The thesis of Justine Taylor was revised and approved* by the following:

Barbara Sims  
Professor of Criminal Justice  
Chair of the Department of Criminal Justice  
Thesis Adviser

Danielle Boisvert  
Associate Professor of Criminal Justice

Carl R. Garver  
Instructor in Criminal Justice

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

The media tends to portray a distorted image of crime to the public, and child abduction incidents are no exception. Though abduction incidents perpetrated by nonfamily members (nonfamily abductions) and strangers (stereotypical kidnappings) are the rarest type of abduction offenses, they receive the most media attention. Consequently, a moral panic has resulted in which society believes that children are routinely abducted by individuals unrelated or unknown to them. Lawmakers have responded to this fear by enacting legislation that addresses these types of incidents, but they have largely ignored the most common type of abduction: the family abduction. Additionally, it has been argued that certain demographics (i.e., age and gender) play a role in whether or not a child abduction incident receives media attention. This has possible ramifications because widespread publicity is usually necessary to recover a missing child. To examine disparities between media depictions and actual incidences of child abductions, a content analysis of newspapers drawn from *LexisNexis* was compared to data from the Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAKT-2). It was concluded that the media was more likely to report on incidents in which children were abducted by nonfamily members (nonfamily abductions) and strangers (stereotypical kidnappings). In addition, the media dedicated more words to female victims than male victims and over-reported on the abduction of younger children (aged 11 and under) than older children (aged 12 and over) when they were the victims of a nonfamily abduction. In all other areas, however, the media was reporting a relatively accurate picture of child abduction offenses. Policy implications are discussed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ........................................................................................................ v
List of Tables .......................................................................................................... vi
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................ vii

Chapter One. Introduction .................................................................................... 1

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature ......................................................... 5
  Empirical Data on Child Abductions ................................................................. 5
  The Influence of the Media on Images of Crime .............................................. 11
  Media Depictions of Child Abductions ............................................................. 14
  Filling in the Gaps: Overall Purpose of the Research ...................................... 19

Chapter Three: Methodology .............................................................................. 22
  Phase I: Research Questions ........................................................................... 22
  Data Collection ................................................................................................. 23
  The NISMART-2 ............................................................................................. 23
  Content Analysis of the Print Media ................................................................. 28
  Operationalization of Key Concepts/Variables ................................................. 31
  Phase II: Hypotheses ....................................................................................... 38

Chapter Four: Findings ......................................................................................... 40
  Descriptive Data ............................................................................................... 40
  Phase I: Research Questions ........................................................................... 51
  Phase II: Bivariate Analysis of Hypotheses ..................................................... 55

Chapter Five: Conclusions ................................................................................... 57
  Discussion ......................................................................................................... 57
  Limitations of the Study ................................................................................ 62
  Policy Implications ......................................................................................... 63
  Directions for Future Research ....................................................................... 65
  Summary .......................................................................................................... 66

References ............................................................................................................ 68

Appendix A: Household Survey Family and Nonfamily Abduction Screening Questions ................................................................. 72
Appendix B: Child Abduction Incident Database ................................................... 75
Appendix C: Sample Code Book .......................................................................... 77
Appendix D: Bibliography of Sampling Frame .................................................... 83
List of Figures

Figure 1: NISMART-2 Categorization of Incidents in Newspaper Articles……………41
List of Tables

Table 1: Characteristics of Offenders and Event Outcome........................................... 42
Table 2: Characteristics of Victims and Their Locations Prior to Abduction............... 43
Table 3: Characteristics of Family Abductions............................................................. 45
Table 4: Characteristics of Nonfamily Abductions...................................................... 46
Table 5: Characteristics of Stereotypical Kidnappings.............................................. 48
Table 6: Characteristics of Newspapers...................................................................... 50
Table 7: Frequencies of Gender and Age by Abduction Incident............................... 54
Table 8: Categorization of Abduction by Victims’ Age and Gender............................ 56
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and the support of several individuals who in one way or another contributed to the completion of the research. Though dozens of individuals could be included here, the following deserve special acknowledgement.

First, I would like to thank Drs. Boisvert and Garver for their assistance and insight on this thesis- I truly could have not asked for a better committee.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. Sims, my thesis adviser. Because of her insight, guidance, and support (not to mention countless edits and last minute meetings!), I was able to conduct and complete this research. What a great mentor you have been to me over the past two years.

I am forever indebted to my parents, who for the last eighteen years never questioned my ability to succeed. I am so grateful for the countless sacrifices that you have made for me over the years. Thank you for your support, guidance, advice, and unconditional love- I love you!

Finally, I owe my deepest appreciation to Nathan for tolerating me these past few semesters and always reminding me that there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Your moral support never wavered, and I am thankful for that. I love you.
Chapter One: Introduction

Few crimes evoke as much terror and alarm as child abductions (Miller, Kurlycheck, Hansen, & Wilson, 2008). Little more is as heart-wrenching as knowing that a child is away from the protection and security of his or her caretakers. As a result, the moment the media catches wind of an abduction incident, detailed coverage and moment-by-moment developments in the case often dominate newspapers, magazines, television screens, and websites. Children who would have otherwise gone unknown to the world instantly become headlines. Consequently, children like Megan Kanka, Elizabeth Smart, Samantha Runnion, Sandra Cantu, and most recently, Jaycee Dugard have become household names.

Some may argue that the more news coverage an abduction incident receives, the more likely the child is to be found. This could be because such coverage forces law enforcement to work harder to solve the case or because of a better informed public that becomes involved in the search for the victim. Had the media, for example, not publicized Elizabeth Smart’s story so intensely, she may never have been recognized by an elderly couple who had seen her story on America’s Most Wanted the night before. Had she not been identified by them, she may still be missing today.

Unfortunately, while intense media coverage of certain child abduction cases may be beneficial to that case, there is also an inadvertent dilemma that accompanies such publicity. Because the media tends to focus on the most unusual and frightening child abduction incidents, particularly incidents in which children are abducted by strangers or nonfamily perpetrators, the public is led to believe that the characteristics of such incidences typify the child abduction problem. Miller et al. (2008) state that “media hype and sensationalism have […] fueled both popular culture and sociological constructions of offender and victim stereotypes” (p. 523), such
as the nonfamily-offender and, most especially, the stranger-offender. Consequently, the media has actually invented a social problem in which Americans believe that children are routinely abducted by individuals unrelated or unknown to them or their families (Forst & Blomquist, 1991). In reality, cases that dominate the media are not at all representative of the empirical findings regarding the abduction of children in America.

To illustrate, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) reported that in 1999, the last year that a large-scale nationwide study was completed, approximately 262,215 children (individuals under the age of 18) were victims of an abduction (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlak, 2002; Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002). However, of these 262,215 abducted children, only 115 were identified as what has been coined a stereotypical kidnapping, an incident in which the child was “abducted by a slight acquaintance or complete stranger and subsequently detained overnight, transported at least 50 miles, held for ransom or abducted with the intent to be kept permanently, or killed” (Finkelhor et al., 2002, p. 2). This figure represents 0.04% of all estimated child abductions that occurred during 1999. In addition, only 58,200 children were the victims of nonfamily abductions, incidents in which nonfamily members, such as friends, acquaintances, and strangers, were the perpetrators. The remaining 203,900 incidents were family abductions, offenses in which family members or individuals acting on behalf of family members committed the abduction.

Unfortunately, due to the social problem that has been invented by the media’s tendency to over-report the least common types of child abduction, a moral panic has ensued in which

---

1 The OJJDP admits that these numbers could be as high as 348,500 or as low as 175,800. In addition, these figures reflect both reported and unreported cases of child abductions. The methods of how these statistics were derived are explained in greater depth in Chapter Two of this thesis.

2 Stereotypical kidnappings, regarded as the most serious abduction offense, are a subcategory of nonfamily abductions.

3 The terms stereotypical kidnapping, nonfamily abduction, and family abduction are discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.
society constantly fears that their children are going to be snatched off the streets by a stranger or nonfamily member at any moment if left unattended. As a result, there has been political pressure for legislators to solve this problem. However, the solutions that have been offered by policymakers are based on these distorted perceptions of the child abduction problem, particularly incidents involving stranger-offenders. Instead of addressing the root issues of family-related child abductions, legislation passed by federal, state, and local governments has identified the best practices for handling nonfamily-related abductions, particularly the stereotypical kidnapping (Forst & Blomquist, 1991).

Muschert, Young-Spillers, and Carr (2005) agree, stating that the public may be more likely to engage in “political or grassroots efforts to ‘solve’ the social problem” (p. 19) of child abductions after learning about such incidents from the media. However, the public will ultimately be lobbying for solutions (in the form of legislation) that address the statistically smaller group of victims, those of the over-reported nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings. Similarly, the majority of the victims, victims of family abductions, will be excluded from this solution.

In addition to concentrating on nonfamily-offender and stranger-offender incidents, the media has been known to focus their reporting on certain characteristics of child abduction victims. More specifically, Fu, Moellers, Moscotwitz, Duvall, and Tan (2009) discovered that 76.5% of stories on child abduction incidents in their sample of 212 newspaper articles focused on female victims while only 18% of stories focused on male victims. In addition, Fu et al. (2009) found that 65.8% of victims reported on were under the age of 12. This tendency to focus on younger and female child abduction victims ultimately has serious implications for older victims and males. Fu et al. (2009) commented that “children who receive widespread publicity
in the mass media are much more likely to be returned home safely and quickly, whereas those whose kidnappings go unreported are rarely ever found” (p. 1). After all, if the public is not aware that a child is missing, they cannot aid in the search for him or her.

Given the somewhat supported notion that the media could be biased in its reporting of child abductions, this research investigates the issue further. First, it explores the degree to which the media contributes to creating a moral panic surrounding the issue of abductions committed by nonfamily offenders. This is particularly true of the most dramatic nonfamily abduction offense: the stereotypical kidnapping. It has already been argued that the media over-reports the issue, ultimately creating a socially-constructed problem that is way out of line with the objective reality. This research, however, quantifies just how distorted this reality is. Second, this research explores how gender and age play a role in deciding which abduction incidents are covered by the media and what the implications of such decisions may be. Using data collected by the OJJDP’s Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2), the true profiles of the typical and/or most common child abduction incidents were determined. Following this, a content analysis of print media was performed on articles from the years in which the NISMART-2 was completed in order to determine what characterized the profiles of cases on which the media reported. That is, what characteristics of a given child abduction incident were made newsworthy by the media? Then, both sets of profiles were compared to determine the extent to which the media sensationalizes child abduction incidents in the United States as well as how gender and age are portrayed.
Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Empirical Data on Child Abductions

Problems with estimating child abduction incidents.

It is difficult to get a precise figure on the number of abductions that actually occur annually (Boudreaux, Lord, & Etter, 2000; Miller et al., 2008). Much of this difficulty is due to there being no single accepted definition of child abduction. For example, the legal definition of the term child can differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Even the legal definition of abduction can vary from one jurisdiction to another (Boudreaux et al., 2000). As a result, when researchers approach law enforcement or other social service agencies in an attempt to compile information and statistics, the process can prove to be very cumbersome because what one agency deems an abduction, another may not.

Boudreaux et al. (2000) also noted that sometimes child abduction cases are not classified as such even when the incident meets the jurisdiction’s legal definition. For example, if the abduction resulted in a murder, the case is categorized as a homicide. If the child was raped, the case may be categorized as a sexual assault. Consequently, figures of child abductions that are derived from official law enforcement data could very well be underestimated.

In addition, it is hard to rely solely on police records for information on the incidence of child abductions in America because many abductions are not reported to law enforcement agencies (Boudreaux et al., 2000). This is actually a universal criticism of using police records for data collection because if the crime is not reported, it cannot be included in crime statistics (Currie, 2009). Once again, figures of child abductions that are derived from official law enforcement data could very well be underestimated.
Finally, up until the late-1980s, many of the statistics that were provided concerning the incidence of abductions combined what have now been identified as different *types* of child abductions (i.e., family abductions and nonfamily abductions). Realizing that clumping all forms of child abductions into one category clearly distorts the reality of the situation, the federal government and the OJJDP undertook the first of two NISMARTs in 1988.

**The NISMART.**

Among several other things, the NISMART identified two distinct categories of child abductions: *family abductions* and *nonfamily abductions* (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1992). The NISMART defined an incident as a family abduction if either of the following conditions were met: (1) a family member took a child in violation of a custody agreement or decree; or (2) a family member (in violation of a custody agreement of decree) failed to return a child at the end of a legal or agreed upon visitation or custody period, with the child being away at least one additional night in these cases (Carmody & Plass, 2000). An example of a family abduction is when a mother is granted custody of her children, and during a visitation day, the father takes the children to his home and refuses to return them to their mother once the visitation has ended.

In addition, the NISMART characterized a nonfamily abduction as the “coerced, unauthorized movement of a child, the detention of a child, or the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime” by a nonfamily perpetrator, such as a stranger, acquaintance, babysitter, or neighbor (Finkelhor et al., 1992, p. 228). This definition “includes cases where a child was simply taken forcibly into a vehicle or building or a distance of more than 20 feet” (Finkelhor et al., 1992, p. 228). An example of this type of incident occurred when a babysitter refused to let three children go home until she was paid for her services (Finkelhor et al., 2002).
The NISMART further identified one subcategory of nonfamily abductions, which was named *stereotypical kidnappings*. In order for an incident to be categorized as a stereotypical kidnapping in the NISMART, a stranger had to be the perpetrator of the abduction and one of the following conditions had to be met: (1) the child was gone overnight; (2) the child was transported a distance of 50 miles or more from the point of abduction; (3) the child was killed; (4) the child was ransomed; or (5) the perpetrator evidenced an intent to keep the child permanently (Finkelhor et al., 1992). An example of a stereotypical kidnapping is the Elizabeth Smart case. Smart was abducted on June 5, 2002 by Brian David Mitchell, a drifter who had once done work at her home. She was not recovered until March 12, 2003. Mitchell, who was a slight acquaintance to the Smart family, kept Elizabeth overnight\(^4\) and suggested that he had every intention of keeping her permanently.

Aside from identifying and defining the two distinct categories of child abductions, the NISMART gathered both the frequency of incidences of family and nonfamily abductions in America as well as descriptive information about each of the cases, both of which will be discussed in turn below. The study combined a large-scale household survey, a national study of police records, and a re-analysis of FBI homicide statistics (Finkelhor et al., 1992). In the end, the NISMART proved to be a pioneering study because it was the first source of information about child abductions in America in which data were not drawn solely from official sources, such as police reports, court reports, or files from missing children’s organizations. This is significant because the multiple sources of information protect the data from the potential biasing effects of official reporting that have been previously discussed (Carmody & Plass, 2000).

---

\(^4\) Elizabeth was actually held captive for almost a year. However, for NISMART operationalization purposes, “overnight” is used to describe this period.
Additional studies on child abductions.

In 2000, Boudreaux and colleagues took the results from the NISMART, as well as several other studies, and compiled descriptive information on the different characteristics of child abduction cases, such as victim characteristics and offender characteristics. First, in terms of victims, the authors concluded that females are at a higher risk of abduction in general than are males (70% vs. 30%, respectively). The only time in which males are more likely to be a victim of an abduction than females is when the child is between the ages of zero and three (Boudreaux et al., 2000).

In regards to being a victim of a nonfamily abduction (either acquaintance or stranger offender) and subsequently killed, the authors concluded that females were at the highest risk of being a victim, especially when they were preteens or teens. Teenage males were at the next highest risk, which suggests that age is also a factor in that older children are more likely than younger children to be victims of an abduction that results in murder. The data also show that Caucasians are more likely to be victims of these types of crimes (Boudreaux et al., 2000).

In terms of being a victim of a family abduction, both males and females have an equal chance of being abducted by their parents. Since “these abductions are typically highly emotional [and] meant to obtain revenge against the other parent, the victim’s gender is inconsequential” (Boudreaux et al., 2000, p. 65). The greatest percentage of victims are between the ages of three and five (34%), followed by nine to eleven year-olds (26%), six to eight year-olds (22%), twelve to eighteen year-olds (13%), and under three (5%). This indicates that, unlike victims of nonfamily abductions, victims of family abductions appear to be younger. Furthermore, it is logical that victims of family abductions are younger because they are more dependent on their parents and will do what they say, whereas older children may refuse to go
with a parent who has intentions of abducting them. It was also concluded that males are more likely than females to be killed by family members. Finally, the location of the child abducted by a family member is known the majority of the time (50%-61%) (Boudreaux et al., 2000).

As to race, victims are primarily Caucasian (72%), followed by African Americans (18%), then other minorities (10%). This was reflective, however, of the overall race distribution of American society as measured by the United States census for 1992, and “does not appear to be an effect of the abduction phenomenon” (Boudreaux et al., 2000, p. 66). Furthermore, Caucasian victims tended to be older than African American or other minority victims. Likewise, African American children under the age of five were more likely to be victims than Caucasian children of the same age (Boudreaux et al., 2000).

In terms of offender characteristics, child abductors are generally familiar with their victims, and most are either parents or primary caretakers. The most commonly cited reason for a parent to abduct a child is over a custody battle, and men are more likely than females to be the offender in these types of abductions. Family members are more likely to abduct younger children, and acquaintances and strangers are more likely to abduct older children. In addition, abductors are most likely male (87%) and Caucasian (71%). Furthermore, offenders typically choose victims within their own race. Interestingly, even though Caucasians were more likely to be offenders, African Americans were overrepresented in comparison to their overall distribution in the United States population (Boudreaux et al., 2000).

In 2008, Miller and colleagues examined data from 671 child abductions cases in South Carolina to gather information about such incidents there. Overall, their conclusions tended to mirror the results from Boudreaux et al.’s (2000) study. In general, females were more likely than males to be abducted, and female victims were more likely to be abducted by strangers.
Younger victims were more likely to be abducted by family members, and older victims were more likely to be abducted by strangers. In terms of offenders, abductors were most likely to be male.

Miller et al. (2008), however, made four different discoveries than Boudreaux et al. (2000). First, in their sample, Miller et al. (2008) found that African Americans were equally likely as Caucasians to be abducted even though they made up only about 29% of the population in South Carolina. Second, females were much more likely than males to commit a family abduction (66% vs. 30%). Third, there was no distinct relationship between the race of the offender and the race of the victim. Fourth, males were more likely to be abducted by family member. In addition, Miller et al. (2008) concluded that family abductions were most likely to occur at home and stranger abductions were more likely to occur in a public location such as a highway or parking lot. When the incident occurred at school, however, the offender was about as likely to be a family member (48%) as a stranger (40%).

Beyer and Beasley (2003) interviewed twenty-five offenders who had been convicted of nonfamily child abductions which had subsequently resulted in a homicide of the victim. All twenty-five offenders were male. In addition, 76% were Caucasian, 12% African American, and 12% Hispanic. As was the case with Boudreaux et al.’s (2000) findings, these figures were all consistent with 2000 census data on the racial demographics of the United States population (Beyer & Beasley, 2003).

While this descriptive information is certainly important in “identify[ing] specific critical issues and draw[ing] clear conclusions regarding the dynamics of an abduction” (Boudreaux et al., 2000, p. 64), it is arguably just as important to understand the frequency of each type of offense. For example, prior to the completion of the NISMART, but after a string of highly-
publicized stranger-abductor incidents in the 1980s, estimates of such abductions were as high as 50,000 (Finkelhor et al., 1992). However, the NISMART reported that in 1988 there were an estimated 3,200-4,600 nonfamily abductions, with only between 200-300 (.06%) cases fitting the criteria of a stereotypical kidnapping (Finkelhor et al., 1992). On the other hand, family abduction incidents ranged from 163,200-354,100 (Boudreaux et al., 2000). Why then, had the public been led to believe that such large numbers of stranger abductions had occurred? The answer is most likely the media’s tendency to have sensationalized such cases. Indeed, “the data indicate that there is a wide discrepancy between the mass media reportage about child abductions and the empirical evidence about the social problem” (Muschert et al., 2005, p. 15).

The Influence of the Media on Images of Crime

The media has been known to sensationalize stories, particularly ones involving crime (Irsay, 2002; Krajicek, 1998; Pritchard, 1985; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Surette, 1992). Indeed, “research on the content of crime news has consistently shown that the news media present a distorted image of crime” (Duwe, 2005, p. 60). For example, Graber (1980) found that homicide is the crime most likely to be reported on, though statistically, it is one of the least frequently occurring criminal offenses. Cherbonneau & Copes (2003) discovered that carjackings in which the victim was either injured or killed were more likely to be reported on, though most carjackings are not physically violent. Fishman (1978) found that the media was likely to sensationalize violence against the elderly. Duwe (2005) concluded that, in general, television news is most likely to report on incidents that involved the following: (1) large numbers of fatal and wounded victims; (2) strangers as victims; (3) incidents that occurred in public locations; (4) assault weapon use; (5) workplace violence; and (6) suicidal offenders.
The media’s role in constructing social problems.

By reporting on the most frightening and unusual events that occur in a society, the media is ultimately appealing to their consumer so that their product will sell (Duwe, 2005; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). Unfortunately, as a result of this sensationalization, the media has been known to be responsible for constructing social problems (Duwe, 2005; Griffin & Miller, 2008). Spector and Kitsuse (1977) state that social constructionist theory views social problems as the product of “the activities of individuals and groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions” (p. 75). Social constructionist theory focuses on the subjective claims of individuals and groups, such as the news media, rather than the objective reality of the situation. Similarly, Spector and Kitsuse (2006) state that social problems result from “the activities of individuals or groups making assertions about perceived social conditions which they consider unwanted, unjust, immoral, and thus about which something should be done” (p. xi).

Duwe (2005) actually explains the mechanism in which social problems emerge as a result of the media. Cases that stimulate greater media coverage are more likely to influence perceptions about the prevalence and patterns of such crimes. In other words, the more attention the media places on a particular issue, the more insidious the general public assumes that issue to be. However, as previously discussed, the cases that are most likely to receive media coverage are those that are typically frightening, unusual, and least representative of the crime problem. Consequently, the public believes that these atypical cases are actually the norm. At some point, the public deems certain incidents as unwanted, unjust, immoral, or a combination of the three and seeks to fix the newly regarded crisis (social problem). To further compound the situation,
the media is generally the only place in which the public acquires their information\(^5\), so they are not able to balance out the media’s influence (subjectivity) with real facts (objectivity). Duwe (2005) adds that high-profile crimes have historically been the catalyst for the emergence of social problems.

**The media’s role in creating moral panics.**

Once a social problem has been created, a moral panic is known to ensue in which society is struck by fear of real or imagined criminal attacks based on an exaggerated perception of the pervasiveness or intensity of the threat actually posed (Griffin & Miller, 2008). A moral panic is described by Cohen (1972) as “a condition, episode, person, or groups of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (p. 204). In addition, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) described a moral panic as having five criteria: (1) a heightened level of concern; (2) hostility directed towards those considered responsible for the problem; (3) consensus about the seriousness of the threat; (4) disproportionate concern about the nature of the threat; and (5) volatility.

There are several examples of moral panics that emerged in criminal justice following sensationalization from the media. For example, in the 1990s the media created a hysteria surrounding juvenile crime which was based on the belief that there had been an increase in violent crimes committed by juveniles (Miller, Potter, & Kappeler, 2006). As a result of this hype, the notion of the “superpredator” evolved, and many were led to believe that there was going to be a catastrophic amount of violent crime committed by juveniles in the decades to come. The predicted amounts of violence committed by juveniles, however, were not realized. Similarly, following the highly publicized Columbine school shootings and several other school

---

\(^5\) Irsay (2002) states that up to 95% of the population claim that the news media is their primary source of crime information.
shootings around the same time, many believed that schools were dangerous and violent places and that violence in that setting was increasing. As noted by Walker (2006), however, “between 1995 and 2001, the total victimization rate in schools declined 40 percent” (p. 36), and most of the victimization that actually occurred involved less threatening offenses such as theft.

**Media Depictions of Child Abductions**

**The media’s sensationalization of high-profile cases.**

Most specific to this research, a moral panic was created in the 1980s surrounding child abductions, particularly after the high-profile kidnapping and subsequent murder of Adam Walsh. Griffin and Miller (2008) state:

> Extensive media attention and heart-rending appeals by various child advocates like Adam Walsh’s father, John, employed overly inclusive definitions and distorted counts of “missing children” and conflated them with lurid “typifying cases” such as the Adam Walsh murder that resulted in hysterical overestimations of the phenomenon and a socially constructed “epidemic” of child victims. (p. 161)

As previously discussed, the sensationalism and hype surrounding child abductions perpetrated by nonfamily members and, most especially, stranger-offenders has resulted in a socially constructed problem in which the public believes that children are routinely kidnapped by people unrelated and unknown to them and thus serves as a perfect example of the media’s role in such fabricated formations. Shutt, Miller, Schrek, and Brown (2004) agree, stating “the threat of child abduction has […] been a socially constructed problem, resulting from mass media sensationalism and fabrication” (p. 128). In line with Spector and Kitsuse (2006), Shutt et al. (2004) support the claim that the public has responded to this socially constructed problem by trying to fix it through several policy initiatives such as Megan’s Law and Carlie’s Law. While these policy initiatives certainly address the problems of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical
kidnappings, they fail to address the issue and root causes of family abductions, which comprise the largest portion of abduction incidents. This issue is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Three content analyses have been identified that examined the media’s role in sensationalizing child abduction cases. Muschert et al. (2005) analyzed the New York Times and the Columbus Dispatch in order to examine both the national news media and local news media’s characterization of child abductions in America in the year following the Elizabeth Smart abduction (June 1, 2002 to May 31, 2003). The authors concluded that 83.3% of the New York Times articles (N= 67) and 87.7% of the Columbus Dispatch articles (N= 15) were about stereotypical kidnappings. Neither newspaper reported extensively on family abductions (Muchert et al., 2005).

Similarly, Finkelhor, Hotaling, and Sedlak (1990) reported in an executive summary of the NISMART that a content analysis of newspaper articles concluded that 92 percent of the crimes against children described with the words “abduction” or “kidnapping” were in fact stereotypical kidnappings. According to Finkelhor et al. (1990), this “confirmed that when reporters write and the public reads about abductions, they are thinking primarily of the [s]tereotypical [k]idnapping” (p. 8).

Finally, Fu et al. (2009) examined 212 news articles from the USA Today, The Houston Chronicle, New York Times, The Washington Post, and The San Diego Chronicle from January 1, 2000 to mid-November 2003. They concluded that these newspapers were most likely to report on nonfamily abductions, particularly stereotypical kidnappings in which there were strangers or unknown offenders, female victims, victims under the age of twelve, victims from middle- to upper-class, male perpetrators, and suspects from lower- to working-classes.
The media’s bias in regards to gender and age.

It is important to note that in addition to concentrating on the most frightening and unusual incidents, the media tends to report on certain characteristics of victims, specifically in regards to their gender. For example, Paulsen (2003) found that the *Houston Chronicle* was most likely to cover homicide cases in Houston that involved statistically-rare victims, such as females. Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener (1995) compared the types of homicide incidents that were reported on by the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* to police data on all homicides that occurred in 1987. The researchers concluded that homicides were more likely to be reported on when the victim was female, although according to the police data, it was statistically rare for females to have actually been the victims of a homicide that year. Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson, and Ackerly (2004) discovered that three English and Wales newspapers (*The Times*, *The Mail*, and *The Mirror*) were also more likely to report on homicides when the victims were female. Sorenson, Manz, and Beck (1998) compared the types of homicide incidents that were reported on by *The Los Angeles Times* to all homicides that occurred in Los Angeles County between 1990 and 1994. The researchers concluded that females were more likely than males to receive media coverage compared to what would be expected considering their actual frequency of homicide victimization.

Wanzo (2008) agrees that female victims tend to receive disproportionate amounts of media attention. She suggests that when historians examine the years shortly before and after the turn of the twenty-first century, they will note that one of the major themes that dominated the media was *Damsels in Distress*. Wanzo (2008) states that “names such as JonBenêt Ramsey, Megan Kanka, Elizabeth Smart, Natalee Holloway, and Laci Peterson entered the cultural
lexicon during this period, so famous that their first names alone could trigger the stories of their victimization in many citizens’ minds” (p. 99).

Wanzo (2008) also states that males are not constructed as similarly vulnerable in the media. The author attributes this to what she has deemed “The Lost Girl Event” (p. 100). The Lost Girl Event focuses on the vulnerability and innocence of females, particularly girls, and the devastation surrounding the inexplicable violence that affects them. Younger females are perpetually represented in the news because what happens to them is often regarded as every parent’s worst nightmare. In the media’s narratives, these victims are typically described similar to characters in a fairytale. Words such as angelic, perfect, ideal, and golden typically accompany descriptions of them. Ultimately, the stories are so engaging to readers because of the senseless horror that causes these “fairytales” to turn into “nightmares.”

Similarly, Tanner (2006) suggests that JonBenét Ramsey’s murder received so much media attention because she was an “emblematic child,” representing innocence, purity, and goodness (p. 10). She clearly fit the image of a fairytale character as a “beautiful, blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty pageant winner” (Tanner, 2006, p. 10). Ultimately, the media was so attracted to her story because she was so unadulterated, the essence of the idealized child. As Wanzo (2008) suggests, as the idealized child and thus the poster child, she represented all children, and her case signified the risks that all girls face.

A famous quote by Edgar Allan Poe provides perhaps another explanation as to why female victims receive more media attention. Poe states, “The death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world” (as cited in Wanzo, 2008, p. 108). Fu et al. (2009) offer some support to this notion, citing that media personnel admit that images of
attractive females sells better to readers and viewers, and that having footage of them is part of the marketing strategy to attract audiences and garner higher ratings.

The tendency to report on female abduction incidents was perhaps most evident in 2002 when there were five child abduction incidents clustered close together in time. These incidents involved the following victims: Samantha Runnion, Danielle van Dam, Elizabeth Smart, Alexis Patterson, and Jahi Turner. The first four victims, all females, received varying degrees of media attention. Turner, a two-year-old boy who disappeared while playing in a park in San Diego, the same city from which Danielle van Dam was abducted, received almost no attention. Only one content analysis has been identified that systematically examined the gender of kidnapping victims in newspaper articles. Fu et al. (2009) discovered in their sample newspaper articles that 76.5% of stories focused on female victims while only 18% of stories focused on male victims.

Similar evidence exists that suggests that younger kidnap victims are more likely than older kidnap victims to receive media attention. Criminologist James Alan Fox points out that Americans “have a protective response to crimes against children and when they appear to us to be particularly defenseless” (as cited in Fu et al., 2009, p. 24). Hargrove and Haman (as cited in Tanner, 2006) state, “For a missing child to attract widespread publicity and improve the odds of being found, it helps if the child is […] cute and under 12” (p. 8). Tanner (2006) suggests that because children under twelve are still undergoing “the social experience of childhood,” they, like females in general, are presumed to embody all that is virtuous: purity, innocence, and vulnerability. Because of these qualities, it is assumed that they are unable to place themselves into situations in which their victimization is explainable. For example, if a teenage female is sexually assaulted by an older male while intoxicated at a party, some may claim she is partially at fault for placing herself in that situation. A female toddler, however, that is sexually assaulted
by an older male would not be viewed as blameworthy for her victimization. In addition, they are often viewed as being unable to adequately defend themselves as they are still dependent on adults for many of their most basic needs. Thus, regardless of gender, the media will dedicate more attention to them since the devastation that surrounds their victimization is deemed inexplicable and unwarranted.

Only one content analysis has been identified that systematically examined the age of kidnapping victims in newspaper articles. Fu et al. (2009) discovered that in their sample of newspaper articles that 65.8% of victims reported on were under the age of 12. The authors did not, however, provide any explanation as to why these results were found.

**Filling in the Gaps: Overall Purpose of the Research**

Fu et al. (2009) comment that “how news media cover child abductions is a relatively new area of research [but one that] has important theoretical implications […] as well as professional applications (emphasis added) (p. 1). As such, the main contribution of the current research is to add to the very scant literature that currently exists on the topic. Only three content analyses could be identified that have examined the same topics of interest (i.e., Finkelhor et al., 1990; Fu et al., 2009; Muschert et al., 2006). In addition, this research uniquely contributes to the existing literature in two important ways. First, this study examines newspaper articles from the years in which the NISMART-2 study was conducted (1996-1999) in order to give the best representation of how distorted the media’s portrayal of child abduction incidents really is. This approach was unique because all other identified content analyses on this topic examined newspaper articles in years outside the NISMART-2’s timeframe. Yet researchers still made comparisons from their findings to data derived from the NISMART-2. This could, however, be problematic. For example, the types of child abductions that were
occurring in 2002 may differ from the types that were occurring in 1996-1999. Hypothetically, perhaps in 2002 there were significantly more stereotypical kidnappings than family abductions. If the media had reported on more stereotypical kidnappings than family abduction incidents, they would not have been sensationalizing the problem, but rather reporting it as is. Of course it is unlikely that much changed between 1996-1999 and 2002, but in order to make the most accurate comparison between the media’s depictions and the NISMART-2, the years in which the data were collected must be the same years in which the media’s accounts of such incidents. Ultimately, this has important implications (professional applications) because if the public is misguided in terms of the circumstances that surround the most common type of child abduction incidents (nonfamily abductions versus family abductions), they are going to demand a solution that fixes only a small fraction of the problem (stereotypical kidnappings) and excludes the overwhelming majority of it (family abductions).

Second, since this research also examines in-depth the depiction of gender and age in child abduction incidents, it expands on what is known about how males and females and younger and older children are portrayed in the media when they are victims of such incidents. Previous research has mostly focused on the gender of abduction victims during 2002 and what was dubbed the summer of child abductions (Fu et al., 2009). This research, however, goes outside of that time frame to examine if male children are consistently underrepresented in media coverage of child abduction incidents.

Whether or not certain demographics of children receive more media attention than others has important implications (theoretical implications) because, as previously mentioned, children who receive extensive coverage are much more likely to be found, particularly alive. If male children, therefore, are receiving less coverage, they are less likely to be found. Similarly,
if older children are receiving less coverage, they are less likely to be found. If these hypotheses are supported, it would provide evidence that the media places more value on the victimization of some children over others.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Phase I: Research Questions

The major research question for Phase I of this study was: “What types of child abductions are most reported on in the print media, and how does this compare to the NISMART-2’s data on such incidences in the United States?” Subsumed under this overall question were the following research questions:

RQ1: Is the media more likely to report on nonfamily abductions (excluding the subcategory of stereotypical kidnappings) than family abductions?
RQ2: Is the media more likely to report on the subcategory of stereotypical kidnappings than nonfamily abductions or family abductions?
RQ3: Does the media over-represent the number of female abduction incidents in comparison to the NISMART-2 data on such incidents?
RQ4: Will the media dedicate more words to female abduction incidents and less so to male abduction incidents?
RQ5: Is the media more likely to report on the abduction of younger (aged 11 and under) children than on older children (aged 12 and older) in comparison to the NISMART-2 data?
RQ6: Will the media dedicate more words to younger (aged 11 and under) children and less so to older (aged 12 and older) children?

Foundation for research questions.

Research questions 1 and 2 were derived from the results of Muschert et al.’s (2005) content analysis which concluded that family abductions were not extensively reported on and that stereotypical kidnapping incidents received the overwhelming majority of media attention in their sample of newspaper articles. Research questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 were derived from the results of Fu et al.’s (2009) content analysis which concluded that female abduction victims and abduction victims under the age of twelve were most likely to be reported on by the media in their sample of newspaper articles.
Data Collection

In order to quantify the extent to which moral panics are created by the media as well as examine how gender and age are portrayed by them, a content analysis was conducted. A content analysis is “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Using news reports and articles, researchers systematically examine the characteristics of a message that is being conveyed by the media. As a result, a profile is determined of the types and characteristics of crimes that are most likely to be reported on by the media. After the content analysis is complete, the resulting profile created is compared against empirical data (i.e., UCR reports, law enforcement data) in order to examine just how sensationalized the media reports truly were.

The NISMART-2

Information on incidences of child abductions was derived from the NISMART-2. The NISMART-2 was conducted between 1997 and 1999, a decade after the first NISMART was completed. Most surveys were completed during 1999, and since the respondent was asked to report on incidents that occurred within the previous twelve months, the annual period referred to in the study is 1999 (Finkelhor et al., 2002; Hammer et al., 2002). In addition to the NISMART, the NISMART-2 is the only other large-scale, nationwide study that utilized multiple methods for collecting data on child abduction incidences. Although this current research project focused on family and nonfamily abductions, the NISMART-2 had also gathered information on runaway/thrownaway episodes, missing child episodes that were result

---

6 The NISMART-2 was used to gather empirical information on child abduction incidences in the United States instead of the NISMART because the former study was completed more recently. In addition, the NISMART-2 employed more rigorous data collection methods than the NISMART.
of the child being lost or injured, or episodes in which the child was missing for benign reasons\(^7\) (Finkelhor et al., 2002).

Two different sources were used to gather the data that were examined in the current study: (1) the Adult Caretaker and Youth Household Surveys, and (2) the Law Enforcement Study. First, victims of family and nonfamily abductions were identified through the Adult Caretaker and Youth Household Surveys. Employing computer-assisted telephone interviewing, self-reported information was collected from a national probability sample of households (Hammer et al., 2002). Maxfield and Babbie (2006) state that there are several advantages to using computer-assisted telephone interviewing over other types of survey research designs. For example, respondents may answer questions more candidly, researchers are able to get detailed answers to questions from respondents, and researchers can ensure that as many questions as possible are answered by respondents. A total of 16,111 interviews were completed with an adult primary caretaker. This resulted in a 61% response rate with an 80% cooperation rate among eligible households with children (Hammer et al., 2002).

Each primary caretaker who completed the initial interview was asked if the interviewer could speak with one randomly selected youth in the household who was between the ages of 10 and 18. Permission was obtained 60% of the time. A 95% response rate was obtained for the youth who had been granted permission by their caretaker to be interviewed, yielding 5,015 youth interviews. Both sets of interview data were weighted to reflect the Census-based population (Hammer et al., 2002).

\(^7\) The OJJDP uses the term benign to describe incidents in which caretakers believed their children were missing, but in reality they were not. For example, if a mother forgot her son was going to a friend’s house after school, she may notify authorities because she thought he was missing when he did not get off the school bus.
The interviews were designed to screen for abduction episodes as operationalized by the NISMART-2 and to collect demographic information on the household and its members. In addition, in-depth follow-up interviews were conducted on each of the specific types of incidents that were being researched (Finkelhor et al., 2002). Respondents were administered a set of 17 screening questions to determine their eligibility for participation in the in-depth follow-up interview pertaining to each type of missing child episode. Please refer to Appendix A for the five adult screening questions that led to a family abduction follow-up interview and the six adult screening questions that led to a nonfamily abduction follow-up interview.

Family abductions were defined similarly in the NISMART-2 as they had been in the NISMART. These incidents were operationalized in the following way: “The taking or keeping of a child by a family member in violation of a custody order, a decree, or other legitimate custodial rights, where the taking or keeping involved some element of concealment, flight, or intent to deprive a lawful custodian indefinitely of custodial privileges” (Hammer et al., 2002, p. 2). Some of the specific definitional elements identified by the NISMART-2 are as follows:

1. **Taking**: Child was taken by a family member in violation of a custody order or decree or other legitimate custodial right.

2. **Keeping**: Child was not returned or given over by a family member in violation of a custody order or decree or other legitimate custodial right.

3. **Concealment**: Family member attempted to conceal the taking or whereabouts of the child with intent to prevent return, contact, or visitation.

4. **Flight**: Family member transported or had the intent to transport the child from the state for the purpose of making recovery more difficult.

5. **Intent to deprive indefinitely**: Family member indicated an intent to prevent contact with the child on an indefinite basis or to affect custodial privileges indefinitely.
6. **Child**: Person under 18 years of age. For a child 15 or older, there needed to be evidence that the family member used some kind of force or threat to take or detain the child, unless the child was mentally disabled.

7. **Family member**: A biological, adoptive, or foster family member; someone acting on behalf of such a family member; or the romantic partner of a family member.

The family abduction estimates reported in the NISMART-2 were obtained by combining the countable family abductions described in the Household Surveys by both the caretakers and the youth. However, any individual child was counted only once, even if the abduction was reported for the same child in both the adult and youth interviews (Hammer et al., 2002).

Nonfamily abductions were also defined similarly in the NISMART-2 as they had been in the NISMART. Nonfamily members included all nonfamily perpetrators, including friends, acquaintances, and strangers. These incidents were operationalized in the following way:

(1) An episode in which a nonfamily perpetrator takes a child by the use of physical force or threat of bodily harm or detains the child for a substantial period of time (at least one hour) in an isolated place by the use of physical force or threat of bodily harm without lawful authority or parental permission; or (2) an episode in which a child younger than 15 or mentally incompetent, and without lawful authority or parental permission, is taken or detained or voluntarily accompanies a nonfamily perpetrator who conceals the child’s whereabouts, demands ransom, or expresses the intention to keep the child permanently. (Finkelhor et al., 2002, p. 2)

In addition, a stereotypical kidnapping was defined as: “A nonfamily abduction perpetrated by a slight acquaintance or stranger in which a child is detained overnight, transported at least 50 miles, held for ransom or abducted with intent to keep the child permanently, or killed” (Finkelhor et al., 2002, p. 2). Some of the specific definitional elements identified by the NISMART-2 are as follows:

1. **Stranger**: A perpetrator whom the child or family does not know, or a perpetrator of unknown identity.

2. **Slight acquaintance**: A nonfamily perpetrator whose name is unknown to the child or family prior to the abduction and whom the child or family did now know well enough to speak to, or a recent acquaintance who the child or family have known for
less than 6 months, or someone the family or child have known for longer than 6 months but seen less than once a month. (Finkelhor et al., 2002, p. 2)

The nonfamily abductions estimates were obtained the same way as the family abduction estimates. However, since victims of stereotypical kidnappings are “rare and therefore difficult to estimate through household sampling without conducting an enormous and prohibitively expensive survey” (Finkelhor et al., 2002, p. 3), a survey of law enforcement agencies throughout the United States was used to accurately measure the number of stereotypical kidnapping victims. The research team assumed that given the seriousness of such incidents, almost all of them would have been reported to and recorded by law enforcement. Only information gleaned from the surveys of law enforcement agencies was used to estimate the incidences of stereotypical kidnappings.

Next, the Law Enforcement Study was conducted to gather national estimates of stereotypical kidnappings. Data was collected from a nationally representative sample of 4,165 law enforcement agencies in two phases. First, a mail survey was sent to all law enforcement agencies in the sample inquiring whether the agency had any stereotypical kidnappings during the 1997 calendar year that were open for investigation. The researchers received a 91% response rate for the mail survey. During the second phase, agencies that had reported any stereotypical kidnapping were contacted again. Key investigating officers were interviewed via telephone in each of the qualifying cases handled by that agency. Data were collected for 99% of the cases that had been targeted for interviews. Weights were developed to reflect the probability of the agencies and subsequent cases having been included in the sample, as well as to adjust for non-responses and refusals (Finkelhor et al., 2002).
Limitations of the NISMART-2 data.

It should be noted that while this study is “currently the most comprehensive and methodologically sound data available for the missing children problem in the U.S.” (Muschert et al., 2005, p. 6), it is not without its limitations. For example, the Household Surveys may have undercounted children who were victims of child abductions that were living in households without telephones or were not living in households during the study period, such as street children or homeless children (Finkelhor et al., 2002). It may have also undercounted those households in which respondents failed to participate in the survey. Additionally, there were very few cases of stereotypical kidnappings identified. From these identified kidnappings, national estimates were statistically derived. Given the extremely small sample size of cases, however, any data derived from the estimates must be used with caution, especially when considering precision and confidence intervals. Furthermore, the Household Surveys used a research design that depended heavily on non-verifiable interviews, so the estimates resulting from the data may be biased. Finally, the Law Enforcement Study only includes stereotypical kidnappings that were reported to authorities and occurred in 1997. Nonetheless, even considering these limitations, this national study has been utilized by several other researchers when examining the issue of child abductions in the United States (e.g., Muchert et al., 2005; Muschert et al., 2006; Shutt et al., 2004).

Content Analysis of the Print Media

As previously mentioned, information on incidences of child abductions in the United States were compiled from the NISMART-2 in order to establish the *true* profile of the most common types of abduction cases. Following this, articles from American newspapers published in 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999 were collected from LexisNexis Academic; these
newspaper articles served as the sampling frame. Since the NISMART-2 was conducted between 1997 and 1999, and participants were asked to report on incidents that occurred within the last twelve months, the 1996-1999 timeframe covered all years that the NISMART-2 data reflect.

Similar to Fu et al. (2009), the search words “kidnap!” and “abduct!” were utilized. All newspapers that were collected were read, and those that reported on child abductions in general (i.e., proposed policies) were taken out of the sample. Only those articles that reported on specific abduction incidents were retained for the study. In addition, if the same exact article appeared more than once during the course of the search, only one was retained for the sample. If, however, there were multiple stories on the same child abduction event but the articles were not identical (i.e., written by different authors, focus on different aspects of the crime), all were retained for the study.

Special attention was made so as to not include attempted abductions. The only attempted kidnappings included in the sample were those in which the child was physically moved from one location to another. For example, a father and his two children were in a grocery store. The two children were taken by an offender from the store and placed in the offender’s truck, which was located in the parking lot. The father realized his children were missing and was able to recover them before the perpetrator could drive away. In another incident, an abductor took a child from a beach and put him in his car. Moments later, a friend of the boy’s mother realized what had transpired and cut the man’s car off as he drove away through the beach parking lot. Incidents were not included, however, in which the child was not moved from one specific location to another. For example, in one discarded article, a teenage boy grabbed a baby from a stroller being pushed by the baby’s mother in the parking lot of a
mall. The boy ran thirty feet with the baby then abandoned the abduction as the mother and another man caught up to him. In a similar incident, a man grabbed the arm of a small boy in a grocery store and tried to exit the building. An employee of the store intervened at the entrance door and the child was release before the man was able to get him out the door.

A database was constructed that identified each unique incident reported on by the media. This database can be found in Appendix B. Each incident was given a distinct number and included the victim’s last name, the type of child abduction, the number of articles dedicated to the incident, the number of words detailing the incident\(^8\), the newspaper ID number, and the victim’s ID number. If there were more than one child abducted during the incident, only the first victim’s name was recorded. If the name of the victim was not identified in the article, “N/a” was marked next to the incident number. This database was meant to keep track of the number of unique incidents identified over the four-year search period, not to comprehensively describe what was reported about each incident.

To assist in the latter task, specific information on the characteristics of the victim, the offender, and the incident were collected from both the NISMART-2 and the selected newspaper articles. The independent variables that were examined for the offender characteristics are as follows: gender, race/ethnicity, relationship of the offender to the child, family member’s relationship to the child, whether the perpetrator acted alone, and if not, how many accomplices there were. The independent variables that were examined for victims are as follows: age, gender, race/ethnicity, and location prior to the abduction. The independent variables that were examined for the abduction incidents include: primary motivation for

\(^{8}\) It is assumed that child abduction stories that have more words detailing the incident indicate that the media finds those events more newsworthy than stories which have fewer words detailing the incident. This ultimately sends a message to the reader signifying which incidents are more important to them.
abduction by family members, primary motivation for abduction by nonfamily members, primary motivation for abduction by strangers/slight acquaintances, and case outcome.

**Operationalization of Key Concepts/Variables**

During the content analysis of the selected newspapers, each article was examined for twenty-four different items that assisted in identifying the type of child abduction being reported on and specific characteristics of that particular abduction, including offender information, victim information, and incident information. If more than one victim or offender were involved in the incident, information related to the appropriate independent variables were collected for each victim and offender. All of these independent variables were defined by the NISMA RT-2, and these definitions were used to operationalize the key concepts. A sample of the coding form that was utilized in this study is included in Appendix C.

**Offender information.**

Certain descriptive information the offender was collected. Gender was measured as 0= male and 1= female. “Unknown” was selected if the article did not explicitly or implicitly identify the gender of the victim. Race/ethnicity was measured as 0= White (non-Hispanic); 1= Black (non-Hispanic); 2= Hispanic; and 3= other. If the article did not mention the offender’s race/ethnicity, the variable was coded as missing.

The relationship of the offender to the victim was also identified. This assisted in categorizing the type of child abduction since family member abductors indicated a family abduction, nonfamily member abductors indicated a nonfamily abduction, and stranger/slight acquaintance abductors indicated a stereotypical kidnapping. The relationship of the offender to the victim was measured as 1= family member; 2= nonfamily member; and 3= slight acquaintance/stranger. A “family member” was defined as a biological, adoptive, or foster
family member, someone acting on behalf of such a family member, or the romantic partner of a family member. A “nonfamily member” was defined as someone who was well known to the child or the family, but not a family member. This may have included a boyfriend/girlfriend, a babysitter, a teacher, a neighbor, a coach, a boy scout/girl scout leader, or a school bus driver. A “slight acquaintance” was defined as a nonfamily perpetrator whose name was unknown to the child or the family prior the abduction and whom the child or the family did not know well enough to speak to, or a recent acquaintance whom the child or the family had known for less than six months, or someone the family or the child knew for longer than six months but had seen less than once a month. A “stranger” was defined as a perpetrator whom the child or family did not know, or a perpetrator of unknown identity. If the article did not describe the offender or his/her relationship to the victim, the variable was coded as missing.

Finally, the family member’s relationship to the child was identified. The family member’s relationship to the child was measured as 1= child’s father; 2= child’s mother; 3= child’s grandfather; 4= child’s grandmother; 5= child’s uncle; 6= child’s aunt; 7= child’s stepfather; 8= child’s stepmother; 9= child’s brother; 10= child’s sister; 11= child’s mother’s boyfriend; 12= child’s father’s girlfriend; and 13= other. “Child’s father” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster father. “Child’s mother” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster mother. “Child’s grandfather” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster grandfather. “Child’s grandmother” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster grandmother. “Child’s uncle” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster uncle. “Child’s aunt” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster aunt. “Child’s stepfather” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster stepfather. “Child’s stepmother” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster stepmother. “Child’s brother” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster brother. “Child’s
sister” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster sister. “Child’s mother’s boyfriend” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster mother’s boyfriend. “Child’s father’s girlfriend” was defined as a biological, adopted, or foster father’s girlfriend. “Other” was selected if the relationship of the family member was not any of the previous options. If the article did not identify the family member’s relationship to the child or the offender was a nonfamily member or slight acquaintance/stranger, the variable was coded as missing.

Finally, it was determined if the perpetrator acted alone or had accomplices. This variable was measured as 1= yes and 2= no. If the item was coded as “2,” the number of accomplices was recorded as a continuous variable.

**Victim information.**

Information on the victim was then gathered. The age of the victim was measured as 1= 0-5; 2= 6-11; 3= 12-14; and 4= 15-17. An age of “0-5” included newborns, infants, toddlers, and children up to the age of five. If the article did not identify the age of the victim, this data was coded as missing. Gender was measured as 0= male and 1= female. If the article did not specify the gender of the victim, this variable was coded as missing. Race/ethnicity was measured as 0= White (non-Hispanic); 1= Black (non-Hispanic); 2= Hispanic; and 3= other. Additional means to gather information on this variable were taken. If the article did not explicitly mention the race/ethnicity of the child, a Google search was conducted to identify such information. If that option failed to yield the race/ethnicity of the child, the last name of the victim was used to make an educated guess (i.e., Lopez, Rivera, Hernandez, etc.). If the last name did not allow for such a guess to be made (i.e., Short, Smith, etc.), this variable was coded as missing. An additional variable identified whether the race/ethnicity was mentioned directly
in the article or determined through alternative means. It was measured as 1= expressly mentioned in the article and 2= derived from alternative means.

Finally, the location of the child prior to the abduction was analyzed. The location was measured as 1= own home or yard; 2= other home or yard; 3= public area; 4= school or daycare; 5= a vehicle; 6= on vacation; and 7= other. A “public area” included such areas as a street, a wooded area, a store, a mall, a restaurant, etc. “Other” was selected if the location did not fit into any of the previous locations. If the article did not mention the child’s location prior to the abduction, the variable was coded as missing.

**Incident information.**

Information about each abduction was then collected in order to identify the type of incident that was reported on as well as gather descriptive data on each incident. First, the primary motivation for abductions by family members was analyzed. Motivation for family members was measured as 1= to gain custody of the child; 2= revenge; and 3= other. “To gain custody of the child” involved incidents in which one parent was granted full custody of a child and the other parent abducted the child so that he/she could have them. “Revenge” involved incidents in which a parent abducted a child to “get back” at the other parent. For example, a husband and wife may be have been going a divorce, so the husband took the child to “get even” with his wife. “Other” was selected if another motive was identified by the article that was not mentioned previously. This motivation was also recorded on the coding sheet since the literature has only focused on the two previous motivations for family abductions. If the article did not specify the reason for the nonfamily abduction or the offender was a nonfamily member or stranger/slight acquaintance, the variable was coded as missing.
Next, the primary motivation for abductions by nonfamily members was analyzed. Motivation for nonfamily members was measured as 0= not explained and 1= explained. “Explained” was selected for any reason that was provided as to why the nonfamily abduction occurred, and that reason was recorded on the coding sheet. Since the NISMART-2 definition of nonfamily abduction does not require any specific motivations for such incidents to be categorized as such, there really are limitless possibilities for why a nonfamily abduction may occur. Instead of trying to list every potential motivation, it was more feasible to simply record the motivations identified in the selected newspaper articles. If the article did not specify the motivation for the nonfamily abduction, it was coded as “not explained.” If the offender was a family member or stranger/slight acquaintance, the variable was coded as missing.

Third, the primary motivation for abductions by strangers or slight acquaintances was identified. Motivation for strangers or slight acquaintances was measured as 1= for ransom; 2= for sexual assault; 3= to keep the child permanently; and 4= other. “For sexual assault” was selected if the child was raped or forced to perform sexual acts while detained by the offender. “To keep the child permanently” involved, for example, incidents in which a woman who could not have children abducted her neighbor’s newborn with the intentions of raising the child as her own. “Other” was selected if the described motivation was not previously mentioned. In addition, the provided motivation was recorded on the coding sheet. If the article did not specify the motivation for the abduction or the offender was a family or nonfamily member, the variable was coded as missing.

Fourth, the outcome of the case was analyzed. Outcome was measured as 1= child returned alive; 2= child returned injured; 3= child was killed; 4= child had not been returned, but his/her location was known; and 5= child had not been returned, nor had he/she been
located. “Child returned injured” included physical injuries such as scrapes, bruises, broken bones, and sexual assault. If the article did not mention the outcome of the case, the variable was coded as missing.

Specific information about incidents perpetrated by stranger or slight acquaintance abductors was also gathered to ensure that the incident was actually a stereotypical kidnapping since certain criteria must be met for an incident to have been classified as such (i.e., the child must have been abducted by a slight acquaintance or stranger, and one of the following must have occurred: the child was been detained overnight, the child was transported 50 miles or more, the child was held for ransom, the child was abducted with the intent to be kept permanently, or the child was killed). In addition, this detailed information on the particular incident aided in the compilation of additional descriptive data on the most reported on stereotypical kidnappings.

First, it was identified whether a nonfamily abduction perpetrated by a stranger/slight acquaintance occurred, and if so, whether the child was detained overnight. Whether the child was detained overnight was measured as 1= yes and 2= no. If the article did not specify whether the child was detained overnight or if the offender was a family or nonfamily member, the variable was coded as missing.

Similarly, it was identified whether the child was transported 50 miles or more. To determine if the child was transported over 50 miles, a MapQuest search was used if the child’s location prior to the incident was specified as well as if it was specified where the child was transported to. Transportation over 50 miles was measured as 1= yes and 2= no. If it could not be determined whether the child was transported 50 miles or more or the offender was a family or nonfamily member, the variable was coded as missing.
Third, it was identified whether a ransom was demanded. Ransom was measured as 1= yes or 2= no. If the article did not specify whether ransom was demanded or if the offender was a family or nonfamily member, the variable was coded as missing.

Fourth, it was identified whether the child was abducted with the intent to be kept permanently. Intent to keep permanently was measured as 1= yes and 2= no. If the article did not specify whether the child was abducted with the intent to be kept permanently or if the offender was a family or nonfamily member, the variable was coded as missing.

Fifth, it was identified whether the child was killed by the offender. This was measured as 1= yes and 2= no. If the article did not specify whether the child was killed or if the offender was a family or nonfamily member, the variable was coded as missing.

Lastly, using the previous five variables (child detained overnight, transported 50 miles or more, ransom demanded, child intended to be kept permanently, child killed) as well as the offender’s relationship to the child (i.e., family member, nonfamily member, or slight acquaintance/stranger), the NISMART-2 category under which the incident fell was determined. This was measured as 1= family abduction; 2= nonfamily abduction; and 3= stereotypical kidnapping. Not every article provided all of the necessary information to conclude with absolute certainty the particular NISMART-2 category that the incident fell under, particularly when trying to distinguish between nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings.

Muschert et al. (2005) addressed this issue by providing two different estimates of the type of incidents reported on. One estimate was conservative in nature and left all unknown cases counted as unknown. The other estimate was liberal in nature and counted all unknown cases as stereotypical kidnappings if the circumstances described in the article implied a stereotypical kidnapping. The current study took a similar approach, providing both a conservative and liberal
count of family abductions, nonfamily abductions, and stereotypical kidnappings. A variable was included to identify whether the article provided enough information for a definitive categorization to be made. It was coded as 1= yes and 2= no. If not enough information was provided for a definitive categorization to be made, an additional variable was included that allowed for an educated guess to be made (the liberal estimate) on the type of child abduction incident that was being implied in the article. This variable was be coded as 1= family abduction; 2= nonfamily abduction; 3= stereotypical kidnapping; and 99= a definitive categorization was able to be made.\(^9\) Finally, a variable was included that allowed for a conservative estimate to be made. This variable was coded as 1= family abduction; 2= nonfamily abduction; 3= stereotypical kidnapping; and 99= a definitive categorization was able to be made.

**Phase II: Hypotheses**

Phase II of this research allowed for a more quantitative analysis of some of the collected data. This additional step was taken to explore whether certain demographic characteristics (i.e., age and gender) of the victim could predict the categorization of a particular child abduction incident in the print media.

The major research question for Phase II of this study was: “Can certain demographic information (i.e., age and gender) predict under which NISMART-2 category a particular child abduction incident will fall in the print media?” The following was hypothesized:

**H1:** Younger children (under the age of 11) are more likely to be victims of family abductions than are their older (aged 12 and over) counterparts.

**H2:** Older children (aged 12 and over) are more likely to be victims of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings than are their younger (under the age of 11) counterparts.

---

\(^9\) This attribute was included because if a definitive categorization was able to be made, there would have been no need to make a conservative or liberal categorization.
H3: Females are more likely to be victims of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings than are males.

**Foundations for hypotheses.**

These hypotheses were derived from the empirical findings presented by Boudreaux et al. (2000) which concluded that children under the age of eleven were most likely to be victims of family abductions, that children aged twelve and older were most likely to be victims of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings, and that females were most likely to be the victims of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings.
Chapter Four: Findings

Descriptive Data

The identification of incidences involving the abduction of children yielded sixty-six newspaper articles. If one abduction incident was reported on multiple times, duplicate incidents were removed. This means that each offender, victim, and incident is reported on only once in this section. There were forty-nine unique incidents documented within the sample with a total of forty-nine unique offenders and sixty-nine unique victims. In fifty-six of those incidents, the NISMART-2 categorization of the incident was able to be determined from information provided within the newspaper article. As shown in Figure 1, the most frequently reported on incidents were nonfamily abductions (N= 25; 36%) followed by stereotypical kidnappings (N= 18; 26%), then family abductions (N= 13; 19%). In two cases, there was no information at all to help make a determination. In the remaining eleven cases (16%), liberal and conservative categorizations were made because not enough information was provided to make a definitive classification. There were only problems in categorizing incidents in which family members were not the offender (i.e., either nonfamily abductions or stereotypical kidnappings). Liberally, these incidents were categorized as stereotypical kidnappings. Conservatively, they were categorized as nonfamily abductions. Ultimately, there could have been as many as thirty-six nonfamily abductions (52%) or as many as twenty-nine stereotypical kidnappings (42%).
The overwhelming majority of offenders were male (N= 44; 90%), with only five (10%) being female. In terms of the offender’s relationship to the child, most were nonfamily members (N= 18; 37%), followed by slight acquaintances/strangers (N= 13; 27%), and family members (N= 11; 22%). In seven (14%) incidences, the relationship of the offender to the victim was unknown. Forty-four (90%) of the offender’s acted alone. Three (6%) had one accomplice, one (2%) had two accomplices, and one (2%) had three accomplices. The outcome of the incident was known for sixty-four of the sixty-nine victims. Most children were returned alive and unharmed (N= 42; 61%) or alive but harmed (N= 13; 19%). In nine (13%) cases, the child was killed by the offender. In five (7%) cases the outcome was unknown.
Table 1: Characteristics of Offenders and Event Outcome*
(N= 49 for Offenders; N= 64 for Event Outcomes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to child</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonfamily members</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slight acquaintances/strangers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offender acted alone</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If no, how many accomplices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Outcome</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alive and unharmed</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive but harmed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages may not always total 100 due to rounding. This will remain the case on all remaining tables.
The characteristics of the victims and their locations prior to abduction are shown in Table 2. There were more female (N= 37; 54%) than male victims (N= 25; 36%) in the sample, though the gender of the victim could not be concluded in seven (10%) of the cases. More children were aged 11 and under (N= 41; 59%) than aged twelve and older (N= 25; 36%). Most children had been abducted from their own home or yard (N= 25; 36%) or a public area (N= 21; 30%), though some were abducted from a vehicle (N= 5; 7%), another’s home or yard (N= 4; 6%), and a school or daycare (N= 2; 3%). In twelve (17%) instances, the child’s location before their abduction was not known.

Table 2: Characteristics of Victims and Their Locations Prior to Abduction (N= 69)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and over</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Prior to Abduction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own home or yard</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public area</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another’s home or yard</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School or daycare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family abductions.

Characteristics of family abductions are shown in Table 3. Eleven family member perpetrators were identified. Nine (82%) were male and two (18%) were female. The child’s father was most likely to be the offender (N= 6; 55%), followed by the child’s mother (N= 2;
18%), child’s grandfather (N= 1; 9%), cousin (N= 1; 9%), and mother’s estranged husband (N= 1; 9%). Nine (82%) of the perpetrators acted alone, one (9%) had two accomplices, and one (9%) had three accomplices.

Males and females were almost equally represented as victims of family abductions (N= 5; 38% and N= 4; 31%, respectively). In four (31%) instances, the gender of the child was unknown. Victims, however, were most likely to be aged eleven or younger (N= 9; 69%). In eleven incidences, the child’s last location was known. Victims were most likely to be abducted from their own home or yard (N= 9; 69%), followed by a public area (N= 1; 8%) and a vehicle (N= 1; 8%). The outcome of the incident was known for ten of the thirteen incidences. Nine (69%) children were returned alive and unharmed while one (8%) was returned alive but injured.

The primary motivation for abduction by a family member was known in nine of the cases. The most common motivation was to gain custody of the child (N= 5; 38%). In another two (15%) instances, the father had abducted his two children in an attempt to force his wife to lift the restraining order that she had on him. In another case, the child was abducted during a domestic dispute. In the last incident, a man abducted a younger, distant male cousin of his in order to demand a ransom from the boy’s wealthy father, who was a former police chief.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Characteristics of Family Abductions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N= 11 for Offender; N= 13 for Victim)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offender Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offender Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s father</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s mother</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s grandfather</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s cousin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s estranged husband</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perpetrator Acted Alone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If no, number of accomplices</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location Prior to Abduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own home or yard</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public area</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome of Incident</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive and unharmed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive but injured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain Custody of Child</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lift restraining order</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic dispute</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ransom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nonfamily abductions.

Characteristics of nonfamily abductions are shown in Table 4. Eighteen nonfamily member perpetrators were identified. Sixteen (89%) were male and two (11%) were female. All eighteen offenders acted alone, having no accomplices.

| Table 4: Characteristics of Nonfamily Abductions  
(N= 18 for Offender; N= 25 for Victim) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offender Gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perpetrator Acted Alone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and over</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location Prior to Abduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own home or yard</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public area</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another’s home or yard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome of Incident</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive and unharmed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive but injured</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostage after murder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child not receiving care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic dispute</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother abducted</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven (28%) victims were male and eighteen (72%) were female. More victims were under the age of eleven (N= 18; 72%) than aged twelve or older (N= 6; 24%), though one
victim’s age was unknown. The child’s last location was known for twenty-three cases. Most had been abducted from a public area (N= 10; 40%), followed by their own home or yard (N= 8; 32%), a vehicle (N= 3; 12%), and another’s home or yard (N= 2; 8%). Seventeen (68%) were returned alive, and eight (32%) were returned injured.

The primary motivation for abduction by a nonfamily member was known in eleven (44%) of the cases. The most common motivation for abducting the child was to commit a sexual assault (N= 7; 28%). In one case, the victim was abducted by her best friend’s boyfriend after he killed the friend. In another incident, a babysitter abducted a handicapped boy she felt was not receiving adequate care. In another, the child was the abducted during a domestic abuse incident, though the offender was not related to that child. Finally, one child was abducted when the offender kidnapped the mother to commit a sexual assault.

**Stereotypical kidnappings.**

Characteristics of stereotypical kidnappings are shown in Table 5. Fourteen stereotypical kidnapping offenders were indentified. All fourteen were males. Eleven (79%) acted alone while three (21%) had one accomplice each.

There were more female victims (N= 11; 61%) than male victims (N= 7; 39%) of stereotypical kidnappings. Victims were slightly more likely to be younger (N= 10; 56) than older (N= 8; 44%). The child’s last location was known for thirteen cases. Most had been abducted in a public area (N= 6; 33%), followed by their own home or yard (N= 3; 17%), a school or daycare (N= 2; 11%), another’s home or yard (N= 1; 6%), and a vehicle (N= 1; 6%). Nine (50%) children were killed, seven (39%) were returned alive and unharmed, and one (6%) was returned alive but injured. In one case, the outcome of the incident was unknown.
Table 5: Characteristics of Stereotypical Kidnappings  
(N= 14 for Offender; N= 18 for Victim)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offender Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perpetrator Acted Alone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If no, number of accomplices</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and over</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location Prior to Abduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own home or yard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public area</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another’s home or yard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School or Daycare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome of Incident</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive and unharmed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive but injured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be kept permanently</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ransom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get victim to join cult</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride to NYC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary motivation for abduction by a stranger or slight acquaintance was known in fourteen of the cases. The most common motivation for abducting the child was to commit a sexual assault (N= 7; 39%). In three (17%) of the incidents, the child was abducted with the intentions
of being kept permanently. In two (11%) of the cases, the child was abducted for ransom. In one incident, the victim was abducted by an older male who wanted the child to join a cult. Finally, in one incident, a man jumped into a teenage girl’s car and made her drive him to New York City before letting her go unharmed.

**Race/ethnicity.**

In the original proposal for this research, the race/ethnicity of the victim and its relation to the coverage of an abduction incident was going to be examined. Unfortunately, during the data collection phase, very few victims’ race/ethnicity could be identified. Out of sixty-nine victims, only fourteen children’s race/ethnicity were identified. In addition, in many of these incidents, the victim’s race/ethnicity was determined from his or her last name since it was not explicitly mentioned in the article. Given the obvious limitations of this variable, it was decided that it would be omitted from the analyses.

**Newspapers.**

Characteristics of the newspapers included in the sample are included in Table 6. Twenty-six articles from the total sample are from *The St. Petersburg Times*. Of those twenty-six articles, twelve (46%) detailed nonfamily abductions, five (19%) described family abductions, and five (19%) were about stereotypical kidnappings. The type of incident detailed could not be properly categorized in four (15%) of the articles because not enough information was present. Fifteen articles came from the *Boston Globe*. Seven (47%) of which detailed family abductions, six (40%) detailed nonfamily abductions, and two (13%) detailed stereotypical kidnappings.

Nine articles were drawn from *The Washington Post*. Four (44%) detailed stereotypical kidnappings, three (33%) family abductions, and two (22%) nonfamily abductions. Eight
articles came from the *New York Times*. Five (63%) detailed stereotypical kidnappings and one (13%) described a nonfamily abduction. In 25% (N= 2) of the *New York Times* articles, a proper categorization could not be made with the given information. Three of the articles were drawn from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Two (67%) reported on nonfamily abductions and one (33%) detailed a stereotypical kidnapping.

Two articles came from *The Washington Times*. One was a family abduction and one was a stereotypical kidnappings. Two articles were drawn from *The Daily News*. One reported on a nonfamily abduction and one a stereotypical kidnapping. Only one article in the sample
was from *USA Today*, and it reported on a family abduction. A full citation for each article utilized in the study can be found in Appendix D.

**Phase I: Research Questions**

As noted previously, the overall research question for this study was: “What types of child abductions are most reported on in the print media and how does this compare to the NISMART-2’s data on such incidences in the U.S.?” In order to answer this overarching question, the information collected was examined by way of a series of additional research questions. Those results are discussed below.\(^{10}\)

**RQ1: Is the media more likely to report on nonfamily abductions (excluding the subcategory of stereotypical kidnappings) than family abductions?**

There were a total of thirty-two articles (41%) dedicated to nonfamily abductions, but only nineteen dedicated (24%) to family abductions. Therefore, it appears that the media is more likely to report on nonfamily abductions than family abductions, though this difference is not statistically significant. The Chi Square Test of Independence was used to test for significance for this research question.

**RQ2: Is the media more likely to report on the subcategory of stereotypical kidnappings than nonfamily abductions or family abductions?**

In all, twenty-seven articles (35%) reported on stereotypical kidnappings. Only nineteen reported on family abductions (24%), but thirty-two reported on nonfamily abductions (41%). As a result, only part of the research question is answered in the affirmative. The media was more likely to report on stereotypical kidnappings than family abductions but not more likely to report on stereotypical kidnappings than nonfamily abductions. However, these differences were not statistically significant. The Chi Square Test of Independence was used to test for significance for this research question.

\(^{10}\) Unlike the Descriptive Data section, duplicate incidents are included in these results.
RQ3: Does the media over-represent the number of female abduction incidents in comparison to the NISMART-2 data on such incidents?

Please refer to Table 7 for the results of this research question. In regards to the gender of family abduction victims, the NISMART-2 data suggests that males and females have almost an equal chance of being abducted by a family member (49% and 51%, respectively). In the current sample, however, females were more likely than males to be abducted by family members (N= 9; 60% versus N= 6; 40%, respectively), though this difference was not statistically significant (See Table 7).

The NISMART-2 data suggests that females are significantly more likely than males to be victims of nonfamily abductions (65% versus 35%, respectively). The results from this current sample almost mirror the NISMART-2 data: 63% (N= 20) of victims from all the nonfamily abduction incidents in the sample were female and 38% (N= 12) were males (See Table 7). As such, the media is not more likely to over-report the number of female abduction incidents in comparison to the NISMART-2 data.

Finally, the NISMART-2 data suggests that males are significantly less likely than females to be the victim of stereotypical kidnappings (30% versus 70%, respectively). The results of the current study also parallel this data: 67% (N= 18) of victims from all the stereotypical kidnapping incidents in the sample were female and 33% (N= 9) were male (See Table 7). As such, the media is not more likely to over-report the stereotypical kidnapping of a female. The Test of Difference between Proportions was used to test for significance for this research question.
RQ4: Will the media dedicate more words to female abduction incidents and less to male abduction incidents?

In the total sample of newspapers, articles detailing male victims had an average of 357 words. Articles detailing female victims, however, had an average of 541 words. Therefore, the media is more likely to dedicate more words to female abduction incidents and less to male abduction incidents. This difference was statistically significant (p < 0.01). The Test of Difference between Means was used to test for significance for this research question.

RQ5: Is the media more likely to report on the abduction of younger (aged 11 and under) children than on older children (aged 12 and older) in comparison to the NISMART-2 data?

Please refer to Table 7 for the results of this research question. According to the NISMART-2 data, 79% of family abduction victims are aged eleven and under while 21% are aged twelve and older. In the current sample, 88% (N= 15) of victims were aged eleven and under while 12% (N= 2) were aged twelve and older (See Table 7). This difference was not significantly different. Thus, the media is not more likely to report on the abduction of younger child than older children in regards to family abductions.

In terms of nonfamily abductions, the NISMART-2 reports that 19% of victims are aged eleven and under while 81% are aged twelve and older. In the current sample, however, 74% (N=23) were aged eleven and under and only 26% (N= 8) were aged twelve and older (See Table 7). This difference was statistically significant (p < 0.001). Therefore, the media is significantly more likely to report on the nonfamily abduction of younger children (aged 11 and under) than older children (aged 12 and over).

In regards to stereotypical kidnappings, the NISMART-2 data reports that 41% of victims are aged eleven and under and 59% are aged twelve and older. In the current sample, this distribution is almost exactly the same: 44% (N= 12) of victims were aged eleven and under
while 56% (N= 15) were aged twelve and older (See Table 7). Therefore, the media is not more likely to report on the stereotypical kidnapping of a child aged eleven and under than the stereotypical kidnapping of a child aged twelve and older. The Test of Difference between Proportions was used to test for significance for this research question.

Table 7: Frequencies of Gender and Age by Abduction Incident (Percentages reported)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NISMART-2</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Victim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Abduction (N=15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfamily Abduction (N=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical Kidnapping (N=27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Victim</th>
<th>NISMART-2</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Abduction (N=17)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 and Younger</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and Older</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfamily Abduction (N=31)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 and Younger</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and Older</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical Kidnapping (N=27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 and Younger</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and Older</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at p< 0.001

RQ6: Will the media dedicate more words to younger (aged 11 and under) children and less so to older (aged 12 and older) children?

In the total sample of newspapers, there were an average of 454 words detailing incidents in which the victim was aged eleven and younger. There was, however, an average of 477 words detailing incidents in which the victim was aged twelve and older. This difference was not statistically significant. Therefore, the media is no more likely to dedicate more words to younger children (aged 11 and under) compared to older children. The Test of Difference between Means was used to test for significance for this research question.
Phase II: Bivariate Analysis of Hypotheses

In this section, a series of crosstabulations were used to examine the relationship between the victim’s age and the type of abduction committed as well as the relationship between the victim’s gender and the type of abduction committed (see Table 8). Three separate hypotheses were tested, and the results are presented below.

**H1:** Younger children (under the age of 11) are more likely to be victims of family abductions than are their older (aged 12 and over) counterparts.

As illustrated in Table 8, this hypothesis was supported. Children aged 11 or younger were more likely to be categorized as the victim of a family abduction (31%) than were their older counterparts (8%) (p< 0.01).

**H2:** Older children (aged 12 and over) are more likely to be victims of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings than are their younger (under the age of 11) counterparts.

As shown in Table 8, this hypothesis is partially supported. Victims of stereotypical kidnappings were more likely to be aged twelve and older (60%) than 11 and under (24%). This was as predicted. Nonfamily abduction victims, however, were actually more likely to be aged eleven and under (45%) than they were to be 12 or older (32%). These relationships were statistically significant (p< 0.01).

**H3:** Females are more likely to be victims of nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings than are males.

As illustrated in Table 8, this hypothesis was partially supported. Females were more likely than males to be the victim of a stereotypical kidnapping. Males and females, however, were equally likely to be the victim of a nonfamily abduction. These relationships were statistically significant (p< 0.05).
Table 8: Categorization of Abduction by Victims’ Age and Gender  
(N= 76 for age; N= 79 for gender) (Percentages reported)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Nonfamily</th>
<th>Stereotypical Kidnapping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 and under</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and over</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at p< 0.05  
** Significant at p< 0.01
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Discussion

The main goal of this research was to quantify the degree to which the media contributes to creating a moral panic surrounding the issue of nonfamily offender incidents, particularly stereotypical kidnappings. In addition, this research sought to explore how gender and age play a role in deciding which abduction incidents are covered by the media. This was done by completing a content analysis of newspaper articles. Very few content analyses exist that examine these two issues, and thus the literature is very scant in this area. The current research sought to uniquely contribute to what is known about the portrayal of child abduction incidents in the media by analyzing newspaper articles from the years in which the NISMART-2 was completed (1996-1999) and examining in-depth the media’s depiction of gender and age in their coverage of such incidents.

In Phase 1 of the study, only two of the six research questions (research questions 1 and 4) were answered in the affirmative. First, the media was more likely to report on nonfamily abductions than family abductions. This is consistent with Muschert et al.’s (2005) study which discovered that the newspapers in their sample did not report extensively on family abductions. It is also consistent with the literature that suggests that the media is more likely to report on more dramatic and unusual abduction incidents (Forst & Blomquist, 1991; Griffin & Miller, 2008; Shutt et al., 2004).

Second, the media was significantly more likely to dedicate more words to female abduction incidents than male abduction incidents. This is consistent with Wanzo’s (2008) claim that female victims tend to receive disproportionate amounts of media attention. Because society views females as more vulnerable and innocent than males, the public is drawn more to stories in which the former have been victimized. Knowing this, the media responds by
purposefully detailing females’ victimization more extensively than the victimization of their male counterparts.

When examining research question 3, it was discovered that the media was not significantly more likely to over-represent the number of female abduction incidents in comparison to the NISMART-2 data on such incidents. In the sample, the percentage of newspaper articles detailing victims of family abductions, nonfamily abductions, and stereotypical kidnappings was consistent with what would be expected considering the NISMART-2 data on the prevalence of such incidents, suggesting that the newspapers were portraying a relatively accurate picture of the crime.

In regards to research question 6, it was discovered that the media was no more likely to dedicate words to younger children (aged 11 and under) than older (aged 12 and over) children. This is surprising given that younger (aged 11 and under) children were more likely than older children (aged 12 and over) to be the victim of a family abduction and nonfamily abduction in the sample. It may be explained, however, by the fact that older children were significantly more likely than younger children to be the victims of stereotypical kidnappings, which, as the literature suggests, is deemed to be the most horrific type of abduction incident (Forst & Blomquist, 1991; Fu et al., 2009; Griffin & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2008; Muschert et al., 2005; Shutt et al., 2004). Recalling that the media is most likely to report on the most unusual and frightening child abduction incidents, it seems logical then that articles detailing these incidents would have higher word counts.

Research questions 2 and 5 were each partially answered in the affirmative, depending on the type of abduction incident examined. For research question 2, it was discovered that the media was more likely to report on stereotypical kidnappings than family abductions but not
nonfamily abductions, though these differences were not statistically significant. This finding is contradictory to the previous literature which suggests that the media is most likely to report on stereotypical kidnappings (Finkelhor et al., 1990; Ford & Blomquist, 1991; Fu et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008; Muschert et al., 2005). In all three content analyses that were previously completed (i.e., Finkelhor et al., 1990; Fu et al., 2009; Muschert et al., 2005), stereotypical kidnappings were the type of abduction most reported on.

These incongruous results from the current research may have been found for several reasons. First, the operationalization of key variables utilized in the study may have differed from the previous studies. Similarly, the previous studies may have chosen to define attempted abductions/actual abductions differently than they were defined in the current study.

Second, perhaps in reality very few stereotypical kidnappings actually occurred between 1996 and 1999. With so few incidents to report on, the media chose to detail the second most horrific and unusual incident: the nonfamily abduction. Third, all of the incidents in the sample were of abductions that occurred on the east coast. Fu et al. (2009), however, included newspapers that covered all geographic regions in the United States. It is plausible that perhaps the types of incidents that occur on the west coast differ significantly from the type of abduction incidents that occur on the east coast. If this is the case, this disparity could account for contradictory results since the findings from the current study would be skewed. Unfortunately, the NISMART-2 does not provide data on the geographic region of abductions for family abductions or stereotypical kidnappings.

Finally, many of the incidents that had been categorized as a nonfamily abduction could have very well turned into a stereotypical kidnapping had the victim not escaped or the abduction thwarted by a third party. For example, in one nonfamily abduction, a teenage girl
was grabbed by a stranger and thrown into the trunk of his car while she was jogging. Had she not been able to escape from the trunk, she may have experienced one of the conditions necessary to make the incident a stereotypical kidnapping (e.g., detained overnight, transported 50 miles or more, held for ransom, kept permanently, or killed).

In light of this, however, incidents involving nonfamily perpetrators (which include both nonfamily abductions and stereotypical kidnappings) were still more likely to receive media attention than incidents involving family perpetrators. That is, even though there were more nonfamily abduction incidents than stereotypical kidnappings, there were still more incidents in which nonfamily members were perpetrators than family members, thus explaining the discrepancy in what had been expected to be found.

In regards to research question 5, it was concluded that the media was significantly more likely to report on the abduction of younger (aged 11 and under) than older (aged 12 and older) children for nonfamily abductions but not family abductions and stereotypical kidnappings. In the latter two incidents, the percentage of newspaper articles detailing the victimization of younger (aged 11 and under) was consistent with the NISMART-2 data on such incidences. However, for nonfamily abductions, the media was more likely to report on incidents in which the child was aged eleven and under even though, according to the NISMART-2, it is relatively rare for them to be the victim of this type of abduction incident. Thus, the media was presenting a distorted image of the age group of children who were most likely to be the victims of nonfamily abductions, but not family abductions or stereotypical kidnappings.

This study also found that age of the victim was able to predict the categorization of family abduction incidents. It is logical that children under the age of eleven are more likely to be the victims of family abductions than are older children since younger children usually do
not (or cannot) resist being taken by a parent. In the case of older children, particularly older
teenagers, however, parents cannot readily control where they go or stay, which is reflective of
their independence.

Age was able to predict the categorization of a stereotypical kidnapping, but it was not
able to predict the categorization of a nonfamily abduction. While stereotypical kidnapping
victims were significantly more likely to be aged twelve and over, nonfamily abduction victims
were significantly more likely to be aged eleven and under in the current sample. Again, this is
contrary to what Fu et al. (2009) and the NISMART-2 found. Interestingly, it might be
expected that children aged eleven and under would be erroneously categorized as the victim of
a stereotypical kidnapping in this sample since they are deemed more vulnerable and would
have been subjected to the most horrific type of abduction incident (which reflects the media’s
tendency to report on the most dramatic type of stories). Victims of stereotypical kidnappings,
however, were accurately categorized in the media. It is perplexing, then, why younger children
would be more likely to be categorized as the victim of a nonfamily abduction but not a
stereotypical kidnapping. This is an area that deserves further investigation.

Gender was able to predict the categorization of a stereotypical kidnapping but not a
nonfamily abduction. In line with the NISMART-2 and Fu et al. (2009), females were more
likely than males to be the victim of a stereotypical kidnapping. Both males and females,
however, were equally likely to be categorized as the victim of a nonfamily abduction, even
though females are more susceptible to this offense. This is also an area that deserves further
investigation.
Limitations of the Study

There are three limitations to this research. First, the sample was not drawn randomly. Instead, it was a convenience sample drawn from newspaper articles readily available from the LexisNexis database. Similarly, the articles in the sample were all from newspapers on the east coast. Not one article was drawn from a newspaper located on the west coast. Therefore, the results may be most reflective of incidents that occurred in the east, not the west. As such, the findings from this research can only be applied to this particular sample; no generalizations can be inferred. Nevertheless, this exploratory study still contributes to what little is known about the depiction of child abduction incidents in America.

Second, the small sample size (only sixty-six newspapers) did not yield as much useful information as desired. In addition, because the sample size was so small, certain parameters of the variables of interest in the sample population, such as the mean or the standard deviation, could not be calculated easily, which restricted the use of appropriate parametric tests. Fortunately, non-parametric tests, specifically the Chi-Square Test of Independence, were able to be utilized in some cases. StatSoft, Inc. (2008) states that non-parametric methods were developed to be used when nothing is known about the parameters of the variable in the population. Siegel (1957) comments that these distribution-free statistical tests do not make assumptions about the underlying distribution of the sample population and its parameters and, therefore, are ideal for small sample sizes. In addition, StatSoft, Inc. (2008) state that it is most appropriate to use these tests when examining the relationship between variables, especially when the variables are categorical in nature.

---

11 Though one article in the sample came from the USA Today, a newspaper known to report on nationally-representative stories, this particular article detailed an incident that occurred in New York. All of the articles in the sample, therefore, detail incidents that occurred on the east coast.
Policy Implications

In spite of these limitations, the findings of this study have several policy implications, particularly the results that illustrate that abductions by nonfamily members are more likely to be reported on than abductions by family members. Since “intense interest in disturbing child abductions by the mass media […] has helped sustain a socially constructed mythology and sporadic ‘moral panic’ about the pervasiveness of this threat to children” (Griffin & Miller, 2008, p. 159), politicians have responded by creating reactionary legislation that that does little more than memorialize the victim. Griffin and Miller (2008) state that these types of policies that have been enacted represent crime control theatre, policies defined as “socially constructed ‘solution[s]’ to […] socially constructed problem[s]” (p. 159). Such policies symbolically address tragic events. These events, however, are extremely rare, and thus the policies address only a portion of the much larger problem.

To illustrate, Griffin and Miller (2008) provided several instances in which crime control theatre policies were enacted. For example, the “Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration” was enacted after the disappearance of Jacob Wetterling. This law requires that sex offender registries are kept by states. Following the abduction and death of Megan Kanka by a convicted sex offender who lived in her neighborhood, “Megan’s Law” was passed which requires states to develop procedures for notifying citizens of sex offenders who may be residing in their community. “Carlie’s Law” was enacted after Carlie Brucia was raped and murdered by a non-compliant federal probationer. This law pushed for stricter revocation criteria for federal probationers. In 2006, President Bush signed the “Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act” which entails strict and uniform requirements for reporting sex offenders across all states. It also created a nationwide sex
offender database (Griffin & Miller, 2008). Finally, another less formal policy that has been adopted is the “stranger-danger” initiative that takes place in schools in which children are warned, usually by local police officers, of the dangers in talking to persons whom they do not know. These policies have all been designed to prevent the least frequently occurring types of abductions: abductions by nonfamily members, particularly strangers. It should be noted, however, that these aforementioned policies are indeed useful to those victims who may be affected by their regulations, and as such, their importance cannot be underscored enough.

The point of this research, however, was to demonstrate that policies that address the most commonly occurring type child abduction incident, the family abduction, are lacking because the media has not spurred strong reactions from the public like they have with other, less frequently occurring abduction incidents. Though some policies do exist that address family abduction incidents after they have occurred (e.g., the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act and the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction), few exist to actually prevent the crime from occurring. Most of these prevention policies focus on the court’s and law enforcement’s role in upholding custody decisions in order to avoid family abductions. For example, the Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act of 1980 requires appropriate authorities of every state to give full faith and credit to child custody decisions made in other states. Similarly, both the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act (UCCJA) and the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) establish jurisdictional rules for interstate child custody and visitation cases. Both laws require interstate enforcement of valid custody and visitation orders (Hoff, 2009) (See also the Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act and the Family Abduction Prevention Act of 2004).
Furthermore, it could be argued that very few policies exist that address the root causes of such abduction incidents. Since most of these types of abductions are the result of the erosion in the structure of family life, Forst and Bloomquist (1991) suggest that child abductions should not even be considered a crime problem, but rather a family problem. The authors claim that prosecuting parents who abduct their children is only a limited solution since the problem is tied to much more complex social issues, such as family conflict, family dissolution, poverty, and high divorce rates. Solutions, therefore, require improvements in basic social institutions, such as the family, education, the job market, and the neighborhood. As such, any policies that are to be enacted to address the most commonly occurring type of child abduction incident should also address these societal issues (Ford & Bloomquist, 1991).

**Directions for Future Research**

There are four suggestions for future research on this topic. First, a deeper analysis on the findings regarding the media’s tendency to distort the circumstances surrounding nonfamily abductions should be conducted. Not only was it more likely for the media to report on these types of stories in comparison to the other two types of abduction incidents, they were also most likely to distort the reality of the demographics (i.e., age and gender) of the children most likely to be the victims of such incidents.

Second, the sampling frame should be drawn randomly, not conveniently, so that the results can be more generalizable. Pragmatically, however, it may not be possible to get a random sample of every newspaper in the United States. At the very least, though, newspapers from each major geographic region in the United States should be included.

Third, more expansive attempts to examine the role that race/ethnicity play in the coverage of child abduction incidents should be made. As previously mentioned, it was the
original intention of this research to examine this role. Unfortunately, given the available sampling frame along with time and monetary constraints, this focus had to be discarded. There have been several claims in the literature that there is incongruence in the media’s reporting on the victimization of different races/ethnicities (see Dixon & Daniel, 2000; Dowler, 2004; Paulsen, 2003; Weiss & Chermak, 1998), and it would be interesting to examine if this incongruence extends to child abduction incidents.

Finally, future research could examine the role that age and gender play in other types of missing children incidents, not just child abduction incidents. It was suggested to this author at a criminal justice conference that the media may focus on certain demographics of missing children incidents in general, not just those that have been identified as abductions. For example, it was suggested that perhaps missing children from wealthy neighborhoods receive more media attention than children missing from lower-class neighborhoods because it is perceived as more likely that the latter are either runaways or thrownaways, stories not likely to be deemed newsworthy by the media. The rational could explain why younger children would receive more attention when they are missing in compared to older children.

**Summary**

In sum, the results of this study lend support to the notion that the media does indeed contribute to creating a moral panic surrounding the issue of nonfamily offender and stranger offender abductions. Even though it did not report more on the most horrific type of child abduction incident (the stereotypical kidnapping) but rather the, perhaps, second most horrific type of child abduction incident (the nonfamily abduction), it did over-report on the type of abductions committed by nonfamily members in general, even though abductions committed by family members are much more common. This has resulted in policies being enacted that
address only a small proportion of child abduction victims and exclude a much larger proportion of them (i.e., victims of family abductions).

In addition, it also lends support to the notion that gender and age play a role, albeit small, in deciding which abduction incidents are covered by the media as well as how comprehensively they are covered. The media dedicated more words to female victims than male victims and reported more on younger children (aged 11 and under) than older children (aged 12 and over) when they were the victim of a nonfamily abduction. In these particular incidences, both males and children aged twelve and over would have been at a distinct disadvantage in being recovered since, as Fu et al. (2009) suggest, the more media attention an incident receives, the more likely the child is going to be found. Fortunately, however, it appears that in all other areas, the media is reporting a rather factual depiction of the demographics of abduction victims.
References


APPENDICES
Appendix A: Household Survey Family and Nonfamily Abduction Screening Questions
Household Survey of Adult Caretakers: Family Abduction Episode Screening Questions for Follow-Up Interview (Hammer et al., 2002, p. 3)

1. Was there any time when anyone tried to take [this child/any of these children] away from you against your wishes?

   In the past 12 months, did any family member outside your household, such as a spouse, an ex-spouse, an ex-partner, brother, sister, parent, in-law, or any other person you consider a family member or someone acting for them, do any of the following things:

2. Did any family member or someone acting for them take or try to take [this child/any of these children] in violation of a custody order, an agreement, or other child living arrangement?

3. Did any family member outside of your household keep or try to keep [this child/any of these children] from you when you were supposed to have [him/her/them] even if for just a day or weekend?

4. Did any family member conceal [this child/any of these children] or try to prevent you from having contact with [him/her/them]?

5. Has anyone ever kidnapped or tried to kidnap [this child/any of these children]?
Household Survey of Adult Caretakers: Nonfamily Abduction Episode Screening Questions for Follow-Up Interview (Finkelhor et al., 2002, p. 6)

1. Was there any time when anyone tried to take [this child/any of these children] away from you against your wishes?

2. Was there any time when anyone tried to sexually molest, rape, attack, or beat up [this child/any of these children]?

3. In the past 12 months, has anyone attacked or threatened [this child/any of these children] in any of these ways:
   - With any weapon, for instance, a gun or knife?
   - With anything like a baseball bat, frying pan, scissors, or stick?
   - By something thrown, such as a rock or bottle?
   - Including any grabbing, punching, or choking?
   - Any rape, attempted rape, or other type of sexual attack?
   - Any face-to-face threats?
   - Any attack or threat or use of force by anyone at all?

   Something that happens to some children these days is that adults or other youth try to force or trick them into doing something sexual. This includes trying to touch the child’s private parts or trying to make the child touch or look at the other person’s private parts. Children report that these kinds of things happen with people they know well or trust, such as teachers or relatives.

4. In the past 12 months, has there been a time when an older person, such as an adult, an older teenager, or a babysitter, deliberately touched or tried to touch your child’s private parts or tried to make your child touch or look at their private parts when your child did not want to?

5. [Has/have] [this child/any of these children] been forced or coerced to engage in unwanted sexual activity by someone [he/she/they] did not know before, a casual acquaintance, or someone [he knows/she knows/they know] well?

6. Has anyone ever kidnapped or tried to kidnap [this child/any of these children]?
Appendix B: Child Abduction Incident Database
## Child Abduction Incident Database

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Number</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Newspaper ID(s)</th>
<th>Victim ID(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2480</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 6, 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Stover</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Piers</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chandra</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Stull</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gue</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Maden</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>19, 21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Lambert</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Chan</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>23, 31, 60</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Weill</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>24, 27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Dorsey</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>26, 28, 55</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Regan</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Crosby</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>30, 41, 65</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1127</td>
<td>33, 34</td>
<td>30, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Cantave</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36, 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sparrow</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Hajney</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45, 46, 47, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1307</td>
<td>47, 50</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Curley</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1010</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Fulwood</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Garcia</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54, 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Lisk/Silva</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2838</td>
<td>56*, 57*, 59, 62</td>
<td>58, 59, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Jacobson</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62, 63, 64, 65, 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>S.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Burchill</td>
<td>Non-Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Silva murder was only mentioned in articles 56 and 57, while the Lisk murders were mentioned in all four.
Appendix C: Sample Code Book
Codebook: Media’s Coverage of Child Abduction Incidents

Unit of Data Collection: Newspaper article detailing incidents of a specific child abduction

Newspaper ID: __________ (Fill in the newspaper’s unique ID number)

Victim(s) ID: ________________ (Fill in the victim’s unique ID number)

Newspaper: __________________________ (Fill in the title of the newspaper)

Incident Number: __________ (After reading the article, fill in the number of the incident that it details, as indicated by the running database. If this incident has yet to be identified in the database, please input the applicable information into the database and assign an appropriate incident number)

Number of Words in Article: __________

Offender Information

Gender: ______
0 = Male
1 = Female
99 = Unknown (The articles does not specify the gender of the offender)

Race/Ethnicity: ______
0 = White, non-Hispanic
1 = Black, non-Hispanic
2 = Hispanic
3 = Other
99 = Unknown (The article does not mention the offender’s race/ethnicity)

Relationship to child: ______
1 = Family member (This includes a biological, adoptive, or foster family member, someone acting on behalf of such a family member, or the romantic partner of a family member)
2 = Nonfamily member (The offender is well known to the child or the family, but not a family member. This may include a boyfriend/girlfriend, a babysitter, a teacher, a neighbor, a coach, a boy scout/girl scout leader, a school bus driver, etc.)
3 = Slight acquaintance/Stranger (A slight acquaintance is a nonfamily perpetrator whose name is unknown to the child or the family prior the abduction and whom the child or the family did not know well enough to speak to, or a recent acquaintance who the child or the family have known for less than six months, or someone the family or the child have known for longer than six months but seen less than once a month. A stranger is a perpetrator whom the child or family do not know, or a perpetrator of unknown identity)
99 = Unknown (The article does not describe the offender or his/her relationship to the victim)

Family member’s relationship to the child: ______
1 = Child’s father (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster father)
2 = Child’s mother (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster mother)
3 = Child’s grandfather (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster grandfather)
4 = Child’s grandmother (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster grandmother)
5= Child’s uncle  (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster uncle)
6= Child’s aunt  (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster aunt)
7= Child’s stepfather (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster stepfather)
8= Child’s stepmother (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster stepmother)
9= Child’s brother  (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster brother)
10= Child’s sister  (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster sister)
11= Child’s mother’s boyfriend (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster mother’s boyfriend)
12= Child’s father’s girlfriend  (This includes a biological, adopted, or foster father’s girlfriend)
13= Other
99= Unknown  (The article does not identify the family member’s relationship to the child or the offender was not a family member)

Did the offender act alone:_______
  1= Yes
  2= No

If no, number of accomplices: ______

Victim Information

Age: ______
  1= 0-5  (This includes newborns, infants, toddlers, and children up to the age of 5)
  2= 6-11
  3= 12-14
  4= 15-17
  99= Unknown  (The article does not identify the age of the victim)

Gender: ______
  0= Male
  1= Female
  99= Unknown  (The article does not specify the gender of the victim)

Race/Ethnicity: ______
  0= White, non-Hispanic
  1= Black, non-Hispanic
  2= Hispanic
  3= Other
  99= Unknown  (The article does not mention the offender’s race/ethnicity)

Determination of Race/Ethnicity: ______
  1= Expressly mentioned in the article
  2= Derived from alternative means
  99= Still unknown  (The race/ethnicity of the child could not be determined from the article, a Google search, a search through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, or the child’s last name)
Location Prior to Abduction: ______
1= Own home or yard
2= Other home or yard
3= Public area (This may include a park, a street, a wooded area, a store, a mall, a restaurant, etc.)
4= School or daycare
5= A vehicle
6= On vacation
7= Other
99= Unknown (The article does not mention the child’s last known location, or the child’s location prior to abduction was unknown to the family)

Incident Information:

Primary Motivation for Abduction by Family Member: ______
1= To gain custody of the child (For example, a mother was granted full custody of a child, so the father abducted the child so that he could have them)
2= Revenge- (For example, a husband and wife are going through a divorce, so the husband takes the child to “get even” with his wife)
3= Other (Explain) __________________________________________________________
99= Unknown (The article does not specify the motivation for the abduction or the offender was not a family member)

Primary Motivation for Abduction by Nonfamily Member: ______
0= Not explained (The article does not specify the motivation for the abduction)
1= Explained __________________________________________________________
99= Unknown (The offender was not a nonfamily member)

Primary Motivation for Abduction by Stranger or Slight Acquaintance: ______
1= For a ransom
2= For a sexual assault
3= To keep the child permanently- (For example, a woman who cannot have children abducts her neighbor’s newborn with the intentions of keeping and raising the child as her own)
4= Other (Explain) __________________________________________________________
99= Unknown (The article does not specify the motivation for the abduction or the offender was not a stranger or slight acquaintance)

Outcome of the Case: ______
1= Child returned alive
2= Child returned injured (This would include physical injuries such as scrapes, bruises, broken bones, and sexual assault)
3= Child was killed
4= Child had not been returned, but his/her location was known
5= Child had not been returned, nor had he/she been located
99= Unknown (The article did not mention the outcome of the case)
If the incident was a nonfamily abduction, and the child was abducted by a stranger or slight acquaintance: _____

Was the child detained overnight: _____
  1= Yes
  2= No
  99= Unknown (The article does not specify whether the child was detained overnight or longer or the child was not abducted by a stranger or slight acquaintance)

Was the child transported 50 miles or more: _____
  1= Yes
  2= No
  99= Unknown (The article does not specify and/or it could not be determined whether the child was transported 50 miles or more or the child was not abducted by a stranger or slight acquaintance)

Was a ransom demanded: _____
  1= Yes
  2= No
  99= Unknown (The article does not specify whether a ransom was demanded or the child was not abducted by a stranger or slight acquaintance)

Was the child intended to be kept permanently: _____
  1= Yes
  2= No
  99= Unknown (The article does not specify the child was kidnapped with the intent to be kept permanently or the child was not abducted by a stranger or slight acquaintance)

Was the child killed: _____
  1= Yes
  2= No
  99= Unknown (The article does not specify whether the child was killed or the child was not abducted by a stranger or slight acquaintance)

NISMART-2 Categorization: _____
  1= Family abduction
  2= Nonfamily abduction
  3= Stereotypical kidnapping
  99= Unknown (This article does not provide enough information for a definitive categorization to be made)

Did the article provide enough information for a definitive categorization to be made: ____
  1= Yes
  2= No

Liberal Categorization: _____
  1= Family abduction
  2= Nonfamily abduction
  3= Stereotypical kidnapping
  99= A definitive categorization was able to be made
Conservative Categorization: ______

1= Family abduction
2= Nonfamily abduction
3= Stereotypical kidnapping
99= A definitive categorization was able to be made
Appendix D: Bibliography of Sampling Frame
Bibliography of Sampling Frame

Baby sitter arrested in boy's kidnapping. (1996, April 7). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.


Child slaying suspect indicted. (1996, November 21). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 6B.


Jaffe, M., Flam, F., & Benson, C. (1996, August 1). Neighbors, dog foil child snatching: Four other girls had been kidnapped and molested. A Kensington man was arrested and charged in all five cases. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. A01.


Man arrested, charged in stun-gun kidnapping of mother, two babies. (1999, April 15). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 7B.

Man arrested in Tampa on kidnapping charge. (1999, July 9). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.

Man charged in kidnapping. (1999, January 29). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.

Man charged with kidnapping, fondling 7-year-old girl. (1998, July 20). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.

Man faces sentencing in kidnapping, rape. (1996, July 2). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.


Man pleads not guilty to Internet kidnapping. (1996, April 4). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 4B.


Minai, L. (1999, June 22). Tip leads to arrest in Gandy Beach kidnapping. *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.

Missing boy, suspect found in Tampa hotel. (1998, July 13). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3B.


Schweitzer, S. Police scour Tampa for abducted boy. *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 1B.


State seeks death penalty in slaying of boy, 3. (1997, August 8). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 5B.


