

# Dallas Morning News

July 20, 2006

## Media Spotlight Dims on Some Killings

*One woman's death was splashed across newspapers and newscasts.  
Three others' were not.*

By Jennifer Emily ([jemily@dallasnews.com](mailto:jemily@dallasnews.com)), The Dallas Morning News

Nothing in Sarah Anne Walker's spontaneous and vivacious life could compare to the attention she's attracted in death.

She was an attractive, blond real estate professional with a Jaguar who wanted to marry a millionaire. CNN, Fox News Channel, MSNBC, Greta Van Susteren and Geraldo Rivera sought out the case of the 40-year-old divorced mother of two, slain in the model home of an upscale Collin County neighborhood.

But few know about Elizabeth Ann Avery, who died the same day as Ms. Walker, July 8. Ms. Avery, also a mother of two, was shot as she fried catfish in her Dallas kitchen. And many don't know of Hai Ping Duan, a woman found dead in the trunk of her car June 9 in Plano.

Media experts say there's no formula for determining why one woman's death splashes across newspapers and newscasts around the country and another's does not. But they say readers and viewers respond when they relate to the lives of those struck by tragedy.

Women are less likely to be killed than men. Last year, 40 of Dallas' 213 slaying victims were women. So far this year, of the 117 people killed, 28 were women.

"Murders that get lots of attention are usually those that remind many people of their own vulnerability," said Jack Levin, director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Boston's Northeastern University. "When a middle-class child is abducted and killed, when college students are slaughtered, then millions of Americans believe that they or their family members could be next."

A Plano couple found Ms. Walker's body in the kitchen of the model home where she worked. Police are still searching for her killer and say it's possible she knew her attacker.

Ms. Avery was shot twice in the head. Two men barged into her apartment in the Red Bird area of Dallas after one had exchanged glares with her boyfriend.

The death of Ms. Avery, 30, who dreamed of being a nurse and helped battered women, was a blip on the local news scene.

So was the death of Ms. Duan, a Chinese national who was found dead this summer in the trunk of a car in Plano. Her boyfriend hasn't been seen since before the massage therapist's decomposed body was discovered at Sam's Club. Media in China have highlighted the case there.

Like Ms. Walker's case, Ms. Duan's remains a mystery.

Although media experts say national news organizations are drawn to pretty blondes like Ms. Walker, other factors may actually determine why her death attracted such attention. It is not as simple as Ms. Walker being white, Ms. Avery black and Ms. Duan Asian, they say. Another woman not mentioned by the national media is Terea Lewis, who was found dead in a Garland creek this month and had a criminal record.

Most compelling is that Ms. Walker's death is a whodunit. Arrests were made in Ms. Avery's case the next day. Ms. Duan's killer remains a mystery, and not much is known about her because her family is hard to reach. They live in China and do not speak English.

Race, however, is a part of how news agencies choose stories, even if it is not purposeful, said Kelly McBride, an ethics group leader at the Poynter Institute, a media studies organization.

"A local crime story tends to become national when it fits into an overarching narrative, and the most popular narrative is the damsel in distress. Part of the definition of damsel in distress is white and blonde," Ms. McBride said. "News execs don't sit around asking 'Is she white? Is she blonde?'"

The loved ones of lesser-known victims don't think others are unworthy, but Ms. Avery's former fiancé said he wonders why some stories are left untold.

Aubrey Dewayne Robinson, 38, a DART bus driver, said that before Ms. Avery died, he would often peruse the obituaries and wonder about all the young people he saw whose stories never made headlines in the paper or the nightly newscasts.

"Liz might not have been a business-type woman who could get the so-called write-ups, but any kind of death is terrible," said Mr. Robinson, who traveled to Arkansas for Ms. Avery's funeral. "Someone out there loves everyone. I don't care if it's a few sentences, but if someone could say someone was a good person, that would help. That would be fair."

Evan A. Marshall, a producer for America's Most Wanted, said sometimes a decision to run an episode is made simply because there are few clues about an unsolved slaying or fugitive search.

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The show also examines cases to see whether featuring a crime would help. The show has no reason to tape a segment about a murder where the killer is behind bars.

“I wish there was an easy answer. I wish we had criteria I could ramble off,” said Mr. Marshall, who handles all Texas cases for the show. “But it’s kind of done on a case-by-case basis.”

Beauty plays a role.

“There is strong evidence that we associate beauty with goodness, ugliness with evil,” said Mr. Levin of Northeastern University. “It defies our stereotyped images and becomes of great public interest, therefore, when an attractive person commits a heinous crime.”

CNN’s Nancy Grace called Ms. Walker a “Texas beauty” on air, and in the next breath said she was “absolutely gorgeous.”

In other cases, people become fixated on the horror of a crime as a means of escape.

“When sexual sadism is involved, when the body count is large, the crime seems too hideous to be real,” Mr. Levin said. “It can therefore be entertaining.”

Ms. McBride of the Poynter Institute said it’s impossible to hold national news shows accountable for their coverage.

“I don’t know that you can hold national newsrooms accountable,” she said. “But the national media is not accountable to one community like you are in Dallas.”

The nation absorbed news of missing and pregnant Laci Peterson in California, who was later found dead. Her husband, Scott Peterson, was sent to death row for killing her. But the media reacted differently when pregnant LaToya Figueroa disappeared last summer from Philadelphia. Her family struggled for news coverage outside the area, Ms. McBride said. Ms. Figueroa, who was black, was found dead. Her boyfriend was arrested.

“The family really felt her story was ignored to concentrate on Natalie Holloway,” said Ms. McBride, referring to the case of a white American teenager who went missing in Aruba about the same time as Ms. Figueroa’s slaying and has still not been found.

The struggle of Ms. Figueroa’s family in Philadelphia is familiar to the relatives of those killed in another McKinney case – a quadruple homicide more than two years ago in a poorer part of town. Those slayings, which included two high school students, remain unsolved.

The families, including Nancy Self, mother of Matthew Self, 17, one of the victims, battled for America’s Most Wanted to tell their story. Kinks in the system, such as police making arrests and then dropping the charges, prevented the episode from airing. Two of the victims were Hispanic and two were white, including Mrs. Self’s son.

A segment about Ms. Walker's murder aired over the weekend.

The show about the quadruple homicide is scheduled to air Saturday, said Mr. Marshall, the show's producer. Because there are so few clues in the case, the segment will follow the victims' paths the night they died.

"It really hurt," Mrs. Self said about the show featuring Ms. Walker's death airing before her son's episode.

"Not that I don't want that family to have closure, but here we have been fighting two years to get this on."

*Staff writer Jason Trahan contributed to this report.*

## **The Victims**

### ***Elizabeth Ann Avery, 30***

Died: July 8 in the Red Bird area of Dallas

In life: She had two sons and was taking classes to become a physician's assistant. She hoped to become a registered nurse.

What happened? She was shot twice in the head execution-style after a gunman shot her boyfriend six times. He survived. Ms. Avery was frying fish in the kitchen at the time of her death. Her boyfriend and the accused killer, Trandy Crew, had been exchanging angry glares, or "mean mugging" each other, for several days in the apartment complex. Mr. Crew frequented the complex to visit his cousin, who lived a floor above Ms. Avery and her boyfriend.

Arrests: In custody are Mr. Crew, 26, and Dexter Jackson, 27. Mr. Crew and Mr. Jackson are cousins from Louisiana. Both are at the Lew Sterrett Justice Center, charged with capital murder and aggravated robbery. Mr. Jackson is being held without bond for a parole violation. Mr. Crew is being held on \$650,000 bail. The two suspects allegedly did not know Ms. Avery and had only a passing familiarity with her boyfriend.

### ***Hai Ping Duan, 38***

Died: Uncertain. Her body was found June 9.

In life: She was a massage therapist who had been denied asylum in the U.S. She lived in Dallas with her boyfriend, who is from China. He has not been seen since before her body was found.

What happened? Her decomposed body was found in the trunk of a car at a Plano Sam's Club.

Arrests: None

***Terea Lewis, 25***

Died: July 12

In life: She had four children. She had been previously charged with robbery and burglary.

What happened? She was shot several times and found in a creek in Garland.

Arrests: Brothers Jerremie King, 19, and Richard King, 17, both of Garland, and friend Brayden Russell, 17, of Dallas

***Sarah Anne Walker, 40***

Died: July 8 inside a model home in McKinney

In life: A real estate professional and recently divorced mother of two sons. Friends say she lived life to the “extreme.” She had expensive clothes and cars and went on luxurious vacations.

What happened? She was stabbed 27 times. A couple from Plano found her body in the kitchen.

Arrests: None

*SOURCE: Dallas Morning News research*

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