13. The Popular Virgin and the Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing: A Case Study of the Imaging of Victims and Offenders

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13 The Popular Virgin and the Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing: A Case Study of the Imaging of Victims and Offenders

WILLEM KOETSENRUIJTER AND GABRY VANDERVEEN

13.1 Introduction
Crime is popular and this popularity has a long-standing tradition. Most people like to read news about crime, watch crime series on television, read books about crime, and a large number of movies are about crime. Evidently, we have a ‘pleasurable fascination with crime’ (Katz 1987, p. 57). Crime is probably one of the most popular subjects in the stories people tell each other, including news stories.

Stories such as these do not only provide information about (specific types and incidents of) crime and the criminal justice system, but they also give information about the cultural and social rules of living and provide an explanatory framework of how to make sense of everyday life. Since it is easier to make sense of a world in which everything is either black or white, without any nuances, it might come as no surprise that (news) media tend to focus on the stereotypical crimes and the stereotypical actors: victims and offenders. By using specific rhetorical devices (frames) we are encouraged to interpret words, phrases, or visual images, as well as stories in general, in a specific way. In this chapter, we examine how the Dutch media constructed stereotypical images of the victim and the alleged offender by using these frames or rhetorical devices in a particular case; the case of Holloway/Van der Sloot. By making content analyses of newspaper and magazine accounts, photographs and television programs, it becomes clear how the Dutch media convinced the public of Holloway’s innocence, and Van der Sloot’s guilt. We will describe how the Dutch media presented the Van der Sloot/Holloway case, both visually and verbally, and what means were used to construct guilt and innocence.
Our general question in the project is: How do media construct frames of victims and offenders? More specifically for this chapter the question is: What rhetorical means have the media used to construct guilt and innocence by portraying Joran van der Sloot as an ideal offender and Natalee Holloway as an ideal victim? In this chapter, we look at news as a narrative, which has specific social functions that we will discuss. Also, news stories selectively depict reality and play a major role in the construction of social problems. This selective depiction of reality is demonstrated overwhelmingly by empirical studies that illustrate the stereotypes of victims and offenders which are common in (news) stories. These stereotypes are partly created by rhetorical devices which we will elaborate on. The following section describes the method we used to study the cases and the various instruments used in different content analyses. When presenting the results, we focus on the photographs published in tabloids, magazines, newspapers and on the Internet.

Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the main implications of this study, which suggest that Holloway can be presented as a stereotypical victim with features that fit the stereotype. Van der Sloot, on the other hand, is a more round and complex character and not a stereotypical offender. A methodological point is made about the limits of a quantitative content analysis of the photographs. We found that the quantitative instruments were not able to fully grasp the meaning of the images and we make a case for using a mixed methods research design (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007). Our analysis shows that some media – like the Peter R. de Vries tv program – use several rhetorical devices to present the distinction between victim and offender in as clear a manner as possible. Yet, in cases like the Holloway/Van der Sloot case, when the stereotypes can be challenged, the just world is challenged too and the rhetoric of victims and offenders is less simple and clear-cut, enabling discussion and different scenarios about who is good and evil to exist. But, first we will begin by broadly describing the Van der Sloot/Holloway case.¹

13.2 The case: Van der Sloot/Holloway
The case which we have focused on involves the disappearance of the American high school student Natalee Holloway, who spent her holidays with her classmates on the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba.

¹ With thanks to our students L. van Dijk, D. Guldemond, M. Lammers, V.B.M. Nistro, N.J.K.J. Raats and C.W. Wong, who, among other things, collected and coded the data.
Natalee Holloway disappears after a night of dancing and drinking. Two Surinam brothers – Deepak and Satish Kalpoe – and a Dutch adolescent named Joran van der Sloot are arrested as suspects, but are released a few months later because of a lack of evidence. Almost a year after the disappearance of Holloway, Dutch and Aruban television broadcast a reconstruction in the program *Opsporing verzocht* (comparable to *America’s Most Wanted*). When Van der Sloot, the son of a Dutch judge, returns to the Netherlands, he is arrested again. Once again, he is released because of a lack of evidence. The Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries concentrates on the case in his TV program *The Peter R. de Vries Show* and presents footage filmed using a hidden camera. De Vries puts the hidden camera in a car, and uses an accomplice, Patrick van der Eem, to find out what happened. Van der Sloot thinks of Van der Eem as his friend, not knowing that he is, in fact, working for De Vries, and he talks with Van der Eem in the car.

Caught on camera, Van der Sloot tells Van der Eem that he and Natalee were making out at the beach, when all of a sudden she started having convulsions. Not knowing what to do, he phones a friend, some people guess that this friend is in fact his father, who helps him to put her in a boat. He states that she was dumped in the sea. The body is never found. This episode of *The Peter R. de Vries Show*, trailed as “the confession”, received a lot of media attention. The week after the broadcast, Van der Sloot appears on television and says that he made the whole story up. He is not arrested because legal evidence is still lacking. Currently, Van der Sloot is still a free man.2

The case generated a huge amount of media exposure, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the rest of Europe, and – because Holloway was American – in the United States as well. Baynes (2008) gives an overview of the amount of media coverage of the case. According to Google Trends, during the month after Holloway’s disappearance, the story generated thirty times the number of Google searches as the American Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. During the month of June 2005, Google searches for Holloway were more than double the number of Iraq war searches. Holloway’s disappearance was one of the top ten stories on network and cable television and it made the top ten stories list for the week of February 4-10 2008. According to a Lexis Nexis Report, the story was at the top of the most talked about

2 Since June 2010, Van der Sloot is locked up in a Peruvian jail, charged with murdering a Peruvian girl.
news stories in 2005 (Baynes 2008). The interest in this particular case, that media and the public shared alike, is also reflected in the publications about the death of Van der Sloot’s father on sale in February 2010. In these recent publications, De Vries is interviewed again and argues that the case will never be solved, since the father’s knowledge and role will now never be known.

The Van der Sloot/Holloway case is a typical high-profile crime (Chancer 2005), receiving a lot of attention in the media. These media, including the footage from the hidden camera interviews with De Vries, from Van der Sloot and his parents, Holloway’s mother Beth, websites and books written by the main characters (i.e., books by Van der Sloot, the accomplice Van der Eem, Holloway’s mother, Holloway’s father), two Dutch plays, and a movie broadcast by Lifetime in the USA, all provide information on this case. All these media are the main sources of information; this is elaborated in the following section.

13.3 Theoretical framework: Media as sources of information
Media are usually the most important source of information about crime. Most people have no direct experience and hence no knowledge of (specific types of) crime and the criminal justice system. Therefore, people obtain their knowledge, ideas and attitudes from other people and from the (news) media. Yet, the information which people get from the media does not necessarily reflect reality. On the contrary, numerous studies have found that a variety of media, such as movies, cartoons and newspaper accounts, tend to focus on the more sensational, unusual and stereotypical crimes (Vanderveen 2006). All these media, these kinds of sources of information, provide the social context and the material and ideological constraints that act on individuals.

In general, the way a society gives meaning to social phenomena such as crime and specific incidents thereof, and the way news media use rhetorical devices to depict these phenomena, can be described in terms of framing. Though the definition of framing is still under discussion (e.g., Scheufele 2008), in this study the concept contributes to an understanding of how a frame, consisting of a set of characteristics – or rhetorical devices – works to picture or to frame a social phenomenon. Framing concerns the inevitable process of selective influence over the individual’s perception of the meanings attributed to words, phrases, or visuals. A frame – the set of characteristics used to frame a phenomenon – defines the packaging of elements of rhetoric in such a way as to encourage particular interpretations and to dis-
courage others. Ervin Goffman (1974, p. 21), one of the founding fathers of framing theory, suggests that the idea of frames can be used to label the “schemata of interpretation” that allow individuals or groups “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” events and occurrences, thus rendering meaning, organizing experiences and guiding actions. In our study, frames are considered the means that media use to construct the picture of victims and offenders.

Similar to Gamson and Lasch (1983), our analysis focuses on the elements in visuals that make them persuasive. These framing devices are part of the rhetorical structure of visuals (photographs, info-graphics), like metaphors, stereotypes and particular features of the image. Thus, in our study about the guilt or innocence of the leading actors of the assumed murder of the American high school student Natalee Holloway, certain aspects of the visuals function as rhetorical devices to convince the public. All sorts of media, as sources of information about crime and criminal incidents, employ frames or rhetorical devices to construct a story or narrative. As we will discuss below, whether the source of information is fiction or news is, in line with narrative theory, irrelevant.

13.4 Media as social context
Stories from various sources provide information about cultural and social rules for living and offer an explanatory framework of how to make sense of everyday (urban) life. According to Wachs (1988, p. 32), the purpose of a lot of stories that people tell one another is to address human predicaments by showing how people act in times of crisis and danger; they provide models for the reconstruction of everyday experience. Wachs (1988) suggests the stories stress street smarts; the importance of being on one’s guard, being aware of the environment, following one’s intuition and being suspicious, as part of sensible (urban) behaviour, since it increases the ability to act in case of danger:

Street smarts were developed by the American National Crime Prevention Council for policy purposes and are propagated by American city councils and police departments. These street smarts portray the popular images of crime as well. “Wherever you are – on the street, in an office building or shopping mall, driving, waiting for a bus or subway – stay alert and tuned in to your surroundings”, “Trust your instincts. If something or someone makes you uneasy, avoid the person or leave”. The popular image of the offender as a stranger instead of an acquaintance is reflected by, for example: “Have to work late? Make sure there are
others in the building, and ask someone – a colleague or security guard – to walk you to your car or transit stop”; “Never hitchhike or accept rides from strangers”; “If you have to walk in the street, walk facing traffic. A person walking with traffic can be followed, forced into a car, and abducted more easily than a person walking against traffic” and “Walk confidently, directly, and at a steady pace. Don’t stop to talk to strangers.” (NCPC, n.d.)

Stories have an important function in warning people, especially women, about dangers and threats. Stories tell them how to protect themselves in cases of danger. The more frightening stories, in particular, serve as cautionary tales (Wachs 1988, p. 61). Obviously, several sources reinforce each other; they result from and further shape the shared assumptions about the appropriate behaviour for people and victims and set the limits of this appropriate behaviour (e.g., Green, Hebron and Woodward 1987). Sometimes, the warnings are very explicit. For example, immediately after the Lifetime movie on Holloway/Van der Sloot, Beth Holloway (Natalee’s mother) was screened in a public service announcement, in which she encouraged (young) people to take the proper precautions before traveling abroad (mylifetime.com, n.d.).

In addition to the social function that stories have, teaching people “what crimes to fear, where and when to be afraid, who is dangerous and who is safe” (Madriz 1997, p. 343), there are other consequences as well. Indeed, the information the public gets from the media about crime, victims, offenders and the criminal justice system can have several other consequences. For example, people may become more afraid of crime and of becoming a victim of crime (Heath and Gilbert 1996). Also, the overrepresentation of African-Americans in offender statistics leads to the development of stereotypical notions of the relationship between race and violent behavior (e.g., Dixon 2007, 2008). Besides the effect on perceptions and attitudes, information portrayed in the media on particular cases can have direct, behavioral consequences in real life as well. For example, high-profile cases, cases that get an extraordinary amount of attention from the media, can lead to public hatred, loathing and the commission of vigilante actions (see Jones and Wardle 2008). As noted previously, the case in this current study is such a high-profile case. The Van der Sloot/Holloway case received extensive (news) media coverage in the Netherlands, Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles as well as in the United States.
13.5 News as narrative
In this study, the question as to whether the source of people’s information is fiction or news, is irrelevant. The media are usually the most important source of information about crime, and what specific type or background the media have is of little interest here. In other words: this study is in line with narrative theory. Narrative Theory, developed in the seventies and the eighties (Fisher 1987) changed the idea that news is objective, that it is about the truth and nothing but the truth. Narrative theory created a new perspective on news and the function of news in society. Ettema and Glasser (1988) set out this perspective in their article called ‘Narrative Form and Moral Force’. They point out that – referring to Tuchman (1976, p. 97) – news is a selective reality with its own internal validity, with particular forms and themes. The writers suggest that our fascination with crime can be explained because of the way crime news helps us to establish our ideas about good and evil, about normal and deviant. Every time we read or see news about crime we establish our norms; thus, crime news also functions as a mean of establishing coherence in society or within groups in that society. Similarly, Kellner (1995, p. 24) states: “Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values; what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil”. Other researchers follow this line of reasoning. For example Grabe et al. (2006), who describe a number of studies (Erikson 1966; Grabe 1999; Schattenburg 1981; Stevens 1985) which have examined the potential of crime news to serve social functions and found patterned evidence that journalistic narratives support social control, the construction of morality and social integration. With what is called by Durkheim and Mead “episodes of shared outrage”, individuals reaffirm their membership of society (Durkheim 1933; Mead 1918). Thus, news, like any other source of information, provides narratives or stories that contain information about cultural and social rules for living. This holds for several types of news programmes which we describe in the following section.

13.6 News as entertainment
Analogous to Ettema and Glasser (1988) who suggest looking at news as narratives, Surette and Otto (2002) state that news and entertainment cannot be clearly distinguished; this is reflected in the term infotainment. Infotainment refers to the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction in media depictions. News media, or other predominantly factual programs, use dramatic, recon-
structive elements (Mason 2002). Besides news and news magazines as common types of infotainment, reality-based crime shows and co-opted courtroom dramas and media trials can also be distinguished (Craig and Newcomb 2003; Surette 1989; Surette and Otto 2002). For example, a violent incident can be presented as news with “story lines, plot and character development, victims, villains, and dramatic endings” (Surette and Otto 2002, p. 445). Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) also found that (local) news stories follow a ‘narrative script’ that contains two essential elements, namely that the crime is violent and the perpetrator is a non-white male.

Reality-based crime shows broadcast on television, like COPS, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol and America’s Most Wanted (see Eschholz et al. 2002) typically employ dramatizations of actual crimes, police narratives and interviews or actual video footage (Surette and Otto 2002). The format that is often used by these shows and news media is a secular version of a morality play, building on the audience’s familiarity with narratives that spell out simple and clear truths (Altheide 1997, 2002). The Dutch crime reporter, Peter R. de Vries, has a television show which is of special interest to this study as it complies with the format of such a morality play; the program adheres to existing traditions and morality in the history of popular culture and fulfils a traditional need for a sense of justice (Reijnders 2005).

Peter R. de Vries
Peter R. de Vries is the presenter of a non-fiction (Dutch) crime television program, in the tradition of America’s Most Wanted or Crime Watch UK. Reijnders (2005) studied sixteen episodes of The Peter R. de Vries Show, in which 21 murder cases were featured. In 14 of the 21 cases, the murder victim was female; in four cases the victim was a child and in only three cases was the murder victim a man. The victim is presented as innocent and helpless, by highlighting characteristics that contribute to such an image. According to Reijnders, any information that contradicts the stereotypical representation of the victim and offender is ignored. The show uses rhetorical devices to convince the public of the proposed scenario, including the alleged innocence and guilt of the victim and offender. For example, the mourning family of the victim is shown extensively. A lot of information, in the form of photographs and TV footage, is given about the offender too. This information focuses on personal details, like dress, appearance and life style, which reinforce the idea that the person is indeed an offender. Reijnders states Peter
R. de Vries “commits character assassination of suspects before they have been tried and convicted.” (Reijnders 2005, p. 644). As we will see, the characteristics of *The Peter R. de Vries Show* outlined by Reijnders appear to be applicable to the reports on the Van der Sloot/Holloway case as well. The main episode was highly successful and De Vries got an Emmy for it; the episode also appeared to exert a strong influence on public opinion. This episode presented Joran van der Sloot as an offender without a conscience, and Natalee Holloway as his innocent victim: two stereotypes that were convincingly presented to the public by using rhetorical means.

**Stereotypes of crimes, victims and offenders**

We have already referred to stereotypes in the media presentations of crimes, victims and offenders. The mere classification as offenders and victims gives meaning to the reality depicted by our media. These kinds of simple contrasts – victim and offender, good and evil – make a storyline clear. This arrangement, the classification of offenders and victims, helps media consumers to give meaning to their reality and define our general ideas about good and evil. Also, these stereotypes conform to our belief in a just world: people deserve what they get (Lerner 1980). The stereotypical victim has a set of typical characteristics. Vanderveen (2006) analyses the literature on media representations of offenders and victims and presents the characteristics that are perceived to be essential for a victim (see table 13.1). A victim can be perceived (and represented) as having all these characteristics. Christie (1986, p. 18) refers to this as the ‘ideal victim’: “a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim”. An ideal victim behaves in a manner which conforms to this specific social role; any role inconsistencies make the victim less ideal and less stereotypical, which leads to the attribution of more responsibility (i.e., “she shouldn’t have been drinking”). Information about inconsistencies with the stereotype can be ignored by media representations, which, according to Reijnders (2005) is what *The Peter R. de Vries Show* does. Also, media consumers, people themselves, can discredit information that is inconsistent with their concept of the ideal victim by for example, giving these pieces of information less weight or reinterpreting them. The same holds for the ‘ideal offender’: the more stereotypical a suspect is, the easier people find it to acknowledge that the suspect is indeed the offender and attribute full responsibility to him.
TABLE 13.1 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS (VANDERVEEN 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Essential characteristics of ideal victim/ideal victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Weak, vulnerable, innocent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender</td>
<td>Evil, cruel and bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities victim</td>
<td>Respectable (e.g., going to school, getting groceries for sick friend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Stranger, unknown offender, no relationship between victim-offender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Physical force/violence, deliberately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim protests and resists (physically)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offender is brutal, cruel, violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Random &amp; senseless (random violence) or specific selection (e.g., series of eroticized murder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Victim has made a reasonable effort to protect him/herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Somewhere where s/he cannot possibly be blamed for being, somewhere s/he was supposed to be (e.g., home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Somewhere where s/he cannot possibly be blamed for being at that particular time, somewhere s/he was supposed to be at that time (e.g., during the day)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is overwhelmingly reported in the literature, the two powerful stereotypes designate the victim as a young, weak, vulnerable, beautiful and innocent woman, who lives a peaceful life and is loved by family and friends (Vanderveen 2006). The offender is constructed as evil, cruel, cold-blooded – or hot-headed as Reijnders (2005) states. The crime incident involves a victim who is doing something respectable: she is working, going to school. When the offender, unknown to her, brutally and violently attacks her, the victim protests and resists so that she can protect herself. The location of the crime is somewhere where she cannot possibly be blamed for being at that particular time. Stories in the (news) media comment on these different aspects, socially constructing a more or less stereotypical offender and victim. In some cases, for example, when (very) young children are involved, the information fits the stereotypes more easily: the rhetorical devices are clear. For example, in the case of the young girl Madeleine McCann, who disappeared in the south of Portugal. Clearly, this girl has the characteristics of an ideal victim: a three-year old blond girl, sleeping in the hotel room of her parents. Yet, in this particular case, the role of the offender is not clear. Are the parents victims of a lost child or were they involved in her disappearance (Machado and
Santos 2009)? These less clear-cut cases elicit a lot of discussion: people don’t know how to make sense of them, but nonetheless want to. The discussion on responsibility, guilt and innocence increases, especially in more complex cases where a victim and an offender do not entirely conform to their stereotypical formats. Vanderveen (2006) argues that this is because, in cases such as these, one can identify with both the victim and the offender, as well as contrast oneself with them.

**Stereotypes in a just world: identification and contrast**

Cases including an ideal victim and an ideal offender are clear: we can identify with the victim (or the mourning family) and contrast ourselves with the offender. In general, people’s reactions can take different forms when they are faced with visual and verbal information about victims, offenders and the reactions of law enforcement officials and actors within the criminal justice system. Four reactions are distinguished here, based on the possibility of identification or contrast with the victim and/or offender (see Vanderveen 2006). The elicited identification or contrast with the victim and/or offender influences people’s reactions, such as attributions of responsibility and culpability, and penal attitudes, attitudes to punishment and sentencing decisions.

Starting from a social comparison perspective, which suggests that people relate and compare themselves to others, two comparison targets can be identified: the victim or the offender. People can engage in downward comparisons with the victim and offender, considering the role of victim or offender as not being desirable (see Wills 1981). Next, people can identify with the target, or contrast themselves, as is suggested by the identification-contrast model (Buunk and Ybema 1997). Identification has been considered to be closeness to the target, forming a bond with the target, being similar in personality to the target or viewing the situation of the target as a similar potential future for oneself (see Carmona et al. 2008). Identification with the offender involves interpreting the offender as less stereotypical. For example, identification with both victim and offender refers to a tragedy (see table 13.2); in this situation the individual offender has not acted in a voluntarily capacity under the given circumstances (Fletcher 1974, p. 1306). These ‘excusing conditions’ make the offender less culpable, responsible and blameworthy, causing less punitive reactions and encouraging empathy with offender and victim.
### Table 13.2 Identification and Contrast with Victim and Offender: Four Types of Reactions (Based on Vanderveen 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Offender</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification</strong></td>
<td><strong>Identification</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tragedy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excusing circumstances; voluntariness</td>
<td>Moral outrage</td>
<td>Stereotypes; popular images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She couldn’t help herself”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“He is a monster” (Dutroux, Fritzl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contrast</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blaming the victim</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ignoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justified vigilantism; self defense; necessity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Criminals shooting criminals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I would have done the same thing”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Let them kill each other”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In cases with an ‘ideal’ victim and an ‘ideal’ offender, in which victim and offender are presented in a stereotypical manner, people will contrast themselves with the offender, thinking he is entirely different, or not even human: a monster or beast. _Blaming the victim_ occurs when people contrast themselves with the victim, for example, because s/he acted in ways that are disapproved of, accompanied by identification with the offender. Another typical case would be a father taking the law into his own hands by killing the brutal rapist of his young child (see Neapolitan 1987).

The likelihood of identification or contrast can be experimentally manipulated (e.g., Aguiar et al. 2008), and is also manipulated by the (news) media. In the case of the disappearance of Holloway, _The Peter R. de Vries Show_ used particular rhetorical means: framing devices in order to make Joran van der Sloot a more stereotypical (ideal) offender, encouraging the public to contrast with him. Also, the rhetorical means showed Natalee Holloway as a stereotypical (ideal) victim, encouraging the public to identify with her (and her mother). The main episode of the show in which the footage from the hidden camera was shown, provided an apparently clear picture featuring an immoral offender and an innocent victim. If it were such a clear-cut, stereotypical case, moral outrage would prevail. Yet, in this case _The Peter R. de Vries Show_ wasn’t the only source of information. Other sources presented information which was less consistent with these stereotypes, showing a more complex narrative in which good and evil seem less clear. Because the stereo-
types can be challenged and contested with other information, the public, and young people in particular, are able to both identify with Holloway and Van der Sloot, and contrast themselves with them. Thus, besides moral outrage (see table 13.2), other reactions are possible as well. The complexity of the narrative generates a lot of discussion, possibly because in a case that is less stereotypical, there is a stronger need to make sense: the just world is challenged. The narrative has generated a lot of discussion over a longer period of time, which is hardly surprising. The case involves (possibly) an accident (convulsions); before Holloway was missing, the victim and offender were young people having a good time; and last but not least, the story has an open ending: different scenarios are still possible. These elements enable (young) people to identify with both victim and offender.

**Method**

To investigate the rhetorical means that media employed to construct the guilt of Van der Sloot and the innocence of Holloway, we employed a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of text, photographs and footage from a variety of sources. In this chapter, we focus only on the photographs. We will briefly describe the two checklists we used to code the information derived from photographs published in tabloids, magazines, newspapers and on the Internet.

**Dataset**

All the material was published in the period from May 31 2005 until March 31 2008. Several archives were searched, including the archive of the public broadcasting company, archives of commercial television programs and Lexis Nexis. The photographs that provide the relevant cases for this chapter were collected from different databases. First, photographs from newspapers, including *De Volkskrant* (broadsheet), *Telegraaf* (middle market – tabloid) and three free Dutch newspapers (*Spits, Metro and De Pers*), were collected from the kb (National Library) and the online database archives of newspapers (Lexis Nexis). Photographs from magazines were collected from databases provided by the magazines. We chose three popular Dutch magazines: the popular men’s magazine *Panorama* and two women’s (gossip) magazines *Privé* and *Story*. These three could be seen as leading tabloids in the Netherlands and they paid a lot of attention to the case. Other photographs were collected on the internet using the website FlickR, an international social networking
site based on sharing and exchanging amateur and professional photographs. Our collection amounted to a total of 283 photographs, 189 (66%) of Joran van der Sloot and 94 (33%) photographs of Natalee Holloway.

**Instruments**

As text, television programs and photographs were analyzed, a total of six instruments (A to F, see table 13.3) were developed to examine the content: one on Joran van der Sloot and one on Natalee Holloway, for the three different formats (television, photographs and texts). In part, the instruments or checklists are the same in the checklists for the different formats; other variables are specific for one of these formats.

**Table 13.3 Six Instruments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Van der Sloot</th>
<th>Holloway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some variables were the same for both actors, for example, formal variables concerning the description of the size of the photograph, use of color, publishing date, caption used and the source. Other variables included in both checklists referred to, for example, the position of the body (i.e., standing, sitting), the relative size of the person depicted, facial expression, or where the photograph was taken (i.e., home setting, public setting).

From the literature and an exploratory qualitative analysis, we derived more than fifty variables of stereotypical features. To mention a few: the physical appearance of Van der Sloot included variables related to whether or not the photograph showed him unshaven, with cops, handcuffed, wearing jeans, wearing a baseball cap, wearing a t-shirt, sweating and so on. Physical features of Natalee Holloway that were coded included the use of make-up, whether or not she appeared to be sweating. Other variables included, for example, whether Van der Sloot or Holloway were depicted with friends, with a drink in their hands, a joint, in interaction with other persons, etc. Figures 13.1 and 13.2 show a selection of the photographs found.
A content analysis gives quantitative characteristics of the collection of photographs in terms of the frequency with which the variables occurred. All the photographs were coded by two or more coders using the relevant checklist. In a pilot training session, the coders were trained and instructions were defined explicitly. The checklists were adjusted till inter-rater reliability was sufficient; for all the variables scored, Cohen’s Kappa was at least .75. After coding the data from a total number of 283 photographs, checklists were entered in SPSS, a statistical software program.
Results
Our main research question concerned the means that were used to construct the guilt of the offender and the innocence of the victim, in this particular case. We looked at these means in two ways: first we collected the frequencies of distinctive features and afterwards we combined these means in terms of frames: collections of variables that work together to portray the main characters.

The variables were aggregated by way of a qualitative analysis of the photo material and the literature. After the analysis it became clear that some variables gave almost no variance or just did not occur. We found, for example, almost no photographs with Joran and Natalee together and no photographs where Joran was smoking. The last finding was particularly remarkable, because the stills from the television show of Joran in the car, smoking pot presented a very strong, almost iconic image of him that lasted long after the television show. But indeed: on almost all of our photographs, he was NOT smoking. Table 13.4 summarizes the percentages of photographs that show these particular characteristics.

Table 13.4 shows that most of the variables were coded as binominal values: yes or no. So it is clear that when Natalee is depicted in 85% of the photos with others, in 15% she is alone. Most of the photos are taken from an eye-level perspective, looking right into the camera and most of the photographs are posed. On almost half of the photographs she is with other people, in most of them with known others like friends, parents, etc. She has interaction with the people in the photograph and if she is with others she has, in almost 70% of the cases, eye contact and physical contact. In almost all the photographs, coders judged the facial expression as happy; she has no exceptional make up (“natural” in 97.9% of the photographs) and her hair is always neat. She is not sweating, not smoking. Her position is judged as passive in 70% of the photographs.

In the photographs of Joran the overall image is somewhat different. Although most of the photographs are taken at eye level (60%), a substantial number of them are taken from a bird’s perspective (20%) and from a frog’s perspective (20%). Joran does not look right into the camera in 46% of the photographs and in fewer photos than Natalee is he posing (in only 76% of them). There are some photographs (16%) where Joran is shown with police and in handcuffs. In 48% he is not with others in the photograph. And if he is with others, he is not making eye contact with anyone else in the photograph (97%). In 50% of the photographs his facial expression is judged neu-
the popular virgin and the wolf in sheep’s clothing

TABLE 13.4 RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Holloway (n=94)</th>
<th>Van der Sloot (n=189)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camera perspective, eye level</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera bird perspective</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera frog perspective</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject looks into camera</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject is unshaven</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posed photograph</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handcuffs</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Peter R. de Vries</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With cops on photograph</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With others</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With mom on photograph</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With dad on photograph</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with people on photograph</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical contact</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy face</td>
<td>98.9</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural make up</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decent haircut</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decent clothing</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First impression nice</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First impression innocent</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First impression passive</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

tra; in 49% as happy. In most of the photographs he is clean shaven with a fresh hair cut. In 60% of the photographs he is judged as active.

Frames
Can we set out these variables in terms of frames, as in “collections of variables that work together to portray the main characters”? A common technique of doing this is the homals analysis, or optimal scaling option which is available in srss, but the scores were too diverse and – because of the large number of variables – in many cases too few per variable to make an analy-
sis that would make any sense. Nevertheless, by looking at the preliminary results of optimal scaling/homals, as well as the frequencies of the main characteristics, we can distinguish two remarkable sets of variables: we called them the Popular Virgin and the Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing.

**Popular Virgin**
The Popular Virgin frame can be characterized by the following features: a camera perspective at eye level, eye contact with the viewer of the photograph, posed, interaction with people in the photograph, eye contact with the other people in the photograph, a happy face, natural make up, combed hair, decent clothing (see figure 13.3). Coders characterized her at first sight as nice, innocent and passive in most of the photographs. More than 50% of the photographs represent these typical features.

![Figure 13.3 Popular Virgin](image)

**Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing**
The analysis of the photographic material on Van der Sloot shows more dimensions. The photographs are more diverse than those of Natalee (see figure 13.4). Obviously, this is because after the disappearance of Holloway, the development of visual material related to her stopped, yet the visual material depicting Van der Sloot could still be created and published. Besides that, the distribution of the features of the visual material depicting Van der Sloot is also
more varied. On several photographs, the coders did not consider him to be obviously nice, or happy, but when he is with friends in a photograph, he makes eye contact and physical contact. Also, he is a character in more snap shots, in photographs which have not been posed: he has been in the news for longer than Natalee and became an important news topic after her disappearance. We called this frame *The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing* (also used in e.g., McIntyre 1988 and Sperber et al. 2009). A lot of the photographs are quite similar to photographs featuring Natalee, yet he is often framed as a criminal (e.g., figure 13.5, a screenshot from the website of Peter R. de Vries). This makes him a man with two faces.

**FIGURE 13.4 WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING**
13.7 Conclusions and discussion
Browsing through the collection of the 283 photographs from newspapers, magazines, websites and tabloids, one’s intuitive impression is that the two main actors in this drama are two normal adolescents, from white middle-class families. Several photographs of the victim and offender show both of them with friends, obviously having fun, or with their family members. A quantitative analysis underpins this intuition.

Holloway can be presented, and she often is, as a stereotypical victim with features that fit the stereotype: decently posed photographs of a fresh-faced, happy girl, looking straight at the camera, in the company of friends or her mother, graduated and easily perceived (and judged by our coders) as passive, nice and innocent. Her clothing, combed blond hair, her smile revealing healthy white teeth and her good-looking friends in the photograph support the impression of her innocence. These are the rhetorical means by which she is constructed. Information that contests this impression hasn’t received a lot of attention – it is said, for example, that she was drunk and under influence of drugs before she died. This kind of information does not appear on these photographs and appeared rarely in the written press. She is the flat character in this morality play.
In sum, Holloway is constructed as a normal female adolescent and this offers all the possibilities for identification: it could have happened to you.

Van der Sloot, on the other hand, is the round and more complex character. Based on this collection of photographs, Joran van der Sloot is not a stereotypical offender: we get a far more diffuse picture of him. In more than half of the photographs he is depicted as a normal adolescent with whom one can easily identify (see figure 13.6). These photographs are rather similar to the photographs of Holloway: socializing with friends and family. Yet, after Holloway’s disappearance and his possible role in that incident, his ‘confession’ caught on hidden camera and his appearance in television, he can easily be perceived as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. In more than 20% of the photographs, he is shown with police officers and/or in handcuffs.

**FIGURE 13.6 A NORMAL ADOLESCENT**

Anticipating the findings from the analyses of the television footage, it appears that the impression of deviance that we get from Van der Sloot comes from
his appearance in television shows. There we can see and hear him lying and reacting short temperedly. Although the stills from these television shows, for example the stills from the footage from the hidden camera in *The Peter R. de Vries Show* (see figure 13.7), were not published very often in the print or news media, they established an extremely powerful, almost iconic picture of Van der Sloot.

**FIGURE 13.7 STILL FROM HIDDEN CAMERA**

The narrative has generated a lot of discussion over a long period of time. In retrospect, this is not that surprising. The case involves (possibly) an accident, the main characters are young people having a good time before Natalee went missing; and the narrative has an open ending so different scenarios are still possible. These elements enable (young) people to identify with both victim *and* offender. There is hardly any discussion about Holloway’s fate: she is dead, no one doubts that. This results in a mono-dimensional framing of her. In contrast with Holloway, Van der Sloot’s role is, to a certain extent, questioned. Since nobody knows exactly what really happened that night,
nobody knows whether he is really guilty or not. The incident could still have been an accident. The story leaves a lot of room for speculation, which enables the different media to portray his character in more than one way.

At the beginning of this chapter, we stated that the narrative of this particular case is more complex than the stereotypes we know from our reading of standard literature. The characters here are less stereotypical; at least Van der Sloot is. The interpretation of this character can be challenged and contested with other information. Thus, good and evil are less clear. This makes a wider variety of opinion possible: besides just contrasting with the offender and identifying with the victim (and her family), other reactions are possible. Thus, the narrative generates a lot of discussion; perhaps because, in a less stereotypical case, there is a stronger need to make sense: the just world is challenged.

In this discussion, a number of different issues are highlighted. The nature of the data and method used in these analyses are discussed. After that we will comment on the theoretical relevance of our research question with respect to stereotypical media portrayals. But first, the societal relevance is explored in more detail. During the development of this particular case, the two main reasons as to why the study of media portrayals is societally important were stressed several times. The first reason is that media portrayals reflect issues in (real) social life; that is, the media as a source of information tells us about society. Themes such as alcohol and drug use, international travel, rules of conduct among friends and female and male adolescents, responsibility of parents and media, dynamics between legal actors and the public and so forth were reported on. However, the disappearance of Holloway did not become a typical example of all the (female) adolescents who have disappeared; no claims were made about her disappearance being the tip of the iceberg. In that sense, the disappearance wasn't constructed as a social problem (Best 2007).

The second reason why the study of media portrayals is societally relevant is because these portrayals have (real) consequences in (real) social life. Immediately after the broadcasting of the episode of *The Peter R. de Vries Show* in which Van der Sloot 'confesses' on hidden camera, many people posted insults and threats on (what was supposedly) his social network site (Hyves). Direct responses included protests, discussions, letters to the editor of newspapers, comments on websites and disturbances at sites where Joran was assumed to be hiding himself. One of the newspapers we analyzed, *De
Volkskrant, suggested that if “Van der Sloot had been found, he would have been lynched by a furious crowd” (Giesen 2008).

One of the women’s (gossip) magazines, similar to the magazines we analyzed (Privé and Story) had the headline “Kill the monster” (figure 13.8). In itself, the media exposure caused effects for all (family) members involved. Real consequences, not only for Van der Sloot, but also for legal actors working within the criminal justice system who had to defend the legal notions of a confession and explain why the “confession” on hidden camera did not constitute enough legal evidence to arrest and prosecute him.

**FIGURE 13.8** KILL THE MONSTER

Most people do not have any direct experience with (specific types of) crime or with the criminal justice system, so they obtain their information, and form perceptions, ideas and attitudes, from other people and from the (news) media. As Forst (2004, pp. 213-219) describes, the public’s perception that the criminal justice system is just and effective, its (perceived) legitimacy can be seriously flawed, yet this legitimacy “is essential to a well-functioning, citizen-supported, criminal justice system” (Forst 2004:3). The public’s (mis)perceptions are influenced by, among other things, high-profile media cases and miscarriages of justice. In the Van der Sloot/Holloway case, The Peter R. de Vries Show refers to the footage, in which Van der Sloot tells acquaintance Van der Eem what had happened, as ‘the confession’. Several other (news) media report on the ‘confession’ and people perceive this confession to be
valid, at least to a certain extent. Nonetheless, the confession is not a confession in any legal sense and provides no further evidence. This is difficult to explain to the general public. These kinds of developments, and other miscarriages of justice such as wrongful convictions, may undermine the legitimacy of the criminal justice system (Cole 2009). In short, these considerations illustrate the relevance of analyses of media portrayals. Another issue we would like to comment on in this discussion is the nature of the data and method we focused on in our analyses.

**FIGURE 13.9 MORE EVIDENCE AGAINST JORAN**

Figure 13.9 shows the front page of *De Telegraaf* (June 12, 2005) with the heading “Meer bewijzen tegen Joran”/ “More evidence against Joran”. The article is illustrated with a well-known photograph of Holloway, a photograph of Van der Sloot, who holds money in his hands, and two smaller photographs of the two Surinam suspects. All three suspects have a black band covering their eyes. The smaller heading between the photographs reads: “Politie Aruba vindt sporen van bloed in auto”/ “Aruba police find blood in car”. This front page is a good example of why a content analysis focused on the characteristics of the individual characters in crime news stories, or focused on other substantial research questions, cannot limit itself to a content analysis of text alone. The same article in *LexisNexis Academic NL News*, which contains the
complete texts of several Dutch newspapers, informs us that the article consists of 335 words. In this chapter, we focused on photographs, not text, because previous research has shown that visual material is far more important in establishing, for example, the guilt and innocence of persons (Dubelaar and Vanderveen 2009). While most content analyses of news media are limited to textual data, we believe this will only produce valid and relevant findings if the research question is extremely limited.

However, the richness of the visual data is challenging when one is using a quantitative content analysis. During our analyses of the visual data derived from (print) media and television shows, we found that the quantitative instruments were not able to fully grasp the meaning of the images: by breaking up a photograph into smaller, different pieces, the overall picture can be easily missed. By splitting the visuals up into more than fifty variables, the whole image was covered ... yet it wasn’t. What is important is the way in which all these features work together. While some statistical tools to correlate (certain) features do exist, in our analyses, other issues arose because of missing data and the huge variety of material. In many cases, visual data such as photographs are analyzed in a rather exploratory or qualitative manner, often missing the preciseness, the controllability and strictness of quantitative analytical methods. Yet, these qualitative approaches offer the possibility of analyzing the image as a whole, and analyzing the image in depth. Recapitulating our experiences briefly, we would plead for a mixed methods research design (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007). The main advantages of using such a design are triangulation, complementarity and development (see Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989). Our future analyses of the data will use a mixed methods approach such as this; preliminary findings already indicate, for example, that the visual material accompanying text (in the print media) and the visual material broadcast on television highlight other aspects of the characters, or highlight them in different ways.

The last issue we would like to discuss here concerns the theoretical relevance of our research question with respect to stereotypical media portrayals. We have examined the way in which media construct stereotypical images of victims and offenders by using established sets of characteristics (frames). These frames act as rhetorical devices to convince their public of the guilt and innocence of the parties involved. Although we have found many cases in which these frames are stereotypical, featuring Holloway as innocent victim and Van der Sloot as brutal offender, this is not the whole story.
Though the literature is consistent in stating that disproportional attention is paid to narratives featuring stereotypes as main characters, both in news media and fiction, this portrayal of stereotypes is a stereotype in itself as well (Vanderveen and Koetsenruijter 2009). In many cases, such as the Holloway/Van der Sloot case, the narrative is more complex. When characters are less stereotypical, good and evil are less clear. Such narratives elicit a wider variety of opinion and more discussion because these types of narratives fuel the need that we have to make sense of a situation. The simple classification of persons into either offenders or victims helps media consumers to give meaning to their reality and define our general ideas about good and evil. Media sources like The Peter R. de Vries Show use several rhetorical devices to present the distinction between victim and offender in as clear a way as possible. Yet, in some cases, when the stereotypes can be challenged, the just world itself is challenged. The rhetoric of victims and offenders is less simple and clear-cut; this enables discussion and a variety of scenarios about who is good and evil to coexist.

References


KOETSENRIJTER AND VANDERVEEN


