News Constructions of Fear and Victim: An Exploration Through Triangulated Qualitative Document Analysis

David L. Altheide
Barbara Gray
Roy Janisch
Lindsey Korbin
Ray Maratea
Debra Neill
Joseph Reaves
Felicia Van Deman
Arizona State University

A seminar project used the World Wide Web to examine the multiple meanings of fear and victim in various news media to explore the substance of news as well as experiment with using an interactive Web page in a seminar format. The approach used was triangulated qualitative document analysis (TQDA), which relied on an interactive Web page format that permitted multiple observers to view others' data, analysis, and summary comments as well as incorporate these accounts into their own work. The aim was to foster a critical reflective analysis using online information bases and interacting with each other outside of class as well as during seminar session. The provocative findings were reflexively joined to the information technology and emergent interaction process.

“Nobody would do anything if they knew what they were in for.”

—The Milagro Bean Field War

Authors’ Note: This article was produced as a seminar project in the seminar titled “Justice and the Mass Media” GUS 588) in the School of Justice Studies, Arizona State University Tempe, in the fall of 1999. A draft of this article was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association in San Diego, California, March 23-26, 2000. We acknowledge the helpful suggestions from several reviewers and particularly Norman K. Denzin. Correspondence may be addressed to David L. Altheide, Regents’ Professor and Interim Director, School of Justice Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-0403; phone: (480) 965-7016; fax: (480) 965-8187; e-mail: david.altheide@asu.edu.

Qualitative Inquiry, Volume 7 Number 3, 2001 304-322
© 2001 Sage Publications
Most Americans would not agree with a Pakistani journalist’s statement, “Americans do not know fear.” Compared with those in most countries in the world, U.S. citizens are safer, healthier, and lead more predictable—albeit sometimes hectic—lives. Yet fear is everywhere in American society, and it is most apparent in popular culture and especially the news media. Fear is implicated in fun and games as well as in local, national, and international perspectives and policies. And so are victims and victimization. News reports, talk shows, news magazine shows, and a host of police and reality crime dramas seem to proclaim that everybody is a victim of something, even without knowing it. Our culture has become obsessed with fear and victims. We even use the term victim when we don’t have a victim, for example, “victimless crime,” although reports are far more likely to stress the victim status. And certain domestic violence presumptive arrest policies define people as crime victims, even though they do not perceive themselves as such and refuse to press charges. We report how a graduate seminar used a new approach, triangulated qualitative media analysis, to investigate the context and meaning of various uses of fear and victim in news media reports. This was an ambitious project, and perhaps we would not have undertaken it if we had known what we were in for.

PERSPECTIVE AND APPROACH

This is an exploratory approach to discourse analysis. We offer a narrative about a research process in a unique graduate seminar that used computer and Web information bases as a feature of seminar discussions. The emergence of massive information bases posed a challenge for our seminar: How can we use the Internet as a resource for research materials as well as a means for communication, data sharing, syntheses, and analysis outside the seminar? Ours is a narrative under construction, but this draft reflects what may be termed a shadow narrative rather than an ironic constructionism as we look over our shoulders, so to speak, at the ground just traversed. However, we are striving to report the social construction of meaning through narrative analysis. We want to demonstrate what we found about the process and how some findings reflect this process. We agree with Maines’s (2000) elaboration of Perinbanayagam’s (1986) position that the interaction process building on consensus is important for communication, but taken only that far, however the theory of meaning is incomplete because it begs the question of what in fact is being transacted in the process of meaning-making. . . . Language, with its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, is the obvious instance of such stability in that it provides the categories and structures for symbolic transactions. (Maines, 2000, p. 578)
We did achieve a partial consensus on the research process, although part of the understanding was that the discourse of fear is expansive, reflective of old hierarchies, yet also helping to constitute new power relationships, especially between moral entrepreneurs and news agencies. Accordingly, the article is a finished product about the research process but not about the results and implications of the findings. There were many fits and starts in this project. For example, a researcher’s grasp of a key usage of fear by a particular newspaper would be challenged by another researcher’s analysis of similarities and differences with another report and so forth. The following pages are intended to be coherent but not necessarily to flow smoothly, as if all aspects of the research and discussion were orchestrated by one director; they were not. The project was not done by one individual or by several individuals seeking one voice. It was conducted as a process of discovery by different individuals focusing on common but distinctive problems. This report is intended to represent the process and the uniqueness that contributed to some common understandings. Findings will be interspersed with the process because they are part of the process and reflect how students became aware of what certain connections and contrasts meant.

Our task was to clarify whether, and to what extent, fear has become associated with values and journalistic presentations to constitute a discourse of fear, which refers to the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999). Fowler (1991) and others have pointed out that language and other symbolic representations are not simply presented in literary forms, such as news reports, but also exist in audience’s values and expectations. The texts and effects are mutual.

It is obligatory to select a style of discourse which is communicatively appropriate in the particular setting….and the accompanying ideas follow automatically…The fundamental principle is that... the writer is constituted by the discourse. Discourse, in the present usage, is socially and institutionally originating ideology, encoded in language. (Fowler, 1991, p. 42)

The symbolic ties that connect moments with bridges of meaning are reflexive of previous experiences, but there are also episodes of change and adjustment. We want to understand when new or parallel discourses emerge, with what they are associated, and what the consequences are. A thorough study of discourses in everyday life may entail situated conversations, reflections on meanings by people who use them, as well as historical contrasts when other meanings prevailed. Discourse analysis also benefits from using theoretical samples from various documents to mark changes over time. The qualitative approach and its rationale are discussed below. Some findings are presented to illustrate discovery and contrast that in turn led to more seminar collaboration and refinement. Accordingly, individual discoveries in disparate
news media across cultures are presented as we attempt to let the reader share part of the experience of discovery, collaboration, and synthesis.

We traveled two broad avenues in arriving at this project. One is theoretical and conceptual. The other is methodological, that is, also informed by the theoretical and conceptual bent. Conceptually, we bring several decades of work and understanding to this analysis, including various approaches that inform the perspective broadly referred to as the social construction of reality. The general perspective underlying this inquiry is symbolic interaction, particularly the concept of the definition of the situation, or the notion that the social process of defining situations is significant for how audiences respond to them. From this perspective, social power involves the capacity to define situations for Self and Others. And the mass media, as major contributors to social definitions (e.g., agenda setting, priming, and so forth), loom large in the field of vision of any researcher searching for clues to public perceptions of social problems, issues, and routine, everyday concerns.

Changes in information technology and communication formats have influenced the way we think about social problems and issues. The need to attract audiences has promoted the widespread use of entertainment formats to help select, organize, and present information that is personally relevant. As an organizational product, news techniques have emerged to incorporate fear as part of the entertainment mixture. The entertainment format of news is key to the rise of the “problem” frame (Altheide, 1997). Entertainment pervades newscasts, newspaper reports, and more recently, “Real TV” reports about “actual crime and police work” (Fishman & Cavender, 1998). The entertainment emphasis contains elements of action noted by Goffman and others but clarified by Snow (1983) in his work on the rise of media culture. First, there is an absence of the ordinary; second, there is the openness of an adventure, outside the boundaries of routine behavior; third, the audience member is willing to suspend disbelief. In addition, although the exact outcome may be in doubt, there is a clear and unambiguous point at which it will be resolved. Packaging such emphases within formats that are visual, brief, action oriented, and dramatic produces an exciting and familiar tempo to news audiences.

Numerous studies suggest that public perceptions of problems and issues (the texts they construct from experience) incorporate definitions, scenarios, and language from news reports (Altheide & Snow, 1991; Bennett, 1988; Best, 1995; Comstock, 1980; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991). Gerbner and others (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, & Jackson-Beeck, 1978) have noted that fear is pervasive in our symbolic and effective environment. Fear is perceived as real to a few of us and virtually real to most of us (Glassner, 1999).

Moreover, we’re aware of important contributions by language analysts and semiotic authorities on the underlying structure of language and the cultural understandings that are encoded. As one authority noted,
News values, then, are to be regarded as intersubjective mental categories. In determining the significance of events, the papers and their readers make reference, explicit or more usually implicit, to what are called, in cognitive psychology and in semantics, “frames,” “paradigms,” “stereotypes,” “schemata” and “general propositions.”… A stereotype is a socially-constructed mental pigeonhole into which events and individuals can be sorted, thereby making such events and individuals comprehensible. Now, it is of fundamental importance to realize that stereotypes are creative: they are categories which we project onto the world in order to make sense of it. (Fowler, 1991, p. 43)

Methodologically, this project involves multiple accounts of fear and victim. This includes theoretical-conceptual, methodological, and diverse observational standpoints, but there is far more to it. As a qualitative project, it is inherently multimethod (Flick, 1998). Triangulation has undergone numerous changes in social science since Denzin’s (1978) initial formulation (Flick, 1998), including interdisciplinary triangulation (Janesick, 1994) and a meta-method for exploring the credibility of qualitative analyses over time, for example, a study of trust in counseling in sociopsychiatric services (Flick, 1992). Indeed, several researchers cited above contend that triangulation is best viewed as an approach for understanding rather than validation per se. Paradigm shifts and expansion into other disciplines have increased researchers’ sensitivity not only to providing coherent narratives of content but also to telling “methodologically convincing stories” (Miller & Crabtree, 1994), particularly when varieties of triangulation are employed. For example, Richardson (2000) suggests that the triangle is a less useful metaphor for more complete understanding than crystal, which has a structure but emerges and evolves, subject to contingencies. Our story is informed by the challenge to document not only what we found but also the process through which discoveries were made. There are layers of this process, including various uncoverings: that is, (a) uncovering of various electronic news information bases; (b) uncovering a way of pulling these together, taking them apart, and making the data available for all participants; and (c) a way for the researchers to integrate the ideas of others, insights gained and assumptions lost, and to synthesize these views into their own work. The following pages illustrate what we found out about the process, particularly the following: Asking common questions of news reports enables researchers to work together on individual projects that can be adjusted to encompass insights from collaborators. Moreover, this could be accomplished by combining researchers’ computer information bases with seminar discussions.

The materials for this article were produced as part of an iterative process that included searching information bases for relevant key words and related terms, construction and refinement of protocols, theoretical sampling, and constant comparative analysis. Two methods were combined to forge what may be termed triangulated qualitative document analysis (TQDA). First, the method used to explore the interplay of fear and victim is derived from a
Altheide et al. / CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEAR AND VICTIM

qualitative content analysis approach described elsewhere as “tracking discourse” (Altheide, 1996), or following certain issues, words, themes, and frames over a period of time, across different issues, and across different news media. Tracking discourse is a qualitative document analysis technique that applies an ethnographic approach to content analysis to new information bases that are accessible through computer technology (e.g., NEXIS) (Grimshaw & Burker, 1994; van Dijk, 1988; Wuthnow, 1992). Although there are many differences in some of the approaches, all share an assumption that symbolic representations are enmeshed in a context of other assumptions that are not stated as such. Our approach blends interpretive, ethnographic, and ethnomethodological approaches with media logic, particularly studies of news organizational culture, information technology, and communication formats. The capacity to examine numerous documents with specific conceptually informed search terms and logic provides a new way of exploring documents, applying natural experimental research designs to the materials, and retrieving and analyzing individual documents qualitatively. Moreover, because the technology permits immediate access to an enormous amount of material, comparative exploration, conceptual refinement, and data collection and analysis can cover a longer time period than other technologies afforded.

A second component of the approach was an experiment to put tracking discourse in motion, so to speak. This was accomplished through a synthesis of a qualitative document analysis approach, an interactive Web (Internet) format, and a graduate seminar. A graduate seminar in the School of Justice Studies at Arizona State University called “Justice and the Mass Media” (fall of 1999) afforded an opportunity for students from several disciplines to investigate various dimensions of fear and victim across news media and a range of topics. The task was simple but daunting: How are fear and victim used in current news reports? This was done by relying on multiple observers to interactively track a topic of their own choosing through its association with the keywords of fear and victim while also reviewing and commenting on the “tracking” of other researchers. The topics included crime reports, corporate antitrust cases, post—cold war Soviet political shifts, international conflicts such as Kosovo, civilian casualties, endangered species, American Indian tribal issues (e.g., gambling and control over cultural history), and others.

The seminar format and the use of an interactive Web page, CoursesInfo 2, permitted students to post—via the instructor—and examine each others’ data sources, protocol data, and analytic memos; comment on them; integrate insights into their own projects; and post those for examination and discussion. Shared data, analyses, and assessments were then folded into each researcher’s own tracking. Seminar meetings would be devoted to discussing and clarifying trends, similarities, and differences in preparation for the next week’s discussion topic. This collaborative class effort lasted about half of the
semester, at which point students employed similar methodology to pursue individual projects that occasionally diverged from the larger project. We intersperse some examples of the integrative process used to produce this work to illustrate how our findings were interpreted.

OVERVIEW OF FEAR AND VICTIMIZATION IN THE NEWS MEDIA

The seminar project emerged from several years of previous work that examined how news reports emphasize crime and other threats to personal, familial, neighborhood, and even national security. An initial examination of actual changes in the use of these terms in such major news media as the Los Angeles Times (LAT) and ABC Newscasts (ABC) reveals major shifts that parallel essentially the data about fear, with a major exception: Whereas fear and victim increased in both the LAT and ABC from 1987 to 1994, the LAT usage declined, overall, from 1990 to 1997, but ABC dramatically increased its use of fear by 40%, and victim increased by 268% during the same time period. Clearly, victim is a powerful and growing symbol in the social landscape.

Qualitative investigation of theoretical and comparative samples of news reports indicate that fear pervades American news media, but startling increases in the use of the term and a more expansive discourse of fear have been documented in several major American dailies (Altheide, 1997, 1999). Major shifts occurred between 1985 and 1994, when coverage began to level off, but remained significantly above the level of the 1980s. Specifically, with the Arizona Republic (AR), fear was in headlines 123 times in 1987 and 232 times in 1996; it was in text 1,379 times in 1987 and 2,209 times in 1996. To gain some appreciation for the relative position of the AR in the use of fear in headlines and text of news reports, comparisons were made with 10 major newspapers in the United States: The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, Dallas Morning News, Kansas City Star, LAT, The New York Times, Seattle Times, St. Petersburg Times, and The Washington Post. In sum, this work clarified certain patterns but also revealed some anomalies, particularly with victim.

The seminar project focused on the ways in which fear and victim were used in numerous news reports and how this changed over time. Researchers initially developed a preliminary protocol for selecting information from news reports. Then searches (e.g., “fear within 10 words of victim” in headlines) would be conducted. The articles would be read, data noted in protocols, and other questions would be raised about any peculiar use of the terms. Initial examination made it clear that there are many different types of victims used by the authors of the articles, which were formed by placing an adverb or adjective in front of the term victim. Researchers discovered very quickly that uses of victim and its relationship with fear required refocusing and redefining.
initial questions about the meanings of fear and victim into broader concerns about context, social status, and contested identities within the context of an entertainment-oriented news media. For example, in a *Newsweek* article “Forgotten Victim” (Footlick, Abramson, Huck, & Lee, 1978), there were yen such uses. The article used more modifiers preceding the term *victim* than any other in our theoretical sample. This article used the following modifiers in front of the word *victim*: innocent, pathetic, fighting, crime, state’s, elderly, and forgotten. Further immersion in articles suggested that the most common modifiers used are *elderly* and *innocent*. But there are many other uses and descriptors in our study of victims, and this list surely does not exhaust them: secondary, indirect, sympathetic, forgotten, remembered, future, potential, hidden, silent, unknown, unknowing, deserving, undeserving, spiritual, false, and guilty. (We do not include additional uses of victimization.) Such adjectives, and the more general use of victim, are used with some discretion to convey an evocative sense to the readers to strike a responsive chord. One example of gaining emotional response appears in the article “Crib Job” in *Newsweek* (Steele, 1976). In this article, the author wrote,

> The victims are old people, often very old. Hattie Erwin, who is 103, was inching down a Brooklyn street with the aid of her walker when she was knocked to the ground and robbed of her groceries— worth no more than $2. The assailants are the young—sometimes the very young. Although some elderly victims do testify against their attackers, a far larger number are afraid to do so—or even to notify police for fear that their assailants will retaliate.... The elderly are a young criminal’s ideal victims. “They’re weak and vulnerable,” explained Mark Forrester, a San Francisco social worker. “They always have some money with them and are usually too shaken by the attack to remember things clearly. (p. 39)

Data would be posted on our course Web site for students to examine coworkers’ findings and analyses. Analytic memos would also be written and posted periodically, summarizing and noting discrepancies in use of these terms. As fellow researchers read the memos and browsed the protocols as well as the original articles, they began moving toward more consensus on categories and meanings. For example, *fear* often appears within a few words of *victim*; more typically, it is infused within the word *victim*. Several participants speculated that is why the emotion of fear is invoked in the reader when *victim* is used. One could call this type of fear subliminal fear or implicit fear, that is, a level of fear that is always present in the word *victim*. E-mail to coworkers, with attachments from original articles, were combined with in-class discussions. One insight that emerged from this interaction suggested hat victim in general could be anyone, but a victim that is identified elicits a heightened level of emotion in the reader. As such, this indicates that not only are there different types of victims, but there is a hierarchy of victims and a gradation of fear present at all times in the term *victim*. From that point in the seminar, much of our focus was on the deserving or less deserving victims or, n short, a hierarchy of victims.
A HIERARCHY OF VICTIMS

Discussions suggested that victim often implies innocence and helplessness. We explored how this is reflected in the media and read hundreds of news reports through an analytical lens coated with such queries as, Does the implied innocence or guilt of the victim present the victim as more or less deserving? What role does fear play in presenting the victim? several students asked.

More discussion suggested that some articles imply that some victims are more deserving of victim status than others, whereas some uses of victim do not seem worthy of victim status. For example, in a discussion of the National Football League’s 1991 draft of college players, a prospect’s (Bret Favre) driving mishap was described as: “The sharp, graveled curve outside of Pass Christian, Miss., was an accident awaiting a victim.” Seminar reflections led one member to note that this usage implies that Brett Favre was a victim of a curb awaiting a victim, but this begs the question that it was Favre who caused his car to crash (“Draft ’91,” 1991). Therefore, perhaps he is not as deserving of victim status as an “innocent victim,” which suggests some victims are more deserving than other victims. By the same token, a victim need not be human to be a deserving victim, as in one report’s discussion of koalas:

“The teddy bear-like koala, symbol of Australia, has won the heart of humankind” (Shaul, 1994, p. 7).

A feature of tracking discourse and TQDA is to promote theoretical sampling in which comparisons and contrasts are sought in a kind of natural experiment. Such experiments are easily conducted with TQDA, combining massive information bases and online seminar communication (at any time of the day or night), which then become grist for the next seminar meeting. This process revealed that similar language can pertain to corporations too. For example, in one article about antitrust charges against software magnate Microsoft, lead attorney Paul Maritz was the source attempting to offer an alternative definition of the situation. His attempts at portraying Microsoft as a victim that feared being run out of business were a clear attempt to alter the reader’s thoughts into a specific direction. After all, Maritz would have the reader believe that Apple Computer was attempting to destroy Microsoft. Yet it was Microsoft that essentially stole the operating system created by developers at Apple Computer, turning it into what we now know as Windows. Nevertheless, as one researcher noted, Maritz suggested that Microsoft is the victim. Similarly, in an article titled “Food Firm’s Fears Delay Recycler’s Permit” (Sord, 1999), the owner of a refuse company seemingly appealed to readers who would be swayed by the claim that he was a victim of legal definition.

We all agreed that the news is filled with victims, whose portrayal often determines whether that victim will be important enough to be news. In other words, Are they deserving enough of our attention? In this way, victims become locked in a battle for attention. Analytic memos suggested that if certain
victims have not received the attention they deserve (at least in the journalist’s eyes), they are often referred to as forgotten victims. If the victim is to be considered deserving, he or she needs to be perceived as innocent. Three tides of forgotten victims illustrate how innocence was portrayed. More important for this article, the articles reveal how students working in different media, in different cultures, can join protocols and original data through an interactive Web page.

A researcher’s analytic memo notes the following after reflecting about data from others: The first case is of the “forgotten victim of Chechnya,” the Russian army. The student noted that the author is only referring to the section of the Russian army that fought in Chechnya. Because it is difficult to portray a group, the journalist chose an individual of the Russian army. We do not know how many soldiers the journalist actually interviewed or how representative this particular soldier is of the Russian army. Did the journalist choose the representative soldier because he appears more innocent? This soldier is very young and joined the army to serve his country. He was obedient and did his duty. The soldier says,

I don’t know what it was for....We lost. We never had any guidance. We were lucky to get helmets. Nobody ever told us what our mission was. Nobody ever told us why we were killing the people we insist are Russians. And now we are supposed to sit here and freeze to death until we get the nerve to desert. (Specter, 1997, p. 1)

Another article was an account of a victim of race hate. The report centered on Stephen Lawrence, who was stabbed to death by a gang of White racists as his friend looked on. They were both Black. The story is about the second victim, Duwayne Brooks, who survived the attack. Without providing background or context for the murder, the article began with a very brief synopsis of the crime.

He saw his best friend knifed by a gang of white racists. He was helpless as his soulmate slowly bled to death. He narrowly escaped the same fate himself.” (Honingsbaum, 1999, p. 11)

The researchers would query the report and discuss with others such questions as the following: Did the White racists just decide to attack this guy? What provoked the incident? The picture that we are given is of two helpless, innocent Black men who were attacked for no other reason than the color of their skin. This could be the case, but we are not given that information. Readers might not feel the victim was as deserving if he in some way provoked the fight.

The last article we provide to illustrate what researchers discovered about the implicit hierarchy of victims in news reports was a plea for the attention of victims of hate crimes. The article appeared in The Guardian (Bowley, 1999). The author argued that these victims deserve more attention because of “the
rash of violence against Blacks, Jews and gays.” He also claimed that these groups were more deserving because they were vulnerable, and studies show that the victims of hate crimes suffered more emotional trauma than victims of comparable crimes. The author sounds indignant when claiming that “wall to wall coverage of the Kosovo crisis, GM food, and Northern Ireland have pushed them not just down but entirely off the agenda.”

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The interactive process of TQDA demonstrated that there are notable differences in use of fear and victim between cultures. The research team documented how the terms fear and victim were used in several different ways to discuss several concepts and ideas. Through this multiple usage, the terms have come to represent different meanings. Often, these meanings and usage vary based on who is using the terms and in what context. Further theoretical sampling to find contrasting examples as well as analytic memos indicates that these contexts often vary by region, culture, and the group using them. The process of TQDA is reflected in a brief discussion of two of these: The political aftermath of the breakup of the former Soviet Union and certain usage of fear and victim in the Israeli press.

An implied weighting or scale to judge victimization is apparent in the establishment of a hierarchy of victims. As noted above, such a scale suggests that some cases are more deserving of the title of victim than others. Several of the articles that appeared within the American press reflected this idea and, in addition, questioned who was a more deserving victim. The articles also questioned if one was really a victim at all and whether the culture of victimization had gone too far. Perhaps the best support for the idea that the culture of victimization has gone too far in the United States and that there are too many victims is the fact that many of the U.S. news articles had to define what type of victim was being examined in the report.

Unlike the American-based articles, the protocols based on Soviet Union and Russian journalism, (as well as the U.S.-based The Jerusalem Post) did not highlight the different type of victims, nor did they question the status of anyone as a victim. The use of the terms fear and victim were used by the former Soviet Union government and the current Russian government as political tools. Our interpretation was that these terms were used in certain ways to manipulate the public, based on their former experience, and to help the government maintain its current control.

Similar to the articles based on Russian and Soviet journalism, the Israeli articles do not discuss a culture or proliferation of victimization. Nor do they discuss a hierarchy among victims. Rather, the articles state who the victim is, what they are a victim of, and how they became a victim. However, like some
an authoritarian regime, a police state, unless they reelect Yeltsin. They can only save themselves by first saving their president.

**SHIELDING VICTIMS**

Our analyses of news reports featuring fear and victim helped us explore various scenarios in which actions taken and not taken can be used to contextualize the frameworks that help connect victim to certain events. The creative use of the constant comparative method employed by the seminar throughout this work was very apparent in explorations of the term *shield* and the implied human agency that should have been exercised at a time prior to some event. For example, in an article about a garbage/recycling company, one comment was about how reform would only be “a protective shield for an industry that does not want to police itself and does not feel a responsibility to answer to its victims or the public.” The researcher then recalled that the word *shield* came up in the article about previous sexual pasts of rape victims. In Indiana, there was a shield rule that is supposed to protect victims in court but was overturned in the Supreme Court. Another article claimed that Indiana doctors were protected (shielded) by laws that protected them from medical malpractice suits. Discussion contributed to the creative insight that one way to define victim is those persons who need to be shielded or protected from something.

Further analyses of these materials suggested that the context of the action as communicated to the audience about the role of failure by some external (or potential) controller or protector produces newsworthy victims as people whom audiences should pity because of a failure in shielding them from a situation, person, or incident beyond their control. As Cerulo (1998) notes, contextualizing news accounts helps define the situation more totally, not just from the perspective of the victim or the victimizer but by opening up a field of action to the reader. Indeed, when reports are done well, we get a sense of the identity of the people involved and their perspective on things. Thus, as already noted in regard to both Israel and the former Soviet Union, our preliminary findings suggest that journalists are more likely to refer to survivors rather than victims. For example, an article about the former Soviet Union focuses on a woman who, upon being forced to flee her home by hostile forces, nevertheless disavows being fearful and defined her situation by stating, “No, I was not just afraid, because I knew that all this would happen.

But this is not fear. This is not fear. Ones who are afraid now are the ones who stayed behind” (Federal Information Systems Corporation, Official Kremlin Int’l News Broadcast, January 24, 1990).
VICTIM AND BLAME

The reflexive nature of the TQDA process and the providing of a theoretical sample for testing emergent hypotheses can be illustrated with victim and blame. The TQDA approach of our seminar suggested that victim statuses were related to audience’s awareness of fear and blameworthy circumstances. This is the basis on which deserving and nondeserving or at least less deserving victims turn. This important question was clarified by examining hundreds of qualitative protocols, reflecting on news reports in the course information base, and reviewing analytic memos. The suggestion is that victim, fear, and a deserving victim create a dynamic that allows the audience to identify with the victim and then separate themselves from the victim, whereas fear is the glue that drives the dynamic in a circular manner.

As the seminar reflected on data and discussions, it became more apparent that both the standpoint of the writer and the role of the audience have important implications for justice. If the writer and the audience are both strongly influenced by social norms and cultural stereotypes, can true, impartial justice outside of these norms and stereotypes occur in the media or in society at large? Furthermore, if fear and victim are generalized to be applied to the masses, as several of the analyses would suggest, what does this tell us about justice? Does an act have to affect a large group or several people to be defined as unjust? If not, then why generalize fear and victim?

These questions and others prompted an examination of the way blame is explicitly and implicitly tied to what is feared and what is capable of victim status. We draw on our comparative examination of news reports about fear and victim in the former Soviet Union and resistance to Indian gaming on several Arizona reservations.

The exploratory research provided insights into three key considerations for uncovering how fear, victim, and blame have become part of the discourse for Indian gaming: (a) how fear is manifested, (b) who assesses blame, and (c) the motives for assessing blame. In general, each article selected for analysis indicated that blame most often was assessed by authority figures—primarily governmental officials, forces of law and order, and the media—as a means of providing comfort and reassurance to the public about real or perceived fears. Blame routinely provided a sense of closure either for groups or individuals considered to have been victims or potential victims of fear-inducing events. Assessing blame also provided a perception that justice had been served.

A key aspect of TQDA is constant interaction between researchers who can share common information sources to answer emerging questions in their own project, which in turn become part of the information base for other researchers to use. This process led researchers to discover that blame sometimes is used to transfer fear from victims to others. Frequently, blame is assessed to ease wholesale societal fears. And in still other instances, blame is
assessed as a means to justify revenge either by victims of crime or by self-described potential victims of crime.

Several reports across cultures and topics indicate that authorities can mitigate fear by claiming to have narrowed blame and thereby to have eliminated diverse potential suspects or sources of danger. Thus, when it comes to fear and victimization, it is newsworthy to be specific even if wrong. That was the case in a story in the *Jerusalem Post* about a serial rapist lurking in Tel Aviv: “Since the last two rapes were made public, women have barraged the [Rape Crisis Center] with calls,” the newspaper reported. A staff member at the center said, “People are scared and worried, since this has hit too close to home” (“Tel Aviv women,” 1998).

Although the culprit remained at large, the newspaper, through the authorities, attempted to calm the fearful public by reporting two key facts: that police believed that at least two of the rapes were carried out by the same person and that several of the victims were tourists. The message to the Israeli public was that foreign women were more likely to be attacked. Local women and their families still might have reason to fear, but their fear should be lessened.

We have seen that victim and fear contribute to stability of political systems, particularly to help detract some attention from the sources behind both the current and historical news reports. There was a lot at stake for the world when the Soviet Union changed and for the way in which the change was accounted for in press reports. Victims and victimizers also reflect the high stakes involved with Indian gaming and casinos on many U.S. Indian reservations, including those in Arizona. Analysis of news reports and scholarly accounts suggests that the current debate about gambling on reservations is but another chapter in a long history of struggle over sovereignty between tribes. Tracking the use of the words *fear* and *victim* across numerous newspaper articles indicates the following:

1. An increase in Indian gaming would result in an increase in crime off the reservations.
2. Indian gaming is “bad” public policy because it will harm children and families.
3. The state legislature has difficulty with the emotional aspects associated with Indian gaming.
4. Increased Indian gaming will lead to an increase in the desire for more legalized gaming in the state.
5. Increased Indian gaming will attract organized crime, and there will be more theft, extortion, and drug problems.
6. Indian tribes will become victims of the state if they are given control by the federal government to regulate Indian gaming because they will lose their sovereignty rights.
CONCLUSION

A basic theme in this article is that new research materials may require new methods and approaches. Whereas our study of news accounts of fear and victim illustrates some of the contours of an emerging discourse of fear, the main emphasis has been on the ways in which researchers worked with TQDA to discover some of these connections. We have addressed how TQDA operate in one research project. The availability of massive information on one hand, and interactive Web-based communication formats on the other hand, can be combined as part of a team research project to provide useful information but, more important, raises intriguing questions. Methodically, TQDA is but another version of a dynamic form of triangulation, its application extends beyond the regular classroom: This approach makes it possible to conduct a seminar and intensive team research projects even if people cannot meet face to face. Substantively, an approach such as can take us well beyond more static approaches to cultural and discourse analysis. The constant comparative method may be employed in a variety of creative ways.

Our seminar affirmed what decades of research has documented: Media attempt to elicit emotion, whether it be anger, pity, sorrow, fear, or compassion, to engage the reader to take the time to read or view what is being presented. What we illuminated through TQDA is that explosive terms such as fear and victim have become joined in contexts already familiar to audiences. Numerous analyses in our seminar mentioned the production of an emotional response when discussing the role of audience. But it is the writer who anticipates and fits the proper frame around the report to elicit a predictable emotional response that in turn helps determine which victims are most deserving of victim status. Accordingly, the account must be presented in a way that the reader can determine a victim’s status based on his or her emotional response to the victim’s story, which in turn is based on the victim’s perceived involvement (or guilt) in his or her victimization. The more innocent and helpless a victim is, the worse the audience feels for him or her and more deserving the victim becomes of the victim status. Assumptions about fear and fearful are key here.

Our work with TQDA supports Fowler’s (1991) contention that audience values are tapped by certain language. In our case, the researchers were also audience members. Discussions and reflections on coverage helped clarify various meanings and interpretations of news reports. However, it is also apparent that values may travel with global language usage, particularly popular culture formats that structure common victims, processes, and problems (Altheide, 1995). Perhaps the most interesting aspect in the audience’s role in determining the status of a victim as deserving or nondeserving is that
cultural stereotypes are used to determine how a victim will be portrayed by the writer and perceived by the audience. These points became more salient as researchers pursuing news reports from various countries would compare and contrast the fit of certain concepts from one case to the next, often pointing to different cultural meanings.

These different meanings have important implications for social justice. Furthermore, this implies that widely held cultural stereotypes or social norms, regardless of whether they are correct, help determine victim status. If these stereotypes and norms are based on outdated and sexist social norms, many people (both men and women) who have been victimized may not be considered victims by the public at large and, more problematically, by the justice system. For example, if widely held social beliefs state that men cannot be raped, then a man who is raped while in prison may not be considered a victim of rape. Due to this lack of victim status, the victim in question may be denied assistance by rape crisis centers and recourse through the criminal justice system.

Our TQDA project demonstrates that the issues about deserving victims and hierarchy of victims are analytical views to approach a complex topic. Our study is one reflection of a growing awareness among social scientists that fear and dread are celebrated in public life and social policy (Best, 1990; Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Glassner, 1999). Seldom do people focus on such questions as part of their day-to-day activities. One exception is the recent attempt by artists to select 100 of 6,000 photos of people who were killed by the Khmer Rouge for a display at the New York Museum of Modern Art. From whatever vantage point an artist sees things, the task was similar to that of a journalist or anyone else dealing with finite meanings to capture pain of horrific proportions: Who was the best victim? Who would make the cut? The point is, they did it, criteria were used, narratives were realized, points were made. Our point is that this is emotional work, seldom done with such avowed pain and discomfort; rather, selecting appropriate people as victims implicating fear goes on routinely. As one of our researchers reminded us,

An interesting thing is happening to me internally concerning our fear and victim project which is important to document. I am becoming removed from victims’ suffering, as I am trying to collect their stories as data. I was disturbed that one of my first thoughts after reading this story was, “Oh, that will help me understand fear and victim better.” Usually this sort of story would elicit more empathy from me. The empathy is still there, but it is secondary to data collection. I am an instrument for collecting this data (along with my classmates), and I wonder how this is affecting what we are gathering. What are its consequences?

Indeed.
REFERENCES


David L. Altheide is Regent’s Professor and Interim Director in the School of Justice Studies at Arizona State University, where his teaching repertoire includes qualitative research methods and justice and the media. His work has focused on the role of mass media and information technology for social control. Two recent theoretical and methodological statements on the relevance of the mass media for sociological analysis are *An Ecology of Communication: Cultural Formats of Control* (Aldine, 1995) and *Qualitative Media Analysis* (Sage, 1996). He is completing a book on the organization and social impact of news media emphasis on fear as entertainment.

Barbara Gray, Roy Janisch, Lindsey Korbin, Ray Maratea, and Debra Neil are graduate students in the School of Justice Studies; Joseph Reaves is a graduate student in education; and Felicia Van Deman is a graduate student in communication, all at Arizona State University.