

**Perilous Parents and Sinister Strangers:
Canadian Mainstream Media Portrayals of Child Abduction**

by

Carleigh Smith

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ABSTRACT

PERILOUS PARENTS AND SINISTER STRANGERS: CANADIAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF CHILD ABDUCTION

Carleigh Smith
University of Guelph, 2019

Advisor:
Dr. Mavis Morton

Child abduction continues to be a focus of news media studies, particularly because it involves one of the world's most vulnerable groups, children. This attention has led to a moral panic and the development of child abduction as a social problem. Using a thematic content analysis of local and mainstream Canadian newspapers, this study employs moral panic and moral regulation theories to examine the way child abduction is represented by the mainstream media between 1980-2017. The media's representation of child abduction reflects a neoliberal agenda by reifying the nuclear family, increasing society's fear of the stranger, and holding parents responsible for child safety. Such messages can help shape the way the public and the state understand child abduction but also can influence policy and resource decisions related to family law, parenting, and child safety.

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2 Chapter Two: Introduction

Within the North American context, children are highly valued and, when we hear of children who have been taken unlawfully, either by strangers or those they know, these acts generate considerable fear and worry in citizens. This intense focus on the well-being of children has sparked an interest in researchers to study child abductions (Best 1988; Gentry 1988; Finkelhor, Hotaling, and Sedlack 1991; Shutt, Miller, Schreck, and Brown 2004; Griffin and Miller 2008; Taylor, Boisvert, Sims, and Garver 2013; Knoska 2002; Girdner 1993; Walsh, Krienart, and Comens 2016). A specific research interest among these scholars is how the issue came to prominence and spread via mainstream media (Fritz and Altheide 1987; Best 1987; Gentry 1988; Best 1988; Best 1990; Zgoba 2004; Critcher 2008; Moscovitz and Duvall 2011). Many of the studies came before the 2000s (specifically, 1987, 1988 and 1990) and, thus, there is a lack of current research on media representations of child abduction.

To address the current gap in the existing literature, this study provides an investigation as to how the media portrays child abduction in Canada. Using Canada as the geographical focus is essential particularly because much of the existing literature pertains only to the United States and as a result, how the media portrays the issue in Canada is understudied. The research questions that helped guide my study are as follows:

1. How does the Canadian news media represent child abductions today? Has the media representation of child abductions changed since the 1980s and 1990s and, if so, how and why?
 - a. Does the media focus more on stranger abductions or does it give equal attention to child abductions of both types, stranger and parental/familial?
 - b. Does the media overemphasize the danger children are in now?
2. What impact might these media representations of child abduction have on supports and resources for families in these types of situations?
3. How has the reporting of child abductions changed between 1980 and 2017 with regards to messaging about parenting practices?

3 Chapter Three: Literature Review

This chapter will synthesize the theories and prevalent findings within the existing literature of media representations of child abduction. This study draws upon several interrelated bodies of literature: 1. the media's role in the social construction of child abduction as a social problem and subsequent moral panic, 2. media studies literature, and 3. changing parenting philosophies and practices in the context of child abduction fears.

3.1 The Media's Role in the Social Construction of Child Abduction as a Social Problem

A synthesis of the existing research on how the child abduction issue was socially constructed as a social problem in the United States spans from 1980 to 2017. The 1980s serve as the starting point for this research as scholars in this field have identified these years as the true start of the "abducted-children movement" (Best 1987; Fritz and Altheide 1987; Gentry 1988). Some of the earliest theorists to discuss child abduction include Best (1987), Fritz and Altheide (1987), and Gentry (1988), and have identified that the child abduction issue was socially constructed as a social problem. Later theorists, who also focused on the social construction of the child abduction issue include, Zgoba (2004), Critcher (2008) and Moscovitz and Duvall (2011), and come from fields including public interest, criminal justice, and child and media studies. Therefore, social constructionism is the guiding lens used by researchers in this field to explain media representations and portrayals of child abduction (Fritz and Altheide 1987; Best 1987; Gentry 1988; Best 1988; Best 1993; Zgoba 2004; Critcher 2008; Moscovitz and Duvall 2011).

Within the social constructionist framework, certain deviant behaviours become problematic because the most powerful people deem them to be problematic (Brym 2001). This in turn, causes these behaviours to be constructed as social problems, and typically, results in new crimes being defined based on these deviant behaviours (Brym 2001). The key scholars in this field have all used the child abduction issue as an example (or case study) to explain Spector and Kitsuse's (1977) concept of the social construction of social problems. Social problems are defined as "activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with

respect to some putative conditions” (Spector and Kitsuse 1977, 75). Spector and Kitsuse (1977) identify that a social problem occurs when specific individuals (often those in power) identify certain activities, behaviours, persons, or conditions as being unfavourable to mainstream society (Kitsuse and Spector 1975, 585). These individuals (known as claims-makers) identify the specific individuals and behaviours associated with these social problems and ultimately, work toward relieving, fixing, or eliminating these problems (Kitsuse and Spector 1975, 593). Claims-making occurs through a three-step process: identifying the constituencies associated with the problem, showing how these constituencies will benefit from the elimination of the social problem, and outlining the early stages of the problem (Best 1987, 101). In the end, the claims-maker’s goal is to work towards creating a change in social policy that will help to eliminate the threat of this social problem to the general society, but more specifically, help to reduce the threat to their interests (Best 1987, 101).

Best (1987) identifies that the term “missing children” was coined in the year 1981, as it was during this time that American citizens were consistently exposed to child abduction cases and discussions of threats about the severity of child abduction. The environment that existed at this time can explain the successful social construction of the child abduction as a social problem (Best 1987; Fritz and Altheide 1987; Gentry 1988). Scholars (including McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Rohloff and Wright 2010) argue that in the past, social problems became a key source of concern due to unstable social and political contexts. The activities and actors involved in these social problems became the centre of attention for specific interest groups (typically those in power), and it became a goal to eliminate these activities and actors so as to eliminate the social problem (Rohloff and Wright 2010). Individuals including interest groups, pressure groups, lobbies, and campaigning experts believed that there needed to be a “moral regeneration” of society and that they needed to intervene (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). This resulted in increased ‘law and order’ ideologies, as well as effective punishments for individuals who participated in undesirable behaviours (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). With regards to the child abduction context, the environment that these scholars were talking about involved greater exposure to child abduction cases, increased attention given to two specific abduction cases (Etan Patz and Adam Walsh), the development of missing children organizations such as

ChildFind, the involvement of politicians, and finally, the media's extensive coverage of child abduction cases and details about the likelihood of abductions to occur (Best 1987; Fritz and Altheide 1987; Gentry 1988).

Fritz and Altheide (1987) and Gentry (1988) identify that media was one of the most influential claims-makers in the construction of the child abduction issue. Fritz and Altheide (1987) use Blumer's (1971) social constructionism to explain how the media aided in successfully constructing child abduction as a social problem, whereas Gentry (1988) uses Spector and Kitsuse's (1987) theory. These scholars agree that the media constructed the child abduction issue as a social problem in the following ways: by increasing the number of missing children stories the media reported upon (without verifying the accuracy of the stories); by referring to reports and statistics as given to them by missing children organizations; and finally, by transitioning the child abduction issue from "public to private recognition" (Fritz and Altheide 1987, 482; Gentry 1987, 419). Fritz and Altheide (1987) explain the "public to private recognition" transition in the following way:

Mass media imagery of missing children thereby cut across private and public order, as **individual members of a mass TV audience encountered similar images in familiar interaction settings**, at the grocery store, as well as examining daily mail. **The nature and scope of this imagery reinforced a crisis definition of the problem**, and interactively **joined public and private discourse by labeling all varieties of absent children as "missing," and by implication, abducted** (482) (*my emphasis added*).

In addition, Fritz and Altheide (1987) and Gentry (1988) argue that the media turned the child abduction issue into a social problem by focusing on a specific perpetrator, "the stranger." As the child abduction craze developed, people began placing blame on the media for inaccurately reporting the number of child abductions occurring, but also for inaccurately reporting stranger abductions as the most common type of abduction. It was typical of the media to suggest that children were likely to be abducted by strangers, which in reality proved to be untrue (Christensen 2018). Research shows that the most common perpetrators are parents, family members, or people who the child knew previously (Best 1987; Fritz and Altheide 1987; Gentry 1988; Finkelhor, Hotaling, and Sedlak 1991; Glassner 1999; Shutt, Miller, Schreck, and

Brown 2004; Zgoba 2004; Moscovitz and Duvall 2011; Taylor, Boisvert, Sims, and Garver 2013; Shelton, Hilts, and MacKizer 2016; Walsh, Krienert, and Comens 2016). This inaccurate understanding that stranger abductions were most common was consistent amongst scholars in this field and throughout the existing literature in constructing child abductions as a social problem.

Finally, Best (1987), Fritz and Altheide (1987), and Gentry (1988) all concur that the child abduction issue was successfully constructed as a social problem by undergoing two fundamental processes. The first was making known the intense societal dissatisfaction with the current solutions in place for addressing child abduction, and the second was developing alternative responses to the issue. Specifically, because of the extent to which the media exposed audiences to stories, statistics, and information about child abduction, they began to feel that there were insufficient safety measures in place to look after children, which ultimately led to new responses and procedures being established to help handle this child abduction crisis (Best 1987; Fritz and Altheide 1987; and Gentry 1988). Some of these responses included the development of agencies dedicated to finding abducted children, as well as the creation of resources for parents dealing with child abduction. These processes reflect Glassner's (1999) findings about how emotional reactions to specific issues can often lead to the development of expensive and ineffective public policies. For example, in instances where children are involved, it has typically been 'grief-stricken families' who push for changes to legislation in the hopes that this will solve the problem.

More recent scholars including Zgoba (2004) and Griffin and Miller (2008) identify that the child abduction issue continues to be socially constructed as a social problem. These scholars argue that specific technological and legislative developments (for example the *Protect Act* of 2003 and the AMBER Alert system) are responses to the continued social problem construction of the child abduction issue. The media's impact on constructing the child abduction issue as a social problem continues to be a consistent finding amongst more recent scholars including Critcher (2008) and Moscovitz and Duvall (2011). They identify that the increased media attention on the child abduction issue still causes intense societal concern and spreads fear among citizens (especially parents) regarding the safety of their children (Critcher 2008;

Moscowitz and Duvall 2011). This social construction of the child abduction issue as a social problem also connects to the existing literature on the concept of a moral panic. Due to the intense focus on child abductions, the issue gained ‘moral panic status.’

3.2 The Media’s Role in Creating a Moral Panic

A moral panic is a term originated by Stanley Cohen (1972) and is prevalent within social constructionism theorizing. Cohen identifies that a moral panic occurs when “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (Cohen 1972 in Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, 23). Sociologists Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2004) have used Cohen’s concept of moral panic to refer to a context in which “substantial numbers of the members of society are subject to intense feelings of concern about a given threat which, a sober assessment of the evidence suggests is either nonexistent or considerably less than would be expected from the concrete harm posed by the threat” (149). Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) developed five criteria of a moral panic including, concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (1994). 1. Moral panic involves a heightened level of *concern* about the behaviour of individuals and an acknowledgement that this behaviour is a threat to the rest of society (156). 2. There is *hostility* towards the group of individuals engaging in this threatening behaviour, and these individuals become the enemy of respectable society (157). 3. There is a certain level of *consensus* among society as a whole that the threat is “real, serious and caused by the wrongdoing of these group members and their behaviour” (157). 4. The amount of concern that the society has about these individuals is “out of proportion to the nature of the threat and is considerably greater than a sober empirical evaluation could support” (158) (*disproportionality*). 5. Moral panics are characterized as *volatile*, because they emerge reasonably quickly and can subside just as quickly (158). Based on these five defining elements, the child abduction issue undoubtedly fits the criteria of a moral panic. Zgoba (2004) and Critcher (2008), two moral panic theorists, have used the child abduction issue to discuss moral panics, their defining elements, how they develop, and how they subsist. They argue that it was the media that successfully aided in turning the child abduction issue into a moral panic.

Zgoba (2004) and Critcher (2008) argue that the media successfully used highly sensationalized aspects of the child abduction issue to create moral panic status. The media used the dramatic nature of an issue involving society's most vulnerable populations, to captivate viewers and instill fear in the masses (Zgoba 2004; Critcher 2008). People began to believe that children were unsafe and at constant risk of being abducted due to the messages being provided to them by the news media. These beliefs led to intense panic and the assumption that the current society could not adequately look after its citizens. As a result, citizens turned to politicians for help, which is common within moral panics (as discussed by Hunt 1997). Moral panics can affect and change the way society conceives itself (Cohen, 2004). Scholars have noted that politicians were significant contributors in creating a widespread moral panic about the child abduction issue (Best 1988; Glassner 1999; Shutt, Miller, Schreck, and Brown 2004; Critcher 2008; Walsh, Krienart, and Comens 2016). Child abduction came to be a platform used in political elections, as a way of gaining the trust of voters. Critcher (2008) argues that moral panics "are easily exploited by politicians" (1136). It was typical for politicians in the United States to exaggerate the annual number of child abductions that were occurring and suggest that this crime was on the rise (Best 1987; Fritz and Altheide 1987; Gentry 1988; Best 1988; Walsh, Krienart, and Comens 2016). For example, in her electoral campaign, a US congresswoman labelled the child abduction a "national epidemic which had increased 468% over the past 20 years" (Shutt, Miller, Schreck, and Brown 2004, 128). As a result of these influential leaders presenting horrific incident statistics, the media used their claims and, thus, the false ideas spread to the masses, ultimately creating widespread concern and worry (e.g., panic). In the end, the extent of the child abduction issue became so great because the public was overexposed to sensationalized reporting and instances of child abductions, which were never truly substantiated (Best 1988; Glassner 1999; Shutt, Miller, Schreck, and Brown 2004; Zgoba 2004; Critcher 2008; Walsh, Krienart, and Comens 2016).

Zgoba (2004) and Critcher (2008) argue that the media created a frenzy, leading citizens to believe that all children were in danger, and that mass concern was warranted, especially about child abductions by strangers. The ability for the media to establish a frenzy over an issue is very typical within the moral panic process because intense concern and worry (the most basic facets

of a moral panic) develop in times of “social crises (also known as “normative transgression”) (423) as discussed by Hier (2016). During these times, people (who are dependent upon a strong state to provide safety and security) believe that the state’s ability to maintain order weakens, causing collective anxieties within the public. This heightened anxiety then results in a focus on how to eliminate the threat and dangers of this social crisis (Hier 2016).

3.3 “Fear” as a Prevalent Media Frame

Media framing is an act of social constructionism wherein the media creates a set of frames of reference that audiences use to interpret and discuss public events (Tuchman 1978, ix). This concept has also been referred to in communication literature as priming and agenda-setting (Kim et al. 2012). Scholars in this field (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992; Caragee and Roefs 2004; Entman 2007; Worthington 2008; Matthes 2009; Kim et al. 2012; Barnett 2016) identify that priming, framing, and agenda-setting allow the media to select certain issues and make them more salient, often by exploring the typical images, stereotypes, actions, and actors associated with the issue. The process focuses on “the ways in which news stories are organized by patterns of selection, emphasis, interpretation, and exclusion” (Caragee and Roefs 2004, 216). Because media frames typically reflect the ideas of individuals in power, the process of developing frames serves as a way of maintaining that power and maintaining the status quo (Barnett 2016). Carefully selected news frames can give “the story a ‘spin’...taking into account their organizational and modality constraints, professional judgments and certain judgments about the audience” (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992,120).

Understanding the way media framing works allows readers to see the underlying and hidden messages that may be prevalent in news reports. Entman (2007) writes that “frames typically perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgement, and remedy promotion” (164). Problem definition involves identifying the issue in question, causal analysis involves identifying what the cause of the issue was, moral judgement is developed based upon the opinions of the elites, and finally, remedy promotion involves establishing ways of fixing the issue in question (Entman 1993). The media can influence audience opinion about an issue, especially about social and political issues (Tuchman 1978; Adoni and Mane 1984;

Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992; Glassner 2004; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006; Robbers 2008; Callanan 2012). The media highlights (i.e., frames) certain features of an issue and makes those features the most prominent. An example of this, as discussed by Glassner (2004), is with regards to murder rates, wherein between the years 1990 and 1998, American murder rates dropped by 20 percent, however, the number of media stories presented about murder increased by 600 percent (Entman 2007). This shows that even if untrue, the media can present certain information to audiences and subsequently, audiences may generate their understanding of that issue based on this information. This process of shaping and altering audience interpretations is known as priming. Priming is defined as when the media “introduces or raises the salience/importance of certain ideas which encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way” (Entman 2007,164).

Frames are dependent upon the ideas of the media but are also reliant on the interpretations of the audience. For example, Kosicki and McLeod (1990) identify three ways in which audiences process the frames provided by the media:

Active processing refers to an individual seeking out additional sources based on the assumption that mass-mediated information in general is incomplete, slanted, or in other ways coloured by the intentions of the communicator. Reflective integrators ponder or think about information they gather from mass media, or they talk to others about what they have learned from mass media to understand fully what they have learned. Finally, selective scanners use mass media only to seek information relevant to them. They skim over or ignore irrelevant or uninteresting content (in Neuman et al. 1992, 120).

As a result of these three types of processing, audiences make their opinions about media stories based on a “version of reality built from personal experience, interaction with peers, and interpreted selections from the mass media” (Neuman et al. 1992, 120).

The process of identifying which frames are used by the media has been an integral focus within media studies. Research that analyzes the impact of framing on social issues includes Barnett’s (2016) work on sexual exploitation in magazines, Gilchrist’s (2010) work on newsworthy victims in news media, Kupchik and Bracey’s (2009) work on media portrayals of school crime and violence, and Powell’s (2011) investigation of news media coverage of

terrorism following the events of 9/11. In each of these studies, the authors identify the impact the media can have on an issue by using specific frames over others, which ultimately impacts the societal perception of that issue.

One type of frame that has been used consistently throughout media studies is the fear frame (Heath and Gilbert 1996; Altheide and Michalowski 1999; Dowler 2003; Weitzer and Kubrin 2004; Chadee and Ditton 2005; Breen, Devereux, and Haynes 2006; Kupchik and Bracy 2009; Callanan and Rosenberger 2015). Altheide and Michalowski (1999) argue that “We increasingly share understandings about what to fear and how to avoid it. The consequences are felt in numerous ways but particularly in **accelerated negative perceptions about public order** (e.g. the streets are not safe, strangers are dangerous, the state must provide more control and surveillance)” (476) (*my emphasis added*). The use of fear is common within a variety of media outlets including television, magazines, and newspapers.

A common tactic within the fear frame is to use intense, horrific, or disturbing stories as central reporting areas because these stories are more attractive to viewers (Glassner 1999; Wiltenburg 2004; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006; Kupchik and Bracey 2009; Gilchrist 2010). Katz (1987), Gilchrist (2010), Gekoski, Gray, and Adler (2012) and Barak (2013), all use the concept of ‘newsworthiness’ to highlight the way that reporters choose stories that are sensationalistic and grasp the attention of viewers. Most often, this sensationalism centers around the fear it can incite in readers. As Wiltenburg (2004) states, “sensationalist crime accounts build their emotional potency on both a visceral response to violence itself and the quasi-religious dilemma posed by transgression of core values” (1379). Jewkes (2004/2011), a key scholar in this field, argues that newsworthiness is dependent on 12 features, including threshold, predictability, simplification, and celebrity. For example, threshold refers to stories that reach a certain level of drama. Predictability reports an occurrence that is rare or unpredictable. Simplification is the way in which an explanation for a crime for example can be reported on in a way that reduces it to a few key parts or themes. Celebrity involves individuals who are famous or considered celebrities associated with the issue reported on. Based on the ability of the media to discuss these features, a story will be picked, or not, by the news media. Many scholars identify children as being newsworthy (Christie 1986; Katz 1987; Jewkes 2004; Greer 2007),

especially because they are ‘ideal victims’ (Christie 1986), a term referring to “individuals who are seen as vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sympathy” (Greer 2007, 23). In this way, the media were very successful in ‘selling’ the child abduction issue because it easily captivates the attention of audiences.

Glassner is another principal scholar who studies the use of frames (which he refers to as narrative techniques) and the role they play within media representations in perpetuating fears about social issues. Glassner (2004) identified “much of the answer to why there are so many misbegotten fears in the air resides in how fear mongers sell their scares” (819). These narrative techniques include: volume or repetition (increasing the number of stories presented about an issue); christening of isolated incidents as trends (convincing audiences that seemingly different incidents are connected and demonstrative of a broader issue); and misdirection (convincing audiences of a particular aspect of the issue while neglecting other aspects) (Glassner 2004).

Many of the features, frames, and narrative techniques are present within the child abduction context. The media uses fear to represent the child abduction issue because it involves the harming of innocent children, which allows the media to successfully capture the attention and prey on the emotions of viewers. The media continuously reports upon child abductions and considers any child who has gone missing to have automatically been abducted, specifically abducted by a stranger. The media uses fear to convince citizens that crimes against children (especially child abduction) are rampant in society and need to be dealt with through more punitive and harsher measures that would ensure the safety of all.

3.4 Changes to Parenting Philosophies & Practices Influenced by Child Abduction as a Social Problem

The social construction of child abduction as both a social problem and a moral panic impacts parenting philosophy and practices. Evidence of this impact is found in research from diverse fields including health promotion and education, ethics and information technology, and public health studies (Dixey 1999; Gabriels 2016; Holt et al. 2016).

Researchers have found that following the years of intense societal concern and media focus

on child abduction there were significant changes to how parents raised their children (Valentine 1996; Dixey 1999; Holt et al. 2016). Parents became increasingly concerned about their children being victims of abduction, which resulted in several changes in what children were allowed and not allowed to do. A study conducted in the UK in the year 1971 found that 80% of 7 and 8-year-olds went to school without adult supervision, but by 1990, this number had fallen to 9% (Dixey 1999, 41). The reason for this being parents became significantly more concerned about child abductions, and subsequently, began escorting their children to school (Dixey 1999). This has come to be known as “intensive parenting” (Gabriels 2016) or “interventionist parenting” (McNeish and Roberts 1995).

This transition towards “intensive parenting” (Gabriels 2016) ensued in the West following the mid-1980s (Gabriels 2016). Parents started taking responsibility for their children’s safety to the extreme, in ways that previous generations had not. Parental use of GPS-enabled mobile apps is one example of “intensive parenting” that allows parents to track their children’s whereabouts at all times. These technologies helped to inform parents about when their children arrived safely at certain places, such as at school or home (Gabriels 2016). These devices also had a ‘Panic Button’ function which alerted parents if their children were not where they were meant to be.

Intensive parenting continues to be a response to child abduction fears in today’s parents. Holt et al.’s (2016) study examines the extent to which children have access to “Active Free Play,” which they define as “engaging in spontaneous and voluntary activities with minimal or no adult control” (1). Their study investigates intergenerational changes in perceptions of active free play and reveals that across generations, parents have changed their views on allowing their children to partake in this type of play. Today, compared to previous generations, “children had less freedom to explore their neighbourhoods than their parents enjoyed...were subjected to close monitoring and surveillance due to their parents perceived safety concerns ...and [parents] used spatial and temporal boundaries to limit where their children went and for how long” (Holt et al. 2016, 2). Today’s parents pose the greatest barrier to their children’s engagement in active free play as they are most commonly concerned with traffic safety, and ‘stranger-danger’ and as a result, limit children’s ability to play on their own (Holt et al. 2016). Similarly, Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, and Sleet’s study on children’s play and children’s safety found that parental

concerns about letting children play on their own are heightened due to “traffic dangers and stranger abduction” fear (2012, 3138). Imposing too many restrictions on children’s outdoor activities can be detrimental to children as the ability to play freely plays a major role in child development and learning. This is also a key finding in McKendrick, Bradford, and Fielder’s (2000) study on the commercialization of leisure space for children. They identify that parental reactions to fears for their children (specifically about traffic and stranger abductions) have resulted in the limiting of children’s ability to access neighbourhood spaces for independent play and, thus, commercialized play spaces are more popular. The above examples help to demonstrate the impact that the social construction and intensive media fear framing of child abduction has had on parenting.

4 Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework- Moral Panic and Moral Regulation

The theoretical frameworks used to guide my study are moral panic theory (Cohen 1972; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Hunt 1997; Critcher 2008; Rohloff and Wright 2010) and moral regulation theory (Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Foucault 1989; Garland 1997; Hunt 1999, 2003, 2011; Critcher 2009). Moral panic theory comes out of social constructionism, which focuses on how external forces shape our individual realities. Social constructionism informs us that we need to think critically of everything we know and look for underlying messages in our understandings of reality (Gergen 1985; Berger and Luckmann 1991; Hruby 2001; Burr 2003). Furthermore, social constructionism teaches us to challenge the idea that our knowledge comes from objective, unbiased observations of the world (Burr 2003). Moral panics are often referred to as fear generated (e.g., constructed) in ways that benefit the political and economic interests of the ruling-elite (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009).

Moral panic theory was selected as a theoretical framework to guide this study for several reasons. First, moral panic theory has already been used by scholars to study the child abduction issue (Zgoba 2004; Griffin and Miller 2008; Critcher 2008). Second, moral panic theory is the theoretical lens for studies about other social problems involving children, including school shootings (Burns and Crawford 1999), the sexual exploitation of children on the internet (Potter and Potter 2001), pedophiles (Critcher 2002) and sex offenders (Fox 2013).

Moral panics involve concern over specific issues that typically fail to adequately reflect the reality of the problem, but which often lead to “a shift in social or legal codes” (Rohloff and Wright 2010, 404). As previously discussed, the historical social, political, and legal contexts led to an increased focus on social problems, including the main issues and typical perpetrators involved (which may or may not have been accurate). This intense focus on addressing the key features of the social problem (often referred to as a ‘war on crime’ or ‘law and order’ mentality), subsequently resulted in moral panics, as the public became overconcerned with specific social issues, often which failed to reflect the true reality of the issue.

A concept central to moral panic theorizing developed by Cohen (1972) is that of folk-devils or scapegoats. The folk-devil/scapegoat becomes the person upon whom “public fears and fantasies are projected” (Cohen 1972 in Hunt 1997, 631) and ultimately, becomes the source of societal panic. In the case of the child abduction issue, as previously mentioned, ‘the stranger’ is the person upon whom this crime was blamed and thus, is the folk-devil and the cause of all concern for parents and children.

Moral panic theory is also useful to this study because of the conceptualization of the “Us vs. Them” ideology also developed by Cohen (1972). All moral panics involve claims and counter-claims by competing sectors of society that attempt to establish dominance over others. Ultimately, the goal of moral panics is for those in power to “mark off boundaries, in their own terms, as to where the respectable mainstream leaves off and the margins- the ‘outsiders’ begin” (Cohen 1972 in Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, 30). Moral panics work toward establishing within the social issue who the good people are (“us”) and who the folk-devils are (“them”).

Cohen identified five main actors who are typically involved in moral panics, including the public, law enforcement, politicians, and legislators, actions groups, and finally, the media (also referred to as the press) (1972). The media’s extensive role in the development of moral panics is another reason why this is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Investigating the role of the media in the child abduction issue is very important as social constructionists identify a strong connection between media depictions of crime and how people perceive crime (Sacco 1995; Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton, and Farrall 1998; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006; Callanan 2012; Kohm et al. 2012).

Moral panic theory, in conjunction with agenda setting theory (Kim et al. 2012), (as previously discussed), helps explain how the stories reported upon by the media can shape the reality of the viewers. The media serves a vital role in moral panics as it produces “processed or coded images of deviance and the deviants” and identifies the events and people that are disrupting the social order (Cricher 2008, 1129). Specifically, exposure to certain media stories influences audiences to believe that what they are told is true. In this way, their worlds become socially constructed. Our perceptions about the world are formed through exposure to media portrayals in various forms including television, film, video, and the Internet, which ultimately

shape our opinions about political and social issues (Tuchman 1978; Adoni and Mane 1984; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006, Robbers 2008; Callanan 2012).

Scholars have identified that the process of socially constructing issues as moral panics is in large part due to the goals of moral regulation and so, the two concepts are often discussed together (Hunt 1999; Hier 2002; Critcher 2008; Critcher 2009; Hunt 2011; Lundstrom 2011; Rohloff 2013; Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith 2011; Hier 2016). The connection between the two frameworks is that in essence, moral panics are enactments of moral regulation. The purpose of a moral panic is to create morally acceptable (e.g., regulated) behaviour (Hier 2002; Critcher 2008; Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith 2011). Specifically, the process is as follows: a problem is identified by interest groups (typically those in power), which then creates widespread panic and concern about that problem (e.g., moral panic). Subsequently, this results in the establishment of specific behaviours that either need to be eliminated or need to be enacted, so as to mitigate the social problem. In this way, behaviour becomes constrained by the beliefs held by those in power about moral duties (e.g., moral regulation). Hunt (1997) argues that moral panics allow for the diagnosis of problems, and also, provide the moral vocabulary to describe them. Specifically, this vocabulary includes moral regulation concepts such as “citizenship,” “community,” “civic responsibility,” and “moral order,” which all involve stressing the duties that people have in ensuring that they, and others, behave properly (e.g., morally) (Hunt 1997, 646).

Moral regulation is a concept commonly associated with Foucault (1989), and stems from his conceptualization of governmentality. Governmentality focuses on how crime is problematized and controlled. Foucault argued that from “the 16th century onwards western states have been progressively ‘governmentalized’ ... **state authorities have increasingly understood their task as a matter of governing individuals and populations**, civil society and economic life, in such a way as **to increase well-being, security and prosperity**” (Foucault 1989 in Garland 1997, 178) (*my emphasis added*).

Hunt has been an influential scholar in identifying the connection between moral panic, governmentality, and moral regulation (2003). He argues that Foucault’s ideas help to explain

how “moral regulation projects tend to exhibit various combinations of governing others and governing selves” (Hunt 2003,11). This process stems from Foucault’s concept of “docile bodies” (1989). Docile bodies can be controlled or transformed through strict and regimented discipline from those in power. With regards to moral panics, there has been an increased ability to develop new forms of crime and new sources of fear when investigating the interplay between the police, politicians, and the media (Foucault 1989). As a result, governmentality involves the ability to convince others that these new crimes and new sources of fear are real and, thus, it is necessary to control their behaviour by adhering to the established rules and laws put in place. In this way, the goals of governmentality, including the ability to dictate the behaviour of individuals, are often based upon what is deemed morally acceptable (according to those in power). Establishing an issue that has a moral basis, and using this issue to control citizens’ behaviour, is moral regulation.

Foucault’s ideas of governmentality and docile bodies are commonly discussed in Garland’s work (1997). Garland’s (1997) concept of “criminogenic situations” is useful in applying Foucault’s work to the child abduction issue. Criminogenic situations, commonplace in modern society, are “hot-spots of crime or low-rate, secure areas,” and come in a variety of forms, shapes, and sizes (187). Garland (1997) describes these areas as “a new site of intervention for the governmental practices, a new practicable object, quite distinct from the individual delinquents and legal subjects that previously formed the targets for crime control” (187). Ultimately, the desire to govern these types of situations in the past led to the “reduction of crime and the fear of crime, the promotion of a culture of security consciousness [and] the enhancement of public safety” (188). This came to be known as a “responsibilization strategy,” wherein agencies and individuals focused on crime-reduction and convinced others that crime reduction strategies were in everyone’s best interests (Garland 1997).

The responsibilization strategy is an extension of the ‘law and order’ ideology as previously discussed, wherein people became increasingly focused on ensuring there were effective punishments in place for individuals who participated in undesirable behaviours (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). Garland (2001) discusses this by identifying that there are two key approaches to the way governments act on crime as a result of these ‘law and order’ ideals: 1. a re-emphasis

on punitive and exclusionary forms of punishment (e.g. criminology of ‘the other’); and 2. a focus on exclusion through zero tolerance, punitive segregation, and exclusion through anti-social behaviour (in Scoular and O’Neill 2007, 766).

The connection between governmentality, responsabilization, and moral regulation is a frequent focus amongst researchers, who argue that functions of governmentality show up in a variety of forms (Rose 1990; Garland 1997; Hunt 1999; Garland 2001; Turner 2001; Hunt 2003; Scoular and O’Neill 2007; Hunt 2011). Specifically, according to Rose (1990), “power in liberal societies works not to constrain individuals, but to create, shape and use human beings as subjects who voluntarily subject themselves to power” (256). Furthermore, “neo-liberal forms of governance operate to co-opt subjectivity thereby reducing the possibility for both individual and collective resistance” (Rose 1990, 256). Governmentality, and how it shows up in society, is an enactment of moral regulation. The ability for the government to convince people to participate in certain behaviours, specifically moral behaviour, and further, to convince them that they want to be subject to this power, is a way of regulating their behaviour.

Hunt (2011) identifies moral regulation as when “inquiry is directed at forms of popular action involving different kinds of activists who seek to mobilize the concerns, worries and anxieties of citizens in pursuit of objectives that involve social or moral values” (1). What this means is that specific groups give increased attention to an issue, which generates concern, worry, and anxiety (panic), that is often unnecessary or unwarranted. Researchers including Critcher (2008), Hier (2008) and Rohloff (2008) argue that moral panics are “rational routine features of everyday life that contribute to ongoing processes of moral regulation within and beyond the state” (in Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith 2011, 260). Thus, in the context of the child abduction issue, considerable concern was generated about child abduction due to our moral duty to keep children safe. Because the child abduction issue involved those who are considered the most vulnerable and innocent, and, because the issue elicited such intense concern from citizens, it became a vehicle for identifying morally acceptable behaviour with regards to children (according to the media).

Critcher (2008) argues that at times, the media can take on an active role in moral panics, but more often, they are “passive vehicles for others’ claims-making” (1132). This means that the ideas presented by the media are typically reflections of broader social and political forces. Therefore, the stories reported upon by the media typically reflect the views of those in power about moral obligations and focus on dictating how citizens should behave (specifically, regulating behaviour to fit societally agreed upon notions of morality).

A key facet of moral regulation is that it “involves controversial claims about the connection between alleged harms, proposed remedies and the mobilization of anxieties...” (Hunt 2011, 1), which brings us to a discussion of risk. Hunt and Hier are two prominent scholars who study risk in the context of moral regulation and moral panic (see Hunt 1999; Hunt 2003; Hunt 2011; Hier 2008; Hier 2016). The “Risk Society,” a term coined by Beck (1992), refers to a modernization of society characterized by emergencies or would-be emergencies, or unknown threats constantly lurking in the backgrounds (1992). Moral regulation theory can help to explain how “contemporary judgments about proper and improper conduct are routinely communicated through rational claims about risk and harm” (Hunt 1999 in Hier 2016, 418). More contemporary forms of moral regulation are representations of risk (Hunt 1999; Hunt 2003; Hunt 2011; Hier 2008; Hier 2016). Therefore, proper and improper conduct are based on the process of ‘moralization,’ which is where judgments are made pertaining to right and wrong, in terms of the negative consequences they create for others (Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith 2011, 263). Hunt (2003) and Hier (no date) refer to a moralization in everyday life wherein people are expected to “engage in responsible forms of individual risk management that exist in tension with collective subject positions of ‘harmful others’” (in Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith 2011, 263). By moralizing (also referred to as ‘negotiating social life’) the risks that exist in everyday life, emotions, and concerns are generated about who the potential victims of these risks are, and how likely individuals are of being exposed to these risks. Ultimately, this leads to the encouraging of individuals to “adopt strategies to responsibly avoid potential harms” (Hier 2016, 418). The development of risk thus serves as an essential context for examining the media’s representation of the child abduction issue.

4.1 Limitations of Theoretical Frameworks

While moral panic and moral regulation are instructive theoretical perspectives in helping to explain the child abduction issue, there are nevertheless critiques and limitations to take into account. To begin, authors including McRobbie and Thornton (1995), Miller, Kitzinger, Williams, and Beharrell (1998), Cornwell and Linders (2002), de Young (2004), and Critcher (2008), argue that the theory of moral panic theory fails to explain the role of the public as media audiences. They say that the theory assumes audiences take the ideas presented by the media at face value, and never question what they are told. Moral panic theory tends to overlook the agency of audiences and disregards the fact that media audiences can be skeptical of what they hear in the news reporting of specific issues. However, according to Entman, (2010) and media framing scholars, although the media is unable to influence people in ‘what to think’, they are able to convince people ‘what to think about’. Although it is true that audiences may not blindly accept the ideas presented to them by the media, they do generate their understanding of an issue based upon those ideas. Thus, when the media discusses an issue by presenting specific ideas and excluding others (known as priming), audiences are provided with a one-sided or skewed understanding of that issue. As a result, “when the media shape what people think about, they must logically influence what people think” (Entman 2010, 392).

Another theoretical limitation, according to authors McRobbie and Thornton (1995), is that moral panic theory as a whole needs to be updated and rethought. They argue that the media now offers “greater plurality of views and more contestation of attempts to define outgroups” (Critcher 2008, 1137). McRobbie (1994) (in Hunt 1997) argues that “we live in an era of postmodern moral panics, when the moral panic can no longer proceed unchallenged and cannot, therefore be used to justify new measures of social control” (644). It is vital that we understand that moral panics have existed for thousands of years and as such, are constantly changing. Thus, we need to be aware that the previous facets of moral panics as discussed by Cohen (1972) may not necessarily apply to all moral panics today.

Furthermore, moral panic theorists identify how this theory requires a “widened focus” (Critcher 2009; Rohloff and Wright 2010; Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith 2011), wherein it is

essential that understanding the concept involves respecting its limitations. Regardless of such limitations, the two theories are still very applicable to the child abduction issue. Specifically, these concepts are still relevant forty years later, particularly for the following reason: “the only precondition for a moral panic [is] the existence of a mass media capable of transmitting it” (Sindall 1990, 29). This was especially true of the child abduction issue as it became the centre of attention for many media outlets. Even though people were presented with explicit evidence that the proportions of child abduction and the ‘folk- devil stranger’ as the common perpetrator were completely false, there continued to be widespread panic. This panic generated by the media is still present in news reports about child abductions today and is also still present in the way the media informs parents about raising their children.

5 Chapter Five: Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on mainstream newspaper articles regarding child abduction in Canada. Content analysis is a commonly used method by other researchers studying media representations. For example, O’Grady, Parnaby, and Schickschneit (2010) examine media portrayals of school shootings, Elizabeth (2010) examines villainous mothers within media reports of child abductions, and Moscowitz and Duvall (2011) investigate gender and class biases in media reports of child abductions.

By using content analysis, “[R]esearchers can systematically examine the characteristics of messages that are being conveyed by the media ...” through the examination of news reports and newspaper articles (Taylor et al. 2013, 158). In this way, a content analysis provides the opportunity for researchers to generate their own codes. As well, researchers such as Altheide (1987), Morgan (1993), and Sandelowski (2000), argue that qualitative content analyses provide greater opportunity for researchers to interpret the findings of their studies. Rather than simply listing the number of times a code is used within a piece of text (e.g., frequency coding, which is a method commonly used in quantitative content analyses), the qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to explain in detail, the importance of each code, and how it relates to other codes. For many of the codes used throughout my research, the number of times that a particular code appeared in a newspaper source was recorded and examined. However, in other instances, codes were discussed simply because of their impact and relevance to this research topic, not necessarily because they were present in every news article. Content analyses employ a “set of techniques for the systematic analysis of texts of many kinds, addressing not only manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in texts as primary content” (Mayring 2000, 2). This specific method suited my research well as the goal was to analyze newspaper texts to determine the key frames used to represent child abduction. Content analyses are beneficial in establishing categories, concepts, models, conceptual systems, or conceptual maps (Weber, 1990; Morgan 1993; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Specifically, content analyses can “describe the characteristics of the document’s content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect” (Bloor and Wood 2006, 58). This was very useful as this research aimed to investigate the way child abductions are socially constructed by and represented within the media, and the

impact this has on audiences. The following is an in-depth description of the steps taken to complete this research project.

5.1 Data Sample

This study involved the use of two data collection sources. In total, there were 122 newspaper articles included in my sample. Of the 122 newspaper articles examined, 46 newspaper articles came from the 12 specific abduction cases, and 76 newspaper articles about child abduction came from *The Globe and Mail* (38 articles) and *The Toronto Star* (38 articles), for the years 1980-2017.

5.1.1 Data Collection Source One: The Media Representation of 12 Specific Child Abduction Cases

The first data collection source consisted of news articles about 12 specific child abduction cases from local and national mainstream newspapers. This initial source subsequently led to an additional data collection source, which consisted of news articles about child abduction in general, gathered from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*.

5.1.1.1 Finding the Child Abduction Cases

The first step in my research involved searching for the names of children who had been abducted in Canada between the years 1980 and 2017. This timeframe was chosen as the 1980s are considered the true start of the “abducted-children movement” (Fritz and Altheide 1987; Best 1987; Gentry 1988). I located the children’s names by using two missing children databases. The first database is on the Missingkids website (“Missingkids.ca”) and the second database is on the Missing Children Society of Canada website (“Missing Children Society of Canada”). These two databases serve several important functions with regards to missing children and child abductions. The Missingkids website serves as a tool for families whose children have gone missing, where information can be posted about the child so that the public can be aware of and be on the lookout for any possible sightings of the child. Further, it serves as an educational resource for families, as it provides ways of helping keep children safe and finally, it helps locate missing children. The database is owned and operated by the Canadian Centre for Child

Protection which is “a charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of all children” (“Missingkids.ca”). This database was selected based on a preliminary search of the existing websites dedicated to abducted and missing children in Canada.

The Missing Children Society of Canada website helps to return missing and abducted children to their families. The organization assists with professional investigations and helps gain public awareness about missing children and family support programs (“Missing Children Society of Canada”). These two databases were selected as they are Canadian organizations that provide information about missing children and abducted children cases within Canada only.

For both missing child databases, the layout is similar. There are pictures of the children and short paragraphs that provide information about each child. Specifically, the information listed includes the name of the child, the date of birth, the missing since date, and the location from where the child had gone missing. On the Missingkids website, there is a section called “Additional Information” that provides specifics about who the child was with or, what the child was wearing at the time of the abduction. As well, this database occasionally includes identifying information about the child such as eye colour, hair colour, height, and weight. The Missing Children Society of Canada database includes information such as the “Law Enforcement Case Number,” the “Law Enforcement Contact,” and “Identifying Features” of the child.

These two missing children databases provided the cases that would become the data sample for the first collection source (the specific child abduction cases from local and national mainstream newspapers). Specific criteria were used to determine the child abduction cases included or excluded from my study. I included a case only if the information explicitly used the term “abduction” or “abducted”. This was a necessary piece of inclusion criteria as there were many cases on both databases that were about children or adults who had gone missing but had not necessarily been abducted. As a result, these cases were outside the scope of my research for this project and thus, were excluded.

I did not exclude any cases based on the age of the abducted child as I wanted to look at the news coverage for all abductions, regardless of how old the child was; however, the abduction

had to have occurred to an individual under 18 at the time of the abduction (since the focus of this research is on child abductions). As a result of these search inclusion and exclusion criteria, 17 children fit within the scope of my study, and so, they served as my sample. After gathering these 17 names from the Missingkids and The Missing Children Society of Canada databases, I created my own database and recorded the name, date of birth, “missing since” date, and location where each child had gone missing. These 17 names served as the search criteria for finding newspaper reports about these cases via the Canadian Newsstand and Google News databases. Within three of these newspaper articles, there were references made to two other abducted children whose cases were not on the Missingkids or The Missing Children Society of Canada databases¹. However, these two children met my search criteria as well, and as a result, were added to my list for a total of 19 names, represented over 12 cases (because several cases involved siblings) as shown in Table 1 below. Creating a sample in this way is referred to as snowball sampling and occurs when researchers gather additional sources based on initial data (Noy 2008). After conducting these searches, only ten out of the 19 names yielded newspaper articles.

¹ Initially, I was surprised that not all of the abduction cases were in the Missingkids or The Missing Children Society of Canada databases. However, after further investigation of the website, I found that the cases posted on these sites include only those who are “nationally-registered missing children in Canada” and that the case remains “open until the child is located” (“Missingkids.ca”). Thus, it is possible that the two abduction cases not found in these databases were either not nationally-registered missing children or their cases were closed as a result of the child being located.

Table 1 The 12 Specific Child Abduction Cases

* Parental abductions are coloured blue and stranger abductions are coloured red.

*Cases appear in chronological order based on the date the child(ren) went missing.

Case	Name	Date of Birth	Went Missing Date	From
1	Jermain Allan Mann	September 06, 1985	June 24, 1987	Toronto, Ontario
2	Casey Rose Bohun	July 18, 1986	August 05, 1989	Delta, British Columbia
3	Nina Akbarian	August 29, 1992	July 09, 1996	Toronto, Ontario
4	Mitchell O'Brien	November 29, 1991	November 09, 1996	Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador
	Adam O'Brien	May 08, 1985	November 09, 1996	Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador
	Trevor O'Brien	October 28, 1982	November 09, 1996	Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador
5	Safia Afza Khan	October 04, 1996	August 31, 1991	Surrey, British Columbia
	Memuna Afza Khan	August 29, 1994	August 31, 1991	Surrey, British Columbia
6	Christopher Turgeon	N/A	December 18, 1999	Squamish, British Columbia

7	Karar Al-Meliky	May 20, 2002	June 12, 2007	Montreal, Quebec
8	Livia Hughes	January 03, 2007	July 17, 2009	Kelowna, British Columbia
9	Sofi Ma	August 3, 2011	January 7, 2014	Toronto, Ontario
10	Meitan Serbast Mahmudi-Azer	June 1, 2012	August 6, 2015	Courtenay, British Columbia
	Dersim Baran Mahmudi-Azer	August 22, 2008	August 6, 2015	Courtenay, British Columbia
	Rojevahn Beritan Mahmudi-Azer	June 30, 2006	August 6, 2015	Courtenay, British Columbia
	Sharvahn Delahn Mahmudi-Azer	August 4, 2004	August 6, 2015	Courtenay, British Columbia
11	Josh Giesbrecht	N/A	June 20, 2016	Winnipeg, Manitoba
	Montana Giesbrecht	N/A	June 20, 2016	Winnipeg, Manitoba
12	Louka Fredette	N/A	September 14, 2016	Saint-Eustache, Quebec

My search criteria relied on specific abducted children's names to find relevant newspaper articles. Searching news databases using keywords is an approach used by other researchers focusing on child abductions. For example, Moscovitz and Duvall's (2011) study on child abduction myths in US news used "kidnap" and "abduct" as their keywords, while Taylor, Boisvert Sims, and Garver (2013), used keywords such as "kidnap" and "abduct" to retrieve newspaper articles on child abductions. Similarly, (although not focusing on child abductions), the media analysis study by Lumsden and Morgan (2017) of trolling and online abuse also gathered news articles by using keywords as their search criteria.

5.2 Newspaper Reports on 12 Specific Child Abduction Cases

To find the newspaper reports written about each of the above children's case, I used the Canadian Newsstand Database, accessed through the University of Guelph library website to conduct three searches. Using newspaper databases is a common search strategy (see Elizabeth 2010; O'Grady, Parnaby, and Schickschneit 2010; Moscovitz and Duvall 2011; Johnston, Friedman, and Shafer 2012; Taylor, Boisvert, Sims, and Garver 2013; Lumsden and Morgan 2017).

The first search required four steps: 1. I typed the name of the child and the location from where they had gone missing (based on the information in the missing child database), as the keywords. To ensure that I was collecting all news coverage written about each specific case, I selected the year prior to the abduction as my starting date for the news coverage, and an open-ended end date. I did not limit my search by province, but instead, I included child abduction cases from across Canada. 2. I copied all the news articles written on each case and put them in a separate document. If there were more than 10 articles written about one abduction case, only the first ten articles were included based on the earliest publishing dates. I chose 10 articles because I thought this was a reasonable number of articles to analyze without there being an overwhelming amount of data to manage. For example, some abductions had as many as 35 articles written about the case. Although this step was not cited as common practice in previous research, it helped to ensure that the number of newspaper articles included in my sample fit within the scope and time restraints of this project. 3. I searched Google News and Google News

Archives using the same process as was used in step 1. I included this step particularly because some of the cases yielded zero newspaper articles on the Canadian Newsstand and so, I wanted to consult a second newspaper database (i.e., Google News and Google News Archives) to ensure that all coverage on each abduction case was included in the sample. Sometimes this process led to a collection of newspaper articles from across the globe, but I only included Canadian newspaper articles in my study. This overall process yielded 46 newspaper articles. 4. I divided these 46 newspaper articles into two separate time periods based on their publishing date: seven specific Canadian child abduction news articles were written between 1980-1999, and thirty-nine specific Canadian child abduction news articles were written between 2000-2017. The justification behind dividing the newspaper articles based on their publishing date was to analyze the similarities and differences in the child abduction newspaper coverage between the two time periods (i.e., 1980-2000 and 2000-2017) (e.g., I wanted to identify any historical changes in the way the newspaper media discusses these child abductions). Finally, news articles for the same case were excluded if they contained identical information. For example, if an article written by *The Ottawa Citizen* contained the same information as an article written by *The Leader Post*, the article with the later publication date was removed, so as not to duplicate media coverage.

5.3 Data Collection Source Two: The Media Representation of Child Abduction in The Globe and Mail and The Toronto Star Newspapers

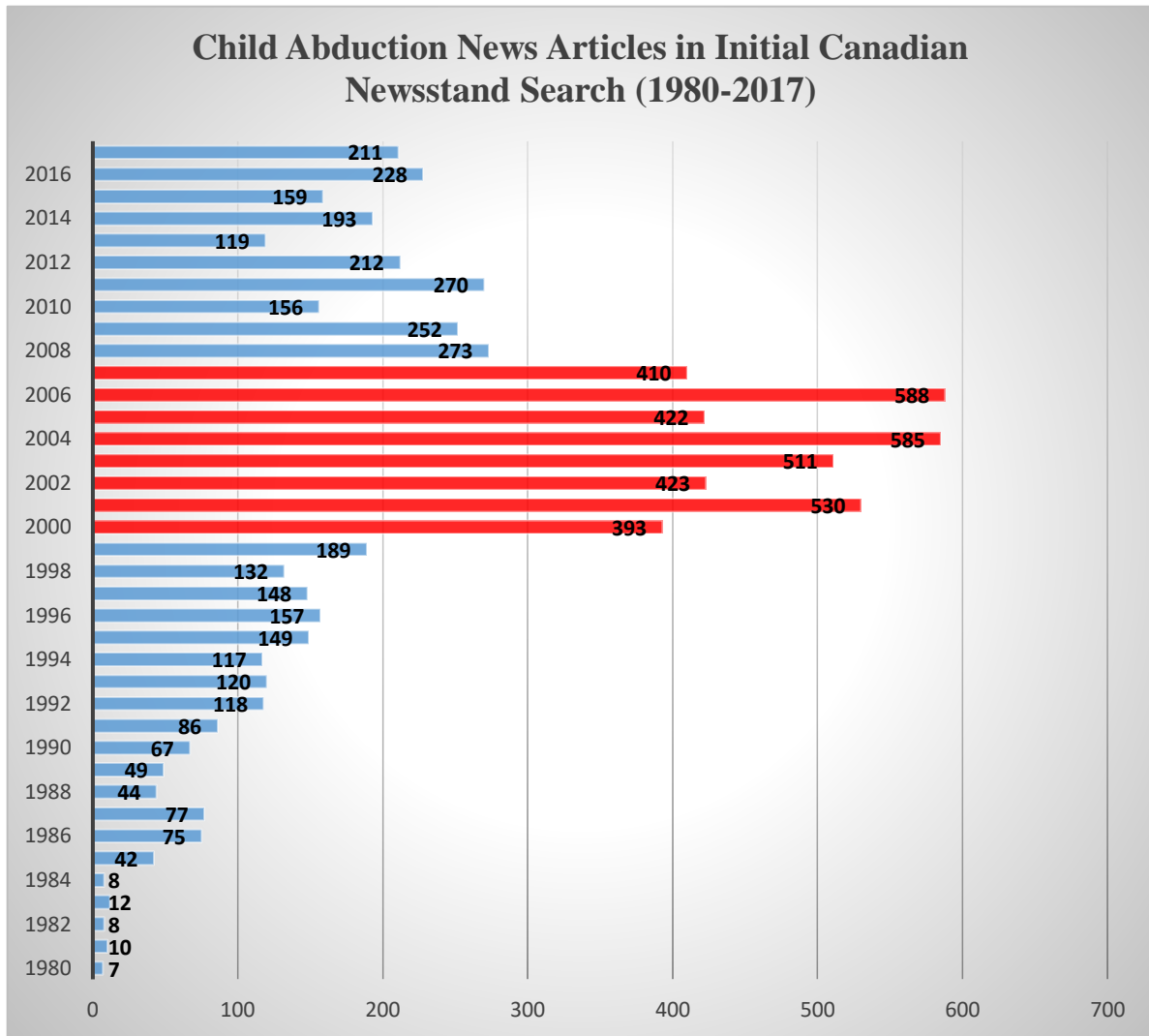
After gathering and reviewing the 46 newspaper articles about the 12 specific child abduction cases, and reading newspaper reports about child abduction more generally, I noticed a difference in reporting. Specifically, the way the media discussed the child abduction issue was different when there was an investigation of a specific case, compared to when the article discussed child abduction in general. An example of this was that the general newspaper coverage was more likely to discuss stranger abductions than was the 12 specific child abduction case coverage. Other differences between the two data collection sources will be discussed later. In order to examine this observation more intentionally and rigorously, I added a second data source that would allow me to analyze news coverage about child abduction generally, to be able

to see if there were in fact differences in the framing of child abduction coming out of the same newspapers. The second data source is discussed below.

5.3.1 Methods for Analyzing Newspaper Articles in Data Collection Source Two: The General Child Abduction from The Globe and Mail and The Toronto Star

When I started searching for relevant general newspaper articles, I included only the following two linguistic parameters: “child abduction” and “Canada” and two timeframe parameters, (January 01, 1980-December 31, 1999 and January 01, 2000-December 31, 2017). This initial search (as seen in Figure 2 below) yielded approximately 7,339 (Full Text) news articles from 1980 to 2017. Because of the large number of articles that resulted from this search, I decided to search for articles within only one year for each of the years between 1980-2017 (e.g., January 01, 1980-December 31, 1980; January 01, 1981-December 31, 1981; January 01, 1982-December 31, 1982; etc.). I also narrowed the search to only two newspapers: *The Globe and Mail* and *the Toronto Star* for methodological and practical reasons.

Figure 1 Child Abduction News Articles In Initial Canadian Newsstand Search²



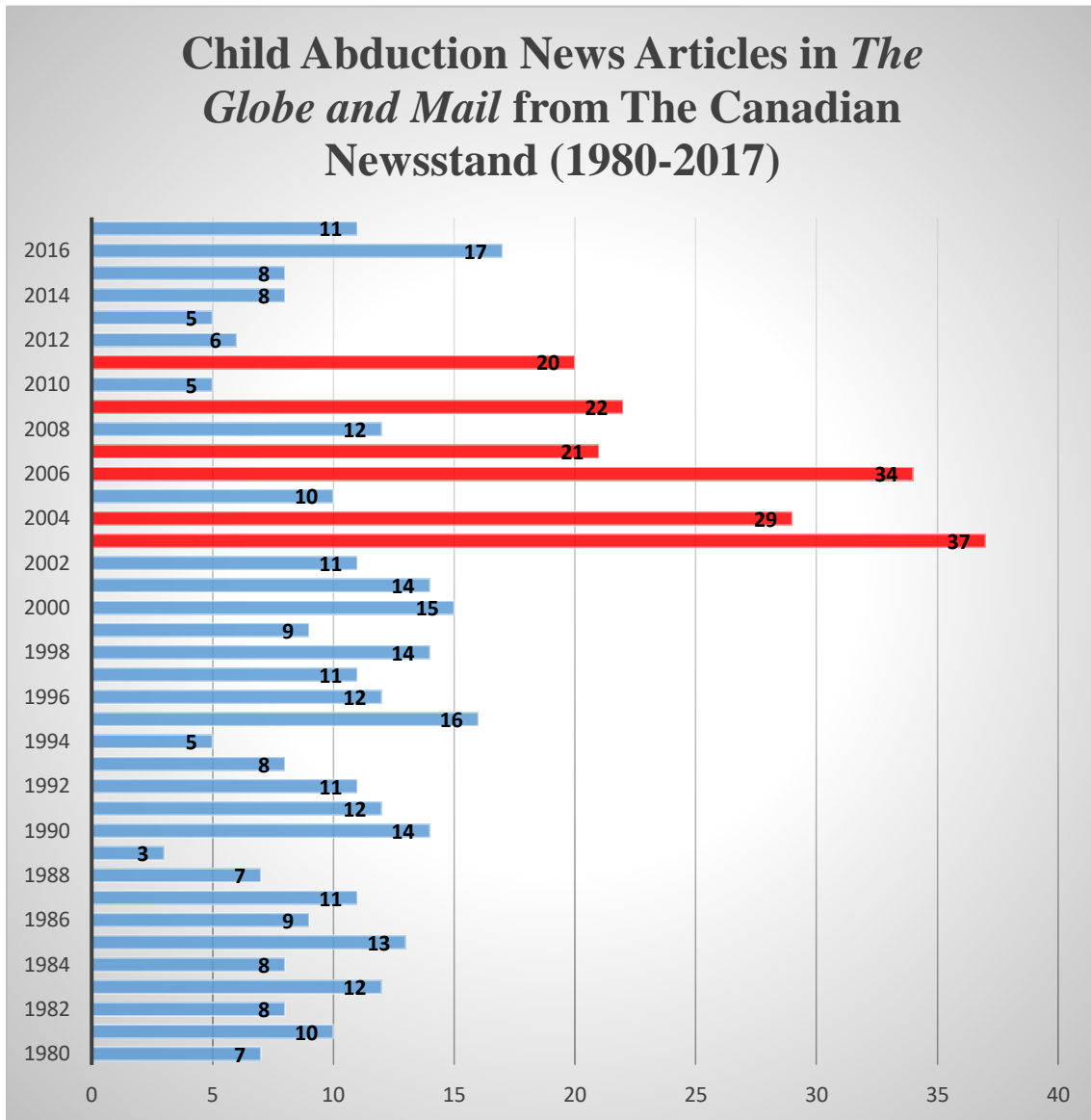
The Globe and Mail and *The Toronto Star* are both national newspapers with the highest circulation (“Circulation Report: Daily Newspapers 2015”). Using highest circulation national newspapers, that target a wide audience is common amongst media researchers (MacDonald and

² In Figure 1 above, the red bars indicate the years within these search parameters with the highest number of articles written about child abduction.

Hoffman-Goetz 2002; Hardin, Dodd, Chance, and Walsdorf 2004; Achtenhagen and Welter 2011; Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2013). Moscowitz and Duvall chose one major news source (*USA Today*) to use as their “preeminent newspaper” as it had the highest circulation and targeted a national audience. In their study, news articles regarding kidnappings in the United States were sampled from *USA Today* and then subsequently, news coverage from additional news sources were selected to parallel the number of stories in the preeminent *USA Today* source. Following Moscowitz and Duvall (2011), I refer to *The Globe and Mail* as my preeminent newspaper given its highest national circulation in Canada. The other news source selected to parallel the coverage in *The Globe and Mail* was *The Toronto Star*. I selected *The Toronto Star* because it has the second highest national circulation in Canada (“Circulation Report: Daily Newspapers 2015”). Although these selected newspapers do not encompass all of the news coverage written on child abductions nationally, they offer a reasonable “snapshot” of child abduction articles found in large circulation sources that span the country. As well, their large circulation means they offer more evidence of how the media has covered and continues to cover the issue of child abduction in Canada between the years 1980 and 2017.

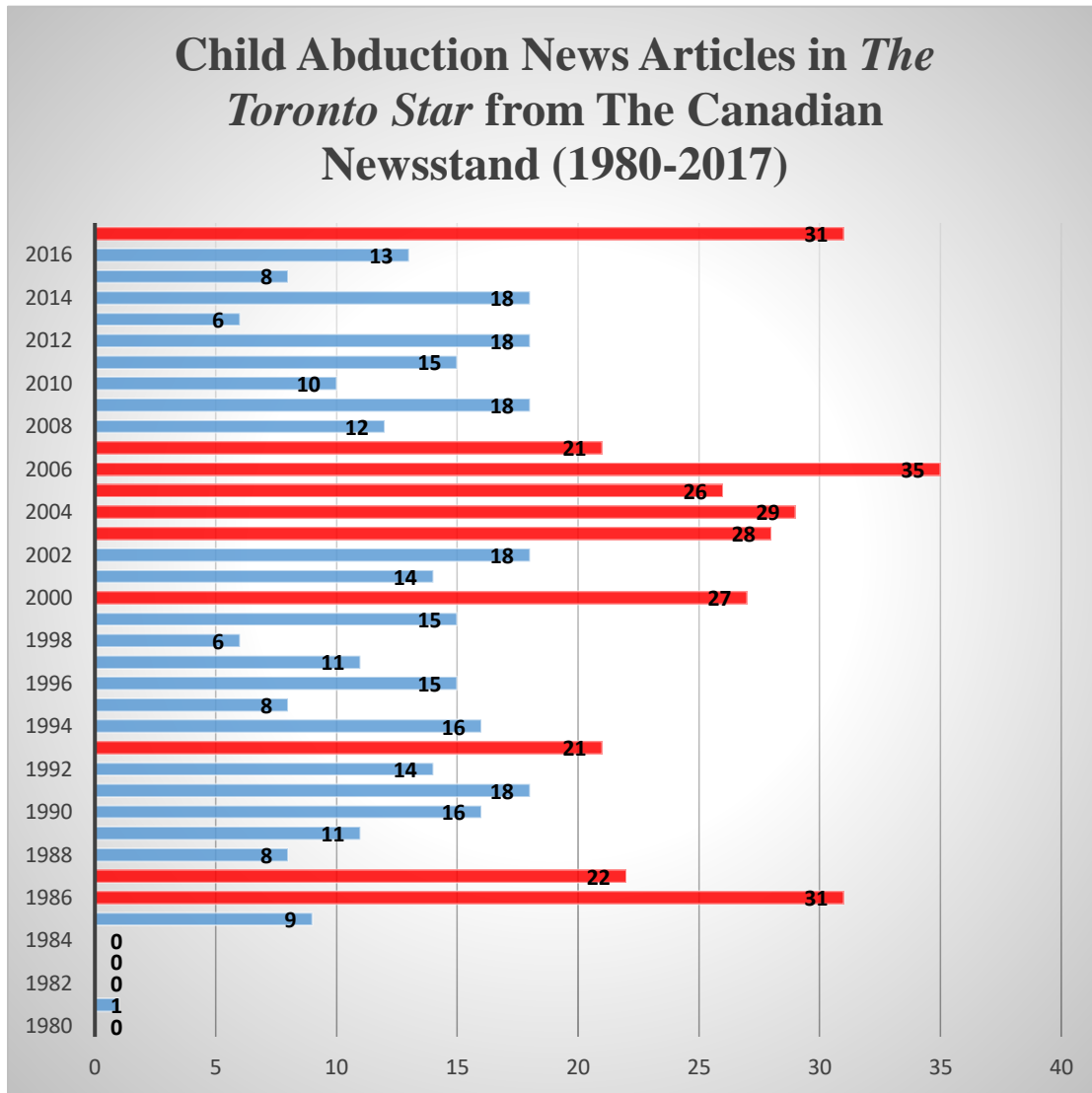
I used the terms “child abduction” and “Canada” and “*The Globe and Mail*” as the keywords for the searches conducted on the Canadian Newsstand for every year between 1980 and 2017. Subsequently, the same searches were conducted using “*The Toronto Star*” as the newspaper keyword. The number of articles that resulted from each search are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Figure 2 Child Abduction News Articles in *The Globe and Mail* from the Canadian Newsstand³



³ In Figure 2. above, the red bars indicate the years within these search parameters where 20 or more articles were written about child abduction.

Figure 3 Child Abduction News Articles in *The Toronto Star* from the Canadian Newsstand⁴



To determine which newspaper article I would select for each of the years in this study, I used a random number generator. This tool produced a number (e.g., 26, 12, 3), which I used to select the associated newspaper article from the results list on Canadian Newsstand. The

⁴ In Figure 3. above, the red bars demonstrate the years within these search parameters where 20 or more articles were written about child abduction.

Canadian Newsstand numbers the articles in the results list starting at one based on the search parameters and keywords. In this way, I selected a newspaper article for every year (between 1980 and 2017) from both *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*⁵. To assess whether or not the representation of child abduction in newspapers changed over time, I compared news articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star* across two timeframes, 1980-1999 and 2000-2017. These years are selected because they provide a look at how the media represented child abduction in the past (1980-2000) and how the media represents child abduction in the present (2000-2017).

5.4 Using NVIVO and Coding the Data

I used the NVIVO program, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package used to “organize, analyze and find insights in unstructured, or qualitative data” (“What is NVIVO?”) to code my data. I uploaded the 46 news articles from the 12 specific abduction cases, and the 76 news articles about child abduction from *The Globe and Mail* (38 articles) and *The Toronto Star* (38 articles), for the years 1980-2017 and grouped them into “Sets”⁶. In total, there were 122 articles included in my sample and coded using the NVIVO program.

The NVIVO program has a “Nodes” function that is used to code the data. These nodes are the “frames” within my research. These frames were used for both data sources, however, as the coding progressed, additional frames were added because of differences identified between the 12 specific child abduction case articles and the general abduction coverage from *The Globe and*

⁵ If the article selected based on the randomly generated number was not relevant to this study, another random number was used to select an alternative article that fit within the parameters of this research. For example, for the year 1981 in *The Globe and Mail*, a news article about “The Abduction of Figaro” (a comedic opera) comes up in the search results but does not fit within the criteria of this research endeavour and so, was omitted from the list of articles used for this study.

⁶ I grouped the families together if there were multiple children from the same family who had been abducted. For example, the Mahmudi-Azer family included four abducted children and so, these were grouped together as the media coverage was consistently written about the family as a whole, not about the children separately.

Mail and *The Toronto Star*. All components of the newspaper article were coded, including the newspaper headlines.

I employed a thematic analysis for this project, which allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and report the patterns (also known as themes) in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). A thematic analysis proved to be useful in my work as it is known to be a more accessible form of analysis, that is useful for scholars who are in the early stages of a qualitative research career (Braun and Clarke 2006). A thematic analysis uses a constructionist method, which means that it can be used to identify a theme that “examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within a society” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 81). Furthermore, thematic analysis can be used to “unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 81). Specifically, a thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify the main ideas associated with an issue/topic. This could involve identifying the language used and the theoretical orientation that guides the text. A thematic analysis not only identifies the main ideas of an issue but also interprets these ideas and connects them to broader theories or concepts. These fundamental characteristics of a thematic analysis are advantageous as one of the main goals of my research was to identify the ways the media socially constructed the child abduction issue and how the media created a false ‘reality’ regarding child abductions and child safety today.

Following similar coding strategies as those discussed within existing research on qualitative content analyses (see Rice and Ezzy 1999; Fereday and Muri-Cochrane 2006), I identified themes through carefully reading and re-reading the data (e.g., the newspaper articles) and recognizing patterns. The codes I used originated from the research questions developed at the outset of the study. This is a coding style typical of other news framing studies including Bullock’s (2007) work on framing domestic violence in Utah newspapers, Mastin, Choi, Barboza and Post’s (2007) work on elder abuse newspaper framing, and Gillespie, Richards, Givens and Smith’s (2013) work on newspaper framing of femicides. These studies employ methodologies that include identifying preliminary content-related patterns that reflect the initial research questions and eventually serve as the research codes. Some of the codes I used were similar to those used in these studies, for example, I used codes including language to describe the incident

(as found in Gillespie et al.'s study) and the couple's history and the environment surrounding the incident (as seen in Mastin et al.'s study). Although these studies do not focus on child abduction, their purpose is to investigate how the media frames specific issues, which was also the goal of my research and so, these codes applied to my study as well.

Following the initial coding of the data (using the NVIVO program), I developed an additional coding tool to organize the findings more clearly. This coding tool (also referred to as an abstraction tool) was in the form of an Excel chart that included headings such as details of abduction, marital status of parents, custody arrangements, geography, and evaluation of parent (see Appendix A). This tool allowed for better analysis and more clearly identified the specific themes present in each article. Further, the chart helped to record how many times each code appeared, which allowed for better timeframe comparisons. The abstraction tool proved to be more effective than only using the NVIVO program because it provided a more visual representation of the key themes present in these newspaper articles. The Excel spreadsheet served as a "checklist" for each of the themes and allowed for better organization and sorting of the articles.

5.5 Developing Themes

A thematic analysis aims to ensure that each theme relates to the initial research questions and represents a patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this way, the general themes that I used to code my data included: 1. a focus on parental abductions, including divorce/separation, custodial arrangements and parental evaluations (which reflects Research Questions 1 and 1a. about how the Canadian news media represents child abductions today, if it has changed since the 1980s and 19990s, and if the media focuses more on stranger abductions as opposed to parental abductions); 2. the use of fear mongering (which reflects Research Question 1b. about whether the media overemphasizes the danger children are in now of being abducted); 3. an increase in attention given to resources and supports for families in these situations (which reflects Research Question 2 about the impact the media representation has on supports and resources for families dealing with child abduction); and 4. a discussion of safety tips given to parents to help prevent child abduction (which reflects

Research Question 3 about how the reporting of child abductions changed historically with regards to messaging about parenting practices). Some of the themes included in my study that resulted from the thematic analysis were: “Parental abduction vs. Stranger abduction”, “Portrayal of Abductor and Left-behind Parents (positive vs. negative)”, “Discussion of Custodial Issues”, “Use of Fear Tactics, Traditional Voices of Authority, Geographical Location of the Abduction, Statistics”, “Resources/Supports for Parents”, “Tips to Parents about Safety Precautions” and “Reflections about Parenting in the Child Abduction World.”

5.6 Newspaper Frames

The coding of the data involved analyzing the way the news media framed the 12 child abduction cases and framed child abduction in general within *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*. The coding process differed across the three main research questions. To answer the first research question, language as a media tool was a key focus and was evidence of the fear mongering frame. Focusing on language in media research is called a “lexical analysis” (Mayr and Machin 2011). Mayr and Machin’s (2011) state that within a media communication perspective, a lexical analysis refers to investigating “what kinds of terms and expressions are used in a text” (29) and is important when examining articles. By creating what is known as a “lexical field,” certain words used in news reports can be used to convey specific meanings that may not be overt but rather require a more in-depth analysis of underlying beliefs (Mayr and Machin 2011, 30). Investigating the use of language is a common tool in the social science field and scholars have studied how language is used to represent, understand, or socially construct various concepts or ideas (Thurlow 2006; Haller, Dorries, and Rahn 2006; Hjarvard 2007; Powell 2011). In the child abduction context, analyzing the media portrayal of cases (especially the use of language), establishes a better understanding of the goals and motivations behind each newspaper report, and helps to identify the frames or messages that the article intends for its audience(s).

Because one of the goals of my study was to see if stranger abductions and parental/familial abductions receive the same amount of news coverage, this was examined and identified within the newspaper articles. This was based on previous research which states that the media is more

likely to cover cases where the child has been abducted by a stranger, as opposed to a family member (Fritz and Altheide 1987; Best 1987; Gentry 1988; Best 1988; Best 1990; Zgoba 2004; Critcher 2008; Moscovitz and Duvall 2011). This also speaks to moral panic theory (the theoretical orientation used for this study). Specifically, folk-devils are established and are the cause of the panic but are commonly false representations of the issue. Hier, Lett, Walby, and Smith (2011) argue that the “the source of the moral panic is not the folk-devil itself but rather, the folk-devil serves as the ideological embodiment of the moral panic” (261). Investigating how an issue relates to theoretical perspectives is an example of ‘theoretical’ thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This type of analysis is driven by personal theoretical and analytic interest. As well, in this type of thematic analysis, the codes are highly correlated with the initial research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006).

After coding the data, the next step involved identifying the most common themes in the newspaper articles. With regards to Research Question 1, this involved investigating how, and how often, the media used tools including language, statistics, traditional voices of authority, and geography/proximity to represent the child abduction issue. With regards to Research Question 2, this involved identifying the information provided by the media about supports and resources for families in these situations. The way that I chose to code for this was to identify whether the articles discussed any technological, legal or social supports/resources surrounding the child abduction issue. If an article included a reference to a technological, legal, or social resource, I added a checkmark to the Excel chart and a note about whether the article discussed a social, legal or technological support/resource. Finally, with regards to Research Question 3, I looked for changes across the two time periods in the media’s messages about parenting practices and about informing parents about parenting behaviour in the child abduction era. This involved looking at and recording how the media informs parents about the dangers of child abduction and safety measures related to this issue. Furthermore, this included an investigation of the reflective nature of the comments made by the media about the significant impact the child abduction issue is having on parents and children today. An example of this was that parents were no longer allowing their children to walk to school on their own because of parental fears about child abduction.

6 Chapter Six: Findings

As previously mentioned, this study involved the use of two data collection sources (the newspaper articles about the 12 specific abduction cases and the general child abduction coverage from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*)⁷. Therefore, the following sections consist of an examination of the results of both data collection sources, analyzed in conjunction with one another. At various times, a focus is given to one data collection source over the other, primarily if the findings differ.

Within the analysis of the general news articles about child abduction from *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, and the 12 specific child abduction case articles from local and national Canadian newspapers, there were both similar and different findings. Concerning the amount of newspaper coverage of child abduction, when I searched for newspaper stories about the 12 specific child abduction cases, there were more child abduction articles available in the second timeframe (39 newspaper articles between 2000-2017⁸) than the first timeframe (seven newspaper articles between 1980-1999). This was also true within the general child abduction coverage in *The Globe and Mail* (189 articles between 1980-1999 and 285 articles between 2000-2017) and *The Toronto Star* (222 articles between 1980-1999 and 347 articles between 2000-2017) as shown in Table 2. This increased media coverage could speak to the extent to which the child abduction issue has increased in its media presence or, could merely speak to the increase in the prevalence and prominence of newspaper news in the present compared to the past. This finding is relevant because it can demonstrate the impact that newspaper media has had and continues to have on audience understanding of child abduction, specifically because readers are being exposed to reporting of child abduction more frequently now than in the past.

⁷ The newspapers referenced in this section can be found in Appendix B on page 92.

⁸ Between 1980-1999, there were only two specific abduction cases reported over seven newspaper articles (one stranger abduction and one parental abduction). Between 2000-2017, there were 12 specific abduction cases reported over 39 newspaper articles (one stranger and eleven parental abductions).

Table 2 Number of Abduction News Articles from Timeline 1 vs. Timeline 2

News Source	Timeframe	Number of Abduction News Articles
12 Specific Child Abduction Cases from Local and National Canadian Newspapers	T1 (1980-1999)	7
12 Specific Child Abduction Cases from Local and National Canadian Newspapers	T2 (2000-2017)	39
<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	T1 (1980-1999)	189
<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	T2 (2000-2017)	285
<i>The Toronto Star</i>	T1 (1980-1999)	222
<i>The Toronto Star</i>	T2 (2000-2017)	347

In answering my first research question about the way the media reports the issue of child abduction, I found that there was significant media attention to divorced/separated parents and parental discord, suggesting that a disruption in the family structure is a factor that impacts child abduction reporting.

6.1 Media Attention on Child Abductions by Divorced or Separated Parents (RQ 1 & 1a.)

6.1.1 Divorced/Separated Parents Blamed for Child Abduction

The following descriptions (i.e., parental marital status, dissatisfaction with custodial arrangements, and parental acrimony) are ways that the media represents family structure as playing a significant role in parental child abductions. There were more newspaper reports about child abduction by divorced/separated parents than there were about stranger abductions. In fact, when marital status was identified (which was not always the case), the parents were always divorced or separated. There were no instances wherein the parents of the abducted child were still married⁹. In the review of general child abduction articles, divorce and separation were also often identified as one of the factors impacting abduction. “[T]here's certainly a **greater chance of a parent abducting a child in the midst of a divorce situation**” (Peritz 2007) (*my emphasis added*). The discussion of divorce and separation is a consistent finding across both types of child abduction coverage (the coverage involving the 12 specific cases and the general abduction coverage).

The following quote is an example of the way the couple’s “bitter divorce” serves as the reasoning behind the abduction: “With more than 10,000 child-custody battles being fought in Canadian courtrooms every year and 10 times as many in the United States, Mr. Maxwell says it is not surprising that most of his cases deal with parental abduction. **This type of child-snatching is usually the result of a bitter divorce where one parent is "lashing back" at an ex-spouse**, he says” (Michelin 1989) (*my emphasis added*).

The custodial arrangement was more prevalent in the newspaper articles focusing on specific abduction cases, but there were no major differences across the two timeframes (1980-

⁹ Between 1980-1999, of the two cases (reported over seven newspaper articles) included in this timeframe, the marital status was only included in one of the cases. This was the parental abduction case and the parents were identified as being divorced/separated. The articles that focused on the second case (involving a stranger abduction) did not include the marital status of the parents. Between 2000-2017, 19 out of the 39 articles (49%) identified the marital status of the parents of the abducted child. Of the 11 cases (reported over these 38 articles), the parents of the child were divorced or separated in every case.

1999 vs. 2000-2017). As shown in Table 3 below, an unresolved custody arrangement was most common, followed by sole custody of the non-abductive parent, shared/joint custody and finally, sole custody of the abductive parent.

Table 3 Custodial Arrangements in Abduction Cases

Timeframe	# of Specific Cases involving Parental Abduction	Sole Custody of Non-Abductive Parent	Sole Custody of Abductive Parent	Joint/Shared Custody between the two Divorced/Separated Parents	Unresolved Custodial Arrangement
T1 (1980-1999)	8	4	1	0	3
T2 (2000-2017)	13	2	0	2	9
Total	21	6	1	2	12

In the cases involving one parent with sole custody, it was the parent without access to their child who committed the abduction. In the cases where there was shared/joint custody between the two parents, the media identified that the abductive parent felt driven to abduct their child because they were not getting enough time with him/her. The media commonly used phrases such as the “child not being returned” to the custodial parent and included information about how the children were visiting or staying with one parent (often the non-custodial parent) but were never returned to the other parent at the agreed upon time. The following quote is an example of how this appears in newspaper reports:

Afza last saw her two daughters, Memuna Afza Khan and Saphia Afza Khan, on Aug. 30, 1999. It was the day after Memuna's fifth birthday, a day marked with a party attended by friends and family. She dropped her two daughters at a local

McDonald's restaurant near Surrey, B.C., where the family was living. **They were to spend a day with their dad**, Muhammed Asif Khan, from whom Afza had separated a year earlier. **When she returned the next day to pick up her daughters, they never arrived.** She waited for close to an hour, then telephoned her lawyer, her parents and eventually the RCMP (Williamson 2004) (*my emphasis added*).

The newspaper reports typically described parents as involved in a “custody battle” (Distraught dad taken from perch 2000), with the abductive parent “in contravention of a custody order” (Burke 2012). In the following example, the journalist is suggesting that the parental separation, and the subsequent joint custody arrangement, are two factors that can produce great discord in the family and which can ultimately impact a child abduction: “The union of Stephen Watkins and Edyta Ustaszewski produced two children and **much acrimony**. After their initial separation in 2004, **they were awarded joint custody, but the relationship was toxic and heavily litigated, producing a large court file with numerous allegations by each parent against the other**” (Daubs 2012) (*my emphasis added*). This reporting method is a way for the media to suggest that a disruption in the family form (through a divorce/separation), resulting in a custody battle, can be a factor related to child abduction and, that child abductions typically occur in families where the parents are divorced/separated.

News reports frequently reported the lengthy legal battles between the two parents that led up to the abduction. When a parent abducts their child, the news media typically indicates that the abduction occurred because one parent was unhappy with the established legal custody order set up for his/her child(ren) (such as spending weekends with one parent and weekdays with the other parent). In several instances, the media represented this issue by including information about the “troubled” family life. The following is an example of how the media represents the impact of the troubled family life on abductions: “the police intervention came on the heels of a nasty, prolonged family court battle. Court documents reviewed by the *Free Press* paint a troubling picture of how the children were caught in the middle of an **ugly dispute between their parents**, who married in 2005. This included Child and Family Service involvement, allegations of sexual assault that were found to be false, violent threats and psychological abuse” (DeGurse 2016) (*my emphasis added*). In this way, the media paints the familial context and custodial decisions as a rationale for child abductions.

6.1.2 Parental Acrimony and the “Bad” Parent Impacting Abductions

The thematic analysis demonstrates that the media gives significant attention to the unhappiness between the couple either before or after their divorce and identifies that this plays a role in the abduction. Presenting this information comes in various forms within the newspaper reports, including focusing on the negative impact the “broken” family structure can have on abductions, by looking at how the children’s best interests were not taken into account, and by focusing on abuse allegations. Specifically, out of 21 articles, the media identified the negative impact the family structure can have on child abductions in almost every article (n=18).

Information about the abductive parent and the non-abductive parent, which is also referred to in the existing literature as the left-behind parent (Janvier, McCormick, and Donaldson 1990; Plass, Finkelhor, and Hotaling 1997), were commonly discussed in these media reports. Between 1980-1999, all four articles about the O’Brien case (one of the 12 parental abduction cases reviewed), included a description of the abductive father that negatively portrayed him as the “bad parent”: “Gary O’Brien was supposed to bring them home that night. Instead a phone call. He said, ‘the children are not coming back to you’. He said, “you’ll know what it’s like to be without your children on your 40th birthday” (A woman is marking a year since her ex-husband abducted her children 1997).

The O’Brien father’s behaviour was depicted as unstable prior to the abduction in four of the articles about this case, as seen in the following quote:

Gary O’Brien, 40, and his three sons haven’t been seen since Nov. 9, when he called his wife to say he was leaving their Torbay, Nfld., home with the children. **He also told her he had rigged their house to explode if she tried to enter.** The bomb was defused by police but the four have not been located, despite two possible sightings (Mother pleads for return of abducted children, kids taken by father say police 1996) (*my emphasis added*).

In the latter timeframe (2000-2017), the abductive parent was evaluated negatively more often than in the earlier timeframe¹⁰. In the following example, language such as “erratic” and

¹⁰ The abductive parent was evaluated negatively in 10 out of 38 articles (approximately 26%).

“dangerous” is evidence of this negative portrayal: “The court finds that the mother’s behaviour is both **erratic** and **dangerous**. Her past behaviour demonstrates that **she is willing to go to any means necessary to get what she wants**” (Greenslade 2016) (*my emphasis added*).

As shown in Table 4 below, an evaluation of the left-behind parent shows that over both timeframes, the left-behind parent is more likely to be portrayed positively.

Table 4 Negative vs. Positive Portrayals of Abductive and Non-Abductive Parents

Timeframe	# of News Articles	# of Abduction Cases	Abductive Parent +ve	Abductive Parent -ve	Left-Behind +ve	Left-Behind -ve
T1 (1980-1999)	7	2	0	4	1	0
T2 (2000-2017)	38	12	2	10	5	2
Total	45	14	2	14	6	2

In the two instances where the news media included a *negative* portrayal of the left-behind parent (2000-2017), they did so to justify their (ex)spouses taking their child(ren). For example, in one article about children who were abducted by their mother, details about the left-behind father, and his physical and sexual abuse were included, which made the abduction by the mother seem warranted. This was also evident in an article written about the abduction of Christopher Turgeon, where the media reported that the left-behind father had abused the child’s mother and so, she felt it was justified to abduct her son in order to escape the situation (Anderson 2000). I found that when the media provides a negative account of the left-behind parent, it is often to place blame for the crime on either the left-behind mother or the left-behind father.

There are several ways of describing the abduction that the media uses to suggest that parental acrimony plays a role in child abduction, as shown in the following quote:

To create a scenario - Bill and Mary get divorced. Bill lives with their two small children. Mary is upset. She picks the children up Saturday and returns them two hours late Sunday, after Bill has spent two hours pacing the floor. **They fight at the door.** The next weekend, Mary calls Bill Sunday night and says she will bring the children home on Monday morning. **They have a fight on the phone.** When she brings them home Monday, **Bill says he is going back to court to prevent her from having any access to the children. Mary threatens to abduct them** (McKay 1987) (*my emphasis added*).

Identifying how the children's best interests are not taken into account in these types of situations is yet another way the news media represents the impact of the familial situation on abduction. Examples of this included descriptions of the failed relationship between the two parents, which ultimately resulted in one of the parents abducting the child, as shown below:

To understand the abduction, you have to go back to the beginning of an acrimonious union. Stephen Watkins, 38, met Edyta Ustaszewski in 1996, when she was dating a friend of his. When they split, Watkins and Ustaszewski began dating in 1998...They married in 2001 and had two children, but it was far from suburban bliss. When the pair separated three and a half years later, they were awarded joint custody, although the children stayed primarily with their mother. Watkins says that arrangement didn't work. **He was routinely in court fighting for his weekend access. Court records show both parents made allegations of abuse against each other.** In a final court order in January 2009, Stephen Watkins was granted custody. Edyta was granted access every second weekend (Daubs 2010) (*my emphasis added*).

The above quote shows that abuse allegations can be a topic of discussion for the news media when reporting on parental child abductions. Although only identified in four articles (two from the first timeframe and two from the second timeframe), the media reported that abuse allegations were present in certain abduction cases. The following quote speaks to the impact of abuse allegations when dealing with parental abductions: "But today with fewer fathers content to be visitors in their children's lives, the custody battles are more bitter. **While allegations of sexual abuse are not common, lawyers are hearing them with greater frequency...**"It's been popular to claim abuse...There's been so much crying of wolf that real cases are losing their credibility" (Abraham 1993) (*my emphasis added*). These descriptions are ways that the media

represents the child abduction issue to identify that a break in the original family structure can result in one parent abducting his/her child.

6.2 Fear Mongering and Moral Panic in Child Abduction Reporting (RQ 1.b)

Another part of my first research question was to examine whether the media overemphasizes the danger children are in of being abducted at different points in history (1980-1999 to 2000-2017). My analysis demonstrates two key findings: 1. there has not been an increase over time, but instead, consistent use of fear to represent the danger children are in from abduction; and, 2. there has been an increase over time in the amount of fear mongering used to represent parental child abductions. This means that the mainstream media portrays children at more risk now because it can be parents, not just strangers, who are the child snatchers.

Evidence of fear mongering is present via the use of media strategies including language (Altheide and Michalowski 1999; Dowler 2003; Weitzer and Kubrin 2004; Chadee and Ditton 2005; Thurlow 2006; Breen, Devereux, and Haynes 2006; Kupchik and Bracy 2009; Callanan and Rosenberger 2015) statistics (Best 1988; Woodward 1999; Chang and Lee 2010), traditional voices of authority (Welch, Fenwick, and Roberts 1998; Beckett and Sasson 2003; Calsmiglia and Ferro 2003; Barak 2007) and geography/proximity (Jewkes 2004; Hoskins 2006; Shih, Wijaya, and Brossard 2008). The findings were not the same when looking at articles about general child abduction vs. the 12 specific child abduction cases. The use of fear mongering was prevalent in both timeframes within the general abduction coverage but was used most often when discussing stranger abductions (compared to parental abductions). This was because out of the 12 specific cases included in the sample, only one was a stranger abduction. However, this one case (that of the abduction of a little girl named Casey Rose Bohun), provided significant insight into how the media can report on a stranger abduction in a way that generates fear in readers. The following bolded words and phrases were used to increase the reader's fear of child abduction by strangers:

Did Casey go **outside by herself** only to be **snatched** there? Or did someone enter the house and **steal her from her bed**...Today, nearly two years later, those

questions remain unanswered. Casey is **still missing**. She was one of 69 children abducted, presumably by strangers, that year in Canada. Sixty-five were found; four, including Casey, **have never been located**... We're expecting about a 30 per cent increase over last year," says Sergeant Dina Kalns, Metro police child abuse co-ordinator. Statistics Canada figures show child abductions in Ontario jumped 22 per cent from 1985 to 1989. During the same period across the country, abductions increased 8 per cent... "**There is no question that our children are not as safe as children 10 years ago** were," says Detective Gary McClelland (Orwen 1991) (*my emphasis added*).

Words like “snatched” and “vanished” and phrases like “... steal her from her bed...” and “... our children are not as safe as children 10 years ago were,” all remind readers that child abduction is a real threat that can occur at any moment.

The media uses specific language that challenges our assumptions that children are safe when in their parents’ care. Further, the media can use certain language to suggest that parents are the likely perpetrators of child abduction because of the disruption of the traditional family form. Another example of how this appears in a newspaper article is as follows: “It is not a cliché to say it's a **parent's worst nightmare**. A mom has not been able to sleep since Monday night, **not knowing where her child** is or **if she will ever see her child again**... There is still a myth in today's society where we think that because a child is with the other parent, that he is necessarily safe. That is really not the case” (Moore 2007) (*my emphasis added*).

The analysis shows that the language used by the media reinforces the likelihood that child abductions will occur. Between 1980-1999, there were 12 articles, and between 2000-2017, there were 13 articles, that commented on the likelihood of child abductions to occur in Canada. There has been a consistent media reference to the likelihood of child abductions across both timeframes. This is further evidence that the media uses fear mongering, via specific language, to portray the child abduction issue. The following quote speaks to how the media uses language to imply that child abductions are likely to occur:

Why is it that our **children are not safe** in our own backyards? Why is the issue of violent crime not properly addressed? It is not a question of having "to keep a little better watch on our children and not leave them alone for a long time" as Phyllis Hallatt, President of Child Find Canada, suggests. Instead we should question why

it is that we need Child Find. Why? Because **Canadians are unsafe and unprotected**. It is not because Canadians are irresponsible and do not protect their children. By not identifying and properly addressing the root of the problem, parents and other Canadians have taken the blame, shouldered the guilt and live in fear of violent crime (Davison 1992) (*my emphasis added*).

This quote is an example of how the media includes specific ideas that reinforce the fear narrative by suggesting that children today are unable to grow up safely because of the perpetual threat of abduction.

The following section provides evidence of how the media uses specific tools and strategies (including language, statistics, reference to traditional voices of authority, and proximity/geography) as fear mongering techniques to represent the child abduction issue.

6.2.1 Use of Fear Language in Newspaper Article Headlines

To begin, the media were able to elicit fear and concern about child abductions in the news article headlines. Scholars have studied the impact that newspaper headlines can have on people's perceptions of social issues. For example, Reynolds (2001) examines the impact of newspaper headlines in terms of creating fear about cancer risks; Dor (2003) examines how newspaper headlines have the ability to alter our perceptions, specifically making us believe that one story can be generalized to all stories and additionally, Bleich, Stonebraker, Nisar, and Abdelhamid (2015) examine how Muslims are portrayed in British newspaper headlines in ways that create fear in readers.

Table 5 shows that the use of fear language in headlines in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star* was more prevalent when the articles discussed stranger abductions compared to articles that discussed parental abductions. This finding was consistent across the two time periods.

Table 5 Use of Fear in Parental Abduction Articles vs. Stranger Abduction Articles

Newspaper	Timeframe	Number of Parental Abduction Articles Using Fear	Number of Stranger Abduction Articles Using Fear
<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	T1 1980-1999	0	9
<i>The Toronto Star</i>	T1 1980-1999	1	8
<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	T2 2000-2017	1	10
<i>The Toronto Star</i>	T2 2000-2017	0	6
Total		2	33

The following are some examples of ‘fear eliciting headlines’:

1. “**Preying on parents' fears**, Identification kits sold by firms claiming to find missing children are useless, police say” [The Toronto Star- June 25, 1988]
2. “**Few places safe** as child abductors growing bolder” [The Toronto Star- June 30, 1991]
3. “**Notorious pedophile sought in abduction**, Prairie boys last seen with suspect, **Repeat offender** released last summer” [The Toronto Star- August 01, 2006]
4. “**Be on guard against baby snatchers**, experts warn” [The Globe and Mail-January 25, 1995]

These headlines help to send the message that child abductions are permeating our society. Further, these headlines are examples of the ‘concern’ feature of moral panics as developed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda. The media is contributing to the moral panic status of the child abduction issue by creating a heightened level of concern about the issue and suggesting that this issue has severe implications on the rest of society.

The media also establishes fear about child abductions by using language to identify characteristics of, or to profile the “typical child abductor”. However, as shown in four different articles (Be on guard against baby snatchers 1995; Gray 2003; Cribb 2016; McKay 1987), there were many different definitions of the typical abductor. Because there is no true definition of the typical abductor, fear is generated amongst audiences because it makes it seem as if a child abductor might be anyone, even a parent or family member. The following are examples from the media’s discussion about typical child abductors:

- A) “[The] typical abductor is a female who has had trouble having her own children. "There's always a fertility issue involved," said Mr. Rabun, vice-president of the National Centre of Missing and Exploited Children. The abductors tend to treat the babies well, as if they had themselves given birth. The bad news is that such abductors are shrewd. Abductions are "well planned” (Be on guard against baby snatchers, experts warn 1995).
- B) “Usually men between ages 20 and 40, often social misfits ...they tend to have been raised in backgrounds of abuse and neglect, they tend to be of average intelligence...they tend not to be very distinguished...their motivation is almost always sexual” (Gray 2003).
- C) “92 percent of Canada's child murderers are men. 68 percent of them are Caucasian in their 20s (the average age is 26 with nearly a quarter under the age of 18). 55 percent of offenders had a criminal record when the offence was committed” (Cribb 2016).

In comparison to these articles that focused on the characteristics of a typical stranger abductor, one article identified the characteristics of a typical parental abductor: “male, usually abducts (or wants to abduct) one child under the age of 4, usually comes from a foreign country, usually has no significant assets in Ontario and usually is not involved in the community” (McKay 1987). These descriptions provided by the media ultimately help shape audience understandings of whom they should fear when it comes to child abductions.

6.2.2 Use of Statistics as a Media Tool for Fear Mongering

Statistics were found to be another media framing tool used to lend credibility to the story and to fortify and add concrete evidence to the fear narrative (see also Best 1988; Woodward 1999; Chang and Lee 2010). The use of statistics was prevalent in the articles about the 12

specific abduction cases and the general abduction articles in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*. The major difference was that the 12 specific child abduction articles were more likely to report statistics about parental child abductions: “About **55,000 Canadian children disappear every year**, according to the RCMP’s missing children registry. Of those, between **20 and 25 percent are abducted**, while most others are considered runaways. About **90 percent of abductions are carried out by a parent**” (Mom insists 4 children still alive a year after disappearance 1997) (*my emphasis added*).

At times, these statistics focused specifically on abducted children who came from divorced parents and couples whose custodial arrangements were unresolved:

She was one of **69 children abducted**, presumably by strangers, that year in Canada. Sixty-five were found; **four, including Casey, have never been located**. Last year, **61,248 children across the country were reported missing**; 56,804 were found and the majority of those **still unaccounted for** are believed to have run away. Some **432 were abducted by a parent involved in a custody dispute** and 84 were taken by someone other than a relative (Orwen 1991).

In other instances, the media includes a combination of statistics and language to create a sense of fear in readers that if a child is abducted it is possible that they may never be returned and these crimes may never be solved: “According to RCMP data, there are **258 cases of missing persons under the age of 17** across B.C. Some have been missing **30 days**, while others have been **missing for months, years, even decades**. The cases date as far back as 1949 and are as recent as February of this year. All **258 cases** remain active” (Carrigg 2016) (*my emphasis added*).

The general newspaper articles were more likely to use statistics to highlight the likelihood that child abductions would occur. The following is an example of the way statistics are used in the newspaper reports: “There have been varying reports on the numbers of children missing in Canada, but we can assure you that **the problem is severe and real**. Most people hear only of the few abductions of children under 12 that make headlines, but **there are literally thousands of missing children who never get mention**” (Rosenfeldt 1986) (*my emphasis added*). When the media includes numbers such as “thousands of missing children” it quantifies the child abduction issue. In conjunction with these statistics, the quotes also involve words and phrases

such as “**severe and real**” and “...**thousands of missing children** who never get attention” that validate the crime and speak to the fact that this issue is a definite cause for fear and concern.

When the media discusses stranger abduction statistics, it is typically in a grim manner and works to elicit fear in readers: “Statistics paint a grim picture of those rare instances when children are spirited away by strangers. According to numbers from the United States and other jurisdictions, most victims are dead within 24 hours. **Forty-four percent are dead within one hour; 74 percent within three hours, and 91 percent within 24 hours**” (Gray 2003) (*my emphasis added*). Even though this quote acknowledges the fact that these instances are “rare,” fear is still generated by the media when they include information about the number of children killed after being abducted and the speed with which these horrific crimes occur.

6.2.3 Traditional Voices of Authority as a Media Tool for Fear Mongering

Traditional voices of authority (see Welch, Fenwick, and Roberts 1998; Beckett and Sasson 2003; Calsmiglia and Ferro 2003; Barak 2007) which is also referred to as the “sources used as experts” (see Gillespie, Richards, Givens, and Smith 2013; Richards, Gillespie, and Smith 2014) or “diversity of sources” (see Comas-D’Argemir 2015) were also found to be another media tool used to elicit fear and panic when representing the child abduction issue. As seen in the above quotes, state managers, including individuals such as police and RCMP personnel, are commonly identified as the voice of authority in the article. News articles included either a direct quote by an individual who is considered to be a traditional voice of authority or, made some reference to him/her. Approximately 65% of the articles were coded as reflecting the use of a traditional voice of authority. One example that best shows how this appears in a newspaper article is as follows:

Abductions by strangers, like the Andrea Atkinson case, are rare, says **Sergeant John Oliver of the RCMP's Missing Children's Registry**. But the rarity of an abduction doesn't ease its tragedy. Numbers and percentages cannot accurately reflect the anguish and pain of the families involved and the fear in the community caused by this kind of cruel, random crime. We see the innocent face of blond, blue-eyed Michael Dunahee on posters in Metro bus shelters. Michael, 4, was playing in a Victoria, B.C., park when he vanished March 24. "We don't know what to say . .

. it's very alarming what's happening out there," says **Metro police Detective Greg McLane** (Orwen 1991) (*my emphasis added*).

When the media presents a story using the fear mongering tactic and includes a quote or reference to a traditional voice of authority (especially in articles that focus on stranger abductions), it validates what the media is saying. It convinces audiences that if an authority figure is supporting the media's argument, then it must be true. Therefore, when the media is presenting information about child abduction in a way that generates fear, the fear is seen as necessary because this authority figure has validated the claim. For example, if the media discusses the traumatic nature of child abduction (which generates fear), and a traditional voice of authority is quoted (as seen above), it causes people to believe that the fear is valid. This contributes to the moral panic about child abduction.

6.2.4 Proximity and Geographical Location as a Media Tool for Fear Mongering

The final media tool that speaks to the fear mongering narrative comes via the inclusion of the geographical location and proximity of the child abduction (see Hoskins 2006; Shih, Wijaya, and Brossard 2008). There are two key findings within this section: 1. a focus on Canadian abductions, which brings the issue close to home for readers and 2. the acknowledgement that children are being taken across international borders, which increases our fear about child abduction and child safety. Overall, there was an increase in the number of articles that focused on international child abductions, but only within the 12 specific child abduction cases (see Figure 4). For the general abduction coverage, the number of domestic and international abduction cases covered in the newspapers was relatively consistent across both timeframes (see Figure 5).

Figure 4 Location of Child Abductions: Canada vs. International in the 12 Specific Child Abduction Cases

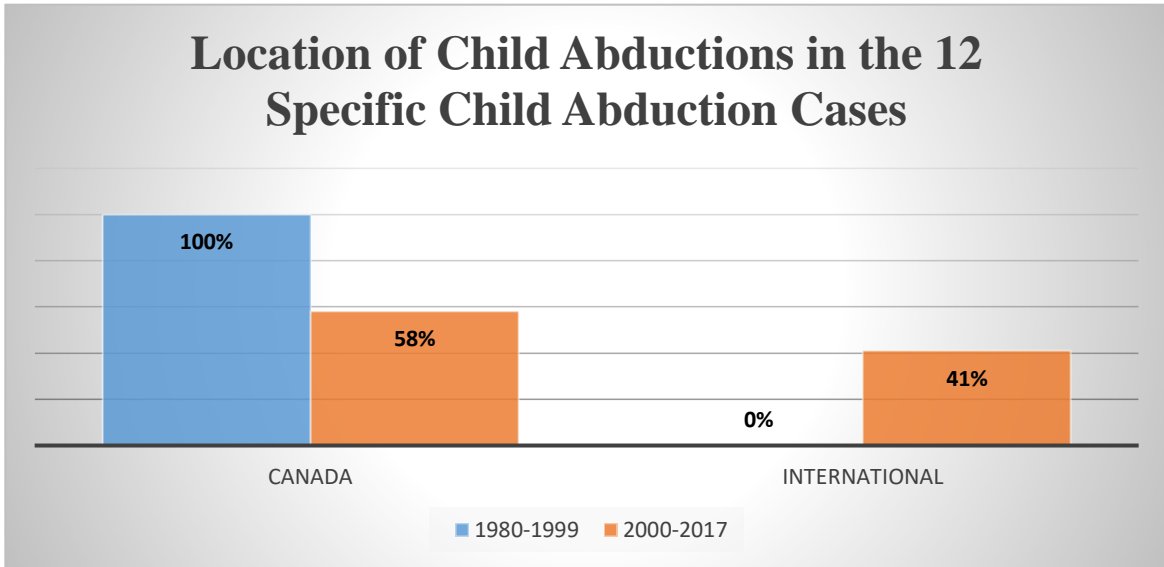
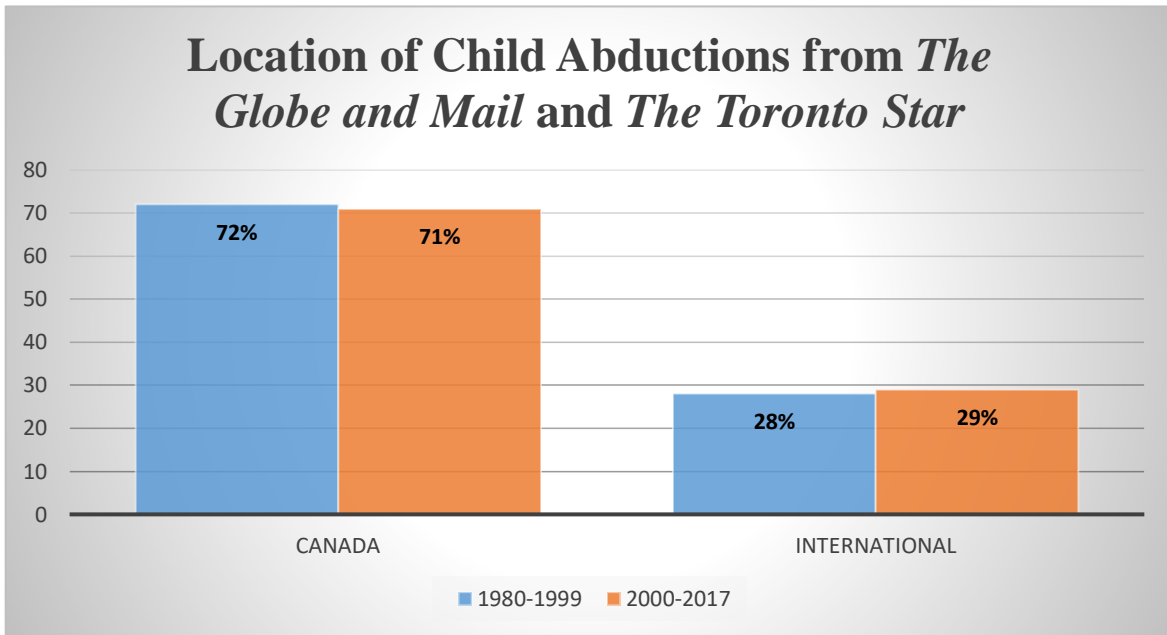


Figure 5 Location of Child Abductions: Canada vs. International in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*



The news articles focusing on international abductions often involved the non-custodial parent taking the child(ren) out of Canada and fleeing to a foreign country (usually the country of origin for the non-custodial parent). The legal issues that occurred when the children are taken

outside of Canada were also common in these articles, as in these instances it is difficult for Canadian officials to solve these crimes. The following scenario speaks to the difficulty in handling international abductions:

She has asked for help from Ottawa, has begged the Pakistani government to send her daughters home, and has gone to court several times to fight the return of her kids. Rodney Moore, spokesman for the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, said an arrest warrant for Khan was issued in Pakistan in September, after he was a no-show for a custodial hearing. "We're encouraging the Pakistani authorities to enforce an arrest warrant for (Khan)," said Moore. According to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, which Pakistan has not signed, **custody orders from other countries are viewed simply as evidence in Pakistani proceedings. Possession of a custody order does not automatically result in the return of an abducted child** (Williamson 2004) (*my emphasis added*).

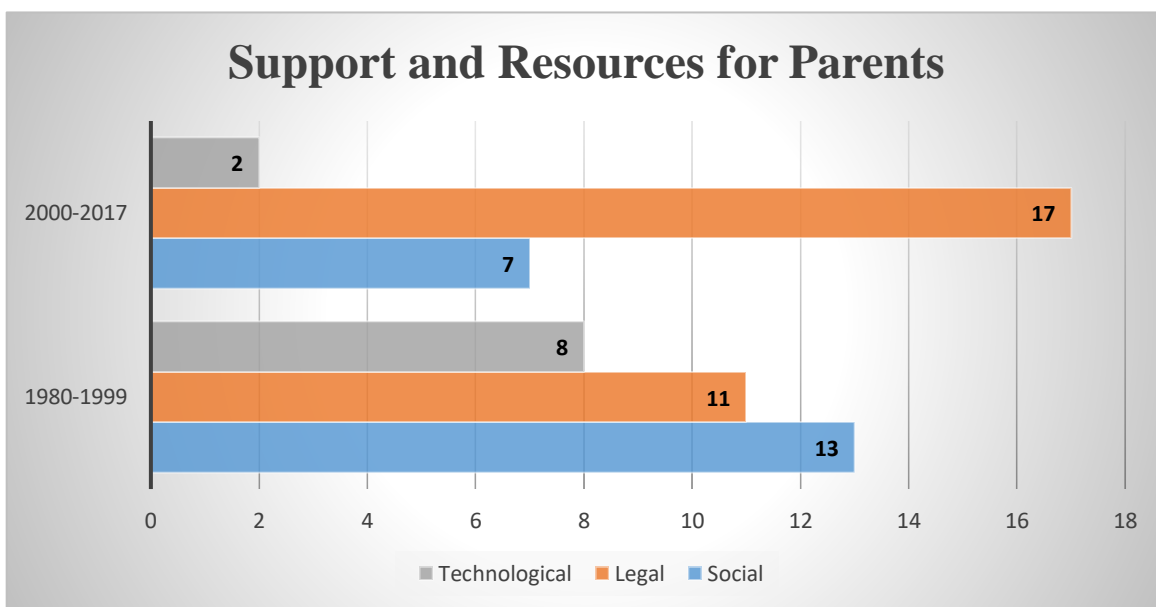
These types of cases speak to the difficulties that can occur when abductions cross international borders. Further, the reporting style of these cases demonstrates how the media can generate fear in audiences by suggesting that it is possible that these children might never be returned if they are taken outside Canadian borders.

The geographical location of the abduction is relevant to studying the media portrayal of the child abduction issue, because it speaks to the fact that the media strategically includes specific details (such as where the abduction occurs) for a targeted purpose: to suggest that abductions can happen in our backyard but also, that children can be whisked away to foreign countries from where they may never return. The use of proximity to sell a story is considered a cardinal news value according to authors Cere, Jewkes, and Ugelvic (2013). Scholars argue that we live in a "de-territorialised" world where the media exposes viewers to stories that occur in faraway geographical locations, but regardless of this lack of geographical proximity, the media is still able to use these stories to shape audience understandings of specific issues (Coombe 1998 in Cere, Jewkes, and Ugelvic 2013).

6.3 Impact of Media Representations on Information for Families about New or Existing Supports and Resources (RQ 2)

My second research question sought to examine the impact media representations of child abduction might have on supports and resources for families in these types of situations. The findings demonstrate that the media representation of child abduction has provided information about new or existing supports and resources for families dealing with child abduction. The coding strategy employed for this section was as follows: a ‘support/resource’ code was recorded in the abstraction chart if the information in the newspaper article discussed any sort of support or resource that could be used by parents and families dealing with child abductions. Following that initial coding, the supports and resources were categorized into social, legal, or technological (as these were the types of supports and resources most typically discussed in the newspaper articles). For example, if the article discussed an organization or centre established to help families handle child abductions, it was categorized as social; if the article discussed the Hague Convention or passport laws, it was categorized as legal; and if the article discussed a website or technology related to child abduction, it was categorized as technological. Figure 6 below represents the number of articles dedicated to information provided by the media about each type of support/resource in the two timeframes.

Figure 6 Number of Articles Discussing Supports and Resources for Parents: 1980-1999 vs. 2000-2017



6.3.1 Information about Available Social Supports/Resources for Families

Information about social supports/resources came in the form of identifying the creation of agencies and centres focusing on child abduction. Some examples of these included the Abducted Children's Rights of Canada (Shipton Sabloff-Bay Karu 1980), Child Find (School rules thwart anti-abduction plan 1984), The National Centre and Registry for Missing Children (Rosenfeldt 1986), and The National Centre of Missing and Exploited Children (Be on guard against baby snatchers, experts warn 1995). The media typically identified these as providing information and referral services to parents, providing assistance for children and parents in these situations, and providing access to the appropriate personnel to help assist in the abduction cases (Baxter 1991). One example was a new non-profit foundation aimed at preventing the disappearance and abductions of children, known as the Canadian Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. The article identified that this centre would provide the following services: "...a clearing house for information on missing children, providing technical assistance to citizens and law enforcement agencies, offering training programs to law enforcement agencies and social service professionals, providing continuing psychological and emotional support to children returned to their families and providing prevention and education programs to schools and communities" (Baxter 1991). The media's consistent reference to these organizations and centres demonstrates the impact that the representation of the child abduction issue has had on creating and implementing social supports and resources for families dealing with abductions.

6.3.2 Information about Legal Supports/Resources for Families

Information about legal supports and resources showed up in two different ways and were more commonly discussed in the second timeframe than in the first. The first way the media addressed legal supports and resources was through the inclusion of details about international laws that might be relevant for those families interested in pursuing legal avenues. Specifically, the international law known as the Hague Convention was commonly discussed. The Hague Convention is "an international treaty aimed at the expeditious return of the child to his or her country of habitual residence" (Bannon 2011, 129). This convention was most often identified in the context of whether or not the country where the child was taken was a signatory. For example, the media identified how a mother's chances of getting her child back after he was

abducted to Iraq by his father were significantly limited because Iraq is not a signatory of the Hague Convention. The media included a quote by the Director General of the Missing Children's Network saying: "If the child is indeed in Jordan, bound for Iraq, those are two countries that are not signatory members of the Hague treaty, therefore we expect that this can be a little more complicated" (Mother of missing boy faces long legal battle 2007). A discussion of this legal support was present within the coverage on the 12 specific abduction cases and within the general abduction coverage in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*.

The second legal support or resource commonly discussed by the media was in connection to changes to passport laws and policies at airports for parents taking their children outside of Canada, as shown in the following quote:

The Missing Children's Network has been lobbying government to make it mandatory for airlines to get notarized letters from both parents approving travel for every child boarding a flight in Canada" [*because at the time*], "while it is recommended that one parent secures permission from the other parent before they travel with their child, it is not required by law (Interpol hunting for Montreal boy possibly headed to Iraq with dad 2007).

News articles written as early as 1986 identified that passport laws needed to change in order to mitigate abductions by parents as shown in the following quote: "separated or divorced parents will no longer be allowed to obtain passports for children who are not in their legal custody, unless they have consent from their ex-spouse ...no passport will be issued for a child whose movement is restricted under a court order. The other parent will always be asked to acknowledge the passport entry before it is approved" (Vienneau 1986). The media's discussion of legal supports and resources is another demonstration of how audiences, especially parents, have been exposed to new resources that can help mitigate the possibility of children being abducted, especially abducted outside the confines of the Canadian borders.

6.3.3 Information about Technological Supports/Resources for Families

The least common (although still relevant) category of supports and resources provided by the media was technological supports and resources. This came in the form of new technologies available to families dealing with, or, concerned about child abduction. The media discussed four

different technological advances: websites, computerized information systems, computerized ID tags, and “toothprinting” technologies. The media typically identified how computers had the greatest impact on supports and resources available to families dealing with child abduction.

The websites provide the parents of missing children with a “one-stop-shop for information” which informs them on what to do once a child is missing, how to organize a community search, how to keep children safe and provide a place for anyone to file tips about missing and abducted children (Press 2011). Furthermore, the media identified these websites as able to “compile digital footprints of a missing child or abductor [by sifting] through open-source websites to compile tidbits of information about a missing child or abductor, spewing out results similar to a Google search” (Press 2011). These websites link the child’s information to other online search engines, and therefore, the child’s information shows up whenever the centre runs a search.

In several instances, news articles referred to technologies used to keep track of children and reduce the number of child abductions. The following quote from *The Globe and Mail* in 1993 speaks to the impact of technology in the child abduction context:

A new computerized information system exchange between countries will make it easier to trace runaway or abducted children...In a suspicious situation, officers will now be able to feed the tiny computers with a child's description and immediately receive a readout of missing children who match that description. Photos will also flash on the screen to make a possible identification easier. (Computers join to trace missing children International network will tie in with hand-held units for customs officers 1993).

A second example of a technological advancement discussed by the media was computerized identification tags worn by babies and mothers at hospitals. Two of the articles included in this study identified the significant benefits of this type of equipment in helping to prevent abductions following childbirth:

...radio-frequency identification is making its way into Canadian hospitals, where thousands of newborns are being tagged with transponders to prevent abductions...a bracelet is placed on every newborn's ankle at the Oshawa, Ont., site at Lakeridge Health; try to cut it and a buzzer goes off at security and the nursing station. Even the act of walking too close to a hospital exit will trigger a locked door. ‘You rest a little easier,’ said Angela Kilgannon, 37, of her son, Conall,

who was tagged with the transponder just after his birth on Monday. ‘If anybody did come in and take him, they wouldn't be able to get past the hospital doors’ (Priest 2008).

Finally, the process known as “toothprinting” was another technological resource commonly discussed by the media. Toothprinting is a dental procedure where “children bite into thermal plastic wafers to have imprints of their teeth and the DNA in their saliva in the hopes [that it will] help police identify them should they ever go missing” (Powell 2004). In one news story, a mother of three disclosed her choice to have her children undergo this procedure saying that, “**with all the scary things that are happening** these days, I want to **take every precaution**” and that she “had her children fingerprinted and filled out police forms that included their photographs and personal data such as blood type, hair colour, shoe size and friends' addresses” (Powell 2004) (*my emphasis added*).

The social, legal, and technological supports and resources mentioned above all help to answer Research Question 2 regarding the impact that the media representation of the child abduction issue has had in assisting families with these types of situations.

6.4 The Media Representation’s Impact on Messages For Parents and About Parenting (RQ 3)

The third and final research question sought to examine how the reporting of child abduction has changed between 1980 and 2017 with regards to messaging about parenting practices. The findings demonstrate that messages for parents and reflective messages about current parenting in the child abduction context were more prevalent between 2000-2017, but only within the general newspaper articles. These messages for parents were about how to keep children safe, and the messages about parenting spoke to the impact that the child abduction issue has had on parents of today.

6.4.1 Messages for Parents About How to Keep their Children Safe

The findings show that there was significant media attention on how parents can keep their kids safe in a child abduction environment. These came in the form of tips and strategies for parents. At times, these messages were evident in the headline of the article, as in “Tell your kids

to say no, unconditionally” (Daum 1993). Other times, messages to parents were discussed in the body of the news article. The following are two examples:

- A) (1) No going to the store with a stranger to get candy.
(2) Never go away by yourself
(3) Never leave with a stranger from school
(4) Never follow a dog.
(5) If a stranger asks you to go somewhere with them, ask them for the ‘PASSWORD’ (Daum 1993).
- B) **No matter who the person** is or what they ask the child to do, if the adult doesn't know the password the child knows the person is not safe or endorsed by the parent. Children have an honest chance to know they're at risk and they can run, yell, and cause a commotion... A child's best defense is their own intuition, but too often parents demand that children succumb to aunts, uncles, and other adults' unwanted requests for hugs and kisses. Making a child cater to adult wants against their will is tantamount to disarming your child against perpetrators of all kinds, regardless of what rules you've taught them. When a child pulls back from an adult, that action must be respected, or the child loses trust of their own intuition and their sense of autonomy and control. Forcing children to submit sends the message that all grown-ups are the boss of all children... We all need to send a new message to children: No matter who asks for help or affection, it's OK to say no, and we have to respect children when they do. **If we don't, there may come a day when we lose them to a "stranger"** -- and we would give anything we have just to hear them say no again (Daum 1993) (*my emphasis added*).

Other news articles referred to the changes that parents should undergo to protect their children from being abducted. The media referred to these changes as “street-proofing” and identified that this process involves teaching children how to look after themselves when they are on their own in the streets. Street-proofing includes actions such as: how to react if someone grabs them, knowing the difference between good people versus bad people, and good touching versus bad touching, and finally, instilling self-confidence and walking children through a range of possible circumstances that could occur when they are on their own and around strangers (Yarmey 1987). The reporting of these “streetproofing” techniques speaks to the extent of the reporting of child abduction. For example, in a news article written in 2004, Frank Furedi, author of a book entitled “Paranoid Parenting,” stated the following:

...parents' concern with their children's safety has reached obsessive proportions. "9/11 simply accelerated the culture of fear that surrounds children from the moment they are born...**child-rearing today is not so much about managing the risks of everyday life, but avoiding them altogether**...our obsessive fears are likely to be more damaging to our children than the risks they encounter in their daily interactions with the world...paranoid parenting is driven by the constant anxiety that something really bad is likely to happen. **Thus panicked, we look for ways to help us ensure that our kids remain safe and secure** (English 2004) (*my emphasis added*).

This quote is an example of the extent to which the child abduction issue has impacted parenting and teaching children about safety. Furthermore, this quote helps to explain the historical changes that have occurred with regards to how the media informs parents about parenting practices. Specifically, the media are identifying that in connection to the child abduction issue, parents today behave differently than previous generations.

Finally, several newspaper articles included details about what parents should do to help eliminate the possibility of having their child abducted. Examples included referrals to community I.D. clinics where children's records were made for use in the case of an abduction, references to the 'Safe Kids Canada' website which provides safety tips for families, and finally, references to the 'Stay Alert . . . Stay Safe' program, which provides videos and educational booklets with safety tips for parents and kids about child abduction. In one article, the media included a full safety list with the following tips:

1. Teach children to recognize what is usual and 'normal' so that they can spot anything unusual. Act out with them scenarios that could pose a threat, so they can practise taking the proper steps.
2. Establish a secret code word and tell your child never to accept a ride with anyone who does not know it.
3. Avoid clothing with your child's name on it. A child is more likely to trust someone who calls him or her by name.
4. If someone tries to force you into a car or building, kick and scream 'Stay away from me!' to attract attention. Screaming and kicking helped save a child from being abducted in North York earlier this month.
5. Be careful if someone asks you to keep a secret. Adults should not ask children to keep secrets.
6. Use the buddy system wherever possible.
7. Don't play in dark areas or take shortcuts.

8. Some people you know can also be dangerous. Trust your own feelings. If you feel uncomfortable or bad about doing something with a grown-up you know, don't do it. It's okay to say 'No' to a grown-up if you feel afraid (Brown 1997).

These tips and strategies provided to parents are examples of the result of the moral panic about child abduction, especially Goode and Ben-Yehuda's concept of 'concern' wherein there is a heightened level of concern about an issue and the acknowledgement that this issue is a threat to society.

6.4.2 Blaming Parents for Their Paranoia

In addition to messages provided to parents by the media about keeping their kids safe, there were also reflections about parenting in the age of child abduction. Typically, this came in the form of identifying the extreme measures taken by parents in response to the child abduction craze. In an article entitled "Positive parenting or paranoia," the author identified that parents have become very focused on the abduction of their children, especially, by strangers: "It's natural to worry about your kids' safety... but **more and more moms and dads are going to the extremes**" (English 2004) (*my emphasis added*).

One example of these extreme measures involved teaching children how to fend off an attacker through certain self-defence techniques (some even including references to how to carry out a quick "chop to the throat"). The following quote speaks directly to the media's portrayal of parental reactions to the child abduction issue and the impact it is having on parenting:

But increasingly, from the time we learn we're going to become parents, **we succumb to the culture of fear and allow anxiety to overtake us... We force ourselves to shut out nightmare visions of drugs, guns, knives, brutal attacks, sexual molestation and what's probably our worst fear, abduction.** In fact, **the horrible fear of our child being randomly snatched off the street by a total stranger is our most irrational fear of all, given that stranger abduction is a relatively rare occurrence.** A December 2003, report by Canada's National Missing Children's Services, a national police services program, determined that there were five incidents of stranger abduction in Canada in all of 2001 and 2002. **The high-profile nature of those incidents stokes our fear** (English 2004) (*my emphasis added*).

The media acknowledges the impact that this abduction craze has had on parents by discussing the various changes that have occurred with regards to how to raise children in this child abduction world: “**You can't let a child be a child anymore** and do the things a child should do. When I grew up you could have a bit of freedom to run around, hang out with neighbors, **but now you have to watch everything they [children] do**” (Harvey 1990) (*my emphasis added*). The media discussion of these changes to parenting reflect Goode and Ben-Yehuda's ‘consensus’ component of moral panics. There is general agreement among parents that the threat of child abduction is real and serious. They are convinced that they need to be constantly fearful of having their child abducted and are convinced that they must undertake certain parenting behaviours in order to protect their children.

Another example of how the media reporting of the child abduction issue impacts the parents and even the children of today is as follows:

Fears, real and imagined, have conspired to drive children indoors... the age of so-called “heli-parenting” **has been accompanied by a trend among urban neighbourhoods to focus less on creating outdoor public spaces for kids.** Instead, the focus has shifted indoors...working parents who can't be home after school don't want their kids playing outside unattended. **So, if the kids aren't in sports or recreation programs, some adults assume they're safe on the Internet or watching TV, “which is not true...**Not only does it lead to unhealthy habits, but **kids who roam cyberspace are vulnerable to predators, explicit or frightening material they may stumble upon** or bullying via MSN (Gordon 2005) (*my emphasis added*).

One of the most commonly identified issues in these newspaper articles was that of determining when it becomes acceptable and or safe to allow children to walk to school on their own. In an article written in *The Toronto Star* in 2014, the author described how parents are faced with deciding the appropriate timeline for allowing their children to walk to school on their own. This fear stems from the “helicopter parent” generation and particularly, fears about child abduction. One author wrote “...it's the parents who are scared. **That kids should walk was taken for granted a generation ago. Now it's a nail-biting parental dilemma: What's too protective and what's too permissive?**” (White 2014) (*my emphasis added*). The article also went on to explore the implications of not allowing children to walk to school on their own,

specifically highlighting a lack of physical exercise in the children of today, compared to previous generations, but also, that children are no longer able to discover the world, become aware of traffic or have the opportunities to interact with the environment: “Parents are so barraged with danger information, they assume being a good mother or father means driving their kids to school” (White 2014). These quotes are examples of the fallout of the child abduction issue, specifically that it has gained ‘moral panic’ status: “Today's child who hears things that go bump in the night **is being taught to reach not for a teddy bear, but for the telephone to contact police**. The word [streetproofing] derived from “drownproofing”, espouses the same idea; **in a frightening and potentially hazardous situation, a child in blind panic is in more danger than one armed with a set of responses**” (Kelly 1985) (*my emphasis added*). These above quotes are clear indications of the impact that the media representation of child abduction. Furthermore, these quotes are clear indications that the media successfully turned the issue into a moral panic. This occurred specifically through achieving a consensus among citizens that child abductions were a real threat to society, as well as through creating a disproportionate level of concern about children being abducted (both of which are key facets of the creation of a moral panic, as discussed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

These reflections on the impact that the media has had on parenting are consistent with Glassner’s (1999) identification that at times, news organizations “allay the very fears they arouse to lure audience” (xxxiv). What this means is that periodically, the news media sheds light on the reality of the issue about which they are trying to convince others. Glassner (1999) identifies that there have been several instances in the past where newspapers ran stories about child murderers, and instead of treating every incident as evidence of a panic regarding child murders, it affirmed the opposite and acknowledged the fact that these are rare instances. In the child abduction context, these media reports of extreme parental behaviours are ways of self-identifying that the media has unnecessarily influenced parental behaviour (especially extreme and unwarranted behaviour). Regardless of this self-reflection by the media and the media taking some of the blame for creating such a widespread panic, the media is framing child abduction as newsworthy, and therefore, continues to influence audience understandings.

7 Chapter Seven: Discussion

The research findings are concerned with understanding the way mainstream news media represents child abduction in Canada. Within the newspaper coverage, I found several patterns that work to frame the child abduction issue in a way that supports a neoliberal agenda, by reifying the nuclear family, increasing society's fear of abductions (especially by strangers), and holding parents responsible for keeping their children safe. The main findings of this study (more attention to parental abductions over time, more fear mongering over time, more information about available supports and resources for families and more messages about parenting in a child abduction context) will be discussed via the theoretical frameworks of moral panic theory and moral regulation theory, and will also be addressed in connection to existing literature on child abduction and media framing.

7.1 Mainstream Media's Role in Social Problem Framing

This study shows that the media were able to successfully “spin” the narrative about child abduction in a way that continued to position it as a social problem and a moral panic. The media's ability to “spin” a story has a tremendous impact on the way audiences understand issues and social problems (Tuchman 1978; Adoni and Mane 1984; Conway and Rubin 1991; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992; Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992; Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch 1997; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006, Robbers 2008; Callanan 2012). By outlining the typical features of child abduction (divorce/separation, marital discord, custodial dissatisfaction), the common perpetrators (parents and strangers), the resources and supports available to parents, and the impact child abduction has had on parenting, the media is suggesting that child abduction is a real problem requiring responses from members of society, especially parents.

The extensive media attention on the child abduction issue over the past thirty-eight years is an example of ‘mediatization’ (Krotz 2001; Hjarvard 2004; Schulz 2004). This occurs when social issues are dominated by the mainstream media, and the social issue becomes present only within a media form. The result of ‘mediatization’ is that social issues become “performed through interaction with a medium, and the symbolic content and the structure of the social and

cultural activities are influenced by media environments which they gradually become more dependent upon” (Hjarvard 2007, 3). What this means is that social issues, and in this case, the child abduction issue, are discussed almost solely by the mainstream media, excluding other voices and expertise. Thus, who audiences believe to be the perpetrators, and what audiences believe to be the factors associated with an issue, are generated based upon what they are told by the media (which in the child abduction case was inaccurate). This in turn, has severe implications on the knowledge audiences have about social problems and subsequently, on the way they react to social problems (Tuchman 1978; Adoni and Mane 1984; Conway and Rubin 1991; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992; Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992; Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch 1997; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006; Robbers 2008; Callanan 2012).

Because of the media’s influence and ability to spread information to the masses, the media as one of the primary sources of information on the child abduction issue could have several negative implications on audience beliefs and attitudes. These inaccurate beliefs include: 1. because of the substantial media attention, child abductions must be rampant; 2. marital divorce, discord, and custodial dissatisfaction will automatically result in a child abduction; 3. parents are solely responsible for keeping their children safe and, thus, should search out resources and supports to handle the issue; and 4. parents need to undertake safety precautions and demonstrate certain parenting behaviors in order to spare their children from being abducted. When audiences are continuously exposed to these media frames about child abduction, it could create a false understanding and false reality of the issue. This is another example of the impact of agenda setting and priming. Although the media cannot convince audiences that these beliefs about child abduction are true, they can influence audiences into consistently associating these ideas with the issue. This is a consistent finding among framing and agenda setting scholars (Cohen 1963; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Dearing 1998; Boykoff 2007; Entman 2010).

7.2 Support for the Nuclear Family (Focus on Divorced Parents)

The overt overemphasis on divorce/separation, parental discord, and custodial arrangement dissatisfaction served as a way for the media to suggest that parents are to blame for their child’s abduction. The divorced/separated parents are stigmatized, which ultimately helps support the

“value” of the nuclear/traditional family form, of two married parents, and the “intact family.” Newspaper reports alluding to the fact that parental abduction can easily result from the divorce/separation of parents, or, from a fight between divorced/separated parents over custodial arrangements, reinforces the importance of maintaining or even reviving the nuclear family. This finding is consistent with Moscovitz and Duvall’s (2011) study on child abduction myths in US news, where they found that stories were framed to reflect how child abductions were in response to how the “American (nuclear) family was in need of protection or salvation” (155).

Because some cases involve parental/familial abductions, the stranger as the elusive “other” cannot be blamed and so, the media seeks a new source of blame, (i.e., the parents). In this way, parents become the new folk-devils of the issue, which allows the media to blame parents for both creating an environment that led to the abduction of their child but also, for being unable to make their marriage work, and, for disrupting the nuclear family form. Establishing the parents as folk-devils speaks to the “Us vs. Them” ideology associated with moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009). By suggesting that parents who fail to reflect the traditional/nuclear family form (due to divorce/separation) are the folk-devils, it establishes that these people are considered to be “in the margins of respectable society” and are thus, “outsiders.” The media helps to reinforce the “us vs. them” concept of moral panics by suggesting that divorced parents who abduct their children are not worthy of being considered “us” because they are deviants and non-law-abiding citizens. This is a reflection of the ‘hostility’ component of moral panics wherein the news media is establishing that the rest of society should consider these divorced/separated parents as enemies because they engage in threatening behaviour. What this means is that there is encouragement from the media for families to return to the nuclear family form. This fits within the neoliberal logic because by returning to the nuclear family form, the state is no longer responsible for family wellbeing. Many scholars have identified this as the ‘neoliberalization of the family’ (Skeggs 2004; Gillies 2005; Garrett, Jensen, and Velloso 2016; Crossley 2016) which occurred as a feature of the ‘New Right’ movement of the 1980s and 1990s. During this time there was a shift from enacting state power over the family to emphasizing individual responsibility for the family. Further, this connects to ‘New Labour’ mentalities, which emphasize giving parents the skills (and thus, the responsibility) to create

social mobility, redistribute opportunities for their children and, allow them to make empowered choices. In this sense, the responsibility of raising a family and therefore, also the blame, is solely on parents (Gillies 2005; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Squires 2008; De Benedictis 2012). Within a neoliberalist framework, by suggesting that the family is under parental, not state responsibility, concepts of ‘dysfunctional families’ and ‘bad’ parenting arise, wherein certain families, typically “underclass” families, are blamed for their family problems (Skeggs 2004). Thus, neoliberalism emphasizes self-governance so that families are aware that they are solely responsible for either their family’s success or their family’s failure.

7.3 Fear of “The Stranger”

Although the media did acknowledge parental/familial abductions, it was the stranger who was continuously overemphasized as the most common perpetrator. The media’s warnings about child abduction risks and dangers, and how to keep children safe, which came in the form of tips and strategies, continued to position the stranger as the person who society should fear. In every instance where the media provided tools or tips on how parents should keep their children safe from abduction, there were zero references to protecting children from parental/familial abductions or seeing the warning signs of parental/familial abductions. The media only provided tips and strategies for how to keep children from being snatched up by “The Stranger.” This is evidence of Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s discussion of ‘disproportionality.’ The media established unwarranted concern about stranger abductions. This concern was out of proportion to the reality of the child abduction issue because it is parents or family members who most commonly commit child abductions. The increased attention on abductions as being typically committed by strangers stems from the “stranger-danger” concept as discussed by authors Pain (2006) and Stokes (2009). These authors identified that this concept became a “buzzword” amongst educators, and especially, amongst the media over the past decade with warnings about “stranger-danger” incorporated into many child safety programs. Pain (2006) explains this concept in the following way: “for adults, the ‘stranger’ is often symbolic rather than real, as the contrast to the purity and innocence of the child. It can be viewed as the modern embodiment of the ‘wicked witch’ or ‘bogyman’” (in Stokes 2009, 7). This idea that the ‘stranger’ is “symbolic rather than real,” speaks specifically to the nature of social problems wherein certain individuals

or groups can identify that deviant people are the source of the problem, even if it is not entirely true.

Suggesting that the stranger is the most typical perpetrator is a tactic used by the media to establish ‘the other’ (as previously discussed). Breen, Devereux, and Haynes (2006) argue that “the other must be constructed as fearful to be feared...fear has the capacity to unite and call to (irrational) action, as well as exclude. The other is constructed as a threat to marshal the members of the in-group to defend their unequal control over resources and opportunities” (16). In the case of child abduction, the in-group refers to the “in-tact” nuclear family. One of the issues with overemphasizing the stranger as the typical abductor is that it could misinform readers about the true reality of abductions, that they are committed most often by parents or family members. The way everyday audiences interpret and understand crime is connected to the media stories to which they are exposed (Tuchman 1978; Adoni and Mane 1984; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992; Dowler 2003; Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 2006, Robbers 2008; Callanan 2012). Therefore, if there is a constant connection between the stranger and child abductions, it is possible that readers will continue to associate the stranger as the most common perpetrator of this crime, which is inaccurate. This could lead to the inability for people to see the warning signs of the true child abductors, parents or family members.

7.4 Framing Fear as a Neo-Liberal Strategy for Parental Responsibility

The media’s use of fear in their portrayal of the child abduction issue was severe enough that it became a social problem, ultimately causing widespread panic and concern (Fritz and Altheide 1987; Best 1987; Gentry 1988; Best 1988; Best 1993; Zgoba 2004; Critcher 2008; Moscovitz and Duvall 2011). As previously discussed, fear is one of the most dominant media tools used for representing issues and social problems (Weitzer and Kubrin 2004; Chadee and Ditton 2005; Reiner 2007; Callanan and Rosenberger 2015). The use of fear in representing an issue is known to create a skewed understanding of social problems, often because fear framing relies upon sensationalistic and exaggerated accounts. As argued by Altheide (1997), “there are two basic social facts: 1. Popular culture includes a relatively large amount of information and images pertaining to fear, including crime and violence, and 2. Audience members perceive social life as very dangerous” (1997, 648). The media’s reliance on the fear frame to construct

and represent the child abduction issue generated a skewed understanding amongst audiences. Specifically, the media's representation led people to perceive that child abduction was rampant and permeating our society, and that without parents taking certain precautions, all children would be abducted.

Altheide and Michalowski (1999) argue that fear is used as a way of “benefit[ing] formal agents of social control and promot[ing] distrust among the audience” (Altheide and Michalowski 1999, 475). This was extremely evident in the child abduction issue and was present in three main ways: 1. Informing parents that they needed to be aware of international child abductions; 2. Informing parents that they needed to rely on specific supports and resources to prevent their children from being abducted; 3. Informing parents that they needed to partake in certain parenting behaviours to spare their children from being victims of abduction.

7.4.1 International Abductions

The media's identification that child abductions were no longer occurring solely within the confines of our country but rather, children were taken to countries where it is significantly more difficult to have them returned, may lead to an increase in fear about whether or not Canada can protect its citizens. When the media consistently reports on child abduction cases that move outside the country (and thus, outside Canadian jurisdiction), it can convince people that children are in grave danger. The reason for this being that it appears as if parents are able to get away with abducting their children and taking them outside of the country with little to no difficulty. Choosing to report on international abductions is a way for the media to suggest that child abduction is a problem that is under the responsibility of the parents, not the state. Parents are the ones who need to take measures into their own hands and ensure that their children are not abducted by disgruntled ex-spouses, or, by strangers. As a result, the media could potentially create distrust in audiences about the state's ability to look after its citizens (a neoliberalist strategy). Parents must enact the ‘responsibilization strategy’ mindset wherein they understand that if they want to ensure their children are not abducted, they must take matters into their own hands.

7.4.2 Supports and Resources to Help Families Handle Child Abduction Threats

The media's focus on informing parents that they need to rely on specific supports and resources to eliminate the possibility of their child being abducted was another way for the media to reinforce that parents are responsible for their children's safety. The extensive media attention given to supports and resources available to parents dealing with child abductions are examples of a buildup of public concern, which is a key facet of moral panics (see Cohen 1972, 9-26) generated around the child abduction issue. Specifically, the media's continual reference to supports and resources (including agencies and centres focusing on child abductions, international laws helpful to parents in these situations, and new technologies used to electronically track children) are all examples of the media's way of suggesting that parents are required to take responsibility for child safety into their own hands. The media puts forth the idea that by using these supports and resources, parents can either get their child back or prevent their child from being abducted.

7.4.3 Parents Partaking in Specific Behaviors to Ensure Child Safety

The media's discussion of how parents should partake in certain behaviours to spare their children from being abducted is the third method of reinforcing a neo-liberalist ideology with regards to child abduction. By addressing that parents need to enact certain behaviours, the media is suggesting that the safety and security measures in place were insufficient and that parents needed to protect their children from abductions themselves. These tips and strategies reflect Garland's (1997) responsabilization-strategy, which focuses on how crime reduction is in everyone's best interest and so, individuals are encouraged to take crime-reduction into their own hands by becoming more security-conscious. Convincing parents to use these resources and supports is a way for the media to reinforce individual responsibility (which is a form of governance). Hier's (2002) discussion of governance refers to how "social agents enter into a process of self-governance in an effort to minimize the risks and dangers purported to reside in some activity or behaviour" (3). Because the media identified that these supports and resources were necessary, they were suggesting that due to the significant risks associated with child abduction, intervention was required, and, people should take responsibility for their children's safety so as to prevent abductions.

The media's attention to parenting approaches and parental reactions to the child abduction issue, which was demonstrated through continual references to parents buying into (both literally and figuratively) the child abduction craze, and changing the way they parent (for example, through relying on paid activities as opposed to allowing free play), are further examples of the responsabilization-strategy that emerged. This responsabilization-strategy follows neoliberalist ideologies. Scholars in the field have identified that "late modernity is governed by greater levels of risk and couples style their identities as parents in relation to a broader culture of risk...the consumption practices of parents can be seen as motivated by the care and protection of children, the avoidance of unnecessary risk and the prioritization of family needs...it can also be seen as excessive and misplaced" (Beck 1992 in Kehily 2010, 182).

One example of the extent to which responsabilization strategies were evident amongst the parents in the news reports in this present study is seen in parental decisions to allow children to walk to school on their own. Several news articles discussed how parents were torn and unsure about the appropriate age when their children should be allowed to walk to school on their own. This is an example of the attention that the media gave to parental reactions and a shift towards more intensive parenting as a result of the child abduction issue. Parents are increasingly concerned with their children being victims of abduction, which has resulted in several changes to what children are allowed and not allowed to do. In Dixey's (1999) study which focused on parents escorting their children to school, she found the following: "in the UK in the year 1971, 80% of 7 and 8-year-olds went to school without adult supervision, but by 1990, this had fallen to 9%" (Dixey 1999, 41). The reason for this was that parents became significantly more concerned about child abductions, and subsequently, began escorting their children to school (Dixey 1999). The media's attention to reflecting on parenting in the age of child abduction, is very similar to the findings of other scholars in this field, specifically, that parents have undertaken extreme measures in their responses to the child abduction issue (Dixey 1999; Gabriels 2016; Holt et al. 2016). This is a result of the shift towards placing the responsibility of child safety onto parents.

7.5 Responding to Risk

As previously discussed, moral panic and moral regulation theory connect to the concept of a risk society, wherein behaviour is regulated by the process of moralization, in which citizens must behave in response to potential risks, and act in ways that ensure their right to freedom of harm (Hunt 2003; Hier 2003). As such, various societal rules, laws, and policies are organized around the prevention of risk. Researchers have focused on the role that fear plays in media portrayals, identifying issues including that fear can contribute to “stances and reactive social policies that promote state control and surveillance” ... fear is a key element of creating ‘the risk society,’ organized around communication oriented to policing, control, and prevention of risks (Ericson and Haggerty 1997 in Altheide 1999; Staples 1997 in Altheide 1999, 476). The media’s representation of the child abduction issue is an example of using fear to establish and assess risk. Bringing attention to certain facets of the child abduction issue (including parental discord and divorce/separation, stranger abductors, supports and resources, and parenting tips and strategies) are ways for the media to establish that children are at great risk of being abducted. The media successfully uses these ideas to suggest that parents must take responsibility, and participate in forms of risk management to ensure that children are not abducted. The entire media representation of the child abduction issue centred around establishing who the folk-devils are, how to avoid these people, and how to prevent children from coming into harm’s way.

These conceptualizations of risk, however, are unnecessary as the media presented a highly skewed reality of the child abduction issue. Specifically, the media presents the risk about the likelihood of abductions and the risk of “The Stranger” both of which fail to accurately reflect the truth: children are in less danger of being abducted than the media outlets were suggesting, and, children are more likely to be abducted by parents or family members, not strangers.

8 Chapter Eight: Limitations

As with any study, there are a few limitations to address. Firstly, due to the vast number of newspaper sources that exist in Canada, it was impossible to analyze every reporting of child abduction. Thus, the limited sample size affected the generalizability of my findings.

The second limitation refers to the coding process. Because only one researcher conducted the coding analyzing, it is important to acknowledge the subjectivity and bias that could potentially exist within this study. Ultimately, qualitative content analysis specialists argue that it becomes crucial for the researcher “to be self-aware and reflective to avoid obtaining a biased sample or one that does not allow for variation in meanings or viewpoints” (Drisko and Maschi 2015, 76). As a result, I was careful to take a neutral approach when analyzing the data.

Another limitation of my study is that although it covered a substantial time period (specifically, 48 years), it involved only one dominant news medium (i.e., newspapers). The study did not include other forms of media such as television news, radio news, or news magazines.

Finally, because some of the newspaper articles came from only two major news sources, (i.e., *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*), it is possible that the articles and reporting styles reflected some of the biases typical of each of these two news outlets. For example, as of October 17, 2018, “The Media Bias/ Fact Check” listed on its website that *The Globe and Mail* newspaper is “slightly to moderately conservative in bias... often publish[ing] factual information that utilizes loaded words (wording that attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion or stereotypes) to favour conservative causes”. Similarly, as of October 17, 2018, “The Media Bias/ Fact Check” listed on its website that *The Toronto Star* newspaper “has a slight to moderate liberal bias... often publish[ing] factual information that utilizes loaded words (wording that attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion or stereotypes) to favor liberal causes”.

Regardless of these limitations, the present study still has significant value in helping to analyze and critique media representations of social problems.

9 Chapter Nine: Implications, Significance of Research, and Conclusion

This paper examines the issue of child abduction in its current media form by highlighting the specific frames that are used to represent the issue. These particular forms help to reinforce Stanley Cohen's (1972) ideas regarding the extensive role the media plays in creating moral panics. This paper explores the media tools and frames used by the media that helps set the tone about child abduction for public audiences. The ideas presented by the media include 1. Parental divorce/separation and custodial dissatisfaction are factors impacting abductions; 2. Stranger abductions continue to be of concern; 3. Parents need to take child safety responsibilities into their own hands (through accessing certain resources or through undertaking specific behaviours). These ideas serve to tell audiences how they should understand the child abduction issue. The portrayal of the child abduction issue in this way has several implications. As dictated by Critcher (2003): "Moral panics distort our capacity for understanding, even when they appear to recognize a genuine problem" (Critcher 2003, 117). To fully understand the true reality of an issue (e.g., child abductions), we need to look at how media representations are subject to constraints and are often a reflection of larger social forces.

The media's portrayal of the child abduction issue presents several underlying messages, all of which reflect a neo-liberalist agenda. This media representation suggests that in order to prevent child abductions from occurring, people need to participate in certain behaviours (i.e., follow the traditional patriarchal family form) and take matters into their own hands, to protect their children. Specifically, they need to be aware that divorce/separation, marital discord, and custodial issues are all factors influencing abductions. They need to be mindful that it is not just strangers who can abduct children. They need to recognize that supports and resources are available to them for handling the missing children issue, and finally, they need to be aware that they can undertake certain parenting behaviours to help lessen their chances of having their children become victims of abduction.

In the words of Glassner (1999), "many fear worthy items are [simply] every day scares we can deal with sensibly as long as we have facts" (xv). Indeed, child abductions are scary,

regardless of the perpetrator, but scary does not have to equal panic. By providing a more transparent look at the reality of child abductions (and shining the light on the fact that abductions are most commonly committed by parents or relatives of the child, not strangers), it is possible to help lessen the number of child abductions that occur in Canada. Acknowledging the reality of the issue could help to stop our irrational fears about the dangerous stranger. We can focus our efforts on the reality of the issue and in this way if we know who the real perpetrators are, and if we know what the warning signs are, it could lead to better support for victims of this crime.

This research serves as an example of a newsworthy topic that can provide the context for understanding the way the media portrays and socially constructs social problems and issues. This study can serve as an educational resource and tool within the field of sociology, specifically with regards to media, as it can help individuals understand the frames and tactics used by the media for the purpose of selling news stories. This study can contribute to the field of critical sociology as it provides a way of interpreting texts (in this case newspapers), identifying the positive and negative aspects of these texts, as well as the underlying messages. In the child abduction context, when the media reports that a child abduction has occurred, not only do we hear about the tragic and unfortunate event where a child has been taken unlawfully, but we are also subject to certain neoliberalist ideals that position the family as a source free of state intervention. By teaching audiences that when we generate our understanding of social problems based on what is provided by the media, we have to look at the underlying messages. We must acknowledge the fact that although the media is a useful source of information, it has its biases and hidden agendas, which can ultimately shape audience understandings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Abstraction Tool Sample

	Nature of Article		Abduction	
	Case	General	Parental Abduction	Stranger Abduction
Article #1 (1980):	✓			✓
Article #2 (1981):	✓		✓	
Article #3 (1982):	✓		✓	
Article #4 (1983):		✓	✓	
Article #5 (1984):		✓		
Article #6 (1985):		✓		
Article #7 (1986):		✓		
Article #8 (1987):	✓		✓	
Article #9 (1988):		✓		
Article #10 (1989):		✓		
Article #11 (1990):	✓		✓	
Article #12 (1991):	✓			✓
Article #13 (1992):		✓		✓
Article #14 (1993):		✓		
Article #15 (1994):		✓	✓	
Article #16 (1995):		✓		✓
Article #17 (1996):	✓			✓
Article #18 (1997):	✓		✓	
Article #19 (1998):		✓	✓	
Article #20 (1999):	✓			✓

Appendix B: Newspaper Articles Used in Thematic Content Analysis (in order as discussed in Results section)

Page # in Thesis	Title	Source	Author	Date of Publication
41	“Quebec riveted by search for missing girl”	The Globe and Mail	Ingrid Peritz	September 07, 2007
41	“Top investigator uses a mixed bag of tricks to find missing children”	The Globe and Mail	Lana Michelin	December 26, 1989
43	“Mom refuses to quit in quest for daughters”	The Calgary Herald	Kerry Williamson	January 14, 2004
43	“Distraught dad taken from perch”	Times-Colonist BC	N/A	March 09, 2000
43	“Father, son reunited after 12-year odyssey”	The Squamish Chief	David Burke	September 13, 2012
43	“Grandfather guilty of role in abduction, knowingly helped daughter illegally take her sons to Poland, court finds”	The Toronto Star	Katie Daubs	August 24, 2012
43	“Sandra Giesbrecht faces abducted charges after brief pursuit”	The Winnipeg Free Press	Carl DeGurse	June 25, 2016

44	“A woman is marking a year since her ex-husband abducted her children”	CTV News	N/A	November 01, 1997
44	“Mother pleads for return of abducted children Kids taken by father say police”	The St. Catharine’s Standard	N/A	November 28, 1996
45	“Canada-wide arrest warrant issue for Sandra Giesbrecht, mom alleged to have abducted 2 kids”	Global News	Brittany Greenslade	June 22, 2016
45	“One Wish: To see son again”	The Province	Charlie Anderson	March 09, 2000
46	“Child always loses out in battle involving parental abduction”	The Toronto Star	Sharon McKay	July 07, 1987
46	“Father’s nightmare came true; Couple’s separation, long custody battle ended with two sons being abducted”	The Toronto Star	Katie Daubs	March 08, 2010
47	“Mom’s term for abducting kids sparks debate”	The Toronto Star	Carolyn Abraham	January 14, 1993
48	“Few places safe as child abductors growing bolder”	The Toronto Star	Patricia Orwen	June 30, 1991

48	“Montreal police fear boy abducted by father headed to Iraq”	The Toronto Star	Dene Moore	June 14, 2007
49	“Living in fear is no way to live”	The Globe and Mail	Kevin Davison	September 19, 1992
50	“Preying on parents’ fears, Identification kits sold by firms claiming to find missing children are useless, police say”	The Toronto Star	Peter Cheney	June 25, 1988
50	“Few places safe as child abductors growing bolder”	The Toronto Star	Patricia Orwen	June 30, 1991
50	“Notorious pedophile sought in abduction Prairie boys last seen with suspect Repeat offender released last summer”	The Toronto Star	Phinjo Gombu	August 01, 2006
50	“Be on guard against baby snatchers, experts warn”	The Globe and Mail	N/A	January 25, 1995
50	“Be on guard against baby snatchers, experts warn”	The Globe and Mail	N/A	January 25, 1995
50	“Rarity of abductions cold comfort for city”	The Globe and Mail	Jeff Gray	October 21, 2003
50	“Child abduction data paint chilling portrait: Study sheds light on violence	The Toronto Star	Robert Cribb	May 25, 2016

	against our most vulnerable”			
50	“Child always loses out in battle involving parental abduction”	The Toronto Star	Sharon McKay	July 07, 1987
51	“Be on guard against baby snatchers, experts warn”	The Globe and Mail	N/A	January 25, 1995
51	“Rarity of abductions could comfort for city”	The Globe and Mail	Jeff Gray	October 21, 2003
51	“Child abduction data paint chilling portrait: Study sheds light on violence against our most vulnerable”	The Toronto Star	Robert Cribb	May 25, 2016
51	“Child always loses out in battle involving parental abduction”	The Toronto Star	Sharon McKay	July 07, 1987
52	“Mom insists 4 children still alive a year after disappearance”	The Sault Star	N/A	November 03, 1997
52	“Few places safe as child abductors growing bolder”	The Toronto Star	Patricia Orwen	June 30, 1991
52	“258 on B.C.’s missing children list; Cases never closed”	The Province	David Carrigg	March 24, 2016

52	“Missing Children”	The Globe and Mail	Sharon Rosenfeldt	January 11, 1986
53	“Rarity of abductions cold comfort for city”	The Globe and Mail	Jeff Gray	October 21, 2003
53	“Few places safe as child abductors growing bolder”	The Toronto Star	Patricia Orwen	June 30, 1991
56	“Mom refuses to quit in quest for daughters”	The Calgary Herald	Kerry Williamson	January 14, 2004
57	“Abducted Children”	The Globe and Mail	Beverly Shipton Snnabelle Sabloff-Bay Lilia Lopez Karu	July 16, 1980
57	“School rules thwart anti-abduction plan”	The Globe and Mail	N/A	December 13, 1984
58	“Missing Children”	The Globe and Mail	Sharon Rosenfeldt	January 11, 1986
58	“Be on guard against baby snatchers, experts warn”	The Globe and Mail	N/A	January 25, 1995
58	“Non-profit foundation targets missing children”	The Vancouver Sun	Jamie Baxter	July 31, 1991

58	“Non-profit foundation targets missing children”	The Vancouver Sun	Jamie Baxter	July 31, 1991
58	“Mother of missing boy faces long legal battle”	CTV News	N/A	June 18, 2007
59	“Interpol hunting for Montreal boy possibly headed to Iraq with dad”	CBC News	N/A	June 14, 2007
59	“New passport rules set to curb child abduction”	The Toronto Star	David Vienneau	March 05, 1986
59	“Website helps Canadian families track missing children”	Postmedia News	Jordan Press	May 24, 2011
60	“Website helps Canadian families track missing children”	Postmedia News	Jordan Press	May 24, 2011
60	“Computers join to trace missing children, International network will tie in with hand-held units for customs officers”	The Globe and Mail	N/A	April 06, 1993
60	“A security blanket for babies- and parents”	The Globe and Mail	Lisa Priest	January 24, 2008
61	“Parents 'toothprinting' their kids; Dental procedure collects DNA Latest reaction to 'stranger danger”	The Toronto Star	Betsy Powell	August 12, 2004

61	“Parents 'toothprinting' their kids; Dental procedure collects DNA Latest reaction to 'stranger danger”	The Toronto Star	Betsy Powell	August 12, 2004
61	“Tell your kids to say no, unconditionally”	The Province	Kimberly-Ann Daum	October 10, 1993
62	“Tell your kids to say no, unconditionally”	The Province	Kimberly-Ann Daum	October 10, 1993
62	“Tell your kids to say no, unconditionally”	The Province	Kimberly-Ann Daum	October 10, 1993
64	“Positive parenting or paranoia”	The Globe and Mail	Kathy English	September 18, 2004
64	“You can’t be too careful streetproofing children”	The Toronto Star	Louise Brown	February 18, 1997
64	“Positive parenting or paranoia”	The Globe and Mail	Kathy English	September 18, 2004
64	“Positive parenting or paranoia”	The Globe and Mail	Kathy English	September 18, 2004
64	“City ‘no longer safe place’ for Annie”	The Toronto Star	Robin Harvey	November 25, 1990
65	“Prisoners of Fear”	The Toronto Star	Andrea Gordon	September 23, 2005

65	“Another school year begins Tuesday. Across the city, parents are contemplating their child's next milestone walking to school alone. But what's the right age According to experts, most kids are ready at 9”	The Toronto Star	Nancy J. White	August 13, 2014
66	“Another school year begins Tuesday. Across the city, parents are contemplating their child's next milestone walking to school alone. But what's the right age According to experts, most kids are ready at 9”	The Toronto Star	Nancy J. White	August 13, 2014
66	“Streetproofing Safeguards sought by anxious parents”	The Globe and Mail	Caitlin Kelly	January 30, 1985