

# **Child murder narratives in Dutch newspapers (1930-2010)**

A quantitative content analysis

Mark Verspoor

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Supervisor: Peter Burger

Second reader: Willem Koetsenruijter

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## **Abstract**

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How do newspapers write about stories that are truly terrifying? Like the murder of children. This is the underlying thought that drives this thesis. An interest in the phenomena of child murder coverage in the press was sparked when Ximena Pieterse, a 15-year-old girl from The Netherlands got brutally robbed of her life in 2012. The headlines were full of powerful emotive language, the offender described as a “person without a conscience”. A question arose: had newspapers always written about child murder cases in this way?

This thesis examines Dutch newspaper coverage of seven child murder cases over four decades; 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2010s. Employing a quantitative content analysis on a sample of just under 600 individual newspaper articles to answer the research question: *what types of narratives are used by Dutch newspapers when reporting on child murder cases (1930-2010)?*

This study found that Dutch newspaper coverage of child murders was relatively similar in the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s. The vast majority (more than 70%) of articles written in these decades were composed of institutional narratives, this means that they focused mainly on the police investigation and subsequent trial. In the 2010s this changed. The percentage of articles with a societal narrative soared from 14% in the 1990s to 38% in the 2010s. Societal narratives focus on the response of the local community to the crimes, and concerns about the greater impact on society. While the percentage of articles with a personal narrative also increased from 9% to 19% in the respective decades. Articles with personal narratives focus on aspects such as the impact of the crime on the victim’s family, creating stories loaded with emotions.

# **Table of contents**

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<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research motive.....	1
1.2 Why now? .....	2
1.3 Dissertation outline.....	2
<b>2. Theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Wardle (2006): the foundation.....	3
2.2 Static factors.....	6
2.2.1 News values and crime.....	7
2.2.2 Sex and violence in news media.....	7
2.2.3. Child murder and news media: the ‘ideal victim’.....	8
2.3 Time-specific factors.....	9
2.3.1 Risk society and crime.....	9
2.3.2 The role of moral panic .....	10
2.3.3 Perceptions of childhood.....	11
2.3.4 Fear of paedophiles .....	11
2.4 A summary.....	12
<b>3. Research method .....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Why employ this method?.....	13
3.2 Operationalisation: scope of the research question and validity.....	13
3.3 The codebook.....	14
3.4 Sampling: identifying and selecting cases.....	16
3.4.1 Use of online databases to select case studies.....	17
3.4.2 The selected case studies .....	17
3.5 The creation of an own dataset.....	17
3.6 Coding the articles.....	18
3.7 Reliability: Cohen’s kappa.....	18
3.8 Limitations.....	19

<b>4. Results</b> .....	<b>20</b>
4.1 Contextualising the cases.....	20
4.1.1 Sara Beugeltasch.....	20
4.1.2 Bastiaan Bloemena.....	22
4.1.3 H�el�ene Isaac .....	23
4.1.4 Jessica Laven .....	24
4.1.5 Nymphe Poolman.....	25
4.1.6 Jennefer van Oostende .....	26
4.1.7 Ximena Pieterse .....	27
4.2 Development of narrative trends .....	28
4.3 Personal narratives: offender or victim driven? .....	29
<b>5. Discussion</b> .....	<b>30</b>
5.1 Comparing and contrasting the narrative development .....	30
5.2 A move from offender- to victim-centred narratives .....	31
5.3 A thematic analysis: comparing and contrasting narrative trends .....	33
5.3.1 Risk society.....	33
5.3.2 Danger of paedophiles.....	34
<b>6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>7. Bibliography</b> .....	<b>36</b>

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Research motive

Violence, sex, drama, and humanity's deepest fears. All are fantastic ingredients for a thriller novel. The plot of which may read something like:

It's late at night, a young girl cycles aimlessly through the badly lit streets of The Hague. She's forgotten how to get to her friend's house where she was supposed to stay over after having visited a birthday party nearby. She stops peddling and grabs her phone to call her friend, but the battery is empty. While she's trying to figure out what to do next a 25-year-old guy walks by, he's on his way home. The two start talking and he tells her that he lives nearby. He offers to let her charge her phone at his house. She accepts his offer.

A fatal offer. The next morning her lifeless, bloodied and naked body is found lying in the middle of a busy through-road. That night she'd been stabbed twenty times by him. He was a man with grave mental issues and a severe drug addiction. He's the villain in this story. But this is not a novel. This is not fiction.

This is what happened to Ximena Pieterse, a 15-year-old girl from The Netherlands. She was murdered by 25-year-old Stanley Anschutz on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2012. While violence, sex, drama and fear make great ingredients for a work of fiction, they are also elements that make for thrilling news stories. Something which became increasingly clear as an array of newspapers, both regional and national, wrote more than forty articles about her murder.

Pieces with gripping headlines full of powerful, emotive and visual language such as "Unscrupulous psychopath snaps and kills Ximena for no reason," (*De Telegraaf*, 28 February 2012, pp. 8.) The nation's largest newspaper in terms of circulation continues in similar tone calling the case as an "atrocious murder committed by a "heavily disturbed" perpetrator against a "defenceless girl."

Ximena's murder was covered not just by print media but also on television broadcasts, radio and online. Coverage was extensive and deeper narratives developed positioning the evil offender versus the innocent victim. The perpetrator's drug abuse and mental health issues served as discussion starters about broader social developments around these topics and the workings of institutions such as mental health clinics and the judicial system.

From the perspective of journalism studies newspapers provide a unique insight into how stories such as Ximena's are told and accordingly what types of narratives are used to tell the story. Newspapers, this thesis argues fulfil the function of a "cultural barometer of attitudes towards the crimes and those who committed them, working on the assumptions that newspapers provide a reflection of a given culture...and may also impact cultural thought" (Wardle, 2006, p. 516).

While Ximena's murder was undoubtedly heinous, the cultural reaction as expressed by the newspaper coverage that followed seemed to be disproportionate. Articles that were written after Ximena's murder showed a clear tendency of emphasising how the crime had affected the victim's family and the wider community.

This observation raised an academic interest. Namely, whether child murder cases have always been reported on in this way in The Netherlands? Has newspaper coverage always given such prominence to the impact of this crime on the victim's family? In more general terms, the personal aspects of a story.

Out of this interest a research question formed that reads: *what types of narratives are used by Dutch newspapers when reporting on child murder cases (1930-2010)?* To answer this question this thesis will analyse coverage of Dutch child murder cases by Dutch newspapers over nearly a century. From the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s through to the 2010s.

## **1.2 Why now?**

What journalism is, is changing rapidly. Newspapers are less and less popular in the digital age. The number of subscriptions decreases yearly. This puts great stress on journalists who work in print media. It changes what topics a medium writes about and how it writes about them. One would expect that due to monetary pressures Dutch newspapers will write juicier stories – with plenty of personal details about the offender of such a crime, or emotional pieces where parents describe the impact of losing their child – in the 2010s than in the 1930s and 1960s when newspapers formed the primary source of information for many citizens and had very little competition. Thus, also less of a need to write stories with a societal or personal narrative.

What is the value of this dissertation to society and academically? According to (Koetsenruijter & Van Hout, 2014, p. 164) qualitative content analyses are valuable because they offer an insight into how a society views or discusses particular phenomenon, in this case child murder.

As of now, there is little knowledge on the types of narratives that are dominant in the coverage of child murder cases in The Netherlands. By conducting a quantitative content analysis we will for the first time – this research has not been carried out before – get an insight into the developments of narratives throughout from decades, the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2010s.

From an academic perspective the literature is outdated, or non-existent. The two most recent studies of this sort were conducted by Wardle (2006) and Danson (1996). This dissertation would update the knowledge on the nature of child murder coverage taking into account fresh literature in the field of journalism studies and beyond.

## **1.3 Dissertation outline**

This dissertation is composed of three main chapters followed by a discussion of the results in relation to the theoretical framework and a concise conclusion. The theoretical chapter comes first and lays out the main framework that this thesis will build forth on. It also contains the most relevant literature to date. The second chapter is dedicated to the employed method. It explains why the choice has been made to employ a quantitative content analysis. Moreover, the method is described in detail. Lastly, the results that are born out of this process are presented, compared and contrasted to findings by Wardle (2006).

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

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A vast range of literature has been written on the coverage of murder cases in news media (Liem & Koenraadt, 2007; Jewkes, 2004; Roth, 2001) and child murder coverage in particular (Danson & Soothill, 1996; Brants & Koenraadt, 2005; Wardle, 2006; Greer & McLaughlin, 2012).

This section commences with a presentation of a paper that was published in 2006 by Claire Wardle called “IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU.” Wardle’s work forms a basic point of reference and framework on which this thesis will build forth. This is followed by a thematic summary of the most relevant literature to date which will give an insight into the academic discourse on concepts such as news values, crime, sex, violence, the ‘ideal victim’, risk society, moral panic, paedophilia and childhood and how these concepts relate to child murder coverage by news media.

Thematic discussion of the literature is divided into two sections. The first being static factors, and the second being time-specific factors. Static factors refer to the basic concepts which have always made murder and in particular child murder particularly attractive for news media to report on. One of the most important underlying concepts in this regard is that of news (market) values which will be discussed at some length in this section. Time-specific factors have to do with academic and cultural shifts and the development of new technologies that have influence on the coverage of child murder. A theory that offers a handhold in this regard is the concept of risk society which will also be discussed at greater length. The function of this division is to provide an orderly overview of the literature.

### **2.1 Wardle (2006): the foundation**

When it comes to recent literature on child murder narratives in newspapers there is only one study that offers a substantial framework and that is the 2006 paper “IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU,” by Clair Wardle. In this article Wardle examines and compares print media coverage of twelve child murder cases in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom over three decades, the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s. Drawing upon both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.

The methodology that Wardle developed to categorise these narratives will also be utilised in this thesis. It is a methodology that is simple but based on a solid theoretical foundation and most importantly produces clear results. It consists of determining the dominant narrative frame of each individual article that is written about a murder case using a coding system. A system which is described in full detail in the methodology section of this thesis. Through this process it is established whether articles have one of three core narratives. These are, personal, institutional and societal. Explained respectively (Wardle, 2006, p. 520):

“Personal” narratives included stories about the victims’ lives, how the crimes had impacted the victims’ families, and the story of the defendants’ childhoods.

“Institutional” narratives focused on the police investigation and subsequent trial ...

[While] “societal” narratives focused on the response of the local community to the crimes, and concerns about the greater impact on society.

After having coded all articles Wardle discovered a trend in the development of child murder narratives. In the 1930s and 1960s the vast majority (89% and 85% respectively) of articles that were written had a dominant institutional narrative. Focussing on the police investigation, persecution and the trial. Coverage of child murder cases in the 1990s however, shows a significant change. While the institutional narrative was still the most common (56%) the percentage of articles that had a personal narrative focus rose from 9% to 19% between 1960 and 1990 respectively and the percentage of articles that had a societal narrative focus rose from 6% to 24% between 1960 and 1990.

The narrative development between these decades is perhaps best demonstrated in Figure 1, shown below. A table from the paper itself where ‘total’ refers to the number of articles coded for that decade

**Figure 1 (Wardle, 2006, p. 520):**

Narrative structure of the articles

	<b>1930s</b>	<b>1960s</b>	<b>1990s</b>
Personal	9%	9%	19%
Institutional	89%	85%	56%
Societal	2%	6%	24%
Total	258	264	588

In explaining the trend towards more personal and societal narratives in the 1990s Wardle notes that the rise in the percentage of articles with a societal narrative was pushed predominantly by two factors. Firstly, the concepts of childhood and risk. Secondly, the perceived threat of a new type of perpetrator: the paedophile.

While childhood has always been considered something mythical and nostalgic Wardle argues that developments in the 1990s put an even greater emphasis on the symbolic meaning of childhood, how it is perceived and the concerns that are connected to it. Some of these developments being the increase in single-parent households, rising number of divorces and decline of community life. The murder of a child distresses the social order which was already changing rapidly releasing deep-rooted fears about modern society. The overriding perception in the 1990s being that children were at greater risk of being harmed than they were in the past. Press coverage made no effort however to explain that children were no more at risk of being murdered by a stranger in the 1990s than they were in the past and that while the structure of society was changing the safety of children was not diminishing in this regard.

The second factor that played a significant role in the shift towards more societal narratives in the 1990s was the extent to which paedophiles were perceived to pose a threat to the community. Public discourse from this period “implied repeatedly that “paedophiles” were a different kind of criminal; that unlike other criminals their behaviour should be compared with addicts, displaying a compulsive obsession that was untreatable, and resistant to social or moral pressures” (Wardle, 2006, p. 525).



Moreover, rapid technological advancement raised public fears about paedophiles further. With the popularisation of owning a household computer in the early years of the 1990s a new threat emerged which provided those with malicious intent new ways of finding, luring and interacting with children: the internet. This further changed the perception of paedophiles in the public mind as people who could possess “a dangerous criminal intellect, with access to the latest forms of technology, communication, and even behaviour-modification techniques” (as cited in Wardle, 2006, p. 529). In a time when computers were a comparatively new device, the internet a new tool, and the average citizen had little skill in using both citizens expressed a sense of powerlessness in coping with this new challenge and protecting their children from paedophiles on the Net.

Carol Vorderman, a Daily Mail columnist went so far as to call the internet a “child hater’s candy store” (Wardle, 2006, p. 529). In earlier decades paedophiles had limited gateways through which they could interact with children, bound by place and time. The internet changed that. Living in a safe neighbourhood no longer meant that a child was safe. Paedophiles could now “groom” children in chat rooms, removing all physical barriers.

The percentage of personal narratives increased between 1930 and 1990 but by a much smaller than the percentage than the rise in societal narratives. In 1930 the percentage of articles that had a dominant personal narrative constituted 9%. In the 1960s there was no change in this figure. By the 1990s the percentage of articles with a personal narrative rose to 19%. Examining Wardle’s research there is no clear explanation given for the rise in the percentage of articles with a personal narrative from 9% in the 1930s and 1960s to 19% in the 1990s.

Wardle points to the “victims’ rights movement,” which took off in the late 1980s as a possible explanation. This movement was a reaction to the penal policies of the 1960s which focussed on rehabilitating perpetrators. By the early 1970s it became apparent to the American sociologist Robert Martison that prisoner rehabilitation programs had concerning shortcomings, he wrote a paper outlining these flaws called “What Works?”. Martison’s work became influential in cultural and political thought and led to the reversal of rehabilitation programs and a movement to increase prison sentence terms. A doctrine of “nothing works” captured the popular imagination and as a result by the late 80s the victim-perpetrator relationship was presented as a zero-sum game where compassion for the offender was by definition an unjust insult to the victim.

This led to a renewed interest in the stories of the victims who were in turn exploited by politicians and media executives. “The sanctified persona of the suffering victim has become a valued commodity in the circuits of political and media exchange, and real individuals are now placed in front of the cameras and invited to play this role – often becoming media celebrities or victims movement activists in the process” (as cited in Wardle, 2006, p. 523). Out of this emerged new narratives that focussed on the victim and his/her families’ experiences.

Wardle’s research does not explain what the direct cause of the increase in the percentage of articles with a personal narrative focus in the 1990s is however, the research does reveal an interesting trend within the articles that were coded as having a dominant personal narrative. In the 1930s the vast majority (68%) of the articles with a personal

narrative were written with a focus on the offender (Wardle, 2006, p. 523). By the 1990s this had changed completely and stories focussed predominantly (71%) on the victim's family.

This shift is largely the result of case-specific details. In the 1990s for example three of the four child murder offenders confessed to the crime and had been previously convicted for sex offences. They were quickly labelled as paedophiles and this was seen as sufficient, there was no need to contextualise their deeds. In earlier decades there was more mystery surrounding the motivations of the offenders, therefore newspapers actively investigated their backgrounds. Moreover, in earlier decades child murder was framed as an isolated event carried out by an "evil" perpetrator. This led to the reasoning that only the offenders and their past lives could explain why one would perpetrate such an act. By the 1990s society was to blame, "creating these monstrous paedophiles, with authorities allowing them to live in otherwise "safe" communities, free to re-offend" (Wardle, 2006, p. 523). This moved the narrative away from being focussed on the offender and towards stories that focussed on the victim's families experiences. Emotions of grief, loss and a desire for justice.

Lastly, the vast majority of articles in the 1930s and 1960s (89% and 85% respectively) were coded as having a dominant institutional narrative. In the 1990s the share of articles with an institutional narrative focus decreased to 56%. The percentage of articles that were shaped around institutional narratives in the 1990s decreased due to the growing importance of concepts such as childhood and risk. Furthermore, technological advancements and perceived threat of paedophiles also came to the foreground. These developments caused a move towards more personal and societal narratives. The majority of the articles in the 1990s (56%) however, still had a dominant institutional narrative.

This is the result of the dependence by media on the police as a source of information. When a child is murdered the police are an easy to contact source, independent, and usually release reliable information that is read for publishing. The information flow is not merely one-way, it is often an exchange between journalists and the police. Studies on the interaction between journalists and the police show that they have a mutually dependent relationship (Crandon & Dunne, 1997; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Leishman & Mason, 2003; Mawby, 2002; Osborne, 1995). The media depend on the police for information about the identity of the victim, the offender, progress of the investigation and the subsequent trial (Chermak, 1998; Fishman, 1980; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994). The police on the other hand use the media as a platform to reach out to the community, relay information, ask for intelligence and call upon witnesses (Innes, *The Media as an Investigative Recourse in Murder Inquiries*, 1999; Reiner, 2003).

## **2.2 Static factors**

In this section three concepts that offer an insight into the motivations of news organisations to write about one story over another are highlighted. This thesis refers to these concepts as 'static factors' since they constitute the basic concepts which have always made murder and in particular child murder particularly attractive for news media to report on. First, news values are discussed in to crime. Secondly, the role of sex and violence in news media is examined. Thirdly, the concept of the 'ideal victim' is explored in relation to child murder.

### **2.2.1 News values and crime**

When is something newsworthy? This is a question that has been asked by many scholars within the field of journalism studies along the veil of years. The most notable and frequently cited paper on the topic was written more than fifty years ago by Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge: “The Structure of Foreign News” (1965). Other authors such as Chibnall (1977) and Jewkes (2004) – to name but a few – have also made worthy contributions to the question: what are the criteria for something to be newsworthy? For the purpose of this dissertation news values are defined broadly as: “those criteria that influence, often implicitly, the selection, production and prioritization of events as news. Key news values include drama and action, immediacy, violence, celebrities and sex” (Davies, Francis, & Greer, 2007, p. 26).

Crime scores well in newspapers, especially if it involves violence or sex. Crime is often violent, it includes narratives of drama, the search for a perpetrator or a victim plays upon elements of immediacy and some crimes involve a sexual component. Due to these characteristics crime is often a newsworthy topic for newspapers. Violence in particular is a peculiar news value. The following has been written about this phenomenon:

Any crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence becomes associated with it ... Violence represents a basic violation of the person; the greatest personal crime is ‘murder’ ... Violence is also the ultimate crime against property, and against the State. It thus represents a fundamental rupture in the social order” (as cited in Davies, Francis, & Greer, 2007, p. 55).

Accordingly it is argued that “research on news values ... has demonstrated that a case of child murder would always be given prominence” as “audiences have an appetite for details about sexually violent crimes” (Wardle, 2006, pp. 519-520). Furthermore, child murder cases can function as ‘signal crimes’ a concept coined by Martin Innes. According to Innes (2004) there are crimes that can leave a lasting footprint on journalism, one of which is child murder. Innes defines signal crimes as crimes that do not just affect those who are directly involved such as the perpetrator, victim and witnesses but also have an impact on society as a whole. The murder of an English 8-year-old girl called Sarah Payne in 2000 who was abducted by a convicted paedophile is an example of a signal crime because it caused new fears in society about child predators.

### **2.2.2 Sex and violence in news media**

Alastair Hetherington, a former Guardian editor, is quoted as having said that “sex, scandal and crime is something that every journalist is looking for” (Wardle, 2006, p. 519). Violence and sex have always played a role as important news values in journalism however, there is an argument to be made that coverage of graphic crimes has increased in recent years due to economic considerations.

In the early 1990’s there was a growing number of articles on violent sexual crimes in newspapers in Britain. According to Walter et al., (1995) the intensified competition among newspapers to come with shocking stories was one of the reasons for this development. In their publication “Death in the News” they write the following:

Competition between papers and between channels is becoming more intense, and ... violent death has always sold well, particularly when sex crime is involved, or can be

salaciously dragged in. The more intense competition, the more shocking must be the portrayal of violent deaths; and the more we get used to violence in the news, the more explicitly it must be portrayed if we are to take notice (as cited in Wardle, 2006, p. 519).

The importance of commercial pressures in bringing more violent and sexual crimes have also been highlighted by other academics. For example, Weaver et al., (2007) argue that news values do not directly correspond to the type of information that readers want or need. Instead they argue that “news values are a reflection of organisational, sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors” (Harcup & O’Neill, 2016, p. 4). The role of the market i.e. economic factors is particularly prudent in the online environment. In a recent analysis of the five largest newspapers in The Netherlands it was established that the number of viewer clicks affected the news selection process (Welbers, Van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok, & Schaper, 2015).

In response to this movement towards greater competition and commercialism Sigurd Allern wrote the article “Journalistic and Commercial News Values: News Organizations as Patrons of an Institution and Market Actors”. Allern argues that a fresh conceptualisation is needed in a time of greater commercialisation. He states that “editorial priorities should not be analysed in purely journalistic terms. Instead, they should be seen as efforts to combine journalistic norms and editorial ambitions, on the one hand, with commercial norms and market objectives, on the other” (Allern, 2002, p. 137). In addition Allern proposes a new set of commercial news values where sensationalist stories – such as murder cases – are pursued news media. Furthermore, it is argued that “violence endures as a core news value, its newsworthiness can be intensified considerably when focussed through the lenses of [childhood and sex]” (Davies, Francis, & Greer, 2007, p. 28).

### **2.2.3 Child murder and news media: the ‘ideal victim’**

Even though all victims of crime are equal, some are more equal than others. Davies et al., (2007) argue that news media allocate the largest part of their resources to those victims that can be portrayed as ‘ideal’. Moreover, a hierarchy of victimisation is mentioned. This concept refers to the idea that within news media and social discourses some victims are more worthy of media attention than others. In the most extreme of cases an ideal victim can generate huge levels of media attention and sometimes even mourning on a national or international scale. So what is an ideal victim?

The concept of the ideal victim comes from Nils Christie. Christie (1986) considers victimhood a status that is given to some more willingly than others by the news media. For example, male youths, the unemployed, the homeless and those with severe alcohol or drug addictions are less likely to be portrayed as a victim than for instance elderly women or young children who are perceived to be vulnerable and defenceless. In a sense news media merely tap into the already dominant and existing cultural conceptions of victimhood as (Harcup & O’Neill, 2016) suggest. Furthermore, newspapers exploit these dominant conceptions to maximise their commercial appeal.

## **2.3 Time-specific factors**

In this section four concepts that offer an insight into academic, cultural and technological developments that have had an influence on the manner in which child murders have been reported on by the news media through the decades are presented. This thesis refers to these concepts as ‘time-specific factors’ as they have either been coined academically in a specific year such as the term risk society (1992), which makes them applicable particularly when analysing narratives in the 1990s and 2010s but less so in earlier decades, or because the concepts have been dominant in particular decades such as paedophilia in the 1990s, fear of modernity and technological progress (the internet) from the 1990s onwards.

### **2.3.1 Risk society and crime**

Originally published in German, “Risikogesellschaft” or “Risk Society” in English, is a highly influential book orientated around the concepts of risk and modernity. Ulrich Beck, the book’s author defines risk society as: “a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself” (Beck, 1992, p. 21).

The book was written right after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Responding to the threat of an ecological crisis Beck argued that environmental risks had become a product of industrial society. While humans have always been at risk of natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons or tsunamis Beck argued that modernity itself had created new man-made risks such as pollution, illnesses and crime. In a sense the risks of modernity are manufactured risks.

An example of a manufactured risk in relation to crime and children is the creation of the internet. Facer (2012) examined the moral panic surrounding children’s access to the internet in the late 1990’s. Facer introduces the idea of a ‘standard model’ of adult-child relations. Within this model the identity of children is ‘dependent’ and ‘vulnerable’ while adults are ‘competent actors in the public space.’ The division between the public and the private space is extremely important. “At the heart of this idea of childhood is the construction of public space as potentially dangerous for children. The home, in contrast, is represented as a site of safety, a private sphere in which the physical limits of the building and the population of the home by people who are known to the child, are represented as protection against risk” (Facer, 2012, p. 398). In short, the internet disrupted the standard model of adult-child relations.

The creation of the internet has manufactured a new reality whereby the concept of crime, the public space and the private space have changed dramatically. The internet has created an alternate reality where the adult is no longer always a ‘competent actor’ and where the public and the private space have merged to some extent. To give a simple example, the internet is not only an adult space, it is also a space for children. However, if children choose to go on the internet they might find themselves in a space with adults that are seeking to harm them. Meanwhile, their parents might not be able to protect them since adults are not always competent in the use of computers. This makes children vulnerable to online ‘grooming’. News organisations realised this too, articles with titles such as “your child is just three clicks away from a paedophile” (Facer, 2012, p. 403) started to appear stressing the danger of this new manufactured reality. Accordingly, the next few years saw a steep rise in the number of articles that were written about pornography and paedophilia as well as a rise

in articles written about technology and the family between 1997 and 2001, see Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2 (Facer, 2012, p. 403):**

Newspaper articles related to pornography and paedophilia.

Article theme	1997	2001
Games	42	65
Children's health	24	65
Cyberporn/regulation and paedophilia	46	276
Technology and the family	60	100
Consumer advice	83	104
Government policy on technology and education	40	32

### 2.3.2 The role of moral panic

The concept of moral panic was popularised by Stanley Cohen in his 1972 book “Folk devils and moral panics : the creation of the Mods and Rockers”. The definition of moral panic given by Cohen (1972) can be summarised as:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions (Cohen, 1972, p. 9).

According to Thompson (1998) Cohen’s definition contains five key elements or stages of moral panic:

1. Something or someone is defined as a threat to values or interests.
2. This treat is depicted in an easily recognizable form by the media.
3. There is a rapid build-up of public concern.
4. There is a response from authorities or opinion-makers.
5. The panic recedes or results in social changes (Thompson, 1998, p. 8).

Cohen’s thesis on moral panic is influential up until this day. There are two concepts that are particularly useful to the coverage of child murders in newspapers. The first is the concept of scapegoating as described in (Hunt, 1997, p. 631): “A moral panic must be about something ... Every moral panic has a scapegoat, or as Cohen calls it a ‘folk devil’ onto which the publics fears are projected.” In the case of child murder coverage in the early 1990’s and onwards paedophiles fulfil the function of the ‘folk devil’ in social discourse and the popular imagination. The second concept that is particularly useful to this dissertation is the idea that moral panics are generated by “the media, or by particular interest-groups ... using the media to publicize their concerns” (Ibid, p, 631). Jenkins (1992) identified a range of interest groups including charities, social workers and even the police who publicized claims about the sexual abuse of children in Britain. Shockingly, or perhaps not, these claims

were presented as truths in the media. As will be discussed next, Ayre (2001) points out that the media can play a destructive role in the coverage of sensitive issues, creating an unnecessary climate of fear due to sensationalist reporting.

### **2.3.3 Perceptions of childhood**

In the previous section the child as an ‘ideal victim’ has been discussed. This section will present some of the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. Children have “come to symbolise all that is decent and caring about a society, [they are] the very index of civilisation” (Jenks, 1996, p. 67). The very mentioning of the term childhood brings up feelings of nostalgia to most people. The concept of childhood has in it the ability to blur out the ugly truth because children do not look at the world in the same manner as adults, this makes childhood appear worryless and brings up a longing to a past that was ‘better’ than now. The anxieties of adults are projected upon their children. The murder of a child therefore ruptures the fabric of any society. Furthermore, there have been “significant improvements in child health. These developments have made child mortality a shocking rarity as opposed to the norm” (Wardle, 2006, p. 519).

Ayre (2001) argues that the media have played a destructive role in the coverage of child abuse scandals in the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s by vilifying child welfare agencies. As a result of sensationalist coverage of child abuse scandals in England and Wales in these periods the media have created a climate of fear and mistrust. This climate of fear has been created because journalists are only concerned with ‘selling’ stories. “The qualities of immediacy and drama required of news stories inevitably slant the selection of stories towards the more sensational” (Ayre, 2001, p. 889). Furthermore, a climate of mistrust has been developed because news values emphasize drama and conflict. Ayre accuses newspapers of portraying child protection workers wrongfully villainous. By adding to the climate of fear and mistrust the safety of children is genuinely feared for by society, which in turn sells newspapers when a child murder does occur.

### **2.3.4 Fear of paedophiles**

Dominant modern perceptions don’t favour paedophiles. As a group they are thoroughly despised. The definition of a paedophile is someone, “commonly a male, who gains sexual gratification from contact with pre-pubescent children” (McCartan, 2011, p. 323). It is argued by McCartan that in Britain and in the West generally the societal discourse about paedophilia has been disproportionately shaped by the media through disparate coverage. The public have therefore formed a wrongful perception of paedophilia that has been fuelled by a low level of engagement and over-reliance on the socially dominant discourses. Especially when paedophilia is related to child sexual abuse McCartan argues that the terms often wrongfully get used interchangeably.

Rightly or wrongly, there is a real fear for paedophiles in modern Western societies. From the 1990’s onwards the fear of paedophiles progressed. The “availability of images of children on the internet, as well as the new threat of “paedophiles” “grooming” children in Internet chat rooms, made paedophilia appear to be universal and not just the concern of professionals” (Wardle, 2006, p. 529). Fear for paedophiles is an easily exploited theme in news media. According to Cohen (1972) paedophiles are easily utilised by the media to represent the ultimate ‘folk devil’. This characterisation, that has shaped the public discourse

makes it an attractive theme for newsmakers who exploit the negative public perception of paedophiles to sell newspapers.

## **2.4 A summary**

The literature on child murder is vast however if one focusses specifically on the issue of child murder coverage by newspapers it is a rather limited field of study. The most recent literature on child murder coverage by newspapers is the 2006 paper “IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU,” by Clair Wardle which simultaneously functions as the framework for this paper.

This review has put forth two main lines of theoretical enquiry. Dividing the chapter into two main sections. On the one hand static factors (the basic concepts which have always made murder and in particular child murder particularly attractive for news media to report on) and on the other hand time-specific factors (academic, cultural and technological developments that have had an influence on the manner in which child murders have been reported on by the news media).

The literature bundled to form the static factors component is structured like a funnel. Starting with the broad concept of news values to progress onto an explanation as to why sex and violence work particularly well in media even when it concerns the gruesome details of the murder and sexual abuse of children. To conclude with Christie’s ‘ideal victim’ theory.

The literature that is bundled to form the time-specific factors section of this framework covers a range of concepts that Wardle mentions as having had an influence on British and American child murder narratives in her study. This includes Beck’s ‘Risk Society,’ Cohen’s moral panic theory, the concept of ‘folk devils’ which is related to that, perceptions of childhood in a changing world and paedophiles as the modern folk devil.

What is yet unknown is whether these concepts serve any demonstrable role in coverage of Dutch child murder cases. The phenomenon of the paedophile as a folk devil in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1990s could be a unique cultural phenomenon of that time and in those locations. Sentiments in The Netherlands may be very different and that could influence the narrative development of child murder cases in that period.



### **3. Research method: quantitative content analysis**

To investigate the research question at hand – *what types of narratives are used by Dutch newspapers when reporting on child murder cases (1930-2010)?* – a quantitative content analysis will be employed. The reason for choosing this particular method will be argued briefly followed by a thorough explanation of the coding system.

#### **3.1 Why employ this method?**

The study of journalism, known as journalism studies, is a scientific study of journalism in practice, the content, and the effect journalism has on society and vice versa. Within this field there are a range of different methods one can employ to investigate this realm. In (Koetsenruijter & Van Hout, 2014) six methods, both quantitative as well as qualitative are discussed. These include: focus groups, surveys, experiments, ethnographical research and content analysis (qualitative and quantitative).

When deciding on which method to employ it is of importance to have an understanding of the aim of your research. In the case of this thesis that is to establish what types of narratives are used by Dutch newspapers to report on child murder cases comparing, contrasting and building on earlier research by Wardle (2006) who discovered that British and American newspaper narratives on child murders could be reduced to three core narratives: institutional, personal and societal. Furthermore, Wardle's results showed that while in the 1930s and 1960s nearly all articles about child murder focussed on institutional narratives (89% and 85% respectively), the 1990s showed a significant movement towards more personal (19%) and societal narratives (24%).

The most effective manner in which one can test whether these narrative developments found in British and American newspapers are similar in Dutch print media reporting on child murders is through coding – an (in)famous part of qualitative content analysis. In practice this means that all Dutch newspaper articles written about child murder cases in the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2010s are coded as having an institutional, societal or personal narrative focus. The results can then be compared to Wardle's findings, putting one set of statistics next to another.

#### **3.2 Operationalisation: scope of the research question and validity**

The scope of the research question is of importance because it is a measure of the feasibility and compatibility of the results. In other words, is the topic broad enough to draw upon an existing body of knowledge while remaining narrow enough to execute within the given amount of time? Furthermore, the selected murder cases need to be relatively similar to the murder cases selected by Wardle in order to draw comparisons between the results at a later stage. To safeguard these concerns a number of choices have been made to guarantee feasibility.

Firstly, the timeframe has been restricted to articles about child murder cases from four decades, the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2010s. This may seem like a vast period of time, however, further restrictions have been built in, such as the number of child murder cases. Examining articles about child murder from these four decades gives an insight into long-term narrative trends. Furthermore, by selecting child murder cases from these specific decades many of the results (apart from those in the 2010s) can be compared and contrasted

to the results found in Wardle (2006) who compared the development of child murder coverage by British and American newspapers in three decades 1930s, 1960s and 1990s. Results from the 2010s will add new insights into the further development of narrative trends.

The second limitation holds relation to the perpetrators. The decision has been made to only examine child murder cases where the perpetrator has reached the age of adulthood and is a stranger to the victim. This allows for the comparison of the results of this dissertation to findings by Wardle (2006) who similarly only investigated child murder narratives in cases where perpetrators were strangers to their victims and had reached the age of adulthood.

Thirdly, the number of case studies has been limited to seven. This is to safeguard the feasibility. A larger number of cases would require multiple researchers since coding the articles consumes a great amount of time. An average of 80 articles have been written about each child murder case. This means that the final database will comprise of a sample of just under 600 articles. This number is more than enough since experience teaches that around 300 samples produce reasonable results, according to (Koetsenruijter & Van Hout, 2014, p. 200). Examining two case studies per decade, with the exception of the 1930s will an insight into the development of child murder narratives through the years.

The final limitations to the scope are the choice to only examine articles that were written in Dutch newspapers, to code articles until the day that the perpetrator is convicted.

An important aspect of the operationalisation is the question of validity. Validity in the context of quantitative content analysis refers to the extent to the question if that which is claimed to be measured is actually being measured. That is, does the method actually measure that which you want to measure?

To this question the answer is affirmative. This thesis aims to examine what types of narratives (institutional, societal and personal) are used by Dutch newspapers when reporting on child murder cases in the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2010s. A quantitative content analysis is suited well to this task since a process of coding just under 600 articles (samples) and the results that follow from this can be compared and contrasted with an existing theory that uses a similar coding scheme, on similar child murders, in similar decades.

### **3.3 The codebook**

#### **Personal**

A personal article is mainly focused around the victim, the offender and/or their direct family. The following six bullet points are the criteria that are related to that which constitutes a personal narrative.

- Reaction/impact of murder on direct family

Score a (1) when: there is a quote from any member of the direct family of the victim. Or, when a description of the emotions and/or reaction of the direct family of the victim is given by a third party, for example a journalist.

- Descriptions of the victim's life

Score a (1) when: anything is written about the victim's past. For example, what school the child attended, their hobby's, what kind of character they had.

- Picture of victim (including sketches)

Score a (1) when: a picture of the victim is present.

- Description of the offender's life

Score a (1) when: anything is written about the offender's life. For example, what kind of a person he/she is, what kind of profession they practiced (or none).

- Offender's attitude/demeanour after the murder

Score a (1) when: anything is written about how the offender feels after the murder. This could be his/her reactions in court, or whether he/she is cooperative during the police investigation (or not).

- Picture of the offender (including sketches)

Score a (1) when: a picture of the victim is present.

### **Institutional**

An institutional article contains expressions and/or descriptions from the police, the judiciary, or social institutions. All information about the police investigation, the court case, and psychological analyses are included. The following five bullet points are the criteria that are related to that which constitutes an institutional narrative.

- Expressions by the police

Score a (1) when: a police officer and/or the press officer are quoted or referred to.

- Expressions by the judiciary

Score (1) when: a member of the judiciary is quoted or when they are referred to.

- Expressions by social institutions

Score (1) when: a representative of a social institution (a psychologist for example) is quoted or referred to.

- Information about the police investigation

Score a (1) when: any information is written about the ongoing investigation.

- Information about the trial

Score a (1) when: any information concerning the proceedings or results of the trial are written.

### **Societal**

"Societal" narratives focus on the response of the local community to the crimes, and concerns about the greater impact on society).

These articles are about the greater impact on society in the broadest sense of the word. This includes demonstrations for justice or to express compassion with the victim.

The following six bullet points are the criteria that are related to that which constitutes a societal narrative.

- Description of societal reaction

Score a (1) when: any description is given of the reaction by a community or a group (not an individual) to the child murder in the form of a demonstration or a people coming together to search for the victim's body. This can also include mass funeral attendance or mobs of people expressing their anger at the offender.

- Picture of societal involvement

Score a (1) when: there is a picture in the newspaper of the community in action. Whether it be a demonstration, an angry mob, or people turning out in large numbers to attend the funeral of a victim.

- Expression by neighbours and acquaintances of the victim

Score a (1) when: direct neighbours, friends, classmates, teachers and any other acquaintances of the victim are quoted in an article or when their opinions are written down and referred to.

- Expressions by those living near the murder scene

Score a (1) when: anyone who lives in the neighbourhood of the crime scene is quoted or his/her opinion about the child murder are referred to.

- Criticism of the police, judiciary, social institutions and media

Score a (1) when: criticism is given of any of the institutions mentioned above. For instance, when it is mentioned that people believe the investigation to be taking too long, or that the sentencing is too soft.

- Murder is direct cause for expressed fears and concerns

Score a (1) when: it is written or people are quoted directly saying that the murder has made them fearful or concerned. For instance about whether they still believe it to be safe for their children to play outside or walk to school alone.

### **3.4 Sampling: identifying and selecting the cases**

Choosing which child murder cases were to be investigated in this dissertation was a difficult task. In nearly each decade there have been more than two child murder cases, it was therefore decided that the cases that had the largest number of articles written about them were to be included.

In The Netherlands there are less child murders than in Britain or the USA, mainly due to the difference in population size. It was therefore difficult to find child murder cases that have been extensively covered in the news media. However, a selection was still made on the basis of earlier publications. Authors such as Leistra & Nieuwbeerta (2003) have written extensively about child murder cases in The Netherlands. Their book “Moord en doodslag in Nederland” which can be translated as “murder and manslaughter in The Netherlands” was helpful in the selection of case studies. Additionally, the book “Een moord kost meer levens” which can be translated as “A murder costs more than just one life” by De Vries (2002) has helped in gathering an insight into the most important and talked about child murder cases in The Netherlands in the past decades.

Having gained an insight into child murder cases in The Netherlands there was only one question left to answer: which cases will be investigated in this dissertation? Some murder cases were extremely violent, yet they had received little attention by the news media. An example of this is the brutal murder of the three siblings Mahmoud (10), Nawal (7) and Karam (3) in Wageningen (1998). Surprisingly, only 12 articles appeared about this triple murder case in Dutch newspapers which was not enough for a substantial research project. To

find out how many articles were written about each case two online databases were used: Lexisnexis and Delpher.

### 3.4.1 Use of online databases to select case studies

The online database Delpher has indexed large numbers of Dutch newspaper articles in the period 1618 to 1995. To find all the articles that were written about murder cases in this period Delpher was used. The online database Lexisnexis has indexed the majority of newspaper articles written from 1980 up until today. Similarly, this database has been used to find all the articles that were written about child murder cases in the periods 1990 and 2010.

### 3.4.2 The selected case studies

The case studies that will be examined, chosen by the number of articles written on them are the following:

- 1930: The murder of Sara Beugeltasch, 65 articles.
- 1960: The murder of Bastiaan Bloemena (112 articles) and H el ene Isaac (35 articles).
- 1990: The murder of Jessica Laven (33 articles) and Nymphe Poolman (78 articles).
- 2010: The murder of Jennefer van Oostende (218 articles) and Ximena Pieterse (47 articles).

### 3.5 The creation of an own dataset

What followed is the creation of an own dataset by coding every article written about each of the seven selected murder cases, two cases per decade. Each article during this process was coded according to the dominant narrative frame. For example, an article that focussed heavily on the police investigation was coded as having an institutional narrative.

This is an essential part of the data collecting process as it provides raw material for the quantitative analysis. Figure 3 (below) gives an impression of the excel sheet used to give shape to the dataset. It shows the coding for some of the articles on the murder of Sara Beugeltasch in the 1930s:

**Figure 3 – an example of the excel coding system:**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
1	Murder of Sara Beugeltasch																		
2	Article code		AH280834TC280834	DB28834	DT280834	TG280834	FD280834	AC280834	NC280834	BC280834	DC280834	HC290834	TG290834	ED290834	VC290834	BC290834	AR290834		
3	Personal																		
4	Reaction/impact of murder on direct family																		1
5	Descriptions of the victim's life		1																
6	Picture of victim (including sketches)																		
7	Description of offender's life		1										1	1			1		1
8	Descriptions of the offender after the murder												1	1					
9	Picture of the offender (including sketches)												1	1					
10																			
11																			
12	Institutional																		
13	Expressions by the police																		1
14	Expressions by the judiciary																		
15	Expressions by social institutions																		
16	Information about the police investigation		3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	3	1	1	3	1	1
17	Information about the trial																		
18																			
19	Societal																		
20	Description of a societal reaction (Example: demonstrations)		1				1		1				3	1	3	3	1		
21	Image of societal involvement						1												
22	Expression by neighbours and acquaintances of the victim						1		1		1	1							
23	Expressions by people living near the crime scene						1					1	1						
24	Criticism of the police, judiciary, social institutions and media																		
25	Murder is direct cause for expressed fears and concerns						1						1						
26																			
27	Highest (M/I/P)		3	1	1	1	4	1	2	1	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	1	1
28	P		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	0	1
29	I		3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	3	1	1	4	1	1
30	M		1	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	1	1	4	1	3	3	1	0	0
31																			
32	Overall (M/I/P)		1	1	1	1	M	I	M	I	I	I	M	I	M	M	I	I	P
33			1	1	1	1	M	I	M	I	I	I	M	I	M	M	I	I	I
34	Societal		0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
35	Institutional		1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
36	Personal		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

To determine whether an article has a mainly institutional, social or personal frame a codebook was constructed on the basis of a similar research project by Wardle (2006). Each article is 'scored' depending on whether or not it meets individual criteria formulated in the codebook. For example, if an article contains only expressions by the police and information about the investigation then a 'one' (1) is scored in the related boxes. Overall it is then determined to have an institutional narrative. This process is repeated for each individual article.

An algorithm imposed on excel adds up the total number of individual criteria met per narrative to determine which is dominant. For example, if an article is coded as having two institutional criteria and three personal criteria then the algorithm automatically registers the article as a personal article. A three weighs much heavier than a one which is normally used when a criteria is met and therefore causes a manual override.

Each article can be looked up easily in the databases due to a unique tag that is attributed to each piece. For example, an article written by De Telegraaf (the largest newspaper in The Netherlands in terms of circulation) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1989 would be called TG220189. Where TG is the abbreviation for the newspaper name and the numbers reflecting the date it was written. This system of tagging works well because newspapers never publish two articles about the same murder case on the same day since their publications are printed. This makes it both reliable and easy to search articles in the databases. All abbreviations are found in the codebook.

### **3.7 Reliability: Cohen's kappa**

As a measure of reliability this thesis employs Cohen's kappa which is a statistic that measures inter-rater agreement. The most important variable of this research being the reliability of the codebook in producing similar outcomes when different coders use it on the same dataset. A solid inter-rater reliability makes it possible for researchers in the future to use this codebook adding to the academic value of this thesis a measure of reproducibility.

To calculate the kappa two raters (R1) and (R2) coded the same thirty-five articles independently. Using the same codebook. The codebook contains seventeen variables. These variables are the criteria that determine whether an article has a dominant personal, institutional or societal narrative. Using an excel spreadsheet designed by Jason King and Wallace Judd available on [www.ccitonline.org/jking/homepage/kappa1.xls](http://www.ccitonline.org/jking/homepage/kappa1.xls) it was calculated that all variables had values between 0.55 and 0.85 .

There are a few ways to interpret what this figure really means. This thesis relies on an interpretation by (Altman, 1991, p. 404):

- Poor agreement = Less than 0.20
- Fair agreement = 0.20 to 0.40
- Moderate agreement = 0.40 to 0.60
- Good agreement = 0.60 to 0.80
- Very good agreement = 0.80 to 1.00

The codebook thus has a "good agreement."

### 3.8 Limitations

Every research project runs into limitations. This one is no different. One major limitation has to do with the use of databases as a source of raw material, namely the newspaper articles. Delpher is a database that consists of scans of articles. Researchers can see the original article including the images and the layout using this database. Lexisnexis on the other hand only shows the text of the articles in its system. Therefore, researchers cannot see either the layout of the original article nor the images that may have accompanied the article. It does give an indication when an article has an image and sporadically there is a description of what can be seen on the picture. This made it more difficult to code articles accurately in the 1990s and 2010s as Lexisnexis was the only database that could be used to look up articles from this period.

Furthermore, unfortunately there was only one murder case in the 1930s that was committed by an adult who was also a complete stranger to the victim. Therefore there is only one case for the 1930s. Moreover, in the 1990s the most talked about case was that of Jennefer van Oostende with a total of 218 articles written up until the sentencing of her killer. However, he was not a complete stranger to her. He was her brother-in-law, having had a relationship with Jennefer's mother. This was not ideal because, as mentioned in the methodology section under "scope", child murders had to be committed by an unknown adult to maximise the compatibility of results from this study with Wardle (2006). He did live separately from the family. Since there was no other child murder case that met the criteria for this thesis, this case had to be included. This was not preferred but it was necessary.

## 4. Results

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When discussing the results of this quantitative content analysis it is important to keep the research question this thesis has set out to answer in mind: *what types of narratives are used by Dutch newspapers when reporting on child murder cases (1930-2010)?*

The results section of this thesis starts by presenting the findings per case where results are given context through quotes from the source material and background information and ends with an overview of the quantitative data gathered on narrative trends in Dutch child murder reporting.

### 4.1 Contextualising the cases

In this section cases will be discussed individually. The context of the murder will be sketched followed by a presentation of the narrative trends. Quotes from the newspaper articles are added to give an impression and a feel of the most characteristic narratives.

#### 4.1.1 Sara Beugeltasch

What stands out most about the newspaper coverage of the murder of 8-year-old Sara Beugeltasch is that a sizable number of articles (20%) that had a societal narrative focus. This is significantly higher than one would expect from the period when compared to Wardle's findings where only 2% of articles written in the 1930s had a social narrative focus. The vast majority (77%) were institutional and only 3% had personal narratives.

As this case is the only Dutch child murder case that meets the criteria for comparison in the 1930s it clouds the results for this period strongly. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to examine why there were a comparatively large number of articles with a societal narrative focus in this period.

Sara's murder on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1934 caused great social upheaval. The main reason for the strong societal reaction to her murder was due to the fact that Sara was of Jewish descent and lived in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood in the capital city of The Netherlands, Amsterdam. The street she lived in was – and still is – called the “Jodenbreestraat” which translates into Jewish Broad Street. An area originally settled by Jews from Portugal and Spain who migrated to Holland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. When news came out of Sara's disappearance the closely knit community sprang into action.

Various newspapers describe how on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August hundreds of residents searched for Sara and ultimately found her body that was hidden in a wooden box in a vegetable storage house not far from where she had gone missing. One described the scene outside Saras's house as: “Het was zwart van de mensen,” (*Nieuwe Apeldoornse Courant*, 28 August 1934, pp. 1).

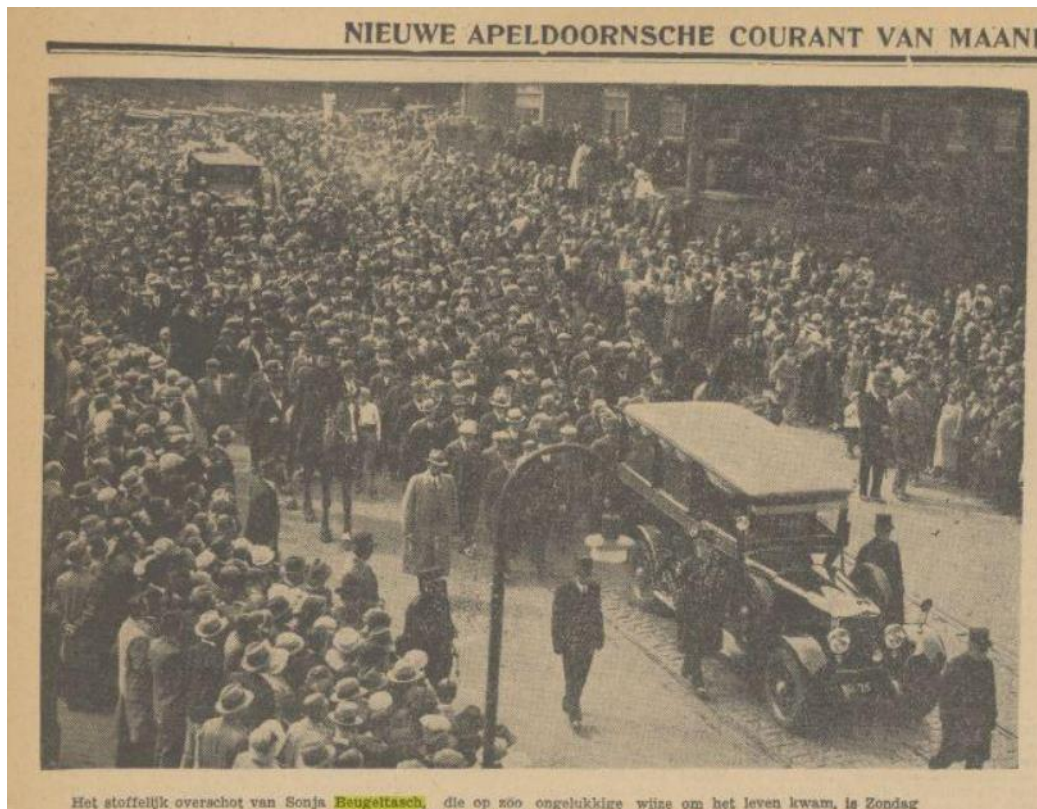
On that same day, the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, a suspect was taken into custody. It was a man who worked at the vegetable storage and who turned out to be Sara's killer. Crowds had already formed that day outside of the police station but on the 29<sup>th</sup> the situation escalated to the extent that the police had to disperse the crowd of hundreds of people with mounted horses, the *Bredasche Courant* describes.



By the 31<sup>st</sup> of August the situation was still tense. In the meantime the suspect had confessed to killing Sara and had agreed to go to the scene of the crime to reconstruct what had happened that fateful afternoon. When the community got a hint of the news hundreds of people flocked to the police station where he was being held. Various newspapers describe how on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August how the crowd stayed at the police station until late in the night and only just before 2 o'clock in the morning could the police take the killer to the crime scene in an undercover vehicle.

The response of the close-knit Jewish community to Sara's murder, turning out in vast numbers at the police station and later at her funeral, had a great impact on the types of narratives and caused the coverage to focus on the societal aspects of the story. Only 3 out of the 65 articles written about the murder of Sara Beugeltasch were accompanied by a picture. Nevertheless, the images (one shown below) give an impression of the turnout for the procession.

**Picture of funeral procession Sara Beugeltasch in Amsterdam. (*Nieuwe Apeldoornse Courant*, 3 September 1934, pp. 3).**



What is further worth noting about the coverage of Sara's murder is that it shows an early mention of sterilisation of sadists as a possible solution to ending sexually driven murderers. The question of whether paedophiles, then referred to as "sadists," could be prevented from sexual crimes by sterilisation was put forward in an article by a newspaper called *Het Vaderland* in 1934. It stands out because the fear of paedophiles is noted in most of the literature to have taken off primarily in the 1990s, a time when paedophiles were portrayed as the ultimate "folk devil." The article shows that six decades earlier at least one newspaper was already asking the same sorts of questions that we hear and read about today such as the chemical castration of paedophiles.

#### 4.1.2 Bastiaan Bloemena

Bastiaan Bloemena (9-years-old) left the house to visit a friend on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1971, something he did regularly, but that day he did not come home. His body was found the next day by a fisherman who saw a rolled up rug in the bushes, when he opened it he found Bastiaan's naked body.

Much of the coverage concerning the murder was focussed around the rug as research revealed the company that manufactured it had sold only one rug of that type in The Netherlands. The rug thus became the key to solving the child murder. As a result the vast majority (82%) of articles were written with an institutional narrative focussing mainly on the police investigation. This included articles early on in the investigation asking citizens to inform the police if they knew of anything concerning the case and many pieces on how the police were unable to solve the case and that the unique rug was the key to solving it.

Despite the apparently homogenous nature of the coverage there were various social developments and respectively newspaper articles with a societal narrative focus (15%) that are well worth discussing that played a significant role in the overall coverage. The most significant of these is the discussion on the danger of child predators to society.

Bastiaan's death was often brought up in relation to the phenomenon of child predators as he himself had (the papers assumed correctly) become a victim of one. The predators were described as men who would lure children to a secluded place such as an alleyway or a vehicle where they could engage sexually with them. Various opinions on this phenomenon were voiced, the two most dominant and recurring explained in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

In one newspaper article the argument is put forth that child predators are (with a few exceptions) not the dirty old men that they are generally portrayed to be. Furthermore it is written that most are "niet gevaarlijk", meaning not dangerous, and that castration would not be an effective measure to stop their sexual desires (*Het Vrije Volk*, 18 August 1971). Moreover, the article states that the panic is largely exaggerated because newspapers focus too much on the exceptional cases (such as that of Bastiaan) where a child is sexually abused and killed and forget that the vast majority of sexual offences are "betrekkelijk licht," meaning relatively mild. Overall it is a piece that in terms of Cohen (1972) and Hunt (1992) attempts to extinguish the moral panic of the threat of child sexual abuse and at the same time provides arguments aimed at correcting the image that has formed in the media of child predators as "dirty old men", the scapegoats/folk devils.

A fundamentally different angle is presented a week later in a different paper (*De Telegraaf*, 25 August 1971, pp. 7). The author describes in great detail how Dutch police are challenged with the fact that many citizens are unwilling to file charges and don't realise the severity of the damage that sexual abuse inflicts. This is exemplified by the example of a woman who was asked to testify in an abuse case but declined saying that she would only testify if her husband or son was accused of such a crime. The police transmit a moderating message as well stating that the total number of child sexual abuse cases has decreased in recent years and that there is no reason to panic however they note that it is important to stay alert.

A mere 3% of the articles about the murder of Bastiaan Bloemena had a personal narrative focus. The main reason is that the police wasn't able to solve Bastiaan's murder, the family were not keen on interviews and there was no murderer to write about. It essentially became a "cold case" until the body of 10-year-old H el ene Isaac (also from Amsterdam) was found 3 years later.

#### 4.1.3 H el ene Isaac

H el ene Isaac (10-years-old) went missing on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1974. She, just like Bastiaan, had been playing outside and never returned home. The same man that murdered Bastiaan, Gerard Spruit, also killed H el ene. He worked as a comic book delivery man and lured both children to his house as they were fascinated with the comics he had in his car. This was revealed by the perpetrator himself during the interrogation sessions where he confessed to being H el ene's killer. During those sessions he also confessed to killing Bastiaan 3 years earlier. This resulted in a high percentage of articles having a personal narrative focus as newspapers wrote portraits about the man who killed not one but two children.

Although the case would seem fit for controversy only 35 articles were written about H el ene's murder. The majority (49%) had a personal narrative focus while 46% had an institutional narrative focus, a mere 6% were societal. The narrative focus of articles is roughly divided into two periods. The institutional articles were written largely up to the point that the murderer had been identified. The personal articles emerged after the identification of the murderer.

The majority of articles with institutional narratives were written before the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1974 which is when the perpetrator confessed to his crime. The articles focussed on reporting purely information about the progress of the police investigation. A few titles of articles written in that period are presented in chronological order below to give an impression:

- "Meisje (10) vermoord." (*Limburgs Dagblad*, 07 August 1974, pp. 1.)
- "Kleding vermoord meisje gevonden." (*De Waardheid*, 08 August 1974)
- "Man verhoord over moord op 10-jarig meisje." (*De Waarheid*, 09 August 1974, pp. 6.)
- "Man bekend moord op twee kinderen." (*Limburgs Dagblad*, 12 August 1974, pp. 1.)

Articles written after the 12th of August tended to have a personal narrative focus. The reason for this was that once the papers were informed that H el ene's murderer also killed Bastiaan their interest shifted to who Gerard Spruit, the man who killed two children, was. In the articles that followed it became clear that Spruit was a heavily disturbed individual who had already been convicted for sexual indecency with a child in 1941. He was convicted again in 1952 and even in 1973 (in between the two murders) he was accused of molestation of a young boy.

Spruit was a married man and had 4 children. This became a separate narrative as various articles described how he managed to persuade his wife not to go to the police when she saw their old living room rug which had gone missing on television and in local newspapers during the investigation into the murder of Bastiaan Bloemena. According to Spruit's wife he used phrases such as 'you don't actually think I'm a child murderer do you?' to take away her concerns.

#### 4.1.4 Jessica Laven

Jessica Laven (11-years-old) was murdered by Michel Stockx, a Belgian freight driver working in The Netherlands. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1991 he managed to lure Jessica away from the public swimming pool where she was enjoying the afternoon. Jessica's body was found on the side of a road on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August of that same year. She had been strangled to death.

The number of unique articles written about Jessica's murder totals only thirty-three. The vast majority (85%) are of an institutional nature, meaning that they focussed primarily on the police investigation and subsequent trial. A further 15% of articles are written with dominant societal narrative and none with a dominant personal narrative.

What stands out most is that such a high percentage of the articles focussed on the institutional aspects of the story. The only way this can be explained is by stating the obvious namely, that journalists failed to produce portraits of the victim and the impact of the crime on the family and the wider community. Most articles contained little more than the information which the police released regarding the progress made in the investigation. This also includes the police using newspapers as a platform to ask for tips and gather information from the general public.

Although only a few articles were written with a dominant societal narrative the themes that are treated in the articles are worth examining further. Take for instance the cementing of the term paedophilia, the discussion of questions of risk and a growing scepticism/criticism of social institutions.

The Dutch police force, in dire need for more information about the potential murderer, reached out to the Dutch paedophilia society with the request of publishing a sketch of the suspect in their papers. Various articles specifically use the word paedophile to describe the child murderer, even in headlines. This is a rupture with past practices as the murderer of H el ene Isaac and Bastiaan Bloemena in the 1970s was not called a paedophile but a child predator and neither was the murderer of Sara Beugeltasch in the 1930s.

In addition to paedophilia various articles hint at a new state of affairs in the modern world. Namely, that it might be a more dangerous and unpredictable place for children. For instance one article digs into the juxtaposition between two fundamental values, safety and freedom. The article raises the question how to teach children to be wary without feeling unsafe or scared (*De Telegraaf*, 02 August 1991, pp. 5.)

Furthermore, the coverage showed a great level of scepticism and at times dismay towards the institutions that managed judicial "terbeschikkingstelling," a system of preventive detention where felons with mental health issues live under supervision. The purpose of which is to help them cope with their mental health problems to the extent that they can reintegrate into society. The scepticism originated and had its roots in the fact that Jessica's murderer had spent five years in one of these clinics for sexually abusing children in 1982. However, in 1987 he was dismissed, against the advice of the head of the clinic S. Leeuwenstein. In an interview the head of the clinic expressed his criticism openly stating that he did not judge Stockx to be "cured" or ready to go back into society (*Limburgs Dagblad*, 29 November 1991.) Instead he had asked for the court to extend the time he would have to stay in the clinic but this was denied by the court and Stockx was allowed to go back into society.

#### 4.1.5 Nymphe Poolman

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1991 Nymphe Poolman (6-years-old) went to the grocery store with her dad. They lived in a small town near the border with Germany and instead of driving back home Nymphe wanted to walk. While she was walking back home German paedophile Georg Adler was sitting in his car in a parking lot. He was waiting for a child to walk by and Nymphe just happened to be the first child he saw. He got out and dragged her into his car to sexually abuse her. During this act he choked her to death. Adler claims he took her to a garbage disposal site where he put the body in a large barrel of chemicals that was destined to be transported to England for burning. However, Nymphe's body was never found. Largely due to this Nymphe's mother and father denied their daughter was dead, even after Adler had confessed and they continued to deny it even after he was convicted. Overall, 73% of articles about this child murder case had a dominant institutional narrative, 14% societal and 13% personal.

Stories with an institutional narrative were dominant as the police frequently shared the progress of the investigation. Nymphe's parents denying the death of their child caused the police to re-open and close the case a few times as citizens started to claim that they had seen Nymphe in all sorts of places. On one occasion in The Hague a woman who worked at a chips stand went to the police convinced that she had sold fries to Nymphe who she said was in the company of 5 Germans (*De Telegraaf*, 05 May 1992, pp. 8.). On another occasion a 28-year-old man traveling through Germany claimed that he had seen Nymphe at a car park in the company of two men, two women and some children.

Personal stories emerged from this denial as well. About three months after Nymphe had disappeared, her parents prepared a statement which they read at the community centre in their town. Her mother, who read the letter which assumed that Nymphe had been kidnapped, appealed to the kidnappers stating that if they returned their child that they would drop any charges (*De Telegraaf*, 18 December 1991, pp. 3.) By December of 1993 Adler had admitted his crime and had been convicted but Nymphe's parents insisted that their daughter was still alive. They went so far as to go to court to see if Adler's conviction could be overturned so that the case could be reopened. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December of that year a court ruled that it was time for the parents to accept that their daughter was dead.

The denial of Nymphe's death also translated into stories with social narratives. On one occasion, a year after she had gone missing Dutch businessmen displeased about a decision by the police to end the investigation into Nymphe's death, issued a f100.000 reward for the golden tip identifying her whereabouts. The police were openly angry stating that if they thought a reward would have been helpful they would have issued one (*Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 August 1992, pp. 3.)

On a different occasion Dutch MPs asked the justice minister whether the Dutch police could and would work with a German television programme aimed at resolving unsolved murders. As Nymphe's body had not yet been found there was a suspicion that she could be in Germany since her village was situated along the border (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 18-08-1992, pp. 1.) Furthermore, as a result of Nymphe's disappearance a study was conducted that showed 52% of parents had taken measures to ensure greater safety for their children. This included asking children to check in regularly and not letting them alone while performing out of house activities. The study also showed that both parents (about half)

and grandparents (around 70%) thought The Netherlands had become less safe for children over the past two years (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 20 February 1993, pp. 3.)

#### **4.1.6 Jennefer van Oostende**

Jennefer van Oostende from Rotterdam was 10-years-old when she was killed by her aunt's ex-boyfriend, Anthony K. She had gotten into an argument with her mom on the 8th of October 2011 and decided to go to her dad's house. By the end of the evening Jennefer had yet to arrive so her mother alarmed the police. Instead of going to her dad's house directly she first went to Anthony's, a place she visited regularly. In what according to the accounts can be defined as a fit of rage and madness Anthony hit and killed Jennefer. His own children (3- and 5-years-old) were home at the time and saw and/or heard it. An investigation into the cause of death revealed that Anthony may have also sexually abused her however he always denied the allegation.

Coverage of Jennefer's murder was extensive, 218 unique articles were written. The majority (54%) of articles about Jennefer's murder focussed on the institutional aspects of the story such as the progress of the police investigation and expressions by the judiciary on the charges and later the trial verdict. Only a limited number of articles (7%) had a dominant personal narrative. These pieces consisted mainly of statements given by Jennefer's direct family and descriptions of the murderer. Most notable about this case was the social upheaval that Jennefer's murder caused. Attributable to the fact that she and her family were liked and known by those in the neighbourhood. A relatively large number of articles with a societal narrative focus (39%) were written.

There is a diversity of themes within the corpus of articles that have a societal narrative focus. One that stands out is criticism by crime experts on the how the police force handled the case. In a range of articles various experts state that the police treated Jennefer's murder as that of a missing person too long instead of considering that she could have been kidnapped. In these articles the experts cite studies that show just how crucial it is for the police force to start a full-scale investigation early on as 74% of victims in such cases are killed within the first three hours. Especially when young girls disappear all should be spring into action.

Closely tied to the criticism of the police force is that of one of the tools the police force had at its disposal, a so-called Amber Alert which allows the police to send information of missing children to citizens phones. The Amber Alert message for Jennefer was sent 28 hours after she had gone missing. Many considered this to be too late and thus Labour Party MPs asked the relevant minister whether he could look into the functioning of the system.

What also cannot go unnoticed is two social developments, a petition to increase prison sentence length for child murderers and the emergence of vigils where people would march through the streets in silence as an act of protest against senseless violence. Jennefer's neighbours started a petition calling the government to look into increasing the sentence for child murder to a life-long one. It received 35.000 signatures and a local political party in Rotterdam even helped out in gathering signatures however due to a lack of organisation many signatures turned out to be unverifiable. Nevertheless, the petition did put the topic on the political agenda. The second development that emerged as a grassroots movement was that of holding silent marches, in Dutch 'stille tochten.' Thousands of people from Jennefer's

neighbourhood but also surrounding areas and the Mayor of Rotterdam Ahmed Aboutaleb participated in the event to protest senseless violence (*Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 21 October 2011, pp. 11.)

While social developments were more prevalent there was also a development in the reporting on stories with a personal narrative focus. On the 11th of October 2011 NRC Handelsblad published a transcript of a Facebook conversation between Jennefer's sister Sandra and some of her friends. The conversation, which was open for the public to see, starts with Sandra stating her sister has gone missing. The next day she writes that her sister has been found dead at Anthony's house, that he is the murderer and that his children saw everything.

#### **4.1.7 Ximena Pieterse**

15-year-old Ximena Pieterse was left stranded in The Hague after going to a party. Her phone battery being empty she did not know what to do. At that moment 25-year-old Stanley Anschütz walked past and offered to let her charge her phone at his house which was nearby. Ximena accepted and eventually fell asleep on a bed in Stanley's house. Little did Ximena know that Stanley, who used amphetamines that night, also suffered from Aspergers Syndrome. While she was fast asleep he stabbed her twenty times. That same morning, on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2012 he dumped her naked body in the middle of the street near his house.

The coverage of Ximena's murder is unique in the sense that it is the only case within the corpus of this study where articles with a personal narrative focus form the majority (57%) of the total reporting. Furthermore, 32% of the articles have a societal narrative focus and a mere 11% are institutional.

A significant part of this divergence from the norm can be attributed to Staley's history of mental health issues which significantly boosted the total number of articles with a dominant personal narrative focus. Out of the 47 unique articles written about Ximena's murder 35 contained information regarding Stanley's life before that fatal night. The vast majority of these articles are about a crime that he committed when he was 15-years-old. At the time he got bullied regularly, due to this frustration and in a fit of rage attributable to his Aspergers he stabbed a random person at a football match. He was subsequently sentenced to 4 years Tbs for youths, which stands for "terbeschikkingstelling." A system of preventive detention where felons with mental health issues live under supervision.

Other articles with a dominant personal narrative focussed on Ximena's family. The titles of some of these articles indicate the position of the family clearly. For instance, De Telegraaf published an article on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2012 titled: "How can we move forward from this? Ximena's family distraught." The title of another article in Algemeen Dagblad on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2012 translates as "It's disgusting that Stanley A. got a second chance." Which refers to the fact that he was not kept in youth preventive detention even though he was still a danger to society.

Ximena's parents were not alone in thinking that Stanley should have stayed behind bars in a prison or in a clinic his entire life. In articles with a societal narrative focus there was significant discussion about what the fate of youths who suffer from a mental disorder that cannot be managed or cured should be. In fact, Stanley's old caretaker when he was still

in preventive detention said that he should have never been released. According to the caretaker he was untreatable and should have been locked up indefinitely as he was a danger to society (*De Telegraaf*, 29 February 2012, pp. 7.) However, this view was not shared by all in society. The Mayor of The Hague, where Stanley lived, pleaded for more supervision of ex-criminals (*Trouw*, 09 March 2012, pp. 9.) The murder was discussed in parliament where the Labour Party and the Liberal Party enquired the relevant minister whether ex-criminals with mental health issues were monitored well enough after they had been allowed to go back home.

#### 4.2 Development of narrative trends

Figure 4 (shown below) is the result of coding near to six hundred articles written about the 7 Dutch child murder cases described earlier across the span of nearly a century. Each ultimately being coded as having either a dominant institutional, societal or personal narrative.

**Figure 4 – bar chart showing results of child murder narratives in Dutch newspapers (1930-2010)**



In the 1930s the vast majority of articles (77%) had a clear institutional narrative focus while 20% of articles had a societal narrative and only 3% were personal. In the 1960s the majority (73%) of articles had an institutional narrative. The percentage of articles with a societal narratives decreased from 20% in the 1930s to just 13%. Articles driven by personal narratives increased to 11% in 1960. Results show no significant changes to the composition of child murder narratives in the 1990s in relation to the two earlier decades. Institutional narratives still make up the bulk (77%) while articles written with societal (14%) and personal (9%) narratives remain an exception. It is only in the 2010s that significant changes take hold. Even though articles with an institutional narrative still constitute a majority the percentage of articles written with a societal narrative focus rise from 14% in the 1960s to 38% in the 2010s. Personal narratives also rise but not significantly.

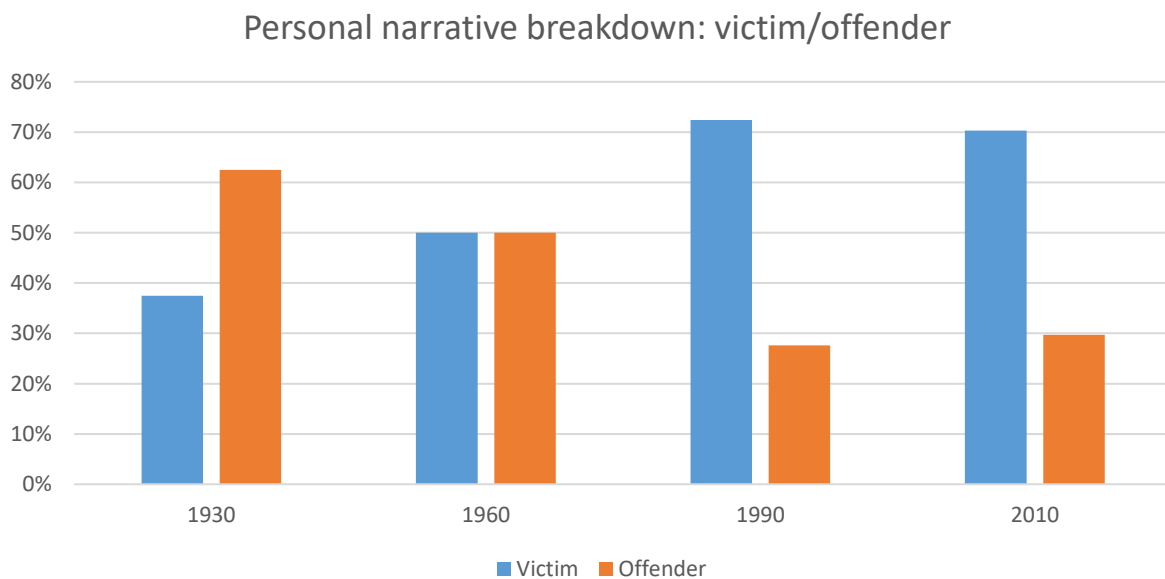


### 4.3 Personal narratives: offender or victim driven?

An article is coded as being ‘personal’ when the majority of the content is of such nature. In other words, it is personal if most of the article refers to events like the reaction of the family of the victim to the murder, or if it is full of descriptions of the victim’s life or pictures of the victim. Furthermore, it is personal if it gives an insight into the offender’s life before he committed the crime, this could be about his mental health or seemingly normal family life. Moreover, an article is personal if it describes the attitude, utterances and actions of the offender after he has committed the crime or reactions of the offender’s family to him committing such an act. Lastly, pictures or sketches of the perpetrator add to the personal narrative focus.

These differing criteria that are used for coding the articles determine whether a piece has a personal narrative. In essence most of these criteria can be divided into on the one hand information about the offender and on the other hand information about the victim. This study shows that Dutch newspapers moved from offender-centred reporting in the 1930s to victim-centred reporting in the 2010s, as is illustrated below in Figure 5.

**Figure 5 – bar chart showing personal narrative breakdown results**



In the 1930s, 38% of the articles coded as personal were about the victim while 63% of the articles coded as personal were about the offender. In the 1960s, half of the articles coded as personal are about the victim and half are about the offender. The 1990s is a turning point. In that decade 72% of the articles coded as personal are about the victim and only 28% are about the offender. This trend stagnates in the 2010s for which the results are similar to the 1990s.

## 5. Discussion

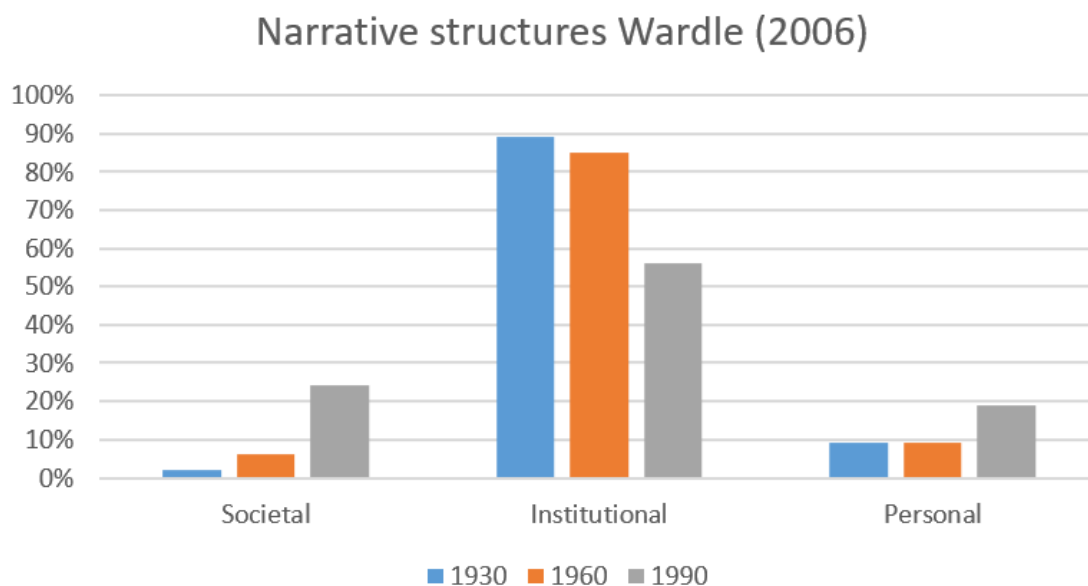
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In this section the results are examined in light of the research question and existing literature as presented in the theoretical framework. First, the quantitative aspects of this study are explored by comparing and contrasting the results of this study with American and British child murder narrative development as studied by Wardle (2006). Secondly, a thematic analysis of the most important narrative developments in Dutch child murder reporting is employed relating findings back to the literature as outlined in the theoretical framework. This section concludes with a recommendation for future research in this subject.

### 5.1 Comparing and contrasting the narrative development

The results of this thesis as shown in Figure 4 and the findings by Wardle (2006) as shown below in Figure 6 concerning the types of narratives used by newspapers to cover child murder cases differ substantially from one and other.

**Figure 6 (Wardle, 2006, p. 520) – made into bar chart**



Dutch child murder reporting in the 1930s produced a far higher percentage of articles that had a societal narrative. Out of all the articles written in British and American newspapers in the 1930s a mere 2% had a societal narrative compared to 20% in Dutch newspapers in that same decade.

There are however also figures that are relatively similar, take for instance those of the 1960s. Wardle found 85% of American and British articles to be institutional, 9% personal and 6% societal. Dutch newspapers produced articles with relatively similar results, 73% being institutional, 14% personal and 13% societal. Furthermore, both in Dutch child murder reporting as well as British and American reporting in the 1930s and the 1960s the vast majority of articles had an institutional narrative.

The move towards more personal and societal narratives that occurs in Wardle's research in the 1990s is not duplicated in the results obtained by this dissertation. This shows a clear difference in the types of narratives that articles were shaped around in the United

States and Britain compared to The Netherlands. The narrative focus of articles written by American and British newspaper in the 1990s changed dramatically as the percentage of articles with a societal narrative increased from 6% in the 1960s to 24% in the 1990s and the percentage of articles with a personal narrative increased from 9% in the 1960s to 19% in the 1990s. While Dutch newspapers in the 1990s shaped their articles around the same narratives as they had done in the 1930s and 1960s with most pieces being institutional (just under 80%) while personal and societal narratives made up the remaining 20%.

This research shows that in contrast to Wardle’s work on child murder reporting by British and American newspapers there is no movement towards more personal and societal narratives in Dutch child murder reporting in the 1990s. In the 2010s however, the picture starts to change.

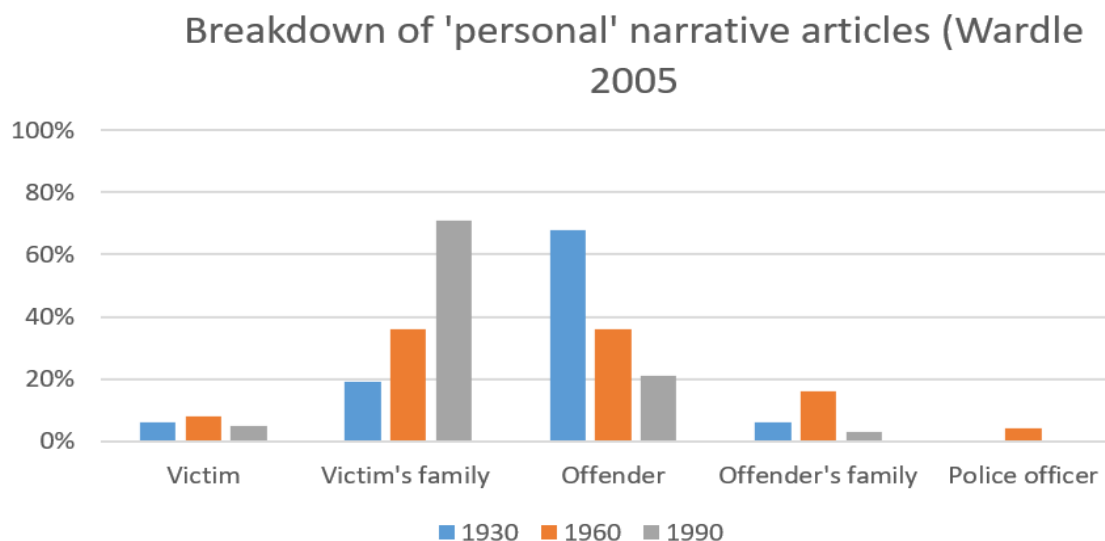
Dutch newspapers in the 2010s produced a vastly higher percentage of articles with a societal narratives than in any of the decades prior. In this decade 38% of all articles are shaped around societal narratives. Furthermore, the percentage of articles with a personal narrative also increases to 19%. Child murder narratives in Dutch newspapers in the 2010s resemble the child murder narrative development of the British and American newspapers in the 1990s.

## 5.2 A move from offender- to victim-centred narratives

This study shows that Dutch child murder coverage shifted from focussing primarily on the offender to writing mainly about the victim, see Figure 5. In the 1930s the vast majority (63%) of articles with a dominant personal narrative were about the life of the offender previous to the crime or his behaviour after. In the 1960s articles increasingly focussed on the victim instead of the offender bringing the balance to an even 50%. By the 1990s articles the vast majority (72%) of articles with a personal narrative wrote about the victim rather than the offender. In the 2010s this development plateaued nonetheless it could now be concluded that Dutch newspapers wrote more about the victim than the offender.

The same trend is seen in British and American child murder coverage. This is illustrated below in Figure 7:

**Figure 7 (Wardle, 2006, p. 523) – made into a bar chart**



By presenting the data as gathered by Wardle in the form of a bar chart it becomes evident that British and American newspapers and tabloids focussed more and more on the victim's life and their family's reaction to the murder than the offender or his family. In the 1930s a solid 68% of the articles coded as personal were about the offender. In the 1990s, 71% of the articles coded as personal were about the victim's family. A shift had taken place.

The question that sticks out and is particularly poignant in this section of the thesis is whether there is a relationship between the forces that caused British and American coverage of child murders to focus more on the victims and the movement in The Netherlands that caused newspapers to write less about the offenders and more about the victims.

In the United States and Britain coverage of child murders became more victim-orientated due to on the one hand an intensification of competition and on the other hand a social movement for recognition of the suffering of victims.

As Alastair Hetherington, a former Guardian editor, is quoted as having said: "sex, scandal and crime is something that every journalist is looking for" (Wardle, 2006, p. 519). In an increasingly competitive environment where newspapers have lost large amounts of revenue due to technological advances that have drawn advertisers who would traditionally pay for their name in the paper elsewhere economic considerations have become even more pressing. In recent years economic factors have only increased Welbers et al., (2015) demonstrated that the news selection process at the five largest newspapers in The Netherlands is affected by the number of clicks an article gets online. Focussing on the victim attracts readers, clicks and in turn boosts revenues.

The victim's rights movement in the 1980s that presented the victim-perpetrator relationship as a zero-sum game is another powerful factor that caused British and American newspapers to reorient their focus, according to Wardle (2006). It had the effect of creating a taboo culture where showing compassion for the offender was per definition seen as an unjust insult to the victim. However, do these factors have any noticeable role in the decision of Dutch newspapers to move from offender- to victim-driven stories?

It would be exciting to write that these global movements had a direct impact on Dutch journalism however there is no evidence that this is the case. While it is undeniable that Dutch newspapers have faced the same economic pressures as journalists across the world it did not reflect in the manner in which articles on child murder cases were written. Not a single article stood out as being overtly aimed at gaining attention on the basis of stating gruelling facts or showing a disgusting picture. Nor was there a hint in any paper of sexual connotations when a murdered child had also been abused.

The explanation for the shift towards victim-centred personal narratives in Dutch reporting is not as mysterious or buried in academic theories as one may think. As a matter of fact it is actually rather transparent. The answer lies in the nature of the cases themselves. Take for example the coverage of the murder of Ximena Pieterse in 2012. Ximena's murder is the only case in this study where the majority (57%) of the article were written with a dominant personal narrative. A large number of these articles were about Ximena's killer, Stanley Anschutz as he had extensive mental health issues and had been convicted when he was a teenager for stabbing someone in a fit of rage. An even larger number (35 out of a total

of 47) contained some information about Ximena's life. Furthermore, 20 out of 47 articles contained some sort of reaction by Ximena's direct family to the murder. Her parents gave a number of interviews in which they express their loss and sadness. It is thus purely dependent on details such as whether the parents of a murdered child are willing to give interviews that a high number of personal articles are centred around the victim.

### **5.3 A thematic analysis: comparing and contrasting narrative trends**

This section links the results with the theoretical framework by comparing and contrasting two dominant themes running through both this study as well as the broader literature on the subject of child murder reporting.

#### **5.3.1 Risk society**

Ulrich Beck's "Risikogesellschaft" or "Risk Society" in English deals with the question of how a society reacts to threats that are essentially a product of modernisation. In broader terms it refers to the fears of ordinary people for events they have little to no control over. Within the field of journalism studies it is a theory that is widely cited and in relation to child murder coverage Wardle (2006) refers to it when noting that the 1990s saw a steep rise in the number of articles about paedophiles using the new technology of the internet to groom children. While the theme of a 'society at risk' is presented as a strong force in British and American child murder coverage Dutch child murder coverage shows a milder engagement with the issue, but engagement nonetheless.

In the 1990s for instance the murder of Nympe Poolman sparked a rare insight into how Dutch people felt regarding the safety of their children in public spaces. A study conducted a year after Nympe's disappearance showed that 52% of parents had taken measures to ensure greater safety for their children. This included asking children to check in regularly and not letting them alone while performing out of house activities. The study also showed that both parents (about half) and grandparents (around 70%) thought The Netherlands had become less safe for children over the past two years.

The murder of Jennefer van Oostende in the 2010s brought to the forefront a new manner of expressing collective condemnation but also fears of a society in decline through the phenomenon of 'silent marches.' The walks against what protestors call senseless violence emerged as a grassroots movement. In effect it is an expression of morality namely that certain actions are reprehensible and have no place in a society. It is a modern phenomenon. In recent years it has become a common sight especially after terrorist attacks. A few days after such attacks vigils are held and marches are organised. Similarly after Jennefers murder thousands of people from her neighbourhood and surrounding organised a march against senseless violence in her name.

Articles with narratives that enforced the idea that Dutch society was in threat of spiralling into decline or that it already was in decline were by no means the norm, instead they were the exception to the norm. In fact, there is quiet a contrast in how Dutch newspapers dealt with this issue in comparison with British and American papers. According to Wardle (2006) British and American newspapers and tabloids did little to nothing inform the public that child murder rates had been declining for decades. Dutch newspapers, when confronted with child predators in the 1960s and onwards explicitly cited and sought

interviews with heads of police departments to give an accurate representation of the facts concerning the threat of child predators to children.

The idea that the internet was a major threat to the safety of children making them vulnerable to grooming is one that is not replicated in Dutch child murder coverage. In fact, there are no mentions of online grooming at all. Furthermore, the coverage showed no signs of affirming a contention made by Facer (2012) that the internet had changed the 'standard model' of adult-child relations. The result of which being growing fears in society about the dangers of the internet to children. This does not mean that there were no such fears in The Netherlands or that the issue was not being discussed in other disciplines. It was just not discussed or mentioned in any of the articles written about the child murder cases studied in this thesis.

### **5.3.2 Danger of paedophiles**

The term paedophile was not used until the 1990s by Dutch newspapers to describe child murderers who had also sexually abused their victims. The case where the word first appeared was that of Jessica Laven in 1991 where various articles specifically used 'paedophile' to describe the child murderer, even in headlines. In earlier decades Dutch newspapers did not use the word paedophile. In the 1930s the murderer of Sara Beugeltasch was referred to as a morally repugnant individual and a sadist. By the 1960s the term 'kinderlokker' came into being which roughly translates into 'child lurer.'

Coverage of each child murder case in this thesis where the murderer also abused the victim sexually has always provoked a societal response. In the 1930s there was already a discussion on whether 'sadists' could be stopped from abusing children if they were castrated. Up to the 2010s this discussion continued in various forms however large scale social unrest was never recorded. This changed in 2011 when Jennefer van Oostende was killed. Jennefer's neighbours started a petition calling the government to look into increasing the sentence for child murder to a life-long one. It gained more than 35.000 signatures. Cohen (1972) put forth that paedophiles are utilised by the media to represent the ultimate 'folk devil.' While some murderers were described as morally repugnant and their condition not treatable the vast majority of articles were factually accurate. Newspapers did not use the opportunity to create a monster that didn't exist.

## 6. Conclusion

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This thesis has set out to answer the question: *what types of narratives are used by Dutch newspapers when reporting on child murder cases (1930-2010)?*

To answer this question the academic literature on child murder coverage in the media was thoroughly studied. Just over ten years ago a paper was written about the very same subject. Wardle (2006) examined child murder narratives in British and American newspapers in the period 1930-1990. It found that all articles were written around three core narratives, personal, institutional and societal. It concluded that newspaper coverage of child murder cases in the 1930s was largely of institutional nature while in the 1960s and much more so in the 1990s there was a trend towards articles with more societal and personal narratives. This was a solid theory, one that could be tested. Thus, this thesis built forth on that research and examined whether the same narrative trends could be measured in Dutch newspaper reports on child murder cases from the 1930s up until the 2010s.

A quantitative content analysis was employed for the task. A sample of nearly 600 newspaper articles formed the raw material and all were coded to fit one of three core narratives; institutional, societal or personal. The product was quantitative data that gave an accurate depiction of the narrative development in four decades, the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2010s.

The data was then compared and contrasted to the theory and findings by Wardle (2006). The results showed that the trend discovered by Wardle namely, that articles in the 1930s and 1960's were mainly institutional but by the 1990s a large percentage were composed of societal and personal narratives, was not applicable to Dutch child murder narratives in those same decades. Child murder narratives in Dutch newspapers were mainly institutional right through the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s. This stood in stark contrast to Wardle's findings. This thesis did find that in the 2010s the hegemony of the institutional narrative was broken. In this decade 38% of all articles were shaped around the societal narrative and 19% around the personal narrative.

What can be concluded from this dissertation is that Wardle's theory that in the 1990s there would be a move towards more personal and societal narratives does not apply to Dutch newspaper coverage of child murders. Later, in the 2010s this development did take hold as more articles were written from a personal and societal perspective.

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