

INCEST NEWS COVERAGE: POLICIES, PRACTICES
AND ATTITUDES OF OKLAHOMA
NEWSPAPER EDITORS

By

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PREFACE

A questionnaire was designed to explore newspaper editor's attitudes, practices and policies about incest crime reporting. The impetus for this work was sparked after reading an incest crime report in a newspaper. The court log identified the suspect in an incest case by name. It became apparent that even though the newspaper withheld the victim's name, the victim and/or other family siblings could be implicated by association since incest is a family crime.

This study is the first of its kind because it directly asks editors their opinions about incest crime coverage and measures editor attitudes toward the victim, the suspect and the crime. The study included small circulation newspapers--an infrequently studied group in attitude research--along with large circulation newspapers.

I wish to thank all the people who helped make this thesis a reality. Thanks go to my advisor, Dr. Marlan Nelson, for his contributions and willingness to make a long-distance thesis an uncomplicated matter. I am grateful for Lisa Schillinger's intelligent comments and direction as well as her support and friendship. Thanks are also due to Dr. Charles Fleming Oklahoma State University, and Dr. Guido Stempel III, Ohio University for their insightful comments.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Journalists routinely identify suspects in crime stories. In recent years, however, they have shown an increasing sensitivity to sex crime, particularly rape, by withholding the name of the victim; by publishing the name of a suspect in an incest story, the media may be identifying the victim, usually a minor child, indirectly.

In general terms incest is described as "sexual intercourse or acts of deviant behavior including molestation, between persons who are related, including step-children."¹ There are fifty legal definitions of incest in the United States. Heider notes that although each state defines incest differently "almost without exception, all fifty states prohibit marriage with mother, daughter, granddaughter, sister, grandmother, aunt and niece."² Most states also list the complementary relationships that a woman is not allowed to marry. In addition to prohibiting marriage, incest laws state that sexual intercourse with blood relatives is a crime. Incest is also considered a willful crime against a person. State statutes, like Oklahoma's Title 21 (Crimes and Punishments), prohibits abuse of children by parents or persons responsible for a child's welfare. The Oklahoma child abuse penalty, which includes incest, calls for a punishment up to twenty years in the state penitentiary or a fine of \$500.00 to \$5,000, or, both a fine and imprisonment.³

The Oklahoma public policy (sec. 845 of Title 21) for protecting children defines child and sexual abuse as follows:

“Child” means a person under the age of eighteen years. A person responsible for a child’s health or welfare includes a child’s parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare, whether in the same home as the child, a relative’s home, a foster care home, or a residential institution;

“Sexual abuse” includes rape, incest and lewd or indecent acts or proposals, as defined by law, by a person responsible for the child’s welfare; ...⁴

In Oklahoma, as in other states, there is a mandatory child abuse reporting law. Unlike most states, Oklahoma requires that actual physical abuse be apparent before a professional is legally liable to report such abuse to the Department of Human Services. It is considered a misdemeanor for health care or educational officials not to report physical sexual abuse of children.⁵

Additionally, incest is defined in Oklahoma as a crime against nature and considered a felony; sentencing for incest under this section of the law is also twenty years or less in the penitentiary.⁶

Treatment of incest in the media has become increasingly evident. Ann Landers writes about it. Phil Donahue interviews victim-authors. Ted Koppel tries to inform us. Movies and daytime drama utilize the incest theme. Newspapers run feature articles and crime news about it, and women’s groups try to keep it from happening. Since the mid-1970s an accumulation of knowledge about child sexual abuse has surfaced; however, this recent openness is overpowered by traditional societal responses to incest and its participants.

Traditionally, societal response to incest is to deny its existence. When forced to deal with the reality of incest, typical reactions include anger, uneasy fascination, and the need to punish,⁷ all of which further humiliate and punish the child who already is experiencing trauma concerning the self, the family and society.

These responses--denial, anger, fascination and retribution--have infiltrated our legal and professional systems. The print media are not immune from the phenomenon; news stories can contribute to and reflect such responses.

When parents are charged with incest and their names are part of the public record, a journalist has a choice of identifying the defendants or withholding the names of the defendants and victims. If the defendant is identified, the journalist indirectly implicates the child or siblings in a relationship. Such a situation occurred in Lincoln, Neb., when a minor told authorities that she was a victim of father-daughter incest. After publication of the report in the Lincoln Journal, the girl went to school and found that classmates had clipped and posted the article in her homeroom for everyone's viewing.⁸ The negative connotations of incest are such that victims are attacked by social stigma. In addition, victims must cope with internal trauma, family disruption and their father's possible imprisonment.

The trauma for this child and others who are brought under further public scrutiny can hardly be overlooked by the journalism profession. As in a rape case, such a response can prevent victims from reporting the crime and seeking necessary counseling and treatment. Even disclosure of the father's arrest in the typical public record of a

newspaper can implicate the child, worsen the trauma and complicate the treatment.

Incest is an emotional issue that evokes an overwhelming negative reaction from the public. Journalists need to consider that most incest charges are valid; however, a false charge can be made.⁹ For example, a man from Oklahoma served two years of his 99-year sentence for incest before his daughter admitted that she had lied because her father, a part-time preacher and oilfield worker, beat her mother.¹⁰

Dismissal, acquittal, or a guilty plea to a lesser charge are likely outcomes of incest charges and trials.¹¹ Incest victims often succumb to family pressures and end up dropping charges. A case may be dismissed if it rests solely on a child's testimony. Or, a guilty plea to a lesser offense may be arranged so that the offender and his family may receive a therapeutic, rather than a punitive, sentence.¹²

Various disciplines, particularly psychology, sociology and women's studies, develop theories to explain why adults sexually exploit their children.¹³ Each recognizes that its "single factor theories" don't adequately explain the complex range of incestual behavior. Likewise, the relatively simple writing style that is used for most crime-story reports is unable to accommodate the complex nature of incest crime. Current use of court reports and testimony may introduce bias because either too little information is available, or, what is available is implicative.¹⁴ Crime facts are rarely enough to explain a taboo. News reports can contribute to the psychological and social harm that experts say victims may experience in their present and future lives.¹⁵

Statement of Problem

The relationship between the content of news and the concept of incest has yet to be explored. Incest is a universal taboo; thus, the controversy that surrounds this multi-dimensional act is here to stay. The current trend of open discussion, concern for child sexual abuse, and the increase in government involvement and funding also suggest it is time for the print media to assess its role in incest coverage. Lack of attention to the issues that surround incest crime coverage can only contribute to the credibility gap that currently exists between the press and the public.

The intent of this study is to compile information on current attitudes and practices in incest crime coverage among Oklahoma newspapers. Several issues will be explored. Do editors consider incest crime newsworthy? What, if any, are newspaper policies or practices on the crime of incest? Do news articles publish the name of the parent charged with incest, and thereby implicate the child-victim and siblings? Do small, and large newspapers have similar perceptions and practices on incest crime coverage? These questions, if adequately addressed, can become the basis of more discussion and policy-making, not only in Oklahoma newspapers but elsewhere and in other media.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that newspaper editors will show that:

- 1) More than 50% of the newspapers would (a) publish news articles about incest, (b) publish the name of the parent charged with incest, (c) withhold the name of the victim in a reported case of

incest, (d) by implication, negate their own policies or practices of protecting the victim in such cases.

2) Large, and small newspapers have similiar attitudes and practices concerning incest crime reporting and incest victims.

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Value of Study

The chief value of the study is to determine whether editors are unconsciously traumatizing children or violating their own sexual assault policy or practice. The results of the study may help editors to be more cognizant of the fine line between ethical intent and newswriting habits.

Chapter II of this study provides an overview of incest crime and highlights the reactions society, professionals and victims have toward incest crime. Chapter III explains the research process used and describes the survey methods and questions. In Chapter IV survey results are noted. The final chapter provides conclusions and recommendation.

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CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The crime of incest poses a unique problem to the press because when the perpetrator of this crime is named, a child or sibling(s) is implicated by relationship and name recognition. Traditional news conveys that a crime has been committed and, if possible, identifies a suspect. This practice poses a dilemma for editors that encompasses the following issues: newsworthiness and First Amendment debates; judiciary problems versus journalistic ones; and, of course, ethical concerns and reader repercussions.

A review of the pertinent literature reveals little, if any, discussion or research about print media treatment of incest crime and its victims. No research on editors' attitudes toward incest coverage was found. One exploratory research study dealt with the topic of incest. The thesis, authored by Susan Fielder, examined Nebraska-area reader attitudes toward newspaper reports of incest. A summarization, in part, of Fielder's data, shows that surveyed Nebraska readers have three distinctly different attitudes toward the reporting of incest:

1. The strongest attitude displayed by readers was that newspapers should withhold the name of the incest suspect because of privacy concerns. This group, which explained 45.3 % of the variance, felt that the newspaper must inform society about incest through feature stories rather than

crime statistics that identify the accused.

2. The second largest attitude, which explained 37% of the variance, reflected a vastly different feeling about incest coverage. This group of readers felt that all facts should be published--no matter the personal cost. They also felt that a newspaper should not act as a "social agency."
3. The least significant reader attitude, 17.7 % of the variance, favored naming the suspect because, respondents felt, "the daughter isn't damaged by having strangers know the situation."¹

Fielder's study suggests readers think incest is a newsworthy topic and hold specific opinions about newspaper incest reports.

A review of the past decade of print media academic and trade journals suggests that incest coverage has received scant attention. In the few instances incest is mentioned, it is within the context of rape or the ethics of naming crime victims.

Professor Carol Oukrop's rape coverage research results compelled her to create a prototype guide for handling rape stories. One of the ten guidelines deals directly with incest. Oukrop suggests that unless this family crime is unusual, editors should delay reporting an incest case until "the case advances to district court;" moreover, reporters should confer with their editors when dealing with incest cases.² Editors from small, medium and large newspapers were also asked by Oukrop how they felt about reporting the name of a rape victim who is a minor. The results of her rape-coverage gatekeeper

study shows 69% of all editors questioned would not report the name of a minor rape victim.³

Studies about editors' practices, policies and attitudes toward withholding the name of an incest perpetrator or suspect were not found. Concerning rape coverage, Professor Michael Bugeja's study notes that "editors disagree more than 2 to 1 about the idea of withholding a rape suspect's name until he is bound over for trial."⁴

A review of the handbook, "A Resource Guide: News coverage of Sexual Assault," appeared in the June, 1987, issue of Editor and Publisher. The handbook's author, reporter Marilyn Musser, noted that the public record can reveal the name of the defendant in sexual abuse cases and suggested:

In these cases, newsgatherers may need to find ways to avoid using the identity of the accused. For example, identification might only include the age of the defendant so that the identity of the victim is not disclosed.⁵

The press' treatment of innocent victims of crime was a topic at the 1983 ASNE convention. Discussions about the pros and cons of the practice of naming rape victims generated minimal debate about incest victims. Arguments for naming rape victims surfaced during The "Ethics of Naming Names" panel. A pro-naming-names stance, put forth by Elieen Shanahan and other journalists, suggested that if newspapers report the name of consenting victims, the industry will move forward in getting the "smirk" and "unfounded skepticism" out of rape stories.⁶ This stance suggests that the press has the power and responsibility to stamp out the harmful stigma society currently directs at rape victims.

When the argument of naming a victim of a sex crime is widened it included names of incest victims--either directly or indirectly. Former chairman of ASNE's Ethics Committee, Kay Fanning, noted a conversation with a woman whose husband was charged with incest; it was published as a rape crime. The woman told Fanning that publishing the rape report had the same impact as printing her daughter's name would because the woman believed, "everyone knew her daughter was the victim."⁷ "If you start naming rape victims," Fanning said, "then you get into all these areas."⁸

A review of the literature suggests that incest crime coverage and its newsworthiness has yet to be discussed or researched at length or in detail by journalists.

An Overview of Incest

Incest, anthropologists note, is a universal taboo. The severity of the act is subject to grades of disapproval by society. Society reacts most strongly when the offender is a male parent who is considerably older than his victim.⁹ Sociologist Clifton Bryant stated, "father-daughter incest is normally considered to be more reprehensible than brother-sister incest."¹⁰

Incestuous unions can also involve mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son and children of like and different sex. However, the most frequently reported and treated union is father-daughter.¹¹ Researchers have found that pre-adolescent (age 8 to 12) girls are victimized most frequently by repeat incest offender men, who use psychological force rather than physical force.¹² These men come from all socio-economic groups--not just the lower-class groups.¹³

Sexual intercourse and/or acts of deviant behavior including molestation is considered incest in Oklahoma and other states, when it is committed by parents or "other persons responsible for a child's health or welfare, whether in the same home as the child, a relative's home, or in a foster home, or a residential institution."¹⁴

Biological, social and psychological ramifications that can result from incest cause society to react strongly against this crime. Czechoslovakian researcher, Eva Seemanova, concluded from her study of 161 children born to women from incestuous relations with brothers and fathers, that there is an "unmistakable effect of inbreeding on infant mortality, congenital malformations, and intelligence level."¹⁵ Other concerned professionals and theorists who research, treat, counsel and study incest victims and perpetrators, are alarmed with the marks incest leaves on children and the family unit. Such professionals feel that the incest taboo exists to prevent harmful sexual competition between family members and/or "role confusion within the nuclear family."¹⁶

Although rape and incest are often lumped together as crimes that reflect the need for sensitive news treatment, these crimes differ in nature and consequence. Incest is considered the most socially repulsive sexual act and the most complex deviant sexual behavior.¹⁷ The nature of the act has caused society to institutionalize reactions toward it with the creation of specific laws, treatments and services.

The first trace of openness about the issue of incest and its victims surfaced in the 1970s. Mandatory reporting laws were passed in most states, and such laws required professional persons working with children to report sexual abuse to the Child Protection Services.

This period also marked the emergence of the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect and the establishment of various community support services that attempted to help victims as well as educate the public about such matters.¹⁸ The reporting laws and establishment of professional intervention indicate that society is willing to take incest out of the closet and act against its destructiveness.

The Reagan administration created a Task Force on Family Violence in 1984 because it became apparent that incest victims, as well as victims of other types of family violence, have been abandoned by society, by their parents and by the legal system.¹⁹ The report recognized that the public must acknowledge that children are increasingly being sexually abused; and, that this abuse problem, despite the increased efforts of the mental health and legal professions, will not be solvable if the public continues to ignore its existence.²⁰

The true extent of the problem of family sexual abuse of children is hard to ascertain because of the nature of the crime. Family members and many parents are reluctant to report abuses because of shame, stigma and the desire to protect a child from embarrassing questioning. Children often do not report abuses to a parent because they fear they will be blamed or punished further by the perpetrator. Additionally, they may feel guilt over their willingness to participate in the act. In 1985 The Los Angeles Times national telephone poll on sexual abuse reported that "one-third of those (adults) who said they had been victimized (as children) also reported that they had never told anyone."²¹

Available statistics on child sexual abuse only reflect cases that have been officially reported to legal and social service authorities. John Briere, a research authority on child abuse, said, "it is probable that at least a quarter to a third of adult women and perhaps half as many men have been sexually victimized as children."²²

All states seek to protect children from sexual abuse. Some states, like Oklahoma, require that actual physical evidence or an eyewitness be provided before the state intervenes on the child's behalf. A revision trend of the mandatory reporting law shows that most states now require officials to also report suspected abuses. The FBI speculates that the change in reporting laws will "increase the reporting, intervention, treatment, and prosecution in cases of incest."²³

Some states have organized and implemented Family Sexual Trauma teams within police departments. These teams work jointly with Divisions of Social Services and, in many cases, judges.²⁴ The team is organized and trained so that it reduces the hardships that victims must endure, and, in addition when warranted, it seeks to rehabilitate the offender so that the victim and other family members are not further traumatized by the realities of incest.²⁵

An extensive amount of incest information is available in the literature. Many professions, including psychology, medicine, social science and law, attempt to deal with incest. Each tries to explain the complicated nature of incest to the general public, families and policy-makers.

Although journalism has yet to look critically at its role in covering the crime, media attention has focused on social problems of

incest. Thus, feature stories about incest victims are published as are docket and crime reports that name the suspect and indirectly implicate a child or siblings. Because of the nature of incest, accusations about it may also be published within a custody or kidnapping story.

An article published in an October 19, 1987, issue of Newsweek described a case of a mother accusing a husband of sexually abusing their eight-year-old daughter. The article recognized the child as the one who suffered most in this type of case; nonetheless, Newsweek fully identified the child by name and picture.²⁶ Press critics, who were referred to in the story, did not criticize the medium for its display of insensitivity to the child, but rather to the notion that the "case is being tried in the newspaper."²⁷

Since the 1830s, journalists have utilized court documents as a sources of "news" about any and all anti-social behavior. Professor Todd Hunt described what news meant to the William Randolph Hearst news gang of the 1930's: "News is crime reports, sex, scandal and gossip, disasters, sports and oddities, served up with scare headlines, dramatic pictures, and slanted lurid writing."²⁸ The last decade of crime reporting has improved measurably in large part because of privacy concerns and reader criticism; yet, the public, despite its criticisms, wants to know what sex crimes have been committed in their area. Jack Haskins noted, "people read bad news, and in doing so they may be scratching a "biological itch" for negative information that once played a vital role in survival, but no longer is needed."²⁹ Haskins also said that people may be addicted to

bad news; however, research shows that "bad news damages the reputation of newspapers in the eye of the reader."³⁰

A review of the literature shows little discussion about why it is important to report incest and what is the most responsible way to report the crime. Why does the public need to know the names of those involved in incest--a family crime? Most cases of incest go unreported because of the repercussions to victims and their families. Thus, do cases that Finkelhor and other researchers describe as being representative of a high-deviancy population, accurately portray to the public the nature of incest crime? Many times although incest has occurred, the sentence suggests it has not. Plea bargaining, which results in therapeutic rather than punitive intervention, is perceived in the courts as a more viable option for the parent and his already dysfunctional family. Clearly, court dockets alone cannot provide an unbiased view of this crime.

Laws and Policies

One concern that is expressed repeatedly in incest literature concerning victims is that their welfare is the No. 1 priority. Yet the media, courts and social workers operate under a system that exposes the victim's name. Also at odds with the best interests of the incest victim is that a minor child lacks a voice in the courtroom and newsroom.

In the American judicial system nearly every trial and court record is open to press coverage and public scrutiny. Victims, like suspects, have no right to anonymity.³¹ It is up to editors to decide whether to keep victim identification and testimony private.

Deckle McLean's overview of recent privacy cases noted that in 1984 the Doe v. Sarasota-Bradenton Florida TV case established that a rape victim's identity in a broadcast is not a private matter. McLean said this case sets forth what is considered a private matter and what is not.³² According to McLean, the ruling was based on the Cox v. Cohn case in which the Supreme Court stated that a rape victim's name obtained from public records could be broadcast.³³

Although the courts have sided with First Amendment rights over the rights of a sexual assault victims, they have expressed the opinion that the press needs to consider responsibly others' rights. For example, the Florida court in Doe stated the following:

We deplore the lack of sensitivity to the rights of others that is sometimes displayed by such unfettered exercise of First Amendment rights. While we shall remain ever attentive to protect inviolate these First Amendment rights, we do so with the admonition that those rights should not be arbitrarily exercised when unnecessary and detrimental to rights of others.³⁴

The type of sentiment the court expressed here will likely remain as such because of prior rulings. Laws requiring judges to close trial proceedings involving minor victims of sex crimes have been ruled unconstitutional. The Globe Newspaper Co. v Superior Court, County of Norfolk³⁵ --a trial of a man accused of raping three minors-- stipulated that, although the issue of protecting minor sex crime victims from negative public scrutiny is necessary, a mandatory law is too restrictive; and, judicial protective action must be decided case by case after a hearing where the medium states its case for access to a minor's testimony.³⁶ Although the possibility of closed testimony exists, the trauma a minor victim may experience in the courtroom is

perceived as not reason enough to close part of a trial. Again, it is up to the press to decide whether a minor's testimony and name should be published.

Research about victim's rights by Rita Wolf, Tommy Thomason and Paul LaRocque found that most editors surveyed felt that "increased attention to privacy rights is good; however, they (editors) were almost evenly divided on the issues of publishing fewer names and addresses and thus interfering with the public's right to know, and, whether the public will seek limitations on the press unless the media show more discretion."³⁷ The study also noted that most surveyed editors would try to make crime victim's identification less obvious to readers. Given a hypothetical rape cases, 90% of the respondents said they would not identify the victim.³⁸ The study did not address the issue of withholding the name of a suspect to protect a victim.

Withholding the name of a rape victim has become a matter of convention for most papers because of the ongoing credibility debate and because of pressures that have been exerted on the press by public organizations and readers. However, in the case of incest victims, there is presently no organized protection voice.

Although studies show that most editors withhold the name of a rape victim, journalists are still debating what precedents this practice may reinforce. In addition to the idea that publishing a rape victim's name will, in the long run, help alleviate the shame of being a victim, some editors feel that not printing victims' names encourages false reports. The FBI Uniform Crime Code showed that 98% of filed rape reports are valid, and that only one of every ten sexual assaults is documented.³⁹

Other editors feel that revealing a victim's name is a constitutional right as well as a representative responsibility. Jon Elsen covered, in part, the national story of a gang-rape in a public bar by four men in 1984 for the Manchester (Conn.) Journal-Inquirer.

Concerning this case Elsen wrote:

It feels strange when you are sitting in the courtroom and the only eyes and ears of the public, where they would be ordinarily if they didn't have other things to do, and someone's testifying but it goes against the grain to withhold something. You're suppose to be a representative.

I don't want to downplay the significance or horror of being raped, but if you consider it constitutionally, if it's so terrible to reveal the victim's name, why is it allowed constitutionally?

It's ironic that some papers who argue against judges who withhold witnesses' names argue just as strongly for not printing rape victims' names. It's the responsibility of the government, not the media, to change that. I'm skeptical about deciding what readers should know and what they shouldn't."⁴⁰

Besides subscribing to the notion that all news should be printed--no matter its nature or personal consequences--journalists also may prejudge some news as being unfit for readers. Such a case, which involved the crime of incest, occurred in North Carolina.

A Watauga County, N.C., judge set a precedent when part of an incest perpetrator's sentence involved the Watauga Democrat newspaper. The judge ordered the man, who pleaded guilty to taking indecent liberties with his young granddaughter, to participate in a frank interview with a reporter from the tri-weekly newspaper.⁴¹

The man also admitted abusing two additional grandchildren. A psychologist, social worker and district attorney worked together to protect the young girl from further embarrassment and psychological

damage that testimony and imprisonment to her grandfather could cause. Once the man admitted the abuse but blamed the victim, the social worker contacted the district attorney.⁴²

The Department of Social services requested reporter Tim Bullard to do an interview with the man. Bullard described the interview:

I didn't know whether he was really guilty or innocent when I went in, but when I talked to him, his words in describing the granddaughter made me feel he wasn't repentant. He fit into the mold of a classic child molester.

The things he said he did with this child offended me as a man. It left me depressed. It was like sitting through a blue movie for 30 hours.⁴³

The editor killed the story because "it was too strong and not representative of the material that ordinarily runs in the Democrat."⁴⁴ Journalists, like ordinary people, can be reluctant to discuss incest. Psychologist Gail Hawkinson, who was involved in the case observed:

More education is making it OK for people to come get help for sexual abuse. The people--our communities, or paper--have to ask who we're protecting with silence. We're protecting the offenders. We'd like to think it's the dirty old man in the trenchcoat offering candy, but it's not.⁴⁵

The First Amendment allows the press to print all that's available on public dockets. Journalism ethics have evolved because of this unique responsibility. Newsroom policies, practices, and perceptions of readers' tastes are developed and/or acknowledged. These planned obligations can serve and hinder because, as Kurt Luedtke noted:

the business is too specific, too immediate, too various to make rules about.

All our talk about non-existent public duties may well serve to insulate us from what ought to be clear recognition that every publication from every fact results not from our compliance with the mandates, but from conscious discretionary decisions made ⁴⁶ by ordinary (underline mine) people like us.

The Justice Department has changed its attitude toward child abuse because of the recent increase (reported cases double from 1976 to 1984) of child abuse.⁴⁷ Until recently family abuse was considered a private matter rather than a criminal problem. Presently there is a federal victim's unit within the Department of Justice. This unit, according to Herrington, has a national referral system for victims; a training package for judges and law officers to help them deal responsibly and compassionately with victims; and, it provides states with current ideas for legislation that deals with sensitive victim issues.⁴⁸

Judges are recognizing that victims of sex crimes should not have to also be victims of the courtroom. Currently there is a trend in the justice system that recognizes incest as a unique problem; thus, offenders who admit at least some involvement and have not used force or created pregnancy are able to influence or negotiate some of the consequences of conviction.⁴⁹ Therapeutic rather than punitive treatment is mandated, so the usually dysfunctional family as well as the assailant can be treated. Such sentences are perceived to lessen the harm that the victim is already experiencing. Most intervention therapists believe that the court procedures children are forced to

endure cause them more harm than the incestuous act.⁵⁰ The legal system has acknowledged that such harm occurs to children in the courtroom and for this reason and others often opt for punitive punishment as a final resort.

Victims of sex crimes--unlike victims of theft--are required to press charges against the accused. This proves to be a very disturbing practice for victims of incest. The Task Force on Family Violence recognized that children need special attention and often do not get it in the harsh environment of an adult legal system. The Task Force recommended resolving this injustice by following three approaches:

1. The court should accept hearsay evidence from preliminary hearings and allow a child to be videotaped for trial.
2. Consider a child to be a competent witness. Children rarely lie about such matters.
3. Allow flexibility in the courtroom and with testimony. Arrange the room so the child is made to feel comfortable.⁵¹ Employ the use of dolls to show the crime.

The idea that children are not credible witnesses and are responsible participants of sex crimes is held by journalists as well as law officers and judges. In a child molesting case, which involved a junior-high teacher and student, the Santa Ana (Calif.) Register published this headline, "Teacher accused of molestation defended." A subhead said, "Union leader says student has reputation of being a fantasizer."⁵² An Editor & Publisher report of the incident noted that the reporter said "the girl would not be damaged significantly by the report because her name was not used and that the

story would balance out."⁵³ Ombudsman Pat Riley disagreed with the reporter and said the paper "fell short" in its responsibilities by "repeating irresponsible statements" that were not newsworthy.⁵⁴

News articles also can reflect how stereotypes play a part in the treatment of child sexual abuse cases. In the Jordan, Minnesota, sexual abuse case, 24 adults were charged with sexually abusing children. A lawsuit brought against the city alleged that the district attorney "conspired with sheriff's deputies, guardians, therapists and court-appointed attorneys to elicit false statements from children, on whose statements charges were based."⁵⁵ Complaints were dropped against 21 of the 24 people. One was charged, another pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and the other was acquitted.⁵⁶ The report made no mention that current information suggests sexually abused children rarely lie about incest and/or molestation abuse.⁵⁷

Typically, adults can see adolescents as being perpetrators of pranks and crimes rather than victims of crimes. Often the behaviors that adolescents display and that adults find to be deplorable are a result of parental abuse.⁵⁸ Newsweek magazine recently cited a study that found children who accuse adults of sexual abuse tell the truth at least 95% of the time.⁵⁹

Victim's Plight, Our Response

When children learn they cannot trust their parent(s), they move quickly from a state of innocence to a depressed state of not trusting anyone--including themselves.⁶⁰

Weinberg identified two basic types of incestuous families--the promiscuous and the endogamic. He describes promiscuous family as

having multiproblems. The household members are neurotic, unstable and often display antisocial and deviant behavior in addition to alcoholism.⁶¹ On the other hand, the "endogamic" family appears to be quite normal and without internal problems--this concealment motive keeps destructive pathologies under one roof.⁶² Dr. Rosenfield describes parents of endogamic families:

... they are immature and their lives are filled with personal losses, actual and psychological. They often seem unable to "mother" or protect children because of deficits in their own early experience. Since all family members fear separation intensely, they tacitly or unconsciously agree to maintain the appearance of an intact, "normal" family, using incest as a "tension-reducing" factor³ that helps maintain the family's tenuous stability by satisfying sexual needs within it.

The child, sensitive to the precarious balance, is played on and struggles to sustain the situation, sacrificing personal desires and developmental needs. The child is "exploited",⁴ since she/he is not appreciated as an individual but rather is valued only as serving as a psychological "cement"⁵ for the endogamic incestuous family's system.

Rosenfield and other authorities noted that force is rarely used in endogamic incest. Often the relationship starts out with fondling and with time involves intercourse. Such a relationship is viewed with disdain because of the power and age difference between the participants. Such a relationship distorts a child's personality growth.⁶⁴ Such relationships are viewed today not only as destructive to involved children and their families, but also as a social problem because many clinicians and social workers have stated that "father/daughter" incest is rampant and of epidemic proportions.⁶⁵

Therapists and researchers noted initial (reactions that occur within the two years after sexual abuse has stopped) kinds of physical and behavioral responses children have to sexual abuse. Anderson et al. (1981) and Peters (1976) studies show that female victims experience sleeping and eating disorders. Repeatedly, incest literature noted a child's sexual behavior can be inappropriate and excessive during the initial period. Additionally, experts agreed that child sexual abuse may adversely affect a victim's social development. Problems surface at school. A victim may run away from home, get involved in prostitution, drugs and delinquent behavior, or get married rather young.⁶⁶

Experts have yet to establish the scope of psychological harm an incest victim may carry into adulthood. A victim's personality, the degree of abuse, the sex of the parent and child, plus the length of the abuse period are just a few of the factors that may determine future psychological problems.⁶⁷ Therapists noted that some victims may experience little long-term effects while others may not be able to psychologically escape the incident.

Clinical literature and empirical studies of long-term effects of child sexual abuse have confirmed a number of difficulties that are experienced by victims in adulthood. In summarizing empirical studies of adult women who were victimized as children, Finkelhor noted:

... such women are more likely to manifest depression, self-destructive behavior, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem, a tendency toward revictimization and substance abuse. Difficulty in trusting others and sexual maladjustment such as sexual dysphoria, sexual dysfunction, impaired sexual self-esteem, and avoidance of or abstention from sexual activity has also been reported by empirical researchers, although agreement among

studies is less consistent for the variables of sexual functioning.⁶⁸

Therapists have likened abuse victims suffering to that of a borderline personality. Borderlines often attempt self-destruction, display outbursts of anger and are unable to sustain healthy relationships. Briere says, "not all borderlines have been sexually abused, but many have been."⁶⁹ He also has noticed that many victims "space out" or "disassociate" from themselves. Other therapists believe, "the label Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which has most often been applied to veterans of combat, may also be an appropriate diagnosis for those who have been abused."⁷⁰ Most researchers and therapists would agree that incest is likely to cause problems for victims in adulthood. Professionals and the public need to recognize that incest victims can be shattered psychologically for years, and that incest continues to shape the experience of childhood in our society. Because journalists have the power to perpetuate social stigma and misinformation about incest, it is time they included themselves in the list of professionals who deal with the problem of incest.

A recent ASNE credibility study suggested that too many respondents feel the press "takes advantage of ordinary people who are victims of circumstance."⁷¹ It certainly can be argued that victims of incest are ordinary people who are victims of circumstance. However, it's doubtful that suspects will ever be perceived as ordinary--even though they come from all types of economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds. The public displays an overwhelming desire to punish incest perpetrators; however, they don't want to further

victimize children. Emotional response is always high when society is forced to deal with incest. The press can, and does, reflect the public's emotional display toward incest. The press aspires to be "above" ordinary when it presents information to its readers. But as Luedtke noted, we are often insulated from recognizing when we are acting ordinary--like the public (which doesn't need to be accountable to anyone when it acts or reacts in an uninformed manner)--by the illusion that we are working from "mandates" rather than plain humanness.⁷²

The public has yet to launch a stance against the industry for exploitation of incest victims; however, a public outcry is a daily possibility because the press itself is attempting to educate readers about this crime in feature coverage. Attending to discussion and debate about this issue is needed to prevent the widening of the credibility gap.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The literature review on incest crime coverage highlighted issues about the incest victim and the ways the press covered such incidents. This study sought information about newspaper treatment of incest crime and its victims, and whether circulation size significantly altered a newspaper's treatment of incest crime reporting. Is incest a newsworthy topic? Would newspapers publish names of parents charged with incest? Would at least 50% of the papers surveyed withhold the incest victim's name? Would newspapers that withheld the victim's name, name the suspect, and thus indirectly negate their own policies of protecting the victim? Would large and small newspapers have similar perceptions and practices concerning incest crime reporting?

This study noted the practices, policies and attitudes of Oklahoma newspapers toward incest crime reporting and its victims. Additionally, the study determined if there was a relationship between a newspaper's circulation size (small circulation 0-3,250; large circulation over 3,251) and treatment of incest crime reporting.

Operational Definitions

1. Attitude is defined as an organized predisposition to think, feel, perceive and behave toward a referent or cognitive object.¹
2. Child is defined as anyone 18 years old or younger.

3. Editor is the title of person "who oversees the total day-by-day operation of the news department and coordinates the work of several departments in the newsroom." Also called managing editor.²

4. Incest is "sexual intercourse or acts of deviant behavior including molestation, between persons who are related, including step-children" and guardians.³

5. A parent or guardian is any person who is in charge of a child's "health or welfare, whether in the same home as the child, a relative's home, a foster care home, or a residential institution."⁴

6. Newspaper is a publication that is printed and distributed daily, bi-weekly or weekly and whose paid circulation is twice the size of its unpaid circulation. Circulation size is 500 or more.

7. Practice is the perceived customary action of handling the names of incest crime victims and assailants.

8. Policy is the written or spoken procedure in naming of sexual assault victims, in particular, incest victims.

Occupational Terms and Parameters

Small, and large newspaper breakdown was determined by plotting newspaper circulation size on a graph. Small is 0 to 3,250, large is more than 3,251.

Years served in present position are divided into 0-5, 6-12, 13-26 and 27 or more.

Selection Process

The Oklahoma weekly and daily paid subscription newspapers, with a circulation of 500 or more, were used as a universe for the study.

Newspaper listings and the names of the managing editors were selected from the 1987 Editor and Publisher International Yearbook.

The author of the study felt that editors would respond to a survey that addressed incest issues because editors share the same social mores and concerns readers do and, additionally, are keenly aware of community standards. The author further assumed editors would want to know if they were violating journalism standards and would want to correct the problem. A mail survey was used.

The managing editor for each of the 184 papers was sent a questionnaire along with a cover letter that requested participation and described the study (see Appendices A [p. 63] and B [p. 67]). A stamped, addressed envelope was included to encourage return of the completed survey. The editors were first contacted April 12, 1988. Approximately ten days after the first questionnaire was mailed a follow-up reminder post card was sent to the editor (see Appendix C [p. 69]) About three weeks after initial contact (April 28) another questionnaire along with a brief note to return the survey by May 10, 1988 was sent. (See Appendix D [p.71].)

Method of Scoring

A questionnaire was constructed to measure practices, policies and attitudes of editor respondents and to determine if small and large newspapers had similar attitudes, policies and practices about incest crime reporting and its victims. Questions relating to treatment of victims, suspects and routine practices were asked. (See Appendix A [p. 63].)

Validity

According to Kerlinger, the validity of content of an instrument is basically judgmental.⁵ Each item of this survey was judged for its relevance to the properties being measured (policy, practices and editor attitudes). Content was scrutinized for clarity, bias and logical validity. In addition, the original survey statements were presented to committee members who judged that the instrument measured the objects in question.

Analysis of Design

The survey was comprised of dichotomous questions, scale items and an open-ended question. Responses were tabulated and analyzed statistically by averaging, figuring percentages and appropriate tests of significance. The dichotomous questions were analyzed by cross-tabulation percentages and significance was determined by Chi Square. Scale items were analyzed by Single-Factor Analysis of Variance and significance was determined by the F table.

Independent variables in the study were the following:

1. Circulation size of newspaper
2. Years served as managing editor
3. Victim treatment by Suspect treatment by Practice treatment by each subject

The dependent variables were respondents' measured attitudes, practices and policies toward incest crime, incest victims and incest suspects.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter describes the sample and analyzes Oklahoma newspaper editors' policies, practices and attitudes toward incest crime, the perpetrator of this crime and its victims. The two hypotheses are also tested.

Description of the Sample

Questionnaires were mailed to 184 daily and weekly newspaper editors or managing editors in Oklahoma. Return rate was 54.3%.

The newspapers were selected from the Editor & Publisher International Year Book of 1987.¹ Representative balance of Oklahoma newspapers was sought; thus, all qualifying newspapers were sent a questionnaire. Circulation figures listed in E&P were used to determine the categories. Newspapers with a circulation of 500 or more that had a paid subscription list twice the size of the unpaid list were sent a questionnaire. This procedure was used so that newsletters and free advertising newspapers could be eliminated, in part, from the sample.

Newspapers were selected into two groups: (1) 3,250 and less (2) more than 3,251. Circulation figures in the E&P indicate that Oklahoma is a state that consists mostly of small-circulation (about 63%) newspapers. The most representative circulation size is around

3,250. Nearly equal return rates from each group were obtained. Small circulation papers, which represented 63% of the total sample, had a return rate of 53.9%. The large circulation group, which represented 37% of the total sample, had a return rate of 55%. (See Table I [p. 73].)

The first two questions addressed whether the newspaper had a policy concerning the naming of sexual assault victims in crime news stories and, if so, how did they routinely deal with names in incest stories.

The next two questions asked whether the media should withhold names of children who have been sexually assaulted by parents and if incest is a newsworthy topic.

Questions six and seven asked whether suspects charged with incest should be named and whether respondents had dealt with reader complaints when a suspect's name was printed. Another question asked how they would react to a reader's request to withhold the names of all involved in an incest case.

Question eight focused on whether editors thought victims were harmed when parents are identified in an incest story. Editors were then asked if the public needs to know that a particular person was charged with incest. Editors were asked whether they felt that the judiciary system was responsible for the stigma victims experience, since it allows names into the public record.

The last two questions dealt with press treatment of an incest victim and whether incest crime stories should be handled in a routine manner.

Testing Hypotheses

The data collected for this study was statistically analyzed using the IBM computer program Statistical Packages for Social Sciences. The data, which was nominal and interval, was crosstabulated and analyzed for variance.

Hypothesis I: More than 50% of the newspapers would (a) publish news articles about incest, (b) publish the name of the parent charged with incest, (c) withhold the name of the victim in a reported case of incest, (d) by implication, negate their own policies, and/or practices of protecting the victim in such a case.

When asked if incest was a newsworthy topic, only 11% of the editors said it was seldom or never newsworthy. Editors who would seldom or never publish the name of a suspect charged with incest represented only 22% of the respondents. Carolyn Leonard, general manager of the Harper County Journal, was one who did not publish names in her paper. She commented:

We don't use names because it's like an additional rape. The stigma is there for the world to see forever after.

More than half the the editors (64%) agreed that the public needs to know who commits incest. (See Table II [p. 74].) One such editor said:

...using names is damaging to unnamed victims, yet it is in the greater public interest to raise awareness that such crimes exist and are being prosecuted.

Part (a) of Hypothesis I was supported since more than 50% of the editors felt that incest was newsworthy, would name a charged incest

suspect and felt the public needs to know who commits incest. Only 24% said they do not publish incest stories. (See Table III [p. 75].)

Part (b) of the hypothesis states that more than 50% of the editors would publish the name of a parent charged with incest. As mentioned previously, only 22% of the editors would seldom or never use a charged suspect's name in an incest crime report. Only 21% of editors felt that the public does not need to know who commits incest. Table IV shows that editors who have a sexual assault victim policy, routinely withhold the assailant's name along with the victim's only 25% of the time. Also, no editor would withhold an assailant's name only. The routine practices of withholding a victim's name only is greatly preferred -- nearly four to one--over the routine of withholding both assailant's and victim's name. Many editors who used suspect's names in crime reports commented that this practice was necessary. Jack Johnson of the Heaven Ledger commented, "Incest is such a despicable crime that the story should be used just as others." He also commented, as did others, that publicizing the suspect's name would prevent him from engaging in other such actions. Part (b) of Hypothesis I is supported.

The editors overwhelmingly (91%) agreed that they should withhold the name of children who have been sexually assaulted by their parents. (See Table V [p.77].) Most respondents also agreed (68%) that when a parent is identified in an incest news story the child is harmed. Some 18% disagree with this statement while another 14% had no opinion. Also, the editors with sexual assault policies routinely (89.7%) agree that an incest victim's name be withheld from a crime story. Part (c) of Hypothesis I was supported.

As mentioned previously, there was no strong support by editors to withhold a suspect's name and thereby protect a child from implication and negative social stigma. In addition, there was no significant relationship between the withholding of a child's name whose parent had been charged with incest and the reporting of a suspect's name. ($X^2 = p > .05$. See Table VI [p. 78].)

Thus, although most editors would withhold a child-victim's name, they could also agree to the publishing of the suspect-parent's name. Part (d) of Hypothesis I was supported--editor's policies and practices to protect an incest victim are negated by the practice of naming a charged incest suspect. Overall, all of Hypothesis I was supported.

Hypothesis II: Large and small Oklahoma newspapers have similar attitudes, policies and/or practices concerning incest crime reporting, its victims and its perpetrators.

A Type I analysis of variance was used to determine if there was a significant difference between circulation group's incest crime treatment.² An ANOVA for each variable (treatment toward the victim, suspect and news practices) was computed and revealed that no significant difference between group treatments at the .05 level exists. (See Tables VII, VIII and IX [pp. 79-81].) Survey respondents of small and large newspapers hold similar attitudes concerning incest victims, incest perpetrators and incest news practices.

A relationship between newspaper circulation size and victim sexual assault naming policy was found. ($X^2 = 9.99981$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Overall, 68% of the respondents had a sexual assault name policy. Although more small circulation newspapers had such a policy (56.5%)

than not (43.5%), small circulation papers were three times as likely not to have a sexual assault naming policy when compared to large newspapers. (See Table X [p. 82].) Hypothesis II was supported.

Supplementary Analysis

Concerning incest victim treatment, 16% of the editors thought that incest victims seduced their assailant and did not deserve press protection. Another 17% had no opinion about it. Most editors disagreed (67%) with this statement. An editor who wished to remain unidentified noted:

I find it hard to believe a child would seduce their parents. If children have sexual fantasies toward their parents it is still the responsibility of the parent to see that nothing sexual develops.

Nearly one-fourth of the editors had no opinion about whether the psychological damage incest victims experience is more than that of other crime victims. Another 9% disagreed with the statement. However, most agreed (68%) that more of this damage occurs to incest victims more than to other crime victims.

There was divided agreement over the issue of whether incest should be treated like other routine crime stories. Those in agreement to the statement represented 42% of the respondents; 50% disagreed and the remaining 8% had no opinion. Larry Gittings, Duncan Banner managing editor, reasoned that it was necessary to routinely report such crimes because "people must know how the criminal justice system is working and who has been charged by the government and faces its punishment." Another editor said, "It is none of the public's business what goes on in a private home." He went on to say

that the "only time a case should be brought before the public is if the suspect is a public person." Additionally, most editors disagree with the statement that the judiciary system is responsible for victim stigma because names are allowed in the public record. A notable number (27%) agreed that this system is responsible for victim stigma. Nearly a quarter of the editors have no opinion on the matter.

A significant agreement relationship was found between treatment of incest like other routine crime stories and whether the judiciary system is perceived as being responsible in causing victim stigma. Those who think incest should be a routine crime story do not also believe the judiciary system is responsible for the victim stigma. ($\chi^2=6.67220$, $df=1$, $p<.05$. See Table XI [p. 83].)

The largest group of editors represented in the sample had been in their current position from 0-12 years (63%). The remaining 37% held their position 13 or more years.

The support for the hypotheses provides insight into the relationship between news content and those involved in incest crime. Editors are not inclined to protect incest perpetrators. On the other hand it is clear that editors attempt to protect incest victims either through policies or naming practices. Due to the nature of incest, the desire to name suspects and withhold the names of victims creates a situation where child victims can be identified and/or implicated in print. It is hoped that support of the hypotheses will stimulate debate about the system of news and how it can better operate to protect child victims of incest and still adequately inform the public about this crime.

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Nearly all the respondents (91%) empathized with child incest victims with regard to the withholding of their names. However, editors often felt as great of a responsibility to report the identity of an incest suspect. (See Table II [p. 74].) Thus, policies or practices concerning incest are negated in most cases since children can be identified by association when a parent's name is printed. The comment of Tom Higley, publisher of Sayre Journal, illustrates that even when an editor practices cautious journalism, the victim still is implicated because of the newsworthy nature of incest crime:

We will withhold names of victims and assailants. But run story after charges filed. Following guilty verdict we will run name of assailant only.

Editors with a sexual assault naming policy also implicate incest victims 64% of the time through use of a suspect's name. Other editors (45%) were not willing to change this practice even when posed with a reader request to do so. (See Table III [p. 75].) Only 29% of the contacted editors would act to protect the victim by running the story with no names or by not printing the story. The remaining 26% said they would do something other than the above, handling the issue on a case-by-case basis. Gene Curtis, managing editor, of the Tulsa World, commented:

All sexual cases are difficult and heart-rending but incest is chief of those. Our policy is to consider each case individually. It would be impossible to have a blanket rule and say we would never use the name(s) of the defendant and/or the victims. There may be a case in which we would use both. It would be rare.

Additionally, most editors agreed (79%) that the public needs to know that a particular person committed incest. The findings clearly suggest that editors are motivated to use incest suspects' names.

Nearly all the respondents (89%) thought that incest was a newsworthy topic. However, they were nearly equally divided as to whether incest should be handled like other routine crimes. (See Table XI [p. 83].) The respondents who thought incest should be reported like other routine crimes did not feel that the judiciary system was responsible for victim stigma. Overall, 24% of the editors said they do not publish incest stories. One editor of a small town said his reporters did not publish incest stories and noted, "I don't feel at this time that I would print any article of this type." Another 25% of the policy holders said they ran such stories but without the victim's or suspect's name. (See Tables III and IV [pp. 75-76].)

There was no significant difference between small and large newspaper treatment of incest victims, suspects or reporting practices. (See Tables VII, IIX and IX [pp. 79-81].) Most newspapers had a written or spoken sexual assault naming policy. As might be expected, more large newspapers had policies than small ones.

Conclusions

The reader should note that the following conclusions are drawn from a survey of Oklahoma newspaper editors and are not meant to

represent a comprehensive evaluation of incest news coverage.

The most significant finding of this study is that editorial commitment to informing the public about incest by naming a suspect outweighs the commitment to protect child victims of incest. The editors' overwhelming agreement (91%) to protect children by withholding their names from print was canceled out by their overwhelming desire (89%) to publish the name of the charged parent some or all the time. Roy Faulkenberry, managing editor of Poteau News & Sun, illustrates why, in part, this canceling out process exists:

We take every possible step to ensure the identity of the victim is unknown, but in the case of the assailant, the only punishment they receive is to have their name published in the newspaper. Experience has shown that in small communities such as this, names of victims are well known without the help of the press. Victims continue to be victims through rumor, innuendo, etc., while the assailant goes about his merry way often with just a slap on the hand.

Editor's agreement to protect children showed a marked decline (from 91% to 64%) when editors were asked whether they thought the printing of a charged parents name harmed the incest victim. Besides being motivated to inform through the use of suspect names, one editor, who thought that naming a parent was not harmful to the victim, said, "We hate it [incest reporting] but must report it to clear and help children." This comment indicates that this editor, and possibly others, are ill-informed about incest an victim's plight.

Perhaps the discrepancy also exists because some editors deny the fact that the routine reporting method of using a crime suspect's name

harms children involved in incest.

The denial explanation may also explain, in part, why editors were almost equally divided in their agreement to treat incest as they do other routine crime stories. (See Table XI [p. 83].) Another possible reason why editors are undecided about this issue may have to do with the various intentions they have about the news. Some editors are intent on informing the public about incest without using a suspect's name. Others are intent on using the suspect's name to further punish him and possibly deter others from committing the crime. Still others are intent on not informing the public at all about incest.

Debra Morton, owner of Big Pasture News suggested why some editors don't print incest stories. She comments:

Living in a small town, crimes such as incest and rape have received no coverage in the past. Only recently have traffic violators been named in the paper. People in small towns, for some reason, don't want to read about the horrors that happen in the world, they would rather gossip and speculate rather than read the facts.

It's also possible some editors have not found it necessary to question their practices in regard to incest. (See Table XII [p. 84].) One editor, unaware of the incidence of incest in the general population,¹ made this comment:

In 30 years of journalism, at small, medium and large dailies, and now a weekly, I've never had an incest story to handle. Is this a real problem?

A significant number (24%) of respondents said they do not publish incest stories. Comments indicate three reasons for this practice: (1) the public does not need to know about such a private crime (2)

incest does not happen in our community and (3) the media should protect the victim from public scrutiny.

One editor, who wished to remain anonymous, said:

I would really rather not comment on this subject. I'm sure it occurs, however I know of very few cases which have come up in this county's District Court.

Another anonymous editor said:

Our paper doesn't publish incest stories. Or at least we have never had any brought to our attention.

Still another editor said;

We are a very small town newspaper. I don't feel at this time that I would publish any article of this type.

The recent public awareness about incest is a reality as is incest crime. It is apparent that some respondents willfully do not report the topic of incest. The literature also suggests that incest is just as likely to occur in a small town as in a city.²

Foster Cain, publisher of Atoka County Times, comments that he does not publish incest stories because "the victim is too easily identified by small-town readers." No editor suggested that alternative methods of informing the public about incest could or would be used.

The most disturbing finding in the study is that a recognizable (16%) number of editors agreed or strongly agreed that victims of incest did not deserve press protection because they seduced their parents. Another 17% of the editors had no opinion on the matter. This finding suggests that at least 16%, and possible more, of the

editors will act more favorably toward a charged incest suspect than toward a child who is a victim of incest. Additionally this finding suggests that such editors are either ill informed about incest victims, or, that they are informed but are inclined to believe the female seductress myth more than the facts. One editor, who wished to remain unnamed, stated:

Many accusations are made and there is evidence suspects may have been damaged by revenge, misinformation or misunderstanding.

While it is true that false accusations can be made and individuals may suffer because of them, such pathological people represent 5% or less of incest accusers. Research shows that at least 95% of the children who report incest are telling the truth.³ However, some may give in to family pressures and drop charges. The author's review of the literature found documented evidence on the types of damage incest victims experience; none was found on men who had charges dismissed.

Another interesting finding shows that 15% of the editors who published incest stories had received complaints about the stories. Considering the nature of the crime and the underreporting of it by victims, this figure perhaps indicates that readers have opinions about the reporting of incest crime stories. One editor who had an opinion about incest reporting wrote:

Before I had much experience in journalism I identified via a photo a sexual assault victim; I thought her identity was protected by the composition of the photo (her arm was up and face was bandaged). She was

identified, however and had problems because of news

coverage. I will never make such a mistake again. I will err for the victim.

There was no significant difference between small and large newspaper treatment of incest practices, incest victims and incest suspects. This occurrence was anticipated since reason suggests that no conceivable newsroom practice or reader need could outweigh the uniformity of crime reporting methods and the reactions editors have toward the incest taboo.

In Conclusion

1. An overwhelming number of respondents (91%) would not publish a child incest victim's name. However, editors often felt as great of a responsibility to report the identity of an incest suspect (only 10% of respondents would never publish a suspect's name). Thus, policies or practices concerning incest victim protection are negated.

2. Most newspapers (68%) had a written or spoken policy concerning the publishing of sexual assault victim's name. More (56.5%) large circulation newspapers had such a policy than small (43.5%) circulation papers.

3. Editors with a sexual assault naming policy would implicate incest victims 64% of the time through use of suspect's name.

4. Overall, most editor's (68%) agreed the psychological damage incest victims experience is greater than that of other crime victims.

5. Findings suggest that at least 16%, and possibly more, of the editor's agreed or strongly agreed that victims of incest did not deserve press protection because they seduced their parents.

6. Most editors (45%) were not willing to change their practice

of printing an incest suspect's name even when posed with a reader request to do so. Only 29% would act on a request by not including names or by not printing the story.

7. Most editor's (64%) felt that the public needs to know that a particular person committed incest. Another 15% had no opinion about the issue. The remaining (21%) editors disagreed with this belief.

8. Only 11% of the respondents felt that incest was seldom or never a newsworthy topic.

9. Overall, 24% of the editors said they do not publish incest stories. Another 25% of editors with sexual assault policies said they would run incest stories without names.

10. Editors were nearly equally divided about how incest stories should be handled. Some (42%) thought incest should be handled like other routine crimes. The other (52%) editor's felt that incest should be treated differently.

11. Respondents who thought incest should be reported like other routine crimes did not feel that the judicial system is responsible for victim stigma that results when journalists use names from public records.

12. There was no significant difference between small and large newspaper treatment of incest victims, suspects or reporting practices.

13. Return rate was 54.5%. Reasons for this, the author felt, are the following: (1) Editors were reluctant to address the subject of incest, (2) No incentives were provided or follow-up phone calls conducted because of limited funds, (3) Many non-returns were addressed to newspapers with circulation less than 1,500 (4) The

author felt that addressing envelopes with names found in Editor & Publisher Yearbook influenced non-return rate since staff turnover at small circulation newspapers was brought to the author's attention through some return mailings and by the fact that a number of signatures did not match the initial mailing name list.

Recommendations

The author recommends that editors begin to take a closer look at incest crime reporting. Withholding an incest victim's name is not an effective method of protecting the identity of such a child. It harms the victim and implicates the siblings who are exposed to social stigma because of a universal taboo. The practice of using a suspect's name needs to be explored as closely as editors previously explored disclosing the name of a rape victim. Incest, however, is more complex than rape coverage. Editors must acknowledge that disclosing the incest suspect's name indirectly negates their own stated ethical policies of not naming sexual assault victims (particularly minors). Further, they must debate alternative ways to cover incest, perhaps through features or issue-related special sections. Such treatment would enlighten the public about an all-too-frequent crime that occurs at every level of society.

Whatever the case, the simplest solution would be to withhold the identity of an incest suspect and explain why in a background precede paragraph. Here is a demonstration news story, patterned after a typical crime news column:

A 30-year-old Guthrie man has been charged with

incest and child abuse in the molestation of his daughter, the district attorney said today.

The defendant, whose name is being withheld to protect the identity of his daughter, is being held on \$2,500 bond in the County Jail, pending a preliminary hearing Aug. 1 at 3 p.m. in District court.

So handled, editors not only fulfill their social responsibility to report incest crime news but also to inform the public of the judicial proceeding. Such an approach shifts the burden to the judicial system where it belongs and helps editors honor their own policies regarding this heinous crime.

Future Studies

Journalism needs to proceed toward a more rational, informative and sensitive approach to incest news coverage. This study shows that ethical behavior concerning incest can and needs to be quantified. Numbers and their imposing order help us keep tabs on ourselves. The author suggests that this study be expanded to a national scale. Perhaps organizations like ASNE and the ANPA could support such endeavors and then disseminate the results to their respective memberships.

ENDNOTES

1. Alfie Kohn, "Shattered Innocence," Psychology Today Feb. 1987, p.56.
2. Clifton D. Bryant, Sexual Deviancy and Social Proscription, (New York, 1982), pp.317-8.
3. See Herrington's "Victims of Crimes," American Psychologist, Jan. 1985, p. 102 and George Hackett and Sue Hutchinson, "In Massachusetts, and Ugly Battle for a Little Girl," Newsweek, Oct. 6, 1987 p.41

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH FREQUENCIES

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each item and check one response for each question.

- 1a. Do you have a written or spoken policy concerning publishing the name of sexual assault victims in crime news stories?

YES 68%

NO 32% N=100

- 1b. If yes, in regard to incest stories do you routinely:

a. withhold victim's and assailant's name. 25%

b. withhold victim's name only. 64%

c. withhold assailant's name only 0%

d. other (please explain below *). 1%

N=68

2. The media should withhold the names of children who have been sexually assaulted by parents:

All the Most of the Sometimes Seldom Never

Time Time

71%

20%

8%

0

1%

N=100

3. Incest is a newsworthy topic:

All the Most of the Sometimes Seldom Never

Time

Time

16%

32%

41%

7%

4%

N=100

4. Would you publish the name of a suspect charged with incest?

All the Most of the Sometimes Seldom Never

Time

Time

30%

24%

24%

12%

10%

N=100

5. Have you ever received reader complaints after publishing the name of a suspect in an incest crime story?

YES 15%

NO 61%

DON'T PUBLISH INCEST STORIES 24%

N=100

6. If you were contacted by a citizen and asked to withhold the names of those involved in an incest case you would:

1. print the name of the suspect and victim. 1%

2. print the suspect's name only. 44%

3. run the story without the suspect's or victim's names. 20%

4. not run the story. 9%

5. other 26%

N=100

7. An incest victim, whose parent is identified in an incest story is harmed by the publication of such news.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<u>20%</u>	<u>48%</u>	<u>14%</u>	<u>17%</u>	<u>1%</u>	N=100

8. The public needs to know that a particular person was charged with incest.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<u>23%</u>	<u>41%</u>	<u>15%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>1%</u>	N=100

9. Incest assailants are identified in the public records; therefore, the judiciary system is responsible for the stigma victims experience when news stories identify parents.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<u>7%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>39%</u>	<u>10%</u>	N=100

10. Many incest victims seduce the assailant and do not deserve press protection.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<u>5%</u>	<u>11%</u>	<u>17%</u>	<u>33%</u>	<u>34%</u>	N=100

11. Incest is a hideous crime that damages its victims psychologically far more than other crimes.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<u>35%</u>	<u>33%</u>	<u>23%</u>	<u>9%</u>	<u>0</u>	N=100

12. Incest should be handled like other routine crime stories.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
<u>9%</u>	<u>33%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>47%</u>	<u>3%</u>	N=100

13. Please check the appropriate space that best represents your newspaper's circulation.

0 - 3,250	<u>62%</u>	
Over 3,251	<u>38%</u>	N=100

14. Years in current position:

1. 0 to 5	<u>30%</u>
-----------	------------

2. 6 to 12	<u>32%</u>	
3. 13 to 26	<u>17%</u>	
4. 27 or more	<u>20%</u>	N=99

15. Please write any comments you may wish to add concerning your responses on the attached page of this questionnaire.

No=64% Yes=36% N=100

16. May we have permission to use your name if we decide to publish your response to Question 16?

NO 58%

YES 42%(If yes, please indicate name and title.)

Name

Title

Newspaper

APPENDIX B

FIRST COVER LETTER



Oklahoma State University

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND BROADCASTING
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA 74078-0195
PAUL MILLER 206
405-624-6354

April 12, 1988

Dear Editor:

Treatment of incest in the media has become increasingly evident. The recent openness about discussing incest is often reflected in newspaper feature articles, crime reports and essays. Despite this trend, little discussion exists in journalism literature about the relationship between news content and the crime of incest.

I am asking newspaper editors for their opinions concerning incest coverage. I would appreciate it if you would take five minutes to fill out the enclosed survey. The survey is entirely confidential, unless you choose to include your name and title.

Your answers are essential to the accuracy of this research. A stamped reply envelope is enclosed for your convenience. This survey is by Diane F. Bugeja in conjunction with the School of Journalism and Broadcasting at Oklahoma State University. If you have any questions please contact me at: 12630 Adeline Circle, Athens, OH. 45701. Phone: 614-594-2016. I welcome your comments and participation in this project.

Sincerely

Diane F. Bugeja
Graduate Student



APPENDIX C

POST CARD REMINDER

April 19, 1988

Dear Editor:

Recently we sent a questionnaire asking for your participation in an incest coverage survey.

If you have already returned the questionnaire, we would like to thank you for your valuable help.

If you have not gotten around to completing it, may we ask you to return the completed form now? Your participation is vital to the success of our study.

Thanks,

Diane F. Bugeja
Graduate Student

APPENDIX D

FINAL LETTER



Oklahoma State University

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND BROADCASTING
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA 74078-0195
PAUL MILLER 206
405-624-6354

April 28, 1988

Dear Editor:

About three weeks ago I sent you a copy of the enclosed survey about incest coverage. I hope you take a minute to fill it out and return it by May 10th, when results will be tabulated.

Little, if any, research exists in this area; therefore, your participation is important.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Diane F. Bugeja
Graduate Student



APPENDIX E

STATISTICAL TABLES

TABLE I
CIRCULATION SIZE RETURN RATE

Circulation Size	Percentage Response
Under 3,250	53.9%
Over 3,251	55

TABLE II
EDITOR'S RESPONSE TO INCEST NEWS, IN PERCENT

Statement	All the time	Most times	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Incest is a newsworthy topic	16.0	32.0	41.0	7.0	4.0
Would you publish the name of a suspect charged with incest?	30.0	24.0	24.0	12.0	10.0
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Public needs to know who commits incest	23.0	41.0	15.0	20.0	1.0
N=100					

TABLE III
READER COMPLAINTS OF INCEST NEWS REPORTS, IN PERCENT

Variable	Response	Percent
Have you ever received reader complaints after publishing the name of a suspect in an incest crime story?	Yes	15%
	No	61
	Don't Publish Incest Stories	24
N=100		

TABLE IV
HOW NEWSPAPERS WITH SEXUAL ASSAULT POLICY
TREAT INCEST STORIES

Value Label	Response in Percent
Withhold Victim Name Only	64.7%
Withhold Victim and Assailant's Name	25
Other	10.3
Withhold Assailant's Name Only	0
N=68	

TABLE V
PRACTICE OF WITHHOLDING NAMES OF INCEST VICTIMS

Value Label	Response in Percent
All the time	71%
Most of the time	20
Sometimes	8
Never	1
N=100	

TABLE VI

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WITHHOLDING CHILD'S NAME
AND PRINTING SUSPECTS NAME

		Publish Suspect's Name		
		All or Most Of Time	Sometime or Never	
All or Most Of Time		50	41	91
	Withhold Child's Name			
Sometime or Never		4	5	9
		54	46	
				<u>100</u>

Chi square = .36355, df=1, p>.05

TABLE VII
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: NEWS TREATMENT OF
INCEST BY NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	26.768	9	2.974	2.645	.009
JUDSRES	9.017	4	2.254	2.005	.100
INISNWSW	19.027	4	4.757	4.231	.003
NPCIRC	.841	1	.841	.748	.389
Explained	26.768	9	2.974	2.645	.009
Residual	101.192	90	1.124		
Total	127.960	99	1.293		

Main Effects measured: (1) whether incest is a newsworthy topic (2) whether incest crime should be treated like other routine crime stories (3) whether judicial system is to blame for victim stigma that results when suspect's name is gathered from public records.

The Between Groups significance of $F=.748$ at $df=99$; .389 it is not significant at the .05 level.

TABLE VIII

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: SUSPECT NAMING TREATMENT BY
NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION SIZE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	58.306	5	11.661	23.332	.000
PUBNMIV	58.222	4	14.556	29.123	.000
NPCIRC	1.574	1	1.574	3.149	.079
2-way Interactions	4.001	4	1.000	2.001	.101
PUBNMIV NPCIRC	4.001	4	1.000	2.001	.101
Explained	69.768	9	7.752	15.510	.000
Residual	44.982	90	.500		
Total	114.750	99	1.159		

Main Effects measured: (1) whether the public needs to know who commits incest (2) whether editors publish incest suspect's name.

The Between Groups significance of $F = 3.149$ at $df=99$; .079 is not significant at the .05 level.

TABLE IX
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: VICTIM TREATMENT
BY NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION SIZE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	9.346	8	1.168	.839	.571
INHIDCR	3.006	3	1.002	.720	.543
PARIDHAR	2.002	4	.500	.360	.837
NPCIRC	.794	1	.794	.571	.452
Explained	9.346	8	1.168	.839	.571
Residual	126.654	91	1.392		
Total	136.000	99	1.374		

Main Effects measured: (1) whether the psychological damage incest victim's experience is perceived as more harmful than other sexual assault crimes (2) whether editor's felt that identifying a parent harms the child victim (3) whether incest victims are perceived as seducers.

The Between Groups significance of $F = .571$ at $df=99$; $.452$ is not significance at the 05 level.

TABLE X
 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HAVING A SEXUAL ASSAULT
 POLICY AND CIRCULATION SIZE

	Circulation Size		
	Small	Large	
Yes	35	33	68
Sexual Assault Policy			
No	27	5	32
	62	38	100

Chi square = 9.99, df=1, p < .05

TABLE XI

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROUTINE REPORTING OF A SUSPECT'S NAME
AND EDITOR'S PERCEPTION THAT JUDICIAL SYSTEM
IS RESPONSIBLE FOR VICTIM STIGMA

	Judicial System Responsible For Stigma		
	Agree	Disagree	
Agree	17	25	42
<hr/>			
Routine Reporting of Suspect's Name			
Disagree	10	48	58
<hr/>			
	27	73	<u>100</u>

Chi square = 6.67, df=1, p <.05

TABLE XII
COMMENT RESPONSES

<u>Catagory</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
	N = 40
I. Public Concerns	
Incest crime is not recognized in small towns.	(6)
Public must be kept informed about incest.	(5)
Charge is usually guised as something other than incest, i.e. sodomy, molestation, rape etc.	(2)
	32.5%
II. Newsroom Incest Coverage Practices	
Suspects name published after charges filed.	(4)
Assailant must be convicted before name used.	(3)
Handle each case individually.	(2)
Only publish incest stories when public person is involved.	(2)
	27.5%
III. Incest Victim	
Needs of victim outweigh public's right to know.	(4)
Identify victim by age, sex and as relative.	(2)
Victim should be named when suspect found innocent.	(1)
Rumors harm more than newspaper facts.	(1)
Any printed matter causes identification in a small town.	(1)
Children are not responsible for this crime.	(1)
	25%
IV. Assailant Treatment	
Publishing names helps to punish and deter.	(5)
Publishing names will not seve as a deterrent.	(1)
	15%

VITA

Diane Faye Bugeja

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: INCEST NEWS COVERAGE: POLICIES, PRACTICES AND
ATTITUDES OF OKLAHOMA NEWSPAPER EDITORS

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Watertown, South Dakota,
September 24, 1955, to Donald and Patrica
Sears. Married to Michael J. Bugeja on
September 19, 1979. Mother of Erin Marie Bugeja
who was born January 6, 1983.

Education: Graduated from Watertown High School,
Watertown, South Dakota, in May 1973; received
Bachelor of Science Degree in Sociology/
Anthropology from Oklahoma State University in
December, 1980; completed requirements for a
Master of Science degree at Oklahoma State
University in July, 1988.

Professional Experience: Social Worker, United
Cerebral Palsy, Sioux Falls, S.D., 1978-79, and
Human Services, Omaha, Neb., 1977-78; Photographer,
University Publications and Photography Editor of
Daily O'Collegian, Oklahoma State University 1980-
81; Photography Lab Instructor, School of
Journalism and Broadcasting, Oklahoma State
University, and Photo Stringer for United Press
International, Oklahoma City, Okla., 1980-81;
Lecturer, School of Journalism and Broadcasting,
OSU, 1983-86.

Other: Inducted in Kappa Tau Alpha for scholarship in
journalism; Outstanding Young Woman of America;
Lecturer for Urban Journalism Workshop, 1982-84.