

Agenda-Setting and the New York Times Coverage of Domestic Violence
A Content Analysis of Domestic Violence Reported by the New York Times
Before, During, and After the O. J. Simpson Trial

by

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the leading cause of female homicides and injury-related deaths during pregnancy, with women five to eight times more likely than men to experience violence committed by an intimate. This study examines how the press reports the battering committed against women by their heterosexual intimates and suggests that the newsworthiness of this violence is not dependent upon the prevalence or the danger of such violence. What is considered newsworthy by the press is affected by the press's current agenda and routine news practices.

This study's premise is that prior to the O. J. Simpson murder investigation and trial, the battering of women by their intimate partners was reported less often by the *New York Times*, and, when it was reported, was covered in an incomplete or misleading way. The *New York Times* plays a dominant role in establishing the saliency of issues on the U.S. media agenda and the O. J. Simpson murder trial (6/12/94), which was covered intensively by the media, was described as the Trial of the Century. After such extensive coverage, did the *Times* change the way its' routine news coverage framed the violence against women?

An agenda-setting perspective was used to analyze the framing techniques of individual stories. After applying the study's criteria for selecting stories to the total census of stories about battering that were not O. J. Simpson related there were 227 (7.4%) stories to be analyzed.

A content analysis was done on the non-O.J. Simpson *New York Times*' routine news coverage of battering articles published between June 12, 1994 and May 19, 1998. The Simpson case lasted from June 12, 1994, which was the date of the crime, to the trial's

verdict which was delivered on October 3, 1995; a total of 480 days. Four consecutive 16 month time frames were developed.

There was strong support for several, but not all, hypotheses; this study substantiated most of the prior research studies. There was much more coverage after the trial, with a significant increase in the number of articles during the period immediately after the trial.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the leading cause of female homicides and injury-related deaths during pregnancy. Each year, women experience almost five million intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). Women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience violence committed by an intimate (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004). Of the 1,544 intimate partner related deaths in 2004, 75% were female (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). Whether it is described as intimate partner violence, domestic violence or battering, it is here defined as abuse occurring in a close relationship between current and former spouses and dating partners and resulting in physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

This is a study about how the press reports the battering that is committed against women by their heterosexual intimates. Even though the issue of domestic violence was historically present long before media attention was focused on it, the newsworthiness of this violence is not dependent upon the prevalence or the intensity or the danger of such violence. What is considered newsworthy by the press is affected by the press's current agenda and routine news practices (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997, Pritchard & Hughes, 1997, Tuchman, 1977). The press, thus, has an integral role in deciding when this issue becomes an important social problem; only then is the violence represented as real enough to be worthy of the press's continuing attention.

It is in this specific context that the role of the press is examined in this study: how does intimate partner violence become a salient issue for the press? If battering is now deemed salient by the press, then how does the press define and frame it? How does the

press depict blame and responsibility when battering is reported? How does the press portray the men who batter women? How does the press use language to represent the reality of intimate partner violence?

Specifically, this study examined how a major news outlet, the *New York Times*, covered heterosexual intimate partner violence, i.e., the battering of women by their heterosexual intimates, before, during, and after the 1995 O. J. Simpson murder trial. My basic theoretical model is an agenda-setting perspective. My primary research question asks: was the *New York Times* daily coverage of routine battering incidents significantly different during the 16 months of the O. J. Simpson case, in amount and theme, from the 16 months of battering coverage prior to the case and in two succeeding 16 month time frames after the trial's verdict? This research examined exactly how many occurrences of battering were reported, and how those occurrences were covered. For purposes of the study's sample, "routine battering incidents" means those incidents not directly related to the O. J. Simpson case. All coverage of battering by the *New York Times*, not directly related to the Simpson case, is included in these time-frames.

The study begins with the premise that, prior to the Simpson case, the battering of women by their intimate partners was reported less often by the press, and, when it was reported, was covered in an incomplete or misleading way. The study further assumes that the press engages in a corroborative function for the prevailing power structure, reflecting the cultural context in which social problems occur. It is, therefore, a policy instrument of the very society it reports on, effectively contributing to public and policy agendas. Because of this function, the study also assumes the necessity for reporting vehicles, such as the *New*

York Times, to be more aware of their role in informing the public and in setting policy regarding the treatment of battering cases, and to make adjustments in news coverage accordingly.

The press is only one of several media outlets, and is itself comprised of different and differing components. However, several studies indicate that the so-called elite national press influences the regional and local press, as well as other media outlets (Rogers & Dearing, 1988; Danielian & Reese, 1996). If these and other studies are correct, then an examination of one of the recognized national elite press outlets can possibly indicate how other media outlets perform in an agenda-setting context.

Agenda-setting, in this study, is conceived as a dynamic process working incrementally across time. A study of the *New York Times* coverage is a useful first step for measuring changes in the press's agenda, because the lengthy coverage given this trial by the press offers the opportunity to compare how occurrences of battering were reported even before the trial began.

Gender roles, race, and class are all integrally entwined with the reality of battering. In order to offer a truly comprehensive picture of battering, a longer and more extensive study would take into account all of the permutations amongst these variables. However, race and class are not often identifiable in the stories; and, the focus of this study is on violence against women generally. There was no attempt to completely explicate these relationships.

This study examined the cumulative content of those *New York Times* stories reporting on intimate partner violence cases across four 16-month periods: the period before

the pre-trial publicity and subsequent trial, the period during the pre-trial publicity and subsequent trial, the 16-month period immediately after the trial, and, a later 16-month period to determine the long-term effects of the agenda-setting. The study asks if those stories changed in number, content, and theme during these consecutive 16-month periods. Stereotypes and familiar images do not work in an isolated, independent manner but through a cumulative, experiential evolution, changing with the forces that impinge upon them. The societal perception of what is typical of a situation is therefore not necessarily created by one particular event nor by one isolated incident. Instead, it is the repetitive exploration, and often the exploitation, of a subject, as well as the varied ways in which it can be perceived, that creates the representation that a particular stereotype or image has in the larger cultural context of the world around us. (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003).

These cumulative representations often constitute what is socially constructed as real and newsworthy, and, if lacking any counterbalancing images, can frame the story as it will be perceived by reader and writer alike. Stories in the mainstream press that cover battering are often not merely reporting the facts about a crime but are offering a representation of the stereotypes and myths about battering.

“At any given moment, the contents of the mass media are indicators of two very different and opposing social phenomena. They reflect the social organization and value system of society. Simultaneously, they are purposeful elements of social change, agents for modeling the goals and values of social groups and society” (Janowitz, 1976, pp.

17-18). This value system, in turn, contributes to how women and men will perceive the day to day reality of battering and how they will articulate their experience of it.

Intimate partner violence and the Orenthal James Simpson Trial

On June 12, 1994, the murdered bodies of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman were discovered on the grounds of Ms. Simpson's residence in Los Angeles, California. Both victims were stabbed to death. Ms. Brown was the divorced spouse of Orenthal James Simpson, a former professional athlete and a nationally recognized celebrity, better known as O. J. Simpson. Mr. Simpson subsequently became a suspect in the murders, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. On June 19, 1994, with the Los Angeles police expecting Mr. Simpson to turn himself in, Mr. Simpson, along with a friend, Al Cowlings, drove off in Mr. Simpson's white Ford Bronco onto the Los Angeles Interstate highway system. Both the authorities and the mass media tracked the progress of the Bronco. The chase received nationwide coverage with helicopters of local TV stations competing for air space with the police helicopters. For hours, cameras followed the movements of the Bronco as it finally made its way back to Mr. Simpson's residence. The cameras continued to watch as a standoff took place, with the police waiting for Mr. Simpson to finally surrender. From that time forward, the mass media closely followed everything that happened in the case, and promptly reported the events to viewers, listeners, and readers alike.

The issue of domestic violence was presented by the attorneys prosecuting the case as integral to the upcoming proceedings of the trial. The trial itself was argued, by the

prosecution, as one of domestic violence that resulted in murder. Mass media coverage, which began immediately on June 13, 1994, the day after the murders, quickly saturated media outlets after the Bronco police chase; and, initially, triggered a national discussion on the issue of spouse abuse. To present his court defense, Mr. Simpson hired famous and highly regarded attorneys, who collectively became known as the “Dream Team.” When the trial began in March 1995, Court TV covered the trial gavel to gavel, while network television and major news organizations such as the Cable News Network (CNN) presented significant portions of the trial. Some of the commentators, who offered their expert and well-considered opinions on the trial, became almost as well-known as the trial participants themselves. Television and radio talk shows generated seemingly endless hours of discussions on the various aspects of the trial; at the same time, the print media devoted significant amounts of space covering the trial and its potential social ramifications.

The trial ran 266 days through 126 witnesses, 20 attorneys, and more than 1100 pieces of evidence; all of it seen by a television audience (Gerbner, 1995). According to Dashiell (1996), “In the first 80 days of media coverage of the case, the three broadcast networks aired 342 stories, and at least one story about the Simpson case aired on all but 14 nights of that 80 day period” (p.164). The trial so dominated the television coverage that of the 100 highest-rated cable programs in the first quarter of 1995, Simpson-related programs comprised 98 of them. And, when the verdict of the jury was televised on October 3, 1995, about 107.7 million people, i.e., 57% of the nation’s adult population watched the live telecast. This extensive media coverage contributed to the trial being labeled the “Trial of

the Century,” and the coverage did not end even after the verdict of “not guilty” was read on October 3, 1995.

Chancer (1997) examined the most publicized high-profile crime cases in 135 United States newspapers between 1985 and early 1997. During that selected time frame, the O. J. Simpson case was the number one story. There were 103,589 articles and references to the case. The conclusion of the trial was followed by a succession of books, magazine and journal articles, as well as new career options for those same well-known commentators who now hosted their own talk shows. The “Trial of the Century” serves as a startling example of what Danielian and Reese (1989) described previously about a different event, that is “... a rapid convergence of media attention during which it seemed that all media channels as well as conversations on the street are filled with the story” (p. 29).

Domestic Violence as a Social Problem

The history of domestic violence against women in this country is well documented, but not always well understood. It was only in the Married Women’s Property Act of 1848 in New York that coverture, i.e., the law that the legal identity of a woman merged with her husband, was rescinded (Marcus, 1994); and, it was not until 1920 (two years after the passage of the women's suffrage amendment) that the beating of a wife became illegal in all states (Pleck, 1987). The rise of the women’s movement in the 1960's and 1970's began a national dialogue about the extent and severity of domestic violence, leading to the first battered women’s shelters being reestablished in the 1970's, such

shelters having been unfunded since the 1930's (Tierney, 1982, Ferraro, 1983, Pagelow, 1992).

Finn (1990), using Pleck's (1987) labeling of spouse abuse as domestic tyranny, noted that wife battering has a long history of sanctions, both formal and informal, that encourages the continuation of the problem. Finn cited the number of victims, wounded and killed as a result of 12 years of international terrorism, as fewer than 11,000. Contrasting this number with the numbers of women beaten and killed yearly, Finn asked why the immediate and extreme actions that are taken against international terrorism are not taken against the terrorism in the home.

What is the reality of the social construction of battering? The reported numbers of battered women are staggering, and, because there are so many numbers available to use, they might actually obscure the magnitude of the problem by their sheer size. Estimates of how many women are battered yearly range as high as five million (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). It is not just the numbers that are salient. Battering is often a prelude to homicide. One third of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000) and much more s more likely than men to experience violence committed by an intimate (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004)

Even the nature of women's own homicide patterns appears to be affected by domestic violence. When women kill, it is often in response to physical threats from their male victims (Browne, 1987; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Ogle, Maier-Katkin, and Bernard, 1995; O'Keefe, 1997). Between 1976 and 1985, there were 16,595 homicides involving persons killed by their spouse in the context of single-offender criminal homicide (Mercy & Saltzman,

1989). These homicides accounted for 8.8% of all homicides committed during that 10-year period. These numbers do not include intimates who were not married, multiple offenders, or unsolved homicides. Such numbers regarding homicide are important to consider because, rather than being isolated incidents of aberrant and idiosyncratic behavior resulting in death, the numbers suggest a systemic problem, in which, "Homicide of women can be viewed within the context of other violent practices directed against women" (Campbell, 1981, p. 72).

The act of battering is implicated in a broad range of effects upon women's lives. These effects go beyond the obvious physical and emotional abuse inherent in such battering by an intimate. Stark and Flitcraft (1996) claimed that, "We reported that domestic violence is followed by a sharp increase in women's risk of addiction, attempted suicide, and a range of other health and mental health problems" (p 18). In fact, ongoing battering may be the most significant precipitant of female suicide attempts (Kurz & Stark, 1988; Stark & Flitcraft, 1995).

These studies do not even deal with the problematic nature of broken families and the resulting challenges of raising children under such conditions. Yet, according to Kozol (1995), the American national media are continually rediscovering and forgetting the problem of domestic violence that pervades American homes. For Kozol, the media coverage of the trial of O. J. Simpson for the murders of his wife, Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend, Ronald Goldman, exposes how narratives of domestic violence - news stories, movies, and the like - reveal a struggle to maintain Americans' most cherished national values and beliefs in the face of social conditions that challenge them. The seemingly private

issue of ongoing problems of violence in an intimate dyadic relationship becomes a salient issue of public debate. If the mass media does not adequately define and frame the question of domestic violence as a social problem and a public issue, will domestic violence then be perceived as an aberration that happens to someone else?

The medical community has often failed to recognize the inherent and obvious dangers of domestic abuse. In drawing on two different studies of emergency medical responses, Kurz and Stark (1988) found that medical records will often mislabel women's complaints. In one instance, only 4% of the nonbattered women were labeled with quasi-psychiatric terms in their records; however, one-fifth of the battered women were assigned quasi-psychiatric designations such as "hysterical" or "depressed." Furthermore, when further episodes of abuse occurred, the original labels continued to be applied to these women.

The legal system is not immune from the impact of this dichotomy. "Law misses the duality and resistance described by social historians and advocates in part because most litigation about domestic violence takes place in an individualized context rather than a socialized one" (Mahoney, 1994, p. 65). Like the press, the law focuses upon a narrower understanding of what has happened and what is happening in the abusive relationship. It is a specific and individual occurrence, rather than a societal one, and does not necessarily become a matter of public scrutiny. "Police tend to dichotomize the community into normal and deviant citizens" (Ferraro, 1989, p. 67). In such a view, a "normal" wife batterer is seen as situationally deviant, responding to particular stresses, such as a threatened divorce. Kurz, in Gelles and Lesoko (1993), in discussing how laws against battering are invoked, suggested that, "To the extent that these laws are not viewed seriously, the legal system will

continue to treat battering as an individual problem, rather than as criminal behavior" (p. 91).

Russell and DeMillo (2006) noted that the general public holds a number of misconceptions about battered women. They found that jurors often use the concept of the "battered woman syndrome" to evaluate the typicality and response history of defendants. They suggest that "If these features truly constitute defining characteristics for battered women defendants in the minds of jurors, then the presence or absence of those characteristics should impact verdicts" (p. 223).

These studies suggest that a societal misunderstanding of what causes battering relationships might affect how battered women are treated by the legal and medical communities. In such a dichotomy, the press might portray battering as an "individual" problem to be taken seriously. However, it might fail to portray battering as a result of the day to day societal interactions that minimize society's responsibility in the battering.

Private Worlds

The fact that "wife-beating" is so frequently reported, yet remains widespread, systematic, and long-term, marks it as social and deliberate. Despite this, social service workers, researchers, victims, and even their attackers, present a portrait of battering as a "private" event determined in the arena of family life either by such individual peculiarities as alcoholism,

psychopathology, and “learned helplessness,” or by the tensions present in family interactions, (Stark, Flitcraft, and Frazier, 1979, p. 462)

This public/private dichotomy influences how police respond to domestic violence calls, including where the violence takes place. Bachman and Coker (1995) found that, “... police were more likely to arrive at the scene within 10 minutes to those victimizations which occurred in a public place compared to private residences” (p. 101). And, Saunders (1995) discovered that police officers often claim inaction on their part as due to their concern about interfering in the “private matters” of the home. “Thus, in the so-called private sphere of domestic and family life, which is purportedly immune from law, there is the selective application of law” (Schneider, 1994, p. 38).

For example, Williams and Holmes (1981) showed the residents of a town cards with a description of a rape incident. The incidents described on the card included a rape by an acquaintance, a rape by a stranger, the rape of a wife by her husband, and the rape of a prostitute. The respondents rated the spousal rape as the least serious of the incidents. Only half of the respondents identified it as rape. Apparently, this private world was off limits to many accepted social mores.

“The battered women’s movement revealed to the public hidden and private violence” (Marcus, 1994, p. 40). The public notion of what is private can affect what is considered acceptable behavior in the unsafe home. Why is the phenomenon of violence against women in the home considered ordinary, while violence occurring in public situations might be considered extraordinary? What makes the unsafe home acceptable but unsafe

other worlds unacceptable? "Privacy thus plays a particularly subtle and pernicious ideological role in supporting, encouraging, and legitimating violence against women" (Schneider, 1994, p. 44).

Previously, the police operated as gatekeepers who viewed such violence as a private matter. Henning and Felder (2005) highlighted that mandatory arrest, i.e., arrest based on the presumption of guilt, has become the preferred law enforcement response to domestic violence. "New laws and policies mandated or presumed an arrest response" (p. 634-635). Cases are likelier to be prosecuted because of mandatory arrests.

The press's treatment of violence against women reflects the dichotomous nature of the public/private sphere. The problematic nature of the private/public distinction in the press regarding battering was recognized in the late 1970's; yet, years later, the distinction remains (Roberts, 1994; Meyers, 1995, McDonald, 1999). Marcus (1994) writes that "...we must recognize that characterizing some violence as both "domestic" and "private" explicitly diminishes or minimizes its seriousness for women both in theory and in practice" (p. 27).

If newspapers continue to portray battered women as victims of personal tragedies and individual pathologies, or continue to emphasize the dramatic or aberrant qualities when a woman is battered, will the public do so as well? "Since the 1970's, when the media first began discussing domestic violence, they have typically depicted it as a problem of the "private sphere" and focused on the women involved, either blaming them for the abuse or championing them as lone heroines fighting lone villains" (Kozol, 1993, p. 648).

Theoretical Perspectives

How are the history and the continuity of intimate violence to be explained?

How does it happen that the problematic question of framing battering as a public and social issue has continued for so long? According to Prasad (1994), there are two major theoretical perspectives in the West to explain the causes of family violence and wife abuse. One perspective views such violence as a result of a patriarchal and social milieu that creates the structural and ideological roles of men and women; and it is within those learned roles that the violence is acted out. In effect, women then hold subordinate positions within the society, lessening their ability to influence and maintain a shared social construction of reality, thus silencing their own views. These positions result in women being at risk in the society specifically because of their identification as women. It is a society whose power structure lies vested in men; and whose dictates as to who is important and who is unimportant results in the devaluation of women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo, 1983; Yllo, 1993, Dobash & Dobash, 1998).

The other perspective attributes violence in the home, including wife battering, to social-structural stresses, such as exposure to violence in childhood, as well as macro-level cultural factors, including mores about violence and gender relations. In addition, an individual's personality problems, ongoing psychopathology and low socio-economic status are all important contributors to the violence. This perspective does not repudiate the feminist assessment of women's social positions, as much as it casts a broader-based

theoretical note to explain family violence, with women's roles as only one among many contributing factors (Gelles and Strauss, 1979; Gelles, 1993).

This study uses the first perspective.

Literature Review - Agenda-Setting

The agenda-setting perspective suggests that the amount and the kind of news coverage that an issue receives can affect the salience that the public ascribes to that issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting is a dynamic process that is context-dependent, and is continually pressed by the search for attracting the public's attention.

This is the heart of the agenda-setting phenomenon, documented by two decades of empirical research. The issues on the media agenda influence the salience of issues on the public agenda. Although the media seldom determine our attitudes and opinions and tell us what to think, they frequently tell us what to think about (Shaw & McCombs, 1989, pp. 114-115)

Our social realities provide the frameworks for our receptiveness to information and whether we act on it (Winter, 1981). Krishnaiah, Signorielli, and McLeod (1993) noted that, "News, like knowledge, imposes a frame for defining and constructing social reality" (p. 648). News stories may reflect and influence how the social reality of an issue should be perceived; possibly framing the responses by the media and the public alike.

Leiber, Jamieson, and Krohn (1993) asked why illegal drug usage by professional athletes became a significant social problem during the 1980's. What factors, in addition to

an actual increase in drug usage among professional athletes, might have contributed to this issue becoming a recognized social problem? Their content analysis of the *New York Times* and the *Sporting News* coverage across a 28-year period suggested that the media's access to a continual supply of story lines about drug use allowed the theme to be transformed into a crime wave. In part, at least, this widespread alarm about drug usage by professional athletes was also a media-defined social problem. The story eventually ceased to be covered so intensively, but not because drug usage decreased. In effect, the media helped to make drug abuse an important issue. Beckett (1994) suggested that, "... it is the definitional activities of the state and the media, rather than the reported incidences of crime or drug use and abuse, that have shaped public concern regarding these issues" (p. 425).

Of course, societal concerns do not have to originate from the media; certainly, these concerns often fall within the direct experience of individuals. However, the mass media's recognition of these concerns can help place them and keep them in the public domain. At the very least, readers will have that issue presented before them in a regular and possibly consistent fashion. Jones (1976) stated that "having a social problem considered serious by the media-attentive citizenry means that it is more likely to be acted upon by the government" (p. 239).

This is only part of the composite agenda-setting process. Dearing and Rogers (1996) identify a research tradition for three types of agenda-setting: media agenda-setting, public agenda-setting, and policy agenda-setting. In media agenda-setting, the main dependent variable is the importance of an issue on the mass media agenda. Public agenda-setting's main dependent variable is the importance of a set of issues on the public agenda.

In other words, what does the public think is important? Lastly, policy agenda-setting is the concern with policy decisions and objectives as a response to the media and public agenda.

Media agenda-setting is also affected by outside forces. For instance, in a political campaign, the media participates in a transaction process in which media, policy makers, and the public converge on what will be the salient issues in the campaign.

According to Matsaganis and Payne (2005), the agenda setting process is important because of the asymmetrical structure of this relationship; individual citizens become more and more dependent on the media to understand what is going on around them. Agenda-setting then becomes the political equivalent of an economic marketplace (Dalton, Beck, Huckfeldt, and Koetzle, 1998).

Danielian and Reese (1989) identified a fourth type: intermedia agenda-setting by influential media. They focused on a single issue - the mass media coverage of cocaine in 1985 and 1986. Their analysis of a 40-week period found that, "... a general intermedia agenda setting influence was noted from the *New York Times* to the other media" (p. 48). When examining intermedia agenda-setting in the coverage of cocaine drug use in 1985 and 1986, they concluded, "The textual analysis has indicated that weekly convergence on a story exists when a story is breaking, when coverage is at its peak, and when the story comes from a national or international source. When the newspapers all go in on a breaking story, they cover it in the same ways using the same themes and sources" (p. 63).

This intermedia convergence by newspapers of the same themes and sources implies an agenda affected as much by structures, routines, and stereotypes as by the prominence of events. Therefore, intermedia agenda-setters with the most credibility, such

as, the *New York Times*, are likeliest to have the strongest effect on both the public agenda and on other news organizations (Becker, 1991; Wanta & Yu-Wei Hu, 1994).

Weaver and Elliott (1985) disagreed, suggesting, on the other hand, that the local media are affected by local news sources more than previous research indicates. This should be taken into consideration whenever defining a model of agenda-setting. In the case of intermedia agenda-setting, for example, one part of the press is not only being influenced by another part of the press, but by other institutions and entities as well. Because these influences do not have a direct, causal relationship, the agenda-setting process must be seen as a fluid, dynamic process, under different pressures from different forces, all of which are competing for attention. Any understanding of the press's framing of intimate partner violence as a salient issue must be presented against such a background.

This study is concerned with the first of these agenda-setting traditions, mass media agenda-setting; in particular, the agenda of the mainstream press. Protest, Leff, Brooks, and Gordon (1985) defined the media agenda as "...the flexible hierarchy of issues that receive fairly consistent coverage by news media organizations" (p. 33).

Four major factors influence the news media agenda: 1) the structure of society; 2) real world indicators; 3) spectacular or trigger events; and, 4) gatekeepers and influential media (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). Spectacular trigger events are usually dramatic events that not only capture but create public alarm about the issue. My research questions presuppose that the news media agenda would be affected by spectacular trigger events, and, that the Simpson trial, labeled by CNN as the "Trial of the Century," qualifies as just such an event.

Prominence

Wicks (1995) claimed that, “Although humans may have trouble recalling discrete news stories in recall examinations, it seems that they acquire “common knowledge’ from the news media. Time is an important variable in helping people to remember news if they use it to think about new information in the context of previously stored knowledge” (p. 666). This accumulated knowledge, repeatedly presented and repeatedly similar, forges the linkages between old and new information. If this happens to the users of the media, then does it happen to the media itself? (see Strodthoff, Hawkins, and Schoenfeld, 1985).

Common knowledge, built-up over time, creates a multiple series of experiences, with each one finding linkages to prior experience (Wicks, 1995). This development over time is important because the press does not have equal influence on all people in all settings at the same time (Winter, 1981). Because an individual’s perceptions of salience can differ at any given moment of coverage, the cumulative build up of the social importance of an issue is integral to an agenda-setting process.

Legitimation of an issue can ensue when enough time and space are devoted to it “Problems require exposure - coverage in the mass media - before they can be considered “public” issues” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 2). The amount of coverage the mass media chooses to devote to an issue can affect how the public perceives the saliency of the issue (Funkhouser, 1973; Einsiedel, Salomone, and Schneider, 1984; Lang & Lang, 1981; Hill, 1985; Ghorpade, 1986; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey, 1987; Salwen, 1988; Meyers, 1992; Schneider, 1994; and Ader, 1996).

By focusing on an issue for an extended period of time, the press might transmit to the public more than just the information.

Even though agenda-setting research has been mostly concerned with what people think and talk about, there is evidence from past studies that the increased salience of different issues can have a significant influence on public opinion (Weaver, 1994, p. 353).

One of the most plausible explanations for the speed with which issues enter and leave the center stage of American politics is that the amount of news coverage devoted to various issues will dictate the degree of importance that the public attaches to these issues. "Most agenda-setting research has conceptualized the media agenda in terms of the amount and prominence of media coverage as the crucial independent variable for the media's aggregate agenda-setting effect on the public" (Salwen, 1988, p. 10).

Iyengar and Simon (1993) examined public opinion of the Persian Gulf War. They found that increased coverage can result in an increase in salience for an issue. In addition, they discovered that the agenda-setting process can also be bidirectional. For example, in October 1989, seventy percent of the public referred to drugs as a major national problem, but, by February 1991, only 5% of the public still considered drugs as a major national problem. Iyengar and Simon concluded that this dramatic decrease was due to a decline in media attention because of the intensive coverage of the Persian Gulf war. "In effect, intensive news coverage generated by a crisis issue not only elevates the prominence of the target issue but also removes other issues from public attention" (p. 376). (See Wanta & Yu-Wei Hu, 1994; Hertog & Fan, 1995)

This prominence is particularly crucial from the standpoint of third-party issue salience. Even though I might not consider a specific issue important to me, the amount of time and space given to that issue might lead me to believe that it is an important issue to others because the press has covered it so much (Salwen & Driscoll, 1997).

In other words, because a person has seen a great deal of news concerning some issue does not mean that this person would necessarily perceive the issue as important personally, but the person would be likely to think that the issue is important to others, and thus an important social issue (Weaver, Zhu, & Willnat, 1992, p. 861). (See Salwen & Driscoll, 1997)

Issues

This study uses Reese's (1992) distinction between an event and an issue. An event is a discrete happening in time, but an issue will often initiate a series of events, each separated by time and space, but somehow linked together. In actuality, it is not always easy to differentiate between the two. The study uses this distinction, with the presumption that the Simpson trial is an "event" in which the "issue" of domestic violence is the overarching social problem, of which the Simpson case is representative.

Issues can be defined as social problems, often with two or more sides disagreeing about how to proceed for the public good. A social problem is defined by Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) as a putative condition or situation that is labeled a "problem" in discourse and action in the public arena, which defines its presence as harmful. "Statements

about social problems thus select a specific interpretation of reality from a plurality of possibilities” (p. 58). Many social problems do not become issues, even though they have proponents and opponents. From the perspective of Lang and Lang (1981), “In the last analysis, it is whatever is in contention among a relevant public” (p. 451). (See also Best, 1999)

This construction of what is recognized as salient to a society is dependent in part on whose definition of the problem is accepted by the press. McCombs, Danielian, and Wanta (1995) observed that, “... - the news media enjoy considerable latitude in sketching our maps of reality” (p. 373). Therefore, in order to understand the weight given to certain definers over others, it is necessary to consider the news making scenarios through which definers of an issue become newsworthy.

“Stories in the media indicate their importance (and the agenda of the media) to an audience by virtue of their placement, length, or other treatment” (Watt, Mazza, and Snyder, 1993, p. 414). This continuing attention can be integral to the perceived importance of an issue by the public (Tsfati & Yariv, 2003). But, what makes one particular issue so salient that it deserves continuing press attention, often to the exclusion of other social issues equally worthy of attention?

What puts an issue on the media agenda? One is the presence of what Dearing and Rogers (1996) called real-world indicators; i.e., variables that measure more or less objectively the degree of risk or severity of a social problem. For Dearing and Rogers (1996), issues like unemployment and inflation are real-world indicators that are felt by almost all of the public. They also identified the importance of the current political administration within

the White House and the lead of the *New York Times* in setting the mass media agenda. In addition, a trigger event is usually present to highlight the problem.

If battering is still a subject open to contention in the press's routine press coverage, why is this so? Certainly, no one espouses the good of domestic violence. However, the issue of battering brings into focus many of the media judgments that make an issue newsworthy. Each inch of space, each second in time occupied by the news of an event represents an inch or a second that will not be allocated to other events. Because news is so often a matter of routinization, phenomena are reduced to constructed classifications, categories and frames pertinent to the question of what makes events newsworthy. Gaps in coverage occur; and occurrences such as social movements can be overlooked because of these gaps. They might not even be defined as news (Tuchman, 1977).

Equally important, the time and space taken to explain violence against women mitigates the inherent drama of the conflict by forcing a reconsideration of a woman's place in the society. Why is there so much violence against women? And, why is it tolerated? Does the society at large have anything to do with the endangerment of the woman? From a feminist perspective, it is a woman's value, or lack of it, in the social construction of reality that supports such violence. Such an ideological argument is a bad fit for routinized news that operates under a deadline and that emphasizes frames that are easily understood. Furthermore, such so-called oppositional issues and the groups espousing them are often marginalized by the media, because they do not fit easily into regular news frames (Shoemaker, 1989; Hansen, 1991).

Because the press does not create the social reality but does actively contribute to its construction, it must necessarily work with the materials it has available. Stories are framed for their accessibility. Often, for issues to have meaning, recognizable deep-seated symbolic imagery needs to be conveyed. “But it is precisely to the extent to which they can be anchored in and made to activate existing chains of cultural meaning which helps determine whether they become part of media coverage and wider social elaboration” (Hansen, 1991, p. 453). If the story does not fit, then the media is likely to search for a schema into which it can fit, rather than creating a new schema which is unfamiliar.

It is widely understood that news editors and reporters have developed distinctive procedures and work habits to help them produce news quickly, efficiently, and regularly, thereby forming criteria for what is construed as a “good” story (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997). Price et al. (1997) investigated the ways in which different news frames applied to a single issue can alter the pattern of thoughts and feelings activated in response to the news. News organizations, under various structural and normative pressures, will often emphasize episodic rather than thematic perspectives; and, stories with news value will usually encompass conflict, human interest, and consequence. They concluded that, “By prompting the activation of certain constructs at the expense of others, frames can directly influence what enters the minds of audience members” (p. 504).

An accurate representation of battering demands a schema into which it can be placed in order to activate these constructs. How will the construct be framed? The actuality of wife battering is a familiar phenomenon, but the understanding of battering is

still part of a relatively unfamiliar lexicon. The press needs a lexicon with which it is familiar in order to present the story to the public.

The typical media response to an event is to attempt to frame issues within previous contexts with which the media is more knowledgeable, hence, more comfortable (Smith, 1991). However, this attempt to link prior experiences to the current coverage can be limiting. “News suffers when reporters assume that all fire stories, or all accident stories, or all election stories, are the same” (p. 236). When the press covers battering, it often asks why she stayed with him. Why did she wait to report her abuse? Why did she go back to confront him? These questions suggest simplistic answers but are not simple to answer; to answer them in a wider frame of reference takes time and space in a medium where time and space are at a premium.

Issue Competition

“If issues disappear from the press, they can sometimes disappear from our attention” (Shaw & McCombs, 1989, p. 117). Equal in importance to gaining press attention is that the press, by virtue of such competitive factors as too many issues vying for too little space, will often choose not to portray other issues (Schudson, 1989). Shaw and Martin (1992) underlined the difficulty of an issue gaining public attention when competing in the public arena with so many other issues. Important public issues not only compete with “bad” or questionable issues; good issues drive out other good issues. For example, the “environment” might push out “women’s rights” so that public debate on women’s rights is

impeded. Zhu (1992) described such basic issue competition as a zero-sum game, in which there are clear winners and losers, with the one issue rising at the expense of another.

How are competing issues to be framed? The public career of an issue is often to a high degree regulated by the conflicts it arouses; the media starts with a tendency to polarize public controversies surrounding public issues (Weirs, 1992). This conflict is given social reality, in part, by the credibility of the source presenting the issue; for example, a newspaper like the *New York Times*. The search for the dramatic elements of an event and that event's perceived newsworthiness is a search for differences and conflict. It can frame the salience of the issue involved. "In this view, issues can be conceived as manifestations of structured contradictions in the system. At the simplest level, they may be composed of at least three facts: (a) incompatible value structures, (b) opposing functions or groups, and c) public controversy or conflict concerning those values" (Meyers, 1992, p. 406).

This continual process of defining and framing draws the maps of reality that the press uses to determine what is newsworthy, and, therefore, which social problems are the most important. Lasswell (1948) wrote that mass media and public groups have a limited "attention frame" during which they pay attention to certain issues. Not all issues can possess equal salience at the same time, and the public can only attach importance to a limited number of issues.

"People have different notions of what is important to them, and they tune in and out accordingly" (Erbing, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980, p. 460). And, not everyone perceives the importance of an issue at the same rate. Brosius and Kepplinger (1990) found that, "The more issues are included that are thought to be important by all or by very few

respondents, the weaker the agenda-setting effects that are found” (p. 203). Some issues are more readily visualized than others, so that the number and types of issues to be examined, and the manner in which the topics are presented, might constitute independent variables affecting the agenda-setting process (Eyal, 1981; Eaton, 1989; Brosius & Kepplinger, 1992b).

People attend to a different variety of media cues on what is an important story (Gamson, 1988). News reporting is the product of ongoing routines and practices constructing meaning from a variety of sources, to make sense of events and issues in a relevant public discourse. Gamson noted that there is a strong tendency in these ongoing news routines to reduce controversy to two competing positions. This somewhat simplified approach constructs meaning in a limited context. If a more complex issue, e.g., intimate partner violence, is to be explained, it might not readily fit into this pattern, and will likely be reframed into a more recognizable pattern.

Cook et al. (1983) examined the extent to which the media have the capacity to influence different groups within society to change their attitudes about the importance of particular social issues, shifting the group’s issue priorities. They found that there were agenda-setting effects that shifted public perceptions of what issues were salient. They also discovered that policy officials exerted a somewhat significant influence upon journalists, thereby affecting the media agenda. So, the media agenda can be affected without input from the public.

For example, Hansen (1991), in a content analysis of media-related research on environmental issues, concluded that, “Studies of media coverage of environmental issues

have repeatedly shown that it shares much of the 'authority-orientation' of other types of coverage, and that environmental pressure group organizations and environmental activists do not fare well as 'primary definers'" (p. 449). The public can either be fully and accurately informed about the importance of a social issue; or, the public can be misinformed or even uninformed by the mass media, thus affecting a change in the public's awareness of an issue. The public might then conclude that the issue is not salient.

Rogers and Dearing (1988) suggested that, "...both the media agenda and the public agenda are probably mutual causes of each other" (p. 571). It is this interactive dynamic that churns the issues, with one issue competing against the others, resulting, perhaps, in the diminution of an issue's salience, and therefore, the issue's importance with the mass media and the public. Not everyone in the public will be affected by all of the issues the mass media determines to be salient; nor will one event or action necessarily cause a change in issue salience on the part of the public. However, most of the available research indicates that, for there is to be an agenda-setting influence, it will likely take place across time as the issue is repeatedly and variously reported (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990).

Nisbet, Broussard, and Kroepsch (2003) asked what forces combine to emphasize certain dimensions of an issue over others. They concluded that media attention increases when journalists can use recycled thematic elements and storytelling conventions. Also, media attention is increased when the issue has the potential to be framed in dramatic terms.

The New York Times

The *New York Times*, with a daily circulation of more than one million readers, has a reputation as a prestigious newspaper that is often influential and widely emulated. Dearing & Rogers (1996) emphasized that the *New York Times* is generally regarded as the most respected U.S. news medium, so that, when the *New York Times* determines the newsworthiness of an issue, other U.S. news organizations usually follow its lead.

Because the *New York Times* plays a dominant role in establishing the saliency of issues on the U.S. media agenda, there are many studies of an apparent agenda-setting role of the *New York Times*, including, Dickson (1992); Hughes (1993); Jordan (1993); Leiber et al. (1993); MacCoun, Kahan, Gillespie, and Rhee (1993); Manning-Miller and Cook (1993); Zhu, Watt, Snyder, Yan, and Jiang (1993); Wasserman, Stack, and Reeves (1994); Ader (1995); Olson (1995); and Lee (2004).

Therefore, in my study, a primary assumption is that articles in the *New York Times* are important because if the *New York Times* adapts and changes, then other news organizations might follow. "How can the *New York Times* influence public opinion, when so few members of the public are likely to see a front page *Times* story? First, it can be argued that the *New York Times* is quite representative of other print news. "It may be the case that the *Times* ultimately drives the news agendas of other newspapers" (Jordan, 1993, p. 198-199).

The effects of news from different sources vary widely. Page et al. (1987) claimed that mass media news information is capable of changing the expected utility of policies for the society under certain conditions. This can occur if five conditions are met: if

the information is (1) actually received, (2) understood, (3) clearly relevant to evaluating policies, (4) discrepant with past beliefs, and (5) credible.

The mass media coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial fulfills the criteria set forth by Page et al. (1987). Because of the pervasive mass media coverage of the trial, it can be assumed that information was received by most of the mass media audience. The trial's major questions concerning domestic violence were referred to continually, if not always intensively debated, and, in terms of a debate about the problem of domestic violence in this society, the question appears to have been understood as important to the events preceding the trial. This debate was, and is, clearly relevant to the current approaches to domestic violence, by bringing to the forum of social discussion the misunderstandings and lack of awareness on the part of the mass media and others in explaining the problem. Finally, the *New York Times* is a credible news source.

Time Frames of New York Times Coverage

Did enough time pass in the *New York Times* coverage of the O. J. Simpson case to identify possible agenda-setting effects? According to Winter and Eyal (1981), research indicates that the time frame will vary with the issue. McCombs and Shaw (1989) indicated four to six weeks would be enough time to see a difference. Salwen (1988) found that agenda-setting occurred after five to seven weeks of coverage. In looking at the agenda-setting function in television news, Brosius and Kepplinger (1990) concluded that, "The broader data base of the whole year does not yield stronger agenda-setting effects" (p. 203).

However, these time-frames refer to the time needed to become aware of the problem. They do not explore how much time it takes for the press to change its own agenda.

Eyal, Winter, and DeGeorge (1981) conceptualized five distinct temporal features in agenda-setting research: 1) the time-frame which is the total period under consideration, from the beginning to the completion of data gathering; 2) the time-lag, which refers to the elapsed time between the independent variable (the media agenda) and the dependent variable (the public agenda); 3) the duration of the media agenda measure, which is the total interval during which the media measure is collected; 4) the duration of the public agenda measure, which refers to the overall time span during which the public agenda measure has been gathered; and, 5) the optimal effect span or peak association between media emphasis and public emphasis of an issue.

My study was more concerned with the third step of this procedure, the duration of the media agenda measure, and proposed four consecutive 16-month periods based on the natural limit set by the date of the murder through to the date of the not guilty verdict. Based on the prior research noted above, agenda-setting effects should be discernible in the analysis of the *New York Times* coverage.

Crime Stories

While all types of coverage contribute to perceptions of crime, routine stories condense the drama of victimization, coming closer to the experience of crime than do a news item about trends or law enforcement policy or opinion statements. They are more likely to reflect journalists' unexplained assumptions about crime than are opinion statements or more explicit forms of news analysis. And routine stories represent the most frequently used format for conveying the news about crime (Humphries, 1981, p. 192).

For this reason, my study separates articles that deal generally about battering from stories detailing specific crimes of battering. It is in these specific crime stories, when the reporter is likely to be operating under a deadline, and has less time to reflect upon the wider context surrounding the event, that the reporter's unexamined assumptions, as well as those of the newspaper itself, will be most influential and apparent (Tuchman, 1977; Humphries, 1981; Reese, 1991; Tuchman, 2002, McManus & Dorfman, 2005).

News about a crime has a commercial value for newspapers. That commercial value fits within the context of a news frame that dictates what is salient as an issue and what is newsworthy. Crime news allows newspapers to both entertain and inform their readers. Sheley and Ashkins (1981) found that certain crimes receive disproportionate coverage, suggesting that crime news is generally not fashioned to portray the many aspects of crime in this society, but, instead, is fashioned to be as marketable as possible. They reasoned that the dramatic presentation of the crime problem has an impact on public views on crime.

My study proposes that such reasoning also applies to the coverage of battering. Even in this relatively narrow issue range, not all the crimes are covered equally well. One type or category of crime will often vie for media attention with another type or category of crime, resulting in the 'best' issue being the survivor of this fierce competition.

Pritchard and Hughes (1997) identified race, gender, and age of the homicide participants, especially victims, as the strongest predictors of what the press deems newsworthy. Barnhurst and Mutz (1997) suggested that, "Many things that happen to people, although novel, may now get ignored, unless reporters can link them to something bigger" (p. 50). For example, women are likelier to be considered newsworthy when they are victims, where they can be fitted into a specific frame.

According to Pritchard and Hughes (1997), recurring patterns of news highlighting certain crimes, criminals, and victims, while minimizing or ignoring others, transmit daily messages about which behaviors matter most in a society. In this context, these patterns can contribute to a misunderstanding of what battering is, and, equally important, inadequately describe the conditions which allow it to continue.

The mass media also provide a corroborative function in judging what correct behavior is. "Stories on serious crime are, however, ideological in a "hegemonic sense;" their representation conforms to the way of life and thought that predominates in and is diffused throughout our society in all its institutional manifestations" (Humphries, 1981, p. 205). If this is true, then the press will reflect the stereotypes and images prevalent in the society. Stereotypes are, here, understood as widely-held generalizations about people or issues that are commonly accepted as part of the societal construction of meaning. They constitute

verbal and symbolic shorthand for framing events. Humphries (1981) concluded that, "Reporter's judgments about the newsworthiness of violent crime are a matter of what they think will sell or what they believe the newspaper-reading public wants. Coverage of violence is less readily understood in the social and historical context in which reporters make their judgments about newsworthy events" (p. 196). Fullerton and Patterson (2006) conclude that reporters need to open up a new frame for reporting on crime. That frame should view all crime as a public matter.

Issues like victim blaming and battering as a social issue might be obscured if the prevailing emphasis is on the individual situation. Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff (2008) found that "newspaper framing of IPV tends to be heavily skewed toward episodic framing which focuses on the individual and tends to ignore the larger social context within which IPV occurs" (p. 181).

When the issue of battering is not considered a serious crime of epidemic proportions, then it is not likely to be taken seriously as a social problem demanding an immediate response. The media will then move on to other "important" issues, all of which are clamoring and competing for its' attention. Like other deviant or oppositional news that does not easily fit into the typical frame, battering can then become marginalized (Meyers, 1992; Stone, 1993; Meyers, 1994).

Literature Review - Mass Media Coverage of Battering

The research literature on intimate partner violence has often focused on when the media covers violence against women, and, how the media typically portrays the women who are battered (Finn, 1990; Lamb, 1991; Kozol, 1993; Meyers, 1994; Lamb & Keon, 1995; Howe, 1997, McManus & Dorfman, 2005). There was virtually no public discussion of wife beating from the turn of the century until the 1970's. "In the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, the major scholarly journal in family sociology, no article on family violence appeared from its founding in 1939 until 1969" (Pleck, 1987, p. 182). Tierney (1982) reports that, "The media paid little attention to the wife beating problem until the latter half of the 1970's" (p. 212). When wife-beating became a more important social issue, press coverage increased. From 1970 through 1972, there was not a single reference to wife beating as a social or community issue in the *New York Times'* coverage, while in 1977, 44 references to the battered woman problem appeared in the *New York Times* (Tierney, 1982). There were similar trends in other mass media, leading Tierney to conclude, "Media interest was crucial to the growth of the battered women movement, because issues that pass through the issue attention cycle typically obtain more resources than those that do not" (p. 213).

Part of the difficulty in the press's coverage of battering is that differences exist between the knowledge that the public expects the press to have about an issue, the actual knowledge the press has, and the knowledge that the public possesses about an issue. On the masthead of the *New York Times* is the famous phrase, "All the news that's fit to print." An inherent frame comes with such a statement. The press may be limited by an agenda that does not allow an adequate representation of the meaning of an event. An issue that is

unobtrusive to the public may be equally unobtrusive to the press, but the public would not know that.

According to Franzosi (1987), the distortion of an event by the mass media does not consist of obvious alterations of the events, e.g., whether the battering actually took place or who the participants were. Instead, the mass media's failure is likelier to consist of remaining silent about an issue that is not considered important enough; or, of marginalizing an issue that is unfamiliar; or, of focusing on irrelevant aspects of an event, e.g., focusing on the attractiveness of the female victim. In each case, the mass media will have minimized the event itself.

Meissner and Solomon (1993), examined this issue in an analysis of how the major media, including the *New York Times*, handled a 1993 domestic violence story involving a famous boxing champion, Sugar Ray Leonard. When Mr. Leonard admitted to physically abusing his wife, including hitting her with his fists, he also admitted using drugs. The story then became a drug story. Later, whenever the issue of battering was addressed by the media, it was in the context of Mr. Leonard's drug use; the domestic abuse issues were minimized. According to Meissner and Solomon, "The *New York Times* essentially followed suit in framing this as a drug story and almost entirely ignored the wife abuse angle" (p. 124). For example, the *New York Times* did not report Mr. Leonard's refusal, at a subsequent press conference, to answer questions about the abuse because, according to Mr. Leonard, it was a private matter. Their study concluded that the mass media already had a "drug story frame" on which to build the Sugar Ray Leonard story; there was no mass media domestic violence frame which could be as simply and easily applied. In the Leonard

story “drugs” ostensibly contributed to or, in fact, caused the battering. In this instance, as in many others, when the press covers battering, the battering is represented as the result of other traumatic or unusual events.

Stone (1993), in a content analysis of six months of Canadian newspaper coverage of violence against women (January 1, 1988 - June 30, 1988), concluded that violence against women was not treated as an issue by the press. Stone examined 1,590 newspaper items on violence against women and found only 156 newspaper items (less than 10% of the total) explicitly addressed violence against women as a social problem in need of a solution. Many news stories focused on violence against women. However, Stone concluded that the reports of violence against women were used by the press for their own ends, due in part to the importance of the crime beats of newspapers and because of the political expediency of the view that violence against women is now considered reprehensible. “For feminists who were interested in focusing attention on violence against women as a problem in need of a solution, the crime beats were relatively impervious” (Stone, 1993, p. 395).

Mass media coverage of battering is not always stereotypical and sensationalistic. Roberts (1994) suggested that the recognition of domestic violence as a social problem grew out of four noteworthy activities, one of which was the publication of news articles and books about battered women. The “problem” of battering, like the “problem” of sexual harassment, did not exist as a social reality until the women’s movement named it, revealing to the public hidden and private violence (Schneider, 1994). The mass media was an integral part of this process. “Public consciousness-raising programs on

domestic violence have probably had considerable success in producing understanding and sympathy for the prototypical victim” (Harris & Cook, 1994, p. 564); such programs depend upon media cooperation. In terms of such a lexicon, Broad and Jenness (1996) concluded that the idea of violence against women has successfully competed for, secured, and maintained a position in the “social problems” marketplace.

But, do such changes affect the press’s routine coverage of battering? An agenda-setting perspective focuses on the cumulative amount of coverage of an issue. “The agenda-setting effect is not the result of receiving one or a few messages but is due to the aggregate impact of a very large number of messages, each of which has a different content but all of which deal with the same general issue” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 14-15).

Blaming the Victim

The norm calls for us to help others who need assistance if they deserve our help. On the other hand, if people are believed to be guilty or responsible for their own suffering, we are not expected to help them (Mulford, Lee, & Sapp, 1996, p. 1326). In examining how the actions of women who fight back against their abuser are represented in the press, Meyers (1997) noted that, "Justification, however, is not determined by the type of or degree of abuse a women is defending herself against but by whether she can be seen as having contributed to or provoked the violence against her" (p. 71). When questions are asked about the circumstances surrounding incidents of battering, such as, why did she stay, or why did she provoke him, or, why did she dress or act in a provocative manner, the answers can be adduced as evidence of the woman's culpability. According to Meyers (1994), "By perpetuating the idea that violence against women is a problem of individual pathology, the news disguises the social roots of battering while reinforcing stereotypes and myths which blame women" (p. 60).

Provocation by battered women often results in the victim being liked less and seen as relatively more responsible for the ensuing violence (Christensen & Giuletti, 1990; Pierce & Harris, 1993). The press reflects this social judgment, habitually using words for women that it never uses for men. According to Benedict (1992), there are 220 words to describe a sexually promiscuous female yet only 20 for describing a promiscuous male. "The signification of women's clothing and bodies as provocation is central to the belief that a woman causes her own victimization by what she wears, how she sits, where and when she goes out" (Meyers, 1994, p. 59). If the focus is on the attractiveness of the victim, then

stories of violence against women serve both as titillation for men and scarcely veiled warnings for women, emphasizing the dangers when women act in a way deemed inappropriate (Finn, 1990; Howe, 1997). Newspapers are unlikely to acknowledge the effects of their own unexamined representation of violence and the gender specificity of the violence in such cases (Bullock & Cubert, 2002).

Finn (1990) contended that when a man injures or kills his spouse because of her alleged infidelity, there is an unstated media collusion corroborating a series of normalizing responses by the media. The woman then becomes the abnormal one, causing this violent deviation. The press dwells on the dramatic, perhaps more lurid aspects, while often ignoring that violence was committed, once again, by a man against a woman. In this culture, a woman is potentially at risk simply by being a woman, yet the courts and the press might emphasize the woman's perceived failings or aberrations, rather than the context in which her actions might have taken place. "Just as violence is differently experienced and participated in by women and men, so also is its presentation and re-presentation in the media. The news is basically a man's show and the "theatre of terror" is directed at him, not her" (Finn, 1990, p. 387).

Harris and Cook (1994) examined attributions of blame in studies of male and female college students reacting to battering incidents. Women reacted more strongly than men to descriptions of violent incidents, judging the incidents to be more violent than the men. In addition, women are more likely to blame themselves while in the relationships (Cantos, Neideg, and O'Leary, 1993; Lamb, 1996). "The power of victim-blaming beliefs is in their mechanism of control over women, in the way they force the assaulted woman and

society to look at her own behavior rather than her partner's or the culture which, through its language, condones the crime" (Hillier, 1995, p. 123).

Mass media use of syntax often reveals these distinctions when writing about women and domestic violence. Lamb (1996) claimed, "The ubiquitous use of the passive voice in media and academic reports of male violence against women contributes to the description of violence with no perpetrators" (p. 115). By stating that "x" number of women were beaten or otherwise abused without saying "by men" might influence readers to focus on the victim instead of scrutinizing the perpetrator of the act who, in such a locution, is not identified. Blame is diffused in the victim-batterer relationship, thus making it difficult to discern who is to blame for the battering.

Penelope (1990) suggested that the use of the passive voice creates ambiguity for readers about who is responsible for an act of violence [p. 211 in Lamb & Keon, 1995]. In a similar study (Beazley, Henley, and Miller, 1994), males who read mock newspaper stories written in the passive voice attributed less harm and less perpetrator responsibility than when the same mock stories were written in the active voice.

Lamb (1991) analyzed 46 journal articles, looking for the ways in which writers represented the reality of men battering women and whether the representations revealed problems with the issue of responsibility. Sentences in the articles were coded using "Problem Sentence Categories" to indicate if it was difficult to determine who was responsible for the violence. The journal authors appeared to avoid assigning blame to men as perpetrators an average of seven out of ten times when writing about men battering women. For example, journal authors continually used the passive voice so that the woman

was represented as the object of acts having no specified agents. Sentences had a verb and an object, but lacked a subject. Or, an act was nominalized in such a way that no agent was identified, instead describing the event in terms of the “the battering” or the “violence.” Responsibility was obscured, implying that the victim was as much a part of the problem as the batterer. Words like assailant and perpetrator obscure who does the battering. Lamb also noted that this was more common among the male authors of the journal articles than the female authors.

In a continuation of that study, Lamb and Keon (1995) asked if the same kind of writing also occurs in newspapers. They examined three newspapers: the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, once again using “Problem Sentence Categories.” These included identifying the use of the passive voice, the diffusion of responsibility with statements such as “couple’s violence,” the nominalization of the act, and the blurring of gender distinctions. They found a ‘... pernicious effect of shared responsibility terminology regarding male violence against women (p. 218),’ although the active voice/passive voice distinctions did not prove significant in their findings. “The unquestioned reality incorporated into news stories is the idea that male violence in relationships is a couple’s problem or a relationship issue. But, in naming the agent of the act, the man as perpetrator, authors may help the public to understand the nature of the violence and to assign blame and responsibility more appropriately” (Lamb & Keon, 1995, p. 219).

Lamb concludes that, “This kind of writing supports the media’s overwhelming focus on women victims and on why they stay with violent men” (pp. 251-252). According to Lamb (1991), Meyers (1993), Lamb and Keon (1995), and, Lamb (1996), it is women’s actions

that become the focus of press scrutiny. When men's roles in the violence are examined, the focus is often on their aberrant or extreme behavior. This approach by the press potentially minimizes the actions of the men, and further substantiates stereotypical representations of violence by implying that such violence is relatively rare. Battering then becomes something distant and unusual; not something happening to a neighbor or to a friend or to oneself.

My Study and the Research Tradition

Strodthoff et al. (1985) suggested that once issues are perceived by the media as sufficiently salient, the media organizations will go through a series of adaptive responses that eventually stabilize as the staff members of the organizations develop the expertise to cope with these issues. The authors use the word legitimization, in which the mass media must determine the legitimacy of the issue before becoming adept at presenting it.

Domestic violence is accepted as an area requiring public concern now; how much, to what extent is it to be reported, and, more particularly, how it is to be reported remain matters of debate (see also Salwen, 1988).

In a study on rape coverage by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Protess et al. (1985) and Protess, Cook, Doppelt, Ettema, Gordon, Leff, and Miller (1991) examined whether an investigative series of reports by the *Sun-Times* changed the public's opinion about rape and related issues. The authors of the study also wanted to determine if the newspaper's own coverage of rape led to a change in the subsequent coverage of rape and related issues. They asked, what was the effect of the investigative impact of the series on the *Sun-Times*?

They found that, “In sum, the most distinctive agenda-setting impact of the Sun-Times investigative series was on the newspaper itself” (p. 30).

Is agenda-setting by the *New York Times* changed by its own coverage when that coverage is so extensive and self-reflective? Did the coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial have an impact similar to the *Chicago Sun-Times*? Did the amount and type of coverage by the *New York Times* change during the *New York Times*’ own coverage of the O. J. Simpson case? Was the O. J. Simpson case, therefore, a watershed period for the *Times*’ coverage of battering, revealing a greater awareness by the press of the complexity of battering and an attempt to convey that complexity?

These studies are comparable for several reasons. Both studies examine the effect of the press’s coverage on its own agenda, using time-frames before and after the events for comparisons. Both studies examine social issues that were historically misunderstood; that is, rape in the Protess et al. (1991) study, battering in my study. Neither the *Chicago Sun-Times* nor the *New York Times* began coverage with the goal of changing their media agenda; the consequences of their coverage were unintended. Protess et al. (1991) discovered that, “...the lengthy investigative process appears to have sensitized reporters and editors so that they continued to keep stories about rape on their agenda for several additional months after publication” (p. 34).

These studies are also dissimilar in several ways. The *Chicago Sun-Times* series deliberately strove to educate and influence public policy and public opinion. Protess et al. (1991) did survey analyses of public awareness, interviewed policy makers, and examined any effects the series might have had on its competitor, the Chicago Tribune. Then, they

turned their attention to the *Chicago Sun-Times* own subsequent rape coverage. My study attempts to discern changes in routine news coverage that was not deliberately attempting to affect public policy or public awareness on the issue.

More specific and similar to my study is the work by Maxwell, Huxford, Borum, and Hornik (2000) who use an agenda-setting perspective to examine whether the newspaper coverage of domestic violence changed as a result of the Simpson case. They did a content analysis of articles from January 1990-August 1997, in the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and, the *Philadelphia Daily News*. "Domestic violence articles were obtained from the Dialog and Lexis-Nexis electronic databases using the following search term: (domestic or girlfriend or spouse or wife) with (abuse or beat or kill or murder or stalk or violence)" (p. 261). The study collected 10,568 domestic violence stories, and used this full count to consider the quantity of domestic violence coverage by time and particular source. To study the overall nature of coverage, Maxwell et al. (2000) selected 598 stories, using a sampling procedure stratified by time and news source. Then, for the detailed content analysis, only stories whose primary focus was domestic violence were examined (n = 280).

"To test our hypothesis of an increasingly broad use of the domestic violence frame we looked for decreases in the number of domestic violence stories that involved murder reports, and increases in (a) mentions of criminal consequences for the abuser, (b) reported actions for the abuser to stop the violence, (c) recommendations for the victim to break the abuse cycle, and (d) stories with secondary references to domestic violence. Finally, we speculated that the domestic violence issue would be referenced more frequently

in articles that were not primarily domestic violence stories, such as political stories expressing candidates' views on domestic violence" (Maxwell et al., 2000, p. 261).

They concluded that, when only the primary domestic violence stories were analyzed, the media focus on the Simpson case did not significantly increase the social coverage of domestic violence. However, their results also showed that the *New York Times* coverage retained a consistently higher level of reporting these issues than did the other newspapers used in the sample.

Maxwell et al. (2000) presume that the media agenda will change because newspaper reporters will have different news angles to work with when reporting about battering; and will be affected by domestic violence advocacy groups, thereby giving alternative viewpoints to enhance the news angles reporters could use in their reporting. This is similar to the adaptive responses that an organization goes through when developing expertise about an issue (Strodthoff et al.). The assumption that reporters will use these different news angles might be weakened by the very ease of routinization that reporters are already accustomed to, and, especially, because these news angles demand a change in perspective about how the society, including the media, perceives the public issue of battering. In addition, if these advocacy groups were previously considered deviant, then, perhaps, the adaptive response will be slower as reporters wait to judge how accurate and reliable the advocacy groups are.

Research Question

My study uses Maxwell et al. (2000) as a starting point; and several of their hypotheses are incorporated into my study. My primary research question uses an agenda-setting perspective, and asks: was the *New York Times* daily coverage of battering during the O. J. Simpson pre-trial and trial time frame significantly different in amount and theme from the 16 months of coverage prior to the case and in two 16 month periods after the trial's verdict?

The Simpson case, in terms of real-world indicators, certainly demanded much of the attention that it received by the mass media. It is a trigger event of a social problem that has recognized salience thanks to the exposure given to it by the mass media, generally, and by the *New York Times*, in particular. The case offers an example of whether media agenda-setting is changed by the media's own coverage.

This study examined the narrative press coverage of heterosexual domestic violence in the *New York Times*. Only daily coverage, i.e., Monday through Friday, is studied. Saturday is not normally known as a strong news day, and Sunday ordinarily has more room for commentary. This study asked how the issue of battering was handled on a daily basis, when, without time for additional reflection, routinization, by necessity, is the rule. Maxwell et al., (2000) did not use the word "battering" as a search term in their study.

Four time frames are examined: the 16 months before the murders and subsequent trial, Time Frame A; the 16 months during the pre-trial and trial, Time Frame B; the 16 months immediately after the trial ended, Time Frame C; and, finally, a 16 month

period after Time Frame C to determine long-term effects, Time Frame D. These Time Frames are the basis for all comparisons and contrasts.

This study assumed that Time Frame B would exhibit changes greater than Time Frame A, Time Frame C and Time Frame D because the greatest attention was given to the subject of battering during the pre-trial and trial phase, thereby keeping the issue salient before the public. The more time that passes, the more likely other competing issues will crowd the issue of battering from the spotlight. However, because of the intensity and duration of the news coverage of the O. J. Simpson case, significant changes are expected in the *New York Times* agenda.

These categories were studied for changes: routine news coverage of battering; routine news coverage that portrays battering as a social problem; routine news coverage that portrays battering as a public issue; routine news coverage that assigns less blame to the victim; the number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility in routine news coverage; the number of occurrences of passive voice in routine news coverage; the number of occurrences of nominalization in routine news coverage.

These are the hypotheses about the time-frames studied:

Hypotheses 1a-1f attempt to establish a predictive quality about the number and kind of stories about battering that the *New York Times* would be reporting. This predictive aspect is based on the premise that the very prominence and duration of coverage about battering in the O. J. Simpson case would have an effect on the coverage of non-O. J. Simpson cases, resulting in the *New York Times* increasing its coverage of these cases. An increased knowledge of battering, as represented by more stories of greater length and

duration, signals a change in the media agenda of the *New York Times*. If Hypotheses 1a-1f are supported, then, based on the agenda-setting research about what affects changes in the media agenda, it is likely that the *New York Times* agenda changed.

H1: routine news coverage of battering will be greater in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.
- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.
- f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Hypotheses 2a-2f attempt to establish that the *New York Times* changed its routine news coverage of battering from a view of battering as an isolated and aberrant occurrence in society to the view that battering is an ongoing social problem. Hypotheses 2a-2f and 3a-3f attempt to capture a more complete picture of how the *New York Times* approached battering as a social problem and as a public issue than did the study by Maxwell et al. (2000).

H2: news coverage that portrays battering as a social problem, and not as an aberration, will be greater in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.

- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.
- f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Hypotheses 3a-3f attempt to establish that the *New York Times* changed its' routine news coverage of battering from a view of battering as primarily a private issue in society to the view that battering is an ongoing public issue.

H3: news coverage that portrays battering as a public issue, and not as a private issue, will be greater in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.
- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.
- f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Hypotheses 4a-4f attempt to establish if the blame directed toward the victim changed across time in media portrayals of a battering incident. As the media became more knowledgeable about battering as a social problem and as a public issue, was a more

comprehensive portrait of responsibility and blame present battering incidents were reported? The research indicates that in routine media coverage of battering the victims are likelier to be blamed, or, at least, are likelier to have their actions scrutinized more closely, than the batterer. Therefore, changes in the media agenda should include changes about how blame is manifested in routine reporting, supporting Hypotheses 4a-4f. Maxwell et al. (2000) did not use blame as one of their primary hypotheses, but only found it suggested in their results. These hypotheses specifically attempt to provide support for Maxwell et al. (2000).

H4: routine news coverage will assign less blame to victims in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.
- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.
- f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Problem Sentence Categories

Kelly (1988) noted that the way something is named will influence how it is perceived. “Some of the names that have been applied to domestic violence caused problems for some women. Wife beating implies that violence happens only to married women. The terms “beating” and “battering” tend to be understood in terms of severe, frequent physical violence” (p. 120). Broad and Jenness (1996) refer to Caputi (1992), who observed that, “... one of the most significant achievements of the Women’s Liberation Movement has been the naming of sexual violence as a systematic form of patriarchal oppression” (p. 76). McHugh, Frieze, and Browne (1993)[p. 210 in Lamb & Keon] emphasized that the issue of naming male violence against women was important for battered women attempting to describe their experiences.

This research also used the Problem Sentence Categories of Lamb (1991) and Lamb and Keon (1991) to study some of the syntactical elements used in the stories. Their approach was to examine the media’s role in obscuring or concealing the identity and responsibility of the batterer. Problem Sentence Categories are particularly relevant to the prior hypotheses because they provide a more detailed examination into how battering was reported by the *New York Times*. This is a more specific assessment of what distinguishes the differences in news coverage than that used by Choudhary (1980).

Lamb uses three (3) categories: 1) diffusion of responsibility; 2) acts without agents; and, 3) gender obfuscation. The category, acts without agent, is comprised of the use of passive voice, the naming of victims without agents, and the process of

nominalization. The Problem Sentence Categories that will be used in this study are diffusion of responsibility, passive voice, and nominalization.

The categories of victims without agents and gender obfuscation are not going to be used because the other categories will pick up this data. For example, as Lamb describes victims without agents, victims are mentioned or identified without the batterer being identified. All of the examples offered by Lamb can already be found dispersed across the categories of social problem, public issue, blame, diffusion of responsibility and passive voice. Gender obfuscation can be viewed as a subset of diffusion of responsibility; and, in fact, Maxwell et al. (2000) do not use gender obfuscation as a category.

Hypotheses 5a-5f, 6a-6f, and, 7a-7f attempt to assess the possible changes in the *New York Times* routine news coverage of battering by applying Lamb's Problem Sentence Categories. According to Lamb (1991) and Lamb and Keon (1995), media misconceptions and stereotypes of battering, including blame, are manifested by the number of Problem Sentence Categories in stories about battering. An important part of a feminist understanding of battering is the recognition and admission that men are most often the ones who are the batterers. In Lamb (1991), rarely did the language project an image of a man harming a woman. If the *New York Times* media agenda changed, then the number of Problem Sentence Categories is also likely to have decreased, and Hypotheses 5a-5f, 6a-6f, and 7a-7f will be supported. Maxwell et al. (2000) did not attempt to determine the structures of actual sentences in their primary hypotheses. Hypotheses 5a-5f, 6a-6f, and, 7a-7f attempt to provide a more complete picture of the systemic nature of the media's approach to reporting battering.

Diffusion of Responsibility.

The first category of Problem Sentences is diffusion of responsibility, in which authors do not specify, but, instead, generalize or else encompass the battering in ambiguous terms such as, “conjugal violence,” “couples’ violence,” “domestic disputes,” “family violence,” “marital aggression,” “parental violence,” “spouse abuse,” “violent relationships.” Lamb (1991) includes other examples: “abuse between husbands and wives,” “couples engaging in violent acts,” and, “married couples experiencing violence.” These generalized phrases conceal the identity of the batterer; for example, the phrase, “abuse between husbands and wives” obscures who committed the violent act. Lamb suggests that changes in the number of sentences reflecting diffusion of responsibility will provide one indication of how accurately the story depicts battering. If the *New York Times* coverage of battering changed, so that men’s responsibility was increasingly reported, then it is likely that the use of diffusion of responsibility decreased. Hypotheses 5a-5f attempt to show how often the *New York Times* used diffusion of responsibility in the four Time Frames being studied and if the number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility decreased.

H5: the number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility in routine news coverage of battering will be smaller in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.
- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.

f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Acts Without Agents.

Passive Voice. The second category that Lamb (1991) uses is that of acts without agents. There are actually three types of this omission of the agent of the act. The first is the use of the passive voice. The passive voice can be used to conceal the action or identity of a performer, rendering the subject unimportant. "Linguistically, responsibility is assigned by naming agents of acts (i.e., subjects of verbs). An author can, by using the passive voice, present a woman as the object of acts that have no specified, no identified agents" (Lamb, 1991, p. 251). Some examples of this use of the passive voice are: "black women are abused at a disproportionately higher rate than white women;" "three-point-eight percent of women experience severe violence in their marriages;" "eighty-five percent of those mothers revealed that they had been beaten;" and, "one hundred fifty victims who had not been abused for at least a year." A story reporting that wives have been struck and beaten does not immediately specify who performed these acts.

In a study by Henley, Miller, and Beazley (1995), the conclusion regarding agency was that, "This finding tends to support Penelope's (1990) contention that the passive voice is used to hide agency, and Lamb's (1991) finding that agency is obscured in journal reports of violence against women, and the first hypothesis of this research" (p. 69). Their first hypothesis was that the ratio of passive to active verbs for a verb describing sexual violence would be greater than that for other verb categories. They point out that this is important because the verb will affect the comprehension of the causal roles of the different actors in a sentence.

The importance of active and passive voice in Henley, Miller, and Beazley (1995) is illustrated by the following example:

- a. In the U.S., a man rapes a woman every 6 minutes.
- b. In the U.S., a woman is raped by a man every 6 minutes.

This is followed by a truncated passive:

- c. In the U.S., a woman is raped every 6 minutes.

“Verb voice determines comprehension of the causal roles of different actors in a sentence” (Henley et al. 1995, p. 61). In the examples above, it appears to be more difficult to identify the perpetrator of the battering in “c.”

One weakness in the Lamb (1991) study is that there is no indication of how many sentences are passive in stories that are not about violence. However, for the purposes of this study, at this time, such a distinction is not pertinent. The likelihood that a newspaper uses the passive voice equally in reporting violent and non-violent events does not mitigate the possibility that, by obscuring agency, it may continue to reinforce the battering stereotypes that are already part of an established societal perspective.

Another feminist contention is that the mass media conceals the identity or the responsibility of the batterer. This concealment is done by a) emphasizing the individual act of battering as an aberration; b) viewing battering as a private issue; and, c) blaming the victim for the battering. The passive voice, by its inherent tendency to obscure the agent of the act, contributes to this concealment. Such concealment is part of the perceived ambiguity of battering; an ambiguity that is emphasized by a societal ambivalence to such crimes. If the *New York Times* coverage of battering changed, so that this concealment

occurred less often, then it is likely that the use of the passive voice decreased. Hypotheses 6a-6f attempt to show how often the *New York Times* used the passive voice when referring to battering and if the number of occurrences of passive voice decreased.

H6: the number of occurrences of passive voice in routine news coverage of battering will be smaller in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.
- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.
- f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Nominalization. The second type of this omission of the agent of the act Lamb identifies as nominalization. Men's violence against women is nominalized through the use of such names as: "the abuse," "the abusive cycle," "the battery," "the process of abuse," and "the violent behavior." Describing the abuse in terms of marital tragedies, sad stories, or tragic destinies weakens the syntactic linkage between the victim and the batterer. This act of labeling an event, in lieu of identifying the perpetrator, distances the batterer from the act of battering, as though the event were somehow independent from the actions of the perpetrator. "Such nominalization removes the graphic quality that a verb (active or passive in voice) would give and makes it possible to write about violence without naming men as perpetrators" (Lamb, 1991, p. 251). The issue of men's responsibility is avoided when nominalizing takes place. If the *New York Times* coverage of battering changed, so that

men's responsibility was increasingly reported, then it is likely that the amount of nominalization decreased. Hypotheses 7a-7f attempt to show how often the *New York Times* used nominalization and if the amount of nominalization decreased.

H7: the number of occurrences of nominalization in routine news coverage of battering will be smaller in:

- a) Time Frame B than in Time Frame A.
- b) Time Frame B than in Time Frame C.
- c) Time Frame B than in Time Frame D.
- d) Time Frame C than in Time Frame A.
- e) Time Frame C than in Time Frame D.
- f) Time Frame D than in Time Frame A.

Battering and the O. J. Simpson Trial

This study accepts the premise that wife battering is a distinct and specific behavioral syndrome, in which,

Wife battering here refers to the physical assault of women by their husbands or partners that is accompanied by a constellation of psychological abuse, marital rape, child abuse, and even threats of homicide that make for an abusive relationship - that is - a reign of terror (Gondolf and Fisher, 1991, p. 275).

The relationship between Nicole Brown Simpson and her ex-spouse, O. J. Simpson, was depicted by the prosecution as one example of this reign of terror. As the trial unfolded, one of the many considerations, within the proceedings of the trial, was that of the 'classic battered wife' subjected to verbal and physical abuse by a spouse who, after the divorce, continued to follow, harass, and threaten her. "Battered woman syndrome" (Walker 1979, 1984a) is a subcategory of posttraumatic stress disorder; and applies a model of learned helplessness to the victims of battering. It attempts to explain the apparent maladaptive coping mechanisms and learned helplessness deficits often exhibited by battered women. These seemingly contradictory behaviors by the victim within the relationship contribute to the public's misunderstanding of the victim's relationship with the batterer.

Mr. Simpson's defense attorneys claimed that it was a murder trial and, not a trial about domestic abuse. They claimed that the domestic violence did not foreshadow the subsequent violence, because most abusers do not kill their victims. The rhetorical ability to make such a contention, and to have it accepted, is a part of the sanctions mentioned by Finn (1990) that influence how wife battering is defined and understood in the society. During the Simpson trial, a domestic violence issue became framed as a race issue. Whether it should have been viewed that way is not the question here. Rather, it is that by virtue of the trial being reframed as a race issue, the issue of battering was treated as secondary to the more newsworthy issue of race. The race issue was easier to frame. If battering is relegated to a secondary role during an event as significant and newsworthy as the Simpson trial, then how will routine coverage treat such issue competition? Because most of the

reports on battering will not be characterized by the media intensity associated with a high-profile case or a spectacular trigger event, it is reasonable to assume that the media will use the frames and stereotypes that are already available to it.

This underscores the difficulty of creating a frame and a context in which the violence of battering can be discussed. Because of such framing problems, the battering can easily be minimized when being reported. In the Simpson trial, race quickly overtook and rapidly superseded whatever salience a discussion of violence against women might have. The press recognition of one salient issue collided with another and equally salient issue, with the one framework, i.e., race, more accessible than another framework, i.e., domestic violence. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, even as a secondary issue, domestic violence remained a part of the *New York Times* reporting.

The Simpson trial was, in many ways, an exemplar of the intimate partner violence issues in society. The trial was presented by the prosecuting attorneys as a domestic violence case that ended in homicide, and the "battered woman syndrome" was offered as one reason why Nicole Brown Simpson remained in what was alleged as an abusive relationship. The Simpson trial began with battering as a crucial element to the alleged killer's motivation for murdering his wife. Although the Simpson trial was a high-profile case, recurrent intimate partner violence issues were present. Questions that are often asked of the victim were asked of Nicole Brown Simpson; such as, why did she stay so long with Mr. Simpson? Why did she continue the relationship with Mr. Simpson? Many of the same apparent contradictions, that battering victims often are asked about, were asked about Nicole Brown Simpson during the trial.

According to Dobash and Dobash (1992), terms such as 'battered woman syndrome' and 'cycle of violence' are integral to the public and media discussions about violence against women. Yet, even the explanation for a battered woman's actions can be misinterpreted. Rothenberg (2003) suggests that the term "battered woman syndrome" was a cultural compromise for enlisting public support, but, "...many advocates today note that the original definition of a battered woman may have gained public sympathy at the outset of the movement, but it was not helpful in representing the complexities of domestic violence" (p. 783).

In examining the attitudes toward battered women who kill, Russell and Melillo (2006) suggested that the characteristics associated with the syndrome create a standard that jurors might use to evaluate battered women. If so, then victims are judged by their typicality and history when evaluating judgments of culpability; and those who do not fit this frame might not be understood. Their findings indicate the typical defendants with a passive response history were likelier to receive a verdict of not guilty. The stereotype of the battered woman worked to the advantage of those defendants who filled the expectations, but was a disadvantage to those defendants who were perceived to be atypical. In addition, there was an important gender effect, "Women, however, rendered a verdict of not guilty significantly more often than men" (p234).

Media accounts rarely direct attention to the structural problems of social life that underpin how battering is perpetrated (Benedict, 1992). Oppositional news often challenges the prevailing view of social life with an unfamiliar view (see Martindale, 1989; Meyers, 1995). If routine news coverage is no more familiar with the oppositional viewpoint

than is the public, it's agenda might not change. Cameron (1996), in her study of style books and guidelines used by newspapers, stated, "Media style policies perform an influential gatekeeping function with regard to linguistic innovations. Such innovations will achieve widespread acceptance and respectability - become mainstream rather than marginal - precisely to the extent that the mainstream media allows them into this most influential linguistic product" (p. 129). When "battered woman syndrome" and "cycle of violence" parlance are used routinely and, equally important, are understood by the press, then acceptance might follow.

Chapter 2

METHOD

A content analysis was done on all the *New York Times*' articles about battering that were published between June 12, 1994 and May 19, 1998, during four consecutive 16 month time frames. The Simpson case lasted from June 12, 1994, which was the date of the crime, to the trial's verdict which was delivered on October 3, 1995; a total of 480 days. Each Time Frame will consist of 480 days. The Time Frames are:

Time Frame A: 02-18-93 through 06-11-94

Time Frame B: 06-12-94 through 10-03-95

Time Frame C: 10-04-95 through 01-25-97

Time Frame D: 01-26-97 through 05-19-98

All of the *New York Times* daily editions, i.e., Monday through Friday, were examined. Because daily editions can vary depending upon the time they're published in any given day, a computer search was performed, using the *Lexis-Nexis* database, for any articles in the *New York Times* that contained any of the following words or phrases: domestic abuse, domestic violence, abused wives/women, wife abuse, wife battering/beating, spouse battering/beating, spousal abuse, abusive men/husbands/partners, and rape/sexual assault in marriage.

Maxwell et al. (2000) did not use “battering” as a search term. The articles studied included both those that discuss battering generally and those that reported specific battering crimes themselves. All stories pertaining to non-O. J. Simpson battering cases were included. Editorials, op-ed columns, and letters to the editor were excluded, because these do not purport to be free of opinion even if attempting to be fair and objective, nor is there automatically an assumption that any journalistic principles were necessarily inherent in them.

In this study, actual incidents of battering are distinguished from the articles that comment upon battering. An actual incident is here understood as one that was recorded by the police, with the identification of specific individuals involved, and with possible follow-ups on the incident. Within the story, a recounting of the actual incident might be expanded by examining its effects or perhaps offering a more inclusive perspective on it.

The total census from the Lexis-Nexis database was 3,063 items stories about battering that were not O. J. Simpson related. After applying the study’s criteria for selecting stories, there were 227 (7.4%) stories to be analyzed.

Leiber et al. (1993) used a similar methodology in their research about press drug use coverage. They distinguished between categorizing actual “incidents” of the coverage of drug use they were studying, and the “commentary” about drug use in the newspapers that were being studied. Commentary, as in Leiber et al. (1993), was comprised of articles not necessarily related to a specific person or persons, but which may have centered on a specific incident to draw wider implications.

This study assumed that the actual number of battering incidents in the United States did not significantly increase or decrease during the O. J. Simpson pre-trial and trial time frame, nor, in the 16 months following the verdict in the trial. This study also assumed that the *New York Times* used the same criteria to identify what it reported as domestic violence incidents during this 64 month time-frame. The total number of stories about battering in Time Frame A, Time Frame B, Time Frame C, and Time Frame D were included. There were 37 stories (16.3%) in Time Frame A; 43 stories (18.9%) in Time Frame B; 70 stories (30.8%) in Time Frame C; and, 77 stories (33.9%) in Time Frame D.

What constitutes an article about battering? Any article whose subject is about, and includes, the words, domestic violence, battering or intimate personal violence, constitutes an article about battering; but only if stating an intimate-perpetrated offense, and excluding topics such as child abuse and elder abuse. If the story included two issues, e.g., wife abuse and child abuse, the article was coded as counting toward a domestic violence article with wife-abuse as a subject. Other key phrases that indicated the need for coding were: wife-battering/beating, spouse-battering/beating, spousal abuse/battering/beating, rape/sexual assault in marriage, abused wives/women, and abusive men/husbands/partners.

Variables in this study included the number of articles in the four reporting periods: Time Frame A, Time Frame B, Time Frame C, and Time Frame D; routine news coverage of battering; routine news coverage that portrays battering as a social problem; routine news coverage that portrays battering as a public issue; routine news coverage that assigns less blame to the victim; the number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility in

routine news coverage; the number of occurrences of passive voice in routine news coverage; and, the number of occurrences of nominalization in routine news coverage. The entire Recording Instrument is in Appendix A.

For purposes of the Recording Instrument, questions 4 -20 applied to battering generally. Questions 21-33 applied to battering as a social problem. Questions 34-45 applied to battering as a public issue. Questions 46-62 applied to blaming the victim. Questions 62-66 apply to the Problem Sentence Categories

Definition of Terms

Using an agenda-setting perspective, the importance of battering on the press agenda is operationalized by: 1) the number of stories about battering as reported by the *New York Times*; 2) the amount of space devoted to stories about battering; 3) the placement of the stories within the paper itself; and, 4) the manner in which those stories are reported. The term “battering” and “intimate partner violence” are used to distinguish the act of violence against females by their intimates from the more general meaning of the term “domestic violence: which can mean not only violence against women by their heterosexual intimates, but can encompass other types of violence in the family, such as child abuse and elder abuse. However, because the term “domestic violence” is used so often in the press to mean battering by intimates; e.g., the Simpson trial was characterized as a “ domestic violence” case, and, because much of the research, including feminist research,

refers to “domestic violence” when actually meaning “battering,” the term “domestic violence” is used as a synonym for battering.

The term "domestic violence" is used here to represent a heterosexual relationship in which the female is the victim and the male is the batterer (Dwyer, Smokowski, Bricout, & Wodarski, 1996). This form of violence involves the unjust exercise of force to dominate, abuse, or coerce another. Although domestic violence as a term is gender neutral, the term will be used as Dwyer et al. (1996) use it. "In this chapter, however, we use the feminine pronoun to refer to the victim, not as a matter of convenience, but to support the feminist perspective that such gender neutrality minimizes the disproportionate amount of male violence perpetrated against women, overlooks the self-defense aspect of much female violence, and discounts the structural reinforcements for such violence" (p. 68).

“Marriage” is used to refer to any continuing and recognized heterosexual relationship, and “wife” to refer to a female participant in such a relationship. “Intimate” refers to a male or female participant in such a relationship. The term “battering” or “intimate-perpetrated violence” is used to convey this heterosexual relationship in which it is women who are being victimized, and it is their male intimates who are the victimizers.

Coder Training

This study used the criteria in Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) for training coders. First, coders are familiarized with the content analysis Recording Instrument, including the definitions of the variables. Coders were expected to review the Recording Instrument

before each coding session. Because the sample itself did not exceed 227 units of analysis, only a few sessions were needed to complete the content analysis coding. This study examines the entire length of the story, regardless of the number of sentences. Lamb (1991) and Lamb and Keon (1995) analyzed only the first 20 sentences.

To check coder reliability, a randomly selected number of stories about battering in the *New York Times* were coded using the same Recording Instrument used in the analysis of the Time Frames in this study. Using Riffe et al. (1998) procedures, twenty percent (38 stories) of the sample were tested for reliability. Using Krippendorff's Alpha, Reliability ranged from .71 to .88. See Appendix B for the results of the entire Reliability Analysis.

This strict chronology of Time Frame A, Time Frame B, Time Frame C, and Time Frame D cannot presume a cause and effect relationship with the data; merely a correlational relationship. However, "A more meaningful case of agenda-setting is one in which a problem is ongoing at a relatively constant level and media attention comes and goes in response to its own cues" (Kosicki, 1993, p. 108). The presupposition for this study is an agenda-setting function across time by a member of the elite national press, with the focus of study centering on how the *New York Times* chose to present domestic violence in these four time frames.

Chapter 3 FINDINGS

Existence of Battering

The first set of hypotheses and analyses focuses on the presentation of battering in this sample of stories from the *New York Times*. There was support for H1 which explored whether the amount of battering varied by the time of publication ($\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 20.51, p<.001$). Table 3.1 shows the number of articles increased over time with the fewest articles appearing during the first time frame and the most in the last time frame

Table 3.1 *Number of battering articles*

Number of battering articles	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent
Frame A	37 (56.8)	16.3%
Frame B	43 (56.8)	18.9%
Frame C	70 (56.8)	30.8%
Frame D	77 (56.8)	33.9%
Total	227*	100%

* Unknown = 2

$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 20.51, p<.001$

Battering as a Social Problem

Hypothesis 2 proposed that news coverage portrays battering as a social problem rather than as an aberration and that there would be differences by the time of publication.

This hypothesis was tested using data from 11 items:

1. battering as a social problem, the number of women battered, or, how women are at risk.
2. how the social system did or did not help the victim.
3. statements and/or quotes from advocacy groups or government sources that battering is a social problem.
4. how the victim appeared to be distraught or upset prior to the battering.
5. victim's friends, relatives and co-workers express their shock or surprise that this happened.
6. how the batterer appeared to be distraught or upset prior to the battering.
7. batterer's friends, relatives and co-workers express their shock or surprise that this happened.
8. batterer's mental or emotional history, e.g., growing up in an abusive family, is mentioned.
9. external events cited as a factor in the battering.
10. custody/support payments cited as a cause or a factor in the battering.
11. cultural factors cited as a cause or a factor in the battering.

There was some support for Hypothesis 2. Items 1 through 5 were statistically significant. The questions of describing how the social system did or did not help the victim ($\chi^2 (3, N=227) = 15.14, p < .01$), identifying battering as a social problem ($\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 14.375, p < .01$) and advocacy groups or government sources stating that battering is a social problem ($\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 11.038, p < .025$) were statistically significant. In addition, the questions of, how the victim appeared to be distraught before the battering ($\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 9.591, p < .025$) and how the batterer appeared to be distraught or upset prior to the crime ($\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 9.529, p < .025$) were also significant.

In describing how the social system (medical, law enforcement, court system) did or did not help the victim (Table 3.2), 18% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 14% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 39% immediately after the trial and 28% during the last time frame.

In identifying battering as a social problem (Table 3.3), almost a quarter of the articles were published prior to the murders, 10.9% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 43.8% immediately after the trial and 21.9% during the last time frame. Interestingly, most coverage was found in the weeks immediately after the trial.

In citing advocacy groups or government sources that state battering is a social problem (Table 3.4), 22% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 11% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 43% immediately after the trial and 24% during the last time frame.

In examining whether the victim appeared to be distraught before the crime (Table 3.5), 45.5% of the articles were published prior to the murders; none of the articles (0) was published during the trial, 45.5% in the weeks immediately following the trial, and 9% in

the final time frame. The most coverage of battering was found both before and after the trial but none during the trial.

In examining how the batterer appeared to be distraught or upset prior to the crime (Table 3.6), 12% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 21% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 47% immediately after the trial and 21% during the last time frame.

The remaining six items focusing set up to test this hypothesis were not statistically significant. Data from these items are presented in Table 3.7 through 3.12.

Table 3.2. Story describes how the social system (medical, law enforcement, court system) did or did not help the victim.

<i>System did/did not help</i>	<i>New York Times actual/ expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	18 (16.1)	18.2%	48.6%	37
Frame B	14 (18.8)	14.1%	32.6%	43
Frame C	39 (30.5)	39.4%	55.7%	70
Frame D	28 (33.6)	28.3%	36.4%	77
TOTAL	99	100%	43.6%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N=227) = 15.14, p < .01$$

Table 3.3. Story describes battering as a social problem; mentions the number of women battered; or, mentions how women are at risk.

<i>Battering/ social problem</i>	<i>New York Times actual/ expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	15 (10.4)	23.4%	40.5%	37
Frame B	7 (12.1)	10.9%	16.3%	43
Frame C	28 (19.7)	43.8%	40%	70
Frame D	14 (21.7)	21.9%	18.2%	77
TOTAL	64	100%	28.2%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N= 227) = 14.375, p<.01$$

Table 3.4. Advocacy groups or government sources state that battering is a social problem.

<i>Advocacy/ gov-social problem</i>	<i>New York Times actual/ expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	12 (8.8)	22.2%	32.4%	37
Frame B	6 (10.2)	11.1%	14%	43
Frame C	23 (16.7)	42.6%	32.9%	70
Frame D	13 (18.3)	24.1%	16.9%	77
TOTAL	54	100%	23.8%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N= 227) = 11.038, p<.025$$

Table 3.5. Story examines how the victim appeared to be distraught or upset prior to the crime.

<i>Victim upset prior to crime</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	10 (3.6)	45.5%	27%	37
Frame B	0 (4.2)	0%	0%	43
Frame C	10 (6.8)	45.5%	14.3%	70
Frame D	2 (7.5)	9%	2.5%	77
TOTAL	22	100%	9.7%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N= 227) = 9.591, p<.025$$

Table 3.6. Story examines how the batterer appeared to be distraught or upset prior to the crime.

<i>Batterer upset prior to Crime</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	4 (5.5)	11.8%	10.8%	37
Frame B	7 (6.4)	20.6%	16.3%	43
Frame C	16 (10.5)	47.1%	22.9%	70
Frame D	7 (11.5)	20.6%	9.1%	77
TOTAL	34	100%	15%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N= 227) = 9.529, p<.025$$

Table 3.7. Victim's friends, relatives and co-workers express their shock or surprise that this happened.

<i>Victim's friends express surprise</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall total</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	4 (2)	33.3%	10.8%	37
Frame B	3 (2.3)	25%	7%	43
Frame C	5 (3.7)	42%	7.1%	70
Frame D	0 (4.1)	0%	0%	77
TOTAL	12	100%	5.3%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N=227) = 1.667, ns$$

Table 3.8. Batterer's friends, relatives and co-workers express their shock or surprise that this happened.

<i>Batterer friends express surprise</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall total</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	2 (1.5)	22.2%	5.4%	37
Frame B	4 (1.7)	44.4%	9.3%	43
Frame C	3 (2.8)	33.3%	4.3%	70
Frame D	0 (3.1)	0%	0	77
TOTAL	9	100%	4%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N=227) = 1.639, ns$$

Table 3.9. The batterer's mental or emotional history, e.g., growing up in an abusive family, is mentioned.

<i>Batterer mental history</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall total</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	11 (5.9)	30.6%	29.7%	37
Frame B	6 (6.8)	16.7%	14%	43
Frame C	9 (11.1)	25%	12.9%	70
Frame D	10 (12.2)	27.8%	13%	77
TOTAL	36	100%	15.9%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N=227) = 1.555, ns$$

Table 3.10. External events, e.g., job stress, unemployment, or alcohol/drugs, cited as a factor in the batterer's crime.

<i>Events external to the crime</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall total</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	9 (7.8)	18.8%	24.3%	37
Frame B	10 (9.1)	20.8%	23.3%	43
Frame C	10 (14.8)	20.8%	14.3%	70
Frame D	19 (16.3)	39.6%	24.7%	77
TOTAL	48	100%	21.1%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N=227) = 5.499, ns$$

Table 3.11. Custody/support payments cited as a cause or a factor in the battering.

<i>Custody or support as factor</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	3 (2)	25%	8.1%	37
Frame B	1 (2.3)	8.3%	2.3%	43
Frame C	3 (3.7)	25%	4.3%	70
Frame D	5 (4.1)	41.7%	6.5%	77
TOTAL	12	100%	5.3%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 2.667, ns$$

Table 3.12. Cultural factors, e.g., foreign cultural practices, cited as a cause or a factor in the battering.

<i>Cultural factors</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	4 (1.3)	50%	10.8%	37
Frame B	1 (1.5)	12.5%	2.3%	43
Frame C	1 (2.5)	12.5%	1.4%	70
Frame D	2 (2.7)	25%	2.6%	77
TOTAL	8	100%	3.5%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 3, ns$$

Battering as a Social Issue

Hypothesis 3 proposed that news coverage would portray battering as a public issue rather than as a private issue and that there would be differences by the time of publication.

This hypothesis was tested using data from 5 items:

1. battering identified as a crime.
2. police record of prior abuse reported.
3. record of restraining order against the batterer reported.
4. police record of batterer reported.
5. battering described as a domestic disturbance.

Four of the five items provided support for Hypotheses 3. The questions of a police record of prior abuse reported (Table 3.3) ($\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 29.125, p < .001$), battering identified in the story as a crime ($\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 26.148, p < .001$), a record of restraining order against the batterer reported (Table 3.4) ($\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 19.42, p < .001$), and a police record of batterer reported (Table 3.5) ($\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 12.698, p < .01$) were statistically significant.

In reporting a police record of prior abuse (Table 3.13), more than 9% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 7.8% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 46.9% immediately after the trial and 35.9% during the last time frame. Almost 83% of the coverage was found in the two time frames after the trial.

In identifying battering as a crime (Table 3.14), 14% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 17% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 32% immediately after the trial and 37% during the last time frame.

In reporting a record of restraining order against the batterer (Table 3.15), more than 14% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 10% during the O. J. Simpson trial, 45% immediately after the trial and 31% during the last time frame.

In reporting a police record of batterer (Table 3.16), 3 % of the articles were published prior to the murders, 18% during the O. J. Simpson trial, more than 42% immediately after the trial and 36% during the last time frame.

The item, battering as a domestic disturbance, did not provide support for this hypothesis. There were seven other items in the recording instrument that explored battering as a social issue. None, however, had enough occurrences to be used in the analysis.

Table 3.13. Police record of prior abuse reported.

<i>Police record of abuse</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	6 (10.4)	9.4%	16.2%	37
Frame B	5 (12.1)	7.8%	11.6%	43
Frame C	30 (19.7)	46.9%	42.9%	70
Frame D	23 (21.7)	35.9%	29.9%	77
TOTAL	64	100%	28.2%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 29.125, p < .001$$

Table 3.14. Battering identified in the story as a crime.

<i>Battering as crime</i>	<i>New York Time actual/expected s</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall total</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	24 (27.5)	14.2%	64.9%	37
Frame B	28 (32)	16.6%	65.2%	43
Frame C	54 (52.1)	32%	77.1%	70
Frame D	63 (57.3)	37.3%	81.8%	77
TOTAL	169	100%	74.4%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 26.148, p <.001$$

Table 3.15. Record of restraining order against the batterer reported.

<i>Restrain/ order</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	9 (10.1)	14.5%	24.3%	37
Frame B	6 (11.7)	9.7%	14%	43
Frame C	28 (19.1)	45.2%	40%	70
Frame D	19 (21)	30.6%	24.7%	77
TOTAL	62	100%	27.3%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 19.42, p <.001$$

Table 3.16. Police record of batterer reported.

<i>Police record of batterer</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall	Overall Total
Frame A	1 (5.4)	3%	2.7%	37
Frame B	6 (6.3)	18.2%	14%	43
Frame C	14 (10.2)	42.4%	20%	70
Frame D	12 (11.2)	36.4%	15.6%	77
TOTAL	33	100%	14.5%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 12.698, p < 0.01$$

Table 3.17. Battering described as a domestic disturbance in the story.

<i>Domestic disturb described</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	20 (17.8)	18.4%	54%	37
Frame B	22 (20.6)	20.2%	51.2%	43
Frame C	31 (33.6)	28.4%	44.3%	70
Frame D	36 (37)	33%	46.8%	77
TOTAL	109	100%	48%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 6.267, p < 0.1$$

Assignment of Blame

Hypothesis 4 proposed that news coverage would assign less blame to victims and that there would be a difference by the time of publication.

This hypothesis was tested using data from 8 items:

1. how the victim attempted to protect herself
2. victim described as a battered wife/intimate/significant other.
3. victim described as hardworking; likeable; nice.
4. battering explained in terms of battered wife syndrome; cycle of violence; learned helplessness.

5. how the victim did not attempt to protect herself.
6. violent event described as a tragedy for both of them.
7. how the batterer suffered, or, that they were both victims.
8. batterer described as hardworking; or likeable; or nice.

Only one of these items provided support for Hypotheses 4. The description of the victim protecting herself ($\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 11.17, p < .025$) was statistically significant. In describing how the victim did attempt to protect herself (Table 3.18), more than 25% of the articles were published prior to the murders, 13% during the O. J. Simpson trial, more than 39% immediately after the trial and 22% during the last time frame. Data from items 2 through 8 are presented in Tables 3.19 to 3.25.

Table 3.18. Story describes how the victim did attempt to protect herself.

<i>Victim protected herself</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Overall Total	Percent of overall total
Frame A	21 (13.4)	25.6%	56.8%	
Frame B	11 (15.5)	13.4%	25.6%	
Frame C	32 (25.3)	39%	45.7%	
Frame D	18 (27.8)	22%	23.4%	
TOTAL	82	100%	36.1%	

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 11.17, p < .025$$

Table 3.19. Victim described as a battered wife/intimate/significant other.

<i>Battered woman, intimate</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	11 (8)	22.4%	29.7%	37
Frame B	6 (9.3)	12.2%	14%	43
Frame C	14 (15.1)	28.6%	20%	70
Frame D	18 (16.6)	36.7%	23.4%	77
TOTAL	49	100%	21.6%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 6.265, ns$$

Table 3.20. Victim described as hardworking; likeable; nice.

<i>Victim is hard-Working</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	6 (3.6)	27.3%	16.2%	37
Frame B	4 (4.2)	18.2%	9.3%	43
Frame C	6 (6.8)	27.3%	8.6%	70
Frame D	6 (7.5)	27.3%	7.8%	77
TOTAL	22	100%	9.7%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 0.545, ns$$

Table 3.21. Battering described in terms of battered wife syndrome; cycle of violence; learned helplessness.

<i>Battered wife syndrome</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	4 (3.4)	19%	10.8%	37
Frame B	4 (4)	19%	9.3%	43
Frame C	4 (6.5)	19%	5.7%	70
Frame D	9 (7.1)	42.9%	11.7%	77
TOTAL	21	100%	9.3%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 3.572, ns$$

Table 3.22. Story describes how the victim did not attempt to protect herself.

<i>Victim did not protect herself</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	12 (4.6)	42.9%	32.4%	37
Frame B	6 (21.4)	21.4%	14%	43
Frame C	7 (8.6)	25%	10%	70
Frame D	3 (9.5)	10.7%	3.9%	77
TOTAL	28	100%	12.3%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 5.999, ns$$

Table 3.23. The violent event is described as a tragedy for both of them.

<i>A tragic event for both of them</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	4 (1)	66.7%	10.8%	37
Frame B	1 (1.1)	16.7%	2.3%	43
Frame C	1 (1.9)	16.7%	1.4%	70
Frame D	0 (2)	0%	0%	77
TOTAL	6	100%	2.64%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 4.498, ns$$

Table 3.24. Story suggests that the batterer suffered, or, that they were both victims.

<i>Batterer suffered or both are victims</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	2 (2.2)	15.4%	5.4%	37
Frame B	4 (2.5)	30.8%	9.3%	43
Frame C	5 (4)	38.5%	7.1%	70
Frame D	2 (4.4)	15.4%	2.6%	77
TOTAL	13	100%	5.73%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N=227) = 2.077, p < .9$$

Table 3.25. Batterer described as hardworking; or likeable; or nice.

<i>Batterer is hard-working</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	4 (2.3)	28.6%	10.8%	37
Frame B	2 (2.7)	14.3%	4.7%	43
Frame C	4 (4.3)	28.6%	5.7%	70
Frame D	4 (4.7)	28.6%	5.2%	77
TOTAL	14	100%	6.2%	227

$$\chi^2(3, N=227) = 0.857, ns$$

Diffusion of Responsibility

Hypothesis 5 proposed that news coverage would exhibit a smaller number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility and that there would be a difference by time of publication. Hypothesis 5 was not supported. The number of sentences containing examples of diffusion of responsibility was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 (3, N = 227) = 3.217, ns$). The data for this hypothesis can be found in Table 3.26.

Table 3.26. Sentences containing examples of diffusion of responsibility.

<i>Articles with diffusion of responsibility sentences</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of overall total</i>	<i>Overall Total</i>
Frame A	17 (15)	18.5%	46%	37
Frame B	21 (17.4)	22.8%	48.9%	43
Frame C	28 (28.4)	30.4%	40%	70
Frame D	26 (31.2)	28.3%	33.8%	77
TOTAL	92	100%	40.5%	227

$$\chi^2 (3, N = 227) = 3.217, ns$$

Passive Voice

Hypothesis 6 proposed that news coverage would exhibit a smaller number of occurrences of passive voice and that there would be a difference by time of publication. There was no support for this hypothesis. ($\chi^2 (3, N = 227) = .0429, ns$) and there were too few examples of passive voice across the four time frames. However, it should be noted that

there were four examples in the first two time frames of 80 articles; and, there were only three examples in the 147 articles of the last two time frames.

Table 3.27. Articles with passive sentences.

<i>Articles with passive sentences</i>	<i>New York Times actual/expected</i>	Percent	Percent of overall total	Overall Total
Frame A	2 (1.1)	28.6%	5.4%	37
Frame B	2 (1.5)	28.6%	4.7%	43
Frame C	1 (2.2)	14.3%	1.4%	70
Frame D	2 (2.4)	28.6%	2.6%	77
TOTAL	7	100%	3.1%	227

$$(\chi^2 (3, N= 227) = 0.429, ns$$

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This study's premise is that prior to the O. J. Simpson murder investigation and trial, the battering of women by their intimate partners was reported less often by the *New York Times*, and, when it was reported, was covered in an incomplete or misleading way. Continual violence against women is not deemed newsworthy until the press deems it to be newsworthy. The newsworthiness of this violence is not dependent upon the prevalence or the danger of such violence; instead, the press's current agenda and routine news practices determine its newsworthiness. When the press reports battering, how does the press frame the story of women being battered by their heterosexual intimates? And, is the media agenda changed by the media's own coverage? The role of the press is examined in this specific context of how battering becomes a salient issue for the press.

The *New York Times* plays a dominant role in establishing the saliency of issues on the U.S. media agenda; and the O. J. Simpson murder trial (6/12/94), which was covered intensively by the media, was described as the Trial of the Century. Did the *Times'* agenda change significantly because of its coverage of such a prominent investigation and trial? After such extensive coverage, did the *Times* change the way its' routine news coverage framed the violence against women?

The *New York Times* routine news coverage of battering was studied by analyzing 227 articles about battering published between February 1993 and May 1998. Four time frames were studied each set up the length of the O. J. Simpson murder investigation and trial, which was 480 days. Each Time Frame, therefore, consisted of 480 days.

Time Frame A: 02-18-93 through 06-11-94 (before the trial)

Time Frame B: 06-12-94 through 10-03-95 (trial)

Time Frame C: 10-04-95 through 01-25-97 (immediately after the trial)

Time Frame D: 01-26-97 through 05-19-98 (480 days removed from the trial)

The research tested six hypotheses:

H1) the amount of routine news coverage about battering would increase across the four Time Frames;

H2) the number of articles that portrayed battering as a social problem would increase across the four Time Frames;

H3) the number of articles that portrayed battering as a public issue would increase across the four Time Frames;

H4) the number of articles that assigned blame to the victim would decrease across the four Time Frames;

H5) the number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility would decrease across the four Time Frames; and

H6) the number of occurrences of passive voice that referred to battering would decrease across the four Time Frames.

There was strong support for H1, H2, and H3, partial support for H4, and no support for H5 and H6.

There was support for Hypothesis 1, which explored whether the number of articles about battering increased by the time of publication. The actual number of articles reporting battering increased in each succeeding Time Frame, with the smallest number of articles in Time Frame A and the largest number in Time Frame D, four years after the end of Time Frame A. In fact, the number of articles in Time Frame D was more than double the number of articles in Time Frame A.

There was support for Hypothesis 2, which proposed that news coverage would increasingly portray battering as a social problem rather than as an aberration and that there would be differences by the time of publication. However, the highest number of articles supporting Hypothesis 2 was found in Time Frame C, immediately after the trial, followed by a slight decrease during Time Frame D. This suggests an attenuation effect, possibly based on the amount of time that elapsed since the Simpson trial. It is interesting to note that Time Frame D continued to have more stories than Time Frame B (during the actual trial).

There was support for Hypothesis 3, which proposed that news coverage would portray battering as a public issue rather than as a private issue and that there would be differences by the time of publication. Four of the five variables used to test Hypothesis 3 reached statistical significance. Once again, the largest number of articles for Hypothesis 3 appeared after the trial, in Time Frames C and D. In fact, in three variables for Hypothesis 3, both Time Frame C and Time Frame D had more articles than the combined totals of Time Frames A and B.

There was partial support for Hypothesis 4, which proposed that news coverage would assign less blame to victims and that there would be differences by the time of publication. Only one variable (how the victim attempted to protect herself) was statistically significant. Using the work of Lamb (1991) and Meyers (1994), this study presumed that the number of stories assigning blame to the victim would decrease. This was not found.

There was no support for Hypothesis 5, which proposed that news coverage would exhibit a smaller number of occurrences of diffusion of responsibility and that there would be differences by time of publication. Diffusion of responsibility continued across all Time Frames. In fact, a diffusion of responsibility was found in one-third (26) of the articles in Time Frame D.

Similarly, there was no support for Hypothesis 6, which proposed that news coverage would exhibit a smaller number of occurrences of passive voice and there would be differences by time of publication. Lamb (1996) concluded that the use of the passive voice in media reports of male violence against women contributes to a description of violence that has no perpetrators. In the 227 articles covering battering, this study found only a total of 7 passive voice occurrences when speaking about battering.

Time Frames C and D had almost 65% (147 of 227) of the articles, indicating that there was much more coverage after the trial. And, Time Frame C had the largest number of articles, overall, showing a significant increase during the period immediately after the trial.

Relation to previous studies

Maxwell et al. (2000) hypothesized an increasingly broad use of the domestic violence frame by three newspapers, one of which was the *New York Times*. They found that

during the pre-Simpson period the *New York Times*, compared to the other two papers studied, already exhibited a very high level of reporting about battering. In the post-Simpson period, the *New York Times* retained that higher level of reporting and, in fact, the frequency of coverage increased. Their conclusions are generally supported by my study, in which the actual number of articles about battering increased in each succeeding Time Frame.

Maxwell et al. (2000) did not find significant changes in the amount of social reporting, nor did they discover significant changes in how the issue was framed. On the other hand, in my study, the number of articles recognizing battering as a social problem increased significantly in Time Frame C, the time period directly after the trial. However, Maxwell et al. (2000) used social reporting as a broader framework; and did not include the identification of battering as a social problem. Another possible explanation for the different results might be that Maxwell et al. (2000) also included the number of articles that either mentioned criminal consequences or recommended corrective actions in social reporting. They investigated whether the number of articles indicating this increased over time; and they found that articles did not significantly change in how often they mentioned criminal consequences or recommended actions.

Although many of the news stories in my sample also mentioned the possible actions by law enforcement or the likely judicial outcomes, this study did not search specifically for such articles. Routine reporting is dependent on space requirements and, of course, the importance of the story. Any mention of criminal consequences is likelier when there are follow-up articles. If the article is about a possible homicide or a likely outcome when criminal proceedings reach the judicial stage, a discussion of criminal consequences

and recommended actions would be expected. But, an exploration of criminal consequences might not be salient for the reporter until the reported battering reaches that stage of investigation.

The analysis of the *Times* coverage of battering as a social problem produced another interesting finding. Time Frame B (during the trial) had fewer articles than Time Frame A (before the trial) or Time Frame C immediately after the trial). Perhaps, there were fewer articles in that time period because resources that would ordinarily be allocated to routine coverage of battering were now being devoted to the O. J. Simpson story.

Maxwell et al. (2000) did not specifically examine if reporting battering as a public or private issue changed. My study asked if the number of articles identifying battering as a crime increased significantly, because identifying battering as a crime treats battering as a public, not a private, matter. In fact, the number of articles identifying battering as a crime increased significantly immediately after the trial in Time Frame C and Time Frame D. Of the 169 articles (of 227) overall that identified battering as a crime; 117 (69%) were published in Time Frames C and D. The significant number of articles might have been affected by the O. J. Simpson criminal case. Reporters looking for similarities could have focused on the public issues of police reports and restraining orders. However, like the *Times'* coverage of battering as social problem, Time Frame B did not show a significant increase compared to Time Frame A.

Did news coverage assign less blame to victims? My study's results are consistent with previous studies although the hypothesis was only partially supported. Although more articles emphasized the victim's attempts to protect herself; there were no

other significant changes. Interestingly, Time Frame C had the highest number of articles for both the question of protecting herself and the presence of diffusion of responsibility. An attempt to “balance” the reporting by showing both “sides” of the story might be a factor in this case.

There was no significant change in the number of articles with diffusion of responsibility. Similar to Lamb (1991), examples of diffusion of responsibility were plentiful but not significantly different from Time Frame to Time Frame. Diffusion of responsibility was found in 92 articles, more than 40%, of the 227 analyzed. Like the results of Hypothesis 4, assigning blame to the victim, this might also be the result of reporters attempting to present a more balanced view or attempting to be objective by offering what they consider to be both sides of the story.

My study found very few occurrences of the use of passive voice when referring to battering. The significant number of passive voice occurrences identified by Lamb (1991) was based on academic journals, not on daily newspapers. Space requirements and the need to write in the active voice probably contribute to this finding.

Limitations of the research

This research only examined 227 articles published in the *New York Times* between February 1993 and May 1998. It did not examine more recently published articles to determine how the *Times* continued to frame these issues. Furthermore, the research only applied to changes in the *New York Times* coverage itself and did not examine what

coterminous changes, if any, occurred in other newspapers that typically follow the *New York Times* lead.

There was no attempt to link the specific framing context of battering in routine news coverage to broader contexts. For example, how does the *New York Times*' perception of its readers determine their framing techniques? And, do the readers perceive these framing contexts in a similar manner? How does the *New York Times* fit its routine news coverage of battering with other domestic violence issues? None of these questions was addressed in the research.

Another limitation is that only the routine weekday coverage of battering was analyzed. An analysis of possible changes to the agenda-setting and framing contexts found in weekend coverage, editorials, opinion pages or guest commentary by the reporter is absent. In addition, this research did not examine any possible relationships between these contexts and the day to day reporting actually analyzed.

The study did not determine if the reporter's gender possibly influenced the actual routine reporting. In many articles, the reporter's gender was not identifiable. In addition, race was not analyzed.

Suggestions for future research

Future research could examine if the changes in the *New York Times* coverage of battering affected other papers. This study did not examine if other newspapers duplicated the *New York Times* agenda-setting and framing approaches? And, if other newspapers did follow the *New York Times*, what were the changes and when did they take place? Were similar changes manifested during similar time periods?

This research is not a complete analysis of battering as a social problem.

Although battering as a social problem was consistently reported, battering as an aberration also appeared often enough to warrant further comparison. Many of the articles mentioned battering as an aberration or else cited other circumstances that might contribute to the battering. Was this merely an attempt to achieve a 'conceptual balance' between the victim and the batterer; or, is it reflective of an unchanging media frame that limits how battering is reported? Battering might now be framed more often as an endemic social problem requiring social, as well as individual, approaches. However, does the presentation of the batterer as an aberration create a significant mitigating factor even within the context of battering as a social problem? From the media perspective, is battering then a social problem precisely because there are so many circumstantial issues involved?

Further study of assigning blame to the victim also appears to be a fruitful direction for future research. The findings indicated that, similar to the *Times'* reporting of battering as a social problem, the *Times'* reporting on the assignment of blame often included an attempt to understand the batterer's point of view. Did such an approach lessen the impact of the *Times'* reporting of battering? Future research into the possible linkage of media perception of battering as a social problem and the media's propensity for assigning blame to the victim might offer fruitful results. In this analysis, the two suggest the presence of similar problematic elements. Perhaps the interconnection of the two items yields something more than just an attempt to present a balanced viewpoint.

This study did not include the Civil Case of wrongful death that was brought by the families of the victims against O.J. Simpson. That trial took place between October 23,

1996 and February 4, 1997; it did not garner as much media coverage. Also, much of the trial's proceedings were closed to the public, possibly lessening the impact of agenda-setting on either the *New York Times* or the public. An A study comparing both criminal and civil trials might provide different results.

Why did Time Frame C have so many significant analyses but Time Frame B did not? Perhaps Time Frame B was affected by the overwhelming presence of the O. J. Simpson story? The story dominated the news so much that it might have replaced some of the routine non-O. J. Simpson coverage. Once enough time had lapsed, the influence on framing the issue might be more pronounced. These differences deserve more study.

Conclusion

The *New York Times* routine news coverage of battering did change across time. However, it was not consistent across all time frames and across all analyses. This research did establish that the number of stories about battering, the amount of news coverage portraying battering as a social problem and the amount of news coverage portraying battering as a public issue varied by the time of publication. This suggests that some significant change took place in how *New York Times* framed the stories. However, the balancing of battering as a social problem with battering as an aberration, the lack of significant change in assigning blame to the victim and the continuing presence of diffusion of responsibility in articles indicates that the study's assumptions were only partially supported.

“An understanding of media agenda-setting is a necessary prerequisite to comprehending how the mass media agenda influences the public agenda” (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 579). Because it is a dynamic process, and not one that can be statically held in place to be studied, the research process must always be returning to the origins of how the press decides what is salient and newsworthy.

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APPENDIX

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59. __ Batterer's apparel described 1.00
60. __ Batterer's relatives, friends, co-workers suggest that the batterer was unable to control his actions .80
61. __ Batterer states the victim is to blame for the battering 0
62. __ Batterer's relatives, friends, co-workers suggest the victim is to blame for the battering 0

SECTION V

Problem Sentence Categories

63. __ # of sentences in the story .99
64. __ # of diffusion of responsibility sentences .89
65. __ # of passive sentences .82
66. __ # of nominalization sentences .39