

Morally wrong or needed?

Naming Rape Victims

On May 16, 2005, a man, woman and a teenage boy were found brutally murdered inside their rural Idaho home. Two children, eight-year-old Shasta Groene and her nine-year-old brother Dylan, were [missing](#). Because of the media putting their names out, Shasta was found with 42-year-old sex offender Joseph Duncan and Dylan's body was found later in a campsite. As the story unfolds, it was clear that the brother and sister were sexually assaulted. Due to Duncan bragging to Shasta, she was able to, in great detail, give police a detailed description of all the murders of her [family](#). Usually the media does everything they can to shield the victims' names in cases like this. But in naming the victim's they were able to find Groene and her little brother. Was this justified? This is the daily question in the newsroom.

In the [SPJ](#) Code of Ethics, it is written that Journalist should "show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverages." It continues to talk about these being juveniles, and victims of sex crimes and such the like. With this being said, should journalist name rape victims in their stories and reports?

In *Ethics Case Studies*, by [Indiana University](#), the president of NBC news, Michael Gartner, said that "media should identify victims of rape, although he appreciates the pain for those initially identified". He was quoted saying that "Rape is a crime in which people still tend somehow to blame the victim...One reason is that the press puts this mystery around it by refusing to name the name."

In the same source, Bruce Sanford, counsel to the Society of Professional Journalists, said that "The decision not to print rape victims' names is a matter of "sense and sensibility."

With this back and forth of whether to name the victims, it seems that there will be no solution on what is right.

Another source, *Mass Media Law*, brings up three arguments that comes with publishing this material.

"Someone who is sexually assaulted becomes a victim three times: the first during the assault; second during interrogation by often unsympathetic police, prosecutors and defense lawyers during the investigation and the public trial; and the third when the identity is published and broadcast in the press, revealing the details of the attack to neighbors, friends, co-workers and others."

"Society often judges the rape victim to be as guilty as the rapist, and this can stigmatize the victim for many years."

"Because of the first two factors, victims who realize that their identities will be revealed frequently fail to report the crime, especially if the rape has been committed by an acquaintance. The rapist is not punished and may go on to attack another victim."

While a lot of newspapers try to go the respectable route with this subject, by only releasing the names of victims, if they give consent, not all newspapers and media outlets follow this standard.

In an article by the Deseret [News](#), *Should Media Name Rape Victims*, there is excerpts from recent editorials in U.S. newspapers on the debate over publishing the identities of sexual-assault victims after a woman alleged, she was raped at the Kennedy family's Florida compound over Easter weekend.

While the Denver Post reported this, "Certainly, when a rape victim voluntarily chooses to tell her story publicly, and surrender her anonymity, the press should use that opportunity to reveal the intimate, psychological trauma a victim suffers...But this newspaper believes the privacy of victims is precious and that any disclosure of their identities should be justified only in the context of an overriding public benefit. That threshold should not be crossed simply for the benefit of competitive business considerations or to pander to the prurient curiosity of the consuming public"

Others like the New York Post said this, "The woman who says she was victimized called the police, not the press. Yet she accused someone quite specific. (William Kennedy) Smith's name has been bandied about in the press for more than two weeks even though no charges have been filed against him--and she appears to be allowing friends to relate her version of what happened to the media. It remains our view, nonetheless, that her name should not be publicized. Rape is a highly invasive crime and society--unfairly--persists in stigmatizing rape victims."

Unfortunately, the question of should media name rape victims, has still yet to be answered even in the 21st century. What do you think the answer to the question should be?