Constructing the Runaway Youth Problem: Boy Adventurers to Girl Prostitutes, 1960–1978

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In this longitudinal qualitative case study, the author examined the social construction of "runaway youth" in print media during 1960–1978. The study found running away was an unconstructed problem (or simmering social condition) in the early 1960s and featured harmless adventures. In 1967, moral panic associated with the "hippie" discourse resulted in rewriting the basic runaway narrative. Afterwards, "runaway youth" emerged as a socially constructed problem featuring teenage girl prostitutes. This study contributes to the "runaway" discourse in general; situates discourse about runaways as predecessor to that of "missing children" documented by other researchers; provides insight into the rhetorical processes—within the print media domain—at work in public problem construction; and allows insights into the mechanics of how moral panic alters basic scripts in public problem narratives.

Since the early 1970s, sociologists have pursued the study of social problem construction (Blumer, 1971; Spector & Kitsuse, 2001). They study how claims are made, forwarded, shaped, rise and decline, and compete for public attention in various arenas (Best & Horiuchi, 1985; Glazer, 1994; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Jenkins, 1998; Schneider, 1985; Ungar, 1996). There is general agreement among them that social problems are crafted from existing social conditions in diverse discourse arenas as part of collective discursive processes. These arenas can be studied collectively or individually in order to learn more about the processes associated with problem construction.

Work in the area of moral panic, first described by Cohen in the 1960s (1967, 1972), is closely related. Moral panic exists when "a condition . . . or group of persons. . . [are] defined as a threat to societal values and interests" and "its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion" (1972, p. 9). It is a "wave of irrational public fear" generated, in part, when "media representations universally

stress 'sudden and dramatic' increases (in numbers involved or events) and 'novelty,' above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 6). Thus moral panic exists when official reaction is out of proportion to the threat; when experts speak of the threat in a unified voice that includes reference to rates, diagnoses, and solutions; and when the media seize on the sudden, emergent problem (Jenkins).

Players in moral panic include the press, the public, law enforcement, politicians, legislators, and action groups (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1996; Jenkins, 1998). Although the interactive effects of these domains are necessary to sustain moral panic, few researchers have examined the detailed operation of moral panic as it unfolds in a single domain. How do moral panic processes dismantle and destabilize public discourse?

The "missing child" phenomena of the late 1970s and 1980s has received the attention of several prominent researchers (Best, 1990; Best & Thibodeau, 1996; Fritz & Altheide, 1987). Best argues that the missing children problem "achieved extraordinary visibility" by the mid-1980s and that it is illustrative of the central role "rhetoric plays in claims-making about social problems" (1990, pp. 22, 40). Fritz and Altheide found that by confounding "stranger abductions" with "parental abductions" and runaways, the multiple dimensions of the missing child issue was distorted. Yet they seem to assume runaways are a constant when, in fact, runaways are also a constructed social problem (Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985). Best (1990) argued that once constructed, social problems serve as a resource and may be built upon to expand a problem's domain. Thus, the runaway problem, once constructed, was expanded to include other missing children, including those abducted by parents or strangers.

Studies on missing children tend to make sweeping, albeit persuasive, arguments about the multiple domains at work in social problem construction. Altheide (1997) argued that "such action fueled legislation, policy changes, increased criminal sanctions and budget allocations in the millions of dollars" (p. 655). Yet, social problem construction is a "cumulative or incremental process" in which each issue is "built upon its predecessors in the context of a steadily developing fund of socially available knowledge" (Jenkins, 1996, p. 13). So, although there is need to understand the mechanism of problem construction across domains, there is also a need to study the details of shifting rhetoric within a single domain to learn how a fund of socially available knowledge develops.

In this longitudinal qualitative case study, I focused on these details and addressed the research question: How did running away emerge as a serious social problem in media discourse during the 1970s? In particular, I examined the structural strategies used to frame print news media stories on running away published between 1960 and 1978. The earlier date was selected based on my hypothesis it was rooted in the values and attitudes of the 1950s, so would capture subsequent change; the later includes passage of legislation (The Runaway Youth Act of 1974 and New York State's Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 1978) that marks maturity of "running away" as a broadly recognized public problem.

The goals of this study were fourfold: to contribute to the runaway discourse in general; to situate it in its rightful place as predecessor to the missing children

discourse documented by other researchers; to gain insight into the rhetorical processes—within print media—at work in public problem construction; and to gain insight into the mechanics of moral panic in altering basic scripts in public problem narratives.

Method

Empirical Evidence, Sampling Strategy, and Sample

Articles published in *The New York Times* (*NYT*) between 1960 and 1978 provided primary evidence for this study. Print media are useful social artifacts and frequently serve as sources for investigating social problems (Beckett, 1996; Benedict, 1992; Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998; Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997; van Driel & Richardson, 1988; Wasserman, Stack, & Reeves, 1994). The *NYT* is recognized as a paper of record and is often used for analysis. Although it has limitations, such as an elite liberal bias, it is useful because it provides a source of daily potential evidence over the 18-year period. In addition, its National and Metro sections function like separate papers and stories could be analyzed in the context of their placement within the paper.

Sampling, modifying sample selection criteria, and analysis are reiterative processes in qualitative work. Starting with a very broad search of all articles that might relate to troubled, wandering, or restless children, the *NYT* index heading "Children and Youth," including its subheadings, "lost, missing and runaway children" and "behavioral and training problems," was searched and articles retrieved. This yielded 809 articles that were photocopied and catalogued.

Second, preliminary analysis suggested the importance of the hippie discourse (of the late 1960s) and the prostitution discourse (in the 1970s) for this study because they were linked in many articles to runaway discussions. This discovery resulted in two further procedures. First, the *NYT* index was reexamined for articles on "hippies" and "prostitution," thus adding articles to the sample. Second, articles that were included in the original sample that were deemed to be outside the scope of the core runaway discourse were eliminated (e.g., civil disobedience, student protest movements). This culling process yielded a sample of 573 articles.

Third, this sample of 573 articles was examined again and pruned in keeping with the developing analytical framework. The sample was narrowed to include only articles implicitly or explicitly mentioning runaways; hippie articles that focused on New York City or San Francisco; and prostitution articles that spoke to New York City's vice campaign of the mid-1970s. Implicit runaway stories included a story about a 13-year-old who disappeared for 4 days leaving behind a note saying she would be back in 10 years. They also included those that contained descriptions of youth who meet current federal runaway definitions. The original hippie sample included some additional domestic as well as international articles; however, the vast majority featured Los Angeles's Haight Ashbury or New York's East Village. These two areas were cited as attractive destination points for runaway youth and thus useful in this study. Finally, the prostitution articles were restricted to New York City because they were rhetorically linked to allega-

tions of a pipeline of Midwestern runaway girls supplying the city's sex trade.

The final sample included 284 articles. Of the 71 hippie articles, 25% (n = 17) linked runaway issues with discussion of hippies. Of the 105 prostitution articles, 28% (n = 27) linked runaway issues with prostitution; only 4 of these articles appeared before 1967. In the total sample, 51% (n = 143) of the articles focused primarily on runaways. Of these runaway articles, 64% (n = 92) were gender specific, whereas the remaining articles were on the general topic. Of the gender-specific articles, 68% (n = 62) involved girls. Twenty-five percent (n = 17) of the articles involving runaway girls in the post-1967 period linked running away with prostitution; none of the runaway girl articles prior to 1967 made this link. Of the boy-specific articles during the pre-1967 period, all but one (n = 6) featured harmless adventures of returned runaways, while none fell into this category in subsequent years. Interrater reliability proportion of observed agreement ranged from 89% to 96%, and the more stringent kappa coefficient measures were from .56 to .76.

Analysis and Interpretative Framework

Analyzing media data qualitatively requires attention to the way the product is presented, including consideration of themes, frames, formats, and interpretive or media packages (Altheide, 1997; Beckett, 1996; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Altheide argued that media story frames must build "on a narrative structure that add story-like coherence" (p. 654). Lee, Pan, Chan, and So (2001) spoke of "ideological packages" as "media narratives" that are "causally related and internally consistent" (p. 352). Thus, media frames can be deconstructed into their essential elements and reconstructed in order to interpret the ideological package being presented the public.

In analyzing runaway articles, certain generic elements appeared routinely. They became a useful way to organize further analysis because the component features were used to craft a coherent ideological package. These elements included identifying runaway "lures" or attractions (answering why the runaway left home); describing home life (answering whether it was a good or bad environment); explaining how children survive (or not) on their own and for how long (answering how children manage on their own); explaining how adults (parents, police, or others) intervene with the runaway (answering questions about where adults were); describing the appearance or physical condition of the runaway (answering questions about well-being); and explaining how the episode ends (answering whether the child returns home safely, continues to be missing, or is injured or killed during the experience, etc.). Together these elements create story-like coherence, yet variation in the pieces can alter the overall story dramatically. Because of this variation very different ideological packages are created.

Furthermore, studies on media framing have used the notion of "episodic" versus "thematic" news story formats (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Episodic formats involve reporting on specific events. In the case of runaways, this refers to reporting on a single runaway episode. In contrast, thematic stories refer to "analytical, contextual or historical coverage" (p. 95) and can include educational or informational reports on runaway youth or program services. The interplay of episodic and thematic stories is useful in qualitative analysis. In episodic stories,

the journalist must utilize story elements to create a clear narrative or coherent ideological package, one complete runaway tale. These crystallized stories can be compared and contrasted with the generic discourse occurring in thematic stories for consistency in public discourse.

Preliminary Analysis

Three distinct analytic stages emerged. Each stage featured a cluster of themes, patterns, descriptions, and story scripts that were consistent internally within the time period but significantly different—in tone and content—from the other two stages. In short, predominant ideological packages shifted over time. These periods can be conceived as the unconstructed runaway, 1960–66; runaway panic, 1967; and the constructed runaway problem, 1968–78.

In addition to evidence from thematic runaway stories supporting the three distinct periods, episodic news stories featuring a single child confirm this construction. This is particularly true of stories that appeared on the front page of the *NYT*, a highly unusual and notable event. There were five front-page stories on individual runaway children published between 1960 and 1978. The first two, Dean Siering (1960) and Dominic Tucci (1964), involved 13-year-old boys who went on extraordinary adventures and returned home safely. The boys earned their places on the front page because of their apparent skills in pursuing adventure and defying adult intervention. They are presented as unique cases. The last two, Karen Baxter (1975), age 15, and Veronica Brunson (1977), age 12, were both murdered in the context of prostituting. They are characterized as "typical" runaways. Thus their cases are used to generalize to a larger population of youth. In between these radically different frames is a 1967 story documenting an extensive search for a 13-year-old girl, dubbed in the headline as a "runaway flower child," supporting the contention that runaway and counterculture discourses commingled during this crisis year.

Findings

In the following sections, the core elements associated with runaway story framing are examined for their general features, followed by a close examination of the front-page stories of the period and their relevance to the evolving discourse. Finally, because gender and prostitution are prominent features in the later scripts, treatment is examined in the earlier phases in order to test the validity of the later interpretative structure and locate potential counter narratives.

Stage One: The Unconstructed Runaway, 1960–1966

General features. Every vignette used to illustrate thematic articles during this period shared two reassuring features: No child is harmed and all children are reunited with families. In general, running away was characterized as normal behavior involving short and safe adventures. Furthermore, runaways were characterized as having learned a lesson and unlikely to repeat their behavior.

During this period, runaway scripts relied on children being lured from home

by identifiable attractions (fairs, carnivals, beaches, going West, etc.) or responding to seasonal stimuli (spring, summer). They assumed that children could not survive for long on their own and would be driven back home by lack of food, shelter, or other basic resources. Police officers and other adults intervened quickly and returned children home safely. The runaways themselves were described as tearful, dirty, disheveled, confused, frightened, or otherwise identified easily by adults, while their homes were always described as happy. From a public perspective, this composite portrait of running away is unproblematic.

Front-page boys: Dean & Dominic's adventures. Both episodic front-page stories frame a single runaway event around an adventure in which a boy successfully, albeit temporarily, defies the norm, thus making the tale newsworthy. In 1960, Dean Siering traveled from Long Island to Chicago and back using his wit and $25. He was described as having "insatiable wanderlust," "bravado," a "high spirit of adventure," "fertile imagination," experiencing an "odyssey," and being a "youthful traveler" (Silver, 1960, p. 1). Two maps traced his cross-country route and appeared alongside his front-page photograph, highlighting both explorer and exploration. Furthermore, Dean reported his plan was to go to California because "it's a nice state" (p. 1). The notion of going West provides an acceptable adventure destination for this New Yorker.

In 1964, Dominic Tucci was described as being "adventurous, but not a bad boy" when he lived "off the land" of the World's Fairgrounds for 9 days in "an experiment in rugged individualism" (Benjamin, 1964). The boldfaced caption under his photograph read, "End of Adventure at Fair" (p. 1). In particular, this story is interesting because 2 months earlier, the *NYT* had published a thematic runaway story under the headline: "To the Runaways the Fair Is a Lure: Unkempt, Without Rest They Will Be Drawn to the City." The verbs "lure" and "drawn" justify a prediction that there will be an increase in the "annual exodus and arrival of young runaways" (Perlmutter, 1964). Furthermore, the headline assumes that runaways will be spotted easily by adults because they are "unkempt" and "without rest." Dominic's "adventure" provided the perfect follow-up to this piece.

In both boys' articles, telltale signs of family trouble appeared but were minimized. For example, it was the third and longest time Dominic had engaged in his "escapades" and "stay(ed) out overnight" (p. 32). He "reluctantly" admitted "he was having trouble at home—school trouble" which was treated humorously in the column divide: "School Trouble at Home" (p. 32). His parents had not searched for him because "if that's what he wanted, let him have his fling" (p. 32). Dominic's recidivism, the increasing duration of his episodes, his struggle in school, and his parents' delay in reporting his disappearance are subsumed by the adventurer frame.

Similarly, in a follow-up squib, Dean's primary caretaker, his grandmother, reported he was "very upset emotionally" about his parents' divorce ("L.I. Boy," p. 78). Her opinion is undermined by a neighbor's opinion that Dean was motivated by "a high spirit of adventure" (p. 78). Dean's mother was in no hurry to retrieve him from detention saying, "Personally, I think it would be nice to have him cool his heels up there for a week" (Silver, p. 27). In isolation, her statement hints at a troubled relationship, but it is softened by its position after Dean's confident assertion that he "did not expect to be punished" (p. 27). In context, her statement

appears an appropriate response to a defiant youth. In short, troubling indicators were minimized in order to tell the primary tale of adventure.

Extensive copy was devoted to describing the boys' resourcefulness in deceiving adults. The public was invited to appreciate these cunning boys. For example, Dominic survived by sleeping in the fair's exhibit halls, scavenging coins from fountains to purchase food, and lying successfully when stopped by adults (including police). Dean's "glib tongue" was used to put "an airline, a railroad, and the police in two states into turmoil" (Silver, p. 1). He "tearfully" conned an airline agent into believing his mother had driven off with his ticket, that he checked two pieces of baggage, that it was imperative he get to school in Chicago, and that his aunt, Miss Amelia Ralph, would meet him at O'Hare (p. 27). There was no mother, no luggage, no school, and no Miss Amelia Ralph, but Dean was permitted to board the plane. In this case, tears were used to deceive an adult and add credence to a fabrication, rather than to mark Dean as a runaway.

Both stories ended happily. Dean phoned his grandmother from a hotel, but not before writing "help" and his real name, address, and phone number on a face towel and "casually" giving it to a railroad employee who called his grandmother (p. 27). Dominic was spotted by a concession stand operator who identified him as a runaway ("I saw how dirty he was, and I thought I recognized him from a picture in the paper," p. 32). A photograph depicted Dominic squeezed between his beaming parents (p. 32). The final sentence in his story described his siblings' cheers as he approaches the family station wagon, suggesting a happy reunion. The net result is that both boys did what little adventurers are supposed to do: They returned home safely to a happy family.

Checking the counter narratives. Given the prominence of girls in later story construction, it was necessary to examine the treatment of gender and prostitution during this early period. Two issues emerged in the process. First, teenage prostitution was characterized as a moral problem involving "wayward" girls and was not linked to running away. Evidence is found in a cluster of articles from June 1960 about a "vice raid" of "an all-night bottle club" used as a "recruiting ground to entice high school girls into prostitution" ("Vice Raid," 1960). Readers are told only that the girls were held as "wayward minors by Girls' Term Court in Brooklyn."

Second, girls in episodic stories during this period were held to higher public accountability standards than boys. In an admittedly small sample of stories on individual girls (n = 2), the similarity in story construction and the dissimilarity with stories about boys is striking. Specifically, both girls were required to articulate a specific reason for running away, be apologetic for their behavior, and promise to delay further action until adulthood. None of the boys were held to such rigid social expectations. In seven episodic stories about five different boys, the label "runaway" was never used. In contrast, both girls were labeled "runaway" in the story headline ("Runaway to Join," p. 20; "Coast Heiress," p. 29).

Stage Two: Runaway Panic, 1967

General features. During 1967, moral panic associated with youth labeled "hippies" invaded public discourse. In the rarified environment of the *NYT*, hippies were isolated, marginalized, and ridiculed. Yet, by mid-1967, discussions on inno-

cent runaways intersected with the more hostile rhetoric on hippies. The crisis necessitated reconstructing a runaway ideological package that made sense under new social and rhetorical conditions.

Traditional story elements were recast dramatically. First, runaway children were characterized as lured to counterculture neighborhoods in response to the hippie discourse on love, peace, brotherhood, and so on. Second, the assumption that children would return home because they could not survive on their own was undermined by counterculture communities providing crash pads, free food, and other resources. Third, police officers and other adults were no longer effective agents in controlling runaway behavior. In fact, hippies were portrayed as actively undermining police authority. Fourth, runaway children were no longer recognizable by their disheveled appearance. In fact, scruffiness permitted them to blend into the counterculture scene. Fifth, runaway children were no longer safe, bad things including drugs, violence, and death happened. Finally, youth still came from middle-class homes, but families begin to be characterized as troubled. Furthermore, because these youth dropped out of official sight, estimates of their numbers swelled. In part, 1967 was pivotal because of the highly touted "Summer of Love" in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco. Like the lure of the World's Fair in 1964, the Summer of Love provided a unique, "seasonal" runaway destination in the spring of 1967.

Front-page stories: Linda Fitzpatrick and the flower child. Cohen (1972) argued that moral panics institutionalize threat. The work of *NYT* journalist J. Anthony Lukas illustrates this best, as he blended the runaway and hippie scripts in four consecutive days of front-page stories (Lukas, 1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1967d). The 4-day sequence is evidence, in microcosm, of what occurred in the macrolevel discourse. The first article was sufficiently poignant to earn Lukas a Pulitzer Prize. It was written 1 week after Linda Rae Fitzpatrick, a dropout from a wealthy Connecticut family, and her "hippie boyfriend" were found brutally murdered in the basement of an East Village tenement in New York City.

Lukas capitalized on the media construction of hippies as an isolated and marginalized group. He utilized the powerful notion of "two worlds" as the core feature in organizing and telling his story. The story's headline, "The Two Worlds of Linda Fitzpatrick," spanned four columns, and the story itself occupied the entire jump page without the intrusion of advertisements or other articles. In painstaking detail, Lukas contrasted Linda's Greenwich, Connecticut, home with her Greenwich Village home. He used sources that inhabited one world or the other and avoided any experts or friends who might bridge the two. In doing so, Lukas, himself the outside storyteller, served as the only link. Reproductions of Linda's art (produced with and without the influence of LSD) also supported the two-world structure. Throughout the article, the East Village perspective was printed in italics whereas the Connecticut version was in regular typeface. This visual device accentuated the contrast between the two worlds. Lukas traced Linda's lonely and sad death spiral and highlighted her parents' oblivious ignorance. Overall, the result was chilling. The story triggered enough public response for the *NYT* to run an entire follow-up, "Story of Girl Hippie Slain in 'Village' Arouses Wide Concern," on the mail its editorial board received ("Story of Girl," 1967).

Linda was not a runaway; however, Lukas used her story as a reference point for the next 3 days and tied it to the runaway theme by calling into question police interest in the murders, linking police inadequacy with runaway children and documenting a father's frantic search for his missing 14-year-old "flower child" (Lukas, 1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1967d). Linda and the so-called flower child are episodic brackets of this 4-day evolution.

Unlike the Fitzpatrick (Lukas, 1967a) story, which was rich in detail, the "Case of the Runaway Flower Child" was sketchy and written in a staccato voice mirroring the frantic nature of the search. It opened with three action-oriented sentences that included that Pamela "painted a blue flower on her right cheek," "left home," and "was found in a hotel on the edge of Greenwich Village." The progression placed this young runaway in the vicinity of Linda's dangerous world (Lukas, 1967d, p. 1). Furthermore, Lukas, who made skillful use of his sources, let silence speak volumes. In the Fitzpatrick story, no sources linked Linda's two worlds; in Pamela's story, Lukas did not interview the child even though she had returned home safely and was presumably available for comment. Instead he wrote that after her departure "her movements were unclear" (p. 1). He narrated the entire story from the father's perspective and meticulously detailed 4 days of futile hunting. Pamela surfaced only after her parents "accidentally" discovered the phone number of her "secret" boyfriend and Pamela, "apparently convinced that her flight was now useless," called home and returned by train "alone" (p. 5).

Told from a parent's perspective, and highlighting the missing phase of the runaway episode, Lukas underscored the intensity and futility of the search (e.g., Pamela's father: "I realized just how hopeless it was"); emphasized police limitations (e.g., Pamela's father: "The cops were so bored by the whole thing and when I got out to Washington Square, I realized why. There were more than a thousand people out there. . . . I realized we were facing a massive search"); and attributed success to chance (e.g., "changed luck" [by Lukas]; "blind luck" [by Pamela's father]). The article closes with her father's assessment, "if she'd been really down in the heart of hippieland it would have been good-bye" (p. 5). The thrust of the story was that this child, teetering on the brink of the counterculture abyss, was saved by chance.

The basic facts of this story were relatively mundane. They included that Pamela returned home safely on her own. She was gone for 4 days, which was considered average earlier in the decade. She first ran to a friend's house. She made three phone calls home (characterized by Lukas as tantalizing, not reassuring, to her parents). Taken together—running to a friend's house, repeatedly calling home, and returning home voluntarily after 4 days—are features that, earlier in the decade, would not have raised concern, let alone been front-page news.

This story was newsworthy because Lukas told the story from the parental perspective and capitalized on growing public fear. Lukas generalized Pamela's "case" to "the thousands of youths who are leaving middle-class homes throughout the country" (p. 1). This framing typified the problem, raised public anxiety, and characterized running away as a serious public problem for middle-class

Americans. The 4-day transition from Linda to Pamela cross-pollinated the problem of older, voluntary, social dropouts with that of younger runaway children, infusing elements of moral panic into the previously innocuous runaway discourse.

In late 1967, these shifting story components were linked in one thematic story headline reading "Homicides Swell 'Missing' Reports, Parents of Runaways Fear Children Are in East Village" (Arnold, 1967a). This story illustrates public panic. Here, the topics of swelling reports and runaway children are linked directly to counterculture territory and homicides. The public was no longer amused by adventuresome children but shared the anxiety of frightened parents. In the longer term, this shift was a necessary precursor for constructing the "missing" child documented by others (Best, 1990; Best & Thibodeau, 1996; Fritz & Altheide, 1987). The missing child story was constructed best from an adult perspective, whereas journalists might choose to tell runaway stories from either the child's or parent's perspective.

Gender and prostitution. During this crisis period, boys are nearly excluded from runaway discourse. Between August and December 1967, eight articles were published on five children allegedly "missing" in the vicinity of the East Village, all of whom were girls. One, Elizabeth Schoeneck, was the daughter of a state political leader, and her disappearance set off an intensive "hunt" in the East Village along with multiday media coverage (Arnold, 1967b). Elizabeth's story occupied half of the front page of the Metro section, above the fold, and was framed as a massive search. In spite of the fact that "dozens of detectives searched the East Village during the day, and all night," she is reported still missing in two follow-up stories ("Hunt for Daughter," Nov. 4, p. 20; Nov. 5, p. 65). Both of these stories used the word "hunt" in their headlines. This strong verb (as opposed to soft verbs like search, seek, look for) usually is reserved for stories of suspected abduction or foul play. Strong verbs are supported in 1967 because runaway stories had become, in essence, frantic parental searches for missing children amidst hippie-abductors.

Furthermore, running away was not linked to prostitution yet. In fact, in a telling pair of articles by Bernard Weinraub, he appeared to miss the possible link altogether. In August 1966, he wrote a story in which he reported that the number of runaway girls exceeded the number of runaway boys (based on missing person reports) for the first time (1966a). Weinraub reverted to a standard thematic story in which the gender significance is minimized (i.e., children leave home because of a "spirit of adventure" and police promised efficient and safe return). A month later, in September 1966, he authored another article in which he reported the NYPD vice squad's cleanup resulted in the greatest number of prostitution arrests in 10 years. Police sources said that those arrested appeared to be "new ones in the trade who don't have records" and expressed surprise that "for some reason many seem to be coming from out of town" (1966b, p. 19). Weinraub appeared to have had the raw material to make the runaway-prostitution story connection but did not. This observation provided some evidence that the discourse on running away and the discourse on prostitution were still operating in separate domains in the latter half of the 1960s.

Stage Three: Constructed Runaway Problem, 1968–1978

General features. Following the post-1967 crisis, running away was accepted as a public problem. The shift in coverage included moving matters traditionally considered private and occurring within the home (such as child abuse, sexual abuse, substance use, mental health issues, etc.) into the public sphere First, runaways reached population status and discussions referenced the collective group. Second, the population was characterized as street-based and troubled. Children did not come from, nor end up in, happy homes; rather they lived, precariously, on the street. Third, long-distance, interstate running and long-term disappearances were assumed. Fourth, the collective nature of the runaway problem was recognized sufficiently to support stories on services designed to "lure" children off the street by providing basic resources. Lack of resources, once deemed to drive children back home, was now described as driving runaways to survival sex and petty crime.

Linking prostitution with runaways also served larger purposes and was a useful tool in advancing political agendas. In November 1977, tension between the NYPD and the mayor reached a head in an episode that centered on a runaway teenager (Raab, 1977a). Teenage prostitutes, who had appeared as minor characters in the vice squad raid of 1960, become *the* story during the 1970s. Like Lukas in 1967, Raab capitalized on the controversy, and, between October and December 1977, wrote 10 stories (including the front-page story of Veronica Brunson discussed below) linking prostitution, runaways, and politics. Between Raab and colleague Nathaniel Sheppard, eight stories in 2 months focused on the "Minnesota Pipeline" (Raab, 1977c, 1977d, 1977e, 1977f, 1977g; Sheppard, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c). The Pipeline was characterized as an organized network supplying runaway teenage girls from the Midwest to New York City's sex trade. Although the reality of such a "pipeline" was later disputed, the image of an unknown number of exploited, young, Midwestern girls was left to linger in the public mind.

Front-page girl prostitutes: Karen and Veronica. Jenkins (1998) argued that "child-protection movements are commonly detonated by sex murders" (p. 10). So, too, the runaway movement in New York was galvanized by the murder of child prostitutes. Like the two front-page stories about adventuring boys that bracket the beginning of the study period, the front-page stories of Karen Baxter (McFadden, 1975, p. 1) and Veronica Brunson (Raab, 1977b, p. 1) provided the end bracket to the period under investigation.

Both girls were characterized as coming from troubled homes and having serious problems in school. They were running away from home rather than being lured toward an attraction. Karen was described as coming from a family where her parents separated "on and off for 11 years," whose father was unemployed, and whose mother was a welfare recipient (p. 1). Her family lived "a kind of nomadic life-style" within a housing project apartment where six children had no "steady places to sleep" but regularly rotated sleeping arrangements (p. 30). Family fights and disputes with neighbors were reportedly common. Karen's "repeated truancy" from school finally led to court involvement that triggered her decision to run away (p. 30). Similarly, Veronica reportedly missed 121 of 180 days of school, came from a "fatherless" home, and had a mother who could not control her (p. 36).

A detective in Karen's case reported, "These kids, 15 and 16 years old, come here, don't know what they're getting themselves into and get exploited by pimps" (p. 30). Veronica was described as "a familiar figure on the "Minnesota strip" (p. 36). In both cases police officers had arrested the girls on prostitution charges and released them to the street before their deaths. Veronica, in fact, had been arrested 11 times on prostitution-related charges before her murder and Karen once before. The girls were described as looking older than their years, not carrying identification, and misleading officers as to their identities. Hence, police continued to be excused from their once-central role intervening in runaway behavior. Both girls were murdered in the context of prostituting, Karen by a john and Veronica probably by her pimp.

Both situations were typified and generalized. Karen was reported to be "one of a million juveniles who run away from home each year and one of thousands who come to New York City" who are "unable or unwilling to get legitimate jobs" and "turn to prostitution" and, because they are "young, vulnerable, inexperienced," they become "easy prey" (McFadden, 1975, p. 1). She was described by a detective as "representative of a whole slew of kids of her generation" (p. 30). A homicide detective was unsympathetically quoted as saying, "There are a lot of them in the city. . . . The only difference is that this one is dead" (p. 30). A police officer cited Veronica's case as a "classic example of how a kid can float through the entire system without getting any help" (p. 1). Raab wrote of Veronica Brunson: "[She] illustrate[s] the problems and dangers confronting thousands of runaway girls and boys who turn to prostitution to survive alone in the streets of New York" (p. 1). In short, teenage prostitutes, at risk of exploitation and death, became the typified runaway. This version had political currency because it generated collective public sympathy, engendered moral outrage, and could be used to organize public response.

Policy Links to Public Discourse

Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) argued that problems arising in one public area will spread to others. Although this is undoubtedly true, Schudson (1995) contended that even though news is an "omnipresent brand of shared knowledge," its connection with "further political acts of government officials or other elites is rarely clear" (1995, p. 3). Even so, other researchers, such as Fritz and Altheide in their study on missing children (1987), attempt to link media discourse and policy action.

In the runaway field, there are enticing bits of evidence linking political and media domains with legislative policy. The mix of politics and the revised runaway script, featuring vulnerable girls, created an atmosphere conducive to legislative action. Three runaway teenage prostitutes were expert witnesses before a legislative committee studying crime in New York City. The headline of an article summarizing their testimony read: "Midwest Teen-Agers Tell of Forced Vice" (1977, p. 29). The girls told the committee they had "been lured to New York by promises of romance and money"; "they had been trained and recruited by pimps" to become "prostitutes and thieves"; and "they had been terrorized into earning a

minimum of $150 a night" ("Midwest Teen-agers," p. 29). In testimony before the committee, a 14-year-old runaway says that she became a prostitute "because I really like having someone caring for me. I really love him [her pimp]. He made me feel like I was someone important" (p. 29).

Less than 9 months after this hearing, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 1978 was enacted in New York State. The memorandum in support of the bill that became law opened with a reference to the typical media portrayal: "Almost weekly we read of the murder, rape or suicide of a homeless or runaway youth. Yet there are few services available to those youths" (p. 1). Furthermore, it mentions Veronica Brunson's case explicitly:

> thousands of teen-age runaways as young as 13, are working in massage parlors, live-peep shows and prostitution houses. The Committee was also told of large numbers of male youth loitering the streets for the purpose of prostitution, a situation referred to as a "chicken and hawk relationship." The problem of youth prostitution is widespread, most dramatized with the grim death of 12 year old Veronica Bronson [sic] (who either jumped or was thrown from the window of a building known to be frequented by prostitutes) in New York City last summer. (p. 1)

The plight of runaway youth was problematized in the legislative arena in accordance with media discourse. Individual representatives of the runaway population at large, such as Veronica Brunson, are shared icons in the political and media domains. Thus, she provided a direct link between the public media discussion in which she served as a typified symbol and the political domain of the New York State legislature which accepted her as exemplifying the problem in need of public response.

Conclusion

This study considered print media treatment of the runaway youth "problem" during 1960–1978. The study used an integrated theoretical approach forwarded by Jenkins (1998) combining social construction with moral panic, but rather than applying it broadly to a discussion of how social problems gain and claim public attention, it was utilized in a detailed longitudinal analysis in a single forum. The lessons derived from this analysis included observations about important public discourse catalysts.

First, researchers should identify the stable features necessary to construct complete stories on any given social problem. This permits discovering the essential building blocks for social construction. For example, runaway stories require information on lures, family life, resources, appearance, and so on. Once core ingredients are identified, their treatment can be examined over time. For example, the runaway lure was alternatively identified as adventure, the World's Fair, the counterculture, and romance, so it became possible to draw interpretations about the longitudinal evolution in problem construction. This also permitted examination of how problem construction moved from being situated in the private to the public domain.

Second, script components must be packaged logically so that story scripts cohere. When the logical coherence of an existing story script is threatened by changing social conditions or newly introduced rhetoric, the overall script will be reconfigured in order to accommodate the shift. Researchers can observe these shifts. For example, in the early runaway discourse, children were driven back to happy homes by lack of resources. During late 1960s, resources were supplied by counterculture communities, so story construction featured children who were surviving on their own and gone for long periods of time. Finally, in the 1970s, children were driven to survival sex by lack of resources and came from troubled homes. The relationships between home life, resources, and survival techniques need to be presented as a logical whole.

Third, researchers can and should consider junctures of reorganization in public discourse. When moral panic is introduced in one substantive discourse arena, it will spill over into related discourses. Clashes in irreconcilable discourse domains require new overall problem synthesis. Thus, researchers should be sensitive not only to the explosive effect of moral panic, but also to the ripple effect caused in other closely related domains. In this analysis, it is apparent that the moral panic around hippies altered public discourse on runaways in part because discussions on innocent young runaways commingled with the more dangerous and less sympathetically constructed discourse on hippies.

Fourth, in times of moral panic the roles of individual journalists should be noted. There is evidence in this study that journalists can miss the opportunity to capitalize on volatile rhetorical conditions (e.g., Weinraub) or seize on that opportunity (e.g., Lukas; Rabb). Individual journalists do not single-handedly alter public discussion; they reflect as well as shape broader public opinion. However, some journalists capitalize on critical components of public tensions, so social constructionists should pay heed to the ways in which they organize discourse threads. When key journalists capitalize on the unique factors, it is possible to see, in microcosm, elements that reflect evolutions in broader discussions.

Fifth, as social conditions are converted into recognizable problems, individuals become identifiable as typical of broadly defined social problems. These examples can be sensational cases such as the Fitzpatrick or Brunson murders, or they can be more mundane such as the "flower child" case. Typification is important for political reasons—it permits representatives to become experiential experts. These experts gain political voice and lend support to socially constructed problems. Hence child prostitutes can testify before legislative committees about the typical runaway experience. This explains one link between media discourse and political forums.

Finally, this study hints at the complex links between social construction, policy, and problem evolution. The missing child discourse undoubtedly had its early roots in the mid-1960s when public gaze switched from the successful adventurer perspective to that of frantic parents. However, the missing child literature is not grafted on top of the solid reality of runaway children, but rather rests on equally constructed underfooting. Taken together, this illustrates the complex, interwoven way in which social problems evolve.

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