Social Impacts of Fear:  
An Examination of the 2002 Washington, DC  
Sniper Shootings

Alex Mitchell  
Department of Sociology  
Colorado State University
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Abstract

During three weeks of October 2002, millions of citizens across the Washington, DC metropolitan area were terrorized by sporadic, unexplained, horrific shootings at the hands of the “Snipers.” In what came to dominate national headlines, the 2002 Washington, DC Sniper Shootings paralyzed citizens with fear and disrupted many people’s lives, relationships, and community functions.

Through a detailed content analysis and the use of in-depth interviews, I focus on the Washington, DC area newspaper reporting during this time and attempt to understand the effects of media on citizen behavior and response. I examine the relationship between media coverage and its influence on perceptions, levels of fear, daily behavior, and feelings regarding the shootings through ten personal interviews with private citizens in the Maryland/Virginia area. I conclude by describing the various factors that influence citizens’ perceived levels of risk during disaster events like these shootings. These factors include levels of media consumption, geographic location in respect to the disaster, demographic characteristics including age and gender, as well as personal ties, if any, to the victims of a disaster.
Perspiring after a long, grueling basketball practice, bundled up in sweatpants and hooded sweatshirt, I was prepared to face the bitter cold wind that awaited me outside the gymnasium. All of the other players had hurried to go home, since the practice was extra long and tiring as our coach wanted to punish us for a previous loss. After using the restroom, I realized I was the only person left in the building. Tossing the sack of basketballs over my shoulder, as it was the captain’s duty to take care of bringing basketballs to practice, I put my hood up and then stopped before I stepped outside. It was at this moment that I realized that this was not the same night as it had been before. How could I have been so stupid? Did I really just forget all about it? What was I going to do now? I had broken all of the rules and plans to which people in our area had now grown accustomed. I had gone outside, at night, alone.

The sniper shootings had been occurring for the past two weeks. They started one day down county, with five shootings occurring within hours of one another. After another string of shootings with the same rifle fire and attack style, panic had ensued around Montgomery County, Maryland, which was my home at the time. The shooters had begun communicating with the county police department, sending messages where they referenced themselves as “God,” and telling the police they had no chance of solving the crimes. Some of the shootings had occurred across the state border in Northern Virginia but others happened right down the highway, only 20 minutes away from where I stood that night.
The sporadic geographic nature of the shootings left millions of residents in fear for their own well-being. Specific behaviors had been adopted by most, and passed around as common knowledge by now. People had begun to skip work, especially after the shooting and injuring of one man on the public bus system in our county. It was normal now to walk quickly (or to run) between rows of cars, barely dodging a scraped knee or bruised leg on the license plate covers of cars in parking lots, anything to keep out of plain view. I often found myself making strange and sporadic movements when jogging from basketball practice, school, or out to the mailbox from my garage, as if to throw the snipers off if they were aiming at me.

Going to the grocery store was especially frightening; the idea of standing by one’s trunk for several minutes while putting bags of groceries into the car almost seemed absurd. Was food really worth leaving oneself out in plain view for the snipers to have an easy shot? The casual walk out to the car from school had turned into packs of friends moving quickly together, walking one another from car to car until the last brave soul ran over to his or her car alone. Where would the snipers strike next? How were they pulling off these crimes in the midst of the largest manhunt in United States history? Wouldn’t someone see where the shot came from next time?

With all of these images and questions swirling in my head, I took a deep breath as I was about to break the most important safety rule for the very first time, “Never go outside by yourself; always travel in groups!” Without a cell phone or any other means of communication, I considered staying in the building until one of my parents grew concerned at home and came to the gymnasium to look for me. That could take all night, I thought, and briskly shoved the door open and began running as hard as I possibly could
toward my lone car under the parking lot lights. Running down the long walkway to the parking lot, I began moving strangely, bopping my head this way and that, stepping side to side while running. The basketballs, which were in a sack and slung over my shoulder, were hitting my back very hard. I was glancing around frantically, noticing all of the dark spots beyond and around the parking lot, prime locations to stand with a deadly assault weapon. Then there was the sweeping baseball field next to the parking lot. My heart began racing uncontrollably as I imagined the headlines in the paper the next morning, “Teen killed in sniper-style shooting at secluded middle school parking lot.” How had I been so stupid? Why hadn’t anyone waited to go out with me to the parking lot?

Just as I neared the beginning of the parking lot, my foot hit a rock and I slipped momentarily. The sack fell off my shoulder, spilling the basketballs all over the south corner of the lot. Not feeling I had any other choice, I recklessly chased after the basketballs, shoving them back into the sack. One ball bounced over the curb and down into the dark field; this one I decided was lost forever and did not even consider giving chase.

Running to my car, I scraped the paint around the keyhole in the process of jamming the key in its place, tossed the sack into the backseat, and drove off with my head down by the wheel and out of view. Upon arriving home, I found myself in the normal routine of running from the end of the driveway into the garage. Did it not occur to me that if the snipers were at the school after my basketball practice, chances were that they could not also be stationed a few houses up or down the street aiming at my driveway? Such
thoughts were too complex for this given moment; I just wanted to make it safely into the only haven of comfort, inside the walls of my home.

Long after the sniper suspects had been arrested and prosecuted, I look back on this night that will always remain a vivid memory, and wonder whether I overreacted in this situation. Obviously, an outsider would probably remark “Yes,” given the miniscule probability that the snipers would have been positioned at such a specific point at a specific time on this given night. Moreover, with such a large radius of land in the entire Washington, DC metropolitan area, the millions of potential human targets, and the fact that the last shooting to occur in Montgomery County had been 11 days prior, what was the real possibility that one lone high school male would cross paths with these killers? In all actuality, I feel that my fear was not a gross overreaction. On the contrary, my fear for my own safety and survival were very real; my mind was conditioned and convinced that my life was at risk that night.

How had two men working together with one sniper rifle succeeded in planting seeds of fear and distress within the hearts of millions, given that they “only” killed ten and injured three within a metropolitan area estimated to have a population of over five million? What had contributed to their ability to petrify both myself in a northern Montgomery County parking lot and millions of others in a fifty-mile radius? Was it really just the fact that the killings had occurred in various, un-patterned locations, or was the snipers’ ability to frighten an entire region of the nation strengthened by some other force? Murderers, rapists and armed criminals live among the common population constantly, inflicting, abusing and harming innocent people every single day. Why is it that people do not hide and shy away from public in the midst of the possibility of
meeting one of these criminals in the street? What common bond did I share with perhaps an old woman in Fairfax, Virginia or a 5th grade boy in Bowie, Maryland that would cause all three of us to stick within the safe confines of our homes to avoid these shooters?

This anecdote and other experiences were reality for me and millions of other citizens within the Washington, DC metropolitan area during October of 2002. During this month, the nation’s capital and surrounding areas were terrorized by a spree of random shootings known as the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings. John Allen Muhammad and his friend Lee Boyd Malvo were the two men responsible for the string of shootings that left ten dead and three wounded. Starting on October 2 with a murder in a grocery store parking lot and culminating with the arrests of Muhammad and Malvo on October 24 at a highway rest stop, the “Beltway Snipers” dominated television newspapers and all media sources throughout the area as each attack brought more attention (Wikipedia 2006). The snipers, using a car with holes bore in the trunk, would fire shots with a professional rifle at random people, often fatally to the head.

The focus of this thesis is to examine newspaper content and reporting throughout the sniper shootings, and to draw connections between how crime and terrorist events are reported and how individuals and communities react and respond. I will show that the media, through its’ style and content of reporting, directly contributed to the heightened levels of fear and behavioral change exhibited by the citizens of Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC during the sniper shootings. In addition to examining media coverage, I also draw on a set of in-depth interviews with a sample of citizens who lived through the
shootings. I use these interviews to further illustrate the impact the media had on people’s responses to the sniper shootings.

This study and critical analysis of media content is essential to understanding why and how communities and individuals respond to crime and human-made disasters in the various ways they do. If an understanding of individual and community response is cultivated, changes can possibly be made to alleviate the often exaggerated measures and stress to which people subject themselves. Whether or not these modifications will need to come through media reform or not, the acknowledgement of a culture of fear (Glassner 1999) ever present in our communities is incumbent to making positive change. Substance abuse, drastic behavioral change, and mental and psychological stress all may result from heightened fears caused by terrorist acts such as the 2002 sniper shootings. Preventing these social problems is in the best interest of the United States; these problems represent direct threats to the well-being of the American public. Therefore, it is a fruitful and responsible scholarly exercise to examine media coverage and to explore its’ possible contribution to the problems and behaviors that are affecting Americans in the wake of criminal and terrorist activity. Given the importance of these issues, my thesis is focused on answering two key research questions:

1. How did the media portray the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?

2. Did media consumption lead to behavioral change among individuals?

Literature Review

Over the past several decades, technology has evolved at amazing speed, and access to real time, 24 hour per day information has become common and expected. With the Internet, cable news, radio, cellular telephones, blackberries, pagers and laptops,
information and news events are spread rapidly between individuals, communities and nations. With such widespread access to technology in the United States, television news networks reach hundreds of millions of viewers in homes across the country. Often, violence is what is depicted on these millions of television screens, coming in the form of news, movies, television shows, and even commercials (Glassner 1999: 44).

Many social scientists and journalists alike have adopted the stance that this “overload” exposure to media violence is directly correlated with violence in reality, or, the brutal nature of crime in real life is being motivated and is stemming from our exposure to brutal television (Schorr 1993). While this argument is strongly opposed by some, the idea that violence on television has an actual effect on people’s actual behaviors continues to be a source of scholarly and popular debate.

Some scholars have argued that violent television programming is causing individuals to believe they are living in an unsafe world where they have become vulnerable (Klinenberg 2001). More specifically, viewers begin to believe their neighborhoods, communities, and cities are far more dangerous than they are in reality, causing a variety of preventive behaviors including purchasing of locks, guns, and watchdogs (Gerbner 1992). These measures are meant to alleviate fear and anxiety. Further, these fears convince the individual to harbor feelings of control in some situations yet helplessness in other situations (Gerbner 1992).

While those most physically able to defend themselves take preventative measures in response to media-induced fear, the elderly tend to remove themselves almost completely from the supposed threats outside their front doors (Klinenberg 2001; Warr 1993). Consistent exposure to media creates an enlarged and heightened sense of potential
victimization among less physically able groups, such as the elderly (Gerbner 1992). A rather vicious cause and effect cycle takes form among the elderly; the more intake of violent television programming, the more likely they might physically and mentally deteriorate as a result of fearfulness to leave their homes (Warr 1993).

In news reporting, one violent news story often triggers false data to be presented, many times perpetuating the idea that a particular crime occurs more frequently than it does. For example, more than five hundred stories in newspapers focused on workplace violence during 1994 and 1995, stating that 2.2 million people are attacked on the job each year. Further research into these claims yielded actual results of 1 in 114,000 working people being murdered each year (Larson 1994). Additional studies showed 90 percent of workplace murders occurred when someone attempted a robbery, whereas the news perpetuated the idea of high frequency co-worker homicides (Larson 1994).

Why then is the media portraying violence and presenting problems at levels that do not actually match reality? Why did two-thirds of Americans believe crime rates were rising in the 1990’s when they had consecutively fallen throughout the decade (Glassner 1999)? According to Klein and Nacarrato (2003), the media portrays stories and events that they believe will be most popular with the public. It is far more captivating to hear statistics of thousands at risk of drive-by shootings, rather than listening to an isolated case of one such shooting. Rather than misrepresenting these trends, the portrayal of actual data might give Americans an increased sense of control; if we know the rates and trends of a particular criminal behavior, we feel that we have an ability to assess where a particular risk may exist. Such beliefs might be coping strategies; believing victims are part of a trend might normalize and allow for better comprehension amongst traumatized
relatives. Or does constant fearfulness and worrying simply seep out all optimism for a healthy future for people (Glassner 1999)? Glassner’s (1999) work on the ways that the media serves to perpetuate fear helped illustrate the incredible power of the media in shaping perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. Is being fearful of crime rational? Most research to date recognizes that there is a relationship between the amount of media one is exposed to and one’s behavioral responses.

Warr (1993) found that 38 percent of people (comprised of black and white respondents) “very/pretty frequently” worry that themselves or someone in their family will be sexually assaulted or raped. Beyond mental worrying, what physical actions are taken in response to fear of crime? How serious are the effects of fear of victimization as a result of amassed exposure to the media? In light of convincing data that suggest that much of the media’s portrayal of frequency and likelihood of crime occurrence is inaccurate in reality, it still results in the harboring of actual and anticipated fear (Silberman 1978). What is most important is the empirical value of anticipated fear; regardless of an actual threat, the belief of threats can induce and create rigid and extreme preventative behaviors (Garofalo 1981), such as purchasing locks and remaining isolated in one’s own home. “Personalization” of an image of crime is created through consideration of perceived prevalence, likelihood, vulnerability and consequences of crime (Garofalo 1981).

Of particular interest in this study is the ways that individuals and communities respond to the fear of crime, which is largely cultivated through media consumption. According to Dubow (1979), specific responses to fear of crime may be organized in the following categories: avoidance, protective behavior, insurance behavior, communicative
behavior and participation behavior. Avoidance represents general actions taken to decrease exposure to crime while protective behavior increases resistance to victimization such as carrying a weapon (Dubow 1979), and is considered the most prevalent action taken among surveyed citizens. Large percentages of survey respondents emphasize simple avoidance behaviors of certain areas or the purchasing of locks as most common (Biderman 1967). Said differently, people are not passive in their fears of crime. Instead, they tend to engage in particular actions that they believe will help keep them safe in the face of danger.

Also of interest is the process of communication behavior, or the sharing of information and emotions related to crime with others; such behaviors are accomplished within the realm of media (Dubow 1979). Likewise, participation behavior, or “actions in concert with others which are motivated by a particular crime” are important in media; the actions of others to prevent crime which are documented in media often empower viewers to take similar action.

Indeed, most current research on responses to fear of crime reveals not necessarily incapacitation as mentioned with elderly, but rather uneasiness and distrust (Garofalo 1981). Behaviors are adopted which do not paralyze an individual or create a sense of helplessness, rather these behaviors create a sense of control and informed decision-making during an overwhelming situation or time period (Garofalo 1981).

**The 2002 Sniper Shootings**

On the evening of October 2, 2002, the lone murder of a man in a grocery store parking lot would spark the beginning of the Washington, DC sniper shootings (Wikipedia 2006). Ultimately killing ten people and wounding three, the two snipers
would terrorize the citizens of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. (See Appendix 1 for a detailed description/timeline of the shootings.)

As the sniper shootings continued and citizens became increasingly fearful for their well-being, they began initiating all types of behavioral changes (Coppola 2004). These modifications, and percentage of persons engaging in them, included (Coppola 2004):

- Using different gas stations than one normally used (36 percent)
- Avoiding stores and shopping centers located near highways (32 percent)
- Staying at home except when absolutely necessary to leave (13 percent)
- Driving when one normally would take the Metro (11 percent)
- Watching or listening to the news more than usual (71 percent)

Other modifications included running or weaving through parking lots and avoiding outdoor activities all together (Coppola 2004). In addition, often parents drove children to school rather than allowing them to walk (Williams 2004).

Beyond behavior modification, physical evidence of fear and stress of the shootings resulted in hospital workers in the Washington, DC area displaying significant levels of acute stress disorder (Grieger 2003). Similar responses were observed in the days and months after the September 11 terrorist attacks, when thoughts and worry about additional attacks were prevalent. According to Vlahov (2002), 28.8 percent of Manhattan residents reported increased use of cigarettes, alcohol or marijuana in the months following September 11. While these actions were not necessarily preventative or actions that made an individual feel safer, they represent coping behaviors related to the fear potential physical harm can cause.
Much data reveals that the majority of people in the Washington, DC metropolitan area received their information about the sniper shootings through media sources, such as television and newspaper. A vast majority of both women, 91.1 percent, and men, 83.9 percent, used the news to obtain information during the sniper shootings (Zivotofsky 2005). Studies also indicate that 71 percent of citizens watched or listened to the news more than usual during the weeks of the sniper shootings (Coppola 2004). Clearly, this shows that media was contributing to citizen’s understanding of the sniper attacks and interpretation of the events. Modification of behaviors was an inherent result of perceived risks caused by the snipers; 76.3 percent of women modified their normal action of filling gas at the gas station; and many other significant numbers of men and women changed behaviors such as eating out, going shopping, and driving in general (Zivotofsky 2005).

The Washington, DC sniper shootings inflicted much fear and anxiety among the citizens of the metropolitan area. In response to these fears and stress, many citizens employed new behaviors or modified existing patterns of behavior. With only thirteen people directly harmed by the snipers (ten killed, three wounded), why were millions of people so fearful for their lives? What caused this behavior of millions while a miniscule number of people were affected?

**Methods**

Two main research questions guided my research:

1. How did the media portray the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
2. Did media consumption change behaviors among individuals?
In order to answer the above questions, I conducted a content analysis of media coverage of the sniper shootings, as well as 10 in-depth interviews with residents who lived in the Washington, DC metropolitan area at the time of the shootings. Below I detail my methodological approach for this thesis.

**Newspaper Article Content Analysis**

Because the media is such a significant source of information for most Americans, particularly during times of disaster, I began my research with a detailed look at how the sniper shootings were portrayed to the public.

I analyzed a set of newspaper articles that focused on the shootings spanning the entire three weeks of news coverage. I collected the newspaper articles using the LexisNexis academic search database. My search query consisted of looking for newspaper articles in “Washington, DC news sources” from October 1, 2002 through October 31, 2002, searching for the combination of key words including sniper, fear, and beltway. The search resulted in a total of 968 related articles. In order to generate a useable dataset, I employed a random retrieving pattern of articles to equal a final total of 30 articles for analysis. Because the sniper shootings occurred in a three week time period, I decided to code roughly one article every day from these weeks, to portray media encompassing the entirety of the shootings. The articles predominantly came from the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times*, and a few articles also came from Cox New Services.

**Semi-Structured Individual Interviews**

To examine the effects of the media consumption and behavioral change during the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings, I interviewed a sample of 10 individuals regarding their experiences. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a more depth
understanding of the ways that media consumption may affect people’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors during times of disaster.

There are many past research studies to take into consideration when constructing a sampling frame for a study such as this. Much disaster research to date indicates significant differences in risk perception among diverse demographic populations in the United States. Some studies have found that individuals of varying occupations report different levels of risk perception (Lamson 1983). Researchers have argued that individuals with lower income or of lower socioeconomic status report the highest levels of concern during technological hazards (Pillisuk et al. 1987). Other extensive disaster research revealed that women often perceive disaster threat more seriously than men (Fothergill 1996). Klinenberg (2001) shows that elderly populations perceive risks differently due to different levels of media exposure.

With respect to these potential differences among populations, I selected a purposive sample of five males and five females, with two males and two females who were 65 or older at the time of the sniper shootings. The other three interviewees of each gender varied in ages from 21 to 57 years of age. Although my sample size is small, it allowed me to compare the responses of men and women and younger and older participants to the sniper shootings. I found the interviewees partly through personal contacts and also through snowball sampling.

The majority of interviewees identified themselves as White/Caucasian with the exception of one woman who identified herself as half Sri Lankan, half White. All senior citizen respondents had children and grandchildren at the time of the shootings, but only two other interviewees under the age of 65 had children during this time. Besides one
single woman and the two college-aged men interviewed, all other respondents were married at the time of the shootings.

Educational attainment ranged from only some classes in high school to undergraduate degrees with extra training such as nursing school. All four of the senior citizens interviewed (two male, two female) are retired and were retired at the time of the shootings. All other interviewees currently work or are full-time students at local universities. Occupations and past occupations of the respondents included:

- Social worker
- Chemical Laborer
- Grocery Store Manager
- Professional Website Blogger
- Undergraduate Student
- Medical Secretary
- Police Officer
- Middle School Teacher
- Telephone Operator
- Administrative Support Assistant

During a ten day period, I informally interviewed ten individuals living in the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area. The majority of these interviewees (8) lived in a rural suburb town, Damascus, located in central Maryland about 40 miles from downtown Washington, DC, but only 17 miles from Rockville, Maryland, the site of multiple murders during the sniper shootings. These Rockville shootings represented the closest attacks to Damascus during the shooting spree of October 2002. The other two interviewees not living in the Damascus area were from Reston, Virginia and Silver Spring, Maryland. Both of these sites were much closer geographically to the shootings, with the Silver Spring resident living only a few blocks from a couple of the shootings.

A wide-ranging set of open-ended questions, which were developed after completing the literature review and content analysis portion of this study, were used throughout the
interview process. The focus of the interview questions was on media consumption, reaction to the shootings, routine/behavior changes in response to the shootings, and general feelings about the attacks. (See Appendix 2 for the complete interview guide.) All interviews were conducted between December 25, 2007 and December 31, 2007. The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees except for one interview that was conducted in a restaurant in Damascus, Maryland.

Data Analysis

Newspaper Articles

The coverage of the sniper shootings in Washington, DC newspaper sources emphasized feelings of powerlessness and helplessness through redundancy of these tones. Constant reporting of coping strategies of other citizens perpetuated feelings of desperation, thus likely motivating readers to take similar actions. The dominating theme of the Washington, DC newspapers was one of vulnerability and fear; a dangerous environment was portrayed for readers.

After the first day of shootings, the crimes were “apparently random,” but very quickly, readers were reminded that “nothing like this has ever happened” before (Moscoso 2002). On this very first day, reporters chose very explicit language to describe the murder scenes, describing one victim leaning on a van, “smearing it with blood” (Moscoso 2002). Such language depicts a fearful scene for readers and reinforcing the murders’ significance.

Images of a “cold blooded killer” whom “elude[d] police” and “prowled peaceful sidewalks” hardly promotes calm, logical judgments of risk perception among citizens
(Washington Post 2002). Titles touting that “Everyone is a victim,” and “Anxiety”
becomes part of daily routine, and the constant use of “fear” such as “fear seeping into”
resident’s lives in multiple newspaper titles during the month of October all contributed
toward feelings of helplessness, stress, and fear (Sorokin, Thomas-Lester, Irvin, 2002).
With “fear” taking its’ place in titles in half of the 30 articles examined, there is no
mystery as to why people became fearful for their well-being. From my sample of
newspaper articles, language seemed to remain consistently “negative,” however future
research might endeavor with a focus on whether or not language becomes more fear-
provoking as a stressful, dangerous event continues to plague citizens.

Another powerful pattern in the articles was the encouragement of readers to change
their behaviors in order to cope during the shootings. The ideas for behavioral change
were often introduced through stories about things that fellow citizens were doing to
protect themselves during the shootings. The amount of reporting focused on citizens’
behaviors was astounding. With only seven out of 30 articles strictly reporting on
developments in the shootings, the remaining articles focused on strategies for changing
daily routines and people’s personal experiences and responses to the shootings. An
abundance of quotations, anecdotes, and observations flooded readers with all kinds of
coping ideas, making it likely that people who were not changing their daily routines in
response to shooters were likely influenced to do so eventually. Some articles talked of
how to wedge oneself between gas pumps to stay out of sight; others suggested carrying
portable radios to monitor developments in the case (Washington Post 2002).

A variety of potential new behaviors were introduced through personal quotations:
walking faster, walking in zig-zag patterns, observing gas stations to gauge safety levels,
never becoming stationary in public, abandoning public transportation, and driving children to school. Through the media coverage, readers are confronted with these behaviors and forced to consider adopting them (Nearman, Johnson, and Witt 2002). The newspapers spared no expense in sharing and justifying extreme behaviors like purchasing and wearing body armor while pumping gas (Sorokin 2002). Reading about others’ new behavior modifications made these behaviors socially acceptable and psychologically reasonable.

The constant reiterating of themes of helplessness sends the reader looking for ways to take back control. Accounts of citizens saying “If it’s your time to go, it’s your time to go,” and quotes of religious leaders commenting on life’s fragility, or news agencies suggesting reduction of coffee intake while driving as to reduce stopping for restrooms – one cannot help but feel powerlessness when assessing these stories (Johnson, Harris, Pressley 2002). As a parent, these feelings only seem to be exacerbated when anecdotes of parents making children sit away from car windows when driving and closing window shades of children’s bedrooms at homes grace the headlines (Edwards 2002).

The newspaper articles were a fountain of stress and worrisome banter at times. Used primarily during the sniper shootings for purposes other than reporting the shooting developments, the articles themselves ironically included quotes of concerned citizens who felt that “we really can make it worse by having the TV on” (Edwards 2002).

**Interviews**

After completing the content analysis of media coverage, I began conducting the qualitative interviews with the 10 participants in December 2006. Upon completion of the qualitative interviews, I transcribed all interviewee responses verbatim (See Appendix 3
for complete interview transcriptions). After finishing the transcriptions, I grouped responses to questions into categories based on similar themes. After searching for themes in the data and grouping responses into categories, I began searching for various factors that helped explain people’s perceptions of and reactions to the sniper shootings.

The most prevalent themes that emerged that influenced interviewees’ mental, physical, and social responses to the impending sniper threat included levels of media consumption and behavioral changes influenced by respondents’ closeness to the shootings. Such examples of closeness include geographical location to the shootings, or personal connections to victims. In addition, demographic characteristics, including both gender and age, affected the responses of the interviewees. From my comparison of interviewee responses, the general trends are that increased levels of media consumption led to more changes in interviewees during the sniper shootings, and increased geographical as well as relational closeness to the actual shooting scenes or victims also contributed to higher levels of stress and behavioral change.

Additional trends emerging from my interviews include the collective sense of sympathy and understanding for those who chose to participate in changing physical behavior during the shootings. Whether the interviewee changed daily routines or not in response to the shootings, the majority of respondents reported that these behaviors in others were both justified and understandable often given their geographical location. In this following section, I will explore the various interviewee responses as related to the aforementioned themes, comparing and contrasting responses to the influences mentioned above.
**Media Consumption and Increased Stress**

Consuming media, whether through watching the news on television or reading the newspaper, was positively correlated with the levels of mental, physical, or emotional stress emphasized by interviewees. The more media interviewees were exposed to, the more often those interviewees expressed frequent concern, worry, and routine or behavioral change in response to the sniper shootings. For example, one male college student reported that he watched 30 minutes per day of news television during the sniper attacks, and also responded that he “really didn’t change [his] behavior at all” during the sniper shootings. A second male college student interviewee reported watching television news up to three hours daily and reported two serious instances of “feeling in danger” and changing his daily routines in response to these feelings. Both college students lived in the same geographical area at the time of the shootings.

This pattern emerged in other comparable interviewees as well. The interviewee living in Reston, Virginia (closer to the actual shootings than those living in Damascus) reported watching television news “hardly at all, anytime,” and that she “didn’t feel worried at all anytime,” and “never felt the need to change routines or worry for her safety.” Conversely, another female respondent who watched television news at least two hours per day remarked that she was “creeped out,” and that the shootings “scared [her] quite a bit.”

Other cases of higher media consumption leading to higher levels of emotional and mental stress are evident throughout the interviews as well. Regardless of media intake, nine of the ten respondents reported watching television news “more than usual” during the time period of the sniper shootings, which fits with prior research findings. Clearly,
all respondents were watching television for updates on the shootings, and reported this in the interviews. However, it was the respondents who consumed the most media, particularly through television broadcasting, who reported the most extreme fears and levels of behavioral change.

**Closeness to the Shootings, Behavioral Change, and Emotional Effects**

Beyond media consumption and its varying effects on interviewee response, interviewees’ closeness to the shootings also had a strong influence on routine changes during the shootings. The respondents from the Damascus, Maryland, a town 15 miles from most of the shootings, reported that they predominantly did not change their behavior in attempt to feel safer.

When asked about changing their routines, most of the respondents from this region only mentioned such affects as feeling more alert or aware of their surroundings. Beyond that, they reported very little behavioral change. Indeed, most continued normal activities but did so with a sense of heightened alertness and cautiousness. One college student in Damascus noted his hyper-alertness while in public:

> *I don’t think I changed all that much. I guess I was just more cautious when I was outside, I was probably just more cautious, looking around and stuff.*

Similarly, an elderly man from the Damascus area noted what a significant change he had undergone in terms of being on the lookout for things out of the ordinary:

> *The only thing I did differently, which I had never done before in my life, I became observant while I was at shopping centers, and looked around, before I got out of my vehicle. I was looking for anything out of the ordinary.*

As a result of the feelings of fear and worry, some took comfort in the safety of their loved ones. An elderly woman commented on her husband’s abilities as a former
police officer, and how that helped her to feel more secure and thus less likely to
dramatically change her normal routine:

*Being an ex-policeman, I feel like my husband knew what to look for. I was
fearful but I don’t think it stopped us from doing things all together. I was more
alert and looking around for unusual things, but I don’t know what I would have
done had I seen anything.*

While these responses certainly illustrate the heightened sense of awareness and fear
that all interviewees expressed, other respondents, including those living closest to the
actual shootings as well as two cases in Damascus reported more dramatic routine and
behavioral change. One Damascus college student recalled his feelings of fear that
culminated one late afternoon at a shopping mall closer to the Rockville area of the
shootings.

*I walked out in the parking lot and no one else was around. I felt like I was being
watched, and I felt like I was in danger. I was further south and closer to the
shootings area, so I was no longer isolated. At that moment I was scared and I
jogged to my car.*

An elderly man told me about how he watched approaching vehicles with great suspicion
during his daily errands:

*When I would go to the mailbox, I would watch every car and truck coming down
the road toward me. I would watch the passenger side of the vehicle, I felt like the
driver was just shooting people. It got my imagination running wild; I was
prepared to dive on the ground if I saw any unusual movement from a driver or
passenger. If I was somewhere else, like the shopping center, I was looking all
around. My antennas were up the whole time.*

One interviewee who lived in the Silver Springs area of Maryland, which was much
closer to the sites of eight of the shootings, discussed how she changed her routine when
it came to putting gas in her automobile:

*I was very scared to fill my gas tank. During the next three weeks, I filled my gas
tank only once. I only filled it early morning, and when I was pumping, I was
looking around and making sure I was aware of what was going on around me. I*
would stand behind my door but I also crouched down while the gas was pumping. I also would not go out for anything unnecessary. Shopping and going out for fun; I just did not do these things during those weeks.

The above quote is likely indicative of the approach that many individuals living in the Washington, DC area took to pumping gas during the time of the sniper shootings, given that four of the thirteen victims were shot while putting fuel into their cars. It is important to note that the two interviewees reporting dramatic change were the two strongest outliers of media consumption in comparison to other Damascus interviewees. The college student and the older man both reported watching three to four hours per day, the highest amounts of media consumption of all interviewees. Perhaps their media consumption explains their extreme behavioral changes, given their far distance from the shootings, living in Damascus.

Beyond the scope of geographic location or media consumption, two respondents’ shared a particular closeness to the sniper shootings. One male respondent in Damascus and the female respondent living in Silver Spring both had personal friendships with victims of the shootings. These instances, clearly impacting the respondents more so than other interviewees, had a profound influence on their perspectives of the shootings, but most importantly, on behavioral changes. The man living in Damascus noted that this development made him feel more vulnerable and was a cause for more alertness. In the following quote, he notes one particular change, but only engaged in this behavior after the murder of his friend.

“Every time I was pumping gas I was looking all around at roof tops and across the streets.”

The respondent in Silver Spring also noted her distinct friendship with one of the victims.
“Then on the news we saw his picture and he was the victim at another gas station. I was really close to his wife for many years. She was a great friend and I also knew her mother.”

As noted previously, this respondent also avoided going out, and sat in her car and hid behind the door while pumping gas. Clearly, there were different factors which contributed to respondents behavioral changes; media consumption, geographical location and even personal ties to victims.

**Collective Understanding**

While some of the respondents did not report making significant changes in their daily routines in the face of the sniper threats, all interviewees noted that they saw this behavior in other citizens on the local and national television news programs. Respondents listed the following behavioral changes that they had heard about through various media outlets, as reporters attempted to convey potential responses to the sniper threat:

- Crouching down, sitting inside one’s car, or standing behind car doors while pumping gas
- Running, weaving, or bopping up and down while jogging/running through parking lots
- Crouching down in seats while riding city buses

In discussing behavioral and routine changes, respondents often reflected upon whether or not these actions among their peers or themselves were rational. Many respondents felt the behaviors of others were irrational and exaggerated and felt it was of no use to act in such ways. Likewise, many respondents felt that the act of staying inside or avoiding public spaces was equally ridiculous and unnecessary. Any number of reasons might explain this collective view of behavioral change as unnecessary. Perhaps enough time has past to skew the actual fear of those weeks during 2002, or maybe
respondents really did think of these changes as irrational. Another explanation is that the Damascus respondents shared a similar geographic location and further distance from the shootings.

Even though these respondents from Damascus were skeptical regarding the levels of avoidance and extreme fears of those who lived through the sniper shootings, the interviewees were in agreement that had the sniper shootings been closer to their homes, they most likely would have modified their daily routines and activities to a much greater extent. A single woman exclaimed:

_I wouldn’t have even gone out of house had it been here!_

Similarly, a married man living in Damascus commented:

_I would have been more cautious and definitely more scared had shootings occurred in our town._

It is impossible to know if these changes would have been at the level of other citizens’ who they deemed irrational and ridiculous. Many interviewees expressed understanding as well for citizens living near the shootings outside of recognizing they would have changed their own behaviors had shootings occurred in their area of Damascus. One female senior citizen in Damascus noted:

_Well if that makes people feel better, than it’s okay to change routines._

Another Damascus citizen expressed similar sympathy for other community members.

_I think it was definitely reasonable and even if they were over-reacting I think it was reasonable._

**Gender and Age**

As prior research has indicated, both age and gender are important demographic factors that affect individual response during times of disaster. Upon implementing these
considerations in my purposive sample of interviewees, I wanted to see if these trends held up with my respondents. Age was one distinct difference with respondents, as two of the five men I interviewed were over the age of 65 at the time of the shootings, as were two of the five women. My results from examining interviewee response from age were inconclusive, as I feel many factors influenced these respondents beyond the scope of age.

For example, both of the elderly men I interviewed lived in the suburban town of Damascus, yet one reported three to four hours of television consumption daily, while the other reported only one hour of television consumption daily. The former reported some of the most drastic routine change and anxiety while in public of all interviewees. Conversely, the latter reported no changes and adopted a stance of strength and unwavering confidence during the shootings. Perhaps a larger sample of respondents may have allowed for better analysis of different age groups, but in this case, media consumption differed between the two elderly men, just as much as their routine changes and response differed. Similar findings were the case for the two elderly women as well.

Gender differences were much more distinct and pronounced. While no conclusive results indicated different routine change or physical responses between males and females, it was the general roles and stances they adopted during the shootings that were highlighted. More specifically, females tended to take on the role of the caretaker, as the males tended to exhibit the protector role in ensuring their families’ safety. For example, one woman noted her daily phone calls to her son, who happened to work in the area of many of shootings:

Many times, I called my son and asked, could you wait and go to Rockville another day instead of today.
For males, they often voiced their concern regarding ensuring family safety. One respondent voiced his anger towards the emphasis of law enforcement officers on looking for a particular vehicle, which turned out to be a false lead.

*I remember at the time being angry with the authorities, especially Chief Moose and Doug Duncan the county executive. Every time they opened their mouths, they were saying white box truck and part of my anger is that if they were just zeroing in on this, they are not protecting my family. The snipers were caught in Frederick in a blue Chevy Caprice; I have a son and daughter in Frederick. I have another son who has his own tow-truck business and he was in Rockville all day every day.*

These responses clearly demonstrate the difference in primary concerns of male and female respondents during the shootings. While women may tended to do the worrying and comforting of other family members, men tended to primarily focus on preventing injury or harm to their loved ones, which fit very closely with more traditional gender roles that we often see in larger society during non-disaster times. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that these roles might be amplified during a time of perceived uncertainty and crisis.

**Conclusion**

In this study, I have examined the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings. Throughout my research, I sought to address two primary research questions:

1. How did the media portray the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
2. Did media consumption change behaviors among individuals?

I first conducted a newspaper content analysis of prominent Washington, DC newspapers. From this analysis, I outlined specific themes which emerged from the newspapers’ coverage of the sniper shootings. Next, I interview a sample of ten private citizens to better understand their reactions and responses to the shootings in correlation
with their media consumption. Upon completion of these interviews, I gathered my data to examine whether or not relationships existed between the nature in which the shootings were reported in the media and how individuals in the Washington, DC community responded.

The analysis of newspaper coverage and in-depth interviews of responses to the shootings support the cases previously made within the scholarly community regarding media exposure and behavioral change. The media showed a very grim picture of the risks and dangers that citizens faced. Living in the Washington, DC area, I related to the personal experiences conveyed in the articles. In retrospect, I realize that much of my behavior modification and psychological stress was irrational; however the media made my actions seem rational.

The issue with the media coverage is that it over-published and over-emphasized the feelings citizens were experiencing to the point that they were messengers of gossip and irrational behavior to the rest of the population. The affects of this media overexposure could have been the cause or a contributing factor for the widespread behavior modification that resulted. After all, reporting that citizens are experiencing sleeplessness, nightmares, forgetfulness, lack of concentration, and anger could induce more cases of such behavior (Washington Post 2002).

Interviewing citizens most directly affected by the Washington, DC sniper shootings revealed many feelings of worry, anxiety, and fear. These feelings were often portrayed through the changing of daily routines, more mental alertness, or avoidance of areas all together. My interviews revealed the relationship between media consumption and changing of behaviors and routines. The respondents’ supported the notion that increased
levels of media during those October days often lead toward more exaggerated responses for safety, both physically and mentally. In addition, respondents’ closeness to the actual shootings or the victims also affected the respondents’ reactions to the on-going threat caused by the snipers.

Clearly the media, both in newspaper and television form, affected the interviewees who consumed the most print and electronic media. The media influenced their physical routines, mindset, and feelings toward the incidents throughout those three weeks in October. While my respondents were digesting the Washington, DC area media, they were simultaneously incorporating this information into their daily actions.

The overarching affects on individuals of the Washington, DC sniper shootings were widespread, immense, and overwhelming. With ten people perishing in a metropolitan area of over five million, a large portion of those five million felt personal risk. The media coverage accurately fulfilled the claims scholarly works have been drawing from research. While large percentages turned to media for information gathering, I now understand what the media supplied them. With dominating messages of helplessness and coping in the newspapers, an educated prediction I can make is that media exposure during this time lead to both behavior modification and fear for one’s well-being.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

My content analysis and comparison to scholarly works focusing on the sniper shootings surely warrants further study into the relationship between one’s psychological and physical responses to a disaster, and the nature of how it is reported in the media people consume. There is an obvious correlation between the themes and messages
portrayed by the Washington, DC newspapers and the behaviors and responses exhibited
by its readers and surrounding public, just as scholarly research suggested.

However, with my research moving out of content analysis and into personal
interviews with people living through this event, there appears to be a strong relationship
between the media’s content and the personal response to it. After documenting media’s
direct content and word choice, I moved forward to examine the personal affects, if any,
this media had on citizens. My research has revealed multiple factors which can
influence a citizens’ response to perceived danger. Levels of media consumption,
geographic closeness to the crime scenes, and personal ties to those directly affected or
victimized by a threat all influence the level and intensity of response to perceived threat.
Further, my research reinforced differing responses by interviewees varying in both age
and gender.

These findings can motivate and encourage even broader research endeavors which
ask: In addition to word choice and choice of content, how else does the media cultivate
and perpetuate fear and response through its reporting of crime and disaster? What other
factors can contribute to the perceived level of threat in citizens during an on-going
threat? With my research, further examinations can address the problems of irrational
stress and fear taking hold on individuals in the wake of perceived threats.
Bibliography


Works Consulted


Appendix 1
Synopsis of 2002 Washington, DC Sniper Shootings

October 2:

- 6:05 p.m., Wheaton, Maryland – James Martin, a 55-year-old program analyst, shot and killed in parking lot of a Shoppers Food Warehouse grocery store.

October 3:

- 7:41 a.m., Rockville, Maryland – James L. Buchanan, a 39-year-old landscaper is shot dead while mowing the grass at Fitzgerald Auto Mall.
- 8:12 a.m., Aspen Hill, Maryland – Premkumar Walekar, a 54-year-old part-time taxi driver is killed while pumping gasoline into his taxi at a Mobil station.
- 8:37 a.m., Aspen Hill, Maryland – Sarah Ramos, a 34-year-old babysitter and housekeeper, is killed while reading a book on a bench at the Leisure World Shopping Center.
- 9:58 a.m., Kensington, Maryland – Lori Ann Lewis-Rivera, a 25-year-old is killed while vacuuming her Dodge Caravan at a Shell station.
- 9:15 p.m., Washington, DC – Pascal Charlot, a 72-year-old retired carpenter, is shot dead while walking on Georgia Avenue at Kalmia Road.

October 4:

- 2:30 p.m., Spotsylvania County, Virginia – Caroline Seawell, a 43-year-old woman is wounded in the parking lot of a Michaels craft store at Spotsylvania Mall just outside the city of Fredericksburg, while she is loading purchases into her minivan.

October 7

- 8:09 a.m., Bowie, Maryland – Iran Brown, a 13-year-old boy, is wounded as he arrives at Benjamin Tasker Middle School.

October 9

- 8:18 p.m., Prince William County, Virginia – Dean Harold Meyers, a 53-year-old man is shot dead while pumping gasoline at a gas station near the city of Manassas.
October 11

- 9:30 a.m., Spotsylvania County, Virginia – Kenneth Bridges, a 53-year-old man dies while pumping fuel at an Exxon station off Interstate 95 in near Fredericksburg.

October 14

- 9:15 p.m., Fairfax County, Virginia – Linda Franklin, a 47-year-old FBI intelligence analyst is shot dead after she finishes shopping at a Home Depot.

October 19

- 8:00 p.m., Ashland, Virginia – Jeffrey Hopper, a 37-year-old man is shot and wounded in a parking lot near the Ponderosa steakhouse about 90 miles south of Washington near Interstate 95.

October 22

- 5:56 a.m., Aspen Hill, Maryland – Bus driver Conrad Johnson is shot dead while standing on the steps of his bus.
Appendix 2
Interview Guide

Media Consumption

- How many hours per day do you watch television?
- Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normal?
- What proportion of that viewing was of a news or cable news source?
- How many televisions are in your home?
- Do you read a newspaper?

2002 Sniper Shootings

- How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
- Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
- Do you remember the shootings on the news at all?
- Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?
- Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
- Were you fearful for your own or your family's well-being during the shootings?

Beliefs and Behavioral Change

- Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings? 
  - If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate;
  - Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?
- Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?
- How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?
- Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?
Appendix 3
Interview Transcriptions

Interview 1

Gender: Female
Age: 77
Occupation: Former Telephone Operator, Grocery Store Clerk
Address: 20872
Town of Residence: Damascus
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Marital Status: Married, 57 years
Children: 2 Children, Both over 40
Education: High School
Ethnicity: White Caucasian

How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 3 hours
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally?
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source? We only watch news. We watch the evening local news channels; we do not watch the national cable ones. We have cable and we do watch MSNBC.
How many televisions are in your home? 2
Do you read a newspaper? Two newspapers, I read the Frederick Post, and the Washington Post, everyday.
How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
I went down to the Aspen Hill area right after one of the shootings, I recall seeing that gas station all shut down from the shooting earlier that week.
Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
It made me very nervous and uneasy. They were shooting at everything and I was scared when I was getting gas someone was going to come and shoot me. Luckily, the shootings did not get up to this area, but I was still nervous. But the shootings overall just made me concerned and alert.
Do you remember the shootings on the news at all?
I did not like Chief Moose because he did not give out much information. He just wrote a book to get rich and then left the area for money.
Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
Well if that makes people feel better, than it’s okay to change routines. But I felt sorry for a lot of people who had to travel down to the Rockville area in the midst of all that.
Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?
None of our children live in the area, so we were not too worried about them.

Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?
- If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
• Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?
I didn’t do any behavior changing. We did most of the things we would normally do the same. But we don’t go out much anyway, so it didn’t matter too much. I do remember seeing people on the television hiding while pumping gas and running out to the parking lot. We travel together everywhere so we feel safe enough when we went out to do things.

Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?
My neighbors were also worried and nervous about it all. We talked quite a bit about it with the neighbors.

How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?
I think we thought they had the right people because they found the gun in the car.

Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?
Horrible; it was just horrible because of what happened to those poor people who were shot. We had no control and those shooters could just do whatever they wanted.

Additional:
My son would call everyday to make sure we are okay in the mornings. He lived in New Jersey and called all the time checking up on us to see if the shootings were happening up here.

Interview Date: Friday, December 29th, 10:25 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Interview 2

**Gender:** Female  
**Age:** 60  
**Occupation:** Administrative Support Assistant (OA) Office Automation  
**Address:** 20872  
**Town of Residence:** Damascus  
**County, State of Residence:** Montgomery, Maryland  
**Martial Status:** Single  
**Children?** : No  
**Education:** High School  
**Ethnicity:** White Caucasian  

**How many hour(s) per day do you watch television?** 2 hours  
**Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally?** “I probably watched the news more during the sniper shootings. I wanted to see what was going on, I wanted to see them get caught.”  
**What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source?** “I watched both the local channels and national ones like CNN.”  
**How many televisions are in your home?** 4  
**Do you read a newspaper?** No  
**How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?** “All I can really remember is that they could not figure out who it was, and they were kind of not in the same area each time. I felt a little safer living some distance from the shootings themselves.”  
**Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?** Not really, I’ve always been careful since I worked in Washington D.C. I am always aware of my surroundings out in public. “But those people were not after money or robbery, they were after lives.”  
**Do you remember the shootings on the news at all?** They gave us enough information but they didn’t know that much about it. “I couldn’t understand why they could not find them.”  
**Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?** It creeped me out. I used to live in Rockville and things have changed since then. Oh yeah, it scared me quite a bit to hear these things happening near me. It didn’t scare me, but I wanted to make sure they were caught as soon as possible. I was very surprised to hear it was a young child involved with the shootings. “I would have been scared to ride the Metro or Metro Bus. Didn’t they kill someone on one bus somewhere? I would have been scared while riding them, luckily I have a car.” “I do this, (looking around a lot) head side to side. I know who is behind me, who is in front of me. But luckily these shootings didn’t happen here.” “I wouldn’t have even gone out of house had it been here!”
Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
You just never know. Yeah it would have changed everything, plus I’m a chicken, I
would have been terrified.” “I think it was definitely reasonable and even if they were
over-reacting I think it was reasonable.”

Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?
When I lived with my mother, I watched it but she didn’t even know it was going on. I
did not have any family members in the area so I didn’t have to worry too much.

Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?

- If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
  - Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your
    immediate control?

I do not pump my own gas so I did not have to worry about it. I have pumped gas before,
however, and I would have
“Riding on the metro or getting off the metro bus would have worried me as well.”

Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to
the shootings?
Yeah I saw it on television and was just happy the shootings were happening around here.

Where did you rely on updates and news about the shootings?
Just the news on television.

How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal
routines immediately?
I felt these were the only two who were guilty of all of these shootings. I was very
surprised by the location and the rest stop they were caught at. I did feel like it was over
after that.

Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word
be and why?
Cautious; it made me very cautious, and I like to be cautious normally any way! This just
made me more cautious than normal and I looked around even more often when I was out
in public.

Interview Date:
Saturday, December 30th, 3:00 – 3:30 p.m.
Interview 3

Gender: Female
Age: 55
Occupation: Social Worker
Address:
Town of Residence: Silver Spring, 20902
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Martial Status: Married
Children? 3 Children; Adult Children
Education: Undergraduate degree, nursing school
Ethnicity: White, Irish background

How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 1 hour
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally? Yes much more
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source? I watch all local news; we do not have cable television
How many televisions are in your home? 2
Do you read a newspaper? Yes, every day, I read the Washington Post.

How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
I remember a lot of it because a lot of the people shot were within a 2 mile radius of my house. One occurred at the local super market I shop at, that might have been the first shooting. But no one saw or heard anything, so it was a big mystery. Then another shooting occurred at the gas station down the street, and that REALLY scared everyone. It was a young mother driving her minivan.

Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
Sure, and I was looking for a white box-truck van. This was what everyone was looking for. And I work quite a bit on the highway; one day I saw the police pull over a white van and they pulled everyone out and put them face down on the road. Another time they pulled an older woman out of the white van and put her on the ground. So the shooter could have been anyone, even me!

Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
I did not feel like people were being silly, because these were killings occurring. It was a way to make the self feel more secure and safer.

Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?
Most people tried to carry on normal activities but it must have been very scary for parents with younger kids. The shootings mostly occurred near our home, not where our kids live. My husband just tried to go straight to and from work.
Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?

- If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
- Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?

I was very scared to fill my gas tank. During the next three weeks, I filled my gas tank only once. I only filled it early morning, and when I was pumping, I was looking around and making sure I was aware of what was going on around me. I would stand behind my door but I also crouched down while the gas was pumping.
I also would not go out for anything unnecessary. Shopping and going out for fun; I just did not do these things during those weeks.

Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?
I heard mostly about people getting worried through the radio on the way to and from work.

How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?
It was a great sense of relief. It was determined that they were the snipers, and I felt they were definitely the ones responsible.

Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?
I would say violence. It was senseless violence and the nature of the attacks was terrible.

Additional:
One day I was riding home and they were talking about the latest shooting and they said an Indian name, and I thought oh God. I thought it might be someone I knew, then I came home and I said I heard this person’s name that died, and I said it can’t be that family we know. Then on the news we saw his picture and he was the victim at another gas station. I was really close to his wife for many years. She was a great friend and I also knew her mother. I also found out the shooters were working out at a gym down the street after their capture.

Interview Date: December 28, 10:20 p.m. – 10:55 p.m.
Interview 4
Gender: Female
Age: 72
Occupation: Medical Secretary and Manager
Address:
Town of Residence: Gaithersburg, 20882
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Martial Status: Married
Children? : Two, Both Children in 40s, 5 Grandchildren, Age 3-21
Education: Graduated from High School
Ethnicity: White Caucasian
How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 3-4 hours
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally?
I definitely watched it more often during the shootings.
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source?
I watch the evening news on NBC, channel 4. I very seldom watch the national news
channels like CNN.
How many televisions are in your home? 2
Do you read a newspaper?
Yes, daily, I read the Frederick Post and sometimes the Washington Post.
How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
Pretty well.
Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
I was also very frustrated and angry with these shootings, it made no sense!
Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and
Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?
Yes, one of people killed was right next door to the cardiologist I go to regularly for
appointments.
Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?
I would say yes because our son travels all in the area of where those shootings seemed to
be occurring. I was very concerned and fearful for him.
Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?
• If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
• Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your
  immediate control?
Being an ex-policeman, I feel like my husband knew what to look for. I was fearful but I
don’t think it stopped us from doing things all together.
I was fearful; I don’t go many places without my husband anyway. I was more alert and
looking around for unusual things, but I don’t know what I would have done had I seen
anything.
I probably went out a few times alone, I was helpless anyway.
If it’s going to be, it’s going to be, we just prayed to God to watch over us.

Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to
the shootings?
I remember the Damascus High School parade being cancelled, but other than that, not really.

**Where did you rely on updates and news about the shootings?**
I got all of my updates and news from television.

**How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?**
I was relieved, but I was hoping and praying that these were really the right guys. It really hit me where they were arrested, because we went past that rest stop every week on trips. I couldn’t believe they were that close to us. They had plans to kill in Frederick next!

**Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?**
Helpless. There was nothing that I could do to help. No one could really see what was coming next.

**Additional:**
Many times, I called my son and asked, could you wait and go to Rockville another day instead of today.

**Interview Date:** Wednesday December 27 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Interview 5

Gender: Female  
Age: 35  
Occupation: Middle School Teacher  
Address: 20910  
Town of Residence: Reston  
County, State of Residence: Fairfax, Virginia  
Martial Status: Married  
Children?: None  
Education: B.A.  
Ethnicity: ½ Sri Lankan, ½ Irish

How many hour(s) per day do you watch television?  Hardly none at all; less than one  
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally? No not at all  
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source?  
How many televisions are in your home? 2  
Do you read a newspaper? Sometimes but not normally  
How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings? I remember the shootings vaguely but only because my husband would watch it on television and tell me about it.  
Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all? They did not make me nervous personally, but from talk of other people, it seemed like they were very worried for their well-being.  
Do you remember the shootings on the news at all? I remember the shootings were on the news all the time because my husband would watch it every morning and evening and constantly tell me what was going on.  
Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours? Yes, only because the shootings were right in the neighborhoods where I grew up as a child and my parents still live there.  
Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried? Um, it did not make that much sense to me. The shootings were out of anyone’s control and no one was going to stop them from shooting whoever they wanted. I just felt like I might as well go on and do things as I always would.  
Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings? I began to worry a little about my mother who lives in the Rockville area. She began expressing worry and stress to me over the phone quite often.  
Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?  
• If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:  
• Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?  

No, I did not do anything differently at all. My husband seemed to be a lot more worried about it than other people. I just listened to his updates from the news but he did not voice that I should really do anything out of the ordinary and I didn’t feel the need to.
Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?
Sure, people were worried at my work and in the neighborhood. Some of the shootings were not that far away from here. Some of my coworkers did not come in certain days, and others said they were scared to be outside and would drive straight home after work.

Where did you rely on updates and news about the shootings?
Just through my husband, I don’t watch T.V. news

How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?
I was happy they were arrested because I did feel really bad for people who they were shooting; there was no reason for it at all.

Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?
Panic, yes I would choose panic because that is literally what everyone did around here during the shootings.

Interview Date: December 28, 8:15 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Interview 6

Gender: Male
Age: 72
Occupation: Grocery Store Manager
Address: 20872
Town of Residence: Damascus
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Martial Status: Married, 53 years
Children?: 5 Children, Ages 37-47, 10 Grandchildren, Ages 4 months – 24 years old
Education: Finished the 8th grade, didn’t finish 9th grade
Ethnicity: White Caucasian

How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 4
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally? Yes, definitely. Because like I said, I get up in the morning and watch the morning news with a cup of coffee. Then I go putter around with something else, but I would imagine we sat more than an hour those days, we might have sit and watched three hours of television then.

What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source? We do not have cable, so we watch the four major channels all of which are local.

How many televisions are in your home? 3
Do you read a newspaper? I get a daily paper now. But then, I got a weekly local Damascus Gazette. Now I read the Frederick Post.

How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings? Dates and times now are lost; but some of the details like when it first started happening, there were a bunch of shootings in one day. Something weird was happening that day, it was not run-of-the-mill. At that time, none of the authorities or people that I knew really had any idea. On that second day, there was a person who said they saw a white-box truck. I didn’t buy into the white box truck theory, but as soon as I saw a white truck I was alert. But I was watching every vehicle on the road.

Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all? I remember at the time being angry with the authorities, especially Chief Moose and Doug Duncan the county executive. Every time they opened their mouths, they were saying white box truck and part of my anger is that if they were just zeroing in on this, they are not protecting my family. They were caught in Frederick; I have a son and daughter in Frederick. I have another son who has his own tow-truck business and he was in Rockville all day every day.

Do you remember the shootings on the news at all? I was hoping there would be a report that said they abandoned a white truck the day before they were caught. When the information came out, we heard there was never a white truck, it just came from a witness who was startled after one of the shootings and just happened to see a white truck driving off.

My anger comes out in the fact there were 10 people killed or so in this whole thing. I think if the police had not repeated over and over to look for a white truck, people might have been looking for a wider range of suspicious activity. The police were programmed
like robots to look for white trucks. Because these shooters were stopped after one of the shootings, and the police let them go, maybe because they were in a Chevy Caprice car. Then they were also questioned by a police officer in Baltimore for falling asleep in a parking lot but were not arrested or suspected of being the shooters.

Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours? Yeah, I mean my imagination just started rolling and I wondered, you know, this wasn’t long after 9/11. Okay, well is this the second phase, or like, is there like a whole squad of terrorists running around. Maybe they are sending grey hound bus loads to every city to sniper shoot people. See, for an individual to kill five people in five different locations, I figured it was a big group behind it.

Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings? They were caught in Frederick; I have a son and daughter in Frederick. I have another son who has his own tow-truck business and he was in Rockville all day every day.

Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?

- If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
- Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?

When I would go to the mailbox, I would watch every car and truck coming down the road toward me. I would watch the passenger side of the vehicle, I felt like the driver was just shooting people. It got my imagination running wild; I was prepared to dive on the ground if I saw any unusual movement from a driver or passenger. If I was somewhere else, like the shopping center, I was looking all around. My antennas were up the whole time.

Most of the doctors I go to are in the Kensington area, where some of the shootings occurred. When we went down to doctor’s appointments during this time, I found myself going to a longer route to avoid the intersections that were near the shootings. It was not something I gave a lot of thought to, but it was just something worth handling more traffic to avoid those areas.

It seemed like the people doing this were invisible. They were sitting up in trees or something else.

Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?

I just heard of some school activities being cancelled around the area. They did not want a whole group of people together, you know, out in the bleachers or stands. Some people even called the Principal a chicken.

I can remember talking to people at the office I worked at during that time, and of course, we were all still working and running around town. I can remember some of them saying, well I usually go bowling on Wednesday night but I did not go this week, that type of thing.

I remember some of the news reports would show people pulling up to the pumps and getting the hose put in the car, and then they crouch down behind the car, or get back in the car and shut the door. I mean, it makes sense; two or three of the shootings were at gas stations.

How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?
I guess I was thrilled with the fact they had finally nailed these suckers, but that kind of anger and frustration came out; I said look there’s no white truck! I was convinced that was them when they came up with that rifle, in my mind, they were convicted.

**Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?**

I would say “tragic” because it was tragic that any of these people were harmed or killed but it just still irritates me that because the authorities put out some ill-thought information that these guys lasted as long as they did, and probably half of the people that died shouldn’t have. Had a close relative of mine been one of those last four or five victims, then I would have really lost it then.

**Additional:**
On a later date after the day of shootings, Sharon and I had been down to Germantown and I guess for a doctor’s appointment. We were on our way back coming up 27 and at the light, I’m behind this dark green or dark blue Chevy and I could tell there were two black individuals in there. I’m trying hard not to sound like a racist, but if you are behind a car at a traffic light, a lot of times, just from the shape of the head, you can tell their race.

These guys were definitely black and the one in the passenger seat, his head was smaller than the other guy. That’s about all I remember. As we were leaving the doctor’s office, and this was during the time of the shootings. We were discussing the shootings, and Sharon said something about the white box truck, and I’m there sitting behind this vehicle, and saying “Hey, I don’t buy the white box truck thing.”

Just about everybody was looking for a white box truck, and every white box truck was stopped. I said, well hey, this vehicle in front of us, it could be them. And I’m sitting here reading, and I read, at the Bob Evans at Germantown, two guys distracted a man in the bathroom and took his wallet. By the time he called the credit card companies; they had already hit two stores and were gone.

I could be totally wrong, but the timing and everything worked out. These guys I’m assuming took his wallet and went to a couple stores and got some supplies, but I could be all wrong. The man described the two black guys as an older one and a younger one. You know, later on when they were caught, it was north of Frederick, and information came about that they had definitely cruised up this way.

I saved these papers so I could one day say look stupid, this is what you said, to Chief Moose and County Executive Doug Duncan.

**Interview Date:** Wednesday, December 27th 1:55 p.m. – 2:53 p.m.
Interview 7

Gender: Male
Age: 76
Occupation: Former Police Officer
Address:
Town of Residence: Gaithersburg, 20882
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Martial Status: Married
Children?: Two, Both Children in 40s, 5 Grandchildren, Age 3-21
Education: Graduated High School, and some college semesters
Ethnicity: White Caucasian
How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 1 hour
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally?
I watched it more often for sure.
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source?
I watch the evening news on NBC, channel 4. I very seldom watch the national news
channels like CNN.
How many televisions are in your home? 2
Do you read a newspaper? Yes, daily, I read the Frederick Post and sometimes the
Washington Post.
How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
Quite well.
Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
I was just mad, not fearful. I could not believe people would do this sort of thing, just
killing people for no good reason.
Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and
Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?
Well the first two were killed in the Aspen Hill area, where we were both born. Of
course, another in Rockville is where I worked as a police officer, it definitely got our
attention.
Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
When you’re drowning, you’ll reach for a straw, and some people were doing things they
felt would protect their families, and that’s fine.
There were higher odds of being struck by lightning than being shot by a sniper.
Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?
I was not concerned for myself; I was concerned for my family. We were not as fearful
living up here in Gaithersburg, but as they started branching out, you became more
concerned because it got closer and closer and began reaching your area.
Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?
  • If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
  • Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your
    immediate control?
The only thing I did differently, which I had never done before in my life, I became
observant while I was at shopping centers, and looked around, before I got out of my
vehicle. I was looking for anything out of the ordinary.
When they started branching out their shootings, I knew sooner or later they would hit near our home area. But, if we wanted to go to dinner, we went out to dinner. We did not change our activity that much. It was more mental changes than physical changes.

I didn’t think too much about letting Janice go out alone, because there was nothing you could do about it, if it was going to happen, it was going to happen!

**Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?**

I don’t think so. We very seldom go to activities with large crowds. Everyone was talking to everyone about it though. Total strangers wanted to discuss it.

**Where did you rely on updates and news about the shootings?**

Mostly the news, although I read the newspapers as well.

**How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?**

I was glad that they got caught, but I was mad that they surrendered like cowards and didn’t put up a fight. They were sound asleep and didn’t fight back. Ah yeah, it would have been a massacre.

My theory is, if they aren’t going to execute them right away, put them up in the mountains in maximum security prisons.

**Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?**

Mad and disgusted. They had no pattern, nothing you could look for; they picked targets at random and knew what they were doing. They were cold-blooded killers, and I was just mad they were taking innocent lives for no reason but to kill somebody. That’s why when they were captured I wanted them to be killed right then and there.

**Additional:**

Our son didn’t change; he just didn’t stop at restaurants and stations. He just avoided areas that he didn’t have to go to.

**Interview Date:** Wednesday December 27 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Interview 8

Gender: Male
Age: 21
Occupation: Student
Address:
Town of Residence: Damascus
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Martial Status: Single
Children?: Daughter, 3 years old
Education: Completing undergraduate degree this spring
Ethnicity: White

How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 2-3 hours
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally?
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source? ½ hour of news a day; but I mostly watch local news, sometimes national news.

How many televisions are in your home? 4
Do you read a newspaper? I read the Washington Post probably every day; the front page and sports page.

How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?
I remember what was going on pretty well. I don’t remember the details of each particular shooting. I just remember I was one of the first students at my high school to hear it; and I didn’t know what to do, whether I should go back to school or go home. They were saying they were taking people out of school to send home. My high school kept the doors locked the whole time during the shootings. They also regulated who came and went from the school. Also, sports teams were not allowed to play outside; the football team games were cancelled during that time, including our senior homecoming parade.

Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
Um, I didn’t really change my behavior at all. I just did everything the same I would have done; I don’t think I changed all that much. I guess I was just more cautious when I was outside, I didn’t not go out, but I was probably just more cautious, looking around and stuff.

Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?
I don’t really remember when that occurred.

Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
I think it was logical because no one knew where the snipers were so you have to do what you have do to protect yourself. I felt like anywhere in Montgomery County needed to take precautions. It also got so much more media coverage, it made people worry a lot more about it every day.

Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?
My mom didn’t say anything about preventing us from going outside. She was probably just more mentally cautious too.

Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?
• If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
- Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?
  No, I was just more mentally cautious.

Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?
A couple of my friends said they would bop their heads up and down and weave during the parking lot walking. They felt the snipers wouldn’t be able to hit them. Other people said they would sit in their cars while their gas was pumping.

Where did you rely on updates and news about the shootings?
I just watched the news.

How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?
I felt like that was it. From all the evidence, I was confident they were the only two people behind the shootings. I wasn’t worried about it after that.

Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?
Exhausting. It was not exhausting for me but for a lot of my friends. It totally changed their entire lives, especially my friends on the football team. It changed everything a lot of people were used to.

Additional:
Interview Date: Wed, Dec 27, 11:50 p.m – 12:30 a.m.
Interview 9

Gender: Male  
Age: 55  
Occupation: Robert Oxygen Company  
Address: 20872  
Town of Residence: Damascus  
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland  
Martial Status: Married  
Children?: 2 Children, Ages 25, 27  
Education: High School, 2 Year Associate’s Degree  
Ethnicity: White Caucasian  
How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 2-3 hours  
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally?  
I watched a lot more television then to watch the coverage because they were always updating us with police conferences with Chief Moose. It really dominated the news during that time.  
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source?  
I watch MSNBC and cable networks. I also watch some of the local news channels too.  
How many televisions are in your home? 2  
Do you read a newspaper?  
Yes, I read the Washington Post every day. I read the articles on the sniper shootings during that time as well. I had a radio at work also, so I listened to updates during the day as well.  
How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings?  
Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?  
I was never afraid to go outside during that time. I was not hesitant. I always thought that if the snipers were around here, what could I really do to stop them from shooting me? A lot of people near my work didn’t want to pump gas. Every time I was pumping gas I was looking all around at roof tops and across the streets. I was aware but I never cared too much.  
Do you remember the shootings on the news at all?  
I remember one day they stopped all traffic on I-95 after the Fredricksburg shooting.  
Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?  
The very first day, I was outside re-sealing the driveway. Some lady pulled up and said, “You know, you better not be outside.” I asked her, and she said there was someone driving around shooting people nearby. Then I went outside and turned on the news, and then I realized why she was so worried. I called the commissioner of the high school football league, because I am a referee, and right then he told me that he was canceling the games for that night. The games stayed canceled all next week too.  
Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?  
Well it’s the first time something like that ever happened. I would have been more cautious and definitely more scared had shootings occurred in our town. So, sure I would have done the same things.
The news contributed a lot of stress and over-reporting of the events to make it seem way worse. I felt a lot of people were overreacting with their behavior however.

**Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?**
I don’t remember ever worrying about my wife or daughters. If they were worried, they never mentioned it to me.

**Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?**
- If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:
- Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?

I didn’t change anything, but was more alert while pumping gas. I did see on the news all the time the people who would change how they did that.

**How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?**
Yes, when they caught the two guys that night, I knew there would be no more shootings. They had the FBI, police, everyone there, there was no question. I was really happy when they got them. It still irritates me that they are still alive, they should both be executed. I have no respect for lawyers trying to keep them alive longer.

**Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?**
Unfortunate; I can’t believe there are people like that in the world. It’s sad but true.

**Additional:**
I actually knew one of the victims! Dean Myers was killed by the snipers while he was pumping gas. We were casual friends and I had seen him over the years; Dean and I had mutual friends. We used to play volleyball together and would talk to him at parties at our friend’s houses.
I really liked Chief Moose from what I saw; I thought he did a fantastic job in communicating to the public what was going on, but I got tired of Doug Duncan, the county executive trying to show he was in charge. He did the best possible job you could have done.

**Interview Date:** Saturday, December 30\textsuperscript{th} 12:45 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.
Interview 10

Gender: Male
Age: 21
Occupation: Student, Towson University
Address: 20872
Town of Residence: Damascus
County, State of Residence: Montgomery, Maryland
Martial Status: Single
Children? : No
Education: High School, Working on Bachelors Degree
Ethnicity: White Caucasian

How many hour(s) per day do you watch television? 3 hours
Did you watch more television during the sniper shootings than normally? “More than normal, I was always watching the sniper coverage. I started watching more television after the first day after we knew they were all related.”
What proportion of that viewing is of a news or cable news source? 10% is local news, 80% is cable news, 10% is national broadcast
How many televisions are in your home? 5, 2 in apartment
Do you read a newspaper? I read a paper twice a week during the shootings, now I read a paper six times a week. I read the Washington Post during 2002, and now I read the New York Times and Baltimore Sun.
How well do you remember the 2002 Washington, DC sniper shootings? Moderately well.
Did the shootings make you nervous or scared at all?
I lived in Damascus which was 25-30 minutes away from the closest shooting, so I felt relatively safe, but there were two instances when I was very scared.
Do you remember the shootings on the news at all?
Chief Moose was the number one figure during the shooting spree. I never knew who he was beforehand but definitely remember him now. He became the main face of the shootings.
Do you remember the “first wave” of attacks in Montgomery County and Washington, DC when five individuals were killed within twenty four hours?
“It took a little while for people to realize the shootings were related. The schools were put on a heightened state of security. The local news channels covered it heavily. I remember the Chief of Police came on television and said the percent of murders in Montgomery County just went up 25% for the year in a single day. I know our school is put on alert immediately. We were in lock-down for several weeks. They told us to move quickly on school grounds, but at the same time we were told everything is fine.”
Do you think it’s logical that people were so worried?
I think the media handled the shootings well, but they added fireworks to the shootings with big media headlines SNIPER SHOOTINGS. The media coverage was beneficial; one reporter found evidence at a scene and reported it.
There was a huge need to find out what was going on, the news accomplished that. Mathematically, it was unlikely you would be a victim, but the news covered this story way more than any other story at the time. The media made it seem likely that shootings
could occur. Fear is a powerful motivator and the media helped cause this fear, and if people are afraid, they change their habits and in this case, they had a reason to be afraid. The media took one shooting at a time and sucked the life out of it. Sometimes, media will take 1,000 deaths and minimize it, but a sniper shooting is different. It was irrational fear, but at the moment, I felt the fear, and it affected me. I look back now and think it was strange I was afraid but at the time it made sense. Sure, shootings in head, brutally, this makes you more scared. I had no control over these shooters that scared me.

**Were you fearful for your own or your family’s well-being during the shootings?**
Yes, my most vivid memory was a day when I was at Lake Forest Mall in Gaithersburg, Maryland. And I walked out in the parking lot and no one else was around. I felt like I was being watched and I felt like I was in danger. I was further south and closer to the shootings area, so I was no longer isolated. At that moment I was scared and I jogged to my car.
The only other time I felt in danger was when I pulled off the highway at Rockville to get gas, where one of the shootings happened, and while I was pumping my tank, I felt in danger because I was no longer far away from the shootings areas.

**Did you modify ANY daily routines or behaviors in response to the shootings?**
- **If you did modify a routine or behavior, please elaborate:**
- **Did the shootings disrupt any normal activities of yours that was out of your immediate control?**

I think during pumping gas, I got back in my car after I put the gas pump in the side of the car. I had fear of the possible shootings while I was pumping gas. Even though the odds of me being impacted were miniscule, I still felt like it was possible for me to be shot.

There was a lot of intrinsic fear. I am a skeptical person when it comes to risk, and I am scared of terrorist activity. The school system put us on code blue, an elevated state of security were you were not allowed to go outside during the school day. Our football game and homecoming activities were cancelled, and all field trips were cancelled.

**Did you hear about other people changing their behaviors or routines in response to the shootings?**
I saw it on T.V. There were lots of stories about people being careful at gas stations, and stations putting tarps up to block view of gas station customers. Television was the predominant media following the attacks.

**Where did you rely on updates and news about the shootings?**
The local channels and from time to time I would watch cable channels when they would go live. MSNBC went live over the Ponderosa shooting and took it to a national level.

**How did you feel upon the arrest of the two suspects? Did you resume your normal routines immediately?**
I was shocked by their location, just north of Frederick. That is much closer to Damascus than Rockville or southern areas. It was creepy how close they were. They could have been everywhere! I don’t remember being scared after the arrest of these two individuals.

**Describe the shootings and the entire experience in one word, what would the word be and why?**
Confusion. Why would someone be doing this? Why are they choosing the places they are choosing? Why are security measures the way they are? Like, I felt the school security was bogus. But after the school shooting, it felt justified. The media contributed to the confusion, but also helped shed light on the situations at hand. They “fanned the flames,” the media made us afraid because if the story was just written, it wouldn’t scare me. The media brought pictures, moods, etc.

Additional: TV News Blog Person, Brian Stelter

Interview Date: Wednesday, December 27, 2006 10:45 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.