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# The Framing of Political Advocacy and Service Responses in the Crime Victim Rights Movement

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*This paper analyses two major aspects of the mobilizing frames found among local organizations in the crime victim rights movement. A national survey of 301 organizations demonstrated that organizations shape their service/action responses in terms of three conceptualizations of the "victim problem." These conceptualizations clearly influence the pattern of service programs found in different types of organizations. In addition it is shown that some types of organizations are more oriented to political advocacy than others; yet all types of organizations are more apt to be involved in political action if their staff members are oriented to "victim rights" framed as changing the status of victims in the criminal justice system.*

The grievances and claims of social reform movements can be analyzed as mobilizing frames that define problems and cast these problems as injustices that are addressed through various modes of action (Gamson 1990). Mobilizing frames serve as interpretive orientations that can be associated with both individual convictions and organizational activities (Snow and Benford 1988). As a social movement becomes more prominent it develops a variety of organizations that serve as the centers of direct action and constitute what has been called a social movement industry (McCarthy and Zald 1977) or an organizational substructure (Von Eschen, et.al 1971). The organizations can be perceived as embodying the primary mobilizing frames that direct action within the movement. Yet, the procedural agenda of organizations and the beliefs of the individual activists may not be entirely consistent. This raises the problem of frame alignment or how interpretive frames held by individuals correspond with and influence the actions of social movement organizations (Snow, et.al. 1986; Snow and

Benford 1988). Frame alignment refers to the linkage of the beliefs and values of individuals with the activities and goals of the social movement organizations (SMO). Individual activists can use organizations as legitimating vehicles for the expression of their beliefs and demands. On the other hand, organizations can create social processes that lead to the alteration of mobilizing frames through goal transformations, restricted actions, and co-optation (Zald and Ash 1966). Thus, mobilizing frames that underlie participation in a social movement operate on at least two levels—the level of individual participants and the level of organizational activities (Snow, et.al. 1986; Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994).

The crime victim rights movement is a reform movement that has spawned a variety of local community based organizations that provide services designed to assist crime victims. The movement has also engaged in political advocacy designed to increase public awareness and support reform legislation.

This paper examines the frame alignment of two primary frames found in the crime victim rights movement that influence political advocacy. The first frame consists of different definitions of the "crime victim problem" that influence the service programs of SMOs. Service programs, that are more easily funded, have been seen as individualizing the problem of victimization by stressing a casework approach and detracting from wider political concerns (Johnson 1981; Morgan 1981; Matthews 1994). It is expected that political advocacy of a SMO will vary depending on the conception of the "victim problem" that is manifested in their service programs.

The second frame, consisting of beliefs associated with victim rights, also affects the political advocacy of SMOs. It is expected that political advocacy will vary depending on the beliefs held by staff members concerning the need to change the status of victims in the criminal justice system thereby creating "victim rights." The alignment of these two frames should reflect the fact that the staff members who are committed to "victim rights" can use small service organizations for political advocacy regardless of the organizational constraints imposed by service programming. This is similar to other findings in the social movements literature where status concerns are associated with political activism or issue advocacy (Snow, et.al. 1986; Page and Clelland 1978; Wood and Hughes 1984).

### The Crime Victim Rights Movement As An Aggregated Movement

The crime victim rights movement emerges out of a variety of separate social movements that started in the 1970s (Weed 1995). A part of the victim rights movement emerged out of the feminist movement's concern for battered women and rape victims which led to the first shelters and rape crisis centers in the early 1970s (Tierney 1982; Rose 1977; Matthews 1989; Matthews 1994). There are also groups that deal with criminal fatalities and bereavement like Parents of Murdered Children founded in 1978 (Villamoare and Benvenuti 1988), or anti-drunk driving groups like RID (Remove Intoxicated Drivers - USA) started in 1978, and MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) founded in 1980 (Weed 1987). There are also a few groups that deal with the abuse, molestation, or abduction of children (Johnson 1989; Best 1989). There are more general victim advocacy groups at the local level such as VOCAL (Victims of Crime and Leniency). Finally, there are the Federal-State-County funded victim-witness programs started in 1974 to increase the cooperation of crime victims in prosecuting a legal case (Karman 1990). Some of these organizations with local affiliates have national offices that exist alongside national level umbrella organizations such as National Organization for Victim Assistance, Inc. (NOVA) founded in 1976 and the National Victim Center founded in 1985 (Carrington and Nicholson 1989; Weed 1995).

The concept of "victim" itself implies some degree of mobilization because it rests on the perception that the person has been wronged or harmed in a fashion which calls for public action (Gusfield 1975). This social movement defines crime victims as having special needs that can be addressed by specialized services and new "rights." Most of the grass roots organizations in the movement can be portrayed as service providers and are able to secure funding through community contributions and state/federal grants to supply specific services to particular categories of crime victims and their families. At the same time activists and constituent groups unite around issues that identify crime victims as neglected and mistreated by community institutions, the police, the prosecutor, and the courts of law. Activists in the movement refer to this mistreatment as "secondary

victimization" or "revictimization" (Smith and Huff 1992). The portrayal of the crime victim as being treated unjustly by the very institutions responsible for meting out justice in society is a political symbol and rallying point for the victim rights movement (Viano 1987; Nelson 1984; Elias 1986; Weed 1995). The conceptual frame of crime victim's rights generally calls for crime victims to be treated with dignity and respect, that they have the right to be present and heard at various stages in the criminal justice process including bail hearings, sentencing and parole hearings, and that they have a right to compensation and restitution for the harm done to them. Starting in 1980 almost every state had passed some form of a "victims bill of rights" which contains some or all of these elements (Weed 1995). This represents one of the changes in status or the legal standing given to crime victims in the criminal justice process, however, these so called "rights" can often be ignored, and remain an active issue.

Service programs and the victim status issue do not necessarily spring from each other, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather they become associated when the interpretative frames become connected in an alignment that effects political advocacy. In general the linking of political advocacy and service may very well be a historical trend among SMOs starting after 1970 (Minkoff 1994). In this movement, however, the advocacy of victim rights gives a unifying focus to an otherwise diverse set of SMOs.

### Action Frames and Types of Organizations

The organizations that constitute the victim rights movement tend to deal with victims in terms of the goals and functions they have prescribed for themselves (Ziegenhagen and Benyi 1981). This is partly true because the term victim lacks a clear descriptive content of its own, so its meaning varies with its function. The service functions of organizations become entwined with how they define the "victim problem." In the crime victim rights movement, organizations can be said to fall within three basic approaches to the "victim problem."

1. In the first approach, the problem is seen as the tendency of victims to be unwilling, fearful, or disinterested in being a witness against the offender. They are seen as resisting the

idea of cooperating with the prosecutor to gain a criminal conviction. The organization's role is to assist the victim to the extent that their cooperation in prosecution of the accused can be assured. In this instance the victim is to play the role of the witness.

2. In the second approach, the problem can be seen in terms of the emotional harm done to the victim of a crime. The problem is located in the individual victim who is suffering as a result of a crime. The organizational role is to provide services designed to help restore the victim's sense of well-being. In this situation the victim is to play the role of a client.
3. In the third approach, the problem is seen as one that requires public action because of the magnitude of the harm done to the individuals and surviving family members. The organizational role is to represent victim's interests and advocate for changes in how victims are treated by the social institutions of the community. In this instance the individual victim serves as the exemplar of the problem of mistreatment. This action can also include political advocacy that influences new legislation focusing on the perceived interests of crime victims as a group.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. An organization that takes a client service approach to victims might also feel that their clients should do everything in their power to legally prosecute the offender. Moreover, an organization with a client service approach may also invest some of its time and resources in advocacy for victim's rights. Nevertheless, an organization will tend to have a dominant frame that shapes their programming and guides the organization.

The grass-root organizations have developed historically in such a way that they can be classified into four types that represent the three approaches to the "victim problem." The first type, *victim-witness programs*, are generally part of the prosecutor's office, although some are located in police departments and a few are private non-profit agencies. Their purpose is to gain the victim's cooperation in proceedings against the accused. The objective is to secure convictions, and attaining a conviction is

often dependent on the victim being a witness. Victim witness programs have a more narrowly defined, shorter term relationship with the crime victim and serve the greatest variety of crime victims.

A second type of victim organization deals with *victim advocacy*. Victim advocacy organizations will generally pressure the criminal justice system to give higher priority to victim's interests in a system that favors the interests of the prosecutor and the defense of the accused. These organizations often work on behalf of deceased victims, by encouraging the family members of the victim to pressure the legislature to take action on behalf of crime victims. They may also provide support groups to bereaved family members who feel they too have been victimized by the crime.

The third type of victim service organizations consists of *women's centers and domestic violence shelters*. These organizations are concerned with crisis intervention services directed to the needs of female victims of domestic violence. In these agencies the victim is seen as a client who has unique emotional and physical needs brought on by being a victim of domestic violence or in some cases sexual assault. Battered women are seen as having developed an adaptive reaction based on "learned helplessness" that keeps them in the abusive relationship. The battered-woman syndrome is based on a learning theory that predicts guilt, low self-esteem and passivity (Kromsky and Cutler 1991; Forte et.al. 1996). Victims are seen as having to become more independent and self-reliant through resocialization in counseling and peer support groups. Centers will encourage victims to take legal action and cooperate with the police, but legal action is not a primary objective.

The fourth type of victim service program consists of *rape crisis centers and sexual assault agencies*. These organizations deal with women or children that have experienced unwanted or, in some cases with children, inappropriate sexual acts. Services are provided with or without legal action being taken; although victims are encouraged to report their case to the authorities, they are nonetheless treated as clients. The victim is seen as having suffered the immediate trauma of the sexual assault and also the longer term post-traumatic stress. To reach an adjustment stage requires that victims tell and retell their memories of the event,

and its emotions, until they see themselves as a "survivor" (Figley 1985). These victims, as clients, are understood to have suffered emotional trauma with long-term consequences.

The service programs offered by different types of organizations should reflect the different conceptual frames that define the "victim problem". Moreover, it is expected that an organization's involvement in political advocacy activities will be influenced by their service goals, as well as by the victim status concerns of the staff members.

The victim status concerns of staff members represent the aligning frame that promotes political advocacy, particularly in service based organizations.

### Study Design and Measures

The organizational base of the victim rights movement consist of a nationwide collection of heterogeneous groups. National directories of groups that are concerned with crime victim rights and services are only partly complete. This study uses the directory of 6,742 organizations and contact persons, and 848 victim witness programs compiled by the National Victims Center in 1990 as the sampling frame. Organizations were selected in a proportional way from the fifty states forming a non-random representative sample of 7.4% or 497 regular organizations, and 18% or 153 victim witness programs. Organizations were selected from different communities in each state and were selected to represent the full spectrum of shelters, crisis centers, and advocacy groups found in that state. In 1990-91 organizations were sent two waves of questionnaires, to be filled out by the agency director, with return postage paid envelopes. From the total sample of 650 organizations, 26 no longer existed, 215 regular organizations from 50 states, and 86 victim witness programs from 40 states returned usable questionnaires. This is a return rate of 48% or 301 organizations. The return rate seems proportional to the sample by state since the correlation between the sample and the return rate is  $r=+.877$  for regular organizations and  $r=+.881$  for victim witness programs.

The questionnaire was eleven pages long and asked questions on characteristics of their organization, types of clients served,



programs they emphasize, community relations, personnel background information on three employees, and beliefs about victim rights issues.

The typical crime victim service organization is small (5 paid employees), about 11 years old, and serves a city/county or multi-county area (91%), and relies on volunteer help for part of its workforce (86%). Most of the employees are women (87%) with at least a college education (68%), who have worked with victim's issues for an average of 6.5 years.

The variables in this study consists of the following typology, measures, and indexes.

1) The four types of victim service organizations were based on the organization's name or brief statement of goals. All the organizations readily fit into one of the four categories. There were 86 victim/witness programs, 53 victim advocacy organizations, 96 women's centers/shelters, and 66 rape crisis centers/organizations that were primarily concerned with sexual assault.

2) The service program emphasis is based on a rating from 0 to 4 of how much emphasis their organization placed on 9 different service functions (See Appendix I for rating scale). A score of greater than three indicated a service they gave a great deal of emphasis, and a score of less than two represented a service they gave little or no attention.

3) There are two indexes of orientational frames: *Victim Status Issues* and *Political Advocacy*. The index of *Victim Status Issue* is based on a five question ratings dealing with staff members individual beliefs about changes in victim status in the criminal justice process. The questions dealt with the following issues: (1) offenders have too many rights compared to victims; (2) victims need constitutionally protected rights; (3) reform should reduce judicial discretion through mandatory sentencing; (4) the harm done to the victim should be a criteria for deciding the severity of punishment; (5) justice for the victim requires balance retribution (See Appendix I). The *Political Advocacy Index* is a three question rating of the emphasis given to organizational activities that are designed to create a climate of public awareness of victims, to recruit victims to be activists, and to promote legislation that will benefit crime victims by changes in laws and governmental policies (See Appendix I).

## Findings

The way different organizations are prepared to respond to crime victims sets the framing of the "crime victim problem." This process should be manifested in the pattern of service programs provided by the four types of organizations. In Table 1 nine program services are compared across the four organizational types to reveal the different patterns of service programs. Virtually all the organizations regard themselves as being involved in crisis intervention because they view victimization as both a short and a long term crisis for the individual and family members, and all see themselves as providing information and referral services which are basic to the operations of almost all community service agencies. It is interesting that the differences between types of organizations are statistically significant; with the women's centers/shelters being highest, implying a more direct link to the community welfare networks, and the victim advocacy organizations being the lowest, reflecting their lesser role in direct client contact.

The victim witness programs follow the pattern of services called for by their sponsoring interests. These programs emphasize 1) orienting victims to the criminal justice system, 2) helping with getting victim compensation aid from the state which usually requires a victim to cooperate with the local prosecutor, 3) and assistance in preparing a victim impact statement. The victim witness programs are low on the emphasis given to longer term counseling or support group services. They tend to confine their contact with the victim to the duration of the legal case.

Victim advocacy organizations share with the victim witness programs a belief that crime victims need emotional support and assistance in dealing with the criminal justice system. These cases can be the basis for demanding reforms by focusing on the treatment of the victims by the police, prosecutors and judges. The advocacy organizations do not regard victims as clients, however, and are less apt to provide counseling and support group services.

The women's centers/shelters are more apt to have desperate women and children dropped on their door-step. These centers provide client oriented services such as counseling, support groups and shelter. The focus is on the emotional needs of women

Table 1  
*Variation in Program Emphasis and Orientation by Type of Victim Organization (Means and F Ratios)*

	Victim Witness Program	Victim Advocacy Organizations	Women's Centers and Domestic Violence Shelters	Rape Crisis and Sexual Assault	F* Ratio	PR
<i>I. Programs Services</i>						
1 Crisis Intervention	3.36 n=84	3.14 n=49	3.82 n=96	3.70 n=66	6.51	.001
2 Information & Referral	3.71 n=85	3.16 n=51	3.74 n=96	3.56 n=66	5.72	.001
3 Counseling Services	.99 n=84	2.06 n=47	2.95 n=96	2.91 n=66	28.59	.001
4 Victim Support Groups	1.43 n=84	2.98 n=50	3.28 n=96	3.05 n=66	30.95	.001
5 Orienting Victims to the Criminal Justice System	3.60 n=84	3.04 N=48	3.03 N=96	2.82 N=66	5.74	.001
6 Shelter and Basic Needs	.77 n=83	.51 n=45	3.51 n=96	1.06 n=65	114.38	.001
7 Assist with Victims Impact Statements	3.14 n=85	2.13 n=46	1.17 n=93	1.71 n=66	34.53	.001

8 Assist with Victim Compensation	3.74 n=84	2.26 n=47	1.83 n=95	2.20 n=66	38.97	.001
9 Personal Safety and Prevention Programs	.84 n=84	1.33 n=46	2.26 n=93	3.00 n=66	33.82	.001
<b>II. Orientations</b>						
A. Victim Status Concerns	14.9 n=82	16.4 n=49	15.3 n=92	15.1 n=63	3.21	.023
B. Political Advocacy	5.6 n=82	7.6 n=46	7.3 n=93	7.4 n=64	8.46	.001

\* F ratios are based on a One Way Analysis of Variance

\*\* Variation in row Ns represents missing data

and the financial problems of getting women to be self-reliant. These agencies are less involved with the legal case against the offender who may never be charged with a crime. Assisting victims of domestic violence with compensation claims and victim impact statements is a lower priority. The women's centers/shelters rely more on counseling and support group approaches to helping women. Their ideology sees the solution to the problem of domestic violence as requiring women to change their behavior and become more independent. The consciousness-raising groups were developed in women's centers as a method of addressing women's problems through a kind of peer socialization and these support groups are a vestige of that earlier approach (Matthews 1994; Forte, et.al. 1996).

The rape crisis and sexual assault organizations deal with the problem by serving the victim as a client. These organizations are highly involved in crisis intervention in that they are often called first before the police are called in the case of a rape. At the same time women who have been raped in the past, in which there is no viable legal case, may still be in need of counseling services. Serving the emotional needs of clients is seen as taking place independently of legal action against the offender. The crime of rape is an assault designed to humiliate the victim and so the more private one-on-one counseling approach tends to be used.

Rape is often portrayed as a predatory crime. Rape crisis centers have found that programs that deal with personal safety can be an effective way to reach non-victims and provide a "community service" that raises public awareness about the crime. This represents a kind of community political action in providing classes in personal safety for women (Matthews 1994; McCall 1993).

These organizations have defined different protocols for dealing with the "crime victim problem." Some organizations focus on the role of the victim in the criminal justice process both to increase conviction rates and to advocate for further reforms in the treatment of victims. Other organizations serve victims as clients, with the focus on the harm done to the individual victim and less on the legal case against the offender. In either case, as indicated in Table 1, the organizations follow their conceptualization of the "victim problem" in their programming.

Table 2  
Two Way ANOVA for Political Advocacy by Status Concerns and Organizational Type

Agreement on Status Concerns	Victim/Witness Programs (N=78)		Victim Advocacy Organizations (N=42)		Women's Center & Domestic Violence Shelters (N=90)		Rape Crisis & Sexual Assault (N=61)	
	$\bar{X}$	n	$\bar{X}$	n	Mean	F	Mean	PR
Strong	6.03	38	7.81	27	7.80	7.16	8.44	.001
Weak	5.42	40	7.40	15	6.83	8.06	6.71	.005
							34	.590
(A) Type of Organization	Sum of Square		162.3	3	54.1	7.16		
(B) Status Concerns	Sum of Square		60.8	1	60.8	8.06		
A X B	Sum of Square		14.5	3	4.8	.64		
Error	Sum of Square		1985.9	263	7.5			

The victim rights movement must cross organizational lines and create a demand for reforms based on a common problem that promotes political advocacy. This tactical action depends on defining a common problem that the diverse groups can support. The common issues, in this case, that represent a mobilizing frame is the "victim status issues." It is expected that the framing of the "victim problem" by the different types of organizations will influence the degree of concern for victim rights. The results presented in Table 1 show that the victim status concerns are highest in victim advocacy organizations along with a higher interest in political advocacy. The other three types of organizations that deal with crime victims more directly have lower scores on these variables, however the women's centers and rape crisis agencies are only slightly lower. The victim witness programs are the lowest on both status concerns and political activism in that they tend to represent the interests of the criminal justice system.

It is expected that organizations whose staff members are concerned with victim rights will also involve their organization in political advocacy. Table 2 shows the relationship between organizational types and victim status concerns in terms of how they effect political advocacy. Both the variables of organizational type and victim status concerns make statistically significant differences in political advocacy. The greatest differences in the effect of victim status issues are in organizations that take a client approach to dealing with victims. Staff support for the victim status issues has the greatest influence on political activism among the Women's Centers and Rape Crisis organizations. In this movement, if an organization's members are concerned with victim rights they are more apt to have their organization involved in political action. The effects of service programming appears to be off-set by the staff members concern for victim status issues when it comes to the degree of political advocacy.

### Discussion

This study contrasts the frames that are basic to the formation of the various service organizations and the frame that links these organizations into the crime victim rights movement. The small community based organizations in this study represent the different conceptual frames of the "crime victim problem" that shape

and direct their service programs. The concept of victim lacks descriptive content that would help direct action, so other social and political interests are free to influence the service programs that constitute the frame. The victim witness programs reflect the needs of prosecutors to gain the cooperation of witnesses to secure convictions. This reflects the law-and-order political interests in the community more than the mental health service needs of the victims. The victim advocacy organizations have less real contact with victims, offer less direct services, but instead act on behalf of crime victims to "balance the scales of justice." They are concerned with retribution as the best proof of justice, and reforms that they believe constitute victim rights (Weed 1995). The women's centers/shelters and the rape crisis centers focus on the emotional harm done to the victims. These organizations approach the victim as a client. The sources of funding for these organizations require client centered services as part of society's response to the problem of domestic violence and rape (Matthews 1994).

This organizational base represents a venue for participation in the crime victim's movement. As a reform movement, political advocacy represents tactical action that is necessary for maintaining public support. The mobilizing frames that underlie the service programs are often seen as a conservative force that deflects the concerns of activists away from further political advocacy as they become preoccupied with providing victim services. Yet as a venue of participation, organizations can also be used by activists to promote issues they identify with, so that a movement can have crosscutting frames that effect levels of political advocacy. The mobilizing frame of victim rights influences the level of political advocacy, and serves as the unifying issue across the diverse parts of the movement.

These findings show that organizational tactics are not just the property of organizations, but also reflect the orientations of staffers who act as a constituency for these demands. These findings elaborate on the ideas of Snow, Rochford, Worden and Bedford (1986); Hunt, Bedford and Snow (1994); and Cress and Snow (1996) dealing with the role SMOs play in the frame alignment process. Yet this is only one possible outcome and more



research will be needed to understand the role played by cross-cutting frames within a social movement.

Appendix I

1) *Political Advocacy Index*

Please check each of the services listed indicating whether your organization provides the service or not, and then indicate how much emphasis you are able to place on each activity. This is a long list and we do not expect that any organization could provided all these services, so just pick the services or closest similar services you regularly provide.

Amount of Emphasis Given					
Not Regularly Provided	A Little	Some	A Fair Amount	A Great Deal	
0	1	2	3	4	
0	1	2	3	4	Public Awareness and Community Education: programs designed to increase general awareness of the plight of victims.
0	1	2	3	4	Advocate Education: to promote activism among victims and their supporters.
0	1	2	3	4	Legislative Advocacy: to enact laws and policies that benefit victims.

- a. The items are summed to form an index: Alpha = .662.
- b. The list of items consists of the nine service programs presented in table 1 and these three advocacy items.

*Victim Status Concerns Index*

4	3	2	1
Most people would strongly agree	Generally people would agree	People would have mixed opinions	Generally people would disagree

Write the appropriate number in the space provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ In terms of justice for all, offenders have too many rights compared to victims.

\_\_\_\_\_ Crime victims will not be treated with proper considerations until they have more constitutional protection of their rights.

- \_\_\_\_\_ All serious crimes should have mandatory sentences leaving less leeway to the sentencing judge.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Regardless of the offender's intent, the offender's sentence should be based on the harm done to the victim.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ When a convicted criminal gets a light sentence it indicated that the victim's suffering is of not importance to the courts.
- a. The items were summed to form an index: Alpha = .655
- b. For the two way Analysis of Variance the index was divided at the median: Strong = > 16

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