Public–private tragedy: Stigma, victimization and community identity

Nicola O’Leary
University of Hull, UK

Abstract
On 13 March 1996, Thomas Hamilton shot and killed 16 children and 1 teacher at Dunblane Primary School, Scotland. In the weeks and months that followed, intense and extensive media coverage focused on the victims, the community, the aftermath and the subsequent intense and emotional outpouring of grief for Dunblane that seemed to come from around the world. The impact of crime on indirect victims has generated a wealth of research; however, surprisingly little is known regarding the impact of ‘high-profile’ crime on a community living in a location that has become synonymous with the crime that took place there. Drawing on a unique set of interviews with members of the Dunblane community, this article explores the victimizing experiences and processes by which some build their sense of identity in the wake of such a high-profile crime. Empirical findings highlight the ways in which private tragedy becomes public property and how some community members are stigmatized by, manage (and are sometimes resilient to) the impact of wider societal reaction. The aftermath of events at Dunblane encouraged some to identify as victims, whilst others were more resilient to the stigmatizing effects of the crime that labelled them and their community with a ‘spoiled victim identity’.

Keywords
Victims, community, identity, stigma, Dunblane

Introduction
Although historically ignored, crime victims are now firmly on the map. For politicians, the media and the public at large, criminal injury and loss are sources of constant concern and anxiety. Within criminal justice and public policy there has been a discernible shift from the individual, through claims of victim status based on experiences of collective identity, to a cultural context of the
‘universal victim’, where we can ask ‘are we all victims now?’ (Mythen, 2007: 464). Both criminological and victimological literature has addressed much of this concern in recent years (Chermak, 1995; Furedi, 2006; Green, 2008; Schlesinger et al., 1991). Yet, Spalek (2006: 88) has argued that a deeper consideration around the diversity of the crime experience may result in a more nuanced understanding of indirect victimization: the impact on a wider audience as a result of their shared ‘subject position’. With this in mind, this article examines what has not yet been investigated, how communities experience high-profile crimes and the effects of the media attention that inevitably follows.

Utilizing events that took place at Dunblane Primary School, Scotland on 13 March 1996 as a case study of a serious, high-profile and highly mediated crime event, this article uniquely explores the construction and representation of a collective sense of identity, notions of victimhood and the processes by which some in the community come to acquire a collective stigma and sense of spoiled identity. Drawing on 18 qualitative interviews with members of the wider community of Dunblane, we explore identity and victimhood in the wake of a serious and high-profile crime. In doing so, this article offers a novel sociological account of how the media represent people and places and what it means to accept or resist a ‘spoiled identity’. It considers the processes of achieving or acquiring victim identity or status, the management or otherwise of stigma and the consequences of the media’s role in constructing a private tragedy for public consumption.

This article is situated within a victimological position that embraces the turn to the ‘cultural’ (Ferrell et al., 2008; McGarry and Walklate, 2015; Mythen, 2007; Valier, 2004). More explicitly, it lies where cultural victimology foregrounds our exposure to suffering, how it is presented to us and how we make sense of it (McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Specifically, we not only recognize the public nature of emotional responses provoked by criminal victimization and harm, but also acknowledge the wider dissemination of them, in this case via the media. We know the broader ramifications, the legacy and other embedded experiences of high-profile traumatic events can extend way beyond those most directly involved and their families; such events can also ‘haunt witnesses who are less frequently heard’ (Walklate et al., 2014: 267). Through original empirical research this article gives voice to the lived realities of such individuals and ‘collectivities’ (McGarry and Walklate, 2015) and in doing so contests the boundaries of victimhood in order to understand the significance of victim identity and the impact that a high-profile crime and subsequent societal reaction can have on wider members of a community.

As has been expressed recently by David Wilson and colleagues, very little is known academically about the serious crime event in Dunblane. Such a lack of knowledge amounts to what can be described as a ‘criminological silence’ (Wilson et al., 2016: 2). Some academic literature has been published regarding Dunblane and gun control (Squires, 2000) and more exists with regard to how the murders were covered in the print and broadcast media (see Jemphrey and Berrington, 2000; Smith and Higgins, 2012). Also available are more intimate accounts of the events, such as Dunblane: Never Forget (North, 2000), an emotional and moving account written by Mick North, father of one of the primary school victims, Sophie Lockwood North. However, even less attention has been paid to the significance of these events on those ‘other’, indirect witnesses in the wider community of Dunblane.

From a cultural victimological perspective and utilizing the sociological framework of Goffman, this article addresses this gap by exploring how some in the community of Dunblane lived through the tragic events at the time and how they coped with the attention of the world’s media afterwards. After first giving a vignette of the events that took place in Dunblane on 13 March 1996, this article will then set out the theoretical framework and analytic approach that informs it.
Vignette

Dunblane is a small cathedral city in Perthshire, Scotland, with a population of almost 9,000 people (Scotland Census, 2017). The following description is taken largely from the findings of The Public Inquiry into the Shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996 (Cullen, 1996). On the morning of 13 March 1996, a local man called Thomas Hamilton drove the short six-mile journey to Dunblane from his home in Stirling. He arrived at Dunblane Primary School just before 9.30 a.m. Primary 1/13 (a class of five and six year olds) had changed for their gym lesson and along with their teacher, Gwen Mayor, the class of 28 pupils had made their way to the gym for their lesson (Cullen, 1996). Thomas Hamilton entered the gym pointing a loaded handgun. He fired indiscriminately and in rapid succession. Mrs Harrild (the PE teacher in attendance) was hit several times and stumbled into the open-plan store area that adjoined the gym, followed by a number of the children. Mrs Mayor was shot several times and died instantly. Mrs Blake (a teaching assistant in attendance) was then shot but also managed to reach the store, ushering some children in ahead of her. After firing further random shots at the remaining children, Hamilton then left the gym. Once outside he began shooting into a mobile classroom. The teacher, realizing something was wrong, had told the children to hide under the tables. Hamilton also fired at a group of children walking along a corridor, injuring another teacher (Cullen, 1996). Hamilton then returned to the gym where he fired shots at point-blank range at the group of children who had either been disabled by the initial firing or who had been thrown to the floor. He then took out another gun and turned it on himself, dying instantly. Thomas Hamilton killed 16 children and 1 teacher, and wounded all but 2 of the children in Primary 1/13. Fifteen children died at the scene along with their class teacher. A further 11 children and 3 adults were rushed to hospital, with one of the children being pronounced dead on arrival (Cullen, 1996).

Within hours of the incident at the school (minutes in the case of some of the local media), large numbers of the print and television media – local, national and (later) international crews and reporters – converged on the town. The Daily Mirror, for example, sent 12 journalists to Dunblane within hours of the tragedy (although through co-operation with its Glasgow-based sister paper, the Daily Record, it drew on more than 30 overall). By the end of the day, driven by the requirements of a 24-hour rolling news station, Sky News had five reporters and five camera crews present in Dunblane (Carter, 1996). In the days following the tragedy, Dunblane and its people were ‘overwhelmed’ by up to 600 journalists and associated media workers (BEIPI, 1996: 26), who had come to cover the events at the school and their aftermath.

Theoretical context and analytical approach

Exploring the concept of victim identity

The key and often taken for granted characteristic associated with being a victim may be described as suffering as a result of an imbalance of power relations, willingly or otherwise (McGarry and Walklate, 2015). This is central to how we understand who is given and who is not given the label of victim and, as a consequence, who acquires, or not, the status of victim. Similarly, when Nils Christie (1986) articulated the characteristics underpinning the ‘ideal victim’, he was attempting to capture an appreciation of process. Acquiring the victim label is a process and to attain victim status, others must acknowledge an individual’s victimization and, as such, victimhood is highly contested. Centring on the importance of process, Strobl (2010: 6) suggests four analytical possibilities in the construction of victimhood: the actual victim (considered a victim by themselves and
others); the non-victim (not recognized by themselves or others); the rejected victim (regarded as a victim by themselves but not others); and the designated victim (considered a victim by others but not themselves). As well as characteristics of power, suffering and choice (as discussed further by McGarry and Walklate, 2015) this categorization by Strobl highlights the importance of the process of recognition, how victim identity happens and how it is understood. Contemporarily, the role of the media is acutely relevant to understanding the processes and conditions for successful acquisition and recognition of the victim status for certain types of crime. There is, undoubtedly, a complex process of victim acknowledgement as indicated by Strobl (2010), but this also indicates a potential role for the ‘cultural’, as witnessed by Mythen (2007: 466), ‘acquiring the status of victim involves being party to a range of interactions and processes, including identification, labelling and recognition’.

Such concepts are part of a wider notion of suffering and blamelessness, from which Carrabine et al. (2004) came to identify a ‘hierarchy of victimisation’. At the bottom of this hierarchy are those undeserving groups or categories of people who are presumed to have exposed themselves to victimization. According to Strobl (2010), one of these groups might be ‘rejected victims’, for whom the recognized status and label of victim becomes very difficult to acquire. Those at the top of the hierarchy (actual or designated victims) are those who have been subjected to processes not of their choosing; they are innocent, legitimate and deserving.

Further dimensions to our understanding of who is to be considered a victim occur at the definitional level. Whilst primary victimization refers to the direct impact that a crime has on a victim (Davies, 2011; Walklate, 2017), indirect victimization draws attention to the experiences of others, for example, those who know the victim, witnesses to the victimization or those involved in a wider sphere who may be unable to make sense of what has happened, all of which can manifest themselves in many different and context-dependent ways. Spalek (2006) argues that thinking more deeply about the diversity of the crime experience might result in a more subtle understanding of indirect victimization. Introducing the notion of ‘spirit injury’, she suggests that some victimizing experiences have a detrimental effect on an ‘individual’s self-identity and their dignity’ (p. 88) and that this is also likely to impact a wider audience who may be indirectly victimized as a result of their shared and collective situation. Although Spalek’s contribution here was designed to appreciate cultural and ethnic difference, the idea of a collective, indirect victimization also has resonance for others with shared experiences of crime, demonstrated here by the wider impact of the actions of Thomas Hamilton in 1996 and the consequences of them for many in the local community.

**Victim identity and stigma**

Individuals and communities (and collectivities as defined by McGarry and Walklate, 2015) can be enhanced but also diminished as a result of indirect victimization. It is here that stigma becomes evident in our discussions of the process and acquisition of a victim identity. It is widely accepted that the notion of stigmatization, as detailed in Goffman’s (1963) classic study (to which all later studies of stigma refer), goes some way to explaining why some (perceived) deviants are subjected to marginalization and social exclusion and are the recipients of hostile reporting and censure by the media. By reflecting this notion, this article examines the influence of media constructions and representations of indirect victims and their subsequent stigmatization by association with locations where serious and high-profile crimes have taken place.
Stigma is described by Goffman (1963: 9) as ‘the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance’. Originally, the term stigma was used as a reference to the visual signifiers of the moral status of the bearer: a cut or burn to the body often indicating a criminal, slave or traitor – a blemished person who should be avoided. However, over time, the term stigma has more often been used in relation to the disgrace itself, rather than the bodily evidence of physical disorder, and shifts have occurred and continue to occur in the perceptions of the kinds of disgrace that arouse concern (Goffman, 1963). Stigma is, therefore, the social consequence of the negative attributions that are attached to a person based on a stereotype (Pilgrim, 2011: 154). In order to examine what relevance stigma may have on the examination of indirect victims more widely and their representations in the media, it is helpful to examine the structural preconditions of stigma as indicated by Goffman (1963). Routines of social intercourse allow that for any social setting a person has a preconceived idea, both of the type of person he/she would expect to encounter in that setting and in the range of attributes he/she would naturally expect that person to possess. Goffman (1963: 12) describes this as a person’s ‘virtual social identity’, in other words, that which we ordinarily expect he/she to be. However, a person also has an ‘actual social identity’ and if in reality he/she is in possession of a less desirable attribute than might be expected, this person is then reduced in our minds and in such a way becomes tainted or spoiled. Such an attribute is a stigma: a special discrepancy that may exist between a person’s virtual and actual social identity. It is argued that the stigma assumes more importance than other characteristics and becomes the defining attribute of a person; as Goffman (1963: 15) notes ‘we tend to impute a wider range of imperfections on the basis of the original one’. Thus, the label of the stigma becomes the defining or ‘master status’.

Goffman (1963: 24) notes that a person who has been stigmatized will often feel unsure of how the rest of ‘normal’ society will identify and receive him/her. This feeling of stigma, represented and disseminated via the media in the case of high-profile crimes, may be as a result of the knowledge that the community cannot reverse or fix that collective spoiled identity in the eyes of the rest of the world, ‘thus in the stigmatised arises the sense of not knowing what others […] are “really” thinking about him’ (Goffman, 1963: 25). Context is important when considering what Goffman terms the ‘usual scheme of interpretation for [actions and] everyday events’ (1963: 26). Within this, any minor accomplishments by the stigmatized become remarkable and noteworthy because of their circumstance, thus further enhancing a person’s difference and stigma. Conversely, minor failings and indiscretions of one who is stigmatized may be interpreted as a direct expression of that difference.

Since Goffman’s early contribution, the concept of stigma has been applied widely and used in different ways (Kosketa et al., 2016; Link and Phelan, 2013). However, it has been criticized for being imprecisely defined, for being too focused on the individual rather than on social processes and for neglecting the perspective of the stigmatized person (Link and Phelan, 2001, 2013; Yang et al., 2007). Definitions of stigma have moved only gradually from those that stress its individual aspects to ones that emphasize its social and moral dimensions (Yang et al., 2007), points to which this article now turns.

‘High-profile crimes’: Victims and the media

Media representations of crime, deviance and control serve as one of the primary sites of social inclusion and exclusion in late modernity. In recent years, the interest in the media’s willingness to present the atypical as typical serves primarily to exacerbate audience anxieties and deflect
attention away from more commonplace offences (Jewkes, 2015). The wider impact of the media as a vehicle for constructing and disseminating representations of certain serious and high-profile crimes has deep significance for those in the wider communities involved. As Goffman (1963) has indicated, each time someone with a stigma makes a spectacle of themselves (either good or bad), these events can be covered by the media and communicated to wider society. An associated concept here, pertinent to indirect victims, is that of ‘courtesy stigma’. In such circumstances, those who are related in some way to the stigmatized situation are obliged by association to share some of the discredit and the stigma, although ‘the problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity’ (Goffman, 1963: 43). As others have also found, indirect (or co-victims) may experience social stigmatization due to the loss of a loved one or one known to them, as a result of a serious crime (Van Wijk et al., 2017).

As Goffman (1963) notes, in general, the tendency for a stigma to spread from the individual to their close connections provides an opportunity for those relations to be severed or avoided; thus, a disassociation with the stigmatized may occur. Whilst this may be true in some circumstances, within contemporary late-modern society this attachment and vicarious association with suffering and harm – with victimhood – can be a sought-after status and one that can be facilitated via the media (Valier, 2004). Furthermore, some of those in wider society, those unconnected with the potentially stigmatizing events, seem to actively seek out connections and relationships with those most directly involved and affected, albeit often from a distanced position (Giddens, 1990). With specific regard to victim identity in such situations, this may amount to an invasion of the private by the public, where more distant others feel compelled and want to identify with a community or event that is removed from them, both symbolically and physically. This point is made clearly by others. As Robert Reiner (2016: 138) has recently noted, the harm done by crime is often equated with the suffering and distress of the victim, through portrayals of their ‘ordinariness, innocence and vulnerability’. Elsewhere, Paul Rock (2002) argues that the status of victim is one so stigmatized that it may be naturally and understandably avoided. Yet, this is not always the case. For many, including those who visit and leave their thoughts and emotions in physical (and virtual) books of condolence, the association with the serious and high-profile crime event, with the direct and indirect victims and the ongoing aftermath, is precisely what is sought: to be involved in some way, to be or feel part of it. In contemporary life, the mass media play a critical role in the transformation of a ‘private tragedy’ into a ‘public suffering’.

As such, the media can be seen as a conduit for those attachments and associations where the interest has turned to focusing on the collective outpouring of grief witnessed in relation to certain criminal acts, and which has resulted in such cases occupying a particular symbolic place in the popular consciousness. It is suggested that this coming together of individuals to express collective anguish – whether physically or symbolically – is a ‘gesture of empathy and solidarity with those who have been victimized’ (Jewkes, 2015: 35). However, this may also be seen from a post-modern position as a voyeuristic desire to be part of the ‘hyper-real’ (Baudrillard, 1981), to take part in a globally mediated event and say ‘I was there’. It is clear that the media are significant in creating and representing an identity for localities associated with a high-profile crime. In considering the processes by which wider individuals or collectives come to be labelled or self define themselves as victims, and the stigma of being associated with a serious and high-profile crime event, this article draws both on Goffman’s stigma framework and highlights the significance of the process of acquiring a victim identity as identified by cultural victimology. First, the research design and methodology are set out.
Method

Over a 24-month period (January 2006–December 2008), I made multiple research visits to Dunblane and the surrounding area. During these times I visited significant places of interest, such as Thomas Hamilton’s house in Kent Road, Stirling. These visits also saw me walking the streets of Dunblane, visiting the churches and memorials to the children and their teacher, eating and drinking in pubs and going to the site of the school and its approach lane, where so many tributes were laid in the days and weeks following the shootings. Spending time in Dunblane in such a way illustrates a clear ethnographic strand to the research.

Other researchers have more recently (Wilson et al., 2016) reported that they were confronted with a silence in the community; however, my own experience was a very different one. The potential causes of such reticence from the community experienced by other investigators may have been twofold. First, it would seem that Wilson and colleagues were attempting to talk about the perpetrator, Thomas Hamilton. My own experiences and early conversations with some Dunblane residents quickly established that almost as a collective, participants did not want (consciously or otherwise) to engage in discussions about this man. Feelings of grief, loss and a need to remember the children who were killed and injured were not to be contaminated by entertaining into simultaneous discussions of Hamilton. Second, many had come to foster an insider/outsider attitude (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Ransome, 2013), based on their earlier experiences of the community and locality as a focus of media and public attention. Those to whom I spoke, both participants in the research and others more informally, wanted the events to remain a private (community) tragedy. My research did not focus solely on the crime event and even less on the perpetrator, but rather on the participants as individuals and as a collective with a wider connection to this tragic event, and on the shared indirect victimization they suffered and the subsequent impact on their identity(ies). On these topics they felt willing and able to contribute in a way that would not be perceived (by others in the community) as speaking for, or on behalf of the Dunblane community.

During this two-year period I focused on conducting and simultaneously analysing the 18 semi-structured interviews, representing input from a selective range of those living and working in Dunblane. The sampling strategy was open and inclusive, so obtaining a broad perspective on the issues being explored. Using a convenience sample, I relied on self-selecting and ‘directed’ volunteers from an initial contact made within the community, who effectively acted as a ‘champion’ for the research (for a full account of the methodology see O’Leary, 2012). All interviews were conducted face to face and on a one-to-one basis (although on one occasion two participants, a husband and wife, preferred to be interviewed together). There are, of course, a number of limitations associated with the approach taken here. The empirical research was conducted almost 10 years after the serious crime event had taken place. It is inevitable that during this time some residents may have moved away (possibly as a result of the shootings). Other residents may not have been aware of the study and others will still have decided not to engage, as is the case in such situations; those available and willing to take part were a selective sample of the Dunblane population.

For many of those that did take part in the research, the subject was inevitably of a sensitive and emotional nature and, as such, mechanisms were put in place to mitigate any adverse impact this may have had on them. After the interviews had taken place, participants were provided with the contact details of sources of support if required. All interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes on average, amounting to around 28 hours of
transcribed research data in total. The transcription procedure began early on in the data collection process and was subsequently organized and coded to produce categories in line with areas of thematic interest. Participant names and identifying details were anonymized. The interviews were analysed in the light of the aims of the research study and extant literature relevant to the field. This article will now go on to explore these themes and processes.

The process of victim identity and stigmatization

Stigma: The legacy of ‘tragic towns’

The crime itself and the community in which it happened are remembered by the rest of the world as being inscribed with issues of victim identity and stigma. The media play an important part in creating/communicating an identity for a place such as Dunblane, which previously may have constituted a plurality of communities or possessed multiple identities. Before the notorious crime took place, Dunblane was viewed in many different and competing ways. However, since the time of the shootings and via the media, it has become synonymous with, and a coded reference for, the serious crime event that took place there. This stigmatized construction involves the use of particular representational and rhetorical frameworks by the media, drawing on a tragic crime event to evoke images with which to brand the next event or current crisis (Innes, 2004). This is demonstrated in the following newspaper headlines from the 

\[\text{Guardian}\]

in the days after the murders: ‘Dunblane massacre’, ‘Slaughters’, ‘Dunblane joins roll of carnage’, ‘Sixteen deaths at Hungerford head catalogue of other killings’ (The Guardian, 14 March 1996); ‘Targets of fear’, ‘Hungerford was bad; Dunblane was even worse’ (The Guardian, 19 March 1996).

In such simple ways the media are a strong influence on the way the crime event and the community are remembered, including tarnishing the place name and forging links with other ‘tragic towns’. However, the identification of Dunblane as a ‘tragic town’ was not only apparent in the media. Some research participants frequently referred to other communities who had suffered tragedies themselves in the past, but also and more specifically to those who had undergone specific and intense media scrutiny and, as such, were deemed synonymous with their corresponding crime or tragedy, that is, those who were stigmatized. Often help and advice from such places and communities was offered and taken by community leaders and others in Dunblane:

We consciously took a decision for the first year that we would not officially acknowledge the first year anniversary. We were actually advised that by the people of Lockerbie. They had got locked into an annual commemoration and didn’t know how to get out of it. (Church leader 2, Dunblane)

Places where serious and high-profile crime events have occurred may become ‘place-laden’; the serious crime event often becomes universally known by the name of the physical locality where it happened. In the case of Dunblane it is now synonymous with the fatal shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996. Like ‘Hungerford’,1 ‘Lockerbie’2 and ‘Aberfan’3 before it in the UK, these localities and residents are labelled and identified, and can be stigmatized by the crime event that took place there.

The above response was typical of many on this issue; adding Dunblane to the list of ‘tragic towns’ may seal the fate of those living in and connected to the community for many years to come. The ramifications of this stigma by association (Goffman, 1963) could be identified some years later with the emergence on the world tennis stage of Andy Murray (who is from Dunblane and was
present at Dunblane Primary School at the time of the attack). During a television interview in 2013 Murray spoke emotionally and for the first time about the trauma and difficulty of being in the public eye and associated with Dunblane and the crime events so directly. Murray revealed that it is only in later years that he has been able to position that association in a more positive way and that through the recognition of his sporting achievements he has been able to modify or transform the negative view of Dunblane that still existed in the minds of many people into something more positive (BBC, 2013).

It is in such ways that the media stigmatize (and at times sanctify) those victims deemed particularly vulnerable or tragic, thereby encouraging the ‘ritualisation and commodification of grief, where grief becomes something to be conspicuously consumed and then discarded’ (Greer, 2004: 116). It is this power of the media to symbolize grief and define the (blurring) boundary between the private and the public to which this article now turns.

**Dunblane: Private tragedy to public grief**

A further significant theme illuminated by conversations with Dunblane participants was the concept of physical place as the focus for widespread national and international grief. Many talked of how they understood the feeling within their own community of needing to ‘do something’ in the wake of the crime events; it was after all ‘their’ tragedy. What they often found more difficult to understand was the grief felt by wider society and unconnected others, those not personally or geographically involved in the crime event at all. For some of these ‘others’, it may seem to be a straightforward and uncomplicated expression of sympathy; participating in the grief and suffering of a (far-removed) tragic event is one way of outwardly expressing someone’s depth of feeling. In addition, it is argued by some that the fact this empathy is expressed towards strangers only serves to amplify further that expression of feeling (Greer, 2004). However, for those living within the community affected, it was much more complicated.

Four months after the shootings in Dunblane, a Derby-based tour company announced plans to run a sightseeing trip to the primary school in Dunblane. A headline in *The Guardian* on 12 July 1996 read: ‘Fury at idea of coach tour for ghouls’. As well as the site of Dunblane Primary School, potential attractions on this coach trip were to include the Gloucester home of convicted murderers Fred and Rosemary West and the street in Hungerford, Berkshire where Michael Ryan shot and killed 16 people in 1987. On the idea of becoming a kind of ‘Disneyland’, many in the community of Dunblane were united in their condemnation of the tours. In reply, a spokesman for the tour company said: ‘it is not to satisfy people’s gratuitous, morbid curiosity, but more along the lines of helping them come to terms with what has happened by actually being there’ (*The Guardian*, 12 July 1996).

Yet, as one participant illustrates in the quote below, knowing others from afar are quite so emotionally engaged and that the physical community of Dunblane is a focus and centre for an outpouring of expressive empathy and grief does not always have the expected or desired effect: ‘It’s understandable but very difficult to deal with practically...the amount of letters and toys we received for the children was overwhelming, this was very difficult to deal with on a community level’ (Church leader 1, Dunblane). For others still, the impact on their community as the physical point of reference and focus for this wider collective sense of victimhood and grief was even more distressing and problematic. In addition, the extent and nature of the media coverage contributed to and enhanced those sentiments:
We had difficulty dealing with all that because it was raw emotion. All those tributes...we watched and listened to the international media coverage and I think it wrecked some of us. Tributes...they are a visible, tangible expression of emotion, but to be the recipients of that emotion has a tremendous effect on the community. (Community member 10, Dunblane)

Whilst some participants were troubled to see their community as a focus for that wider expression of grief and suffering, others in Dunblane seemed to feel differently regarding the impact on the community of the public attention received. For some of these participants, the outcome of the extensive media coverage was that it affected them in ways that on first analysis seemed to be more positive. However, this more constructive observation of the impact of the media coverage was quickly tempered by the effects of the inevitable end to the coverage of Dunblane and of the crime that had taken place there. As the following quote reveals:

There was the feeling that we had the goodwill of the rest of the world and people really felt buoyed by that I think. But the community definitely felt isolated after the event had dropped out of the media – we needed a national support group to help deal with the wider community feelings and emotions. This did not just happen to those directly involved. (Community member 7, Dunblane)

This highlights two interesting elements. First, the media coverage of events and the physical presence of reporters in the community seemed to have had a positive impact on some. What is more often referred to as the ‘intrusive’ nature of the media was seen as constructive and of benefit to some participants. The media are a powerful tool, and their potential for good can often be understated. In all its various forms and platforms, the mass media reach a vast audience on a daily basis and are a site of exchange for news, messages and important information. For some victims of crime, both direct and indirect, this can aid recovery on an individual or collective level by allowing them to utilize the media. Some who have been victims (and witnesses) may derive comfort from the media interest in them and for some, talking to the media can help them to feel that they are doing something to help with the profile or the investigation of a crime (Mulley, 2001). However, the second observation contained in the quote above alludes to the crime ‘happening’ to the physical community as a recognized body. This expression also indicates a notion of ownership of the crime event and the subsequent emotions that are evoked when that ownership is called into question. In fact, several of the Dunblane residents told of similar feelings as the quote below illustrates:

We did receive thousands of letters from around the world, particularly people sending money...I think it makes people feel better, like they are doing something. I think there is an element of belonging and wanting to be involved somehow in the tragedy. (Church leader 1, Dunblane)

In an example that accurately illustrates the notion of ownership and the blurred boundaries between private tragedy and wider public grief, one participant in this research told the following story:

I was at one of the funerals and I spoke to an elderly man outside. I had noticed him earlier he had been around the church and in the vicinity for hours; it seemed he was crying the whole time I spoke to him. He told me that he and his wife used to holiday in Dunblane for many, many years and he thought of it as such a happy place. He could not believe that the shootings had happened here and he said he just
had to come back and express his sorrow. But he was so upset, it was really moving. (Community member 11, Dunblane)

Within this story there is a reference to the notion of a stigmatized ‘sense of place’ in relation to identity. Within the media, the issues around the words and images portraying the landscape, location and place are all part of how we come to acknowledge and frame crime events – where they happen and to whom they happen. The geographical and social placement of a story by the media is framed by the descriptions and visual aids used to conjure up ideas about the location of the crime event and its cultures and peoples (Kitzinger, 2004). Descriptions and images of place are used to provide context for the audience. These images of place, as well as introducing atmosphere, can also be used to lend authority to media reports, inviting the audience to ‘be there’ and to ‘see with their own eyes’. However, these representations or descriptions of place are more than simple physical geography, they evoke ideas and values about the social context of events and as Goffman (1990 [1959]: 11) suggests, convey ideas about ‘the natives’. As such, the symbolic importance of this for the wider audience should not be underestimated. Consider the following quote: ‘It seemed like the world was grieving, although I try not to overstate that, but what I saw was an outpouring of grief from all over the world’ (Police Officer 1, Dunblane).

The way the story is narrated by words and images in the media is significant when considering victimhood and identity as an (inter)national focus of grief after serious crime events, such as the one that occurred in Dunblane. How the wider audience come to regard the community and, more specifically, the people within it is defined solely in most cases via the media. Intertwined with ideas about Dunblane as a physical space were ideas about the people who lived there. The stigmatizing effect of this may have meaning for victim identity on an individual and community level. At times, this emotional involvement from those in the wider media audience was none the less personal for its vicarious state. The quote below demonstrates this theme in action:

My sister had five or six phone calls from abroad at the time. She didn’t know them at all, they had looked her name up in a telephone book and because they shared the same surname as her... they actually phoned her up and asked ‘Are you affected? Do you have any relatives affected?’ (Community member 8, Dunblane)

As the discussions above indicate, the community of Dunblane and its people being a focus for national and international grief was a comfort to some, but for many such vicarious attachment and involvement from others much further afield from the tragic events that took place within the community were a source of stigmatization and negative emotion. The loss of ownership of the tragedy that occurred was a significant theme in the empirical research and a starting point for some further explorations into the theme of agency and the ability of certain people to somehow manage or resist the stigmatizing label attached to them by social reaction to the serious crime event that occurred in Dunblane.

Managing, resisting and breaking down stigma

It is interesting and important, then, because of the media’s wide reach, to question how their repetition and standardization of response and narrative around the people and places affected by serious crimes are built into how both direct victims and groups of indirect victims come to see themselves, their identity and how they deal with the serious crime event and the subsequent social
reaction to it. Notions of labelling and stigma are often associated with media coverage of serious and high-profile crimes and there are distinct consequences of this construction and representation of identity. However, it should not be assumed that the label of victim in this sense results directly in stigmatization. Participant data discussed in this article illuminate how some individuals can manage and resist the stigmatized identity that is thrust upon them, or indeed employ further agency to do so.

Previous related work has suggested that negative labels can be managed or resisted (Goffman, 1963; Link et al., 1989, 2002; Thoits, 2011), and there was evidence in the accounts of participants in this research of both stigma management and resistance. One way of managing stigma was avoidance of an identity that could be associated with Dunblane. Many times over, participants claimed to have denounced their belonging to or knowledge of the place where they lived. The following quote plainly illustrates this position: ‘When I go on holiday now I do not say I am from Dunblane, I say Stirling now to avoid being interrogated. Saying you are from Dunblane is a conversation stopper’ (Community member 12, Dunblane).

Many participants indicated that, for some, the stigma of association with the name Dunblane where the crime occurred was centred on emotions such as embarrassment, self-consciousness or fear for future generations of residents in the town. Since stigma is often seen as a permanent predicament or dilemma, the consequences of which are hard to eliminate (Link and Phelan, 2001), participants worried about the long-term implications for their individual and community identity in this regard. However, there were others who seemed to have ulterior motives for not wanting the stigma of association, as implied by the following quote: ‘Some people do not want the name of Dunblane associated with this. Some of that is selfish; it’s down to property prices. Some people just want it to go away but that’s never going to happen’ (Police Officer 1, Dunblane).

For other victims in the community, the notion of stigma by association of name or place was conversely seen as a positive referent and as a potential catalyst and reinforcement for resistance and change. Therefore, for some, the stigma associated with the murders as presented and reinforced by the media was encouragement for a wider audience not to forget what had happened. However, it should be noted that this was primarily the case for those most directly and closely affected by the crime event itself: ‘It doesn’t feel tainted [Dunblane]. It will always be place-laden but that can be a good thing, people will not forget what happened here and how it happened’ (Father of victim 1, Dunblane).

This quote highlights the tension apparent within the community between forgetting and remembering, where ‘remembering is to honour the truth’ (North, 2000: 298). Whilst there were some in the community encouraging the media and the world at large to look forward and move on from the tragic events at Dunblane, for those most closely associated with events, not forgetting what had happened in their community and constructing patterns for prevention and change in the future were uppermost in their minds. Such strategies continue as a form of resistance to the stigma associated with the crime events that have taken place in the town. Thoits (2011, summarized by Link and Phelan, 2013) identifies a number of forms of resistance in such situations that may include: behaving in ways that contradict the stereotype; attempting to change the attitudes or behaviours of others; and engaging in advocacy and activism. There was certainly some evidence of this in community members challenging the media to be responsible and also with regard to activism seen in the formation of the Gun Control Network.5 However, from whatever concern these feelings of stigmatization arise, crucially, it is the media’s pivotal role in late-modern society that turns this essentially private matter into a public one. This is the impact of collective indirect victimization. The media’s construction and use of rhetorical frameworks (Innes, 2004) in the
representation of the events that took place in Dunblane led to the identification and public labelling of the community as a collective entity. The stigmatization of Dunblane and its people, ultimately, reinforced by the societal reaction that follows in the wake and aftermath of such media portrayals. The boundaries between public and private (community) grief are subsequently blurred and in the case of Dunblane, the loss of ownership of that grief for many participants only added insult to harm and injury.

**Conclusion and implications**

Utilizing the findings of a two-year qualitative study, this article has looked beneath the surface of the experiences of indirect victims, those who are struggling to come to terms with the most harrowing of events within the glare of the media spotlight. Through the lens of cultural victimology and the social and meaning-making processes associated with ‘becoming’ or ‘being’ a victim, this article has considered ways in which some participants experience stigma and a ‘spoiled identity’ as a result of a serious and high-profile crime event. It has examined the media’s role as the conduit in reshaping and representing private grief and suffering for its ‘public and didactic salience’ (McEvoy and Jamieson, 2007: 425). In doing so, this article also reflects on the management of, or resistance to, the application of the ‘victim’ label and the associated stigma caused by extensive media coverage of the serious crime event. As such, it offers a unique cultural and sociological account of how communities, who have experienced serious and high-profile crime, make sense of becoming or being a victim, what it means to live with the associated stigma and how the media representation of their victimization shapes their individual and community identities.

The primary contentions of this article are first, that in our media-saturated, late-modern society there is a constructed identity, and in some cases a stigma, attached to those indirect victims in the wider community who have been associated with particular serious and high-profile crimes. For some, their individual and collective identities are ‘spoiled’. Following Goffman (1963) the argument presented here is that processes of stigmatization are specific to the social relations in which they are embedded, the result of which is, for many, having to manage and/or sometimes resist the label and its associated stigma. This research has demonstrated how acceptance of the stigma is not inevitable. Whilst some adopt the label applied to them, others, with a degree of agency, may be able to adapt or even resist the stigmatized identity assigned to them. The second contention concerns how the media constructs and reports these events with an ‘excavation’ of our feelings (Valier, 2004), putting us, the wider global audience, in a position where we are entitled to share in the suffering. Certain serious and high-profile crime events are communicated in such a way that urges us all to empathize unreservedly – to ‘see it with our own eyes’ – but more than that, to imagine ourselves in the situation, side by side with the victim as the turn to the ‘cultural’ would suggest (Cole, 2007; Furedi, 1997). The final assertion is that the consequence of both of the above contentions, in sum, the stigmatization of a collectivity (McGarry and Walklate, 2015) around a high-profile crime and the expression of vicarious victimhood, is a feeling of loss of ownership for many of those involved when a private tragedy comes to be owned by the wider public. Private grief and suffering of the victim community is commodified via the media and for public consumption (Greer, 2004; Valier, 2004). This position cannot be separated from the increasingly visual nature of social life and of the media that constantly places us beside the victim and encourages us to feel what they feel.
The research that informs this article arises from a wider and long-standing interest in the role that criminal victimization plays in shaping self and collective identity. This includes a focus on the social processes associated with ‘becoming’ a victim. Considering the events at Dunblane with a focus on victim identity through the lens of cultural victimology, this empirical research illuminates and gives voice to a previously unheard collective of victims. This has two significant consequences and related implications.

First, by examining how the media construct identities in the wake of a serious and high-profile crime and the associated stigma this can cause, this article uniquely demonstrates the impact of the media coverage of events in Dunblane on the wider community involved. In propelling such crime events into the public sphere with such vigour and emotional intensity, the media shape wider public fears of victimization, often invoking the strongest public reaction locally, nationally and, sometimes, globally. In doing so, they reveal the victimizing experience as a process, beginning with how it affects individual and collective identities and lives, and ending with its impact on the community as this becomes both a focus for ongoing international attention and for public grief. These explorations have significant implications for how we engage with and support indirect victims of similar and future crimes and help to transform our understandings of ‘other’ victim experiences.

Furthermore, this article contributes to the increasing body of work emerging as cultural victimology by challenging and contesting the notion of victimhood and who can legitimately be considered a victim whether on an individual or collective basis. The resulting visibility of some types of victims and not others frequently dictates the ways the state and its services respond positively or not (or not at all) to certain types of harm (Greer, 2017; Mythen 2007). As McGarry and Walklate (2015) have stated, this also has important implications for how we do victimological work. High-profile crime events of late are all historically recent international examples of events as wider forms of victimization: the Oslo and Utøya terrorist attacks carried out by Anders Breivik in 2011; numerous incidences of deadly shootings in the United States as exemplified by Columbine (1999), Sandy Hook (2012) and, most recently, tragic events in Las Vegas (2017); the Paris attacks (including the massacre at the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo) in January 2015; and the sexual assaults on the streets of Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015. Events such as these have an impact on and consequences for our study of identity, collective victimization, stigma and resilience. These are often marginalized but wholly relevant areas of investigation as the kaleidoscope of victimological theory and research explores and illuminates those darker areas of knowledge and interest that have traditionally not made communities’ suffering visible.

Notes
1. The ‘Hungerford massacre’ was a series of random shootings in Hungerford, Berkshire, UK on 19 August 1987, when Michael Robert Ryan, an unemployed part-time antique dealer and handyman, fatally shot 16 people before committing suicide.
2. On 21 December 1988, a transatlantic aircraft, Pan Am flight 103, was destroyed by a bomb, killing all 243 passengers and 16 crew, in what became known as the ‘Lockerbie bombing’. Large sections of the aircraft crashed on to residential areas of Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 11 more people on the ground.
3. The ‘Aberfan disaster’ was the catastrophic collapse of a colliery spoil tip in the Welsh village of Aberfan, UK that killed 116 children and 28 adults on 21 October 1966. The collapse was caused by the build-up of water in the accumulated rock and shale tip. In only a few minutes, more than 1.4 million cubic feet of debris covered a section of the village, including the primary school.
4. Fred and Rose West committed at least 12 murders between 1967 and 1987 in Gloucestershire, England. All the victims were young women. The victims’ bodies were typically buried in the cellar or garden of the Wests’ Cromwell Street home, which became known as ‘the House of Horrors’. In addition, Fred is known to have committed at least two murders on his own, whilst Rose is known to have murdered Fred’s stepdaughter. The pair were apprehended and charged in 1994.

5. A group known as the Gun Control Network was founded in the aftermath of the shootings and supported by some of the parents of victims at Dunblane and at the Hungerford massacre. Bereaved families in Dunblane and their friends also initiated a campaign to ban private gun ownership that was named the Snowdrop Petition (because March is snowdrop time in Scotland). This gained 705,000 signatures and was supported by some newspapers, including the Sunday Mail, a Scottish tabloid newspaper. The Cullen Inquiry into the massacre recommended that the government introduce tighter controls on handgun ownership. The Home Affairs Select Committee agreed with the need for restrictions on gun ownership but stated that a handgun ban was not appropriate.

References

Baudrillard J (1981) For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. St Louis, MO: Telos.

BBC (2013) Andy Murray: The man behind the racquet. BBC1, 8 July, 21.00. Available at: http://www.bmetv.net/video/3854/andrew-murray-the-man-behind-the-racquet (accessed 13 Oct 2017).

BEIPI (1996) Dunblane: Reflecting Tragedy. London: British Executive International Press Institute.

Carrabine E, Ignaski P, Lee M, et al. (2004) Criminology: A Sociological Introduction. London: Routledge.

Carter M (1996) Public interest versus private grief. The Independent, 19 March. Available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/media/public-interest-versus-private-grief-1342873.html (accessed 4 April 2017).

Chermak S (1995) Victims in the News. Oxford: Westview Press.

Christie N (1986) The ideal victim. In: Fattah EA (ed.) From Crime Policy to Victim Policy. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 17–30.

Cole A (2007) The Cult of True Victimization. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Cullen the Hon. Lord (1996) The Public Inquiry into the Shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996. Cm. 3386. London: HMSO.

Davies P (2011) Gender and Victimisation. London: SAGE Publications.

Ferrell J, Hayward K and Young J (2008) Cultural Criminology: An Invitation. London: SAGE Publications.

Furedi F (1997) The Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectations. London: Cassell.

Furedi F (2006) Culture of Fear: Revisited. London: Continuum.

Giddens A (1990) The Consequences of Modernity. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goffman E (1990 [1959]) The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Goffman E (1963) Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Green D (2008) Suitable vehicles: Framing blame and justice when children kill a child. Crime, Media, Culture 4(2): 197–220.

Greer C (2004) Crime, media and community: Grief and virtual engagement in late modernity. In: Ferrell J, Hayward K, Morrison W, et al. (eds) Cultural Criminology Unleashed. London: Glass House Press, pp. 109–118.

Greer C (2017) News media, victims and crime. In: Davies P, Francis P and Greer C (eds) Victims, Crime and Society. London: SAGE Publications, pp.48–65.

Hammersley M and Atkinson P (1995) Ethnography: Principles in Practice. London: Routledge.

Innes M (2004) Crime as a signal, crime as a memory. Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media 1(2): 15–22.

Jemphrey A and Berrington E (2000) Surviving the media: Hillsborough, Dunblane and the press. Journalism Studies 1(3): 469–483.
Valier C (2004) *Crime and Punishment in Contemporary Culture*. London: Routledge.

Van Wijk A, van Leiden I and Ferwerda H (2017) Murder and the long-term impact on co-victims: A qualitative, longitudinal study. *International Review of Victimology* 23(2): 145–157.

Walklate S (2017) Defining victims and victimisation. In: Davies P, Francis P and Greer C (eds) *Victims, Crime and Society*. London: SAGE Publications, pp.30–47.

Walklate S, Mythen G and McGarry R (2014) Trauma, visual victimology and the poetics of justice. In: Haviid-Jacobsen M (ed.) *The Poetics of Crime*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp.263–284.

Wilson D, Yardley E and Pemberton S (2016) The ‘Dunblane massacre’ as a ‘photosensitive plate’. *Crime, Media, Culture* 13(1): 1–14.

Yang HL, Kleinman A, Link BG, et al. (2007) Culture and stigma: Adding moral experience to stigma theory. *Social Science & Medicine* 64(7): 1524–1535.