

# **Exit Stage Left: A Dramaturgical Analysis of Media Accounts of Executions in America**

**By**

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Despite the fact that anthropologists have long noted that rituals associated with death are central to understanding a culture's worldview, studies of capital punishment have not examined its ritualistic elements. The purpose of this paper is to address this shortcoming by examining news media portrayals of capital cases as emergent ritual dramas of death. We used narrative and content analysis methods to examine 524 newspaper reports of 100 executions that occurred between January 1, 1990 and April 30, 2005. We sought to determine the types of information reported, the structure of the reports, and their functionality in the dramaturgy of executions. We conclude with a discussion of the implications for future research suggested by our analysis.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Executions are the final act in a series of dramatic events. The public drama begins with the discovery of a crime, continues through the investigation, trial, and appeals, and eventually culminates in the death of the condemned. Historically, the final act was conducted in public with great fanfare. Prior to the 1800s, punishment ceased being a spectacle and became hidden (Foucault, 1979). Lofland (1975) explored the shift from public to concealed executions. He employed dramaturgical analysis to compare and contrast the historical process of capital punishment to that of modern closed executions. He argued that the historical open dramaturgics of executions were an ideal type (Weber, 1968), and were in stark contrast to the closed dramaturgics of modern executions.

Foucault (1979) described the shift from open to closed punishment in terms of benefits to the state. He argued that punishment became an abstract idea when it was removed from common perception. Essentially, in removing punishment from public view, the state has made it easier for members of society to allow executions to continue. Foucault (1979) argued that during public tortures and executions, the audience tended to feel sympathetic toward the condemned. While this is contrary to contemporary belief, it is an important idea because it was anathema to the historical and contemporary goals of the state. It is necessary that the state create and maintain an 'us versus them' dichotomy. This makes it easier to punish and facilitates the

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public's acceptance of punishment. Maintaining trials, imprisonment, and executions as abstract ideas reserved for the worst offenders enables the state to perpetuate this dichotomy.

Second, when justice is hidden it "no longer takes public responsibility for the violence that is bound up with its practice" (Foucault, 1979, p. 9). Removing the presence of an audience from execution allows the state to make the claim that it is not proud of its actions and remove itself from the violence it inflicts. The process of capital punishment removes full responsibility from all actors except the condemned. The system is designed to insulate each actor from accepting responsibility for the death of the condemned. Judges simply affirm the decisions of juries, appellate courts just protect the constitution, prison workers are just doing their jobs, and governors are merely upholding the law. The system of capital punishment is, in many ways, a system of justifications and rationalizations. A condemned man can be executed and society believes that only he is to blame. The criminal is a paradox. As Foucault (1979) argued, the condemned, as a member of a society, agreed to its laws. In breaking the law he becomes an enemy, but is also participating in his own punishment.

While the state may not be proud of its violent forms of punishment, it is necessary for members of society to know about them. Crime is an attack on both the state and society. Punishment, therefore, is an attempt to avenge the contempt the defendant showed for state authority and society. Foucault (1979:57-58) argued that in a public execution the main character was the audience. Executions that occurred in private were historically reserved for privileged members of society and despite their subsequent sympathy; the public was often outraged when the condemned was removed from view prior to death. Secret executions do not deter, do not instill fear, and do not avenge the state. The public must be aware of an execution if it is to have the desired effect. We argue that the audience is still the most important character in the current system of punishment and that executions are still spectacles. The news media has replaced the scaffold and the crowd of observers is larger than ever, just hidden from view.

Lofland (1975) focused on the shift from open to concealed dramaturgics in executions. He reviewed eleven aspects of executions: the death wait, death confinement, execution time, death trip, death place, death witnesses, executioners, features of the condemned, technique of death, corpse disposal, and death announcement (Lofland, 1975, p. 273-274). He argued that the state executions continue because of "how they are done and not merely because they are done" (p. 294). The dramaturgy of executions likely builds public support for the process. We build upon Lofland's work by focusing on the "death announcements" to determine if their content provides an overview of the dramaturgy of executions. Specifically, we used narrative and content analysis methods to examine 524 newspaper reports of 100 executions that occurred between January 1, 1990 and April 30, 2005. We sought to determine the types of information reported, the structure of the reports, and their functionality in the dramaturgy of executions.

## **DRAMATURGY AND MEDIA CONSTRUCTIONS**

This effort represents the convergence of two areas of media research, that of dramaturgy and social constructionism. Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* served as the foundation for Lofland's (1975) dramaturgical comparison of historical and contemporary state executions. He argued that "how people do things, the style in which they do things, is virtually as important as what they do, the substance of their actions" (Lofland, 1975, p293) Goffman emphasized a qualitative analysis of human interaction. He provided a detailed description of processes and meanings in routine interaction. His dramaturgical approach focused on the mode of presentation employed by the actor and the production of meaning in broader social contexts. Goffman viewed interaction as a performance and argued that each performance is shaped by the interplay between actors, environments, and audiences. According to Goffman (1959), individuals construct their performances to provide others with impressions that are suitable to actors' desired goals. All interaction, therefore, involves attempts to establish social identities.

Interaction occurs between and among individuals as well as groups. Developments in media and technology have changed the nature of interaction and have enabled one person to interact with many members of a society simultaneously. For example, a news conference broadcast by several media outlets is an interaction between the speaker and a wide audience. The speaker carefully considers the audience prior to actually presenting the information. This consideration affects everything from the language used to the information provided. It is a large-scale effort to impact the audience's collective opinion of the speaker and the speaker's message. The idea that interaction can be large scale and involve different audiences and environments is important. It provides a micro approach to macro level issues. Due to these factors, Goffman's dramaturgical approach is an interesting perspective from which to analyze newspaper accounts of executions.

Relatively few studies have examined news media portrayals of executions. Those that have tended to rely on single case studies or small sample sizes, while examining particular social constructions of executions. Studies that have used more representative sampling techniques have tended to focus on measurable characteristics of news coverage, including the extent of news coverage of executions, while ignoring the social construction evidenced in the content of the media accounts. This study seeks to address this shortcoming in the literature by conducting an analysis of a relatively large and representative sample of newspaper reports of executions carried out between 1990 and 2005. We have utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to fully understand the content of the reports.

In addition to Goffman's dramaturgical approach, we also situate our analysis in the social construction of social problems literature. Over the last 30 years, social constructionist perspectives have become quite prominent. Constructionist analyses have given considerable attention to the mass media as well as crime and criminal justice problems. According to Spector and Kitsuse (1987, 77), social problems are "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions." The constructionist perspective focuses on how people identify, define, and disseminate social

problems. As Holstein and Miller (1997, xii) assert: “not only must we ask how social problems come to be defined, but we must also look into the rhetoric associated with the factual assertions that are used to bolster claims about social conditions. In essence, the constructionist approach asks us to stop taking claims about reality for granted and start looking closely at how the ‘facts’

of social reality are ‘argued,’ ‘asserted,’ and ‘resisted’ – in general, how they are interpretively constructed in the course of everyday life.”

Because of its central role in communicating information about social problems, the mass media have received considerable analytical attention. In his study of mass media accounts of threatened children, Best (1989) distinguishes between primary and secondary claims making. Primary claims-makers are activists, experts, or victims who seek greater public awareness of some condition and often advocate changes in changed or new social policies. Primary claims-makers compete in a social problems market place and typically attempt to attract media attention (Best 1989; Benford and Hunt 2003).

The media do not merely reproduce the accounts offered by primary claims-makers. Rather, analyses of the production of news demonstrate that news stories are shaped by informal conventions and structural constraints (e.g., Epstein 1973; Molotch and Lester 1974; Altheide 1976; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Iyengar 1991; Cook 1998; Croteau and Hoynes 2000, 2001; Starr 2004). Therefore, Best (1989) identifies the news media as well as a variety of entertainment media as secondary claims-makers. Rather than merely transmitting claims made by primary claims-makers, the media “translate and transform” claims (Best 1989, 259). The presence of primary claims-makers, however, is also important. As early as 1973, Sigal (1973) found that government officials accounted for half of the sources in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. The media’s dependence on official sources has continued unabated since that time and has been consistently documented by researchers. For example, Chermak (1995a) found that law enforcement and court officials constituted more than half of all sources in stories about crime.

While studies of media constructions of problems have encompassed a wide range of topics, media portrayals of crime and the criminal justice system have received abundant attention. Quinney’s (1970) “social reality of crime” developed a Marxian perspective of how society’s knowledge and understanding of crime are socially produced and disseminated. Surette (1992) demonstrates the central importance of the mass media in socially constructing crime and criminal justice knowledge. Scholars have noted that media presentations of crime and criminal justice are often distorted because the media focuses on violent, relatively rare crimes, and it distorts the true extent of crime (Surette, 1992; Chermak, 1998; Potter and Kappler 1998; Altheide 2002; Kappler and Potter 2005). In examining how citizens use media reports to talk about and understand crime, Sasson (1995) argues that even though media claims may be distorted, individuals can make sense of the information in a myriad of ways, some of which transcend media distortions. Sasson’s (1995) analysis of the reception and interpretation of media frames of crime and criminal justice can be summed up as follows: “A cultural level

analysis tells us that our political world is framed, that reported events are pre-organized, and do not come to us in raw form. But we are active processors and however encoded our received reality, we may decode it in different ways” (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson, 1992, p. 384). From this view, media claims about crime and criminal justice problems are sufficiently ambivalent, despite distortions stemming from personal bias, conventional practices, and structural constraints. Attempts to interpret how those claims are received and understood by the public is not straightforward.

While analyses of the media and crime are relatively common, studies of media claims about executions are not. While studies may also examine media content for the purpose of validating, or not, perceptions about media coverage, research on the news media’s reporting of executions tends to fall into two primary categories. First, research attempts to examine whether news reports of executions serve as a deterrent to homicides or actually produces a brutalization effect that increases homicides. For example, exploring the “argument that the deterrent effect of criminal law is dependent on communication to the public of the threat and application of sanctions,” Bailey (1990, 628) studied monthly homicide rates and television publicity of executions from 1976 through 1987 (see also Bailey 1991). The results of Bailey’s (1990, 628) study did not “support either the deterrence argument, which contends that capital punishment reduces killings, or the brutalization argument, which contends that capital punishment promotes killings.” Bailey and Peterson (1994) likewise found no evidence to suggest that police killings were reduced with greater coverage of executions. However, modest support for brutalization theory was found in Stack’s (1994) study of publicized executions in Georgia from 1950-1965, suggesting that publicized executions were associated with increased homicide rates. Despite the earlier study that found no brutalization effect, Bailey’s (1998) later study suggests a link between news coverage and a brutalization effect in Oklahoma.

The second general focus of research on media reports of executions explores the effect of news coverage on public opinion. For example, Fan, Keltner, and Wyatt (2002, 429) found that the “change in death penalty support” from the 1970s until the early 1990s “was in fact due to the press turning a spotlight on the condemnation of innocent persons.” Lipshultz, and Hilt (1999) analyzed the effect of four local television station’s coverage of three Nebraska executions in the 1990s had on public opinion. Using data derived from off-air recordings of the stations’ late newscasts, recordings of the special coverage, and content analysis of visual images portrayed, Lipshultz and Hilt (1999) found reporting was influenced by journalistic routines and reporters awareness of public support for the death penalty.

In a study of 1994 television news reports on execution by three stations in the Philadelphia/Wilmington, Delaware market, Yanichi (1997) found that the two Delaware-based stations provided more balanced coverage than the much larger Philadelphia station, which was governed more by an “action news” format. In a study with a larger sample of stories, Hochstetler (2001) analyzed newspaper stories of executions performed in the United States from January 1977 through February 1999. Data were derived from 449 executions published in the 50 largest newspapers and from the Death Penalty Information Center. Hochstetler (2001, p.

1) demonstrated that the “executions of offenders who killed the most people received the greatest coverage, as did sensational and unusually harmful crimes.” Conducting a systematic content analysis of 29 cases involving the exonerations of wrongful capital punishment convictions, Miller (2006) demonstrated how media constructions function to avert a legitimization crisis for the criminal justice system.

This review of the literature suggests that while the media construction of crime has received considerable analytical attention, the media construction of executions has received scant attention. Those studies that have examined media portrayals of executions have tended to be based on case studies, small sample sizes, or exceptional cases, which limits their generalizability. Studies with more representative samples, such as Hochstetler (2001) focus on the structure of the news reports (e.g., number of words per case or number of stories per case) and do not explore the rhetorical presentations in the news stories. Our study addresses these limitations by examining data derived from a representative sample of executions and providing analysis of the structure of the news reports as well as the rhetorical content of the news stories.

## DATA AND METHODS

To address limitations in the literature, we sought to generate a representative sample of news stories from executions in the post-*Furman* era. Between Gary Gilmore on January 17, 1977 and Mario Centobie on April 28, 2005, there have been 962 executions in the United States (Death Penalty Information Center, 2005). We sought to gather a representative sample of these cases, but wanted to focus on “typical” cases and avoided executions that contained some extraordinary element. The purpose of this article is to examine the commonalities among generic reports of executions. Therefore, we established selection criteria that eliminated executions of: volunteers, those under federal jurisdiction, females, those who suffered from mental retardation, juveniles, foreign nationals, and cases where whites were executed for crimes against blacks. This decision was made in an effort to avoid cases that may be “outliers.” Essentially, our goal is to determine how the media report executions. When a female or mentally retarded individual is executed it is no longer merely a report of an execution. It becomes a review of the social policy issue. We believe this is an important distinction.

To facilitate data collection, we elected to collect news stories using Newsbank’s Access World News Internet archives (2005). This was attractive because Newsbank provides access to almost 500 US newspapers from all regions of the country. Since the online, searchable archives of many newspapers begin in the 1990s, we also limited our sample to executions occurring 1990 through 2004. This yielded a population of 763 executions from which to sample. We then

assigned numbers ranging from 1 to 763 to these cases. Using a list of random numbers, we assembled a final sample of 100 executions from 21 states.<sup>1</sup>

As indicated in Table 1, our final sample is comparable to the 763 cases from which it was drawn. Our sample mean age (42.3) is slightly higher than the population of cases, 41.2. The percent of executed who were white is nearly identical for the population and sample – 55.7% and 55% respectively. The percent of multiple victims is slightly higher for the population, 21.7% of cases in the population involved multiple victims while 20% of the sample did. Victim race was almost identical, with 80% of cases in the sample involving white victims compared to 79.2% in the population. Additionally, 89.5% of the population and 91% of the sample involved lethal injection. The one major difference between our sample and the population was geography. Southern states were slightly underrepresented, with 70% of the sample and 80% of the population originating in southern states. Overall, the selected sample characteristics suggest that it is highly comparable to the population from which it was drawn.

**Table 1: Comparison of Population and Sample of Executions on Selected Characteristics**

Selected Characteristics	Population n=763	Sample n=100
Mean Age of Executed	41.2	42.3
Percent of Executed who were White	55.7	55
Percent 2 or more Victims	21.7	20
Percent with only White Victims	79.2	80
Percent South	80.3	70
Percent Lethal Injection	89.5	91

For each execution, we searched newspapers that were available through Newsbank's archive. Whenever possible, we chose newspapers from different regions of the state and always searched the same newspapers when a state was represented by multiple cases. When Newsbank offered only three newspapers in a particular state, we searched all three. When numerous papers were available we chose three papers with wide readerships in different regions of the state.

<sup>1</sup>Texas, Virginia, Oklahoma, Missouri, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, California, Illinois, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Delaware, Washington, Arizona, and Utah.

After selecting the newspapers, we searched for the executed's name on the day of and two days after the execution. For example, if an execution was performed on January 1 we search January 1, 2, and 3. All letters to editors and duplicate stories were eliminated (e.g., the exact same story appearing in a morning and an evening edition of a newspaper was considered just one story). We collected a total of 524 stories. It should be noted that these stories were not completely independent. Large portions of stories are sometimes modified and reproduced in and across newspapers. Additionally, 138 articles were reports of executions to be performed on that date. We decided to include these reports in the analysis. Table 2 identifies story prompt and the characteristics that were present in the reports. The analysis provided herein, however, is a review of all the articles.

Using the information from the Death Penalty Information Center (2005), we coded each story for the known objective facts of the case: date of the execution, name of the executed, age of the executed, race of the executed, number of victims in the crime for which the condemned were executed, the race of the victims, the state in which the execution took place, and the method of execution (e.g., electrocution, lethal injection, etc.).

We subjected the stories to content analysis and qualitative narrative analysis. The content analysis focused on the manifest elements of the text. Two coders reviewed the data. We sought to assure reproducibility and consistency (Weber, 1990) in coding by both coding each article. Any disagreement was discussed until consensus was reached.

**Table 2: Characteristics of the Sample of Newspapers Stories (N=524)**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Pre-Execution</b>	<b>Post-Execution</b>	<b>Percent of all Stories</b>
Summary of the Crime	72 (99)	63 (274)	65 (373)
Positive Status of the Victim(s)	47 (65)	48 (208)	48 (273)
Negative Reference about the Condemned	25 (35)	26 (114)	26 (149)
Describe Condemned's Criminal History	27 (37)	35 (150)	33 (187)
Summary of Legal Process/History of Case	80 (111)	58 (252)	63 (363)
Statement by Authorities	65 (89)	59 (257)	60 (346)
Statement by Defense	19 (26)	9 (41)	12 (67)
Statement by Condemned's Family/Friends	5 (7)	6 (26)	6 (33)
Statement by Victim's Family/Friends	17 (24)	29 (126)	26 (150)
Condemned Statement of Guilt	10 (14)	19 (83)	17 (97)
Condemned Statement of			

Not Guilty	17 (23)	21 (91)	20 (114)
Religious Statement by			
Condemned	5 (7)	21 (90)	17 (97)
Religious Statement by			
Victim's Family	2 (3)	5 (24)	5 (27)
Condemned's Final Hours	21 (29)	29 (125)	27 (154)
Details of the Execution Scene	NA	32 (140)	24 (140)
Condemned Final Statement	NA	66 (288)	50 (288)
Condemned Defiant at Execution	NA	5 (22)	4 (22)
Described Death of Condemned	NA	30 (130)	23 (130)
Details of Final Meal	22 (30)	26 (114)	25 (144)
Mention Witness to Execution	10 (14)	49 (214)	40 (228)
Provide Time of Death	NA	68 (294)	51 (294)
Mention Next or			
Previous Execution	34 (47)	58 (251)	52 (298)
Protest of the Execution	23 (31)	25 (108)	24 (139)
Execution or Death Penalty			
an Injustice	4 (6)	7 (30)	6 (36)
Execution as Closure	4 (5)	8 (36)	7 (41)
Statement of Justice by			
Victim's Family/Friends	8 (11)	11 (50)	11 (61)
<u>Statement of Justice by Other Party</u>	<u>5 (7)</u>	<u>12 (53)</u>	<u>10 (60)</u>

We subjected the stories to content analysis and qualitative narrative analysis. The content analysis focused on the manifest elements of the text. Two coders reviewed the data. We sought to assure reproducibility and consistency (Weber, 1990) in coding by both coding each article. Any disagreement was discussed until consensus was reached.

This involved coding each story for details of the execution which included: details of the condemned man's final hours, recapitulations of the crime and events leading to the execution, identification of protests associated with the execution. We examined the articles for mentions of positive or sympathetic status of the victims (e.g., police, correctional officers, elderly, disabled, children, etc.), as well as negative references to the executed, including: a deficient human being, evil, an animal/monster, a diseased being, an inanimate object, a waste product, or a non-person under the law. We also coded for descriptions of the condemned's criminal history.

This portion of the analysis also involved counts of sources and the types of statements attributed to them and we counted instances of various behaviors and statements attributed to the condemned. These included professions of innocence (innocence of the crime completely or not guilty of a crime that warrants execution), confessions of guilt, displays of defiance, last words, and statements referring to religious faith. Similarly, we coded for statements by the victims'

families referring to religious faith, statements made about justice being done or closure, and other generic statements by the victims' families or friends. Finally, the articles were coded for statements about the injustice of the death penalty, generic statements by the executed's family or friends, statements made by authorities (e.g., wardens, prosecutors, governors, official spokespersons, etc.), and statements made by defense attorneys.

Each article was also subjected to qualitative narrative analysis. This involved the review of the articles to connect the text to context, form, and content. Narrative analysis involves the review of a "story" told by an individual article and by a series of reports, rather than just counting words used to tell the story or sources that tell the story. Narrative analysis involves reviewing how the story is storied and focuses on the sequencing of events, scripts, and the illumination of patterns of themes (Labov, 1997). This portion of the analysis was achieved through analytic memo writing and analytic comparison. Each article was read as a stand-alone report. We noted each frame present in the article in the order they appeared. We then read the articles in conjunction with the other reports appearing on the same day in the same newspaper, and again, we made notes about the frames that appeared in this larger narrative. Once we had analyzed each article in this way, we reviewed the notes looking for commonalities.

Capital cases involve a script, or an expected sequence of events: crime, arrest, trial, conviction, death sentence, appeals and execution. This analysis focused on the newspapers' presentations of the grand finales in these cases. Bruner (1990) argues that the use of narrative methods involve an evaluative element that allows the researcher to reveal the narrator's point of view. It also, however, allows researchers to connect the elements of one story to that of another. By utilizing narrative analysis, we were able to review all the reports in a single newspaper on a single day in an effort to see the overall "story" being told by the newspaper. Doing so adds an evaluative element that is lost when reviewing each article as an independent entity.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS**

The content analysis focused on the an examination of sources, the types of statements attributed to these sources, the number of words per article, and the impact of demographic information on the number of articles per case. Essentially, this effort entailed an analysis of who said what and how much space the newspapers devoted to the executions. The executions in our sample had a mean of 5.5 stories per case, with a median of 5. We anticipated that this number would be small, because we analyzed "typical" executions. Defendant race had little effect on the mean articles per execution. Executions of minority defendants received slightly more coverage; these cases averaged 5.7 articles per case while those of whites averaged 5.3. This was not statistically significant at alpha .05. Executions for crimes against white victims, however, received more attention than those involving African-American victims. Specifically, cases involving white victims averaged 5.6 articles while those with African-American victims had a mean of 4.8. This was statistically significant at alpha .05.

Three factors had the largest impact on the number of reports. First, geography was a factor that influenced the coverage of an execution. Executions in non-southern states averaged 6.5 reports while those in southern states averaged 5.1. This is likely due to the fact that executions are more common in the south. Second, and similar to Duwe's (2000) discussion of the media's focus on "high-amplitude homicides," the number of victims impacted the amount of coverage an execution received. Cases with multiple victims averaged 7 reports while those with a single victim averaged 5. This was statistically significant at alpha .05. Finally, the presence of some form of protest increased the number of reports. Executions that involved reports of collective protests averaged 6.2 articles per case while those without protest averaged 4.7. This was statistically significant at alpha .05. Mentions of collective protests primarily involved "death penalty protesters gathered in a field near the prison about an hour before the execution to show their opposition to capital punishment" (Petkofsky, 1999) or "protesters signed a petition, lit candles, prayed and marched in a circle outside the prison" (Corbin, 2005). Some were atypical. For example the execution of Terry Sims included "a video crew sent by filmmaker Michael Moore for his television show, *The Awful Truth*. An actor dressed in a Hawaiian shirt grilled sausages on a portable grill and passed out popcorn. He called his antics a tailgate party" (Clark, 2000). Letter writing and petition campaigns were also commonly mentioned. The only atypical protest effort involved officials from Reggio Emilia, Italy who threatened to end their 15-year cultural exchange program with Ft. Worth, Texas over the execution David Goff in 2001 (Calaway, 2001).

In addition to the extent of coverage, we reviewed who spoke in the articles. The identification of sources was an important component of the analysis. We included direct and indirect quotes as instances of someone speaking. We found that 60% (n=345) of the stories contained statements attributed to the executed, and 50% (n=288) quoted the condemned's final statement. We found that 60% (n=346) of the reports contained statements by authorities (e.g., ubiquitous unidentified "authorities," prison officials, governors, district attorneys, law enforcement officers, etc.). Statements from authorities appeared far more often than statements from individuals who spoke officially for the condemned (e.g., defense attorneys, counselors, and other professionals). Defense statements were found in only 12% (n=67) of the stories. While not as extreme, a similar pattern was revealed by comparing the percentage of stories with statements made by the executed's and victim's family or friends. Statements attributed to family members of the condemned were present in only six percent (n=33) of the stories, while statements by the victim's family were present in 26% (n=150).

In addition to examining who spoke in the stories, we explored what was said. Defendant admissions of guilt were present in only 17% (n=97) of the stories, while 20% (n=114) contained denials of guilt by the condemned. Importantly, these "not guilty" statements were not always an exact protestation of innocence. Some defendants admitted participating in the crime for which they were executed, but these confessions were made in conjunction with statements that indicated the crime was not a death penalty offense or that there were extenuating circumstances, such as brain damage or temporary insanity, that reduced or eliminated their culpability.

Additionally, very few (4%) of the articles included descriptions of defiant statements or behavior attributed to the condemned at the time of execution.

Religious statements, while relatively rare, were far more likely to be attributed to the executed than to the victims' family. While 17% (n=97) included religious statements by defendants, only 5% (n=27) attributed religious statements to the victims' family or friends. Only 24% (n=139) of the stories mentioned the presence of protest during the execution, and only six percent (n=36) contained statements indicating that the execution or the death penalty was an "injustice." Statements of "justice" being served and closure were relatively absent from the articles. Only seven percent (n=41) contained statements that indicated the execution would bring "closure," and only 10% (n=61) contained statements of "justice" from the victims' families.

While statements of justice were relatively rare, descriptions of the positive status identifies attributed to the victims were not. While these were less common than we expected, 47% (n=273) of the articles described some positive status of the victim. These positive identifiers included references such as "good Samaritan," "volunteer," "off-duty police officer," "good person." Additionally, the victims were presented as being victimized by violence during the course of their positive, normative life experiences. This primarily involved being victimized during the course of their employment, upon returning home, or in a public location. For example, "Davis was kidnapped by armed intruders as she returned to her apartment" (Ward, 1999); "an off-duty sheriff's deputy who walked in on a drugstore robbery" was then killed (Word, 2000); and "Allen had run out of gas on the way home from a date" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2001).

We were also surprised by the fact that only 26% (n=149) attributed negative characteristics to the defendant. These negative characterizations included dehumanizing references such as a "monster" and "animal." Additionally, 32% (n=187) described the condemned's criminal history. While the execution of the defendant for the victim's death is automatically a dichotomous representation, the articles did not overtly present one as evil and one as good.

As indicated in Table 2, one factor revealed through the analysis was that 65% (n=373) of the stories included a summary of the details of the crime for which the defendants were executed. The crimes were not presented as typical homicides. Unlike the dynamics in most homicides, these cases involved perpetrators and victims who were quite different from one another, usually strangers. In a real sense, nearly all of the cases seemed to be high amplitude cases. Importantly, the details of the execution received far less space than the crimes. The two elements of the executions that were commonly reported were the times of death and the next or previous execution. The exact time of the defendant's death was reported in 51% (n=294) and the previous or next execution was reported in 52% (n=298). Only 24% (n=140) recapitulated the execution scene, which included mentions of gurneys, needles, room colors, etc. Similarly, only 23% (n=130) described the defendants' deaths, 25% (n=144) recounted the defendants'

final meals, and only 27% (n=154) provided details of the condemned's final hours. In essence, these reports did not appear to contain the macabre motive of providing a vicarious witnessing of capital punishment.

In sum, the descriptive characteristics of newspaper articles revealed an important finding. There is not a clear-cut, overt bias in the reporting of the execution. We anticipated that sourcing bias would be more obvious, as has been found in other types of crime stories research (Sigal, 1973; Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989; Chermak, 1995a; Chermak, 1995b; Surette, 1998). Statements by authorities were counterbalanced with statements by the condemned. While there are far fewer statements by the condemned's family or friends than statements by the victims' family or friends, both were relatively rare. The content analysis, or counts of manifest elements, did not reveal an overt bias inherent in these reports of executions. The reports were relatively devoid of manifest claims making. When viewed in their totality, and in conjunction with the all reports of a specific execution however, the results are very different.

### **THE DRAMATURGY OF EXECUTIONS**

The components identified by Lofland (1975) continue to be a part of the dramaturgy of executions. Our analysis of the "announcements" of executions has revealed that newspaper reports serve an important part in the finality of the event. These announcements serve as denouement. In drama, a denouement follows the climax and provides resolution. It is the final clarification of a dramatic plot. Denouement serves to unravel the plot and reveal the nature of the catastrophe. The stories overwhelmingly portrayed the crimes as senseless and the consequences for all involved as tragic. Denouement, in a subtle manner, provides the sense of "proper," albeit often tragic, closure or resolution to series of events linked in a story. Denouement solves the problem, and it ties up loose ends. The latent meanings associated with denouements are functionally equivalent to manifest statements that maintain that the execution brings closure. Importantly, this is not necessarily closure in the psychological sense, but rather an end to a long drama.

#### *Types of Articles*

Before describing the results of the narrative analysis, it is important to describe the two primary types of articles. First, the shortest of the stories functioned as a brief public epitaph, which reported the name of the executed, the time and method of execution, and some brief details of crime. Chermak (1995a) referred to these types of articles as "tertiary" stories, but these differed from typical tertiary articles due to their page placement. These short epitaphs often appeared on the front page of the main section or the state/regional section, rather than in a "regional," "state," or "local" briefs column on the inner pages of the newspaper. The following story about the execution of Noble Mays, reported in the *Houston Chronicle* on April 8, 1995 (page1), exemplifies a public epitaph:

A former oil field roughneck quietly went to his death early Thursday for the robbery and knife slaying of a Good Samaritan who had agreed to help with a stalled car. The

execution of Noble Mays, 41, came after a flurry of appeals to the US Supreme Court, including one just before midnight that delayed his punishment for more than 90 minutes.

Even this short epitaph made reference of the “Good Samaritan” status of the victim. This example of an epitaph is somewhat unusual in that it mentioned the positive employment status of the defendant. Sometimes epitaphs appeared as the only story in the newspaper. More typical, however, was an epitaph appearing in conjunction with longer, more detailed account. It is important to note that a majority of the short epitaphs appeared in the Texas newspapers. This is likely due to the frequency of executions in Texas and their related lack of newsworthiness.

The longer stories tended to be broader overviews that contained more information on the history of the case. These accounts were very similar to what Chermak (1995a) referred to as “primary stories.” They were rather high profile stories, often on the front page or the front page of the local section. They were more in-depth accounts that more fully addressed the frames present in the article. These longer articles served the narrative function of a denouement more clearly and were more common in our sample. Additionally, in cases that were particularly newsworthy, the papers often ran multiple articles on the same day, with each article containing a different element of denouement. Importantly, the use of narrative analysis allowed us to examine these groups of articles as one narrative.

### *Denouement*

The structure of the articles and their common elements suggest a subtle and latent pattern of claims-making associated with reports of executions. Essentially, we argue that a primary function of reports of executions is to report justice being served. The manner in which they report the final scene in a lengthy tragedy contains implicit claims. In answering the questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how, the articles function as denouement by moving back and forth between past and present. Due to the fact that the articles were all reporting executions, these reporters questions tended to be answered in a similar way. The defendants were the “who,” the execution was the “what,” and the time and date were the “when.” While the “why” of the executions was primarily the crime, it also sometimes involved the criminal history of the defendant, and/or the particularly sympathetic status of the victim. “Where” and “how” contained multiple components. “Where” was answered by both situating the location of the execution and informing the reader of “where” the crime occurred. Similarly, the question of “how” was answered by mentioning both the method of execution and some element of the legal process. This usually focused on failed appeals or clemency attempts. The coinciding answers to these ‘reporters’ questions’ could be explained by the fact that the articles were reporting similar situations. The similarities in the way they were storied, however, indicate that the implicit claims are more significant than mere coincidence. The reports, be they short epitaphs or lengthy overviews, shared five commonalities that led to this conclusion.

First, the stories almost always began by reporting that a defendant was executed. This element, which almost always served as the lead, often quite succinctly served to answer the “who,” “what,” “when,” and one element of the “how” question. For example, “Marlon Dwayne

Williams was executed by injection last night” (Green, 1999). In nine words the reporter informed the audience of the defendant’s name, the method of execution, and when it took place. Others also succinctly addressed the “why” of the execution by including a brief description of the crime. For example, “Martsay Bolder, who fatally stabbed a fellow inmate while serving a life sentence for another murder, was executed by lethal injection early today” (Fallstrom, 1993). Others failed to introduce the defendant in the opening statement, while some introduced both the victim and defendant in the opening statement. For example, Domingo Cantu was not named in the first statement that reported his execution: “A convicted burglar with a violent history was executed Thursday night” (Graczyk, 1999). While both the victim and defendant were introduced when “Brian Lee Cherrix was executed by injection last night for the 1994 capital murder of Tessa Van Hart in Chincoteague” (Green, 2004). These lead statements, or hooks, follow the rules of journalism. The reader need only read the first sentence of the article to have some understanding of what was being reported. While the executions were obviously newsworthy, and were clearly the event being reported, it was the placement of information in the stories that functioned as denouement.

The second commonality that is indicative of the reports as denouement is that they then moved backward in time to provide some details about the crime that led to the execution. Crime descriptions ranged between cursory, rather mild descriptions of violent events to extremely graphic narratives. The lengthier, more graphic accounts were more likely to be included in primary stories rather than the shorter epitaphs. Both types, however, almost always informed the reader of the manner of the victims’ deaths. The cursory descriptions tended to mention how the victim died without providing extensive illustrations about the gruesome nature of the injuries. For example, Cedric Ransom was executed “for robbing and fatally shooting a gun dealer, one of four slayings authorities linked him to during a 17-day spree in 1991” (*Houston Chronicle*, 2003). Tracy Hansen was executed “fifteen years after he killed state Trooper David Bruce Ladner by pumping one bullet in his shoulder and another in his back” (Gates, 2002). While Bryan Toles was put to death for “the 1993 shooting deaths of a 39-year-old man and his 15-year-old son” (Talley, 2003).

The lengthier accounts tended to be quite gruesome in their summaries of the victims’ deaths. These types of accounts, combined with the ways the articles presented the defendants’ as factually guilty, legitimized the punishment meted out. While these types of reports commonly presented the crimes as particularly heinous events, they differed in one distinct way. One group focused on the injuries to the victims while others also included details of the interaction between the victims and assailants during the crime.

The lack of focus on the interaction between the victims and assailants is exemplified in the following accounts. First, a report of William Andrews’ execution by the state of Utah focused on the torture forced upon the victims. Since Andrews’ accomplice was primarily responsible for the victims’ injuries, the description does not attribute the behavior to Andrews:

Andrews was condemned to death for his role in the April 1974 torture and murder of three people at an Ogden stereo shop. Five people were forced to drink caustic drain cleaner, then bound, gagged and shot. A woman was raped and a man had a ball point pen kicked into his ear. Two people survived (Hunt, 1992).

Second, a report of lone defendant James Reid's execution in Virginia focused on what he did to the victim:

“Reid hit Lester in the head with a can of condensed milk, dragged her into her bedroom, strangled her with an electrical cord, stabbed her 22 times in the chin, neck and chest and attempted to rob and rape her (Simmons, 2004).

The report of the execution of Roy Harich in Florida exemplifies the lengthier reports that provided not only detailed descriptions of the victims' injuries, but the interaction between the victims and assailant:

Court testimony showed that Harich was drinking heavily and smoking marijuana the night he picked up 18-year-old Carlene Kelly and a companion, Deborah Miller, then 17, as they were hitchhiking to the beach. The three drove around in his van smoking marijuana, then Harich took them to a wooded area where he was growing marijuana plants. There, he ordered them to disrobe, forced Kelly to perform oral sex, then told them to put on their clothes. He drove a short distance, then ordered them out and shot each of them in the head as they lay on the ground. Then he slashed their throats with a knife, killing Kelly. Miller survived, and crawled away, where she was picked up by a passing motorist. Investigators said she was holding her head on with her hands, and lived only because Harich's knife severed her trachea, leaving a hole through which she could breathe (Kennedy, 1991).

While similar in the fact that they provide graphic details on the injuries suffered by the victims, the account of the crime attributed to Harich offers much more detail on the interaction. Importantly, despite this difference, the focus on the heinous nature of the crimes function to justify the executions.

The third commonality of denouement was that the reports moved forward from the crime by mentioning the legal process that led to the execution. The legal process is one element of the “how.” Mentions of appeals and clemency review boards are indicative of a process. They suggest that decisions were made by a variety of actors and that the execution is the end of a process, a drama. For example, “a jury condemned” Feltus Taylor (*The Advocate*, 2000). Gary Leon Brown faced execution “with his court appeals exhausted and clemency denied” (Mitchell, 2003). While William Powell was executed “after the courts rejected arguments that his crime didn't meet the legal standard for the death penalty” (Holmes, 2005).

The notion of legal process was also present in the fourth commonality of denouement. The reports again moved forward in time to the final hours and days of the condemned. This includes last-minute appeals and final hours, including the final meal. The articles that mentioned appeals in the final days and hours rarely provided great detail on the legal arguments. Instead, they tended to be brief reminders of the process and efforts to stop the executions. Alvie Hale was executed only after “his last appeal, a request for a stay of execution from the U.S. Supreme Court, was rejected Wednesday” (Doucette, 2001). Bruce Kilgore’s death came after “the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a final appeal and Gov. Mel Carnahan denied clemency” (Bell, 1999). While Albert Clozza “had no pending appeals, and Gov. L. Douglas Wilder had ruled out clemency on Tuesday” (Boyer, 1991).

Descriptions of final hours were brief and tended to focus on visits with family, defense attorneys, and clergy. For example, Adremy Dennis “spent his last hours visiting with about a dozen family members and two spiritual advisers” (Trexler, 2004). Similarly, John Roe “spent his final hours visiting with his mother and stepfather, and conferring with a prison religious adviser” (Provance, 2004), Joseph Trueblood “visited with family members and friends” in his final hours (Tan, 2003), and Gary Burris “spent his last day visiting with his attorneys and a few friends” (*Evansville Courier*, 1997).

The final meals of the condemned were often described in great detail, with one newspaper even including an entire story about condemned inmates last meals (see Vansickle, 2003). Final meal requests were so important that it was even reported when a defendant did not request or eat one. Most, however, focused on what was ordered by and actually consumed by the condemned. Many reported gourmet meals similar to Gary Burris’ request for “a last meal of steak, lobster, salad with thousand island and bleu cheese dressing, baked potato, cheesecake and two espressos” (Armour, 1997). Most, however, tended to be more traditional fare, such as Stephen Hatch’s “last meal of barbeque ribs, a baked potato, a chef salad and pecan pie with ice cream” (Plumberg and Thornton, 1996), or Terry Mincey’s “last meal of fried shrimp, baked potato, a pint of chocolate ice cream and two soft drinks” (Osinsk and Cook, 2001). Sammie Felder and Dennis Dowthitt seemed to have the most voracious appetites. Felder ordered “a half-pound of chitterlings, 10 pieces of fried chicken, 10 strips of bacon, a raw onion, 15 pieces of fried shrimp, peach cobbler and a pitcher of whole milk (Turner, 1999) while Dowthitt ate “a dozen fried eggs, a loaf of bread, salad dressing, french fries and three cartons of milk” (Kimberly, 2001).

Others used their final meal request as a form of protest. Odell Barnes replied that he wanted “justice, equality and world peace” when asked for his final meal request. (Graczyk, 2000), while Tommie Smith “refused to eat his last meal” (Wyman, 1996). Manuel Babbit, a veteran, refused a final meal and “asked that the money instead be donated to feed homeless veterans” but his request was denied (La Ganga, 1999). Carl Isaccs was “given the “regular institutional tray” of pork and macaroni, pinto beans, cabbage, carrot salad, dinner roll, chocolate cake and fruit punch. He pushed the meal away” (Torpy and Montgomery, 2003).

Finally, the articles returned to the finale by describing some aspect of the execution. This involved reporting the condemned's final statement, describing the execution scene, reporting someone's satisfaction with the event, mentions of on-site protests, and/or descriptions of the defendant's death. The broader narratives tended to provide more detailed descriptions of the execution scene, rather than briefly describing the defendant's death. The long stories and multi-article narratives devoted lengthy, rather dramatic descriptions of the scene. Often, these combined elements that were lone "scene" descriptors in shorter accounts. This is exemplified in a report of John Joubert's execution by Nebraska.

Harvest gold drapes - the same color as Joubert's boyhood home - opened so he could see for the last time some of his closest friends... Joubert's head, beard, mustache and eyebrows were shaved off. He wore a faint smile as he scanned the witnesses in the front row... Joubert focused his attention on his girlfriend, Ms. O'Brien. "I love you," he mouthed to her. She appeared to mouth the same words back, news media witnesses said... One electrode was attached to Joubert's scalp and another to his left calf, where his pants were cut along the seam. Guards placed a leather mask over his face, leaving only his forehead and nose visible... A traveling executioner, whose identity is kept secret, flipped the switch from an adjoining control room. The first charge was 2,450 volts, followed by a second charge of 490 volts, then the cycle repeated. The electrical surges flowed for one minute. Witnesses said they heard a thud each time a jolt was administered. Joubert's right forefinger had been extended but as the first charge was applied, he clenched his left hand in a fist and his right hand in a partial fist. Smoke or steam rose from Joubert's left calf where the electrode was attached... (Powell, 1996).

The reporter described everything from the color of the drapes to the steam that rose from Joubert's leg when he was electrocuted. She mentioned his last words, witnesses, actors in the scene, and Joubert's death.

Similarly, Maurice Byrd was described as:

[L]aying on a gurney with a white sheet draped over him as three drugs were injected by a machine. He stared straight up at the ceiling as the drugs were administered and yawned once, just as a drug that would make him unconscious was put into his veins. The sheet rose and fell as he took his last breaths. Another drug was then given, which shut down his breathing. About seven minutes later a prison official said, "The order of the state has been carried out" (Aguillard and Lhotka, 1991).

Other reports that provided great detail of the execution scene did not describe the death of the condemned. For example, Terry Sims was executed:

[I]n a small chamber at Florida State Prison, dark brown curtains were pulled aside for a public viewing. Sims, gaunt and wizened at 58, his face nearly swallowed by a pair of thick horn-rimmed glasses, lay motionless on a blue-sheeted gurney. Intravenous tubes

laced both arms. Leather straps crossed his chest and arms. A white sheet covered his body. Only the collar of a dress shirt was visible. (Clark, 2000).

The final statements were given prominence in the articles. For lengthy statements, a portion was included the story and often the entire statement would be run in a separate insert. Most statements, however, were brief and were included in their entirety in the body of a story. Like final meals, the papers tended to mention final statements even when the defendant did not make one. For example, Antonio James "said "I don't want to say anything," James whispered when asked if he wanted to make a final statement" (Varney, 1996), while Winford Stokes "offered no last statement" (Gauen, 1990) and Ernest Baldree said "No, sir" when asked if he had a final statement (*Dallas Morning News*, 1997).

Most defendants, however, did make final statements that were contrite. Ernest Basden's was quoted as saying: "I killed Billy White. I'm sorry for it. And I pray that his family will come to forgive me and let time heal their wounds" (Thompson, 2002). Similarly, Harold McElmurry said: "I'd like to say I'm sorry to the Pendleys. I hope they can forgive me" (Jenkins, 2003). While the final statements attributed to some defendants were defiant. Like Leslie Martin who chose that moment to say "You're fired" to his attorney (Filosa, 2002). Or David Dawson who looked at an "unidentified blond woman and said, "I love you, you hear me? And to the rest of you, this is how I feel right here," and he extended his middle finger in a gesture of contempt" (Miller and Portman, 2001).

As was previously described, some defendants used their final statements to insist upon their innocence. These were usually brief statements such as David Stoker who said "I am truly sorry for your loss, but I didn't kill anyone" (Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 1997) and Charles Rector's "I want you to know that I am not guilty" (Ward, 1999). Similarly, Gerald Stano said "I am innocent" (Ditzler, 1998). One defendant, however, released a very lengthy written statement that was the heavily quoted in the reports of his execution.

Charles Albanese, who was executed by Illinois in 1995, wrote an open letter to the citizens of that state. The presentation of the statement is not only significant because of Albanese's claim of innocence, but the report reveals the final pattern on denouement. The articles always contained an underlying assumption of defendant guilt. Protestations of innocence or reduced culpability were reported, but were offered no credence by the reports. The reliance on state sources, the descriptions of the crimes, and even the elements of denouement functioned to leave the reader with a sense that the defendants were legally and factually guilty of the crimes. While this may in fact be true of all the executed men in this population, the report of Charles Albanese's execution and his declaration of his innocence is particularly demonstrative of how the newspapers presented these types of statements.

As with his 13 years on death row, Albanese's final minutes of life passed with quiet resolve. His final words to warden George DeTella were simply, "Thank you." However, in an eight-paragraph letter to the "people of the state of Illinois," Albanese wrote: "By

the time you have read this, you will have executed an innocent man . . . "You have destroyed my family, all I have worked for in life, and allowed someone to get away with murder." The letter also urged his death row comrades to "Keep fighting!!" "Maybe, just maybe, the people of Illinois will wake up to the injustice. I pray not too many more innocent people will be executed before the people of Illinois realize that any one of them could be next," he wrote.

A few days earlier, in a letter to the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, Albanese had written, "I am prepared to die with a clear heart and conscience." Albanese was convicted in 1982 of fatally poisoning his father, M.J. Albanese, his mother-in law, Marion Mueller, and his wife's grandmother, Mary Lambert, and of the attempted murder of his brother, Michael. The former company president carried out his killings by methodically lacing the food of his victims with arsenic, at one point even sprinkling powdered arsenic in his father's cookie jar and his brother's pea soup (Burns, 1995).

Albanese clearly stated his innocence. The use of the phrase "was convicted" suggests a decision by someone, and later statements about the appeals process and clemency options are indicative of the execution as being the end of a process, a drama. Additionally, despite Albanese's protestations of innocence, the reporter injected guilt as a matter of objective fact: Albanese "carried out his killings by methodically lacing the food of his victims with arsenic, at one point even sprinkling powdered arsenic in his father's cookie jar and his brother's pea soup." The sentence that followed reinforced the imputed objective guilt of Albanese with a sardonic twist: "Only hours before his own death, Charles Albanese ate an untainted meal."

## CONCLUSION

Little has changed about the dramaturgy of executions since Lofland (1975) explored them. The typical "death wait" is still long, condemned inmates are housed in a "special place," the "death time" continues to be determined by practicality, the "death trip" is still performed, and the "death place" is still hidden. Similarly, the executioners continue to be anonymous, the mechanized execution process limits displays of the condemned's personality, the corpse is quickly removed and disposed of, and the death is still "announced" to the public. Changes have occurred, however, in terms of the witnesses and the "techniques" of execution. Specifically, it has become increasingly common for victims' family members to be present at executions (Barnes, 1996), and the lethal injection is now the predominate means of execution in the United States.

Our analysis of newspaper reports of executions has addressed a gap in the literature by providing a representative sample of execution stories in state newspapers. Also, we have attended to the objective characteristics of the execution stories as well as the content of the stories. Our analysis reveals that there is no clear, direct bias in the reporting of the executions. However, the content analysis suggests that the construction of the majority of execution stories implies that the death sentence is a proper closure to a string of criminal and legal events. In

particular, the concept of denouement suggests how the details of the crime and status of the victims are presented in such a manner as to suggest the executed's criminal past, his commission of the crime, and the innocent status of the his victims are objective facts. Executions stories as denouement shows that carrying out the death sentence was a fitting end to a series of tragic and catastrophic events.

Our research here has some implications for future studies of media portrayals of death sentences. We attempted to pick cases that were not high amplitude in nature. However, it became clear that event the "typical" execution case is high amplitude. The criminal acts and the victims tend to be extraordinary. For the most part, there were clear demarcations between perpetrators and victims. The executed were typically presented as possessing a criminal past, while the victims were typically presented as law-abiding and innocent. Cases of homicides taking place between mutual combatants or fellow criminals were lacking. Because this stands in sharp contrast about what we know about the relationships between perpetrators and victims of violent crimes, it suggests a need for comparing our cases with murder cases that did not result in a death penalty. Such a comparison might show that media devotes relatively less attention to murders in which the victims are not particularly sympathetic.

Another line of inquiry could involve a comparison of our "typical" sample of execution cases with less common cases. For instance, is there a difference between the media portrayals of executions of men compared to women? We would expect that the execution of women would garner more attention (i.e., number of stories and words per story). However, we would also expect that the construction of the women's executions would be more deeply gendered. For example, are women who are executed dehumanized by being portrayed as not a "normal woman?" In addition to a comparison of stories about men and women who have been executed, a comparison of stories about those who volunteered for execution seems warranted. Do those who volunteer to be executed generate more or less media coverage? Does the fact that one volunteers to be executed enhance or diminish the sense of resolution? Additionally, in light of the current legitimacy crisis facing the American system of capital punishment due to the number of death row exonerations (Miller, 2006), it would be interesting to explore the cases in which the condemned maintained their innocence. It is certainly possible that the guilt of some of these men was, indeed, questionable.

We hope that our research here will open new avenues for research on the media reporting of executions. Importantly, our analysis indicates that when only the manifest elements of an article are examined, news coverage does not seem to offer an overt bias in the reporting of executions. When the methodology is broadened to include the review of latent indicators we found tendencies that construct the "guilt" of the executed and the warranting of death. We feel this is an important indicator of the need for blended methodologies in media research. We believe that such research will reveal how a culture accepts death sentences as a "legitimate" use of state power to provide resolution. While we have not focused on the practical implications of our research, we would hope that detailed analyses of the reporting of executions might have an

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impact on reporting practices so that it becomes easier to recognize the subtle ways in which the death penalty is justified in media accounts.

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