Criminal constructs: the social construction of crime reporting

by
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Declaration

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Abstract

One's understanding of language is socially constructed. One of the factors in the social construction of language is the media. People understand what certain terms mean within the limits defined by the media. However, these meanings are not fixed and can change over time or even from one publication to the next.

This study aims to understand how crime journalism uses language to describe the actors in a crime news report; specifically, the victim(s), accused, and criminal(s) respectively. This will be executed by examining to what extent these constructions are the by-product of an understanding (social contract) between journalists and readers, where the one feeds off the other's general interpretation of certain words and terms. The theoretical frameworks are social construction and the sociology of knowledge, and the research design and methodology are qualitative content analysis and case studies. The study will conclude by suggesting methods for crime journalists to employ language in their reporting that accurately portrays the individuals involved in a case and does not succumb to generalised stereotypes concerning victims, accused, perpetrators, and criminals.

Opsomming

'n Mens se begrip van taal is sosiaal gekonstrueer. Een van die faktore in die sosiale konstruksie van taal is die media. Mense verstaan wat sekere woorde beteken binne die perke wat die media bepaal. Egter, hierdie betekenisse is nie vas nie en kan verander met die verloop van tyd, of selfs van een publikasie na 'n ander.

Hierdie studie het ten doel om te verstaan hoe misdaadverslaggewing taal gebruik om die betrokke mense in 'n misdaadverslag te beskryf; spesifiek die slagoffer(s), beskuldigde(s), en kriminele onderskeidelik. Dit sal uitgevoer word deur te ondersoek tot watter mate hierdie konstruksies die produk is van 'n begrip (sosiale kontrak) tussen joernaliste en lesers, waar die een bou op die ander se algemene begrip van sekere woorde en terme. Die studie het sosiale konstruksie en die sosiologie van kennis as teoretiese vertrekpunt gebruik, en kwalitatiewe inhoudsanalise is as navorsingsontwerp en gevallestudies as metodologie gebruik. Die studie word afgesluit deur voorstelle te maak van hoe misdaadverslaggewers se taalgebruik die slagoffer(s), beskuldigde(s), en kriminele onderskeidelik meer akkuraat voor te stel.

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It would be remiss of me to not mention the great bands and artists whose music fuelled me throughout this degree. A particular mention has to go to John Mayer, Simon and Garfunkel, The Eagles, Led Zeppelin, Elton John, Leonard Cohen, Ozzy Osbourne, Lady Gaga, Joni Mitchell, and Marianne Faithful.

The greatest share of thanks goes to my fiancé, **David Gross**, and my mother, **Amanda Cilliers**. Thank you for your support during the highs and lows, stresses and joys of this degree. I would also like to thank my family, the **Cilliers**, and my soon-to-be mishpacha, the extended **Gross** clan. I love and appreciate all of you.

This thesis was written in an effort to raise more awareness of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. While it centres on the cases of Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius, it is of utmost importance that we continue to say their names and let their memory be a blessing, hopefully one of peace over the lives of every womxn. May we all reach a point in our society where womxn can live without fear.

Below follows a list of those womxn who unfortunately lost their lives to GBV and IPV since 2000 alone. This is by no means exhaustive. This thesis is dedicated to all of them and to those who way we may not be aware of.

Inge Lotz

Hannah Cornelius

Jesse Hess

Sinethemba Ndlovu

Natasha Conabeer

Busisiwe Ngwadlu

Uyinene Mrwetyana

Agnes Msiza

Altecia and Raynecia Kortje

Alice Lotter

Sibongiseni Gabada

Nadia and Amber Strydom

Michaela Booysen

Beth Tomlinson

Lithemba Jama

June Nefdt

And countless more . . .

<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Motivation

This study's topic results from my personal interest in crime journalism, both as a concept to study and as a field I wish to specialise in. The specific case studies which will be used as a vehicle for the study to be conducted were chosen not only due to their similar nature, but for their relevance in current times, especially in relation to the prevalence of gender-based violence in South Africa. By investigating how the media reported on these cases, I can hopefully make actionable suggestions for future cases and thereby contribute towards ensuring that those who committed acts of gender-based violence are held accountable for their crimes.

Some work has been done in this regard by independent authors outside of the academic sphere who have published non-fiction books on their findings of certain gender-based violence and domestic violence cases. These were an important motivating force behind this study. They include, in chronological order, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree: a True Story of Murder and the Miscarriage of Justice* by Altbeker (2010), *Bloody Lies* and *Bloody Lies Too* by Mollett and Mollett (2014, 2015), *Dealing In Death: Ellen Pakkies and a community's struggle with Tik* by Walker (2009), and *Bloed, dunner as water* by Kemp (2018).

The works by Altbeker, and Mollett and Mollett focus on the Inge Lotz murder case, which is one of the two cases which will be examined in this study. Walter's book focuses on the case of Ellen Pakkies who killed her Tik (meth) addict son. Kemp's work focuses on violence and murder within the family context. She uses various case studies to examine this phenomenon; including Don Steenkamp's murder of his parents and sister. The other case which this study will focus on is the Hannah Cornelius murder case. However, to date no book has been written about this case. This means that the only information available about this case are media articles on it and no further analysis has been conducted. Therefore, I surmise it would be of value to media scholarship to conduct an academic study using these two cases to examine how the victims, accused, and perpetrators in these cases were portrayed by the South African media.

1.2 Literature review

This study seeks to answer questions pertaining to the field of crime journalism. In Chapter 2 existing literature pertaining to this study will be discussed in detail. For the purposes of this

chapter, however, I will briefly outline the concepts applicable to my study. I have used the search terms 'crime AND journalism', 'crime AND media', 'victims AND journalism', and 'criminology AND journalism' on the Stellenbosch University search engine as well as JSTOR, Sabinet, and SAGE to search for relevant studies.

In order to achieve a thorough understanding of crime news, one should first acquaint oneself with the concepts of news and newsworthiness. Therefore, the concept of news values will first be discussed. Whether or not a story – the news room jargon for a report – can be classified as news is based on how well it adheres to accepted news values. Galtung and Ruge's list of news values is considered to be the first of its kind (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). In 2001, Harcup and O'Neill published an updated list of news values that were more in line with the needs of modern times, such as taking social media into account (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001:261). They revisited these values in a subsequent article (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016:1470).

A story does not have to meet every news value to be considered news, but should fulfil at least one. However, the more news values a story has, the higher its chances of being included in the news cycle. The ten news values that Harcup and O'Neill (2001:279) identify are as follows:

• the level of involvement by elites,

• if the story is surprising,

• if the story is relevant,

• whether celebrities are involved,

• the significance of the story,

• the impact of the story,

• if it is already part of the news cycle or an ongoing narrative,

• if the story aligns with the publication's agenda

• whether the story involves the entertainment industry,

• if the story is negative or positive.

These values apply to all genres of news, including crime news. This explains why certain crime news stories are given more media attention than others. Only crime news stories that

2

successfully fulfil the accepted news values are included in the news cycle, and those that do not, hardly ever become known to anybody other than those directly affected by the crime (Jewkes, 2004:61). News values are adapted by various genres to fit their nuances, crime journalism included (Greer, 2010:228). An example of this is the argument that disagrees with the notion that a story has to be unexpected for it to be of interest to readers (Katz, 2010:232). This argument states that crime journalism is part of readers' daily ritual of questioning how their own morals and values relate to the day's crime news.

That is, that readers who are interested in crime news do not need a shock value to be present in reporting for them to read a story in that genre. Instead, they read a crime news article analytically, with the specific intention of evaluating whether their morals are in line with those involved in the subject of the report or not. For example, if a reader reads an article about a murder, they might see themselves as morally superior to the murderer, because they could not see themselves committing such a crime. In doing so, readers form a symbiotic relationship with journalists, as the latter feeds the needs of the former, while readers support crime journalists by reading their reports or articles. Therefore, Katz's argument comes from the perspective that both society and journalists are responsible for crime news (Katz, 2010:236).

While a journalist is an important actor in a crime news story, the key players are the victim(s), accused, perpetrator(s), and later, if found guilty, the criminal(s). Before one can explore the journalist's role in depicting these key players, one must first understand what the individual terms (victim, accused, perpetrator, and criminal) means. A victim can be defined as "a person harmed or killed as a result of a crime or accident or a person who is tricked" (Soanes, 2006:1026). The term accused refers to a person "charged with a crime or fault" (Oxford English Dictionary,2020). A perpetrator can be defined as "someone who has committed a crime or a violent or harmful act" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The term criminal refers to "a person who has committed a crime" (Soanes, 2006:204).

A crime journalist's language choices when writing about victims, the accused, and perpetrators influences how the public view the people these terms apply to in a given crime news story, and even the terms themselves (Jewkes, 2004:57). An example of this is when crime reporters' language choices show compassion towards victims, but blame the other actors involved (Jewkes, 2004:61). Wertham first introduced the term victimology (the

scientific study of victims) to the academic world in 1949 (Marsh & Melville, 2009:101). Victimology focuses on the following key areas:

- whether or not someone can be seen as a victim,

- if a victim deserved their fate,

- group victimisation, and

- how the media affects victims.

This study will focus on the latter, but will include the accused, perpetrators, and criminals with regards to how they are affected by the media. The positive media effects on crime victims include providing a platform for them to make their perspective on the story known to the public, a way for victims to get public support through reader interest in their story, and the knowledge that they are not the only ones who were victims of crime by viewing articles on others who have had similar experiences (Marsh & Melville, 2009:110). This being said, as Marsh and Melville write, there are times when a journalist's manner of reporting on a crime news story can be interpreted as invading victims' privacy and insensitive. According to Marsh and Melville, reporting in this way can traumatise victims further than the incident they experienced did

Victims can be individuals and groups. The latter often consists of those who have been victimised as a result of how they self-identify, such as people of colour and minorities (Lurigio, 2010:329). When one embarks on a study of how the accused, perpetrators, and criminals are depicted by the media, Marsh and Melville (2009:72) have found one can stand to gain much information by examining how child and teenage criminals are portrayed, how criminals of different genders are depicted in relation to one another, how people originating from different communities (including online communities) are represented, and the language used to describe criminals of various races.

The above, just as an introduction and to be fleshed out with other relevant studies in Chapter 2, will form the basis when exploring how victims, the accused, perpetrators, and criminals are portrayed in crime news and the information gleaned from this will be used to compare the findings in the two specific cases, namely the murders of Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius respectively.

1.3 <u>Research problem</u>

The terms *victim*, *accused*, *perpetrator*, and *criminal* are linguistic constructions which immediately evoke a certain image and perception in the mind of a crime news reader (Greer, 2007:22). This study aims to understand how crime journalism (as defined in the above literature review) uses language to describe the actors in a crime news report; specifically, the victim(s), accused, perpetrator(s), and criminal(s) respectively. This will be executed by examining to what extent these constructions are the by-product of an understanding (social contract) between journalists and readers, where the one feeds of off the other's general interpretation of certain words and terms. The study will conclude by suggesting methods for crime journalists to employ language in their reporting that accurately portrays the individuals involved in a case and does not succumb to generalised stereotypes concerning victims, accused, perpetrators, and criminals.

This study will have one central research question from which two more research questions will flow. The main research question is:

How is the way in which crime reporting describes victims different from how it describes the accused, perpetrator or criminal?

The two research questions which originate as a result of the main research question are:

1. How did the way in which the Lotz case was reported on, differ from how the Cornelius case as reported on (if so)?
2. How can crime reporting be improved to accurately represent victims, the accused, perpetrators, and criminals respectively?

1.4 <u>Problem statement and research questions</u>

The difference between the above section and the current section can be understood by their respective definitions. The above section, namely the research problem, can be defined as "a statement about an area of concern, a condition to be improved, a difficulty to be eliminated, or a troubling question that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or in practice" (Sacred Heart University Library, 2020). Therefore, the main research question, as well as the two questions which flowed from it, were included in the above section. The current section (problem statement) can be defined as "a clear description of the issue(s), it includes a vision, issue statement, and method used to solve the problem" (Lindstrom, 2011).

Due to the narrow scope of this 50% thesis, this study will focus on only two cases. The choice to limit the study to only two cases will allow for a detailed, in-depth analysis of how they were reported on by crime journalists. This study will focus on the Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius cases respectively. The cases were chosen due to their similar nature. They are both high-profile murder cases which gained a high volume of media attention, they both took place in Stellenbosch, and they both involved the murder of a young female university student.

Both cases will be analysed to answer the question of how the language used to describe the victims (Lotz and Cornelius) compares to how the accused, perpetrator, and criminal were written about. By doing this, this study will add to the field of media scholarship on crime reporting, while filling a gap in existing literature by providing the field with a unique understanding of how South African crime journalism employs linguistic constructions.

1.5 <u>Theoretical point of departure</u>

In chapter three the theoretical point of departure will be discussed in detail. This section serves as an introduction and summary of what will be presented in that chapter. This study will employ social construction as its theoretical point of departure. Many scholars have different interpretations of the term social construction, but a widely accepted definition of the theory is that it is "concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises" (Vera, 2016:7). The first published record of the term is in an article by Ward in 1905, but social construction entered mainstream academia in 1966 after the publication of Berger and Luckmann's book on the topic (Best, 2008:41, Elder-Vass, 2012:7). The premise of their study is that reality is a social construction and they sought to analyse how this process occurs by using the sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:13; Brodeur & Dupont, 2006:9). How one perceives reality is dependent on one's conditioning (nature vs nurture) and is often separate from reality itself. Reality is communally constructed in that groups of people have a shared understanding of reality, or at least what they think it is. Therefore, social construction is approached differently by philosophy and sociology. This is a result of the former aiming to examine how one can know that what one thinks is reality, is truly real, whereas sociology is aware that reality can not be taken for granted, as many versions and interpretations thereof exist based on one's context and lived experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:14; Vera, 2016:12). This study will focus on journalism studies' approach to social construction, and the sociology of knowledge.

6

The term sociology of knowledge was first written about in German as Wissenssoziologie in the 1920s in the work of Scheler (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:16). In one of his essays Scheler (1980:67) argues that one's understanding of reality takes place before one becomes self-aware and prior to developing one's self-value and consciousness. Therefore, one's perception of reality is contingent on the group(s) one finds oneself in, which can vary over time. One's positionality in various groups also affects one's experience, and in turn understanding, of reality (Scheler, 1980:68). Social construction does not accept any view of reality on a surface level, but seeks to discover the relationship between a person or group and what they perceive reality to be (Scheler, 1980:74; Tuckett, 2018:182).

One of the ways that one is taught about reality is through language (Boroditsky, 2017). Each different type of knowledge has a specific language system that develops from it and reflects the way people understand the subject (Scheler, 1980:76). Language can be used for both describing one's view of reality and constructing it (Burr, 2003:46; Elder-Vass, 2012:121). Traditionally, language has been seen as a method of human expression with fixed meanings. Social construction, however, recognises that language is open to having various meanings and that the meaning of language elements (e.g., words, exclamations, phrases, etc.) are continuously changing. Instead of using language to label one's self and experience, social construction uses one's lived experiences to inform language (Burr, 2003:47). Therefore, this study will, through the lens of social construction, explore to what extent the media's understanding of victim, accused, and perpetrator agrees with, or challenges, stereotypical and socially constructed interpretations of these terms.

1.6 Research Design and Methodology

1.6.1 Research design

The research design and methodology will be discussed in chapter four. For the purposes of this introductory chapter, I would like to present the following:

When conducting an academic study, one needs to employ a research design, which will inform how the study will be conducted (Du Plooy, 2009:85). Like research methods, research designs can be qualitative or quantitative, or contain characteristics of both. This study will be conducted by using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research designs can be used when a study focuses on characteristics, values, and needs of different messages, events, groups, or individuals (Du Plooy, 2009:88). This type of research design tends to be inductive, meaning that the study will flow from particular assumptions or observations that

the researcher has about the text and the findings will centre on a theory or description of the preliminary observations. Therefore, the assumptions chosen as a theoretical point of departure in a qualitative study have to be established in academic literature to avoid bias. According to Du Plooy, the aim of qualitative research designs are to research areas where relatively little to no prior work has been done and to analyse units according to their themes, attitudes, behaviours, needs, or trends.

The research design that will be used in this study is a case study followed by a comparative analysis as methodology. First the two respective cases will be analysed individually and then they will be compared to one another. A case study is "a method of research involving an in-depth study of a single unit" (Du Plooy, 2009:79). There is no set formula of how one should conduct a case study, but rather it is advisable to carry it out in a manner which is relevant to the study and meets its needs (Du Plooy, 2009:180). Case studies are guided by a research question or hypothesis to achieve a definite outcome. The key characteristic of a case study is that it allows the researcher to collect a dense volume of information, whereas other research designs (such as surveys) can lead to generalisation (Du Plooy, 2009:182). The advantages of employing a case study as the research design in a study includes its ability to be used for longitudinal studies, the researcher can obtain a holistic view about the subject, its flexibility in terms of how it can be conducted, and it can be executed in a way that is mindful of the nuances of the particular study's aims (Du Plooy, 2009:181). After the two respective case studies have been conducted, they will be analysed in relation to one another using a comparative analysis. This research design uses the data and results of previously conducted studies to explore the differences and similarities between them (Du Plooy, 2009:89). According to Du Plooy (2009:89) often a comparative analysis can lead to an entirely new study, which flows from the previous studies.

1.6.2. Methodology

This study will employ content analysis (CA) as its research method. CA can be defined as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (Höft, Heckmann & Jankowicz, 2018:346). As media has expanded into different platforms over the last few decades, so has the general understanding of the term "text" (Mayring, 2000:2). The term "text" no longer only refers to print media (such as books and newspapers), but includes various new types of media which have been introduced in the current digital age, such as videos, social media posts, blog posts, interactive media, and podcasts (Neuendorf, 2017:19).

8

As Neuendorf writes, works of art are also considered texts, for example, as in a study by Wansink and Wansink (2010) where they used CA to compare the size of the food to the size of Jesus and His disciples' heads in the *Last Supper* painting by Leonardo da Vinci.

Researchers can use CA to achieve various outcomes based on the study they would like to conduct. These include focusing on the text itself, the text's consumers, or those who created it (Weber, 1990:10; Du Plooy, 2009:213). Studies which employ CA as a research design or method each do so for a specific reason originating from the study's aim. However, according to Weber (1990:10), the most cited reason by scholars for using CA in a study is to examine if bias is present in a text. As Du Plooy (2009:213) writes, CA is also popular with scholars due to its many advantages over other methods and research designs; including that it can be conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively, the consumer of the text and its creator are not aware that the text is being studied because it is in the public domain (which means that this method has hardly any ethical implications), a text can be directly analysed, and studies can be done over time, as is the case in this study

CA can be done in three different ways, namely by using either a qualitative or quantitative approach, or a mixed method approach which combines the two (Du Plooy, 2009:214). The *Oxford Dictionary* defines quantitative as "relating to or measured by quantity," and qualitative as "having to do with or measured by quality" (Soanes, 2006:729). Regardless of if a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method approach is employed when one is conducting a CA, there are four units of analysis which are used. According to Du Plooy (2009:214) these are propositional units (questions, statements, and answers), syntactic units (words, phrases, and paragraphs), physical units (time duration, body language, page number count, and medium), and thematic units (patterns concerning a theme or issue).

This study will move from CA to qualitative CA (QCA) as its research method. QCA is useful when employed in studies which aim to explore connotation, denotation, themes, styles, or meanings behind messages (Du Plooy, 2009:219). Traditionally CA is conducted in a quantitative manner, but QCA is not executed or expressed in numerical terms. QCA makes use of questions and delivers the answers in a manner that relates to attributes of the data (Du Plooy, 2009:220). Therefore, researchers cannot generalise their findings when using QCA, because every piece of data has unique attributes. According to Du Plooy , where traditional CA focuses on overt meanings in a text or collection of texts, QCA analyses text to find the covert meanings

This study will, by using QCA, examine articles pertaining to the Lotz and Cornelius cases respectively. The articles used for the Lotz case study will be sourced from a South African newspaper, namely *Die Burger*, and a South African news website, IOL. In terms of the latter, relevant articles will be found using the keywords "Inge Lotz" in the website's search bar also indicate the time period that will be covered. The articles about the Cornelius case will be sourced from two South African news websites, namely *News24* and *Times Live.* The reason the same sources could not be used for both cases is that the sources which had plenty of articles on one case lacked a sufficient quantity of articles about the other. Therefore, this researcher had to find different sources for each of the respective cases, with the additional challenge of having access during the COVID-19 lockdown in which the study was conducted.

In both cases, the articles will be sourced from the first report on their deaths to the final day of the respective court cases. These articles will be analysed to determine how crime journalism in South Africa linguistically constructs the victim in comparison to the accused, perpetrator, and criminal. The articles about the Lotz case will be found using newspaper archives and using the date of the murder, 16 March 2005, until the final date of the trial, 30 November 2007. The articles about the Cornelius case will be found by means of a keyword search on both news websites and using the articles found in the results. The keywords which will be used to conduct the search for articles are "Hannah Cornelius." The date range for the Cornelius trial articles is from 29 May 2017 (the first day the case was reported on) until 14 February 2019 (the last day of the case).

1.7 Structure of research

This study will consist of the following six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will provide the motivation for the study, research problem and research questions, and focus of the study, and will introduce an overview of relevant literature, theoretical point of departure, as well as the research design and methodology to be used for the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

In this chapter relevant literature in the areas of news, newsworthiness, crime news, and victimology will be discussed. There will be a particular focus on what constitutes news, who

qualifies as a victim, and how the terms victim, accused, perpetrator, and criminal have traditionally been depicted by crime journalism.

Chapter 3: Theoretical point of departure

This chapter will explore the theory of social construction as understood within media studies. The focus of this chapter will therefore be the social construction of language in specific media texts, and how it applies to the terms victim, accused, perpetrator, and criminal.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This chapter will discuss the research design and methodology which will be employed by this study. Qualitative research methods will be used to answer the research questions that the study poses. As research design case studies will be used, and as methodology Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA).

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

This chapter will examine and discuss the data found in the relevant texts according to the theoretical point of departure and within the case study and QCA application.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

In this chapter the previous chapters will be summarised, as will the answers to the research questions. The chapter will provide possible recommendations to crime journalists on how to improve the genre's approach to language surrounding victims, the accused, and perpetrators.

1.8 Summary of chapter

This chapter introduced the focus of my study, and briefly touched on the parameters that will be followed in the execution of the study. In the next chapter a review of relevant literature will be presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

A literature review seeks to discuss various sources that are relevant to a particular study (Lab, 2020). For the purposes of this study, the sources for this literature review were found by using the Stellenbosch University Library's website to search for the keywords "news", "news values", "crime news", and "crime journalism" and relevant books, journal articles, and academic studies were selected. This chapter will explain the concepts of news and news values before moving to a discussion of crime news and its actors. This will lead to identifying gaps in existing literature.

2.2 News and news values

Before undertaking a study of crime news, it is important to first have a thorough understanding of the terms *news* and *newsworthiness*. Consequently, this section will begin by discussing news values. Whether or not a report or article can be categorised as news depends on how well it fulfils the standard news values. Galtung and Ruge's list of news values is considered to be the first of its kind (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). This list was updated by Harcup and O'Neill in 2001, which took the nuances of the modern-day news cycle (such as social media) into account (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001:261; Tiripelli, 2016:21). They revisited these values in a subsequent article (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016:1470).

A report or article has to meet at least one news value to be considered a news item. The ten news values as identified by Harcup and O'Neill (2001:279) are as follows:

- the level of involvement by elites,

- if the story is surprising,

- if the story is relevant,

- whether celebrities are involved,

- the significance of the story,

- the impact of the story,

- if it is already part of the news cycle or an ongoing narrative,

- if the story aligns with the publication's agenda

- whether the story involves the entertainment industry, and

- if the story is negative or positive.

Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (2010:240) expand on how news values decide what stories are considered newsworthy by exploring how news is produced. News is how an incident is reported on, not an inherent quality of the event. This notion is best summarised by MacDougall (1968:12):

> At any given moment billions of simultaneous events occur throughout the world…All of these occurrences are potentially news. They do not become so until some purveyor of news gives an account of them. The news, in other words, is the account of the event, not something intrinsic in the event itself.

The way in which publications (both print and digital) organise their news sections is frequently centred on similar types of genres of news stories, crime news being a popular choice (Hall et al, 2010:240). According to Hall et al this includes ongoing stories, for example, a murder trial might take two years on and off before a sentencing commences. A publication would often choose to report on this event every day that it takes place. On any given day there may be too many incidents taking place for each one to be individually reported on by a specific publication. Therefore, the publication needs to decide which stories to include and which to exclude. This is where the aforementioned news values become important. They are used to determine which stories should be prioritised over others. However, the so-called cardinal or primary news value is that of shock value or an element of the unexpected (Jewkes, 2004:42; Hall et al, 2010:240). According to Hall et al (2010:241), while other news values are also taken into account, the primary one is what news journalists tend to focus on through their tendency to heighten the dramatic or extraordinary elements of an incident or event (Hall et al, 2010:241). Secondly, while a story can adhere to only one news value and be deemed newsworthy, the more news values a story fulfils, the higher its chance of being prioritised in the news cycle. According to Hall et al an example of a story which fulfilled all the news values is the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, because it was unexpected (due to his mainstream popularity), it involved elites (the president and first lady of the United States of America), it was relevant, it was part of an ongoing narrative

(daily coverage of the president and his activities), and it involved human tragedy in a powerful nation with negative consequences (Hall et al, 2010:240).

The production of news does not only involve the inclusion and exclusion process, but also how news articles are constructed. Journalists and editors assume who their audiences or readers are and construct news stories with them in mind (Hall et al, 2010:240). According to Hall et al one of the most common ways that this is carried out is that the media seeks to present the news in an organised manner that will not confuse audiences. This is done by identifying and presenting exact information in a defined social context. Hall et al write this informs the meaning of the article, because the news item is presented within a socio-cultural context which the assumed audience will already be familiar with. Therefore, according to Hall et al one can infer that many publications "patronise" their assumed audiences, not only by assuming who they will be, but also by presenting news items in a set way, often forsaking nuance for the purpose of making things easy to understand. Furthermore, according to Hall et al, this method lends itself to employing stereotypes, which are harmful to individuals, as will be discussed later on in this chapter.

2.3 Crime news and its actors

One can accept that the aforementioned discussion on news and news values apply to all genres of news, including crime news. This explains the phenomenon of certain crime stories receiving more media attention than others. The news cycle only includes crime stories which fulfil the accepted new values. Those stories that do not, are seldom ever made public and the facts are only known by those directly affected by the crime (Jewkes, 2004:61). Each genre of news adapts the traditional set of news values to accommodate their nuances and needs (Greer, 2010:228). For example, Katz (2010:232) disagrees with the idea that a crime news story has to have an element of surprise or unexpectedness to be of interest to readers. His argument goes further to state that readers use crime journalism as part of their "daily ritual". This "ritual" consists of reading the day's crime news and then assessing their own morals and values in relation to it.

Therefore, people who participate in this "daily ritual" will do so whether the crime news stories have a shock value or not. According to Katz (2010:232), this is due to the fact that they have a specific intention (namely analysing their own morals and values in relation to the crime news of the day), and will participate in the "daily ritual" using whatever crime new stories they can find in the media which they regularly consume (e.g., the same news

14

broadcast or publication). As Katz writes, an example of this is if a reader reads an article about a rape trial, where they might view themselves as having better morals than a rapist because they can not see themselves committing such a crime. Journalists and readers form a symbiotic relationship with one another by engaging in this "daily ritual". In this relationship the former meets the needs of the latter, whilst readers support crime journalists by reading their reports or watching their broadcasts. Therefore, Katz (2010:236) argues that journalists and society are co-actors in the crime news cycle.

The standard set of news values were adapted for crime journalism by Chibnall in his 1977 study (Jewkes, 2010:216). While Chibnall's study focused on post-World War Two journalism, it remains influential amongst scholars in this field (Mawby, 2010:1060). Chibnall identified 12 crime news values as follows:

- Size of the event,
- Probability,
- Universalisation,
- Uniqueness,
- Danger,
- Sex,
- Violence,
- Involvement of elites or celebrities,
- Proximity,
- Opportunity for a dramatic angle,
- Whether children are involved, and
- Political motive (Jewkes, 2010:217).

While the above crime news values are seen as the definitive set for the genre, one must keep in mind that the crime media landscape has changed considerably since Chibnall published his study (Jewkes, 2010:216). Also, according to Jewkes, changes in how media is constructed and owned, have taken place, also how it is published (e.g., social media and digital media). As Jewkes states, audiences are also different in modern times, such as an increased level of scepticism towards the media and government institutions. However, the above values are still useful to crime news journalists and editors, as well as academe. As Jewkes writes, where the standard set of news values wants reports to fulfil as many as possible of the news values, on Chibnall's list's items are prioritised according to the

15

particular publication's agenda. For example, one publication might have a tendency to focus on political angles, whereas another might prioritise covering incidents involving elites or celebrities.

Yet there are trends in terms of which values tend to be used more, a combination of danger, sex, and violence (Jewkes, 2010:217). These will now be discussed in terms of what was found in the literature review and how they relate to current crime reporting. While most crimes are committed by someone known to the victim, crime journalism often promotes a narrative which states that outside forces are the greatest threat to one's personal safety (Chermak, 1994:125). According to Jewkes, this can cause audiences to develop a fear of being victimised by strangers at any time, as the media is constantly affirming this narrative. Another commonly-prioritised crime news value is reports on sexual incidents, such as rape and sexual harassment. These articles are repeatedly framed in a way which particularly affects the psyche of women, by making them feel that they are continually at a high risk of becoming victims of this type of crime, often perpetrated by their male counterparts (Jewkes, 2010:218).

As with danger, empirical data confirms that the victims are often in a type of relationship (e.g., live-in partner, employee, colleague, etc.) with the perpetrator (Jewkes, 2010:218). Another aspect that is relevant in current times is the mainstream acknowledgment that the stereotypes that the media perpetuate about sexual crime makes assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and gender identity which are not necessarily correct. Victims, the accused, perpetrators, and criminals may seem to have a certain gender identity, but may identify differently. In terms of masculinity and femininity, women are seen as the helpless victims of men, and men are seen as the victims of their natural sex drive which they cannot control:

> These stories draw on narratives about particular kinds of masculinity and about violent pornography, reiterating a discourse about masculine violence as a 'natural force', both random and inevitable. They normalise this violence, drawing on and repeating the narrative that all men are potentially violent and that all women are potentially and 'naturally' victims of male violence (Naylor, 2001:186).

This stereotype does not represent sexual crimes committed by women, the effects of sexual crime on gender non-conforming individuals, and male victims of sexual crimes. Sexual crime is probably the second-most popular angle for crime news, following violence (Jewkes,

2010:221). As Jewkes writes, crime journalism has an inclination towards depicting violent incidents in the most dramatic and graphic manner possible, sometimes to the extent that the reporting violates acceptable reporting standards. According to Jewkes in recent times crime news has presented a desensitised attitude towards violence, by reporting on it in "a dull and routine way". Despite the apparent desensitisation, violence has continued to be the leading crime news value in many publications and crime media. This creates a situation where victims are used (to a certain extent) for their personal traumatic experiences with violent incidents to create a product for crime news audiences (Presdee, 2000:75).

A journalist is an important "actor" in crime news stories, making the public aware of crimes that have taken place. However, the key actors in a crime news story are victim(s), accused, perpetrator(s), and later, if found guilty, when the accused or perpetrator changes into the criminal(s).

Before discussing how these actors are depicted by journalists, one should first acquaint oneself with the definitions of the different terms.

A *victim* can be defined as "a person harmed or killed as a result of a crime or accident or a person who is tricked" (Soanes, 2006:1026). The term *accused* refers to a person "charged with a crime or fault" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). A *perpetrator* can be defined as "someone who has committed a crime or a violent or harmful act" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The term *criminal* refers to "a person who has committed a crime" (Soanes, 2006:204).

How the public, and crime news audiences in particular, view the people that the above terms apply to (and the terms themselves) is influenced largely by a crime journalist's language choices when writing about *victims*, the *accused*, *perpetrators*, and *criminals* (Jewkes, 2004:57; my italics). One example is when the language employed by a crime reporter in an article displays empathy for the victim, but blames the other actors involved (Jewkes, 2004:61). The term victimology was first introduced to the academic world by Wertham in 1949 (Marsh & Melville, 2009:101). Victimology's focus areas are as follows:

- whether someone qualifies as a victim,

- deserving vs undeserving victims,

- group victimisation, and

- the media's effect on victims.

The field of victimology, like most areas of study, has been met with criticism. Two subgenres of victimology emerged due to scholars critiquing the field, namely radical victimology and critical victimology (Marsh & Melville, 2009:103). Radical victimology developed between the mid-1960s and early 1970s. According to Marsh and Melville, the guiding principle of radical victimology is interrogating why certain victims are not viewed as being legitimate by the state and gaining a holistic understanding of the victim. However, this subgenre did not produce empirical research and therefore no valuable data has emerged from radical victimology. Marsh and Melville argue that this subgenre was criticised by scholars for not acknowledging crimes that were committed on the basis of sex and race. Critical victimology, according to Marsh and Melville, developed as a response to radical victimology with the goal of correcting its predecessor's shortcomings while incorporating the feminist and leftist perspectives of the time into its approach. Where radical victimology did not focus too much on research, critical victimology seeks to conduct research that will produce valuable empirical data (Marsh & Melville, 2009:104). Critical victimology, as Marsh and Melville write, places an emphasis on defining what is true and how one can ascertain what is true and what is false. It also seeks to problematise the link between the state and its citizens from the point of view that the state is not neutral, but rather has its own agenda The state's agenda informs how the criminal justice system conducts itself in terms of the sex, gender, race, and class of those involved in a crime.

One question that crime journalism often brings forward is whether the victim in a crime news report "deserved" their fate or not (Marsh & Melville, 2009:104; Gekoski, Gray & Adler, 2012: 1213). The reason that such a question can even be asked is that the media have the power to set the criteria for who "qualifies" as a victim. This criteria-setting process happens through social construction, which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter (Chapter 3, Theoretical Point of Departure). The criteria for who qualifies as a victim is guided by morality and passed on to readers by the media. According to Marsh and Melville, media scholars have argued that this process operates in a similar way to propaganda, in that the media spread an idea and constantly affirm that idea until audiences believe that it is their own innate opinions and beliefs. Crime stories make up a considerable part of news and every crime has at least one victim. Therefore, according to Marsh and Melville, there is a focus on victims and depicting them in such a way that will boost media sales or views, depending on the medium. One of the main ways that the media influence the

audience's opinion of whether a victim was deserving or not, is through the photographs they choose to accompany the news reports on the incident (Marsh & Melville, 2009:106). According to Marsh and Melville (2009:106), an example of this is cases involving children, such as kidnapping, paedophilia, or murder of a child. Marsh and Melville wrote that publications tend to use photographs of the child with their family where they are all smiling, and then photographs of the grieving family next to it. This situation is best summarised by Wardle (2007:276) when she argues that the media help the audience feel sympathy towards the victim by "[c]reating montages" that further underline "the tragedy of the crime by forcing readers to identify with the idyllic family album photographs, and to place themselves as part of the grieving family".

Marsh and Melville (2009:106) argue that perhaps the most contested types of victims in terms of whether or not they deserved their fate is women. This gender bias extends to female sex workers, who are often seen as "asking for it" in cases of rape or sexual harassment. Another set of terms used to describe deserving and undeserving victims are "innocent" and "guilty" victims (Marsh & Melville, 2009:107). The reason for these terms is that the media have created a situation where it is considered as acceptable practice to question why the incident happened to the female victim, especially in cases of sexual crimes, and less so in other incidents such as a robbery (Pagelow, 1981:63; Meyers, 1997:83). "Undeserving" or "innocent" victims are often the most vulnerable in society, such as children and the elderly. This notion extends to crimes with female victims (Marsh & Melville, 2009:107; Gekoski et al, 2012:1221). However, according to Marsh and Melville, female victims who are seen as "guilty" or "deserving" are thought to fall into this category because they were doing something outside of their "traditional" role as a woman at the time of the incident, such as sex work, or going to a public place alone. This categorising process of depicting victims as either deserving or undeserving can lead to secondary victimisation in many cases, because victims feel that they are not only victims of those who conducted the criminal incident against them, but also of the media (Marsh & Melville, 2009:109; Pugach, Peleg & Ronel, 2018:6).

Secondary victimisation takes various forms, including journalists trying to find negative facts about the victim to make them seem deserving of their fate, interviewing victims in ways that triggers trauma from the crime, and insensitive reporting, for example during funerals. Crime news journalists should keep in mind that most victims have no personal experience with the media and may unwillingly receive media attention due to the crime

conducted against them. Therefore, crime reporters should employ sensitivity in their interactions with victims (Marsh & Melville, 2009:110).

This study will focus on the fourth focus area of victimology, namely how media affect victims, but will include the accused, perpetrators, and criminals with regards to how those who fall into these categories are affected by the media. Marsh and Melville (2009:110) argue that a positive effect of the media on victims is that they provide a platform for victims to share their experience with the public and to learn that they are not the only ones who are victims by reading articles of others with similar experiences. Another positive effect of the media on victims is that they can use the platform provided by crime news to gain public support via reader interest. Victims can be individuals and groups. The latter usually happens when people are victimised due to how they self-identify with different groups, for example minorities and people of colour (Lurigio, 2010:329).

When conducting a study on how the accused, perpetrators, and criminals are depicted by the media, according to Marsh and Melville (2009:72) it is useful to note that the categories which are interesting to examine are how criminals of different genders are depicted in relation to one another, the language used to describe criminals of various races, how child and teenage criminals are portrayed, and how people originating from different communities (including online communities) are represented.

However, the media not only affect victims, but also the accused, perpetrators, and criminals. The media's portrayal of them is often influenced by the identifying characteristics of the individual, such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and residential area (Marsh & Melville, 2009:70). In the 21st century it has been found that youth have a higher chance of being found guilty of crimes (Marsh & Melville, 2009:72). This has resulted in the youth being viewed as a social problem, mainly due to how they are depicted in the media. The two main archetypes that crime journalism has constructed against young criminals are anti-social and juvenile delinquents (Marsh & Melville, 2009:73). These terms are not necessarily separate, because they are frequently used in conjunction with one another by crime reporters. These constructions have created "moral panics" where the public view the youth in their communities as a threat to their personal safety. Yet, elderly people who have committed crimes are also stereotyped by the media. This group consists of three distinct types of elderly criminals: those who committed their first crime at a mature age, those who have prior convictions, and those who are serving a long sentence which they received at a

young age (Marsh & Melville, 2009:74). In the case of criminals who are found guilty of a crime at an advanced age, the media have a tendency to depict these individuals in a way that gains them public support. Marsh and Melville refer to, e.g., cases of fraud committed by the elderly, portrayed as them trying to make ends meet, as their government pension cannot cover all their expenses.

The strength of the relationship between crime and age is similar to that of crime and gender (Marsh & Melville, 2009:76). The common narrative presented by crime news is that the majority of criminals are young men, which, according to Marsh and Melville, is empirically correct. Due to the element of unexpectedness being an important news value, crime journalists and their editors are interested in giving crime news reports involving female criminals' media attention, as audiences will not be expecting it (Marsh & Melville, 2009:77). Women's ability to mother children has put them in a stereotype where they are seen as maternal and caring. Crime journalism employs this stereotype to create the assumption that women are not capable of violent crime, and, according to Marsh and Melville, those women who are found guilty of such crimes are demonised for deviating from traditionally held ideals of womanhood. These methods have been criticised by feminist scholars who view them as sexist and argue that they do not take mental health conditions into account. Besides stereotypes, crime news focuses on the appearance of a criminal more if they are female than if they are male (Marsh & Melville, 2009:78). If the criminal is conventionally attractive, then she is classed as a *femme fatale*, and if she is not, then she is seen as "acting out" because she is upset that she is not desirable (Marsh & Melville, 2009:79). Often these narratives concerning female criminals' appearance receive more attention than the crime itself or the motive behind it, similarly to how the sexuality of a criminal is dealt with by crime journalism.

In terms of sexuality, female criminals are divided into two types by the crime media; namely "virginal" or "promiscuous" (Marsh & Melville, 2009:82). The latter category includes non-heterosexual sexual orientations and deviant sexual preferences, such as fetishes (Marsh & Melville, 2009:83). According to Marsh and Melville, one of the main reasons for that is that, historically, men have held positions of power, and women in this category threaten their power by not needing them for sexual fulfilment, thereby giving women power. For example, a female murderer who kills men is a threat to male-dominated power structures because it provides proof that women are capable of threatening the personal safety of men. One such case is that of Aileen Wuornos, a sex worker who murdered seven men and claimed it was

self-defence (Marsh & Melville, 2009:83). Crime journalism portrayed her in a manner which highlighted her career as a sex worker and the fact that she was a lesbian (even though she would have intercourse with men for her job). The "black-and-white" method of reporting that was used could not reconcile her private life and professional life. According to Marsh and Melville, the "black-and-white" method of reporting looks at the facts of a case through the lens of stereotypes, without allowing for any nuance. As Marsh and Melville write, the most common theory put forward in crime news reports on Wuornos was that her lesbianism originated from a hatred for men, which motivated her murders.

Lastly, this literature review will discuss how crime news portrays criminals, or "actors", of different ethnicities. The media-constructed stereotype of most crimes being committed by young males goes further in terms of ethnicity by stating that most of these young men are black (Marsh & Melville, 2009:84). The crimes that are stereotypically linked to young black men are substance abuse, gang activities, and opportunistic mugging. However, crime statistics do not support this stereotype (Marsh & Melville, 2009:85). This media stereotype seems to have influenced police behaviour, as, according to Marsh and Melville, black men are the demographic that are stopped most often by police. The media does not only focus on black men, but also assigns other stereotypes, such as labelling illegal immigrants as drug dealers, and white men are seen as only capable of white-collar crime (Marsh & Melville, 2009:86). Due to its agenda-setting, crime journalism does not reflect an accurate picture of how many crimes are being committed by people of different ethnicities. Agenda-setting refers to the practice by publications and various media sources to prioritise certain events by giving them more attention than others, thereby setting the agenda (Molloy, 2020). According to Marsh and Melville, a publication might try to report on more crimes committed by a certain ethnic group than another, because doing so aligns with its assumed audience's politics, thereby ensuring increased sales figures, subscriptions or views.

The above literature review will be used to inform the subsequent study, which will compare the findings in the two case studies, namely an analysis of the reporting on the murders of Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius respectively.

2.4 Gaps in the existing literature

Three recent studies show that crime journalism is an area that media scholars are interested in exploring. They are Van Niekerk (2004), Van der Spuy (2009) and Grundlingh (2017).

Each of these studies will now be discussed to find similarities and differences between their scope and that of this study.

Van Niekerk's study (2004:3) is concerned with the ethical debates surrounding crime reporting and seeks to formulate a set of ethical guidelines for crime news journalists. They concluded that it is not enough to criticise the current state of the media without offering practical suggestions for improvement (Van Niekerk, 2004:83). Therefore, their study provided guidelines for all crime journalists to use when compiling a report to ensure that a variety of factors are taken into account.

The study by Van der Spuy (2009) explored how pre-trial publicity of the accused can affect the outcome of their trial. This was done by evaluating the relationship between the media and law by using case studies of how different criminal cases were reported on by the South African media. The conclusion of this study stated that the relationship between the media and the law in South Africa is antagonistic and that said relationship needs to move towards benefitting the democracy (Van der Spuy, 2009:125).

Lastly, Grundlingh's study in 2017 sought to identify both subtle and overt markers of sensationalism in crime journalism. Grundlingh (2017:125) examined four different criminal cases to find how the media employed sensationalism in their coverage of the case. While each case had nuances due to the nature of the crime and differences between those involved, she identified five markers of sensationalism that exist in the reporting of all four cases (Grundlingh, 2017:133).

While all three of the above studies focused on topics in the crime journalism field, only one comes close to the aim of this study, namely that of Van der Spuy (2009), which concentrates on the effects of pre-trial publicity. While Van der Spuy focuses solely on the media's effect on the accused, this study will also include the victim, perpetrator, and criminal. There is also a shift in focus between this study and that of Van der Spuy, as the latter asked whether or not crime journalism's pre-trial publicity of the accused influence the legal consciousness of their readers, thereby affecting their view of the accused. This study, however, will examine how crime news linguistically constructs the terms victim, accused, and criminal; as well as their readers' understanding of these terms. Therefore, this study will supplement existing media scholarship in the subject of crime journalism, while simultaneously filling a gap in the field of research by providing a unique linguistic perspective, which is currently relatively

23

understudied in this genre. Still, it must be taken into account that this is a wide field with many opportunities for different niche studies.

2.5 <u>Summary of chapter</u>

This chapter explained a review of literature concerning the concepts of news and news values, arguing that news values dictate whether an event is viewed as news or not, and why it is newsworthy. This explanation was followed by a discussion of crime news and its actors, which included a description of crime news values and explained how they differ from news values. The chapter was concluded by identifying the gaps in existing literature. In the next chapter the theoretical underpinning for this study will be presented.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Point of Departure

3.1 Introduction

The theoretical point of departure is conducted in a similar manner to the previous section, namely the literature review. The similarities are that keyword searches are used to find relevant literature and the literature is analysed. However, unlike the literature review, the theoretical point of departure finds literature that focuses on theories that are relevant to the method that will be employed (Du Plooy, 2009:97).

This chapter will explore the theory of social constructionism and how it applies to the study. The literature included in this chapter was sourced by using the keywords 'social constructionism', 'language AND journalism', and 'social constructionism AND media' on the Stellenbosch University Library search engine, as well as JSTOR, Sabinet, and SAGE to search for relevant literature. The seminal work in this field, namely *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Best, 2008:41, Elder-Vass, 2012:7) was also used as a springboard for finding relevant theory, both by using the reference list in the book and sourcing studies which cited this work using Google Scholar.

This study's main aim is to ascertain how crime journalism portrays primary victims, secondary victims, the accused, and criminals in relation to one another. By doing so, this study will learn whether existing stereotypes about people who fall in the above categories are being furthered or challenged by the media. Therefore, this study will employ social constructionism as its theoretical point of departure, because this theory makes one aware of how the language used by the media can form stereotypes in the minds of its readers. I will now proceed to discuss this theory, as applicable to this study, namely social constructionism and its development. While social constructionism as a theory emerged from the field of sociology, it is applicable to journalism studies because of its strong linguistic focus.

3.2. Social Constructionism

This study will employ social constructionism as its theoretical point of departure. The term *social construction* was first published in an article by Ward in 1905, although it did not gain much popularity in academia at the time. Social construction entered mainstream academia in 1966 after the publication of Berger and Luckmann's book on the topic (Best, 2008:41, Elder-Vass, 2012:7). The premise of Berger and Luckmann's study is that reality is socially

constructed and they sought to analyse how this process occurs by using the sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:13; Brodeur & Dupont, 2006:9). The theory of the sociology of knowledge is discussed later on in this chapter in section 3.3. The two main questions Berger and Luckmann asked in their study was how is reality socially constructed, and if reality exists independently of how humans interpret it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:2; Best, 2008:43). There are many different interpretations of the term social constructionism, but a widely accepted definition of the theory is that it is "concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:16; Vera, 2016:7). While social constructionism entered mainstream academia through sociology, the theory is also employed in other fields, such as political science and history (Best, 2008:41).

In the late 1970s, social constructionism was widely used in sociology, particularly in studies analysing news, social problems, crime, and science (Best, 2008:43). According to Best, science and journalism were fields which were already viewed as types of knowledge, thereby making it a logical step for sociologists to employ social constructionism when studying issues flowing from these fields of study. Best writes that there was an increase in the number of sociologists who analysed news, editors, and journalists through the theoretical lens of social constructionism. However, this was not the only debate within sociology.

One of these debates centred on what social constructionism means and the correct way to incorporate it as theory into academic studies in different disciplines (Best, 2008:45). According to Best, this debate is referred to as "vulgar social constructionism" and stems from a misunderstanding of social constructionist theory. While social construction became more widely used in sociology, there were those scholars who did not interpret the precepts accurately, causing them to equate ideas that are different in nature (Best, 1995:345). An example of this, as Best writes, is when a scholar contrasts uncertain claims (such as the alleged sighting of a UFO) with serious social issues (such as homelessness). When one describes something as socially constructed, it can create the impression that one is casting doubt on whether it is real or not. In the above example, equating homelessness and alleged UFO sightings as social constructions does an injustice to the serious issue of homelessness by creating the impression that it's constructed, like an alleged UFO sighting. According to Best, vulgar social constructionism deviates greatly from Berger and Luckmann's original conception of social constructionism: "Berger and Luckmann would not have understood them as having equal standing as description of empirical reality."

26

That being said, one can see how "vulgar social constructionism" came into existence and how the confusion started. Certain scholars wanted to concentrate their work on how social constructionism functions. In order to successfully achieve this, they had to make their work interesting and justify the process of social constructionism as vital and engaging. One method that made this easier for scholars was to choose topics for their studies which were easier to analyse, and that plainly showed how social constructionism worked and why its processes are important (Best, 2008:46). A common trope amongst sociologists was, as Best writes, to focus their work on what he called various "moral panics" (such as drug scares and strangers abducting children), which they then argued were uncommon occurrences that had been exaggerated by the media through the use of social constructionism.

They would then, show how social constructionism worked and why it is important (Best, 2008:46). While it was useful to these sociology scholars to show the processes of social constructionism, it was to its detriment that "vulgar social constructionism" had to be employed, because this furthered confusion in the field. One by-product of this confusion was the use of the word "just" in sociological analyses, specifically in the context of creating the impression of what follows, as being "innocent". According to Best, an example of this is to dismiss a particular topic (such as satanic rituals) as "just" a social construction. While language is socially constructed, most words can be linked to empirical evidence (such as water), but "satanic rituals" cannot, as it does not denote empirical reality (Best, 2008:47). Therefore, those who practice "vulgar social constructionism" would dismiss satanic rituals as "just" a social construction, which promotes the idea that something is either a social construction, or real, with no room for a "grey" area or a spectrum of understanding. According to Best, besides "vulgar social constructionism" there are other by-products of scholars misunderstanding social constructionist theory.

Another, albeit more subtle, way that social constructionism was misunderstood by sociologists is generally referred to as "ontological gerrymandering". While vulgar constructionism aimed towards limiting what can be viewed as fit for analysis, "ontological gerrymandering" argues that the language used by scholars are social constructions in their own right. Therefore, according to Best (2008:47), sociologists should not accept their own assumptions at face value, but should analyse how social constructionism affects their own interpretations of the topics they study and not just how it impacts the topics themselves. In other words:

> The successful social problems explanation depends on making problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimising the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends (Best, 2008:47).

A third phenomenon that occurred through various sociologists' interpretation of social constructionism is a division between those who practiced so-called *contextual constructionism* and *strict constructionism* (Best, 2008:48). As Best writes, the latter recognised that ontological gerrymandering is problematic and that scholars should try to avoid it as far as possible. Kitsuse became a prominent scholar of "strict social constructionism" and co-edited a volume of studies on the subject in which he wrote:

> None of the chapters in this volume is an exemplar of strict constructionism … Investigators and analysts in spite of themselves cannot help but import their interests, if not their professional agendas, into their interactions with their informants (Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994:14).

Scholars who practice strict social constructionism believe that their primary focus should be on how sociology worked before they tried to understand the nature of social constructionism (Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985:162; Best, 2008:48). Another suggestion was that strict constructionism scholars should work towards creating general theories rather than analysing the social constructionism of a particular subject (Ibarra & Kitsuse, 1993:33; Best, 2008:48). However, according to Best, both of these suggestions failed in practice. A secondary reason for the failure of the above suggestions was, as Best writes, due to the fact that scholars were not interested in self-introspection and preferred to examine the social construction of various issues. Scholars eventually stopped practicing strict constructionism, because they were forced to make a decision between analysing empirical evidence and exploring theory, when many scholars wanted to incorporate both into their work (Best, 2008:50).

The distinction between strict constructionism and contextual constructionism is not the only way that social construction has been divided into categories. In sociology there is a distinction between how social constructionism is employed by scholars, namely

28

"interpretive constructionism" and "objective constructionism" (Harris, 2008:232). According to Harris, these two methods are at times difficult to distinguish from one another, as they often make use of similar language, which can create the impression that they are arguing the same point when they are not. Firstly, interpretive social constructionism (ISC) will be discussed. As Harris writes, ISC developed from various theoretical fields, including phenomenology and pragmatism. The key focus of ISC is the notion that meaning is not innate. ISC argues that meanings are constructed, taught, used, and reconstructed through socialisation (Blumer, 1969:2; Harris, 2008:232). The meanings of all things stem from how people view and use them (Coulon, 1995:23).

The concept of ISC fits with how social constructionism was originally conceptualised by Berger and Luckmann, because a central question raised in their work was how to define meaning:

> The sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people 'know' as 'reality' in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives… The sociology of knowledge, therefore, must concern itself with the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:15).

Therefore, the ISC argument that meaning is not inherent fits this description, because it places a focus on problematising what is considered as reality (Harris, 2008:233). As Harris writes, different people can interpret the same thing in a variety of ways. An example of this is a chair, which can be used to sit on, stand on, sell, and so on (Blumer, 1969:69). One person may view a chair as a commonplace object, while in a different context a chair might signify a place of honour, such as at the head of a boardroom table. According to Blumer, this is applicable to many inanimate objects, as well as more controversial and complicated phenomena, such as homelessness, war, and animal cruelty. Their meaning is constructed through the actions, life experiences, attitudes, and interpretations of the individuals who attempt to understand them. ISC has the same view of social media, in that scholars in this field argue that the existence and use of social media platforms depend on people's understanding of them. The general idea put forward by ISC is that in nearly every situation multiple definitions and interpretations of the same object or thing exist. This is taken further by questioning what constitutes the "truth" and that various versions of the "truth" can occur

simultaneously. ISC researchers argue that scholars should observe how people understand the meanings of different things and how they developed those understandings, rather than prescribe how people should understand meanings (Harris, 2008:234). This differs, at least to a certain extent, from objective social constructionism (OSC).

OSC is not primarily concerned with meaning construction, but rather seeks to ascertain how real social phenomena are created (Harris,2008:234). An OSC argument is one which examines the role of individuals and groups on the production of social phenomena by taking various factors such as race, gender, class, religion, and or politics into account. Where ISC arguments first question the true meaning of different factors in an analysis, OSC takes the meaning of them for granted so that they can take an analysis further by asking what caused a social phenomenon. For example, and taking the focus of this study into account, where an ISC analysis of crime might first question what is crime and why is it defined in that manner, an OSC analysis takes predetermined definitions of crime at face value and moves into a debate over what causes crime. The core argument put forward by OSC is that a phenomenon (not a meaning or interpretation) can only be classified as socially constructed if it originated from outside social factors. However, the differences between ISC and OSC arguments can be difficult to identify, as many scholars employ both, at times within the same study. This causes an overlap between the two approaches. An example of this is the argument that interrogating how meaning is constructed can be beneficial to society and lead to change within existing social structures. Nevertheless, there is a difference between how language is employed by OSC and ISC.

The four main terms which show a difference between OSC and ISC's vocabulary choices are

- Contingency
- Essentialism
- Reification
- Work (Harris, 2008:236).

As Harris (2008:236) writes, OSC and ISC both make use of these terms, but there are differences in how they are employed in an argument. Firstly, contingency will be discussed.

Contingency can be defined as "a future event which is possible but cannot be predicted with certainty" (Soanes, 2006:186). According to Harris (2008:236), a similarity between OSC

and ISC is that scholars who employ these approaches agree about the conditional nature of social phenomena. Arguments which put forward the notion that social phenomena are inherent or natural are the antithesis or foil to social constructionist studies (Hacking, 1999:12; Harris, 2008:236). The difference between OSC and ISC arguments in this regard is that for the former, only real social phenomena or traits are contingent, whereas ISC arguments interpret contingency on a deeper level by questioning what meaning is contingent upon (Harris, 2008:237).

Secondly, essentialism will be discussed. Essentialism is viewed as the stronger form of predictability and argues that certain phenomena have an inherent "essence" that determine what they are (Harris, 2008:237). The weaker form of predictability, as Harris writes, takes place when one accepts something as true without questioning it. Essentialism can be employed in arguments in different ways depending on which type of constructionism is being used. In OSC arguments, essentialism is used as a catalyst for debates concerning the causes of real social phenomena. The OSC approach to essentialism is best summarised in the following statement: "Essentialism is the tenet that human behaviour is 'natural', predetermined by genetic, biological or physiological mechanisms and thus subject to change" (Ore, 2003:5). ISC, on the other hand, employs essentialism to conduct in-depth studies of the reasons for social phenomena and how they are understood without discussing the nurture vs nature debate (Harris, 2008:238). According to Harris, OSC's use of essentialism focuses on the nature vs nurture debate, that is, the debate whether people possess inherent qualities which lead to certain behaviours, or if they are fostered.

Thirdly reification will be discussed. Berger and Luckman (1966:89) define reification as follows:

> Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly superhuman terms. Another way of saying that is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world.

In OSC analysis, reification amounts to viewing an inequality, a family, or an organisation as things which exist separately from the processes people went through to create and assign meaning to them (Harris, 2008:239). This interpretation has been critiqued by scholars who

31

believe that all social phenomena must be recognised as "recurrent patterns of joint action" (Schwalbe, 2000:420). An example of this, according to Harris, is class. Many scholars refer to class as a thing that requires no explanation, but the scholars who critique this trope argue that class must be examined in order to ascertain how and why it is constructed (Harris, 2008:240). As Harris writes, this examination should be thorough and take elements such as jobs, worker-employer dynamics, government structures, business structures, and elite organisations into account.

Lastly, work will be discussed. The different types of work that people do are used by constructionists when they debate reification, essentialism, and contingency. These debates argue about whether reality is inherent or created through the work people do. This has resulted in the metaphor of people being viewed as 'construction workers', i.e., active participants in the creation of reality. ISC analyses do not argue about which forms of work are more important or real than others, but focus on how different types of work create the idea of reality (Harris, 2008:241). OSC analyses centre on which types of work are involved in the construction of reality (Harris, 2008:242).

3.3 Sociology of Knowledge

The term sociology of knowledge was first written about in German as Wissenssoziologie in the 1920s in the work of Scheler (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:16). In one of his essays, Scheler (1980:67) argues that one's understanding of reality takes place before one becomes self-aware and prior to developing one's self-value and consciousness. Therefore, one's perception of reality is contingent on the group(s) one finds oneself in, which can vary over time. One's positionality in various groups also affects one's experience, and in turn understanding, of reality (Scheler, 1980:68). Social construction does not accept any view of reality on a surface level, but seeks to discover the relationship between a person or group and what they perceive reality to be (Scheler,1980:74; Tuckett, 2018:182).

How one perceives reality is dependent on one's conditioning (nature vs nurture) and is often separate from reality itself. Reality is communally constructed, in that groups of people have a shared understanding of reality, or at least what they think it is. Therefore, social construction is approached differently by philosophy and sociology. This is a result of the former aiming to examine how one can know that what one thinks is reality is truly real, whereas sociology is aware that reality cannot be taken for granted, as many versions and interpretations thereof exist based on one's context and lived experiences (Berger &

Luckmann, 1966:14; Vera, 2016:12). This study will focus on sociology's approach to social construction, and the sociology of knowledge, and how it applies to the specific analysis of how crime journalism portrays primary victims, secondary victims, the accused, and criminals in relation to one another.

According to Best (2008:41) Berger and Luckmann's 1966 study was not initially popular amongst scholars, but later became commonly cited. The core focus of their study was how knowledge is influenced by social processes. One of the social processes that they discussed, e.g., was childhood language acquisition, which is an important part of how children learn to socialise. Best argues that when young children learn words and their meanings, they also acquire the ability to identify different categories and what should be included in and excluded from a category. For example, if the category is colours, then children learn to identify that the words *red* and *white* fit the category, but that the word television does not. Language is not only discussed in social construction in relation to childhood acquisition, but in general. This study will examine how both crime journalists use language to socially construct primary victims, secondary victims, the accused, and criminals.

One is taught about reality through language (Boroditsky, 2017). Different types of knowledge have specific language systems that develop from them and reflect the way people understand the subject (Scheler, 1980:76). Language can be used for both describing one's view of reality and constructing it (Burr, 2003:46; Elder-Vass, 2012:121). Conventionally, language has been viewed as a way for people to express themselves that has a fixed meaning. However, social construction recognises language's ability to take on various meanings and that the meaning of language elements (e.g., words, exclamations, phrases, etc.) are continuously changing. Social construction uses one's lived experiences to inform language, rather than using language to label one's self and experience (Burr, 2003:47). For example, in this study, one will observe that in one of the case studies the accused might be portrayed in a completely different way to the accused in the other case study. Nevertheless, both parties fall in the category of accused and the language is used to describe them can be analysed as such.

3.4 Critique of social construction

While social constructionism is a useful and important theory, also as applicable to this study, it has been met with criticism. One such critique focuses on social construction's failure to develop a theory on the relationship between society and people (Burr, 2003:181). Social

constructionism acknowledges how people are influenced by society, but does not explore how this can contribute to social or individual change (Burr, 2003:182).

According to Burr (2003:182), this raises questions such as whether social constructions can be changed and whether individuals have the ability to change their society. These questions, as Burr (2003:182) writes, stems from the greater so-called *agency/structure* debate in sociology. This debate, according to Burr, revolves around the question of whether individuals are influenced by society or whether society is determined by individuals. Those who support the case for the latter, argue that people existed before the idea of a society did, which conserves individual agency. However, this does clarify why people differ in terms of personality, choice, and understanding based on which society they find themselves in. This is answered by those who support the other end of the debate, namely that individuals are influenced by society, but this is done at the cost of losing personal agency. This is due to the fact that people in this case follow the norms of the society they live in and do not deviate when making choices that influence their lives. Therefore, Burr argues that both sides of the agency/structure debate are problematic when viewed through the lens of social constructionism. The debate that argues that individuals influence society does not accommodate social construction, because individuals are seen as existing before any social element (Burr, 2003:183). As Burr writes, the debate that argues that society influences individuals sees language as a by-product of societal structures and cannot effect social change.

Berger and Luckmann successfully avoided the agency/structure debate in their seminal work on the sociology of knowledge (Burr, 2003:185). Instead they presented the idea that while society seems objective, in reality it is a human construction: "Despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it" (Berger & Luckmann,1966:78). They argued that being part of a society is inherent to human nature (Berger & Luckmann,1966: 69). According to Burr, there is no need to invoke the agency/structure debate, as they believed that both cases were happening simultaneously. That is, that society and individuals are in a symbiotic relationship, whereby people construct society, and then have to respond to those social constructed realities. To understand this relationship as symbiotic rather than as a debate or conflict, gives agency to the individual, as it recognises their role both in construction and deconstruction (Burr, 2003:186).

Berger and Luckmann's seminal work was also the subject of critique, mostly for not achieving all of the goals it set out to achieve (Vera, 2016:10). One of these goals was to ensure that sociologists thoroughly understood the term social construction and did not misuse it in their work (Vera, 2016:11). According to Vera, there have been many different misunderstandings of the term and examples of its misappropriation. The language and jargon originating from social constructionism is also commonly misappropriated by scholars. An example of this is in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:9-10), who use the term *constructionism* interchangeably with *subjectivity*, as if to suggest that the two are synonyms. Another criticism that was levelled against the work of Berger and Luckmann focuses on the sociological style that they tried to develop, namely humanist sociology (Vera, 2016:10). Humanist sociology would, ideally, conduct an ongoing dialogue between philosophy and history with the aim of acknowledging the human role in constructing the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:173). Despite their attempts, this sociological style did not gain popularity and is only employed by a few scholars.

3.5 Application of the theory to this study

This study will, through the lens of social constructionism, explore to what extent the media's understanding of "victim", "accused", and "criminal" agrees with, or challenges stereotypical and socially constructed interpretations of these terms. Through the coding and analysis process, this study will examine how language surrounding the above categories of crime news actors is socially constructed to fit certain stereotypes, agenda-setting, and/or angles the specific journalist or publication wants to use for the respective case studies.

3.6. Summary of chapter

This chapter discussed the relevant theoretical point of departure as applicable to this study project. It firstly discussed SC, then sociology of knowledge, followed by a critique of the approach. Lastly, I argued why this theoretical approach is the most relevant to be used for the purposes of this study. In the following chapter, I will discuss the research design and methodology chosen for this research project.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

4.1. Introduction

A research design can be defined as a "method and technique used to collect, analyse and interpret data" (Du Plooy, 2009:51). This differs from research methodology, which is, simply put, the "research strategy" (Du Plooy, 2009:21). The literature consulted in this chapter were sourced by a keyword search on the Stellenbosch University Library website, JSTOR, Sabinet, and SAGE. The keywords use in the aforementioned search were "research design", "research methodology", "content analysis", and "case study."

This chapter will discuss the concepts of research design and methodology, before moving to an explanation of the specific research design and methodology that will be employed in this study and how that will be achieved. The research design that will be used in this study is two case studies and the methodologies that will be used are content analysis and comparative analysis.

4.2 Research design

A research design is an essential part of an academic study, as it informs how the study will be conducted (Du Plooy, 2009:85). Like research methods, research designs can be qualitative or quantitative, or contain characteristics of both. Qualitative research can be defined as

> an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:41).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018:41), scholars who employ qualitative research methods in their studies seek to find unique meanings and acknowledge the importance of nuance when studying a complex situation. The key characteristics of qualitative research are as follows: the use of a natural setting, the researcher working as their own research instrument, the incorporation of various data sources, deductive and inductive analysis, focusing on the participants' or subject's meanings, reflexivity, all-inclusive presentation of findings, and developing design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:257). Researchers who use qualitative research, as Creswell and Creswell write, prefer to execute their data collection at

the site where the subjects or participants experience the phenomenon or issue being researched. According to them, this method is preferred over sending out items, such as surveys, to be filled out and returned. Qualitative researchers view personal interactions with participants as a way of gathering more information than just the words they say, such as their non-verbal behaviour and how they interact with others in their immediate context. Therefore, qualitative researchers tend to act as their own research instruments by interviewing participants, observing behaviour, and analysing documents. While some of these researchers may use data recording instruments (e.g., voice recorders), the researchers themselves are directly involved in gathering data and analysing it.

These researchers also have a preference for collecting various data sources instead of relying on a single source (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:257). The sources used included audio-visual data, observations, interviews, and documents. One thing that these source types have in common is that they are open-ended, which allows participants to express themselves more holistically than what a survey or multiple-choice questionnaire might allow them to. These sources are then analysed and coded thematically by researchers. The first round of analysis is conducted inductively, meaning that "a general rule or conclusion is drawn from particular facts or examples" (Soanes, 2006:458). Researchers find patterns and themes in the sources they analyse from the bottom up by structuring the data into progressively more abstract categories. In the following round deductive analysis is employed, meaning that "a general rule or principle is used to draw a particular conclusion" (Soanes, 2006:226). The researchers reflect on the themes they found in the first round of analysis to ascertain if they have the necessary evidence to support the theme, or if more data collection needs to take place.

Researchers focus on what participants mean rather than imposing their own meanings on participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:258). According to Creswell and Creswell, qualitative researchers also favour the meanings the participants have about the phenomenon or issue being studied over what scholars have written about it in literature. The qualitative research process is described as developing or emergent, because many changes may take place during the period in which a study is planned, carried out, and reported on. Qualitative researchers cannot be prescriptive when planning a study, because they have to make provision for changes that may take place. Another important characteristic of qualitative research is that researchers reflect on their positionality in relation to the study, the issue being studied, and the participants involved. This means that they recognise the effects of

their background, experiences, and culture on their interpretations and analysis of data in a study, as well as how their positionality influences the study's course.

Qualitative researchers seek to present a holistic account in their reporting of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:276). This is done by identifying the various aspects of the situation being studied, representing many perspectives, and depicting the greater picture at hand. This greater picture is represented by way of recognising the various factors involved rather than using the cause-and-effects model. Qualitative researchers believe that this greater picture reflects reality and most people's experiences thereof in a more accurate manner. Qualitative research emerged from sociology and cultural sociology with the intent to comprehend a particular social interaction, event, group, situation, or role (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:278). This is an analytical process, whereby the researcher progressively learns about the issue or phenomenon being studied by comparing, contrasting, reproducing, categorising, and cataloguing it. As Creswell and Creswell write, one of the main ways that this is achieved is by the researchers entering the participants' immediate environment and immersing themselves in the culture and social life of the participants in order to experience the phenomenon from as close to their perspective as possible.

 Researchers concur that qualitative research has specific features which makes it distinguishable from quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:40). Firstly, qualitative research is often conducted without a pre-planned or established hypothesis in order to make provision for changes which may occur during the research process. Secondly, qualitative research yields descriptive data, rather than prescriptive or positivist data. This is largely due to the fact that data is presented pictorially or in words, instead of numerically. Thirdly, qualitative research seeks to explore how participants construct meanings in their lives and what their perceptions of reality are. Researchers aim to understand multiple realities instead of a single narrative. Lastly, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the process of the phenomenon being studied while studying the phenomenon itself.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, can be defined as follows:

> an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures. The final written report

has a set structure consisting of introduction, literature and theory, methods, results, and discussion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:41).

The terms empirical or positivist research are used interchangeably with quantitative research (Du Plooy, 2009:22). According to Du Plooy, positivism can be defined as "a philosophical system that restricts itself to data of experiences and rejects any form of speculation". In the beginning of the 20th century, different forms of media and journalism (such as newspapers, comics, and films) were viewed as having the capacity to be a catalyst for moral deterioration in society. This reached a peak during World War One when the media was used as a propaganda machine in the USA and Europe (Du Plooy. 2009:23). This made scholars believe that mass media had the potential to affect audience opinion. These scholars chose to undertake quantitative research to study the methods that mass media were using to influence audiences. The researchers at that time held an idealistic view of mass media as a mechanism for constructing and sustaining agreement between members of society (Du Plooy, 2009:24). As Du Plooy writes, in the 1970s scholars started to lend methodologies from sociology and psychology to ascertain how the meanings disseminated in the mass media result in various consequences. However, this method failed to recognise the complex nature of the relationship between audiences and mass media.

The chief theoretical assumption in quantitative research is positivism (Du Plooy, 2009:24). In the 1940s and 1950s mass media research was conducted using a positivist approach to ascertain what the effects of mass media were and whether they were harmful or positive (Du Plooy, 2009:25). As Du Plooy writes, Laswell, a sociologist in 1948, pioneered the movement amongst scholars to define the functions performed by mass media in sustaining societal structures. Laswell's philosophy was summarised in the following question which is still used by modern-day scholars as a starting point to analysis: "Who says what to whom, through what channel and with what effect?" (McQuail, 2000:52). This question interprets the effects of mass media as happening in a linear manner. Laswell's work, according to Du Plooy, led to the development of information theory, which is based on the premise that mass media is intended to be used as a one-way communication tool between the sender (or producer) and the audience. At the same time the stimulus-response theory was formed, which was in a similar vein, but was less specific in its cause and effect model structure. This theory was influenced by the use of propaganda in World War Two and the power it held. However, information theory and stimulus-response theory were criticised by scholars such as Mead and Cooley in the mid-20th century, who did not agree that mass media

communication was a linear process. Instead, they forwarded the notion that mass media is a social interaction and intends to share meanings. Due to the academic zeitgeist of the time, which viewed quantitative research methods as the most reliable and relevant, these criticisms were not pursued (McQuail, 1996:44).

Mass media was interpreted as effective vehicles for the spread of information and that it was not inevitable that they would change the audience's attitudes. This interpretation resulted in researchers reflecting on previous studies that made use of information theory or stimulus-response theory, causing many scholars to come to the conclusion that the effects of mass media are limited. One such scholar was Lazarsfeld who held that mass media's effects on human behaviour was limited (Du Plooy, 2009:26). This, according to Du Plooy, gave rise to the two-step flow model, which advances the concept that there are two steps in the mass media distribution process. This was the first model to not view audiences as an unrelated mass of individuals, but rather to recognise the influence of social relationships on how mass media messages were interpreted and understood by audiences. Therefore, messages disseminated by the mass media did not have static meanings, but could be understood in multiple ways depending on the socialisation of individual audience members. In the 1950s a third stage of quantitative theories developed with the emergence of the uses and gratifications approach, which views mass media as a source of gratification for audiences. This third stage moved away from exploring the effects of media on audiences to examining how audiences use mass media. The uses and gratifications approach assumes that individual audience members have different needs that they use mass media to fulfil. audience members, each one has different needs that they use mass media to fulfil. This results in different gratifications being gained by different individuals.

In the late 1970s scholars moved towards seeking to understand general mass media issues, such as the role of the mass media in how audiences define social reality. This scholarly movement gave rise to agenda-setting theory, which is based on the notion that the mass media make calculated decisions regarding which individuals, issues, or topics are given prominence in their broadcasting or publication. These decisions are based on the agenda of the publication or media company, such as favouring topics that will ensure they retain their advertisers (and the revenue they provide). Agenda-setting theory has two main views regarding how the mass media influences audiences (Du Plooy, 2009:27). Firstly, this theory assumes that mass media shapes how individual audience members interpret reality. Secondly, agenda-setting theory takes the view that there are topics and issues which are

given prominence by the mass media which are not as justifiably important as some of those that are not reported on. There are a few variations of agenda-setting theory, including framing theory and cultivation theory (Swanson, 2001:19).

According to Du Plooy (2009:27), framing theory uses content analysis to analyse messages to understand how the mass media encourage certain interpretations of social reality which may be false, but which audiences view as the truth. Cultivation theory, as Du Plooy writes, recognises how the media's choice of which version of reality to publish or broadcast shapes individual audience members morals and values. Quantitative research is associated with deductive reasoning, in that the theoretical concepts advance a positivist premise which is usually presented as a hypothesis. Therefore, the intention thereof is to verify the premise. The research methods used by quantitative researchers include surveys and audience studies (Du Plooy, 2009:29). According to Du Plooy, the reasons why these methods are valued in quantitative research are that they provide information about the influence of mass media, whether the data collected on the process of communication is reliable, and whether the data can be used to formulate the premise or hypothesis of future studies.

This study will be conducted by using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research designs are suited to studies which emphasises characteristics, values, and needs of different messages, events, groups, or individuals (Du Plooy, 2009:88). The goal of qualitative research design is, as Du Plooy writes, to study areas where relatively little to no previous research has been conducted and to analyse items according to their themes, attitudes, behaviours, needs, or trends. The research design that will be employed in this study is a case study and then a comparative analysis as methodology. The two respective cases will be analysed separately and then qualitative content analysis will be used to compare the two case studies to one another. A case study can be defined as "a method of research involving an in-depth study of a single unit" (Du Plooy, 2009:79). Case studies do not have a fixed structure, but researchers are advised to conduct a case study in a manner which is relevant to the nuanced needs of the study (Du Plooy, 2009:180). A research question or hypothesis is used as a guide to guarantee that a case study will achieve a definite outcome. One of the main features of a case study is that researchers who use this design in a study can collect a dense volume of information, whereas other research designs (such as surveys) can lead to generalisation (Du Plooy, 2009:182). The advantages of employing a case study as the research design in a study includes its ability to be used for longitudinal studies, the researcher can obtain a holistic view about the subject, its flexibility in terms of how it can be

conducted, and it can be executed in a way that is mindful of the nuances of the particular study's aims (Du Plooy, 2009:181). The case study will be conducted using qualitative content analysis (QCA) and will be followed by a comparative analysis. Comparative analysis explores the similarities and differences between data from previously conducted studies (Du Plooy, 2009:89). A comparative analysis can often result in a new study which follows the findings of a previous study. The following section will expand on content analysis and qualitative analysis.

4.3 Methodology

This study will employ content analysis (CA) as its research method. CA is defined as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (Höft, Heckmann & Jankowicz, 2018:346). The term "text" has been interpreted in different ways as media expanded into different platforms over the last few decades (Mayring, 2000:2). The term "text" now includes different forms of media which have emerged in the current digital age, such as social media posts, blog posts, interactive media, and podcasts, instead of referring only to print media (Neuendorf, 2017:19). As Neuendorf writes, artworks are also viewed as texts, as illustrated in a study by Wansink and Wansink (2010), where they used CA to compare the size of the food to the size of Jesus and His disciples' heads in the *Last Supper* painting by Leonardo da Vinci.

Researchers can employ CA in a study to achieve the goals set out in the study. These include focusing on the text itself, the text's consumers, or those who created it (Weber, 1990:10; Du Plooy, 2009:213). According to Weber (1990:10), scholars who use CA as a research method do so for a specific reason, which depends on the individual study's aim. Weber writes that the main reasons why researchers employ CA in a study is to ascertain whether or not a text contains bias or not, reception studies, finding trends and patterns in a text, and examining if a text has achieved what it intended to (Du Plooy, 2009:167). CA has many advantages over other research methods, which is a key factor to its popularity amongst researchers. These advantages include that it can be conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively, the consumer of the text and its creator are not aware that the text is being studied because it is in the public domain (which means that this method has hardly any ethical implications), a text can be directly analysed, and studies can be done over time, as is the case in this study (Du Plooy, 2009:213).

There are different ways that researchers employ CA in studies, namely by using either a qualitative or quantitative approach, or a mixed method approach, which combines the two (Du Plooy, 2009:214). In all three of the above approaches, four units of analysis are used to execute a CA study. According to Du Plooy, the four units are as follows: propositional units (questions, statements, and answers), syntactic units (words, phrases, and paragraphs), physical units (time duration, body language, page number count, and medium), and thematic units (patterns concerning a theme or issue).

This study will employ qualitative CA (QCA) as its research method. This method is beneficial when used in studies which intend to examine connotation, denotation, themes, styles, or meanings behind messages (Du Plooy, 2009:219). CA is generally conducted using a quantitative approach, but QCA is not expressed or performed in numerical terms. QCA asks questions and delivers the answers in a manner that relates to attributes of the data (Du Plooy. 2009:220). This results in researchers not being able to generalise their findings when using QCA, because every piece of data has unique attributes. Du Plooy states that CA concentrates on overt meanings in texts, but QCA finds covert meanings by analysing texts.

An important feature of QCA is that it functions systematically (Schreier, 2012:5). QCA requires researchers to thoroughly examine the data collected to ensure that nothing is overlooked or excluded, as this can cause incorrect findings. This can mostly be avoided, according to Schreier, as QCA always makes use of the same order of steps, regardless of the nuanced differences between studies. These steps are as follows: choosing a hypothesis, deciding what will be studied, constructing a coding system, coding the data, testing the coding system by double-coding, discussing the discrepancies between the first and second coding processes, reviewing the coding system if needed, and interpretation and presentation of findings. While a researcher's opinions and background may influence the outcome of a study they conduct, QCA looks beyond individual researcher understandings to verify if their interpretations can successfully pass a consistency test (Schreier, 2012:6). A consistency or reliability test involves inspecting the validity of the connection between coders and the coding system, as well as ascertaining if other researchers reach the same conclusion when coding the same data.

While QCA functions systematically, it is also a flexible research method (Schreier, 2012:7). Therefore, as Schreier writes, no one set coding system exists, but it is rather the role of the researcher to develop a coding system that is relevant to the data and the nuances of the

specific study at hand. A coding system needs to consist of categories that will provide the best analysis of the data for the study. QCA coding systems are data-driven to allow one of the main features of the research method, namely providing descriptions of the data. Theories and coding systems used in previous studies by other researchers may be used in a new study by a researcher, but it is first adapted to the unique situation of the study that will be conducted. Qualitative research methods tend towards expanding on the data that is analysed, but QCA reduces data by placing it in different categories and refining the categories down to their most relevant form. This refinement process, according to Schreier, changes the nature of the data from concrete to abstract. The goal is to code without losing the details of the data (Schreier, 2012:8). In the process of the data becoming more abstract, new information is created, namely comparative data between cases.

When constructing a coding system, one can start by either categorising the raw data according to where it was obtained from or which topic it is about (Schreier, 2012:80). After one has completed this first step, one should discern between relevant and irrelevant data, and to omit the latter from the study (Schreier, 2012:81). It is recommended that one err on the side of caution by making the irrelevant category stricter than the relevant category, so that relevant data is not incorrectly labelled as irrelevant (Schreier, 2012:83). The coding system can then be constructed either around the existing data, or deductively, by using the hypothesis (Schreier, 2012:84). This study will construct its coding system in a data-driven method by using the following steps:

- finding relevant sections in the text,
- turn new concepts into categories,
- construct subsequent sub-categories, then
- go through relevant text again, and
- add words and phrases with references to the corresponding category (Schreier, 2012:88).

Then the data will be coded comparatively, by adding categories to the coding system which show the differences between the data sets. Each category requires a name, a justification for using that name for the specific category, examples, and, if needed, rules as to how one decides which data will be included in the category (Schreier, 2012:95).

This study will, by using QCA, examine articles pertaining to the Lotz and Cornelius cases respectively. The articles used for the Lotz case study will be sourced from a South African

newspaper, namely *Die Burger*, and a South African news website, IOL. In terms of the latter, relevant articles will be found using the keywords "Inge Lotz" in the website's search bar. The articles about the Cornelius case will be sourced from two South African news websites, namely News24 and Times Live. In both cases, the articles will be sourced from the first report on their deaths to the final day of the respective court cases. These articles will be analysed to determine how crime journalism in South Africa linguistically constructs the victim in comparison to the accused, perpetrator, and criminal. The articles about the Lotz case will be found using newspaper archives and using the date of the murder, 16 March 2005, until the final date of the trial, 30 November 2007. The articles about the Cornelius case will be found by means of a keyword search on both news websites and using the articles found in the results, from 28 May 2017 (the start date of the reporting on the case) to the last day of the trial, 14 February 2019. The keywords which will be used to conduct the search for articles are "Hannah Cornelius". The codes that will be used are 'victim', 'accused', and 'criminal.' The descriptions of the actors who fall in these categories will be coded and then analysed to ascertain how these categories of people are portrayed by crime journalism.

4.4. Ethical clearance

Stellenbosch University strives to conduct and produce research which protects the safety, dignity, and rights of all participants. Therefore, all researchers need to gain ethical clearance for their proposed studies before they begin any research. The ethical clearance process is overseen and managed by the Research Ethics Committee (REC). The researcher will apply online and provide the title of the proposed study, the research proposal, and answer questions regarding data collection and storage. This application is reviewed by the REC, who decide whether or not the researcher is able to move forward with their proposed study, or if the proposal requires revision before they may begin.

As this study did not involve any interviews or compromising information, and data collection was conducted from publicly accessible sources, this researcher was granted an exemption from ethical clearance. The letter from the REC which states this can be found in addendum A.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology deemed to be applicable to the specific study, namely a case study design and QCA as method of analysis. The next chapter will discuss the findings of the study.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will briefly review the methodology as laid out in the previous chapter (namely case studies and qualitative content analysis) and discuss the limitations encountered when applying the methodology to this study. Thereafter this chapter will examine and discuss the data found in the articles regarding the Lotz and Cornelius cases respectively, before embarking on a comparative discussion of the findings of both cases.

5.2 Brief review of research design and methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research designs are suited to studies which focus on emphasising characteristics, values, and needs of different messages, events, groups, or individuals (Du Plooy, 2009:88). This is relevant to the aim of the current study, as this study employed a case study as its research design and then a content analysis as methodology. The two respective cases will be analysed separately and then qualitative content analysis will be used to compare the two different news products used in each case study to one another. Du Plooy (2009:79) defines a case study as "a method of research involving an in-depth study of a single unit". The case studies chosen for this study are the Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius cases respectively. The news products used for the Lotz case study were *Die Burger* and *IOL*. The news products used for the Cornelius case were *News24* and *Times Live*. Due to different news products being analysed in each case study, the findings of the respective case studies cannot be compared to one another, but rather the titles within a case study can be compared to ascertain the similarities and differences between how they covered the same case.

This study will employ qualitative content analysis (QCA) as its research method. CA is defined as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (Höft, Heckmann & Jankowicz, 2018:346) and follows the construction of a coding system. This study will construct a data-driven coding system by using the following steps: finding relevant sections in the text, turn new concepts into categories, construct subsequent sub-categories, then go through relevant text again and add words and phrases with references to the corresponding category (Schreier, 2012:88). Categories will be added to the coding system to show how the data sets differ, thereby coding the data comparatively.

5.3 Limitations of the chosen research methodology

Due to the manual nature of QCA, this researcher experienced that the data collection process was more time consuming than originally assumed before undertaking the study. While even reading through all the relevant articles only once would be a time-consuming activity, re-reading them as many times as the study demands (mainly for the sake of avoiding any errors or overlooking important information) took longer than what many other research methods would. This is not an outright limitation, as it did not prohibit this researcher from conducting the study, but it did result in needing to rethink the timeframe for the study's completion. Like the reading and re-reading of the articles, the coding process was also more time-consuming than initially assumed.

5.4 Findings

The titles analysed were *Die Burger* and *IOL* for the Lotz case, and *News24* and *Times Live* for the Cornelius case. In total 178 articles were analysed for the Lotz case, 64 of which were published in *Die Burger* and 114 of which were published on *IOL*. In total 121 articles were analysed for the Cornelius case, 73 of which were published on *News24* and 48 of which were published on *Times Live*. In order to collect data for this study, multiple rounds of coding were conducted.

In the first round of coding, the articles pertaining to each of the two respective cases were divided into which of the terms they refer to, namely *primary victim*, *secondary victim*, *accused*, and *criminal*. The reason why the victim group was split into primary and secondary victims, is because some articles focused on the deceased (and in the Cornelius case, also the survivor) and others focused on the families and friends of the primary victims, which made them secondary victims. As some articles referred to two or more of the terms, there were also groups in the first round of coding which acknowledged this, such as articles which referred to the primary victim and the accused.

The next few rounds of coding involved reading and re-reading the content of each article within each group to find the phrases attached to the terms *primary victim(s)*, *secondary victim(s)*, *accused*, and *criminal(s)*. Each round of coding sought to verifying the phrases found in the previous round of coding and to narrow down the phrases to their most relevant form.

5.4.1 Inge Lotz case

In this case, when the terms *primary victim*, *secondary victim(s)*, *accused*, and *criminal* were used, they were referring to the following actors in the case:

- Primary victim: Inge Lotz
- Secondary victim(s): Jan and Juanita Lotz (Inge Lotz's parents), Wimpie Boshoff (close friend of Inge Lotz), and Louis and Carien van der Vyver (the accused's parents).
- Accused: Fred van der Vyver
- Criminal: Not applicable, as no one was found guilty in this case.

While this is not a quantitative study, it is interesting to note that out of the 178 articles analysed in regards to this case, 101 refer to the primary victim, 52 refer to the secondary victims, and 164 refer to the accused, with many of the articles referring to two or more of the above terms. This shows that the agenda-setting of the case included more coverage of the accused than the other actors in the case.

5.4.1.1 *Die Burger*

Once the articles from the different editions were analysed and coded, common themes emerged within the coding categories. When writing about the primary victim, *Die Burger* tended to focus on her academics and intelligence, her relation to the Olympic swimmer Ryk Neethling, and the way that she was murdered. *Die Burger*'s reporting on the secondary victims focused on the primary victim's parents and the accused's flatmate. Lastly, three themes emerged from *Die Burger*'s writing about the accused, namely his relationship to the primary victim, his career and qualifications, and his behaviour during the trial. This section will now discuss specific examples from each of the themes mentioned above.

Die Burger's depiction of the primary victim centred on her academic achievements and intelligence. At the time of her death, she was a Master's student in Mathematical Statistics at Stellenbosch University; a fact which was mentioned in almost every article. These references include: "M-student in wiskunde" (Master's student in Mathematics), "uitblinker-Matie" (outstanding Matie), and "meestersgraadstudent in wiskundige statistiek" (Master's student in Mathematical Statistics) (Smith & Ekron, 2005). This portrayal framed the primary victim as an academically-gifted postgraduate student, thereby playing into the trope of the

victim as innocent. This trope is furthered by *Die Burger*'s focus on the brutal manner in which she was murdered. The two words that were used the most in this context are "wreed" (cruel) and "bloedig" (bloody) (Smith & Ekron, 2005; Barnard, 2007a; Prince, 2007). These linguistic choices clearly communicate that the victim suffered, which advanced the agenda of framing the primary victim as innocent. Lastly, *Die Burger* added the element of celebrity to the case by repeatedly mentioning the connection between the South African Olympic swimmer Ryk Neethling and the primary victim: "kleinniggie van Olimpiese swemmer Ryk Neethling" (niece of Olympic swimmer Ryk Neethling) (Smith & Ekron, 2005).

The primary victims' parents were portrayed as somewhat demure secondary victims: "sag geglimlag" (smiled softly) (Barnard, 2007b), "stil bly sit" (remained seated) (Nel, 2007), and "verkies om nie nou kommentaar te lewer nie" (chose not to comment at this time) (Barnard, 2007c). The image of them as quiet, yet smiling, represented them as presenting a brave face to the world despite the tragic loss they had experienced. The depiction of the parents not only affects how they are viewed as secondary victims, but also has an effect on how readers perceive the primary victim. The parents' grief furthers the framing of the primary victim as innocent, as it shows a great loss, which causes readers to become sympathetic towards them. The accused's flatmate, on the other hand, is only referred to as who he is in relation to the accused and no additional information as to his mental state, emotions, or actions are provided: "voorheen huismaat, vriend, studentemaat en kollega" (former housemate, friend, fellow student, and colleague) (Barnard, 2007d).

Like the primary victim, *Die Burger* made many references to the accused's academic history and career: "'n aktuaris by Ou Mutual in Pinelands" (an actuary at Old Mutual in Pinelands) (Pienaar, 2005a) and "aktuariëele student" (actuarial student) (Prince, 2007). Framing the accused as an intelligent man with a career could cause readers to not believe that he is the sort of person who could commit murder, least of all, of his girlfriend. The accused was represented as devoted boyfriend, which advanced *Die Burger*'s positive framing of him. His personality, in general, as well as how it manifested during the trial, were key aspects in his portrayal. He was depicted as a stable, calm, peaceful, sensitive, and gentle young man: "'n saggeaarde en vredeliewend Christen" (a gentle and peace-loving Christian) (Pienaar, 2005b), "baie kalm en rustig" (very calm and peaceful) (Barnard, 2007e), and "ongelooflik sensitief" (unbelievably sensitive) (Barnard, 2007f). This complete picture, namely the accused as an intelligent man with a pleasant disposition, causes readers to doubt if he could have committed the crime. Crime news readers are accustomed to cases where the accused are

unstable, have a negative temperament, and often also have a criminal record, or at the very least a history of acting out against others (Drake & Henley, 2014:142).

5.4.1.2 *IOL*

Like *Die Burger*, *IOL's* writing about the primary victim also focused on her academics and intelligence, her relation to the Olympic swimmer Ryk Neethling, and the way that she was murdered. However, there were two other themes that emerged from the *IOL* articles, namely her age and her personality. *IOL*'s reporting on secondary victims mentioned various people who fall in that category, but focused primarily on the primary victim's father, her best friend, and the accused's flatmate. *IOL* took a three-pronged approach to portraying the accused by paying attention to his relationship to the primary victim, his career and qualifications, and his behaviour at the trial. This section will now discuss specific examples from each of the themes mentioned above.

IOL's reporting on the primary victim echoed that of *Die Burger* in that it framed her as innocent through focusing on her personality, academic achievements and intelligence, young age, and the brutal nature of her murder. But then the sense of innocence that is established at the beginning of the reporting on the case is replaced with a sense of doubt. In terms of her personality, *IOL* described her as a "loving Christian" (Breytenbach, 2005a) and a "particularly bright and attractive young woman" (Smith, 2007). This depiction was cemented by repeated references to her young age, "brilliant 21-year-old" (Breytenbach, 2005b), as well as her academic achievements, namely "obtained an honours degree in mathematics" (Staff Reporter, 2005) and "master's student in mathematical statistics" (Breytenbach, 2007a). However, despite these positive descriptions, she was also referred to as having "flirty relationships with other men" (Oliver, 2007).

This depiction could cause readers to doubt the extent of the primary victim's innocence, because IOL's writing about her raises suspicions that she could have been unfaithful to the accused, thereby making jealousy a possible motive. The last theme that emerged from *IOL*'s reporting on the primary victim was how she was murdered. The language used in this regard is factual, rather than emotive: "numerous stab wounds to her chest and neck" (Breytenbach, 2005a), "beaten and stabbed to death" (Schroeder, 2006), and "bludgeoned to death with a blunt object" (Breytenbach, 2007b). By maintaining a relatively objective stance when reporting on the way the primary victim was murdered, *IOL* shifts the responsibility of interpretation to its readers, who in turn are invited to ascertain the roles of the primary

victim and the accused respectively, although one should take into account that readers are doing so in light of the character sketch provided by the website's reporting on the primary victim.

The secondary victims are not mentioned too often by *IOL*, but the ones who are referred to the most, are members of the primary victim's family, particularly their actions and emotions. Her parents were depicted as doting, emotional, and concerned: "rushed from Bloemfontein to Stellenbosch" (IOL, 2005), "suspected there was tension between Inge and her boyfriend" (Breytenbach, 2007c), and "weeping parents" (Breytenbach, 2007d). The portrayal of the Lotz couple not only shows their grief following the loss of their daughter, but also causes readers to wonder why they were suspicious about the quality of the primary victim and the accused's relationship and if they had shared these thoughts with her. One can even go so far as to say that this could affect how readers view the accused and the primary victim respectively, because the situation must have been serious for the parents to be aware of tension.

Lastly, *IOL*'s depiction of the accused will be discussed. Many references were made to the accused's academic achievements and career: "an actuary with Old Mutual" (Powell, 2007), "actuarial assistant" (Breytenbach, 2007e), and near the end of the trial, "former Old Mutual actuary" (Hawker, 2007). There were also repeated mentions of the accused being the boyfriend of the primary victim: "Lotz's boyfriend" (Oliver, 2007b) and "long-time boyfriend" (Hawker, 2006). This factual, rather than emotive, description of the accused does not show either a negative or positive opinion of him by the website, but he does not at this point seem like the archetypal murderer. This position is advanced by *IOL*'s writing on the accused's behaviour during the trial, which is mixed in terms of how readers can interpret his personality. On the one hand, he is described as emotional and showing signs of poor mental and physical health following the death of his girlfriend and the trial in general: "in shock" (Breytenbach, 2007f), "faded version of a man once strong" (Smith, 2007), and "wept at times" (Breytenbach, 2007g). However, on the other hand, the reporting also raises doubts concerning whether or not his aforementioned emotions were purely performative: "behaviour was excessive and affected", "tried to look sad", and "emotions did not look genuine" (Breytenbach, 2007h). This doubt over how he appeared at the trial, paired with the suspicions about the primary victim's fidelity and her parents' suspicions about their relationship, could cause readers to view the case with more nuance than if it was just an innocent victim and a guilty perpetrator.

5.4.2 Hannah Cornelius case

In this case, when the terms *primary victim*, *secondary victim(s)*, *accused*, and *criminal* were used, they were referring to the following actors in the case:

- Primary victims: Hannah Cornelius and Cheslin Marsh
- Secondary victim(s): Anna and Willem Cornelius (parents of Hannah Cornelius), Lali van Zuydam (cousin of Hannah Cornelius and spokesperson for the family during the trial), Hannah Cornelius; younger brother (his name is not included in any of the reporting), and the family of Cheslin Marsh
- Accused: Eben van Niekerk, Geraldo Parsons, Vernon Witbooi, and Nashwill Julies
- Criminal: the accused once they received their sentencing.

As stated above, this is not a quantitative study, yet the agenda of the publications covering the case can be gleaned by knowing how many articles focused on each of the terms. Out of the 121 articles analysed within regards to this case, 95 refer to the primary victims, 32 refer to the secondary victims, 78 refer to the accused, and 18 referred to the criminals, with many of the articles referring to two or more of the above terms. This shows that the agenda-setting of the case favoured coverage of the primary victims, closely followed by the accused. The reason for the noticeable disparity in articles which refer to the criminals and those that refer to the other terms is that the criminals were identified at the end of the case, whereas previously the same group were referred to as the accused.

5.4.2.1 *News24*

As there were two primary victims, the themes that emerged have been split between the two, as each of them were reported on slightly differently. The first primary victim that will be discussed is Cornelius. The themes that emerged from how *News24* wrote about her are her age, the fact that she was a student, the manner in which she was murdered, and her personality. The next primary victim is Marsh, and the themes that *News24* focused on when writing about him, was that he survived, the nature of his injuries, his hearing loss, the fact that witnesses suspected him to be an intruder, and his behaviour during the trial. Many secondary victims were mentioned in *News24*'s reporting, but the articles tended to focus on Cornelius' father's profession as a magistrate, her family's positive outlook despite the circumstances, her brother's autism, and her mother's drowning. Marsh's family are

mentioned a few times, but are not given as much attention as the Cornelius family. The accused are framed in terms of their respective ages, the charges they faced, Witbooi as the leader, and Julius as being less involved than the other accused. After the accused are found guilty and fall in the category of criminals, the themes that arose from *News24*'s writing about them are their personalities and lack of remorse, and their criminal history. This section will now discuss specific examples from each of the themes mentioned above.

The first primary victim that will be discussed is Cornelius. *News24* depicted Cornelius as a young student with a pleasant disposition, who was an underserving victim of a brutal attack that resulted in her murder. In terms of her personality, Cornelius was described in a positive light and many quotes from friends and family were used to substantiate this: "wonderful, loving, and beautiful person" (De Wee & Brits, 2017), "loving, intelligent student" (You, 2017a)[1], "lovely, perfect, beautiful cousin" (You, 2017), and "wonderful daughter" (Theron, 2017a). The positive framing of her personality is juxtaposed by the disturbing details of how she was attacked and murdered: "murdered and raped" (You, 2017b), "hijacked, kidnapped, and murdered" (People's Post, 2018), "stabbed twice in the neck" (Petersen, 2018a), and "raped and stabbed to death" (Petersen, 2018b). This juxtaposition evokes sympathy from readers as it emphasises that she did not deserve what happened to her, neither did she provoke or cause it.

Secondly *News24*'s reporting on the second primary victim, Marsh, will be discussed. He was framed as a young man who was lucky to survive the ordeal, whilst trying to cope with survivor's guilt and the loss of a friend. The fact that he survived despite Cornelius being murdered was often highlighted by *News24*: "managed to escape" (Cronje, 2017), "survived the attack" (Evans, 2017), and "managed to get away" (You, 2017a). These descriptions were often paired with details of the injuries he sustained during the attack, as well as the fact that he was left for dead: "assaulted and left for dead" (De Wee, 2017), "suffered severe head and body injuries" (Etheridge & Petersen, 2018), "lost hearing in his left ear" (Pitt, 2018a), and "stoned and left for dead" (Petersen, 2018c). The last element of his framing was the descriptions of his behaviour during the trial, particularly the way in which he displayed his emotions: "wept inconsolably" (Etheridge & Petersen, 2018), "unable to testify further" (Petersen, 2018d), "choked back tears" (Pitt, 2018b), and "tearfully testifying" (Petersen,

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[1] *You* magazine and *People's Post* are publications that publish some of their articles on News24's website. When this occurs, then the author is cited as Staff Writer and not the journalist's own name.

2018e). The combination of his grief at the trial, his injuries from the attack, and his status as a survivor could cause readers to view Marsh as an underserving victim, like Cornelius. However, in *News24*'s reporting on the case they focused more on Cornelius than Marsh, which had the effect of him being seen as a secondary victim, when he was as much a primary victim as her.

News24's writing about the secondary victims focused on the Cornelius family rather than the Marsh family, although the latter were mentioned in a few articles, specifically Marsh's mother. Each member of the Cornelius family was portrayed in a different manner. Her father was referred to in terms of his profession, "retired Simon's Town magistrate" (Etheridge, 2018), and his individual emotional state was not referred to. The reporting on her brother centred on his autism and that he "does not understand the concept of death" (Petersen, 2018f). Her mother, like her father, is initially only referred to in terms of her profession, but when she later dies due to drowning, this becomes the focus of how she is written about: "discovered along the shores of Scarborough" (Mitchley, 2018) and "reportedly drowned" (Correspondent, 2018). When the family's emotions are mentioned, they are grouped together: "trying to stay positive" (You, 2017c), "made peace with her death" (You, 2017a), and "no bitterness, no anger, just incredible loss" (Evans, 2017). This creates a unifying effect and does not allow for nuanced reporting on each person's individual attitudes. The advantage of this is that the family are viewed as presenting a united front, although the disadvantage of this is that readers do not get an opportunity to see how the loss affected each family member individually. This is not a unique situation, as reporting on secondary victims is often done without giving thought to its impact, because the focus tends to be on the primary victim(s) (Drake & Henley, 2014:145).

When *News24* mentioned the accused, their ages were almost always included. Van Niekerk was 27, Witbooi was 32, Parsons was 26 and Julius was 28 (Smith, 2017). The repeated references to their ages made one think that as Witbooi was the oldest, he must be the leader. This theme is later enforced by the reporting which blatantly states that he is the "mastermind behind the brutal killing" (Petersen, 2018g). There was also a focus on the charges they faced: "charged with murder, robbery, abduction, assault and rape" (You, 2017d) and "face a string of charges" (Petersen, 2018a). This served to remind readers of how brutal their alleged actions were almost every time they read a *News24* article on the case. The effect of this is that sympathy for the victim grows, while dislike for the accused increases, and potentially readers would also begin to believe that the accused are guilty. One of the few, if only,

nuances in how the accused are written about, is that the fact that Julius was less involved than the other three accused is mentioned: "after the robbery Julius left the scene" (Petersen, 2018h) and "fled after the robbery" (Petersen, 2018g). However, this does not absolve him; as he is viewed as wanting to "capitalise on the actions of his co-accused" (Petersen, 2018i).

Once the accused was found guilty and changed categories to criminals, the reporting on them shifted to focusing on their respective criminal histories and their personalities. In terms of the latter, their lack of repentance was highlighted: "have no respect for human rights" (Petersen, 2018f), "none of the accused showed true remorse" (Petersen, 2018j), and "society deserves protection from them" (Petersen, 2018k). Each of the guilty had previous convictions. Witbooi had a "10-page rap sheet", Parsons was "released on parole in 2010", Van Niekerk was "convicted only five years ago", and Julius has "five previous convictions" (Petersen, 2018f). By framing them in this manner, *News24* depicted them as seasoned criminals who were a danger to society, which could cause readers to support the judge's decision to convict them and remove any doubt or thoughts that they are innocent. *News24*'s framing of the criminals not only affects how readers view them, but also how the primary victims are depicted. When conceptualising the primary victims in light of how the criminals are portrayed, one is led to believe that they were no match and that Marsh's survival is a miracle, with Cornelius' death being inevitable in that situation. This plays into the innocent victim/guilty perpetrator trope.

5.4.2.2 *Times Live*

As written in the previous section, the two respective primary victims were analysed individually with regards to which themes came to the fore during the coding process. Like *News24*, *Times Live* focused on Cornelius' age, the fact that she was a student, the manner in which she was murdered, and her personality, but they also repeatedly referred to her intelligence. When writing about Marsh, *Times Live* made readers aware of the nature of his injuries, his emotional state during the trial, the fact that he survived, and that he is a student who subsequently dropped out of university due to the psychological effects of the attack. The secondary victims who were mentioned most frequently were Cornelius' brother, her mother, and her father. *Times Live* wrote about the accused in terms of their gang involvement and history, the charges they faced, their attitudes during the trial, their drug use, and that they pleaded not guilty. Once the accused were found guilty and fell into the category of criminals, the only theme that occurred was repeated references to their criminal

history. This section will now discuss specific examples from each of the themes mentioned above.

Time Live's portrayal of the first primary victim, Cornelius, framed her as an intelligent young student who had a kind personality and suffered a brutal death following an attack on her and a friend. Almost every article that mentions Cornelius refers to her being a Stellenbosch student and many of these articles describe her history of academic achievement: "murdered Stellenbosch University student" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2017a), "matriculated with six distinctions" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2017a), and "21-year-old Stellenbosch University student" (Collins, 2017). This depiction could cause readers to view Cornelius as an underserving victim who was taken too young. The portrayal of her as underserving was furthered by the positive descriptions of her personality, which, like *News24*, often used quotes from people who knew her to describe her disposition: "too good for this world" (Hyman, 2017a), "she was good-hearted" (Hyman, 2018), "made the world a better place" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2017a), and "remembered as an incredible human being" (Hyman, 2017a). These positive descriptions of her personality and capabilities are starkly contrasted with the details of her attack and subsequent murder: "hijacked" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2017a, "abducted, raped and left to die" (De Klerk, 2018), "crushed by a 37kg rock" (Hyman, 2018c), and "found dead on a farm" (Molyneaux, 2018a). This juxtaposition evokes sympathy for Cornelius from readers, because she is portrayed as an innocent, young student with a pleasant disposition who did not deserve what happened to her.

The second primary victim, Marsh, is reported on through the lens of him surviving the attack that caused Cornelius' death: "managed to escape" (Hyman, 2017a), "managed to find help" (Molyneaux, 2018b), and "nearly lost his own life" (Hyman, 2018c). However, his survival is not reported on in a vacuum, but rather with cognisance of the fact that experiencing the attack, paired with Cornelius dying as a result of the same attack, had a psychological effect on him: "battled to fight off fits of sobbing" (Hyman, 2018a), "broke down in tears" (Hyman, 2018d), "repeatedly collapsed sobbing" (Hyman, 2018e), and "traumatised" (Hyman, 2018b). It should also be taken into account that the effects of the attack on Marsh were not only psychological, but also physical: "covered in blood" (Hyman, 2017b), "stabbed and struck with a brick" (Hyman, 2017c), "left for dead" (Molyneaux, 2018b), "bloodied, shocked and bruised" (Hyman, 2018d), and "left partially deaf" (Shange, 2018). Similar to their portrayal of Cornelius, *Times Live* framed Marsh as an undeserving victim of an attack, but added the nuance of his psychological and physical trauma from surviving an attack that left his friend

dead. Where *News24* reported more on Cornelius than Marsh, *Times Live* referred to them almost equally in their articles.

Like *News24*, the secondary victims that *Times Live* wrote about the most, are members of the Cornelius family. The Cornelius family members were each framed in a different way. Her brother was only referred to in terms of his autism and the effects thereof: "cannot comprehend what happened to his sister" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2017a), "will never stop asking when she's coming back" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2018), "does not really understand death" (Davids & Farber, 2018), and "autistic" (Molyneaux, 2018a). The father was reported on in terms of his profession and emotional state: "retired as a magistrate" (Davids & Farber, 2018), and "no joy, no hope or goals for the future" (Molyneaux, 2018a). Lastly, her mother was only written about as an individual (as opposed to as part of the family unit) following her death: "found floating offshore" (Gous, 2018a), "with her daughter now" (Gous, 2018b), and "had been ill" (Davids & Farber, 2018). By focusing on the immediate family of Cornelius, *Times Live* gives its readers the impression that Cornelius is the sole primary victim or that her family deserves more publicity than the Marsh family. However, the latter does not seem to be something the Cornelius family wanted, because the father is quoted as saying that he "can't help feeling guilty about the publicity" (Farber, 2018).

Times Live depicted the accused as having gang connections (and in some cases involvement), using drugs, and displaying inappropriate attitudes in court during the trial. Their gang connection was mainly through Parsons who allegedly was "part of the 28s gang" (Hyman & Molyneaux, 2017c), although both Witbooi and him "had prison tattoos with the number 28" (Hyman, 2018f). The accused were reported to have "bought tik and dagga" (Hyman, 2018g) on the night of the attack. Their drug use, paired with their gang affiliations, could cause readers to assume that they committed the crime, as they are portrayed as criminals while still only falling in the category of accused. The accuseds' attitudes in court were often referred to: "seemed defiant" (Hyman, 2017c), "gave his girlfriend a toothless smile" (Hyman, 2017e), and "laughed" (Hyman, 2018b). In these descriptions the accused do not appear to recognise the gravity of the situation and only seem to understand how serious the situation is when they are being sentenced: "chuckles turned to tears" (Hyman, 2018b). This furthers the framing of the accused as definitely guilty, at least in the readers' view, because not only do they have a criminal past one can refer to, but they also did not seem to feel any remorse for their actions. Therefore, it could seem ridiculous to readers that they all "pleaded not guilty" (Hyman, 2018g), because they have been reported on in a way that

makes them appear to be guilty without a shadow of a doubt. There are very few articles from after the accused were found guilty, thereby placing them in the category of criminals. However, in these articles the focus tends to be on their criminal records: "criminal history started in 1997" (Hyman, 2018h) and "extensive criminal records" (Farber, 2018). This feeds into the narrative of gang-related crimes (or crimes committed by those with gang affiliations) being committed by repeat offenders, especially people like these who are "from low-resource communities" (Farber, 2018).

5.5 Comparative discussion

5.5.1. Inge Lotz: *Die Burger* and *IOL*

Die Burger and *IOL*'s writing about the primary victim both focused on her academics and intelligence, her family connection to Ryk Neethling, and the way she was murdered. However, *IOL* also framed her in terms of her age and personality. *Die Burger* portrayed the primary victim as a victim who did not deserve what happened to her. This was conveyed through emphasis on her academic prowess and descriptions of her murder. The coupling of these topics depicts the primary victim as a diligent student who did nothing to justify being brutally murdered. While *IOL* took a similar route, there is an element of doubt cast by their framing of the primary victim. *IOL* does portray the primary victim as innocent at the beginning of their reporting on the case, but later makes mention of other young men in her life (besides her boyfriend) who had crushes on her and the way that she allegedly flirted with them. These descriptions could cause readers to understand the accused's jealousy to a certain extent.

In terms of secondary victims, *Die Burger* and *IOL* both focused on Lotz's parents and the accused's flatmate, but *IOL* also reported on the primary victim's best friend, which *Die Burger* did not. *Die Burger* writes about the primary victim's parents as demure and smiling through their grief. This further emphasises the innocence of the primary victim, because readers will naturally interpret a direct correlation between how much she is missed and how good a person she was. *IOL*, on the other hand, reported on the primary victim's parents as doting and concerned. This angle made readers aware of their grief, but simultaneously caused readers to wonder why they were worried about the quality of the primary victim and accused's relationship. One could even go so far as to speculate that by making the parents' concerns public, *IOL* could affect how readers view the accused and primary victim respectively.

When reporting on the accused, *Die Burger* and *IOL* had the same focus, namely his relationship to the primary victim, his career and qualifications, and his behaviour during the trial. Both publications wrote about the accused's academic achievements and career in such a manner that showed him as an intelligent career man and not as the archetype of a person one would think would murder his girlfriend. However, where *Die Burger*'s focus on him as the primary victim's boyfriend depicts him as devoted and loving, *IOL* states the fact without emotion. This could cause readers of the latter to view the accused as not being the most loving partner, especially when coupled with the previously mentioned suspicions of the primary victim's parents about their relationship, thereby furthering the doubt that has been planted. *IOL* further portrays the accused as emotional during the trial, but later mentions that his emotions could be performative in a bid to evoke sympathy. This adds more doubts about the accused in the minds of the readers. *Die Burger* took a different approach by framing the accused as having a stable, calm, and sensitive personality. The effect of portraying him as an intelligent young man with a pleasant disposition, is that *Die Burger* readers could doubt that he could be the murderer, as he does not fit the established stereotypes of those criminals who are written about in the media.

5.5.2. Hannah Cornelius: *News24* and *Times Live*

Both *News24* and *Times Live* reported on the first primary victim, Cornelius, in similar ways. *News24* portrays her through positive descriptions of her personality, which are then juxtaposed with details of the brutal attack and murder that took her life. *Times Live* also depicted her through positive descriptions of her personality, with elements such as her kindness and intelligence being highlighted. This is contrasted with stark details of her attack and murder. *News24* and *Times Live*'s framing of Cornelius evokes sympathy from their readers by playing into the stereotype of her as an innocent victim who did not deserve what happened to her. *News24*'s depiction of the second primary victim, Marsh, focuses mainly on the fact that he survived the attack that ended in Cornelius's death, although themes such as his emotions during the trial and the nature of his injuries also emerged from their reporting. *Times Live* also focused on Marsh's status as a survivor of the attack, but honed in more on both the physical and psychological effects of the attack, particularly the effects of witnessing Cornelius's murder. Both news websites portrayed both of the primary victims as underserving, with Marsh as the survivor having to live with trauma from the attack.

When reporting on the secondary victims, *News24* mostly reported on Cornelius' family (both as individuals and as a group) and there were a few articles which mentioned Marsh's mother. This disparity in how much attention the families of the victims were given, could cause readers to see Cornelius as the main victim and Marsh almost as a secondary victim himself. On the one hand, Cornelius lost her life while Marsh survived, which makes the case more high-profile, and by proxy, brings more attention to her than to Marsh. On the other hand, Marsh still suffered trauma, and as a victim deserves to be given equal attention in the media. This problem persists in *Times Live'*s reporting, where they hardly make mention of anyone related to Marsh, which can cause readers to see Cornelius as the only primary victim.

News24's depiction of the accused focuses on the group's individual ages, the charges they faced, and the fact that Julius was less involved than the rest of the group. *Times Live*, on the other hand, chose to focus on the accused's gang connections, their drug use, and the attitudes they displayed in court. These very different framing choices affect the respective news websites' readers' view of the accused. *News24*'s framing of the accused evokes sympathy for the primary victims through focusing on the charges the accused faced. This focus reminded readers of the brutal manner in which the primary victims were attacked. By doing this, the sympathy for the victim grows, while dislike for the accused increases. *Times Live*'s depiction of the accused brings their negative attitudes to the fore, particularly their lack of remorse and flippant dispositions during the trial proceedings. This portrayal further frames them as guilty, because it seems like they cannot be rehabilitated as they do not feel guilty for what they did. Therefore, *Times Live*'s readers could have viewed the accused as guilty before they were sentenced. Once the accused were sentenced and moved into the category of criminals, their framing changed. *News24* portrayed them in terms of their respective criminal histories and their lack of remorse. This cements the innocent victim and guilty perpetrator trope that *News24*'s reporting had been following throughout its reporting on the case. *Times Live*'s writing on the criminals also focused on their criminal histories, but added the element of gang involvement. This framing makes the case look like it was just another gang-related crime committed by repeat offenders from low-income areas, which ignores the nuance of the situation.

5.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the data that was collected for the study through applications of QCA. This chapter also explained what CA and QCA is and the limitations thereof. The Lotz and Cornelius cases were examined separately, followed by a comparative discussion of the differences and similarities between how victims, the accused, and criminals were portrayed in both cases. The following chapter will conclude the study and provide suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study aimed to ascertain how crime news journalists linguistically portray primary victims in relation to secondary victims, the accused, and criminals respectively. This was done by means of a qualitative content analysis of two specific cases, namely the Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius cases.

This final chapter will reflect on the study up to this point before using the findings in the previous chapter to answer the research questions. This will be followed by recommendations for further research.

6.2 Thesis summary

Chapter One served as an introduction to this study. The chapter outlined the motivation for the study and introduced the subsequent chapters; namely the literature review, theoretical point of departure, and research design -and methodology. Chapter One also discussed the research problem, problem statement, and research questions. The main aim of this study was presented, that is, to determine how crime reporting differs in its descriptions of victims, the accused, and criminals respectively.

In Chapter Two the Literature Review was conducted. The topics covered by the literature review are news, news values, and crime news. The information presented was sourced from relevant literature concerning the above topics. After providing an introduction to news and news values, the chapter discussed crime news and its actors. However, it became apparent that there were gaps in the existing literature, the most prominent of which was the lack of linguistic studies of crime news media, which this study sought to fill.

Chapter Three presented the theoretical point of departure for this study. The theoretical point of departure that was chosen is social constructionism, therefore the chapter began with a discussion and explanation of this theory. Social constructionism is "concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises" (Vera, 2016:7). The explanation of social constructionism gave way to a discussion of the theory of 'the sociology of knowledge'. This theory expands on social constructionism to argue that one should question what one perceives reality to be and why one perceives it to be this way, as one's interpretation or perception of reality is a construct, even if one constructed it oneself. In crime news the media are constructing the reality, using linguistic choices as one

of their main methods. Therefore, one should analyse crime news articles to ascertain to what extent they are truthful or objective and how much of what they write has informed one's personal view of certain people, groups, and events.

Chapter Four focused on the research design and methodology that was employed in conducting this study. To fit the needs of this study, qualitative research designs were chosen over their quantitative counterparts. The specific research design that was used is a case study, which involved analysis of how two different publications reported on the same case. This was done for two cases, specifically the Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius cases. The way that the two publications for each case reported on the respective cases were compared to one another, for example, the manner in which *News24* and *Times Live* reported on the Cornelius case. As the two cases had articles from different publications, they could not be compared to one another. The methodology that was used was qualitative content analysis. This was conducted by a close analysis of each article published in the chosen publications about the respective cases and then coding the information according to certain categories.

Chapter Five examined and discussed the data that was found from the relevant texts and using the applications of the chosen research design and methodology. The chapter also explained the limitations of the selected methods. The findings of the Lotz and Cornelius cases were discussed separately. First each publication's articles on a specific case were analysed, and the two publications for each respective case were compared to one another. The chapter concluded with a comparative discussion of the similarities and differences between how victims, the accused, and criminals were reported on in both cases.

In this chapter the previous chapters have been summarised. Following this, the findings will be applied to answer the research questions, make recommendations for crime journalists, and suggest areas of further research. This will conclude the study.

6.3 Response to the main research question

The main research question for this study is as follows:

How is the way in which crime reporting describes victims different from how it describes the accused or criminal?

6.3.1 Inge Lotz case

64

In this case the primary victim is portrayed as an academically gifted young woman who did not deserve to be murdered. However, *IOL* added the nuance of her history of flirting with young men (other than her boyfriend) who had crushes on her. This could lead readers to believe that jealousy might have been the motive for her murder. To a certain extent this amounts to a degree of victim blaming, because her actions (innocent or otherwise) are seen as the reason she was murdered. This takes some of the blame away from the alleged murderer, as they are seen as justified in their actions. However, nobody was found guilty for the murder.

The individuals who are considered secondary victims varied between the two publications. In terms of secondary victims, *Die Burger* and *IOL* both focused on Lotz's parents and the accused's flatmate, but *IOL* also reported on the primary victim's best friend, which *Die Burger* did not. Besides differing on which people qualify as secondary victims, the two respective publications portrayed Lotz's parents in different ways. *Die Burger* depicted Lotz's parents as reserved and smiling through their grief. This further emphasises the innocence of Lotz, because readers will naturally interpret a direct correlation between how much she is missed and how good of a person she was. *IOL*, on the other hand, portrayed Lotz's parents as loving and concerned about their daughter (particularly her relationship with her boyfriend). This reporting technique causes readers to connect to and realise the primary victim's parents' grief while making them wonder why they were concerned about Lotz and the accused's relationships. One could even go so far as to say that by making the parents' concerns public, *IOL* could affect how readers view the accused and primary victim respectively.

Both publications portrayed the accused in a similar way by focusing on his qualifications, career, behaviour during the trial, and relationship to the primary victim.

When reporting on the accused, *Die Burger* and *IOL* had the same focus, namely his relationship to the primary victim, his career and qualifications, and his behaviour during the trial. Both publications wrote about the accused's academic achievements and career in such a manner that showed him as an intelligent career man and not as the archetype of a person one would think would murder his girlfriend. However, where *Die Burger*'s focus on him as the primary victim's boyfriend depicts him as devoted and loving, *IOL* states the fact without emotion. This could cause readers of the latter to view the accused as not being the most loving partner, especially when coupled with the previously mentioned suspicions of the

primary victim's parents about their relationship, thereby furthering the doubt that has been planted. *IOL* further portrays the accused as emotional during the trial, but later mentions that his emotions could be performative in a bid to evoke sympathy. This adds more doubts about the accused in the minds of the readers. *Die Burger* took a different approach by framing the accused as having a stable, calm, and sensitive personality. The effect of portraying him as an intelligent young man with a pleasant disposition, is that *Die Burger* readers could doubt that he could be the murderer, as he does not fit the established stereotypes of those criminals who are written about in the media.

No one was found guilty in this case, therefore no one fit the category of criminal. This means that the criminal category could not be coded and analysed.

6.3.2. Hannah Cornelius case

The first primary victim, Hannah Cornelius, was portrayed similarly by both *News24* and *Times Live.* Both news websites focused on positive descriptions of her personality, specifically highlighting her kindness, friendly disposition, and academic achievements. *News24* juxtaposed these positive descriptions with details of the attack (and subsequent murder). *Times Live* likewise contrasted the positive accounts of Cornelius with frank details regarding the attack that took her life. Both news websites employed sympathetic framing with regards to Cornelius. They achieved this by playing into the stereotype of her as an innocent victim who did not deserve what happened to her. *News24*'s reporting on the second primary victim, Cheslin Marsh, focused on him having survived the attack that ended Cornelius's life; whilst also establishing themes such as the nature of his injuries and the emotions he displayed during the trial. *Times Live*, on the other hand, paid more attention to the physical and psychological effects of the attack on Marsh than his status as a survivor. Both news websites depicted both Cornelius and Marsh as underserving.

Between the two news websites there was a degree of disparity as to who they considered secondary victims. *News24* focused on the Cornelius family, with Marsh's mother only receiving a few mentions. This gap in how much reporting was done about the respective secondary victims could cause readers to view Cornelius as the sole primary victim and relegates Marsh to being considered a secondary victim himself. This mentality springs from the fact that Cornelius lost her life, which causes Marsh as the survivor to be seen as having suffered less than his friend. However, he suffered his own trauma and is a primary victim

66

who, along with his family, deserves equal media attention. *Times Live*'s reporting has similar problems, in that it doesn't make much mention of Marsh's family.

The accused in this case are a group of four men. *News24*'s reporting on the accused repeatedly mentioned the individual ages of each man in the group, in addition to focusing on Julius being less involved than the other three men and the charges that all four faced. This contrasts *Times Live*'s depiction of the accused, which sought to highlight their drug use, gang connections, and the attitudes they displayed in court. By taking disparate approaches in framing the accused, the respective news websites cause their readers to have different views of the accused. *News24*'s focus on the charges faced by the accused evokes sympathy for the primary victims through focusing on the charges the accused faced as it reminds readers of what took place when the primary victims were attacked. This causes a direct correlation between the increase in sympathy for the victim and dislike for the accused. *Times Live*'s portrayal of the accused focuses on the accused's negative attitudes by highlighting their lack of remorse and flippant dispositions during the trial proceedings. This establishes the accused as guilty individuals who cannot be rehabilitated as they are not affected by guilt. In turn, *Times Live*'s readers likely could have viewed the accused as guilty before they received their respective sentences.

When the accused were sentenced, they moved from the category of accused to criminals. This shift is mirrored in how they are framed. *News24* focused on the criminals' lack of remorse and their individual criminal histories, thereby following the innocent victim and guilty perpetrator trope which *News24* had employed throughout their reporting on this case. *Times Live*'s reporting on the criminals made mention of their criminal histories but also focused on their gang involvement. By doing this, *Times Live* makes the case look like it was just another gang-related crime, committed by repeat offenders from low-income areas, which ignores the nuance of the situation.

6.4 Response to the second research question

The second research question for this study is as follows:

How did the way in which the Lotz case was reported on, differ from how the Cornelius case was reported on?

In order to answer the above research question, one has to take the above answer to the first research question into account by assessing the differences between how the primary

victim(s), secondary victims, accused, and criminals are reported on in the respective cases. This information will inform the key differences between the manner in which the respective cases were reported on, due to these categories being the main focus of this study.

The reporting on the primary victim in both the Inge Lotz and Hannah Cornelius cases highlights their positive qualities, often through use of quotes by those who knew them. However, the reporting on the Lotz case contains a certain degree of victim blaming, which the Cornelius case does not. The latter established a theme of innocence in the framing of the primary victim, which led her to be viewed as an underserving victim, thereby playing into the innocent victim/guilty perpetrator trope which traditional crime reporting tends to follow. As the Lotz case has only one primary victim and the Cornelius case has two, there is no second primary victim to compare the reporting style on. The second primary victim in the Cornelius case, Marsh, is reported on with regards to his status as a survivor of the attack that killed Cornelius. He is not written about as an equal to Cornelius, which is exemplified in the case being named after her and not including his name. The main reason this could be the case is that she is seen as having suffered more due to her being raped and losing her life.

The main similarity between how secondary victims were reported on in the respective cases is that in both cases there was a lack of agreement between publications as to who qualifies as a secondary victim in the case. This made comparisons between publications or news websites difficult, as often one news source regarded a certain individual as a secondary victim (and therefore reported on them) and another did not. Therefore, at times one could not compare the reporting by a news source about a certain individual with another. Yet, there are key elements of the reporting on secondary victims that can be picked up. In the Lotz case, the writing on her parents evokes sympathy for them as well as for the primary victim. This technique is also employed in the reporting on Cornelius' parents. However, the few mentions that Marsh's family, his mother in particular, receives, does not allow one the opportunity to form an opinion on her.

The accused in the respective cases differ in many respects; included, but not limited to, race, class, number of accused, relationship to primary victim(s), and criminal history. Therefore, the reporting on the accused in the respective cases has many differences. Firstly, there was only one man accused in the Lotz case and the Cornelius case the accused were a group of four men. The Lotz case's accused was a white, middle-class, university educated, employed man with no criminal history and a close personal relationship to the primary victim. The

accused in the Cornelius case were a group of Coloured, working-class men who had no steady employment or mention of education. This group had a storied criminal history and were unknown to both primary victims. In both cases publications and news websites alike focused on the aforementioned elements. Therefore, the reporting on the accused in the Lotz case frames him as an unlikely candidate to commit murder, as he is linguistically constructed as a model citizen. On the other hand, in the Cornelius case the accused are all framed as career criminals, which furthers sympathy from readers for the primary victims. No one was found guilty in the Lotz case, resulting in there being nobody to fulfil the 'criminal' category and making no room for comparison between the two cases in this regard.

6.5 Response to the third research question

How can crime reporting be improved to accurately represent victims, the accused, and criminals respectively?

The main improvement that can be made is that in the case of both primary and secondary victims is that all involved parties need to be reported on in equal measure. This means that if a crime story has a single primary victim or multiple primary victims, they should receive the same amount of media coverage. A similar approach should be taken with regards to secondary victims, in that all relevant parties should be included in the reporting on the case, unless they personally do not consent to being reported on.

In terms of the accused, it is important that the rule of innocent until proven guilty is followed through. This should manifest as reporting that does not lead readers to believe that the accused is guilty before they have received sentencing. One way of ensuring that is to use fact-based reporting without emotive language so that readers are presented with facts and not lead to believing certain things about the accused without adequate proof. Like with primary and secondary victims, it is important that if the accused are a group, then equal reporting should be conducted on each member of the group. Beyond repeating what has been suggested for the aforementioned categories regarding equal reporting, there is not much in the way of suggestions for improvement in how criminals should be written about by crime journalists. The only tangible suggestion that could be made is that family, friends, partners, and associates of criminals should not be harassed by the media (both during and after the trial) as they are secondary victims in their own way and do not necessarily consent to being involved in the trial and/or the media thereof.

6.6 Recommendations for further research

From this study it has become apparent that further research in the field of crime journalism needs to be conducted. This study examined how reporters linguistically construct the terms victim, accused, and criminal. This can be further analysed to analyse how victims, the accused, and criminals are portrayed in relation to their demographics, for example what race, class, and gender identity they are. While this was touched on in this study, it was not studied in depth. Such a study could analyse how victims, the accused, and criminals who belong to different demographic groups are linguistically constructed by crime journalists in relation to one another.

One could also further the research conducted in this study by conducting studies that focus on only one of the terms each, namely victims, the accused, and criminals. For example, one could conduct an in-depth analysis of how victims are linguistically constructed by crime journalists. When conducting such a study one gains depth in the study by only focusing on one category, and having the ability to analyse many different cases in this regard.

While this study was qualitative, quantitative studies could also be a useful addition to the field of research in crime journalism. Quantitative research could provide useful metrics, such as how often certain terms are used by reporters, how many times victims are mentioned in relation to criminals, and how many articles journalists write during a criminal case (either daily or for the whole case in total), in other words, how newsworthy the crime was regarded in terms of the news agenda, and on a qualitative level, why it was regarded newsworthy.

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<u>Addendum A – Exemption from ethical clearance:</u>

PROJECT EXEMPT FROM ETHICS CLEARANCE

8 April 2020

Project number: JOU-2019-13160

Project title: Criminal constructs: the social construction of crime reporting

Dear Miss Claudia Harrison

Your application received on **19 November 2019** was reviewed by the REC: Humanities.

You have confirmed in the proposal submitted for review that your project does not involve the participation of human participants or the use of their data. You also confirmed that you will collect data that is freely accessible in the public domain only.

The project is, therefore, exempt from ethics review and clearance. You may commence with research as set out in the submission to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities.

If the research deviates from the application submitted for REC clearance, especially if there is an intention to involve human participants and/or the collection of data not in the public domain, the researcher must notify the DESC/FESC and REC of these changes well before data collection commences. In certain circumstances, a new application may be required for the project.

Please remember to use your **project number (JOU-2019-13160)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project. Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)