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**MEDIA AND THE CREATION OF MYTH: THE ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA IN  
THE POPULARIZATION OF STRANGER-DANGER IN CHILD ABDUCTION**

by

**Hollis F. Johnson**

B. A., Mankato State College (University of Southern Minnesota), 1967

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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in the School

of

Criminology

• Hollis F. Johnson 1988

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## ABSTRACT

Since 1983, the missing children campaign has become a "hot" issue for the media, the control culture, legislators and the public in North America. The subject of child abduction has grown from a non-issue into a multi-million dollar welfare issue. The phenomenon of child abduction has however been clouded by inconclusive statistics. Preliminary evidence revealing the discrepancy between the *actual* level of danger as indicated by these statistics, and the degree of danger suggested by the disproportionate official/public response to child abduction, forces social scientists to reach beyond traditional crime control explanations of the problem. Underlying these new explanations is an appreciation of how the public forms reactions and the significance of media representations of crime. Studies of crime waves and their attendant moral panics suggest that the media are a primary influence in shaping public perceptions and reactions to apparent increases in criminality. In large measure, the media act to legitimize forces of law and order, and to build consent for the extension of coercive state regulation and the de-legitimization of marginal social groups defined as responsible for the crime wave.

This study examines the role of the Canadian print media in the manufacture and perpetuation of a crime wave of child abduction, and the implications of the concomitant moral panic for official reactions to child abduction. Through a content analysis of 554 news items taken from three major metro Toronto newspapers (1979-1986), the study documents the media development of a "stranger-danger" perspective of child abduction. This perspective contributes directly to the moral panic over abduction, the reinforcement of law and order responses to abduction, and the under-representation of child abduction by parents. These findings are considered in terms of their implications for public attitudes toward child safety and child abuse, and policy responses to child abduction.

## DEDICATION

*For Kate*

For she is wise, if I can judge of her,  
And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true;  
And true she is, as she hath prov'd herself;  
And therefore, like herself, wise, fair, and true,  
Shall she be placed in my constant soul.

The Merchant of Venice, II. vi

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## CHAPTER I

### SOCIAL RESPONSE TO MISSING CHILDREN:

#### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CREATION OF A MORAL PANIC

*From this short story easy we discern  
What conduct all young people ought to learn.  
But, above all, the growing ladies fair,  
W'hose orient rosy Blooms begin t'appear:  
Who, Beauties in the fragrant spring of age!  
With pretty airs young hearts are apt to engage.  
Ill do they listen to all sorts of tongues,  
Since some enchant and lure like Syrens songs.  
No wonder therefore 'tis if overpower'd  
So many of them has the Wolfe devoured.  
The Wolfe, I say, for Wolves too sure there are  
Of every sort, and every character.  
Some of them mild and gentle-humour'd be  
Of noise and gall, and rancour wholly free;  
Who tame, familiar, full of complaisance;  
Ogle and leer, languish, cajole and glance;  
With luring tongues, and language wonderful sweet,  
Follow young ladies as they walk the street,  
Ev'n to their very houses and bedside,  
And thought their true designs they artful hide,  
Yet ah! these simpering Wolves, who does not see  
Most dang'rous of all Wolves in fact to be?"*

Had Little Red Riding Hood read the moral to her own story, it is probable that she never would have entered the woods at all, and yet remained in peril. As Claude Perrault cautioned, the forest, and thus the wolves, comprise society itself. No one can avoid them, but through the learning of a few simple rules, one may endure them unscathed. The difficulty which Perrault did not foresee, however, is that as the forest expands and increases in complexity, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognize the wolves and thus to prescribe

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Perrault, "The Moral" in "The Little red Riding-Hood, Tale I" in Histories or Tales of Past Times (J. Pote and R. Montague: London, 1729; reprinted, Garland Publishing Inc.) London, 1977).

rules by which to thwart their evil ways.

Indeed, in reaching its modern forms, the wolf has assumed a variety of roles over time and across different social groups. For Perrault, it was a male person, either known or unknown to its almost always girl-child prey (Perrault, 1729). The contemporary wolf,<sup>2</sup> familiar to the early 1970's, materialized within the family in the form of the abusive parent (Eliasoph, 1986:9). In this context the wolf manifested a new and more menacing side, for now it had left the forest and appeared in the previously sacred and private realm of the family. As a member of the one social institution believed (at that epoch) to be free of the predations of the larger world, the wolf found a safe haven for its deviance. A general social distaste for violating the so-called "sanctity of the family" meant that much, if not all, of the wolf's work could remain largely undisturbed, if not entirely undetected (Ibid.:27; see also: Lasch, 1977).

This haven came under increasing assault in the late 1970's with a sharp increase in the rate of divorce (Ambert, 1980; McKie, Prentice and Reed, 1983:61-62). At the same time, a new dimension of "familial deviance" materialized. Some estranged parents, having been denied custody of their progeny became child abductors (Abrahms, 1983; Agopian, 1981; Gelles, 1980; Lawrence and Taylor-Young, 1983). Although the combination of these factors should have been sufficient to disintegrate the insulating walls of the family, it appears to have had the opposite effect. Despite the reality of *parents* as abductors, the media — and, in some cases, the family itself — misrepresented the problem as one of the *stranger* as abductor (Eliasoph, 1986). This portrayal of stranger-danger was functional to familial ideology: to view the abductor as a threat outside the family strengthened the ethos of the protective role of the nuclear family. It was equally effective in suggesting that the wolves had

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<sup>2</sup>This difficulty in preventing harm to children has, however, been addressed by numerous booklets, board games and programmes. For the clearest link between Perrault's folk-tale and the abduction-prevention enterprise, see Janis Buschman and Debbie Huntley, Strangers Don't Look Like the Big Bad Wolf, (The Children Safety Series, Book 5), Edmonds WA. The Charles Franklin Press, (n.d.).

returned to the forest, thus facilitating the rise of a "cottage industry" of agencies directed to detect and thwart their predations. Whether, in fact, the wolf had returned to the forest is at best uncertain. A more likely scenario suggests that those defining the problem of child abduction and exploitation simply shifted their focus from family deviance to the deviance implicit in the larger society.

Yet the magnitude of this shift suggests it was anything but simple. The question necessarily arises as to how the focus was altered, why, and *in whose interests*. In the United States, this shift appears to have been preceded (and, possibly promoted) through a series of particularly vivid child abduction/murders (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice, 1984; U.S. Attorney General's Advisory Board on Missing Children, 1986). The first of these occurred in May of 1979 and involved the disappearance of six-year old Etan Patz (The New York Times, 27 May 1979; The New York Post, 29 May 1979). Having literally vanished off the streets of New York on his way to school, Etan Patz became famous throughout the U.S. as synonymous with the notion of child abduction as perpetrated by strangers. Within two months of the Patz case, the first of what would become known as the "Atlanta Child Murders" was discovered. These latter incidents reinforced the "dangerous stranger" image, a perspective which was endorsed two years later with the arrest of Wayne P. Williams as the demented perpetrator of the Atlanta murders (Taylor, 1983; The New York Times, 3 January 1981; 7 January 1982; U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice, 1984).

These cases paved the way for the Media spectacular created over the tragic disappearance of Adam Walsh from a shopping mall in Hollywood, Florida in July of 1981. The search for Adam was the most extensive in Florida's history, and the most widely publicized case of its kind in the United States to date. When the child's death was confirmed two weeks after his disappearance, the fear of child abductors as sinister strangers attained panic proportions (Griego and Kilzer, 1985). The ascendancy of this phenomenon to

a panic state was greatly encouraged by the work of John Walsh, subsequent to the abduction and murder of his son Adam. Embarking on a campaign of moral entrepreneurship<sup>3</sup>, Walsh promoted a view of every child as unsafe in a world of "sick and sadistic molesters and killers" (Griego and Kilzer, 1985; U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Human Resources, 1984; U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Human Resources, 1984). The media absorbed the often fantastic pronouncements of Walsh and his cohorts [for example, Griego and Kilzer, 1985; Kee MacFarlane (see below); U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Human Resources, 1984; Wadsley, 1984; and others] with a vengeance; both print and electronic media inundated the public with impressions of a society gone more than slightly mad, preying upon its children and promoting its own suicide by "eating its young" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2 August 1986; Eliasoph, 1986; Hoffman, 1986; Schneider, 1987; Spitzer, 1986; The New York Times, 9 June 1985, 18 August 1985). Emphasizing a perception of the "abductor as stranger", virtually all missing children — including those who might also have qualified as runaways or who were, in fact, the object of parental abductions — were

presumed to be [victims] of predatory cruelty usually committed by pedophiles, pornographers, black market baby sellers or childless psychotics bidding desperately for parenthood (Gelman *et al.*, 1984).

Walsh was not the only source of sensationalized stories; equally compelling statements came from child advocacy and interest groups. Kee MacFarlane was one of the more widely publicized of the latter. As director of the Child Abuse Diagnostic and Treatment Center in Los Angeles, MacFarlane advanced a theory that child abduction was a "conspiracy, an

---

<sup>3</sup>Moral entrepreneurs are actors who attempt to persuade others to adhere to a particular value system. These individuals begin moral crusades to transform the public's attitudes towards specific issues, change legislation and/or attempt to "deviantize" others. Their success in generating a state of moral panic appears to depend upon several factors (see: Becker, 1983). First among these factors is the ability of the entrepreneurs to mobilize moral power in their favour, an element often integrally related to the second factor, namely, the entrepreneur's success in promoting public awareness of the potential threat posed by the issue for which they crusade. Whether such "promotion" achieves fruition is dependent in large measure upon the type, quality and quantity of resistance posed by segments of the population against the entrepreneur's campaign. This opposition which can often be countered by the final factor: the ability of the entrepreneurs to suggest a clear and workable solution for the target situation (see: Ben-Yehuda, 1986:496).

organized operation of child predators designed to prevent detection" (The New York Times, 18 September 1984). In her investigation of abduction allegations made against a Manhattan Beach, California daycare center, MacFarlane reported having tapped a "fly-in" pornography ring. This ring was purported to involve a national network of daycare centres which would, on a daily basis, fly children from a variety of locations to a common centre where they would take part in pornographic photography sessions. Her "proof" of this assertion apparently rested upon the discovery that children from centres in widely disparate geographical regions could recite common nursery rhymes (The New York Times, 18 September 1984).

Included in the "conspiracy theory" were organized pedophilic groups dedicated to "child molester's lib". These groups, primarily by virtue of their rather unconventional sexual appetites for young children, were held by many to be responsible for the disappearance of literally thousands of apparently abducted children (Leo, 1983). The case of Etan Patz is again illustrative. Approximately four years after his initial disappearance in 1979, the New York police claimed that a picture of Etan had appeared in a calendar published by the "North American Man/Boy Love Association" (NAMBLA), a group that exists to promote the right of men and boys under legal age to engage in consensual sex. It was later discovered that the calendar had been issued 11 years prior to the boy's disappearance, and was thus not even remotely connected to that specific case. Nevertheless, NAMBLA became a prime media suspect in several as-yet unsolved child abductions. The New York Post, for example, initiated its condemnation of the Association with articles entitled "Etan Clue: Who's Who of kid-sex freaks" (24 December 1982) and, later, "Man/Boy network preys on kids" (29 December 1983). The fear and loathing of child-sex freaks was picked up by Time magazine, which issued an extensive article entitled "Furor over Pedophilia" (Leo, 1983), and New York and New England television stations produced documentaries and news stories linking Etan Patz and NAMBLA (Eliasoph, 1986).



The "furor over pedophilia" was not confined to the United States. With the detection in British Columbia of a serial child molester/murderer, the American paranoia found its way north. The "Olsen Case" was publicized as being exceptionally reprehensible, based upon the macabre nature of the crimes themselves and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's unsavoury "cash for corpses" investigation practices (Taylor, 1983; Wilson, 1987). The Olsen case, almost single-handedly, brought Canadian parents into a nightmare they had previously believed to be quintessentially American (Taylor, 1983; 1987).

### I. Responding to the Myth:

#### Public and Private Reactions to Media Portrayals of Missing Children

The mounting fear of child abduction has spawned a massive growth industry of products and practices designed to safeguard children against "stranger-danger". These products span a wide range of preventive alternatives, including homing mechanisms such as miniature transmitters and receivers, identification devices which affix to the child's wrist and require special instruments for removal, and kits for recording a child's fingerprints. Educational materials such as books, videocassettes and games attempted to relate to the potential victims on their own level. The very lucrative market which produces such products, however well meaning and intentioned, is necessarily premised upon on a foundation of fear. The popularization of "stranger-dangers" has reinforced protective parental concerns which were, in most cases, always already there, driving parents to inordinate effort and expense to protect their offspring from an as yet unproven threat. The premise of stranger-danger is additionally

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\*The case of Clifford Robert Olsen, who was arrested and subsequently convicted of the murders of eleven children over the period spanning August 1981 and January 1982, was accorded an additional measure of horror when the media revealed that the basis of the investigation leading to Olsen's conviction was a series of cash inducements (totalling \$90,000.00) made to Olsen by the federal Solicitor-General and Attorney-General of British Columbia for information concerning the location of bodies and similar evidence. Not only did this case constitute one of the most expansive serial murders in Canadian history, it also constituted a sort of fall from grace for the Canadian public, which had previously held itself above the rampant criminality and authoritarian populist justice characterizing their southern neighbors (Taylor, 1983:4)

tainted by a plethora of fraudulent and purely exploitative businesses which spring upon the scene as abruptly as they subsequently disappear (Bergman, 1986; Kantrowitz and Leslie, 1986).

The response in the public sector was easily as pronounced and quixotic as its private counterparts. Grassroots "childfind" and child advocacy groups sprang up everywhere, while governments held hearings and congresses in a desperate attempt to gauge the extent of the fear and to marshal an appropriate response. Manufacturers of children's toys and safety devices took advantage of the panic as creating a new marketplace, as did many others. Book sales on how to "pervert proof" children flourished (The Globe and Mail, 30 January 1985; Toronto Star, 27 September 1984; 8 September, 1986), as did videotapes on the same theme. One of the latter, entitled "Strong Kids, Safe Kids: A Family Guide", aimed at teaching children to "say no" to strangers, quickly became a best seller (The Globe and Mail, 30 January 1985). Its popularity may be largely the result of its "included bonus" — 15 blank minutes at the end of each cassette for parents to make a video reproduction of their child, to be used in the event of abduction.

The fear of having a child abducted has thus driven millions of parents to exaggerated measures to ensure the safety of their children. Increasing numbers of parents have, for example, lined up in schools and shopping malls across North America to have their children videotaped and fingerprinted<sup>4</sup>. Upon request from child-find organizations, alarmed parents are making up child identification kits and placing them in bank deposit vaults for safekeeping (The Chronicle Herald, 11 May 1984). Some parents have placed additional faith in

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<sup>4</sup>The wholesale fingerprinting of children in the wake of parental fears of having a child abducted has civil libertarians crying foul. These critics maintain that if mass fingerprinting is to be done, it must be closely monitored and follow basic guidelines. Fingerprinting must, for example, be totally voluntary with the prints obtained remaining the sole property of the parents rather than the police. Furthermore, where police or school facilities are to be used, it must be made abundantly clear to both parents and children that there is no pressure to engage in the practice; channels of exemption must always remain clear and open (The New York Times, 26 January 1983; The New York Times, 22 February 1983; The New York Times, 6 March 1983; The New York Times, 9 October 1983).

companies such as Photo Alert Inc. which, for a fee, will photograph and fingerprint children for the purposes of compiling a record of the child which could be distributed to the police and media in the event of an abduction (Toronto Star, 8 September 1986). It is interesting to note that several of these companies have since folded, and in the process of going under, have lost or misplaced confidential data (The Globe and Mail, 6 February 1986).

Local service clubs, community organizations, Block Parents, schools, and other groups have been active in a wide array of prevention programs for children. Schools across North America have responded to the abduction fear with education and prevention programs designed to mitigate the likelihood of a child being carried off. As an additional measure, many schools have adopted coordinated emergency response or "safe arrival" programs involving community volunteers, Block Parents, and local law enforcement officials. These programs were designed to confirm that children leaving for school have actually arrived at their intended destination, and to enable a prompt mobilization of local authorities should a child not arrive at his or her school. In many school districts these programs were made mandatory.

As fear over the plight of missing children intensified, so too did the number of commodities to thwart child abduction. Dozens of books, games, flashcards, colouring books, and videocassettes featuring "stranger-danger" themes (as discussed above) appeared in Retail Stores. An especially popular preventative mechanism has been found in board games, which vary widely and are represented by such titles as "Don't Talk to Strangers", "Safely Home", "Safe City USA", "You Can Say No" and "Careful Kids". Talking dolls reciting child safety information were equally popular. Even Saturday-morning cartoon developed the abduction-prevention motif. One spot featured by the National Crime Prevention Council depicted a little girl named Jenny being lured to a car by a stranger while good-guy cartoon character McGruff warned that, "if she gets into that car, you may be looking at her for the last time" (Kantrowitz and Leslie, 1986).

The burgeoning missing children industry also boasted a growing number of product lines ranging from fingerprint kits to micro identification discs that bonded tiny information badges onto the child's tooth. "Child-minding" kits were also popular, especially one which electronically monitored a child's movement and which would emit a warbling siren should he/she stray from a prescribed territory (Karlen, Greenberg, Gonzales, and Williams, 1984). These items varied in price from a few dollars, for a single child's identification kit, to several thousands of dollars for sophisticated electronic child-tracking devices, similar to those used to monitor animals in the wild. Insurance companies recognized the sales potential of this profitable new field, and began to offer policies against the prohibitive cost of trying to recover a lost child (Spitzer, 1986). Private investigators were also active, and as a large proportion of investigators (expanded or) restricted their agencies to cases of or related to missing children (Huey, 1979; Toronto Sun, 5 June 1987).

Subsequent to the initial airing of *Adam*<sup>6</sup>, child-find groups sprung up across North America (between 200 to 300 in the United States alone), offering to assist parents and police in their searches for missing children (The New York Times, 24 March 1983). As the number of these agencies expanded, so did their interactions and mutual support. In March 1986, more than 700 members of various child-find groups and law enforcement officials gathered for the first National Conference in Chicago on Missing and Exploited Children. A month later, a similarly well-attended National Forum on Missing Children was held in Toronto, with similar conferences scheduled for Chicago in 1987.

Beyond the concrete responses cited above, the elevation of the phenomenon of missing children to a single theme — that of violent/pedophilic stranger-abductions — has produced some intriguing rippling effects. Suddenly, all who might consider abducting a child are ascribed less than positive characters and motivations — estranged parents who kidnap their

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<sup>6</sup>This was a made for television movie about the abduction and subsequent murder of Adam Walsh. The movie was televised a total of three times to over 50 million viewers (Schneider, 1987). A sequel — *Adam: His song continues* — was aired in October 1986.

own children subsequent to a denial of legal custody present an apposite illustration. Where these individuals might once have been granted the perhaps generous intentions of parents acting out of affection and need for involvement in their children's lives, or a genuine doubt of the parental abilities of their ex-spouse, they have been recast as selfish, pathological monsters. According to the "experts" on such abductions, the noncustodial, abducting parent fits into the following profile:

The kind of parent who will abduct his or her own child [is] an excessive drinker or drug abuser who doesn't have a steady job and abuses the children...25 to 50 percent of all children snatched by an estranged parent are either physically or sexually abused (Wadsley, 1984:6).

In a similar vein, children who go missing by their own volition, running away from pathological homes and families, have also been caught up in the drive to criminalize. In March of 1986, the United States federal Attorney General's Advisory Board on Missing Children released its report "America's Missing and Exploited Children: Their Safety and Their Future" (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1986). The Report called for alterations in state and federal laws regulating runaways which would allow authorities to "take into custody and safely control runaway and homeless children" who are seen to be "at risk" (The New York Times, 8 March 1986:8). Harking back to earlier eras of child savers and *parens patriae*, the Board rejected the notion that parents and legal guardians should not interfere with a child's decision to leave home "in search of individual identity" (Ibid.). The view was promoted that, owing to the social glorification of "deviant pastimes" and "lurid, everyday depictions of perversion in magazines, rock music lyrics, videos and movies", children must be protected from their inability to recognize the dangers around them (The New York Times, 8 March 1986:6; U.S. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1986). This focus upon "stranger danger" — of children being unreasonably and irresistibly drawn into the dangers of street life — not only denied the probability that most runaways are fleeing "non-stranger dangers" in the home (Hartman, Burgess and McCormack, 1987), but at the same time actively

advanced the often-erroneous notion of the home as a haven from greater, unknown social ills (Lasch, 1977). It also, albeit subtly, turned the responsibility for social and familial ills upon the child, thereby allowing officials to direct their corrective efforts toward the least powerful and potentially resistant actors in addressing situations which are usually well beyond their control (The New York Times, 29 March 1986).

The "stranger danger/stranger as abductor" theme thus created a functional umbrella of deviance under which could be grouped a variety of previously intractable behaviors. By defining parents who abduct as dangerous, intimate strangers, the right to deal with these individuals shifted from the family and civil court realm to the criminal courts. At the same time, this shift removed the onus of guilt in such cases from the family as a social institution to certain dysfunctional individuals within the family. By thus particularizing the problem, control agencies were afforded a focus for their preventive and reactive efforts. In the context of runaways, scrutiny was deflected from the family in a more obvious fashion by criminalizing the unconventional behaviours of the children. Again, the problem was not located in the family unit as such, but certain elements within it. Taken from this perspective, habitual runaways were to be viewed as the undesirable products of non-traditional families, against whom traditional society must be protected. Simply stated, they came to be seen as rotten apples in an otherwise healthy crop.

Clearly, such redefinitions had highly functional consequences for social control agencies. Now they were able to pinpoint the source of the problem or at least, if not the source, a key pressure-point by means of which the source might be flushed out. If most missing children were abducted due to dire circumstances, then all the control mechanisms normally levied against such circumstances could be mobilized against child abductors. For law and order agencies the advantage was clear: with the locus of the problem identified, they were given a new power and authority to act. For parents of abducted children and child advocate groups, their cause was awarded greater recognition and thus greater leverage in redirecting

political and economic energies in their favor. For society in general, a new cause was born and with it, more exciting copy for the press and subject-matter for the electronic media, as well as a new market for manufacturers of children's toys and safety devices. Clearly deviance truly could be functional.

What is intriguing about this deviance in particular, however, is its high profile — why has the phenomenon of missing children become as notorious and arresting as it has? It is arguable that the phenomenon is not an entirely new one, and yet the substantial media and political attention creates a very compelling illusion that it is, in fact, a creature of the twentieth century. Estranged parents have apparently been absconding with their children for decades (Ewaschuk, 1978-79; Gottheil, 1984), and children running away seems no less novel an historical event. What is less clear in historical record, however, are the actions of the violent, often pedophilic deviants who appear so prevalent in the contemporary context. Perhaps it is these individuals who constitute the modern addition to the history of child exploitation; if so, their renown may be less surprising than is suggested here. But if they are simply an accretion, how is it that they have redefined *all* forms of abduction into the single, alarming theme of stranger danger? It is unlikely that a single-faceted answer will satisfy this query. What is more likely, given the apparent complexity of the question, is that the uni-dimensional missing children theme is the result of a complex interaction of a variety of elements and interests.

Among these interests are those of the parents whose children have fallen prey to the stranger dangers — The John Walshes and their counterparts in the Williams and Olsen cases. These individuals enlisted the distressing circumstances of their losses to promote a "child saving ideology" and a wealth of agencies based upon that ideology. As was well-documented in the film *Adam*, prior to the entrenchment of the stranger danger interpretation of the phenomenon of missing children, there existed little official recourse for parents who suspected their child(ren) had been abducted. By criminalizing child abduction,

grassroots groups such as "Child Find" placed their problem(s) firmly within the jurisdiction of criminal law and order agencies, thereby creating a recourse where little or none had existed before. This movement was also functional for the state social control agencies, as it provided them with a clear and identifiable target in a previously intractable field of deviance. Thus a functional synergism emerged between the grassroots and control agencies: the former had a hero and, now, the latter had a clear villain. Given the success of the arrangement, it is perhaps not surprising that it soon generalized beyond the realm of *clearly* criminal child abductions to play a part in the majority of cases of parental abductions and runaways.

Yet this synergism would seem to require something more than its two extremes (i.e., the grassroots and the formal control agencies); the simple fact of an interaction between, for example, Child Find and the police does not necessarily lead to the aforementioned interaction. For, although the motivation of Child Find to achieve a greater degree of involvement on behalf of the police in child abductions might seem obvious, the reverse effect does not seem as clear. It is doubtful that the pressure of this agency, independent of any larger forces, would be sufficient to mobilize the policing institution to the extent of action presently characterizing their response to child abduction cases. It is equally uncertain that the synergism between these agencies could create the wholesale social panic currently surrounding the phenomenon of missing children. There is clearly something at work outside of these actors which intensifies both the problem and their reaction to it. That something, in the view of this thesis, is the media.

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<sup>1</sup>Child Find Inc., of New Patz, N.Y., was first established in 1980 by Gloria Yerkovitch. In 1974, when her daughter was not returned to her after a weekend visit with her father, Yerkovitch was constantly frustrated by the lack of effective mechanisms for responding to parental abductions. In an effort to address this difficulty and in the process of locating her own child (which she did), she created "Child Find Inc.", a national network intended to assist in the location of missing children. The agency moved into Canada in 1983 and is now part of an international child detection system.



## II. Understanding the Myth: The Truth in Print versus the Truth in Numbers

Perhaps more than any single element in the phenomenon of missing children, it has been the involvement of the print and electronic media which has brought the problem into the lives of the general populace. For most of the citizenry, information about social events or issues is drawn primarily from the local newspaper and the six-o'clock news (Fiske and Hartley, 1978; Graber, 1980). They read or hear "The Facts" as they are offered by journalists, news-writers, and other commentators, and in most cases will assume a response commensurate with those "facts". Unfortunately, and as will be demonstrated in the chapters which follow, most of those "facts" undergo such a marked degree of sifting and creative interpretation by news agencies that, by the time they are presented to the public, they bear little resemblance to the reality they are supposed to mirror (Cohen and Young, 1973; Epstein, 1974; Gitlin, 1980; Sherizen, 1978). This disjunction between actuality and news accounts has been especially pronounced in the reporting of child abductions (Griego and Kilzer, 1985).

Accounts in the print and electronic media have given credence to the claims of various child find groups suggesting that as many as 1.8 million children disappear each year (an additional 2,000 to 100,000 are supposedly missing in Canada), that strangers kidnap as many as 50,000 of these children, and that as many as 4,000 children are murdered after being abducted (Griego and Kilzer, 1985; U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Human Resources, 1984; U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Investigations and General Oversight, 1981). On the heels of such claims have followed others: that 1.5 million children are involved every year in prostitution or child pornography, and that some 2,500 unidentified children are buried every year in potter's fields (Spitzer, 1986).

These numbers are problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which concern the validity of the statistics themselves. First, since its inception, the missing children

issue has been clouded by conflicting numbers. Estimates concerning the magnitude of the problem range from 1.5 million missing or abducted children (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Investigations and General Oversight, 1981) to 2.5 million in the United States (Howell and Treanor, 1986) and that, according to Child Find, some 15,000 children or approximately 290 per week are abducted annually by strangers in Canada (Toronto Star, 27 September 1984). These estimates vary depending upon who is supplying the figures, how the problem is being defined, and how the data are being collected. Second, no trustworthy, by-category, national survey has been attempted; such a survey is an essential first step if the needs of missing children and social and institutional responses to those needs are to be placed in proper perspective. Third, as was discussed above, it is largely in response to a perceived epidemic of stranger abductions — and not because of the perennial problem of runaway youth or the increasing number of parental abductions — that the missing children issue has received public attention<sup>1</sup>

Preliminary research indicates that — contrary to what the merchants of fear would have the public believe — stranger abductions are in the minority (Griego and Kilzer, 1985) and the majority (95%) of missing children are runaways — 97% of whom return home within one month of their leaving home (Hoffman, 1985). This suggests that the statistics used to generate a North American epidemic of fear about "stranger-danger" are at best inconclusive. What is most intriguing about the figures surrounding the missing children phenomenon is not their inclusiveness, however, but their selective use. Why is it that the media, despite being presented consistently with opposing sets of figures, perennially opted for one set (those dwelling on the stranger as abductor) as opposed to the other? Why, when additional facts are brought to bear upon the problem, is the smallest group of missing

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<sup>1</sup>While reliable statistics on the number of parental abductions are currently unavailable, much of the professional literature and legislative proposals have cited estimates of 25,000 to 100,000 incidents of apparent parental kidnappings annually in the United States alone. Recent research contends that there may be many more parental abductions than these statistics suggest (Gelles, 1983), with estimates ranging between 313,000 and 626,000 abductions annually (The New York Times, 23 October 1983).

children given the most public attention? Indeed, what purpose and whose interests does this myth of the "abductor as stranger" actually serve?

The discrepancy between the actual level of danger, as indicated by official occurrence rates, and the level of threat as revealed by actions taken to prevent and control child abduction, is considered by Hall and his associates to be "ideological displacement" or moral panic (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, 1978:29)<sup>9</sup>. In the face of such a discrepancy, new explanations other than the conventional crime — crime control accounts would seem justified. Underlying these new explanations is an appreciation of how the public forms reactions and, as a necessary corollary to this, what sources of information are most significant in that formulation. It is in the latter context that the mass media and their sources become important.

By exploring the nexus between the media, the control culture and the public culture, the analyst of the media can learn a great deal about how and why particular media messages are constructed. That so many people are willing to believe that there are so many missing children — despite ample evidence to the contrary — suggests that something other than simple child advocacy may be at work in the construction of this social problem. That other element could be what Taylor (1980) had in mind when he called for increased attention to Canadian criminal justice politics.

In some ways, the present research may be seen as an effort to answer Taylor's (1980) call for more research on the ideological functions of the Canadian state. This will be accomplished through an exploratory analysis of how moral panics are influenced by the interplay between the state, the media and interest groups. With particular attention to the position of groups such as Child Find in this interaction, the present research will attempt to

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<sup>9</sup>It is suggested that by casting such groups as the pedophile or pervert into the role of "folk devils", the media serve to strengthen the degree of commitment to dominant norms and, thereby, to create a climate of opinion supportive of society's law enforcement agencies and the extension of their powers.

document the hypothesis that these groups are not merely "responding" to a state-manufactured ideological presentations of social phenomenon, but are actually instrumental in the shaping of that presentation through their role as media sources. The significance of these findings is two-fold. First, through its concentration upon what are seen to comprise the primary influences upon public perceptions of social phenomenon, the potential of the research to shed light upon the key sites of hegemony in society is realized. Second, by virtue of its concentration upon interest groups and their role in the shaping of public sentiment, the present research also offers insights about the motives which impel interest groups to speak to public opinion and, subsequently, to the significant effects they might have upon public policy (Lacombe, 1988).

The chapter which follows provides a review of the literature documenting the role of the media in shaping social problems as well as responses to them. Emphasis is placed upon the media as an active participant in defining social and political reactions to social events reported in the papers, rather than as a simple distributor of information. The third chapter provides the basis for the quantitative analysis of the fourth chapter, through an introduction and discussion of content analysis. The application of this method to the present research is discussed, both in terms of its strengths and weaknesses as well as its probable outcomes. The fourth chapter details the actual results of the content analysis, and thus leads into the fifth chapter, which measures the degree to which those results support the assumptions outlined in the second chapter. That is, whether there exists support, within the present research, for the view of the media as an active intervener in shaping public sentiment and response to social problems.

## CHAPTER II

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

#### SHIFTING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MEDIA POWER AND THE REDISCOVERY OF IDEOLOGY

Whereas the 1950's saw the domination of mass communications research by the positivist canons of American social science, the past decade has borne witness to an increasing challenge of this theoretical orthodoxy from a wide range of academic disciplines. In the main form, this campaign has been waged by deviance theory, linguistics, structuralism, and semiology, but is perhaps most compelling in those debates emerging in and around ideology within Marxist frames of reference (Bennett, 1982(a); Gurevitch, 1982). Taken together, these efforts have exerted a powerful force on the way mass communications research has construed and critiqued media power. This section of the thesis attempts to chart the on-going theoretical shift in mass communications research, and to identify some of the seminal theoretical elements which have been assembled in the course of this reformation.

While there are several alternative theoretical accounts of how the media work (Bennett, 1982(a); Hall, 1982), this thesis focuses primarily on the division and opposition between the liberal-pluralist and marxist views of the media. These perspectives were selected for study on a number of grounds, not the least of which is the importance of their conflict—and interaction in the historical development of mass communications research. Perhaps more importantly, however, their juxtaposition illuminates the differences present in conceptualizations of the media and society, as well as of differences and discrepancies within the perspectives themselves. The latter is especially true in the context of marxist analyses wherein, for example, significant deviations arise between those approaches which spring from a base/superstructure metaphor and which emphasize the economic infra-structure of media industries, and those approaches which are directed to a rethinking of marxist theories of ideology

outside the parameters of a hierarchy of economic determinants (Gurevitch, 1982:3-5).

By the 1970's there arose a general recognition on the part of both "mainstream" and "critical" media analysts concerning the inadequacies of existing conceptualizations of the media which stressed a purely natural and reflective role. At the crux of this criticism lay a concern that rather than a mere *passive transmitter* of messages, the media must be scrutinized for their role as *active interveners* which actually shape those messages (Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott, 1982; Hall, 1982). Rather than looking at the media through the guise of a mirror metaphor, the study of mass communications shifted to examinations of the ideological bases which were suspected to underlie much of the ultimate media product (Hackett, 1982; Hall, 1982; McCron, 1976). Hall was among the first to incorporate this shift into empirical work. In his survey of the development of media theory prior to the 1960's, Hall documented the connection between American positivist and behaviourist social science, and the ideology of American pluralism which emerged subsequent to 1960. It was his belief that, to the extent that the early work presented the media as reflective or expressive of a pre-existing social consensus, this work paved the way for the recurrent sociological tendency to "underwrite pluralism" (Ibid.:61):

Conceptually, the media message, as a symbolic sign-vehicle or a structured discourse with its own internal structuration and complexity, remained theoretically wholly underdeveloped within the liberal-pluralist tradition.

In direct contrast to Hall's summation of the early work, research in the past decade has moved to the opposite extreme: rather than viewing the media as being relatively passive reflections of some antedate consensus, researchers now perceived them as the *inventors* and primary caretakers of that consensus (McCron, 1976).

It would seem that, from Hall's (1982) perspective, one is prevented from making radical distinctions between the world of social processes/events and the media which supposedly reflect them. In his view, "the media are not merely transmitting an already existing meaning, but are involved in the more active labor of *making things mean*"

(emphasis added). (Ibid.:64). In this conception, the work of the media was expanded beyond simple message injunctions wherein A influenced B's behavior, to a responsibility for the total ideological environment surrounding A and B (Ibid.:65).

In order to facilitate a better understanding of the role of the media as a sculptor of public consciousness and creator of popular consent, this thesis draws upon a synthesis of structuralist and culturalist views.<sup>1</sup> This consolidation will focus specifically upon a reconciliation of Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony with an analysis of the signifying practices of the media and the sociology of moral panic. It is to this task that discussion now turns.

### I. Marxism, Class Ideology, and the Media

If Marx was right and the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, then it becomes crucial to understand precisely how those ideas obtain that status. How is it that those ideas prevail and, perhaps more significantly, that subordinate groups in particular come to mirror those beliefs and thus reinforce their continued subjugation? How is it that dominant ideology can become transmitted into common-sensical notions and putatively natural representations? In order to approach the satisfaction of these questions, it is necessary to turn to a more detailed consideration of two key ideas in the development of ideology: *Hegemony* and *Myth*.

Ideology is one of the principal mechanisms by means of which the dominance of certain class interests is maintained and amplified, and is thus a central means of ensuring an ongoing political and social hegemony. In the conception of the term devised by Antonio Gramsci, hegemony exists when an alliance of ruling class factions, a "historical bloc", is able to coerce a subordinate class to submit and conform to higher interests through the exertion

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<sup>1</sup>For a brief discription and additional references of these two theoretical approaches to the study of the media, see Curran *et al.* (1982: 11-29).

of a "total social authority over the social formulation as a whole" (Hall 1977:332). As a mechanism for understanding the acceptance, voluntary or otherwise, of a dominant class leadership by a subordinate class, Gramsci's theory is of central importance to the discussion in this thesis.

Gramsci recognized that a variety of cultural, political and economic factors are instrumental in creating particular forms of class consciousness. It is for this reason that he argued that the supposed "spontaneous" consent in western European bourgeois democracies was actually developed through the complex interactions of the media, church, educational system, family, and other cultural institutions of civil society (Masterman, 1985:196-201). Hegemony, then, cannot be won through dominance of the spheres of production and the economy, or by force alone; it must be organized at the more fundamental levels of the state, politics and the superstructures. Only through widespread dissemination of the dominant ideology across a wide range of civil institutions is it possible to achieve anything like mass hegemony:

[those] *definitions of reality* favorable to the dominant class factions...come to constitute the primary *lived reality*...In this way ideology provides the *cement* in a social formation, *preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc*. This operates, not because the dominant classes can prescribe and proscribe, in detail, the mental content of the lives of subordinate classes...but because they strive and to a degree succeed in *framing* all competing definitions of reality *within their range*, bringing all alternatives within their horizon of thought. They set the limits — mental and structural — within which subordinate classes live and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them (Hall, 1977:332-333).

For Gramsci, hegemony is never a permanent state of affairs and never uncontested; it is always a temporary mastery of a particular struggle (Hall, 1980:37). Hegemony thus has to be constantly sought after, secured and maintained. For inasmuch as it must be actively secured, hegemony can also be lost (Hall, 1977:333). The reverse is also true; even under hegemonic conditions there is no *total* incorporation or absorption of the subordinate classes as such,



Hegemony...must incorporate the views and interests of subordinate groups, making whatever concessions are necessary in order to establish equilibrium and win legitimacy, without compromising the existing fundamental structures. For its part, if the working class were ever to establish its own hegemony it would have to represent its own interests as being the interests of the society as a whole. The revolutionary struggle involves the dialectical linking of both force and persuasion (Masterman, 1985:196).

As stated earlier, the concept of hegemony is especially important in discussions of mass media, for this is one of the civil institutions Gramsci identifies as a key site of the struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideas. Its additional importance as a conceptual tool for analysing and understanding the workings of dominant ideologies was revealed above, as was the function of the concept as a strategic guide to the means by which major social transformations may be most successfully accomplished (Masterman, 1985:197). What remains to be discovered is the nature of the mechanisms by which hegemony is achieved — that is, how a dominant ideology can be transformed into "commonsensical" notions and natural representations.

For the most part, ideologies are held in a less than conscious manner — even when explicit they remain largely unrecognized. It is sometimes argued that the status endures not simply because ideologies are hidden, but because they are *not* hidden. As framed by Stuart Hall, ideologies should be understood as manifesting two distinct, but interrelating and interactive, levels. The first contains that which is most often reflected in the so-called "commonsensical" ideological representations; in this context ideology should be understood as "precisely what is most open, apparent, manifest — [that which] takes place on the surface in view of all men" (Hall, 1977:325). By the mere fact of its conspicuousness this form of ideology can be the most inconspicuous of all. At a deeper level lie the true foundations of this *prima facie* ideology, the ideological ingredients which are "hidden, repressed or inflected out of sight [and which] are its real foundations". This is the source and site of the ideological unconsciousness.

Consisting as it does of both conscious and unconscious (or true) elements, the question necessarily arises as to how that ideological realm in which all thought, speech, reason, explanation and experience — the domain of consciousness — may be at the same time unconscious. Perhaps the first response to such an inquiry brings to mind those most obvious and "transparent" forms of consciousness which operate in everyday experiences and ordinary language — the consciousness of *common sense*. For it is precisely the spontaneous quality of the latter which renders it transparent and natural, its "common" base which engenders a refusal to examine the premises upon which it is made and subsequent resistance to change or correction. The fact of its instant recognition, coupled with the closed circle in which it moves, makes common sense at one and the same time spontaneous, ideological and unconscious.

Barthes' 1956 collection of essays entitled Mythologies provides additional insights into the mechanisms by means of which ideological representations came to be accepted as commonsensical, and the important role played by the media in this process. Central to Barthes' thinking is the concept of myth, which he describes as a mode of representation, "a type of speech" characterized most by its "naturalness" (Barthes, 1972, cf Masterman, 1985:197). He contends that the production of myth is dependent upon the dual repression of history and politics (Barthes, 1972). Myth involves the miraculous evaporation of history from the process of signification into the alternative receptacle of nature. This transformation was, for Barthes, the very principle of myth:

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it came from. Or even better; it can only come from eternity, since the beginning of time, it has been made for bourgeois man, the Spain of the Blue Guide has been made for the tourist, and *primitives* (sic) have prepared their dances with a view to an exotic festivity. We can see all the disturbing things which this felicitous figure removes from sight: both determinism and freedom. Nothing is produced, nothing is chosen; all one has to do to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace has been removed. This miraculous evaporation is another form of a concept common to most bourgeoisie myths: the irresponsibility of man (Barthes, 1972:151).

By denying history, myth also denies politics. Myth conveniently forgets that "reality" is dialectically forged, that it is a product of human activity and struggle and it is thus that myth may be understood as depoliticized speech (Ibid.:143). This is why Barthes describes the function of myth as being to siphon reality, to empty it in a ceaseless flow outwards, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, resulting in its perceptible absence (Ibid.). Hence, as politics, history and struggle are sifted out in the process of representation, "nature, unchanging and unchangeable, floods in" (Masterman, 1985:198).

To see the media as symbolic systems or signifying practices which deal in representations, rather than mere reflections, of reality is to understand the importance of scrutinizing the media rather than passively accepting them as substitutes for experience. It is to recognize, as elucidated above, that the ideological power of the media resides in their plausibility, in their ability to pass off as "real" or "natural" what are inevitably partial and selective constructions of the world (Masterman, 1985).

Shifting paradigms of the power of the media, in conjunction with the increasing influence of marxian theorizing, has prompted a reappraisal of the role of the media in society and focussed attention on the structure and organization of the media. From a media standpoint, this has prompted a concern with the study of institutions, their work practices and their relationship with the socio-political environment (Curran *et al.*, 1982). Researchers working in this area share the assumption that an examination of the political, organizational and professional factors which impinge upon the process of message production could shed considerable light upon the nature of ideological work and the ways in which particular ideologies are reproduced and sustained (Ibid.).

## II. Media Institutions: Socio-Political Environment and the Production of Consent

The media are important shapers of perceptions and ideas. This is especially so when the public possesses limited experience with the behaviour in question; in such instances the media often become the primary, and in some cases sole, source of information about the world in question (see Graber, 1980). In this context the media become what Masterman (1985) terms "consciousness Industries" that provide not simply information about the world, but ways of seeing and understanding it as well. Hall observes that:

as social groups and classes live...increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes; (b) for providing images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces can be coherently grasped as a whole. This is the first piece of the great cultural functions of the modern media: the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge (1977:340-341).

In this way, the media "tells us what is important and what is not by what they take note of and what they ignore, by what is amplified and what is muted or omitted" (Masterman, 1985:5). Hall concludes:

The line...between preferred and excluded explanations and rationales, between permitted and deviant behaviors, between the *meaningless* and *meaningful*, between the incorporated practices, meanings and values and the oppositional ones is ceaselessly drawn and re-drawn, defended and negotiated (1977:344).

News, according to recent academic literature (e.g., Chibnall, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987), is not a veridical account of reality, but a social and cultural construction of journalists and their sources. The media assume a social consensus and help to create an impression of that consensus (Hall *et al.*, 1978:55). In so-doing they actively define for the public what significant events are taking place and offer powerful interpretations of how to understand those events (Ibid.). Such news is the major source of information about the normative contours of society (Erikson, 1966). But, as was contended above, the media consistently and systematically promote certain ways of understanding problematic situations at the expense of others (Chibnall, 1978; Tuchman, 1978;

Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984). To understand why news stories are almost always presented in a dominant consensual view, one must examine more closely how news is constructed and who in fact plays a major role in defining what constitutes news.

All media texts are the outcome of a variety of choices, many of which are made to appear so spontaneous and natural that they are sometimes hardly recognizable (Epstein, 1974; Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980). As noted by the American critic David Altheide, "almost anything could be said about any event" (in Masterman, 1985:129). According to this rationale, it would appear that almost everything presented in the media, however seemingly natural, is the product of innumerable filtering processes and frequently implicit human choices (Dussuyer, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). The implications and subsequent significance of this contention are two-fold: first, as Barthes (1972) has observed elsewhere, what is noted becomes by definition notable; and second, the very act of selection is itself evaluative. Thus, as Masterman concludes,

the media...carry out what is perhaps their most important ideological role through a process which is generally regarded as being ideologically innocent — the process of reporting the facts (1985:129)

In the liberal-pluralist view, news stories supposedly begin with the facts and build upon them. However, according to Cockburn, the reality of news production encompasses a quite different trend. In his view, news reporting usually begins with the journalist's perspective, through which the "facts" are later filtered and organized (in Masterman, 1985:137). Indeed, Altheide's research of American television news suggests that "the story is simply the medium through which the definition of an event or the angle is presented" (Ibid.). But even this is a somewhat unhelpful view since, as will be seen below, both the "facts" of the case and the angle from which they are presented are frequently not set by the journalists at all, but rather by the news sources which provide them with the supposedly "raw" information.

The key to the media's involvement in the production of consent lies in the analysis of journalists as performing a crucial transformative, but secondary, role in defining social events (Hall *et al.*, 1978). The primary architects are those to whom the media turn, namely their "uncredited sources" in government and other social institutions (Ibid.). Although the authors in *Policing the Crisis* emphasize the transformative nature of media news reporting, their conception of the media role centers upon the structured subordination of the architects to the primary designers (Woollacott, 1982).

According to Curran *et al.* (1982), media organizations exist in a symbiotic relationship with their environment, drawing on it not only for their economic sustenance, but also for the raw materials which form the basis of their reports (1982:20). Indeed, a major theme in the research literature concerns the production demands of the news organization, which, in conjunction with the news value of "objectivity", ensure that newspaper accounts are structured in terms of dominance. In this way there is a tendency to take up the presignified accounts of events articulated by those in elite positions and to exclude definitions by those lacking in qualifications (see: Chibnall, 1977; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987; Hall *et al.*, 1978; Hall, 1982; Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984).

Since journalists must draw their materials from the few repositories of authoritative information routinely available, they must take care to remain on good terms with those sources. In the absence of the latter's cooperation there would, in many instances, be no news at all. Thus journalists risk a high degree of dependency upon their sources which tends to discourage an overtly critical attitude toward the information they supply. Yet it is deceptive to suggest that the crux of the problem rests with the necessity that journalists ingratiate themselves with their sources, or that they constitute little more than uncritical dupes. The concern is more appropriately expressed that "by simply reproducing what they consider to be the most accurate and authoritative information available, journalists may be colluding with the agenda set by their sources and [thus] underwriting the values implicit in

the information they provide" (Masterman, 1985:123). As described by Hall *et al.*, the result of

systematically structured over-accessing to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions...is that their spokesmen *become* the primary definers of topics. The media do not simply *create* the news; nor do they simply transmit the ideology of the *ruling class* in a conspiratorial fashion. Indeed...the media are frequently not the *primary definers* of news events at all; but their structured relationship to power has the effect of making them play a crucial role in reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access, as of right, to the media as *accredited sources*. From this point of view the media stand in a position of structured subordination to the primary definers (Hall *et al.*, 1978:58-59).

Journalistic reliance on accredited sources is important because "even when the system is operating at its best, the crucial powers of agenda-setting and primary definition remain with the sources, and form the common-sense parameters within which journalists are expected to work" (Masterman, 1985:123). Moreover, attention to the influence of sources also raises questions of structured absence of information or images which are not readily available; the power of sources may easily lead to a filtering out of "other" interests, of those voices which are not easily heard, which tell different stories, or offer counterpoint explanations which threaten the unanimity of the subjects they raise (Ibid., p.125).

The primary definitions supplied by accredited sources thus tend to "command the field", setting the terms of reference by which all further coverage or debate takes place (Hall *et al.*, 1978:58). Once this interpretive framework has been established, it is extremely difficult to alter:

Changing the terms of an argument is exceedingly difficult, since the dominant definition of the problem acquires, by repetition and by weight and credibility of those who propose or subscribe it, the warrant of common sense. Arguments which seek to change the terms of reference are read as *straying from the point*. So part of the struggle is over the way the problem is formulated, the terms of the debate and the logic it entails (Hall, 1982:81).

Thus, the mass media and their sources limit the frame of reference within which public issues are debated. These limits may permit the expression of some dissenting opinion, but, as Miliband notes, the media contribute to a climate of conformity by containing dissent,

"by the presentation of news which falls outside the consensus as curious heresies...or by treating [dissenting views] as irrelevant eccentricities which serious people may dismiss as of no consequence" (1969:238; cited in Tuchman, 1978:156). As a result the media tend to symbolically reproduce the existing structure of power in society's social order. This line of argument, however, is mute regarding the precise nature of the mechanisms through which this reproduction is effected. To understand these mechanisms, it is necessary to turn to a detailed consideration of the media and the transformation processes they exert upon the raw materials, "facts" and interpretations supplied by the powerful. Central to the question of how a particular range of privileged meanings is created and sustained are the issues of *classification* and *framing* of those meanings (Hall, 1982). As discussed earlier, the media do not simply present the public with information, they are also actively involved in aiding the public to make sense of public events through the offering of commonsensical interpretations (Ng, 1981). As regards the latter, Hall has noted that:

...what passes for common sense in our society — the residue of absolutely basic and commonly-agreed upon, consensual wisdoms — helps us to make sense out of the world in simple, but meaningful terms. Precisely, common sense does not require reasoning, argument, logic, thought; it is spontaneously available, thoroughly predictable, widely shared. It feels, indeed, as if it has always been there, the sedimented, bedrock wisdom of *the race*, a form of natural wisdom (1977:325).

As a result, "you cannot learn, through common sense, how things are; you can only discover where they fit into the existing scheme of things" (Ibid.). Indeed, precisely because they have become universalized and naturalized, they become sedimented as the "only rational universally valid" forms of intelligibility apparently available (Marx, 1965 *in* Hall, 1977:344).

Thus, as Connell (1979:88) has claimed, "dominant definitions of the world" are granted "the status of what many or most people think", which "actively contributes to the continuing domination of those definitions and of the groups whose interests are thereby made accessible, *natural* and *the same as our own*" (in Hartley, 1982:106). In the process, the sense which is made of the world turns out to be much more ideologically active and productive in the maintenance of a particular (dominant) "reality" than mere propaganda



would' be, for propaganda is contrived and contestable, whereas common sense informs that "nature" is neither (Ibid.).

The media have a ready-made stock of images, myths and folk devils from which to draw upon; symbols and labels which eventually acquire their own descriptive and explanatory potential.<sup>2</sup> Such normative predilections contain strong predispositions to see events in certain ways, thereby incorporating or excising/excluding other perspectives. This continuing dialectic between dominant ideologies in the cultural and occupational ideologies of the mass media is described by Hall in the following manner:

Assignment of social relations to their classifying schemes and context is, indeed, the site of an enormous ideological labor, of ideological work, [involving] establishing the rules of each domain, actively ruling in and ruling out certain realities, offering the maps and codes which mark out territories and assign problematic events and relations to explanatory contexts, helping us not simply to know more about *the world*, but to make sense of it. Here the line, amidst all its contradictions of struggle and contradiction, between preferred and excluded explanations and rationales, between permitted and deviant behaviors, between the *meaningless* and the *meaningful*, between the incorporated practices, meanings and values and the oppositional ones, is ceaselessly drawn and redrawn, defended and negotiated: indeed the *site and stake* of the struggle...(Hall, 1979:341).

Thus, news is successful in providing a way of understanding the world which accords with common sense. In its apparent naturalness, news manifests the essential component of Myth as defined by Barthes (1972); it shapes not only its audiences' knowledge of the world, but also shapes the manner in which that knowledge is discovered, organized and supplemented with new information. In transforming the bureaucratic information disseminated by sources within the social control apparatus into commonsense terms accessible to their readership, journalists necessarily not only convey that information, but a particular way of structuring

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<sup>2</sup>Once the subject of the story is set, its subsequent shape is determined by certain recurrent processes of news manufacture. Halloran, Elliot and Murdock (1970) refer to the development of an "inferential structure". As discussed above, this is not an intentional bias on the part of newsmen, but "a process of simplification and interpretation which structures the meaning of a given story around its original news value"(Ibid.:215-216). Simply stated the argument holds that "events will be selected for news in terms of their fit or consonance with pre-existing images — the news event will confirm earlier ideas. The more unclear the news item and the more uncertain or doubtful the newsman (sic) is in how to report it, the more likely it is to be unreported in a general framework that has already been established" (Ibid.:26).

and understanding that information. To the degree that a single structure is paramount, all others are necessarily ignored, with the result that news tends to be as much a way of gaining some types of knowledge as it is a means of avoiding others (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson *et al.*, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978; Voumvakis & Ericson, 1984).

[N]ews consumers are led to see the world outside their first hand experience through the eyes of the existing authority structure. Alternative ways of knowing this world are simply not made available. Ultimately, routine news places bounds on political consciousness (Fishman, 1980:138).

### III. Crime Waves: Moral Panics and the Politics of Law and Order

Information about incidents of crime and malfeasance become news because, quite simply, reports about deviance comprise the news most people regularly read (Ericson *et al.*, 1987). Crime sells papers — not only because it fascinates and entertains, but because it provides a gauge of the social health and welfare of a society. Depending upon the apparent position of society on that gauge, news reports about crime assume an additional function of informing of readers about current sensibilities concerning deviance and the basis of social order. In the latter capacity, journalists are aligned with other agencies of social control as a kind of "deviance-defining elite" (Ericson *et al.*, 1987). The news media serve an on-going articulation of the moral boundaries which are intended to confine the behavior of the social group:

The rituals of cleaning up crime and excluding deviants to purify society are not simply based on responding to events in the world. In addition, there is proactive effort to manufacture symbolic boundaries by visualizing deviance and effecting enforcement and punishment. From witch hunts (Erikson, 1966; Bergesen, 1977, 1978), to confining people in asylums and prisons (Foucault, 1965, 1975, 1977), to technological and environmental dangers (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982), the powerful construe the undesirable and relegate it to the status of social waste (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:61)

When things appear to be "out of hand", presenting a substantial challenge to the acknowledged order of things, the media provide a means of ritual action against the disruptive activities. The typification of deviants and their deviance as aberrations from an

otherwise orderly social machine, portraying these as instances of hooliganism, violence, psychopathology, paves the way for suggestions of preferred law and order solutions to those deviations:

A *morality play* is presented, in which peripeteia device is used to assert the reality of deviance, but then to explain it away and reaffirm consensual reality through cathected scenerios of heroic control agents neatly trimming the blemishes from an otherwise orderly landscape. The believability of this depiction is enhanced by the fact that most citizens have no direct, independent knowledge of the phenomenon reported on or its relation to other aspects of social order. The news media fill in the void with factual detail and a consensual framework, thus giving the public both a factual basis for their commitments as well as a context in which to understand them (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:62).

Sociologists of deviance and the mass media (Chibnall, 1977; Fishman, 1978; Hall *et al.*, 1978; Ng, 1981; Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984) have credited the media's portrayal of deviance in society with much of the responsibility for the construction of putative "crime waves". Fishman (1978:533), for example, argues that publicized crime waves often have little basis in official measures of the "actual" rates of occurrence of a phenomenon, such as police crime rates. Accepting that such "official" measurements may possess no greater validity or accuracy than any of a number of alternative measurements, to the degree that news reports offer such statistics as validations of their representation of a incident, they necessarily draw upon a public perception (however erroneous) that such statistics do, in fact, possess greater authority (Hall *et al.*, 1978:9-11). The essence of the issue is that, regardless of the sources used or the numbers they cite, the production of a moral panic will have less to do with those statistics than with the ways in which the media choose to report - or not report - them and the cases they represent. In this way such panics may be understood as the result of newspapers deploying their working and professional ideologies in manufacturing news themes for the selection of suitable news items. In Fishman's (1978:534) view, crime waves are often little more than the continued heavy coverage of numerous occurrences which the journalists report as a single theme. Hence many "pseudo-crises" arise which are actually little more than constructions of the media and their sources.

While the construction of news themes simplifies the process of making sense of news events (insofar as a given news item is more easily managed as part of a pre-existing theme), the manufacture and use of the themes themselves may do more to obfuscate than elucidate the subjects of the news. To the extent that themes act as filtering mechanisms, they tend to result in the inclusion of particular material at the expense of others. This tendency, according to Tuchman (1978), plays a significant role in the ideological production of crime.

Insofar as all crime themes retain the potential for becoming crime waves, a single news organization is unlikely to produce such a wave; rather, the process appears to require the collaboration of a number of news agencies (Fishman, 1978; Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984). Collaborating with other news organizations or engaging in "pack journalism" is not unusual; in fact, it appears to be a very common means by which journalists remain informed and up-to-date on news issues (Fishman, 1980; Hall *et al.*, 1978; Rock, 1973; Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984). Research on crime waves and moral panics suggests, however, that during times of moral panics this interaction seems especially pronounced. Combined with the influence of the thematic agenda and source selection, this phenomenon results in a crime wave dynamic where the reality of the theme being reported is confirmed and reconfirmed by other news agencies pursuing the same theme (Fishman, 1978:537). This symbiosis can become reinforcing: should a sufficient proportion of newspapers ratify an event as news, the others will tend to accept that ratification and treat the event as newsworthy (Rock, 1973:77). This process elevates certain types of deviance (i.e., street crime) above their status as individual incidents of criminality to the level of crime waves.

An often concomitant element of crime waves is a *moral panic*, a phrase used by Stanley Cohen (1972) in his interpretation of Folk Devils and Moral Panics. Cohen conceptualizes a moral panic in the following manner:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and

stereotypical fashion by the mass media. The moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions, ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to. The condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes less visible. Sometimes it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself (1972:9).

Cohen uses the concept of moral panic to describe situations (such as rebellious youth in Britain in the 1960's) in which a relatively minor social issue becomes a metaphor for deeper social problems (1972:192). Seen in this light, the moral panic appears symptomatic of wider, more troubling, but less concrete forms of social problems (Hall *et al.*, 1978). By feeding upon the anxieties generated by those larger concerns, an emotional climate of ascending moral distress is produced which often has little connection to the original, and commonly far more truncated, deviant act which impelled the panic. The moral panic in effect severs the social anxieties from their societal causes, taking hold of the public consciousness in a classically Durkheimian fashion whereby salient, supposedly collective, sentiments are reaffirmed (Taylor, 1982). As the collective consciousness is reconstructed in this way, society erects a "gallery of types" which informs its populace which social roles should be avoided and which emulated; categories of "folk devils" arise from the former — ongoing, visible reminders of discouraged goals (Cohen, 1972, in Taylor, 1982:136).

Cohen's study of the local political reactions to the media sensationalization of the "mods" and the "rockers" incidents in 1960's Britain offers a useful illustration of some of the issues involved here (Bennett, 1982(b):295-301). In his view, the primary issue with regard to the social over-reaction to gang violence between these two groups was not the violence per se, but rather the exaggerated portrayal of that violence by the media (Cohen, 1973:31). The media appeared to purposely sensationalize the gang interactions, consistently grossly exaggerating the seriousness of the events in terms of the degree of violence and damage as well as in terms of the numbers involved in the skirmishes (Ibid.). The result of

the media presentation of the situation was the rise of a climate of moral panic which Cohen linked directly with an ascending public support for intensification of those social control mechanisms directed to quelling the violence.

The strength of Cohen's analysis resides in its elevation of discussions of the media beyond a simple media-audience relationship, to considerations of the interplay between the media and larger social forces, and how that interplay affects the pictures the media create for their audience. In this light, the role of the media in society is not simply one of acting upon the public, it is equally one of being acted upon. Other social agencies and institutions — the police, the courts, local political and interest groups — will respond to social phenomenon as will the media, however, to the degree that such agencies serve as "sources" to the media, they also help to define media perceptions and presentations. As well, in those cases where the media responds first to a social phenomenon, they may incite the attentions of social agencies who then act upon the media. The result is an on-going tautology which Cohen terms an "amplification spiral":

whereby the scope and significance of an initial *problem*...is subject to increased magnification as the reality-defining practices of such agencies reciprocally sustain and complement one another (Bennett, 1982(b):299-300).

Since Cohen's seminal work, additional research has been directed to the phenomenon of moral panics, notably Hall et al's (1978) critical analysis of mugging in Great Britain; Fishman's investigation of crimes against the elderly in New York (1978); Ng's (1981) analysis of sexual violence against children in Toronto; Voumvakis and Ericson's (1984) study of attacks against women in Toronto; and Ben-Yehuda's (1986) research on adolescent drug abuse in Israel. A single theme has emerged from these studies: moral panics have a largely functional component which facilitates the public exposition and reinforcement of a given society's purported underlying value structure, a reality which possesses profound implications for social control and public order.

Sociologists working at the spearhead of media and deviance theory have, in recent years, asserted that the media contribute to moral panics through the exaggeration and dramatization of behavior contained in news reports. The result has been the creation of a norm-reinforcing gallery of folk devils which has been signified within a semiology of law and order (Bennett, 1982(b)). Their work suggests that the media have been instrumental in endorsing primary definitions of specific instances of deviance, pulling discrete events into an amplification spiral and registering them within the field of law and order discourse. In particular, media portrayals of violence (see Hall *et al.*, 1978) have served to legitimate the forces of law and order, and build support for the extension of coercive state regulation of deviant individuals/behaviours (Curran *et al.*, 1982:14). This tendency towards a law and order society is a central theme throughout Hall *et al.*'s (1978) Policing the Crisis. According to them, the passage into a law and order society beings with the projection of generalized fears in society onto easily identified groups and individuals. The anxieties of a society in crisis are temporarily exorcised by the "discovery" of demons, the identification of folk devils, the mounting of moral campaigns, the expiation of prosecution and control – in the moral panic cycle (Ibid.:322). Their analysis suggests that the notion of moral panic is one of the key ideological forms in which a historical crisis is experienced and fought out (Ibid.:221). The moral panic creates the political context whereby a "silent majority" is won over to support increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state and lends legitimacy to more than usual control (Ibid.:221).

When the panics promoted by particular agencies (above and beyond those larger panics already in place in the society) are exchanged and passed between various reality defining institutions, they tend to be drawn in to a "seamless web of associations" whereby discrete panics converge and are experienced and signified as but one thin edge of the larger wedge threatening dissolution of the entire matrix (Ibid.:323). So-combined, these moral panics converge into a larger panic reflecting an all-encompassing historical crisis whose escalation is deemed avoidable only through a marked extension and mobilization of coercive state power

(Ibid.:221). The widespread dissemination of this larger panic, and the promotion of a single panacea in response to it, serve to rally a good measure of support for what Hall and his associates term an authoritarian consensus favorable to stronger remedies and reactionary policies.

The moral crusades of the 1950's and 1960's have now been superceded, according to Hall *et al.* (1978), by law and order campaigns in which the state no longer assumes a passive role in the creation of social problems. The public has become sensitized, through the media, "not only to the existence of a threat, but also to the mobilization of the control culture against such a threat" (Taylor, 1980:294). Hall *et al.* (1978:52) make the important point that the state is not neutral; social control agencies, according to them,

must be understood as actively and continuously part of the whole process to which, also, they are reacting. They are active in defining situations, in selecting targets, in initiating *campaigns*, in structuring their actions to the public at large, in legitimizing their actions through the accounts of situations which they produce. They do not simply respond to *moral panics*. They form part of the circle out of which moral panics develop.

As will become apparent, the foundations established in this and the preceding chapter will figure prominently in subsequent chapters. Thus, it is well to reiterate briefly those points most crucial to these later discussions. The role of the media as a symbolic (or sign) system must not be underemphasized, for it is this quality which compels an active reading of media messages. To the degree that the media has digressed from unproblematic, self-explanatory reflections of reality to an active involvement in the construction of that reality, the impact of the signs they design and transmit may be seen to comprise a central feature in any study of moral panics. In addition, the ideological power implicit in the media's reality-defining function must be juxtaposed with the apparent "naturalness" of those definitions. The degree of that power is directly proportional to its lack of distinction, with the result that those in the media who control news content are ultimately in the position "to pass off as real, true and necessary what are inevitably selective and value-laden constructions based upon particular interests, ideologies and ways of making sense"



(Masterman, 1985:12). With the importance of these points emphasized, discussion will now turn to a brief explication of the thesis methodology.

### CHAPTER III

## TECHNIQUES OF MEDIA ANALYSIS: CONTENT ANALYSIS AS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING MEDIA MESSAGES

Most of the earliest studies of crime news concentrate upon two ends: namely, determining how much crime is presented in the press on a daily basis, or assessing the association between reported crime and the actual occurrence of that crime in society (Fair, 1984:16; Ng, 1981:31). However, few of these projects have attempted any theoretical interpretation of the phenomenon itself. Most of the research conducted in the tradition of mainstream sociology treats the presentation of crime news as ahistorical and apolitical; little or no attention has been given to the social, political and institutional conditions underlying the production of crime news (Chibnall, 1977; Hall *et al.*, 1978; Ng, 1981). An equally neglected area of research is the investigation of sources (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson *et al.*, 1987; Gans, 1979), what type of information is attributed to them in crime news reports (Vournvakis and Ericson, 1984), and the ideological implications of the contents of those reports (Drechsel, 1983:142). It was felt that by systematically analyzing the composition of groups of "authorized knowers", what organizations they represent, and their "target deviance" and their preferred remedies for that deviance, a great deal can be revealed about the nature of news ideology and the media as an institution.

This chapter commences with a brief overview of the existing research in the area of crime news and focuses on the salient epistemological, methodological and procedural issues. From a general discussion of content analysis and its strengths and weaknesses, discussion here argues for a "middle ground" methodology (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, 1986). Such a method combines both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to fashion a methodology sensitive to the multiple layers of meaning implicit in media messages. Following from a discussion of the application of middle ground methodology to this study, especially as it pertains to difficulties in the implementation of the procedure with regard to problems

of reliability and generalizability of the study's findings. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of some of the assumptions and limitations which lie at the foundation of this methodology.

Until recently, the traditional method for scrutinizing the underlying meanings of media messages was content analysis (Fiske, 1982). This method of inquiry proceeds by establishing certain conceptual categories in relation to media contents, which are subsequently assessed for the presence or absence of the elements held to comprise these categories (Hackett, 1982). The basic assumption of content analysis is that there is a relationship between the frequency with which a certain item appears in news reports and the interest or intentions of the producer on the one hand, and the response of the audience on the other hand (Dyer, 1982:108). The producers' hidden meaning can, according to this perspective, be revealed by identifying and counting certain significant textual features (Ibid.).

### I. Content Analysis in Media Research

Content analysis is designed to facilitate the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952:15). Its proponents claim its unbiased results are incumbent upon the interaction of three elements: objectivity, expedited by the promotion of explicit coding rules; systematicity, realized through the use of consistent criteria for selecting samples of content, and finally, generality or the theoretical relevance of the samples to other attributes of contents and/or to the characteristics of the sender(s) or recipients of the analysed message (Fair, 1984:36-37).

The method inevitably stresses the manifest content of the message as the most important area for scientific analysis. That this is so may be attributed to the reality that these surface messages are the only ones tapped by the method:

The requirement of objectivity stipulates that only those symbols and combinations of symbols actually appearing in the message be recorded. In other words, the

coding process cannot be one of *reading between the lines*. In this sense, content analysis is limited to the manifest attributes of the text (Holsti, 1968:600).

The result of this limitation has been extensive criticism by censors of the method concerning its inadequacy as a measurement of meaning (Hackett, 1982; Hall, 1982; Sumner, 1979). Structuralists have attacked the utility of the analysis as nothing more than "counting categories"; these theorists question the adequacy of theories which connect categories of content with conditions of message production and reception.

Colin Sumner (1979:69) maintains that content analysis places too much emphasis on the "repeatability" (frequency of occurrence) of signs, and too little importance upon the significance of those signs for the audience. Because content analysis does not question the meaning of items within messages, the repetitions it taps lack an understandable context:

The absence of a theory of sign, signification and significance renders content analysis absurd because the key concept is left unsupported and the concept gives it no knowledge of its avowed object, the content (in Leiss *et al.*, 1986:174).

Sumner's point that content analysis can say nothing about the audiences' interpretation of the message is not necessarily a weakness, however, provided one is careful to avoid extending the method to demonstrate audience response. The real weakness of content analysis, especially for understanding news discourse, is its inability to tap multiple layers of meaning. In the realm of contemporary newspaper discourse, however, messages occur at a variety of connotative levels of meaning (Leiss *et al.*, 1986:174-175)<sup>1</sup>, and thus require a more sensitive methodology than that offered in content analysis.

To get at the underlying complexities of newspaper discourse, what is needed is a methodology which is both vigorous and systematic as well as able to tap the multiple levels of meaning and the multi-faceted codes that news reports employ. To date, researchers have had to settle either for the systematicity of quantitative measures or the greater sensitivity of

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<sup>1</sup>Methodological parochialism or theoretical ethnocentrism can be found in the majority of published research. Until investigators take theories at odds with their own more seriously in the design of their research, there will be little progress made towards unified sociological paradigms (Smith, 1981:60).

some qualitative methods, largely as a result of an erroneous impression of the mutual exclusivity of these measures (Leiss *et al.*, 1986:175). In the present research, quantitative content analysis will be combined with a qualitative description of "core case" news reports.

The use of convergent data collection by multiple methods has been called triangulation (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest, 1966). Triangulation is broadly defined by Denzin (1989:291) as the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. The basic premise of the method is the assumption that research analysts can improve the accuracy of their judgements by collecting different kinds of data bearing on the same subject.

In all the various triangulation designs, one basic assumption is buried. The effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premise that the weakness in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing of another. That is, it is assumed that multiple and independent measures do not share the same weakness or potential bias (Rohner, 1977:134 in Jick, 1979:604).

Triangulation, then, purports to exploit the assets and neutralize rather than compound the liabilities (Ibid.).

Triangulation provides the researcher with several important opportunities (Jick, 1979:608-609). First, it allows researchers to be more confident in their results. Second, it can also stimulate the creation of inventive methods, new ways of capturing a problem to balance with conventional methods. In the present study, this is illustrated by the development of a core case group which helped reveal journalistic techniques for constructing and sustaining the crisis in missing children. Third, triangulation may also help uncover deviant or off-quadrant dimensions of a phenomenon. Again, in relation to this research, qualitative analysis helped explicate some of the contradictions and anomalies of media coverage of missing children. Finally, triangulation may also serve as the critical test, by virtue of its comprehensiveness, for competing theories. For instance, the contradictions and anomalies uncovered by the qualitative methods suggests that the site of hegemony is not only located in the state as implied in Hall *et al.*'s (1978) analysis, but also in civil society, as suggested by Gramsci

(1971).

Inasmuch as qualitative datum is the thread linking all these benefits, qualitative data analysis function as the glue that cements the interpretation of convergent results. As such the creative researcher uses the qualitative data to enrich and brighten the portrait. In sum, triangulation, which prominently involves qualitative methods, can potentially generate what anthropologists call "holistic work" or "thick description" (Jick, 1979:609). As Weiss (1968:344-345) concluded,

Qualitative data are superior to quantitative data in density of information, vividness and clarity of meaning — characteristics more important in holistic work than precision and reproducibility.

Applying a systematic quantitative approach to news content allows the analyst of the media to specify more precisely the range of sources used in sustaining a particular theme, the frequency of their use, and how they were used. This study is particularly interested in how sources were mobilized to create certain images of the "locus of the problem" (Vounvakis and Ericson, 1984); that is, to what factors or social forces the problem of missing children may be traced, and what remedial action is necessary to contain that problem.

The qualitative analysis concentrates upon a core case group consisting of five Canadian incidents (specifically, the cases of Nicole Morin, Elizabeth Tomlinson, Alison Parrott, Sharin' Keenan, and Christine Jessop) which were consistently recycled by the newspapers studied. These core cases, which also formed the larger part of the content analysis, were scrutinized for additional dimensions of meaning which would complement the outcome of the quantitative content analysis. In particular, the layout of items and the structure of the texts was studied for what these reveal about journalistic techniques for creating and sustaining a particular image of child abduction. It is hoped that the combination of these methods will provide the means to analyze how meaning is constructed and the implications of news reports concerning deviance and social control, especially as these pertain to ideologies of

crime and the politics of law and order.

This approach also addresses the important question of variation among news organizations. Recent research has begun to examine "popular" and "quality" news outlets as to whether they are more "open" or "closed" in terms of the range of sources, ideas, formulations of the problem and contradictory messages they contain (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:26). This research is still in its nascent stages (Ibid.). The present study attempts to address the important question of variation among news organizations, especially in terms of their use of similar sources. Mapping variation in terms of different news organizations, news space, sources and their explanations of the problem, allows news analysts to consider the extent to which news media truly are "mass media" in the sense of uniformity of coverage and message.

The content analysis was accomplished by a systematic analysis of the contents of news reports of child abduction, as these reports were presented in three major Canadian newspapers over the period 1979-1986. These newspapers included the Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and the Toronto Sun. The Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star were selected because both were identified as national newspapers by the Royal Commission on Newspapers (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:82-83). These are regarded by the Commission as encompassing a "national agenda-setting" function, meaning that they constitute a prime source of guidance for other news organizations in terms of what events receive news coverage. As such, these newspapers exert a considerable influence over the assignment of priorities and direction of commentary of leading wire services such as the Canadian Press (CP) agency. In addition, the Globe and Mail is believed to cater to an "elite" readership and is thus situated at the "quality" end on a newspaper continuum, which is bordered at the opposite extreme by such "popular" press papers as the Toronto Sun (Ibid.).

The Toronto Star, on the other hand, has the largest circulation of any newspaper in Canada and may be seen to occupy a mid-point position on the aforementioned newspaper

continuum. In their survey of Canadian newspaper readership, the Royal Commission on newspapers found the Star to be the top overall paper in terms of both size of readership and frequency of reading within that readership (Ibid.).

The Toronto Sun was chosen because it occupies the "popular" end of the newspaper continuum, being of that variety of paper often regarded as "tit-and-bum" newspapers, after those London Fleet Street tabloids which inspired the label. According to the Royal Commission, the Sun ranks second in terms of the number of issues read per week, third in frequency, and fourth in total overall readership (Ibid.).

Inasmuch as the newspapers studied combine the two key characteristics of wide readership and agenda-setting for other newspapers, one might expect that the findings of this study would be generalizable to most other mass circulation Canadian dailies. The findings may not, however, be generalizable to other types of media. This issue is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

## II. The Sample

The news reports comprising the data base of the study were collected through the combination of computer-assisted and hands-on searches of the Canadian Newspaper Index (CNI). The CNI is a front-to-back page reference to the contents of over 30 major Canadian newspapers and popular magazines; it does not include tabloids, such as the Toronto Sun, in its database. Articles were derived from this database through the use of "descriptors", that is, key words describing articles which the computer was directed to look for. Five descriptors were used in compiling the data for the present study: "missing", "runaway", "exploited", "abducted children" and "abducted/murdered children". The sample of articles provided by this search was then supplemented by a hands-on search using a number of more general descriptors. Child abuse, child custody and child welfare were included



among these more general descriptors.

The total number of articles was reduced based on a number of decision rules. The rules dictated that the sample would *not* include articles concerning short-term abductions and sexual assault, defined by the return of the child within 24 hours of his or her disappearance. These cases were excluded from the research because, as critics have pointed out, the central concern in short term abduction or assaults is not the abduction, but rather the sexual assault. Given the emphasis of the present study upon abduction, to include cases with so clearly disparate a focus would necessarily cloud any contribution they might make to the research. Also, abductions involving ransom requests and abductions occurring outside North America were omitted from the study. Reports of "kidnappings" were left out, as these abductions were for purposes of exploiting parents and their wealth as opposed to the children themselves. Abductions occurring outside North America were also excluded from the sample, as these probably did not contribute to a panic over ascending rates of abduction in Canada and the United States.

### III. The Analysis

Quantitative analyses were run on the data which delineated the articles into a number of categories by frequency and proportion. The categories include the year of publication; type of publication (primary versus secondary); the focus of the article; the reasons given for the cause of missing children; the rationale, cause, or blame attributed to specific cases of missing children; the sources quoted or consulted; and the specific cases cited. Some analyses cross-tabulated two or more of these categories. The research instrument adopted by this study was primarily based upon from the Voumvakis and Ericson (1984) study of news accounts of attacks on women. Although there were a variety of changes and amendments made to their instruments in order to meet the objectives of this study, the basic coding format was similar. As well, three categories were taken from Voumvakis and Ericson. These

included: new contexts, sources quoted, and locus of the problem. The other categories, outlined below, were constructed by the author and were included to provide additional data on the subject emphasis of the articles, the frequency with which certain cases were mentioned and whether Child Find was cited.

The coding scheme was carefully developed over a period of time in consultation with a senior researcher at the Criminology Research Centre, Simon Fraser University. During this period categories were selected on an *a priori* basis by examining the documents to be studied. From this a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories emerged. The resulting coding scheme (Appendix B) was then examined by an independent observer on the same set of observations. The categorization that proved most difficult was the type of news (primary versus secondary)<sup>2</sup> and the locus of the problem. On these categorizations, there was only about 60% agreement, but on all other categories there was at least 80% agreement. Chadwick, Bahr and Albrecht (1984:252) posit that inter-rater reliability should be at least 60%; items with a reliability less than 60% suggest that the operational definitions probably need to be made more specific.

The basic counting unit employed in this analysis was that of the single newspaper article. To permit an in-depth analysis of each story, all news reports on missing children were coded on the basis of thirteen variables (see Appendix B). Every itemized piece of information collected from these reports was systematically catalogued on a coding sheet (see Appendix C) and then key-punched. To ensure comprehensiveness, double-coding was permitted with respect to the following variables: focus of the article, sources quoted, and locus of the problem.

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<sup>2</sup>Classification of articles as either primary or secondary was determined in accordance with the criteria set out by Hall *et al.* (1978). They specified primary news reports as first order presentations; that is, primary news items describe events as they happen without presenting theories or opinions about their causation. Secondary news coverage addresses questions arising from the primary news items, and presents theories and opinions about the causation. These categories are described in greater detail in the coding manual (Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability in classifying articles as primary or secondary can be low because of the overlap between the two categories.

The first analysis examines the amount of coverage across the three newspapers by year and shows the extent of the increase in the amount of reporting after the advent of Child Find. The second analysis concentrates upon the proportion of the articles that were primary as opposed to secondary news items, such as features, opinion columns and editorials. The third analysis classifies the articles by their subject emphasis. This classification was in accordance with four categories of subjects, including: stranger abductions; parental abductions; runaway or castaway children; child safety; or some combination of two or more of the four. Initially, cases of abduction by acquaintances and abduction by other relatives were included in the classification as two separate categories. However, as it became apparent that most articles did not contain sufficient information to reliably classify cases along these lines, these categories were dropped from the list of subject categories.

The next analysis classifies articles according to the reasons given generally for the cause of missing children, and the rationale, cause or blame attributed to specific cases of missing children. In addition to the categories used by Voumvakis and Ericson (1984)(see Appendix B), the present research also included organized conspiracy or profiteering as a reason or cause. The analysis also shows the percentage of articles in each category that referred to Child Find. Following this, three analyses are presented, these concerning the sources quoted or consulted in the articles and the reasons or rationales offered for the cause(s) of missing children by the various sources. Appendix B shows the definitions which were used to classify articles according to their source. The analyses provide cross-tabulations of the sources quoted by the newspapers by (1) the reasons given for the cause of missing children, and (2) the rationale, cause or blame attributed to specific cases. The latter two categories are also cross-tabulated with the focus of the article.

The final analyses depict those cases which were reported with the most frequency. The cases are broken down by newspaper and type of article (primary versus secondary). Appendix A shows the names of all victims that appeared in the total sample of articles; among these

articles five names were most prominent: Sharin' Keenan, Christine Jessop, Lizzie Tomlinson, Alison Parrot, Nicole Morin. Because the descriptors used in the search of the Sun's clipping file included abducted and murdered children, it is possible that some cases are disproportionately represented. These cases, however, are the ones that received the most extensive media coverage and which figure prominently in the analyses that follow.

#### IV. Assumptions and Limitations of the Methodology

It is impossible, within the boundaries of a single research effort, to examine the full range of media forms and devices which contributed to the moral panic over missing children. The sheer magnitude of the media, ranging from television and radio to billboards and the sides of milk cartons, obscures the "big picture", and thus a series of smaller, more detailed examinations contributes to a clearer perspective on the subject. Massive sweeps of the media phenomenon at the expense of smaller, but no less important details, often render little more but a picture of the forest with no differentiation between the trees which compose it. In the interests of avoiding these difficulties, the present research limited its focus to an examination of the print media and their role in the production of knowledge of missing children and stranger-danger.

To some degree, an emphasis on the print media necessarily limits the generalizability of the research. Those who have compared the different forms of media and their roles in the production of knowledge (most commonly, comparisons of the print media and television) and the reception and effects of that knowledge upon their audiences, for the most part report little variation between these media forms. The degree of variance of course depends upon the information sought by the researchers; those studying the production process, such as Epstein (1973), Gitlin (1980), and Tuchman (1978), have argued that there is very little difference across media, while those who have engaged in systematic analyses of news content perceive a far wider discrepancy. An example of the latter group is found in the Glasgow

University media group's study of the contents of industrial news reports, which were found to vary greatly depending upon whether they appeared in newspapers or on television (1976:80). In the area of crime news, Graber (1980) has demonstrated considerable divergence between television and newspaper coverage.

Assuming that there is a tangible difference between electronic and print media news coverage, a truly comprehensive study of the role of media in the production of moral panics would certainly combine analyses of both. However, given the constraints of size and time imposed upon masters' theses, such an exhaustive exercise was clearly beyond the auspices of the present study. The intention here was the elaboration of a single aspect of the media as a means by which to facilitate an appreciation of the total entity.

Another limitation of the study concerns the adequacy of the sample. Because the Canadian Newspaper Index does not include the Toronto Sun, the articles representing the Sun's coverage were derived from a search conducted by the Chief Librarian for the Sun. One cannot be sure that the coverage is as complete for this paper as it is for the other two papers. Finally, the findings of this study can only be generalized to Canadian newsprint media. Because the problem addressed in this study has a longer history in the United States than in Canada, the findings probably underestimate the extent to which the stranger-danger phenomenon is portrayed in North America. Thus a more extensive study of a large sample of United States newspapers might yield different findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### DANGEROUS STRANGERS: ANALYZING MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF CHILD ABDUCTION

In this chapter, the theoretical assertions raised in the preceding chapters will be subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the findings of which are presented in two distinct sections of this chapter. Although an integrated presentation of the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative analyses might have provided a more powerful discussion, these were kept separate to facilitate a clear appreciation of which findings arose from each approach. Integration of the findings is accomplished in the concluding chapter.

Earlier in this thesis, the argument was made that the media are not simple mirrors for events of the day, reflecting news from its origins in the community to a reading audience. Rather, through an analysis of the process of news reporting, it was asserted that journalists sift the news through a series of criteria which not only gauge its value as news, but also flush out those elements of a story which must be highlighted in order to maximize that value. These criteria were shown to manifest a pronounced ideological bent which translates news into ideological reinforcements of real-world institutions and the socio-political status quo. In the context of social control, this reinforcement is effected through the presentation of news in a "crisis format", encouraging to successive waves of panic conducive to a reliance upon strong remedies and reactionary policies.

At this point it should again be emphasized that the creation of news, as an ideological account of "real happenings", does not appear to be a matter of personal agendas or organized conspiracies on the part of journalists. Rather, it is a matter of the systemic relationships among journalists and their sources. From this perspective, the cultural and social configuration of news work narrows the news aperture, so that news becomes ideological or "partial" knowledge in two senses: first, it renders preferred readings of the ideological messages of particular source organizations. This is accomplished by omitting the ideological

messages of other organizations or relegating them to a less significant level. Second, the emphasis placed upon those preferred messages encourages a sort of tunnel vision regarding certain types of events. This, in turn, leads to a unidimensional way of seeing those events, both for journalists and the consumers of their products, which reinforces a conservative, consensual view of the world (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:9).

Contemporary analysts of the media (see: Chibnall, 1977; Ericson *et al.*, 1987; Fishman, 1980; Hall *et al.*, 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984) have revealed that, in aggregate, news accounts of deviance and social control contribute to ideological hegemony. By relying upon sources which are accredited, and whose accreditation tends to coincide with a particular moral persuasion, journalists wishing to legitimate their articles with accredited information necessarily colour their writings with a particular moral position. This tendency is taken to a more insidious level when journalists, attempting to "reach" their readership through "speaking their language", translate *both* the raw information which forms the basis of their presentation, and the moral tenor surrounding that information, into commonsense terminology which, at least potentially, is construed as the commonsense core of the event.

Portrayals of child abduction would not be expected to vary in this regard, leading child abduction to be understood as resulting not from any structural defect inherent in the society itself, but rather from individual aberrations within that society. Thus, those abductions which are explained tend to be attributed to offender pathology, victim carelessness, inadequate legislation or inattentive policing.

## I. Owning Social Problems:

### The Role of Sources in Media Portrayals of Missing Children

Table 1 shows that during the eight-year period covered by this study, all three newspapers provided extensive coverage of stories pertaining to missing children, but in differing degrees. Scrutiny of the papers published in that period revealed 218 articles related to this theme in the Toronto Star, 231 in the Toronto Sun and 105 in the Globe and Mail. Despite the Globe's larger "newshole"<sup>1</sup> (the proportion of reading material to advertising), both the Sun and the Star awarded more news space to items focusing or touching upon the notion of "stranger-danger" than the Globe and Mail.

TABLE 1  
Number of Articles on Missing Children in Toronto Newspapers by Year, 1979-1986

Year	Toronto Sun	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	Total
1979	0	6	1	7
1980	25	12	3	40
1981	2	4	11	17
1982	1	9	5	15
1983	33	43	15	91
1984	18	31	5	54
1985	47	50	28	125
1986	92	76	37	205
Totals:	218	231	105	554

Differences among the newspapers in the amount of coverage may reflect disparities in their target audiences. Both the Sun and Star, for example, in competing for a mass audience, might be expected to have a greater interest in sensationalism and reports of crime

<sup>1</sup>Approximately 45% of a typical weekly Globe and Mail newspaper is devoted to news space, as compared to the other two Toronto dailies included in this study, which have approximately 30% each (Royal Commission on Newspapers, 1981:76 in Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984:16).



than the Globe and Mail, which aims to tap a more elite readership, who are more interested in business and economic issues, national politics and international affairs.

Table 1 also shows that the amount of coverage was greater and steadily increasing in the last four years covered by the study. This increase may have stemmed from the media's conspicuous treatment of a few specific cases, such as Sharin' Keenan in 1983, Christine Jessop in 1984, Nicole Morin in 1985, and Alison Parrott in 1986.<sup>2</sup> Another element fueling the rise in coverage of missing children was the movement of Child Find Incorporated into Canada in 1983. This development received a good deal of media attention and offers an excellent example of the symbiotic interplay that can arise between agencies such as Child Find and the media. Without the accelerated coverage of child abductions, especially those of a more grisly nature, it is doubtful that Child Find would have made its move north, as Canadians may have been reluctant to view the missing children phenomenon in Canada as having attained the epidemic proportions it had been ascribed in the United States (Taylor, 1983; 1987). In turn, the arrival of Child Find was not only a news story in itself, but it also promised a future accessible source of "credible" information on missing children for the media.

Table 2 indicates the number of articles in each newspaper that may be classified as primary news items, that is, those stories describing an incident or legal action resulting from it. Approximately 80% of all articles in the newspapers qualified as primary news items, most of these providing stories of incidents. The three newspapers did not differ substantially in this respect: the Toronto Sun had a slightly higher proportion of primary news articles (85.3%), and the Toronto Star manifested a smaller number (76.3%). The Globe and Mail, which is noted for its emphasis on secondary news and commentary (Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984), might reasonably be expected to produce a greater proportion of secondary news accounts relative to its more popular counterparts, the Sun and the Star. This was not the

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<sup>2</sup>For a detailed discussion of these cases and similar cases, see pp. 68, 70, 72, 73.

case, however, as approximately 80% of the Globe's news items constituted primary news reports. Taken together, the Toronto Star appeared to offer the most balanced coverage, with over one-quarter of its articles providing secondary analysis and discussion of primary news events.

TABLE 2  
Number and Percentage of Articles on Missing Children in Three Toronto Newspapers by News Categories

News Categories	Toronto Sun	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	Total
<b>I. Primary News:</b>				
Stories of Incidents	183 (83.9)	160 (69.3)	80 (76.2)	423 (76.4)
Stories of Court Cases	3 ( 1.4)	10 ( 4.3)	4 ( 3.8)	17 ( 3.1)
<b>II. Secondary News:</b>				
Features, Opinion Columns & Editorials	32 (14.7)	61 (26.4)	21 (20.0)	114 (20.6)
Totals:	218 (100.0)	231 (100.0)	105 (100.0)	554 (100.0)

Furthermore, not only were certain types of abductions emphasized, but also certain aspects of the criminal justice system were underscored to the almost total exclusion of others. As documented in Table 3, most of the articles in the three newspapers were news reports of crime incidents involving the kidnapping and sexual assault of a child by a non-family member. Where the incident became the subject of a criminal investigation and subsequent court case, only those criminal justice system authorities involved in the pre-arrest facets of the case were noted by the media. There was little or no mention of the post-arrest stages of the case, and rarely did the papers carry coverage of the court proceedings. As a result of the newspapers' fixation with this statistically infrequent form of

abduction, their reading public is presented with a over-arching view of missing children as victims of violent, physical exploitation. To the degree that official occurrence rates confirm such cases as comprising only a small minority of abductions, the reading audience is necessarily presented with an erroneous impression of child abduction. In addition, owing to the media's focus upon the crime, rather than society and the criminal justice system's response to it, the public is afforded an unbalanced picture which impresses only what the crime has done to them, not what they might do about the crime.

TABLE 3  
Number and Percentage of Articles on Missing Children in Three Toronto Newspapers by Focus of the Article

Focus of Article	Toronto Sun	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	Total
Stranger Abduction	197 (90.8)	171 (74.0)	84 (80.0)	452 (81.7)
Parental Abduction	4 ( 1.8)	24 (10.4)	6 ( 5.7)	34 ( 6.1)
Runaway/Castaway Children	3 ( 1.4)	13 ( 5.6)	4 ( 3.8)	20 ( 3.6)
Combination <sup>1</sup>	3 ( 1.4)	11 ( 4.8)	5 ( 4.8)	19 ( 3.4)
Child Safety	10 ( 4.6)	12 ( 5.2)	6 ( 5.7)	28 ( 5.1)
Totals:	217 (100.0)	231 (100.0)	105 (100.0)	553 (100.0)

Note: 1. The categories were not mutually exclusive. Articles with two or more foci were included in the "combination" category.

Table 3 demonstrates how the media have perpetuated the myth of "stranger-danger." This table shows the number of articles about missing children categorized by the individuals believed responsible for the abduction. Over 85% of the articles *across all three papers*

centered their assessment of blame upon strangers and how parents might protect their children from them. Less than ten percent of the articles dealt with what are known to be far more commonplace means by which children disappear, such as running away or parental abductions.

Contrary to what the foci of these newspapers would suggest, the research and official crime statistics discussed in Chapter I make a strong case for the probability that stranger abductions account for only a slim minority of children gone missing. Thus, while official tallies establish the greatest percentage of missing children as runaways (95%) and attribute *less than one percent* of the total to stranger abductions, the media report incidents of missing children in a manner that suggests quite the opposite ratio. When over 85% of the total news coverage on missing children is concerned with less than one percent of cases, it suggests that something very important is being lost in the translation of the phenomenon from statistics to news stories. This, as was previously mentioned in Chapter I, is the moment of ideological displacement or *moral panic*. According to Hall et al (1978:22), it is at this point that the "silent majority" detects a sense of panic over the deviance and moves toward increasingly punitive and repressive measures to counteract it. In most cases, the design and implementation of these measures will be left to the state, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of pre-existing law and order institutions and coercive state regulation.

The degree to which each of the three newspapers emphasized stranger abductions over runaways or parental abductions reflects the same pattern observed in Table 2, which describes the frequency of primary and secondary news coverage. The Toronto Sun and the Globe and Mail possessed the highest percentages of primary news items (85.3% and 80.0%, respectively), and also manifested the greatest percentages of articles pertaining to stranger abduction or strategies for its prevention (95.0% and 86.0%, respectively). The Toronto Star offered a relatively more balanced coverage, with 16% of its articles dealing with parental abductions or runaways, as opposed to stranger abductions. Even in the Star, however, the

magnitude of coverage of stranger abductions greatly exaggerated the actual frequency of such abductions as indicated by official statistics.

Given the apparent discrepancies between the newspapers' depiction of the missing children phenomenon and that offered by the official statistics, it might be suggested that the media, in helping to make crime news available to the public, have powerful event-creating and event-limiting influences, and that what passes for crime news is an ideological construct, which is fashioned from the power of official versions of crime.

Gusfield (1981) argues that in analyzing public problems, a pattern emerges which dictates how problems arise and evidence a structure. According to this author, understanding this pattern will also lead to an understanding of how that particular problem came to be viewed in the way (or ways) it has within the public arena. This in turn illustrates the notion of ownership of public problems. Those who "own" public problems are not necessarily those original participants in the problematic event itself, but rather those who pick up on the problem as an event and re-create it through the media, thereby defining the way in which the public ultimately comes to view it. The concept of ownership is derived from the notion that, in areas of public opinion and debate, all groups do not possess equal degrees of power to influence or define public perceptions of reality. For some of those groups, such as those social control agencies interested primarily in simply solving the problem, these variations in authority over problem-definition are immaterial, while to others, such as Child Find organizations, it is a crucial dimension of their on-going struggle to politicize and criminalize a problem which has not typically manifested either quality. Central to this struggle is the drive to "own" the problem, for such control would greatly facilitate Child Find organizations' ability to define the issue as they see fit (Gusfield, 1981:10-12).

The question of ownership and "disownership" (Ibid.) of public problems, then, is very much a matter of the power and authority different groups can rally to control the degree

to which they enter the public arena. These groups, and their varying power differentials, comprise a larger social structure of problem definition, wherein some versions of "reality" exert a greater degree of influence upon the definitions of events than do others. As these definitions necessarily enter into conflicts for control over, or ownership, of the problem, a political dimension enters the structure. It is the existence of this conflict which make the politics of an issue manifest (Gusfield, 1981:15).

This control over problem definition — and the control over solutions which invariably accompanies it — present an important vehicle by which the source asserts his/her monopoly of knowledge (Ericson *et al.*, 1987). Through this monopoly, a source gains control over definitions of the locus of the problem, attributions of causal responsibility, and of political responsibility (Gusfield, 1981).

In line with the preceding, it was felt that aggregate data on the preferred definitions of the problem, and proposed remedies of those agencies initially consulted regarding missing children, might help explicate the ideological circumstances underlying the ultimate portrayal of the missing children phenomenon. Table 4 indicates that approximately 12% of the 554 articles referred to Child Find organizations. However, only about six percent of the primary news stories (24 out of 423) refer to child find organizations, while approximately 35% of the secondary news articles (40 out of 114) refer to such agencies. Because it is secondary news coverage that is responsible for mobilizing possible explanations of a given problem (Hall *et al.*, 1973), these findings are entirely consistent with the "agenda-setting" (Nelson, 1984) function attributed to the preferred solutions of accredited bodies like Child Find.

Table 4 also indicates that out of the 452 articles that emphasize stranger abduction, only 31 had the journalists consulting accredited agencies such as Child Find. Amongst the articles discussing parental abduction, the proportion citing Child Find was about 18% (6 out of 34). These figures probably represent more closely what these organizations actually do, in that private organizations like Child Find are less concerned with abduction by strangers than

TABLE 4

Number of Articles Referring to Child Find or Related Organizations by Category, Focus of Article, Reasons Given for the Cause of Missing Children, and the Rationale, Cause or Blame Attributed to Specific Cases of Missing Children

	Total Number of Articles	Number of Articles Referring Child Find
<b>I. Category</b>		
Primary News:		
Stories of Incidents	423	24
Stories of Court	17	1
Secondary News	<u>114</u>	<u>40</u>
	554	65
<b>II. Focus of Article</b>		
Stranger Abduction	452	31
Parental Abduction	34	6
Runaway/Castaway Children	20	0
Child Safety	19	13
Combination	<u>28</u>	<u>15</u>
	553	65
<b>III. Reasons Given Generally</b>		
Victim	2	1
Offender	23	5
Criminal Justice or Police	20	9
Organized Conspiracy or Profiteers	12	3
Family	20	2
Wider Social Pathology	11	2
Deviant Persons (Psychopaths)	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>
	92	23
<b>IV. Rationale, Cause or Blame for Specific Cases</b>		
Victim	11	0
Offender	94	7
Criminal Justice or Police	31	17
Organized Conspiracy or Profiteers	4	0
Family	6	0
Wider Social Pathology	8	0
Deviant Persons (Psychopaths)	<u>20</u>	<u>2</u>
	174	26

the more common abductions by parents. However, nearly three-quarters (13 out of 19) of all articles referring to such groups had child safety or stranger danger as their focus. It might be suggested, then, that the media, in selecting out only the more alarmist of Child Find agencies' positions, actually betray the primary motivations of those agencies. Yet, insofar as it is stranger danger that sells papers, this is what the media must emphasize. And insofar as these agencies require the patronage of the media and the subsequent legitimation that this patronage provides, it might be ventured that the media, in altering the true focus of these agencies, provides an indirect confirmation of the continued funding and support of Child Find agencies.

The final section of Table 4 shows the number and percentage of articles citing organizations such as Child Find among those that specified a "cause" of missing children generally (23 out of 92 articles altogether), and among those that gave a rationale, cause or blame for a specific case (26 out of 174 articles altogether). Of the three largest categories (20 or more articles) of reasons given, Child Find agencies were cited most frequently in articles blaming the criminal justice system (9 out of 20), followed by those naming the offender (5 out of 23), and those referring to the family (2 out of 20). The other categories yielded fewer than 15 articles. Among those articles providing a rationale, cause or blame for a specific case, the largest categories were offenders, the criminal justice system, and deviant (psychopaths) persons. Again those articles blaming the criminal justice system most often cited Child Find (17 out of 35 articles). Articles blaming offenders or deviant persons seldom quoted Child Find; less than 10% of the articles in those categories mentioned the organization.

The finding that articles blaming the criminal justice system most often cited child find agencies, relates to the genesis of the missing children scare. At the incipience of these agencies, their primary membership was composed of parents who had endured the loss of a child. For most of these people, and thus the agencies they together created, the prevailing



litany was that the police might be able to help you find your stolen car, but not your stolen child. Most periodicals and many newspaper articles dealing with the scare at that time willingly repeated that litany, primarily as a means by which to convey the "messed up" value system of modern, western society.

Attributing the locus of the problem generally to the police or the criminal justice system led Child Find groups to promulgate a variety of extremist responses to the perceived inactivity of the system.<sup>3</sup> To the degree that these responses were intended to fill a rather profound gap between police services and perceived public needs, they were also an attempt to embarrass official agencies into involving themselves in areas they had previously regarded as purely domestic (e.g., especially runaways and parental abductions), and thus beyond the "appropriate" rubric of law enforcement responsibilities.

Table 5 shows the percentages of the types of sources cited by each newspaper. Journalistic practice predisposes reporters to rely primarily upon people in positions of authority to obtain information and provide validation for reports (Chibnall, 1971; Fishman, 1981; Sherizen, 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984). This structured access results in the press consistently legitimating the interpretations of those whose positions make them primary authorities, often leading to the exclusion of definitions of the problem offered by those outside the realm of official authority and knowledge. As a result, one might expect the opinions of laypersons to be conspicuously absent from the majority of news reports, especially those offered by newspapers priding themselves in "serious" or "quality" news coverage. The Globe and Mail qualifies as a newspaper in the latter category, and might therefore be expected to look to "official" viewpoints in their news stories to a greater degree than either the Sun or Star. Table 5 suggests that this was, in fact, the case. For example, 72% of the articles in the Globe and Mail cited authorities of the criminal justice system, as compared with 65% in the Sun and the Star. The Globe and Mail was also a more

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<sup>3</sup>As was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, these responses included child identification schemes, missing children registries, etc.

TABLE 5  
 Percentage of Articles in Each of Three Toronto Newspapers Quoting or Consulting Specific Sources

Source Quoted or Consulted	Toronto Sun	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	Overall Percentage
Criminal Justice System	55.0	64.5	72.4	62.3
Individual Citizens and Participants	45.9	51.1	44.8	47.8
Experts	11.9	19.9	19.0	16.6
Journalists/Authors	0.9	3.0	2.9	2.2
Author of Article	9.2	11.3	1.0	8.5
Politicians and Legislators	3.2	10.0	13.3	7.9
Other	12.4	17.3	15.2	15.0

Note: Percentages do not total 100% as many authors cited more than one source.

frequent forum for the opinions of experts, as well as politicians and legislators, on the matter of missing children.

The three newspapers did not differ substantially in the extent to which they relied on individual citizens and participants: approximately one-half of the articles in each paper relied upon "non-accredited" sources. In most contexts, the opinions offered by this category of individuals were enlisted to reinforce an article's theme of stranger-danger. The reactions of parents of the victims, their friends, neighbours and other family members, were often solicited to add a dramatic, personal effect to the story. This finding concurs with Voumvakis and Ericson's (1984) study of attacks on women in Toronto. In personalizing the experience of missing children, the print media, whether intentionally or otherwise, contribute to the general social moral panic over child abduction. Reading of a family's grief over a missing and possibly murdered child adds a dimension of immediacy to the phenomenon which keeps

it alive as a news theme, thereby sustaining not only the newspapers' rates of circulation, but an entire industry of "child-saving" devices against stranger-danger.

## II. Assumptions of Guilt: Media Portrayals of Responsibility for Missing Children

Table 6 shows the numbers of articles that gave reasons for the cause of missing children generally, while Table 7 reports the number of articles that attributed to a specific case some rationale, cause or blame. The figures in both tables are categorized by the source of the opinion.

One might expect that members of the criminal justice system would more often attribute the cause of missing children to offenders and victims, and occasionally to organized conspirators or profiteers, while experts would be more likely to see the problem located within the offender, the family or as a wider social pathology. Individual citizens, especially those who had endured the loss of a child, might be expected to blame the police or the criminal justice system. This conjecture, as mentioned above, stems from the fact that Child Find began as a grass roots initiative by parents who were disturbed by the efforts made by the legal system in locating their child.

The most striking finding presented by Tables 6 and 7 is the scarcity of articles that offered any reason or rationale. Only 90 of the 554 articles (16%) gave a reason for the cause of missing children generally, and only 170 (31%) offered some rationale or blame for the specific case. This finding suggests that the papers studied adhered to a primary news format in constructing this theme. In following this formula and avoiding explanations of specific crimes, the focus of the articles necessarily gravitated toward commonsense concerns and assumptions about the missing children phenomenon, which in turn contributed to generalized explanations of stranger-danger.

TABLE 6

Reasons Given for the Cause of Missing Children by Source Quoted or Consulted

Reason Given	SOURCE			Total
	Criminal Justice System	Experts	Author of Article	
Victim	0	0	0	0
Offender	5	5	6	16
Criminal Justice or Police	4	7	4	15
Organized Conspiracy or Profiteers	2	7	1	10
Family	4	10	4	18
Wider Social Pathology	1	3	3	7
Deviant Persons (Psychopaths)	2	1	0	3
Total	18	33	18	69

Note: Only 90 out of the 554 articles gave reasons for the cause of missing children. Sixty-nine of these 90 cited the three sources above. The remainder (not shown) were in the following source categories: Individual citizens (7), journalists or authors (3), participants (5), politicians or legislators (5), and other (1).

TABLE 7

Rationale, Cause or Blame Attributed to Cases of Missing Children by Source Quoted or Consulted

Rationale, Cause, or Blame	SOURCE			Total
	Criminal Justice System	Individual Citizen or Participants	Experts Author of Article	
Victim	0	11	0	11
Offender	49	26	11	92
Criminal Justice or Police	1	15	4	22
Organized Conspiracy or Profiteers	1	1	0	3
Family	1	4	1	6
Wider Social Pathology	2	4	0	8
Non-Deviant Persons (Psychopaths)	8	1	11	20
Total	62	62	27	162

Note: One hundred seventy of the 554 articles offered a rationale, cause or blame. Of these, 162 cited the four sources listed above. The remainder (not shown) were in the following source categories: Journalists or author (1), politician or legislator (2), and other (5).

Although the numbers are insufficient to permit definitive statements about the reasons and rationales offered by specific sources, what information may be derived from them reveals their alignment with the hypotheses stated above. For example, in 5 of 18 articles criminal justice system experts attribute the cause generally to offender's personal pathologies, as compared with a similar attribution in 49 of 61 articles dealing with specific cases. Experts outside the criminal justice system more often understood the problem as residing in the home or community; they attributed the general cause to the family or wider social pathology in 13 of 33 articles. This was not to the exclusion of other explanations, however, as these experts also cited offenders, the criminal justice system, organized conspirators and profiteers as the principal causes in 19 of the 33 articles. On specific cases, the experts were divided: just under half of them blamed a deviant person (psychopath) or the family, while the remainder ascribed blame to offenders or the criminal justice system. Of those sources that blamed the police or the criminal justice system in specific cases, nearly three-quarters were individual citizens. Citizens were also more willing to blame offenders and, interestingly, they were the only group to attribute the cause to the victim (but with a low frequency). These findings are also consistent with Voumvakis and Ericson's (1984) study, which suggested a chain reaction wherein different newspapers emphasized different sources, who in turn emphasized different attributions for the problem.

Table 8 depicts the number of articles that gave reasons for the cause of missing children generally and the number of articles that attributed to a specific case some rationale, cause or blame. The figures for both the reasons or rationales are categorized by the focus for the article. Again, while the numbers are insufficient to permit generalizations about the causes of missing children, they provide a basis, albeit tenuous, for some brief discussion. For example, Table 8 reveals that half of the articles (12 out of 24) focusing on stranger abduction cited the offender or deviant person as the cause of missing children generally, as compared with a similar attribution in 77% (114 out of 148) of the reports dealing with specific cases. Articles focusing on parental abduction, on the other hand, understood the

TABLE 8

Reasons Given Generally for the Cause of Missing Children, and the Rationale, Cause or Blame Attributed to Specific Cases of Missing Children, by Focus of the Article

	FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE			Total
	Stranger Abduction	Parental Abduction	Runaway/Castaway	
<b>I. Reasons Given Generally</b>				
Victim	1			1
Offender	11	4		15
Criminal Justice or Police	3	11	2	16
Organized Conspiracy or Profiteers	2		7	9
Family	1	2	14	17
Wider Social Pathology	5		4	9
Deviant Persons (Psychopaths)	1		1	2
Total	24	17	28	69
<b>II. Rationale, Cause or Blame for Specific Cases</b>				
Victim	10		1	11
Offender	94	4		98
Criminal Justice or Police	13	5	1	19
Organized Conspiracy or Profiteers	1	1	1	3
Family	2		4	6
Wider Social Pathology	8			8
Deviant Persons (Psychopaths)	20			20
Total	148	10	7	165

Note: Some articles gave more than one general or specific reason. Therefore the totals do not represent numbers of articles.

general cause to reside with the criminal justice system in 65% (11 out of 17) of the items, as compared with half the articles (5 out of 10) dealing with specific cases. Finally, approximately 75% (21 out of 28) of the newspaper items dealing with runaway youth attributed the general cause to pathological family forms and organized conspiracies, as compared with five out of the seven articles dealing with specific cases.

Blaming offenders, organized conspiracies and the criminal justice system clearly cast the missing children scare not only as a criminal problem, but one perpetuated by particular categories of people. By personalizing the problem, criticisms regarding missing children episodes could be deflected from structural consideration (Chibnall, 1977). In this way, critical discourse relating to the wider structural or social aspects of the missing children problem, including those pertaining to the boundary between public and private problems, remained outside the issue.

Tables 9 and 10 demonstrate one of the means by which dramatic, but statistically rare events, such as child sex-slayings, are amplified beyond their actual implications to emphasize their "threat value" for society. These tables show the number of articles citing specific primary and secondary cases for each of the three newspapers.

Of the 554 articles, 470 cited a specific primary case. Of these, 389 (83%) focused upon specific cases which were *generally unrepresentative* of the most common forms of child abduction, including: Christine Jessop, Sharin' Keenan, Nicole Morin, Alison Parrott, and Elizabeth Tomlinson. Each of these cases, believed to be stranger abductions, received saturation coverage by the media which, in turn, evoked a strong sense of community outrage. With the exception of Nicole Morin, whose present whereabouts/status are unknown, all these children met with the most heinous forms of sexual assault and death, justifying parents' worst fears about child abduction. The Parrot case was especially chilling for safety conscious parents, as the murdered Toronto girl had supposedly been "street-proofed". By accentuating these cases, the papers created an exaggerated sense of stranger-danger and from

TABLE 9  
Number of Articles for Each Primary Case by Newspaper

Primary Case	Toronto Sun	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	Total
Christine Jessop	38	31	14	83
Sharin' Keenan	38	31	11	73
Nicole Morin	40	39	19	98
Alison Parrot	45	39	20	98
Elizabeth Tomlinson	27	10	0	37
Other Primary Case	19	38	24	81
No Primary Case	18	49	17	84
Totals:	218	231	105	554

TABLE 10  
Number of Articles for Each Secondary Case by Newspaper

Secondary Case	Toronto Sun	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	Total
Christine Jessop	10	11	1	22
Sharin' Keenan	5	9	2	16
Nicole Morin	4	8	5	17
Alison Parrot	7	3	1	11
Elizabeth Tomlinson	3	3	0	6
Other Secondary Case	21	67	19	107
No Secondary Case	185	181	87	453
Totals:	235	282	115	632

Note: Some articles included more than one secondary case. Therefore the totals do not represent numbers of articles.



this, a climate of escalating threat, calling for increasing social controls to stop that escalation. These same five cases were also most commonly recycled as secondary news items. Only 101 of the 554 articles listed as secondary cases, but of that 101, 72 cases were constituted by the five exemplary cases. Several articles cited more than one secondary case, with 107 mentions of cases other than those noted above. The frequency of citation of specific cases did not vary substantially across the three newspapers.

In constructing the missing children phenomenon as a news story, *all three* newspapers emphasized its most troubling aspects. For example, the smallest group of missing children cases, those involving stranger abduction, received by far the the most media attention. Within that focus, the media further emphasized only the most hideous aspects of those cases, inundating their reading audience with reports of vicious sexual assaults and grisly murders. By focusing upon these elements, and consistently restricting news coverage to those cases manifesting those elements, a myth of all missing children as "stranger-endangered" prevailed in the public culture. The cumulative effect of the "fear and loathing"<sup>4</sup> approach to child abduction is to remind parents of their children's vulnerability and their own limited power to protect them.

While the emphasis upon attributions varied across news reports depending upon the sources consulted, the predominant rationalizations related to the offender, inadequate policing and criminal justice system reactions, and to the victims themselves. These findings are consistent with the Voumvakis and Ericson (1984) study and are consonant with the popular ideology regarding law and order.

Critical discourse relating the problem to some wider social pathology, such as the media's portrayal of children as sexual objects and the apparent ambivalence surrounding sexual interaction with children, was conspicuously absent in all newspapers studied. A sterling

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<sup>4</sup>This phrase was first used by the Thompson Newspaper chain (specifically Maclean's magazine, 26 July 1982) to describe an emotional climate of "fear and loathing" which arose in response to a series of murders and rapes in the Toronto area in 1982.

example of this was presented by Time magazine in its 9 August 1983 edition, wherein the editors followed an especially horrific article on child sexual abuse with a photo of eleven-year old Brooke Shields, striking a provocative pose in lacy pink underwear, accompanied by a cheery note about her recent role as a child prostitute in the popular film "Pretty Baby" (Eliasoph, 1986:16).

Thus the media, as yet apparently uncertain of their own mandate in the phenomenon, preferred to advise parents of unknown dangers in their neighborhood playgrounds and alleys, rather than the structural considerations which contributed so greatly to that danger. In so doing, they presented the public with a set of media blinders that prevented them, and those among them who may have been in the position to suggest remedies, from seeing the larger motif of child abuse (Eliasoph, 1986; Finkelhor, 1984).

## II. More Nuts, Sluts and Perverts:

### Understanding Media Presentations of Child Abduction

Popular anxieties about child abduction were dramatized and amplified by the newspapers included in this study.<sup>5</sup> This was especially so with the Sun and the Star, which made a habit of contextualizing their primary reports of children gone missing with reports of previous, often grisly, cases. All "new" cases, regardless of their apparent origins, came to be understood as extensions of the larger phenomenon of stranger-endangered missing children. This action manifested two important side effects. First, it permitted the maintenance of the theory of "stranger-danger" at a fever pitch, and second, it nurtured an on-going context for new cases. This interaction was highly productive for the papers, as it removed the need to

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<sup>5</sup>This approach centers on the securing of comments from friends and relatives of the victim which reveal their fear and loathing of the incident and its perpetrator. The intent is to provide tertiary understanding of "what it is like to be involved in, or close to someone involved in, the calamitous event" (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:142-143). Often this approach is intensified by the constant repetition of these reports, which reinforces the fear and loathing and, implicitly, those aspects of the event(s) which are most conducive to the fear and loathing.

explain each new incident in its own terms and added an important source of titillation to other, possibly less-than-exciting news stories. The Toronto Star, for example, used the case of Christine Jessop's disappearance and the recovery of her body as a means to recall the murders of other metro Toronto children kidnapped by strangers (The Toronto Star 18 October 1984; 2 January 1985). In the initial portrayal of her disappearance, and in the report following the discovery of Christine's body, the Star embedded her slaying in the context of a series of child abductions and murders by strangers. The following excerpt was repeated verbatim in both stories:

The tragic end of the Christine Jessop case calls to mind the rare grisly murders of metro children kidnapped by strangers...Toronto is still scarred by the discovery of the sexually-abused body of Sharin' Morningstar Keenan. The 9-year-old was found stuffed in a rooming-house refrigerator on Feb. 1, 1983, nine days after she was last seen at a playground.

Other victims are: Lisa Ann Kowalski, 8, sexually-abused and strangled, found in a garbage bag in a neighbor's garage, May 18, 1976; Emanuel Jaques (sic), 12, sexually tortured and drowned in a sink, later found in a garbage bag on the roof of a body rub parlor, Aug. 1, 1977; and Elizabeth Tomlinson, 5, raped and strangled, found in bushes near her home, May 26, 1980.

When Sharin' Keenan's body was found stuffed in a refrigerator in a Toronto rooming house, the Star linked her brutal murder with the abduction of several other metro Toronto youth, including Lizzie Tomlinson:

Her name was Lizzie Tomlinson. The 6-year old girl with blonde hair went missing in 1980, and after a massive police search her body was found raped, beaten and strangled...Like Sharin'...Lizzie had been playing in a park when she was last seen...Lizzie and Sharin' were both seen leaving parks in the company of a strange man...The searchers who combed metro in recent days remembered more than the case of Lizzie Tomlinson. They remembered Emanuel Jaques (sic), the shoeshine boy lured into an apartment above a sex shop and body-rub parlour on the Young Street strip where he was raped repeatedly and murdered...On July 1, 1980, just a week after she graduated from grade 8, 13-year old Kim Field of St. Thomas disappeared while she was delivering morning newspapers. Unlike Lizzie Tomlinson and Emanuel Jaques (sic), she was never seen again.

The same cases were again cited in the report offered by the Star concerning the discovery of the body of Alison Parrott on the bank of the Humber River in Toronto:

Her name joins a tragic list that includes three of the most frightening cases in recent years. The disappearance of Nicole Morin and the slayings of Christine Jessop and Sharin' Morningstar/ Keenan...Nine-year old Sharin' was abducted from a Brunswick Ave., parkette in January, 1983. An exhaustive search ended 10 days later with the discovery of her body stuffed in a rooming-house refrigerator. The victim had been beaten, raped and strangled...Another 9-year old - Christine Jessop - vanished Oct. 3, 1984, after visiting a candy store in Queensville near Lake Simcoe. Her remains were found three months later in a remote area 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of there...Lisa Ann Kowalski, 8, was sexually attacked and strangled 10 years ago. Her body was found in a neighbor's garage on May 18, 1976...Emanuel Jaques, a 12-year-old shoeshine boy, was tortured, sexually abused and drowned in a sink in a downtown body-rub parlor in the summer of 1977...Elizabeth Tomlinson, 5, raped and strangled, was found in bushes near her Regent Park home in May, 1980...Other cases may have slipped from the public mind but never from parents' hearts.

The linking of these occurrences had the effect of maintaining the thematic agenda that missing children *en toto* are "stranger-endangered" - an agenda which was almost entirely inspired by the media's emphasis upon the essentially rare cases noted above. The sheer magnitude of primary and secondary news reports manifesting this focus (85% of all news items included in this study) possesses profound implications for the public perception of missing children and for the generation of a strong sense of moral panic within that public. This result, when viewed in terms of what may easily be understood as the *deliberate* distortion of the missing children phenomenon by the print media, necessarily leaves the viewer with a vague sense of unease that something is missing from the picture. The precise nature of that "something" and, consequently, the origins of the unease, will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Within their reports of missing children, the media often included some discussion concerning the locus of the problem. In most cases, that locus was derived from the opinions of individual citizens who cited the victims as the primary determinants of their misfortune (see Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984, for further support of this finding). This practice of blaming the victim materialized in most settings in discussions of how those familiar with a given case were altering their lifestyle and that of their children as a result of "stranger-danger". For instance, the rape and murder of six-year old Lizzie Tomlinson had

many residents in her neighborhood thoughtful and worried:

There's not enough parents who care about their kids around here, says Brian Prior, who lives two blocks from the park where Lizzie disappeared. Somebody had to get killed. We could all get killed before they'll start caring. They were really worried for us kids for about a month when Emanuel Jaques was murdered two years ago, but then they all stopped worrying and everyone runs wild again as usual (Toronto Sun 29 May 1980).

These attributions most frequently appeared in primary news stories of incidents in which the reports adopted a "fear and loathing" approach by interviewing those close to the victim. The Sun and the Star generally made greater use of this approach than did the Globe and Mail. In their reports, the preceding newspapers commonly included the statements of grieving relatives that, given the chance, they would gladly kill those responsible for the disappearance/death of their loved one. Commonly accompanying these assertions were those of persons who, having been made aware of stranger-danger and missing children, expressed a high measure of fear for their own safety as well as that of their children. For example, some who knew of Elizabeth Tomlinson's death indicated their wish to avenge her death. Such graphic accounts were reproduced in the print media:

"How could someone hurt an innocent little child? If I see him first, I swear to God I'll kill him", said William Allen of Queen Street (Sun, 27 May 1980).

Coverage of the funeral of the girl inspired further "fear and loathing" copy and support for official powers, especially in statements taken from the family:

"She's safe in the hands of the Lord now." Wiping away his tears, Ronald McEwen then walked away from the grave that marked the six years in the life of Lizzie Tomlinson. "But every other little girl in the city is in danger. I want the press to keep this before the public, because there's a maniac out there," McEwan said brokenly as he left the funeral of his great-niece yesterday. "The public has to stay on the police side, and not accuse them of harassment while they try to catch him" (Sun, 30 May 1980).

The unsolved murder of Sharin' Keenan had Regents Park residents as parents keeping children behind locked doors with strict orders to stay home (Sun, 3 February 1983).

"I'm too afraid for my children" she said through her mailbox, "I have been very plain with them in the past about what can happen to young children, and told them about sexual assaults" (Ibid.).

Other young women like Tyla, who works in a local restaurant refused to have her surname or her children's full names printed for fear that the "Regent Park rapist" might read it and come after them. "I get goosebumps when I hear things like this", Tyla said (Sun 4 April 1983).

In their reports on the abduction and murder of Alison Parrott, the Star included extensive "man-on-the-street" statements of how the murder had, understandably, affected life in the deceased's neighborhood. Residents of the Summerville Avenue area were reported as saying that they now kept their children close to home, telling them not to talk to strangers and reporting to the police any strangers who appeared unusually suspicious (Star, 30 July 1986).

Young girls walking their pets now go in pairs for protection and women who work in the area say they are nervous about going to and from work...One woman who works in the neighborhood said she was nervous walking through the area but was more fearful for her daughter, who is about Alison's age. "I've been giving her lots of instructions," she said. "This has happened too often lately." (Ibid.)

Sensitizing the public to events surrounding the disappearance or slaying of a child often included information — usually *misinformation* — about the person suspected of committing the act. In the context of hypersuggestibility and hysteria that often follows from a "media blitz" of certain cases (such as the Elizabeth Tomlinson case), extensive pressure is exerted upon policing agencies to solve the crime, with the result that often a wrong or ambiguous stimulus becomes the object of fear. This process is most clearly illustrated in the protracted manhunt which follows sensationalized crimes. Again, the example of Lizzie Tomlinson is instructive. Lizzie was last seen leaving a park in the company of an apparent stranger. Following the publication of her picture in the Sun (20 May 1980), a Toronto cab driver volunteered information to the police that he had given a ride to a young girl closely resembling Lizzie, who was traveling with a "bearded man" (Ibid.). From the description offered by the cabbie, the police produced a composite drawing of the man which was released and published in all metro Toronto newspapers. The Sun couched this picture in a

story whose headline read, "Girl's Killer may Strike Again", and in which police sources were quoted as saying they were "looking [for] a pervert and [that] perverts graduate through more serious sexual assaults to murder" (29 May 1980).

In this highly charged atmosphere, parents became terrified of suspicious looking bearded men and police began rounding up literally hundreds of them (Sun, 2 June 1980):

More than 100 suspects have been checked and cleared by Metro police wading through thousands of tips as the manhunt for Lizzie Tomlinson's killer enters its second week... "It's really amazing, the concern that people have shown," said [Sgt. Gary] Leitch. One man, who bore a resemblance to the suspect until he shaved off his beard, voluntarily reported to police headquarters last week to have himself cleared.

Subsequent to an extended investigation of numerous innocent, albeit bearded, individuals, the same police detachment responsible for the composite drawing arrested a clean-shaven relative of the victim (Sun, 13 May 1980). In this latter arrest, the primary motivation for picking up the cousin resided in the similarity between his brand of cigarettes and two cigarette butts found at the scene of the crime (Star, 7 June 1980). The fact that police experts confirmed the probability that literally "thousands of people smoke Player's Light" (*Ibid.*) did not mitigate the evidence against him until well into the trial, at which point his acquittal did little to mitigate the perception of his guilt held by much of the public (*Ibid.*).

It is through the generation of this type of hysteria that the media play into the hands of those "abduction-prevention entrepreneurs" whose products were discussed earlier in this thesis (see Chapter I). The distortion of the missing children phenomenon into an epidemic of stranger-danger promoted parents taking measures to protect their children from strangers. In the example noted above, the media alert of a particularly dangerous bearded stranger led to a variety of measures aimed specifically at bearded men; Furthermore, the media portrayed the danger as emanating primarily from the children themselves and preventive efforts were aimed at the children. One of the most visible illustrations of the latter resides in the marketing of a wide range of often highly elaborate abduction prevention devices. Among these devices were child finger-printing kits, identification kits, videotaping of

potential victims, and procedures for implanting microchips in the tooth enamel for ease of identification.

The media role with regard to this industry went beyond the simple act of fueling the fears which motivated parents to buy, to actual commentary upon some of its more intriguing products. In its July 30, 1985 edition, the Sun ran a detailed story outlining the newest in a line of child tracking devices.

...President Greg McGroarty...said his firm monitors all the personalized frequencies on a computerized grid pattern of the city to locate any child at any time. He said the system is already used successfully for Alzheimer's sufferers who tend to wander...McGroarty said also that the recent abduction and murder of Alison Parrott, 11, has prompted his company to immediately implement its plans for a missing child fund and street-proofing programs. "The children who are already missing we cannot help. Through donations, public awareness and the Trackfinder system, we shall save lives in the future", he said.

Within a month the Sun was touting yet another preventive panacea, this one in the form of "Child dogtags" (Sun 29 August 1986).

George Wagner thought it was ridiculous that his great dane carried more identification than his four children. Now he's heading programs to distribute free tags in Canada and Europe. More than 40 million have been distributed in the U.S. and 12 million are planned for Canada.

Discussions of child safety devices were not always so clearly directed to the sale of products. Two examples were derived from the sample in which a critical stance was assumed toward the "gimmicks" (Globe and Mail 23 May 1986; Star 25 May 1986). These articles were significant not because they critiqued a market for which the media has at least implicit support, but that they challenged the sources which provided the media with the derogatory discussions of some child safety devices. In both the Globe and Mail and the Star, the articles relied entirely upon the views of Child Find to justify their condemnations, thereby implicitly legitimating that agency over the manufacturers of the condemned devices. Seen in this light, the media served not so much as a consumer advocate but as an advocate of Child Find, providing this agency with a forum in which to elevate its views and mandate over those of other agencies competing for the lion's share of consumer



attention in the child abduction market place.

Returning to considerations of the role of the media in shaping perceptions of the missing children phenomenon, it is important to note their relatively consistent exaggeration of the events surrounding the disappearance or deaths of the children. This amplification is especially apparent in the cases discussed above (including Christine Jessop, Sharin' Keenan, Elizabeth Tomlinson, Nicole Morin and Alison Parrott), particularly in terms of the portrayals of their abductors/murderers. In the three major newspapers, stereotypical depictions appeared with regularity, including "depraved monsters", "sickos", "neanderthal-looking perverts", "maniacs", "animals", "psychos", "crazies", "nuts", and "creeps". Depicting abductors in this manner added fuel to the fires of moral indignation and, as a result, enhanced the news value of a given report. In addition, it contributed to the repertoire of folk devils upon which society draws to solidify their definitions of deviants as clearly different and separate from the normal majority. The effect is to create a "symbolic identikit", a composite of child abductor/murderers which allows the public to visualize and react to a previously faceless threat (Bennett, 1982(b)). In almost all cases that visualization is of an individual clearly situated within the "lunatic fringe".

The purpose in raising this issue is not to suggest that the perpetrators of these crimes are unjustly maligned or erroneously stigmatized by these depictions, but that perhaps the facicity of these stereotypes is misleading. Many of this century's most notorious child murderers (Bundy, Gacy, Meirhofer, Olsen) have been documented as highly articulate, often affable people with a higher than average level of intelligence and formal education, and an unremarkably "ordinary" appearance (New York Times, 26 October 1986). Thus, portrayals of abductors as atavistic and deranged is misleading and dangerous. Even if some abductors may manifest some of the aforementioned mannerisms, to characterize all abductors as assuming these characteristics betrays the reality that no "single type" exists and misdirects public scrutiny toward all persons who resemble that stereotype. From the standpoint of parents

interested in protecting their children from abduction, such stereotypes are additionally problematic in that they inject a potentially dangerous red herring into preventive efforts — every measure of prevention redirected toward the stereotype is a measure detracted from a possibly more appropriate focus on the putative sanctuary of the family.

An additionally striking aspect of newspaper coverage of the missing children phenomenon is found in its political component. In the stranger-danger theme of missing children the print media found not only exciting copy, but also a forum in which to further their own views (and possibly those of their readership) on the politics of law and order (Hall *et al.*, 1978). A striking example of this is presented in the story run by the Sun shortly after the discovery of Christine Jessop's body, which advocated a return to the death penalty for child murderers (2 January 1985). This article was followed by a series of additional pro-capital punishment segments in the Sun<sup>6</sup>, most — if not all — of which represented the Sun's editorial judgements on the matter, and which also represented the mode of address (public idiom) characteristic of that newspaper. In this context, the newspaper reinforced its pleas for severe penalties by portraying the potential recipients of those penalties as "vile, depraved monsters" ("Some Should Die", Sun, 28 May 1980), and those rejecting capital punishment for child murderers as "self-righteous do-gooders" and "bleeding hearts" whose "softness" on crime would ultimately cause "the decline of western civilization" (Ibid.).

The Sun further reinforced its editorial position through what Hall *et al.* refer to as "taking the public voice" (1977:63), a term which reflects the journalistic practice of essentially re-stating public consensus in such a way as to inform the public what they *should* think about a given issue, rather than merely what they *do* think. In most cases the primary motivation for this re-statement is to render public sentiment in line with the

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<sup>6</sup>Including: "Some Should Die" (Sun, 28 May 1980); "Child Killer Should Die" (Sun, 2 January 1985); "The Death Penalty Now" (Sun, 29 July 1986); "No Defence Against the Diabolic" (Sun, 29 July 1986); "No Punishment is Enough" (Sun, 30 July 1986), and others.

sentiments of the newspaper. This practice of "articulating what the vast majority of the public are supposed to think, this enlisting of public legitimacy<sup>s</sup> for views which the newspaper itself is expressing, represents the media in its most active, campaigning role — the point where the media most actively and openly shape and structure public opinion" (Hall *et al.*, 1978:63).

This kind of editorial commonly takes the form of a demand that strong action be taken because it is what the majority of the public truly want ("The Death Penalty Now", Sun, 29 July 1986). A case in point is the editorializing which followed in the wake of the death of Alison Parrott:

Vengeance may not be fashionable to liberals but it is in the hearts and minds of Torontonians as they contemplate the criminal madness of recent days. In Toronto, the city shudders as the nude body of a little girl is discovered. What a cold, calculated end to the promising life of 11-year old Alison Parrott...Yet Prime Minister Brian Mulroney continues to welch on the election promise of a free vote on capital punishment. We demand a vote now. We insist on action, not excuses and stalling...The three leaders are still against the death penalty but the country isn't. Shouldn't our voices be heard? Our criminals must fear our laws. We need fewer days of sorrow. We demand the death penalty now!(Ibid.)

In the preceding example the putative alignment between the editor's views and those of the public is clearly illustrated by the use of the first person; it is not the majority of the public as "they", but rather the majority of the public as "we" which is presented as advocating return of the death penalty. In this way the opinion of the public is rendered synonymous in appearance with the opinion of the newspaper — or at least that of the editor(s). Upon receiving their views back in print, with the sanction of the press and the legitimacy of consensus behind them, those members of the public whose opinions are genuinely represented in the paper are greatly reinforced and those who waver in the general direction of the editorial may be moved that much closer to adopting the law-and-order ideology it contains.

This sort of active campaigning or editorializing was equally a part of the "letters to the editor" column, that portion of the editorial section in which members of the public are

given the opportunity to respond in print to editorials or news items which are viewed as controversial. To the extent that many more letters are probably received than there exists room to print, the selection of which letters are printed must to some degree reflect editorial selection by the newspaper. These selection processes will differ from paper to paper depending upon the respective editorial philosophies (Hall *et al.*, 1978:121-122). In most cases, however, the "letters" section is intended to stimulate controversy, provoke public response and encourage debate (Ibid.). Perhaps more important than the statements the letters column might make about public sentiments are those it makes about the paper itself, namely, that the editors are open to publicizing views other than those which they themselves hold. In this way the paper sustains its appearance as a "fourth estate".

Among those newspapers surveyed in this study, only a few contained letters to the editor which attempted to address the respective papers' coverage of missing children. This is an interesting finding, given the magnitude of that coverage and its sometimes inflammatory nature. Notwithstanding this, those letters which did surface in the course of the research most commonly (approximately 60%) reinforced the ideology of the paper with regard to missing children. A good example of this is presented by a letter to the editor of the Toronto Sun in June, 1986. The Sun was one of the three newspapers most responsible for the promotion of the stranger-danger theme, variously presenting those believed responsible for abductions as perverts, pedophiles, and atavistic throw-backs. The letter, composed by the president of the Edmonton-based "Mothers Against Abduction and Murdered Children" (MAAM), supported the Sun's view of abductors as "dangerous strangers", relating that "we seem to find a number of common factors among those who have victimized our children...the majority of them are on some form of conditional release (usually mandatory supervision) at the time they commit the offence...[they are] violent criminals, back on the street before their sentences have expired.." (Toronto Sun 8 June 1986). As a corollary to this letter when it appeared in print in the Sun, the editor confirmed its sentiments by stating that he would "bet [they] hear some real horror stories" (Ibid.).

#### IV. Summary

What is perhaps most intriguing about media portrayals of child abductions is that, despite their implicit insistence upon the frequency with which violent abductions occur, the three newspapers studied consistently reported and re-reported the same group of cases. This "core case group" was found to consist of five abduction/murder incidents, namely, Christine Jessop, Sharin' Keenan, Nicole Morin, Elizabeth Tomlinson, and Alison Parrott. These cases occurred with remarkable frequency not only as primary news items, but were equally prominent as heuristic devices in secondary reports of other abduction or suspected abduction incidents. The reasons for their membership in this core group are uncertain, but may be suggested to reside primarily in their common circumstances. All these cases involved or are believed to have involved abduction, sexual assault and murder by a stranger, as such they constituted excellent grist for the media mill, incorporating as they did all the elements crucial to exciting news stories and increased rates of circulation, and to conservative ideology, especially the reinstatement of capital punishment.

It is argued here that by recycling these cases the media play an integral role in the initiation of drives against "new" kinds of deviance and in attempts to "save" a faltering campaign. As such, these cases serve as "memory joggers" which help foment public outrage and intensify the grip of the collective conscience which, ultimately, serves various organizational and political ends. Fleming (1981:108) refers to the process of linking present crusades to past campaigns that have enjoyed a great measure of public support as "moral maneuvering".

One of Toronto's most recent and certainly most effective campaigns, revolved around the Jaques tragedy<sup>7</sup>. Saturation publicity was given to the murder and the subsequent arrest

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<sup>7</sup>Jaques, a 12 year-old shoeshine boy on Yonge Street, was found murdered atop a massage parlour in August 1977. He had been strangled and drowned after being forced to submit to various indecent acts with four men (Fleming, 1981:114)

and trial of the men believed responsible for the crime. The Jaques crusade focused public attention on "permissiveness", homosexuality, sexual liberation and their connection with the Yonge Street strip. Public sentiment created an atmosphere which aroused not only the closing of massage parlours, but led also to a pronounced rise in the amount of policing directed to the strip and the street people populating it (Fleming, 1981:108). The clean-up operations engendered widespread support for the police as protectors of public morality, while at the same time provided a boost in moral for the police.

The Jaques case was subsequently used by the media to "morally maneuver" public sentiment in favor of what appeared to be a politically motivated persecution campaign by the police against the Toronto homosexual community and its social facilities (Brannigan, 1984; Fleming, 1981; Taylor, 1983).<sup>1</sup> Primary news reports on the raids characterized the homosexuals involved as "sick" and/or "criminal", not for their presence in the baths, but for their homosexuality. In this way the credibility of those gay politicians running for municipal office was undermined in a classic case of guilt by association.

The Toronto Sun, in a series of reports, juxtaposed the Jaques case with the baths raids in an effort to reinforce the legitimacy of efforts to "clean up" Yonge Street. This provided a memory jogger which served to connect, or fuse, homosexuality with criminality in the public mind. The net effect on the reader is the production of an "understanding" of a news event in terms of an existing category, thus rendering "new" behaviors familiar and allowing the option of trivializing the event (Rock, 1973:28). In this way, the reality which is made of gay sexuality in the present case fits in with prior ideas about homosexuality and

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<sup>1</sup>This police campaign culminated in a massive raid, the largest in Canada since the invocation of the War Measures Act in 1970, by at least 200 plain-clothed police officers in four gay steam baths. This raid had apparently been initiated six months earlier, roughly at the start of a municipal election campaign in Toronto in 1980 in which several gay candidates openly stood for election on reformist platforms. Moreover, it was revealed that the raids were initiated by the Metro Toronto police intelligence squad, not the morality squad, and that they were initiated days before the squad's budget was to be renewed. The idea that the raids were undertaken to serve a police organizational objective and the slandering of gay political activity is revealed by the conviction rates — charges were unfounded in 87% of the arrests (Brannigan, 1984:99; Taylor, 1983:45-46).

thus implicitly diminishes the significance of the baths raids as a social event. The raids, like those they persecuted, become trivialized by their position with regard to general public sentiments about homosexuality and, as is the case with the deflection of the missing children issue onto the margins, larger structural questions about the propriety and legality of the raids themselves are lost (Fleming, 1981:108).

Because of their repetition in numerous news stories and contexts, the core case group appears to have ascended to the level of a defining standard of child abductions. Those "new" cases which were reported were almost always discussed with reference to the core case group, either as a similar incidents or different cases of the same phenomenon. In this way all missing children came to be understood only in their relationship to this iconic core, as yet more evidence to support perceptions of stranger-danger. The media creation of the missing children epidemic is a patent example of the signifier becoming the signified.

Drawing from this core, media presentations went beyond their composite victim to a composite perpetrator. Child abductors were presented, once again in denial of the form derived from the statistical portrayal of child abductors, as "neanderthal looking perverts" deserving of the public's fear and loathing. So powerful was this presentation that fear and loathing did indeed appear to be its outcome: all three papers reported extensively upon the preventive efforts maintained by worried parents, from locking their children in their homes to having identifying micro chips implanted in their molars. Whether these efforts were in fact those exerted by the majority of parents is unclear; to the degree that extremes of prevention are as "news worthy" as extremes in victimization, the motivations for including such reports in the papers may be less opaque.

The news value of child abductions in general and the core case group in particular, is exceeded only by their value as conveyors of ideological messages. Depending upon who is doing the reporting of what cases to which readership, the message and its medium were seen to differ — *but to a very limited extent*. For the most part, the Sun, Star and the

Globe and Mail all appeared to condone the same underlying message, namely, that a return to basic law and order values would lessen the degree of stranger-dangers and thus the number of lost children. What tended to diminish the semblance of these messages was their medium. The Sun, for example, appeared to adopt the most extreme medium, couching arguments documenting stranger-danger and child abduction in terms of social permissiveness, homosexuality, sexual liberalism and an absence of capital punishment (Taylor, 1983:99). The Globe and Mail, which was seen in many ways as the antithesis of the Sun, may be seen as differing from the latter paper primarily by the language through which it promoted its "back-to-basics" line. The Globe preferred to send the same message via petitions for increased recognition of the rights of children to be safe from unwanted sexual and/or violent adult impulses. To the degree that this view implicitly condones the more liberal doctrine of child rights, it might be ventured that it does so only insofar as this promised to induce the more conservative end of curtailing the expression of sexuality in society (Burstyn, 1984; Lacombe, 1988).

While the message itself is relatively clear, what is less obvious are the reasons or motivations that might underlie the medias' choice to espouse that particular message. To the degree that a certain measure of security may be seen to accompany adherence to a mainstream of thought and opinion, the rationale for the newspapers' adherence to an essentially conservative reaction to the missing children phenomenon may be explicable in no more elaborate terms than a general reluctance to offend the apparent status quo of its readership. Notwithstanding the potential validity of this position, throughout this thesis the position has been advanced that perhaps there is, in fact, "something more" at work in this choice of message. Attempting some determination of the essence of that something is the object of the fifth and final chapter.



## CHAPTER V

### UNDERSTANDING THE MISSING CHILDREN PHENOMENON: THE MEDIA, MORAL PANICS, AND LAW AND ORDER POLITICS

*Of this unrest I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. These dreams are the consequence of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe.<sup>1</sup>*

The last decade has witnessed what appears to be a dramatic and frightening increase in criminality against children, most particularly in acts of child abduction, assault and murder (Leyton, 1987; Wilson, 1987). Much of this impression has been derived from the media, who seized upon a core of such incidents and, through these, came to define the shape of this new criminality (Taylor, 1983). Their focus within those cases was turned primarily upon the perpetrators; it was not that the victims were of less importance, but rather that the concreteness of their experience rendered them less amenable to journalistic dissection and reconstruction. Notwithstanding the value of the victims and their victimization in terms of commentaries on the declining morality of modern society, it was the perpetrators of the criminality against children who seemed to draw the bulk of media attention.<sup>2</sup> To the degree that their child victims were portrayed as the personification of innocence - and thus of

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<sup>1</sup>J.M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (Penguin Books: London, 1980:8).

<sup>2</sup>The perpetrator perspective (Freeman, 1983) serves to highlight specific cases and recommend limited remedies. The current child abduction scenario is interesting in that it emphasises characterological flaws, yet it has generated a more widespread preventative agenda. As noted earlier, it nevertheless retains a focus on perpetrators at the expense of a wider analysis on the nature and origins of child abduction.

innocence lost - the lack of information about the perpetrators in most cases provided the media with a blank slate upon which to project the antithesis of that innocence. Where the children were the good, the promise of the next generation, their assailants became the personification of evil and the denial of that promise.

What is perhaps most intriguing about this portrayal of the apparent rise in violence against children is its lack of foundation outside the realm of the newspapers. The media version focused on stranger-danger, on the emergence of an epidemic of "neanderthal-looking perverts" unleashed on an innocent prey, within a society too absorbed in a culture of narcissism and rampant technology to address this latest disease. That the majority of victimizations against children had no connection to stranger-danger was confirmed by the official statistics - in Canada, less than one percent (0.23%) of all missing children were confirmed or suspected stranger abductions (Solicitor General of Canada, 22 May 1987). Of the remainder, the majority were runaways (70.5%), parental abductions, "cast-away children"<sup>3</sup> and unspecified or unknowns (Ibid.).

#### I. Summarizing the Study: A Cumulative Discussion of the Chapters to this Point

Focusing upon this curiosity, this thesis has attempted to penetrate and understand the phenomenon of missing children as this has been portrayed in the media. In particular, the focus has fallen upon the discrepancies which appear to exist between the *actual* levels of stranger danger indicated by official statistics, and the manner in which child abductions are reported by the media. The crux of the analysis was contained in an examination of the content of over 500 articles published in three leading Canadian newspapers, which were scrutinized on such matters as the frequency of publication of reports of missing children (whether as primary or secondary news items), reasons given for the abduction/murder, and

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<sup>3</sup>Children who are not wanted by their parents, perhaps on the basis of general economic or specific behavioral problems, and who subsequently find themselves on the streets (Newsweek, 18 October 1982, p.97)

whether a rationale was offered for the cause of the missing children phenomenon as a whole. These indicators were then transcribed into numerical representations which provided a graphic depiction of the degree of gap between the construction of the phenomenon provided by the official statistics and that created in the cumulative effect of media reports of missing children.

The discrepancy between the media's reports of child abduction and actual occurrence rates was considered in light of Hall *et al.*'s (1978) work on the social creation of moral panics. In their view, supposed "crime waves" — such as the recent wave of child abduction/murders — have less to do with the crime rates *per se*, than with the symbolic value of crime waves in legitimizing the forces of social control. Because they usually encompass a substantial element of increased threat, crime waves are easily translated into justifications for extending the reach of coercive state regulation through an increased de-legitimization of members of society already viewed as outsiders, deviants or simply generally marginal.

It was in the first chapter of the thesis that the theory of moral panics was applied to the phenomenon of missing children. With regard to the United States, this panic was seen to have originated with the disappearance of Etan Patz, whose abduction constitutes the first well-publicized case of what was most likely a stranger-perpetrated kidnapping. The conviction of Wayne Williams, suspected in the disappearance of 28 young blacks, on two counts of murder emanating from those abductions, and the later abduction and murder of Adam Walsh by an unknown perpetrator provided additional fuel for the fires of moral panic. In the Canadian context, the panic was driven home by the arrest and subsequent conviction of Clifford Olsen for the murders of eight young girls and three boys in the Vancouver, British Columbia area. The cumulative effects of massive media coverage of these cases, individually and together, provided substantial support for a growing public perception that random killings of children constituted a new and rapidly escalating strain of crime.

Popular concern about the apparent rise in criminality against children was given added recognition when journalists ignored the reality of the majority of these disappearances, preferring instead to represent the problem as one of stranger abduction. As a result, contemporary concern for missing children has been preoccupied with faceless dangers outside the home, and an inordinate fascination with the concept of stranger danger. Panic reaction to the myth of stranger danger was intensive and wide-ranging; the fear of having a child abducted by a stranger impelled millions of parents to exaggerated means of ensuring the safety of their children. Entrepreneurs capitalized on the sense of panic by releasing a remarkable range of preventive and "quick response" devices. Civic groups, politicians and large corporations, wanting to maintain a semblance of good citizenship, contributed to and, in a sense, capitalized on the media conceptualization of the problem in various ways, including the use of the phenomenon as a political platform, a funding lever, and a market place. Child Find was the interest group most receptive to the media perception of the problem, as it greatly increased public recognition of their role and mandate, and thus granted greater leverage in redirecting political and economic resources in their favour.

The idea of stranger danger became further entrenched as it resonated with more general social fears regarding crime, especially as these corresponded with concerns over the dissolution of family, "mainstream" morality, and "appropriate" moral persuasions as conducive to higher levels of criminality and deviance. In addition, stranger danger provided a highly acceptable scapegoat — the *violent*, pedophilic stranger. To the extent that pedophiles were already marginalized and disenfranchised, they were able to offer little resistance to this addition to their deviant behavioural repertoire. In addition, and probably more importantly, the new attention these groups received in light of the heightened public concern over child abduction and abuse was attention removed from other, less vulnerable contexts of that abuse, the most important of which was the family. In this way, the legitimacy of the family was reinforced almost by default, and the police were given a socially acceptable target for their proactive and reactive efforts against child abduction, abuse and exploitation.

In the second chapter the focus moved to a review of the literature documenting the power of the media in defining social problems. The review emphasizes that the media do not passively present facts and events, but take an active role in shaping the messages which underlie those facts and events. Because of this, the media play a key role in shaping the consciousness of their readership on a given subject. The argument was made that newswriters, including both journalists and their sources, are actively involved not only in the presentation of news but in the perpetuation of particular ways of seeing and understanding that news. To the degree this role involves the re-structuring of news events in line with particular perspectives, it is profoundly ideological work. In most cases, the ideology which the media serve and reinforce is the dominant or mainstream ideology; it does this through encouraging a consensual view of society and the legitimation of the status quo by actively engineering popular consent. In times of moral panic, this engineering assumes an accelerated pace as the social vulnerability engendered by the panic renders the public especially receptive to media representations of the problem and possible solutions (Ericson *et al.*, 1987:62). Insofar as these solutions are derived from the dominant, usually conservative ideology, they necessarily garner support for that ideology, swinging the support of the "silent majority" in its favor (Hall *et al.*, 1978:221).

Chapter III initiated the quantitative effort to document the role of the media in defining social problems, and was directed to familiarizing the reader with the content analysis which formed the core of that effort. From a general discussion of content analysis, its strengths and weaknesses, the chapter narrowed into a specific discussion of the application of the procedure to the present study. This discussion necessarily included elaboration of difficulties in implementation of the procedure in this context and the potential ramifications of these for the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings:

The fourth chapter dealt with the actual outcomes of the analysis described in the third chapter. It begins with an explication of the frequency with which articles on missing

children appeared in each of the three newspapers studied over a ten-year period; these articles are classified as either primary or secondary news items. From this, the articles were sub-classified according to their emphasis on stranger danger, parental abductions, runaways, or child safety. The analysis also tapped reasons given for the general phenomenon of missing children as well as the rationale(s), cause(s), or blame attributed in discussions of specific cases. One of the unique features of this analysis is realized in its cross-tabulation of reasons, rationales, and/or the awarding of blame with the sources quoted in each articles<sup>4</sup>

The final analysis shows the number of articles referring to a "core case group" consisting of five incidents (the cases of Nicole Morin, Elizabeth Tomlinson, Alison Parrott, Sharin' Keenan, Christine Jessop) which reappeared with remarkable consistency in the articles studied. This core case group figured prominently in the second section of Chapter IV, which provides a qualitative analysis of how the media represents child abduction.

## II. The Principal Findings and Their Implications

The analyses produced the following principal findings. First, over 85% of the articles across all three papers centered their assessment of blame for missing children upon strangers, leading to discussions of how parents might protect their children from this stranger danger. Second, 389 of the 554 articles, or 83%, reported on what were generally unrepresentative forms of child abduction — again with the focus on stranger danger through the elaboration of the core case group described above. Third, while the emphasis upon attributions varied across news reports depending on the sources consulted, the predominant rationalizations of the problem drew upon one of three scapegoats, namely: inadequate policing, deficient criminal justice system resources for responding to child abductions and, inevitably, the victims themselves. Critical discourse relating the problem to some wider social pathology, such as the

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<sup>4</sup>To the best of the author's knowledge, there is only one other piece of research in which a similar form of cross-tabulation is featured (see Voumvakis and Ericson, 1984).

portrayal of children as sex objects by the media or larger socio-structural deficiencies — including and especially aspects of patriarchy — received scant attention.<sup>5</sup>

The first two findings support the thesis that the newspapers centered their assessment of blame upon strangers. This finding implies that popular concern for missing children has been preoccupied with faceless dangers outside the home. Child safety programs and child protection services were seen to concentrate on identifying "strangers" as though they constituted the most likely source of abduction and sexual abuse. As was established in the first chapter, however, research on these forms of exploitation clearly identifies the danger of abduction alone (independent of sexual abuse) as residing primarily in non-custodial parents. Similarly, research on the most likely sources of sexual abuse outside the context of abduction points to trusted friends or relatives of the families of the victims. In this way the "mundane" picture of violence against children that is apparent in scholarly literature on the subject — as a routine, human affair occurring in a variety of domestic circumstances across the social structure, and in which sexual abuse by family members may provoke runaways, or result in long-term trauma for children (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986) — is replaced by the fantastic imagery of stranger danger presented by the media (Taylor, 1983:95). From this, the popular image of child abuse in the contemporary context is not located within the mainstream tradition of the family or friendships, but is relegated to the marginal elements

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<sup>5</sup>The term patriarchal relations is used here to refer to the historically developed social relations of male domination through the sexual division of labour, family organization and state politics (see Gavigan, 1987). News reporting of missing children manages to obscure the social organization of gender differences between male and female, and between adults and young people. Through the creation of the category of missing children as "stranger-endangered", the patriarchal character of the family and domestic relations in society is maintained. The question of why most sex-related violence is carried out primarily by heterosexual men *known to the child* is implicitly rejected in favor of explanations of such violence which center on strangers. In this way the categorization of missing children as stranger-endangered is both reductionist and individualist, as it conceptually limits young peoples' perceptions of violence and harassment to the dimension of *demonized gays*. Abuse by strangers is treated as a uniquely *sexual* — as opposed to social or structural — problem perpetuated by homosexuals and pedophiles. The possibility of that the impetus for the problem may reside in a broader social network of relations of age, class and gender is implicitly diminished. Understandings of missing children mobilized in this context have a static, genderless character, which does not allow for the recovery of the larger socio-structural origins of this form of violence (see Brock and Kinsman, 1986:110-111).

of society where it cannot endanger firmly entrenched social institutions such as the family.

The impression that most crimes occur between strangers has two consequences. First, this particular conceptualization of the problem has the ideological function of stabilizing and reproducing as crimes only certain types of behaviours (see Brannigan, 1984). Those reproductions focus upon a common image that "real crime" is crime on the streets, crime occurring between strangers which brutalizes weak and defenceless members of the mainstream of society (Fishman, 1978:349-350). That such crimes exist is unquestionable, but as an imagery of crime in the media, such events are misrepresented as the predominant reality of crime. However, as this is the sole message repeated to a reading public over a wide range of news stories on crime by the media, it tends to become the only image of crime which that public will take seriously. As such, crimes which occur outside this setting, in the less visible realm of the family, or between friends, are less likely to fall within the public perception of crime encouraged by the media and thus less likely to be defined as criminal in the strict sense of the term. Taken a step further, actions not defined as criminal are also less likely to attract the same degree of attention as do those stereotypical criminal acts.

The specific case of battered women is illustrative in this context. In his research on the differing perceptions of criminal behavior in private versus public spheres, Pahl (1985) documented how "private abuse" of women in the domestic realm is less likely to be seen criminal than similar violence perpetrated against women by strangers in a public context. The primary ratiocination for this, in Pahl's opinion, resides in the reluctance of some members of society to accept the fact of criminality within such traditional, mainstream institutions as the family. The need for women to press charges further demarcates the public domain from the private, and distinguishes those areas of deviance considered to constitute appropriate contexts for police intervention from those believed to fall outside the realm of social control solutions.



One crucial element in the problem is that violent behaviour in the domestic sphere is often ignored or minimized by social control agencies, not because the violence itself is not criminal, but because the context of its occurrence is not receptive to the application of such labels. The family has traditionally been viewed as a sanctuary within society and has been granted rights to privacy virtually unprecedented in any other social institution (Laslett, 1973). Respect for domestic privacy has many implications. Inasmuch as privacy contributes to and reinforces the intimacy and sense of solidarity in family life which are lauded by society, it also creates a separate, clearly defined, "private" sphere for the exploitation of the weaker by the stronger. In the privacy of the home, women can be assaulted by men, children by their parents, the frail elderly by their sons and daughters (Pahl, 1984:190-191).

It is at this point that missing children enter the picture, guarding the tense border between public and private, providing a suitable replacement for domestically abused children and deflecting attention away from the family into the margins of society (Eliasoph, 1986:9). Thus the sanctity of the treasured institution of the family is reinforced; by deflecting some of the attention that should be directed toward familial violence, the missing children issue reassures society that the privacy of the "normal" nuclear family will not only remain intact, but be strengthened (Ibid.). Taken a step further, this logic suggests that those regulatory and control measures which could come to play upon the missing children crisis will be directed toward the fringes and "stranger danger", saving the family from unwanted governmental intrusions. In this way the fate of the wayward or neglectful parent is often secured at the expense of so-called strangers and wayward children.

This diversion was important for at least two reasons. First, in diverting attention about missing and abused children away from the nuclear family, an image of child abuse as occurring on the fringes, perpetrated by "demonized gays" or within clearly marginal, dysfunctional families, rather than in the mainstream of society was established. Second, this focus enabled official agencies and child find groups to avoid delving into nuclear family

politics, in favor of far safer conversation about the debauching of modern society, the dangers of permissiveness and erotic license. From these, the diversion of attention can be understood in its most functional form, as a means by which to allow society to ventilate anxieties surrounding the well-being of children while avoiding the very issues which inspired that anxiety in the first place, namely, the fragile balance and decline of the family as an institutional structure.

This is not to say that reports of child exploitation within the family did not appear in the print media. Such reports were present and indeed, from the perspective of the media in their role as a fourth estate and their promotion of the concept of stranger-danger, the inclusion of such stories was absolutely imperative. Their importance stemmed from two grounds. First, in order for the media to preserve its credibility with regard to its role as a general social critic and balanced commentator, it had to include news challenging its own themes or explanations of social phenomenon. Failure to do so could raise doubts in the minds of the public as to whether they were being given the whole story. The readership is, in all probability, capable of recognizing a whitewash — and therefore of being insulted by it, and possibly rejecting the newspaper that attempted it. Sensitivity to its readership is, one would venture, central to the success of any media form. With every report of intra-familial child abuse or exploitation, the newspapers reinforced their status as "hard-hitting", "no holds barred" media which leave no social stones unturned. In promoting this view of their comprehensiveness, the newspapers also implicitly bolstered the validity of any conclusions or interpretations which they may draw from their "research"; their views were valid because, stated simply, the newspapers had done their homework (see Eliasoph, 1986:7-8).

Inasmuch as presentation of stories of domestic child exploitation enhanced the newspapers' credibility, these stories were equally effective in promoting the papers' view of the pervasiveness of child exploitation and the importance of a return to "traditional" values to combat it. Central to the logic of this proposition is the realization that, when the media

spoke of the importance of family, what was being talked about was not "normal" families, but rather an ideal of family life: The Cleavers, baseball and apple pie. By documenting the pathologies of what families should *not* be, the media also implicitly reinforced what a "real" family should involve. To the extent that this idealized family was presented as part of the law-and-order panacea for the current crisis of child abduction, enumerating its characteristics was not unlike the process of revealing to Einstein that the "E", "M" and "C2" were constituent elements of the equation which would lead him to his solution. Reports of "bad" families clarified the moral boundaries placed upon good families and the sorts of behaviors that might occur within them. Beyond this, the reporting of dysfunctional families exacerbated the sense of moral panic because it revealed how out of control the problem really was. In the same sense that Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was not a "true" social problem as long as it remained within the margins of society with homosexuals and intravenous drug users, its importation into the mainstream resulted in those extreme reactions commonly associated with threats against "normal society" (Vass, 1986). If paedophilia had now infiltrated the ranks of the family, it truly did constitute a problem.

The second consequence of media portrayal of missing children as stranger-endangered was widespread fear and loathing of "new" dangers in the streets (Taylor, 1983). This fear promoted a definite crisis not only in the public's feelings of security, but also in the ability of the police to persuade them that their policing services could provide protection from violent assault and sexual attack (Ibid.). The media's penchant for reporting the least characteristic forms of child abduction, and their focus upon the same five core cases, underpinned the perception of a "crime wave" and an ensuing sense of moral panic. The vulnerability of public perception exposed by the fear and loathing implicit in the climate of moral panic, in turn induced a tendency on the part of the public to entertain "exceptional" measures to counteract not only the disappearance of children, but the sense of social insecurity that accompanied those disappearances. This was highly productive for police and child find agencies alike as it permitted the criminalization of a number of events which,

prior to the moral panic, had occupied an uncertain position on the fringes of official police business. For child find groups, the criminalization of missing children awarded their cause a clear definition as a valid social problem — children as victims were removed from a primarily domestic context to a predominantly criminal one. Runaways, parental abductions and "cast-away" children were, in one fell swoop, subsumed by the criminality of stranger danger and the criminal justice system's response to that danger. For the police, this alteration in the perception of exploited children greatly facilitated their duties with regard to homeless and street children, groups which inevitably coincided with the runaways and cast-off children. Where their mandate over these latter groups had once been obfuscated by the nightmare of status offences and inadequate judicial responses to delinquency, the criminalization of a childhood on the streets afforded a much clearer police directive: stop the crime.

In line with this mandate, the police were once again able to forcibly detain dependent and neglected children, while child find organizations seized the opportunity to actively lobby for closer attention to any persons seeking "inordinate access" to children (e.g., through employment) and for a general rise in the severity of the consequences facing those who endanger or exploit children. In this way, the deviance associated with missing children became truly functional for some segments of society.

To the degree that criminalization of the missing children phenomenon echoed a general social condemnation of those "dangerous strangers" believed to be responsible for the phenomenon, it was also much more than this. Inasmuch as society resented those strangers and the danger they represented, there was equal resentment toward the social devaluation of children and of family life. In this light, the crisis was never really over missing children. It was about all children and how they are raised — often without the benefits of both parents or clear family structures, values, or moralities (Burtch, LaPrairie and Wachtel, 1985:372-373). It was about a society lacking in clear priorities, caught up in the pursuit of the "almighty dollar" in an era of rampant narcissism (Lash, 1979) and over-technologization. It was not

about a few marginal psychotics endangering the children, it was about an entire culture which failed to value those children (Greer, 1984).

Yet if the crisis over missing children was largely about the social structures which surrounded them, how is it that society failed to perceive the crisis in its larger structural context? To the degree that the media work to influence the perceptions of their audience, they may be seen to be instrumental in the deflection of public scrutiny away from the structures into the margins for an explanation for the missing children phenomenon. But the original question remains — *Why would the media be interested in achieving this deflection?* An attempt to address this question will send the inquiry to a deeper level, to the sources to which the news workers turn for rationalizations of the events they reproduce as news. Throughout the thesis, the role of child find agencies as sources and lobbyists has surfaced as a significant aspect in the development of the crisis over missing children. Prior to the rise of the crisis and its attendant panic, these agencies had lacked a forum not only for the promotion of their cause among the general public, but also for the solicitation of political patronage. With the incipience of news coverage of the initial, more spectacular cases and the desire of the news reporters to validate their reports with "official input", child find agencies, by virtue of their already on-going involvement with missing children, provided ready sources of such validation. With their elevation to the level of authoritative sources, these agencies ascended to a highly productive role. As sources, they were able to disseminate their own interpretation of the causes and reasons behind child abduction (and, implicitly, the philosophy which shaped that interpretation) to the journalists, who then disseminated that philosophy to a reading public in the form of news reports. Inasmuch as these reports promoted the child find agencies' agendas, they also attracted a good deal of publicity to an agency and a cause which, up to this time, had been largely ignored.

For the most part, child find agencies were composed of individuals advocating as their primary mode of response to missing children a return to "law and order" values — and it

was this philosophy which was amplified to the public through the journalists. Central to this perspective was a belief that the true heart of the missing children phenomenon resided in the loss of the "organic society" and traditional values endemic to the twentieth century. With the rise of social permissiveness and erotic license, a fringe of "demonized gays" and organized pedophilic groups<sup>6</sup> emerged whose sole intent was the exploitation and abuse of children. In the creation of a vicious tautology, child find/advocacy groups argued that the same lack of structure which hindered society's ability to deal effectively with the pedophilic epidemic was also the primary cause of that epidemic. In essence, had society adhered to the dual philosophy of the monogamy and the traditional family, there would not have been a missing children phenomenon in the first place; however, having rejected those structures, society not only sowed the seeds of their downfall but destroyed the tools which might have prevented this bumper crop of deviance. In their view, the abrogation of the family in favor of women's liberation, two-career couples and day care, pedophiles and child abusers would never have been given the opportunity to prey upon children in the first place.

These sentiments appear ad nauseum in the pamphlets and media statements produced by child find groups as well as those of many formal social control agencies. Eliasoph quotes one child find group's statement, found in a May edition of Newsweek, that

the single parent family is the most important group to reach [to solve the problem of sexual abuse]. Generally the mother is unstable emotionally...if the mother is of immoral character and allows her boyfriend to "move in", then it is certain the eight year old will have her own boyfriend...Many single parents, and married ones, are so wrapped up in "self" that they actually pawn off their children on the pedophile" (Ibid., 1986:23).

The Toronto Star (17 May 1980) included the following statement, released by the "Project Pornography" squad of the Metro Toronto police department, declaring that:

The primary cause of sexual exploitation of children is lack of caring on the part of parents...If you don't give your kids attention and affection, I can guarantee you someone else will" (p.H1).

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<sup>6</sup>See especially the pamphlet published by the Alberta organization "Victims of Violence", which attempted to document the presence of an extensive conspiracy of pedophiles, homosexuals and "assorted perverts" who have "...in recent years become organized in their efforts to engage in sex with children" (1986:33)

Finally, children who grow up in bleak urban environments with one harassed parent and large amounts of solitary free time are lonely, ill-nurtured and ripe for the plucking; this according to a videotape presented by Child Find. In this video a self-confessed "chicken hawk", an older man who uses young boys for sexual pleasure, discusses how easy it is to find children longing for a sympathetic, older ear --

If I'm a deviant for taking in [parent's] problems and responsibilities, then I'm proud of it. Once reality doesn't exist in the home, then my reality does (Globe and Mail, 30 January 1985:8).

From this, the most logical solution to the missing children phenomenon resides in the recovery of those structures which had once protected children from stranger danger, namely, the patriarchal family and the centrality of children which accompanied it.

Official abduction reactions to the phenomenon were no less condemnatory of the dissolution of, and lack of support within, the nuclear family. Notwithstanding the consistent position on the part of policing agencies that stranger abductions constituted only a small percentage of child disappearances (a reality rarely included in newspaper reports), the remaining percentage was most commonly understood in terms of domestic explanations. Abduction of children by estranged parents was clearly amenable to explications centering on the dissolution of family, as were runaways and, to a somewhat lesser extent, cast-off children. All these could be easily understood in the terms offered by the child find/advocacy groups and echoed in the media: children are lost because family structures are inadequate to hold them.

Exacerbating the vulnerability of children implicit in a society lacking in structural supports and traditional values, was the promotion by the media of children as acceptable sources of sexual gratification. The rise of the "Lolita Syndrome", that is, images in media and advertising that transform little girls into sexual objects and thus legitimize their sexual exploitation (New York Times, 3 March 1981; Globe and Mail, 9 March 1981; Toronto Star, 22 August 1981), was hailed by the so-called experts and policing agencies alike as providing

further encouragement for the sexual exploitation of children. That this image was facilitated by the removal of children from the definition accorded them in the traditional nuclear family, however, necessarily meant that the dissolution of the family must shoulder the blame here as well.

Further to this, as was observed earlier in this thesis, parents are often accorded a measure of blame in cases of abduction or murder, as if being "better parents" might have prevented the demise of their child. Concomitant with such tendencies toward blaming the victim, is a propensity on the part of social control and child advocacy agencies to drive for greater supervision over parents, in an effort to prevent child exploitation through proper parenting. In some respects, this monitoring of the family is not unique to the current era, nor is it entirely a product of the current crisis in childhood characteristic of this era. Social welfare agencies directed to ensuring the social health of the family have been a tangible component of society since the advent of "child-saving" with the rise of the Industrial Revolution (Danzelot, 1979; Lasch, 1977; Platt, 1977). This is not to say that the moral panic over missing children has not altered the workings of these agencies. With the rise of a social crisis over child abduction, there has been a concurrent promotion of those branches of the state responsible for policing the family (Danzelot, 1979), as well as an expansion of their power and authority as other agents of social control join with them against a common enemy.

This magnification of social welfare agencies is justified both by the sense of moral panic over missing children and the paranoia incited by this panic; fear which is fed and nurtured by the print media. Society becomes increasingly receptive to messages of ubiquitous dangers such as that disseminated by the metro Toronto police department through the Toronto Star, warning that

they [pedophiles] come from all walks of life and all classes of society...They are doctors, lawyers and teachers; low-income earners and high-income earners (17 May 1980)



If such statements are believed (and it would appear that they are), then support for the enhancement of efforts directed to weeding out pedophiles and murders seems well-justified. The danger, however, in turning toward a "panacea of more policing" to deal with child abduction is the propensity for this policing to touch aspects of private as well as public life. Insofar as documentation exists verifying the need for closer scrutiny of private domains to respond adequately to child exploitation, the concern here is synonymous with the persecution of bearded men after the disappearance of Lizzie Tomlinson (see Chapter V, pp.74-75). The suspicion that any segment of society might produce a child molester leads to the wholesale policing of all persons even remotely associated with that segment. As the logic goes, if one teacher molests, all teachers must be watched; if one man rapes, all men are potential rapists and must be dealt with accordingly. This phenomenon has emerged as a insidious side-effect of the moral panic over missing children, leaving parents in a state of uncertainty as to the "appropriate" ways of displaying affection to their children. In a process of what Lasch (1977) calls the "proletarianization of parents", parents find their instinctive or socialized (in the case of learned responses from their own childhood experiences) modes of relating to their children usurped by the commentaries and admonishments of experts. Interactions with their offspring become inhibited by notions of "good" versus "bad" touching, both in terms of what the parent personally defines as good or bad and, more importantly, apprehensions concerning what sorts of touches an observer might regard as appropriate or inappropriate (Ibid.:172). As the number of observers, both informal — as in the eternal example of the "nosy neighbor" — and formal — the police, child welfare bureaucracy and so on — increases, so does the level of parental anxiety and the potential for a child to suffer from a *lack* of affection in the interests of saving him or her from receiving the *wrong* affection. Those who fail to respect the physical prohibitions imposed by this scrutiny must be prepared to suffer the consequences:

There was a couple who...let their little daughter play naked on the beach. Not content with this affront to the Californian sense of propriety, they had gone on to fondling and kissing the girl on those parts of the body normally protected from such improprieties by a diaper or bathing suit...Eyewitnesses alerted the

police; half an hour later, the parents were in jail and found themselves faced with a charge of child molesting — specifically, having committed an oral sex act on their daughter. The child was held in police custody for the hours her parents remained behind bars. A judge eventually found that a paternal kiss on a baby's behind does not quite fit the standard of oral sex and declared the parents not guilty. A fortunate outcome, but not without cost: the parents had spent a day in jail, their lawyer's fee was in the thousands, and their daughter had suffered a trauma (Schneider, 1987:52).

Taken to this extent, the child abductor assumes a new and no less intimidating form: the new abductor prototype is the state.

It is thus that the perceived solution to the crisis over missing children becomes yet another source of the problem. As the state impresses that a return to the values of monogamy and family will remove the opportunity to exploit and abduct children, its attempts to coerce those values through an increased policing of the family implicitly jeopardize those very same values. In an atmosphere permeated with fear of molestation, children are left feeling that they are unable to trust adults, and adults say that they are afraid of appearing too friendly to children for fear of being accused of improprieties.

To the degree that the media enlisted those sources discussed above as their primary authorities regarding missing children, they included in their reports the biases and philosophies of those sources. As was illustrated, those biases tended toward a rejection of "contemporary lifestyles" in favor of the resurrection of the organic community and the family, which dictated a response to child abduction in line with conservative "law and order" values. In this way it is possible to see the media as occupying a middle ground between the sources and the public, wherein the information the journalist possesses about the subject of his/her report is sifted through both the sources' perspective and the journalist's own assessment of the situation, and translated into the "popular idiom" for the awaiting public. In this way the query launched earlier regarding the motivation which might underlie the media's promotion of a particular view of the missing children phenomenon must be restated, taking into account the role of sources in the presentation of incidents of child abduction in the news. The issue thus becomes not only what the media stand to gain by

reinforcing a public perception of stranger danger, but what profits might flow to the sources in the cultivation of such a view.

Clearly, child find/advocacy groups gained some advantage by the promotion of stranger danger. In the most obvious sense, the moral panic created by the rise of stranger danger attracted an unprecedented degree of attention and publicity to these groups, thereby validating their work and increasing the probability of monetary and community support. At a less precise level, that of their philosophical perspective, these groups stood to gain an even more important advantage. As "authorities", their "I-told-you-so" assertions about the dissolution of family and family-oriented values gained a legitimacy above similar statements made by rival authorities. Although their status as authorities was balanced somewhat precariously on the maintenance of the sense of crisis and moral panic, the sources' position with regard to media representations of the situation necessarily placed them in a position to promote that sense of panic. It also gave them the ability to shape the direction of the panic, to deflect scrutiny into the margins, away from the institutions whose revival the child find/advocacy groups advanced as the solution to the crisis of missing children.

To the degree that the media had its own mandate, this necessarily merged with that of the sources. In some ways, due to the nature of the news items studied and the overwhelming influence of source perceptions within those items, it would be difficult to specify with precision the elements of the media mandate on missing children. This would best be achieved through future research on the role of the media in fostering moral panics of the variety considered in this thesis. To realize fully the goal of a better understanding of the media and moral panics, the research would improve upon the present study by achieving a larger, more expansive sample. This sample would draw from a wider region than metro-Toronto, thereby maximizing the ability of the data to create an accurate representation of the situation nationally. As an added advantage, the research might attempt to address the nature of the distinctions between the portrayal of missing children by the

United States media and that offered by their Canadian counterparts. In this way the study may be able to tap the degree to which the Canadian panic is an offshoot of the missing children phenomenon as this is understood in the United States, as opposed to constituting a "genuine" panic of its own.

In order to offer a full picture of the production of moral panics by the media, future research might also expand the bounds of the analysis beyond the news stories themselves to include the reactions of the recipients of those stories. The latter may be detectable through the inclusion of "letters to the editor" in the sample of news items, or through adding an interview component to the research. A sample of the public could be interviewed to gain an estimation of community response to the media, either through a survey of general attitudes on the subject which could then be juxtaposed with the media presentation, or through direct inquiries into the degree of seriousness accorded to the reports by individual citizens. In this way insights could be gained into the actual dynamics of the press-public relationship, and perhaps an assessment of the actual role of the media in shaping public perceptions. It may be that the public take news reports "with a grain of salt" (Roshier, 1973), thus tempering their impact. If the latter should prove to be true, the inclusion of other forms of media "opinion-shapers" could shed further light on the construction of public sentiment and the creation of moral panics.

Clearly, there remains a large body of work to be done before the role of the media in the generation of moral panics and "crime waves" is fully understood. When the potential implications of such panics for various, often marginal, segments of society are juxtaposed with the paucity of understanding that exists with regard to the promotion of moral crises, the significance of the research is clear. The current panic over the AIDS is illustrative in this context. The presentation of the disease as originating in, and characteristic of, marginal populations has served primarily to promote a general public climate permitting the exclusion and further marginalization of the targeted populations. Like the crisis over missing children,

the crisis generated in response to AIDS has centered upon the male homosexual community and the displacement of traditional values in modern society. In this way anxieties which might be better directed toward the resolution of the disease or the deviance assume the form of hostility toward, and alienation of, those individuals held up by the media and their sources as blameworthy. When this occurs, what the "majority" often fails to recognize is that the enemy is no longer those marginalized groups — rather the enemy comes to reside within the majority in their own blindness to the origins of social crises.

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**MISSING CHILDREN**



Table I

Missing Children, Believed Stranger Abductions, by Case Number/Victim Name.

CASE NUMBER	VICTIM NAME
1	Bacsu, Shelly Anne
2	Bauer, Ingrid
3	Cook, Kelly
4	De Camps, Melanie
5	Derksen, Candace
6	Doove, Jeanne
7	Dupres, Jeffrey
8	Ethier, Michel
9	Hanson, Cheryl
10	Jaques, Emanuel
11	Jessope, Christine
12	Keenan, Sharin'
13	Kowalski, Lisa Ann
14	Larsfolk, Eric
15	Lubin, Wilton
16	Mandeville, Steve
17	March, Cameron
18	May, Jenny
19	McCormick, John Patrick
20	McNaughten, Adrien
21	Metiver, Sebastien
22	Morin, Nicole
23	Murrell, Tania
24	Parrott, Alison
25	Prince, Christine
26	Pruyser, Carolyn
27	Reimer, Kevin
28	Roux-Bergevin, Denis
29	Schuett, Mariann
30	Skleryk, Karen
31	Tomlinson, Elizabeth
32	Viens, Maurice
33	Walsh, Adam
34	Wilson, Simon
35	Worobec, Daniel
36	Scofield, Dorothy Delilah
37	Vasquez, Elvia (Crissie Morgan)
38	Field, Kim
39	Babinéau, Marcel and Jeanne

Table I continued

CASE NUMBER	VICTIM NAME
80	Desmarais, Anne
81	MacKay, Laurie
82	Mitchell, Lawrence
83	Peterson, Morgan
84	Vanalebek, Caralyn
85	Mitchell, David
86	Johnsen, Fred
87	Legault, Loraine
88	Darrah, Tuesday

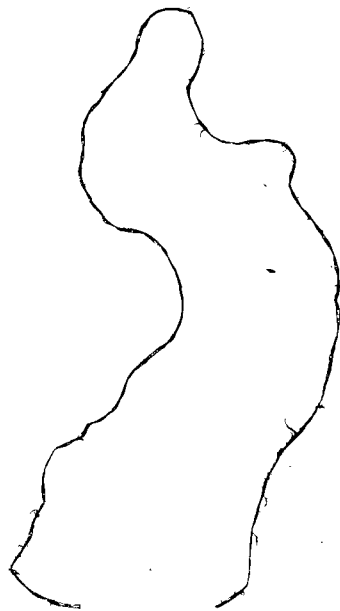


Table II

Missing Children, Believed Parental Abductions by Case Number/Victim Name

CASE NUMBER	VICTIM NAME
40	Amisano, Jennifer
41	Cant, Jonathan
42	Clark, Christopher and Craig
43	Desjardins, Agnieska and Jennifer
44	Edwin, David Krish
45	Eyre, Joan
46	Florek, Cynthia
47	Gadjaloff, Peter
48	Glover, Sean and Michel
49	Golabek, Paul
50	Hillier, Lynn Marie
51	Hollett, Tracy
52	Hrenorsky, Craig and Mark
53	Karu, Louise-May
54	Lambropoulos, Stacy Rose
55	LeGault, Lorraine
56	Matatai, Juan and Lydia
57	McInnes, Tracy
58	Parchment, Lorna
59	Pawley, Jeff and Ruth
60	Polejis, Alios
61	Shipton, Jody
62	Sliwinsky, Sheryl
63	Swanson, Annette and Joseph
64	Wilson, Colin and Stephanie
65	Dolejs, Pavel and Gabriela
66	Servant, Julie
67	Thatcher, Stephanie Anne
68	Hare, Tavinder and Jaspal
69	Watrous, Kellen Chace
90	Defalco, Daisy Reyna
91	Hughes, Karen
92	Koresky, Sarena and Ryan

Table III  
 Missing Children, Confirmed Stranger Abductions by Case Number/Abductor Name/Victim Name.

CASE NUMBER	ABDUCTOR NAME	VICTIM NAME
70	Clifford R. Olsen	Carson, Terri Chartrand, Louise Court, Ada Diagnault, Colleen Johnsrude, Daryn Todd King, Raymond Kozma, Judy Partington, Simon Weller, Christine Wolfsteiner, Sandra

98=examples of runaways

99=pseudonyms, e.g., "Jane Doe"

anonymous, e.g., "Mrs. X, a case"

blank=No cases

**APPENDIX B:**  
**CODING MANUAL**

APPENDIX B  
CODING MANUAL

VAR#	NAME	COLUMN	CODE	EXPLANATION
1	Article Number	1-3	01-999	
2	Date	4-9	79-86 01-12 01-31	Year (1979-1986) Month (January-December) Day of the Month
3	Newspaper	10	1 2 3	The Toronto Star The Toronto Sun The Globe and Mail
4	Page Number blank=unknown	11-12	01-99	Earliest page upon which the story appears
5	News Category	13	1 2 3	1 News stories of incidents. -include first order news presentations of crime incidents, follow-ups on particular incidents, reports on state of police search/investigation, new investigative tech., background reports on victim, victim's family, reactions of acquaintances, memorial services, public appeals, rewards offered. 2 News stories of court cases. -include reports on progress of trials, sentencing of offenders, appeals, adjustments in sentencing; reports on legal issues surrounding such cases. News stories/stories of court cases are within Hall <i>et al.</i> 's (1978) definition of primary news reports. 3 News Features. -provide a way of developing (through explanation and background) further elements of primary news items dealing with various aspect(s) of the missing children phenomenon. Includes features on child abduction, child exploitation, new tech. for the education, identification and location of missing children.

CODING MANUAL

VAR#	NAME	COLUMN	CODE	EXPLANATION
			4	Opinion Columns. -include only established columns in which an identified individual journalist gives an opinion on some incident/issue regarding missing children.
			5	Editorials. -include statements of of opinion written by editorial staff; Features, opinion columns and editorials are all secondary news items.
			6	Letters to the Editor. -include commentaries from citizens, often but not necessarily focussing upon a primary item/point.
6	Focus of the article	14	1	Stranger Abduction or no suspect/serial killers
			2	Parental Abductions
			3	Runaway/castaway children
			4	Combination
			5	Streetproofing, child protection and/or child identification devices
7	Sources quoted/ consulted; blank=N/A	15-22	1	Criminal Justice System category. -includes any of the following police, judges, defence lawyers, crown attorneys and/or factual information brought out in the course of an investigation of trial which could only be attributed to a primary source.
			2	The individual citizens category includes citizens affiliated with any particular organization who have been interviewed and those interviews reported; citizens who wrote to the newspaper and whose letters appeared in the "letters to the editor" column; relatives, friends and the solicited comments of friends and acquaintances of the victim.

CODING MANUAL

VAR#	NAME	COLUMN	CODE	EXPLANATION
			3	The category labelled experts and organizational representatives includes social scientists, mental health professionals, medical doctors, academics and spokespersons representing child find and child protection groups, private detectives, clergy and consultants.
			4	The category labelled journalists/authors includes journalists when they offer an opinion of their own without reference to outside source(s) (e.g., as in editorial or opinion columns), and persons appearing as authors of books/articles, films, etc. on some aspect of the missing children phenomenon but whose expertise is unknown and/or questionable.
			5	The category labelled author of article includes the person responsible for the article.
			6	The sixth category, participants, includes the victim and offender.
			7	The final category includes politicians and legislators.
			8	Other
8	Locus of the problem		1	Attribution of the problem to the victims.
			2	Attribution of the problem to the offender, including those with psychological and/or sexual problems.
			3	Attribution of the problem to the Criminal Justice System and/or policing.
			4	Attribution of the problem to an organized conspiracy and/or profiteers, including organized organized pedophile groups, pornographers, white slave rings, satanic cults, black market baby groups.



CODING MANUAL

VAR #	NAME	COLUMN	CODE	EXPLANATION
			5	Attribution of the problem to the family; including divorce, neglect/abuse, lack of supervision.
			6	Attribution of the problem to some sort of larger social pathology, e.g., permissiveness, loss of organic community, etc.
			7	Attribution of the problem to apparently non-deviant person(s) (psychopaths).
9	Source(s) offering opinions on the locus of the problem re: missing children blank=N/A 9=not stated, but could have been	23-28	1-7	See locus of problem
10	Sources offering opinions or rationales/ causation/blame for specific case blank=N/A 9=not stated, but could have been	29-34	1-7	See locus of problem
11	Primary Case blank=N/A	35-36	1-71	Record only those child abduction cases appearing as primary news reports (see appendix A)
12	Secondary Case (Exemplary) blank=N/A	37-54	1-71	Record all other exemplary child abduction cases appearing as primary or secondary news items.
13	Child Find	55	1=yes 2=no	Record the following: Child Find, Gary or Sharon Rosenfeldt and the then Solicitor General, Perrin Beatty

**APPENDIX C:**  
**CODING SHEET**

APPENDIX C  
CODING SHEET

VARIABLE	CODE	COLUMNS
Article Number	___:___:___	1-3
Date	___:___/___:___/___:___ Y M D	4-9
Newspaper	1. The Toronto Star 2. The Toronto Sun 3. The Globe and Mail	10
Page Number	___:___	11-12
News Category	1. News stories of Incidents 2. News stories of court cases. 3. News features 4. Opinion Columns 5. Editorials 6. Letters to the Editor	13
Focus of the Article	1. Stranger Abduction/No Suspect/Serial Killer  2. Parental Abduction 3. Runaway/Castaway Children 4. Combination 5. Streetproofing, child protection and child safety devices	14
Sources Quoted/Consulted	1. The Criminal Justice System 2. Individual Citizens 3. Experts 4. Journalists/Authors 5. Author of Article 6. Participants 7. Politicians and Legislators 8. Other	15-22

CODING SHEET

VARIABLE	CODE	COLUMNS
Locus of the Problem	1. Attribution of problem to victim(s) 2. Attribution of problem to offender 3. Attribution of problem to Criminal Justice System and/or police 4. Attribution of problem to an organized conspiracy/Profiteers 5. Attribution of problem to family 6. Attribution of problem to some wider social pathology 7. Attribution of problem to apparently non-deviant person(s) (psychopaths)	
Sources offering opinions on the locus of the problem re: missing children	Source 23. _____ Reason 24. _____ Source 25. _____ Reason 26. _____ Source 27. _____ Reason 28. _____	23-28
Sources offering opinions or rationale/causation/blame for specific case	Source 29. _____ Reason 30. _____ Source 31. _____ Reason 32. _____ Source 33. _____ Reason 34. _____	29-34
Primary Case	35-36 _____:_____	35-36
Secondary Case	37-38 _____:_____ 39-40 _____:_____ 41-42 _____:_____ 43-44 _____:_____ 45-46 _____:_____ 47-48 _____:_____ 49-50 _____:_____ 51-52 _____:_____ 53-54 _____:_____ 55-56 _____:_____	37-56
Child find	1. Yes 2. No	57