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Aruba and Natalee Holloway

A Content Analysis of Four Years of Newspaper Coverage Surrounding the Incident

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Communication

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by

Brittany L. Parks

May 2009

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Keywords: Content Analysis, Aruba, Natalee Holloway, Newspaper, Tourism, Public Relations

## ABSTRACT

Aruba and Natalee Holloway: A Content Analysis of Four Years of Newspaper Coverage

Surrounding the Incident

by

Brittany L. Parks

Negative media coverage can have a significant impact on the image of a country and can be detrimental to tourism-dependent areas. This study examined the newspaper coverage of Aruba 2 years before and after American tourist Natalee Holloway disappeared while vacationing with fellow classmates on a class trip. A content analysis of 400 major world newspapers was conducted. The study's purpose was to uncover the amount of publicity (both good and bad) from the incident as well as to unearth the overall tone towards Aruba.

The study revealed the Holloway incident did have a visible effect on the world news coverage of Aruba, although the scope of the effect seems relatively small. Overall, mentions of Aruba in major world newspapers became more prominent, more negative, and more frequent after the disappearance of Natalee Holloway.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Often times, people depend on the mass media to get news and information about other countries (Lee, 2007). Although international tourism has grown rapidly, “foreign countries are psychologically far away in the perception of ordinary people” (Lee, para.1). Thus, the news media can become the ultimate source of information on other areas of the world.

It can be critical for a nation’s officials to understand the publicity (both good and bad) they are receiving throughout the world and the images that are being conveyed of them. A community’s image is one of its most important commodities, and it is often the consequence of media coverage (Tilson & Stacks, 1997). It can be especially critical to understand this publicity and image during a time of crisis. A thorough understanding of media coverage during a critical time can help government officials and public relations practitioners respond quickly with progressive initiatives.

On April 30, 2005, American high school student Natalee Holloway disappeared while vacationing with fellow students in Aruba. Her whereabouts still remain unknown (Seeking Information, 2005). The media coverage following the incident was substantial. Aruba, a tourism dependent country, could suffer from the negative publicity that followed the incident (Mohl, 2006). This study examines major world newspapers’ mentions of Aruba both before and after Holloway disappeared. This researcher seeks to uncover the extent of the publicity (both good and bad) from the Holloway incident as well as unearthing the overall tone towards Aruba from these major world newspapers.

Aruba is one of the premier vacation spots in the Caribbean islands. The disappearance of

the American teenager may have had an impact on the tourism in the island, especially among visitors from the United States (Mohl, 2006). Potential island visitors may perceive Aruba in a negative manner. Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) noted that risk perceptions of an area do, indeed, have an impact on travel behavior. The island's image took a substantial hit following the massive media coverage. The island established a team of local officials to work on the image of Aruba (Mohl). Additionally, Aruba is expected to invest more than \$230 million in public and private money to boost tourism (Mohl).

Research of this nature is significant to Aruban public relations practitioners, tourism officials, and the government. It is important to examine the incident and the effects of the media coverage because Aruba is a tourism-dependent country. Negative publicity could harm its tourism industry, and ultimately, its economy. Dimanche and Lepetic (1999) highlighted the importance for tourism destinations to understand that crime, media coverage, and the resulting safety perceptions can have a significant effect on image as a whole. They noted that "perceptions or images of a particular destination held by potential visitors are known to have significant influences on the success of tourism" (p. 20). This study is necessary to understand the scope of the damage of the incident in terms of newspaper media coverage. It will be beneficial for Aruba officials to see how Aruba's image is being portrayed, so they might craft a campaign to combat the publicity they are receiving. This type of research would not only benefit Aruba but also other tourism-dependent areas. Understanding the scope of media coverage from tragic incidents may help other areas examine issues of their own. Ultimately, a study such as this might help to quantify the amount of media damage done by this incident and may provide a basis to begin the rebuilding process.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Aruba and Natalee Holloway

There is little research available on Aruba itself as a tourist destination. Furthermore, research is scarcely available on the Natalee Holloway incident in relation to media coverage. With the lack of research pertaining to the incident, it is necessary to examine crime in other tourism dependent areas and the impact it has as well as strategies to combat it. It will also be necessary to examine communications efforts during critical situations. Public relations strategies in relation to tourism are reviewed as well. A theoretical framework for this issue is also explored.

Aruba is a popular Caribbean getaway for many travelers. Tourism is one of the most important economic resources for Aruba (Fact File, 2006). In fact, in 2006, Aruba experienced more than 1.2 million visitors (tourist arrivals and cruise passenger arrivals) to the island (Aruba, 2006). More than half of those visitors were from the United States, with 71% of the visitors to Aruba in 2006 from the states (Aruba).

On May 26, 2005, Natalee Holloway and a group of her senior classmates and chaperones from Mountain Brook High School in Alabama took a senior trip to Aruba (Seeking Information, 2005). On their last night of the trip, Holloway and a large group of friends went to Carlos N' Charlie's, a local night club in Oranjestad, Aruba. As the club closed around 1 a.m., some of the group headed back to the Holiday Inn where they were staying, while others went to various local bars (Seeking Information). Holloway was last seen getting into a silver Honda

around 1:30 a.m. with three males, Joran van der Sloot, Deepak Kalpoe, and Satish Kalpoe. The following morning as the group was meeting in the hotel lobby to prepare for departure, they noticed Holloway was missing. Holloway did not return to her hotel room, nor were any of her belongings missing (Seeking Information). The group returned to Alabama, and Holloway's whereabouts are still unknown (Seeking Information).

Aruba has been visibly affected by the disappearance of Natalee Holloway. In November 2005, Alabama Governor Bob Riley called for a boycott against Aruba on behalf of Holloway's family (Alabama governor calls for boycott of travel to Aruba over missing teen case, 2005). Holloway's family claimed the island's government was not fully cooperative with them about the investigation. They also argue that the island's government and law enforcement did not take the issue as seriously as they should have. Governor Bob Riley asked for other governors to follow as well (Alabama governor). Holloway's mother, Beth Holloway Twitty, supported Riley's encouragement, citing that authorities have failed to adequately investigate her daughter's disappearance (Alabama governor). In a 2005 poll, conducted by the *Mobile Register*, the University of South Alabama, and the USA Polling Group, the results showed that three quarters of Alabama residents supported Governor Riley's call to boycott Aruba (Poll: Most Alabama residents support Aruban boycott, 2005). Furthermore, the poll also found that "seven out of ten respondents wouldn't travel to the Caribbean, even if they won a free trip" (para. 2).

The worldwide media coverage following the incident was substantial and often negative (Myers, 2006). The Holloway incident has had an obvious effect on the island and its economy (Aruba taking action to counter their boycott, 2007). While Aruba is taking action to revive its image, it is still to be seen if and when it will fully recover (Aruba taking action). In 2005, Aruba

hosted 532,352 tourist arrivals from the United States, with that number dropping to 493,285 in 2006 (the year after Holloway disappeared), a 7.34% decrease (Aruba, 2006). Overall tourist arrivals to the island also decreased by 5.2% from 2005 to 2006, with 732,512 in 2005 and 694,372 in 2006 (Aruba). In a country that relies on tourism for economic stability, decreases such as this could be devastating.

### Crime and Tourism

Negative media publicity can have a significant effect on tourism and is a great concern for areas where tourism is a major source of the economy (Tilson & Stacks, 1997). Tilson and Stacks examined crime and tourism data as well as campaigns to counter negative publicity in Miami, Florida. Miami has long had a mixed image of sunny beaches, tourists, and crime. That image was further tipped towards crime during the 1990s. In South Florida in 1992, nine tourists were murdered in separate incidents (Tilson & Stacks). What followed was a public relations nightmare. Government and tourism officials were extremely concerned due to the impact of tourism on state and local economies. It was estimated that 40 million visitors come to Florida every year, which “employs 675,000 people in tourism-related jobs, generating \$32 billion in revenue” (p. 104). In the months to follow, tourism decreased significantly. The extensive media coverage damaged the image of South Florida, and tourism officials went to great lengths to clean its image, employing key public relations campaigns as well as investing millions of dollars in key advertising campaigns (Tilson & Stacks). They introduced new security measures as well as updating hospitality. The federal government also provided grants to boost tourism.

The result of the initiatives taken by Miami was an effective strategic communication

plan that mixed both marketing and public relations and targeted all primary publics (Tilson & Stacks, 1997). The campaigns, which relied on public relations models such as press agency, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric, were an appropriate solution to boost Miami's image. It is critical for Miami officials to continue their efforts in promotion as well as efforts to resolve social, political, and economic problems that lie at the root of community crises (Tilson & Stacks).

Dimanche and Lepetic (1999) studied crime in popular U.S tourist destination New Orleans. New Orleans is considered a major tourism destination with its various attractions. However, significant social problems had led to the growth of crime. The subsequent negative media coverage had led to undesirable publicity. Dimanche and Lepetic note, "as the media disseminate crime stories locally and nationally, people increasingly perceive the city to be dangerous and fear their safety" (p.20). They note that "it is important for tourist destinations to understand that crime and, more importantly, media coverage and the resulting safety perceptions, will have an effect on their image" (p.19).

New Orleans reacted to crime by revamping and supporting the police department and hiring marketing consultants to address the negative image. However, there was a somewhat lack of support by tourism businesses, mainly because tourism had not yet seemed to suffer from the crime and negative publicity (Dimanche & Lepetic, 1999). Dimanche and Lepetic stressed that although tourism revenue hadn't begun to decline, it is important for tourism businesses to join in on collective efforts to take significant action. They found that a negative crime image, although detrimental, can be outweighed by other attractive features. It is the responsibility of the industry, though, to stress those attractive features in promotional messages.

## Tourism and Public Relations

When conducting a study on the impact of negative media coverage on Aruba, it is important to examine the role of public relations in tourism. When a high-profile crime occurs in an area like Aruba, the public relations efforts to revive tourism will be critical. L'Etang, Falkheimer, and Jugo (2007) mentioned the Holloway case in their examination of public relations and tourism. They stated that the incident received major media coverage and damaged the image of the paradise island (L'Etang et al.). L'Etang et al., note that Aruba authorities did not initially understand the wide scope of the media coverage and gave the public little information, which in turn, caused them to crave more. Only after Fox News Channel's Greta Van Susteran show brought the case into spotlight in the U.S. did the Aruba Tourism Authority pressure the police into holding a press conference. It was too late; the damage had been done to the country's reputation (L'Etang et al.).

The researchers used the concept of 'moral panic' to explain media coverage and reputation (L'Etang et al., 2007). They state that a characteristic of these panics is to turn local issues into national issues, and they feature exaggerated speculation by the media. L'Etang et al., explained that the Holloway case highlighted the importance of public relations practitioners and academics taking account of media conventions and media sociological perspectives.

Effective public relations strategies can be used to boost images of tourism destinations. Kanso (2005) examined the role of public relations to reposition Lebanon as a premier tourism destination. Kanso highlighted the explosion of tourism in today's society. Travel that was once reserved for wealthy individuals is now available to common citizens. This is due, in large part, to advancements in communication and transportation. Kanso noted that Lebanon had not been



able to capitalize on the boost in the tourism industry due to negative publicity the country received. The publicity was a result of circumstances that happened beyond the country's control. Kanso stated that although the country's infrastructure had improved, its war-torn image was still present, and the government's public relations efforts to improve the image were minimal.

Kanso (2005) suggested that launching a proactive public relations and marketing communication plan could help restore tourism in Lebanon and revitalize the economy. Kanso's study focused on "developing an understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of potential tourists to Lebanon" (p.137). Kanso conducted focus groups addressing Lebanon tourism issues. Based on the data collected from the focus groups, Kanso suggested a strategic plan that "makes the necessary improvements to change tourists' perceptions of the country and successfully reintroduce Lebanon as a first class opportunity in the travel and tourism industry" (pp. 147-148). By conducting the focus groups, Kanso was able to formulate a public relations campaign that effectively addressed the perceptions of potential tourists. This could allow Lebanese officials to tailor marketing and public relations efforts directly to tourists' concerns and desires.

Carden (2005) examined persuasive appeals and public relations by travel destinations post 9/11. After September 11, 2001, the tourism and travel industry suffered from financial losses. Carden stated that, traditionally, the travel and tourism industry has relied on mass media advertising and special events for promotions. However, during critical times (such as 9/11), these methods may not be particularly useful, as they are mostly used for attracting attention. Carden noted that public relations, on the other hand, "deals with image and perceptions on an ongoing basis by employing various persuasive techniques" (p. 80). It is important for public relations practitioners to monitor their environment and adjust their messages and behaviors

accordingly, especially during critical times. Similarly, issue and crisis management become critical responsibilities of public relations practitioners during tension and crises.

### Crisis Communication

In crisis situations, it is important to have effective response strategies. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1998) examined crisis response strategies in tourism organizations in the United States and Spain. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt stated that crises inevitably receive significant media attention, and it is important for tourism organizations to have predefined crisis and communication strategies. They examined the following five communication strategies: issues management, crisis-communication plan, crisis-management center, company representative, and the use of external consultants (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt).

In regards to issues management, Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1998) found that it is a more common practice in the U.S., where most tourism organizations recognize the right time to resolve a conflict before it unfolds. In regards to crisis communications plans, the United States responds more favorably to having a crisis communication plan as opposed to its Spanish counterparts (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt). When examining crisis management centers (which is necessary for crisis teams to work), the researchers found that Spain had more compared to the United States. The United States tended to have a designated company representative during crises time more so than Spain. This representative would field questions and provide media updates during a crisis (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt). Finally, the United States tourism organizations typically use external consultants on crisis issues more than Spain (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt). The researchers ultimately found that although the countries had different

approaches to crisis communications, both had practical approaches that could be used as a foundation for crisis marketing and communications (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt). Both countries used tactics that could be beneficial for other nations dealing with similar crisis situations.

Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow (2007) examined postcrisis communication. They highlighted the fact that communication is challenging during crises because immediate responses are necessary. Ulmer et al. argued that the image restoration theory is an important part of crisis communication. Image restoration is focused on the immediate aftermath of a crisis and does so “through the lens of various strategic messages including denial, shifting the blame, mortification, corrective action, and minimization, among others” (para. 1). Ulmer et al. also discussed postcrisis communication that focuses on renewal. While image restoration focuses on explaining what happened, renewal is more concerned with how the parties involved will move forward. They mentioned several characteristics of postcrisis renewal. Among those characteristics was an interesting point: focusing on the ability of the organization to “reconstitute itself by capitalizing on the opportunities embedded in the crisis” (para. 10). The researchers go on further to say that “stakeholders have no reason to be inspired by model behavior if they cannot see a positive outcome” (para. 10). Although these statements are primarily geared towards organizational crises, they can seemingly be applied to a crisis such as that which Aruba faced with the Holloway incident.

#### Theoretical Implications

In an examination of media during a time of crisis, it is important to examine the framing theory. Scheufele (2000) noted that framing

“is based on...the assumption that subtle changes in the wording of the

description of a situation might affect how audience members interpret this situation. In other words, that influences how audiences think about issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of oncoming information” (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309).

The framing of stories differently can invoke different emotions and reactions to a story. In the Aruba situation, the framing of the story by different nations and newspapers may affect how people feel towards the country and the situation. Ultimately, the media can, and often does, affect how the audience receives messages.

Luther and Zhou (2005) examined the SARS health crisis and the framing theory. The SARS health crisis not only affected health and medical systems but also the economy, government, and tourism. Luther and Zhou examined news frames in the coverage of SARS in Chinese and American newspapers. The researchers found that Chinese newspapers used similar news frames as those in the U.S. Luther and Zhou argued that national politics would, however, determine how and what boundaries would be used in the frames. Also, differences were noted in how the human-interest frame was presented. The United States seemed to focus on negative human struggles with SARS, while China was more positive (Luther & Zhou). It is important to note this study because it shows that different media outlets in different countries may frame stories differently.

The theory of agenda-setting can also be explored within the context of this study. Agenda-setting is the notion that “media don’t tell people what to think, but what to think about” (Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 316). Cohen (1963) stated that (press) is “stunningly successful in

telling its readers what to think about” (p. 13). The theory of agenda-setting establishes an important relationship between media reports and people’s ranking of public issues.

Wanta and Hu (1993) examined the agenda-setting impact of international news by comparing various categories of coverage with the level of public concern with international problems. The results of the study produced several findings. First, the findings suggested that the way international news is framed may determine the magnitude of salience. Second, certain categories showed the strongest agenda-setting influence; among the strongest was crime coverage. Last, the results supported the fact that stories with high degrees of conflict and those with concrete presentations (by including Americans in the stories) have the strongest agenda-setting impact (Wanta & Hu).

Chyi and McCombs (2004) suggest that object salience has been the central focus of agenda-setting research. They stated that one underlying assumption of agenda-setting is that “once an object appears on the media agenda, the volume of cumulative news coverage increases its salience” (para. 2). Chyi and McCombs conducted a content analysis of The New York Times newspaper coverage relating to the Columbine school shootings. Chyi and McCombs examined how “the media can build a news event’s salience by emphasizing different aspects of the event during its lifespan” (para. 1). During a news event’s lifespan, the news media can use the notion known as frame-changing. Frame-changing refers to the reframing of the news event to emphasize different attributes in order to keep the story fresh. Chyi and McCombs found that the newspaper built salience of the school shooting by emphasizing different aspects (framing) of the situation over time. This enabled the story to stay a prominent figure in the news for a longer period of time. The researchers also found that the sheer volume of coverage of the incident also

enabled the story to stay prominent.

Both framing and agenda-setting could be used in examining a situation such as the Natalee Holloway incident. An understanding of these two theories could help Aruban officials comprehend the theoretical implications behind the news coverage of the incident. This could help to further quantify the amount of damage done to Aruba's image. It could also provide a theoretical framework for the rebuilding process.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

#### Introduction

The researcher examined the mentions of Aruba in major world newspapers both before and after Natalee Holloway disappeared. The Lexis-Nexis news database was used to retrieve the articles from major world newspapers. The newspapers retrieved for this study can be found in Appendix A. A content analysis was conducted on the major world newspaper articles and comparisons were made on the 2 time periods. The study addressed the following questions: Will there be a difference in the number of articles before Holloway's disappearance and after? Will there be a difference in the tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway's disappearance? How will the tone of Aruba mentions post-Holloway's disappearance be different among countries? How will story and page placement be affected after the Holloway incident? How will newspaper topics about Aruba be impacted by Holloway's disappearance? What will the tone of Aruba mentions be in editorials? Where will stories of Holloway be more prominent?

These research questions were formed based on previous research. A methodology similar to what King and Zayani (2007) used was used for this research. King and Zayani examined the launch of the Al Jazeera English channel on the Al Jazeera brand. For this, the researchers did a content analysis of major world newspapers. King and Zayani examined tone (negative, neutral, positive), page placement (inside page, section front, front page), story placement (lead, headline, body, paired with graphic), links to terrorism (linked to terrorism, not linked to terrorism), antiwest sentiments, and publication service with links to Al Jazeera. This

researcher used a method similar to this as well as using similar dependent and independent variables.

### Hypotheses

Hypotheses were formed through an analysis of previous research and from the expectations gained from the literature review. The researcher formulated and tested eight hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 measured the tone of Aruba mentions during the 2 time periods. The tone was recognized as negative, neutral, and positive.

**Hypothesis 1:** The tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway's disappearance will be more negative compared to the tone of those articles before she disappeared.

Hypothesis 2 measured the tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway's disappearance compared with the nations (from where the article originated).

**Hypothesis 2:** The tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway disappeared will be more negative in the U.S. compared to elsewhere.

Hypothesis 3 evaluated the story placement of the Aruba mentions both before the disappearance and after.

**Hypothesis 3:** Story placement of Aruba will be more prominent after the Holloway incident.

Hypothesis 4 measured the page placement of Aruba mentions both before and after the incident. Placement was measured as body, lead, headline, or paired with graphic.

**Hypothesis 4:** Page placement of Aruba will be more prominent after the incident.

Hypothesis 5 examined newspaper topics before and after the incident to determine what



topic was most prevalent.

**Hypothesis 5:** The majority of newspaper coverage about Aruba after Holloway disappeared will be based on Natalee Holloway.

Hypothesis 6 examined the tone of Aruba mentions compared to whether they appeared in editorial pieces or news features.

**Hypothesis 6:** The tone of Aruba mentions will be more negative and less positive in editorials than in news.

Hypothesis 7 measured the prominence of Holloway stories. This measured whether or not the Holloway topic was more prominent in news pieces or editorials.

**Hypothesis 7:** Mentions of Aruba and Natalee Holloway will be more prominent in news items.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

A content analysis was conducted for this study. For this research, the researcher used the LexisNexis database to retrieve the newspaper articles used for the study. Data were collected 2 years before and after the disappearance of Natalee Holloway. The 2-year time period was chosen because Holloway disappeared in 2005, and that would provide 2 full years of data. The 2 time periods were classified as the following: the time period of May 30, 2003, through May 30, 2005 (2 years before Holloway disappeared), and May 31, 2005, through May 31, 2007 (2 years after Holloway disappeared). Using LexisNexis, the researcher used the search term “Aruba” and searched major world newspapers for that mention. A total of 1,467 articles mentioning Aruba were found. The simple random sample resulted in a distribution of 732 articles from the 1st time period, and 735 from the 2nd time period. A simple random sample of 400 articles was generated using the online sampling source Research Randomizer to be sure that each article had an equal chance of being chosen. The simple random sample of 400 articles was chosen so that the .05 probability level could be used during analysis. A list of newspapers used in the study can be found in Appendix A. Hypotheses were tested using Chi-square analysis with SPSS software.

#### Research Design and Coding

The unit of analysis for this study is individual mentions of ‘Aruba’. Dependent variables for the study include tone of the mention of Aruba (positive, negative, neutral), story placement

of the article (lead, headline, body, paired with graphic), page of the article (section front and inside page), and topic of the mention of Aruba (general facts, tourism environment, business, economics, crime and violence, hotels, transportation, culture, entertainment, weather, energy, illegal drugs, government, sports, and Natalee Holloway). Independent variables include time period (before or after the Holloway incident), newspaper name, originating nation, and whether or not it is a news or editorial piece. Again, this method is quite similar to King and Zayani's (2007) methodology.

Coding instruments used were the LexisNexis database and a coding sheet. Two experienced coders were responsible for the coding of the material. Intercoder reliability was tested through trial rounds of newspaper analysis. Approximately 30 items were examined. Through five trials of newspaper analysis, a 100% agreement was reached on all variables except for the tourism topic, for which a 93% agreement was reached.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Chi-square tests, as well as frequency tables, were analyzed to test the different hypotheses and examine the exploratory questions. The results section includes the quantitative data obtained from conducting the tests. The hypotheses are matched with the data. In some cases, variables were collapsed to limit the number of empty or low frequency cells.

#### Frequencies

Frequency data are shown first. The frequency data gave a general overview of information found.

Fifty-eight different newspapers were coded, with 743 mentions. As Table 1 shows, the U.S. has the highest frequency of Aruba mentions, with 41.2%, followed by Canada (24%), and England (19.4%). Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, and Singapore had the lowest frequency of mentions with .1% each.

Table 1

#### *Frequency of Mentions by Nations*

<b>Nation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
U.S.	306 (41.2%)
Canada	178 (24.0%)

Table 1 (continued)

England	144 (19.4%)
Australia	78 (10.5%)
Ireland	23 (3.1%)
Korea	5 (.7%)
China	3 (.4%)
Scotland	2 (.3%)
Malaysia	1 (.1%)
New Zealand	1 (.1%)
Russia	1 (.1%)
Singapore	1 (.1%)

Note: N=743.

The nations were further condensed to continents and East and West to eliminate empty or low frequency cells in chi-square analysis.

Table 2 shows that North America has the highest frequency of mentions (65.4%), while Asia had the lowest frequency of mentions (1.5%).

Table 2

*Frequency of Mentions by Continent*

<b>Continent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
North America	486 (65.4%)
Europe	167 (22.5%)
Australia	79 (10.6%)
Asia	11 (1.5%)

Note: N=743.

Table 3 shows the frequency of mentions was highest in the West, with 98.5%. The East only featured 1.5% of the mentions.

Table 3

*Frequency of Mentions by East & West*

<b>East and West</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
East	11 (1.5%)
West	732 (98.5%)

Note: N=743

As Table 4 highlights, mentions of Aruba were predominately featured in news items (99.1%), with only .9% of mentions in editorials.

Table 4

*Frequency of Mentions in News/Editorials*

<b>News/Ed</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
News	736 (99.1%)
Editorials	7 (.9%)

Note: N=743.

Neutral tone was defined as tone that was not predominately positive or negative. As Table 5 shows, neutral mentions of Aruba were most prominent with 91.5%, with negative mentions as the least prominent with 2.4%. Positive mentions accounted for 6.1%.

Table 5

*Frequency of Tone of Mentions*

<b>Tone</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Neutral	680 (91.5%)
Positive	45 (6.1%)
Negative	18 (2.4%)

Note: N=743.

In Table 6, the tone was also condensed to eliminate empty or low frequency cells. Neutral and positive were grouped together, which accounted for the majority, 97.6%. Negative mentions accounted for 2.4%.

Table 6

*Frequency of Tone (condensed) of Mentions*

<b>Tone</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Neutral & positive	725 (97.6%)
Negative	18 (2.4%)

Note: N=743.

Mentions in the lead were defined as any mention in the first two sentences. Mentions paired with graphic were any mentions that were part of a photo feature. As shown in Table 7, Aruba mentions were predominantly in the body (93.5%), while mentions paired with graphics were the least prominent (1.1%). The lead accounted for 3.2%, while mentions in the headlines were 2.2%.

Table 7

*Frequency of Story Placement of Mentions*

<b>Story Placement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Body	695 (93.5%)
Lead	24 (3.2%)
Headline	16 (2.2%)
Paired with Graphic	8 (1.1%)

Note: N=743.

In Table 8 story placement was condensed to eliminate empty cells. Mentions in the lead, headline, and those paired with graphics were grouped together, while mentions in the body remained alone. Body mentions accounted for 93.5%, while all other mentions accounted for 6.5%.



Table 8

*Frequency of Story Placement (condensed) of Mentions*

<b>Story Placement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Body	695 (93.5%)
Lead/headline/with graphic	48 (6.5%)

Note: N=743.

The section front was defined as any mention which was featured on the front page, or on a section front. Inside page included any other pages, excluding the front page. Table 9 shows that mentions of Aruba were overwhelmingly on inside pages (99.6%), while mentions on section fronts were few (.4%).

Table 9

*Frequency of Page Placement of Mentions*

<b>Page</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Inside Page	740 (99.6%)
Section Front	3 (.4%)

Note: N=743.

Topics were divided as listed. As Table 10 shows, mentions of general facts (32.8%) and tourism (21.3%) were most prominent, while energy (.7%) and illegal drugs (.4%) were least prominent. Mentions of Natalee Holloway held the third largest percent (8.7%).

The topics were also further condensed.

Table 10

*Frequency of Topic of Mentions*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
General Facts	244 (32.8%)
Tourism Environment	158 (21.3%)
Natalee Holloway	65 (8.7%)
Business	55 (7.4%)
Economics	52 (7.0%)
Crime/Violence	45 (6.1%)
Sports	31 (4.2%)
Hotels	28 (3.8%)
Transportation	20 (2.7%)
Culture	12 (1.6%)
Entertainment	9 (1.2%)
Weather	9 (1.2%)
Government	7 (.9%)
Energy	5 (.7%)
Illegal Drugs	3 (.4%)

Note: N=743.

Table 11 shows the frequency of topics condensed to reduce the number of empty cells.

Table 11

*Frequency of Topics (condensed) of Mentions*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
General facts & weather	253 (34.1%)
Transportation, hotels, & tourism	206 (27.7%)
Economics, business, & energy	112 (15.1%)
Natalee Holloway	65 (8.7%)
Sports, entertainment, & culture	52 (7.0%)
Crime & drugs	48 (6.5%)
Government	7 (.9%)

Note: N=743.

As shown in Table 12, the frequency of Aruba mentions in major world newspapers increased by 3% after Holloway’s disappearance (48.5% to 51.5%).

Table 12

*Frequency of Aruba Mentions by Time Period*

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
After Holloway’s disappearance	383 (51.5%)
Before Holloway’s disappearance	360 (48.5%)

Note: N=743.

Hypothesis 1

Table 13 illustrates the results of the first hypothesis: The tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway’s disappearance will be more negative compared to the tone of those articles before

she disappeared.

As shown in Table 13, the results tend to lend support for the hypothesis. However, it is important to note that although the mentions of Aruba are more negative (4.2% vs. .6%) after Holloway disappears, they are also more positive (8.1% vs.3.9%). It is also important to note, as Table 13 shows, that the percent differences are relatively small.

Table 13

*Tone of Aruba Mentions by Time Period*

<b>Tone</b>	<b>Before Holloway Disappears</b>	<b>After Holloway Disappears</b>
Negative	2 (.6%)	16 (4.2%)
Neutral	344 (95.6%)	336 (87.7%)
Positive	14 (3.9%)	31 (8.1%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Hypothesis 2

Table 14 illustrates the results of the second hypothesis: The tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway disappeared will be more negative in the U.S. compared to elsewhere.

Table 14 shows possible support for the hypothesis. A total of 4.6% of U.S. mentions of Aruba were negative, which is more than any other nation.

Table 14

*Tone of Aruba Mentions by Nation*

<b>Nation</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>
U.S.	14 (4.6%)	281 (91.8%)	11 (3.6%)
Canada	1 (.6%)	171 (96.1%)	6 (3.4%)

Table 14 (continued)

England	2 (1.4%)	121 (84%)	21 (14.6%)
Australia	1 (1.3%)	75 (96.2%)	2 (2.6%)
Ireland	0 (0%)	21 (91.3%)	2 (8.7%)
Korea	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
China	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
Scotland	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Malaysia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
New Zealand	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
Russia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
Singapore	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

In Table 15 the nations were condensed to continents and then to east and west to eliminate empty cells.

North America held the most negative mentions with 3.1% while Asia held the least with 0.

Table 15

*Tone of Aruba Mentions by Continent*

<b>Continent</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>
North America	15 (3.1%)	454 (93.4%)	17 (3.5%)
Europe	2 (1.2%)	142 (85.0%)	23 (13.8%)
Australia	1 (1.3%)	76 (96.2%)	2 (2.5%)
Asia	0 (0%)	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Table 16 shows that the East has a higher positive rate of 27.3% as opposed to the West's rate of 5.7%.

Table 16

*Tone of Aruba Mentions by East & West*

<b>East &amp; West</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>
East	0 (0%)	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
West	18 (2.5%)	672 (91.8%)	42 (5.7%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Hypothesis 3

Table 17 illustrates the results of the third hypothesis: Story placement of Aruba mentions will be more prominent after Holloway's disappearance.

Table 17

*Story Placement of Aruba Mentions by Time Period*

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Body</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>with graphic</b>
Before NH	345 (95.8%)	8 (2.2%)	3 (.8%)	4 (1.1%)
After NH	350 (91.4%)	16 (4.2%)	13 (3.4%)	4 (1.0%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Story placement was further condensed to eliminate empty or low frequency cells. As Table 18 shows, the hypothesis is supported. Before Holloway disappeared, Aruba mentions in headlines, leads, or with graphics appeared 4.2% of the time. After her disappearance, that number more than doubled to 8.6%.

Table 18

*Story Placement (condensed) of Aruba Mentions by Time Period*

Time Period	Body	Lead/headline/graphic
Before Holloway	354 (95.8%)	15 (4.2%)
After Holloway	350 (91.4%)	33 (8.6%)

Note: N=743; Chi-Square= 6.08; df=1; p<.05

Hypothesis 4

Table 19 illustrates the results of the fourth hypothesis: Page placement of Aruba will be more prominent after Holloway’s disappearance.

As Table 19 shows, the hypothesis is not supported. While there is a .8% difference in page placement before Holloway disappeared compared to after, these numbers are not statistically significant. For this study then, the variable will be eliminated.

Table 19

*Page Placement of Aruba by Time Period*

Time Period	Inside Page	Section/Front
Before Disappearance	360 (100%)	0 (0%)
After Disappearance	380 (99.2%)	3 (.8%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Hypothesis 5

Table 20 illustrates the results of the fifth hypothesis: The majority of newspaper coverage about Aruba after Holloway disappears will be based on Natalee Holloway.

After Holloway disappeared, general facts about Aruba held the majority percentage, with 30.5%. Mentions of Natalee Holloway accounted for 17%.

Table 20

*Topics of Aruba by Time Period*

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>business</b>	<b>sports</b>	<b>economics</b>	<b>crime &amp; violence</b>	<b>illegal drugs</b>	<b>entertainment</b>	<b>weather</b>
Before	40 (11.1%)	19 (5.3%)	27 (7.5%)	22 (6.1%)	1 (.3%)	3 (.8%)	2 (.6%)
After	15 (3.9%)	12 (3.1%)	25 (6.5%)	23 (6%)	2 (.5%)	6 (1.6%)	7 (1.8%)

<b>Culture</b>	<b>transportation</b>	<b>government</b>	<b>Natalee Holloway</b>	<b>Hotels</b>	<b>tourism environment</b>	<b>general facts</b>	<b>energy</b>
7 (1.9%)	11 (3.1%)	4 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	19 (5.3%)	74 (20.6%)	127 (35.3%)	4 (1.1%)
5 (1.3%)	9 (2.3%)	3 (.8%)	65 (17%)	9 (2.3%)	84 (21.9%)	117 (30.5%)	1 (.3%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

In Table 21 the topics were condensed to eliminate empty or low frequency cells. Again, the hypothesis is not supported. After Holloway disappears, general facts and weather occupy the largest percentage of mentions with 32.4%, followed by transportation, hotels, and tourism, with 26.6%. Mentions of Natalee Holloway hold the third largest percentage with 17 %.



Table 21

*Topics (condensed) of Aruba by Time Period*

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>government</b>	<b>Holloway</b>	<b>crime/drugs</b>	<b>sports/entertainment/culture</b>	<b>general facts/Weather</b>	<b>economics/business/Energy</b>	<b>transportation/hotels/tourism</b>
Before NH	4 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	23 (6.4%)	29 (8.1%)	129 (35.8%)	71 (19.7%)	204 (28.9%)
After NH	3 (.8%)	65 (17%)	25 (6.5%)	23 (6%)	124 (32.4%)	41 (10.7%)	102 (26.6%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Hypothesis 6

Table 22 illustrates the results for the sixth hypothesis: The tone of Aruba mentions will be more negative and less positive in editorials rather than in news items.

The hypothesis is again, not supported. The numbers are not statistically significant. There are only seven editorial mentions of Aruba throughout the study. Therefore, this variable will also be eliminated.

Table 22

*Tone (condensed) of Mentions in News and Editorials*

<b>News &amp; Ed</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral/Positive</b>
News	18 (2.5%)	718 (97.5%)
Editorials	0 (0%)	7 (100%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

Hypothesis 7

Table 23 illustrates the results for the seventh hypothesis: Mentions of Natalee Holloway will be more prominent in news items compared to editorials.

The hypothesis is not supported. In news items, the 64 Holloway mentions only account

for 8.6% of the mentions in news items. In editorials, the 1 Holloway mention accounts for 14.2% of mentions in editorials. However, the news and editorial variable has been eliminated due to lack of significance in hypothesis 7.

Table 23

*Topics (condensed) of Mentions in News/Editorials*

<b>News/Ed</b>	<b>government</b>	<b>Natalee Holloway</b>	<b>crime/ drugs</b>	<b>sports/entertainment/culture</b>	<b>general facts/ Weather</b>	<b>economics/ business/ Energy</b>	<b>transportation/hotels/tourism</b>
News	6 (.8%)	64 (8.6%)	48 (6.5%)	52 (7%)	251 (34.1%)	109 (14.8%)	206 (27.9%)
Editorial	1 (14.2%)	1 (14.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (27 %)	3 (42.8%)	0 (0%)

Note: N=743; Chi-square attempted, due to low frequency, results are not definitive

## CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

### Summary of Major Findings

#### Frequency of Aruba Mentions

The frequency of Aruba mentions in newspaper articles did increase after the disappearance of Natalee Holloway as compared to mentions before her disappearance. Although the increase is small (48.5% mentions before the disappearance; 51.5% after the disappearance), the 3% difference is noted.

#### Tone of Aruba Mentions

The tone of Aruba mentions after Holloway's disappearance was more negative compared to the tone of mentions before she disappeared. While the mentions became more negative after the disappearance by 3.6%, the mentions also became more positive by 4.2%. Overall, the majority of the mentions of Aruba both before Holloway's disappearance and after were neutral.

#### Tone of Aruba Mentions by Nation

The tone of Aruba mentions were more negative in the United States compared to any other country. This finding may not be surprising, considering Holloway was from the United States. This finding might be significant to Aruba tourism, considering that over half the visitors to Aruba in 2006 were from the U.S. (Aruba, 2006). There were 14 negative mentions of Aruba in U.S. newspapers. England had the second most negative mentions, with two. The United States did, however, have the second highest number of positive mentions with 11. Although the

U.S. did have the majority of negative mentions, again it is important to note that most mentions were neutral.

#### Story Placement of Aruba Mentions

Story placement of Aruba mentions did become more prominent after Holloway's disappearance. Placement prominence increased by 4.4% after her disappearance. Before Holloway's disappearance, 15 mentions were paired with a graphic or appeared in the lead or headline. After her disappearance, that number doubled.

#### Page Placement of Aruba Mentions

Although page placement of Aruba mentions did change after Holloway's disappearance, the noted difference was small. Before Holloway's disappearance, there were no Aruba mentions appearing on a section front or front page. After her disappearance, only three mentions were found in the section front page. The .8% increase is not statistically significant, and therefore the variable would be dropped.

#### Topics of Aruba Mentions

The majority of newspaper coverage after Holloway's disappearance was not about Natalee Holloway. Initial expectations were that Aruba coverage after her disappearance would be overwhelmingly about the incident. However, general Aruba facts and the tourism environment occupied the majority of the coverage. Mentions of Natalee Holloway were the third largest topic, and this was an increase.

#### Tone of Mentions in News & Editorials

The tone of Aruba mentions was more positive in news stories rather than editorials. However, only seven editorial pieces were observed in the randomly generated sample.

Therefore, the numbers are not statistically significant. This variable would also be dropped.

### Application of Study

Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of effective communication and public relations strategies in the face of crisis. The small Caribbean island of Aruba, which is most dependent on tourism as the main source of the economy (Fact File, 2006), received a major blow when American tourist Natalee Holloway disappeared suspiciously. The effects of such a tragedy could be detrimental. However, the results of this study show that although there is evidence of negative publicity from the incident, the overall impact is far less detrimental than it may have been. Publicity from major world newspapers shows minimal negative effects of the incident.

The findings from this study may be significant for public relations practitioners. First, it is important for public relations practitioners to understand the impact of negative news media coverage on tourism-dependent areas. As Tilson and Stacks (1997) and Dimanche and Lepetic (2000) noted, negative news media coverage can be devastating to tourist destinations. In those situations, it would be critical for public relations practitioners to first gather information regarding the extent of the damage. This information could be gathered through a study such as the one conducted. Then, based on the data gathered, practitioners can begin to formulate specific strategies to combat the incident. For instance, as L'Etang et al. (2007) noted, Aruban officials waited too late to hold a press conference after the Holloway incident. This was significant, as the damage to the country's image was already taking shape. In retrospect, it may have been beneficial for Aruban authorities to not only hold a press conference but also to begin

preparations for news releases regarding the incident. Ultimately, it was critical that Aruban officials reacted quickly and showed full cooperation. It was noted that Alabama Governor Bob Riley called for the boycott of in support of Holloway's family who claimed that Aruba officials were not taking the issue as seriously as they should, nor were the authorities being fully cooperative (Alabama governor, 2005). In this type of situation, successful public relations efforts may help offset this outcry. Although this type of situation would require fast-acting public relations strategies and would not have included time to conduct this type of study, it is still important to gather all possible information regarding the situation. A full and working knowledge of the crisis at hand could allow practitioners to address issues more specifically and more thoroughly. It is important to understand the scope of negative publicity from a crisis situation, for it is through understanding that one is able to create effective strategies for combat.

This study is also significant for government and tourism officials. During the midst of crisis, it is important for government and tourism officials to understand, just as public relations practitioners, all information regarding the situation. They must also be aware of the image being formed of their area. It is important that they are aware of the extent of the damage to their image. Tourism and government officials could then craft tourism, communications, and marketing campaigns designed specifically to combat their negative image, as Tilson and Stacks (1997) noted.

#### Limitations of Study

There are obvious limitations to this study. The LexisNexis database was used to retrieve major world newspapers. The only newspapers included in the study were those that were

available via LexisNexis. This is limited to English language newspapers. Internet articles and magazines were not included in the study because the study focused solely on the Natalee Holloway and Aruba coverage in newspapers. Further research might look to examine more articles in a larger time frame. Also, further research could examine internet articles, magazines, and broadcast media. It would also be interesting to examine the actual public relations, communications, and tourism efforts used during the Holloway crisis. It might also be beneficial to examine the island's tourism economy since the incident. Future research might also examine triangulation between actual content analysis of newspapers and surveys of populations on their opinions of Aruba.

It may also be interesting to conduct a qualitative study on this issue. Focus groups examining tourist perspectives on the incident and on the image of Aruba could provide actual concerns from potential island visitors. This type of information may be invaluable to Aruban government and tourism officials. It might also be interesting to examine American perspectives of Aruba versus world-wide perceptions.

Ultimately, the Natalee Holloway incident in Aruba did have an impact on the island. Although this research suggests that worldwide negative publicity may have been minimal, the actual scope of damage done by the incident may never be fully known. These findings may highlight the need for effective crisis and public relations strategies as Tilson and Stacks (1997) and Dimanche and Lepetic (1999) note. In a place like tourism-dependent Aruba, these strategies may be crucial for the survival of the island.

## Conclusion

Although the disappearance of Natalee Holloway seemed to have a visible effect on world newspaper coverage of Aruba, the scope of the effect seems relatively small. The findings from this research are quite interesting and, for the most part, surprising. Initially, the researcher believed that the disappearance of Natalee Holloway would be very evident in newspaper coverage, and the overall image of Aruba would be visibly damaged. However, the findings seem to support otherwise. Although there is visible evidence of the effects of Holloway's disappearance in newspaper coverage, those effects seem to be less dramatic and pronounced than the researcher originally anticipated.

There may be several explanations for the findings. The lack of dramatic margins in the findings and the lack of a highly negative tone might be a result of a successful public relations effort by Aruba tourism authorities. As found in Table 13, mentions of Aruba become both more positive and negative after Holloway's disappearance. This could be a result of successful marketing and communications campaigns by Aruba, as Tilson and Stacks (1997) highlight the need for. The results of the study indicate that the scope of the damage done to Aruba's image by the Holloway incident may not have been as substantial as first thought. The results of this research suggest that it is possible, perhaps with an effective public relations and communications plan, to combat crisis situations and negative publicity.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Newspapers Examined in Study

*The Globe and Mail*  
*The New York Times*  
*USA Today*  
*The Washington Post*  
*Daily News*  
*The Toronto Star*  
*The Daily Telegraph*  
*Sunday Times*  
*National Post*  
*The Toronto Sun*  
*The News of the World*  
*The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
*Daily Star*  
*The Guardian*  
*The Irish Times*  
*The Advertiser*  
*Sunday Express*  
*The International Herald Courier*  
*Computer Reseller News*  
*Sydney Morning Herald*  
*The Mirror*  
*The Independent*  
*The Age*  
*The Express*  
*Sunday Mirror*  
*Sunday Tribune*  
*The Australian*  
*The Korea Herald*  
*The Washington Times*  
*Daily Mail*  
*Irish Independent*  
*The Sun Herald*  
*The Times*  
*Belfast Telegraph*  
*Jane's Defence Weekly*  
*South China Morning*  
*Sunday Age*  
*Sunday Mail*  
*Sunday Tasmanian*  
*The Observer*

*Wall Street Journal*  
*Accountancy*  
*Courier Mail*  
*The Business*  
*The Sunday Independent*  
*Brisbane News*  
*Daily Telegraph*  
*Herald Sun*  
*Moscow Times*  
*New Straits Times*  
*Scotland on Sunday*  
*Sunday Telegraph*  
*The Business Times*  
*The Dominion Post*  
*The Herald*  
*The Sun*  
*The Sunday Telegraph*

## APPENDIX B: Code Sheet

Unit of Analysis: Examine each mention of 'Aruba'.

### Independent Variables

Date: date of publication

Name: newspaper name

Nation: nation where newspaper is located

News/Ed: news (anything not editorial, opinion, etc) or editorial comment

### Dependent Variables

Tone: tone towards Aruba itself in the sentence containing the mention

- Tone:
1. Negative
  2. Neutral
  3. Positive

Story: story prominence

- Story:
1. In the body of the story
  2. Paired with graphic or photo caption
  3. In the lead of the story (first 2 sentences)
  4. In the headline of the story

Page: page prominence

- Page:
- 1: Inside page of newspaper (also if no page number is given)
  2. Section front of newspaper
  3. Front page of newspaper

Topic: analyze topic closest to Aruba mention

- Topic:
1. Business
  2. Sports
  3. Economics/Economy
  4. Crime/Violence/Courts
  5. Illegal drugs
  6. Entertainment
  7. Weather
  8. Culture
  9. Transportation
  10. Government
  11. Natalee Holloway
  12. Hotels

13. Tourism/Tourism Environment/Travel
14. General (population, geography, etc.)
15. Energy (oil, gas)

Time Period

1. Before Holloway's disappearance
2. After Holloway's disappearance

VITA

BRITTANY L. PARKS

Personal Data:       Date of Birth: September 15, 1986  
                          Place of Birth: Kingsport, TN  
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                          Federal Bureau of Investigation, Honors Intern;  
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