community documents, letters written to me by some of the community and the media articles about each of the cases.

The process of analysis of the media articles; identifying and linking conceptual categories, including processes of describing, classifying and connecting (Dey, 1993), had begun much earlier during the research process. Interpretation and sense making is also part of the process of writing and analysis of field material; noting what is significant and what is not is an active process and not a matter of passively recounting the facts as one sees them. However, once the collation process was complete, there was a stage of more focused analysis, which broadly followed several stages (similar to Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I began by reading through the media articles many times to get a 'feel' for the important themes and issues. The articles were then colour coded by hand as a basic tool to order relevant sections of text. At first this produced a very long list with a rainbow of colours, which was gradually linked and recoded and ultimately refined to a list of key themes emergent from the data. The codes used came from two sources: pre-designated categories which by this stage of the process I knew to be important to the analysis (for example, key words for each crime were used) and those which emerged from the media articles themselves (such as

'a sense of place' and 'media/police relations'). The coded categories were therefore both 'observer-identified' and 'member-identified' (Loftland, 1976). Within each of these broader groups further categories and sub-categories were developed and the importance of some variables previously identified was checked. The data was coded manually and I looked for anything that related to my coding scheme and anything else that emerged as important. Finally for this part of the empirical data, as the ideas were developed and during the writing stage, points were checked and re-checked against the data. I would not like to present this process as a neat and tidy categorisation of the media data; it was often a messy and time-consuming process, messier than many descriptions of methodology reveal and involved going back and forth between data, ideas, analysis and writing until eventually clearer, coherent and consistent ideas and theoretical frameworks evolved.

## Appendix 2

**Quantitative overview of news coverage analysed  
(all the articles analysed appeared in a year long  
period beginning the day the crime occurred)**

	<b>Dunblane</b>	<b>Soham</b>
<b>National Newspapers</b>		
<b><i>The Guardian</i></b>	<b>143</b>	<b>85</b>
<b><i>The Daily Mail</i></b>	<b>30</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Local Newspapers</b>		
<b><i>The Stirling Observer</i></b>	<b>71</b>	
<b><i>The Ely Standard</i></b>		<b>73</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>233</b>

**Overall number of articles analysed    477**

## Appendix 3

### Overview of Interviewees

	<b>Dunblane</b>	<b>Soham</b>
<b>Church Leader</b>	2	1
<b>Police Officer</b>	1	0
<b>Parents of victims</b>	3	0
<b>Community members</b>	12	20
<b>Male</b>	6	8
<b>Female</b>	12	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>

**Total number of interviews analysed 39**



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