

Spring 1982

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### Recommended Citation

John Hagan, Victims before the Law: A Study of Victim Involvement in the Criminal Justice Process, 73 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 317 (1982)

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# CRIMINOLOGY

## VICTIMS BEFORE THE LAW: A STUDY OF VICTIM INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS

JOHN HAGAN\*

*If the criminal process is the taking over by the state of the vengeful instincts of the injured persons—buttressed by the recognition that the harm to the victim is also harm to the state—then it would seem, at first blush, that the victim at least has a right to be informed of, and where appropriate involved in, the processes that have led to whatever is the state settlement of the harm that has been done to him.*

NORVAL MORRIS  
THE FUTURE OF IMPRISONMENT

### I. INTRODUCTION

The epigraph to this article presents a postulate that is difficult to deny: victims have a right to be informed about, and involved in, the criminal justice process. Despite general agreement to this principle, it is important to note that almost nothing is known about its practical implications. That is, despite considerable journalistic speculation,<sup>1</sup> we know very little about how victims respond to their experiences in the criminal justice process. We do not know how attending court, coming into contact with agents of the system and learning the outcome of a case influence a victim's attitude toward the system or toward the person charged with committing the offense. In other words, we do not know how victims, as consumers of justice, respond to their experience of it.

In contrast, there are an increasing number of studies that focus on the influence of victims on decisions made by agents of the criminal

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., J. BARKAS, VICTIMS (1978); R. REIFF, THE INVISIBLE VICTIMS: THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM'S FORGOTTEN RESPONSIBILITY (1979).

justice system.<sup>2</sup> This imbalance reflects a more general situation in criminal justice research: while there is a growing number of empirical studies that focus on processes that lead to criminal justice decisions, there are few quantitative studies that consider the impact of these processes and decisions on those who participate in them. Malcolm Feely summarizes this situation well when he notes that while “[l]iberal legal theory directs attention to formal outcomes, to the conditions giving rise to the application of the criminal sanction of adjudication and sentence . . . this emphasis produces a distorted vision of the process and the sanctions it dispenses.”<sup>3</sup> The result is that we know less about criminal justice operations than we *could*, and, in the case of crime victims, we know less about these operations than we *should*.

## II. MEASURING VICTIM RESPONSES TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS

Understanding the reactions of victims to their experiences in the criminal justice system requires that we focus on this system as a *process*, and that we follow one of two general strategies in measuring their responses to this process: a *panel design* that measures responses of the same victims to the criminal justice process at more than one point in time, or a *cross-sectional* design that measures different victims' responses to different stages in the process and then relies on statistical techniques to sort out the kinds of persons, cases and stages involved. Either design will require measurement and analysis of various kinds of victim experiences in this process in order to provide very specific information about what it is in the criminal justice process that produces victims' reactions. Of the two approaches the first seems preferable, if only for the assurance it provides that victims considered at different stages are comparable.

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<sup>2</sup> For studies that focus on this influence at early stages in the system, see W. LAFAVE, *ARREST: THE DECISION TO TAKE A SUSPECT INTO CUSTODY* (1965); A. REISS, *THE POLICE AND THE PUBLIC* (1971); W. SANDERS, *DETECTIVE WORK: A STUDY OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS* (1977); Black & Reiss, *Police Control of Juveniles*, 35 AM. SOC. REV. 63 (1970); Gottfredson & Hindelang, *A Study of the Behavior of Law*, 44 AM. SOC. REV. 3 (1979); Williams, *The Effects of Victim Characteristics on the Disposition of Violent Crimes*, in *CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE VICTIM* (W. McDonald ed. 1976). For studies that focus on this influence at final disposition, see SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL, *RACE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF SENTENCE DISPARITY AMONG BLACK AND WHITE OFFENDERS IN SOUTHERN PRISONS* (1969); Allredge, *Why the South Leads the Nation in Murder and Manslaughter*, 2 Q. REV. 123 (1942); Garfinkel, *Research Note on Inter- and Intra-Racial Homicides*, 27 SOC. FORCES 370 (1949); Jones & Aronson, *Attribution of Fault to a Rape Victim as a Function of Respectability of the Victim*, 26 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 415 (1973); Judson, Pandell, Owens, McIntosh & Matschullat, *A Study of the California Penalty Jury in First-Degree Murder Cases*, 21 STAN. L. REV. 1297 (1969); Myers, *Offended Parties and Official Reactions: Victims and the Sentencing of Criminal Defendants*, 20 SOC. Q. 529 (1979); Wolfgang & Riedel, *Race, Judicial Discretion and the Death Penalty*, 407 ANNALS 119 (1973).

<sup>3</sup> M. FEELY, *THE PROCESS IS THE PUNISHMENT* (1978).

Nonetheless, application of either strategy to the problem at hand could theoretically produce the results required to answer important questions about victim responses to the criminal justice process.

Unfortunately, neither strategy has been very fully explored to date. What information is available derives largely from atypical situations in which special programs have been evaluated for their impacts on victims,<sup>4</sup> and from a frequently cited study by Knudten, *et al.*,<sup>5</sup> that considers crime victims' responses to the criminal justice system in Milwaukee. Although the latter study offers a comprehensive description of victims' experiences in, and responses to, this system, the nature of its design leaves a number of issues, including the types of processual issues raised above, unaddressed. Thus, victims were contacted at various stages of the court process; however, there is little attempt to determine how the stage in the process when victims were contacted is related to their reactions to the criminal justice system. Nor is there any attempt to determine what it might be about the victim's experience in the process that influences his or her response to it. In other words, there is little that is processual about this study, and the need for further research seems clear.

### III. THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The research reported here was conducted in a collection of suburban communities adjacent to the city of Toronto, Canada. This area, called the Region of Peel, is spread over more than 400 square miles and includes small pockets of rural territory, an international airport, commercial enterprises varying in size and character from small firms to large scale enterprises, and a variety of housing ranging from low density, upper socio-economic residential neighborhoods to high density, high rise apartment buildings, some of which include government supported low cost rental accommodations. Undoubtedly the most distinctive feature of this area is its rapid growth, with an annual rate of population increase of over eight percent from 1961 to 1976. The total population of the Region in June 1976 was more than a third of a million people. In short, the Region of Peel is a varied and rapidly growing suburban area.

As noted above, measuring the consequences for victims of their involvement in the criminal justice system requires a focus on this system as a process, and the measurement of the responses of victims to this

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Heinz & Kerstetter, *Victim Participation in Plea-Bargaining: A Field Experiment*, in PLEA-BARGAINING (W. McDonald & J. Cramer eds. 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Knudten, Meade, Miknudten & Doerner, *The Victim in the Administration of Criminal Justice: Problems and Perceptions*, in CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE VICTIM (W. McDonald ed. 1976).

process over time. To this end, 200 victims for whom an offender was charged were interviewed as soon as possible after a charge was placed, and as soon as possible again after the disposition of the case. Only victims for whom an offender was charged were selected to increase the possibility that the interviewed victims would have more than a passing contact with the criminal justice process. It was also necessary to decide what experiences of victims in the process, and what responses of victims to this process, should be considered.

This article focuses on two types of victims' responses: victims' responses to sentences imposed by the courts generally and victims' responses to the specific person charged. Victims' responses to sentences can be regarded as indicators of the legitimacy victims accord to the work of the court; our purpose is to analyze how the experience of victims in the criminal justice process may change this assessment. The second type of response can be taken as a measure of the way the court and its representatives have affected the attitudes of victims toward the accused; again, our purpose is to analyze how victim involvement in the criminal justice process may alter these attitudes. The two kinds of responses may be related. The more negative victims' attitudes are toward the accused, the more likely they may be to regard court dispositions as too lenient.<sup>6</sup> However, these two types of responses to the court process are analyzed separately here.

Some additional details of the data collection should be noted. We began in June 1976 by taking from police files all cases (as they entered these files) that satisfied the criteria of having an individual victim and a person charged for the offense; we eliminated from these only those cases involving juvenile victims, property crimes resulting in less than five dollars damage, or person crimes that the victim could not, or would not, recall. Using this as our sampling frame ( $n = 429$ ), we successfully contacted and interviewed 68.7% of our intended respondents ( $n = 305$ ). We failed to anticipate that our problems of retrieval for the second interview would be as much a matter of case delay as of victims refusing to be interviewed or disappearing before the second contact. We eventually lost fifty-one victims as a result of subsequent refusal or disappearance and fifty-five victims were lost to case delay (*i.e.*, the latter cases were not yet disposed of by December 1978, the date by which the target figure of 200 panel interviews was achieved). The median time elapsed between date of occurrence and disposition was five months. A

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, we have found elsewhere in our research that the relationship between the attribution of negative characteristics to the accused and the demand for sentence severity is substantial, and highly resistant to controls for other variables. *See* Hagan, *A Study of Victim Involvement in the Criminal Justice System* 243 (1980) (unpublished report to Solicitor General Canada).

comparison of our interview data with population data drawn from the same police files from September 1976 to January 1977 reveals no systematic sources of bias in terms of demographic or legal characteristics or case outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. MEASUREMENT AND METHODS

##### A. DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The analysis is organized around three dependent variables, the first measuring victims' reactions to sentences generally imposed by the court and the latter two measuring victims' attributions of characteristics to the accused. Thus, victims were asked before and after court, "Are sentences that are generally handed out here too harsh, about right, or too easy?" and to rank the accused on seven point semantic differential scales that ranged from "responsible" to "irresponsible" and "mature" to "immature." The interest was first in determining whether there were significant changes in these responses over the court process.

None of the victims in the interviews, either before or after sentencing, thought the sentences generally imposed by the court were too harsh. On the other hand, the descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 reveal that 63% thought sentences were too *easy* before court, and 50% continued to think this after sentencing. Since the responses of these victims before and after sentencing were obviously not independent events, it was not possible to calculate a simple chi-square test of significance of this change. Instead, we calculated a t-value (3.12) for the difference of means ( $\bar{X}_1 = 2.63$ ;  $\bar{X}_2 = 2.50$ ) before and after sentencing, indicating (after adjusting the degrees of freedom for lack of independence) that the change was statistically significant ( $p = .002$ ). Below we will attempt to explain this change in attitude toward sentences generally handed out by the courts.

The remaining two dependent variables for this analysis involve victims' attributions of characteristics to the accused. Before sentencing, 25% of the victims regarded the accused as immature and irresponsible. After sentencing, 36% of the victims found the accused immature, and 35% found the accused irresponsible. In other words, victims thought less of the accused after sentencing than before. These differences for the maturity ( $\bar{X}_1 = 4.49$ ;  $\bar{X}_2 = 4.76$ ;  $t = 2.39$ ) and responsibility ( $\bar{X}_1 = 4.45$ ;  $\bar{X}_2 = 4.64$ ;  $t = 1.68$ ) scales were significant at the .02 and .09 levels, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Below we attempt to determine those aspects of the court

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<sup>7</sup> See *id.* at 67-82.

<sup>8</sup> Because this research is exploratory and the sample is small, we will regard findings significant at the .10 level and below in this article.

TABLE 1

VARIABLES, THEIR VALUES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS  
(N=200)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:	VALUES	$\bar{X}$	s
Court Attendance	No=0 Yes=1	.57	.50
Knowledge of Disposition	No=0 Yes=1	.51	.50
Length of Contact with Police	Proportion of Hour	1.60 (96 Minutes)	1.65
Length of Contact with Judge	Proportion of Hour	.22 (13.20 Minutes)	.86
Length of Contact with Prosecutor	Proportion of Hour	.19 (11.40 Minutes)	.62
Length of Contact with Defense Lawyer	Proportion of Hour	.16 (9.60 Minutes)	.87
Length of Contact with Probation Officer	Proportion of Hour	.01 (.6 Minutes)	.09
Disposition	Charge Withdrawn, Dismissed or Acquitted at Trial=0 Absolute Discharge=1 Peace Bond or Fine=2 Probation=3 Prison=4	1.88	1.51
Return of Property to the Victim	Property Not Returned=0 Property Returned=1	.22	.41
Victim-Accused Relationship	Intimacy Scale	7.55	4.84
Seriousness of Victimization	Sellin-Wolfgang Scale	3.61	2.81
DEPENDENT VARIABLES:			
Response to Sentencing Generally	Too Harsh=1 About Right=2 Too Easy=3	T1=2.63 T2=2.50	T1=.52 T2=.56
Attribution of Responsibility	Semantic Differential 1=responsible 7=irresponsible	T1=4.45 T2=4.64	T1=1.49 T2=1.49
Attribution of Maturity	Semantic Differential 1=mature 7=immature	T1=4.49 T2=4.76	T1=1.45 T2=1.44

process that lead victims to increase the attribution of negative characteristics to the accused.

#### B. INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Two of the most important ways in which victims have contact with, and involvement in, the criminal justice process are through attending court when the accused appears and by obtaining knowledge of the disposition of the case. The means for these variables, presented in Table 1, indicate that slightly more than half of the victims attend court (57%) and know the disposition of the case (51%). Further cross-classification of these variables reveal that, as we might expect, most victims who attend court know the outcome of the case (76.3%) and most victims who do not attend court do not know the outcome of the case (83.7%). Still, there are enough cases in each of the cells created by this cross-classification (72, 14, 27 and 87 cases, *see* Table 4) to allow consideration of each of the possibilities presented for change in victim attitudes. We will take advantage of this situation in analyses presented in this article.

The next five variables presented in Table 1 measure victim contact with the criminal justice system, or more correctly, with its representatives. These measures consider the length of time victims reported they were in contact with police, judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers and probation officers, in and out of court. Most notable of the information provided is that while the average victim spends more than an hour and a half with the police, the mean time spent with judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers is a little over 13, 11 and 9 minutes, respectively, and almost no time is spent with probation officers ( $\bar{X} = .6$  minutes). In other words, beyond the police, contact with representatives of the system is slight. However, there is enough variation in these measures to allow analysis, and we will demonstrate below that even brief contacts can produce significant consequences.

If we are to argue successfully that contact and involvement of victims with the criminal justice system have independent effects on the attitudes and attributions of victims, we also need to control other variables that may alter these sentiments. The next four variables presented in Table 1 are included for this purpose. The first of these variables is the disposition of the case, coded in order of severity from acquittal, dismissal and withdrawal of charges (0) to imprisonment (4). The second variable measures whether property was returned to the victim (no = 0; yes = 1).

The next two variables deal with two aspects of the nature of the offense. One measures the intimacy of the victim-accused relationship.



The measure of this relationship is based on ordinally ranked responses to five interview questions referenced to the nature of this relationship *before* the victimization experience. These questions asked: How well did you know the offender? How frequently did you talk to the offender? Did you know the offender's name? Would you say that you generally liked the offender before this incident? Did you feel that the offender generally liked you before this incident? Responses to these items were combined into an additive measure of intimacy used in the analysis.

The second aspect of the offense considered is the seriousness of the victimization. This variable measures the harm done to the victim as indicated by the Sellin-Wolfgang (1964) seriousness scale. Using a magnitude estimation procedure, this scale is designed to take into account the extent and nature of bodily injury, weapon use, intimidation, forcible sexual intercourse and financial loss. These elements of the victimizations are scored for seriousness, resulting in seriousness scores that potentially range from zero to 26. Victimization events in this sample are skewed toward lower seriousness scores ( $\bar{X} = 3.61$ ). These scores are incorporated in their raw form into our analyses.

### C. METHOD

The most intuitively appealing means of analyzing the type of attitude change considered in this article is to create a change or gain score, based on the simple difference between measures of the attitude in question at time 1 and time 2, and correlate that difference with one or more other variables assumed to have caused the attitude change. However, the best prediction of an attitude at time 2 is likely to be its prior measurement at time 1, and as Bohrnstedt<sup>9</sup> demonstrates, this effect is not *totally* removed by the calculation of change or gain scores. Alternatively, this effect can be taken into account fully by regressing the attitude measured at time 2 on its measurement at time 1, along with the other independent variables of interest. This is the strategy employed in this article.

### V. THE ANALYSIS

Table 2 presents the results of the above regression analysis using the time 2 measure of victims' attitudes toward sentencing as the dependent variable and the first eleven variables in Table 1 and the time 1 measure of attitude toward sentencing as the independent variables. Two measures of victim contact and involvement yield significant, al-

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<sup>9</sup> See Bohrnstedt, *Observations of the Measurement of Change*, in *SOCIOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY* 113 (E. Borgatta ed. 1969).

beit opposite, effects: attendance in court makes the victim less likely to assess sentencing as too easy ( $B = -.17$ ;  $p < .05$ ), while knowledge of disposition increases the assessment that sentences in general are too easy ( $B = .15$ ;  $p < .10$ ). There is also evidence in Table 2 that the influence of court attendance on victims' responses to sentencing is suppressed by some other variable. That is, the Beta coefficient is more than double the correlation coefficient. Given the earlier observation in this article that court attendance and knowledge of disposition are strongly related, and that the effect of knowledge of disposition on the response to sentencing is opposite in sign to court attendance, there is reason to suspect that knowledge of disposition is acting as the suppressor variable. This expectation is examined by controlling the step-wise introduction of independent variables into the regression analysis reported in Table 3.<sup>10</sup> In this table, the effect of the time 1 measure is first

**TABLE 2**  
CORRELATION AND REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR  
VICTIM RESPONSES TO SENTENCING GENERALLY  
(N=200)

	r	Beta	F-Level
Time 1 Measure	.45	.45	45.70***
Court Attendance	-.05	-.17	4.33**
Knowledge of Disposition	.10	.15	3.37*
Contact with Police	.06	.04	.30
Contact with Judge	.03	-.01	.04
Contact with Prosecutor	.06	.01	.03
Contact with Defense Lawyer	-.04	.06	.81
Contact with Probation Officer	-.04	-.08	1.39
Disposition	.11	.09	1.83
Return of Property	.08	-.01	.01
Victim-Accused Relationship	.03	.03	.14
Seriousness of Victimization	.06	.01	.02

$$R^2 = .24$$

$$\text{Intercept} = 1.13$$

- \* Significant at .10
- \*\* Significant at .05
- \*\*\* Significant at .01

<sup>10</sup> Stepping the independent variables into the equation in a variety of ways yields the

removed, court attendance is stepped in second, knowledge of disposition third, and then the remaining variables as selected by the SPSS<sup>11</sup> step-wise procedure. Results presented in Table 3 reveal that almost all of the suppression of the effect of court attendance is a result of knowledge of disposition (*i.e.*, between steps two and three in Table 3 the effect of court attendance more than doubles, and it increases only slightly thereafter).

**TABLE 3**  
**DECOMPOSITION OF THE EFFECT OF TRIAL ATTENDANCE**  
**ON VICTIM RESPONSES TO SENTENCING**  
**GENERALLY**  
**(N=200)\***

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	STEPS											
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Time 1 Measure	.45	.45	.44	.44	.44	.45	.45	.45	.45	.45	.45	.45
Court Attendance		-.06	-.15	-.15	-.15	-.16	-.16	-.17	-.17	-.17	-.17	-.17
Knowledge of Disposition			.15	.15	.15	.16	.16	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
Disposition				.08	.08	.09	.09	.09	.09	.09	.09	.09
Contact with Probation Officer					-.08	-.08	-.07	-.08	-.07	-.07	-.08	-.07
Contact with Defense Lawyer						.06	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06
Contact with Police							.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04
Victim-Accused Relationship								.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Contact with Prosecutor									.01	.01	.01	.01
Contact with Judge										-.01	-.01	-.01
Seriousness of Victimization											.01	.01
Return of Property												-.01

\* The measures reported in this table are standardized regression coefficients (Betas).

To examine further the nature of the suppression effect, we generated the distributions of changes in victim responses to sentencing under

same substantive conclusions. The ordering used in Table 3 was adopted for heuristic purposes.

<sup>11</sup> N. NIE, *et al.*, STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (2d ed. 1975).

each of the four conditions that result from the cross-classification of knowledge of outcome and court attendance. The results are presented in Table 4. They reveal that the greatest reduction in the demand for severity in sentencing (37.0%) follows from court attendance combined with an ignorance of the case outcome. In contrast, the smallest reduction in such demands (7.1%) follows from knowing the case outcomes and not attending court. The remaining possibilities, involving no exposure (don't know outcome and didn't go to court) and full exposure (know outcome and went to court), produce roughly the same results: about a fifth of the victims (20.8% and 21.8% respectively) moderate their demands for severity. Overall, the implication is that attending court helped to reconcile victims to the types of sentences generally imposed, while knowledge of specific case outcomes did not. Thus, it should not be surprising to find that the criminal justice system makes little effort to inform victims of case outcomes. However, insofar as victims have a right to this knowledge, the policy implication of our finding is that victims might well be encouraged to attend court as well. In our sample more than a fifth of all victims who do both reduce their demands for severe sentences.

TABLE 4

CHANGES IN VICTIM RESPONSES TO SENTENCING  
GENERALLY, UNDER FOUR CONDITIONS OF  
KNOWLEDGE OF OUTCOME AND  
COURT ATTENDANCE

	Don't Know Outcome and Didn't go to Court (percent)	Don't Know Outcome and Went to Court (percent)	Know Outcome and Didn't go to Court (percent)	Know Outcome and Went to Court (percent)
Demand for Severity Reduced	20.8	37.0	7.1	21.8
No Change	68.1	55.6	85.7	69.0
Demand for Severity Increased	11.1	7.4	7.1	9.2
TOTAL (percent)	100.0 (72)	100.0 (27)	99.9 (14)	100.0 (87)

Victims' changing attributions of characteristics to the accused are considered next. As indicated above, victims are more negative in their attributions of characteristics to the accused after sentencing than before. The regression analyses presented in Table 5 attempt to explain why.

**TABLE 5**  
CORRELATION AND REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR  
VICTIM ATTRIBUTIONS

	RESPONSIBLE-IRRESPONSIBLE (T2)			MATURE-IMMATURE (T2)		
	r	Beta	F	r	Beta	F
Time 1 Measure	.42	.45	42.82***	.36	.32	21.32***
Court Attendance	.01	-.12	2.05	.06	-.05	.42
Knowledge of Disposition	.05	.06	.49	.06	-.02	.04
Contact with Police	.12	.06	.92	.13	.14*	3.92**
Contact with Judge	.16	.11	2.60	.13	.08	1.21
Contact with Prosecutor	.10	.10	2.33	.16	.14*	3.92**
Contact with Defense Lawyer	.06	.15*	4.95**	.15	.14*	4.21**
Contact with Probation Officer	.03	.01	.01	.07	.04	.42
Disposition	-.01	.00	.00	-.02	.06	.77
Return of Property	-.01	.01	.01	-.06	-.06	.69
Victim-Accused Relationship	.14	.01	.03	.24	.11	2.35
Seriousness of Victimization	.09	.08	1.37	.04	.03	.15
	R <sup>2</sup> = .25			R <sup>2</sup> = .22		
	Intercept = 2.32			Intercept = 2.75		

\* Significant at .10 level

\*\* Significant at .05 level

\*\*\* Significant at .01 level

The most consistent finding in Table 5 is that contact between the victim and the defense counsel is associated with an increased tendency to see the accused as irresponsible ( $B = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and immature ( $B = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Beyond this, there is evidence that contact with the prosecutor and the police increases the victim's tendency to see the accused as immature. There is some irony in the finding that the defense counsel has the most consistent impact on these attributions. It may be that in the process of attempting to prove the client's innocence the defense counsel aggravates tensions between victims and accused.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

We begin this article with the premise that victims should be informed about, and involved in, the criminal justice process. At the same

time, we note that we know very little about victims' experiences in the criminal justice process. This research seeks to improve this situation through the use of data drawn from interviews with 200 victims before and after sentencing of the offender. Several findings stand out from the analyses. First, court attendance in itself seems to improve victims' evaluations of sentencing decisions. Second, the amelioration of victims' attitudes toward sentencing is diminished by learning the outcomes of these cases. Third, we discovered that contacts of victims with defense counsel seem to increase victims' attributions of both irresponsibility and immaturity to the accused. Victims' contacts with police and prosecutors also seem to aggravate attributions of immaturity.

Notwithstanding the negative consequences of victims' learning the outcomes of their cases, and the consequences of coming into contact with defense counsel and other agents of the system, we take these data as providing some support for the involvement of victims in the criminal justice process. Our reasoning is that victims have a *right* to know the outcomes of their cases and that, when it is to their advantage to do so, defense counsel and others will make contact and demand victim involvement in the process anyway. Against this, we demonstrate that victims who have almost *no* exposure to the process (*i.e.*, do not attend court or know the case outcome) respond very similarly to those who have *full* exposure to this process (*i.e.*, attend court and know the case outcome), at least in terms of changes in their reactions to the types of sentences generally imposed by the courts. This reaction is in approximately a fifth of the victims who are informed and involves reducing their demands for more severe sentencing. Our point is that the full exposure of victims to the criminal justice process involves fewer risks than agents of the system may have misguidedly assumed. In sum, not only do victims have a right to be informed about, and involved in, the criminal justice process, but the consequences of such a policy seem in some important ways to be benign.

