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HEADLINES IN CRISIS: THE D.C. SNIPER AND OTHER CASES OF LOCALIZED TERRORISM
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ABSTRACT

Headlines from cases of localized terrorism, such as the D.C. Sniper case, the Columbus Sniper case, and the Anthrax attacks, tell the story of the crimes, and they can send powerful messages to readers; therefore, they should be analyzed, monitored, and crafted with care. Case studies were performed to better understand the headline's role in cases of localized terrorism. For the D.C. Sniper case study, a sampling of headlines from the Washington D.C. publication the *Washington Post* was compared to a sampling of headlines from various reputable publications from across the United States. The headlines were evaluated for their underlying messages and emotional implications, their content, their intentions, their level of sensationalism, and their general treatment of the events. Similar evaluations were done using local and national headlines from the Anthrax case and the Columbus Sniper case. All of these evaluations uncovered the narratives that were created around these cases during those fear-provoking times. The analysis gave insight into how the media depicts acts of localized terrorism and how Americans respond to the events and the media's depiction of them. The analysis also shows how headlines can cause fear and negative consequences that need to be avoided, but it will also show how that negativity can be prevented.

Keywords: Headlines, Newspapers, Terrorism, Media, D.C. Sniper

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Chapter 1

The D.C. Sniper Case and the Media

Introduction

It is Monday morning, and a thirteen-year-old boy has just been shot and wounded on his way to school (Horwitz). The police are called to the scene, and they have to question their worst fears. Did *he* do this? Is this poor boy his next victim? How many more people will he shoot? Could *I* be next? How long until we catch him? Who is he? Who does he *think* he is? As they search the scene to collect and document evidence, one of the officers looks down and finds something. He realizes he is holding a tarot card, the card that symbolizes death, and he soon finds out the answer to the last question. On the card is written, “For you Mr. Police...Call me God” (Blohm 36).

This haunting series of events made up only one day of the D.C. Sniper’s month of terror. In October of 2002, John Allen Muhammad, also known as the D.C. or Beltway Sniper, and his young accomplice Lee Boyd Malvo shot thirteen people before they were apprehended and arrested (Blohm 66). For ten of those people, the shots were fatal. For the rest of the country, those shots brought sympathy, fear, and echoes of the still-fresh pain and panic caused by the national terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York, D.C., and Pennsylvania. People were affected nationally, and “For three weeks in the fall of 2002, the prospect of sudden death haunted millions of Americans...” (Horwitz xiii). Locally, the events of this month held the population of the D.C. area in constant fear; everyone was afraid that he or she might become his next target.

During this month, the D.C. Sniper haunted Washington D.C. and the surrounding counties with a series of events that made up almost thirty days of crime and terror, which

recalled past events and foreshadowed those to come. In September and October 2001, the Anthrax attacks in Florida, D.C., and New York brought another terrorizing wave mere weeks after 9/11. Similarly, a Sniper disturbed the Ohio's Columbus area by shooting randomly at cars on the interstate in the summer of 2003. Years later, the evidence, facts, and timelines for these crimes became available; however, they contained many mysteries while they were occurring. How did the information reach the people? Who told them the story? How was that story told? Was the story told in the terrorized area the same story that was told in other parts of the country? Headlines from cases of localized terrorism, such as the D.C. Sniper case, the Columbus Sniper case, and the Anthrax attacks need to be analyzed since they tell the story of the crimes and send powerful messages to readers.

This thesis will explore the role of headlines in cases of localized terrorism. For this chapter, in particular, a sampling of D.C. Sniper headlines from the Washington D.C. publication the *Washington Post* will be compared to a sampling of headlines from various reputable publications from across the United States. The headlines will be evaluated for underlying messages and emotional implications, content, intentions, level of sensationalism, and general treatment of the events. In later chapters, similar evaluations will be done using local and national headlines from the Columbus Sniper case and the Anthrax case. All of these evaluations will uncover the narratives that were created around these cases during those fear-provoking times and give insight into how the media depicts acts of localized terrorism, how Americans respond to the events based on the media's depiction of them, how these responses can cause fear and trauma, and how that fear and trauma can possibly be avoided.

The D.C. Sniper, Columbus Sniper, and Anthrax cases are all examples of localized terrorism. While discussing the D.C. Sniper events, PBS' NewsHour television program

illustrated the idea of localized terrorism, stating, “We begin with a story of terror. Terror is a word we’ve used a lot over the last twelve months. But this is a reminder that terror isn’t always spelled with a capital “T.” Sometimes terror is as simple as a guy with a gun” (Censer 117).

Terrorism can be more than just national attacks; terrorism can be any action that causes terror and fear. The D.C., Anthrax, and Columbus cases all occurred in a specific area in a relatively short period, yet they dragged on long enough to perpetrate fear and to attract considerable media attention. Localized, or isolated, terrorism mainly affects the area where they take place because people in other areas are not in immediate danger of becoming the next victim. Localized terrorism does not aim at national symbols nor does it aim to damage the country as a whole. Instead, this type of terrorism aims to cause damage and instill fear in a specific area.

Nevertheless, in today’s world, any significant act of terrorism will not remain local. The media shares the news, the fear, some of the effects, and some of the burden with the rest of the country. As Robert Burns once said, “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn” (Burns). In today’s information sharing society, one isolated act of terror can radiate throughout the world.

The D.C. Sniper Case and the Media

The D.C. Sniper case is one of the most prominent and memorable examples of localized terrorism. An analysis of the D.C. Sniper headlines will serve as a model or template for analyzing the other two cases. Before beginning the analysis, an informed understanding of the events will help to illuminate the impact of these crimes of terror and the differences among the media sources that reported on them. In the D.C. Sniper case, Muhammad and Malvo began their serial killing spree on October 2, 2002. They shot sniper-style from the trunk of a car and killed a man who was running errands in Washington D.C. On October 8, police found the murderers

sleeping in their car. Unfortunately, the police did not realize they were the killers and let them go with a warning (*U.S. News & World Report*). Throughout the month, the police stopped Muhammad's car nine times and let him go (Blohm 44). Ironically, Muhammad's Chevy Caprice was formerly a police cruiser, and it was purchased from a used car lot called Sure Shot Auto Sales (Blohm 55). Muhammad's shots of localized terrorism radiated into other parts of the country when Kenneth Bridges, a resident of Philadelphia, became one of the Sniper's victims on October 11 (Morello). Over the course of twenty days in Maryland, Virginia, and D.C., ten people were murdered, and three were wounded (Blohm 66). The month of terror ended on October 24 when a Pennsylvania man found the criminals sleeping in their car at a truck stop, and they were finally arrested (Blohm 78).

This crime spree was shocking and terrifying, and it warranted a large amount of media attention. Throughout this month of terror, journalists "produced millions of words that were avidly consumed by many millions of people" (Censer 205). Journalism becomes a lifeline for people living through cases such as these. These crimes were newsworthy, and they quickly became the focus and dread for people throughout the country. People want to be informed, they want answers, and they want reassurance. People turn to journalism in its many forms to meet these desires. Barry Richards, Public Communication Professor at Bournemouth University in the UK, describes the importance of journalism:

But journalism is us: it is our eyes and ears, or our windows to the world. We see with it, or look through it. Because of this, its emotional tone will resonate deeply inside us, and we are identified with its affective qualities. When we pick up the familiar paper, or watch the assured presence and listen to the authoritative words of the television newscaster, we are both finding out something of what's happening in the world, and finding ourselves in relation to it. (Richards 66)

Journalism is important for all these reasons, and these reasons are especially relevant in criminal cases. During October 2002, people desperately turned to newspapers, television, and other

forms of media to answer their questions, provide reassurance, and inform them about the status of their world.

Crime reporting is one of the most popular forms of journalism, and crime news needs to be reported. As G.M. Hyde's *Handbook for Newspaper Workers* states, crime news exists mostly to warn the public, but it also exists to show that law enforcement is successfully reducing crime by discouraging criminals from acting (Baker). Headlines from the Columbus Sniper case show anger and a demand for information in these types of cases. The public aversion expressed in "Sniper was Kept Secret from Public" and the headline "Knowledge of Crimes Would Benefit Residents" illustrate the need for reporting in these cases (*The Columbus Dispatch*). For their safety and for their rights, people deserve to know about such crimes, and not reporting on them is not an option. Reporting on crime can help protect the public and even lessen crime in the end.

However, these positives are often masked by the dangers of crime reporting, which include sensationalism and crime news turning into entertainment (Baker 463). Crime news easily tends towards those pitfalls because "crime sells" and "the cliché phrase, 'if it bleeds, it leads' is unfortunately the case with the American media; the search for heinous, outrageous and even sexy crimes, no matter how rare the incident...is sure to boost ratings" (Muraskin 11). Violent, racy, and atypical crimes, like those committed by the D.C. Sniper, seem to be intriguing for American audiences. The American public is drawn to crime stories and entertained by them, and the media smartly takes advantage of this to sell its products. As a business, the goal of the media is to maximize profit. They do this by maximizing the size of their audience, and audiences buy things that "entertain [them]...hit their pleasure buttons: sex, violence, laughter, and so on..." (Exoo 11). The D.C. Sniper case was the focus of a large amount of journalism because of its audience appeal. People came to the media for answers and

information about the case: the case was emotionally charged, and it involved the unpredictability and violence that often entertain.

Newspapers became one of the primary sources for information in this case because they were “readily available,” “published daily,” and “commonly considered...accurate and legitimate sources of news” (Muzzatti 47). Papers such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* “are considered premier news sources,” and the “*Washington Post* is generally recognized as the leading newspaper of the nation’s capital” (Muzzatti 47). Before people began to get the majority of their news online, people looked to reputable national dailies in print. Since these crimes occurred prior to Web 2.0, newspapers played a major role in informing Americans about these cases, and newspaper headlines provided a concise overview of the type of attitudes and information presented to readers. Headlines are still prevalent and relevant today since they now appear as web page headings, blog titles, television lead-ins, and other short media statements, but during the early 2000’s, newspaper headlines were one of the most influential types of media.

Headlines are an important part of newspapers because they draw in readers and keep them coming back. During criminal cases, like localized terrorism, readers will look for headlines pertaining to the case for updates and new information. Headlines “are frequently the only part of the newspaper article read or memorized,” and they are often “remembered long after the details of the original story...are forgotten” (Aitchison 23, Franklin 224). When readers look at a newspaper, the headline will be the first thing they read and probably the last thing they forget. Readers become a “shopper of headlines” (Williams 35). Since headlines are meant to sell papers, catch the eye, and “influence readers,” readers choose what to purchase and read based on headlines (Aitchison 23). Headlines can also provide a reader with “reasons to click or not

click” with an article, and they need to grab “traffic” for that article (Phillips). Without captivating headlines, important or paper-selling articles might go unnoticed.

Headlines prepare the reader for the article to follow in various ways. A headline can facilitate quick reading, serve as a “tone setter, story precis and signpost,” and be “a riveting short-cut to the contents of newspapers” (Straughman 109, Stanko 20, Ifantidou 699). Headlines are also “eyecatching devices” that contain the subject of the article, help the reader decide if the article is worth reading, and “...stir up those emotions of his which will cause him to attach the intended amount of importance to the information given by the appended text” (Williams 35, Straughman 23). These short statements can sum up the article and should put the consumer in the right frame of mind for reading its contents. Author John Osburn claims that headlines can also be viewed as the climax of dramatic structure (510). Instead of being located in the story or article, the climax is “displaced” to the headline. This tells readers the most important and exciting part of the story first, hoping they will want to keep reading (Osburn 510). Osburn goes on to say, “Headlines are dramas unto themselves, manufactured climaxes independent of fact. When the news lacks a climax, the headline will supply one” (Osburn). Headlines are supposed to be factual summaries of the article to follow; however, headlines today often have little or nothing to do with the story they label, and they can be misleading, overexciting, overdramatic, and over sensationalized (Aitchison 24, Franklin 224).

Audiences today are attracted to stories of crime and violence, and headlines and newspapers try to take advantage of this by sensationalizing and focusing on these types of stories to sell papers. One article on the D.C. Sniper case published in the *Chicago Tribune* comments on the population’s attraction to acts of crime and terror by saying, “Serial killers, spree killers, mass murderers--their crimes repel, and on some level, fascinate us. We seek

explanations for the killings” (*Chicago Tribune*). People across the country were, in fact, repelled by Muhammad’s crimes, but they were also fascinated and continually consumed the media reporting the case.

Furthermore, an article in the *Washington Post* commented on America’s fascination with fear by saying, “There is pleasure in fear...we can call our attraction ‘concern’ or ‘sympathy,’ but there’s an element of excitement and pleasure involved, too...Until and unless fear hits home” (Fisher). In cases where fear “hits home,” sensationalism seems out of place, insensitive, and counterproductive, and a headline analysis of the D.C. Sniper case illustrates this point. Including sensationalism in these cases, where the fear and trauma are bad enough without any exaggeration, seems wrong. Readers look to papers as a credible source of information, and they begin to question that credibility in the face of too much sensationalism. Some may even ask if “the press is hyping the news to make a buck” (Hess 254). If audiences respond positively to sensationalism and crime, it makes sense for newspapers and other media to include them, but how much is too much?

D.C. Sniper Headline Case Study

In this case study, headlines describing the D.C. Sniper’s crimes from U.S. publications in October 2002 were analyzed for language, tone, message, and other criteria. The D.C. Sniper’s acts of localized terrorism were portrayed differently throughout the United States, and when local headlines are compared with national headlines, unique narratives of the same story emerge containing varying messages, emphasis, and intentions. In newspapers outside of D.C., editors, the writers of the headlines, presented different messages, attitudes, and comparative contexts than those within the D.C. area. Overall, the major newspaper in Washington D.C. presented the

information in a composed, hopeful, and guarded way, while newspapers in areas outside of the Sniper's firing range freely expressed negative, fearful, and sensational ideas.

The Washington Post

As a whole, the articles from the *Washington Post* presented calm, practical information that rightly focused attention on the immediate area. The *Washington Post* conveyed information emphasizing collectivity, the victims, and positive and encouraging messages. Many articles assured people that their fears and preoccupations were justified and that they were not alone in those fears. The article heading, "Our Fear Feels Different When We're All Targets," shows comradery in tragedy by labeling the fear with a collective "our" and including the word "all" (Fisher). Another headline commented on the region's communal preoccupation with the events by labeling it "The Subject on Everyone's Screen" (Walker). The *Washington Post* headlines also focused on the victims and those they left behind. "New Lives, Old Ties Ended with Gunshots: Victims' Families Plan Their Goodbyes" and "Neighbors Laud 'Wonderful,' 'Sweet' Teen" both portray this spotlight on those taken by the Sniper (*Washington Post* Staff Writers, Vogel). The people who died deserved that local recognition, and these headlines provided it.

Local headlines also made a point of sending out positive and encouraging messages. The headline "Bullets, Locations Hold Clues to Shootings: Investigators are Using Latest Scientific Tools in Effort to Solve Series of Crimes" sent out a hopeful message to assure people that the best and "latest" measures were being taken to catch the killer (Cohn). Another hopeful message came with the news that a "Reward Fund Well on Way to \$400,000" might help people come forward with information (*Washington Post*). Resilience was also a message that Washington journalists focused on, and one message asserted the D.C. region's toughness by saying that "It's Hard Work Keeping Us All on Edge" (Fisher).

This D.C. publication seemed intent on providing its readers with as much confirmation and certainty as possible. The headline “Sniper May Have Left Taunting Note: ‘I Am God’ Scrawled on Tarot Card at School Site” was published, and a headline was published later that same day confirming and correcting the previous statement by stating that the “Sniper Left Taunting Note, Police Say: ‘I Am God’ Scrawled on Tarot Card at School Site” (Davenport). By removing the word “may” from the headline, the writers removed a small piece of uncertainty from the lives of those in D.C. and the surrounding area. When so many things are uncertain, even one small amount of confirmation can bring some comfort.

National Publications

Headlines from outside the D.C. area were generally freer in the topics they discussed and more sensationalized than those published in D.C. They portrayed negative messages and comparisons to September 11 and other serial killers which *The Washington Post* tended to avoid. Words and images used by national publications were never used in the D.C. area; they were only used in places that were not threatened. People would have been traumatized if they were bravely going about their lives in D.C. and saw statements like those published nationally on their newsstands.

The dramatic contrast in this area says volumes about the freeing power of being and feeling out of harm’s way and knowing that the audience probably feels the same. Quite a few articles commented on the idea that tragedy has a different effect when its influence has a personal touch and “hits home.” One journalist from the *Miami Herald* gave the following thoughtful and emotional statement on the feelings of detached observers of tragedy:

It’s different, isn’t it, when it hits close? When it happens across the country or in the next state or even in the adjoining ZIP Code, you feel terrible about it, sure. But it’s something else again when it happens in places you know and go. Then it’s personal,

then it's in your face, then it's something you can't escape through those convenient lies you tell yourself about how it can't happen here. (Pitts)

Differences in the media are bound to arise when feelings such as these separate those who are experiencing the tragedy from those who can merely look on from afar. Media in those detached states can hide behind those "convenient lies" and the fact that the events do not "hit close," while media in the area have to deal with the fear, the personal affront, and the immediate consequences. Another author commented on this phenomenon and said, "Presentation of large amounts of local crime news engenders increased fear among the larger public, while the presentation of large amounts of non-local crime news has the opposite effect by making the local viewers feel safe in comparison to other areas" (Muraskin 14). Readers outside of the terrorized locations can separate themselves from the tragedy and feel safe, and this separation is clearly visible in national headlines.

The difference between local and national headlines is immediately noticeable. National publications included many colorful, imaginative, and even frightening ideas and images. Negative words like "carnage," "evil," and "madman" appeared in headlines across the country (Smith, Miller, Latham). In states outside of his haunting grounds, Muhammed was given titles such as "Beltway Beast," "Roving Killer," and "Psycho Sniper- Houdini" (Latham, Clines, *New York Post*). One headline even invoked the frightening image of a hunter and the hunted by saying, "Hunter Fear Spreads: Desperate Search as New Pair Fall Prey" (Latham).

National headlines discussed how the Sniper's crimes changed lives. These publications discussed practical information about the immediate effects of the attacks on the rest of the country such as one headline stating, "Schools Question Safety of Trips to D.C.: Several Back out Because of Sniper" (Black). They also discussed how the lives of Washington D.C. residents were affected. Headlines such as "Routine Trip to Grocery Store, Gas Station Could Lead to

Death” from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* described the fear-inducing situation in D.C. in ways that would have added to the D.C. residents’ fear (Macpherson). This publication also called life in D.C. during this month, “Learning to Live as a Target” (Harden).

Comparing the attacks to those of the still painful events of September 11, 2001, seemed to be allowed in other parts of the country more than it was in D.C. Outside publications included many references to 9/11, but the *Washington Post* published only one or two. An article from *The San Francisco Chronicle* contrasted killers’ attacks in their own area to the attacks in D.C. by saying, “It’s probably worse now because of 9/11” (Salter). People feared that the Sniper’s attacks were related to Al-Qaeda, and another writer from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote, “If the sniper is a terrorist - and I don’t think so - it ought to hearten us about the diminished nature of al-Qaeda’s threat in this country since Sept. 11, 2001” (Bowden). The *Chicago Tribune* published the thought provoking testimony of Laura Hambleton, a Maryland resident, describing her feelings about the attacks and the 9/11 comparison. She said, “This time the acts of terror are different, less grandiose, but no less frightening, for my children, my neighbors or for me. As last fall’s terrorists pointed planes at the symbols of America, this fall’s terrorist aims his gun at the very fluidity of our society” (Hambleton). The *Washington Post* seemed to agree with Hambleton’s thoughts and avoided comparisons with the tragedy of September 11. One article from the *Washington Post* did comment on this comparison, but it only said, “Fear Hurts Business: Sniper Attacks Only Add to Setbacks That Began With 9/11” (Barbaro).

Publications in other parts of the United States wrote frequently on the topic of past killers and how their situations compared to the events in D.C. One article compared the D.C. murders to the random gang initiation killings that occurred in San Francisco taking the lives of

fifteen and wounding eight (Salter). Another article from the *New York Post* asserted that the deaths in D.C. induced a feeling of vulnerability more than the “Son of Sam” killings by saying, “It was scary with the Son of Sam, but there were rules you could follow...He shot at night into parked cars. This guy is shooting any hour, day or night, in public places you can’t avoid. You try to be on guard, but what can you do?” (Smith). Another article compared the D.C. Sniper to the Columbine killers by saying, “Like the two teenagers who committed the massacre at Columbine High School, this shooter probably lives in a fantasy world that has less kinship to reality than his favorite ultraviolent video game” (*Houston Chronicle* Staff). An article in the *Houston Chronicle* questioned if the still unsolved Houston freeway shootings could be the work of the same man but decided against it because of the Houston shooter’s lack of accuracy and the relatively low death toll of one (O’hare). One article summed up Muhammad’s relationship to the world of crime and a society of killers by saying, “Whoever he is, he may have written a new chapter in the annals of heinous crime. Or maybe that is giving a blood-thirsty sociopath too much credit. Ultimately, we likely will find his story just as pathetic and repugnant as others who have killed for the thrill of it” (*Chicago Tribune*).

On the other hand, the *Washington Post* seemed less inclined to include comparisons to other serial killers in their publications, and the few articles that D.C. did publish portray the area’s aversion to discussing the crimes of others. One *Post* article involved a Fox reporter rigorously defending her idea that the now-imprisoned “Son of Sam” killer may have some insight into the mind of the killer in D.C. (Kurtz). Another *Post* article, “Life Lessons from a Madman with a Gun,” was a discussion with a survivor of a past killer, the Shotgun Stalker. Since this man had dealt with the fear in D.C. before, he had a reassuring perspective on the situation (Milloy).

National publications also had to deal with the issues that arose when the Sniper's acts of localized terrorism held direct consequences for areas outside the Sniper's range. When Muhammad shot Philadelphia man Kenneth Bridges the terror and grief hit home miles away in Philadelphia and throughout Pennsylvania. Headlines in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette* switched from sensationalism to a focus on the family and friends the D.C. Sniper left mourning in Philadelphia and the legacy Bridges left behind. Headlines like "Woman Here Mourns Loss of Latest D.C. Sniper Victim" emphasize the fact that the crimes' effects crossed boundaries and hit home, "here" in a different place (Heltzel). Another headline, "Sniper Cuts Short a Life Full of Purpose, Vision - Ken Bridges of Germantown Had Become Known Around the Country for His Work to Empower African Americans," focused on the positive contribution the victim had and what the world lost as a consequence of his death (Schogol). Headlines such as "Justice Will Prevail, Says Wife of Phila. Victim - Jocelyn Bridges, Wife of the 8th Person Killed by the Sniper..." show that the desire for justice and resolution also crossed state lines and found its way into the headlines as well (Lin). When local terrorism finds its way out of its designated locality, its pain, grief, and fear go with it. The media in Pennsylvania displays this consequence since the headlines in Philadelphia also echoed the calmer, positive reporting tendencies that the *Washington Post* used when their cases "hit home."

Interestingly, some patterns did emerge concerning the sensationalized statements in national publications. Sensational headlines tended to come from certain publications or certain editors. D.C. Sniper sensationalism mostly came out of publications from a state that loves the sensational and the dramatic, New York. *USA TODAY*, which as a national paper should speak for all Americans, was surprisingly the most negative of all. It spoke often of difficulties that authorities faced and evoked feelings of hopelessness with some of their headlines. Headlines

like “Criminals Don’t Respond to Reason,” “Forensic Science Isn’t Crime-Fighting Cure-all,” and “Sniper Rouses Parents’ Worst Fear” present the difficulties faced in the search for answers and the capture of a killer (*USA TODAY*, Levin, El Nasser). *USA TODAY* did send one positive message reminding people to focus on what is important, the children, with the headline, “Experts Offer Tips to Ease Children’s Anxiety” (Peterson). In addition to the geographic sensational tendencies, certain editors seem to be responsible for the majority of the sensational titles from their particular publication.

Similarities in *Washington Post* and National Headlines

Topics that the *Washington Post* and outside publications focused on equally include general information, alternate agendas, and fear. While each comments on these topics repeatedly, the topics are not necessarily treated in the same manner, which impacted the consequences of the comments depending on the place. Even headlines merely intended to inform the audience that the facts in the case are still unclear may have added to the uncertainty that was torturing the fearful population. In instances of localized terrorism, headline writers need to be careful, even with informative messages, because the implications behind them could be harmful to those in the terrorized locale.

For example, both types of publications include many headlines and articles with the purpose of informing, but even similar informative headlines can send diverse messages to the separate audiences. Two headlines depicting the same scene were published in the *Washington Post* and the *Miami Herald*; however, to people in D.C., the image would exacerbate fear while it informs those in Miami. The informative headlines read, “8 Dead; Manhunt Grows- Father of Six Gunned Down at Gas Station While Trooper is Across Street,” from the *Miami Herald* and “D.C. Sniper’s 10th Hit Taunts Cops / Man Shot While Trooper Writes Ticket across Street”

from the *Washington Post*. Both depict the same event and the same image of a police officer standing close by while someone dies; however, they contain opposite underlying meanings (McCaffrey, Morello). To the Miami audience, this headline simply means that the killer in D.C. is insolent and is eluding the police. To the D.C. audience, however, this information implies that no one was safe, not even if police were nearby, and that the police were powerless to stop this man. Other headlines possessed unintended messages of uncertainty for the D.C. population, including “Sniper’s Image Remains Vague, Witness Accounts Called Inconsistent” and “The Case with No Easy Answers” (Morello, Kurtz). Fear and uncertainty are already an extensive part of localized terrorism cases, and the media adds to that frightening mystery through messages such as these. People living through these cases look for reassurance and answers, not uncertainty.

Publications across the country and in Washington D.C. took advantage of the Sniper activity to discuss ulterior agendas. D.C. publications took the opportunity to discuss theories of terrorism and violence caused by video games in the headline, “Residents’ Theories Run Gamut: Video Game Devotee, Terrorist Among Guesses” (Johnson). Terrorism was a popular discussion in outside publications as well because people worried if the Sniper was connected to the attacks of 9/11. Headlines such as “Killer Pair Spur Jihad Fear These are Terrorists” show how discussions of national terrorism found a forum in the media surrounding the Sniper’s crimes (Dunleavy). Another article, “Loner, or terrorist? It’s not important,” focuses its attention on proving that the D.C. Sniper was not an Al-Qaeda terrorist:

Al-Qaeda deals in symbols, in bold acts that resonate. A sniper interested in shaking up the country would target people on the National Mall, where congressmen, staff members, and even an occasional president has turned out to jog. Such a sniper would be easier to catch, but getting away has not been a priority of the terrorists we’ve seen. If al-Qaeda wanted Americans to be seized with fear, it would put 10 snipers to work in 10 cities. (Bowden)

The primary alternate agenda that emerged in publications was the topic of gun legislation and rights. Articles such as “Townsend Weighs Plan To Expand Gun Data: Sniper Attacks Push Rifle Issue to Forefront” and “Sniper Attacks Expose Need for Better Gun-Tracking Tools” show how people applied the Sniper’s crime to pleas for tighter gun control legislation (Montgomery, *USA TODAY*). “Terror in The Land of the Free, Home of the NRA” used the magnitude of the Sniper’s damage to state the opinion that the rights upheld by the NRA were allowing such horrible events to take place and needed to be amended (Van Deerlin). Headlines and articles like these show that the media took advantage of the opportunity to use the crimes as examples promoting their various agendas in Washington as well as across the country.

The topic of fear was common among local and national publications as well. Many national comments about fear in D.C. may have intended to show that no one was alone in his or her fear; nevertheless, in many instances these comments only made the fear worse. Simple headlines from the *Washington Post* such as “Fear Hurts Business: Sniper Attacks Only Add to Setbacks That Began With 9/11” and “As Attacks Mount, Fear Infiltrates Everyday Routine” show how much fear found its way into life in the D.C. area (Nakamura). “Too Spooked to Trick-or-Treat: For Many, Sniper Fears Threaten to Take the Fun Out of Halloween” and “Again, No Games: Most Outdoor Activities Postponed for Second Day” show how fear of the Sniper took the fun out of the locals’ lives (Hernandez, Gallo). Another D.C. article, titled “Be Afraid of Being Very Afraid,” defined fear from a psychological perspective by saying:

The more aware of a risk we are, the more afraid we are likely to be...Fear is greater when a risk is new...Risks to children frighten us more than risks to adults...Fear, born of that most ancient and genetically embedded imperative -- survival -- is real, and at times far overpowers reason. This is one of those times. (Ropeik)

That same article also asks a not-so-reassuring rhetorical question regarding fear:

Would it reassure you to know that your risk of being killed by a sniper in the Washington area is infinitesimally low -- as of Friday, about one in 517,422? Probably not. Is it meaningful to suggest that the risk of being shot by the sniper is tiny compared with risks you take every day, like driving, jaywalking or smoking? Of course not. (Ropeik)

Fear on the level that the residents of D.C. experienced may not be logical, but it did influence their daily lives and attracted a great deal of local media attention as a result. Interestingly, one article commented on how the media attention affects fear by saying, “Another difference is the media today...the pervasive media attention...that’s not going to calm fear. It’s going to accentuate it” (Reel). The media may have planned to reassure its readers; however, in some instances the fear was only accentuated.

Headlines from national publications such as “Sniper Rouses Parents’ Worst Fear,” “Learning to Live as a Target-In D.C. Suburbs, People Worry Where Sniper Will Strike Next,” and “Fear We’re Not Used To,” show the country’s recognition of the fear felt in D.C. (El Nasser, Harden, Kovalski). Publications from outside of D.C. also focused on sympathizing with the fear that D.C. residents must have felt. One article said, “We can imagine what the fear must be like in Washington and its suburbs. We can imagine because the victims are just ordinary people, going about daily routines--pumping gas, mowing the lawn, going to school, shopping at a strip mall...Everyone is a potential target” (*Chicago Tribune*). People across the country also shared in the celebration that came when the fear ceased and normal life resumed. This fact can be seen in the headline stating, “With Break in the Case, Residents Breathe Easier - After so Much Fear, a Routine Errand was a Happy Occasion [sic]” (Nicholas).

All of the publications reporting on the D.C. Sniper’s crimes intended to inform their readers and tell them the story of the crimes. The *Washington Post* was obligated to inform, give

hope and comfort, and satisfy its readers' preoccupation with the case without presenting underlying negative messages, causing fear, or causing uncertainty. Other publications had a different set of obligations. They also needed to inform; nevertheless, they also had to satisfy their reader's fascination. They had to entertain and draw on comparisons that people everywhere could relate to, and they did not think to worry about underlying negative messages or the implications of what they were writing. One possible analogy is that other publications told the story of the monster in their neighbor's closet. This monster is frightening and disturbing, but it cannot hurt the people a few doors away. However, the D.C. publications had to tell the story of the monster in their own closet, and they had to be wary of how they told the story because telling it the wrong way could make the monster more frightening. A *Miami Herald* journalist sums up the idea that the media in and away from cases of localized terrorism are not the same by asking, "It's different, isn't it, when it hits close?" (Pitts). Events like those surrounding the D.C. Sniper affect local communities in a specific way, and the headlines from this month of terror are proof.

Chapter 2

The Columbus Sniper and the Media

It is November 25, 2003. Mary Cox and Gail Knisley are driving down Interstate 270 together on a beautiful fall day (Grinberg). These longtime friends met in high school, and they are still friends over 40 years later. They are spending the day together, and Mary is driving Gail to a doctor's appointment. While she is caught up in their conversation, Mary accidentally misses her exit. Right after she turns her car around, both women hear a noise like the popping of a balloon (Grinberg). A bullet had entered through the driver's door, grazed Mary's sleeve, and hit Gail in the chest (Blanco, Grinberg). Gail's head drops to the side as she dies, and Mary is left frantically calling 911 and feeling guilty because she "made the wrong turn" (Grinberg).

On May 10, 2003, the Columbus Sniper began terrorizing people in Ohio when he shot out the windshield of a woman's car on the side of Interstate 270 near Columbus, Ohio (Blanco). By October, his bullets found their way into a horse trailer, a tire, the side of a car and its rear window, and a driver's side window (Blanco). In the early hours after midnight on November 11, a bullet broke through the window of an elementary school less than a mile from the highway where the previous shootings occurred. After this, the shootings continued, and shots were fired at a parked van, a mail truck, a driver's side door, and a minivan. Up to this point, the shots only damaged inanimate objects and people's feeling of safety. However, on November 25, one of the Sniper's shots found its way through the driver's side door and into the passenger, 62-year-old Gail Knisley from the story above (Blanco). Her death was the first and only life this Sniper would claim.

After this, the Sniper's terrorizing continued for three more months. Among various other life threatening assaults on personal and commercial vehicles driving on I-270, the Columbus

Sniper also shot at two school buses and two houses. Bullet holes were found on the exterior walls of the residences, and the bullets were found in the living room floor and the bathtub (Blanco). The Sniper's terrorizing ended with an arrest on February 8, 2004, and later Charles A. McCoy Jr. confessed to committing these crimes (Blanco). This Sniper may not have taken many lives, but he shot at least twenty-three holes in the daily lives of those living near Columbus, Ohio. Driving down the highway, sending children to school on the bus, or sitting in a living room or a bathtub made targets out of anyone near this haunted road.

The media quickly latched on to this new "sniper" story, and coverage was widespread. One article from *The Columbus Dispatch* discussed the "heavy national news coverage" by stating that on one particular day, "...the story was on the front page of *USA TODAY* and the *Washington Post*. It was one of the first things visitors to AOL's Web site saw, and was updated hourly on CNN" (Edwards). In this case, coverage in newspapers was delayed after the beginning of the shootings because time passed before enough crimes occurred to spur suspicion of a trend and a connection. However, once the news coverage began, it became "excessive" and made residents "paranoid" (Edwards). An expert, Bill Reader, associate journalism professor at Ohio University in Athens, described the situation well by saying:

The sensationalism of last fall's Washington-area sniper killings, amplified by the trials in those shootings, likely has pumped up the national media's interest in the I-270 shootings...If we weren't pre-sensitized to the 'sniper story,' this one might not seem as big a story without a higher body count. (Edwards)

The public and the press realized similarities in these two cases, and this realization led to quite a large amount of news coverage.

Media coverage was not the only characteristic these two cases held in common. Like the D.C. Sniper, this Sniper held a whole area hostage for an extended period. An environment of fear was built up around McCoy's crimes, and people in the Columbus area were at the mercy of

the messages the media sent to inform them. An editorial from one Ohio publication compared these two cases well by stating:

The Washington-area shootings were nearly always fatal -- eight of 11 victims died. So far, the Columbus shooter has only, tragically, claimed one victim, 62-year-old Gail Knisley. The Washington-area killings began in a flurry: six dead in 16 hours. The Columbus shootings lingered for months, if not years, as disconnected events until Knisley's death... Yet, on too many points, there is a maddening similarity, beginning with the random nature of the violence. (*Akron Beacon Journal*)

These cases were varied based on fatalities and time span, yet the similarities made a powerful connection between the two crimes that possibly influenced the media's treatment of the Columbus Sniper's crimes. An analysis of a majority of the headlines published on the Columbus case also illuminates many other similarities and differences between these two cases.

Columbus Sniper Headline Case Study

Headlines from November 2003 to March 2004 relating to the Columbus Sniper crimes were analyzed for language, tone, message and other criteria using the same method as the D.C. Sniper headline case study. The crimes began in May 2003, but the majority of media coverage occurred after November once quite a few crimes occurred and a connection between the crimes was suspected. Some positive messages of community and hope were published locally; however, this case's headlines were mostly negative and sensational. Local publications lacked the restraint shown locally in the D.C. Sniper case, and in some cases, local publications sensationalized headlines as national publications did. The overall tone of local headlines showed frustration and fear, and national publications echoed these sentiments.

Positive Messages: Local and National

The Columbus Sniper crimes produced some relatively neutral, practical headlines, locally and nationally, as any case would. For example, "Authorities Test Another Bullet, Car"

was found in *The Columbus Dispatch* (Cadwallader). In addition, “Freeway Shootings Stand at 14” was published in a Texas publication, and both examples provide basic informative statements for readers (*Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*).

The Columbus Dispatch published a few hopeful messages during this fearful time. “I-270 Task Force Hopes Sweep Provides Tips on Shooting” conveys the idea that authorities are hopeful in their search for this shooter (Cadwallader). Another headline, “Prayers Offered in Hope of Ending Highway Shootings,” shows a hopeful community coming together to pray for the end of this time of terror (Williams).

Quite a few positive messages of hope could also be found in headlines from areas outside of Columbus. The headline, “Sniper Sighting in Ohio Raises Hope of Capture,” invokes positive feelings through the use of the powerful word “hope” (Torriero). This headline tells readers to be hopeful that the culprit is making mistakes, an arrest will be made, and this traumatic time in Columbus will soon be over. “Leads Rise in I-270 Shootings” is also a hopeful statement and lets the reader know that the investigation into this crime is progressing well (Wagner). “Police Get 350 Tips in Shootings - Reward of \$10,000 Offered for Info” and “Businesses Hike Reward for Columbus Freeway Sniper” present the optimistic ideas that rewards are in place, that the incentive is bringing in tips, and that the whole Columbus community is working together (Wagner, Wendling).

Community was an important topic in many headlines from the D.C. Sniper case, and it is also a relevant topic in the Columbus case. The limited number of headlines focusing on community in Columbus seems to suggest that locals did not come together in the same way as those in D.C. did during their Sniper crisis. Nevertheless, headlines emphasizing communal participation in stopping the crimes and remembering the victim did find their way into the

headlines. Headlines such as “Companies Contribute Generously to Reward” show how local businesses in Columbus played their part in the investigation (Futty). Like the D.C. headlines, Columbus headlines also made a point to remember the victim. Headlines such as “Probe of I-270 Shootings Gains Steam... Woman Slain Tuesday Remembered for Her Kindhearted Ways” commemorate the victim and celebrate the person she was before her un-timely death (Kossler). Oddly, national headlines focus on this topic of community more than *The Columbus Dispatch*. Like the national headlines in the previous paragraph suggest, police, business, and the public all came to be involved in the effort to end the crimes. For example, “I-270 Shootings Data Reviewed - Columbus Businesses’ Gifts Double Reward for a Key Tip to \$20, 000,” also shows how businesses stepped in to help solve the crime (*Akron Beacon Journal*). Even truckers on the road helped in their own way and encouraged others to do the same. Truckers’ efforts can be seen in the *Akron Beacon Journal* headline, “Truckers Search Highways for Clues- Group Asking Drivers to Help Police Investigate Ohio Interstate Shootings” (Roberts). All of these positive messages were represented in Columbus Sniper headlines.

Local and National Negative Messages

Both local and national headlines produced negative messages. While local D.C. headlines avoided the negative, local Columbus papers included it in many of their own headlines. National headlines in both cases included a variety of negativity as well. Both local and national Columbus headlines included negative messages in the form of word choice, comparisons to other crimes and criticism of police, as well as comments on the cost of the investigation, drastic measures taken because of the Sniper, and the necessity for school closings.

Word choice was the topic of many local and national headlines. The word “sniper” became a frequently used word in this case in spite of some resistance to its use. One article from

the *New York Times*, “Page Two...Don’t Say Sniper,” provided some of the context that surrounded the word “sniper” during this time. James Dao wrote:

Washington had its sniper case last year, as did West Virginia in August. Now, someone is shooting into vehicles and, in one case, a school near Interstate 270 in Columbus, Ohio. One woman is dead and people are frightened. But the police are not ready to call the shooter a sniper. (Dao)

He suggests that the police will not use the word “sniper” because they are “simply trying to avoid a loaded word” (Dao). That word had definitely come to mean much more for Americans than a military style of shooting. The word “sniper” now brought back memories of the traumatizing events from the D.C. case and other cases, and it was loaded with fear for this type of crime. Avoiding this word entirely may have been an advisable idea for the media in this case. Though this writer also claims, “While police may be skittish about using the word, the news media is not: *The Columbus Dispatch* has dubbed the shooter the ‘I-270 sniper,’” and headlines from *The Columbus Dispatch* prove this claim to be true (Dao).

The word “sniper” was avoided in local Washington D.C. publications during their time of localized terror; however, the Columbus area did not seem to share their same aversion to the word. Perhaps the media was trying to make a connection or comparison to the D.C. crimes. Maybe the low death toll in the Columbus case did not produce the same level of seriousness that the high toll in D.C. did. The explanation may just be that the word “sniper” had by this time become so ingrained in the American vocabulary that its use became common and likely. Whatever the reason, the word “sniper” was used often in the media in Columbus whether it was negatively loaded and frightening or not. Local headlines such as “Sniper Strikes Again, Hits House - South-Western Buses Struck; Classes Canceled” use the term “sniper” to give updates on the case (Cadwallader). Other headlines refer to the Sniper situation as “Sniper Case,” “Sniper Investigation,” “Sniper Storm,” and “Sniper Fears,” (*The Columbus Dispatch*,

Cadwallader, Stephens). Also, at least four other headlines use the term “sniper” in various ways (Futty, *The Columbus Dispatch*, Ludlow).

National headlines did not avoid the term “sniper” either. These headlines referred to the Columbus’ Sniper as a “Serial Sniper,” “Highway Sniper,” the “Ohio Sniper,” “I-270 Sniper,” and a “Sniper-Style Gunman” (Savidge, Costello, *New York Post*, Paulson, James Drew). Additionally, National headlines included the idea of fear along with their use of this loaded word. Headlines such as “Fear Rampant over Shootings- Columbus Sniper-Style Gunman Still at Large” and “Slaying Raises Fears of a Sniper on Highway” discuss both fear and use the word sniper in the same line (James Drew, Williams). By doing this, national papers commented on the fear people in Columbus felt, and they emphasized the fact that these two ideas naturally go together. While local papers did discuss fear and use “sniper” in headlines, they never discussed the two together. Maybe this was their way of separating their fear from its cause, or maybe local audiences could not handle those two thoughts at once. However, national audiences outside of the Sniper’s range could think of snipers and fear going together from their position of safety. Also, national headlines provided more context for why “sniper” was an acceptable word in the case in Columbus and not in D.C. “Sniper” was already a common word in the media at this time because the D.C. Sniper was going through the trial process, as seen in the headline from Georgia, “Jury: Death for Sniper - Muhammad Faces Sentencing Feb. 12” (*Columbus Ledger-Enquirer (GA)*). This word was already in the media and in the minds of the people when this case began; therefore, using the term may not have been as hard as it was for D.C. publications a few years earlier.

The term “serial” is also a loaded word with negative connotations, yet local and national publications used it anyway. By using this word, the media brings about fear and comparisons to

the many serial killers who have terrorized the nation. Headlines like “Serial Sniper Moves East...” from Columbus and “Authorities Look for Serial Sniper in Columbus, Ohio” from CNN bring about these comparisons and imply that the crimes will continue and more lives could be lost (Ludlow, Savidge). Even if this is true, the word choice in these headlines could have been different in order to avoid causing readers depressing and fearful thoughts.

While using the word “serial” implied a connection, some comparisons to serial killers and crimes, like the Columbus Sniper’s, were much more obvious and deliberate in national headlines. Similar to the nationwide media during D.C.’s month of terror, the national media discussing Columbus was comfortable using comparisons to other crimes and killers. For example, “Other Highway Shooting Sprees in Recent Years,” “History Shows Highway Shootings Often Require Good Luck to [be] Solved,” and one headline claiming that “Columbus Shootings Fit a Pattern of Past Cases” provided comparisons to similar crimes (*Akron Beacon Journal*, Jonathan Drew, Wagner). The headline “Copycat in Columbus?” assesses how much this case can be compared to similar shootings in recent wars and terrorism (*The Cincinnati Post*). “Ammo and Anthrax” even finds similarities between the Columbus case and the Anthrax attacks in Washington D.C. (*The Plain Dealer*). The comparison made most was between the Columbus shootings and the D.C. Sniper case. The headlines “...Possible Sniper Copycat Surfaces in Ohio,” suggested the idea that the Columbus Sniper might be copying Muhammad and Malvo’s crimes (University of Massachusetts-Amherst). Speculation led to comparison to the D.C. case with the idea that “Gunman May Use Altered Vehicle - Technique Would be Similar to D.C. Case” (James Drew). “As Pattern Emerges, Ohio Residents Fret - Task Force Draws from D.C. Sniper Inquiry” also shows how Columbus authorities used lessons learned from the D.C. case to solve their crime (Pierre). The headline, “‘He’s Got the Whole Highway’ -

The Ohio Highway Shooting Story Has Generated Less Attention than the D.C. Sniper Attacks. But in Some Ways, It's Even More Menacing,” points out the fact that, even though the media attention was unequal, both cases involved criminal parties who took over a whole geographic area and threatened its people (Keller). The similarities in media coverage were the only topic of comparison that made it into local Columbus headlines. For example, “TV News Coverage Driven by Parallels to Beltway Sniper” was published in *The Columbus Dispatch* (Feran).

One of the most common topics that found its way into local headlines in the Columbus Sniper case was the Police. Mostly all comments about the police published in Washington's case were positive, respectful, and reassuring, and about half of the comments published in Columbus follow this pattern as well. Some headlines were sympathetic towards police and tried to reassure people that authorities were working hard and doing their best. “Police Working Hard to Solve Sniper Case” is also a reassuring message for readers regarding the police (*The Columbus Dispatch*). Another headline, “Chief Deputy Model of Calm in Middle of Sniper Storm - Law-Enforcement Veteran Wins Kudos from Colleagues on Multiagency Task Force” promoted the idea that the Chief Deputy did a good job handling this broad shooting case (Cadwallader). Other headlines such as “Forensic Experts Lurk Along Sniper's Trail” and “Tracking a Shooter - Authorities Fan out Along Closed Part of Outerbelt...” present a positive image of authorities pursuing closely behind the Sniper (McCoy, Pyle). However, a few negative messages regarding the police did find their way into *Columbus Dispatch* headlines. “Law Enforcement Slow in Shootings Response” and “Police Didn't Follow up on Earlier Reports...” express the frustration some Columbus residents felt as the crimes continued over time (*The Columbus Dispatch*, Ludlow).

National papers also printed some negative commentary on the Columbus police. A few national headlines expressed positive or considerate messages as local headlines did. For example, “Police may Have Trouble Catching Serial Shooter - Lack of Crime Motive and Physical Evidence Raises Level of Difficulty” informs people that the police are up against serious odds and their lack of results has a good reason (Jonathan Drew). Nevertheless, the rest of the national headline comments on the police were criticizing and derisive. Statements such as “Police Can’t Tie I-270 Shootings to Other Cases” and “...Police Don’t Know if Incident is Related to Eight Others” use contractions such as “can’t” and “don’t” to express the idea that the police were incapable of solving the crime (Carrie, *Akron Beacon Journal*). “Highway Assaults Have Puzzled Police All Over,” “I-270 Shootings Separate - Columbus-Area Police Unable to Link Them to Other Unsolved Incidents,” and one headline claiming the criminal was “Thwarting Police” also convey the idea that the police are incompetent in some way (Wagner, *Akron Beacon Journal*, Williams). The headline, “Police Turn to Public for Help - Residents Asked to Look at Others’ Habits Around Times of I-270 Shootings” has many negative implications (Welsh-Huggins). Asking residents to be wary of their surroundings in this way can be a positive, safe suggestion; however, it can also lead to public paranoia. Also, stating that the police are turning to their public for aid implies that they cannot do this work on their own and provides no reassurance for readers. Two headlines, “Ohio Sniper Investigators Fail to Find Links with Other Cases” and “Ohio Police Fail to Link Gunfire at Vehicles to Other Shootings,” both use the strong word “fail” to discuss the fact that the police had not solved the crimes yet (*Mobile Register*, *Charleston Gazette*). Even though headlines such as “Shooting Cases Find Roadblocks - Police Often Stumped After Highway Attacks” express the difficulty of catching this kind of criminal, the media was still critical of the police’s results in this difficult case

(*Houston Chronicle*). Other headlines like “Police Haven’t Connected Shootings Yet” echo the local frustration felt because the case dragged on so long, and the police could not seem to fix the situation (Gannon). Criticism of police was avoided in the D.C. case; however, both local and national publications from the Columbus case used the media to express their frustration with law enforcement.

Amidst all the terror and confusion during these months, the media published headlines regarding the cost of catching the Sniper in Columbus, Ohio. Local readers found the headlines “Sniper-Hoax Bills Have Added Up to More than \$4,000” and “Probes Manpower Costs are Adding Up” in their paper (Futty, Cadwallader). Maybe Columbus residents were worried about how much it would cost to rid them of this menace; however, no price was too high, and no measures were too extreme for catching the Sniper in D.C. The only monetary amount that found its way into D.C. headlines regarded the reward for helpful tips. The comments on the cost of the investigation in Columbus may reflect the frustration the people were feeling as this Sniper drained many aspects of their lives. It may reflect an insensitivity that existed with the low death toll in Columbus that did not exist in D.C. where more lives were lost. Whatever the reason, the discussion of cost is a clear point where the local media in Columbus and D.C. differed greatly. National papers published headlines about cost as well. National readers were informed that the “Investigation Costs in the Millions,” the “Investigation Costs Climb in Highway Shooting Spree...,” and the “Sniper Investigation Cost More than \$3 Million- Agencies Spent Heavily on Overtime, Aircraft Surveillance, Cameras” (*The Cincinnati Post, Akron Beacon Journal*).

Some local headlines were published regarding the extreme measures taken to catch the Sniper. Topics such as schools closing, I-270 closing, and cameras being installed along the highway are discussed in *Dispatch* headlines. For example, “Cameras Installed on South

Outerbelt ...” and “Cameras’ Increasing Presence Helps Police” discuss one such extreme measure (Futty, Nirode). Headlines were also posted informing readers that cameras were going up along the highway to catch the Sniper; however, the Sniper probably read these headlines too, and informing him of this measure may not have been the best idea. Residents needed to be informed of these measures for practical reasons and to let them know the seriousness of the crime that was going on around them.

Many of the national headlines published on this case also described the extreme measures that were necessary because of the Sniper’s attacks. “Columbus Shuts Down I-270 Stretch Officers Comb Freeway in Hunt for a Serial Sniper” tells about one of the most drastic measures taken to catch this Sniper (Wendling). Closing a major highway is a major inconvenience for locals and travelers alike. Schools were also closed during this time, and another headline, “Shot Buses Keep Schools Shut- Officials Cancel Classes for Second Day Near I-270 after Bullet Marks Found on Two Buses,” shows that children’s safety was seriously questioned because of the Sniper (Spencer). “Ohio Authorities Close City Beltway to Advance Investigation into Shootings” lets a distant audience know that these crimes are serious enough to close a whole highway and that this measure will hopefully further the investigation in a positive way (*Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*). The nation also heard about the school closings in Columbus through headlines such as “Schools Stay Shut for Fear of Sniper – Classes Remained Cancelled Today in an Ohio District after Shots Hit Two Buses” and “School Bus Bullet Holes Mean Cancelled Classes - 2 Vehicles, House Added to Mystery Sniper Case” (Spencer, Jonathan Drew). Headlines about the drastic measures taken to solve this case and keep Columbus residents safe show readers the gravity of the events terrorizing this location, let them know that

something big is happening in this case, and possibly keep them coming back for more information.

Schools and the safety of children were the focus of many local headlines. “Parents Jumpy at News of Shot Hitting School - Absenteeism up at Central Elementary; Community on Guard” tells how life changed since parents were fearful, children stayed home from school, and the community became cautious (Sternberg). How the children would respond to the shootings was a topic of concern expressed in newspapers as well. Headlines such as “Kids Schooled on Shootings, Safety - Families in Closed District Think Truth is Best Protection” shows measures that were chosen to help students cope with the stress and fear the Sniper brought to their environment (Sternberg). The community chose to educate its children on the Sniper’s crimes rather than hiding the reality from them in the hopes that maybe knowledge would help keep them safe.

National headlines also mentioned measures taken by schools due to the attacks on buses and the fear felt by parents. “School Buses Become Targets” and “Bus Marks Tied to Sniper - School Security Tightens” informs readers that an everyday part of childhood life has become a target for the Sniper’s shots and that local authorities are working to keep the children safe (Spencer, Jonathan Drew). The headline, “Targeted School Alters Routines, as Do Teachers, Kids’ Parents” shows the extent to which the Columbus community changed its habitual schedule because of the Sniper scare (*Akron Beacon Journal*). This fear that Columbus parents felt was also the topic of many headlines such as “Schools Reopen Near I-270, Parents Nervous;” “Sniper Shootings in Columbus, Ohio, Frighten Parents of Schoolchildren...” shows that parents in Columbus feared for their children and helps distant parents imagine how they would feel in such a fearful situation (Jonathan Drew, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*). In addition,

“Parents Fear for School Children’s Safety - Bullet Strikes on Columbus-Area Buses Have Parents Reassuring Kids but Keeping Closer Tabs on Them” shows how parents and children in Columbus were affected by these crimes (*Akron Beacon Journal*).

Local Sensationalism and Fear

During this time of terror, some sensational headlines appeared in the Columbus area newspaper. While the D.C. publications toned down their headlines and tried to reassure readers, Columbus publications included a few dramatic messages that could psychologically affect their readers in negative ways. When published in the area where the localized terrorism is taking place, these headlines lack the assurance readers seek, cause increased fear, and sometimes even mock the vulnerable state of readers. While many Columbus headlines were as toned down as D.C. headlines were, sensationalism did appear in *The Columbus Dispatch* and should be considered a meaningful part the narrative of this crime.

The Columbus Dispatch published headlines including sensationalized word choices. “The Victims: Helpless Against the Unknown” includes a few potentially negative words (Futty). First, readers in the Columbus area probably did not want to hear themselves referred to as “victims” or potential victims. This label could add to the fear and vulnerability they were already feeling. Also, the word “helpless” presents the idea that Columbus residents were unable to protect themselves or end the terror. This word once again multiplies the vulnerability this headline is expressing. Lastly, this headline uses the word “unknown.” In these mysterious cases of localized terror, uncertainty and the “unknown” are so prevalent and powerful. The media does not need to emphasize this aspect of the case. Other headlines use the verbs “strikes” and “storm” to describe the Sniper’s actions (Cadwallader, Price, Ludlow, Cadwallader). These words have violent associations with them, and while they may be clever word plays, they make

the Sniper seem even more monstrous. “Strikes” signifies an attack such as a snake or an army would make; “storm” implies an uncontrollable, dangerous phenomenon.

Other types of local sensational headlines involve evoking images in the minds of readers. The majority of images in local headlines involve bullets and bullet holes. Headlines of a “Bullet Hole Found in Tractor-Trailer” and a “Bullet Found in SUV on West Side” could have inspired haunting images in the minds of readers (Nirode, Narciso). Another headline, “Bullet Hits House,” presents readers with the same type of image of violence on homes like theirs (*The Columbus Dispatch*). One other negative headline describes the Sniper moving, striking, and disappearing around the highway (Ludlow). This image of the Sniper moving freely, attacking at will, and vanishing, uninhibited by fear or law enforcement, could cause fear and panic for readers in the area he was terrorizing.

Some of the local headlines did manage to use sensational images for good. One headline, “Forensic Experts Lurk Along Sniper’s Trail,” portrays an image of experts following close behind the Sniper and “lurking” as he does (McCoy). A further headline presents the idea of officials hard at work in a mine, digging for clues to stop this killer. “Officials Mining Tip Line for Clues” gives readers a positive message made memorable by a touch of sensationalism (Dutton).

Fear found its way into local Columbus headlines as well as sensationalism. It makes sense for fear to be a common topic for publications since it is such a major part of this type of case. Fear presented itself in the form of headlines about how the crimes influenced everyday life, headlines about changed school routines, and headlines about how to deal with fear.

The fear caused by the Columbus Sniper led to changes in the everyday life of Ohio residents. First, and most obviously, many drivers avoided the highway where the shootings were

occurring. “Many are Trying to Avoid Shooting Zone” mentions how people changed their driving patterns as a result of their fear (Turnbull). “Some Holiday Travelers Wary of South Outerbelt” uses the word “wary” to share the same message (Simakis). However, another headline, “Despite Concern, Many Drivers Don’t Change Their Routes,” shows that not every driver in the Columbus area was fearful or let their fear change their routine (Wilson).

Parents’ fear for their children’s safety also changed day-to-day activities. Many fearful parents changed their routines and their children’s by keeping them home from school as seen in “Parents Jumpy at News of Shot Hitting School - Absenteeism up at Central Elementary; Community on Guard” (Sternberg). This schedule change was welcome in the face of immense fear as portrayed in the headline “Families Grateful as District Closes its Schools Again” (Juliano). Fear led Columbus residents to change their basic daily activities, and headlines show how their lives were interrupted by this Sniper’s crimes.

Many of the headlines from the D.C. Sniper case offered readers helpful information for dealing with fear and let readers know that they were not alone in their fears. Some Columbus headlines echo those intentions including, “Sniper Fears Must be Kept in Perspective” which discussed how the newspapers were adding to fear and how local residents should try to cope (Stephens). Many Columbus residents had to deal with relatives calling anxiously to check on them; therefore, the headline “Shootings Stir Slew of Worried Relatives” could have been helpful for local readers experiencing this communal occurrence (Edwards).

Clear differences and similarities can be seen between the treatment of local headlines in the D.C. Sniper case and the Columbus Sniper case. Whereas the *Washington Post* avoided sensational headlines, Columbus publications did include some. In the D.C. case study, sensationalism seemed to increase proportionally to the distance away from the terrorized

location. In this case, distance was not an issue, and sensational headlines were published right in the area of the crimes. However, Columbus headlines did tend to be as positive overall as D.C. headlines were. In most cases, fear in D.C. headlines was used to discuss common emotions and a common ground for readers, and a few headlines on fear in Columbus headlines have this same positive purpose. Also, both cases express ideas about the same cause of fear. D.C. residents experienced this type of crime for the first time while, in a way, this was the second such experience for the Columbus audience. Writer Diane Evans states, “There are two pathways to fear...One involves situations that people have experienced before. The other, more common one involves situations people haven’t experienced but have learned, sometimes through the media” (Evans). In an odd way, the Columbus case took both pathways. Columbus residents experienced this crime once before during the D.C. case through the media, and now they were experiencing it in person. In this way, the fear seemed to double since they were experiencing their own fear while associating it with the national fear felt from the D.C. tragedy.

National Sensationalism and Fear

While the local media in the Columbus case did include sensationalism, the sensationalism in national publications seems to outdo the local variety in many cases. The national headlines echo the national D.C. headlines and share similar themes, tendencies of negative word choices, and the sheer dramatics of their sensationalism. While national headlines on the Columbus Sniper may not have been as extreme or did not make a monster out of the Sniper the way national D.C. headlines did, they definitely did suggest many creatively sensational ideas. These headlines usually become sensational and negative through inappropriate word choice, puns, dramatic descriptions and images, and national headlines display all of these things.

One of the main forms sensationalism took in the national Columbus headlines was negative word choice. For example, the most popular sensationalized word was “slay” or “slain.” “Ohio Sniper in Highway Slay,” “Ohio Freeway Slaying Linked to at Least One Other Shooting,” and “Slaying Raises Fears of a Sniper on Highway” all use this negative, sensational, and dramatized word to describe the sole fatality in this case (*New York Post*, McCarthy, Williams). An additional headline, “Ohio Car Shootings Probed – Woman is Slain While Driving near Columbus,” also uses this term, which is associated with horror movies and past horrific crimes (Williams). Another negatively loaded word, “plagued,” found its way into headlines as well. “Bullets Hit Car, House in Gunfire-Plagued Area” likens bullets and gunfire to the frogs and locusts that tormented the Egyptians of the Old Testament or the Bubonic plague. This comparison presents the idea that the Columbus Sniper may have seemed like a pestilence sent against this city (*San Jose Mercury News*).

The negative word choice continued when different headlines called the events a “mysterious spree” and “shock and bravado” (O’Brien, Paulson). Words like “mysterious,” “spree,” and “shock” are all powerful and carry potentially negative ideas with them. “Spree” brings thoughts of other serial killers and violent times, and “mysterious” and “shock” suggest ideas of the unknown and surprise. Finally, one headline calls this time an “Aura of Terror” for Columbus (*The Times (Trenton, NJ)*). “Terror” associates this time with other terrorist attacks the world has faced and the fear they cause. “Aura” presents the idea that the whole atmosphere of Columbus is one of terror. Other headlines label the Sniper as a “brazen,” “bold...,” and “stealthy” individual who “blends in well” (Jonathan Drew, James Drew). Words such as these have negative messages behind them. “Brazen” can emphasize the idea that this person feels invincible, does not care about consequences that might come from his crimes, is not afraid of

police, and is not afraid of being seen. One play on words, “Gunfire Hits Home,” is informative in that it tells readers one of the Sniper’s bullets hit a house; however, it is sensational because it comments on the closeness of the attacks and the personal consequences for Columbus dwellers (James Drew).

Another headline, “Fear on the Highway – The Chilling Randomness in Driving around Columbus,” is full of sensational words (*Akron Beacon Journal*). First, the beginning of the headline labels a common place in the lives of Columbus residents as a place of fear. In addition, this headline could be read as labeling the Sniper himself as fear, since he was on the highway for his crimes. Then, the headline emphasized the randomness of the crime by calling it “chilling.” The randomness of these localized terror crimes are a major part of what makes them so frightening. This aspect should not be highlighted or forced into the mind of already fearful readers, and choosing the word “chilling” was also a bad idea under the circumstances. Lastly, this headline illustrates how driving in Columbus seemed to be a lottery for life and death at the time. Even if this were true, that message should not have found its way into a headline. By choosing to include these words and phrases in their headlines, the editors chose to unleash these negative messages on their readers and potentially increase the fear the Sniper was already causing. These powerful words add to the sensationalism found in national headlines from this case.

As in the local Columbus headlines, images were popular in national headlines. The image of a target was the most common illustration. “More People Targeted in I-270 Shootings” and “Latest Shootings Raise Fears of Sniper’s Expanding Target” both present the sensational images of people and their property as the aim of the Sniper’s rifle (*Bucks County Courier Times, Houston Chronicle*). “Target Area Expands with Shooting East of Columbus” and

“Sniper Target Area Widens in Ohio...” give the image of a shooter setting his sights on a target, when in reality, the shooter was a criminal and the target was property, human lives, and a city’s feelings of safety (James Drew, Williams). “School Buses Become Targets” also presents the same image; however, the sight is set on an image of childhood (Spencer). Images of childhood, school buses, and bullets were the topic of many other sensational national headlines as well. “Bullet Marks on Buses” and “School Bus Bullet Holes” are literal, descriptive headlines, but they present images that would bring chills to any parent and anger them as well (Spencer, Jonathan Drew).

Other examples of sensational imagery can be seen in national headlines. “In Shadow of Violence, Life Goes On” depicts the image of violence as a dark shadow hovering over the city and making life under it more difficult (Hobson). “Shooting at House Tied to I-270 Gun – Bullet Found in Bathtub of Residence near Columbus Freeway” also can put a scary image in the minds of viewers (James Drew). This true detail found in the headline creates the image of one of the most personal aspects of home life being defiled and invaded by the criminal who also stole the commonness of the daily commute. This piece of information would have been less terrifying if it was found only in the body of the article rather than in the headline. Another headline, “I-270 Drivers Ride with Fear in Rearview - CB Traffic Chronicles Truckers on Edge Police Increase Patrols of Area in Wake of Shootings,” is full of sensationalized images (Chancellor). First, the reader is attacked with the image of drivers looking up into their rearview mirrors only to find that something terrifying is pursuing them. Also, the reader can see images of fearful truckers looking nervously around them and police cars unsuccessfully going up and down the highway in search of this “fear” haunting the city. Imagery can be a great way to make an idea vivid, relatable, and memorable; however, the negativity makes them images readers will want to

forget. Editors should be more aware of the images they are writing into their headlines. While they might make a headline unforgettable, they attract readers for all the wrong reasons and cause extra, unnecessary fear.

Another theme occasionally found in national Columbus Sniper headlines is universality. These headlines promote the idea that this type of crime could affect anyone and everyone and that America should listen to the stories from this not-so-distant city. First and most powerfully, “Sniper Steals Sense of Safety - Highway – Symbol of American Mobility – Is Held Hostage in Ohio,” is full of loaded words, alliteration, and extremely sensational ideas (Keller). If this headline is broken down into sections and analyzed, it reveals many layers of sensationalism. To begin, the word “steals” rightly presents a feeling of injustice. Then, this headline becomes a statement of national importance with the phrase “Highway – Symbol of American Mobility.” This phrase makes the crimes and injustice occurring in Columbus crimes and injustices against the whole country. This broader application is often the object of large-scale terrorism. Rather than attacking a specific isolated location, terrorist attacks, like those of 9/11, aim to attack a nation through its symbols. Since this criminal is attacking an American symbol, he is attacking all Americans, and all Americans should pay attention and care. Also, the comment on “mobility” being hindered by this criminal can present the feeling of being trapped. Finally, add the last phrase, “...Held Hostage in Ohio,” and not only is an American symbol the aim of an unjust action, but it is a hostage in the hands of this traitorous criminal. This headline makes the crimes in Columbus important for all Americans.

Other headlines continued this idea of universality. For example, “Fatal I-270 Shooting Linked to 1 of 9 Others – Homemaker was Killed Riding on Sparsely Populated Stretch” expresses two ideas of universality (McCarthy). The word “homemaker” and the idea that she

was killed on a “sparsely populated stretch” both present the idea that no one was safe in Columbus during this time. Stereotypical kindly, sweet homemakers could be victims as much as stereotypical strong men. Also, while many people associate crimes with densely populated areas and cities, this death occurred in a sparsely populated area. This headline emphasizes the fact that fear increased because stereotypes did not apply in this case, and anyone could be the next victim. This headline also helps a national audience relate to the Columbus case. The homemakers reading at home along with those who feel safe in areas of sparse population could empathize with the victims who were just like them. Additionally, anyone who was familiar with the stereotypes of homemakers or sparse populations, or knew someone or somewhere fitting those descriptions, could empathize as well. Lastly, “Mercedes and a Van Hit by Sniper Fire in Ohio” also shows the same sense of commonality (*The Desert News*). This statement shows that both the rich and poor became victims of this criminal, and any Americans on either end of the spectrum of wealth could relate to the Columbus residents. While the sensationalism in these headlines may not be the best for these situations, it certainly did accomplish one important thing. These words made a distant tragedy relevant and applicable to a national audience. As seen in the D.C. Sniper analysis, this accomplishment might be the motivation for the excessive sensationalism in national headlines. If used the correct way, this method could be used to create positive national connections; however, with the sensational associations it has now, this message’s negative effects mask the positive it could achieve.

Overall, this case’s national headlines, including sensationalism, fit the type of sensationalism and themes found in the D.C. case as well, but they differ in key ways. Sensationalism did increase along with distance from the crimes. The problems with word choice and dramatic imagery and themes can also be found in both. Yet, not as many themes made it

into the Columbus headlines since this case did not receive as much media coverage. For example, D.C. national headlines were full of alternate agendas such as gun control; yet, little to no mention of alternate agendas can be found in Columbus headlines. Both cases' sensationalism at the national level follow the same trend in which the same writers, or their editors, seem to be responsible for many of the sensationalized headlines. Unlike the D.C. case, the Columbus case did not include any moments that "hit home" in other parts of the country. The one fatality was a Columbus resident; therefore, no other audiences were directly affected by the crimes. Also, the national D.C. headlines did not portray the same ideas and methods of universality that their counterparts from the Columbus case did. The national D.C. lines seemed to choose excessively dramatic and shocking statements to draw in a potentially disinterested national audience. Still, the ideas found in the Columbus examples of universalizing headlines to draw in readers seem to be a better way to achieve the same goal.

National publications also seemed to be interested or concerned with the level of fear in Columbus. Headlines such as "Fear Rampant Over Shootings- Columbus Sniper-Style Gunman Still at Large" and "Ohio Town Living in Fear of Next Random Shooting" commented on the large amounts of fear and uncertainty Columbus residents felt before an arrest was made (James Drew, Simon). Headlines included phrases such as "...Shootings Unnerve Columbus," "...Shooter's Late... Attacks May Be to Spread Fear While Thwarting Police," and "Fear in Columbus: Maybe I'm Next..." (*Akron Beacon Journal*, Williams, Theis). Other headlines discussed the varied responses of the Columbus people. "Ohio Shootings Give Residents the Shakes" and "Columbus Concerned, not Panicked" present two different takes on the feelings of those directly affected by the crimes (Chang, Cauchon). These general statements on fear were common in national publications.

Like local Columbus headlines, many national headlines discussed how routines were altered, especially school routines, as a result of the shootings. For example, “Parents Fear for School Children’s Safety – Bullet Strikes on Columbus-area Buses have Parents Reassuring Kids but Keeping Closer Tabs on Them” describes how parents reacted to the shots (*Akron Beacon Journal*). “Columbus Parents, Teachers Alter Routines Because of Series of Mysterious Shootings” is another example of this topic in the headlines (*Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*). How the crimes caused fear for childrens’ safety and changed the school schedule were also common topics. “Schools Stay Shut for Fear of Sniper – Classes Remained Cancelled Today...” and “Sniper Shootings...Frighten Parents” shared the status of fear and schools in Columbus with the country (Spencer, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*). Driving patterns were also clearly changed by the crimes, and national headlines provide a picture of people’s responses to driving during this anxious time. For example, “Ohioans Wary of Travel with Sniper on the Loose” shows the fear that went along with the everyday action of driving a car (Simon). Furthermore, the varied responses of Columbus residents are represented in “Some I-270 Drivers Shift into Caution - For Others, It’s the Road not Taken” (Wagner).

The most common description of fear in national headlines occurred through fearful words and phrases. Three headlines use some variation of the term “wary” to describe Columbus drivers’ feelings about the Sniper (*The Detroit News*, *Jefferson City News-Tribune*, Spencer). Five headlines, including “Freeway Sniping has Ohio on Edge,” use the phrase “on edge” to describe the fear (McCarthy, Chang, Dao, *The Press of Atlantic City*, Chang). “Terrorize” and “spook” were also used often to describe what the shootings did to Columbus (McCarthy, Jones). The headlines also described the shootings as “unnerving” for parents (Chang, Jonathan Drew).

Other words such as “fret,” “rattle,” and “jittery” were used to describe the fear felt in Columbus (Pierre, Chang, Simon).

Quite a few headlines sensationalized and personified fear by creating powerful images. One headline, “Suddenly, Fear Rides Interstates,” personifies fear by portraying it as a driver on the terrorized highway (McCarty). Another headline, “Try to Keep Fear from Riding Shotgun – Fear, Worry, Stress Can Cause Health Problems,” also personifies fear by placing it in a car (Evans). However, this headline also presents a positive message, discusses the negative effects of fear, and suggests some ways to handle the fear as some local headlines did.

After analyzing fear in the national headlines about Columbus, certain trends are visible. Overall, these national headlines were similar to those national headlines on fear in the D.C. case. They contain the same topics, themes, and words. Another commonality in these cases holds true as well. Certain authors tend to be attached to multiple headlines about fear. Also, national headlines exceed local headlines in volume; however, the local headlines tend to be more powerful and personal than their national counterparts. Since local headlines are usually written by fearful people living in the terrorized area and are supposed to express a collective message about fear, it makes sense that they would be more heartfelt and personal. Fear is such a common theme in these cases, and this theme tells much about how the media handles localized terror.

Chapter 3

The Anthrax Case and the Media

Less than one month after 9/11, Robert Stevens, photo editor for American Media Inc., began to feel sick (Hess 124, Johnstone 5). He had “fever, chills, sweats, fatigue, and malaise, which progressed to vomiting, confusion, and incoherent speech,” and the doctors told him he had meningitis (Johnstone 5). However, his diagnosis soon changed to anthrax poisoning, and he died two days after his symptoms began on October 5 (Johnstone 5).

Stevens, the first victim, died because of letters sent to his workplace containing the potentially deadly, spore-forming bacterium, *Bacillus anthracis* (Johnstone 3-4, CDC). On September 17 or 18, 2001, a person or persons “mailed letters containing anthrax spores” to New York to Tom Brokaw (NBC) and the editor of the *New York Post* (Johnstone 3). Three others were presumably mailed to ABC in NY, CBS in NY, and American Media Inc. (AMI), where Stevens worked, in Boca Raton, Florida (Johnstone 4). FBI handwriting analysis concluded that the letters were from the same person. They were processed at the United States Postal Service Trenton mail processing and distribution center and thought to be mailed from a mailbox in Princeton, New Jersey. The “message inside each was identical – a copy of a one-page, handwritten note in all capital letters, as follows: “09-11-01/ THIS IS NEXT/ TAKE PENACILIN NOW/ DEATH TO AMERICA/ DEATH TO ISRAEL/ ALLAH IS GREAT [sic]” (Johnstone 4).

On October 9, other letters were sent to Senator Tom Daschle and Senator Patrick Leahy in Washington D.C., and the FBI was certain that they were written by the same person as the earlier letters. These two letters were identical to each other but differed in content from the previous letters (Johnstone 9). These letters said: “09-11-01/ YOU CAN NOT STOP US./ WE

HAVE THIS ANTHRAX./ YOU DIE NOW./ ARE YOU AFRAID?/ DEATH TO AMERICA. / DEATH TO ISRAEL./ ALLAH IS GREAT [sic]" (Johnstone 10).

In total, approximately 10,000 people were treated with precautionary antibiotics, twenty-two people were infected with anthrax through these letters, and five of those people died (Hess 124, Johnstone 17, CDC). Victims included postal workers, first responders, media company workers, a lab worker, and unrelated sufferers of cross contamination (Johnstone). The fourth fatality was "hospital supply worker" Kathy Nguyen, who had no known personal ties to the other victims or cases. Nguyen and the fifth victim, 94 year old Oillie Lundgren, are thought to have been infected by cross contaminated envelopes (Johnstone 16). The zip code on the letter sent to Senator Patrick Leahy was misread and sent to the wrong postal facility. This error potentially saved the Senator and those around him, but unfortunately, it resulted in an infection at its unintended destination (Johnstone 16).

The Anthrax case differs from the D.C. Sniper case and the Columbus Sniper case in key ways. However, this chapter will illustrate how the case can still be useful in analyzing localized terrorism in the media. A case analysis of the Anthrax headlines uncovers the same trends, themes, fear, and sensationalism as the Sniper cases, and this case can be used to help determine how local terrorism and national terrorism might be reported in the future.

The Anthrax case differs from the two localized Sniper cases, and it has characteristics of national terrorism that the others do not have. Anthrax disturbed three main cities; however, its target area was never clearly defined. The potential area of impact for this case was as large as the entire postal system. This area could have grown if the attacker chose to distribute the terror in another way as well. Cross contamination could also have led to victims in locations the terrorist did not intend. This different medium for delivering terrorism minimized location's role

in this case. Also, many of the targets in this case can be seen as symbols of America; therefore, this terrorist seemed to be attacking America in more than one location. The attacks on senators and large media companies along with the “DEATH TO AMERICA” letters suggest motivations for terrorism that resemble the attacks of 9/11 more than just the Snipers’ localized terrorism. This case also differs because it had no clear ending, and no criminals were caught. In spite of these differences, the Anthrax case can still reveal valuable information through analysis.

Stories about these Anthrax attacks were even more rampant in the news media than the Sniper cases. A search for the word “anthrax” in the *Newsbank (Access World News)* database reveals that at least 50,092 U.S. newspaper articles were published on this topic from October-December 2001. Even reporters began to realize that the coverage was excessive: Ceci Connolly, *Washington Post* science and health reporter, said in an interview, “There were very serious heated conversations about this concern of scaring people needlessly” (Hess 133). This case highlighted the line between the need to inform people and the problem of causing disproportionate fear.

In spite of differences, these three cases share an important characteristic: fear. Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases commented on the unavoidable fear in these cases. He said, “In addition to the human toll of the Anthrax attacks, the fear and disruption they engendered were extraordinary...” (Johnstone 19). These crimes were terrible, and the risks were great. The simple, everyday task of getting the mail became a life or death risk. A “public opinion survey conducted for ABC and the *Washington Post* was released, indicating that 54 percent of the American public was ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ worried that they or a relative, or friend might be the victim of an anthrax attack” (Johnstone 11). Clearly, this situation caused fear throughout the country. However, the amount of coverage and

negative messages published in the media added to the fear. For example, speculation proved to be dangerous in this case. Panic ensued when one report discussed, without any evidence, the possibility that the Anthrax criminal was riding the subway in New York. This article caused heightened fear in an already traumatized city (Hess 130). This type of reporting should teach a lesson to the media about publishing sensationalism in these types of cases. The Anthrax attacks showed the government that it needed to “be better coordinated to handle such crises” and better equipped to communicate to the public, and the attacks showed the press that it needed to be “better prepared to report them” (Hess 125). The Anthrax case illustrates the need for change in how the media reports localized terror of any type. Also, even though D.C. and Columbus did show some restraint in their headlines about terrorism, the media in both cases needed to be more sensitive to the potential impact of their reports.

The D.C. Sniper case, Columbus Sniper case, and Anthrax attacks share more in common than the need for improved reporting practices. First, the high number of attacks yet relatively low death toll from the Anthrax case is similar to the Columbus case, with twenty-two victims and five deaths in the Anthrax case and twenty-three shots with one death in Columbus. Both the D.C. Sniper case and the Anthrax case share ties to Washington D.C. and were a news focus for the *Washington Post*. Even though the attacks mainly affected Florida, Washington D.C., and New York, they share with D.C. the experience of where their case “hits home” in other areas (Hess 124). In D.C., the Sniper’s crime hit home in Pennsylvania when a Philadelphia man became a victim. In the Anthrax case, the crimes hit home when the letters were cross-contaminated or misread and delivered to the wrong address. Moreover, these cases share the fear caused by this type of crime. Fear became a part of every American’s life in these times, and the sensationalism and over-reporting in the media emphasized and increased this fear.

Anthrax Case Analysis

According to the *Newsbank* database, over 25,382 headlines about anthrax were published in the United States in October 2001 alone. This massive amount of data makes a detailed headline analysis, like those performed on D.C. Sniper and Columbus Sniper headlines, extremely difficult. This type of research and analysis would take years to complete. Nevertheless, a general comparison among these cases can be very beneficial to understanding these types of crimes.

Case Study and Comparisons

Anthrax already appeared in headlines before the attacks were discovered in the form of military, science, and bioterrorism discussions. Days after September 11, headlines about the possibility of bioterrorism were published across the country. This possibility may have been on the minds of many Americans, and they may have wanted information on this topic; however, the sensationalism that came along with that information was far from what America wanted or needed.

One headline provides information without sensationalizing or increasing fear. “U.S. Center for Disease Control Sharpens Focus on Bioterrorism” tells readers that bioterrorism is a possibility, but the CDC is working to avoid it or prepare for it (*The University News*). This headline gives readers the information they want without sensationalism, and it gives reassurance.

Conversely, most other headlines published in this time were full of sensationalism and lacked any reassurance. Headlines such as “Officials Bracing for Bioterror,” “Anthrax, Smallpox Top List of Possible Biological Threats,” and “Fears of Bioterrorism – Experts say Killer

Microbes Potential Scenario” are examples of the many headlines published on bioterrorism before the Anthrax attacks occurred (McVicar, Bohan, Abate). The fact that “officials” are “bracing” for the impact of these devastating threats tells readers that they should prepare themselves for the worst. “Killer Microbes” are also a violent and frightening idea for readers to imagine and comprehend. Other headlines included even more sensationalism than these. For example, “Imagine the Unimaginable” vaguely leaves readers thinking about gruesome possibilities that had never crossed their mind (*Times, The (Trenton, NJ)*). Another headline, “Specter of Bioterror Alarms Experts - Even More Horrible? Science Now Exists to Launch Invisible, Insidious Killers,” turns science, a discipline that has saved the lives of so many, into a discipline solely for creating weapons and death (*Ventura County Star (CA)*). In addition, if experts are alarmed, readers will think that they need to be alarmed as well and fear will spread. One particularly colorful headline from the *Washington Post*, “U.S. Poorly Prepared to Combat Bioterrorism, Experts Warn Unleashing Plagues Safer for Attackers, Deadlier for the Populace,” seems more like marketing to terrorists than a headline for worried Americans (Weiss).

These sensational headlines and others like them seem particularly inappropriate because of their timing shortly after one of the hardest times America has seen. These scare inducing statements also raise certain questions. Should the media have been talking so much about bioterror in light of very recent terror attacks? Could these articles give terrorists or criminals ideas? Could they create more fear? Clearly, these headlines did raise the fear in America. Proof can be seen in headlines such as “Gas Masks Big Sellers...” and “Gas Masks, Survival Gear are Hot Items since Attacks” which show how people’s fear led to action after 9/11 (*The Belleville News-Democrat, Blackwell*).

Headlines from after the attacks reveal some of the same themes as those from the D.C. and Columbus Sniper cases. First, headlines such as “Anthrax Facts” and “Anthrax Developments” present basic, informative, neutral headlines (*The Dallas Morning News*, *Dayton Daily News*). Headlines can sometimes give readers a sense of reassurance, and “Agents Find no Other Trace – of Anthrax Germ in Florida” is an example of this (*The Augusta Chronicle*). Letting audience members know this positive finding provided some of the comfort and certainty they craved in these frightening and uncertain circumstances. Comparing this crime to others like it was also a theme in Anthrax headlines. “Russian Anthrax Case Serves as a Guide - U.S. Officials can Refer to Studies of a 1979 Outbreak in Investigating the Disease’s Presence in Florida” suggests that a similar case in Russia can be a helpful example for investigators (Vedantam). Another headline from Philadelphia, “Anthrax is no Stranger to Area – Delco Village was Evacuated in 1934,” discusses how a suburban county dealt with anthrax years before (Morrison).

Discussions of the police and the victims are also common themes in the headlines of these three cases. “FBI Tries to Crack Anthrax Mystery,” “Feds Vow Intense Probe as Fla. Man Gets Anthrax,” and “Anthrax Case Baffles Officials...” show how investigators in this case made the headlines (*The Seattle Times*, Gorta, *The Belleville News-Democrat*). The words “tries” and “baffles” in these headlines suggest the idea that the police deserved criticism; however, most mentions of police addressed their determination and the extremely difficult odds they faced. The headline above uses the strong words “vow” and “intense” to express this resolve. The victims of this case were remembered in local Florida headlines as well. “Anthrax Victim Remembered as Witty Raconteur” and “Anthrax Patient Called Well-Liked, Avid Fisherman”

emphasize positive parts of the first victim's life and shift the focus away from all the negativity in this case (Othon, McCabe).

As in the other cases, fear was a heavy part of the Anthrax case and its headlines. For example, "Anthrax Anguish- After Sept. 11, it's Easy to Fear the Worst" depicted the already fearful environment in which these attacks occurred (*Birmingham News*). The prevalence of fear can be seen in the headline "Anthrax Fears Run Rampant; FBI Runs Tests" (*Columbia Daily Tribune*). This personification of fear, and its "rampant" running across the country, tells readers how fear influenced this case. The appropriateness of the fear is shown in the headline "Bioterror Hysteria: Anthrax Fears Outstrip Reality" (Osborne). Fear may have seemed disproportional to the actual threat; however, the threat was real and the fear was understandable. Other headlines placed fear within the greater picture of recent events in the world. "Terrorists Can Claim Victory if Americans Show Fear" and "Don't Let Fear Help the Enemy" propose that showing fear gives the terrorists what they want and shows them they are winning (*Union-News, Sun-Sentinel*).

Positive headlines on fear, similar to those found in the D.C. case, appeared in newspapers regarding this case as well. "Anthrax Scare Exposes our Jitters" uses a collective "our" to describe the fear felt by almost all Americans (Edwards). Another headline expresses collectivity, unity, and resilience; it states, "Hardly 'Full of Fear,' Americans Unite For Fight" (*The Tampa Tribune*). Headlines discussing how to deal with the large amounts of fear include "Understanding is Key to Living with the Fear of Bioterrorism" and "Amid Scare, Call for Calm" (Neus, LaMendola). Local headlines in the D.C. case gave similar advice on managing fear to provide comfort for readers. One other headline, "Fear Won't Stop Fun," shows America's refusal to let this threat and its fear ruin Halloween (*Austin American-Statesman*).

Sensationalism about bioterrorism in headlines slowed when Anthrax attacks became a known reality; however, some sensationalism remained. One headline presents the image of terrorist threats as an “eerie fog” settling over America through which citizens had to “press on” (*Alameda Times-Star*). One headline presents an open-ended question that can spur on a readers imagination in fearful ways. “After Anthrax, What’s Next?” leads readers to question the future in ways that could be psychologically traumatic for them to think about (*Cape Cod Times*). Another headline, “Spores Sent to Daschle Able to Infect 2 Million,” puts an interesting, yet terrifying fact front and center in a newspaper (*The Charlotte Observer*). While this headline may be memorable, it told readers about the potential lives that could be lost from the amount of anthrax found in one letter. While readers may want to know anthrax’s potential, they do not need to get that information in such a sensational way.

This brief case analysis shows the trends and common threads in cases with elements of localized terrorism and supports the findings of the first two case studies. A more detailed analysis from the headlines of the months of terror caused by the Anthrax attacks may have revealed more themes and common elements among the three cases. That analysis may also have revealed some interesting differences among the cases stemming from the Anthrax case’s focus on national terrorism. The vast amounts of information in this case create difficulties too; however, that can determine how the media will handle cases of terrorism in the future.

The Anthrax Case and the Future Reporting of Terrorism

In the years since these cases, the delivery methods of news have undergone significant changes that will also change how these cases are reported in the future. When these three cases were occurring, most Americans got their news from newspapers. Since the development of Web 2.0, most Americans get their news online, and “increasing numbers of people, young people

especially, now cite the web as their main source of news...” (Richards 85). Now, nearly every newsworthy event generates a vast amount of information online, and the public is surrounded by the media’s messages even more instantaneously and continually than before. In this new media landscape, local boundaries blur and almost every case will become national. Cases will no longer remain local because the media will permeate the lives of many and spread that act of terror throughout the country and even the world. Now, headlines can be found in places other than newspapers. Web site headings, blog titles, and even posts on social media sites can be block language similar to headlines (Straughman 39). These new forms of headlines have the same potential for sensationalism and fear induction and an even greater potential to reach more people faster. This new media environment makes improved reporting techniques even more essential.

The findings from the Anthrax case study can be applied other national terrorism attacks. Massive amounts of media attention is directed towards terrorism cases, and readers will have to wade through immense quantities of information. In addition, sensationalism in large-scale is problematic: the slightest bit of sensationalism in a headline discussing this level of terrorism can bring a crippling fear to the American psyche. Reporting about national terrorism needs to be monitored closely and greatly improved.

Chapter 4

Improving Headlines in Localized Terrorism Cases

The D.C. Sniper brought about a traumatic time for Americans, and the analysis in Chapter I revealed both reserved, reassuring local headlines and sensational national headlines. The in depth analysis of the Columbus Sniper case in Chapter II supports the findings of the D.C. Sniper case and suggests many similar trends. In Chapter III, the brief study of headlines from the Anthrax attacks also supports the findings from the other two cases. All of these studies can provide valuable insight into the reporting of terrorism, the media's current manner of dealing with it, and the public's responses to both the events and the media coverage. The findings can also be helpful in understanding how the media has changed since these events and will continue to change in the years to come.

The present research on the D.C. Sniper, Columbus Sniper, and Anthrax cases reveals many trends, themes, and insights, including the notions of fear and sensationalism, which are especially problematic and need to be addressed by the media. The overwhelming fear expressed and intensified by headlines combined with the dramatic sensationalism that comes with these already frightening cases is a serious problem that will only grow with technology and the continuous coverage of today. Without far-reaching changes in reporting this type of case, social hysteria and insensitive reporting will continue to add further disruption to the lives of Americans in situations of terror. Fear and sensationalism are a major part of the reporting of localized terror; however, minimizing them through the improvement of headlines is essential, practical, and possible.

The Problems of Fear and Sensationalism in the Media

Fear is an integral part of media reporting on crime and terrorism. Fear is a common emotion in humans, and fear of crime is like other fears (Warr 454). Mark Warr, a sociology professor at the University of Texas at Austin, writes, “Criminal events, at their most elemental level, are *frightening* events. They are reminders to all that the world is not a safe place, that danger can strike at any time or location, and that life, in the end, is tenuous and precious” (452). Crimes remind people that they are mortal, and “...knowledge of our own mortality threatens to overwhelm us with paralyzing terror” (O’Hair 95). Fear of crime is heightened when people realize they possess characteristics that make them more vulnerable to crime (Muraskin 14). In these particular cases of localized terrorism, the killers chose random victims from a wide demographic and committed their crimes unhindered for a frightening space of time (Muzzatti 50). Everyone in the area was vulnerable, and fear was a natural result.

The goal of this analysis is not to reduce this natural fear caused by terrorism, but to show how the media can stop increasing fear unnecessarily, how to provide comfort to readers, and how the media can help the readers cope when that fear is inevitable. An article in the *Akron Beacon Journal* stated, “Fear is an interesting thing when you think about it. It can be paralyzing. Yet it is basic to survival. The issue becomes one of how much it rules our lives” (Evans). The terrorists cause the fear, but that fear can rule lives through the current practices of the media.

For example:

...Large headlines...contribute to the build-up of scares and moral panics with regard to violent crime. Exaggeration and over-emphasis of events can be achieved in a number of ways and by various techniques: for example through the size of typeface and language of the headline, or by the repetition of the same or similar stories over a number of consecutive days or weeks. (Stanko 25)

Improved media practices will be achieved through “striking the proper balance between being necessarily informative and needlessly frightening” (Hess 4). While true and complete objectivity is impossible, achieving more objectivity and less sensationalism is feasible.

Sensationalism in headlines caused much of the amplification of fear in these cases. If many of the sensational names used to describe the D.C. Sniper are combined into one headline, the result is astounding (Gregoriou). “Evil Hunter Madman, Roving Killer, and Psycho Sniper-Houdini: the Beltway Beast Targets Prey for Carnage” (Miller, Latham, Clines, *New York Post*, Harden, Smith). Obviously, the D.C. Sniper did horrible things and committed atrocious crimes; however, the language used to describe him in headlines is clearly excessive and fear inducing. The 1967 President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice stated, “The most damaging of the effects of violent crime is fear, and that fear must not be belittled” (Warr 452). Fear should not be belittled, but it should also not be blown out of proportion, encouraged, or spread as if it was a new form of bioterror.

In spite of the clear excess of sensationalism and the fear it induces, the media still finds reasons to employ sensationalism in these cases. Perhaps sensationalism is used to fight against the apathy and numbness the public acquired as a result of the increasingly grotesque and exaggerated crime entertainment on television and in books and news of violence. People may be so desensitized to violence that the media has to fight to shock them. Also, sensationalism in national papers may come from a desire to claim the attention of an audience who feels safe and unconcerned about a location far away from them.

Sensationalism can be positive and have affirmative motivations in cases of localized terrorism as well. Calling the killer a monster or animal can exclude him from the local community. Dehumanizing and demonizing the killer makes him “other” and indicates that he is

not part of regular society. Also, sensationalizing a killer in this way may be a way to cope with the crimes by getting revenge. While this may be therapeutic, it should probably be saved until after the killer is caught and the threat and fear are removed. Sensationalism after the fact may be an acceptable way to deal with the trauma of these cases. However, during the time of terror, it should be avoided, and very few reasons could warrant the type of sensationalism exhibited in the previous three chapters.

Fear and sensationalism in the media can even aid a terrorist in claiming more victims. These issues and terror cases are tied together by “indirect victimization” through fear (Warr 452). Terror cases claim specific victims; however, the spread of fear through the media allows the terrorist to claim even more victims. The readers and consumers become victims when their sense of safety and normalcy is stolen. Also, terrorists, by definition, aim to terrorize. When they have access to the media, graphic, colorful, and fear inducing language shows them that they are winning. An article in *The Columbus Dispatch* states, “The world isn’t nearly as bad as it seems in the papers and on television. The mass media aren’t very good at putting relative risks in perspective, a fact that terrorists and psychopaths count on” (Stephens). They can gain satisfaction and encouragement knowing they caused that fear, panic, and pain. When reporting in these cases, concerns also arise about whether the terrorists or criminals can use the information published to cause even more harm (Hess 142).

Many critics hold cynical views of how the media deals with fear and sensationalism in these cases. Papers are ultimately a business and need profits to survive, especially when newspapers are suffering loss of readership as they are today. However, some believe the media took the healthy justifiable fear these cases generated and led it to become unreasonable constant fear (Exoo 32). They suggest that “fearful people are ‘exploitable’ people,” and the media is

“capitalizing on the fear that it ‘could happen to you’” (Exoo 30, Franklin 146). Another view says, “The media ‘revel in headlines that maintain the image of a constant state of semi-emergency’” (Exoo31). If headlines present this constant state, people’s constant fear will lead them to continue to buy papers, and the newspaper’s profits will rise. One critic holds a particularly pessimistic view of the *Washington Post*’s motives in the D.C. Sniper case. He writes, “The nature of the crime and the events surrounding it were especially attractive to the popular press because of their potential for creating social panic,” and “...media organizations engaged in sensationalist crime reporting to increase public anxiety and thereby heighten the marketability of the story” (Muzzatti 49, 44). Some people do hold this negative view that the media takes advantage of the their readers’ fear and aims to increase it to boost profits. However, one could question whether the media truly operates in this way and intentionally uses fear for gain. Whatever the motivations or intentions, this fear is an issue that the media needs to address.

The media may have considered the fear in these cases as a potential for increased sales, but they just as easily could have seen an opportunity to provide their readers with the reassurance, comfort, and information that they were desperately seeking in order to sell even more papers. The point of this chapter is to define the fine line between warning, informing, and scaring the public (Muzzatti 50). This chapter will also help to show appropriate ways for the media to report on these cases and still obtain the profit they are seeking.

Potential Ways to Improve Headlines and Media Practices

The cases studied in the previous three chapters, along with research on headlines, journalism, the media, crime reporting, crisis communication, and terrorism revealed quite a few ways in which the media could improve its practices and write more appropriate headlines. Information on these types of cases needs to be reported; however, changes in the methods of

reporting are necessary as well. The areas that may lead to better reporting in localized terrorism include guidelines for better practices, use of experts, embedding, concern for public approval, effective crisis communication, and an application of ideas formulated by the case studies of the Sniper and Anthrax cases.

An editorial for the *San Francisco Chronicle* suggested minimizing the coverage of terrorism to lessen fear, but this idea is not the answer to the problems with terror reporting (Censer 120). Coverage in these cases is necessary; people must be informed, alerted, and educated about these events in the world to ensure their safety and their rights. People want and need information and coverage in instances of terror. The answer to the problem of fear does not lie in the absence of coverage but in *how* the events are covered. Aspects of the cases should not be left out or censored to reduce fear in the public; however, aspects of the cases should be presented in ways that reduce or minimize fear.

Guidelines

Some system of guidelines, rules, or laws could help to remove the negative themes, sensationalism, and fear from headlines. These guidelines could be official or unofficial, but they would suggest positive options to include in headlines, point out things to avoid, and keep authors and editors aware of the serious impact headlines can have. Journalists have a “heavy responsibility” and can play “a key role in the movement of whole populations from trauma to recovery, through sequential stages of establishing safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life” (Richards 13, 69). The negative aspects of cases like the D.C. Sniper show what happens when this heavy responsibility is forgotten; however, guidelines could help journalists keep their responsibility in mind and be a positive force in the lives of their readers. Guidelines could also help journalists achieve “higher levels of ‘emotional literacy’” by

making them examine what they write and notice what emotions their headlines are portraying (Richards 13).

Guidelines can also lead to self-censorship. Some television anchors and scholars argue that anchors should “be a rock of stability in crisis,” especially when they are given the opportunity to ad-lib (Censer 55). This means that these anchors edit what they say to ensure the portrayal of reassurance to their viewers. This self-censorship reduces sensational television reporting, and it draws viewers back to that anchor because he or she provided needed information and solace during a fearful past event. If headline writers could have the same attitude, they could do positive work for their readers, be viewed as a go-to source for answers and comfort in tough times, and increase their profits. Self-censorship could also come from a motivation to work for the greater good. In WWII, journalists worked closely with the military. Some journalists disliked the censorship the government imposed on them; however, others accepted censorship because they viewed themselves as part of the “war effort” (Hess 18). Headline writers today could censor themselves in order to be part of effort for the war on terror, crime, and fear.

Like the television industry, many industries possess professional organizations that promote certain guidelines and best practices and encourage compliance to those guidelines. A professional organization for journalists could endorse and uphold helpful guidelines, and it could create a shift in focus to the art and craft of journalism and away from profits. This shift of focus could encourage headline writers to put additional thought into the quality and power of their writing and avoid the shallow thrills of sensationalism.

Use of Experts

Another possible way to encourage better reporting practices in cases of localized terrorism is through the increased use of experts. One way television news stations like CNN and FOX dealt with the Anthrax attacks appropriately and with limited or no sensationalism was to turn the stories over to their medical correspondents. These experts consulted with the writers, verified their claims, and kept them in check (Hess 132). Experts who specialize in law enforcement, law, government, medicine, criminology, psychology, or other related fields can be employed, not to solve or speculate, but to help, give insight, and guard reporting. Newspapers must check to ensure that the experts truly possess the expertise they claim to have. Once expertise is verified, the use of experts could be one answer for the problem of sensationalism. Experts may be biased, but if they are credible, their input will be based more on facts than on opinion or speculation. They can also help writers verify facts in quick reports that otherwise would go unchecked.

Embedding Journalists

Embedding is another journalism practice that could be applied to cases of localized terrorism to help remove some of the fear and sensationalism. Embedding is often used in war reporting, and journalists who are “embedded” live with the troops to gain an inside perspective. Embedded journalists are subject to certain rules and contracts, and if they break those rules, they lose the privilege of being embedded, and they lose the means to their story (Richardson 195). Embedded journalists are part of what happens in their location; therefore, their reporting changes. These journalists often develop sympathy for the troops they live with and consider themselves part of the troops by using “we” (Richardson 193). Journalists could be embedded into the areas where localized terrorism is occurring as well, and they could be placed into the

war of emotions, fear, and danger that occurs in terrorized locations. They would be embedded in local life, live with their audience, and see the situation from the audience's perspective.

The positive results of embedding could be helpful in removing sensationalism. Embedded writers will not over sensationalize or emphasize fear because they are included in their reports. If more reporters are sent to areas where localized terrorism is occurring, they might include more positive elements like those exhibited in local publications and less of the sensationalism and fear that national publications portrayed. Removing the geographic distance that allows people to feel safe and sensationalize events that do not affect them may lead to the removal of sensationalism and unnecessary amplification of fear.

However, embedding could have negative consequences that should be addressed in advance. Embedded journalists are placed in an unsafe environment, and naturally, they will be fearful. Their fear of becoming victims themselves may unconsciously seep into their writing and be sensed and felt by the public. A journalist's lack of ability to dissociate may allow fear to find its way into the writing unintentionally. The fear of *Washington Post* headline writers did seep into their headlines in a few cases, and this could happen if embedding is practiced. This implication indicates that journalists who will be embedded need to be chosen carefully, trained to deal with the special circumstances, and evaluated to determine how they will deal with the fear they will face. Selected journalists should be appropriately suited for the situation they are entering. For example, a journalist who grew up with the fears surrounding the frequent tornadoes in the central United States, a journalist who grew up in a violent area, or a previous war correspondent would be well-matched to an embedding in a fearful environment and prepared to handle new situation. Teams of journalists could also be formed to provide support and accountability, and apprenticeships can be set up to help ensure proper training.

Public Approval

Increased public approval could serve as incentive for the media to remove sensationalism and fear from headlines. Readers appreciate objective, serious, honest reporting in serious cases such as 9/11 (Hess 251, 260). The public continually rates terrorism and war reporting more highly than other news with its “pursuit of the trivial and...absorption with scandal and sensationalism” (Hess 260, 275). People appreciate factual, weighted, and serious reporting because it provides the information they seek without unnecessarily increasing fear and paranoia. Ratings of the press could go up if this method was used more, and this would provide excellent motivation for the press to employ this type of reporting on their own.

Principles of Effective Crisis Communication

Employing the principles of effective crisis communication can also help to eliminate the negative aspects of headlines in localized terrorism. George W. Bush once said, in crisis, “The first thing the leader of an organization, or a state, or a country has got to do is project calm, because if the leader is not calm it’s likely many others won’t be calm either” (George W. Bush: The 9/11 Interview). The media are leaders in information, and the public looks to them for guidance and information. They should view themselves as leaders in this way and project calm during a crisis as well.

The National Academy of Sciences Conference on risk assessment provided advice for effective crisis communication (Warr 474). First, they suggest using “simple, graphic, and concrete material, avoiding technical or specialized language wherever possible” (Warr 474). Sensationalism is not simple or concrete; therefore, it should not be employed in headlines describing a crisis. The Conference also suggested careful consideration of what is “relevant to

the target audience,” how the audience will perceive what is written, and what concerns the audience will have (Warr 474). In crisis situations, additional efforts should be taken to focus on the audience and its needs. A deeper awareness of how the media functions and how audiences receive the media, like that provided by the previous three chapters, is generally helpful in crises as well.

The risk assessment conference also suggests presenting information in a personal way whenever possible. Using “we” or “our” can be comforting in crises. The local headlines in the D.C. Sniper case emphasized collectivity and community. This emphasis lets readers know that they are not alone in fear, anger, or sadness, and it helps writers avoid sensationalism because they are included in whatever statements they make. Embedding also leads to personal reporting in this way. The case studies based on D.C. Sniper, Columbus Sniper, and Anthrax headlines demonstrate a drastic need for personal reporting and shows the positive impact that it can have. Some of the worst headlines treat the terrorized local as “other,” and some of the most powerful emphasize community and collective resilience.

Another strong point from the National Academy of Sciences Conference on risk assessment involves measurements of risk such as statistics and probability assessments. The Conference suggests communicators “identify and explain strengths and limitations of different risk measures,” “identify, acknowledge, and explain uncertainties in risk estimates,” and “provide opportunities for people to learn how to interpret risk information” (Warr 474). If these guidelines are followed, readers will be better equipped to understand the risks they are facing. This understanding could curb unnecessary fear. In practice, employing these methods of risk assessment could include adding statistics to the end of unusual crime reports, like localized terrorism cases, to help lessen the spread of fear (Warr 470). For example, a crime may seem

completely horrible and fear inducing, but when it is combined with a statistic showing that crime's improbability, the crime loses some power to cause fear. For example, a homicide in a small town may be shocking, but papers could add statistics about the low rate of homicides in the area or how many crimes occurred that year. This type of statistic puts that unusual crime in proper context and could comfort the readers (Warr 470). Lastly, a note should be included stating that people can contact the police with any questions and provide contact information. This will provide the Conference's suggested opportunity for the public to learn to interpret risk measures, and contacting the police could remove some uncertainty and provide comfort in these situations.

Case Study Findings

In addition to these ideas regarding effective crisis communication, findings from the case studies in Chapters I through III can be applied in the formulation of appropriate headlines. First, headline writers should appeal to positive emotions and good feelings to sell papers rather than trying to shock, scare, or entertain their audiences in localized terrorism cases. The positive work that the media can do should be the aim of reporting in fearful times. For example, the media often functions to educate, explain, and clarify happenings in the world. These functions should be valued and visible in headlines to provide readers with the information and reassurance they crave. Another positive media function can occur through entertainment. When the media aims to entertain through dramatization and sensationalism, fear can occur; however, if the media aims to provide entertainment in the form of stress relief and a distraction during hard times, it can provide relaxation.

Headlines could also be improved through contextualization and balance. If harsh, depressing, scary news or images must be expressed, including reassurance and calming thoughts

in the same statement can help readers cope. For example, a headline about a hospitalized anthrax victim can be accompanied by news of their recuperation and the success of medicines in their case. In this way, headline writers can provide readers with the “anxiety-provoking event and a way of managing the anxiety” at the same time (Richards 63).

The Columbus Sniper headlines show that positive sensationalism is an option for improving headlines in such cases, and sensationalism may not always be negative. In the Columbus case, headlines used sensational images to portray the police as being close on the Sniper’s trail. This type of positive sensationalism can provide encouragement for readers and can help the writers to make their headlines memorable without psychologically harming their audience. These Columbus Sniper headlines are an example that not all sensationalism is bad.

Rather than begging for national attention through sensationalism, certain national headlines in the Columbus case found positive ways to make Columbus’ troubles relevant to all Americans. For example, when one Columbus headline pointed out the fact that the Sniper was attacking highways, a symbol of American mobility, the Sniper became an enemy of the entire nation rather than a menace to one location. This method of creating significance for a national audience could also be used to gain the national recognition that often motivates excessively dramatic headlines. Helping national readers relate to the locals involved in the case can draw in a larger audience through positive means.

Lastly, the case studies revealed a major issue that needs to be addressed in order to improve headlines. Newspapers that pride themselves on avoiding sensationalism produced some of the most sensational headlines, and newspapers with appropriate headlines tended to have very sensational articles. Newspapers should be aware that the level of sensationalism in their headlines and articles do not match. This disparity can greatly harm the reputation of a credible

newspaper. If newspapers make sure that both their headlines and articles present the reputation, quality, and objectivity they wish to portray, a large amount of fear could be removed from frightening cases of terrorism.

If applied, these suggestions based on guidelines, experts, embedding, public approval, effective crisis communication, and case study findings could go far in reducing the overall trauma caused by terrorism and in fighting back against the individuals who disrupt lives through fear and violence. The media should seek to support their readers, communities, and country, and if they do so, profitability should follow. Expressing a collective effort with the support of the media could help the United States, or any nation, cope with difficult times while changing and minimizing terrorism's presence in the future.

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Disclaimer: The authors below are cited in order to follow MLA citation style; however, these authors did not write the headlines used in this paper. These authors wrote the articles while editors wrote the headlines.

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Lauren Michelle Orner
Academic Vitae

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, Brandywine Campus, Media, PA May 2012

- Schreyer Honors College
- Bachelors of Arts in English
- Minor in Business
- Honors in English

HONORS THESIS

Spring 2012

Headlines in Crisis: The D.C. Sniper and Other Cases of Localized Terrorism
Thesis Supervisor and Honors Adviser: Dr. Kathleen Kennedy, Assistant Professor of English

Thesis Reader: Dr. Myra Goldschmidt, Associate Professor of English

WORK EXPERIENCE

The Writing Studio, Penn State Brandywine, Media, PA, *Peer Tutor* Spring 2012

- Worked individually with students to improve writing skills

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Brandywine Believes, Penn State Brandywine, Media, PA Fall 2012

College Intern, unpaid position

- Edited essay submissions for the Brandywine Believes program
- Collaborated with the program leader and other interns to improve essay submissions

GRANTS RECEIVED

Schreyer Ambassador Travel Grant Summer 2011

- Amount: \$350

AWARDS

Outstanding Academic Achievement Award, Penn State Brandywine 2008-2012

Recognition of Leadership and Civic Engagement,
Penn State Brandywine 2009, 2011

SCHOLARSHIPS

Chancellor's Award Scholarship 2008-2010

W.W. Smith Charitable Trust Scholarship 2010-2012

Academic Excellence Award Scholarship 2010-2011

PUBLICATIONS

Orner, Lauren. 2011. "Sleeping." *175 Years of Reflections, Laurel Hill Cemetery 1836-2011*. Eds. Gwen Kaminski, Alexis Jeffcoat, and Emma Stern. Philadelphia, PA: Friends of Laurel Hill Cemetery, 2011. Print.

PRESENTATIONS

- Orner, L., Stephenson, Z., Guertin, L., *Field Mapping the Green Trail at Tyler Arboretum: Using GPS and Google Earth to Create a Virtual Hike*. Presented at the Sigma Xi (The Scientific Research Society) Research Symposium, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA, April 8, 2011. Presented by undergraduate authors L. Orner and Z Stephenson.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Sigma Tau Delta, International English Honor Society
Phi Kappa Phi

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE

Honors Program, Penn State Brandywine

National Honors Service Day project chair, Spring 2009, Spring 2011

National Honors Service Day participant, 2008-2012

Alumni Liaison, 2008-2012

- Organized and led a two-week long event to raise awareness about human trafficking and slavery, raised approximately \$200, and collected toiletries for trafficking victims in a shelter in Washington D.C.
- Planned and led a coupon-clipping event through the Overseas Coupon Program and raised \$13,022 in one day to benefit the U.S. Navy base stationed in Ikego, Japan.
- Collaborated in organizing a 5K run and Open Mic event to raise money and awareness for organizations called Sweat for Hope and Profugo, which benefit fair trade.
- Participated in Hope for Heritage, the National Honors Service Day project for 2009, which raised enough money for 5 scholarships for poor, yet promising students to the Heritage schools in Ghana, Africa.
- Communicated with Alumni regarding the Honors service projects each semester

Pen in Hand Literary Magazine, Penn State Brandywine

Secretary, 2011-2012

- Collaborated in choosing and editing submissions for the Pen in Hand.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Penn State Brandywine's International Program in Greece

May 7-16, 2011

- Enrolled in CAMS 045U- Honors Greek Mythology and Art (3 credits)
- Traveled through Athens, the Peloponnese, and the islands Hydra, Poros, and Aegina
- Visited the Acropolis, the Oracle at Delphi, Mycenae, Olympia, and the Theater at Epidaurus

- Visited the National Archaeological Museum, the New Acropolis Museum, the Olympia Museum, and the Delphi Museum

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Spanish, basic proficiency in spoken and written

TECHNOLOGICAL PROFICIENCY

Advanced proficiency with Microsoft Word

Basic proficiency with iMovie, Garageband, Google Earth, and WavePad Sound Editor