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Drama in the dailies : violence and gender in Dutch newspapers, 1880 to 1930

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Chapter 3: Newspaper dynamics and crime reporting

This chapter looks at the Dutch newspaper market and the factors that influenced the selection and presentation of stories of private violence. To do this, it draws on the model presented in Chapter 1, which identifies the sources and the target readership as the key determining factors. The media landscape changed dramatically between 1880 and 1930, with the rise of the mass-market newspaper and the feminization of the media. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the literature to date on press coverage of violence and gender has largely failed to take account of these changes. This has limited the explanatory power of these studies. Crime stories are seen as inevitably sensational and little insight is given into why the press crime discourse changed over time or differed between countries.¹ Moreover, the literature largely ignores the extensive body of scholarship in media studies on how journalists arrive at their content.² Some historical studies take a more holistic approach. For example, Nathaniel Wood looks at the influence of New Journalism and the interaction between the press, the authorities and a female-dominated public in the production and dissemination of sex crime news in early twentieth-century Cracow: this allows him to criticize simplistic assumptions that the press dictated the discourse on sex scandals.³

The current chapter addresses three questions. First, it considers how and why the target readership changed and how this affected the imagined community that was implicit in the newspapers' stories. The effect of the changing target readership on the style and content is also considered. The second question concerns the mediating effect of sources: what sources did journalists use and what impact did this have on crime coverage? Thirdly, the question of how the newspapers engaged readers in stories of private violence is considered. Chapter 2 already showed that the Dutch general public was not involved in the prosecution of justice to the same extent as laypeople in other countries. This chapter considers whether the press sought to engage readers emotionally in accounts of violent crimes and whether newspapers encouraged active involvement in the administration of justice.

The first section in this chapter deals with the Dutch newspaper market. That market expanded between 1880 and 1930 and the target readership broadened to include the working classes and women readers. Section 2 examines the significance of stories of family

¹ For examples where extensive crime coverage is assumed to equate to sensationalism, see: Linders and Van Gundy-Yoder, "Gall, Gallantry," 329-330; Ramey, "Bloody Blonde," 627-631; Christopher A. Casey, "Common Misperceptions: The Press and Victorian Views of Crime," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41, no. 3 (2011): 372.

² Key texts used in the present study include: Laughey, *Media Theory*; Manning, *News and News Sources*; Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message. Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (White Plains: Longman, 1996); Jewkes, *Media & Crime*.

³ Nathaniel D. Wood, "Sex Scandals, Sexual Violence, and the Word on the Street: The Kolasówna 'Lustmord' in Cracow's Popular Press, 1905-1906," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 2 (2011): 243-269.

and sexual violence in the editorial content. Journalists increased coverage of such cases in the period prior to the First World War as part of the strategy of appealing to the new readers. Stories resonated with readers, but the press remained aloof from the administration of justice. Section 3 looks at journalists' representation of the accused, in particular the practice of using initials rather than full names. This gave journalists an additional tool for shaming perpetrators. In the fourth section, the news values are explored that journalists used to select and present stories. The fifth section deals with the sources journalists used, such as the police and other newspapers. The sources influenced the geographical spread of stories and encouraged homogeneity across newspapers. The final section looks at the form and style of the articles on family and sexual violence. It argues that sensationalism was used strategically, and most items fitted an institutional narrative.

3.1 Expanding market and rising importance of female readers

The expanding population and rising prosperity described in the previous chapter fostered the expansion of the market for newspapers. The Dutch newspaper market took off in the decades following the removal of taxes on newspapers (*dagbladzege*) in 1869.⁴ Circulation increased from 90,000 in 1866 to around 1 million in 1910 while the number of newspaper titles increased from 160 in 1869 to 760 in 1894.⁵ The market received another boost during the First World War, with the thirst for news that this produced. In 1939, circulation was over 2 million.⁶ The number of readers was always considerably more than the number of copies sold. Newspapers were available in cafes and lending libraries, and they could also be rented.⁷ By the interwar period, most Dutch people must have regularly read a paper: a survey in 1946 found that 97 per cent of men and 94 per cent of women read one or more newspapers daily.⁸

The burgeoning newspaper market was the combined result of democratization of reading and falling production costs. Boudien de Vries has charted the ownership of books and use of lending libraries from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. She concludes that the key factors in the spread of the reading habit to the lower middle and working classes were rising incomes and expanding leisure time, in combination with a proliferation of distribution channels for printed materials; there were more bookshops, more libraries and more door-to-door salesmen selling cheap editions of genre novels.⁹

⁴ Pier Abe Santema, "Jacob Hepkema en de introductie van de moderne journalistiek in Friesland," *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 8, no. 1 (2005): 86.

⁵ Huub Wijfjes, "Modernization of Style and Form in Dutch Journalism, 1870-1914," in *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News, 1880-2005*, ed. Marcel Broersma (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 6869.

⁶ Marcel Broersma, "Botsende Stijlen. De Eerste Wereldoorlog en de Nederlandse Journalistieke Cultuur," *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 2, no. 2 (1999):54-55; Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 202.

⁷ Boudien de Vries, *Leescultuur in Haarlem*, 88-104; Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 217.

⁸ Schuit and Hemels, *Recepten en rolpatronen*, 21.

⁹ Boudien de Vries, *Leescultuur in Haarlem*, 88-104, 403-405.

Newspapers were generally the first step in the acquisition of the reading habit. Moreover, they became more affordable thanks to technical advances such as the introduction of the rotary press and the switch from cotton to wood pulp for paper. This enabled newspaper proprietors to increase the number of pages, and in some cases offer separate morning and evening editions, without raising prices.¹⁰

Three kinds of newspaper flourished in the expanding market of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: newspapers with a political or religious affiliation; regional and local newspapers; and national newspapers aimed at a mass market.¹¹ The first category was a feature of the pillarized society in which each pillar had its own newspapers as a way of engaging its rank and file and propagating its views. For example, the orthodox Protestants had *De Standaard* (founded in 1872), while the socialists had *Het Volk* (launched in 1900).¹² These ideological newspapers had a combined market share of 45 per cent in 1939. As explained in Chapter 1, this segment has not been included in the scope of the current study. The current study focuses on four politically neutral newspapers: the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Handelsblad*. It examines their coverage in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930. As *De Telegraaf* was only founded in the early 1890s, *Het Nieuws van de Dag* has been used instead in 1880.

The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was an example of the category of regional and local newspapers. It was aimed at readers in and around the fast-growing industrial city and port of Rotterdam. Founded in 1878, it was initially conceived as a rival to the upmarket *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and targeted local businessmen. But this strategy was a commercial failure and in the mid-1880s it reinvented itself as a mass-market paper for a broad social spectrum. Given that most of Rotterdam's population belonged to the working class or lower-middle-class, these became *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad's* target readership.¹³ It cut its quarterly subscription price from 2.25 guilders in 1880 to 1.25 guilders in 1895 and changed its content to focus on local affairs rather than foreign politics. The new strategy was a success. Circulation rose from around 4000 in 1880 to 50,000 in 1900 (when the city had around 65,000 households) and over 100,000 in 1939 (when the number of households was about 140,000), see Figure 2.¹⁴

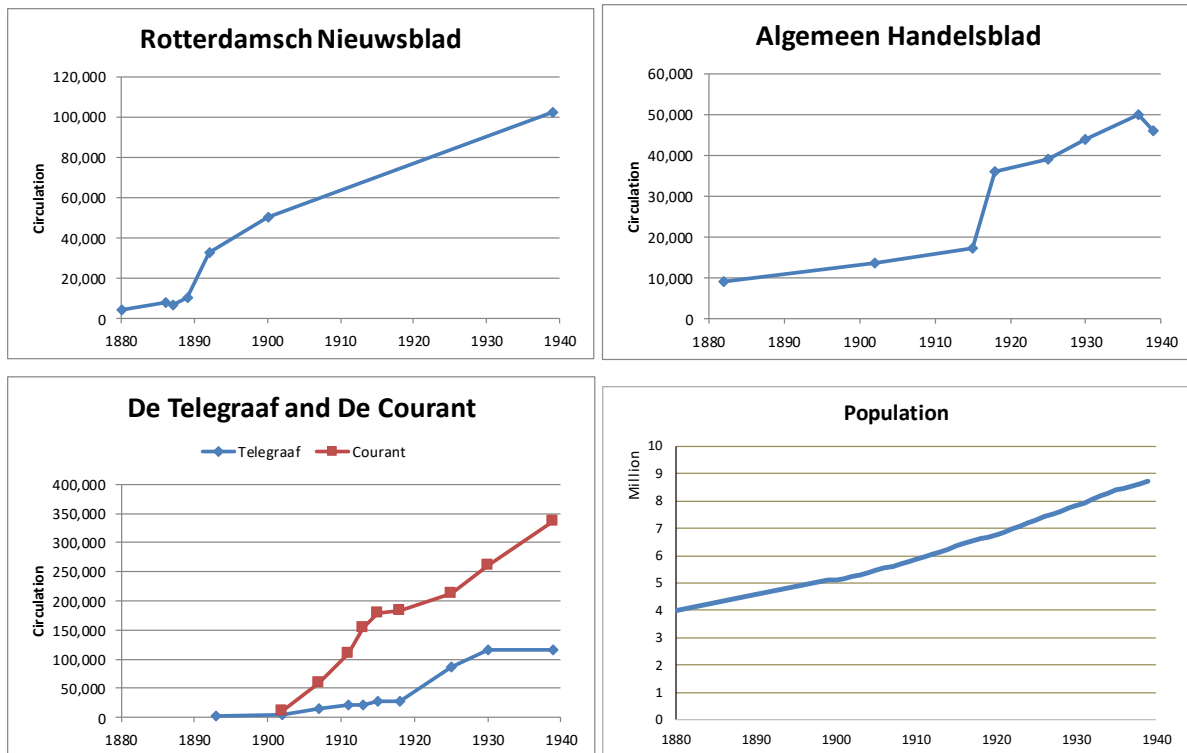
¹⁰ Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 68-74; Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 7-25.

¹¹ Wijffjes, "Modernization," 69.

¹² Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 28, 41.

¹³ Nelleke Manneke, *Uit oogpunt van politie: zorg en repressie in Rotterdam tussen 1870 en 1914* (Arnhem: Gouda Quint, 1993), 50-53.

¹⁴ Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 50-82; Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 192-193.



Source: Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 192-193; CBS. No circulation data available for *Leeuwarder Courant*.

Figure 2 Development in newspaper circulations and the Dutch population.

The *Leeuwarder Courant* was another regional paper but rather different in tone. It was based in Leeuwarden, a much smaller town (with a population of 55,000 in 1939) in the predominantly rural northern Netherlands and the capital of the province of Friesland. The *Leeuwarder Courant* was founded in the eighteenth century and became a daily paper in 1879, at which point it had around 4000 subscribers.¹⁵ It was an upmarket paper aimed at the local elite. However, competition from the end of the century from both new local papers and mass-market national papers forced it to widen its target market by making changes to its content and pricing. As a result, the number of subscribers increased, passing 10,000 in 1914 and 20,000 in 1928. Although the *Leeuwarder Courant* remained more highbrow than the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, by the interwar period its readership extended to the lower-middle-class and upper reaches of the working class.¹⁶

Het Nieuws van de Dag and *De Telegraaf* were examples of the category of national, mass-market papers. *Het Nieuws van de Dag* was founded in 1870 and was the first Dutch daily aimed at a mass market targeting the lower middle classes.¹⁷ It had a circulation of 31,800 in 1882, over three times that of its biggest rivals. But it was *De Telegraaf* that came

¹⁵ Subscription figures are available for the *Leeuwarder Courant* but not circulation data.

¹⁶ Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, 253-321; Santema, "Jacob Hepkema," 87, 94-95.

¹⁷ Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 28; Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 26; Huub Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland, 1850-2000* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2004), 39.

to epitomize the Dutch mass-market press. *De Telegraaf* was founded in 1893 for a progressive, metropolitan readership. Although it enjoyed initial success, in the late 1890s it foundered as the owner, Henri Tindal, bled it dry to finance various madcap adventures. In 1902, the newspaper was acquired by H.M.C. Holdert. He pursued an aggressive marketing strategy and modelled himself on the British press barons such as Northcliffe, founder and owner of the *Daily Mail*. In 1923, he acquired *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, which he merged with *De Courant*. *De Courant* was a so-called *kopblad*, a cheaper sister paper with fewer pages and largely made up of the editorial content of the main paper, in this case the *De Telegraaf*, that was aimed at a less affluent market segment.¹⁸ As only *De Telegraaf* has been digitized, the research presented in this thesis is based on that newspaper rather than *De Courant*. However, a comparison between *De Telegraaf* and *De Courant* for a sample period (carried out for the purpose of the present study) showed that all items appearing in *De Telegraaf* were also printed in *De Courant*, with the exception of news that had become out of date (unlike *De Telegraaf*, *De Courant* had no Sunday edition and only appeared once a day).¹⁹ In other words, the data gathered for *De Telegraaf* can be assumed to be representative of the content of *De Courant* as well. *De Courant* was an important factor in *De Telegraaf*'s success as it enjoyed high circulations and brought in advertising revenue while the editorial costs were minimal. *De Telegraaf* also saw circulations increase, particularly after World War I when it became more politically neutral and targeted a broader middle-income segment (see Figure 2). In 1930, when the population was 7.8 million, the combined circulation of *De Telegraaf* and *De Courant* was 370,000, far more than any other national paper and the equivalent of about 20 per cent of all households.²⁰

De Telegraaf's journalists and owner saw the *Algemeen Handelsblad* as its main rival.²¹ *Algemeen Handelsblad* was a long-established national paper, founded in 1828. It became the first Dutch paper to appear daily in 1830.²² It was aimed at the elite, as is evident from its pricing: in 1895, a quarterly subscription cost six guilders, compared with three guilders for *De Telegraaf*. Like the other newspapers in the study, it increased its circulation, particularly after World War I (see Figure 2). An indication of the differences between the readerships of the three national newspapers in the interwar period is given by a survey held in 1938. This showed that six per cent of *Algemeen Handelsblad* readers belonged to the working class compared with 21 per cent for *De Telegraaf* and 84 per cent of the readers of the merged *De Courant/Het Nieuws van de Dag*.²³

¹⁸ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 82; M. Wolf, "An Anglo-American newspaper in Holland. Form and style of *De Telegraaf* (1893-1940)," in *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News, 1880-2005*, ed. Marcel Broersma (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 81-94; Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 40.

¹⁹ Comparison based on all items on family or sexual violence involving women or children in *De Telegraaf* and *De Courant* in March 1920.

²⁰ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 82, 224; Wolf, "An Anglo-American Newspaper".

²¹ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 23-24, 83-84, 171.

²² Visser, *Papieren Spiegel*, 72.

²³ Schuit and Hemels, *Recepten en rolpatronen*, 19.

This survey of Dutch housewives, which was ordered by the Dutch *Bond van Adverteerders* ('association of advertisers'), was symptomatic of another change in the media market, namely the drive to attract female readers because of their importance to advertisers. The association wanted to know what housewives were reading "given that in the vast majority of cases advertisements are intended precisely to attract the housewife".²⁴ In the nineteenth century, advertisements consisted of notices from individual shops and advertisers were most concerned about reaching the right kind of reader, that is to say affluent readers. With the expansion of the retail sector and the rise of brand advertising, it became more important to reach as many potential buyers as possible. And because housewives were assumed to be in charge of spending the household budgets, they were the potential buyers that advertisers wanted to reach.²⁵

Thus with the rise of the mass media, the target readership expanded to include two new groups: the working class and women. As a result, these two groups became fully incorporated in the 'imagined community' that was constructed through the newspapers' content.²⁶ This imagined community operated at two levels. At one level was the community of readers of a specific newspaper. That sense of being part of a virtual community was fostered by such sections as readers' letters, where readers could see others responding to the issues of the day, and the small ads, where readers offered one another goods and services. But this community of readers was still limited to a particular class profile and, in the case of local newspapers, a particular geographical area. At another level, the newspapers' content portrayed an imagined community that extended to Dutch society as a whole. The incorporation of women and the working class in the imagined community meant that they were treated as full members of Dutch society and their views were taken seriously by all newspapers, regardless of their specific target readership. The *Algemeen Handelsblad*, for example, never saw working-class readers as a significant target group yet its portrayal of the lower classes changed from the end of the nineteenth century. In countless articles in 1880, the working classes were depicted as the unruly 'other', but the paper adopted a more respectful tone in the later sample years.

This more inclusive approach by the newspapers was tied to and bolstered the process of emancipation of the working class and women that was described in the previous chapter. In this regard, it is useful to make a distinction between civil society and the public sphere, as discussed by Maartje Janse. Civil society "refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values", whereas the public sphere is about the notion of debate and the expression of opinion, often facilitated by the press. Janse argues that it was often easier for new groups such as women to gain access to civil

²⁴ Schuit and Hemels, *Recepten en rolpatronen*, 19.

²⁵ Schuit, Hemels, p.19; Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, 29-34.

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6, 33-36.

society – for example through philanthropic activities – than the public sphere.²⁷ The incorporation of women and the working class in the newspapers' imagined community can therefore be seen as a new stage in their emancipation as it gave them access to the public sphere.

Where women are concerned, this voice in the public sphere is evident in the serious attention paid to women's political demands in the newspapers from the 1890s. In 1895, the newly emergent feminist organizations received sympathetic treatment, with full reporting of their meetings and addresses to the government on subjects such as marriage law, employment rights and female suffrage.²⁸ This positive coverage continued throughout the period. The newspapers also provided a forum that feminists could use directly. The leading feminist Aletta Jacobs was a regular contributor to *De Telegraaf*.²⁹ Only in 1930 was the tone rather less exclusively emancipatory. On the one hand, the newspapers still gave room to feminist viewpoints but on the other hand the women's sections firmly addressed women in their domestic role with cleaning tips, fashion advice and articles on cooking and bringing up children. But even here, journalists often used the language of progress. For example, an article in the *Leeuwarder Courant* on women's fashions in 1930 started by marvelling at how far women had come; whereas in 1910 she was just a housewife and mother, the modern woman of 1930 could excel at all kinds of jobs.³⁰ The exception to this pattern was the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, which exemplified what Alison Light has termed 'conservative modernism', modern in form while espousing conservative values.³¹ The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was an enthusiastic supporter of the modern woman with its articles on individual female achievements – the first woman to captain a boat across the Atlantic or swim across the Zuiderzee, for example, yet it was lukewarm about topics such as women's position in the labour market and female suffrage.³²

In order to appeal to the new categories of readers, Dutch journalists changed the style and content of the newspapers. They were influenced a new approach to journalism, termed 'New Journalism', that originated in the US and UK. The key elements of this New Journalism were an emphasis on news rather than 'views' (editorials and opinion pieces), more human-interest stories (including crime), a greater range of subjects that qualified as

²⁷ Maartje Janse, "Towards a History of Civil Society," *De negentiende eeuw* 32, no. 2 (2008): 104-121.

²⁸ For example: "De rechtstoestand der vrouw," *De Telegraaf*, 28 March 1895, 1; "Vrouwelijke Inspecteurs," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 12 April 1895, 3; "Mr. H.Ph. de Kanter en de vrouwen," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 15 February 1895, 6.

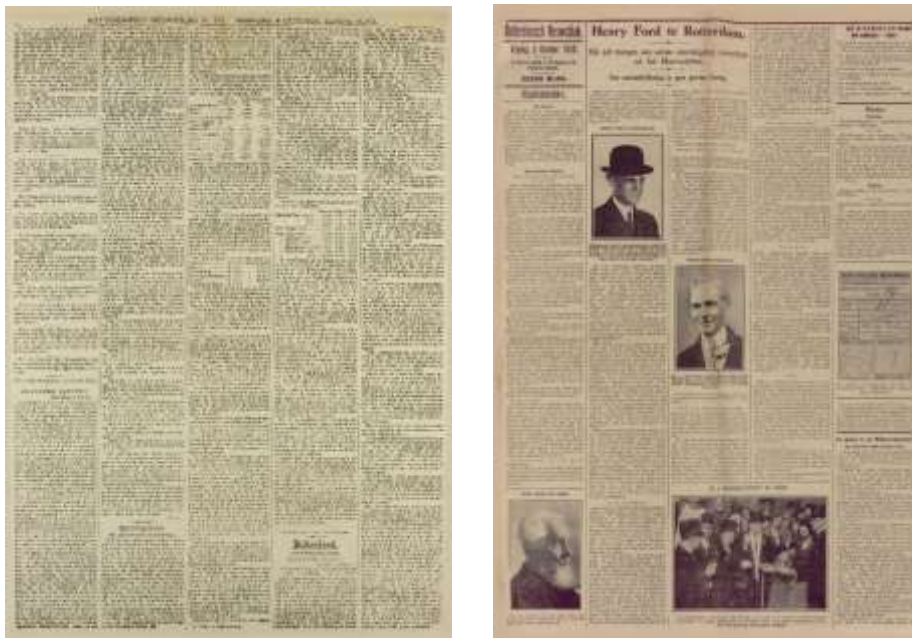
²⁹ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 98-99.

³⁰ "De vrouw van 1930," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 1 February 1930, 14.

³¹ Light, *Forever England*, 11.

³² "Een vrouwelijke kapitein," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 2 February 1920, 11; "Rotterdamsche zwemster over de Zuiderzee gezwommen," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* 28 August 1930, 13; "Geniet vrouwelijk personeel de voorkeur?" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 5 May 1930, 3; "Vereeniging ter behartiging van de belangen der vrouw," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 27 February 1895, 5; "De vrouw en het kiesrecht," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* 13 January 1910, 10. Bingham sees newspaper reports of heroic female swimmers and pilots as part of a discourse of modernity: Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, 74-78.

newsworthy, such as sports, new genres such as interviews and reportages, a more attractive appearance with headlines and illustrations and a more accessible writing style with snappier articles. Articles became shorter and the inverted pyramid system was used in which the most important information was summarized in the first sentence and the rest of the article presented the facts in descending order of importance.³³ Dutch newspapers were relatively slow to adopt these new elements. Commentators and journalists working for the quality papers were resistant to many aspects of New Journalism such as interviews, headlines and illustrations. They were criticized as appealing to the readers' emotions rather than their reason, and trivializing and sensationalizing the content. Yet even the upmarket Dutch newspapers did eventually adopt many of the hallmark elements of New Journalism in the fifty years following 1880.³⁴



Source: *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 4 October 1880 (left) and 3 October 1930 (right), www.delpher.nl.

Figure 3 Shift to a more appealing visual style.

The changes in style and content in the newspapers covered in this thesis were analysed in detail as part of the present study. This involved cataloguing the sections and use of illustrations and other visual elements in a typical week in late October for each

³³ Kevin Williams, *Read All About It! A History of the British Newspaper* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 119-122; Williams, "Anglo-American Journalism".

³⁴ Wijffjes, "Modernization"; Marcel Broersma, "Vormgeving tussen woord en beeld. De visuele infrastructuur van Nederlandse dagbladen, 1900-2000," *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 7, no. 1 (2004): 7-17; Marcel Broersma, "Mediating Parliament. Form Changes in British and Dutch Journalism, 1850-1940," in *Mediatization of Politics in History*, ed. Huub Wijffjes and Gerrit Voerman (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 180-183; Bernadette Kester, "Breuk en continuüm. Erich Salomon en de personalisering van de politiek in geïllustreerde tijdschriften," *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 15, no. 2 (2012): 63-66.

newspaper and sample year.³⁵ This was supplemented by analysis of the adverts on the biggest advertising day of that week (that is, the day with most advertising space). The newspapers in 1880 were austere, devoid of illustrations and dominated by news in the public sphere of business and politics. They were designed for the educated man of business who had the leisure to read the paper from cover to cover. But from 1895 onwards there was a shift in content away from the world of work and politics towards the private sphere of the home and leisure activities. Sections started to appear on sport. In the interwar years, newspapers added sections on the cinema, radio and children's cartoons and puzzles. Business news, on the other hand, took up less and less space. The newspapers became more visually attractive too, with headlines for the individual articles. The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was the first of the study newspapers to include pictures, with several a day in 1895. In 1921, *De Telegraaf* introduced a separate photo page, with other Dutch newspapers soon following suit.³⁶ By 1930, all the papers in this study were using photographs.

Many of the changes in content were clearly designed for female readers. Indeed, according to Mark Hampton, New Journalism was associated by critics with the feminization of the press because it was seen as a "blurring of the distinction between the public (masculine) and private (feminine) spheres", giving prominence to what had previously been seen as domestic, commonplace matters.³⁷ In the Dutch newspapers of 1880, the only concession to the female reader was the serialized story (the *feuilleton*), but even in 1895 the papers were already starting to incorporate more items thought to appeal to women. The foreign news sections extended beyond politics to include descriptions of fashionable life in Europe's leading capitals. There were more travel reports, amusing sketches and book reviews, and in the twentieth century film and radio news.³⁸ The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was the first of the study newspapers to explicitly target female readers. It had a daily fashion item in 1895 and a weekly woman's section (*Voor de Dames*) from 1910. By 1930 all the newspapers had a weekly woman's page. At this point, the newspapers also had dedicated sections for children. They had become all-round family papers, paying attention

³⁵ Specifically, the week beginning Monday 25 October in 1880, the week beginning 21 October in 1895, the week beginning 24 October in 1910, the week beginning 25 October in 1920 and the week beginning 20 October in 1930. Late October was chosen as it did not include any public holidays or festive or holiday periods in any of the sample years.

³⁶ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 184-186. In the Dutch literature, *De Telegraaf* is generally viewed as the pioneering Dutch newspaper in the use of elements of New Journalism — see for example: Wolf, "An Anglo-American Newspaper" — but that is because it has been compared to other national newspapers. Of the sample newspapers in the present study, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* often led the way.

³⁷ Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 120-121.

³⁸ For the kind of items thought to appeal to women, see: Gretchen Soderlund, *Sex Trafficking, Scandal, and the Transformation of Journalism, 1885-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 100; Siân Nicholas, "Media history or media histories?," *Media History* 18, no. 3-4 (2012): 385; Schuit and Hemels, *Recepten en rolpatronen*, 11-14.

to the private world of leisure and the domestic front as well as the public world of politics and business.



Source: *De Telegraaf*, 25 October 1930, www.delpher.nl.

Figure 4 Women's section in *De Telegraaf*.

3.2 The role of family and sexual violence in newspaper content

With the rise of New Journalism and the mass media, crime acquired a more prominent place in newspapers' content. It is therefore not surprising that coverage of family and sexual violence increased in the selected Dutch newspapers after 1880 (see Table 6). However, it is argued in the present study that an additional factor driving the changing coverage is that these crime stories were thought by journalists to interest female readers. They were therefore part of the strategy of producing content that appealed to women as well as men.

The argument that stories of family and sexual crime were thought to interest women may seem counterintuitive. After all, prevalent notions of femininity saw women as naturally weak, fragile and nonaggressive. However, there are several reasons for concluding that women were thought to like reading about cases of violence with a human-interest angle. Studies of journalists' policies in Britain show that this association was made there: *Daily Mail* journalists "expected women to be interested solely in knitting jumpers, in caring for their complexions, looking after babies, in a 'good murder' and in silly stories

about weddings”.³⁹ Violence in the family was seen as part of the private, domestic — and therefore feminine — sphere.⁴⁰ In the twentieth century, stories of intimate partner violence tied in with debates on marital relationships that were taking place in the women’s pages.⁴¹ Studies of Dutch journalists’ attitudes and policies from a gender perspective are lacking. However, the articles logged for the present study include comments by journalists on the considerable interest shown by women in cases of private violence. In the trial of a man for the murder of his two children in 1930 in a working-class district of Rotterdam, the spectators were mainly local women “who, as you can imagine, were *extremely* interested in the drama”.⁴² A 1910 trial involving an aristocratic student who had killed his married lover attracted numerous smartly dressed ladies “desirous of sensation, burning with curiosity for the details of this drama”.⁴³ The changing nature of the Dutch coverage is also an indication that journalists were selecting these stories at least in part with female readers in mind (as will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters). The accounts were increasingly sympathetic to the female protagonists and some categories, such as foreign stories of intimate partner violence, appear designed specifically for women readers as they were placed in sections that women were thought to read and drew on romantic fiction, a genre associated with women.

The point being made here is that journalists thought women would want to read stories of family and sexual violence, not that women were necessarily interested in such stories in practice. That conclusion cannot be drawn in the present study as its scope does not extend to reading habits and reader reception. Even so, it is at least plausible that women were more interested than men in such stories. Studies of modern reading and viewing preferences find that women are more likely than men to watch fictional crime series, read crime fiction and read true crime stories.⁴⁴ Experiments by the psychologists Vicary and Fraley also suggest women may enjoy reading true crime because they identify with the female victims.⁴⁵ One of the few investigations of readers’ responses to crime news in a historical context, an analysis by John Carter Wood of readers’ letters concerning the trials of Beatrice Pace in the 1920s for the murder of her husband, found that letters from women outnumbered letters from men by a factor of five. He notes too that these women

³⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, 28.

⁴⁰ Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, 121.

⁴¹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, 105-110; John Carter Wood, *Most Remarkable Woman*, 70-71.

⁴² “welke naar zich begrijpen laat, zéér voor het drama interesseerden,” in “Het drama van de Rubroekstraat voor de rechtbank,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 17 October 1930, 10.

⁴³ “begeerig naar sensatie, brandend van nieuwsgierigheid naar de bijzonderheden van dit drama,” in “Het drama te Rijswijk,” *De Telegraaf*, 27 June 1910, 2.

⁴⁴ Will Atkinson, “The Structure of Literary Taste: Class, Gender and Reading in the UK,” *Cultural Sociology* 10, no. 2 (2016): 252-253; Amanda M. Vicary and R. Chris Fraley, “Captured by True Crime: Why are Women Drawn to Tales of Rape, Murder, and Serial Killers?,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 1, no. 1 (2010): 82-83, 85-86.

⁴⁵ Vicary and Fraley, “Captured by True Crime,” 84-85.

often identified with Mrs Pace, her hard life and her cruel husband.⁴⁶ In conclusion, there is evidence that stories of violence involving a female protagonist would indeed appeal more to women than men.

Table 6 Changing coverage of family and sexual violence in newspapers.

Newspaper	Year	No. of lines on family and sexual violence in year	Newshole (editorial pages) per week	Average no. of lines per page on family and sexual violence
<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>	1880	1,306	18.9	1.3
	1895	4,247	30.3	2.7
	1910	6,852	42.2	3.1
	1920	1,628	31.6	1.0
	1930	6,046	63.5	1.8
<i>Algemeen Handelsblad</i>	1880	1,428	34.2	0.8
	1895	2,527	32.4	1.5
	1910	8,413	61.4	2.6
	1920	1,874	52.7	0.7
	1930	4,401	92.8	0.9
<i>Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad</i>	1880	1,261	20.2	1.2
	1895	10,374	42.4	4.7
	1910	12,060	50.5	4.6
	1920	3,568	38.4	1.8
	1930	14,665	83.6	3.4
<i>Het Nieuws van de Dag</i>	1880	1,019	32.6	0.6
<i>De Telegraaf</i>	1895	5,017	36.1	2.7
	1910	14,628	48.4	5.8
	1920	3,478	42.4	1.6
	1930	6,163	70.9	1.7

Source: www.delpher.nl, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, all issues in 1880; *De Telegraaf*, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

Table 6 details the changing coverage of family and sexual violence in the sample newspapers between 1880 and 1930. It shows an increase in the total number of lines between 1880 and 1910 for all newspapers. This in itself does not prove journalists were focusing more on these kinds of crimes, as newspapers were increasing in size anyway; for example, a week's issues of the *Leeuwarder Courant* totalled 42 pages in 1880 but 70 in

⁴⁶ John Carter Wood, *Most Remarkable Woman*, 175-182.

1910. The relative importance of articles on private violence can be deduced by comparing coverage to the total number of pages minus the space taken up by adverts – what is termed the ‘newshole’.⁴⁷ The final column in Table 6 does just that by expressing coverage as the number of lines per available page (newshole). It is clear that in relative terms too, the space devoted to private violence increased in the two decades leading up to the First World War.

The increase in column inches devoted to stories of private violence was not however a straightforward linear development: coverage was much lower in 1920 and while it rebounded by 1930, these stories were less significant as a proportion of the newshole than they had been in the pre-war decades. The decline in 1920 is connected with the aftermath of World War I. Historians have noted that wars were associated with falls in crime news, regardless of the actual level of crime.⁴⁸ As was noted in Chapter 2, the Netherlands was severely affected by World War I even though it was neutral. The war had ended by 1920 but it still cast a shadow over the press. Newspapers had fewer pages than in 1910 due to paper rationing and the exorbitant price of paper.⁴⁹ Moreover, the mood was sombre. The news was filled with the repercussions of the war – the revolution in Russia and unrest in Germany and Italy – while the Netherlands was hit by a series of strikes. Accordingly, we see a return in the Dutch newspapers to the ‘masculine’ topics of politics and economics. In such a context, crime stories were seen as trivial and not worthy of extended attention, as the *Algemeen Handelsblad* made clear in a caustic article criticizing the hype in Britain surrounding the trial of a man accused of poisoning his wife.⁵⁰ The coverage of violence within the family and sexual assaults was up again in 1930 but did not return to the pre-war levels. To some extent this reflected the new makeup of the interwar newspapers: reflecting the wider definition of ‘news’ under the influence of New Journalism, the newspapers of 1930 had special sections on sport and culture, women’s pages and children’s sections, leaving less space for crime stories.

Dutch stories of violent crime involving women and children clearly resonated with readers. There is evidence that the major stories in the newspapers were also events that mattered to local communities. The papers frequently mentioned the crowds drawn by an event or a trial and their emotional involvement. When a couple was tried in Amsterdam in 1880 for the murder of a two-year-old boy, the crowds attending were “very numerous” (*zeer talrijk*) and the public gallery was “packed” (*stampvol*).⁵¹ The arrest of a man for the rape and murder of a little girl from a village in the northern Netherlands in 1920 aroused a

⁴⁷ King, “Making Crime News”, 93.

⁴⁸ Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg, *Crime News*, 131; Esther Snell, “Discourses of Criminality in the Eighteenth-Century Press: The Presentation of Crime in The Kentish Post, 1717-1768,” *Continuity and Change* 22, no. 1 (2007): 25.

⁴⁹ Visser, *Papieren Spiegel*, 360; “Het dure courantenpapier,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, 19 April 1920, 1.

⁵⁰ “De vergiftigingszaak van Kidwelly,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 17 November 1920, 6.

⁵¹ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 January 1880, 6; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, 14 January 1880, 7.

heated response among the local community. According to the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, they were raising their fists and threatening to attack the accused.⁵² It should be noted, though, that crime stories were less important in selling copies than in countries such as Britain and France, where dramatic murders were placed on the front page to boost sales in fiercely competitive markets.⁵³ In the Netherlands, most newspapers were sold by subscription so that front-page news did not serve the same purpose.⁵⁴

Once an incident caught the public's attention, the press could magnify that effect by publicizing the event and maintaining the public's interest. In the case of the funeral of a nurse who was raped and murdered in woods near the village of Bennekom in 1930, *De Telegraaf* informed its readers of the date and place in advance, effectively inviting them to attend.⁵⁵ The funeral attracted huge interest and afterwards the newspapers printed a photograph of the funeral procession winding its way through the streets of Arnhem.⁵⁶ The impact of the newspapers was enhanced too by the broader media ecosystem that included magazines, books and, in the twentieth century, cinema and radio. Because the newspapers appeared much more frequently than other media, it was the newspapers that decided what the big stories were, with the other media following suit.⁵⁷ Illustrated magazines complemented the newspaper coverage with extensive reports focusing on the human-interest angle and visualization in the form of prints and (from the 1910s) photographs. The most successful of these was *Het Leven*, founded in 1906 and with a circulation of 95,000 only two years later.⁵⁸ It was known for its focus on crime and other sensational events. Not surprisingly, it featured numerous photographs of the Bennekom case.⁵⁹ Radio and the cinema took off in the interwar period but remained less important as a source for crime news.⁶⁰ However, film was key in popularizing fictional crime narratives. Detective fiction flourished from the end of the nineteenth century. Authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (who created Sherlock Holmes) and Wilkie Collins were popular among Dutch middle-class readers while the adventures of the American detective Nick Carter were sold in cheap editions and consumed enthusiastically by the masses.⁶¹ The cinema fuelled the rage for detectives by transferring these stories to the silver screen.⁶² The newspapers in turn

⁵² "Gruwelijke moord te Beilen," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 13 October 1920, 1.

⁵³ Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang*, 21-25; Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid century. The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), 8.

⁵⁴ For example, non-subscription sales made up six per cent of the total circulation of *De Telegraaf* in 1898. Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 486. See also: Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 122.

⁵⁵ "Arrestatie van den dader," *De Telegraaf*, 2 March 1930, 5.

⁵⁶ "De moord te Bennekom," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 5 March 1930, 6; "De moord te Bennekom," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 5 March 1930, 13; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 6 March 1930, 9.

⁵⁷ Kester, "Breuk en continuüm", 61-62.

⁵⁸ Van de Plasse, *Kroniek*, 232; Kester, "Breuk en continuüm", 68.

⁵⁹ See www.geheugenvannederland.nl, accessed 31 July 2017.

⁶⁰ See www.kb.nl/bronnen-zoekwijzers/kb-collecties/collecties-per-thema/radiobulletins-anp; www.eyefilm.nl/collectie/filmgeschiedenis/artikel/nederlandse-bioscoopjournaals, accessed 31 July 2017.

⁶¹ Boudien de Vries, *Leescultuur in Haarlem*, 185, 292.

⁶² Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang*, 29-43, 47-52.

serialized detective stories in their feuilleton sections and used elements from the detective genre in their real-life crime reports (as will be discussed in the next chapter).⁶³ Thus the press played a key part in encouraging the general public's interest in violent crimes.

The Dutch press did not, however, become actively involved in the judicial process. Chapter 2 already discussed the absence of a role for laypeople in the Dutch criminal justice system and the contrast in this respect with other countries. That contrast extends to press coverage of violent crime. The historiography on Anglo-Saxon countries shows intense and increasing involvement by newspapers in the pursuit of justice. British journalists in nineteenth-century papers discussed sentences and gave their opinions on whether the punishment was too harsh or too lenient. Wiener has shown that in the case of convicted murderers, newspapers increasingly became a player in their own right, influencing Home Office decisions on whether or not to execute the criminal.⁶⁴ In contrast, Dutch journalists never commented or editorialized on sentences by Dutch courts.⁶⁵ Indeed, when the *Algemeen Handelsblad* published a letter complaining about a lenient sentence, it added an editorial remark underneath noting how difficult it is for outsiders to assess the correctness of a sentence.⁶⁶ As there was no death sentence, there were no appeals for mercy for journalists to comment on. Nor did Dutch journalists need to educate the public (as potential jury members) in legal niceties as there were no juries. In the case of sexual offences, the lack of involvement was compounded by the fact that reporters were almost invariably excluded from trials of a sexual nature.⁶⁷

The reticence of the Dutch journalists was also a reflection of their understanding of their role in society. In his study of British newspapers, Hampton identified three ideal types for the press's role in society: educational, representational and entertainment-based. The educational model, which was in the ascendant in the mid-nineteenth century and was epitomized by *The Times*, envisaged the press as educating its citizens by providing them with the information they needed to exercise their democratic rights and by acting as a neutral forum for debate. The representational model, which was epitomized by W.T. Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the late-nineteenth century, saw newspapers as acting on behalf of citizens, campaigning on social issues and holding the government to account. The Maiden Tribute affair discussed in the previous chapter, which brought about a change in the age of consent, is a prime example of that approach. The entertainment model, in which

⁶³ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 55. On crime fiction and the interaction with crime news in England, see: Emsley, *Twentieth-Century England*, 110-122.

⁶⁴ Wiener, "Convicted Murderers", 110-111. A similar development is seen in Australia and the US: Kaladelfos, "Condemned Criminals," 703; Linders and Van Gundy-Yoder, "Gall, Galantry," 324-327.

⁶⁵ Dutch articles on foreign cases did sometimes include comments on the administration of justice, see for example: *De Telegraaf*, 7 July 1910, 5.

⁶⁶ "Te humane rechters?" *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 March 1930, 14.

⁶⁷ There seem to have been occasional exceptions in the nineteenth century: two cases in the north of the country in 1895 were reported in such detail that the press must have been in attendance. See: *Leeuwarder Courant*, 1 May 1895, 5; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 16 December 1895, 5.

the main purpose of the newspaper was to amuse its readers, dominated in the twentieth century with the rise of the tabloids.⁶⁸ The representational model was never widely adopted in the Netherlands although Stead was admired by the more progressive journalists of the 1890s and 1900s.⁶⁹ It was the educational and entertainment models that dominated in the Netherlands. The quality newspapers such as *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *Leeuwarder Courant* stayed true to the education model throughout the period 1880 to 1930, while the popular papers such as *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* and the post-war *De Telegraaf* embraced the entertainment model.⁷⁰ Both of these approaches fostered a passive, neutral attitude to the operation of the criminal justice system.

3.3 Naming and shaming the perpetrator

Dutch reports of family and sexual violence can also seem aloof when compared with the Anglo-American press because they contain relatively little information about the accused, usually giving no more than the initials and with no description of their appearance. British and American reporters paid considerable attention to the accused's physical appearance and attire in their trial reports. This was particularly the case with women. Shani D'Cruze writes that demeanour and clothes were a way of signalling respectability. Newspapers "linked appearance to character and thus to behaviour".⁷¹ The Dutch papers on the other hand rarely gave any physical description at all. It is possible that this was intended to preserve the privacy of the accused. That would fit with the practice, still adopted by Dutch newspapers today, of referring to the accused only by their initials.

Initials were not however used for all offenders. As in modern Dutch newspapers, the practice of using initials was restricted to Dutch stories. However, in contrast to the modern-day situation, the full names of Dutch offenders were regularly printed (see Table 7).⁷² The question is why some were named and others not. The Dutch historian Herman Franke examined naming practices in the nineteenth-century *Algemeen*

⁶⁸ Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Soderlund.

⁶⁹ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 99-100; Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 33-34.

⁷⁰ Marcel Broersma, 'Form, Style and Journalistic Strategies. An Introduction', in *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News, 1880-2005*, ed. by Marcel Broersma, (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. ix-xxix.

⁷¹ D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, 141-143. For the message conveyed by descriptions of appearance in specific cases, see: Ramey, "Bloody Blonde," 633-635; Andrew Davies, "Youth, violence, and courtship in late-Victorian Birmingham: the case of James Harper and Emily Pimm," *History of the Family* 11 (2006): 111; Frost, "Kitty Byron," 543.

⁷² Modern Dutch newspaper companies argue that initials should be used as suspects are innocent until proven guilty, while to name perpetrators would be an additional punishment. These arguments are given in the style guide of the NRC Media Company (which publishes the successor to the *Algemeen Handelsblad*). The main exceptions made by the media company are in the case of foreign stories, public or well-known figures and high-ranking officials where the press is serving the public interest by making their names known. apps.nrc.nl/stijlboek/5-wat-we-publiceren, accessed 18 July 2017.

Handelsblad.⁷³ He sees the naming of criminals as a public shaming exercise. The nineteenth century was a period in which public punishments declined. It has been argued that this was because the middle classes were increasingly repulsed by public displays of violence by the state. Moreover, according to Elias's theory of the civilizing process, public spectacles became less necessary as people increasingly internalized social norms.⁷⁴ However, more recent studies have argued that rather than shaming rituals disappearing in the nineteenth century, the emergent mass media took over this role.⁷⁵ In the case of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Franke traced the origins of the practice of using initials to the mid-nineteenth century, but the newspaper continued to print the full names on occasion. Franke interprets this as the persistence of shaming practices, although he could not discern a clear policy on when to use full names.⁷⁶

Table 7 Reporting the suspect's name in stories set in the Netherlands.

Newspaper	No information		Initials		Name		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Algemeen Handelsblad</i>	221	75%	19	6%	53	18%	293	100%
<i>De Telegraaf/Het Nieuws van de Dag</i>	146	40%	148	41%	67	19%	361	100%
<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>	149	35%	224	53%	51	12%	424	100%
<i>Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad</i>	320	49%	281	43%	56	9%	657	100%

Source: www.delpher.nl, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, all issues in 1880; *De Telegraaf*, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

An insight into the *professed* views of Dutch lawyers and journalists at the time on the practice of using initials comes from a debate on the topic in 1920. It was prompted by a sex crime case involving homosexual contacts between large numbers of minors and adult men in The Hague (a case discussed in detail in Section 6.6). Although sex crimes were almost invariably tried *in camera*, the standard procedure was to first call out the charge,

⁷³ H.J. Franke, *Van schavot naar krantekolom: over de ontwikkeling van de misdaadverslaggeving in het Algemeen Handelsblad vanaf 1828 tot 1900* (Amsterdam: Sociologisch Instituut, 1981).

⁷⁴ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*; Hoekstra, *Hart van de natie*, 21-58; Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering. Executions and the Evolution of Repression: from a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 200-207.

⁷⁵ Phil Carney, "Foucault's punitive society: visual tactics of marking as a history of the present," *British Journal of Criminology* 55, (2015): 240-242; David G. Barrie, "Naming and Shaming: Trial by Media in Nineteenth-Century Scotland," *Journal of British Studies* 54 (2015): 349-376.

⁷⁶ Franke, *Van schavot naar krantekolom*, 115-126.

name and other personal details of the accused before asking the public and press to leave and closing the doors. In this particular case, the names were not read out.⁷⁷ The press was incensed and smelt a cover-up (it was rumoured that high-ranking men were involved). The incident prompted *De Telegraaf* to ask a number of lawyers to give their opinion on the legality and desirability of publishing the defendant's names in trial reports. The lawyers were agreed that it was legally permissible to publish the full names but also that it was not generally desirable: publishing the full name was an additional punishment and it was not fair on suspects who might later be acquitted. The only exception they countenanced was in the case of crimes such as swindling where the general public was at risk and the publication of the culprit's name could act as a warning. Aside from the rational arguments put forward by the lawyers, their responses betrayed a deep-seated aversion to the intrusion of the press and the general public in the processes of the criminal justice system. They described the wish of readers to see the full names as the "base curiosity instincts of the masses" (*lagere nieuwsgierigheids-instincten der massa*) and a "craving for sensation" (*zucht naar sensatie*).⁷⁸ Commenting on the lawyers' contributions, *De Telegraaf* wrote that its wish to publish the names in the sex crime case was merely as a warning to parents and teachers to help them protect children against the dangers of homosexuality. Thus the avowed reason for printing full names was as a warning.

Examination of the actual use of names in the logged articles on family and sexual violence suggests however that full names were used primarily as a shaming device rather than a warning. If that had been the case, full names would have been used most often for perpetrators of sexual violence by strangers where the potential victims consisted of women and children in the general public, but in practice it was individuals who used violence against their partner or own children who were most likely to be named in the papers. The vast majority of cases where the full name was given involved exceptional violence or cruelty in the eyes of the press. Sex crime cases where the full name was printed tended to be gang rapes, multiple rapes or rapes followed by murder. Moreover, the naming practice betrays a lack of regard for the notion of 'innocent until proven guilty'. The full name was usually cited during the investigation or in the trial report, that is before the final verdict was given (as was noted in Chapter 2, the verdict was announced in a separate session up to two weeks after the end of the trial). In 1920, *De Telegraaf* gave the name, age, town, and profession of a man who was accused by his housekeeper of having poisoned his wife. Her body was exhumed but no evidence of poisoning was found and the man was released without charge.⁷⁹ Furthermore, while the lawyers approached by *De*

⁷⁷ "Het Haagsche zedenschandaal," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 23 May 1920, 11.

⁷⁸ "De pers en het vonnis," *De Telegraaf*, 16 July 1920, 5; "De pers en het vonnis," *De Telegraaf*, 17 July 1920, 5; "De pers en het vonnis," *De Telegraaf*, 18 July 1920, 5; "De pers en het vonnis," *De Telegraaf*, 22 July 1920, 5.

⁷⁹ "Vergiftiging te Leiden?" *De Telegraaf*, 17 February 1920, 6; "De vermoedelijke vergiftiging te Leiden," *De Telegraaf*, 22 February 1920, 6; "Geen vergiftiging," *De Telegraaf*, 6 March 1920, 6.

Telegraaf talked of a craving for sensation, the journalists themselves clearly did not see printing the full name in this light. After all, this practice was just as prevalent in the quality papers such as the *Algemeen Handelsblad* as in the popular papers. Rather, the ability to name or not name a suspect gave newspapers an additional tool for expressing their condemnation in particularly despicable cases.

3.5 News values as determinants of crime news content

How did journalists decide which crime stories to print? As discussed in Chapter 1, journalists select and present stories with a view to appeal to a particular readership but they are also influenced by the availability of sources. Crime news is consequently not a neutral record of actual crime. For example, violent crime tends to be over-reported while crime coverage declines during periods of war, regardless of actual crime levels. Rather than a window on the world, Yvonne Jewkes aptly calls the media “a prism, subtly bending and distorting the view of the world it projects”.⁸⁰

The influence of individual journalists in this process – and consequently of the sex of those journalists – is limited. As journalists have to work to tight deadlines and make fast decisions about which stories to chase up, organizational procedures are put in place and routines developed to make sure that the paper can obtain “unexpected events on a routine basis”.⁸¹ Most journalists in the period under review in the Netherlands were men. Women journalists started to be employed from the 1890s onwards, but were usually hired to produce ‘women’s’ articles on subjects such as fashion.⁸² There is no evidence of any female crime reporters during this period (although journalists wrote anonymously so it cannot be discounted completely). However, it is debatable whether the content would have been any different if women had been employed on crime stories, given the overwhelming impact of professional and organizational constraints.⁸³

Journalists use ‘news values’ as criteria for deciding which stories to select and how to present them. Often these are implicit: the journalists themselves are unable to say why they chose a particular story. But scholars analysing media content are able to elicit common features. Yvonne Jewkes has produced a list of twelve news values applicable to modern crime reporting that serve as a good starting point for analysing what made an appealing story in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Dutch newspapers. Some of her news values, such as ‘visual spectacle’, are specific to the modern media context, but eight of them have explanatory value for the historical Dutch situation too. ‘Simplification’, ‘predictability’ and ‘individualism’ shaped how the stories were presented.

⁸⁰ Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 45.

⁸¹ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 119; Manning, *News and News Sources*, 50-80; Marcel Broersma, “Form, Style and Journalistic Strategies. An Introduction,” in *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News, 1880-2005*, ed. Marcel Broersma (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), xiii.

⁸² Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 196-197; Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 42, 55.

⁸³ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 78.

‘Sex’, ‘celebrity’, ‘proximity’, ‘violence’ and ‘children’ influenced which stories were selected and which were given prominence.⁸⁴ Based on an analysis of the top Dutch stories, I have added a ninth news value, ‘mystery’.⁸⁵

Individualism refers to the tendency of journalists to ascribe criminal acts to individual motivation rather than looking at socioeconomic and cultural factors and the wider context.⁸⁶ In the Dutch stories, poverty and unemployment are sometimes mentioned as factors but they are seen purely as evidence of individual failings. Other social factors, for example the dependent position of maidservants in infanticide cases, are not touched upon. As a result, each crime becomes an isolated example of an individual flaw rather than symptomatic of larger forces.

Simplification refers to the need to have stories where the meaning is unambiguous and can easily be guessed by the reader.⁸⁷ In the Dutch newspaper stories, simplification is evident both in the nature of the crime and the designation of the aggressor. Journalists divided crimes into clear-cut categories (sexual assault by a stranger, domestic violence, infanticide and so forth), whereby each category had its own clearly recognizable script and tropes. One aspect of this simplified categorization was a clear dividing line between sexual assaults and physical assaults, with different language for these distinct categories. Thus stories of sweetheart violence were presented consistently in the newspapers as purely physical attacks devoid of any sexual connotation, although in practice such violence often incorporates a sexual element.⁸⁸ Another aspect of simplification is the tendency by the Dutch newspapers to deal in binary oppositions when describing the protagonists: there is a clear victim and a clear perpetrator. In domestic violence, there may not necessarily be a single aggressor but only a handful of domestic violence cases were presented in the newspapers as ‘a couple fighting’ with both parties equally culpable. Even in more complicated cases where multiple family members become involved in the fight, the newspaper accounts singled out one person as the ‘real’ aggressor.

Another key news value is predictability. While the events themselves have to be novel to be newsworthy, news organizations prefer predictable storylines as this helps them deploy resources efficiently. This explains the preference for trial reporting – trial dates for

⁸⁴ Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 49-68. For another example of the use of Jewkes’ news values in a historical context, see: Heather Shore, “Rogues of the Racecourse. Racing men and the press in interwar Britain,” *Media History* 20, no. 4 (2014): 353-354.

⁸⁵ Jewkes uses the news value ‘Threshold’ to describe how newspapers continue with a story because they keep finding new angles. Each individual item has exceeded a threshold level of importance. But this does not capture the fact that once a story has been constructed as a mystery, the threshold is lowered – even a lack of information becomes ‘news’. Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 49-51.

⁸⁶ Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 53-54; Gabriel Cavaglion, “Fathers who kill and press coverage in Israel,” *Child Abuse Review* 18, (2009): 130-136.

⁸⁷ Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 51-53.

⁸⁸ D’Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, 18-25; Shani D’Cruze, “Sex, Violence and Local Courts. Working-Class Respectability in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century Lancashire Town,” *British Journal of Criminology* 39, no. 1 (1999): 45-47.

murder for example were known in advance so a reporter could be sent to cover the trial. Predictability also involves the preference for stories that fit existing conceptual frameworks and can be covered using standard angles.⁸⁹ In the Dutch situation, this is evident in the similarity of many of the reports on a particular category of crime. For example, in the five sample years there were over fifty items in the different newspapers concerning suspected infanticide that were all remarkably similar in structure. The following item can serve as an illustration:

“On the 23rd of this month, the little corpse of a newborn male baby was hauled out of the Wester Canal in this city, entirely naked with the exception of two loose ribbons wrapped around the body and the presumed remains of a little shirt. Anyone able to provide information on this matter is requested to contact the Spaarndammerstraat police station in this city.”⁹⁰

All the items started with one or two sentences announcing the discovery of corpse of a newborn baby, giving the location (“Wester Canal”), when the baby was found (“23rd of this month”) and any distinguishing features of the dead baby (“naked with the exception of two loose ribbons wrapped around the body and the presumed remains of a little shirt”). The items often ended with a sentence making clear that the police were investigating the case. It appears as if the journalists had standard scripts for dealing with certain situations.

The combined effect of the preference for predictability and simplification is that most of the Dutch crime stories fit a limited number of standard narratives, with a sharp distinction between sexual violence and physical violence. It is this classification used implicitly by the Dutch newspapers that is the starting point for the following three chapters. The stories of family and sexual violence are divided into stories of physical violence between current or former partners (Chapter 4), physical maltreatment by parents of their offspring (Chapter 5) and sexual violence (Chapter 6). Alternative classifications of family and sexual violence could theoretically be used, for example categorization by the relationship between the perpetrator and victim; incest would then be included with other forms of maltreatment of children. However, such alternative classifications require knowledge of the actual facts of the case and cannot be made on the basis of the information in the newspaper articles. Moreover, such an approach would obscure the constructed reality of the newspapers, which is the subject of the current study.

⁸⁹ Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 50-51; Manning, *News and News Sources*, 60-67; Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 121.

⁹⁰ “Op 23 dezer is uit het Westerkanaal alhier, opgehaald het lijke van een pasgeboren kind van het mannelijk geslacht, geheel naakt, met uitzondering van twee losse bandjes gewikkeld om het lichaam en vermoedelijk restanten van een hemdje. Dengene, die inlichtingen omtrent deze aangelegenheid kan verstrekken wordt verzocht, zich in verbinding te stellen met het politiebureau Spaarndammerstraat, alhier.” In “Kinderlijkje gevonden,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 24 January 1930, 14.

News values were used not just in the presentation of crime stories but also in deciding which crime stories should be covered. In her discussion of news values, Jewkes concludes that modern newspapers over-report sex crimes, are more likely to report a crime if it involves a celebrity or high-status person or if it involves children (whether as victim or perpetrator), over-report violent crimes and focus on crimes that are proximate.⁹¹ To determine what criteria Dutch newspapers used, ideally a comparison would be made between the coverage and the pool of available stories.⁹² This is the approach used by Peter King, for example, who compares Old Bailey trial reports with late eighteenth-century London newspapers to see which trials they were picking out.⁹³ However, there is no equivalent Dutch source to the Old Bailey records giving the list of 'available' trials. As an alternative, I have examined which stories received most coverage.

The news values embodied by the top stories in each sample year give an indication of the criteria Dutch journalists were using to select stories. I identified the five top stories in each newspaper and year, based on the number of lines and number of articles.⁹⁴ I then examined whether they involved a sexual offence, high-status protagonists (middle- or upper-class protagonists), children or extreme violence (defined here as murder), whether the incident was geographically close to the newspaper's offices and whether the story involved a mystery. A story was classified as a mystery if it was not clear from the initial reports whether a crime had been committed (for example, because the death could have been accidental) and/or who had committed the crime. The results are shown in Table 8. As there was considerable overlap between newspapers in the top stories, the figures for all newspapers are not the sum of the figures for the individual newspapers.

⁹¹ Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 55-68.

⁹² David Pritchard, Karen D. Hughes, 'Patterns of Deviance in Crime News', *Journal of Communication*, 47 (1997), 49-67.

⁹³ King, "Making Crime News"

⁹⁴ The stories were ranked by the total number of lines and by the number of articles. Then a weighted average was calculated, with a weight of 70% for the number of lines and 30% for the number of articles. This gave most weight to the space taken up with the story but avoided having a story ranked high simply because of one long article. The top five stories were the five stories with the highest average ranks.

Table 8 News values embodied in top stories.

The news values in the newspapers' top five stories in each year (measured by the number of lines and number of items).

Newspaper	No. of top stories	News values					
		Sex	High status	Geographical proximity	Violence (murder)	Children	Mystery
<i>Algemeen Handelsblad</i>	25	4	9	10	21	4	18
<i>De Telegraaf/Het Nieuws van de Dag</i>	25	5	7	12	23	5	18
<i>Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad</i>	25	5	5	11	19	6	13
<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>	25	10	5	13	21	10	14
All newspapers	53	10	12	26	42	15	25
	100%	19%	23%	49%	79%	28%	47%

Source: www.delpher.nl, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, all issues in 1880; *De Telegraaf*, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

Table 8 shows that extreme violence was the leading criterion for Dutch journalists: 79 per cent of top stories were cases where the victim had died. Murder following a sexual assault was a particularly potent combination – some of the biggest stories concerned women or children who have been raped and then killed. Geography also mattered: newspapers were particularly likely to cover a story at length if the incident took place near the newspaper's home base. This did not just apply to the two local newspapers; the national newspapers were equally prone to focusing on news close to their offices in Amsterdam. In 1930, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was the only newspaper to include a filicide in Rotterdam in its top stories, *Leeuwarder Courant* had two wife murders in Leeuwarden among its top stories and *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf* were the only papers to give prominence to the story of a murder in Amsterdam of a louche character by his girlfriend. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that the papers were only interested in local stories. There were two or three foreign cases amongst the papers' top stories every year. Most of these foreign stories involved either mass murderers or protagonists of high social status. These were exceptional stories of the kind that were in short supply in the Netherlands itself.

A common feature in many of the top stories was an element of mystery – that is to say, it was not immediately clear what had happened and who was responsible. This explains why some ostensibly similar stories could receive very different coverage. The sexual assault and murder of a boy in May 1930 fulfilled several of the criteria for a high-

profile story, as it involved sex, extreme violence and a child victim. But the man who had killed him was arrested and confessed within a couple of hours of the body being found. This information was already available in the first newspaper articles on the event and the story effectively had nowhere to go after that.⁹⁵ But in the Bennekom case when a nurse was raped and killed in February 1930, it took several days before a suspect was arrested. Moreover, he did not confess, and the police investigation continued in an effort to collect sufficient evidence. This gave the newspapers an opportunity to print daily accounts of the investigation's progress.⁹⁶

Trials which went to appeal were another category where the lack of clarity about what has happened gave the press an opportunity to spin out the story. One of the big stories in 1930 concerned an event that had actually taken place and gone to trial in the previous year. A trader in The Hague had shot and killed his estranged wife in what he claimed was an accident when he attempted to commit suicide. The public prosecutor had demanded ten years, but the accused had been sentenced for six months for criminally negligent homicide (*dood door schuld*). As he had already been detained for more than six months, he was released. The case went to appeal in The Hague where the man was found guilty of manslaughter (*doodslag*) and was sentenced to five years but by then the man had absconded. Two months later, the case went to the Supreme Court. This court referred the case to the Court of Appeal in 's Hertogenbosch, which eventually found the husband not guilty. For the newspapers, this was an attractive story, both because of the mystery surrounding whether or not the man had meant to kill his wife and because each step in the legal procedure gave another opportunity to revive the story.⁹⁷

3.6 The mediating effect of sources

Crime news sources influenced journalists' selection of stories. In Chapter 1, Herman and Chomsky's theory of news filters was introduced in which they argue that journalists' sources act as a filter. While journalists see themselves as neutral and objective, their preference for official sources affects their message.⁹⁸ This section considers the main sources of crime stories for Dutch newspapers – the courts, the police, their own reporters

⁹⁵ "Acht-jarig knaapje vermoord. De moordenaar aangehouden. Hij heeft een volledige bekentenis afgelegd," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 18 July 1930, 15.

⁹⁶ For example, in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*: "De moord bij Bennekom," 28 February 1930, 18; "De afschuwelijke moord," 1 March 1930, 2; "De misdaad bij Bennekom," 2 March 1930, 11; "De moord te Bennekom," 3 March 1930, 3; 4 March 1930, 2; "De moord te Bennekom," 5 March 1930, 12.

⁹⁷ For example, in the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*: "Het drama Faber van Riemsdijkstraat Den Haag," 5 March 1930, 18; "Het drama Faber van Riemsdijkstraat Den Haag," 19 March 1930, 19; "Het drama Faber van Riemsdijkstraat, Den Haag," 24 April 1930, 10; "Het drama Faber van Riemsdijkstraat Den Haag," 27 May 1930, 10; "Het drama in de Faber van Riemsdijkstraat, Den Haag," 27 October 1930, 18.

⁹⁸ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, chap. 1; Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 35-49.

and correspondents, other newspapers and news agencies. It looks at the effect the sources had in terms of the geographical setting and of convergence between newspapers.

The police were an important source for journalists, although rarely explicitly cited: half of all items on incidents in the Netherlands dealt with the police investigation. Haia Shpayer-Makov argues that there were both benefits and disadvantages for the police in cooperating with journalists. On the one hand, providing information during ongoing investigations could reduce the chance of catching the perpetrator and there was also the risk of bad publicity if the police had made errors or failed to solve the case. On the other hand, cooperation with journalists could burnish the police force's reputation and improve relations with the general public, while the police could use the press to appeal for information. For individual policemen, there was a chance of personal glory when their names were mentioned in the article.⁹⁹ Dutch newspaper reports in 1880 and 1895 give evidence of strained relations between the press and the police. The judicial authorities complained that the papers were impeding police investigations with their publications, but the journalists argued they were providing a public service in encouraging the public to come forward with useful information.¹⁰⁰ From the turn of the century, procedures were put in place in police forces to regulate press relations. Press passes were issued and rules introduced on which police officers could talk to the press and when. By 1920, the Amsterdam police were issuing daily press releases with a list of local crimes.¹⁰¹ The improved relations are reflected in the positive descriptions of the police. Reports regularly stress the speed with which they act and the effort they put into solving crimes.¹⁰²

Crime reporters could also gather news by keeping their eyes and ears open on the streets and asking around. Numerous reports concern incidents that caused a stir in the streets, attracting crowds. The hospitals were another possible source. In 1895, the *Telegraaf* reporter seems to have regularly visited the Binnengasthuis, the main Amsterdam hospital, on his beat round as a number of reports of family violence end with the victim being patched up in this hospital but make no mention of police involvement.¹⁰³

As the above-mentioned story of the trader from The Hague shows, court cases were a convenient and reliable source for the newspapers. Trials satisfied the news value of

⁹⁹ Haia Shpayer-Makov, "Journalists and Police Detectives in Victorian and Edwardian England: An Uneasy Reciprocal Relationship," *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 4 (2009): 963-987. An extreme example of personal publicity is seen in an article in the *Leeuwarder Courant*, which gave the names not only of the detective and police-dog trainer but also of the three police dogs. "De Misdaad te Renkum," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 26 August 1910, 10.

¹⁰⁰ "De moord te Rotterdam," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 16 December 1895, 1; *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5 June 1880, 5.

¹⁰¹ Blaauw, *Twee eeuwen*, 136-137; Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 88-89; "Pers en criminaliteit," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19 October 1920, 1.

¹⁰² For example: "Jongen ontvoerd op een motorfiets," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 20 March 1930, 2.

¹⁰³ For example: "Man en vrouw," *De Telegraaf*, 17 January 1895, 2; "Een hardhandige bestraffing," *De Telegraaf*, 1 June 1895, 2.

predictability; the date was set in advance and editors could therefore arrange for a reporter to attend. The *Leeuwarder Courant* seems to have covered the local court cases comprehensively throughout the period under review. The other newspapers were more selective, although the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* appears to be listing most local trials in 1910. The national papers covered high-profile trials at length throughout the period with verbatim accounts.

Many of the stories of private violence in the Netherlands concerned local incidents. Even the national papers were disproportionately likely to feature stories from the province in which their offices were based. This is clear from Table 9, where the figures for the 'home' province are shown in the grey cells. Just under 20 per cent of the Dutch population lived in the province of Noord Holland (1920 figures) but a substantially higher proportion of the stories in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *De Telegraaf* and *Het Nieuws van de Dag* (all based in Amsterdam in Noord Holland) took place in this province. This was a question of both convenience and the importance of geographical proximity as a news value (as discussed in the previous section). To obtain news from other parts of the country, both national and local newspapers culled information from other Dutch newspapers. This was accepted practice and was not seen as stealing.¹⁰⁴ Political affiliation does not seem to have been a limiting factor either: the newspapers in the present study, which were unaffiliated, made use of a wide range of other newspapers, including pillarized publications such as the Catholic paper *De Tijd* and the socialist paper *Het Volk*. In total, other Dutch newspapers accounted for about one third of crime items where a source was specified. The national papers also built up a network of correspondents covering the whole country who sent in tips and were paid per article.¹⁰⁵ Dutch news agencies were another source. The most important was Belinfante-Vaz Dias, which later became the Correspondentiebureau. Founded in the mid-nineteenth century, this agency initially concentrated on political news from The Hague but by the interwar period it was also providing Dutch newspapers with crime news.¹⁰⁶

Poor communications were a limiting factor in the early years. Neither Rotterdam nor Leeuwarden had telephones in 1880. The main methods of communication were pigeon post and the telegraph, but even sending a telegram from The Hague to Rotterdam could still be a time-consuming procedure. Poor transport networks also complicated distribution of the national papers, which therefore relied heavily on a metropolitan readership.¹⁰⁷ Interlocal communications and transportation improved immensely in the decades that

¹⁰⁴ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 36-37; Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 183-186.

¹⁰⁵ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 36; Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 172-175. The Correspondentiebureau is explicitly mentioned as the source for a number of stories in 1920 and 1930.

¹⁰⁷ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 36-37, 486; Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, 222; Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 195-196; *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 30 October 1880, 1.

followed; this was an integral part of the economic growth described in Chapter 2.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps because of this, the crime news in the national papers became less skewed towards the local area in the twentieth century. Even so, the more outlying provinces of Overijssel, Zeeland and North Brabant remained under-represented, with fewer and shorter items.

Table 9 Location of stories.

Number of cases per province (Dutch cases) and country (foreign cases). Grey cells denote province in which newspaper offices are based.

Province/Country	<i>Algemeen Handelsblad</i>		<i>De Telegraaf/Het Nieuws van de Dag</i>		<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>		<i>Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
- Noord Holland	115	39%	100	28%	66	16%	89	14%
- Zuid Holland	58	20%	89	25%	73	17%	369	56%
- Friesland	11	4%	26	7%	121	29%	17	3%
- Other provinces	108	37%	145	40%	161	38%	181	28%
Total Netherlands	292	100%	360	100%	421	100%	656	100%
- France	15	17%	38	22%	30	25%	81	26%
- Germany	18	21%	45	26%	29	24%	83	26%
- Other countries	53	62%	93	53%	61	51%	150	48%
Total foreign	86	100%	176	100%	120	100%	314	100%
Total	378		536		541		970	
% foreign		23%		33%		22%		32%

Source: www.delpher.nl, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, all issues in 1880; *De Telegraaf*, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

A striking proportion of the stories about family and sexual violence came from abroad, mainly Europe. Foreign incidents accounted for almost one third of all such crime stories (see Table 9). This seems to be unusually high compared with the press in other countries. Dominique Kalifa for example writes that the French fin-de-siècle dailies paid little attention to foreign crimes. Rowbotham, Stevenson and Pegg see some reporting of foreign crime with a human-interest angle in the British Edwardian tabloids, mainly from the US and from British colonies.¹⁰⁹ This Dutch interest in foreign crime stories was not confined to the national papers: 32 per cent of the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*'s stories and 22 per cent of the stories in the *Leeuwarder Courant* concerned events that had taken place abroad.

¹⁰⁸ Wielenga, *Nederland*, 51-52.

¹⁰⁹ Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang*, 109-111; Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg, *Crime News*, 109.

Some of the foreign stories came from the paper's foreign correspondents, at least in the case of *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Handelsblad*. These national newspapers had correspondents in all the main European capitals, who covered crime among other things in their regular reports. This reached a peak around 1910 with the feminization of foreign news when the correspondents were reporting on 'the talk of the town' in London, Paris and Berlin rather than just dry political news. That 'talk of the town' was often the latest trial for some crime of passion. In contrast to most crime news, the influence of the individual journalists can be seen here in their style and choice of subject.¹¹⁰ Thus in 1910 *De Telegraaf's* Berlin correspondent sent almost daily reports on the trial of Frau von Schoenbeck for inciting her officer lover to murder her husband, Major von Schoenbeck. These were lengthy items with verbatim accounts of the trial, sometimes in the original German as if the correspondent had not had time to translate and edit the articles.¹¹¹ This story, with officers, secret lovers and a mysterious murder on Christmas day, would undoubtedly be thought to appeal to female readers but also seems to have attracted the personal interest of *De Telegraaf's* correspondent. Coverage in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* was much more muted, for example.

In addition to foreign correspondents, foreign newspapers and agencies were important sources of information. The Dutch newspapers sometimes made a deal with foreign papers for the exchange of news. For example, *De Telegraaf* had arrangements with the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *The New York Times* and the *Daily Mail* in the pre-war years.¹¹² The foreign news agencies, such as Reuters, Wolff and the Dutch colonial agency Aneta, also became more important over time. They were first mentioned as a source in the crime items logged for the present study in 1910. In 1930 they accounted for two thirds of foreign crime items where the source was mentioned. They were a convenient and relatively cheap source of news from abroad for the Dutch newspapers.¹¹³

Foreign items had various functions. Most obviously, they enabled the Dutch press to feature the kinds of crimes that were rare: extreme violence with multiple killings or crimes involving the rich and famous. This may explain the fact that foreign stories were most prevalent in the newspapers targeting a populist market (see Table 9). Foreign items were often convenient fillers as timeliness was less important than with the Dutch items. In

¹¹⁰ Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 102-104.

¹¹¹ See for example "Het proces-Schoenbeck," *De Telegraaf*, 11 June 1910, 5. The author was probably G. Simons, correspondent for *De Telegraaf* in Berlin at this point, see: Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 126-127. The use of German was indicative of *De Telegraaf's* middle-class readership at this point: as Boudien de Vries notes, middle-class readers were expected to be able to read French and German. In contrast, the policy of the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, which targeted a lower-middle-class and working-class market, was to avoid all foreign words. Boudien de Vries, *Leescultuur in Haarlem*, 163, 222-223; Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 245.

¹¹² Wolf, *Geheim van de Telegraaf*, 89.

¹¹³ Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, 176-185; Donald Read, *The Power of News. The History of Reuters, 1849-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 53-58, 149; Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, "Propaganda that Dare not Speak its Name. International information services about the Dutch East Indies, 1919-1934," *Media History* 20, no. 3 (2014): 241-244; Broersma, "Botsende stijlen," 85.

many articles, the date of the event is left rather vague – it happened “recently” (“*dezer dagen*”). The newspaper could then print the item when it had space to fill. A Finnish story from 1895 in which a girl murdered her lover with the help of her family can serve as an illustration. It was printed in all four newspapers but on different dates over a period of more than one month.¹¹⁴

Foreign crime stories were also instrumental in setting the boundaries of the imagined community. They showed foreign countries as the ‘other’, places where people behaved differently and the criminal justice system operated differently. A recurring theme, for example, was that of the jury that acquitted an obviously guilty defendant.¹¹⁵ These stories served to reinforce confidence in the Dutch criminal justice system and the wisdom of having no jury. What is more, the foreign items painted a particular picture of each individual country, thus creating an ‘imaginative geography’ of violence. The term ‘imaginative geography’ was first used by Edward Said to denote the West’s conceptualization of the Orient as an idea as much as a physical space.¹¹⁶ In the Dutch newspapers, certain countries were associated with certain kinds of crime. This may explain the dominance of France and Germany as sources for stories of private violence: these two countries alone contributed between two fifths and half of all foreign stories, depending on the newspaper (see Table 9). This was not simply a result of the papers having foreign correspondents or agreements with news agencies in these countries as this applied to the UK and Belgium too, yet they contributed far fewer stories. The French stories largely concerned intimate partner violence, constructed as crimes of passion, while the German stories disproportionately featured excessive violence towards children.¹¹⁷

One result of the reliance on other newspapers and news agencies, both Dutch and foreign, for content was considerable overlap between the different newspapers in their content.¹¹⁸ On numerous occasions, the newspapers printed identical texts because they were simply reproducing agency material, changing only the headline.¹¹⁹ Not only were they

¹¹⁴ “Een vreeselijke geschiedenis,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 17 October 1895, 7; “Een drama,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19 September 1895, 2; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 September 1895, 3; *De Telegraaf*, 11 September 1895, 1.

¹¹⁵ For example: “Het recht van de jury,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, 24 April 1930, 3.

¹¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 49-72. This notion of an imaginary geography of crime is attracting increasing interest among historians. See: John Carter Wood and Paul Knepper, “Crime Stories. Criminality, policing and the press in inter-war European and transatlantic perspectives,” *Media History* 20, no. 4 (2014): 346; Dominique Kalifa, “Crime Scenes: Criminal Topography and Social Imaginary in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004): 175-194.

¹¹⁷ The extent to which this reflects differences in actual patterns of violence is an open question. Intriguingly, in a study of family murders among immigrants in Chicago in 1875 to 1920, Adler found that German immigrants were the most likely to kill their children. See: Jeffrey S. Adler, “We’ve Got a Right to Fight; We’re Married: Domestic Homicide in Chicago, 1875-1920,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 1 (2003): 32.

¹¹⁸ Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, 78-79.

¹¹⁹ For example: “Meisje meegetroond in een auto,” *De Telegraaf*, 18 March 1930, 5; “Zedenmisdrif,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, 18 March 1930, 3; “Een minderjarig meisje aangerand,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 18

relying on the same sources, they were also reacting to and competing with one another. Even when the newspapers were generating their own content, there was therefore considerable agreement between the papers on which stories to cover and how much importance to attach to a story. About three quarters of the stories in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* appeared in at least one of the other papers. The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was most divergent with a high proportion of minor local incidents and foreign stories of extreme or bizarre violence: only 36 per cent of its stories also appeared in the other newspapers. Where stories did appear in more than one newspaper, there was a high degree of agreement in the amount of coverage. The big stories almost invariably appeared in all the papers. The correlation between *De Telegraaf* and the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, which saw one another as rivals, was particularly high: if *De Telegraaf* devoted considerable space to a particular story, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* was very likely to do the same.¹²⁰

The phenomenon whereby newspapers converge in their content has been called 'media consonance'.¹²¹ Despite ostensibly targeting different readerships and covering different geographical areas, the newspapers were largely agreed on the salience to be accorded certain stories and there was considerable homogeneity in the content. As a consequence, the changes over time in the type of story covered were more significant than the differences between the newspapers. This chimes with the findings of other scholars.¹²² One possible result of this consonance is an amplification of the effect of media reporting. This is the view taken by Shaw, who considers consonance in the context of the agenda-setting model. Consonance increases the media's impact on public opinion because readers are not being exposed to a diversity of messages.¹²³ With regard to crime news in the Dutch media, this meant readers of all newspapers were being exposed to a similar assortment of stories carrying similar messages about gender and violence.

3.7 Form, style and the question of sensationalism

As discussed in Section 3.1, the rise of the mass media was accompanied by a change in form and style, known as New Journalism. That applied to crime articles too. Style elements such as headlines were used more frequently and the tone of the articles became more emotive and empathic. Yet these changes must not be exaggerated. In the literature, the crime reporting of New Journalism has often been termed sensationalist, but that is

March 1930, 13; "Aanranding door een Rotterdams automobilist," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 18 March 1930, 17.

¹²⁰ Correlation coefficient of 0.91 for the number of lines per case, for stories appearing in both newspapers in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

¹²¹ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 59.

¹²² Claire Wardle, "'It could happen to you'. The move towards 'personal' and 'societal' narratives in newspaper coverage of child murder, 1930-2000," *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 4 (2006): 520.

¹²³ Eugene F. Shaw, "Agenda-setting and Mass Communication," *International Communication Gazette* 25, (1979): 102-104.

misleading.¹²⁴ Dutch journalists used sensationalism selectively as a strategy and most crime news fitted an institutionalist narrative.

Headlines for individual articles were a ‘new’ element in the late nineteenth century. They made it easier for the readers to navigate the newspaper. In 1880, almost none of the items logged for this study had their own heading but even in 1895 between 37 per cent (in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*) and 79 per cent (in *De Telegraaf*) of all the crime items had a headline. By 1930, nearly all the articles had their own headlines and many longer articles had crossheads as well. Headlines were an intrinsic part of the article, telling the reader what to expect. At their simplest, they were a short, neutral statement of the subject matter (“Murder in Tilburg”).¹²⁵ Longer headlines comprising a main heading and one or more subheadings summarized the content, letting the reader quickly absorb the main message (‘He stabbed his wife with a knife. Eight months demanded’).¹²⁶ Headings were also used to attract the reader’s attention and entice them to go on and read the article, for example by suggesting a mystery (“A mysterious poisoning case”, “Infanticide?”).¹²⁷ Many headlines were designed to arouse an emotion rather than simply designate the subject matter. That might be condemnation of the perpetrator (“Depraved parents”) or sympathy with the victim (“Poor wife and children”).¹²⁸ But in countless examples the headline simply aims to evoke shock and horror. An exclamation mark is added, the incident is described as a drama or scandal, or intensifying adjectives such as “horrific” (“*gruwelijk*”) are used.

A comparison of *De Telegraaf* and *De Courant* gives an interesting insight into the influence of the headlines and the wider context on the impact of crime news.¹²⁹ As explained earlier, *De Courant* was a *kopblad* using content from *De Telegraaf* but targeting a much more working-class readership. Accordingly, it had fewer pages than *De Telegraaf*, more sport and fewer articles on culture. In the news section, there was a much greater focus on accidents and crime. Moreover, these items appeared on the front page. The front page of *De Telegraaf* was always taken up with foreign news and even the story of the rape and murder of a nurse in Bennekom, one of the biggest crime stories of the year, was tucked away on the inside pages of the paper. The headings in *De Courant* were also adapted to suit the more working-class readership. This occasionally involved the replacement or elimination of ‘difficult’ words. Headlines were also often longer with more information and more explicit wording. The *De Courant* reader would be able to get all the information they needed from the headline. The headlines were no more emotive or

¹²⁴ Examples include: Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg, *Crime News*, 86; Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, 36-37.

¹²⁵ “Moord te Tilburg,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25 October 1920, 13.

¹²⁶ “Zijn vrouw met mes gestoken. Acht maanden geëischt,” *De Telegraaf*, 25 December 1930, 11.

¹²⁷ “Kindermoord?” *De Telegraaf*, 17 May 1920, 6; “Een geheimzinnige vergiftigingszaak,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5 November 1920, 5.

¹²⁸ “Ontaarde ouders,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, 12 January 1910, 3; “Arme vrouw en kinderen,” *De Telegraaf*, 6 February 1920, 7.

¹²⁹ Based on a comparison of articles on family and sexual violence in March 1930 and on general content in the week beginning 20 October 1930.

dramatic than in the *De Telegraaf*, but the stories gained in impact simply by being placed on the front page in a newspaper that clearly placed a high priority on crime news.

Another style element associated with New Journalism was the image, but even in the interwar period, images were still used only sparingly for crime stories. As early as 1895, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* occasionally printed illustrations alongside its crime reports. For example, a report on a local boy who had gone missing included a drawing of his head.¹³⁰ The use of photographs was restricted for a long time by technical limitations: printing photographs in newspapers was both costly and time-consuming. That changed after 1920 and all newspapers started including photographs, both in a separate photo-page and alongside articles. However, only the most prominent crime stories seemed to warrant such treatment. In the *Leeuwarder Courant* and *Algemeen Handelsblad*, only one story of private violence – the rape and murder of the nurse in Bennekom – was accompanied by photographs in the sample years covered in the present study. The relatively downmarket *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was most profuse in the use of photographs to illustrate crime reports. That points to another reason why Dutch newspapers did not include many images before the 1920s: journalists resisted this innovation as they feared that “pictures would appeal to readers’ emotions, resulting in superficiality and sensationalism”.¹³¹ The more upmarket newspapers were happy to print photographs of sporting events and royal visits but remained reluctant to do so for murders.

¹³⁰ “Een knaap vermist,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 25 November 1895, 17.

¹³¹ Marcel Broersma, “Visual Strategies. Dutch Newspaper Design between Text and Image, 1900-2000,” in *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News, 1880-2005*, ed. Marcel Broersma (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 184-186.



This article reports on the rape and murder of a nurse in Bennekom, with a photograph of the suspect. Source: *De Telegraaf*, 3 March 1930, 5.

Figure 5 Headlines and photographs were a hallmark of New Journalism.

This raises the question of how sensationalist the Dutch crime reports were in practice. The rise of the mass-market media has often been associated with sensationalism but was that actually the case? As a term, sensationalism dates back to the nineteenth century when it had a pejorative connotation. It ran counter to the rationality that was prized at the time, and it was thought capable of leading to vice and depravity.¹³² This negative association is often still found among modern scholars, who dismiss sensational content as irrelevant and not worthy of study while failing to define what they mean by the term. This attitude has been critiqued by both Joy Wiltenburg, who has examined sensationalism in early modern German broadsides, and Gretchen Soderlund, who has explored its use in reporting on sex trafficking in the US and UK around the turn of the previous century. Wiltenburg defines sensationalism as “the purveyance of emotionally charged content, mainly focused on violent crime, to a broad public”.¹³³ Sensationalist accounts focus on the victim whereas the judicial process concentrates on the accused. Wiltenburg argues that sensational reports are persuasive precisely because they operate

¹³² “Misdaad en prikkel-literatuur,” *De Telegraaf*, 19 November 1910, 11.

¹³³ Joy Wiltenburg, “True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism,” *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (2004): 1377.

through the emotions: they produce a shared response amongst readers to the violent crimes they are describing by using such textual elements as direct dialogue, emotive language, graphic descriptions of the violence and dramatic juxtaposition.¹³⁴ Soderlund sees sensationalism as a strategy that can have positive effects. For example, Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, thought sensationalism was justified as a way of revealing deep truths about social abuses and arousing the public to take action.¹³⁵

A close examination of the logged crime text shows that some headlines and articles were sensationalist and that the use of sensationalist elements increased from the turn of the century. But the sensationalist style was used sparingly and reserved for particular violent or horrific attacks. As might be expected, the relatively downmarket *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* was most likely to use emotive language. The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* also regularly used dialogue and graphic descriptions of the incident to dramatic effect, as in the following 1910 article about an attempted murder by a Groningen man of his former partner, Gepke. The impact is enhanced by the use of direct speech, active verbs and short sentences:

“In the middle of the night, P. jumped through her window and entered her room. ‘Let’s make things right again before it’s too late’, he said. In the last few days he had had a desperate criminal urge, he felt he had to kill Gepke and himself. Gepke cried for mercy as she jumped out of her bed. But he didn’t hear her, he lifted the revolver and shot, calling ‘You must die’. But he missed. Gepke ran around the table until he grabbed hold of her. Then he fired three more shots, one in her thumb. Now she rushed out of the room and collapsed below, on the threshold of the door. ‘You won’t get away,’ he screamed and shot again, hitting her in the shoulder. Gepke lay there unconscious.”¹³⁶

This extract is also an example of what Kobie van Krieken terms a narrative-internal discourse report, namely a report in which the narrative is dramatized “by revealing what the people involved were saying or thinking while the newsworthy event took place” but

¹³⁴ Joy Wiltenburg, “Formen des Sensationalismus in frühneuzeitlichen Kriminalberichten,” in *Verbrechen im Blick. Perspektiven der neuzeitlichen Kriminalitätsgeschichte*, ed. Rebekka Habermas and Gerd Schwerhoff (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2009), 323-338; Maarten Charles J. Franck, “‘Daer en is geen liefde of barmherticheyt meer in ons’. Percepties over criminaliteit en criminaliteitsberichtgeving in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden gedurende de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw,” *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 12, no. 1 (2009): 7.

¹³⁵ Soderlund, *Sex Trafficking*, 15-19, 23.

¹³⁶ “Midden in den nacht sprong P. bij haar door het raam en drong in haar kamer binnen. - Laat ons het nog in orde maken, voor het te laat is, zei hij. Hij had in de laatste dagen een wanhopigen drang tot misdaad, hij meende Gepke en zichzelf te moeten dooden. Gepke riep om genade, terwijl zij uit het bed sprong. Maar hij hoorde niet, hief de revolver op en schoot, daarbij roepend: — Dood moet je. Hij trof echter niet. Gepke liep om de tafel tot hij haar vast greep. Drie schoten loste hij toen nog, waarvan één in haar duim. Zij snelde nu de kamer uit en beneden op den drempel van de deur viel zij neer. — Ontkomen zul je niet, schreeuwde hij en schoot nogmaals, haar in den schouder treffend. Gepke bleef bewusteloos liggen.” In “Doodslag,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 27 October 1910, 10.

without presenting this narrative as a communication by a source.¹³⁷ In this particular case, the narrative is from a trial report and presumably a reworking of information that came to light at the trial but it is not presented as such (for example, the journalist does not write “P. said at the trial that he had jumped through her window”). According to Van Krieken’s analyses of murder stories in Dutch newspapers over the past 150 years, the narrative-internal discourse report was common up to the mid-twentieth century and was used to create lively accounts. Such reports make the reader a mediated witness, bringing them closer to the event being described and helping them develop “an emotional alignment with eyewitnesses to that crime”.¹³⁸

The emotive impact of the sensationalist and narrative elements was, however, counteracted by the institutional focus of most articles. The above extract is typical of many dramatic accounts in the Dutch press in that it was based on official sources and sandwiched between an opening section and closing section in more formal legal language. The dominance of the police and judicial perspective is also evident from an analysis of the words used in the articles. Frequency counts can be represented in a ‘word cloud’, where the size of the word corresponds to the frequency – the larger the word, the more often it appears in the texts. Word clouds have been created for the top 100 nouns in each of the Dutch newspapers.¹³⁹ Figure 6 gives the word clouds for the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant* and *De Telegraaf*. Institutional terms associated with the investigation and trial, such as ‘police’, ‘accused’, ‘suspect’ and ‘witness’, are far more prominent than sensational words such as ‘drama’. This is even the case for *De Telegraaf* and *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, the two more populist newspapers, which would be expected to make the most use of sensational language.

¹³⁷ Kobie Van Krieken, “Linguistic Viewpoint in Crime News Narratives. Form, Function and Impact” (PhD thesis, Radboud University Nijmegen, 2016), 138,

¹³⁸ Van Krieken, “Linguistic Viewpoint,” 31, 270-272.

¹³⁹ The application Word Cloud (www.wordcloud.com) was used for this. Proper nouns, that is names of people and places, were excluded. Singular, plural and diminutive forms were treated as one word.

Figure 6 Word clouds showing word frequencies in newspaper stories.

¹⁴⁰ Wardle, "It could happen," 520-521.

An examination of the Dutch items also shows that personal and societal narratives were rare: more than 80 per cent of the stories concerned the police investigation or the trial proceedings, and most of the remaining stories were simply a description of the incident. Personal narratives usually concerned the victim's recovery, or funeral if the victim had been killed, but there were only a few such items. Because journalists could not obtain this information through the usual channels, it required an additional effort, and such articles seem to be reserved for particularly appealing victims, namely young women and children.

The predominance of institutional narratives affected not just the language but also the content. It meant that stories reflected the perspective of the police and judiciary. Journalists were more likely to report information that was deemed relevant by the authorities and less likely to provide information that had a low priority for the criminal justice system. Journalists were also more likely to cover stories for which the police actively sought publicity. The implications of this for the reporting on family and sexual violence are explored in the following three chapters.

Conclusion

Three questions were set out at the start of this chapter. The first question concerned the changes in the target readership and the impact on press coverage of family and sexual violence. This chapter has shown that with the rise of the mass media, the target readerships expanded to encompass both female readers and (for some papers at least) the lower classes. This was accompanied by an expansion of the imagined community as constructed in the newspapers' content: women and the working class became fully fledged members of Dutch society. To appeal to these new readers, journalists developed a more accessible style known as New Journalism. Stories of violence involving women and children were also part of this strategy as they fitted in with the new emphasis on human interest stories and were thought to appeal to female readers. Journalists prioritized stories that involved extreme violence and mystery and applied simplification to convey a clear message.

The second question was about the mediating effect of the sources. Journalists obtained their stories from the police, the courts and other media. The sources affected the geographical spread of the coverage, with a predominance of local stories and (when reporting stories from abroad) of particular countries. Moreover, because journalists were using the same sources, this led to a high degree of homogeneity between newspapers. The use of the police and courts as sources also gave an institutional bias to the crime reports, with few personal narratives.

The third question concerned the role of the press in engaging readers with the crime stories. There is evidence that the papers were choosing stories that resonated with

the general public. With the advent of New Journalism, stories became more emotive but sensationalism as a strategy was used only selectively and most stories used the institutional language of the police and courts. Moreover, journalists adopted a respectful and passive attitude to the criminal justice system. The routine use of initials and lack of other information about Dutch perpetrators, along with the journalists' practice of never commenting on judgments and sentencing, reduced the potential for readers to engage in the prosecution process. Thus, the press reinforced the exclusion of laypeople from the administration of justice in the Netherlands, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

This chapter has considered press coverage of family and sexual violence as a whole. The following three chapters examine the individual categories of violence, focusing on newspapers' construction of violence and the role played by gender. Chapter 4 looks at intimate partner violence, which accounted for 60 per cent of the total coverage of family and sexual violence.¹⁴¹ Chapter 5 explores parental maltreatment of their children: physical abuse and neglect, abandonment, infanticide and other filicides. Such stories accounted for 13 per cent of the total coverage. Chapter 6 considers stories of sexual assault, which made up 27 per cent of the overall coverage.

¹⁴¹ Expressed as the number of lines.