

Child Abduction in Television News Media: A Content Analysis

by

Timothy Scott Miller

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Approved by

Greg Weaver, Chair, Associate Professor of Sociology
Allen Furr, Professor and Chair of Sociology
Angela Ware, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Abstract

Television news media can be a beneficial part of society. It allows for individuals to gain knowledge about what is occurring around them. When child abduction cases are presented to the public through television news media, it can be difficult for the television news outlet to not give in to sensationalism and present stories that will keep its audience tuning in time after time. This research determines if television news media disproportionately reports on nonfamily abduction (specifically stereotypical kidnappings) rather than abductions that are committed by family members. The type of victims portrayed in these cases that are reported are also determined. Reporting on non-family child abduction can give the viewer a false sense of how his or her reality truly is. A content analysis of child abduction cases from five major television news media outlets are analyzed during the period of 1970 to 2013. Demographics of the victims as well as cases are collected to determine what types of cases are more likely to be reported within television news media. The findings are then compared to statistics from the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
BET	Black Entertainment Television
CBS	CBS Broadcasting, Inc.
CNN	The Cable News Network
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FNC	Fox News Channel
MWWS	Missing White Woman Syndrome
NBC	The National Broadcasting Company
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NISMART	National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children
NISMART-2	Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SES	Socio-economic Status
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Univision	Univision Communications

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While social media has an unprecedented growth due to the expansion of the internet, television news media remains the largest and most powerful form of news media (Buckingham & Willett, 2013). Television news media is a very beneficial part of today's culture because it enables individuals to stay current on what is occurring around them. Television media also can help young children (pre-school age) understand and learn from real-life experiences (Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008). The benefits are almost endless but while television media comes with those benefits, it also comes with negative effects.

Stories that are presented within the television news media can sometimes convey a false sense of how things really are in one's surroundings. When individuals watch television news programs, they view content that is sorted through a filter known as 'newsworthiness'. Defined as possessing a quality of being interesting enough to attract attention, newsworthiness require stories to possess eight different components: having impact, being the most recent story, being prominent, having close proximity to the audience, including bizarreness, presenting conflict, having currency, and including human interest (Fogerty, 2011). Content that is reported in news media will include a story that is considered intriguing or interesting and ultimately gaining the attention of viewers. Even though many categories of news stories can have a less than lackluster story line, reports on crime news are the more popular choice in grabbing many viewers'

attention. When crime is reported in television news media, crimes that are considered violent and rare are included more often than others (Jerin & Fields, 1994; Gruenwald, Lockwood, Harris, & Mennis, 2009).

One of the most intriguing and violent crimes that are reported in television news media is child abduction that is committed by strangers. Child abduction can include cases that involve sexual violence and abuse or sometimes even the death of a child. Child abduction is the type of crime that is reported on more than any other type of crime (Carpenter, Lacy, & Fico, 2006). Rather than reporting on a story that involves a child who was abducted by a father because the court ruled custody to the mother, television news outlets are more likely to report on a case that involved a young girl who was abducted from her bedroom in the middle of the night by a complete stranger. Like the Jessica Lunsford case in 2005, these types of stories are considered more interesting than a custody battle, so they are shown more often to the public. These stories are more likely to last for days or even weeks at a time.

The purpose of this research is to determine which type of child abduction is more likely to be reported in television news media by conducting a content analysis on three national news networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) and two cable news networks (CNN and FNC). This research also aims to determine what type of victims as well as what type of characteristics are portrayed in cases that are reported. The time period used for this is from 1970-2013. All child abduction cases that are shown by each television news network during the time frame will be used for the current research.

It is important to determine what type of child abduction cases are shown more often on television news media networks because it provides insight that family abduction occurs more frequently than does non-family abduction or more specifically, stereotypical kidnapping. This

work adds knowledge onto already existing studies of child abduction in media. A Gallup poll was released in 2013 identifying television as the more popular choice among the public to receive news by 55 percent (Saad, 2013). As television is considered the more popular choice to gain knowledge of news events, this study provides a more updated analysis of media by specifically analyzing television media rather than print media.

This research is divided and organized into several chapters. Chapter 2 presents the literature on child abduction that is reported on television news media, in particular family abduction, non-family abduction, and stereotypical kidnapping. A review of the literature on child abduction in television news media and on previous studies of child abduction in print news and crime, in general, in media is included.

Chapter 3 includes information on the research design and methodology and how this research was conducted. Research questions are provided along with a description of the content analysis method used to complete the study. A detailed explanation of the sample selection as well as the coding procedures are provided. The importance of the use of each variable is provided.

Chapter 4 reports the results and findings of the study. Results on all variables (type of child abduction, age, race, gender, location abduction occurred, and time of day abduction occurred) are reported. Statistical findings are provided to answer each research question and important factors from each table are included.

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and then discusses each research question along with the findings in detail. Each question, along with the findings, are compared to data from studies conducted by National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway

Children. Unexpected findings discovered while conducting the current study are also provided and discussed.

Chapter 6 begins with reviewing the findings and also discussing previous research that has been done on child abduction in news media. Limitations of the study are included to identify the shortcomings that could not be controlled while conducting the research. These limitations are important to mention because it places restriction on the methodology that was used for the study. Possible future research is also included in the conclusion to provide more opportunity to research the topic of child abduction in television news media further. The last part of the conclusion contributes a developed grounded theory through which the findings are interpreted.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Family Abduction

Family abduction can be defined as a child that has been taken by one parent from another parent without permission or against the placement of legal sanction (Hegar & Greif, 1991). Children can also be considered victims of family abduction when the child is taken by one parent and wrongfully retained or concealed by the other parent or other members of the immediate family (Diamond, 1985). Family abduction is considered to be the type of abduction that happens more frequently than other types. With this kind of child abduction occurring more than others, it is important to know the definition of this type of crime.

Family abduction is often thought of as not a crime. The public is quick to minimize the risk to a child abducted by a parent. Mistaking the child being in safe hands of a parent often disregards the occurrence as a crime. The oversight can lead much of family abduction out of crime statistics. If a parent abducts his or her own child and is ultimately convicted, the crime can have an effect on subsequent custody decisions in family court. Family abduction can also lead to fines and jail time.

2.1.1 Definition of Family Abduction

A majority of sources define family abduction once a custody decree has been put into place by the courts. The problem that arises with the definition of family abduction is that it varies from state to state. The definition of family abduction can differ between various organizations, law enforcement agencies, and states. An example of different definitions of family abduction is the California law compared to the Texas law. In the State of California, family abduction is considered when any person not having a right to custody of a child, who maliciously takes, entices away, keeps from, withholds, or conceals any child from the host parent with the intent to detain or conceal that child from a lawful custody decree.

The definition also identifies these actions as a crime even if the abduction of a child occurred before the custody decree was considered (CA Penal Code § 278). On the other hand, the State of Texas identifies family abduction only if there is a custody decree placed after the divorce (TX Penal Code § 25.03; TX Penal Code § 25.031; & TX Penal Code § 25.04). Even though there is not a universal definition for these types of crime, it is the most universal type of kidnapping offense that involves children.

2.1.2 Family Abduction Statistics

Research on statistics of family abduction is scarce. The latest study that determined how many family abductions occur in the United States estimates a range of 200,000 to 750,000 cases per year (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlack, 1990; Gelles, 1984). According to the U.S.

Department of Justice, nearly 800,000 children are reported missing each year. Annual statistics averages to about 2,000 cases every day. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports that out of 800,000 missing child cases per year, 203,000 involve children who have been abducted by family members while 58,200 cases involve non-family abductions. Many other cases are runaways that have been pushed out of the home by family members (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlack, 2002). Child victims of family abduction are usually between the ages of two and eleven years old. Nearly 75 percent of the victims are six years old or younger, while two-thirds of the cases that are reported only involve one child (Hilgeman, 2001). From periods between the months of January and August, the abduction, detention, or concealment of the child is greater because of the children's vacations and holidays. During the time frame, abduction cases spike the most during the hours of four o'clock in the afternoon and eight o'clock in the evening (Finkelhor, et. al, 1990).

2.1.3 Causes of Family Abduction

Families that are involved with child abductions by other members of the same family may experience stressors. These stressors can be chemical or biological agent dependency or the use of drugs, lack of trust towards anyone that they come in contact with, or many other types of stresses. The most apparent motivation for family abduction is one spouse gaining power over another spouse, controlling the other spouse, or seeking revenge against the other spouse for some particular reason. These characteristics of motivation can also be the motivation within family violence cases. Family abduction is often referred to as a form of family violence. When the parents of the child are still together (i.e., living together), the child that is involved can be

used as a crutch to respond to any and all problems that arise with family domestic violence. This means that the child can be used by one parent to get what is wanted from the other parent (Hilgeman, 2001). If the child's parents are divorced or are in the middle of a divorce, other motivations can arise, e.g., a parent failing to receive partial or complete custody of the child in question.

Custody issues that emerge from divorce are among the main causes of child abduction. The order of a joint custody decree can both benefit and hurt the family. Having joint custody can have a small but beneficial impact on the wellbeing of the child. The main reason for joint custody is that the child has greater involvement with both parents instead of just one parent (sole custody). In most cases, the father is particularly benefitted from joint custody (Vanassche, Sodermans, Matthjis, and Swicegood, 2013). Joint custody can also lead to the rapid re-partnering of the mother. The idea of both parents having custody advantages to the mother as well as the child because it enables the mother and child to spend less time in poverty (Bauserman, 2002; Vanassche et al., 2013).

An issue with having joint custody is the possibility of the child feeling instability from consistently moving from one house to another. Feeling this way can cause elevated stress and possibly psychological disadvantages in children (Vanassche et al., 2013; Vélez, Wolchik, Tein, & Sandler, 2011). When a court completes a custody decree, the decision is usually the judge's opinion of the interest of the child. The idea of ruling in the favor of the child was introduced with the Family Law Act (1969), which required all custody disputes to regard the best interest of the child as the most important consideration when determining a custody decree. It was also required that parents use this principle when creating parenting plans that involved the child (Quinnell & Bow, 2001).

Even though the divorce rate among couples in the United States is slowly decreasing (4.0 divorces per 1,000 total population in 2000 to 3.6 per 1,000 total population in 2011), so is the marriage rate (CDC, 2013). While divorce rates among Americans are slowly declining, the births that occur out of wedlock are slowly increasing (CDC, 2014). When a custody decree is implemented on the divorce, the child can be placed in primary care of one parent, while the other parent is left with stipulations on visitation rights (Shear & Kushner, 2013). A parent may feel as though he or she is protecting the child from allegations of abuse and neglect. Taking the child for reasons of spite or to blame the host parent for non-related reasons can be why the child is taken (Johnston, Girdner, & Sagatun-Edwards, 1999). The child can also be abducted for reasons of attempting to keep the marital relationship intact or for some type of reconciliation. The idea that one parent fears that he or she may lose complete custody rights of the child can also be a factor in family abductions.

2.1.4 Effects of Family Abduction

When a child is abducted by a family member, the child may go through psychological, emotional, and physical harms that many other children never have to experience. Everything that is familiar to the child rapidly dissolves. Since a family abduction is more difficult to conceal than non-family abductions, it is possible that the child will experience a nomadic life that can last for years (USDJ, 2010). Because it is possible that the child is moved from place to place by the abductor, this action will keep the child from feeling stability or making interpersonal connections with others. If the abductor moves away with the child, the abductor

may change the name of the child or even change the child's physical characteristics. Ultimately, the child will become completely removed from who they once were.

Child development experts agree that the personality of a child is formed before the age of six (Hilgeman, 2001; Klimstra, 2013). The abduction of a young child can and will have a great influence on whom the child becomes. During the beginning of the child's life, hopes, wishes, fears and attitudes of the significant people that tend to be around the child can be more or less adopted. The abductor influences a child's attitude toward themselves, other people, and the world in general. The influence that can be forced upon a child is especially true if the abduction happens as a significant early age (Hilgeman, 2001).

If the abducted child's identity is changed, he or she may be told that the left-behind parent (host parent) no longer has any use for them or even told that the other parent is dead. The impact that the abduction has on the victim will differ from each case. Every child is an individual that can have distinct reactions to different circumstances as well as having various coping styles. The age of the child, how the child was taken from the other parent, length of time missing, and what they were informed about the other parent, will play a major factor in how the coping process will be played out (Shear & Kushner, 2013).

The victim can go through emotional and physical downfalls after falling victim to a family abduction. Family abduction or custodial interference within itself is considered to be a type of child abuse or maltreatment. Family abductions are usually associated with sexual assaults. Sexual assault can be common in situations where the child lives with one biological parent and one step-parent or the biological parent's significant other. Family abduction motives can be associated with sexual abuse or fears about sexual abuse happening. Fear of possible

sexual abuse can motivate unilateral intervention by guardians (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

The left behind family can also suffer from family child abduction incidents. If the left behind parent lacks some type of support system to help with coping strategies, he or she can be faced with many choices. Some of these choices can include: Will they return to work? If not, how will they pay their bills? Should they hire their own private investigator? The left behind parent sees their child's belongings or simply something that reminds them of their child and can begin to fear the unknown. They will wonder if they will ever see their child again. Trying to convince the authorities that their child may be in serious danger when taken by a family member is sometimes impossible. Failing to convince the proper authorities can lead to more anger, much of the anger being taken out on them, which can contribute to depression or psychological disorders. Many left behind parents react to these situations with physical symptoms, such as sleep or eating disorders and become victim of headaches and gastrointestinal distress (Grief, 2012; Hilgeman, 2001).

2.2 Non-family Abduction

Non-family abduction is the type of abduction that is least common to occur. There are many types of this abduction, which can be very complex. Even though the definition of non-family abduction varies slightly from state to state, there is a universal understanding of what non-family abduction is. For example, in the state of California, the definition of kidnapping is similar to how most states define kidnapping. The difference lies within the distance that a victim is transported before it is legally defined as 'kidnapping'. While California does not use the

universal definition of kidnapping, there is no one standard definition. In California, a minimum amount of distance is not part of the definition. As long as an abductor detains the victim without his or her consent, it is considered kidnapping by state laws. The definition of kidnapping that the state of California uses is only emphasized to provide an example.

2.2.1 Definition of Non-family Abduction

Legally defined non-family abduction is the coerced and unauthorized taking of a child into a building, a vehicle, or a distance of more than twenty feet, the detention of a child for a period of more than an hour, or the luring of a child for the purpose of committing another crime (Finkelhor, et. al, 1990). Most issues with identifying abductions that occur by non-family perpetrators are caused by definitions. Much of society views kidnapping as having notorious meaning behind the crime, much like the Adam Walsh case in the 1980's (Newton, 2002, p. 331). In most states, the definition of kidnapping is very broad, sometimes including the brief coerced movement of the victim. According to the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART), the legal definition of kidnapping is broken into two components: acquaintance abduction and stereotypical kidnappings (Finkelhor, et. al, 1990).

2.2.2 Types of Non-family Abduction

Acquaintance abduction. According to the State of California, "Every person, who for the purpose of committing any act defined in Section 288, hires, persuades, entices, decoys, or

seduces by false promises, misrepresentations, or the like, any child under the age of 14 years to go out of their current country, state, or county, or into another part of the same county, is guilty of kidnapping” (Cal. Penal Code § 207). On the other hand, in the State of Texas, the offense is considered kidnapping when the victim is moved outside a 120-mile radius of the victim’s residence, but only if the victim is over the age of 17. If the victim is under 17 years of age, a minimum distance is not required (Tex. Penal Code § 20.01). Even though kidnapping laws vary between states, the central idea of what defines a kidnapping is common across the United States. The laws are created to identify what crimes are considered kidnapping in hopes to diminish the number of cases.

Stereotypical kidnappings. The second part of the legal definition of kidnapping is the defining of Stereotypical Kidnappings. In defining a Stereotypical Kidnapping, one of five characteristics must be identified: (1) the child must be gone overnight, (2) the child must be killed during the process of the kidnapping, (3) be transported a distance of fifty miles or more, (4) the child must be ransomed during the kidnapping, or (5) the perpetrator must present evidence of intent to keep the child on a permanent basis. The perpetrator must also be a stranger to the victim (Finkelhor, et. al, 1990; Asdigian, Finkelhor, & Hotaling, 1995). The issue with the definition of stereotypical kidnapping is that most states combine the definition with non-family abduction or combine parts of this definition with other violent crimes such as homicide or sexual assault. While family abduction constitutes a majority of the child abduction cases that occur each year, the amount of non-family abductions that take place is just over seven percent of the total missing children cases (Finklehor, et. al, 2002). This number may not sound like a large amount compared to family abduction cases; however, non-family abduction is still very important.

2.2.3 Non-family Abduction Statistics

According to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children, 58,200 non-family abductions occur in a given year (Finkelhor, et. al, 2002). This constitutes just seven percent of the total missing children cases that occur each year. Since only about 203,000 cases are actual abduction cases, non-family abductions equal just over 28 percent of the child abduction cases as a whole. Even though over 58,000 children fall victim to non-family abduction in a one year period, only about 115 of those kidnappings are considered stereotypical kidnappings.

As of December 2013, there are 84,136 active missing person files that were recorded with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Of those cases, juveniles that are under the age of 18 account for 33,849 (40.2 percent). A total of 627,911 missing person cases were recorded in 2013, which was a 5.1 percent decrease from the total of 661,593 total cases that were recorded in 2012. Of the total cases that were recorded in 2013, 440,625 of those cases were under the age of 18. Of recorded cases, only 9,617 juveniles were considered to be in some type of danger. The number of cases was determined by using two of the characteristics of the five that were mentioned about determining a stereotypical kidnapping: (1) the victim needs to be rendered 'in danger' and (2) the kidnapping is defined as a non-family abduction even when the perpetrator is an acquaintance, then some of these cases are considered non-family abductions (FBI, 2014).

2.2.4 Causes of Non-family Abduction

Nonfamily abductions involve very different motives and offender typologies than are reported in family abductions. It can be difficult to determine which type of offender commits

these crimes. While the rate of non-family abduction is lower compared to the rate of family abduction, most of the non-family abduction cases are committed by someone the victim knows, even if he/she is just a slight acquaintance (Miller, Kurlycheck, Hansen, & Wilson, 2008). In non-family abductions, since the perpetrator will most likely be an acquaintance to the victim, the reasons behind why the child is kidnapped vary greatly.

Non-family abduction is more likely to have a criminal motive. These motives can range anywhere from robbery to sexual assault to homicide. Since kidnapping is not the primary motive for non-family abductions, there is little data to determine why these types of abductions occur. Agencies that report to the Federal Bureau of Investigation use the hierarchy rule to report crimes (reporting the more violent crime), so unfortunately some kidnapping crimes are not reported. Overall, 19 percent of non-family abductions are associated with another crime (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000).

Causes of acquaintance abduction. The primary motive identified for non-family acquaintance abduction is sexual assault. Data for non-family abductions show about half to two-thirds of all victims report sexual assault during an incident (Miller, et. al, 2008). Acquaintances who abduct children are more likely than strangers to sexually assault their female victims (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2010, p. 21-22). As female victims are more likely to be sexually assaulted by their abductor than male victims, male victims are more likely to be abducted because of a robbery motive (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Beasley, Hayne, Beyer, Cramer, Berson, Muirhead, & Warren, 2009). In 1999, an FBI study determined that kidnapping for profit was the leading motive for abduction of high school aged males. At the same time, high school aged females were more likely to be abducted because of sexual assault (Boudreaux,

Lord, & Dutra, 1999). Motives as well as offender typologies vary greatly because of the age of the victim.

Causes of stereotypical kidnappings. Typologies of stereotypical kidnappings are easier to identify. It is reported that three out of every four stereotypical kidnapping cases, an offender will have a prior criminal record. The offender's criminal record will often include a range of crimes that involve property crimes, drugs, and violence. Of the prior convictions, violent crime is usually the case 45 percent of the time. These charges range from prior assault charges, burglary, and forcible sexual assault charges (Beasley, et. al, 2009). Instances of stereotypical kidnappings occur less often than other types of abduction. With stereotypical kidnapping cases, the victim does not know the offender. Since there is no acquaintance between the victim and the offender, the abduction is easier to hide. There are three main types of motives for stereotypical kidnappings: holding the victim for ransom, intending to keep the child permanently, exploiting the child through human trafficking, or killing the victim.

Ransom kidnappings. Holding the child for ransom is one reason why children are kidnapped by complete strangers. Ransom kidnappings are generally accomplished with minimal preparation. Offenders will usually target individuals from affluent families. Since the families are wealthy, the ransoms requested are relatively easy for the victim's family or in some cases, company, to obtain. Knowing that a loved one is in danger, paying the ransom set by the perpetrators for the victim's safety is hardly an issue (Wright, 2009). A majority of these types of kidnappings are when the child is kidnapped and taken over an international border; however, these kidnappings still occur nonetheless.

Permanent kidnappings. The second type of stereotypical kidnapping is a case where the offender plans to keep the victim permanently. There are a few causes for permanent kidnappings, the first in which one is a kidnapping with intent to raise the child on their own. This action is referred to as an illegal adoption. The offender kidnaps the child with the intent to rear the child themselves. Permanent kidnappings are a type of abduction that is not common but still exist. Permanent kidnappings can also include what is known as a 'fetal abduction'. Fetal abduction is the kidnapping of an unborn fetus that is taken from a mother's womb by forced cesarean. The proportion of fetal abductions is included within infants abducted at nearly 11 percent of children who were one day old or less (Carr & Nahirny, 2011). These abductions are usually perpetrated by women (Mundy & Zapotosky, 2010). Fetal abduction has been recognized as a major human rights violation, especially since it exists in every region of the world (Rigby, 2011).

Human trafficking. Human trafficking is the abduction with the intent to exploit the child. The intentions of exploiting the child can be for sex, trading, or possible abuses such as slavery, forced labor, sexual abuse, or even illegal organ trading (Davidson, 2011). Each year, millions of children fall victim to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. A majority of this type of kidnapping cases happens in other countries; however, it does happen in the United States as well. Since research is limited, statistics regarding the magnitude of this type of crime are almost impossible to find. The International Labor Organization has estimated that over one million children are kidnapped and trafficked each year.

Kidnappings resulting in homicide and/or other violent crimes. When a child becomes victim to a stranger abduction, the case can sometimes result in a homicide. Homicide is usually the end result in these types of abductions because of the offender's fear of being caught. Killing

the victim increases the likelihood that the offender will get away with the crime. The abduction and murder of a child that is under the age of 18 is considered to be very rare. Each year, it is estimated that there are only 40 to 150 cases of child abduction resulting in homicide (Brown & Keppel, 2007). Although these types of cases are uncommon, they can be horrendous crimes. Studies also show that the child victim is murdered in approximately forty percent of all stereotypical kidnappings (Brown & Keppel, 2007; Heide, Beauregard, & Myers, 2009).

2.2.5 Effects of Non-family Abduction

Child abduction can be a very traumatic experience for the victim. When a child is recovered from the offender and then reunited with his or her family, the effects from the episode do not stop automatically. After the abduction, the child may suffer from long-term psychological effects such as anxiety, fear of being around strangers, nightmares, and even mistrust of their own family members. Emotional and social problems arise as well as academic problems. There have also been reports of regressive behaviors developing (Tedisco & Paludi, 1988). A stranger abduction situation causes stress levels in the victim to rise. The victim's body goes through three different stages as their body responds to stressful situation: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. Facing these effects may lead to regressive and/or self-defeating behaviors, possibly leading to depression (McKenzie, 1987).

As a result of being kidnapped, many surviving victims experience an aftershock of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is known as an anxiety disorder that a victim develops after the exposure to a terrifying event that has threatened or caused physical harm. This disorder is caused by the body's reaction to severe psychological

trauma. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may develop after becoming a victim of kidnapping, becoming a prisoner of war, or other major events. Individuals who become victim of a kidnapping and later released develop symptoms such as sleep problems, nightmares, flashbacks, impaired memory, irritability, panic attacks, feeling of nervousness and anxiety, and depression (Birch, 2000).

2.3 Crime and Media

According to a 2013 Gallup Poll, fifty-five percent of Americans prefer television news as their primary news source, twenty-one percent of Americans preferred the internet for a news source, nine percent preferred print media, and six percent preferred radio means (Saad, 2013). These percentages were for U.S. news and global events. At more than fifty percent for every group, television news is also considered to be the primary news source for all age groups. Television news was also the primary source for every educational category, employment, as well as political party identification. More than half of Americans prefer local television news at fifty percent and nearly forty percent preferring cable news (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013). Americans also prefer news that is aired during the day instead of during the night (Morales, 2008). To be able to keep society interested in tuning into a television network, media outlets have to keep programs interesting.

2.3.1 Crime News in the Media

Crime stories are among the most popular topics within both media and the public. Crime stories are rated the second most frequent news coverage at 16.1 percent behind general interest

stories which is at 20.7 percent (Surette, 1994). News on crime, especially violent crime, is the most newsworthy type of report. These types of stories are rated the highest in newsworthiness because of the uniqueness of the crimes as well as the excitement (Gruenwald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009). Newsworthiness is the most important part of gaining ratings.

Newsworthiness of a Story. Newsworthiness is defined as a news report having the quality of being interesting enough to attract attention. There are eight factors to determine if a story is newsworthy. The story needs to have: impact; timelessness or represent the most recent story; prominence; proximity to the audience; the quality of bizarreness; presentation of conflict; currency; and finally, human interest (Fogerty, 2011). When television media reports on news, the story has to be interesting enough to keep the attention of its viewers. The reason behind the idea is to be able to get the highest viewer rating possible so that the television news company can make more money. In order for these ratings to increase, the stories that are reported will sometimes be altered or stripped of vital information (Surette, 1994). The stories that are brought to the attention of the producers of the television news outlets are not all chosen to be aired. The perfect report is considered to be “news worthy”.

Characteristics of crime stories usually stand out when selecting newsworthy stories. Crime stories present themes that show worthiness of being aired. Stories can include homicides that are centered on a rare storyline. Homicide occurrences usually show rare elements that make them more likely to be selected rather than general homicide stories. An example of these types of rare elements would be a well-known individual that is abducted, sexually assaulted, and then murdered, although these elements in stories do not happen often (Jerin & Fields, 1994; Gruenwald, et. al, 2009), therefore, the excitement of one of these stories gains much attention from society.

Moral boundaries of crime news stories. While there are many types of crimes in crime news, these stories are required to possess at least one or more of four characteristics to be considered newsworthy: (1) personal competence and sensibility, (2) collective integrity, (3) moralized political conflicts, and (4) white-collar crime. Personal competence and sensibility is a story that is related to individuals on a very personal basis while still being realistic. When a story includes collective integrity to where the crime occurs, individuals within society may see the place as belonging to part of the “good life”; e.g., a crime that is committed in an airport, not in a famished neighborhood where many people are struggling to make a living. Moralized political conflicts include a crime that conveys a general message about a moral character. These conflicts include news stories that are not considered ‘general interests’ stories. White-collar crime includes items that provide moral instruction about matters of pressing concern for individuals who are apart from the crime (Katz, 1987).

Fear as a result of media. Knowledge that the public receives about crime is largely derived from the media. While newsworthiness is the main priority when selecting a news story to publicize, the story sometimes will be altered enough so that goal is reached. Altering of a story does not mean that facts about the story are changed, but important information may be left out. When altering of a story occurs, issues arise. Negative perceptions and beliefs can develop among members of society, causing them to fear something that is not real; believing something that is not true causes society to fear crimes that are very rare. This perception is termed Culture of Fear.

Culture of fear. Culture of Fear is a theoretical perspective that suggests a part of society instills fear in the general public in order to achieve some goal, usually a political goal. These fears are generally exaggerated or they can be irrational in nature. It is believed that media

causes much of this fear because it feeds off providing the public with sensationalistic stories that are specially designed to increase viewer ratings. The news is filled with violent crime stories because of how those types of crimes entice viewers to tune in. As these types of stories increase in prevalence, so do the ratings of these news broadcastings (Glassner, 1995).

Crime news has drawn in the attention of individuals within society even before the advent of television. While radio was among the first ways to stay updated on current events, the Lindbergh kidnapping (1932) began to unfold. The attention that media gave this particular case fed a very large amount of public interest. Since using the radio to listen in on updates about this case, it gave society a more intimate and more immediate experience than news print did. Television access was limited in American households because it was seen as a luxury rather than a necessity to own one. At this time, owning a television was a function of wealth.

Once television became easier to access, society made the shift from radio news to television news (Howell, 2012). It was also that after the Lindbergh case was aired on the radio, much of the American public, especially parents of young children, began to view their society as a much riskier place to raise children (Penfold, 2004; Howell, 2012). Violent crime in media has given negative connotations to society about the world around them. A majority of media stories on television are about violence. While newsworthiness is the main goal for television media outlets, violence increases interest among society. With the need for giving the public what it wants most, the violent content on television increases the fear that society has for its surroundings. Rare types of crimes are displayed on television causing society to believe that those crimes happen more often than they actually occur (Glassner, 1999).

Urban legends. Like the urban legend of Halloween sadism, the media will air a story of a report of a child receiving candy on Halloween that has been injected or laced with poison. Razor blades being placed into apples in hopes to harm the child also attract media attention. During a sixteen year period, 76 incidents of Halloween sadism were published in four nationally known newspapers and two nationally viewed television stations. It was determined that only two incidents actually occurred that resulted in the death of a child. These two incidents were later found to have been caused by family members. Once media is alerted of a special type of crime, the news of the incident is spread throughout the country within just a few hours. These reports that are televised have been greatly exaggerated, causing the urban legend of Halloween sadism (Best & Horiuchi, 1985).

Effects of violent crime in media. A majority of local television stations begin the evening news with a report of a criminal activity or event. Airing a criminal activity rather than a political story happens twice more likely (Kohm, Waid-Lindberg, Weinrath, Shelley, & Dobbs, 2012; Maguire, Sandage, & Weatherby, 1999). Media attention focused on crime events and also was evident during the D.C. Sniper case that occurred in 2002. According to CBS News, there was no other law-related story that captured the nation's attention in the same year as the story of the D.C. sniper shootings did (Kohn, 2002). Crime news is considered objective, and even though reporters do not usually make up facts about stories that they report on, they do rely on editors of the news media companies to outline points that they should cover. Choosing points to include in a story is referred to as 'professional ideology' (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007). This term is defined as the way that the media operates (Zollman, 2009).

2.3.2 Encouraging Fear of Victimization

While viewers of media reports involving crime begin to have a false perception of what society is really like, they also tend to overestimate the likelihood that they will fall victim to violence, much like they see portrayed in the news. This belief is referred to as Indirect Victimization. Indirect victimization is second-hand information that society receives or witnesses first hand, but the crime usually happens to someone else. Indirect Victimization is not direct experience with crime, but it raises society's fears and causes them to feel as though victimization is very likely to happen to them (Kohm, et.al, 2012).

Studies have hypothesized (Snedker, 2012; Cossman & Rader, 2011) that increased levels of fear of victimization cause an increase in vulnerability to crime. These effects are believed to be caused by media exposure of crime news or what is referred to as indirect victimization. Individuals that suffer from this effect learn of crime events that have occurred at the local or national level, see these types of crimes happening because they are heavily broadcasted, then fear that these crimes will happen to them (Kohm, et. al, 2012; Covington & Taylor, 1991). This action can especially be true when the individual is exposed to local television crime reports (Xie & McDowell, 2008).

2.3.3 Child Abduction in Media

While crime is a popular choice to report on television news stations, kidnapping is a very popular type of crime broadcasted on television (Dowler, 2003). As child abduction is reported on television news media, the crime grabs the attention of an alarming rate of viewers.

Crime stories that involve kidnapping provide both dramatic as well as mythic value to such stories. Kidnapping crimes are considered high visibility as well as a crime that can easily become personal with its viewers (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013). Often, the media justifies crime news, arguing that the public has a right to know what is occurring. Keeping members of society informed is believed to help everyone take precaution about certain dangers while attempting to not infringe on an individual's rights. Keeping members of society informed is also seen as a type of deterrent for potential criminals. Believing that a specific crime like kidnapping is quickly reported on national news may keep certain individuals from committed the crime (Chermack, 1994).

Myths of kidnapping in the news. Like other crime news stories, child abduction stories also need to have a uniqueness to them before the story is considered newsworthy. According to the most recent comprehensive study of missing children, there were 258,000 children who were abducted by both family and non-family members. This number averages out to be approximately 706 child abductions occurring every day. Of that average, in over 540 of those abductions, the perpetrator is a family member to the child while the other 153 are committed by non-family members. Of the 56,000 child abductions occurring every year by non-family members, only 115 are classified as a "stereotypical kidnapping" (NCMEC, 2000). The percentage indicates a very small number of how many of these types of kidnapping occur. Even though stereotypical kidnappings only occur at a small percentage of the time, when viewing the news, the numbers can seem much greater.

Stranger danger. While many parents tell their children "Don't talk to strangers", "Don't take candy from strangers", or "Don't take rides from strangers", it is not usually a complete stranger that a child has to worry about. The idea is known as "Stranger Danger". Stranger

danger refers to the danger that children are presented with by complete strangers (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008). These strangers are someone whom the child does not know. The term “Stranger Danger” has been used in numerous ways that intend on helping children to stay away from someone they do not know that could possibly present any sort of danger to them. Children will usually hear it at least once during their childhood. The term “Stranger Danger” has been used to help children; however, that same term has also been criticized for not teaching children that their worries usually lay with someone they know or are even related to (Moran, Warden, Macleod, Mayes, & Gillies, 1997).

The concept of stranger danger can primarily be blamed on media. The news coverage of abduction cases by broadcast and print media has brought many negative feelings to many American households. According to most media reports, kidnappings are conducted by evil individuals who are complete strangers to their victims. Media can also convince individuals within society that stereotypical kidnapping problems are growing. The emphasis of stereotypical kidnappings can hinder a child abduction prevention effort. Instead of worrying about a child being taken from his or her front yard or the park, child abduction rates are actually related more to a decline in the child’s family life and the community that the child lives in (Shutt, Miller, & Schreck, 2004). As the decline of the child’s family life continues, the chance for getting abducted by a family member increases.

One particular study has shown that though it is statistically rare, print media has disproportionately covered kidnapping stories where a child is taken by a complete stranger as well as the victim being a young Caucasian female who belonged in a middle-to-upper class neighborhood (Taylor, Boisvert, Sims, & Carver, 2011). These reports have created a nationwide epidemic of fear on stereotypical kidnappings. Society uses what they see in media and

associates it with everyday life (Moscowitz & Duvall, 2011). Parents view these media news reports and begin to see these types of kidnappings as the most common type of child abduction. As a result, societal fear increases about something that is not realistic. The number of child abduction cases reported in the news has significantly increased during the past five years from six in 1998 to fifty reports in 2003. These reports came from *USA Today* (Wilson, Martins, & Marske, 2005).

2.3.4 *Media Representation*

There are negative effects that watching news programs can have on children. Children between the ages of two and five spend at least an average of thirty-two hours per week watching television. Seventy-one percent of children between the ages of eight and eighteen have a television in their bedroom, while 37 percent of these children have cable or satellite access to those televisions. When there is a television in a child's bedroom, those children spend an average of one and one-half more hours per week watching it (Boyse, 2010). Children witness these reports in media and then they respond to these events emotionally and physically. While research is rare on kidnapping in news media as well as how it affects its viewers, much of the current research on the media's capacity to evoke society's emotions has focused on the news' ability to arouse its fears and anxieties (Weimann, 1983).

Media effects on children. American households have their televisions turned on for an average of six hours per day. During this time, many children between the ages of five and seventeen watch the news on a weekly basis (Lillard & Peterson, 2007). The media exposure increases with the age of the child. Since news about crime is prevalent, the exposure to the child

of criminal activity increases. Nearly half of children who watch news are frightened by what they see (Riddle, Cantor, Byrne, & Moyer-Guse, 2012; Buijzen, Van der Molen, & Sondij, 2007). The realism of television news not only affects children's perceptions but adults as well. Heavy television viewers have been shown to believe that violence is very frequent and that no one in society can be trusted. This understanding identifies that violence reports on the news are overwhelming. The beliefs of light television viewers are much more consistent with the actual behaviors and attitudes of society (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

When children watch news reports on television that come across as frightening, the effects are sometimes severe and long-lasting. If a child watches at least six hours of television per day, the effects result in the child suffering from trauma symptoms. The symptoms include having trouble falling asleep, being anxious at bedtime, and had an increased chance of having bad dreams while the child was asleep. It may be more difficult to confirm a conclusion from such studies. Heavy television watching of programs that include some sort of violent act may trigger fear in these children (Wilson, 2008; Wright, Huston, Vandewater, Bickham, Scantlin, Kotler, & Finkelstein, 2001).

Crime reported by television media also has a negative effect on children when the child is not directly exposed to television news programs. When adults are exposed to television media, the effects of watching news reports about crime are passed to their children. If parents watch a report on a stereotypical kidnapping case, they may view a certain crime as a problem within their society. If the crime occurred within the same area that they reside, it easily causes the parents to define their surroundings as a dangerous place to live. These parents teach their children about possible crimes that occur or that they can fall victim to. Teaching children that danger is a possibility may cause children to define their surroundings in the same way: unsafe.

Child abduction is considered a problem within itself. There are types of child abductions that happen more often than others. Family abductions are proved to happen at least four times more often than non-family abductions, yet because of media representation, society has a false idea of what type of abduction to be cautious about (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlack, 2002). Even though media is beneficial to society in many ways, priority of news stories can have major negative effects on society as a whole. Reporting rare non-family abduction because it grabs the attention of more viewers can lead to false ideas and beliefs about how prevalent the crime actually is. If media changes the requirements of what defines a newsworthiness story, it will begin to change the ideology behind child kidnapping, and society can begin to fight the crime as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEACH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research Questions*

The research questions for this study focus on determining what type of child abduction news is reported on television media networks, including national news networks and popular cable news networks. The following research questions also seek to answer which characteristics are important to television news outlets when selecting a ‘newsworthy’ report.

Question 1a: What type of child abduction is reported more on national news networks and cable news networks – family abduction or non-family abduction?

Question 1b: When television news outlets report on a non-family abduction, how often is the story about a stereotypical kidnapping?

Question 2: What are the demographic characteristics of a victim, such as age, race, and sex, as well as the victim’s location and the time of day that the abduction occurred, shown on a television news report when covering an abduction case?

Question 3a: Does age of victim, race of victim, sex of victim, location abduction occurred, and the time of day that the abduction occurred, which is portrayed in television news reports, vary across television news networks?

Question 3b: Does one television media network show more of one type of case than another when reporting on this crime?

3.2 *Content Analysis*

A content analysis is the best suited research method to answer these questions. A content analysis is defined as a method of research in the social sciences with a systematic analysis approach of written texts or artifacts. The content can be written work, speech, or film. Content also includes the study of thematic and symbolic elements that determine the objective or meaning of a particular communication (Neuendorf, 2002). The main reason of using a content analysis is to reduce the total content within a communication in order to create a set of categories that represent characteristics of research interests. It may involve verbal as well as non-verbal material (Singleton & Straits, 2010).

Conducting social research using a content analysis allows for a researcher to learn a great deal about society through analyzing cultural artifacts such as newspaper articles and television programs. When a content analysis is used, the primary goal is not to study individuals but to discover more about communications that those individuals within society use to create an image of society itself. Using a content analysis is often used to measure a change culturally as well as many different parts of society by analyzing a broad range of texts. An example of a content analysis is studying how a certain group of individuals (women, African Americans, etc.) are portrayed in news programming (Berg & Lune, 2004).

There are strengths and weaknesses for using a content analysis as a method of conducting social research. The content being studied may be limited since content analysis methods primarily based on mass communications. A content analysis cannot tell what an individual is thinking or how that individual feels. Content analysis has the potential of leaving more room for error compared to other research since the researcher needs to make choices on

how to conduct and record research data accurately. As a whole, using a content analysis as a research method has shown to be very effective. Using a content analysis does not interfere with individuals because of primarily studying cultural artifacts. Since these artifacts have already been produced by individuals within society, this method does not directly affect humans. Gaining access to data for a particular study may be rather easy since most of the sources used are media sources or publications (Bos & Tarnai, 1999).

This content analysis will focus on television news network reports on child abduction cases and how the networks portray abduction cases to society. The content analysis will also seek to determine how many family child abduction cases are aired as well as non-family child abduction cases. Finally, each group of child abduction cases will be compared to national kidnapping statistics gathered by National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART). Other information from the data collected will be analyzed to determine what types of cases are aired on television news programs. Lastly, information collected will include sex of victim, age of victim, race of victim, whether the child abduction is considered a stereotypical kidnapping, time of day the abduction occurred, and the location the victim was located prior to the abduction.

3.2.1 *Sample Selection*

The sample selection will include news clips from five television media companies: three national news networks and two cable news networks. The three national news networks will be *ABC*, *NBC*, and *CBS*. The two cable television news networks will be *CNN* and *Fox News Channel*. Television news media is rated as the most popular media choice for America to watch

news reports. There is not a goal for the number of cases to be analyzed. This number will be reached once there are enough cases to substantially conduct the research. There is also not a set time frame since it is unknown how many cases will be discovered in any given year. The beginning year will be 2013 in which the data collection will start. From 2013, the data collection will continue to go back in time to 2012, 2011, 2010, and so on, until the desired amount of cases for the research is reached.

The news analyzed for the content analysis will be derived from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, Tennessee. The method of using the Vanderbilt Television News Archive was borrowed from a study published by Min and Feaster (2010). The Vanderbilt Television News Archive is considered the world's most extensive and complete archive of television news. The core of the archive collection consists of regularly scheduled newscasts from all five of the news networks that will be used in the present study: *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *CNN* and *Fox News*. These recordings have been preserved since August 5, 1968 (Vanderbilt Television News Archive, n.d.).

3.2.2 Coding Procedures

Several characteristics will be analyzed for each news clip (Appendix A1). An analysis codebook was created for collection of data on child abduction cases in television media news clips (Appendix A2). The analysis code book will be used to collect the following items: what type of child abduction that the television news channel broadcasts, determining if the news clips portrayed a child abduction that can be identified as a stereotypical kidnapping, race of the victim that is portrayed in the news clip, sex of the victim that is portrayed in the clip, where the

child was located prior to the abduction occurring, and what time of day the child abduction occurred. If the news clip reports on more than one victim, there are places to answer these questions by each victim. Followed by the sample code book-code sheet there are directions on how to fill out the form (Appendix A3).

Type of Abduction. Identifying the type of abduction that is portrayed in television news media is important because the intent of the research is to determine which type of child abduction is being reported more often. Since family child abduction occurs more frequently than non-family abduction, it would be ideal if the media would report on family abduction cases proportionately (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlack, 1990; Gelles, 1984). However, since television media chooses a story based on newsworthiness criteria in order to gain more viewers and ratings, it is imperative to determine if media reports on one type of child abduction case than another. Once the data collection is complete, each news clip will be coded appropriately. Family abduction will be coded as “0” while non-family abduction will be coded as “1”. Data will also be gathered for the questions that determine if a non-family abduction is considered a stereotypical kidnapping. If the answer to each question is no, then the answer will be coded as “0”. If the answer to each question is yes, then the answer will be coded as “1”. Patterns will be determined after the data collection is complete.

Demographic characteristics of victim within cases. Identifying the demographic characteristics of the victim within child abduction cases that are reported on the news clips will be important to determine if news outlets base their newsworthiness criteria on a victim’s demographics. Age, race, and sex of the victim will be collected from each child abduction case that is reported. Socio-Economic Status of each victim was removed from this research because it would be difficult to determine this by most television news reports. News reports are found to

show bias concerning the coverage of missing children cases in regard to race and sex. In particular, missing African-American children are underrepresented in news coverage (Min & Feaster, 2010). It is reported that the age of the kidnapping victim matters in media news as well. According to Duvall & Moscovitz (2011), white females between the ages of six and twelve are more likely to be reported in the news than any other child.

The specific age of the victim will be collected for each child abduction case. The ages of the victim(s) will later be coded into the following categories: 0 to 5 years of age, 6 to 11 years of age, 12 to 14 years of age, and 15 to 17 years of age. The race of the victim will be coded as follows: Caucasian = 0, African-American = 1, Hispanic = 2, and other = 3. Any case where the race of the victim is not revealed, the information will be considered “missing data” and will be coded as 9. The race of the victim will only be recorded if it is mentioned in the news report. The sex of the victim reported will be coded as follows: Male = 0 and Female = 1. If the sex of the victim is not revealed within the news report, the information will be considered “missing data” and will be coded as 9. If more than one victim is shown on the news report, these victim’s demographic characteristics will be recorded as well.

Victim’s location prior to abduction. The victim’s location prior to the kidnapping is important because location is a characteristic of newsworthiness in a news report. A news report is selected based on newsworthiness characteristics, personal competence and sensibility, collective integrity, moralized political conflicts, and if the crime is considered a white-collar crime matter. A particular part of a good moral boundary is the collective integrity of a story. Allowing viewers to relate to the story on a more personal basis can increase interest. For instance, if a child abduction occurs in a mall, it becomes more realistic to the viewer than if the abduction occurred at a child’s home (Katz, 1987). The location of the victim before the child

abduction occurs will be collected and coded as the following: Victim's home or yard = 0, other home or yard = 1, street, car, or other vehicle = 2, park or wooded area = 3, store, restaurant, or mall = 4, school = 5, daycare = 6, other public place = 7, and other location = 8. If the location of the victim prior to the abduction is not given in the news report, the information will be considered "missing data" and coded as 9. The categories under Victim's Location prior to Abduction was derived from a study conducted by Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlack (2002).

Time of day abduction occurred. The time of day that the child abduction occurred will be important because of the intervals that a child is away from home. A child usually attends school between the hours of six o'clock in the morning until around three o'clock in the evening. If the child is at daycare, these times are the same because of the parent or guardian's work hours. It is reported that abduction cases usually increase between the hours of four o'clock in the afternoon and eight o'clock in the evening (Finkelhor, et. al, 1990). The time of day that the abduction occurred will be coded as follows: between 12am to 7am = 0, between 7am to 2pm = 1, between 2pm to 9pm = 2, and between 9pm to 12am = 4. If the time of day the abduction occurred is not mentioned in the news reports, this will be considered "missing data" and will be coded as 9. The categories under Time of day abduction occurred was also derived by the study conducted by Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlack (2002).

3.2.3 *Timeline for Proposed Study*

The data for this study will be collected during the time frame of July 7, 2014 through July 9, 2014. Once the data collection is complete, all of the data will be coded and entered into IBM SPSS Software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). After the data are entered into

SPSS, an analysis of the data will be conducted and the results will be entered into paper form for publishing.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Television news media reports regarding abduction demographics (i.e., age, race, sex, victim location, and time of day) were compared by network. Each data output was carefully analyzed to determine patterns that were presented within the above television news networks, ultimately answering the research questions.

4.1 Types of Abduction Reported by Television News Networks

Question 1a asked “*What type of child abduction is reported more on national news networks and cable news networks – family abduction or non-family abduction?*” and question 1b asked “*When television news outlets report on a non-family abduction, how often is the story about a stereotypical kidnapping?*”. Both question 1a and 1b were answered by running a frequency analysis (Appendix B, Table 1).

4.1.1 Family Abduction vs. Non-family Abduction

Question 1a seeks to determine between family and non-family abduction, which type of child abduction is reported on more in television news media. After running a frequency

analysis, using ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and FNC to identify the most frequent type of abduction shown by each network, non-family abduction is reported more often than family abduction across all networks. While all television news networks reported more non-family child abduction cases than family-abduction cases, the percentage of non-family child abduction cases reported on as a whole was large across most networks at 95 percent or above, with the exception of FNC which reported non-family abduction cases 67 percent of the time.

CBS reported the most child abduction cases at 42 cases between the years of 1970 to 2013. Other networks' reports were as follows: ABC = 38, NBC = 29, FNC = 24, and CNN = 21. During the same time period, only ABC, NBC, and CBS reported during the entire time frame. According to Barken and Sharpe (2003), CNN reported from 2013 back to 1980. According to Collins (2004), FNC reported from 2013 back to 1996. CBS also reported on the most child abduction cases that were considered non-family child abduction cases. With 42 cases total reported by CBS, 98 percent of those were non-family abduction cases which totaled to 41 cases. According to Table 1, NBC and CNN reported on non-family child abduction cases the most with 100 percent of both networks' cases determined to be of the non-family type. Each time both NBC and CNN reported on child abduction cases, they always reported on non-family child abductions.

4.1.2 *Stereotypical Kidnapping vs. Non-stereotypical Kidnapping*

After determining what type of abduction was reported on more frequently by television news networks, it was important to determine how many cases of non-family abduction were classified as stereotypical kidnapping. The same table to answer question 1a reveals the answer

to research question two. In order to determine if a non-family abduction case is considered a stereotypical kidnapping, there are six questions were asked (see Appendix A-1).

With CBS having the most reports of non-family abduction at 41, the network also had the highest percentage rate of reports on stereotypical kidnappings with 93 percent. Similarly, CBS also had the highest number of reports on the same type of kidnappings with 38. The television news networks with the least amount of reports on stereotypical kidnappings were CNN and FNC with 20 and 15 respectively.

After running the frequency analysis to determine what type of abduction was reported on more among the television news networks, several observations have been recorded. Non-family abduction has been reported on more than family abduction. Stereotypical kidnapping is the most frequent type of kidnapping broadcasted on television news media. Cable television news media outlets (CNN and FNC) are more likely to report on stereotypical kidnappings than national news media outlets (ABC, NBC, and CBS). NBC and CNN were the only television news networks that did not report on family abduction at all during the time period used for the research (1970-2013).

4.2 Demographic Characteristics Shown in Television News Reports

Question 2 asked “*What are the demographic characteristics of a victim, such as age, race, and sex, as well as the victim’s location and the time of day that the abduction occurred shown on a television news report when covering an abduction case?*” Question 2 was answered by running a frequency analysis for each variable, including *Age of Victim, Race of Victim, Sex*

of Victim, Victim Location, and Time of Day (Appendix B, Tables 2 through 6). To determine the demographic characteristics that were most reported within television news reports, frequency tables were computed in SPSS. Each demographic variable was placed into a separate table and percentages were shown according to news media outlet.

Consider Table 2, which shows *Age of Victim* as shown in television news reports. According to the frequency table, all television news networks primarily report on child abductions when the victims are between the ages of zero to eleven years of age, with the category 0-5 years of age being the largest category based on overall percentage. Both ABC and CNN more frequently report on victims who are between the ages of six and eleven while NBC and FNC both are more likely to report on victims who are between the ages of zero and five years of age. CBS's percentage rate for *Age of Victim* was at 31 percent for both zero to five and six to eleven age ranges. The age range that is least likely to be reported in television news networks was fifteen to seventeen years of age.

Table 3 illustrates the categories for *Race of Victim* as shown in television news reports. Since network reports rarely included victims of a race other than white, the variable *Caucasian* was recoded into the variable *White* and the variables *African-American, Hispanic, and Other* were recoded into the variable *Non-White* (if a picture was provided by the news network that presented the case). News networks in this study sample rarely mentioned the victim's race. Since it was difficult to determine if a victim was biracial, victims who were similar to the Caucasian race (fair skinned or light skinned) were recoded into *White* and victims who did not look similar to the Caucasian race (dark skinned), were recoded into *Non-White*. According to the frequency table, all of the television news networks were more likely to report on child abductions that included white victims. NBC reported the most on non-white victims with 28

percent of the reports. The overall percentage rates across all news media networks was 75 percent of white victims and 22 percent of non-white victims.

Table 4 presents *Sex of Victim* that was shown in television news reports. Television news networks, overall, were more likely to report female child abductions (64 percent). The data show that all networks except for FNC were more likely to include female victims. Fifty-four percent of FNC's reports included male victims. The network that was most likely to include reports on female victims was CNN (71 percent).

Looking at Table 5, the percentage rates for *Victim Location* are shown according to television news reports. According to the frequency table, television news networks were overall more likely to report on child abductions that occurred in the victim's *own home or yard*. The overall percentage rate for a child abduction occurring in a victim's own home or yard was 44 percent. CNN reported most on child abductions that occurred at the victim's own home or yard. The next most frequently reported place was *Street, Car, or other vehicle* which included 21 percent of victims. ABC reported the most on child abduction that occurred while the victim was on the street, in the car, or another vehicle (32 percent).

Table 6 presents the percentage rate for *Time of Day* shown in television news reports. The variable included the time of the day that the child abduction occurred. Overall, 53 percent of abduction reports did not mention the time of day in which the abduction occurred. When time of day was mentioned, every network except NBC most frequently reported on child abductions that occurred between 2pm and 9pm. The overall percentage rate for abductions that occurred between 2pm and 9pm was 23 percent. NBC was more likely to report on abductions that occurred between 12am to 7am at 17 percent. The least reported time was between 9pm and 12am (3 percent).

4.3 Demographics Varying Across Television News Networks

Question 3a asked “*Does age of victim, race of victim, sex of victim, location abduction occurred, and the time of day that the abduction occurred, which is portrayed in television news reports, vary across television news networks?*” Question 3a was answered by running Pearson Bivariate Correlation of the demographic characteristics and cases shown on each television media network (Appendix B, Table 7).

The first correlation found was between the *age of victim* and *race of victim*. The correlation was $-.254$ ($p < .05$). Cases usually involved older victims who were Caucasian or younger victims who were Caucasian and other races. While the majority of victims were Caucasian in every age category, it was rare that a case involved a victim who was older and of a race other than Caucasian.

Another correlation that was found was between the two variables *age of victim* and *sex of victim*. The correlation was $.258$ ($p < 0.01$). In the case of both variables *age of victim* and *sex of victim*, as the victim’s age increases, the more likely the victim is female. While the majority of child abduction victims reported in television news media are female, the females are typically older.

The final correlation found was between the two variables *race of victim* and *time of day*. The correlation was $.370$ ($p < 0.01$). In the case of both variables, *race of victim* and *time of day*, cases included abductions that occurred later in the day, the victim was more likely to be of a race other than Caucasian. News reports that involved a case occurring earlier in the day usually involved a victim of Caucasian.

After running the correlation analysis to determine which child abduction demographics are most frequently shown on television news media networks, it was determined that the older that the victim was, the more likely that victim was also Caucasian. It was also determined that the older the victim was, the more likely that victim was also female. Victims that were a race other than Caucasian were more likely to be abducted later in the day. All findings were from child abduction reports within the time period used for the research (1970-2013).

4.4 *Types of Reports Shown by Television News Networks*

Question 3b asked “*Does one television media network show more of one type of case than another when reporting on this crime?*” Question 3b was answered by running a Pearson Bivariate Correlation for each television news network (ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and FNC) to each demographic variable as well as the *Victim Location* and *Time of Day* variables (Appendix B, Table 8).

There was no significant correlations found between any variables to each television news network. Three negative correlations that were discovered were between FNC and ABC, NBC, and CBS. The correlations determined that FNC usually reported on cases that national news networks did not report on (ABC = $-.389$, NBC = $-.270$, and CBS = $-.375$). All correlations were at the 0.01 confidence level. All correlations between FNC and ABC, NBC, and CBS were negative. There was no significance found between FNC and CNN, most likely because both networks were introduced much later than the other three networks (CNN=1980, FNC=1996). FNC and CNN also more often report on some of the same cases primarily because they are considered national networks.

A correlation of stereotypical kidnapping characteristics by television news media was compared to each other for the final table (Appendix B, Table 9). Each report of a stereotypical kidnapping question was pored to each other and there were two correlations found. The first was a positive correlation between *Victim transported 50+ miles* and *Victim kept overnight* (.252 at the $p < .05$). In a child abduction case, as the victim was kept overnight, it was most likely reported in the news that the victim was also transported a distance of fifty miles or more. The second was a negative correlation between *Victim ransomed* and *Victim killed* (-.199 at the $p < .01$). In a child abduction case covered in television news media, if the victim is ransomed then they mostly likely were not killed. This is also true in the opposite direction. If the victim was killed, they were most likely not ransomed first.

The second set of correlations was discovered when a correlation was used to determine the relationship between the stereotypical kidnapping question and all television news networks. Two correlations were found. The first was a positive correlation between *Shown by NBC* and *Victim ransomed* (.203 at the $p < .01$). The correlation meant that the television news network NBC was the network that showed most of the child abduction cases where the victim was ransomed. The second was also a positive correlation between *Shown by CNN* and *Victims killed*. The correlation meant that CNN was the network that was most likely to report on stereotypical kidnappings where the victim was also killed.

4.5 Stereotypical Kidnapping Characteristics by Television News Media

A bivariate correlation was conducted comparing stereotypical kidnappings characteristics and television news media networks. Two correlations were discovered after

running the test. The first correlation was a positive correlation between *Victim kept overnight* and *Victim transported 50+ miles* ($p < 0.01$). The second correlation was a negative correlation found between *Victim killed* and *Victim ransomed* ($p < 0.05$). There were no correlations discovered between stereotypical kidnapping characteristics and television news networks.

After analyzing child abduction cases from each television news network outlet and collecting the data, it was determined that non-family abduction is reported substantially more than family abduction. With non-family abductions that were reported by all of the media outlets, stereotypical kidnapping was found to be the most popular choice of cases shown. As the cases that or more likely to be shown are considered stereotypical kidnapping, television news outlets are more often showing cases that involve a young victims, white victims, and/or female victims. Television news networks are more likely to cover child abductions that took place in a victim's home.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Research Questions and Findings: What Does it Mean?

The findings from the study are compared to data from the NISMART study from 2002. The family abduction sample used was 203,900 and the non-family abduction sample was 58,200 during a one year period between 1998 and 1999. The data was used from reports by the FBI. Each question's answer will be supported using the data tables that were created. All results will be compared to previously published research from the Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2).

5.1.1 Types of Abductions Reported by Television News Networks

According to the study by NISMART-2, family abductions occur more frequently than non-family abductions. Two hundred and sixty two thousand one hundred children were abducted between 1997 and 1999 and of those victims, 203,900 (about 78 percent of all victims) were abducted by a family member while 58,200 (about 22 percent) were abducted by non-family members (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlack, 2002). After comparing the data between the NISMART-2 study and the current study, it was evident that non-family abductions are over-represented in television news media. NISMART-2 concluded that only 115 stereotypical

kidnappings occur each year. The stereotypical kidnappings that were reported was less than one percent of the total amount of non-family abductions that were reported (58,200). With the current study, stereotypical kidnapping is the type of abduction reports that occur most frequently.

Determining how to interpret the meaning behind these statistics is difficult, however, television media outlets base news stories on characteristics of newsworthiness. Newsworthiness is the most logical answer. Television news network ratings are based on the amount of viewers that tune in at a certain point of time. If the network reports on something that is considered newsworthy, that network's ratings are likely to increase (Chemi & Giorgi, 2014). As television news media reports on non-family abductions (specifically stereotypical kidnappings) more often than family abduction, the perception of this type of child abduction can be misleading to viewers. Providing viewers with a story that is rare and intriguing yet not actually common is going to give a wrong impression of how culture really is.

5.1.2 Demographic Characteristics Shown in Television News Reports

Collecting the demographic characteristics that are more likely to be shown in child abduction cases are important because in previous studies, news reports show bias concerning the coverage of missing children cases in regard to age, race and sex (Min & Feaster, 2010). Within a case, the victim's location prior to the kidnapping was important because location is a characteristic of newsworthiness in a news report. The time of day that the child abduction occurred was important to collect because of the intervals that a child is away from home.

When the case is considered a stereotypical kidnapping, the age category of victims who were more likely to be abducted was *12-14 Years*. The study that was conducted on family abduction by NISMART-2 determined that the age of victims who were more likely to be abducted was within the category *6-11 Years*. African-American children were more likely to be abducted by non-family members and White, non-Hispanic children were more likely to be abducted by family members. White, non-Hispanic children were more likely to be abducted by total strangers when the case was considered a stereotypical kidnapping. Females were more likely (35 percent) to be abducted by non-family members while both males and females were likely (49 percent and 51 percent respectively) to be abducted by family members. When the child abduction case was considered a stereotypical kidnapping, the percentage of females that were abducted were even higher at 68 percent.

When a case is considered a non-family abduction, the victim is most likely to be taken from a *street, car, or other vehicle* and *park or wooded area* (32 percent and 25 percent respectively). With stereotypical kidnappings, *street, car, or other vehicle* was the most likely place for a child abduction to occur. The findings from the current study showed that cases that were reported by television news networks were more likely to include child abductions that occurred at the victim's *own home or yard*. NISMART-2 determined that when a child is abducted, the abduction is more likely to occur between 2pm and 9pm (42 percent). Children who were abducted by a family member were likely to be abducted between 7am to 2pm and 2pm to 9pm (31 percent and 28 percent respectively). The findings from the current study revealed that cases that were shown by television news networks were more likely to include child abductions that occurred between the hours of 2pm and 9pm.

Television news networks report on child abduction cases that include victims who are young, Caucasian, and female. This portrayal of victims can be related to what is known as Missing White Woman Syndrome (MWWS). It includes extensive coverage in media that involve young white women (in this case children) who belong to the middle- or upper-class. While this study does not seek to determine the socio-economic status of victims, the amount of news coverage that television media gives this type of victim can also be misleading to viewers. Primarily reporting on victims who match the findings found in this study can also show race inequality. Choosing mainly young white women for the full damsel treatment says a great deal about a country that likes to believe that it has classified race to irrelevance (Armstrong, 2013).

When television news networks report on child abduction cases that have occurred in a public place or in the comfort of a victim's own home, it sends a message to viewers that children are not safe no matter where they are or who they are around. The truth about child abductions is that they are more likely to occur when the child is alone. In this case, victims are more likely to be heading home from school since the most frequent time a stereotypical kidnapping takes place is between 2pm and 9pm. During this time frame, children can also be at the park with friends or walking to and from a particular destination. Most abductions that take place inside the home occur when the victim is taken by a family member. The best explanation of why television news media disproportionately reports on child abductions stems from the term "newsworthiness". Television news media only report on stories that will increase its ratings and does so without considering the negative effect that this carelessness has on society.

5.1.3 Demographics Varying Across Television News Networks

The first two correlations that were found between demographic characteristics of victims to all television news networks: the negative relationship between *age of victim* and *race of victim* and the positive relationship between *age of victim* and *sex of victim*. These correlations meant that if the victim was Caucasian, they were usually younger as well. On the other hand, older victims were also found to be more likely all races. Also, if the victim was older, they were more likely to also be female.

The importance of the content in television news media is obvious once again. When a television news network reports on a child abduction case, showing the victim as a young Caucasian female raises issues that relate to race, gender, and societal values (Ferguson, 2013). Racial bias or racial preference can be including young, white, and female can result in disproportionate reports in all types of media especially television news media (Serdar, 2011). The U.S. is rapidly becoming a nation that has many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as part of society. As the U.S. Census breaks down the ethnic and Hispanic/non-Hispanic origins of the population every ten years, the U.S. is slowly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). While this transition is slowly taking place, television news media has barely moved along with it. News media outlets that include minorities convey messages to its viewers that assist in challenging the assumptions about race.

The last correlation that was discovered was the positive correlation between *race of victim* and *time of day*. If the victim was of a race other than Caucasian, the reported abduction was more likely to occur later in the day. According to the U.S. Census, White individuals are the most likely to enroll for secondary education. Because individuals of the African-American

race as well as the Hispanic race are less likely to get an education after completing high school, annual salary is usually much lower (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

5.1.4 Types of Reports Shown by Television News Networks

There was no significance found between demographic characteristics of victims to any television news networks. According to the findings, all reports shown by each television news networks are closely related. There were no identified differences between the types of cases that each network reports on. While FNC usually reported on different child abduction cases, all television news networks generally disproportionately reported young victims, Caucasian victims, and female victims. The findings of the current study defends the notion of certain characteristic bias (like race) because the most likely type of child abduction case includes a young victims, Caucasian victims, or female victims who were abducted from their own home or a public place later in the afternoon by a complete stranger.

There could be a few reasons why FNC does not report on the same child abduction cases as national news networks. FNC did not launch until 1996. Since national news networks were reporting on child abduction cases from the beginning of the research timeline (1970), it could be a reason why there was a negative correlation between them. Another possible reason for the negative correlations was because news stories are filtered from local news then to cable news, and the finally national news. Most crime stories are reported at the local level, usually the area in which the crime took place. However, the child abduction is intriguing enough, the story can get passed on to cable news networks (CNN and FNC). Ultimately, the story can be passed on to national news networks. These stories are considered the most rare and interesting (Smith, 2002).

Lastly, the negative correlations can be better understood with the recognition that FNC is based on a political agenda. FNC's primary news sources are political parties in order to influence current and near-future political news and debate (Wemple, 2013). FNC launched in 1996. With the current study, the first child abduction case that was reported by the network was in 2004. Between the years of 1996 and 2004, many events headlined in FNC reports. The events included the 1996 presidential election, 9/11, the 2000 presidential election, and the beginning of the war in Iraq. Once the war in Iraq continued for more than two years, FNC began to report on child abductions again in 2006. The reports ended again with the last of the reports coming in 2007. After 2007, the first African-American president was elected, several earthquakes occurred in Haiti, Chile, and China, and North Korea began testing nuclear bombs. When big headline stories of political significance occurred, these stories dominated news coverage and the network did not report on Child Abduction cases.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND THEORY

During the conduction of this research, it was determined that television news networks relay news information to the public primarily for the purpose of increasing viewer ratings. Keeping each television news network's viewers' attention is important to the news outlets because more viewers equals more money. As a whole, television news networks disproportionately reported on stereotypical kidnappings. These stereotypical kidnappings were more likely to involve a young white female. These kidnappings primarily occurred at a victim's residence or from the street in close proximity to their homes. The intensity that these types of kidnappings provide interest as well as fear to the public. The above idea is especially true for the viewers who can most relate to the stories that were reported.

Previous research on the topic of kidnapping does not provide vital information on what type of child abductions are reported in television news media. It was determined that non-family child abductions are more likely to be reported. Of that type of abduction, stereotypical kidnappings are more likely to be included in television news media reports. After comparing what type of child abductions were more likely to be reported to statistics on how prevalent each type of child abduction can be each year, news coverage of certain types of child abduction is not

reflected of actual occurrences. Family abduction occur much more often than do non-family abduction and stereotypical kidnappings. When non-family abductions and stereotypical kidnappings are overrepresented in television news media, it causes false perceptions of how everyday life can be for individuals within society.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research

The current study of child abduction in television news media provides important insights on how society sees the crime and how reports on the crime affect individuals within society. The research provided vital information to support previous studies that non-family abduction, more specifically stereotypical kidnapping is disproportionately reported in television news rather than family abduction. This research also provided new insight on the type of victim that is more likely to be portrayed within television news media. While this research offered important information to determine how television news networks portrayed child abduction, there are details that did not provide clear information on child abduction in television news networks.

6.1.1 National Level News vs. Local Level News

The limitations of this study would have provided needed information on child abduction and how the crime is portrayed in television news media. When national level television was used this study, the reports that were collected were filtered out starting from local-level. Only the rarer and more interesting newsworthy stories are reported by national level news. With local-level news, all child abductions are usually included (including family abduction) because

the television news outlet is reporting for a smaller area rather than the entire country. Local level news has more of a micro level reporting system.

Including local-level television news on this topic for future research rather than national-level news only can be beneficial. Local-level television news outlets are more likely to report any and all types of child abduction. Since the viewing audience is situated in a more concentrated area rather than the entire country, the future research could provide a more in depth and more accurate look at what type of child abduction is more likely to be reported. Local news is a preferred primary television news source for television news viewers over all national news outlets that were used in the current study (ABC, NBC, and CBS) (Saad, 2013).

6.1.2 *Socio-economic Status*

Socio-economic statuses for reported victims of child abduction were not included in this study. It was impossible to determine this particular information because the SES was not included in television news reports. The socio-economic background of victims of child abduction is said to be primarily middle- to upper-class individuals within society. This is definitely true for individuals who fall victim to a ransom kidnapping (Fass, 1997). Although costs and time would be considerable factors, it could be important for future research to determine the socio-economic statuses of victims of child abduction that are portrayed in television news media because it would be helpful in understanding the importance of this attribute when television news media outlets select the reports for broadcasts.

6.1.3 Fear of Crime among Television News Viewers

The next limitation of this study is the inability to determine the fear levels of crime among viewers of television news networks. Determining the level of fear of viewers can be important because the information provides insight on how much viewers are affected when watching disproportionate reports of child abduction. If this information were collected while performing the current study, it could have determined if viewers of television news media are affected to the point of believing that reality is the way it is portrayed in child abduction reports. For future research, fear of crime among television news viewers could be measured by issuing a survey to individuals who rely on television news as their primary source of news.

6.1.4 Race in Child Abduction Reports

Another limitation of the current study is determining race among child abduction reports. Most child abductions that are reported on television news media reports do not verbally disclose the race of a victim. To determine the race of the victim that is portrayed in reports, photos of the victim (if shown) are used to collect the information. In future research, in order to collect the race of a victim is only to use the race of a victim if it is verbally disclosed within the report. Because it is rarely disclosed, national news media will only work if there are plenty of reports to analyze. In order to collect this information, the research would most likely need to focus on local level news media.

6.1.5 *Other Networks*

The last is only for future research purposes. For future research, an analysis of reports reported by both BET and Univision would be interesting to include in research because of the type of audience that both networks cater to. BET primarily caters to the African-American population while Univision primarily caters to the Hispanic population.

6.2 *Symbolic Interactionism*

A grounded theory is used to explain how and why society is affected by the false perception of child abduction in television news media. Television news media reports on stories that are considered interesting to its viewers in order to keep them tuning back in for more. The effect that is created by result of primarily reporting on child abduction cases that are rare can be a misleading view of how reality actually is within society. Symbolic Interactionism is a theory that provides insight as to why viewers of television news media can be easily persuaded into believing something is true about their reality when in reality it is not true at all.

Symbolic Interactionism was introduced in the 1920's. The theory originated from two theorists: George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead's, coined the term and created a summary of the theoretical perspective. Symbolic Interactionism relies on the meaning that individuals develop and rely on during the process of social interaction. Through social interaction, interpretive meanings to object, beliefs, and concepts are created in everyday life situations (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975).

Herbert Blumer presented three premises to explain Symbolic Interactionism: (1) human beings behave towards objects, beliefs, and concepts based on the meanings that those particular

individuals have created, (2) the meanings of these objects, beliefs, and concepts are derived from the social interaction that one individual has with other human beings as well as society as a whole, (3) the meanings of these objects, beliefs, and concepts are handled and modified through an interpretive process that is operated by the individual (Blumer, 1969).

According to Symbolic Interactionism, everyone inhabits a world that is socially constructed. Meanings of different objects, beliefs, concepts, and behaviors come from the interpretations that people give those things. These interpretations can vary from one person or group to the next. These meanings are passed from one person to another (parent to offspring, friend to friend, etc.). When these meanings are passed from one to another, they begin to become part of an individual's everyday reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

6.3 Symbolic Interactionism and Child Abduction in Television News Media

According to the current study, television news media disproportionately reports on stereotypical kidnappings. The victims that are more likely to be included in the child abduction reports are young white females. These reported child abductions are also more likely to have occurred at a victim's home or a car or street area. These types of child abductions are considered rare (according to NISMART-2). The television news networks that were used in the current study are most likely reporting on these types of cases in order to keep viewers of media programs interested. Because television news media primarily takes into account the ratings of its programs, viewers are given a meaning of how children are more likely to get kidnapped by a total stranger than someone they know.

By watching child abduction cases that are reported by television news media, Symbolic Interactionism is a key reason why one's perceived reality is different than their actual reality is. Individuals who pass meanings on to others do not always create these meanings. While the Symbolic Interactionism perspective is defined by individuals developing and relying upon processes of social interactions with others, the meanings of an object, belief, concept, or behavior are usually created by larger groups or institutions.

With child abduction in television news, media is considered the institution. Media provides society with meanings of different objects, beliefs, concepts, and behaviors (Fine & Manning, 2003). When television news media disproportionately reports on stereotypical kidnappings, a belief is created that these types of child abductions occur more often than any other type. Media creates and spreads these symbols that become the basis for our shared understanding of society. Disproportionate reports of stereotypical kidnappings provide the understanding that these types of child abductions occur more frequently and as a result, individuals within society believe that it is true.

Once individuals view child abduction cases in television news media, the meaning that stereotypical kidnappings occur more often than any other type of child abduction can easily be instilled as part of society. This meaning can then be passed on from the individuals who learn it from the institution (television news media) to others. Eventually, these meanings create behavior among everyone in society. Once the meanings are passed on, they become subjective meanings. Subject meanings are given authority because people behave solely based on what they believe and not on what is actually true. Thus, society is thought to be socially constructed through these human interpretations that are created between individuals within society (Snow, 2001).

To consumers of television media, the occurrences of non-family abduction are given a meaning of commonality. The belief of commonality can motivate individuals to act towards stereotypical kidnappings by teaching their children to take precaution when it comes to strangers. When parents tell their children that they need to be careful around strangers, these children see those strangers as dangerous. These beliefs are eventually developed within coordination between individuals and other members of society until the meaning of the word stranger is socially constructed. When the habitual actions are observed by other members, such as taking precautions to avoid strangers, those actions can become institutionalized and eventually considered normal and socially acceptable.

This study provides a look at Symbolic Interactionism perspective as sort of a pyramid. Television news media is the institution that provides meaning to the belief that nearly all child abduction cases are committed by a total stranger and that no child is safe from such a crime. These meanings are then passed down from the viewers of these cases and again passed along to others. Because of television news media, society as a whole has an inaccurate perception of this type of crime.

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Appendix A1: Research Tools

Code Manual

Variable		Coding Category
Network		ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, FNC
Type of Child Abduction		Family Abduction, Non-family Abduction, Stereotypical Kidnapping
	Stereotypical Kidnapping	Was the perpetrator a stranger to the victim(s)? – Yes, No Was the victim(s) kept overnight? – Yes, No Was the Victim(s) killed? – Yes, No Was the victim(s) transported a distance of 50 miles or more? – Yes, No Was the victim(s) ransomed during the abduction? – Yes, No Perpetrator provided evidence of intent to keeping victim(s)? – Yes, No
Age of Victim(s)		0-5 years, 6-11 years, 12-14 years, 15-17 years, Unable to determine
Race of Victim(s)		Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Other, unable to determine
Sex of Victim(s)		Male, Female, Unable to determine
Victim's Location Prior to Episode		Own home or yard, Other home or yard, Street or car or other vehicle, Park or wooded area, Store or restaurant or mall, School or daycare, Other public place, Unable to determine
Time of Day Abduction Occurred		Between 12am to 7am, Between 7am to 2pm, Between 2pm to 9pm, Between 9pm to 12am, Unable to determine

Type of Child Abduction

No. of Victims _____

	Family Abduction (0) _____				
	Non-family Abduction (1) _____				
	Stereotypical Kidnapping		No (0)	Yes (1)	
	• Was the perpetrator a stranger to the victim(s)?	_____	_____	_____	
	• Was the victim(s) kept overnight?	_____	_____	_____	
	• Was the victim(s) killed?	_____	_____	_____	
	• Was the victim(s) transported a distance of 50 miles or more?	_____	_____	_____	
	• Was the victim(s) ransomed during the abduction?	_____	_____	_____	
	• Perpetrator provided evidence of intent to keep the victim(s)?	_____	_____	_____	

	Victim 1	Victim 2	Victim 3
Age of Victim(s)	_____	_____	_____
Race of Victim(s)			
(0) Caucasian	_____	_____	_____
(1) African-American	_____	_____	_____
(2) Hispanic	_____	_____	_____
(3) Other	_____	_____	_____
(9) Unable to determine	_____	_____	_____
Sex of Victim(s)			
(0) Male	_____	_____	_____
(1) Female	_____	_____	_____
(9) Unable to determine	_____	_____	_____
Victim(s) Location Prior to Episode		Time of Day Abduction Occurred	
(0) Own home or yard	_____	(0) Between 12am to 7am	_____
(1) Other home or yard	_____	(1) Between 7am to 2pm	_____
(2) Street, Car, or other vehicle	_____	(2) Between 2pm to 9pm	_____
(3) Park or wooded area	_____	(3) Between 9pm to 12am	_____
(4) Store, Restaurant, Mall	_____	(9) Unable to determine	_____
(5) School	_____		
(6) Daycare	_____		
(7) Other public place	_____		
(8) Other	_____		
(9) Unable to determine	_____		

Notes/Comments

Appendix A3: Analysis Codebook – Code Sheet Information

News Clip ID No.

For the *News Clip ID No.*, place the ID number for each news clip examined for the content analysis in the blank. The first number of the ID will begin with the respective network the clip was taken from. The clips are as follows: *ABC-1, NBC-2, CBS-3, CNN-4, and FNC-5*. The next six numbers will be the date the news clip was aired. (*Ex: If the news clip was aired on October 12, 2013 and was aired on NBC, the ID number will be 2-101213.*) If the news clip was aired multiple times in a single day on the same network, the last number of the ID will be the number it aired by time. (*Ex: If CNN aired the same story twice in the same day, the ID numbers for both clips would be 4-101213-1 and 4-101213-2.*)

Network

The coder will place the name of the network that each clip was aired on.

No. of Victims

The coder will place the number of victims each story reports. If there is more than one victim for a story, blanks are provided for some of the questions that follow.

Type of Child Abduction

Within this section, please mark which type of child abduction was aired on the news clip. If the clip is about a family abduction, please mark the appropriate blank and then skip down to the Age of the victim(s).

Stereotypical Kidnapping

For the *Stereotypical Kidnapping* section, please answer these questions if the child abduction is considered a non-family abduction. The first question “Was the perpetrator a stranger to the victim” needs to be checked if the abduction in order for the abduction to be considered a *non-family abduction*. For the last five questions, at least *one* question needs to be marked *yes* for an abduction to be considered a *non-family abduction*. Once these questions have been answered, please move to the *Age of Victim* section.

Age of Victim(s)

In the *Age of Victim(s)* section, please record the age of each victim reported in the news clip. If the age cannot be determined or is not disclosed in the report, please select *Unable to determine*.

Race of Victim(s)

In the *Race of Victim(s)* section, please record the race of each victim reported in the news clip. If the race cannot be determined or is not disclosed in the report, please select *Unable to determine*.

Sex of Victim(s)

In the *Sex of Victim(s)* section, please record the sex of each victim reported in the news clip. If the sex cannot be determined or is not disclosed in the report, please select *Unable to determine*.

Victim's Location Prior to Episode

In the *Victim's Location Prior to Episode* section, please record the place the child or children were before the abduction took place. If this location is not reported within the news clip, please select *Unable to determine*.

Time of Day Abduction Occurred

In the *Time of Day Abduction Occurred* section, please record the time of day that the abduction took place. If the time was not reported within the news clip, please select *Unable to determine*.

Notes/Comments

For the *Notes/Comments* section, please use for additional information about the news clip.

Appendix B: Tables

Table 1. Reports of Abduction by Television News Network

Variable	Network				
	ABC (N=38)	NBC (N=29)	CBS (N=42)	CNN (N=21)	FNC (N=24)
Non-Family	95% (N=36)	100% (N=29)	98% (N=41)	100% (N=21)	67% (N=16)
Family	5% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	2% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	33% (N=8)
Stereotypical	89% (N=32)	93% (N=27)	93% (N=38)	95% (N=20)	94% (N=15)
Non-stereotypical	11% (N=4)	7% (N=2)	7% (N=3)	5% (N=1)	6% (N=1)

Table 2. Frequency of Age of Victim Reported by Television News Networks

Variable	Age of Victim				
	0 to 5 Years	6 to 11 Years	12 to 14 Years	15 to 17 Years	Unable to Determine
ABC (N=38)	32% (N=12)	39% (N=15)	13% (N=5)	5% (N=2)	11% (N=4)
NBC (N=29)	38% (N=11)	31% (N=9)	17% (N=5)	4% (N=1)	10% (N=3)
CBS (N=42)	31% (N=13)	31% (N=13)	19% (N=8)	7% (N=3)	12% (N=5)
CNN (N=21)	38% (N=8)	49% (N=10)	9% (N=2)	4% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
FNC (N=24)	58% (N=14)	26% (N=6)	8% (N=2)	8% (N=2)	0% (N=0)
Total (N=154)	38% (N=58)	34% (N=53)	14% (N=22)	6% (N=9)	8% (N=12)

Table 3. Frequency of Race of Victim Reported by Television News Networks

Variable	Race of Victim		
	White	Non-White	Unable to Determine
ABC (N=38)	76% (N=29)	21% (N=8)	3% (N=1)
NBC (N=29)	69% (N=20)	28% (N=8)	3% (N=1)
CBS (N=42)	79% (N=33)	21% (N=9)	19% (N=0)
CNN (N=21)	63% (N=17)	9% (N=4)	0% (N=0)
FNC (N=24)	58% (N=16)	21% (N=5)	13% (N=3)
Total (N=154)	75% (N=115)	22% (N=34)	3% (N=5)

Table 4. Frequency of Sex of Victim Reported by Television News Networks

Variable	Sex of Victim		
	Male	Female	Unable to Determine
ABC (N=38)	29% (N=11)	68% (N=26)	3% (N=1)
NBC (N=29)	31% (N=9)	66% (N=19)	3% (N=1)
CBS (N=42)	33% (N=14)	67% (N=28)	0% (N=0)
CNN (N=21)	24% (N=5)	71% (N=15)	5% (N=1)
FNC (N=24)	54% (N=13)	46% (N=11)	0% (N=0)
Total (154)	34% (N=52)	64% (N=99)	2% (N=3)

Table 5. Frequency of Victim Location Reported by Television News Networks

Variable	Victim Location									
	Own Home or Yard	Other Home or Yard	Street, Car, or other Vehicle	Park or Wooded Area	Store, Restaurant, Mall	School	Daycare	Other Public Place	Other	Unable to Determine
ABC (N=38)	47% (N=18)	3% (N=1)	32% (N=12)	3% (N=1)	5% (N=2)	3% (N=1)	5% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	2% (N=1)
NBC (N=29)	38% (N=11)	0% (N=0)	31% (N=9)	0% (N=0)	10% (N=3)	7% (N=2)	3% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	10% (N=3)
CBS (N=42)	33% (N=14)	0% (N=0)	22% (N=9)	5% (N=2)	7% (N=3)	2% (N=1)	7% (N=3)	2% (N=1)	2% (N=1)	19% (N=8)
CNN (N=21)	62% (N=13)	5% (N=1)	10% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	10% (N=2)	5% (N=1)	5% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	4% (N=1)
FNC (N=24)	52% (N=11)	4% (N=1)	4% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	13% (N=3)	8% (N=2)	8% (N=2)	4% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	13% (N=3)
Total (N=154)	44% (N=67)	2% (N=3)	21% (N=33)	2% (N=3)	8% (N=13)	5% (N=7)	6% (N=9)	1% (N=2)	.06% (N=1)	10% (N=16)

Table 6. Frequency of Time of Day Reported by Television News Networks

Variable	Time of Day				
	12am to 7am	7am to 2pm	2pm to 9pm	9m to 12am	Unable to Determine
ABC (N=38)	13% (N=5)	8% (N=3)	31% (N=12)	3% (N=1)	45% (N=17)
NBC (N=29)	17% (N=5)	7% (N=2)	14% (N=4)	0% (N=0)	62% (N=18)
CBS (N=42)	19% (N=8)	7% (N=3)	24% (N=10)	2% (N=1)	48% (N=20)
CNN (N=21)	9% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	24% (N=5)	5% (N=1)	62% (N=13)
FNC (N=24)	0% (N=0)	17% (N=4)	21% (N=5)	4% (N=1)	58% (N=14)
Total (N=154)	13% (N=20)	8% (N=12)	23% (N=36)	3% (N=4)	53% (N=82)

Table 7. Correlation of Child Abduction Demographics to Television News Networks

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Television Network	--				
2. Age of Victim	-.073	--			
3. Race of Victim	.045	-.254*	--		
4. Sex of Victim	-.164	.258**	.100	--	
5. Victim Location	.029	-.059	.137	-.017	--
6. Time of Day	.110	-.158	.370**	.076	.244

*Correlation is Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8. Correlation of Variance of Types of Reports Shown by Television News Networks

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Shown by ABC	--									
2. Shown by NBC	.082	--								
3. Shown by CBS	.054	-.093	--							
4. Shown by CNN	.131	.074	-.100	--						
5. Shown by FNC	-.389**	-.270**	-.375**	-.091	--					
6. Age of Victim	.054	.003	.153	-.018	-.106	--				
7. Race of Victim	-.023	-.009	-.103	-.007	.028	-.254*	--			
8. Sex of Victim	.175	.114	.096	.161	-.136	.258**	.100	--		
9. Victim Location	-.160	.031	.089	-.155	.085	-.059	.137	-.017	--	
10. Time of Day	.106	-.257	-.103	.134	-.158	-.158	.370**	.076	.244	--

*Correlation is Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9. Correlation of stereotypical kidnapping characteristics by television news media networks

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Victim kept overnight	--									
2. Victim killed	-.084	--								
3. Victim transported 50+ miles	.252**	.172	--							
4. Victim ransomed	.052	-.199*	-.120	--						
5. Offender provided evidence on intent to keep victim	.127	-.098	.141	-.100	--					
6. Shown by ABC	.063	-.048	.008	-.108	-.034	--				
7. Shown by NBC	.046	-.006	-.011	.203*	.026	.082	--			
8. Shown by CBS	.150	.053	.128	-.022	-.077	.054	-.093	--		
9. Shown by CNN	.041	.203*	.001	-.188	.139	.131	.074	-.100	--	
10. Shown by FNC	-.168	-.112	-.041	-.072	.144	-.389**	-.270**	-.375**	-.091	--

*Correlation is Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)