ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SOCIAL PROBLEM: BRITISH COLUMBIAN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF MISSING CHILDREN, 1981 - 1991

by

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Abstract

Few issues have generated the level of public concern that was devoted to the missing children social problem during the decade between 1981 and 1991. This thesis examines the construction of this social problem through a content analysis and qualitative documentary review of the Vancouver Sun and Province coverage of missing children cases over this eleven year period, with particular attention being paid to the effects of interest groups and their claims-making activities on the rise, fall, and eventual re-emergence of the issue in both media and public discourse.

This exploration of trends and transformations in missing children problem construction is informed by a model of argumentation first developed by Stephen Toulmin. Through a decomposition of textual constructions into their component parts, it becomes possible to examine both the sociocultural and factual aspects of social problems with which these arguments are linked, and to locate the grounds, warrants and claims that empower media narratives and establish reader interest.

An application of these procedures to 338 assembled newspaper items on missing children in British Columbia revealed the importance of specific stranger abduction cases in generating sustained coverage. Against the backdrop of the 1981 Clifford Olson murders, along with a number of high-profile child abductions occurring during the early 1980s, strong elements of endangerment and concern emerged which came to infuse media depictions of subsequent disappearances. Yet by the late 1980s, the frequency of missing children articles began to diminish and content shifted towards abductions by parents and friends, as feelings of threat subsided, and as it became apparent that stranger abductions were a rare occurrence and most missing children were returning home safely. It was not until the 1991 disappearance of Michael Dunahee, and his depiction in the media as an abducted child, that the issue once again attracted widespread interest.

Overall, through this exploration of trends in the media coverage of missing children cases over a eleven-year period in British Columbia, this thesis demonstrates the potential for combining constructionist methodologies with structural analyses of print media text, for the purpose of analyzing the content, patterns and form of social problem arguments in the public culture.

Dedication

For my family, who have always been the main source of inspiration, hope and ability.

Acknowledgements

To acknowledge and thank everyone who contributed to this project would take up more space than the actual thesis. so I will limit myself to thanking the people who were most directly responsible for the finished project you see before you. First of all I would like to thank my Parents. Grandparents, and Beth for their love, understanding and support throughout the last four years.

I would also like to thank Bob Menzies. Doug Cousineau. and Bill Glackman for their perseverance, co-operation and patience through the various stages of this project (which at times resembled a Greek tragedy more than an academic pursuit). Thank you for showing me when "good enough" wasn't quite what you were looking for and encouraging me to go beyond my limited conception of this issue and see what other perspectives had to offer.

Finally, to Mike, Joe, R.K., Ian, Kurt, Jody and John, Pat and Paul, and the L.G.C., thank you for keeping things in perspective and reminding me that there is more to life than my research and assorted anxieties.

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Introduction

Here in Derry children disappear unexplained
and unfound at the rate of forty to sixty a
year. Most are teenagers. They are assumed
to be runaways. I suppose some of them even are.
                                        -Stephen King, It (1986: 151).

The Emergence of the Child Victim

During the 1980's threats to children became an issue of both public concern and entertainment programming. The popularity of Stephen King's novels serves as a visible example of the significance of this theme. It, for example, was one of the best-selling books in both 1986 and 1987 and when it was released as a television mini-series in 1990, it received high ratings. The public interest in this book seemed to reflect the feelings of both Canadian and American audiences and marked the past eleven years as a decade of concern about children.

As the decade progressed, different threats to children emerged in the news and entertainment media including: child abuse; incest; child pornography; harmful rock lyrics; and, of the most importance to this thesis, missing children. What makes the depiction of children intriguing is the high degree of interplay and overlap between news and entertainment media portrayals of child victims. In fact, the endangered child had been elevated to a universal symbol by the mid 1980's. Before I develop my arguments concerning the British Columbian newspaper depiction of the missing children social problem, I would like to provide a brief discussion of the emergence of the theme of the endangered child. There are three main areas that will be addressed: the depiction of children by the entertainment media; the informational context of threats to children; and, the constructionist perspective on social problems in the social sciences.

The Depiction of Children by the Entertainment Media

During the 1980's threats to children emerged as an important theme in print, movies, and television. In the print media, the popularity of Stephen King's novels increased the visibility of children either as main characters (Firestarter, The Shining) or as victims (Salem's Lot, It). The juxtaposition of the innocent child with a clearly defined threat (often supernatural in origin) enabled both the development of the child as a blameless victim and the establishment of reader identity transferal.

The use of extreme examples reduces a potentially complex issue down to its absolute dichotomy (good/evil, right/wrong), and removes moral ambiguity which might impede reader identification with the main characters. For example, the children in It were preyed on by a monster that could change its appearance. The image of a pathological beast that preyed on children is not that far removed from the newspaper depiction of Clifford Olson in 1981. If anything, these novels allowed readers a chance to deal with their feelings of concern through vicarious participation in these structured scenarios[1].

Threats to children were also a dominant theme in V.C. Andrews' books. The Flowers in the Attic series portrayed a group of children who were the victims of ongoing abuse and neglect over a period of years. Child abuse, neglect, and other threats to children became a staple of entertainment programming over the course of the decade[2]. The use of extreme examples in these story lines allowed the audience to categorize the various issues within the theme of child endangerment into simple categories of victim and offender with the child victim emerging as a unifying feature of these scenarios. The development of the child victim is shown in the following diagram:

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[1] This tendency for readers and other consumers of entertainment media to deal with their feelings of threat through vicarious participation has been researched by Boyanowsky (1974).

[2] The popularity of situation comedies and dramas that used family members as the main characters provided a convenient forum for the depiction of threats to children. In particular, the television series "Family Ties" dealt with parental abductions.

```
Extreme Example---------------------Less Extreme Example
        |                                    |
(Development of                      Gains legitimacy and
Child Victim)                         support through
                              reference to the Child Victim
```
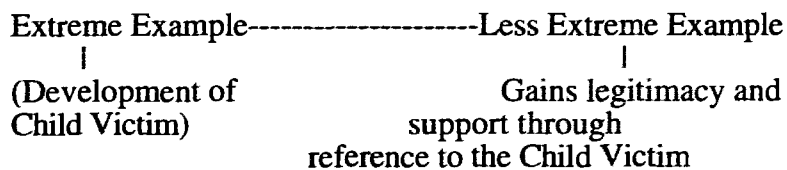
The development of the child victim through the entertainment media provided a hook on which news media could advance arguments concerning the entire range of threats to children. The characterization of the endangered child allowed for the modification of the original scenario to deal with options within the original issue (such as the transition from stranger abductions to parental abductions) and for the movement from one threat to another (the linking of child sexual abuse to the missing children social problem)[3].

The Informational Context of Threats to Children

The emergence of the theme of the endangered child may also be associated with the growth of the so-called "soft news" programs[4]. The popularity of talk shows and shows like "A Current Affair" which emphasized the entertainment value of news provided a venue for interest groups to present their issues. In this genre, the program "America's Most Wanted" is important. It is hosted by John Walsh whose son was abducted from a South Florida mall and was the focus of two television movies ("Adam" and "Adam, His Song Continues"). In 1991, the search for Michael Dunahee[5] was profiled on this show and generated a great deal of both Canadian and American interest in this case.

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[3] The mechanics and implications of linking examples and issues will be discussed in Chapter Four.

[4] The importance of "infotainment" or soft news programming and its influence on the public perception of news has been discussed by Postman (1985).

[5] Michael was abducted from a Victoria play ground in 1991. The newspaper coverage of his disappearance will be discussed later in this thesis.

The demand for packaged accounts of social issues by media outlets also influenced the popularity of interest groups as spokespeople for and authorities on their given topics. For this thesis, the newspaper coverage of these groups will be an important area of study.

The Social Science Constructionist Perspective of Social Problems

The final issue I would like to touch on in this brief introduction is the theoretical perspective I will be using for this thesis. By examining social problems as the product of ongoing negotiations between interest groups, news media and their audiences, it is possible to emphasize the dynamic nature of social phenomena. In this approach to social problems, the subjective packaging of the given issue is of more importance than addressing the objective or physical dimensions of the problem.

This thesis consists of four chapters which deal with the evolution of the missing children social problem throughout the 1980's in British Columbia. Chapter One addresses theoretical issues facing constructionist research and provides a model for analyzing the relevant newspaper articles. Chapter Two provides an aggregate and descriptive analysis of the major themes and issues in the newspaper coverage. Chapter Three deals with the importance of interest groups in the depiction of the missing children coverage. And finally, Chapter Four traces the evolution of this social problem from the missing children crime wave in 1981 through the emergence of the parental abduction and runaways social problems, and finally, it examines the re-emergence of the missing children social problem in 1991.

Summary

This thesis is intended to provide an examination of the trends in the newspaper depiction of an important issue. By focusing solely on missing children, it is possible to address the development and significance of the theme of child endangerment while

remaining within the confines of a Master's thesis. In short, this thesis regards the recent concern about missing children as a case study of the processes of contemporary claims-making activities. Instead of focusing on the structures of newspaper organizations, it focuses on the meanings of threats to children as those meanings are constructed by the newspapers.

I. Beyond "Objectivism" and "Constructionism": Rethinking the Constructionist Perspective Of Social Problems[1]

Introduction

There has been considerable debate in the area of social problems research over the merits of objectivist and constructionist conceptions of deviance. Traditionally, this debate has revolved around the subjective nature of deviance. This thesis will examine this debate and comments about the nature of social problems analysis, in order to understand the current state of social problems research. The purpose of this chapter will be to reveal the strengths and limitations of these arguments and to propose a new model, based on the evolutionary analysis of natural science proposed by Toulmin[2], that offers a new direction for social problems analysis.

What is a Social Problem?

At first glance, the answer to this question is deceptively simple: things like war, racism and crime are social problems. Once you move from the concrete example to a more abstract definition, however, the answer becomes less obvious. Social problems could viewed as trouble spots in our society - they are social arrangements that do not work properly (Best, 1989:xv). Researchers like Sanders and Pinhey define social problems as: "Conditions faced by members of a society that adversely affect their social welfare" (1983: 14). By defining a condition as a "problem", one implies that there are "solutions" to these issues (Nettler, 1989: 261).

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[1] The quotation marks around objectivism and constructionism are deliberate. This chapter will address the general issues addressed under these broad headings. It is simply beyond the purposes of this thesis to address every theorist that may be included in these categories.

[2] In particular, the arguments presented in "Conceptual Revolutions in Science" (1967) and "The Evolutionary Development of Natural Science" (1967) will be applied to this model of social problems.

The Dimensions of Social Problems

That social problems research has had such a long and dynamic history reflects the complex nature of this topic. Jones, Gallagher and McFallis (1988: 16) have argued that this complexity is due to the fact that social problems exist in two dimensions. The objective dimension of a social problem is the concrete, measurable harm associated with an identified phenomenon; the subjective dimension refers to general level of concern held by the community. The differences between these two perspectives are presented in Table 1:1.

The interplay between the objective and subjective[3] perspectives of social problems will provide the starting point for an examination of the strengths and limitations of these theories. After this examination has been completed, I will present a framework for moving beyond this debate and towards an alternative understanding of the complexities and inherent contradictions in social problems research.

Objective Definitions and their Limitations

The Sanders and Pinhey (1983) definition is objectivist suggesting that the essence of social problems lies in identifiable, objective social conditions and that some of these conditions are problems. The focus of this perspective lies in definitional activities. Theorists define the parameters of a given phenomenon, assess its consequences, and determine if this issue qualifies as a social problem. The underlying assumption of this perspective is that an objective reality exists and the appropriate instrumental and theoretical tools are in place to evaluate the social impact of objective conditions.

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[3] In the interests of time and space, constructionism will be the sole variation of subjective research discussed in any great detail. While I realize that there are a great number of disparate theories that fall under the broad heading of subjective research, constructionism is of the most relevance to this thesis.

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Table 1.1
The Dimensions of Social Problems

The Objective Dimension

(I) Primary measurement: social indicators of actual conditions

(II) Sources of suffering: theories concerning the causes of problematic conditions

(A) Social disorganization: what is wrong with society's design?
(1) Social Control Theory (Durkheim, Hirschi, Sykes and Matza)
(2) Conflict theory (Turk, Vold, Chambliss)
(3) Marxist Theory

(B) Deviant behavior: what are the causes and consequences of rule breaking?
(1) Subculture theory (Cloward and Ohlin, Albert Cohen)
(2) Labeling theory (Tannenbaum, Becker)
(3) Differential Association (Sutherland)

The Subjective Dimension

(I) Primary measurement: public opinion polls and evidence of attitudes about social conditions

(II) Sources of concern: factors affecting attitudes toward problematic conditions

(A) Visibility
(1) Intrinsic drama
(2) Media exposure

(B) Expectations

(C) Values
(1) Magnification of harms
(2) Minimization of harms

Criticisms

There are three main criticisms of objectivist definitions. First, they minimize or even ignore the subjective nature of social problems. Not all harmful conditions are considered to be social problems: thousands of people die each year in traffic related fatalities yet there are few calls to ban automobiles. Even though traffic deaths fulfill the criterion of harm, automobile use is not considered to be a social problem[4]. Social problems are essentially what people consider them to be.

Histories of social problems reveal the importance of subjective judgment. The current conception of rape as a social problem was due, in large part, to the ability of feminist groups to draw attention to their conception of the issue (McNickle-Rose, 1977: 78). While rape may have existed as a crime for centuries, its current definition as a "violent act involving power and dominance" (Gunn and Minch, 1988: 3-4) is certainly new. The objective conditions of the crime may have remained relatively constant[5], the changing conception of rape was due to changing subjective conceptions of this crime.

This subjective nature of social problems leads to the second criticism of objectivist definitions: the objective conditions that people define as social problems have little in common (Best, 1989: xvii). There is little that links conditions such as racism, A.I.D.S., and ozone layer depletion except that they all have been defined as harmful conditions.

Such definitions inevitably lead to a hodge podge list of unrelated topics (Best, 1989: xvii). Each of these conditions has different causes and requires different modes of analysis. For example, the standards by which ozone layer depletion is deemed harmful do not translate into generalizable standards of by which other issues can be measured. Simply categorizing conditions as social problems does not offer useful directions for further research.

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[4] Only some aspects of automobile use, such as intoxicated driving, are considered to be problematic.

[5] The implications of assuming that social conditions have an objective existence will be discussed later in this chapter.

While objectivist definitions may fit our common sense notion of what social problems are, they fail to adequately answer the question of **why** a given issue is defined as a social problem. The criterion of harm argument is essentially tautological. The concept of "harm" has no independent existence apart from its social context. Therefore, it is illogical to argue that the criterion of harm and the concept of social problems are ontologically fixed. Under critical scrutiny, the objectivist argument collapses into itself as the lack of a clearly defined point at which an issue qualifies as a social problem renders such designations entirely subjective.

A final criticism of objectivist definitions, that will be developed in greater detail later in this chapter, concerns the existence of a real world. At the core of the objectivist argument is the assumption that there is a real world that can be accurately measured through the use of existing technologies and theoretical perspectives. In social science, there has been the gradual realization that the traditional conception of research and its regulative idea of proper method cannot be consummated (c.f. Foucault, 1966; Goffman, 1974; or Hazelrigg, 1985). The analytic perspective of the researcher is subjective and research bias will influence the findings and preclude the possibility of purely objective research.

The Constructionist Perspective Of Social Problems

The constructionist perspective was developed in response to the criticisms that were made of objectivist conceptions of social problems. While objectivist theorists were concerned with **defining** social problems, the constructionist theorists directed their attention to the **processes** by which claims-making groups[6] successfully defined issues as social problems. At the core of the constructionist perspective was the view that social problems are the result of political processes.

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[6] For the purposes of this thesis, claims-making groups are organizations that present arguments about specific issues. This category includes single interest groups (such as Child Find B.C.) and government agencies (such as the police and social services).

Some constructionist theorists chose to ignore objective conditions when studying social problems. This is not to say that these theorists totally disregarded objective conditions, but rather, they chose to focus on the processes of claims making. The most influential definition of social problems from this perspective is offered by Spector and Kitsuse. For these theorists, a social problem is defined as: "the activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims to organizations about some putative conditions" (Spector and Kitsuse, 1973: 146).

The key feature of this definition is the recognition of social problems as a product of interaction between claims-making groups and policy makers. By getting their conception of a given issue accepted by policy makers, these groups have a major role in determining the direction that public policy regarding this issue will take. In this perspective, it is the responsibility of the claims-making groups to present their conception of the given issue in such a way as to demonstrate their authority as a claims-making group as well as to persuade policy-makers to accept their definition of the proposed social problem.

The Critique of Constructionism Offered By Woolgar And Pawluch

While there have been other criticisms of constructionist definitions, the critique of constructionism presented by Woolgar and Pawluch is of particular importance if only due to the reactions it provoked. The main charge leveled against constructionist definitions concerned the use of "ontological gerrymandering" by constructionist theorists[7]. These researchers also used "selective relativism" or the practice of assuming that some evidence (that of the researchers) was more accurate than the evidence presented by the claims-making groups. The constructionist theorists were accused of criticizing objectivism while at the same time they were using its premises in their explanatory practices. They applied relativism to the

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[7] Woolgar and Pawluch directed their attention towards what they defined as "constructivist" theorists which included both constructionists and definitionalists. For the purposes of this chapter, I am focusing my attention solely on constructionist arguments.

definitional activities of others but failed to consider its relevance for their own explanatory formulations (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985: 159).

The attempts to regulate the tension between objectivism and realism by constructionists were seen by Woolgar and Pawluch to involve the use of certain rhetorical strategies including ontological gerrymandering. The constructionists placed boundaries between assumptions which are understood as being ostensibly problematic and those which are not. By doing this, the constructionists created and sustained the differential susceptibility of phenomena to ontological uncertainty (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985a: 216).

Responses to Woolgar and Pawluch

a. Methodological Caution

The fundamental character of this response was to call for greater methodological caution to be employed by the researchers. Gusfield (1985), for example, felt that the constructionist focus, and the insights that it yields, do not necessarily undermine conventional analyses. The constructivist focus reveals the social character of conventional views and the possibility of alternative approaches.

Schneider (1985b:225) adopted a similar stance and argued that constructivist analysts "know" commonsensically that "real problems" exist but ignore the objects of definitional activities and the relationship between conditions and definitions. By ignoring the objective conditions, these researchers simply refuse to take notice of these conditions; belief in the existence of these conditions is neither denied or suspended. Schneider feels that the use of objective conditions is an unnecessary element of the constructionist approach.

For both Gusfield and Schneider, the objective conditions about which claims are made may or may not actually exist. Their existence may be established empirically, but it is irrelevant for research on the activities of social problems participants. For the purposes of constructionist analysis, "the 'contained' can be seen only through the 'containers' provided by the social problems participants" (Schneider, 1985b: 233).

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on the "container" as understanding of the contained is felt to beyond the scope of the given rather than "facts," these theorists carry relativism to its logical extreme. The emphasis here is sociologist who makes statements is just another claims-maker. By emphasizing "artifacts" Continuing with this conception of the world as being a social construction, the processes through which these groups depict their version of the truth.

theorists concern themselves not with determining the validity of the claims, but rather, the Attention is directed solely towards the claims-making activity. By examining the latter, these that "historical evidence of all sorts is itself a social construction" (Pfohl, 1985: 230). strict constructionism. Strict constructionism is rooted in phenomenological theory and holds

The second main response to the Woolgar and Pawluch critique was the emergence of

b. The Strict Constructionist Perspective

much of a social construction as the evidence that they are criticizing.

consideration that these theorists seem to have failed to consider is that their evidence is as their representations cannot be demonstrated (Hazelrigg, 1985: 236). The underlying equipped to deal with the issue that Hazelrigg (1985) raises: the epistemological superiority of relativism. By implicitly assigning objective status to the "contained," these theorists are ill-The most serious drawback of this form of constructionism lies in the use of selective

status (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985: 160).

in that it remains the same regardless of the "container" or that it has a *de facto* objective one time period, but not in another" (Gusfield, 1981:8) make assumptions about the contained 1985b: 160). Assertions such as "the same objective condition may be defined as a problem in existence (or non-existence) of the objects of definitional activity (Woolgar and Pawluch, seen by Woolgar and Pawluch to inevitably make claims about the "contained" in fixing the for constructionist analysis (Schneider, 1985a: 233). However, social problems authors are mistakes: instances of careless talk in the sense that they are both unnecessary and undesirable

It follows, then, that challenges to specific claims are to be seen by Schneider as

theory and method. Strict constructionists are solely concerned with how definitions express the claims-maker's conception of "the problem"; how these conceptions are pressed as claims; to whom are these claims presented; and what resources are mobilized by the claims-making groups in order to make their claim more persuasive.

There are two more points to be made about the arguments presented by strict constructionists. First, by depicting the world as being a social construction, they make no presumption about the accuracy of the claims put forth. Even "official" sources are seen as being artifacts. Therefore, there is no mechanism for determining if one claim is "better" or "more accurate" than another. Claims and claims-making activities simply exist among a sea of other alternatives.

The final consideration about strict constructionism to be discussed here is that there is no accounting for the social context in which the claims-making activity takes place (Rafter, 1992: 38). Strict constructionists effectively "bracket" their area of study away from the larger society. While this approach may minimize the disruptive effect that social influence may have on the analysis, the social context of the claim is a vital determinant in the success or failure of the claim in the social problems market place. While this perspective offers some valid insights into the internal processes of social problems construction, this utter disregard for external influences limits the effectiveness of this perspective in understanding social problems.

c. Contextual Constructionism

The final variant of constructionism to be addressed here is contextual constructionism, which is concerned with evaluating the efforts of claims-making groups within the context of larger social structures. As opposed to strict constructionists, contextual constructionists assume that they can know - with reasonable confidence - about social conditions (Best, 1989: 247). Consequentially, claims can be used by these theorists to evaluate other assertions.

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Contextual constructionists also see the necessity of making statements about social conditions (Best, 1989: 248). In order to be able to evaluate the claims presented by various groups, it is vital to accept that some evidence has more validity than others. And in keeping with the contextual focus of this perspective, this evidence is often supplied by official sources[8].

Criticisms of this Perspective

The first main criticism of this perspective is that the evidence of the researcher is taken to be correct. Hazelrigg directs attention to the fact that the "I" of the researcher is ontologically given (Hazelrigg, 1986: s5). In other words, the evidence presented by the researcher is taken to be external to the processes that are being called into question. This assumption is internally inconsistent with the social constructionist argument. From this theoretical standpoint, all evidence is to be seen as being a social construction. By granting some evidence epistemological priority, the researcher moves beyond constructionism and into an area that is much more difficult to support.

Once the researcher moves beyond constructionist boundaries, he or she is put in a position of trying to assert a claim without any means of supporting his or her position. Without a "pure" method, a hierarchy of claims in the field of social problems cannot be constructed. While we may know commonsensically that "real" problems exist, there is no way of effectively "proving" that these conditions have a fixed existence over time and space.

The use of statistics, and in the particular, the use of selective relativism allow researchers to construct their evidence to support their conclusions, but at the expense of methodological purity. Assuming the objective existence of some evidence but not of others renders this perspective only partially constructionist and raises methodological questions that call into question any theoretical insights that this form of analysis may yield. The assumption

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[8] For one such example, see Best (1988). In this article, the validity of missing children claims was evaluated using F.B.I. statistics.

that some evidence has an existence apart from the social reality presents the clear and continuous danger of this perspective backsliding into objectivism (Troyer, 1992: 36-7).

Moving Beyond Objectivism and Constructionism

The preceding paragraphs are not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of the nature of social problems research. Rather, this is to be seen as something of an exercise in understanding the theoretical moves carried out by some of the major perspectives and the criticisms of these approaches. It appears that there are serious methodological flaws in each of these perspectives and that there is a need for new directions in social problems research in order to circumvent these difficulties.

Spector and Kitsuse (1973) intended that their definition of social problems and the subsequent research generate new avenues for research. The critique of Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) opened up additional possibilities within constructionist research. Briefly, these responses to Woolgar and Pawluch's criticisms include: (1) calls for greater methodological caution (Gusfield and Schneider (1985)); (2) a move towards strict constructionism (Troyer (1992)); and, (3) the development of contextual constructionism (Best: 1987; 1989; 1991; Rafter 1992).

As the above discussion has demonstrated, there are still serious methodological problems with each of these constructionist perspectives. So instead of putting myself in a position of having to chose between the devil and the deep blue sea, I propose that a new perspective be developed that is consistent with the spirit of Spector and Kitsuse's definition but does not share the same methodological limitations.

Abandoning Empiricism

At the heart of the constructionist dilemma is the exogenic/endogenic antimony (Gergen, 1985: 269). Appeals to factual evidence and the presumption of an objective existence are inconsistent with the endogenic perspective, within which knowledge depends

on processes that are endemic to the organism. The human tendencies to think, categorize or process information are of paramount importance (Gergen, 1985: 269). It follows, then, that any appeals by constructionists to empirical evidence will be inconsistent with the endogenic perspective in which they are working.

For the sake of methodological consistency, I suggest that further constructionist analysis eschew all appeals to empiricism. This move will be even more demanding than it appears. By abandoning empiricism, I am also choosing to forego any appeals to factual "truth". By suspending belief in the commonsense basis of social reality, the processes that create this reality become evident.

Another element of analysis that is no longer available to us once we abandon empiricism is the pursuit of the origin of a given phenomenon. Through the use of endogenic based analysis, the attempt to fix the origin of a social phenomenon in time and space becomes an exercise in futility. We can arbitrarily select a point at which we begin analysis, or where our data claim the phenomena began, but we can never be completely sure of the origin of our given topic of study.

Similarly, we can trace the evolution of a social phenomenon and account for these changes on the basis of the social context. What we are not able to do is provide definitive statements concerning the development of social problems or propose a causal relationship between current packaging of the social problem and identifiable conditions. We can base our conclusions only on the evidence that is available to us. We cannot impute the motives of the social actors; nor do we have grounds to believe that we have located all of the causes of a given issue.

This perspective sheds light on the methodological limitations in the work of other theorists on media. By alleging that news organizations distort the news, one relies on the underlying assumption that an objective truth exists and is available to the researcher (c.f Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991), Herman and Chomsky (1988) or Voumvakis and Ericson

(1984)). Without this assumption of at least a more accurate reading of the truth in newspaper stories, the researchers have no backing for their arguments.

The appeal to empirical evidence by researchers inevitably leads to some form of ontological gerrymandering. All knowledge is communal and all claims that are put forth are the result of negotiations both within and without the claims-making bodies. What separates these claims are the arguments put forward in their defence. Claims about smoking by the Surgeon General have no more objective accuracy than the argument presented by your Grandmother. The difference between these two claims lies in the authority linked to each claims-making body and the arguments presented in support of these assertions.

Through the assumption of a non-empirical approach to social problems analysis, the processes of consent generation can be examined via the use of appeals to empirical evidence. The abandonment of empiricism does not imply that anything goes as far as analysis is concerned. Through the use of a theoretical perspective as an entry point for analysis, one can conduct an examination of social problem construction along pre-defined parameters. The choice of a theoretical perspective becomes of critical importance as it serves to simultaneously liberate and constrain the researcher.

The goal of this perspective is not to generate objective knowledge, nor is it to provide the definitive statement of social problem research. Rather, my aim is to point out the methodological limitations of current approaches to social problems and provide new avenues for research. I am not naive enough to hope that everyone will drop his or her theoretical perspectives after reading this thesis. This is not so much an advertisement for a new theoretical orientation as it is a challenge to all social science researchers to critically examine their theoretical and methodological assumptions.

Evolutionary Constructionist Analysis

What I propose is that constructionist theory be applied to the evolutionary model of natural science developed by Stephen Toulmin. At the heart of this model is the view that

social problems are the end product of an ongoing dialogue between claims-making groups and external structures[9]. Toulmin's research is intended as a conceptual entry point into the analysis of social problems. I am not accepting all of Toulmin's methodological assumptions nor am I suggesting that Toulmin's analysis is epistemologically superior to other perspectives. The use of Toulmin is due to the fact that there are theoretical implications in his work that have yet to be fully developed and it serves as a way of methodologically grounding my analysis.

Toulminian models have been used to circumvent concerns about the structural clarity of both constructionism and media studies. The aim of this thesis is to use a clearly articulated structural model in order to examine the role of interpretation in social problems theory. Unlike the work of Marxist content analysts or contextual constructionists, this form of research cannot make assertions about socio-economic structures, since the model does not allow extrapolation beyond the data sources being consulted. The following paragraphs outline the external, internal, and statistical components of Toulmin's model.

External factors, such as current government policy and newspaper coverage, can be seen as providing the context for determining the success or failure of a claims-making campaign. By paying attention to the context in which the claims are being made, one can reach some understanding of the reasoning behind the particular articulation of the claims in question (Toulmin, 1967: 464). For example, this thesis will examine the linking of the missing children social problem in British Columbia during 1981 to child sexual abuse which was already recognized as a social problem[10]. The need to revitalize the missing children social

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[9] For the purposes of definition, external factors will be taken to represent "social, historical, political and economic factors as well as the various conditions that provide different opportunities for and place various obstacles in the way of intellectual innovation" (Toulmin, 1967: 460-1)

[10] For an example of the legitimacy of the Child Abuse Problem in British Columbia please see the "Royal Commission on Family and Children's Law" (The Berger Commission (1974)) which began as a British Columbia Study and was expanded into a Federal Commission.

problem in order to compete with other problems on the social problems marketplace will also be examined.

While such external conditions may influence the direction that claims-makers take in developing their arguments, and the ultimate success of their claims, they are insufficient to explain the process of claims-making activity in its entirety. There is little explanation provided of why some conceptual variants within the pool of available options are developed at certain times while others are effectively ignored (Toulmin, 1967b: 88).

By examining the internal activities of claims-making groups, one can gain insights about the mechanisms of the claims-making process[11]. It is through examination of the claims-making group that the researcher can examine how these groups verse their arguments in terms that will develop public support, ensure news media coverage, and persuade policy-makers to accept their conception of the given issue[12].

A very important methodological consideration that must be mentioned here concerns the study of claims-making groups. There has been a tendency of some researchers (in particular, contextual constructionists) to refer to the motives of claims-making groups. As Mills (1940) has argued, it is virtually impossible to impute the motives of social actors. The observed actions of the claims-making groups may not be an accurate representation of the motives that lie behind these activities. Research must be concerned only with people's talk about their motives. There is a serious danger that the subjective interpretations of the researcher may be taken to represent the actual intentions of the subjects. This methodological weakness can be avoided without jeopardizing the theoretical insights that this perspective offers.

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[11] While Toulmin focused on individuals, I have chosen to focus on claims-making groups as the focal point of internal considerations.

[12] The need for positive press coverage for the success of most claims-making activities cannot be under-estimated. Most claims-making groups are outside the sphere of government influence and have to resort to appeals through the news media in order to have their arguments reach the public and claims-making groups.

The final analytic tool used in this perspective is statistical analysis. By statistical analysis, it is not implied that there will be an evaluation of the statistical claims of the claims-making groups by using evidence whose ability is presupposed by the researcher. It is my feeling that, for purposes of analysis, all manner of claims (especially those that I make myself) are to be considered to be social constructions. By making this particular analytical move, one can evaluate claims, not by their accuracy, but by the evidence that is presented in their support.

Reducing the examination of statistics to the evidence that is presented in support of these statistics, permits greater insights into claims-making activities without sliding into objectivist assumptions. Statistics will be examined as another form of claim put forth by claims-making groups. While statistics may be employed in the context of wider claims-making activity, there is no reason to make assumptions about their accuracy any more than there is reason to presume the validity of the claim that the statistics are being enlisted to support.[13]

For the purposes of this model, statistical analysis will refer solely to the observed trends concerning the relative prevalence of the various subsets of the social problem by claims-making groups. This form of analysis attempts to chart the developments of the various subsets (or conceptual variants) over time. This analysis can be carried out by charting the amount of coverage devoted to the social problem as a whole and to the conceptual variants within the larger social problem. For the purposes of this thesis, the newspaper coverage of the missing children social problem[14] will be analyzed and broken down into: type of

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[13] By the same token, there is no reason to presume the validity of any element of the claims-making (or counter-claims making) activities that come under our evaluation. For an example of the analytic tool that I have chosen to employ to break these arguments down, see the model proposed by Best (1987) which is based on Toulmin's earlier works on the structure of arguments.

[14] The sample used for this thesis is the Vancouver Sun and the Vancouver Province for the period from January 1, 1981 to December 31, 1991. Although there was some coverage of missing children cases before 1981, there was a "missing children crime wave" that generated a great deal of public concern about this issue. The ten year period, in my opinion, is sufficient to chart the development of the missing children social problem, as it encompasses a rise in concern about runaways and parental abductions.

abduction; sources quoted; whether the story represents a claim or a counter-claim; and finally, the form of coverage (primary, secondary or tertiary)[15]. Newspaper analysis represents only one form of media that this model can be applied to[16]. Other sources of data could include: journal publications; coverage on television news; and the number of television shows and movies that deal with the given issue.

Theoretical Implications Of This Model

With the basic elements of this model in place, attention may now be directed towards the theoretical implications of this perspective. In keeping with the spirit of early constructionist theory, this model is primarily concerned with examining the processes that underlie social problems construction. Claims-making activity lies at the heart of constructionist analysis. It would be a mistake to lose sight of this approach, as there are still many theoretical insights in this perspective that are yet to be revealed.

What separates this perspective from other variants of constructionist theory is that a social problem is seen as an evolutionary process rather than a static interaction between claims-making groups and their audiences[17]. It is conceived to have "a continuing identity through time, and is characterized as much by the processes as by the content of any one historical cross section" (Toulmin, 1967a: 466). Such a tradition will be concerned with the elements of continuity and variability within the given social problem.

It is of particular interest from this perspective to examine why social problems develop along certain dimensions, and why particular forms of arguments are enlisted at some points of their history but not at others. Do the new forms of the claims put forth by the

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[15] This list is arbitrary and selective. It stands to reason that any list would be necessarily subjective in nature. The important consideration, at this level of analysis, is to accurately chart the amount of coverage devoted to the issue and its conceptual variants.

[16] In fact, Toulmin originally used this model to trace the linear development of scientific thought.

[17] To be fair, Spector and Kitsuse attempted to develop a natural history of social problems as having a single trajectory (e.g. from "discovery" of problem to the "solution").

claims-making groups meet the demands that external factors place on them better than their predecessors (Toulmin, 1967a: 466)? And finally, what conditions either favor the continuance of a social problem, or demand that new claims be made in order to preserve its existence?

A key difference between this model and other frameworks used to conduct content analysis is that this perspective cannot take the reactions of readers and other target populations as a given in the examination of arguments. A key weakness of content analysts in the past has been their assumption of universality of sensory experience[18], which frees the researcher to move beyond his or her impressions of the data and determine how the given audience would react, therefore enabling the transition from examination to explanation.

Unfortunately, this rhetorical move is subject to the same criticisms that Mills (1940) raised about the imputation of motive. There is simply no basis on which claims to universality of experience can be made. While the Toulminian model enables me to trace the development of the newspaper depiction over time, this thesis will necessarily be impressionistic rather than realist in scope[19]. The key difference in narrative between these forms of research is that the impressionist recounts the events as he/she has seen them instead of making realist assumptions about factual accuracy and comprehensiveness (Van Maanen, 1988: 102). The differences between evolutionary constructionism and contextual constructionism are summarized in Table 1:2.

With this theoretical perspective in place, we can now develop the analytic tool for breaking the arguments of claims makers down into parts that can be analyzed within the framework of evolutionary constructionism. By decomposing the claims into their components, the researcher can better understand the role of each of the parts of the argument

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[18] This rhetorical move is especially evident in script analyses of media violence.

[19] Geertz (1983: 154) has argued that it is possible to apply the anthropologist's ethnographic style of inquiry to the study of contemporary human thought. My application of impressionist ethnography to Toulminian analysis is intended to highlight the role of interpretation in constructionist theory.

and gain some insights into both the form of arguments used and the theoretical assumptions that underlie these claims. I feel that the best analytic tool for this purpose is the aforementioned model developed by Joel Best.

Model Being Used

This thesis will use the model of arguments developed by Toulmin (1958). Although this model was originally applied to simple, three line arguments, it is also effective in breaking down the arguments presented by claims-making groups (as demonstrated by Best, 1987). From this perspective, an argument can be seen to consist of three elements: **grounds**, **warrants**, and **conclusions or claims**. While I have chosen to use Best's model, I do not necessarily accept all of the analytic moves he has made in using this model.

Grounds

Grounds refer to the data that claims-makers present in support of their claims. The grounds used by claims-making groups in social problem construction are usually attempts to define the dimensions of a given issue in a way that justifies the proposed conclusions. For the missing children social problem the grounds presented by claims-makers can be broken down further into definitions, examples, and incidence estimates.

a. *Definitions*

Claims-making groups attempt to define both the boundaries of the proposed social problem, and the nature or severity of this area. **Domain statements** refer to the efforts of the claims-making groups to establish the boundaries of their social problem (Best, 1987: 104). In the case of the missing children social problem, there was (and still is) considerable debate concerning who qualifies as a missing child.

Orientation statements, on the other hand, refer to the conception of a social problem that claims-making groups present to the audience (Best, 1987: 105). For example, in

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Table 1.2 Contextual and Evolutionary Constructionism

Contextual Constructionism

(I) Primary measurement: social indicators of actual conditions and measurements of public concern.

(II) Sources of problem depiction: theories concerning the depiction of problematic conditions by claims-making groups and government organizations

(A) Physical and Perceptual Charcteristics of Problem:
(1) Hierarchy of accuracy
(2) Assumption of objectivity in order to enable evaluation of claims-making activities
(3) Combination of exogenic assumptions and endogenic methodology
(4) Knower and known are independant
(5) Assumption of observable reality

(B) Argument Form:
(1) Realist/confessional
(2) Only partially constructionist
(3) Selectively subjective
(4) Evaluation of the mechanics of issue promotion
(5) Imputting motives

Evolutionary Constructionism

(I) Primary measurement: news media as a linear guage of problem evolution

(II) Sources of problem depiction: print media as site for ethnographic analysis using Toulmin's model as the main geneological device.

(A) Visibility
(1) Intrinsic drama
(2) Media exposure
(3) Interaction between claim and counterclaim
(4) Issue promotion and decline

(B) Argument Form:
(1) Identification of data, warrants, and conclusions
(2) Modifications of original argument
(3) Impressionist, examination
(4) Purely endogenic in assumptions and methodology
(5) Knower and known cannot be separated
(6) Emphasis on the construction of rather than revealing reality

the case of missing children, to be "missing" is taken to necessarily imply being "endangered".
By establishing a clear threat to children, claims-making groups develop public concern and
support for strong action to resolve this problem.

b. Typifying Examples

The examples used by claims-making groups attract public attention and develop
public concern for the given issue. In the newspaper coverage, emotionally riveting "grabber"
stories are often used. These stories relate extreme, sensationalistic examples of the given
social problem to the public, and it is by their very nature that these atrocity tales generate
public concern.

The other effect of these atrocity tales isn't as obvious to the public. When the public is
presented with atrocity tales as examples of the given phenomenon, readers begin to view the
entire social problem in terms of these extreme examples. The use of high profile missing
children cases like that of Michael Dunahee[20] helps legitimate the missing children social
problem as a serious issue. Claims-makers try to draw our attention to examples that justify
their claims (Best, 1990: xxi). The use of stranger abduction cases, in particular, typifies the
missing children social problem and adds a sense of urgency to the claims-makers' assertions
about this issue.

c. Incidence Estimates

The statistical claims that claims-making groups present concerning a given issue are
vital in generating public concern. In terms of incidence estimates there are three main forms
of statistical appeals concerning respectively: (1) the estimated extent of the problem; (2) the
growth of the problem; and (3) the range claims presented by these groups.

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[20] Michael Dunahee was briefly mentioned in Footnote 5 of the Introduction and will be discussed in greater
detail in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

Estimating the Extent of the Problem

These statistical claims are intended to persuade the public that a given issue affects a large segment of the population. If the public can be convinced that the missing children social problem harms a large number of people, there will be increased concern about this area (Best, 1987: 106). These estimations are particularly effective in legitimizing the social problem in its early stages. Through a combination of atrocity tales with large numerical claims about the missing children social problem, this issue was recognized as a serious issue in its early stages of development.

Growth Patterns

The growth patterns of a given issue are another effective catalyst for generating public interest in the early stages of a social problem. Through arguments that a given condition is occurring with greater frequency than in the past, public concern is focused on ensuring that this problem is stopped before it gets worse (Best, 1987: 107). Claims about the growth patterns are particularly effective if the given incident does not occur often. For example, an additional 50 cases of stranger abductions would constitute a dramatic increase while the same number of assaults would not be as significant.

Range Claims

The range claims are the final area of statistical claims espoused by claims-making groups. The basis of these claims is that if a given social problem is seen to affect all segments of the population, there will be increased public support for the means to stop the spread of this problem (Best, 1987: 108). In the language of claims-making groups, references to "epidemics" or random crime patterns place nearly all segments of the population at risk of being victimized.

Warrants

In Toulmin's analysis of arguments, warrants serve as bridges between grounds and conclusions. These structures justify accepting the proposed conclusions based on the available grounds. Warrants become especially important when there are counter-claims that refute the grounds presented by claims-making groups. Established warrants can enable the audience to accept proposed conclusions even though the grounds of the argument may be refuted.

The warrants serve as logical bridges between the grounds and the proposed conclusions. In effect, the warrants justify accepting the conclusions based on the available evidence. Once these warrants have been established, they can be used to modify the grounds in order to address new argument fields or respond to modify the existing grounds that are challenged by counter-claims. Best developed six warrants in his analysis of the missing children social problem: (1) the sentimental value of children; (2) the blameless victim; (3) associated evils; (4) deficient policies; (5) historical continuity; and finally, (6) the rights and freedoms of children (Best, 1987: 109-112)[21].

Conclusions

Conclusions are the specific recommendations that claims-making groups present as ways of dealing with a social problem. The claims-making activity is carried out to justify their view that this single set of recommendations is the only logical option available to the public in light of the available evidence. In terms of the conclusions presented by the claims-making groups, Best examined the following: (1) awareness; (2) prevention; (3) social control policies; and, (4) other objectives[22].

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[21] These warrants will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Three and Four.

[22] These conclusions will be examined in Chapter Three. They are mentioned here primarily to draw attention to their role in Best's model.

Through the decomposition of arguments into their requisite components, it becomes possible to examine: (1) the rhetorical effect of these arguments; (2) the audiences towards which they are directed; (3) the tactics employed by the claims-makers in order to persuade the audience; (4) the underlying assumptions and motivations behind this particular manner of constructing an argument; (5) the form of the argument (is it designed to reaffirm existing conceptions about a given issue or to develop a new form of analysis within the subject area?); and finally, (6) the expected consequences of these arguments on the target populations.

Applying This Model To Social Problems Analysis: A Conclusion and an Introduction

Now that we have armed ourselves with a new approach to social problem analysis, all that remains is to test this model. As it stands now, evolutionary constructionism is more of an orientating strategy than a grounded theory. While the theoretical and methodological statements appear sound, these need to be applied to an actual case study to determine if this model actually opens up any new avenues for research.

I have chosen to apply this model to the newspaper depiction of the missing children social problem in British Columbia from January 1, 1981 to December 31, 1991. The choice of this time frame will allow me to trace the development of a social problem from its incident (The Olson abductions)[23]; to gauge the effects of conceptual variants (parental abductions and runaways) and counter-claims (fund raising scandals, low number of stranger abductions, etc.); and finally, to examine the mechanics of a "warrant re-establishing" example (Michael Dunahee). The eleven year time frame is also short enough to allow a sufficient level of depth of analysis while staying within the boundaries of a Master's thesis.

The final reason for the choice of the missing children social problem is that there has been a great deal of research on this topic and related issues. The existence of research carried out by theorists from other perspectives serves as something of a benchmark to assess the findings generated by this model. The crucial consideration behind this model is that it is not a

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[23] In 1982, Clifford Olson was convicted for the murders of 11 children during 1980 and 1981. He has become a visible symbol of the treat that child abductors pose to the public.

radical departure from existing theories, but rather, it represents a response to criticisms of current variants of constructionist theory.

The final note to be made here is that I have come not to bury constructionism or to praise it but to recognize it for what it truly is: a promising theoretical perspective that has been hampered by methodological and theoretical shortcomings. While the inclusion of Toulminian analysis is not intended to cure all of the ills of this perspective, it provides a new direction for subsequent research while maintaining the original emphasis on claims-making groups that made Spector and Kitsuse's work so appealing to sociologists.

II. Trends in the Newspaper Depiction of the Missing Children Social Problem, 1981-1991

Introduction

The depiction of missing children by British Columbian newspapers[1] provided a unique opportunity for an examination of the construction of social problems. In particular, the eleven year period from 1981 to 1991 was marked by two of the largest missing children investigations in British Columbian history: the abductions linked to Clifford Olson[2] in 1981[3] and the disappearance of Michael Dunahee in 1991[4]. This decade also included the emergence of parental abductions and runaways as publicly recognized social problems[5].

The choice of this particular topic allowed the media depiction of claims-making groups to be examined. A comparison of the differences between single interest groups (the parents group fronted by Chris Burgess in 1981) and a local chapter of an American missing children organization (Child Find BC) provided a context for examining news media designations of social problem ownership[6]. These features and the relatively short time frame enabled a comprehensive analysis of this issue while remaining within the parameters of a Master's thesis.

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[1] For this thesis, "missing child stories" will refer to newspaper articles that had missing children as the dominant theme. These stories are tabulated by both page and separate story counts. Specific missing children stories refer to articles that focus on a single child.

[2] While Clifford Olson was mentioned in Chapter One, the newspaper depiction of him and the child abductions he was linked to will be developed during the course of this chapter.

[3] "Massive investigation - possibly B.C.'s largest" (Province, August 21, 1981: A1)

[4] "Victoria police... mount the biggest investigation in the city's history" (Province, March 27, 1991:3)

[5] "Children in the Crossfire" (Province, February 16, 1986: 53); "Runaways are a 'low priority' for police" (Province, May 26, 1986: 28.

[6] These groups will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Research Design

The data set for this thesis consisted of 338 articles on missing children collected from the Vancouver Sun and the Vancouver Province from January 1, 1981 to December 31, 1991[7]. The stories were located through the use of the British Columbian and Canadian News Indexes. In addition to these sources, a page by page analysis of each newspaper was conducted for a one week period preceding and immediately following each listed article[8].

The Province and Sun represent two of the most prevalent forms of newspaper reporting in Canada[9]. The Vancouver Province takes a "popular based" editorial stance and is oriented towards a less educated audience. The Vancouver Sun occupies a mid-point, or "mass", position on this continuum (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991: 35)[10].

Through the choice of these two papers, with their different editorial stances and target demographics, the relationship between presentation of missing person cases and target populations could be established. By including these different styles of newspaper reporting in my sample, I was able to examine variations in the method of presenting missing children cases. As well, these two papers devoted considerable coverage to the geographical area of interest for this thesis (namely, British Columbia).

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[7] In the interests of establishing a comprehensive coverage of the stories within this time frame a period of six months in either temporal direction was used in order to cover any stories that extend beyond these boundaries.

[8] These checks did not reveal any new story lines but did help in locating 11 articles that were overlooked in the News Index listings. The most common example of this trend was listing one or two stories per newspaper page when there were more.

[9] The Globe and Mail was used in a preliminary analysis of newspaper coverage of the missing children social problem in British Columbia. Since this paper devoted very little coverage to this issue, it was not included in the final data set.

[10] Ericson, Baranek and Chan refer to the target markets that different newspapers pursue. Popular based newspapers emphasize the emotional and entertainment based elements of news stories. On the other hand, quality newspapers seek acceptance through more literary means and tend to offer longer articles with fewer photographs and other forms of physical adornment. Between these two extremes lie the mass newspapers which incorporate aspects of popular and quality reporting formats in order to appeal to a wider range of readers (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991:35).

In examining this issue, a central question emerges: **Is there a consistent frame of issue depiction for missing children cases in British Columbia?** In order to address this concern, it is important to study a wide variety of indicators to determine what trends emerged in the data set. This chapter will focus primarily on revealing quantitative trends in order to provide a context for a broader analysis of this issue in Chapters Three and Four. In particular, the following questions will be addressed in this chapter:

(1) What were the overall article frequencies and trends?

(2) What themes emerged in the presentation of the missing children social problem and how were they related to specific cases?

(3) What topics and sub-topics were used to develop these themes? How were they influenced by contextual and temporal considerations?

(4) How were specific missing children cases presented? Were there specific categories of examples?

(5) What strategies were used in the presentation of missing children? Was there a relationship between the type of missing child and patterns of coverage?

(6) How were offenders depicted in the coverage of this issue? Was there a correspondence between the category of missing child and feelings of threat?

(7) What functions did official agencies and interest groups play in the development and depiction of the missing children social problem? Was there a relationship between issue ownership and the style and amount of newspaper coverage? Were there consistent patterns with regard to the sources quoted in these articles? Were there differences in the selection of sources between the Vancouver Sun and the Province? What patterns emerged in the use of sources and how were they related to specific missing children cases?

The selected time frame (1981 to 1991) enabled me to trace the development of the missing children social problem in the newspaper coverage while keeping the amount of research required

for this project down to a manageable level. The eleven year period was of particular importance in studying the development of missing children cases. This decade witnessed the official "problematization" of missing children; the Olson abductions which served as a high profile depiction of missing children; and the presentation of counterclaims challenging the legitimacy of both the claims-making groups and their "solutions" to the missing children social problem. By including the years before and after these pivotal incidents in the history of missing children coverage, I was able to explore the effects of claims-makers.

This project is not intended to represent a definitive statement on the media construction of the missing children social problem. The 1980's were chosen in large part because it was during this decade that the "missing children" issue emerged. With more time, tracing the evolution of this issue over a period of decades, rather than years, would have generated interesting findings. This would have especially been the case if the research could have connected the depiction of this issue to the changing conceptions of childhood over the past century[11].

The quantitative content analysis was used to reveal aggregate patterns in news content. This form of analysis operates from the premise that repetition is the most valuable indicator of significance (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991: 50). This approach was integrated with qualitative documentary analysis, which is concerned with understanding how human expression articulates social order (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991: 55). When enlisted together in this thesis, quantitative content analysis revealed patterns in news presentation, while qualitative content analysis elaborated this work with descriptive detail of ideographic cases and illustrative examples of accounting practices (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991: 57)[12].

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[11] In particular, the type of analysis conducted by Platt (1977) would have generated some intriguing findings concerning the relationship between the depiction of missing children cases and prevailing images of children and childhood.

[12] For a list of the variables used and their definitions, please refer to Appendix A. The basic form of the coding sheet used for this thesis was derived from Johnson (1988).

The Quantitative Content Analysis

The reason for using content analysis in this thesis was to better understand the relationship between the media (in this case, newspapers) and missing children claims-makers. As mentioned above, this thesis was also concerned with tracing developments over time in the newspaper reporting of missing children stories. For these reasons, it seemed appropriate that a study concerned with media presentations of news events, and with the social impact of such presentations on public conceptions of social problems, should study newspaper accounts firsthand.

The main focus of the quantitative content analysis was to reveal consistent patterns of depicting the offender, victim, community and official agencies that would support the existence of a frame for the newspaper depiction of missing children. By examining the use of sources, article frequencies, and other elements of story construction devoted to specific missing children, it was possible to develop categories of newspaper coverage. The quantitative analysis was based on the major themes of child depiction, development of threat and official response to specific incidents originally developed by Joel Best (1987). These categories were used in the delineation of content analysis items which were in turn organized under the following general headings: newspaper identity, date, page, topic, subtopic, sources quoted, specific missing child, location, nature of disappearance, theme, and claims-making groups topics (see Appendix A). All 338 Vancouver Sun and Province articles were then coded for these items, and the resulting data were subjected to quantitative analysis using the SPSS and Harvard Graphics facilities of the Simon Fraser University UNIX system.

Having said this, some methodological criticisms of quantitative content analysis of media should be noted. The *first* common criticism is that the researcher may have the tendency to count only words or specific phrases and fail to derive any significant findings concerning the area being studied (Shaughnessy and Zechmeister, 1990: 137). This work, of course, was also restricted to data that are indeed amenable to quantification (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991:

51). Even when such data are present, the researcher is frequently limited to categories predefined by the sources (Ibid). The major limitation of this style of research is that the emphasis on repeatability ignores the larger social context in which these events are occurring.

A *second* and opposite criticism is that the content analyst may be led to take creative liberties with the findings, viewing the data or selecting information that fit into his or her preconceived views of what the findings should be. In the process, the researcher may ignore the majority of the data that point in directions other than the one being anticipated (Palys, 1992: 278)[13]. This difficulty was minimized by adopting the methodological strategy of "examining" rather than "explaining" the development of this issue, restricting the analysis to a grounded presentation of available information.

Third, content analyses of this type cannot incorporate cases that are excluded from the sample or from the media coverage altogether. As a result, the examination of the accounting process and the construction of news stories is not possible through quantitative work alone. Only observational methodologies based in newsrooms and source organizations can tell us what is considered for inclusion but not published and why (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1991: 51). Such research - while important in understanding this area - is beyond the scope of the thesis.

The Qualitative Documentary Analysis

With the quantitative component of the content analysis in place, a qualitative analysis focusing on the handling by the two newspapers of the missing children issue in general, and of British Columbia cases in particular, was developed. The main objective of the qualitative level of analysis was to determine if there was any evidence of an operative frame[14] in the stories being

[13] Since the majority of the research used in Chapter One focused on claims-making groups, there is a tendency to over-emphasize their importance. The significance of this bias will become apparent later in this chapter and in Chapters Three and Four.

[14] For the purposes of this thesis, the "frame" will refer to standardized patterns of coverage of missing children cases. The thesis will also examine the relationship between this "frame" and the warrants used in the construction of the missing children social problem.

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studied that corresponded to the arguments presented by claims-making groups. Selected case studies were used to highlight the categories proposed in the above model. Attention was paid to how the frame developed, where it came from, and how it was reinforced through repeated use.

The other reason for using qualitative methodologies was to examine the effects of issue ownership and claims-making activities on the depiction of the missing children social problem. By examining the arguments presented by groups involved with this issue, it becomes possible to assess the relative strength of groups with conflicting images of a given topic. In this thesis, the dialogue between claims-making groups, official agencies and the media will be an important area of study.

To determine the influence of depictive frames and claims-making groups on the presentation of missing children stories in these two newspapers, I have compared cases eliciting high and low intensity newspaper coverage[15]. This comparative analysis was enlisted to identify the connections between the elements of a particular story and its suitability for use in newspapers. An effort was made to standardize geographic area and time frame wherever possible in order to minimize the effect of external variables and be better able to measure the specifics of each individual case against the frame itself.

Model Being Used

For the purposes of this thesis, the missing children social problem will be conceptualized in terms of depiction by the Vancouver Sun and the Province. In particular, the presence of a repeatable pattern of coverage or frame of issue depiction is pivotal to my examination of this issue. The frame refers to the structure rather than the substantive content of newspaper articles about missing children. At this level of analysis, the issue of what is presented to the reader is less

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[15] By high intensity coverage, I am referring to cases that were the basis of ten or more newspaper articles. The specific frequencies for each child will be shown in Figure 2.5 and discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

important than how this information is conveyed. The sources, themes, topics and subtopics are vital to establishing a context through which the reader can conceptualize a given incident.

The frame, as something of a structural abstraction, is difficult to isolate. In this thesis, I have chosen to develop the missing children story frame through reference to the roles played by themes, topics, subtopics, and sources in the generation of this social problem dynamic.

The themes used by the two newspapers serve as the first level of the depictive framework. They are often implicitly stated within the newspaper coverage and serve as narrative development in a specific article and often throughout the coverage devoted to a given incident. Of the six themes to be discussed in this thesis, four of them (offender blaming, official reaction, claims-making group arguments and victim blaming) deal primarily with the identification of a threat and the responses of the police, government officials and concerned citizens to deal with the problem. The other two themes (child depiction, and searches for missing children) focus on the human interest element of missing children cases by emphasizing the reaction of the people close to the missing child. The missing children cases that contain these themes usually do not have access to the same feelings of threat and concern associated with incidents under police investigation.

The themes are expressed primarily in the topics used by the newspapers. Topics are the main focus of the article and include: primary examples; secondary examples; police investigations; and, claims-making groups. As the primary vehicles for the expression of the themes, the topics convey the necessary feelings of concern, threat or emotional attachment through the development of clearly defined victims, offenders, investigative responses, and interest groups. Without such delineated characters and scenarios, it would be difficult for readers to mentally construct these incidents and develop emotional attachments to the story lines.

The development of primary characters and scenarios by the topics is supported through the introduction of secondary characters and plot development in the subtopics. The subtopics include the depiction of the child, family, suspect, police investigators, and interest groups. While the topics introduce readers to the main characters, the subtopics provide a clearer picture of the

given incident and of the people involved. By including the parents of the missing child in the story coverage, a message is conveyed to the audience about the effects that this type of incident can have on the family and an entry point is provided for vicarious participation. Likewise, personality profiles of the police investigators give readers additional insights into the human interest implications of these cases.

The final element of this frame are the sources used by the newspapers. As is the case with the themes, topics, and subtopics, the sources play a pivotal role in determining the nature of emotional appeal being used in the construction of the given story line. Stories that use either the family of the missing child or the general public as sources tend to appeal to the emotional attachment between the reader and the scenario to generate interest. On the other hand, the use of the police and claims-making groups as sources reflects attempts to either respond to feelings of concern or generate them.

All elements of this depictive frame were isolated after I conducted a general overview of the data set. In particular, I paid particular attention to how the emergence of missing children story lines corresponded to Joel Best's model of missing children coverage. The combination of this initial analysis with the theoretical foundation led to the development of these categories.

Warrants (blameless victim; sentimental value of victim; rights and freedoms; historical continuity; associated evils; and deficient policies) provided the framework for the evolution of the categories I used in this thesis. These warrants are clearly evident in the themes, topics, and subtopics and were confirmed by my initial analysis of the data set.

To be more specific, the warrants addressing rights and freedoms, deficient policies, associated evils, and historical continuity were used almost exclusively in incidents involving public safety. One obvious example of this approach would be to juxtapose a story about missing children with a report about cutbacks to programs to prevent child abuse.

On the other hand, the other warrants were used in stories that emphasized the human interest element of the given case rather than emphasizing an ongoing threat to children. The blameless child as a metaphor facilitates vicarious participation without requiring the additional

rhetorical impact provided by a clearly defined offender. In other words, these warrants address the **reaction** of the family while the others depict the **response** of the police.

Findings

(1) Trends in the Depiction of Missing Children Cases

There was considerable diversity in the intensity of the newspaper coverage of the missing children social problem during the course of the ten year time frame. This difference in the level of attention devoted to this issue is graphically evident in Figure 2:1.

This graph demonstrates a high degree of fluctuation from year to year as well as a significant decrease in the number of articles in the later part of the decade. For example, in 1981 130 articles (38.5% of the sample) focused on missing children cases and the number of articles decreased until it reached a low of 3 (0.9%) in 1990. The main exceptions to this trend were 1986, when there was a large number of articles dealing with claims-making groups (a total of 29 articles or 8.6%) and 1991, which was marked by the abduction of Michael Dunahee (32 articles or 9.5% of the sample).

The other main trend in this graph was the decrease in the number of articles in the Vancouver Sun after 1985[16]. In fact, after 1986, the vast majority of missing children stories were

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[16] From 1981 to 1985, the Sun printed 131 articles on missing children while the Province published 107 (a difference of 10 per cent). In the remaining years, the Sun published 29 missing children stories while the Province printed 72 stories (a 43 per cent differential).

Figure 2:1
Article Frequency
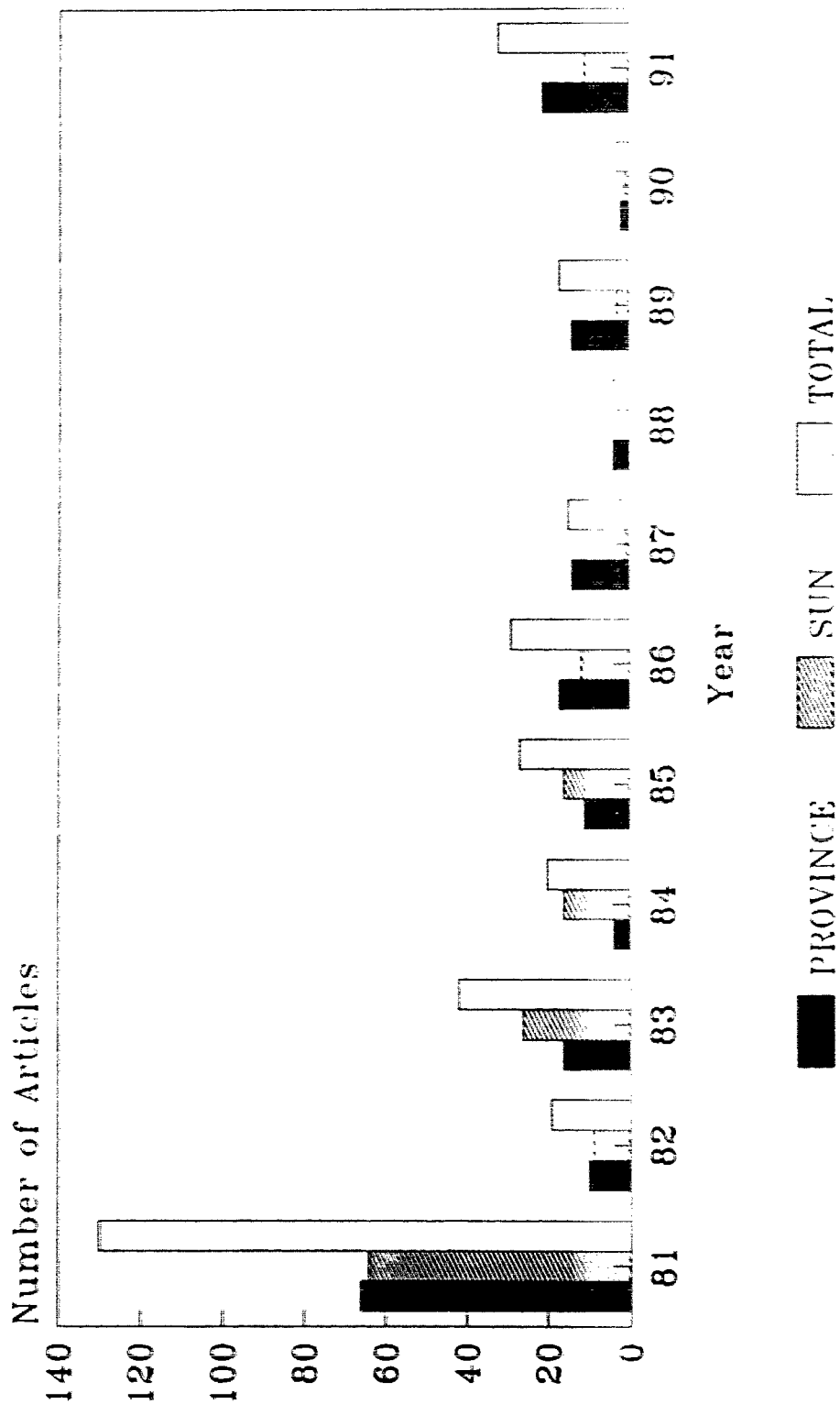
printed in the Province. A possible reason for this downturn in the number of articles in the Sun is that as the official concern about this issue declined, there were fewer potential police investigations and other forms of official response around which the Sun could construct its story lines. On the other hand, the Province tended to use either the victim's friends or family as sources while developing the human interest angle in its coverage.

There were clusters of stories that resembled the crime wave dynamic (Fishman, 1978: 537). This clustering was especially evident in 1981, 1983, and 1991 where there was a large number of missing children articles[17]. In the following paragraphs, a series of hypotheses accounting for the differences in the intensity of coverage of specific missing children cases will be presented. These arguments deal with the depiction of specific victims and with the current state of the missing children social problem. The analysis is intended to provide an orientation to the basic themes generated in the newspapers and in doing so, to establish an entry point for a more in depth analysis of this issue in Chapters Three and Four.

(2) Themes in the Depiction of the Missing Children Social Problem

There were five main themes in the newspaper depiction of the missing children social problem: (1) offender blaming; (2) depiction of the missing child; (3) victim blaming; (4) the reaction of official agencies; and finally, (5) the search for missing children[18]. The distribution of these themes is shown in Figure 2:2. One significant finding of this graph is the importance of offender blaming articles in the construction of this issue, which accounted for 10.4% of the articles. The depiction of a clearly defined threat provides an entry point for the development of story lines dealing with the other elements of the frame. In particular, this threat manifested itself in items portraying the responses of police to specific missing children cases, which represented

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[17] In 1986, there was a large number of articles that dealt with missing children claims - making groups rather than focusing on specific missing children cases.

[18] The description of these themes is provided in Appendix A, and the construction and implications of these structures will be discussed later in this chapter.

Figure 2:2
Breakdown by Theme

Number of Articles

160 140 120 100 80 60 40 20 0

Theme

Offender Blaming

Official Reaction

Child Depiction

Searches Non–S.A.

Victim Blaming

Claims
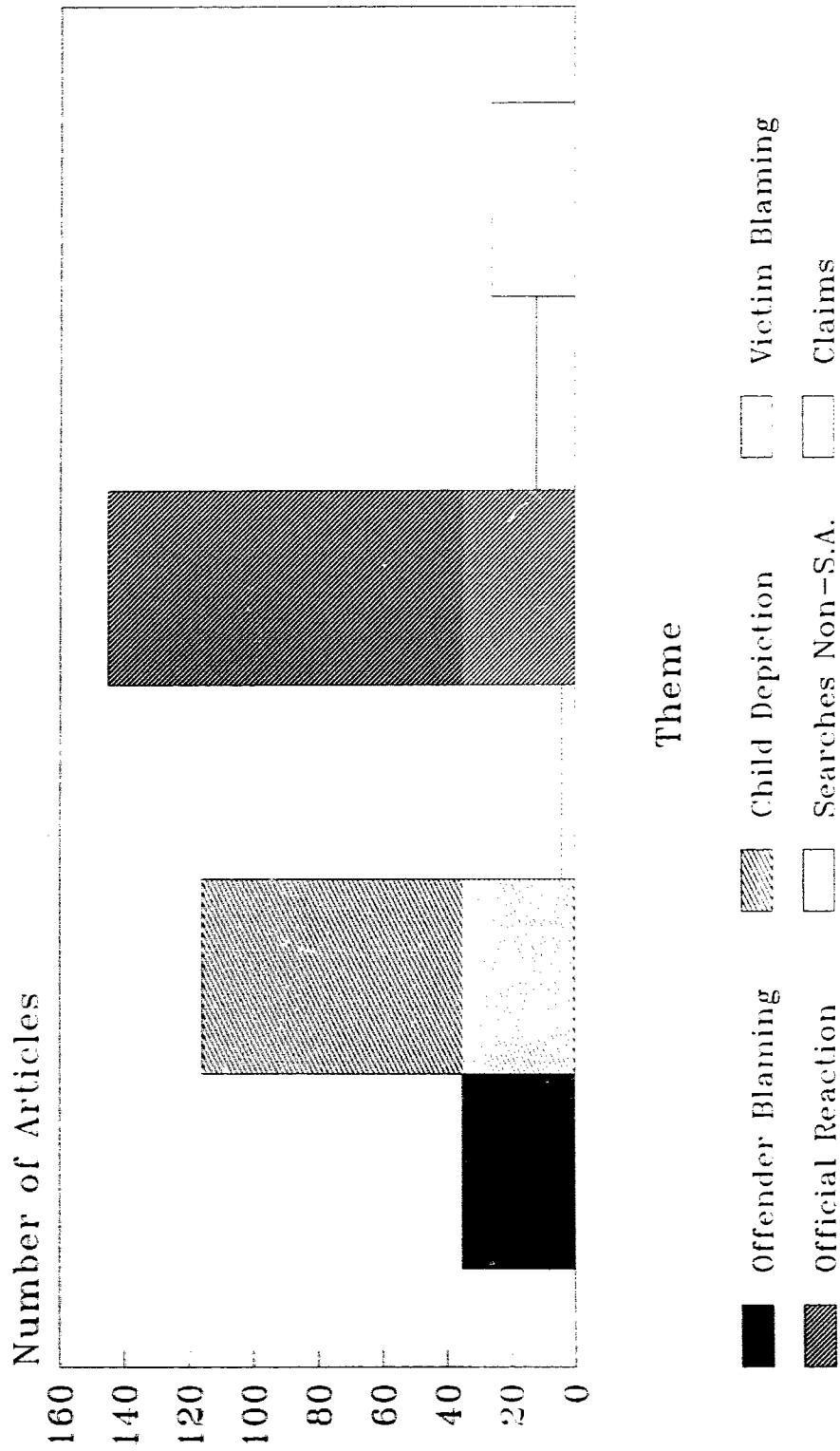
43% of the stories, and in articles focusing on victim depiction, which accounted for 34.5% of the sample.

(3) Topics and Subtopics Used in the Development of the Missing Children Social Problem

In the newspaper depiction of this social problem, topics and subtopics play a pivotal role in conveying both the thematic and the structural contents of the given article or story line. Topics and subtopics serve as the vehicles through which the themes are conveyed to the reader. The topics provide the overall focus of the story while subtopics support the topic and clarify the article's intent and structure.

In the development of these frames, four main topics emerged: (1) primary and secondary examples; (2) the offender; (3) the police and other official agencies; and finally, (4) claims-making groups[19]. The frequencies of these topics is shown in Figure 2:3, which clearly demonstrates the importance of the depiction of specific missing children in the development of this social problem. Stories dealing with either primary of secondary examples represent 61% of the articles sampled while the articles that focused on the police responses to these incidents comprise an additional 31%.

The emphasis on the victim is further illustrated by Figure 2:4. In this histogram, the articles that deal primarily with the character development of the missing child account for 89 references or 22% of the total number of missing children stories. The coverage of the child victim in these stories becomes even more apparent when the secondary character development provided by stories dealing with the families is taken into consideration[20].

Stories depicting the reaction of the family accounted for 22 per cent of the articles and provided additional character development of the missing child. On the other hand, 36% of the stories focused on police investigations and 12% of the sample dealt with the development of the

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[19] Claims-making groups will be the focus of Chapters Three and Four.

[20] This theme will be developed later in this chapter and in Chapter Three.

offender in missing children cases which substantiated feelings of concern about the given incident.

(4) All Missing Children Are Not Created Equal

In addition to the clustering of stories, there was considerable variation in the amount of attention devoted to individual missing children cases. Some cases received a great deal of press coverage while others were virtually ignored. The difference in the relative intensity of coverage was especially evident in the depiction of the Simon Partington and Michael Dunahee disappearances. These cases were the focus of two of the largest searches in British Columbian history, and they generated the greatest number of references in this sample as shown in Figure 2:5[21]. Comparing this chart to Figure 2:3 yields some interesting findings. The four cases that received the highest amount of press coverage (Simon Partington, Joanna Pedersen, Teri Lynn Scalf and Michael Dunahee) accounted for 81 articles or an average of 20.3 articles per child. On the other hand, the remaining 42 children who were accorded at least one primary reference in the newspapers figured in 136 articles or an average of only 3.4 per child. This statistic becomes even more striking when one considers that of the victims linked to Clifford Olson, only seven received a primary reference[22].

Simon Partington was abducted on July 2, 1981 from a mall in Surrey, British Columbia[23]. His disappearance sparked a public outcry that in part led to the formation of a parents group[24] to

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[21] The newspaper coverage of Michael Dunahee will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

[22] In addition to Partington, Raymond King Jr., Louise Chartrand, Judy Kozma, Colleen Daignault, and Teri-Lyn Carson were all the focus of at least one article.

[23] "Father Convinced Boy Abducted" (Province, July 23, 1981:A3)

[24] This group originally consisted of the parents of Simon Partington, Raymond King Jr., and Ada Court ("Parents Start Missing Children Poster Campaign" (Province, August 6, 1981: A1). Through their spokesperson, Chris Burgess, this group attempted to generate public concern and official action on the missing children social problem.

Figure 2:3
Breakdown by Topic

Number of Articles
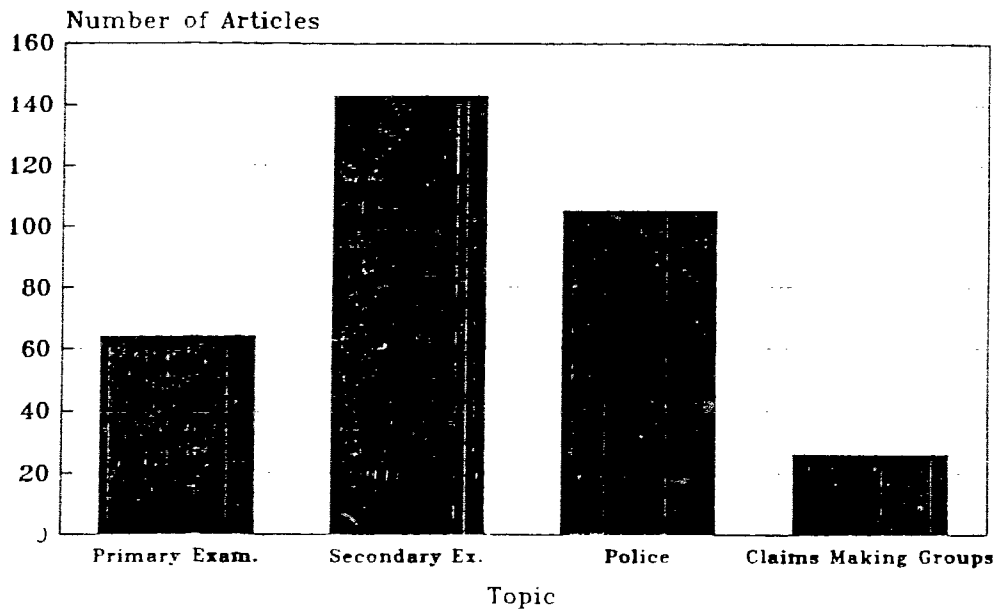
Figure 2:4
Breakdown by Sub-topic

Number of Articles
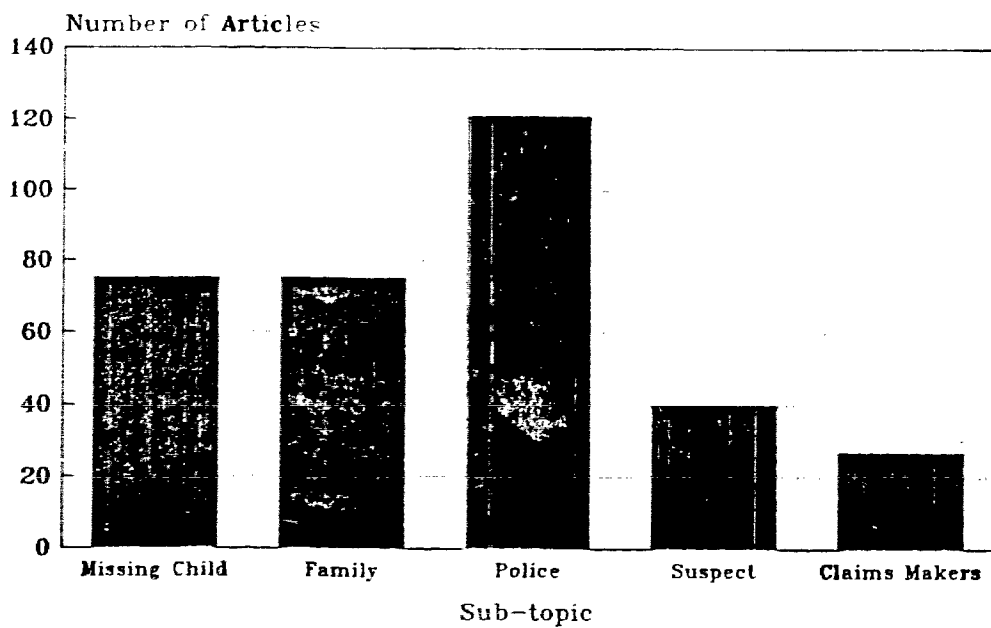
Figure 2:5
Frequency by Child
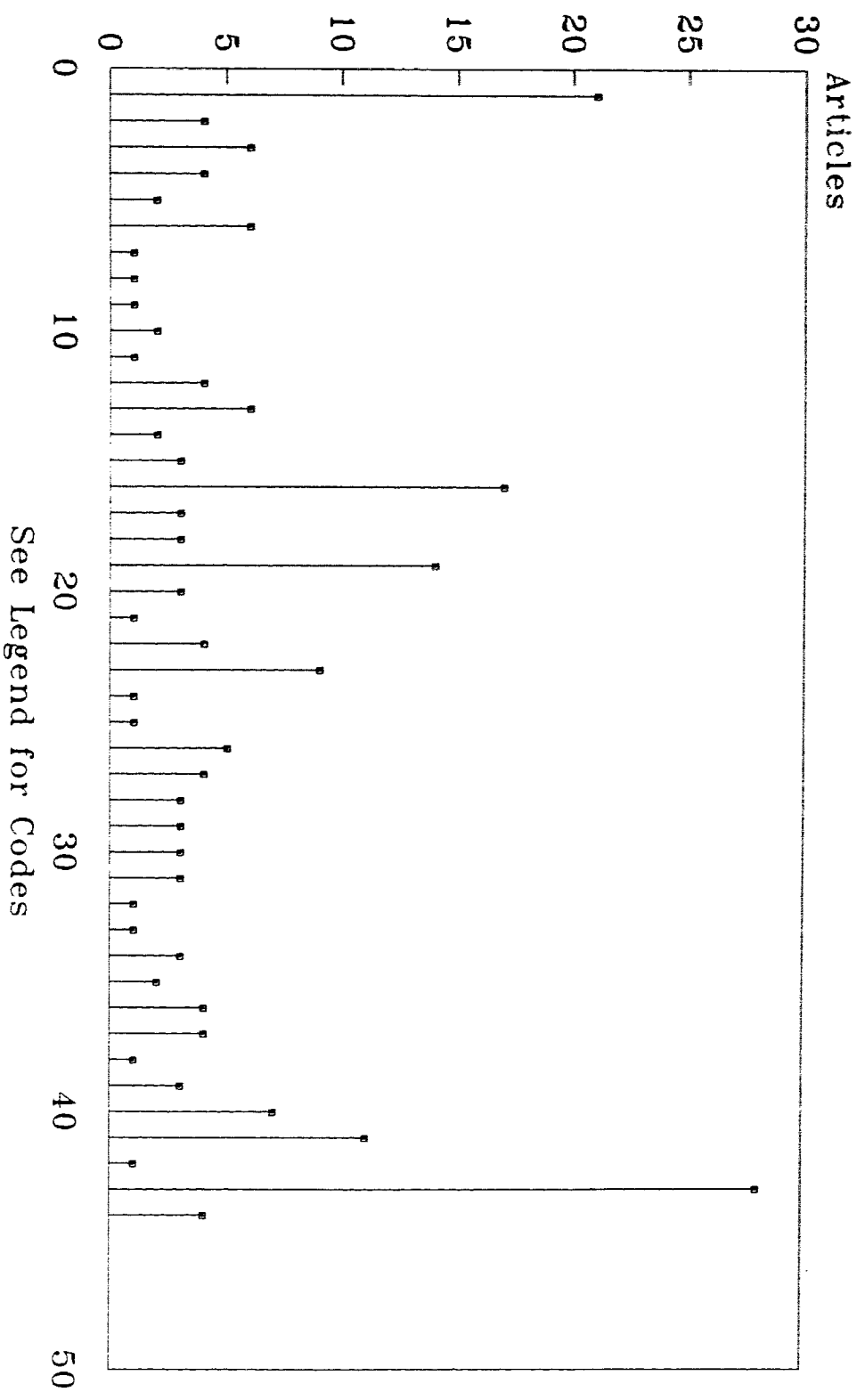
Legend For Figure 2:5

(Cases are arranged Chronologically by Date of First Article)

1. Simon Partington
2. Raymond King
3. Judy Kozma
4. Louise Chartrand
5. Verna Bjerky
6. Colleen Daignault
7. Pamela Darlington
8. Teri-Lyn Carson
9. Monica Rose
10. Tara Dyck
11. Ada Court
12. Elizabeth Kozma
13. Diane Babcock and Gary Ambrozuk
14. Christopher Lingle
15. Michelle Miller
16. Joanna Pedersen
17. James Thue
18. Trixie Martin
19. Teri Lynn Scalf
20. Jeremy Morton
21. Maria Norwich
22. Rachel Etienne
23. Tom Marsden
24. Tom Sun
25. Tanya Winston
26. Fritz Anker
27. Jeffery Jones
28. Evelyn Lau
29. Mia Kulchyski
30. Tamara Blowers
31. Candy and Lulu Pottle
32. Trent Tompkins
33. Alison Parrott
34. Lyn Hillier
35. Robin Ferguson
36. Stacie Harker
37. Rosie Hardy and Roxanne Beatty
38. Gerrod McCoy
39. Jesse Bergman
40. Cathy Saviskoff
41. Casey Bohun
42. Caroline Smith and Janet Crittenden
43. Michael Dunahee
44. Randy Wyse

demand police action on child abductions[25], to investigations into the disappearances of children who were originally presumed to be runaways[26], and to the eventual arrest and conviction of Clifford Olson on 11 counts of murder.

While the homicides that were eventually linked to Olson began in November of 1980[27], there was no newspaper coverage of these crimes until after the Partington investigation had begun. One explanation for this trend may be that a consensus - establishing victim was needed around which a newspaper frame of presentation could be constructed. A consensus - establishing or primary example is an incident that is stripped of any moral ambiguity and that represents an extreme case of the given issue. These incidents reduce a complex social concern down to its black and white absolutes[28].

Joanna Pedersen served as a consensus - establishing incident in 1983. She disappeared from outside a Chilliwack store on February 19, 1983 and was last seen talking to a man in a black jacket. This man figured prominently in the coverage of this case[29]. This was particularly evident when it was alleged that the offender knew the family[30]. This case was later linked to the

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[25] Articles that focused on this group included: "Parents start missing children poster campaign" (Province, August 6, 1981: A1); "Victim's Families Seeking Direct Ottawa Action" (Province, August, 9, 1981: A4); and, "Anxious Parents Appeal to the Nation" (Province, August 10, 1981: A1).

[26] There were two vivid examples of this trend in 1981: the disappearance of Terri Lyn Carson, age 15, who was last seen August 1, 1981 and the abduction of Colleen Daignault, 13, on April 13, 1981. In both of these examples they were treated as runaways before they were added to the list of suspected abductions: "Girl's case treated as 'just another runaway'" (Sun, August 31, 1981: A3) and "'Runaways' added to abductions" (Sun, August 20, 1981: A3).

[27] "The horror starts late in 1980. It goes on to the present, and, as the searches continue, will move into the future" (Sun, August 28, 1981: A14).

[28] While most of the consensus-establishing examples deal with stranger abductions, Jennifer Amisano served the same role in the early stages of the parental abduction social problem (Sun, August 30, 1981: A18). She was also the focus of a failed attempt to have pictures of missing children posted on milk cartons ("Missing Child to be on Milk Carton"; (Sun, January 10, 1985: A14); "Milk Plan Sour Now" (Province, February 14, 1985: 12)).

[29] "The mother's common law husband came to the phone but he spoke, not to the girl, but to a man who had taken over the telephone. The man said he would call the police if the girl wasn't picked up within 30 minutes" (Sun, February 23, 1983: A13).

[30] He placed a call to the girl's Grandmother who has an unlisted telephone number (Sun, August 5, 1983: A3).

investigation into the disappearance of Teri Lynn Scalf[31]. The police investigation of these cases carried over into 1984[32].

Michael Dunahee disappeared from a Victoria playground on March 24, 1991. His case was immediately treated by the police as a "criminal abduction" (Province, March 26, 1991: 5). There was a tremendous amount of public response[33] and media coverage of this issue including a profile on the American television show "America's Most Wanted"[34].

(5) Consensus-Establishing Victims and the Development of Frames of Problem Depiction

In the initial stages of missing children claims-making activity, there is a need for interest groups to generate public concern and support. By depicting Simon as an innocent child who was the victim of a predatory offender[35], attention was diverted from the individual victim to focus instead on the threat being posed by his abductor. As argued by Johnson (1989) and Pratkanis and Aronson (1992), the generation of public support for a social problem depends on three factors: (1) identification with victim; (2) feelings of threat or discomfort; and, (3) the convergence of newspaper coverage in specific cases.

(i) Identification With The Victim

The first element in the development of a frame for social problem depiction was the generation of a consensus - establishing victim. There were two main functions of this analytic

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[31] She disappeared from an Aldergrove apartment complex on July 24, 1983.

[32] "Search for two girls turns up few clues" (Sun August 16, 1984: A11).

[33] This response was shown by a reward fund and the overwhelming response of search volunteers ("It's past 11 PM. and the volunteers are coming out of the woodwork, more than can possibly be handled" (Province, April 4, 1991: 3).

[34] "Hopes turn to TV: Missing child to feature on US program" (Province, April 4, 1991: 3).

[35] There was speculation that Clifford Olson may have posed as a police officer to win the boy's confidence: "Boy's Trust in Mystery Man Puzzling" (Sun, July 30, 1981: A12).

structure[36]. First, victims provided the audience with a worst case scenario of the identified phenomena. By exemplifying the extremes of the offender/victim relationship, Simon Partington offered an emotionally captivating case from which the public could not distance itself[37].

The second function of the consensus - establishing example is to provide the target audience with an entry point to enable vicarious participation. The character construction of the victim is necessarily vague, enabling the displacement of this person's identity and its replacement with that of someone close to the reader. Vicarious participation substantiates the depicted risk and enables further rhetorical construction through public identification with these examples[38].

The victim often serves as a "hook" for these stories (Johnson, 1989:11). The ability of the audience to identify with the victim determines the amount of public attention that this story will receive. Simply stated, the higher the degree of public identification with the missing child, the more interest it will show in subsequent developments of the story. By facilitating vicarious participation, public support for the story lines is generated.

Secondary examples often play a supporting role in the construction of missing children story lines. Since these examples often deal with an older child or teenager, it becomes difficult to generate a large amount of public interest in these cases. Since these stories do not provide a "hook" it is especially difficult to develop a crime wave dynamic with secondary examples.

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[36] For this thesis, an analytic structure refers to the depiction of individual victims as a specific subset of the larger examination of the missing children social problem.

[37] The consensus establishing examples almost invariably involve young children. As the age of the victim increases, there appears to be a greater amount of responsibility assigned to the child. Once some responsibility for the abduction is assigned to the victim, it becomes easier for the reader to establish emotional distance from the story line.

[38] Quotes like "I think that everyone could use their imagination what it is like when their son's missing" (Stephen Partington quoted in the Province, July 23, 1981: A5); "It's every parent's worst nightmare" (Province, April 7, 1991: 4); "Missing Girl's Dad Pleads 'Let Her Go'" (Leo Pedersen quoted in the Sun, October 29, 1983: A3); and "I want my daughter back" (Phil Amisano quoted in the Sun, August 30, 1984: A18) develop the connection between the public and the story.

(ii) Feelings of Threat or Discomfort

The second element of the construction of the missing children social problem is the development of feelings of threat or discomfort in the audience ("It is fear - the fear of strangers. It is the fear of not knowing where your children are every hour of the day" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4)). Readers who feel that their children are at risk[39] will be receptive to proposed solutions to this problem. In response to the Partington case, these feelings of threat were generated by quotes that stressed the innocence of the victims[40]. The dominant theme in these stories - that of the predatory offender who stalked innocent children - was displayed in Figure 2:2 and is substantiated through references to the police as shown in Figure 2:6[41].

The most significant trend in this graph is the difference, in terms of subtopics cited, between primary and secondary examples. With the exception of the secondary examples in 1981, the type of victim is differentiated primarily through proportion of police references. In particular, there were no stories on the police response to the disappearance of Casey Bohun while 63% of the Dunahee abduction articles emphasized the police investigation and other forms of official response to this incident.

The use of police as a secondary topic in the depiction of the consensus - establishing examples implies the severity of threat posed to both the child and the public. On the other hand, the use of the family as a secondary topic in the presentation of secondary victims reflects an

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[39] These feelings of threat were developed through headlines like: "Voice of Terror Warns: You Next" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4); "Scared Youngsters Under Curfew as Fear Stalks Valley" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4); and "Police Team Troubled By Sex Crime Increase" (Province, August 16, 1981: B2).

[40] This theme was developed by quotes like: "Some maniac has declared war on the children of this country and we've got to stop him" (Chris Burgess quoted in the Province, August 9, 1981: A4); "our children are missing, yours could be next" (Province, August 6, 1981: A1); "Creepy Bogey Man Preyed on Children" (Province, August 16, 1981: A1); and "...when combined, they form the worst mass murders in B.C. and have involved the largest police manhunt" (Province, August 30, 1981: A4).

[41] Feelings of threat were also generated through references to potential offenders: "They say as much as five per cent of the population in any area could have deviant tendencies... 70 000 or 80 000 molesters, exposers and sexual offenders of some sort... the germ is there" (Vancouver Staff Sgt. Ken Miles quoted in the Province, August 16, 1981: B2).

Figure 2:6
Sources Quoted
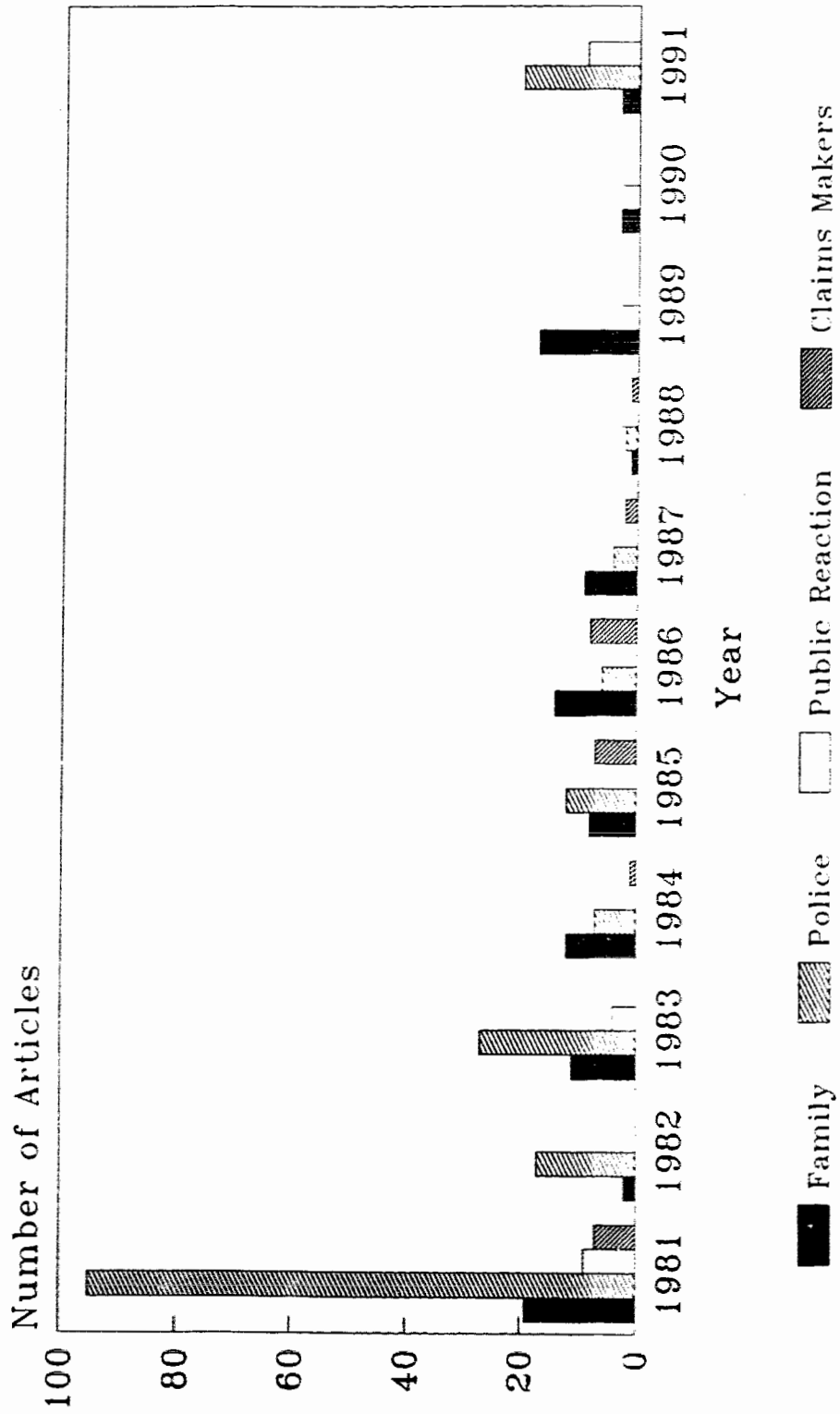
attempt at enabling vicarious participation rather than the theme of endangerment developed in the other stories.

Moreover, across the entire sample, 59% of the primary example articles emphasized the police response to the given abduction while this was the case in only 34% of the other missing children cases. The family was the source quoted in 58% of the stories dealing with secondary examples as opposed to 22% of the consensus - establishing case articles.

The use of fear to generate public support was not limited to stranger abductions. In parental abduction stories, the emphasis was on the emotional warfare between ex-spouses with the child being an innocent victim[42]. The publication of a parental abduction warning signs checklist ("The Danger Signals") expanded the range of potential abductors to include all non-custodial parents (Province, February 16, 1986: 55). The generation of threat was also evident in the depiction of runaway cases through the imagery of innocent children being victimized through drug abuse, pornography and prostitution (Province, May 26, 1986: 28).

Feelings of discomfort also play an important role in the construction of a social problem. Instead of direct fear of victimization, urban unease or discomfort addresses concerns about societal deterioration (Garofalo and Laub, 1978: 248)[43]. For example, the release of child sexual offenders from prison, when juxtaposed with a missing child case[44], elicited a conservative, offender blaming response[45].

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[42] "Revenge the Ultimate Motive" (Province, February 16, 1986: 55); "Children in the Crossfire" (Province, February 16, 1986: 53).

[43] For this thesis, urban discomfort will be used to address feelings of concern rather than of direct victimization. Such as in the case of childless adults, where there is no direct fear of victimization. This concept is intended to supplement rather than replace the previously developed arguments concerning fear of victimization.

[44] This was specifically the case with the coverage of Michael Dunahee in 1991 when the investigation into his abduction was juxtaposed with the attempts to extradite a suspected child molester (Martin Bakker) from the Philippines (Province, March 27, 1991: 4).

[45] This offender blaming response was developed through the use of quotes like: "'We're demanding federal assistance' said Burgess. 'My whole issue is that the police are hamstrung by their own efforts - only with federal government assistance can they handle the flood'." (Chris Burgess quoted in the Province, August 10, 1981: A1); "Panel members at the forum agreed with the parents that police and judicial systems often seem ineffective in cases of runaways, parental abductions of children and children lured away" (Province, May 26, 1986: 28).

The generation of public discomfort was very important in the early stages of missing children problem development. Through the depiction of the blameless victim in the consensus - establishing example, attention was directed away from a victim blaming perspective and towards offender blaming. References to attempted abductions[46] and the inability of correctional and child care organizations to deal effectively with child sex offenders[47] provided the audience with adequate justification for their feelings of concern. These initial orientations to the social problem in general, and the specific case in particular, established a context through which warrants and conclusions that build on these assumptions were made[48].

On the other hand, the secondary examples serve two main roles with regard to the generation of feelings of threat and discomfort. The first function of these stories is to legitimate the feelings of concern developed by the consensus - establishing case. The linking of previous missing children cases to the initial coverage of Simon Partington's abduction provided the audience with a legitimate threat to their children[49].

The second function of secondary examples is to provide a resolution to these feelings of threat. This is accomplished primarily through assigning responsibility for the abduction to specific traits or actions of the victim. This action has the effect of removing the random element from the crime wave by providing the readers with the possibility of actions that would minimize further victimization[50].

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[46] The references to attempted abductions included: "...a series of more than six abduction attempts in the suburban Victoria community last fall... not ruled out attempts are connected to Dunahee's disappearance" (Sun, March 27, 1991: A16); and "strange man offering children jobs" (Province, August 16, 1981: A4).

[47] This theme was developed through the use of these quotes: "Abused Children Victim of Budget Cut" (Province, August, 20, 1981: A5); "Tragedy of Child Abuse: Offenders Run Free" (Province, August 16, 1981: B2); "Privacy' is hiding sex-abuse suspect" (Province, March 27, 1991: 4).

[48] In 1981 and 1983 missing children investigations were linked to the "blindfold paper bag rapist", an individual or individuals who are responsible for as many as 120 sexual assaults of young children in the Lower Mainland as far back as 1977 (Sun, August 13, 1981: A3; Sun, August 27, 1983: A3).

[49] The mechanics of linking primary and secondary examples will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

[50] Victim responsibility will be discussed later in this chapter.

(iii)The Convergent Character of Newspaper Coverage of Missing Children Cases

Consensus-establishing victims are further differentiated from secondary examples by the converging coverage of these cases by both newspapers as shown by Figure 2:7. There were similar trends in the coverage of consensus-establishing examples and their resulting crime waves while the same pattern of coverage did not prevail for secondary examples. In 1981, 1983, and 1991, the newspapers devoted similar amounts of coverage to primary examples. Other missing children may have received a significant amount of coverage in one newspaper but not in the other (such as Tom Marsden in 1986).

Secondary examples, such as Tom Marsden and Casey Bohun, received coverage in only one of the two papers sampled for this thesis. The coverage of these missing children was also marked by an emphasis on the reaction of the community and the child's family instead of documenting the police response. While these secondary examples received a substantial amount of coverage, the generation of threat and establishment of external validity through the presence of a secondary source of story development were not apparent.

This high intensity coverage of primary examples may be attributed to the effects of these incidents in defining the missing children social problem. Stranger abductions involving young children generated significant public interest in this issue during the early 1980's. However, there were only a few stories that fit into this framework and received disproportionately intensive coverage. Once this framework was in place, the few stories that fit both the specific parameters of this frame and the organizational requirements of the newspapers received high priority coverage.

(6) The Development of the Offender in Missing Children Story lines

Aside from the depiction of the victim, the most important role in the generation of missing children story lines is played by the offender. If the missing child provides the contextual entry point for the reader, the implicit and explicit development of the antagonist is what ensures ongoing reader interest. In evolution of this social problem, there are three main trends

Figure 2:7
Convergence of Coverage

Article Counts

80	60	40	20	0							

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

| 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 |

Quarter Year

Province ▬   Sun ▨
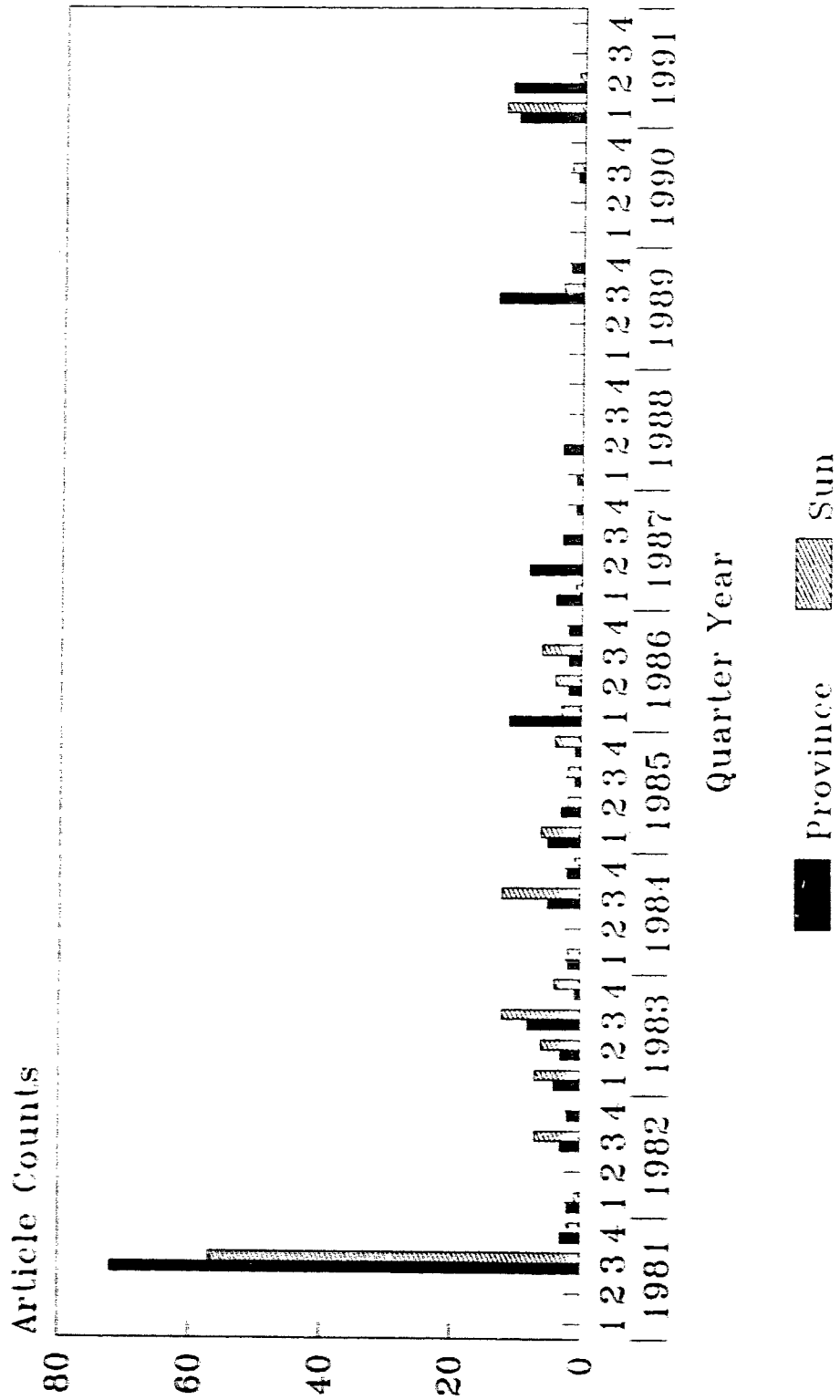
concerning the depiction of the offender: (1) the portrayal of the offender by the official sources; (2) the evolution of the newspaper presentation of the antagonist; and (3) the role of the offender in responsibility assigning story lines.

(i) The Portrayal of the Offender By Official Sources

The use of official sources in the newspaper coverage provides the public with the majority of its information about the offender. The mere fact that the police are taking action in a missing children case serves to affirm the serious nature of the incident[51]. It is largely through the newspaper coverage, and quotes from police and other authorities, that the public derives its conceptions of the offenders in these stories.

In addition to the mentality of the offender, the police serve to inform the public about trends in particular missing children cases. Through established links between missing children cases, the impression is developed that a single predatory offender is snatching children[52]. Through the depiction of a single offender being responsible for a group of missing children cases, the image of the deranged offender is perpetrated and the suspect's apprehension will often be sufficient to convince the public that the crisis has been solved.

The perpetration of the single offender hypothesis was particularly evident in the coverage of the missing children stories that were eventually linked to Clifford Olson[53]. By comparing the disappearances of Valley children to the Atlanta child murders[54], newspapers legitimated the focus

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[51] The relationship between primary examples and references to the police is especially evident in Figure 2:5.

[52] "Some examples of this impression management include: "Cunning Killer With Blazing Eyes" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4); "...he has the gut feeling that several of the slayings are the work of one killer - a psychopathic woman hater" (Sgt. Mike Eastham cited by the Province, August 30, 1981: A1); and, "the biggest mass murder of children in Canadian history" (Province, August 30, 1981: A1).

[53] The most obvious example of this trend was this quote: "New Westminister deputy police chief Ed Cadenhead says 'logic and police intuition' convince investigators that a single killer may be on the loose" (Province, August 11, 1981: B1).

[54] During the time of the missing child wave in 1981, Wayne Williams went to trial in Atlanta and was eventually convicted of killing 28 young black men over a period of 2 years. This tragedy was touched upon in conceptualization of the murders eventually linked to Clifford Olson: "The Lower Mainland has its own little Atlanta going on" (Human Resources Minister Grace McCarthy quoted in the Province, August 11, 1981: A1).

on a single offender in police investigations[56]. The arrest and subsequent conviction of Olson gave the appearance, at least, of effectively "solving" the missing children problem in British Columbia.

In the newspaper accounts of the investigation into the "Fraser Valley Child Killer" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4), links were made from this case to the murders of young hitchhikers in the interior[57] and to other missing children cases[58]. Through the conviction of Olson, the impression was developed that the other cases had also been solved, or at least had become of less importance in terms of public safety. The conviction of an offender is the logical conclusion to the crime wave dynamic developed in the newspaper coverage of missing children cases[59].

(ii) The Evolution Of the Offender In the Newspaper Coverage

To facilitate the ability of the audience to provide a context through which current missing children cases can be understood, newspapers often refer to previous cases or related images. During the child abductions that would later be identified with Clifford Olson, there were references to the Atlanta child murders (Province, August 11, 1981: A1) and to the child sexual abuse epidemic (Province, August 30, 1981: A1) which provided a context to interpret these events. Through the association of these abductions with child sexual abuse, the themes of "missing equals endangered" and the "predatory offender" are established[60].

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[56] "Logic Points to Lone Killer" (Sun August 8, 1981: A1); "Eyes Linked As Children Go Missing" (Sun, August 27, 1983: A3)

[57] This link was established primarily through the use of police sources in the following fashion: "The R.C.M.P. plans an 'intense investigation' into possible links between the recent spate of Lower Mainland child killings and a series of brutal sex slayings on B.C. Interior and Alberta highways" (Province, August 30, 1981: A1).

[58] These links were established through articles such as: "Probe Widens: Two Old Slayings 'Almost Fit' Mold" (Sun, August 17, 1981: A1) and "Child Deaths May Be Linked to Road Murders - R.C.M.P. Say" (Province, August 30, 1981: A1).

[59] Incidentally, of the four missing children investigations that received the most newspaper coverage (Simon Partington, Joanna Pedersen, Teri Lynn Scalf, and Michael Dunahee) only the Partington case was solved.

[60] These links were established through allegations that the victims were sexually mutilated either before or after they died.

The presentation of the predatory offender in the Clifford Olson case had been internalized to the point where the audience often assumed that a report of a missing child implied an Olson - like abduction. Olson has become a reference point for missing children cases to the point where there was little need to remind the public of Olson when missing children cases arose.

(iii) Location Of Responsibility

The location of responsibility for the disappearance is a crucial issue in the construction of the missing children social problem. There are two main forms of responsibility assigning story lines: (i) offender blaming; and (ii) victim responsibility. The following paragraphs will examine the structure of these themes and how they relate to the overall depiction of offenders and victims in missing children story lines.

(a) Offender Blaming Perspectives

In the generation of primary examples, offender blaming perspectives play a major role. The predatory offender evokes feelings in the audience that legitimate the blameless victim hypothesis that is the pivotal element in the construction of consensus - establishing examples[61]. The main role of the offender in these story lines is to generate feelings of concern and threat in the readers to ensure their continued interest.

Sex offenders may commit monstrous acts, but they do not physically appear to be monsters. Although British Columbian newspapers often ran pictures of Olson looking unshaven and disheveled, on most days, he bears no resemblance to the man in these pictures (Marshall and Barrett, 1990: 65). Stories on Olson, after his incarceration, focused less on his physical

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[61] Blameless victims and the other elements of the construction of the missing child in newspaper coverage will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Three.

appearance than on his manipulative actions, and in particular, his offers to help solve other murder cases in return for more money[62].

Clifford Olson has served as a touchstone for the depiction of other child abductors. In media coverage, he has transcended mere criminal status and has become a symbol of all the atrocities that one human being can inflict on innocent children. Through either explicit[63] or implicit[64] reference to Clifford Olson, the depicted threat posed by the offender in subsequent missing children cases was recurrently legitimated. The categorization of the offender as a "creepy bogey man" (Province, August 16, 1981: A1), a "psychopathic woman hater" (Province, August 30, 1981: A1) or a "monster" legitimates what the public may already believe about these people.

The main importance of the offender in the construction of the missing children social problem is that the development of an antagonist provides a foundation on which the public conception of this issue can be presented. The delineation of a psychopath who preys on innocent children justifies both public concern and demands for stricter laws. The assumed presence of an offender enables the development of responsibility-assigning articles by providing a clearly defined threat and related standards of proper conduct.

(b) Victim Responsibility

In the newspaper coverage of secondary examples there were often elements of victim blaming[65]. As opposed to the depiction of children like Michael Dunahee and Simon Partington,

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[62] In particular, Olson offered information in order to clear up 12 murders (Province, February 23, 1984: 5) and he claimed to be the Green River Slayer (Province, July 29, 1984: 19). Another issue which added to the notoriety of Clifford Olson was the "cash for corpses" scheme where he was paid by the Police to reveal the locations of the bodies of his victims ("The fight to recover blood money paid to child killer Clifford Olson may bankrupt the families of his victims" (Province, March 13, 1986: 3).

[63] In 1983, it was alleged that "another Olson" (Province, August 29, 1983:4) was responsible for a subsequent missing children crime wave.

[64] During the coverage of the Michael Dunahee case, there was a story about proposed plans to bring Olson back to British Columbia ("Olson Not Returning" (Province, March 27, 1991: 22).

[65] Secondary examples will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

people like Terri Lyn Carson and Colleen Daignault were shown to be partially responsible for their abduction: "The girls who have gone missing in the Lower Mainland since April were all between the ages of 13 and 17 and were all either hitchhiking or waiting for a bus when they disappeared" (Sun, August 11, 1981: A2). Without exception, the depiction of secondary examples involved an older child (usually early to middle teens) who really should have known better than to have been taking part in the activities that led to the victimization.

(7) Story lines Concerning Official Institutions

The final element in the frame for depicting missing children cases are the stories dealing with the police and other people's institutions. As Figure 2:8 demonstrates, the police are the main source of information in these story lines. The coverage devoted to the police in these articles serves two main purposes: the legitimization of threat; and further development of the offender blaming perspective.

Police, as exhibited in Figure 2:8, were the source quoted in 190 articles or 59% of the total sample. On the other hand, the missing child's family was quoted in 29% of the articles, while claims-making groups and the general public played a minor role as information sources. What this histogram does not show is the gradual transition in the story construction of missing children cases that emerged over the course of the decade, resulting in an increasing focus on sources other than the police in the development of the story dynamic as shown in Figure 2:9. In fact, the only significant coverage of police responses to specific cases after 1981 occurred during the investigations of the Pedersen/Scalf abductions in 1983 and Michael Dunahee in 1991.

Figure 2:8
Sources Quoted

Number of Articles
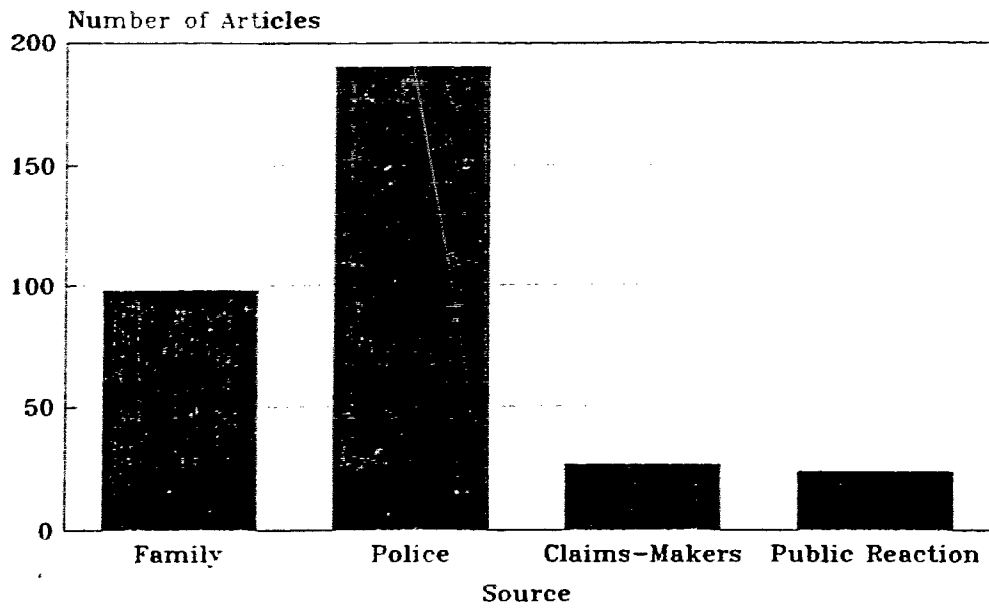
Source

Figure 2:9
Breakdown of Sources Quoted by Year

63
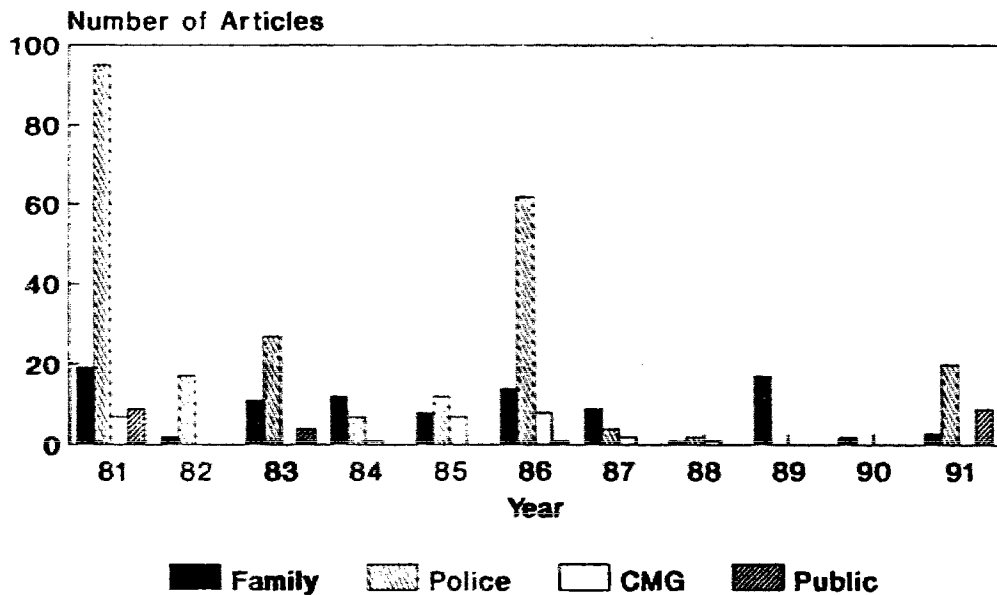
Newspaper depictions of this social problem were essentially transformed from criminal investigations in 1981 to little more than human interest stories by the end of the decade[66].

In the coverage of the police response to a specific missing children case, the emphasis is on the efforts that the police are making to find the child and ensure that others are protected. The culprit in these stories is the offender, and a persistent image of the police is one of dedicated people who are often shackled by restrictive laws that enable criminals to go free. The depiction of the police and government agencies legitimized the threat posed to society by the offender[67]. If anything, the official response story line functioned to substantiate the conservative depiction of the missing children social problem generated by the offender and victim blaming story lines.

While these stories provided character development of the offender, they also substantiated the threat that the antagonist poses to society. This clearly defined threat in turn enabled the reinforcement of standards of proper and improper conduct. The police also serve as a source of counterclaims about the severity of the missing children social problem. This was accomplished primarily through reference to the high number of false alarms[68].

There was, in addition, a considerable difference in the use of sources by the two newspapers in the sample as shown in Figure 2:10. The Sun primarily used the police as their sources. On the other hand, the Province used a greater variety of sources. This trend appears to be consistent with their respective places on the news continuum discussed earlier in the chapter. As a popular

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[66] This distinction is intended to highlight the significance of the victim's family as the primary source of information. In particular, the coverage devoted to Casey Bohun focused on her mother more so than the police investigation into her disappearance.

[67] This is developed through the use of these quotes: "The case of B.C.'s missing and slain children will get the same priority on the R.C.M.P.'s main computers as that given security at the recent economic summit..." (Sun, August 18, 1981: A3); "Dogs, Choppers and Divers Aid Hunt For Clues" (Sun, August 26, 1981: A15); "Grisly Search Goes On; 'Suspect in Custody'" (Sun, August 28, 1981: A1); and finally, "Missing girls still R.C.M.P. priority" (Sun, September 28, 1984: A15).

[68] Article titles like: "Some 'missing' kids waste police time" (Sun, August 6, 1981: A18); "Police seldom told that kids are back" (Province, November 7, 1981: D1); and "Search cost 100 000 only no one was lost" (Province, March 1, 1982: A1) reflect the high costs, in terms of time and money, incurred by missing children false alarms.

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Figure 2:10
Breakdown of Newspaper Sources
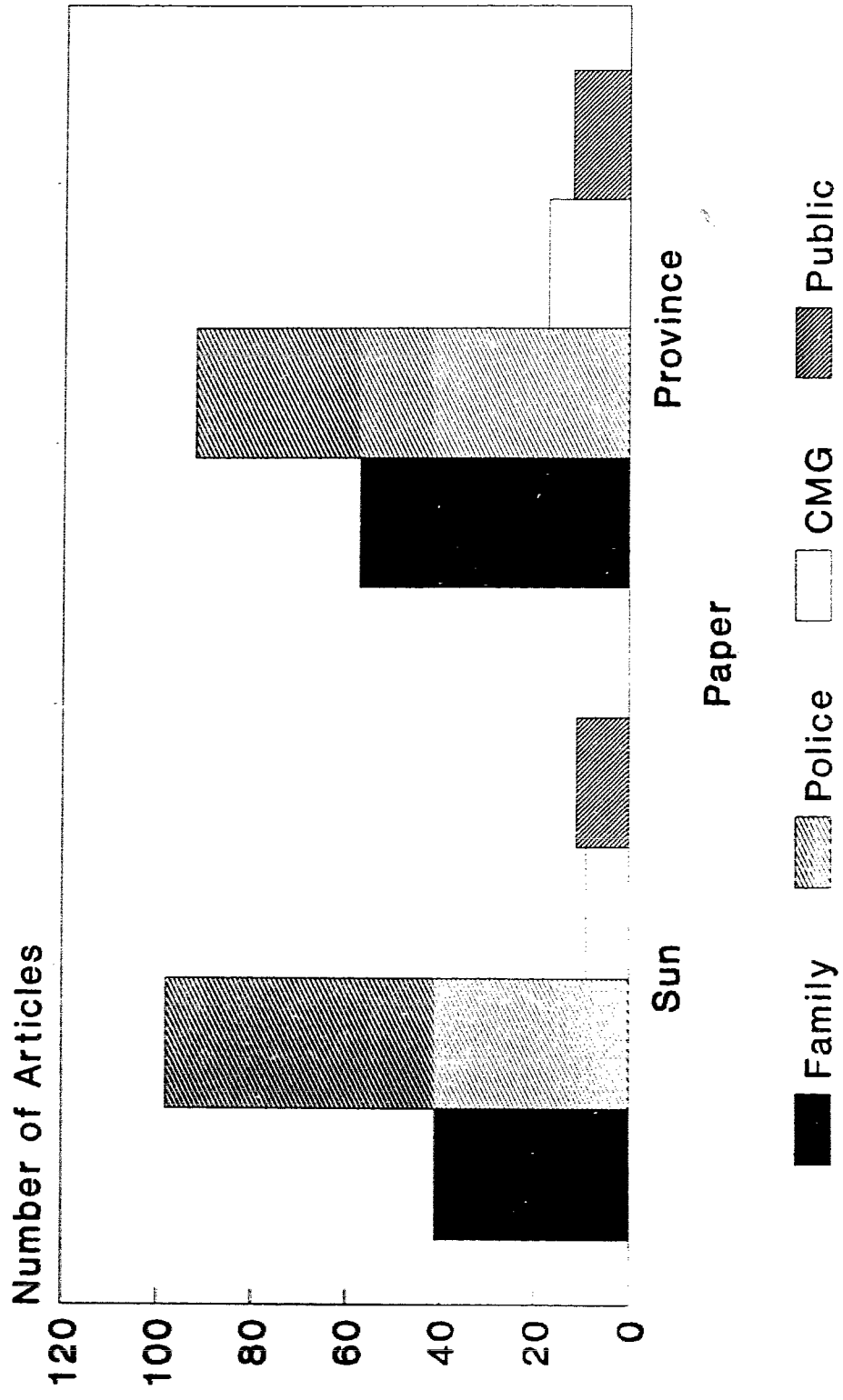
newspaper, the Province is more likely to use public based sources (families, people on the street, etc.) than the Sun which takes more of a professional based approach to developing story lines.

The police were quoted in 62% of the Sun's articles while they were the primary source in 51% of the Province's stories. The family was cited 26% of the time by the Sun and 32% by the Province. The other sources represented 12% of the Sun's coverage and 17% of the Province's coverage of missing children cases.

Taken together, there is a high amount of interaction and overlap in the depiction of victims, offenders and police in missing children story lines generated by these two newspapers. The portrayal of the police serves to develop the character of the missing child, and the threat posed by the actual offender or by similar antagonists. In Chapters Three and Four, the mechanics and implications of this frame of presenting missing children stories will be examined in greater detail.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the research design as well as the aggregate and qualitative findings generated by this thesis research. The remaining two chapters will expand upon the themes that were developed during this initial analysis. While both chapters deal primarily with the presentation of specific missing children cases from 1981 to 1991, there are considerable differences in their modes of analysis. Chapter Three will outline the construction of the missing children social problem in the two newspapers, paying particular attention to the depiction of Child Find B.C. and the parents group in 1981. Chapter Four will trace the evolution of this social problem while assessing the effect of counter-claims on the amount and type of newspaper coverage devoted to this issue.

III. The Construction Of the Missing Children Social Problem In British Columbian Newspaper Coverage

Introduction

The importance of specific examples in generating interest in the missing children social problem was clearly demonstrated in Chapter Two. With this initial analysis in place, attention can now be directed towards examining the structure of claims making groups arguments.

This chapter will be primarily concerned with two claims-making groups: the parents group that had Chris Burgess as a spokesperson (hereafter referred to as the "Burgess group") and Child Find B.C.[1]. One reason for isolating these two claims-making groups is to examine the nature of claims put forth by a single interest group, and the local chapter of a larger organization. The other reason for isolating these two groups is to reveal the similarities and differences between the newspaper coverage of stranger abductions and parental abductions claims-making activities. The distribution of references to claims-making groups is shown in Figure 3:1[2].

The main trend in this graph is the short attention cycle devoted to any one group. In particular, Child Find B.C. was the focus of 54% of the claims-making group articles, but was present in only three years of newspaper coverage. On the other hand, 21% of the articles focused on the Burgess Group, 14% on child identification kits, and the remaining 11% dealt with the Rosenfeldts. While arguments about the limited effect of

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[1] The Burgess group was founded by the parents of missing children in 1981 and was primarily a single issue group devoted to creating a public panic in order to step up the police investigation of these cases. Child Find B.C. is the British Columbian branch of Child Find International and is primarily concerned with investigating parental abductions.

[2] In addition to the Burgess group and Child Find B.C., I have included Child Identification which includes efforts to either market or distribute means of identifying children with the intent of reducing child abductions and the efforts of Gary and Sharon Rosenfeldt to generate government action on this issue. The Rosenfeldts were also active in the legal actions intended to cancel Olson's cash for corpses scheme.

Figure 3:1
References to Claims—Makers

Number of Articles

Year

Burgess   Child Find B.C.   Child Identification   Rosenfeldt
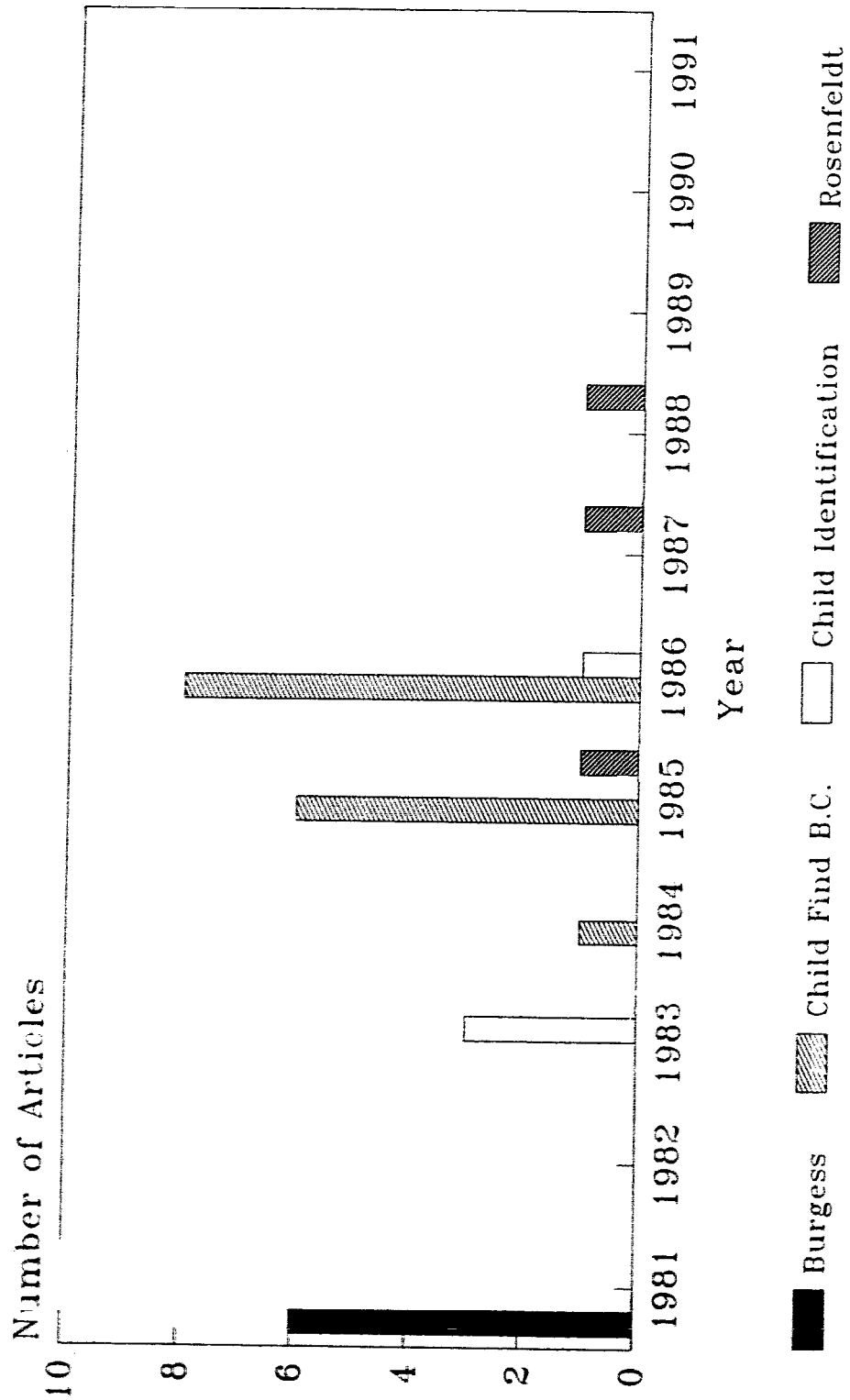
claims-making groups in the newspaper depiction of this issue will be discussed later in this chapter, it is sufficient at this stage to note the limited attention span that any one group generates.

Model Being Used

In analyzing the missing children social problem, a Toulminian perspective is being employed[3]. In his analysis of arguments, Toulmin (1958) broke arguments down into grounds, warrants and claims. Best (1987) applied this analysis to missing children claims-making activities. Arguments are broken down into their respective components, in order to reveal the role of rhetoric in social problem construction. This model of arguments has this basic form:

Grounds------ since Warrants---------therefore: Claims [4]

Grounds

The first element of arguments are the grounds. They provide the audience with factual information about the nature and extent of a given issue. The grounds are further broken down into: (1) definitions; (2) examples; and, (3) estimations of the problem's extent (Best, 1987: 104).

(1) Definitions

The definition of a given topic describes the area that is being examined, establishes its dimensions, and more importantly, provides the audience with an orientation to the problem. In the definitions provided by claims-making groups, there are domain statements and orientation statements.

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[3] The model being used in this thesis has been described in Chapter One.

[4] This is the basic form of the argument. The variations of arguments used by claims-making groups are to be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Four.

(i) Domain Statements

The domain statement identifies the area of interest and sets its boundaries (Best, 1987: 104). Within the missing children social problem, there has been considerable debate about the definition of a missing child. The question of how long a child has to be missing to qualify has been particularly problematic. There has been the tendency for claims-making groups to use inclusive, rather than exclusive, definitions of missing children. Inclusive definitions tend to result in a higher number of incidents being classified as missing children cases, than would a more exclusive definition.

For the stranger abduction social problem, there were calls for immediate response by the police, especially by parents of missing children who were presumed to be runaways by the police[5]. This argument for immediate police response was met with the counter-argument that a large number of missing children reports turn out to be false alarms (Sun, August 6, 1981: A18). The supposed disappearance of Elizabeth Kozma in 1982 is a graphic example of a false alarm because she never was missing in the first place. This incident qualified as a news story solely due to the fact that she was the sister of one of Clifford Olson's victims.

With parental abductions, there were also calls for a more immediate response on the part of official agencies[6]. The legal processes which determine who is the legal guardian of the child are seen to be too time consuming and help parents who have abducted their children get further away before an official investigation is conducted[7].

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[5] There were two vivid examples of this trend in 1981: the disappearance of Terri Lyn Carson, age 15, who was last seen August 1, 1981 and the abduction of Colleen Daignault, 13, on April 13, 1981. In both of these examples these young people were treated as runaways before they were added to the list of suspected abductions: "Girl's case treated as 'just another runaway'" (Sun, August 31, 1981: A3) and "Runaways' added to abductions" (Sun, August 20, 1981: A3).

[6] Specifically, Child Find B.C. called for more convictions in cases of parental abductions and immediate responses by police in these cases (Province, February 16, 1986: 54-5).

[7] To illustrate this point, Child Find B.C used examples where the child was taken out of the province or the country by the non-custodial parent (Province, February 16, 1987: 54-5).

(ii) Orientation Statements

There is also an orientation statement in the definition of a given topic, which provides the audience with an impression of the nature of the specific issue (Best, 1987: 105). In the definition of missing children provided by claims-making groups, especially the Burgess Group, there is the assumption that missing implies endangerment. Seen in this light, a missing child is seen to be at the mercy of society's predators[8].

The difference between the orientation statements of the stranger abduction claims-making group and Child Find B.C. is that the child is not seen as being exposed to the same level of danger as he/she would be in a stranger abduction. Instead of direct appeals to the threatened child, the mental suffering inflicted on both the child and the other parent by a vengeful spouse was a central element of these claims[9] (Province, February 16, 1986: 55).

(2) Examples

The examples used by a claims-making group are a crucial factor determining the success of the given claim. The examples are often presented before the definitions and come to serve as the audience's reference point for this topic (Best, 1987: 106). Of particular interest in this thesis is the use of atrocity tales by claims-making groups. These examples represent rare, sensationalistic cases of the given topic that grab the public's attention (Johnson, 1989: 11).

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[8] This theme was developed by quotes like: "Some maniac has declared war on the children of this country and we've got to stop him" (Chris Burgess quoted in the Province, August 9, 1981: A4); "our children are missing, yours could be next" (Province, August 6, 1981: A1); "Creepy Bogey Man Preyed on Children" (Province, August 16, 1981: A1); and "...when combined, they form the worst mass murders in B.C. and have involved the largest police manhunt" (Province, August 30, 1981: A4).

[9] "Revenge the Ultimate Motive" (Province, February 16, 1987: 55); "Love's High Price" (Province, February 16, 1987: 54).

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In addition to being sensationalistic, these examples must also be familiar and relevant to the audience, in order to be effective in generating public support (Galtung and Ruge, 1974: 64). In other words, an atrocity tale that depicts something that bears no relevance to the lives of the target population will not develop a substantial amount of public interest. As a result, most of the examples used by claims-making groups reflect scenarios common in entertainment media and involve situations that most of the audience can relate to.

These typifying examples also establish a consensus around which claims can be constructed. When the extremes of society are reflected in the offender-victim relationship, there is little that the audience can do but be persuaded by these arguments. Once the consensus establishing example is in place, other incidents, which are not rooted in the same moral absolutes, can be presented and be virtually assured of public support[10].

These atrocity tales are important in that they provide the public with an easily assimilated conception of the nature of the topic and the issues involved. There is a general tendency for the public to view all incidents of this topic in terms of these atrocity tales. Michael Dunahee, Joanna Pedersen, Jennifer Amisano[11] and Simon Partington become referents for the entire range of missing children cases.

The use of these extreme examples is important for the success of the claims-making groups. If these groups can develop the public belief that the atrocity tales represent the problem in general, there is going to be greater public acceptance of the conclusions proposed by these groups. If a less sensationalistic example is used, there will

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[10] The mechanics and implications of consensus establishing arguments will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Four.

[11] See Footnote 28, Chapter 2.

be less emotive appeal, less chance that the public will view this issue as a serious problem, and less likelihood that the public will accept the proposed solutions[12].

(3) Estimating the Extent of the Problem

The third, and final, component of the grounds used in the missing children argument are the estimations of the problem's extent. It is these estimates, in conjunction with the examples, that develop the public impression that the missing children social problem is very serious. In problem extent claims, there are: (a) incidence estimates; (b) estimates concerning the growth of the problem; and, (c) range claims (Best, 1987: 106-108).

(i) Incidence Estimates

These estimates are attempts to establish the number of incidents, of this particular type, that are occurring. For missing children claims, stranger abductions were considered to be a serious problem. By establishing that a given topic is a widespread concern, the claims-makers hope to mobilize public and official support (Best, 1987: 106). In the case of stranger abductions, it was acknowledged from the onset of the problem that they were rare (Sun, August 6, 1981: A18). Instead of claims about the numerical extent of the problem, the legitimacy of the stranger abduction social problem was established through crime waves - notably in 1981 and 1983[13].

There were statistical claims presented by the parental abduction claims-makers (60 000 parental abductions in Canada - Julie Cullen of Child Find B.C. (Sun, August 30,

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[12] Consensus establishing examples portray blameless victims. Secondary examples often include elements of victim blaming which may allow the audience to establish emotion distance, thereby reducing the rhetorical effect of these examples.

[13] It can be argued that the newspaper coverage of the Michael Dunahee abduction represents a self-contained crime wave. Through reference to the attempted abduction of other children in the area, the threat to children was substantiated.

1984: A18)). The purpose of these claims was to substantiate the threat that parental abductions posed to British Columbian children. While stranger abduction cases were based on the powerful image of the evil stranger, parental abduction images did not have the same rhetorical effect. The parent-as-offender image needed additional statistical claims in order to consolidate it as a social problem.

(ii) Growth

In addition to establishing the numerical extent of the problem, claims-makers often attempt to assert that the problem is getting worse. By establishing that a given problem is increasing in frequency, one can direct attention towards stopping the problem before it gets worse (Best, 1987: 107).

The stranger abduction social problem was largely defined largely by a single crime wave. During the summer of 1981, there was widespread concern about the safety of the children in the Lower Mainland. Although there was a small number of stranger abductions, the amount of public concern about the "Fraser Valley Child Killer" gave the impression that the problem had reached epidemic proportions[14].

On the other hand, there were growth claims presented by Child Find B.C.. These claims of there being "three new cases a week" (Province, August 30, 1984: A18) gave readers the impression that parental abductions were a widespread problem in British Columbia. By arguing that there was a widespread parental abduction problem that appeared to be getting worse, Child Find B.C. called for more attention to be paid to this issue by both Federal and Provincial policy-makers (Province, February 16, 1984: 54).

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[14] These feelings of threat were developed through headlines like: "Voice of Terror Warns: You Next" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4); "Scared Youngsters Under Curfew as Fear Stalks Valley" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4); and "Police Team Troubled By Sex Crime Increase" (Province, August 16, 1981: B2).

(iii) Range Claims

The final element of this form of evidence comprises the range claims. Through the establishment that large segments of the population are at risk, greater public support can be mobilized. The use of metaphors such as "epidemics", and the random nature of the abductions, suggest that all children are threatened. By doing so, the claims-making groups hope to generate public support, as well as official action on this social problem (Best, 1987: 108).

In keeping with the crime wave dynamic, the Burgess group printed posters claiming that "your child could be next" (Sun, August 10, 1981: A1-2). These posters were intended to create a "public panic" (Sun, August 10, 1981: A2) that would force the Federal and Provincial governments to take action on this issue (Burgess quoted in the Sun, August 10, 1981: A2). On the other hand, in the parental abduction social problem, there was the assertion that all divorced parents (and especially those without joint custody) were potential child abductors (Province, February 16, 1986: 55).

Warrants

Warrants play an important role in Toulmin's conception of arguments. Warrants are a set of steps linking the grounds to the conclusions (Toulmin, 1958: 100). In addition to acting as a set of logical steps, these structures may also serve as justifications for accepting the proposed conclusions in and of themselves. This is especially the case when the grounds of an argument are challenged by other claims-making groups. The effectiveness of warrants is due to the fact that they are often appeals to the values of the audience. This emotive context of warrants allows for the proposed conclusions to be accepted even when logical inconsistencies in the factual evidence are revealed.

Examples serve as vehicles for the presentation of warrants. It is important to establish that the warrants are most often implicitly stated in the examples. If a warrant were explicitly articulated, there would be a greater chance of its being refuted, especially

if the target values are not held by the audience (Best, 1987: 109). On the other hand, when the warrants are implicitly presented in the context of an atrocity tale, the audience often accepts them without question. The emotional appeal of these examples often leaves the audience susceptible to accepting premises and conclusions that they might reject in a different situation.

Due to the implicit nature of warrants, any list will be selective and incomplete at best. With this in mind, some warrants concerning missing children have been presented by Best (1987). These warrants are: (1) the value of children; (2) blameless victims; (3) associated evils; (4) deficient policies; (5) historical continuity; and finally, (6) the rights and freedoms of children (Best, 1987: 109-112).

(1) Value Of Children

This warrant is concerned with the high sentimental value of children. By focusing on the emotional toll that the child's disappearance has on the parents, claims-makers hope to establish emotional intimacy between the audience and the given story. The importance of this warrant also lies in the fact that it is largely uncontroversial - literally a "motherhood" issue (Best, 1987: 110).

In the newspaper coverage of the missing children social problem, this warrant was developed by quotes like "it's every parent's worst nightmare" (Province, March 26, 1991: 5), and "I think that everyone could use their imagination what it's like when their son's missing" (Stephen Partington quoted in the Province, July 23, 1981: A5). Passages like these facilitate emotional attachment between the readers and the story line[15].

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[15] Quotes like "Missing Girl's Dad Pleads 'Let Her Go'" (Leo Pedersen quoted in the Sun, October 29, 1983: A3); and "I want my daughter back" (Phil Amisano quoted in the Sun, August 30, 1984: A18) develop the connection between the public and the story.

This warrant was developed in the parental abduction social problem through reference to the emotional devastation felt by the child's parent[16] (Sun August 30, 1984: A18; Province, February 16, 1986: 54). In general, the main importance of this warrant is that it allows the audience to displace the identity of the victim and replace it with someone close to themselves.

(2) Blameless Victims

This warrant presents the missing child as being the victim of fate. By establishing the innocence of the child, the claims-makers further develop the emotional attachment between the audience and the depicted victim. If the child is shown to be held accountable for his or her actions, the audience can shift the blame for the disappearance upon the victim, and thereby can emotionally distance themselves from the story. This warrant also develops the image of the pathological offender who preys on innocent children.

The victim is depicted as being deceived by a predatory offender. During the investigation of the Partington disappearance and the subsequent crime wave, there were stories about a man in the area who was trying to obtain sexual favors from girls by offering them window washing jobs (Sun, August 15, 1981: A1). Joanna Pedersen was apparently abducted by someone who promising to help the girl[17], and there were allegations that Michael Dunahee was abducted by someone who may have posed as a policeman in order to win the child's trust (Province, March 27, 1991: 5).

This warrant is not limited to the stranger abduction social problem. In coverage of the parental abduction issue, stories focused on how parents would resort to a form of emotional brainwashing to ensure that their child would trust them. By painting the child's

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[16] "Mothers and fathers who abduct their kids will use any excuse to justify their actions, but the bottom line is revenge, says Julie Cullen of Child Find B.C." (Province, February 16, 1986: 55).

[17] "The mother's common law husband came to the phone but he spoke, not to the girl, but to a man who had taken over the telephone. The man said he would call the police if the girl wasn't picked up within 30 minutes" (Sun, February 23, 1983: A13).

legal guardian as a "drunk", "slut" or other such terms, the child's abductor makes the child believe that it is the child's best interest to go with him or her (Province, February 16, 1986: 55).

(3) Associated Evils

The purpose of this warrant is to further develop the emotional attachment between the audience and the story. Through either implicit or explicit references to associated evils such as pornography, prostitution, and sexual assault, the claims-makers develop the argument that missing means endangerment. Through the assumption that the innocent victim is subjected to all manners of deviant behavior, the audience is more inclined to accept the conclusions proposed by the claims-makers. The latter made little effort to locate the causes of missing children in social conditions, preferring to assign responsibility to criminals and perverted individuals (Best, 1987: 110).

This warrant applies almost exclusively to stranger abduction cases. In fact, early claims about missing children were linked to the child sexual abuse social problem through references to the sexually mutilated victims eventually attributed to Olson (Province, August 30, 1981: A1)[18]. By associating the new issue with an already established social concern, the newspapers developed a context through which the readers could interpret the missing children social problem.

Through reference to associated evils, the missing children social problem also becomes something of a conceptual peg on which other claims-making groups can base their arguments (Best, 1990: 178). The theme of the endangered child developed in newspaper coverage of missing children cases provides a context for other claims within the argument field of child endangerment to be made. Responses to the general issue of

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[18] This theme was also developed through links to the investigation of the rape and murder of 13 young women on highways in the interior of British Columbia and Alberta (Province, August 30, 1981: A1).

child endangerment include calls for: police raids of teen parties[19]; a reinstatement of "young sex taboos" (Province, August 9, 1981: A4; Province, August 14, 1989: 13); a banning of hitch-hiking[20]; measures against child abuse (Province, August 16, 1981: B2); and finally, stricter laws that would prevent women being forced into prostitution (Province, August 28, 1981: M1-2).

(4) Deficient Policies

Claims-makers insist that the existing policies and resources are inadequate in dealing with this problem. The major concern of these claims-makers is the amount of time that elapses before an investigation of missing children is carried out by the police. Especially with reference to atrocity tales, the claims-makers called for immediate action on the part of the official agencies. Insisting that current policies and resources could not locate all of the missing children, claims-makers presented a warrant for change (Best, 1987: 111), within which there is the assumption that the police are doing a good job and that they have a legitimate role within society. In order to do their job more effectively, they need more resources and larger investigations (Province, August 31, 1981: A4).

(5) Historical Continuity

This is a conservative warrant that uses historical continuity to justify future actions. In the case of these claims-makers, there were calls for greater federal involvement in missing children investigations (Province, August 13, 1981: A4; Province, February 16, 1986: 55). Greater federal involvement, then, would be consistent with the history of federal law enforcement (Best, 1987: 111).

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[19] "Inquest urges raids on teen parties" (Sun, October 16, 1981: A3).

[20] "A nationwide ban on hitchhiking would substantially reduce the number of teenagers and young women murdered by sexual psychopaths, says a former top B.C. detective" (Province, September 3, 1981: A5).

This warrant was especially evident in the construction of the parental abduction social problem. There were demands by Child Find B.C. for revamped child custody laws (Sun, August 30, 1984: A18; Sun, February 16, 1986: 54-5). There were also calls for more of a police presence to ensure the safety of British Columbian children (Province, August 11, 1981: A1 and Sun, August 11, 1981: A1-2).

(6) Rights and Freedoms

The final warrant to be depicted here concerns the rights and freedoms of the victims. The point of this warrant is that, when children have to live in fear of their safety, and are not able to play in the playgrounds, their rights are being infringed upon (Province, August 9, 1981: A4; Province, August 14, 1981: A1; Province, March 26, 1991: A2). Children have the right to be free from abduction and exploitation, and to be protected by authorities (Best, 1987: 112).

Conclusions

In addition to presenting the grounds and warrants of a given argument, claims-makers also offer proposed solutions to this social problem. In the case of the missing children problem, claims-makers hoped to affect the general public and, in particular, parents, as well as official policy. There are four main conclusions presented by these claims makers: (1) increased awareness of the problem; (2) prevention; (3) social control policies; and finally, (4) other objectives of these groups.

(1) Awareness

The original goal of the Burgess Group and Child Find B.C. was to develop greater public awareness of the missing children problem. The primary reason for this approach was to enlist more people in the searching for children. With increasing media

attention to this area, there came greater public interest in the missing children social problem (Best, 1987: 112).

The Burgess Group generated public attention through, among other things, a poster campaign (Province, August 6, 1981: A1). By generating a "public panic", this group hoped to generate enough public concern to force the governments to take action and stop the killings. In the case of the Michael Dunahee abduction, there was a reward fund that people could contribute to in order to support the search efforts (Province, March 31, 1991: 3).

Child Find B.C. was very active in raising the public awareness of the parental abduction social problem. In addition to a failed bid to put photos of missing children on milk cartons (Sun January 10, 1985: A14), there was also a campaign to display posters of missing children on rental trucks (Sun, November 13, 1985: A3).

In 1987, there was considerable debate about the media reporting missing children stories. This debate stemmed from the refusal of the Burnaby R.C.M.P. to go to the media about the disappearance of Rosie Hardy and Roxanne Beatty (Province, May 13, 1987: 1,3). The argument that was presented against going public with these stories was that virtually all missing children turn up (Province, May 15, 1987: 27). In fact, groups like Child Find B.C. were accused at generating false impressions about the missing children social problem in British Columbia[21].

(2) Prevention

This conclusion was shaped largely by stranger abductions. The recommended actions included having parents assemble files of recent photographs, fingerprints, and other materials that could be used by investigators in searching for a child (Province, February 16, 1986: 55). There were also school and community programs to prevent child

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[21] "(R.C.M.P. Constable Dennis) Crewe said that out of nearly 1000 missing children reports he's checked into in Surrey, only one fell victim to a child molester" (Province, May 15, 1987: 21).

abductions (Sun, August 14, 1981: A1; Province, August 3, 1986: 23), which were directed primarily at stranger rather than non-stranger abduction cases (Best, 1987: 113).

(3) Social Control Policies

The claims-makers also called for increased social control policies. These recommendations were included the subjection of children and adolescents to greater social control and the coordination of information and search efforts among the various law enforcement agencies in the United States (Best, 1987: 113). The missing children movement presented the theme of greater control over young people with a broader "anti-youth movement" which advocated expanded school and juvenile authority (Carpenter, 1985: 39).

The use of curfews (Province, August 9, 1981: A4), identification kits (Sun May 1, 1986: B2; Province, May 15, 1987: 2) and other practices intended "for the good of children" represent, in effect, the scapegoating of young people to account for wider social conditions (Carpenter, 1985: 39). This "anti-youth" movement also reflected the new progressive era in North American politics that has been characterized by significant cultural optimism about the capabilities of the welfare state to resolve significant social problems (Johnson, 1989: 16). In other words, this movement has represented increased social control of children carried out under the pretenses of humanitarian aid.

(4) Other Objectives

In addition to these conclusions, there were other claims presented by concerned groups. Of the most relevance to this thesis are the calls for a federal study to count missing children, and for further attention to other issues concerning the safety of children. The federal study was advocated to provide an accurate assessment of and official confirmation about the nature and extent of this problem.

Other claims-makers used the missing children social problem as a peg for attacking a wide range of evils. There were calls to prosecute adults involved in child pornography, prostitution, pedophilic conduct, and to screen people who work with children. There were also calls to study the relationship between popular culture and child exploitation. In other words, coverage of missing children cases opened up avenues for examining other areas in which the safety of children was threatened.

The Construction Of the Missing Children Problem By Claims-Making Groups

Public problems are presented by Gusfield (1981) as "having a shape which is understood in a larger context of a social structure in which some versions of reality have greater powers and the authority to describe and define that 'reality' than do others" (Gusfield, 1981: 13). In effect, the ability of some groups to get their versions of reality accepted by the public hides conflicts that are embedded within the given area (Gusfield, 1981: 13). In the case of the missing children social problem, public conceptions have been shaped largely through the political activities of the different claims-making groups.

With this basic understanding of the political nature of social problem construction in place, the use of rhetoric by these claims-makers can be examined. The specific examples employed by claims-makers were not arbitrary by any means. Stranger abductions have a rhetorical effect that is not approached by any other form of missing children case. These stories are particularly grabbing emotionally because they are sensationalistic, and violate several deeply held societal norms (Heath, 1984: 264-5).

The emotionally captivating example attracts public attention by playing on common fears in the target audience. Most parents, for example, have thought about what would happen if their child disappeared. The claims-makers were particularly effective in utilizing this fear to generate public support[22]. These specific examples have the effect of

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[22] For a more comprehensive analysis of the use of fear by the media and claims making groups please refer to Pratkanis and Aronson (1992); Best (1989); Fishman (1978) and Johnson (1988).

capturing the attention of readers and compelling them to accept the problem as a serious one that requires immediate action.

These examples also serve as exemplars for the entire range of missing children cases. The impression that stranger abductions are a widespread problem generates higher levels of concern than would a corresponding number of runaways. Without making distinctions about the various types of missing children represented by the statistics, the public is given the impression that all of the incidents represent instances of these atrocity tales. Thus, 50 000 reported missing children may be seen, by the public, as representing 50 000 stranger abductions like that of Simon Partington. Among these statistics, however, only a very small number of cases are stranger abductions.

The combination of these examples and statistics has a profound rhetorical effect and can lead the audience to accept the proposed warrants and conclusions. The claims-makers often present their arguments in such a manner that there is only one acceptable choice to be made by the public. This channeling of public opinion is especially relevant in the process of establishing warrants. As mentioned earlier, warrants are most often implicitly stated in the examples. When they are presented in the context of these atrocity tales, it becomes a matter of common sense to accept the warrants. Given a less sensationalistic example (i.e. a parental abduction), accepting the proposed warrants becomes less of a clear cut decision. It is far easier to accept the unidimensional conceptions of the child and the abductor presented by the claims-makers when presented in the context of a sensationalistic case than it is to accept these ideas in a less extreme example.

In addition to the use of these extreme examples, the claims-makers must also make these examples of relevance to the target population. It does not matter how extreme a particular example may be; if audiences do not feel that they are affected by this problem, they will not be as inclined to call for solutions. Viewed in this light, it makes sense that the vast majority of missing children cases covered by the media, and referred to

by claims-makers, deal with the white, middle or working class families that make up the majority of newspaper readers and constitute a dominant voting block (Galtung and Ruge, 1974: 64).

Once the appropriate example is presented by the claims-makers and the implicit warrants are accepted by the public, the specific claims of these groups can be made. As with the warrants, the success of the proposed solutions to this problem is contingent on the public identifying with the specific examples used by these groups. If the public feels that the atrocity tales are representative of the entire social problem, they will be much more likely to support the proposed solutions than if they did not accept these atrocity tales. By establishing the serious nature of a given problem, specific plans to solve this problem are often readily endorsed without a great deal of debate.

The Social Control Implications Of the Conclusions Presented By Claims-Making Groups

The conclusions reached by the claims-making groups have definite social control implications. In maintaining the "anti-youth" theme touched on elsewhere in this thesis, the missing children claims-making groups have adopted a victim-blaming perspective. Following the work of Ryan (1971) the claims making groups have: (1) defined missing children as a social problem; (2) revealed differences in the victims that separated them from other children; (3) located the causes of the missing children problem in these differences; and finally, (4) proposed solutions to the missing children problem that removed these differences (Ryan, 1971: 8).

In their conception of the missing children social problem, the claims-making groups have located the missing children problem in the actions of the victims. Such actions include: talking to strangers; being out late at night; being without adult supervision; and other misbehaviors (Kappeler, Blumberg and Potter, 1993: 28). By situating the cause of the missing children problem in the children themselves, these claims-making groups can call for increased social control of children and justify it on the

basis of humanitarian motives. Such activities would normally be interpreted as an invasion of privacy, but against the backdrop of this social problem they were seen to be for the good of the child.

The increased social control proposed by these claims-making groups can only be justified if the public believe that there is a substantiated threat to their safety (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992: 165). In this instance, the depiction of the predatory offender is pivotal in the claims-makers' arguments. Without this perceived threat, there is little likelihood that the public will call for the recommendations presented by the claims-making groups.

The theme of endangerment of children was not the exclusive property of the missing children claims-makers. While the missing children issue was ascending into prominence, the M.A.D.D. movement was gaining support as well (Best, 1990: 7-8). Both of these groups depicted visible threats to young people as a justification for increased social control. While the missing children claims-makers called for curfews and the identification of children, among other recommendations, M.A.D.D. proposed increasing the drinking age to cut down on the availability of alcohol to young people (Carpenter, 1985: 39-40).

The effectiveness of the arguments presented by these different "anti-youth" groups is contingent on their ability to: (1) establish examples that capture public attention while reminding the public of the particular claims-making group; (2) locate the cause of the given incident in **specific** actions of the individual; and, (3) propose recommendations that audiences feel they can accomplish, and that are also seen to ensure that their children will not engage in the same activities as the victim (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992: 165).

The final consideration about the nature of the conclusions recommended by these claims-making groups is that these publicized conclusions all have a societal-reaffirming function. In particular, the victim-blaming perspective often leads to increased social control in order to protect the victim. By focusing on only one facet of a larger social

problem, these claims-making groups offer an oversimplified conception of the missing children social problem. Through the concentration of attention on the victim and the offender, the larger social structures that influence these actions are effectively ignored. These claims-makers, due to their limited conception of the problem, offer a single set of conclusions to a complex issue.

Summary

In conclusion, the efforts of claims-making groups in bringing the missing children problem to the public's attention have centered on the presentation of a single conception of this social problem as being the only appropriate one available. The use of atrocity tales and the other elements of their arguments conveyed the severity of the missing children social problem and the validity of the proposed solutions. These conclusions provided an oversimplified conception of the missing children social problem that fit the agenda setting mandate of the newspapers while justifying increased social control over children.

By examining the construction of the missing children social problem by these claims-making groups, I have endeavored to attain a better understanding of the politics of social problems. The growth of the anti-youth movement was especially evident in these claims-making activities. With the elements of the missing children social problem in place, we can now direct our attention to examining the evolution of this issue in the newspapers.

IV. The Evolution of Missing Children Arguments

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the evolution in the form and content of the missing children arguments presented in the Vancouver Sun and Province from 1981 to 1991. Through the application of Toulmin's analysis of arguments to this issue, developments in the newspaper coverage of this social problem can be revealed. By tracing the progression from warrant-establishing to warrant using arguments and domain expanding arguments, it becomes possible to reveal the analytic moves used in the development and subsequent evolution of the missing children social problem. The social context in which claims and counterclaims are made will also be examined as they pertain to social problem development.

Analysis

Beginning with the basic relationship of argument established by Toulmin (1958) relating data (D), warrants (W), and claims (C), analysis can be directed towards revealing the evolution of the arguments pertaining to missing children. The standard relationship of (D;W; so C) refers to the factual evidence (D) provided in support of a specific claim (C) which is linked to the warrants (W) that register the legitimacy of the steps involved to move from the data to the claims (Toulmin, 1958: 100).

In standard arguments the legitimacy of the warrants is presupposed and there is often little need to re-establish them (Toulmin, 1958: 120). Thus, in most arguments, the warrant is, in a sense, incidental and explanatory, its task being simply to register explicitly the legitimacy of the step involved and to refer it back to the larger set of steps whose legitimacy is being presupposed (Toulmin, 1958: 100). It appears logical to state that while the data are appealed to explicitly, warrants implicitly legitimate the step from datum to claim.

Toulmin's analysis directs attention to the importance of warrants in claims-making activity. Toulmin further expands on the importance of warrants by describing **warrant using** arguments and **warrant-establishing** arguments (Toulmin, 1958: 120). By examining the purposes of these two forms of arguments and how they apply to the evolution of the missing children social problem, one may potentially extract some significant insights into the development of this social problem. The distribution of primary and secondary examples is shown in Figure 4:1.

The main trend in this histogram is the high profile coverage devoted to primary examples in the Vancouver Sun and Province. Michael Dunahee, Simon Partington, Joanna Pedersen and Teri-Lyn Scalf were the focus of both a great deal of initial coverage and a significant number of follow up articles. The other main feature that differentiated the newspaper coverage of primary and secondary examples was the number of articles that focused on the efforts of the police to find the child. In consensus-establishing cases, there were many articles that highlighted the response of the police which legitimated the feelings of concern generated by these incidents.

Warrant-Establishing Arguments and Primary Examples

The process of warrant-establishing arguments is necessarily of a different form from that used in standard arguments. The difference between these two forms of argument is due to the need to establish the warrants before they can be applied to standard arguments. This process is fundamentally the same as that used in scientific experiments. The datum and the results are both known to the researcher, and, by establishing that a particular relationship holds in a certain number of cases, one can ensure that the warrant is accepted (Toulmin, 1958: 121-2). Through this process of induction, the relationship between the two grounds and the conclusions is summarized in the warrant.

Figure 4:1
Breakdown by Topic

Number of Articles

Quarter Year

■ primary ex.   ▨ secondary ex.   ☐ police

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Once established, the warrant can be applied to fresh examples for as long as it proves to be effective in describing the relationship between the variables (Toulmin, 1958: 122). To sum up: the warrant is established by testing it in sample situations where both the data and the conclusion are independently known, rendered general by induction, and finally applied as a rule of deduction in fresh situations to derive novel conclusions from other data (Toulmin, 1958: 122).

This warrant-establishing behavior was evident in the early stages of the missing children social problem (especially during the Olson murders in 1981). The basic relationship used in the newspaper stories at the time followed this basic format:

Child is Missing-----------------Child is Endangered

(Data)   (Conclusion)

The comparison of these missing children cases to the Atlanta Child Murders[1] (Province, August 11, 1981: A1) and the inability of search parties to find these children[2] justified the use of the proposed warrants. They are: (1) the child as a blameless victim (W1); (2) the high sentimental value of children (W2); (3) the associated evils facing children (W3); (4) the policies that are currently in place that do not protect children from predatory offenders (W4); (5) historical continuity (W5); and finally, (6) the rights and freedoms of children (W6) (Best, 1987: 108-112)[3].

Warrants are often implicitly stated in examples. For warrant-establishing arguments, atrocity tales often serve as the vehicle for the presentation of these structures. These **primary**, or **consensus-establishing examples**, present the social problem in all of

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[1] This case was discussed in Chapter Two.

[2] "'Gruesome' search uncovers bodies of 4 missing children" (Province, August 28, 1981: A1).

[3] These warrants were examined in greater detail in Chapter Three and there is little need to repeat myself here.

its horrific detail and without moral ambiguity. For this social problem, children like Michael Dunahee and Simon Partington embody something of a worst case scenario for this issue[4]. These emotionally captivating incidents address the fundamental values of the audience and persuade them to accept the proposed warrants.

The repeatability of the missing children cases calls about this development in the newspaper coverage:

Child is Missing----Child is Endangered---Therefore (W1-W6) are valid.

In 1981, Simon Partington was the consensus-establishing case and subsequent missing children cases confirmed the legitimacy of the warrants[5]. The conviction of Clifford Olson played a pivotal role in the public acceptance of the warrants because there was a clearly defined predator who was preying on these innocent children. In fact, the Olson case, in addition to establishing the legitimacy of the proposed warrants, became the benchmark by which other missing children cases were measured. Through either implicit or explicit references, the missing children cases that occurred after 1981 became that much more serious in the eyes of the public due to these comparisons to the atrocities that were committed by him[6].

The primary examples can be seen as providing a model[7] through which other missing children cases can be presented.

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[4] These examples were discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

[5] There were missing children cases that received a great deal of media coverage in British Columbia before 1981. However, these incidents were often isolated cases. Simon Partington was chosen as the consensus establishing case because of the ongoing media concern about missing children cases that his disappearance sparked.

[6] The previously mentioned investigation into the disappearance of Elizabeth Kozma in 1982 is a case in point of the influence that references to Clifford Olson can have in determining the amount of coverage devoted to a given missing child.

[7] I am using the definition developed by Barbour (1974). A model is analogous and open-ended and represents the enduring structural components of a social phenomenon (Barbour, 1974: 27).

The establishment of warrants in the newspaper coverage calls about the standard newspaper relationship of:

Child is Missing ---------so----------Child is Endangered

|

since (W1-W6)

The Importance of Warrant Using Arguments and Secondary Examples In Generating the Missing Children Crime Wave Dynamic

Once the warrants have been established, they play an active role in conveying the serious nature of the missing children social problem to readers. Since warrants serve as a logical bridge between the data and the conclusions, it becomes possible to modify the grounds of the argument and still have the audience accept the legitimacy of the proposed conclusions. Secondary examples are depicted in newspaper coverage of missing children cases after the consensus-establishing examples are in place. They have the following purposes: (1) to enable the generation of the crime wave dynamic; (2) to substantiate the feelings of threat and discomfort developed in the primary example; (3) to locate the victimization in specific attributes or actions of the victim; and finally, (4) to provide an avenue for emotional closure by the audience by removing the random element from the victimization.

(1) Generation of the Crime Wave Dynamic

Secondary victims receive media coverage only after the consensus-establishing examples are in place. The coverage of Daryn Johnsrude, Ada Court, Christine Weller, Verna Bjerky, Colleen Daignault, and Lynn Wolfsteiner were good examples of this

trend[8]. These disappearances were reported in the newspapers after the initial coverage of Simon Partington even though they had been missing for a considerable period of time. In fact, even though Clifford Olson had been killing children as far back as November 1980, the coverage of these victims was presented only through links to the Partington investigation[9].

Stories about secondary victims or attempted abductions can also establish a context for depiction of the primary examples. In 1991, the Dunahee abduction gained significance through reports of indecent exposures and attempted abductions in the area over the past year: "...parents are correct to be cautious because complaints of strange men bothering children or indecent exposures are common" (Sun, March 26, 1991: A2). These reported incidents enabled the rhetorical transition from missing child to abducted child, and provided a legitimized threat for further attempted abductions.

(2) Further Development of Threat and Discomfort

The secondary examples, and the resulting crime wave dynamic, further develop the feelings of threat and discomfort generated in the primary examples. For example, in 1981, the discovery of additional victims and the re-definition of runaways as missing children led to the development of a public panic and calls for police action to apprehend the person responsible. One disappearance may be cause for concern, two might have been a coincidence, but more than that usually meant the construction of a missing children crime wave.

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[8] Johnsrude, age 16, disappeared in May of 1981; Court, 13, went missing on June 21, 1981; Weller, 13, was abducted in November, 1980; Bjerky, 17, disappeared May 2, 1981; and Wolfsteiner, age 16, was abducted May 19, 1981.

[9] ("Police look for links in four disappearances" (Sun, August 1, 1981: A12); "Mounties Step Up Death Probe" (Province, August 7, 1981: A4)).

(3) Victim-blaming and Responses To This Problem

Next to the generation of the crime wave dynamic, the most important role of secondary victims is that they provide the basis for "solutions" to this "problem". As opposed to the consensus-establishing examples, which are based on the warrant of the blameless victim, secondary cases contain a large amount of victim-blaming or victim responsibility. What separates secondary victims from primary examples is that the former really should have known better or did something that may have led to the victimization, while no such responsibility is assigned to the latter.

The most striking example of this analytic move was the coverage of Olson's female victims in 1981. All of them were either hitch-hiking or waiting for a bus when they disappeared (Sun, August 11, 1981: A2). It was implied in the newspaper coverage that they were old enough to realize the dangers associated with hitch-hiking and as a result must share the blame for their victimization[10]. As a result of this assumed responsibility, coverage of older missing children was printed only when there was sufficient cause to link them to a crime wave or present them as secondary stories to support a primary example[11].

Secondary examples on their own simply do not have enough rhetorical potential to justify media coverage. Through the linkage of these stories to other examples, or to other issues such as child sexual abuse or prostitution[12], there may be isolated coverage, but there often is little chance that these stories can sustain a crime wave dynamic. The

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[10] Howard (1984) has concluded that female victims tend to be blamed more for their victimization than do males under the same circumstances. For example, in 1981, Olson's female victims were blamed for hitch-hiking while Daryn Johnsrude and Raymond King disappeared under similar circumstances and were not held accountable for their abductions.

[11] There appeared to be a great deal of similarity between the newspaper coverage of missing children cases and the M.C.A. definition. There had to be a visible threat to the safety of the adolescent before these cases generated high profile media coverage. These findings also correspond to Johnson's (1988) examination of Ontario newspaper coverage of missing children cases.

[12] "A Young Hooker's Warning" (Province, August 28, 1981: M1-2).

utility of these cases lies not in their individual merits but in their supporting role for other story lines.

(4) Emotional Closure

The final role of secondary examples is to enable emotional closure by the audience. This is achieved through two means. First, secondary examples allow the audience to locate the responsibility for the victimization in the victim and in so doing establish cognitive distance. This counteracts the feelings of threat and discomfort by removing the random element from the crime. Mental equations like: "if the victim wasn't hitch-hiking then she would not have been victimized" allow the reader to partially justify the crime and enable emotional closure[13].

The other effect of secondary examples is that they enable the presentation of solutions to this problem. The responsibility for the victimization is located in specific characteristics of the victim, and appropriate solutions involve changing these characteristics. In primary examples, the lack of victim-blaming effectively defuses micro-level problem solving activities.

The most apparent example of the recommendations flowing from the secondary examples is the hitch-hiking ban proposed in 1981[14]. When it was revealed that all of Olson's female victims were either hitch-hiking or waiting for a bus when they disappeared (Province, August 30, 1981: A1), a law banning this activity would be in the best interests of the children (Province, September 3, 1981: A5). Proposals like this one had the effect

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[13] There were other forms of victim-blaming perspectives advocated in the newspaper coverage of missing children cases. Calls for the re imposition of youth sex taboos (Province, August 14, 1989: 13), police crackdowns on teen parties ("Inquest urges raids on teen parties" (Sun, October 16, 1981: A3)), curfews and other responses reflect more of an attempt to reassert societal control over young people than viable responses to the missing children social problem, due to the location of possible solutions in the activities of young people.

[14] While I have discussed this issue extensively in Chapters Two and Three, these examples clearly show the transition from example generation to recommendation depiction.

of making scapegoats of children who "really should have known better". Such protective measures may have justified increased parental and societal control over teenagers and children (Best, 1990: 182).

Through reference to the consensus example, the grounds of the argument may be modified to allow new arguments to fall within the range of the original issue (domain expansion). These claims attempt to offer a broader domain statement for the chosen issue by implying that the new issue is really another form of an established issue (Best, 1990: 66). The analytic moves that brought attention to parental abductions and runaways are examples of this form of argument.

Parental Abductions

An example of modification of the grounds of the argument concerns the coverage devoted to parental abductions. The warrants and conclusions that were established through the coverage of stranger abductions were applied to cases of parental abductions. The established warrants enabled the transition from the pathological stranger to the pathological parent in newspaper coverage. The basic arguments provided in the newspaper stories were substantially the same; the only significant difference was the relationship between the offender and the victim.

Runaways

Another case of domain expansion is the coverage devoted to runaways in the print media. In the depiction of runaways, the use of these established warrants is even more apparent. Through reference to the associated evils (prostitution, pornography, drug abuse, and other crimes) that await these innocent children on the streets, the conception of the child as being endangered is reinforced.

Publicized stories of runaways who lead difficult lives or die violent deaths serve to reinforce both the implicit warrants and the proposed conclusions in these newspaper

articles. The presentation of the stories in this manner also has the effect of legitimizing proposed solutions to these problems by developing more restrictive rules regarding children.

The Role of Claims in the Construction of the Missing Children Social Problem

The claims, or recommendations on how to solve the given social problem, are the next logical step in the construction of social problems arguments. Claims-making groups can develop public support for their proposed conclusions by providing secondary examples that reinforce their positions. For example, the argument for a proposed hitchhiking ban attached secondary examples, including the "Highway Murders" (Province, August 30, 1981: A1), to the public concern generated by the disappearance of Simon Partington.

While Partington may not have been hitchhiking, the public outrage that his abduction generated provided a context in which a solution to the missing children problem could be presented. The primary examples attract the initial public attention, the secondary examples generate "crime waves" or times of increased public awareness of a given issue, and the claims provide a solution to the **depicted** social problem. This relationship is summarized in the following diagram:

Primary Example---Secondary Examples----- therefore: Claims.

The primary and secondary examples establish the severity of the missing children social problem. The following subsections examine some implications of the recommendations presented by claims-makers in the newspaper coverage of this issue.

Resistances and the Subsequent Evolution of the Arguments Concerning the Missing Children Social Problem

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the early arguments concerning this issue established its severity and legitimated the proposed warrants. These early arguments were largely based on the depictions of the predatory offender. However, there were simply not enough incidents of stranger abductions to sustain the infrastructure of an entire social problem.

This dearth of available incidents could have effectively destroyed the legitimacy of this issue were it not for the warrants established through the newspaper coverage of stranger abduction cases. The newspaper coverage of sensationalistic stranger abduction cases (like those linked to Clifford Olson) legitimated the use of the warrants that were implicitly contained in these stories. Once these warrants were accepted by the public, the transition from warrant-establishing arguments to warrant-using arguments and domain-expansion arguments became possible.

This transition enabled the subsequent newspaper stories to be developed in ways that conformed to both the implicit warrants and the evidence that necessitated this modification of the existing data. The equivalent of this activity, in terms of scientific evolution, would be to modify scientific rules to adhere to both the existing axioms and the incidents that are exceptions to these rules.

In the newspaper coverage of the missing children social problem, there were three notable modifications to the existing patterns of depiction of this issue. These were: (1) the development of a method of depicting parental abductions that conformed to the existing style of presenting stranger abductions; (2) the presentation of runaway stories utilizing the warrants established in child abduction stories; and, (3) the continued usage of existing methods of depicting stranger abduction cases, but only in cases where the child was officially recognized as being the victim of a stranger abduction.

The stranger abduction cases can be seen as an attempt to sustain the legitimacy of the missing children social problem, and the warrants that were contained within these

examples. Recurring coverage of stranger abductions has kept the severity of the missing children social problem fresh as a newspaper article topic. On the other hand, the newspaper coverage of runaways and parental abductions represented "domain expansion" arguments (Best, 1990: 66). These stories draw on the warrants and presentation developed in the stranger abduction cases and relate these incidents to the original incidents that defined the missing children social problem.

The coverage devoted to these secondary issues gains a great deal of its rhetorical effect in the early stages through reference to the primary argument. Through comparison to stranger abductions, the runaway and parental abduction issues gain currency as social problems worthy of public concern. The processes by which runaway and parental abduction stories rise in significance will be revealed below.

(1) Establishing the Legitimacy Of Parental Abduction Cases

The promulgation and perpetuation of parental abductions as a social problem were due, to a large degree, to the ability of claims-making groups to link this social problem to that of stranger abductions. The mere expression "parental abduction" conveys the orientation statements that the child is endangered and that the parent is behaving in an irrational and illegal manner. The successful legitimization of the parental abduction social problem is due primarily to the following factors: (i) comparison to stranger abduction cases; (ii) statistical claims; and (iii) legitimization of the problem by "experts" and official agencies.

(i) Comparison to Stranger Abduction Cases

The success of parental abductions in becoming a serious social problem is largely due to the success of claims-making groups in comparing this form of missing children cases to stranger abductions. The warrants that were established in the depiction of

stranger abduction cases serve as the bridge between these two social problems. The standard for newspaper coverage of parental abductions is shown in this diagram:

Child is Missing (P.A.)--Since (W1-W6)[15]- Therefore the Child is Endangered

In stranger and parental abduction stories, the warrants and the conclusions are essentially the same. The only difference is that the boundaries of the domain statements have been modified to include parental abductions as a specialized threat to children[16]. The form of presentation of parental abductions has as much to do with the successful definition of parental abductions as a serious social problem as does the evidence presented in support of these claims.

Through the presentation of a similar social problem in the same terms (consistency of themes in newspaper coverage of both issues), and through continuous reference to the social problem-defining incident (both implicit and explicit), the audience develops an orientation to the new problem. In the early coverage of parental abductions, there was explicit reference to the theme of a vengeful parent who was using the child as a pawn to inflict emotional suffering on the child's rightful parent. This pathologizing of the offender was a key element in the depiction of the stranger abduction social problem[17].

The warrants established in stranger abductions play a vital role in the construction of the parental abduction social problem. The depiction of the child as the innocent victim of a pathological parent (Province, February 16, 1986: 55) provides the reader with an emotional context for understanding the events. The public conception of parental abductions becomes little more than a modification of the model begun in the depiction of

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[15] The main importance of this diagram is that the six warrants developed in the depiction of stranger abduction cases provide the framework for the depiction of parental abductions.

[16] The construction of the parental abduction social problem focused on the emotional suffering inflicted on both the child and the parent by the abductor. There were no direct references to the physical endangerment of the child.

[17] This theme was developed in Chapters Two and Three.

stranger abductions. The warrants define the problem and provide the context for the readership's reaction to the story.

The disappearance of Joanna Pedersen, who was abducted in 1983 by someone who apparently knew the family[18], serves as a transition between stranger abduction cases and parental abduction cases. She served as the consensus- establishing case for a missing children crime wave that carried over into 1984, when the first coverage of Child Find B.C. and the parental abduction social problem emerged (Sun, August 30, 1984: A18).

The theme established in the Pedersen case - namely, that the offender knew the child - could be seen as being both a new angle that made this story more interesting to the public, and a situation that could easily be appealed to in the construction of the parental abduction. In effect this case bridged the gap between the atrocities committed by Olson and the development of a new conceptual variant of missing children cases. This unique story angle established Joanna Pedersen as the consensus-establishing case for the missing crime wave that occurred in 1983-4, and provided a source of new story lines that were eventually used in the coverage of parental abduction cases.

(ii) Statistical Claims

The stranger abduction social problem in British Columbia has been hampered by a lack of incidents through which crime waves could be generated. The rise of parental abductions as a serious social problem can be seen as part of the response of newspapers to compensate for these limitations. There appears to be empirical confirmation for the serious nature of the parental abduction problem (Child Find B.C. estimated that there were 60 000 cases of parental abductions (Sun, August 30, 1984: A18)). The sheer magnitude of this issue, especially when combined with assertions that all children of divorced parents may be at risk (Province, February 16, 1986: 55), and with the

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[18] The newspaper coverage of this case was discussed in Chapter 2.

typification of parental abduction through the use of atrocity tales[19], facilitate the argument that parental abductions are a serious problem.

(iii) Reference to Experts and Official Agencies

The legitimization of the parental abduction social problem is also due to the efforts of newspapers and "experts" to convey the serious nature of this social problem. In this form of argument justification, a person who is recognized as an authority in one area (i.e. Child Find and parental abductions) makes a claim that another area is a serious social problem (runaways).

In these claims, the only other evidence provided in support of these conclusions was that provided by these experts. More often than not, this evidence is taken at face value and not questioned by either the readers or the newspapers that present these expert opinions. Although stranger abductions and parental abductions are similar, there are still differences that separate these two forms of missing children cases and it would be a mistake to assume that they are essentially the same problem.

For parental abductions, Child Find B.C. is seen as effectively "owning" parental abductions[20]. Thus through reference to the larger authority of Child Find International, the parental abduction problem in British Columbia is legitimated. The authority of Child Find B.C. to make assertions about this issue went largely without question as did their claims (Best, 1990: 12; Gusfield, 1981: 10). By declaring themselves to have been founded to deal with the issue (Sun, August 18, 1984: A18), Child Find B.C. was awarded ownership of this social problem without making any efforts to really understand the mechanisms and motivations underlying this issue.

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[19] See Footnote 28, Chapter 2.

[20] "Abduction of girl case for Childfind" (Sun, August 30, 1984: A18).

(2) The Development of the Newspaper Depiction of Runaways

The attention paid to the runaway social problem reflected more of a renewed interest in an established concern than the generation of a new issue. By juxtaposing the statistic that "85 per cent of runaways are exploited by either prostitution or pornography" (Province, May 26, 1986: 28) with the assertion that runaways are a "low priority" for police (Province, May 26, 1986: 28), public concern for children was generated. The newspaper presentation of the runaway social problem is largely based on the warrants established through coverage of stranger abduction cases.

The image of the endangered child is the prime rhetorical element of the runaway social problem. By presenting the public with the image of good kids subjected to the perversion, drug use and other dangers of life on the streets, public support was mobilized for efforts to "save" these children.

(3) The Transition From "Missing Child" to "Abducted Child"

The final development in the evolution of the missing children social problem was the transition in focus from missing to abducted children. The prime example of this change in newspaper coverage is the Michael Dunahee story line. By 1991, identification of someone as a "missing child" was no longer sufficient to generate public concern. Through counterclaims presented about missing children claims-making activities the assumption of "missing means endangered" was refuted.

The Dunahee case was presented as a child abduction. The importance of this designation is that specific reference was made to stranger abductions instead of the entire range of missing children social problems. This rhetorical move established the context for the child being endangered by reasserting the warrants originally established in newspaper coverage of the Olson abductions (Best, 1990: 184). Additional references to attempted child abductions in the area over the past year reinforced the threat that Dunahee's abductor posed to children.

The designation of the Dunahee case as an abduction also precluded domain expansion to other missing children issues. Instead of revitalizing the entire range of missing children social problems, the Dunahee abduction was, in effect, a self contained story line that reaffirmed the public concern about the serious consequences of stranger abductions. Instead of acting as a conceptual peg on which other examples could be attached, Michael Dunahee represents the latest installment of the missing child myth. As a myth, the Dunahee case is a self contained structure that suggests specific responses by the public.

Counterclaims and Their Effect On the Evolution Of the Missing Children Social Problem

Much of the previous discussion in this chapter has been devoted to the mechanics of crime wave construction in the newspaper depiction of missing children cases in the two British Columbian newspapers. In terms of counterclaims concerning how the missing children social problem was depicted in British Columbian newspapers, there were four main types presented: (1) a low number of stranger abduction cases and the inability to establish links to other investigations; (2) fund raising scandals; (3) concern about gimmicks sold to protect children; and finally, (4) competition with other issues in the social problems marketplace. The effects of these counterclaims on the missing children social problem will be examined below.

(1) Low Number of Stranger Abductions and the Effect of Linking of Missing Children Cases

The argument that there is a very low number of stranger abductions was not as damaging to the missing children social problem in British Columbia as it was in the United States (c.f. Best, 1988). Almost from the onset of the missing children crime wave in 1981, there was evidence stating that stranger abductions are very rare (Sun, August 6, 1981: A18). This lack of incidents through which crime waves could be constructed meant

that the missing children social problem could not be sustained by stranger abductions alone.

This low number of stranger abductions played a significant role in the failure of the proposed milk carton campaign. In the decision not to print pictures of missing children on milk cartons, National Dairy Council President Kempton Matte cited evidence that "9 out of 10 missing children are not believed to be in any danger" (Province, February 14, 1985: 12). The low number of stranger abductions also played a role in the "media blitz debate"[21].

Missing children cases that are either isolated occurrences or cannot be linked to other investigations are often accorded low intensity media representation. The disappearance of children in Kamloops[22] or in small towns on Vancouver Island[23] represents the effect of proximity in determining story selection. These stories were often relegated to the middle sections of the paper where province-wide issues were addressed. In both papers, high priority coverage of missing children cases was limited to local incidents as shown in Figure 4:2.

The main trend in this histogram is the effect that proximity has in determining newspaper coverage. Even though three of the four consensus-establishing cases were

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[21] In this incident, the adoptive mother of two girls demanded that the police immediately go to the media with news of the disappearance ("Mom begged cops to seek media aid" (Province, May 13, 1987: 3)). Their response was that there was a large number of false alarms that needlessly tie up police time and resources ("That children are abducted by faceless strangers is something that happens less than is imagined" (R.C.M.P. Constable Dennis Crewe quoted in the Province, May 15, 1987: 21)).

[22] In particular, Rachel Etienne in 1984: "Parents mum on baby" (Province, November 30, 1984: 5), "Baby's disappearance investigated by police" (Sun, November 30, 1984: A18) and Stacie Harker in 1987: "Child Hunt Fails: Missing Three Year Old Feared Murder Victim" (Province, March 17, 1987: 1).

[23] Lynn Hillier in 1986: "Missing tot found dead on Island" (Sun, August 20, 1986: A1).

Figure 4:2

Breakdown by Location of Disappearance
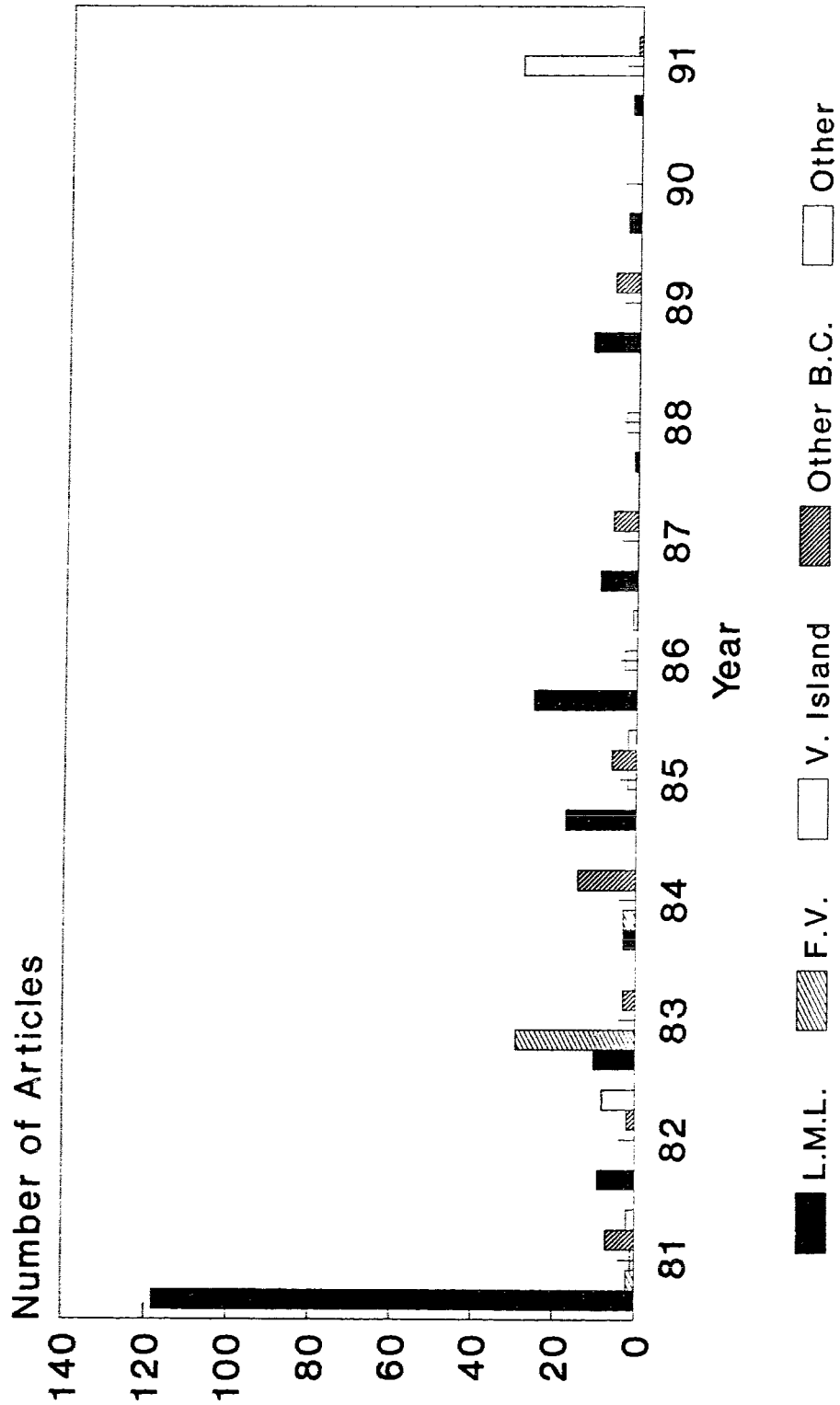
outside the Greater Vancouver area (Dunahee, Scalf, and Pedersen), local cases were still the focus of 61.5% of the newspaper articles. The higher proportion of secondary examples in the Vancouver area also demonstrates that the Sun and Province were more inclined to cover local cases than deal with other parts of the province[24].

Exceptions to this coverage were stories whose unique elements made the specific incident a novel occurrence. The most apparent example was that of Tom Marsden in 1984. What made this story line novel was that instead of character construction, the emphasis in the newspaper stories was on the intensive search conducted by his family and friends[25]. However, this story was accorded less visibility than cases like Joanna Pedersen and Teri-Lynn Scalf which occurred during the previous year and gained rhetorical effect through a combined investigation.

(2) Fund Raising Scandals

This counterclaim proved to be especially damaging to the legitimacy of Child Find B.C.. In 1986, this organization used professional canvassers to raise funds. Seventy-five per cent of the donations collected went to the canvassers (Province, March 20, 1986:4). Although Child Find B.C. fired them, considerable damage was done to the reputation of this organization as people felt that they had been cheated (Province, March 20, 1986: 4).

This scandal shifted public attention from the claims to focus instead on the groups making these assertions. The credibility of these groups came into question, as allegations ranging from misappropriation of funds to sexual improprieties saw missing children claims-making groups becoming stories instead of being quoted for them.

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[24] To be more specific, 10% of the articles dealt with missing Fraser Valley children, 11% featured Vancouver Island youths, 13.5% involved those from the rest of B.C., and the remaining 4% did not originate in the province.

[25] "Friends continue search for lost youth" (Sun, July 24, 1984: A3); "New Strategy Pondered in Search for Lost Youth" (Sun, July 24, 1984: A3); "Mother ends bush search for teenager" (Province, July 30, 1984: 5).

(3) Concern About Gimmicks Sold To Protect Children

This counterclaim centered on the argument put forth by Gary Rosenfeldt of Victims of Violence that gadgets, such as the Kid Finders identification package[26], are costly gimmicks that do not protect children[27]. The important issue here is not the effectiveness of these gadgets but the lack of consensus among missing children claims-making groups. In the early stages of claims-making activity, there is often a large degree of co-operation between interest groups. This debate shows the lack of agreement about the missing children social problem, which may well translate into the public perception that this issue is no longer a serious social problem (Best, 1990: 185).

(4) Competition With Other Issues on the Social Problems Marketplace

With the exceptions of the Pedersen/Scalf investigations in 1983-1984, the coverage of the Marsden search in 1986, and the Michael Dunahee abduction in 1991, missing children cases have steadily decreased in visibility since 1981. A possible explanation for this trend is the limited newspaper space available for printing stories on social problems. As an established social problem, missing children cases lost much of their novelty after the conviction of Clifford Olson. Once this happens to a social problem, it becomes increasingly difficult to compete with newer problems for newspaper space and public attention (Downs, 1972:42).

The loss of novelty was especially damaging to the missing children social problem because of the low number of stranger abductions[28]. While the abductions linked to Olson defined this issue in the early 1980's, the scarcity of subsequent incidents of this type

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[26] "Kid Finders designs tags to aid in family reunions" (Sun, May 1. 1986: B2).

[27] "Gimmicks, gadgets don't protect kids" (Province, January 22, 1988: 35).

[28] The differences between stranger and parental abduction argument construction was discussed in Chapter Three.

defused attempts to generate sustained public concern. In fact, the children who have received the most newspaper coverage (Simon Partington, Joanna Pedersen, Teri-Lynn Scalf, and Michael Dunahee) were all depicted as being abducted rather than merely missing.

The emergence of other social problems such as A.I.D.S. and youth gangs contained elements of novelty and risk to the public that missing children cases could not sustain (Best, 1990: 172)[29]. As a problem in decline, this issue was marked as much by counterclaims about the extent of the problem as by the emergence of new claims. In particular, the reaction of the police in the "Media Blitz Debate" negated claims-making activity by pointing out the low number of substantiated abductions and the large number of false alarms.

Summary

This analysis of the developments in the newspaper coverage devoted to the missing children social problem has hopefully shed some light on the relationship between the press, claims-making groups and prevailing social conditions. By conceiving of social problems construction as an ongoing process of negotiation between these groups, analysis is shifted from objective definitions to subjective interpretation of the given phenomena. While there appears to be some consistency in the arguments presented by different claims-making groups (most notably in the warrants), the missing children social problem is also defined by the adaptations that this perspective underwent as a social problem of the 1980's. As for the future of this issue, it really is anyone's guess. A

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[29] The declining visibility of the missing children social problem may also be tied to the "carrying capacity" of the newspapers (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 70). Since all potential social problems cannot be accommodated by the newspapers, some measure of priority must be assigned by the editors. In other words, the missing children social problem was probably eclipsed by other issues by the late 1980's and declined in coverage.

historical understanding of this problem does not necessarily permit prediction about what will occur under a different set of social conditions.

Conclusion
From Novelty to Where? The Missing Child Re-Assessed

In the previous chapters, the trends, themes, and depictive strategies used by the newspapers in the presentation of the missing children social problem have been discussed. Perhaps the key feature of this issue was the importance of the theme of the endangered child in determining the amount of media coverage. All of the four cases receiving the most coverage included a characterization of the child as a blameless victim and the depiction of an obvious threat to children.

In 1981, this threat was Clifford Olson. Since that time, there hasn't been an offender who has captured the media's attention in the same way. More than an offender, Clifford Olson has become a symbol of the atrocities that one human being can inflict on another. In the years following his conviction, other cases have been compared to the events of the summer of 1981 in order to gauge the severity of the prevailing threat.

More often than not, the initial concern dissipated as the children turned out to be runaways, or as some degree of responsibility for the abduction was assigned to the victim thereby mitigating the threat to other children. Of the missing children cases since 1981, the Pedersen/Scalf abductions in 1983 and the disappearance of Michael Dunahee in 1991 came closest to duplicating the public concern generated by the Fraser Valley Child Killer.

Other cases either lacked the apparent threat of an offender who would strike again, or revealed attributes of the victim which precluded emotional intimacy in the reader. The reader also needs to feel a degree of emotional attachment to the story in order to be affected[1]. In other words, without the combination of an obvious threat and emotional attachment to the depicted victim, it is highly unlikely that a specific missing child will generate a great deal of media coverage.

In the case of secondary examples, there often were attempted linkages to the investigation of primary examples (such as the incorporation of other missing children into

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[1] As I have argued earlier, there appears to be a need to establish a degree of socio-cultural familiarity in order to enable vicarious participation.

the initial coverage of the Simon Partington disappearance). The other main technique used to generate public concern was to focus on the emotional toll extracted by the disappearance on the family and the community. In particular, the coverage devoted to Tom Marsden and Casey Bohun emphasized this component of missing children stories.

Aside from the lack of examples to fit the frame of depicting missing children cases established in the Simon Partington case, another reason for the decline of this issue in the late 1980's was a loss of novelty. In its early stages, a social problem generates a great deal of interest simply because it is new. As the Olson abductions became the subject of a great deal of media coverage, the missing children social problem was on the rise in the United States. Through links to child sexual abuse, this issue presented a new threat to children. This concern was reflected in the high number of false alarms and demands for government action on this social problem.

As the number of false alarms continued to add up, and as it became obvious that there wasn't a sexual predator lurking behind every tree, this issue gradually began to lose steam. The inability of the parental abduction social problem to duplicate the feelings of threat that stranger abduction cases generate presented another challenge to the credibility of this social problem. Perhaps the final internal blow to the missing children issue was the absence of a legitimate claims-making voice after the Child Find B.C. fund raising scandal in 1986. The competition between claims-making groups only highlighted the political nature of this issue at the expense of public concern.

This social problem was also affected by the rise of other issues such as A.I.D.S. and youth gangs, which had elements of novelty and threat that missing children cases could no longer generate. As these issues grew more prominent toward the end of the 1980's, missing children received less and less coverage. By the time of the Michael Dunahee abduction, the mere designation of missing child was no longer sufficient to generate concern. But from the onset of the newspaper coverage, Dunahee was presented as an abducted child. This new designation carried with it the feelings of threat originally

developed in 1981, while avoiding the false alarms and infighting that has characterized this issue since then.

Lately, there has been another transition in the newspaper depiction of missing children cases. This most recent evolution has been the emergence of attempted abductions as a subject of media coverage. While the number of actual abductions is still regarded as being low, these attempts can still generate concern through references to either Olson or Dunahee. In other words, there is a shift from depicting the actual missing children cases to focus instead on the possibility of abductions.

Perhaps the main benefit of this transition is that these suspected abductions do not need to be further justified. While missing children may turn out to be either lost or runaways, the depiction of an attempted abduction carries with it an obvious threat of further endangerment to other children. Whether evolution marks the re-emergence of the missing children social problem, or is simply a continuation of the public concern generated by Michael Dunahee, remains to be seen.

While the processes used to depict a given issue certainly make a difference in how a given issue will be regarded by the public, it would be wrong to assume that by isolating the themes, frames, and depictive strategies used in the presentation of the missing children social problem we can gauge what the public is feeling. While such an assumption may enable the transition from making assertions about a given issue to grounding our arguments in fact, there simply is no logical basis by which we can justify our conclusions. Essentially what researchers in this position are doing is assuming that the audience has same interpretation of the material as the researcher and is affected in a similar fashion.

Instead of making this assumption, the purpose of this thesis has been to provide an overview of the newspaper articles themselves. The main difference between this approach and other forms of content analysis is one of universality. I am not assuming that every person who reads these articles will react in the same way that I have. The reason

for this theoretical structure is simply to provide readers with an examination of the missing children social problem, and in the end to allow them to make up their own minds.

Likewise the choice of Toulminian analysis reflects a high degree of fit with the relativistic perspective of this thesis. While the concept of evolution in the social sciences has been the subject of considerable criticism, the combination of this concept with ethnography has, hopefully, provided some interesting insights into content analysis. The important distinction here is that evolution reflects an interplay between the content of the newspaper articles and the assumptions of the researcher rather than attempting to reveal the essential processes of the given subject.

As my final comment, I would just like to reassert the importance of researcher perspective in the generation of academic work. On a very esoteric level, this thesis can be seen as representing a series of claims about claims-making activities. The interplay between the theoretical perspectives and interpretive strategies of the author is perhaps of more significance to the final outcome of the research than is the data set. In this case, the depiction of the missing children problem by British Columbian newspapers has provided an opportunity both to examine the mechanics of social problem depiction and to address the interplay between theory, method, and research outcomes.

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Paper: (1) Sun; (2) Province
Year: 1981-1991
Month: 1-12
Day: 1-31
Page: (Section; Page)

Topic: (Main topic of story)
(1) Primary Example: Stories that deal with the character development of; search for; or reaction to the disappearance of Simon Partington, Joanna Pedersen, Teri Lynn Scalf, or Michael Dunahee.
(2) Secondary Example: Stories that deal with any other missing child excluding police investigations and stories about claims-making groups.
(3) Police: Stories that deal with official investigations of missing children cases; profiles of officers or resources involved in these operations; or claims made by police officers or other official agencies about the missing children social problem.
(4) Claims-making Groups: Stories that deal primarily with claims-making groups including: profiles of groups; specific claims identified with these organizations; stories that deal specifically with these groups (such as the fund raising scandal that was linked to Child Find B.C.).

Sub topic: (used to develop primary theme)
(1) Missing Child: Character development of child or coverage of initial search.
(2) Family: Reaction of family and appeals for public assistance.
(3) Police: Coverage of investigations and official statements.
(4) Suspect: Stories that deal specifically with an identified suspect (Clifford Olson) or with the character development of someone who may be linked to a current missing child investigation (such as the Blindfold Paper Bag rapist in 1981, 1981).
(5) Claims-making Groups: Same as above.

Sources Quoted: (one source per article, determined by the amount of coverage)
(1) Family and Acquaintances
(2) Police and other officials
(3) Claims-making groups
(4) Public reaction

Specific Missing Child:
(1) identified (see list for figure 2:4);
(2) linking of cases in a police investigation;
(3) no child identified as focus of story (see articles on Parental Abductions or Runaways).

Location: (Where the child was when he/she was abducted or disappeared. This designation addresses the coverage of children from other provinces who disappeared in British Columbia such as Tamara Blowers and Daryn Johnsrude.)
(1) Lower Mainland
(2) Fraser Valley
(3) Vancouver Island
(4) The Rest of British Columbia
(5) Other

Nature of Disappearance:
(1) Assumption of Criminal (Stranger) Abduction/Interference
(2) Parental Abduction
(3) Runaway
(4) Lost
(5) Other
(6) Reason not given

Theme: (Recurring trends in the story development)
(1) Offender Blaming: The search for, identification, or other forms of reference to either a specific person or individuals wanted for questioning.
(2) Victim Blaming: Attribution of responsibility based on an action or trait of a specific missing child.
(3) Child Depiction: The character development of specific victims primarily through stories dealing with family or community reaction.
(4) Official Reaction: Includes: statements about specific cases and investigations by either police or government officials; responses to public concern about this social problem; reaction to claims about the nature and scope of this issue; and finally, media coverage of initiatives to deal with this problem.
(5) Searches: These articles deal with the searched for children not covered by police investigations (primarily children assumed to be runaways).
(6) Claims-makers: as above.

Claims-making Group Topics: (Articles dealing specifically with Claims-making Groups)
(1) Stranger abductions: Calls for more police resources in dealing with stranger abduction cases (specifically in 1981).
(2) Parental Abductions: Demands for public recognition, police support, and stricter legislation dealing with the parental abduction social problem.
(3) Child Identification: Stories dealing with either the fingerprinting of children or the sale of child identification kits.
(4) Child Protection: Claims that are concerned primarily with legislation that will either reduce the risk of child abduction (stricter sentences for child sex offenders) or improve the chances of their safe recovery (National Missing Children Registry).
(5) Runaways: Stories that focus on the need for government action on the runaway issue.