

**“The Truth Behind the Headlines”:  
Media Portrayals and Their Impacts on the Relatives of Sex Offenders**

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*“I have visited families where the windows are nailed shut, letter boxes blocked up to avoid flaming rags or dog excrement being thrown in. Families have been spat at, publicly reviled. A mother will look at her newborn baby and dream that one day he/she will be a doctor, an Olympic athlete, a mechanic like his father; no mother cradles that tiny scrap of life and thinks one day he will be a murderer, a rapist or a pedophile. It is not only parents who feel this terrible pain, there are siblings, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, all get drawn into the net of horror and loss. The ripple effect can be enormous and pass down the generations. All these persons may be viewed as the ‘Scum of the Earth’. The only ‘crime’ that the families have committed is to be related to someone that the public has labeled a ‘monster’. Love does not end when a person gets into trouble; this is the time when true, unconditional love shines through. This is NOT condoning the crime.”<sup>i</sup>*

<sup>i</sup> Cited in Condry, 2007, 180 from Action for Families Enduring Criminal Trauma (AFFECT). (2002). Family Stories. Bognor Regis: AFFECT.

## **Abstract**

Traditionally, emphases in the mass media coverage of almost all crimes have been placed on the alleged offender and the victim (and on occasion, their families). As a result, the families of offenders have been either largely ignored or presented unfairly even though their lives have also been devastatingly impacted by the media coverage of their loved one.

While scholars have explored the impacts of offending on offenders' relatives, this exploratory study adds to the literature by focusing on a uniquely marginalized sub-population of relatives of *sex offenders* in Canada. This study examines some of the collateral consequences of sex offending on the relatives, while focusing primarily on the impacts and effects of media coverage on these relatives. The findings of this study are based on a thematic analysis of nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with partners, mothers and daughters of Canadian adult male sex offenders. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Herbert Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma, this research finds that relatives of sex offenders encounter a myriad of consequences and repercussions resulting from a loved one's sexually offending behaviour. In particular, the interview data suggests that the media coverage of a loved one's criminalized behaviour exacerbates many of the already difficult and challenging collateral consequences, as well as the overall stigmatizing effects that arise when a loved one engages in sexually offending behaviour. Recommendations, offered by the participants, regarding future media reporting practices are presented, along with important directions for future research within this area of study.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*I don't trust the media, I don't trust them at all, but we've [her support group] chosen to speak out at safer events and your study to me is just one of those perfect avenues... to show a point of view that frankly no one cares about, right? But they might care if they understood that we're a family just like your family... People need to understand that good people do, sometimes, bad things... don't prejudge. So it's mainly our opportunity to advocate for what really happens, kind of 'the truth behind the headlines' (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Typically when offenders, particularly 'sex offenders,' are portrayed in the news, one tends to automatically assume that they are monstrous individuals without giving much consideration to their families. When families are occasionally considered, they are rarely thought of in a positive light, and rather they are considered 'bad' themselves (Moroney, 2014).<sup>1</sup> While the media and general public's focus is most often placed on the offender, the details surrounding their criminalized actions and the subsequent punishments, the relatives of these offenders are simply ignored. However, it is the family members and friends who must regain and retain some sort of semblance of their lives as they attempt to make sense of the offence and the harm that has occurred. Additionally, it is the 'private lives of the relatives' that are upended and transformed into public displays through media exposure garnered from their loved one's engagement with criminalized behaviour (Sacco, 1995).

In light of the innumerable challenges experienced by relatives, this exploratory study was undertaken in an effort to discover and examine the impacts and effects of sexually offending behaviour on the relatives of offenders in Canada. In particular, this study explores the role of the mass media within the overall collateral consequences of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Herbert Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and

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<sup>1</sup> I became familiar with this idea in 2014 during the keynote address by Shannon Moroney at a conference entitled, "The Voices of Parents Affected by Youth Sexual Offending: What Are They Telling Us and How Can We Respond?" In November 2005, one month into her marriage with Jason Staples, Ms. Moroney was away at a conference when police officers knocked on her hotel door and told her that her husband had committed serious sexual offences against two women in their home. Moroney is now a public speaker promoting restorative justice and advocating on behalf of relatives of offenders, and notably of sex offenders (About Shannon Moroney, 2014).

Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma, this study specifically focuses on the ways in which relatives of sex offenders understand their interactions with others in their community and essentially, the relationship between stigmatized and non-stigmatized individuals in a society.

While the focus of any crime should never diminish the experience of the victim(s), consideration must also be granted to those related to the offender. Relatives are oftentimes both ethically and legally innocent as they had no participation in or knowledge of their relatives' offending behaviour. Nevertheless, they are often the ones who are forced to bear the blame and responsibility, as well as encounter the stigmatizing glances and interactions with others in their community as they too are punished for their loved one's actions. Moroney (2010), a former spouse of a convicted Canadian sex offender, aptly explained such concerns:

I was starting to see that jails, which locked dangerous people away from society, also protected those very same criminals from facing the impact their actions had on the rest of society. In the perpetrator's absence, someone – often someone close to the perpetrator but not in any way involved in their crimes – would have to bear the brunt of a community's hostility and fear (p.117).

In addition, the mass media plays a pivotal role in shaping and forming opinions held by the general public (Ojo, 2006). As media reporters harass relatives of the offender in order to 'get their story', relatives are forced to cope with the aftermath of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour through a very public forum. This public forum may have long lasting effects on the relatives, as they are never truly given the private space that they require to come to terms with the gravity and seriousness of the harm that has occurred, thereby complicating their own healing process. For example, while Moroney (2010) coped with the extremely public nature of her ex-husband's offence, she later revealed that she "wanted the press to know what it felt like to be at their mercy" (p.96). Moroney (2010) stated that she was never afforded the opportunity to grieve the loss of her husband to incarceration nor was she able to move forward in her own life, as she was constantly forced to recount and clarify details regarding the media content surrounding his case. Moreover, Moroney

(2010) emphasized several of the overall collateral consequences and fears that she experienced, such as: the shock of learning of her husband's crimes, the constant fear of media exposure and harassment, the concern for victims and, the ever-present judgment and blame in the tones of others' words due to the media coverage, all of which are echoed through the experiences shared by the participants in this study.

### **1.1 - Situating the Research**

Research to date has focused on various linkages between the collateral consequences of crime and families of offenders, media and crime, sexual offenders and crime, and sexual offenders and stigmatization; however, it has not focused on the way in which the media may be a collateral consequence of offending behaviour for the families of offenders. In particular, while the literature depicts a slow shift in scholarly attention towards the relatives of offenders, the rise of technological advancements and society's dependence on the media for current information warrants further scrutiny into the media's role in generating stigma for these relatives.

This thesis attempts to contribute to the sparse and limited knowledge on collateral consequences experienced by the relatives of Canadian offenders. Hannem (2008) states that "people who are most affected by the use of incarceration in our society, other than prisoners themselves, have been virtually ignored by academics, politicians, policy makers, and society at large" (p. 4). In fact, aside from Hannem's (2008) recent work on the topic of collateral consequences of imprisonment and involuntary separation and the limited information provided by Canadian organizations such as the Canadian Families and Corrections Network and The John Howard Society, there is currently minimal information available or being generated within this area of study.

With seemingly only two known Canadian studies<sup>2</sup> related to this topic (see Withers, 2003 and Hannem, 2008),<sup>3</sup> this research focused on the relatives of a uniquely marginalized sub-population of offenders: sex offenders.<sup>4</sup> Relatives of sex offenders are a significant population to study as sex offenders are seen as the “seemingly worst of the worst among criminal offenders today” (Tewksbury et al., 2012, p.1). Sexual offending is often thought of as the most heinous and gruesome offence in our society; as a result, it is one of the most stigmatized offences. Sex offending, especially against children, is one of the most sensationalized topics as it caters to the “public’s morbid fascination with sex offenders who target children” (Galeste, Fradella, and Vogel, 2012, p.4). Within the wider criminological and sociological literature, there is a lack of research regarding the impact of media on this particular offender population and their relatives. Moreover, as I discuss later in this thesis, Canada does not currently have a *public* sex offender registry such as the one found within the American criminal justice system; rather, the general public learns of offenders in their community through the media – which in turn, poses its own range of serious consequences. In light of this, the impact of media coverage on relatives of sex offenders has typically been a ‘by-product finding’ for many researchers; in other words, scholars often learn about media-related consequences

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<sup>2</sup> University of Ottawa sociologist Christine Gervais and psychologist Elisa Romano have initiated a qualitatively-based study with parents of youth who sexually offend. While they have not yet published their findings given that the study is still ongoing, they have disseminated their study’s preliminary results through academic conferences and community-based workshops. On April 4, 2014, they hosted a conference at the University of Ottawa entitled, “The Voices of Parents Affected by Youth Sexual Offending: What Are They Telling Us and How Can We Respond?” However, the impact of the media was not explored within their research as the criminalized behaviour of youth (individuals under the age of 18) is banned from media coverage. Nevertheless, the study is drawing attention to the collateral consequences for parents and relatives when a loved one engages in sexually offending behaviour.

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, both Withers (2003) and Hannem (2008) focus on impacts of criminalized offending behaviour on relatives of all offender populations. This research focuses particularly on relatives of sex offenders.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to draw attention to the term ‘sex offender’ as it is used here and throughout this research. Given the social construction of ‘crime’ and ‘criminal offences’, I have intentionally attempted to use less stigmatizing terms such as ‘criminalized behaviour’ and ‘sexually offending behaviour’. In fact, drawing on Kitzinger’s (1999) work, labels such as these are “the dominant way” through which one conceptualizes a particular offender population or action (p. 217). However, in using these terms, one forgets that it is “laden with ideas and assumptions which confine thinking about [the] issue to a very narrow focus” (Kitzinger, 1999, p.217). In short, while undertaking this research with a critical orientation, I do recognize and acknowledge that the term ‘sex offender’ is a legally and socially constructed label (Henry and Milovanovic, 2003) that is stigmatizing by its labeling nature; however, I have used the term throughout this work, both for the ease of writing and in order to maintain consistency with the language used by the participants in this study as they shared their experiences.

through their research, but have not focused on this concern as a primary research area to the extent that this project does.

## 1.2 - Chapter Outline

The following chapter (Chapter 2) provides the historical context surrounding the impacts of criminalized actions on the relatives of offenders; then it reviews the relevant literature inclusive of the collateral consequences of criminalized offending behaviour, the distinctions between offenders and sex offenders, the concepts of stigma, shame and blame, and finally, media and crime. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework for this study wherein the contributions of Herbert Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and Erving Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma are explored. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework utilized in this study, including the epistemological concerns regarding this work, as well as the research questions and research design. Details relating to participant recruitment, interviews, and ethical safeguards undertaken in this study are also presented. The chapter concludes by outlining the methodological steps followed in order to carry out the analysis of the interview data while also acknowledging the limitations of the technique. Chapter 5 comprises the first part of the analysis for this research; it explores the overall collateral consequences of sexually offending behaviour on the relatives of sex offenders. Chapter 6 presents the second part of the analysis, which consists of the primary emphasis of this research: the perceived role of the media as a part of the overall collateral consequences of sexual offending on the relatives. Both analysis chapters place important emphasis on the unique impacts and consequences experienced by relatives of *sex offenders*. The final chapter (Chapter 7) summarizes the study and provides recommendations for future media reporting practices as offered by the participants in this study. The chapter concludes with the study's limitations and directions for future research regarding collateral consequences of sexual offending on the relatives of offenders.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Recent<sup>5</sup> academic emphases of almost all crimes have tended to be placed on the victim (and on occasion, their families) and the alleged or convicted offender (Hannem, 2010, p.183). However, the *families of offenders* have been largely ignored and often presented inaccurately or in a negative light even though their lives have also been devastatingly impacted.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, sex offenders and their relatives are often further impacted by the media coverage that follows the disclosure of a sexual offence. Relatives may be mentioned by name; they may share a last name with the accused/convicted individual; or they may live in a small city or town where everyone is known, or they could be featured in the coverage themselves. Often times, the media perceptions of these relatives are biased, incorrect, and inaccurate.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, relatives may be ignored entirely and not given a chance to speak out suggesting that the general public only receives one side of the story. On the other hand, during the few times when relatives are given the opportunity to speak out and are brave enough to do so, their words are often misconstrued and presented inaccurately.

The limited and sparse literature on relatives of Canadian sex offenders<sup>8</sup> coupled with the influence of media serves as part of the impetus for this project on the impacts on the relatives of sexual offenders resulting from the media coverage surrounding a loved one's sex offence. In this light, the following literature review is non-traditional in the sense that it is fragmented, focusing on the prevalent research for each of the core components that contribute to the development of this

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<sup>5</sup> Emphases on the victims of offences only gained momentum from the 1970s onwards (National Crime Victim Law Institute, 2011; Young, 2001). In fact, in earlier decades, victims' rights advocates worked towards having these rights recognized and acknowledged, thereby making the study of victims a relatively new phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup> While the attention to the plight of victims has advanced, and rightly so, the experiences of offenders' relatives have typically been overlooked by both academic scholarship and overall media coverage.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to imply that families are never portrayed accurately.

<sup>8</sup> Much of the literature and scholarship focusing on relatives of offenders has originated in the United Kingdom and the United States (Hannem, 2008). In fact, to date, there appear to have been no known studies that have been conducted with relatives of Canadian sex offenders in particular, with limited available research regarding relatives of offenders. In other words, the collateral consequences that they experience as relatives of *sex offenders* have not yet been established in Canadian academic scholarship. This is imperative to note as *sex offenders* and their families comprise a unique and largely vulnerable group of individuals due to the nature of sex offending.

research project.<sup>9</sup> Within this chapter, I first begin by tracing a chronological historical background on relevant academic scholarship in an effort to present the progression of this topic. This background focuses primarily on literature involving relatives of all offender populations and the consequences that they encounter as a result of their loved one's criminalized behaviour. I then review the past scholarship on the various elements of this project: a) the collateral consequences of criminalized offending behaviour b) the key distinctions between offenders and *sex offenders* c) the concepts of stigmatization, shame, and blame and d) the literature on media and crime and the influence of media on the general public.

## 2.1 - Historical Background

Studies on the relatives of offenders have been few and sporadic. The mid-1960s saw an emphasis being placed on the rights of prison inmates while the following decade saw a shift in which emphasis was placed on the services needed for the victims of violent crimes. The topic of relatives of offenders failed to spark any real interest until the early 1980's (U.S Department of Justice, 1981, p.5). In fact, the earliest study exploring the experiences of families of prisoners was published in the 1920s and few studies have been conducted since (Schneller, 1976; Hannem, 2008). Likewise, Bakker, Morris and Janus (1978) noted that minimal efforts were put into helping "one of the most neglected groups... the wives and children of male inmates" (p.143). More specifically, Barnes and Teeters (1955) express their dismay at the lack of research on this important population by recognizing that relatives of offenders who have been imprisoned are given little to no consideration when these "dependents are the real sufferers" (p.742). The overall understanding of relatives as 'sufferers' suggests that families of offenders are often left behind to cope with the

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that going into extensive detail on each element of the research project would not be feasible. Therefore, I have chosen to draw on the prevalent aspects of each component within which a link may be established, bridging all of the components together culminating in this research project. While this review is not to be mistaken for a patchwork of components, it is useful to remember that this structuring is beneficial in order to construct this particular research project and to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

fragmented pieces of their lives when a loved one is sent to prison. Appropriately, Bakker et al. (1978) coined the phrase ‘hidden victims of crime’<sup>10</sup> to refer to the immediate relatives of male inmates who are ignored and deemed invisible (p.143).

Schneller (1976) cites Bloodgood’s (1928) work on the welfare of prisoner’s families in Kentucky as the first valuable contribution to this topic. Through interviews and an analysis of case studies, Bloodgood (1928) found that mothers and children experienced extreme collateral consequences of their loved one’s offending in terms of financial difficulties and hardships due to the father’s imprisonment<sup>11</sup> (Schneller, 1976). Following several intermittent studies investigating the overall effects of imprisonment on the families of offenders (Sacks, 1939); adjustment factors regarding spousal separation due to incarceration (Blackwell, 1959); impacts on children of incarcerated female offenders (Zalba, 1964); and impacts on wives as a result of their husband’s incarceration (Morris, 1965), Schneller (1976) emphasized the notion that “legally innocent people, [those] closely related to prisoners ... experienced the suffering which imprisonment brings” (p.1). Schneller’s (1976) acknowledgement of this idea was revolutionary in the sense that it was the first study to shed light on the necessity to consider families and relatives of offenders as legally innocent. Schneller’s (1976) interview-based study among 129 African American families with an imprisoned male relative (spouse/father) found that typical problems and issues that prisoners’ families struggled with were “finances, loneliness, caring for the children, sexual frustration, emotional disturbances and illness” (Schneller, 1976, p.12).

In 1978, Bakker et al.’s study among inmates’ wives echoed Schneller’s (1976) claim that “the incarceration of an individual collaterally punishes the family, thereby creating victims of the

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<sup>10</sup> Victim typically refers to “an individual who is the target of another person’s violent, discriminatory, harassing, or assaultive behaviours” (APA Dictionary of Psychology: ‘victim’, 2007, p. 982). Using this definition, it is believed that ‘victim’ can and should refer to family members of a loved one who has committed an offence. While they are not necessarily the targets of their relatives’ actions, they are often the target of the general public’s discrimination or harassment as a result of their loved one’s actions.

<sup>11</sup> This was due in large part to the male’s role of primary ‘breadwinner’ in their respective families (Hannem, 2008).

system” (Hannem, 2008, p.10). Following their research, in 1986, Ariela Lowenstein conducted structured interviews with 118 Jewish wives/mothers whose spouses were incarcerated (p.79). She found that children coping with paternal absence experienced a variety of emotional hardships, health issues, and behavioural challenges (p.81).

The 1990’s saw the publication of two notable texts emphasizing the hardships experienced by the families of offenders written by two wives of offenders. Fishman (1990), writing as an ex-wife of a prisoner, and Girshick (1996), the wife of an offender, both found that readjustments in the family structure and financial difficulties alongside accompanying stigma were key difficulties experienced by wives of offenders.<sup>12</sup> Following the turn of the millennium, Eschholz et al.’s (2003) study with family members of those tried in capital cases<sup>13</sup> yielded similar results to that of their predecessors as they also noted that family members experience “trauma; express empathy for victims and their families, as well as a desire to connect with them” (Eschholz et al., 2003, p.154 and p.170). Of particular relevance is that their study explored the role that the media plays in facilitating community response.<sup>14</sup>

The first Canadian study conducted by the Canadian Families and Corrections Network in Kingston, Ontario in conjunction with the Correctional Service of Canada published a research report in 2003 regarding a strategic approach and policy document to address the needs of families of offenders (Withers, 2003, p.7). However, prior to 2008, this research was the “only published study

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<sup>12</sup> Girshick (1996), also being the wife of an offender, conducted interviews with twenty-five wives of prisoners in California that reiterated similar results to those presented by Fishman (1990) such as stigma, loneliness, and financial difficulties.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Capital case’ is legally defined as a “prosecution case for murder in which a jury is asked to decide whether a defendant should be put to death, if found guilty” (US Legal Definitions: Capital Case).

<sup>14</sup> This aspect of Eschholz et al.’s (2003) research is discussed further in the ‘media and crime’ section of this chapter. Interestingly, of the approximately eighty studies that I examined for this research, Eschholz et al.’s (2003) work was one of the only studies to place emphasis on the media’s role within the collateral consequences of offending behaviour. While their work focused on the relatives of ‘capital case offenders,’ it is of value to note the ways in which the media has impacted their lives as the gravity, seriousness, and newsworthiness of capital cases parallel that of sexual offences, yet differ greatly in their presentation within the media.

of the effects of incarceration on Canadian families to date, and, as a policy document, offers no theoretical or contextual analysis of the findings” (Hannem, 2008, p.16).

Subsequently, in 2007, Rachel Condry published a study based on thirty-two in-depth interviews conducted with family members of serious offenders in England with offences ranging from violent offences to rape. The main themes to emerge from her research were those of shame, stigma, and blame (p.61). Moreover, this study recognized and acknowledged the vilification, helplessness and isolation experienced by relatives of serious offenders; in fact, one of Condry’s (2007) participants identified herself as a ‘second-class citizen’ treated with minimal respect due to her relation to a sex offender (p.61).

In 2008, Stacey Hannem published the most recent Canadian study regarding the families of offenders based on the findings from twenty-eight in-depth interviews with family members of male offenders and nine service providers for families of offenders. Her study indicated that families of offenders experience “financial, emotional and familial difficulties” which are only heightened by the lack of knowledge and understanding by their community members coupled with the lack of social supports offered to them (Hannem, 2008, p.175). Hannem’s (2008) research serves as a foundation for the current study, as I attempt to build on her work by focusing on the sub-population of relatives of *sex offenders*.

Much of the prior literature on sexual offending has focused on the psychological and causal links regarding one’s disposition towards engaging in sexually offending behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, considerable attention has been placed on the societal reaction of community members towards sexual offenders and their criminalized behaviours.<sup>16</sup> This research attempts to widen the scope of understanding sexual offenders by focusing on the impacts on their relatives. Furthermore, the

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<sup>15</sup> See Marshall, 2000; Ward et al., 2006; Moster, Wnuk, and Jeglic, 2008; Seto, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> See Roberts and Stalens, 1997; Presser and Gunnison, 2002; Caputo and Brodsky, 2004; Quinn et al., 2004; Brannon et al., 2007; Levenson et al., 2007; Hannem and Petrunik, 2007; Schiavone and Jeglic, 2008.

scholarship on the collateral consequences of sexual offending<sup>17</sup> sheds light on the high prevalence of stigma and shame experienced by the families of offenders,<sup>18</sup> as well as relatives' feelings of responsibility for the offenders' actions.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, academic literature appears to have also focused more extensively on media and crime,<sup>20</sup> sexual offending within the media or in general,<sup>21</sup> perceptions from the general public regarding sexual offending and offenders<sup>22</sup> and the impact of public notification or registration<sup>23</sup> - all of which are issues directly pertinent to my research. In addition, studies conducted with the incarcerated individuals themselves<sup>24</sup> and/or with their relatives<sup>25</sup> have also slowly gained momentum in recent years. However, the bridging of these various elements is noticeably lacking in the literature. Thus, it is in connecting these elements that the impact of media coverage may be better understood as a contributing factor to the overall collateral consequences of sexual offending on the relatives of these offenders.

## **2.2 - Review of the Literature on Collateral Consequences of Criminalized Offending Behaviour**

Before the topic can be developed or even considered in its entirety, it is important to examine the various aspects involved in this query starting with the collateral consequences of offending for the families of offenders. For the purpose of this study, collateral consequences refer to

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<sup>17</sup> See Bakker et al., 1978; Cunningham, 2001; Genty, 2002; Arditti et al., 2003; Bayes, 2007; Murray, 2007; Hannem, 2008; Wildeman, 2010; Hannem, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> See May, 2000; Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Farkas and Miller, 2007; Winnick, 2008; Hannem, 2010; Mingus and Burchfield, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> See Fishman, 1990; Jannoff-Bulman, 1992; Condry, 2007; Corrective Services New South Wales, 2011; Womer, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See Sacco, 1982; Soothill and Walby, 1991; Barlow et al., 1995; Sacco, 1995; Welch et al., 1997; Muncie, 1999; Duwe, 2000; Paulsen, 2003; Banks, 2005; Chadee and Ditton, 2005; Cross, 2005; Spencer, 2005; Gruenewald et al., 2009; De Mesmaecker, 2010; Adorjan, 2011; Jewkes, 2011; Welsh et al., 2011.

<sup>21</sup> See Bischof et al., 1992; Tewksbury, 2004; Tewksbury, 2005; Beauregard and Leclerc, 2007; Levenson and Tewksbury, 2009; Winder and Gough, 2010; Blagden et al., 2011.

<sup>22</sup> See Gates and Rohe, 1987; Burchfield, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> See Tewksbury and Lees, 2006; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2009; Comartin et al., 2010; Tewksbury et al., 2012.

<sup>24</sup> See Falls, 2001; Uggen et al., 2004; Murray, 2007; Burchfield and Mingus, 2008; Robbers, 2008; Aresti et al., 2010; Combs, 2011; Munn, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> See Schneller, 1976; Gerstein and Pittman, 1983; Lowenstein, 1984; Carlson and Cervara, 1992; Gabel and Johnston, 1995; Girshick, 1996; Braman, 2002; Eschholz et al., 2003.

the results or outcomes, (positive, negative, both, or neutral) which are experienced by the relatives of offenders as a result of their loved one's affiliation with, and/or conviction of a criminal offence.<sup>26</sup> Commonly experienced collateral consequences for the families of criminalized people may include the "disruption of schooling, desire to escape media or family attention, and the stigma and feelings of isolation associated with being the family of a prisoner" (Cunningham, 2001, p.37), the impacts on "work, marriage and family outcomes" (Grattet, 2011, p.193) as well as the overall dissolution of the family structure (Cunningham, 2001, p.37).<sup>27</sup>

Criminally offending behaviour can have a truly detrimental effect on a family as relationships are broken and trust is lost (Braman, 2002; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008). In this light, one of the first consequences to arise from the disclosure of criminalized offending behaviour is the initial shock and coping with the idea that a loved one<sup>28</sup> has committed a serious offence (Fishman, 1982, p.91). Thus, typical reactions consist of disbelief, fear of the reactions from others, shame, anger and "feeling exposed, especially if there's media attention" (Corrective Services New South Wales, 2011, p.8). Condry (2007) notes within her study that many participants felt as though their lives had been "shattered and smashed to pieces" (p.26-27). The discovery of a loved one's offence forced family members to offer explanations by drawing on stories of their lives prior to the offence, particularly in order to emphasize that they did their best or that they did not know

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<sup>26</sup> It may also refer to an outcome that the relatives of offenders do not have any control over. Moreover, it does not include the actual experience of incarceration on the offender. It should be noted that there are numerous consequences for an imprisoned person (Turanovic, Rodriguez and Pratt, 2012, p.914), but this research will only pertain to those related to the relative experiencing their own consequences as a result of their loved one's actions.

<sup>27</sup> See also Western and McLanahan, 2000; Genty, 2002, p.1671; Arditti et al., 2003, p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that a strong and very evident gender bias exists regarding the families of prisoners. Hannem (2008) states that, "the vast majority of incarcerated persons in Canada (and, indeed, around the world) are men" (p.30). However, as women offenders do exist and are also sent to prison, research shows that their male partners or spouses are not burdened with the same responsibilities of maintaining and caring for the family or waiting for their release (Maidment, 2006; Hannem, 2008). Moreover, Brennan (2012) found that "sexual offences showed the highest representation of males (findings regarding sexual offences of police-reported crime statistics in Canada in 2011): 98% of all persons charged with sexual assault level 1 (common assaults (level 1) the least serious form in which little or no direct harm was caused to the victim... assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault in which the victim is wounded, maimed or disfigured (level 3)), child pornography and sexual violations against children in 2011, were male" (p. 20). Therefore, while the impacts of female incarceration on male partners/spouses is of value and requires further study, this research focuses on the families of convicted male sex offenders.

that their loved one was capable of such behaviour (Condry, 2007, p.36).

In a similar vein, Girshick (1996) states, “prisoners’ wives and children are sometimes called the ‘forgotten victims of crime’ as they try to adjust to the consequences of a crime they didn’t commit” (p.11). In this light, the initial shock that comes from learning of an offence may often transform into a loss of familial structure, also known as ‘dissolution’ of the family structure. The ‘dissolution of the family’ refers most closely to the point at which families are no longer able to function the way they did prior to the offence being committed (Cunningham, 2001, p.36-37). For example, following the disclosure of a loved one’s offence, family members expressed feelings of demoralization (Pueschel and Moglia, 1977) and an overall lack of communication between members (Gerstein and Pittman, 1983). It is important to emphasize that these collateral consequences occur specifically because a family’s life is upended when a relative is taken into custody (Legislative ACT, 2004, p.9). In particular, “when a serious offence is discovered, everyday family arrangements are thrown into disarray” and their lives begin to revolve around the offender and their needs (Condry, 2007, p.49), with minimal regard for their own familial needs.

Additionally, a typical result of a loved one’s imprisonment is the diminished financial resources for a family (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999; Arditti et al., 2003; Withers, 2003).<sup>29</sup> For example, some of these resources may include “loss of income and housing stress as well as the costs of contact including travel, telephone costs, legal expenses and childcare costs” (Community Inclusion Board, 2008, p.8). These financial struggles significantly add to the emotional and psychological harm that accompanies a loved one’s offending behaviour. Moreover, the diminished financial resources for families with an incarcerated parent coupled with the parental absence of the offender may have negative impacts on children due to the inadequate parenting that they receive (Wildeman, 2010, p.285). For instance, the non-incarcerated parent is left to make ends meet and

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<sup>29</sup> See also Anderson, 1965; Legislative Assembly for the ACT, 2004; Mills and Codd, 2007; Smith et al., 2007; Breen, 2008; Mills and Codd, 2008.

manage the household (Hannem, 2008), which may result in the neglect of a child.

In light of this, an important collateral consequence that must be emphasized is the impact of criminal offending and imprisonment on children (Zalba, 1964; Weintraub, 1982; Frigon, 2010). In particular, the fact that convictions for sex offences typically result in some length of imprisonment for the offender, it is important to note that children of prisoners are often at high risk for poor life outcomes given the parent-child separation (Arditti et al., 2003, p.196).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, separation anxiety caused by the absence of a parent from a child's life due to incarceration is often a precursor to sleep disorders and excessive anger coupled with fear, shame, or abandonment issues as well as social isolation and depression.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, a Canadian study found that oftentimes, family members are 'criminalized' for the actions of their loved ones and the accompanying stigma and guilt-by-association can affect the child's relations at school (Withers, 2003, p.43). Specifically, children are at risk of shaming and bullying from their peers due to a parent's offending actions (Fishman, 1982, p.89-90; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008, p.28). In addition, the risk of a child being bullied is heightened when a "family member's court case [attracts] media attention" (Correction Services New South Wales, 2011, p.102). With this in mind, this research also considers the ways in which media coverage of a loved one's crime may detrimentally affect a child's life.

Finally, one of the prevalent themes to emerge from prior literature is the idea that relatives often experienced instances wherein they believed that they were 'paying' for their loved one's crimes. A specific example comes from Fishman's (1990) work:

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<sup>30</sup> See also Murray and Farrington, 2005, p.1269; Bayes, 2007, p.9; Murray, 2007, p.55; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008, p.15-16.

<sup>31</sup> See Legislative Assembly for the ACT, 2004, p.12; Bayes, 2007, p.11; Community Inclusion Board, 2008, p.8.

I was struck by the strong contrast between prisoners and their families. The visitors' faces betrayed the kinds of troubles and anxieties that stem from dealing with too many daily responsibilities. The prisoners, by contrast, appeared relaxed, well-rested, and energetic. I found myself wondering whether or not prison was vacation away from cares and responsibilities – a time to take it easy and not worry about food, clothing, and housing, and to get some exercise... I sometimes yearned to trade places with my husband. 'Punishment' was being on the outside and having to cope with the business of living" (Fishman, 1990, x).

Oftentimes, spouses find themselves also 'doing time' and 'serving life sentences' while their partners are in prison (Fishman, 1990, p.1; Soothill and Walby, 1991, p.127-128). Fishman (1982) states, "because the offender has committed an act that is not socially acceptable, his family members are often thought of as criminals too... they are often confronted with blame for the inmates 'actions'" (p.92-93).<sup>32</sup> In this light, relatives feel as though they are being judged by society (Womer, 2011, p.62); however, this is a notion that must be dispelled as "family members have a right to be treated with respect and without bias: they were not sentenced by the courts" (Withers, 2003, p.39).

Likewise, Bakker et al. (1978) note, "according to society's principles of justice, that these families are being punished is also a crime" (p.148). This is based on the premise that if the law is intended and designed to punish lawbreakers, society should work to ensure that these punishments do not extend to the offenders' family members (Bakker et al., 1978, p.148). In this light, this research intends to increase awareness of the hardships experienced by relatives when the collateral consequences of offending extend beyond the wrongdoer.

### **2.3 - Review of the Literature on Offenders and *Sex Offenders***

Common perceptions imply that, "sex offenders are an ostracized and stigmatized group of individuals" (Womer, 2011, p.65). Therefore, in light of the societal reactions towards sex offences, it is important to note that relatives of sexual offenders often experience collateral consequences in different ways compared to relatives of other offenders (those not of a sexual nature) (Jewkes and

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<sup>32</sup> See Soothill and Walby, 1991, p.127-128; Arditti et al., 2003, p.196.

Letherby, 2002). This is due, in part, to the fact that, “sex offenders and sex crimes provoke a great deal of anxiety in our society” as well as “incite a great deal of fear among the general public” (Levenson et al., 2007, p.1-2). It is this fear and repulsion of sex offenders that forces relatives to “cope with direct and public stigmatization” that emerges from public notifications and media coverage (Farkas and Miller, 2007, p.90-91). Undeniably, the label ‘sex offender’ is “among the most highly stigmatized labels that exist in modern societies” (Mingus and Burchfield, 2012, p.97). Spencer (n.d.) suggests that sex offenders can be understood as ‘homo sacer’ – essentially, this denotes the idea that sex offenders are impure or dirty and embody a life that “no one can touch without dirtying oneself” (p.224). This implies that relatives of sex offenders are automatically tainted once a loved one’s sex offence(s) is discovered or becomes public knowledge.

Additionally, while the general public typically views sex offenders as dangerous, they are also highly discriminated against by other types of offenders (Holmes and Holmes, 2002; Quinn et al., 2004). Particularly notable for this research is Condry’s (2007) finding that relatives feared other prisoners learning of their loved one’s sexually offending behaviour, as sex offenders often experience higher levels of isolation and stigma than other offenders (p.57). Furthermore, the Legislative Assembly for the ACT (2004) states,

The types of crimes committed or alleged to have been committed by a family member can lead to particular forms of discrimination and harassment. This is over and above the stigma associated with offending generally... for example, the women partners and children of child sex offenders often live with enormous shame and secrecy (p.37).

Complementary to this idea is Farkas and Millers’ (2007) findings that demonstrate that when a loved one commits a sex offence, “many family members reported feeling as though they were convicted of a sex offence themselves” (p.90; see also Arditti et al., 2003). Even though these relatives have not committed a sex offence, “their identities as spouses, parents, siblings, and children are suspended while they try to negotiate their daily lives” (Farkas and Miller, 2007, p.90).

It is in this way that relatives understand themselves almost solely by their relation to a convicted sex offender. Moreover, studies have found that families of convicted sex offenders were ostracized or shunned by neighbours, community members, and acquaintances.<sup>33</sup> Notably, some studies suggest that partners of convicted sex offenders would have preferred their loved one to have been convicted of murder as opposed to sex offences as its ‘moral distinction’ targets them as ‘perverts’,<sup>34</sup> thereby intensifying the stigmatizing characteristics.

## **2.4 - Review of the Literature on Stigmatization, Shame and Blame**

For the purposes of this study, stigma is utilized in two distinct ways: a concept and a theory.<sup>35</sup> This section focuses on conceptualizing stigma in accordance with how relatives experience the stigma of a loved one committing a sex offence as well as their relation to a ‘criminal’ (Bakker et al., 1978, p.143). Essentially, stigma refers to the idea that the general public<sup>36</sup> ‘discredits and isolates’ certain individuals or social groups based on a particular characteristic (Grattet, 2011, p.187).<sup>37</sup> Broadly speaking, “a person who is stigmatized is a person whose social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity – the person is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others” (Crocker, Major and Steele, 1998, p.504 cited in Dovidio, J., Major, B. and Crocker, J., 2000, p.1). In essence, those who are stigmatized become “the targets of negative stereotypes and elicit emotional reactions such as pity, anger, anxiety or disgust” (Crocker and Quinn, 2000, p.153), and thus, face a multitude of hardships and difficulties in their

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<sup>33</sup> See Zevitz and Farkas, 2000; Farkas and Miller, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> See Winder and Gough, 2010, p.133; Blagden et al., 2011, p.569.

<sup>35</sup> With this in mind, stigma in this chapter focuses on how various scholars have discussed stigma conceptually as well as in relation to the relatives of sex offenders. In other words, it emphasizes the ways in which people experience stigma due to varying circumstances. In the following chapter, stigma is discussed in relation to Erving Goffman’s (1963) theory of stigma.

<sup>36</sup> The general public is defined as those outside the realm of an offender’s family or friends as well as those outside the victim’s family and friends.

<sup>37</sup> Examples of these discredited social groups include the mentally ill, exotic dancers, disabled individuals, those with AIDs or ethnic and racial minorities (see Devine et al., 1999; Link and Phelan, 2001; Muhlbauer, 2002; Le Poire et al., 2004; Varas-Díaz et al., 2005; Grattet, 2011).

private and public lives, such as secondary stigma, shame and blame (Condry, 2007, p.61; Yang et al., 2006, p.1529).<sup>38</sup>

In order to conceptualize the stigma applied to relatives of sex offenders, I borrow the term ‘secondary stigma’ from Condry (2007) who attributes it to a “stigma by contagion – an extension of the offender’s stigma traveling through kinship ties – and a stigma attached to the new identity the relative holds as a ‘*mother of a murderer*’ or a ‘*wife of a sex offender*’ and the blame this new status attracts” (p.62).<sup>39</sup> To elaborate, sex offenders experience stigma as they are direct producers of the offending behaviour; relatives on the other hand, experience an extension or transference of this stigma on a secondary level for simply being acquainted with or having a close relation to a sex offender.

### Shame

A common resulting emotion of stigma is shame. Nussbaum (2004) states that, “shame... pertains to the whole self, rather than to a specific act of the self... in shame one feels inadequate, lacking some desired type of completeness of perfectness” (p.184). In other words, relation to an offender delimits one’s attainment of perfection. Moreover, Braithwaite (1989) supports this definition by suggesting that shaming is “enhanced by shame being directed not only at the individual offender but also at her family” (p.83). It is believed that those related to the offender “feel shame in their own eyes, and are forced to hide from the shaming gaze of others” (Nussbaum, 2004, p.284). Relatives of any individual (offender or not) play a large role in the way one understands another individual because “the actions of our close kin can cause us to well with pride or to hang our heads in shame” (Condry, 2007, p.5).

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<sup>38</sup> Stigma and shame are used interchangeably throughout this paper, as shame is considered to be one of the most prevalent and significant emotions arising from one’s experience of stigma (Nussbaum, 2004; Condry, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> In addition, Austin (2004) likens stigmas to contagious diseases wherein those associated with the offender are also strongly affected (p.175).

### *Blame and Responsibility*<sup>40</sup>

For the purpose of this paper, responsibility refers to any reaction and/or accountability developed, felt, or expressed by the family members<sup>41</sup> or relatives of a sexual offender towards the victim(s), community, offender, victim's family, or public at large. Relatives often find themselves forced to account for the offence committed by their loved one (Fishman, 1990, p.119; Condry, 2007, p.22). In fact, oftentimes relatives of sexual offenders will claim part responsibility for the actions of their loved ones based on the belief that they may have been able to prevent the offending behaviour from occurring (Condry, 2007, p.129). In a similar vein, Condry (2007) found that the participants in her study "felt their grief was not legitimized because they were seen as somehow implicated and not free of blame" (p.27). This refers to the idea that relatives of offenders feel as though it was their duty or responsibility to prevent the offence from occurring. This resulting shame has been termed the 'web of shame' as the blame and shame gravitates from the sex offender at the center to the relatives on the outside (Condry, 2007, p.129).<sup>42</sup>

## **2.5 - Review of the Literature on Media and Crime**

In the next step of unpacking the elements of this research study, it is imperative to look at the literature pertaining to the link between offences and media portrayals. It is crucial to emphasize that when discussing media as a collateral consequence for the relatives of sex offenders,<sup>43</sup> it does not refer solely to the media's portrayal of these relatives; rather, the distinction is that these relatives are

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<sup>40</sup> Responsibility and blame are interchangeable throughout this paper as they refer to the same idea.

<sup>41</sup> 'Family member' refers to "a kinship unit consisting of a group of individuals united by blood or by marital, adoptive, or other intimate ties" (APA Dictionary of Psychology: 'family', 2007, p.366).

<sup>42</sup> In fact, the feeling of blame is especially held by wives of sex offenders as they are particularly vulnerable to the press as "they are portrayed either as crazy to stay married to their husbands or as disloyal to break away" (Soothill and Walby, 1991, p.128). In addition, mothers of sex offenders are also often blamed for giving birth to the offender and for their role in raising the individual (Condry, 2007, p.130).

<sup>43</sup> Within this paper, the term 'offender' refers to the umbrella term of offender for those who have been accused or convicted of breaching any of the sex offender laws listed in the Criminal Code in Canada, unless I have specifically stated another type of offence/offender. Keeping in mind the social construction of the term 'sexual offender' (see footnote 4), I have chosen to utilize a broad definition provided by Statistics Canada (2008) in which 'sexual assault' refers to "all incidents of unwanted sexual activity, including sexual attacks and sexual touching."

impacted not only by the portrayal of themselves (if applicable), but also by the media's portrayal of their loved one and their alleged or convicted offending behaviour.<sup>44</sup>

The mass media is one of the world's most powerful and influential institutions that fosters, instills, deters, and encourages the thinking of individuals in any given society (Ojo, 2006, p.352; see also Santander Molina, 2009).<sup>45</sup> While other factors may be at play in affecting people's lives (Banks, 2005, p.183), the media is the primary resource through which the general public may learn about their society (Sacco, 1982, p.476).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the media plays an especially large role in shaping the perceptions of crime held by the general public (Sacco, 1982; Boda and Szabó, 2011, p.329). In particular, Burchfield and Mingus (2008) state that it has only been recently that the media has focused on the acts of sexual offenders "to the extent that public opinion of sex offenders is informed by these media portrayals" (p.358).<sup>47</sup>

The existence of so-called 'criminals' and violence tends to receive an abundance of mainstream media coverage and attention (Paulsen, 2003, p.290; Spencer, 2005, p.47; Munn, 2012, p.148). This public image of an alleged or convicted offender or their relatives is an image that is rooted in personal facts regarding each individual, while at the same time exaggerated or embellished in order to depict and produce an interesting and sensational article (Munn, 2012, p.150). Soothill and Walby (1991) state that reports on crime are often sensational instead of serious; this is further echoed by Sussman's (2002) analysis of a particular news piece: "the story titillates rather than educates" (p.277). This 'sensationalized version' poses a traumatic and emotional concern for the

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<sup>44</sup> This can refer to their loved one being featured in the media, they themselves being featured in the media, or some sort of familial trait being disclosed (such as a picture of the house or personal information about the family member). It is imperative to stress that, relatives of offenders, and specifically sex offenders, do not necessarily need to be in the media spotlight themselves. Rather, the media coverage of their loved one will likely impact them collaterally. Moreover, while factual information of the loved one and their sexually offending behaviour is important to report to the general public, other personal information regarding the sex offender and details that make the individual's family known to others usually serves to make the relatives' lives harder by making them a target for shame and blame.

<sup>45</sup> See also McQuail, 1972, p.13; Adoni and Mane, 1984, p.325; Kang, 1997; Surette, 2007; Welsh et al., 2011, p.458.

<sup>46</sup> See also Graber, 1980, p.50; Vipond, 2000, p.87; Chadee and Ditton, 2005, p.322; Yanich, 2005, p.103; Jewkes, 2011, p.155.

<sup>47</sup> It is of value to note that if the general public does not receive their information about sex offenders from the relatives themselves, they are most likely receiving this information from the news media.

victim as well as the family members of the offender as they must cope with an inaccurate version of events (Soothill and Walby, 1991, p.3). Moreover, typical reports of prisoners or offenders depict them as “sadistic, asocial, brutal and calculating” thereby eliminating “all possibility that he could be considerate, gentle, giving and loving” (Girshick, 1996, p.9). Essentially, the media is able to generate a false and deceptive perception of offenders leading the public to create uninformed judgments regarding these individuals. In actuality, media coverage of criminalized people seldom reports “the troubled childhoods, poor work histories, broken families, or drug and alcohol abuse that exist in the majority of cases” (Girshick, 1996, p.10). Girshick (1996) attributes this to the suggestion that the general public would be hesitant to establish any connection or find any similarity with offenders; thus, characteristics suggesting a lack of emotion, or being asocial individuals allows the public to view them as the ‘other’ (Girschik, 1996, p.10).

Equally important, Eschholz et al. (2003) found in their study of relatives of ‘capital crime offenders,’<sup>48</sup> that “media coverage of the crime was frequently framed in terms of good against evil, where the offenders and their families were assumed guilty before the trial began” and that “many family members felt that the media was at the root of the poor treatment they received in the community” (p.173). In this sense, news media perpetuates the development of the ‘other’ and treats the offender and his relatives alike. Furthermore, Eschholz et al. (2003) found that “family members rarely felt that their side of the story was told. Instead, they saw the media as sensationalizing the event and twisting the truth to the detriment of victims and offenders’ families” (p.173).

Media coverage of an offender can have a “devastating effect on their families and friends” (Robbers, 2008, p.15), as well as draw unwanted attention to the offender’s loved ones (Corrective Services New South Wales, 2011, p.11). Alternatively, the media may report on the family or friends of an offender to develop a new spin on the story such as the upbringing and background of the

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<sup>48</sup> While ‘capital crimes’ and ‘sex offences’ are different in nature, they are both considered serious crimes; thus, the impacts on the relatives of capital crime offenders may be similar to those experienced by the relatives of sex offenders.

offender that may have led to the offence being committed (Fox, 1999, p.821). Soothill and Walby (1991) found that reporters reveled in their ability to get various relatives' accounts regarding the offender (p.60-61). In these cases, relatives are harassed and thrown into the media spotlight forcing them to deal with further consequences of their loved one's actions in a public setting (Soothill and Walby, 1991, p.147; Boswell and Wedge, 2002, p.65). Moreover, Condry (2007) and Boswell and Wedge (2002) emphasize that relatives of serious offenders from smaller communities experienced difficulties in attaining anonymity due to community ties or media exposure. Notably, Condry's (2007) research with relatives of offenders found that oftentimes, the media coverage of their loved one 'exacerbated' their family's issues and difficulties (p.81).<sup>49</sup>

Jewkes (2011) states that "the media present[s] crime stories (both factual and fictional) in ways which selectively distort and manipulate public perceptions" and that it "promotes stereotyping, bias, [and] prejudice" (p.155).<sup>50</sup> Particularly, news coverage on sex crimes are constantly "seeking the sensational"; in the reporter's endeavor to achieve this, many lives are affected and damaged in the process (Soothill and Walby, 1991, p.146).

## **Chapter Summary**

Hannem (2008) found that the lack of research focusing on the experiences of Canadian prisoners' families to be indicative of, and contributive to the marginalization of this population (p.91). As noted earlier, only two known Canadian studies have been published regarding the experiences of this marginalized group (Withers, 2003; Hannem, 2008). The former was primarily quantitative without conveying or analyzing the actual lived experiences of the relatives; the latter, while speaking directly with relatives, focused on the collateral consequences of imprisonment for all

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<sup>49</sup> For example, Condry (2007) found that some participants had to change their children's schools due to the media exposure and the verbal abuse that ensued following the disclosure of a loved one's offence.

<sup>50</sup> See Altheide, 1976; Gans, 1979; Best, 1989; Sacco, 1995; Hunt, 1997; Fox, 1999; Duwe, 2002; Sussman, 2002; Gruenewald et al., 2009; Adorjan, 2011.

offender populations, but did not place emphasis on the role of the media. With constant accessibility to and the permanence of the news media, it is important to explore the impact of this coverage on those who are directly affected by its content. Thus, this study draws attention to the lived experiences of these individuals and brings them to the forefront while attempting to present their stories accurately and fairly.

All of the elements discussed above comprise the multiple aspects that contribute to a broader understanding of how media coverage and exposure may function as a collateral consequence of a loved one's *sexually* offending behaviour, especially in terms of exacerbating and perpetuating the stigmatization that they experience. More importantly, while prior literature focused on the individual components discussed above, this study attempted to bring the various elements together in order to present a more comprehensive understanding regarding the collateral consequences of sexually offending behaviour and resulting media coverage.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

Scholarship on sexual offending has focused largely on psychological and behavioural analyses whereby ‘causality’ and treatment have been emphasized (Moster, Wnuk, and Jeglic, 2008; Seto, 2008). Many studies have also drawn on conditioning and social learning theory (Laws and Marshall, 1990), behavioural and addictions theories (Schwartz, 1995), and cognitive theories (Ward and Keenan, 1999) in order to understand sexual offending. While these theories contribute to an overall understanding of sexual offending behaviour on part of the ‘offender’, they do little to help contextualize or understand the collateral consequences experienced by those directly impacted by the offending behaviour. Thus, when considering relatives of offenders, Goffman’s (1963) theory of stigma is highly relevant<sup>51</sup> especially in conjunction with Herbert Blumer’s (1969) conceptualization of symbolic interactionism. In this chapter, I present a brief overview of Blumer’s (1969) symbolic interactionism, followed by Goffman’s (1963) theory of stigma. Thereafter, I draw on Jones et al.’s (1984) six dimensions of stigma in order to supplement Goffman’s (1963) work.

As Benzies and Allen (2001) contend, “symbolic interaction provides us with a theoretical perspective for studying how individuals interpret objects and other people in their lives and how this process of interpretation leads to behaviour in specific situations” (p.545). It is essential to note that symbolic interaction for this study would be incomplete without the complimentary addition of the theory of stigma. For instance, while symbolic interaction is based on the interactions between individuals, it does not draw specifically on the perceived harms that arise from these interactions. In other words, simultaneously highlighting the interconnected and interrelating concepts of both of these theories may present a more comprehensive understanding of the relatives’ experiences regarding their interactions with others. In particular, these theories assist in discovering both the

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<sup>51</sup> See Bakker et al., 1978; Fishman, 1990; Girshick, 1996; Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008; Womer, 2011.

private and public stigmatized interactions experienced by relatives of sex offenders as a result of their loved one's actions, as well as the role of media within these interactions.

### **3.1 - Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism first emerged from the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century as a theoretical paradigm that at its core studied the “micro-level interactions between individuals” (Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p.106-107). Numerous scholars have since discussed, amended and added to the understanding of symbolic interactionism from Georg Simmel to George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer and Charles Cooley, to name a few (Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p.108). For the purpose of this research, I focus briefly on Mead's (1955) conceptualization, as well as on the overall understanding presented by Blumer (1969). The crux of Mead's (1955) understanding states that one can only understand themselves through their interactions with others (Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p.108). In fact, it is in Mead's (1955) own work, compiled by his students, that he states, “we are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as others see us. We are unconsciously addressing ourselves as others address us” (p.68). He further suggests that the individual self is neither created nor formed at birth; rather it develops throughout one's social experiences and activities. In essence, it “develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process” (Mead, 1955, p.135).

While Mead (1955), among other scholars, discussed ‘symbolic interactionism’ long before Herbert Blumer did in 1969, he is still credited with coining the term (Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1975; Charon, 1995; Benzies and Allen, 2001). Blumer (1969) indicates and describes the three basic premises of symbolic interactionism. They are as follows:

[T]he first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world such as physical objects... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with ones fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p.2; see also Benzies and Allen, 2001, p.544; Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p.117).

Blumer (1969), similar to his predecessor, further suggests that through symbolic interactionism, meaning emerges from a “process of interaction between people” (p.4). In other words, meaning is formed based on the way others react and interact towards the individual with regards to the feature or characteristic (Blumer, 1969, p.4-5; Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p.117). Essentially, “symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969, p.5). Thus, Blumer’s (1969) conceptualization of symbolic interactionism is largely centered on the interpretations and interactions between people; thus, individuals determine how to conduct themselves based on their interactions with others.

Through this research, I attempt to highlight the ways in which relatives of sex offenders perceive the reactions that they encounter from the general public as a result of a loved one’s offending behaviour. Furthermore, I focus on the impacts of the subsequent media coverage on these interactions. However, in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of these interactions between relatives of offenders and the general public, the symbolic interactionism approach should be coupled with a theory such as stigma.<sup>52</sup> Importantly, the ways in which relatives of offenders manage and negotiate their experiences in light of stigma has a large bearing on the interactions that they have with others within their social world.

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<sup>52</sup> Stigma serves as a fruitful theory in light of the collateral consequences of offending on the relatives of offenders (Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008) given the stigmatizing nature of sex crimes.

## **3.2 – Stigma**

In the previous chapter, stigma was contextualized as a concept given its relevance to the experiences of offenders' relatives. For a theoretical understanding, I draw on Goffman's (1963) infamous work on stigma, along with the multitude of scholars who have attempted to further this theory, in order to shed light on the stigmatizing impacts of media coverage on the relatives of sex offenders in their private and public lives.

The term stigma originated as a Greek noun “coming from roots that mean to make a point or a mark” (Simon, 1992, p.30). In fact, ancient Greeks would often cut or burn signs or marks into the flesh of slaves, criminalized people or traitors in order to publically brand them or to easily identify them as deviants if they attempted to run away (Goffman, 1963; Shoham and Rahav, 1982; Heatherton et al., 2000; Hannem, 2008). These signifiers marked these individuals as “blemished persons, ritually polluted, to be avoided especially in public places” (Goffman, 1963, p.1). However, over time the term has evolved to no longer require ‘bodily evidence’ of its presence; the disgrace of certain discrediting traits is often enough to create stigmatizing experiences for the stigmatized individual (Goffman, 1963, p.2; see also Shoham and Rahav, 1982, p.7).

### **3.2.1 - Theorizing Stigma**

While numerous scholars have studied the concept and theory of stigma in vast detail, often adding their own amendments, it is likely to always be traced back to Goffman's (1963) original definition. He defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting... a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype” (Goffman, 1963, p.3-4). This refers to the relationship between the stigmatized and non-stigmatized individuals in a society (see Crocker and Quinn, 2000; Hebl and Dovidio, 2005; Grytten and Måseide, 2006). In particular, it is the stigmatizing nature of sex offences that perpetuates negative interactions between the relatives of offenders and the general

public. To elaborate further, Hannem (2008) contextualizes the aforementioned relationship between attribute and stereotype through the tenets of symbolic interaction:

[A]n individual possesses a particular attribute (for example, the quality of having a conviction for a criminal offense) which is defined by others on the basis of stereotypes an undesirable or negative characteristic. This attribute, and others' negative perceptions of it, results in avoidance or discriminatory behaviour directed towards the stigmatized person... stigma is not inherent in the individual attribute, but is realized in interaction with other (so-called normal) persons (Hannem, 2008, p.39).

Considered in light of the current research, stigma that is experienced by relatives of sex offenders is typically borne from the overall fact (or attribute) that they are related in some way to a serious offender. This paves the way to the collective thinking (or stereotype) that serious offenders and their relations are, to use a popular adage, 'cut from the same cloth'. This term is often referred to as 'guilt-by-association' (Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008).<sup>53</sup> It is in this way that relatives are stigmatized and marginalized in a society; in a sense, the stigma that emanates from a sex offender and their behaviour is transmittable upon those closest to them (Condry, 2007). Goffman (1963) further propels the notion that individuals with a stigma are differentiated from others; in this sense, they are considered and seen as "less desirable" and "not quite human" (p.3-5) Specifically, the stigmatized individual is then demoted from a whole person to a "tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p.3). Additionally, Goffman (1963) suggests that 'normal' individuals (those who do not possess a stigmatic characteristic) feel compelled to actively avoid stigmatized individuals (p.12); in so doing, relatives of sex offenders are further isolated from their communities. In this light, the label of 'relative of a sex offender' causes these individuals to have a constant fear, anxiety, and insecurity of being identified as such (Goffman, 1963, p.13).

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<sup>53</sup> As stigmatizing attributes are viewed differently in different social settings and cultures, it is often the context of the attribute that determines whether or not one will be stigmatized (see Hannem, 2008, p.40). However, relatives of sex offenders, typically receive the same treatment in almost all cultures, as most cultures view sexual offending in similar ways.

While Goffman (1963) distinguished between three types of stigma,<sup>54</sup> for the purpose of this research, the type of stigma that I am most concerned with are the ‘blemishes of individual character’ which are “perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonest, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism [etc]” (Goffman, 1963, p.4; see also Goffman, 1997). ‘Blemishes’ through Goffman’s (1963) understanding refer to those in direct possession of a stigmatizing characteristic; in this study, I have adapted the concept to illustrate the ways in which one’s association with a stigmatized person may result in their development as a stigmatized individual as well. In other words, these ‘blemishes’ refer to the personal failures of the individual in question, the offender (Hannem, 2008, p.46); for relatives of sex offenders, this is heightened. While sex offenders are stigmatized for their direct actions against another individual, relatives of sex offenders are stigmatized purely for their relation to the offender. In particular, while these individuals most likely have not committed any ‘crime’, they are still stigmatized by association for their relationship to a criminalized person.

An important aspect of stigma introduced in Goffman’s (1963) seminal text, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, is the distinction between ‘discredited’ and ‘discreditable’ persons. A ‘discredited’ person refers to individuals who believe that their stigma is blatantly visible to others, and consequently, that the stigmatizing characteristic is known within their community. In other words, when a “stigmatized person’s failing can be perceived by our merely directing attention (typically, visual) to him,” this person is ‘discredited’ (Goffman, 1963, p.16). For example, if an individual of a family that is well known in the community commits a serious crime, the rest of the family members tend to automatically become ‘discredited individuals’. Alternatively, even when a family that is not well known is thrown into the media spotlight as a result of one of its member’s

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<sup>54</sup> The other two types of stigma refer to the “abominations of the body” such as physical deformities and the “tribal stigma of race, nation and religion” referring to stigma passed on through lineages of a family (Goffman, 1963, p.4).

committing a serious offence, they may still become ‘discredited’ simply upon recognition from others.

On the other hand, a ‘discreditable’ person is one who has the potential to be ‘discredited’ and has the ability to ‘pass’; simply put, the stigmatizing characteristic of a person is not visible and others are not easily aware of it nor does it come to be easily known by others (Goffman, 1963, p.17; see also Stefan, 2003).<sup>55</sup> In this light, it follows that “a discreditable person is not saddled with a continuous label, not subject to stigma in every interaction” (Hannem, 2008, p.42). In these situations, Goffman (1963) suggests the potentiality of “passing”; individuals are given the option of whether or not to reveal their stigmatizing characteristic or identity to others (p.73). In other words, the stigmatized individual is confronted with the question of whether to “display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where” (Goffman, 1963, p.42). He further notes that ‘discreditable individuals’ are often at risk of finding themselves in problematic instances when they are seen and accepted as ‘normal’ by those who would typically discriminate against individuals with those same stigmatizing characteristics (Goffman, 1963, p.42). For example, they may be seen as “duplicitous or deceitful in attempting to ‘pass’ as normal” (Hannem, 2008, p.42-43). Thus, individuals are given the choice of whether or not to reveal their circumstances to others; however, this is also largely dependent on the visibility of their stigmatizing characteristic (Hannem, 2008, p.49).<sup>56</sup>

To put the above into perspective in relation to the current study, relatives of sex offenders may find that they fall under either of the two distinctions of stigma. In other words, in cases where there is extensive media coverage, there is less of an opportunity to ‘pass’, as information of their loved one’s offending is revealed to the general public. In fact, in discussing fame and infamy,

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<sup>55</sup> Essentially, the concept of ‘passing’ refers to the concealment of discrediting information (Goffman, 1963, p.42).

<sup>56</sup> For instance, individuals with visible physical deformities will find that it is close to impossible to conceal their abnormalities, as they are readily apparent. However, individuals with character flaws will often face less of a challenge in attempting to conceal these stigmatizing features, as they are not readily apparent to others (see Hannem, 2008, p.41).

Goffman (1963) states that, “the mass media play the central role here, making it possible for a ‘private’ person to be transformed into a ‘public’ figure” (p.71). However, in cases where there is minimal media coverage, relatives are occasionally able to conceal their stigma to others. For example, individuals who do not share a surname or physically visible characteristics (such as identical twins) to the offender may also face less of a challenge in trying to conceal their relation. The ability to ‘pass’ is essential, as being able to reveal a stigma to others on their own terms (as opposed to the media’s account) can be extremely beneficial to relatives of sex offenders if they are afforded the opportunity to do so.

Goffman (1963) further raises the concept of ‘sympathetic others’ and the two subgroups that follow.<sup>57</sup> Sympathetic others refer to individuals who are able to take the standpoint of the stigmatized individual and “share with him the feeling that he is human and ‘essentially’ normal in spite of appearances and in spite of his own self-doubts” (Goffman, 1963, p.19). The first subgroup is classified as the ‘own’. These are individuals who “share his stigma” (Goffman, 1963, p.19). In other words, they understand through their own experiences, the circumstances of the particular stigma as they too are burdened with it. This group is useful for providing assistance and moral support as well as tips to manage the stigma (Goffman, 1963, p.20; see also Kaufman and Johnson, 2004). For example, in the case of relatives of sex offenders, there are groups within which mothers, fathers, children, entire families or relatives of offenders are able to come together to discuss their feelings and experiences and provide support for each other.

The second group, referred to as the ‘wise’ refers to individuals who have been allowed in, such as those individuals with whom the stigmatized person informs or shares about their

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<sup>57</sup> For the purposes of this study, both positive and supportive reactions by others will also be highlighted. It is important for a study such as this one to shed light on the various types of support that vulnerable populations, such as relatives of sex offenders, may receive. Furthermore, the two groups, the ‘own’ and the ‘wise’ will be discussed, but it is important to note that the relatives of sex offenders are able to find sympathetic others from both groups.

stigmatizing characteristic.<sup>58</sup> In other words, due to their relation to a stigmatized person, they are granted special access within which to understand the circumstances of the stigmatized individual. It is often through this group of sympathetic others that stigmatized people are allowed to be themselves and are comforted in knowing that they have some form of support and are often considered to be “ordinary others” (Goffman, 1963, p.28).

Finally, Goffman (1963) states that, “the problems faced by stigmatized persons spreads out in waves, but of diminishing intensity” (p.30). For example, relatives of sex offenders often encounter extremely challenging problems while those not as closely related or acquainted with the offender will face some issues to a lesser degree, if at all. This type of stigma that is transferred or that gravitates onto others has been termed a ‘courtesy stigma’ or a ‘sticky stigma’ – in simple terms, this is a stigma that is contagious to those around the individual with the stigmatizing characteristic. Indeed, a ‘sticky stigma’<sup>59</sup> occurs when the stigma “is spread from the stigmatized individual to those close to him or her” (Hannem, 2008, p.64). Hannem (2008) further suggests that individuals contaminated by a ‘sticky stigma’ or a ‘courtesy stigma’ are “marked by association” (p.64; see also Hannem, 2010; Hannem, 2012; Hannem, 2012b); in other words, those who are stigmatized due to their relation to a sex offender are ‘marked’ as tainted by others. This study explores the media’s ability to ‘mark’ these relatives due to their association to an offender and thereby impact their public and private relations through a ‘sticky’ or ‘courtesy’ stigma.

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<sup>58</sup> For example, those with whom relatives share their circumstances, such as support groups. However, relatives sometimes choose to not share these circumstances even with these groups – as was the case with some of the participants in this study.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Courtesy stigma’ has also been defined by Logie (2010) as a “stigma based on one’s association or affiliation with a stigmatized person/group and may impact family, friends, and health care providers” (p. 4).

### 3.2.2 - Dimensions of Stigma

In 1984, Edward Jones along with other colleagues, detailed six dimensions of stigma,<sup>60</sup> most of which are pertinent to this research.<sup>61</sup> They serve to supplement Goffman's (1963) distinction between 'discredited' and 'discreditable' persons.

The first and most prevalent dimension of stigma is 'concealability' (Jones et al., 1984, p.26).<sup>62</sup> This dimension "focuses on those characteristics of marks that make some irrevocably obvious to all involved in a relationship, while others remain completely undetected to some participants" (Jones et al., 1984, p.27-28).<sup>63</sup> This dimension is of significance because those with 'concealable stigmas' often experience discrimination and hostility to a lesser degree because of their ability to hide certain characteristics about themselves (Crocker and Major, 1989, p.619; Crocker et al., 1998; Miller and Major, 2000; Dovidio et al., 2000). However, according to scholars such as Eschholz et al. (2003), when a stigma is non-concealable, the hostility that they face from others can greatly intensify feelings of shame and stigma (p.172). To put this dimension into perspective, relatives of sex offenders who do not share a surname with the offender or do not have their loved one's case publicized in the media will encounter fewer difficulties in attempting to conceal their relation; however, those who do have the same last name or have strong ties in their communities will likely encounter many challenges in managing their stigma.

The second dimension of stigma, termed the 'course of the mark' refers to "those features of marks that determine the pattern followed by socially degrading conditions over time" (Jones et al., 1984, p.36). For example, physical blemishes have the possibility of diminishing or disappearing

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<sup>60</sup> While the authors contextualize these dimensions in regards to mental disorders, it is possible to relate them to the experiences of relatives of sex offenders.

<sup>61</sup> The 'aesthetics' (physical appearance) and 'origin' (how the mark comes to be) dimensions of stigma are not largely relevant for this study and thus have been excluded from this discussion (see Jones et al., 1984, p.50 for more information).

<sup>62</sup> See Shears and Jensema, 1969; Jensema and Shears, 1972; Orcutt, 1976; Tringo, 1979.

<sup>63</sup> For example, those with a physical deformity will find it much more challenging to conceal their disability than those who may be psychiatric patients.

over time, while other marks will often last a lifetime. Putting this into perspective for relatives of sex offenders, it is possible that the stigma that relatives experience may or may not diminish over time depending on the circumstances and gravity of their loved one's case.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the more extensive the media coverage is in a particular case, the higher the likelihood that the 'course of the mark' will not diminish easily over time.

'Disruptiveness' is a dimension of stigma referring to the "property of a mark that hinders, strains, and adds to the difficulty of interpersonal relationships" (Jones et al., 1984, p.46). For example, if the mark is dangerous and overtly visible, interpersonal interactions will be challenging for the individuals. Thus, relatives of sex offenders are often put in situations wherein the very notion and collective societal beliefs of 'sexual offending' subsequently cause their interactions with others to be strained and uncomfortable to a large degree.

Lastly, the dimension termed 'peril' most specifically refers to the "dangers posed by stigmatized individuals" (Jones et al., 1984, p.65). While relatives of sex offenders do not inherently pose any sort of danger to others, their very relation to a *sex offender* tends to pose a certain level of risk. For example, relatives of sex offenders may be at risk of retaliation or vigilantism from others in their community (or the victim's community). Moreover, due to sex offending and its inherently stigmatizing nature, individuals in society are often fearful and threatened by the idea of sex offenders (and by association, their relatives). In fact, Posner (1976) states that, "in our society it is not only the deviant who is stigmatized but also those who are associated or acquainted with the deviant" (p.27).

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<sup>64</sup> For example, since media archives are available (often both in microfilm and online), the offender's children and grandchildren, as well as the general public will have access to these articles in the future, thereby extending the time over which the stigma may remain. Furthermore, sexual offence cases involving children or disabled individuals will also likely ensure the longevity of stigma for relatives.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the two theories that are central to this research: Mead's (1955) and Blumer's (1969) contributions to symbolic interaction and Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma. For the purposes of this study, symbolic interaction is used as a framework through which to understand the relationships between individuals. In addition, the theory of stigma offers an enhanced understanding of the strained and challenging situations that the relatives of offenders experience. This is especially significant in light of the stigmatizing nature of sex offences that may contribute to the difficult interactions between relatives of a sex offender and members of the general public. Furthermore, the combination of these two theories allows for more encompassing questions to emerge. For example, by drawing on elements from both theories, questions regarding relatives' interactions with others as well as within their families were developed.

The following chapter explores the methodological process utilized for this research. Research using a symbolic interactionism approach studies "human group life and human conduct" (Blumer, 1969, p.47). Essentially, in order to conduct a study using this approach, scholars must go into the field and study the interpretations and ideas prevalent in our current society. It is in the direct examination of these processes and attaining first-hand accounts of these processes that make this type of study important (Blumer, 1969). With this in mind, the methodological framework is in large part guided by the theories discussed in this chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

This chapter sets out the methodological approach employed in the development and collection of data for this study. In order to do so, I first focus on the epistemological and ontological concerns underlying the research process. I then present a discussion on the methodological stance undertaken in this study. Following this, I describe the processes involved in conducting my interviews and the subsequent data analysis.

Hannem (2008) justifies her exploratory research as a way in which “a voice” may be given to a “group of people who are often forgotten in discussions of crime, corrections, and social policy in Canada” (p.92). My study also lays its methodological foundation on this claim. While the mass media is given a free passage to report on accused or convicted individuals with seemingly minimal boundaries, relatives are often caught in the aftermath of these publications, forced to manage the collateral consequences of their loved one’s crime in addition to the subsequent media exposure. Thus, this study attempted to provide a safe avenue through which participants could share their experiences and stories.

### **4.1 - Epistemological Concerns**

Blumer (1969) states, “nothing is known to human beings except in the form of something that they may indicate or refer to. To indicate anything, human beings must see it from their perspective; they must depict it as it appears to them” (p.22). Likewise, Hannem (2008) explains that, “the epistemology of symbolic interactionism is grounded in an understanding that lived experiences – our realities – are interpreted and mediated through individual subjectivities” (p.92). Thus, the intention of this study was for participants to convey their own understandings of their experiences in whichever way they felt comfortable sharing them.

With the above in mind, this study followed a social constructionist approach. Constructivism is a process through which observers construct reality for themselves, shaped by attributing meaning

to what they have observed (Von Foerster, 1984; Jonassen, 1991).<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, this approach emphasizes that the focus of the study should be placed on the participants' perspectives and not on the preconceived notions of the researcher. Indeed, Blumer (1969) appropriately suggests, "the task of the research scholar who is studying any sphere of social life is to ascertain what form of interaction is in play instead of imposing on that sphere some preset form of interaction" (p.54). Guided by this, I have attempted to present as authentically as possible the voices of the participants in this study.<sup>66</sup>

In keeping with the social constructivist paradigm, ontologically, this study follows a relativist perspective wherein there are "local and specific constructed realities" as well as "subjectivity [and] created findings" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.109). More specifically, this research study follows a naturalistic ontology which allows for multiple realities and interpretations (Kinash, n.d., p.4). In other words, one account given by a relative of a sexual offender may or may not correspond with other relatives' accounts; however, the emphasis is placed on valuing all accounts equally as generalizing the findings is unnecessary.<sup>67</sup>

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that, "persons choose to do research because they have a dream that somehow they will make a difference in the world through the insights and understandings they arrive at. But it is not enough to dream. Dreams must be brought to fruition" (p.15; see also McCotter, 2001; Mander, 2010; Pittaway et al., 2010). While it was in reading Shannon Moroney's (2012) book 'Through the Glass' that this topic became glaringly obvious as an under-researched area, it is through this study and talking to those directly impacted by media coverage of their accused and/or convicted loved one, that a desire to effect change was born. Moreover, while this study originated as an exploratory project to uncover and discover these

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<sup>65</sup> See also Watzlawick, 1984; Hoffman, 1990; Owen, 1992; Dickerson and Zimmerman, 1996; Van Niekerk, 2005.

<sup>66</sup> This idea is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter under 'Personal Reflexivity'.

<sup>67</sup> Moreover, these findings are subjective as they have the strong potential to deviate according to each person's situation, circumstance, and overall extent of the media coverage that their loved one's case has received.

experiences, it evolved into a desire to effect change regarding the role of the media in these situations. It was listening to the first-hand accounts of the participants that I was inspired to gear my graduate studies towards alleviating the isolation, fear, and stigma that relatives' of sex offenders experience at the hands of the media and their coverage. Thus, as Hannem (2008) states, "while large-scale change is rarely the immediate outcome of academic research, such research is a vital first step toward creating awareness and improving public empathy for the experiences of marginalized others" (p.94). Hence, in facilitating this study, the intended goal and aim is to bring this group to the forefront in a clearer light and to help dispel the myths that surround relatives of sex offenders, while also advocating for a change in the future of media reporting.

#### **4.2 - Personal Reflexivity**

Given the nature of this project and its emphasis on speaking with a largely vulnerable and marginalized population, maintaining my role as a reflexive researcher has been of considerable importance. Reflexivity ensures that I maintain my ethical duties and responsibilities by critically analyzing my methods and practices (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Furthermore, when speaking with particularly vulnerable populations, full and complete respect for participants is absolutely essential (Mander, 2010, p.267; Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman, 2010, p.231). In light of this, it was important for me to recognize that I am also influenced by media portrayals of events and individuals. With this in mind, extreme caution was utilized so as to not treat the participants in a stigmatizing manner.

In light of Grbich's (2004) discussion on the position of the researcher, my voice in this research project should not be mistaken for an 'expert' as my understanding of the relatives' experiences is based on what they have shared with me and how they wanted to inform others of

their experiences (Fine et al., 2003; Grbich, 2004; Brogden and Patterson, 2007).<sup>68</sup> In other words, it was important to treat them as individuals either as part of the process or in the process of knowledge construction in partnership with the researcher as opposed to “sources of data” for the research (Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman, 2010, p.231).<sup>69</sup> Moreover, in order to not speak ‘for’ or ‘about’ the participants (Fine et al., 2003), quotes are presented verbatim and in their entirety as opposed to paraphrasing.<sup>70</sup> In this way, I am speaking neither for nor about the participants, but rather I have attempted to present their points of view in the manner in which they intended.

### **4.3 - Research Questions**

This study was designed with the intention of uncovering the ways in which the mass media impacts and influences the relatives of sex offenders through their coverage. More specifically, it was geared towards speaking directly with relatives and conveying their experiences. Based on the theoretical foundations of symbolic interactionism and stigma, I employed the ideas and concepts to develop the research questions guiding this study (Seale, 2012, p.599). In this sense, I endeavoured to discover the ways in which individuals create meanings of their interactions with others given their understanding of the corresponding media coverage of their loved one’s sex offence.

In order to understand the experiences and realities of relatives of sex offenders in regards to the media coverage of their loved one (or themselves), I posed several research questions. The overarching research question guiding this study was, ‘How are the relatives of a convicted sex

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<sup>68</sup> Likewise, Mander (2010) suggests that, “people’s voices and perspectives are not just anecdotal embellishments” (p.255). With this in mind, the quotes presented throughout this project are not to be seen as elaborations, but rather as necessary in order to answer the research questions. Essentially, researchers attempt to give voice to their participants and in doing so, speak on behalf of these often vulnerable or marginalized populations. However, it must be noted that researchers are ultimately playing decision-maker in terms of who they will speak with and who will be given a voice in their work; put this way, some voices will be silenced at the discretion of the researcher (Grbich, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> In other words, in order to ensure that the participants’ voices are fully respected, I will be sending this thesis to them (prior to its completion) in order to obtain their feedback and opinions. This is primarily to ensure that their voices are neither misconstrued nor misrepresented for official future publications.

<sup>70</sup> In the following analysis sections, quotes from the three online interviews have been presented verbatim to which they were relayed to me. For example, capitalization, grammar and punctuation were not altered as a measure to maintain authenticity of the stories that the participants shared.

offender impacted by the media coverage of their loved one?’ I also posed several secondary questions, which were as follows:

- What are the collateral consequences for the relatives of a loved one who has committed a sexual offence or engaged in sexually offending behaviour?
- How do the relatives of a person who has been accused or convicted of a sexual offence experience or perceive media coverage in relation to the offender and their actions?
- What is the extent of the media’s ability to construct stigma<sup>71</sup> and/or responsibility for the relatives of sex offenders?
- How does the media coverage of a sex offender and/or their relatives impact the relative’s public interactions and personal lives?
- What do relatives of sexual offenders want/need from the media in the future?

#### **4.4 - Research Design**

Blumer (1969) suggests that in order to study the experiences or behaviours of individuals with a certain characteristic, the researcher must go to those who are part of that group (p.47). He further clarified that “for symbolic interactionism, the nature of the empirical social world is to be discovered, to be dug out by a direct, careful, and probing examination of that world” (Blumer, 1969, p.48). Employing this method, in order to convey the experiences of relatives of sex offenders and to conduct proper qualitative research, I have produced findings from speaking with them directly.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, a qualitative research design suited the main objectives of discovering and conveying an in-depth understanding of the relatives’ lived experiences (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

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<sup>71</sup> For this research, I chose to explicitly ask the participants about stigma that they may have experienced. While this is not typical of a symbolic interactionist framework, I felt that it was a key idea to focus on within this research. In other words, I wanted to have a general understanding from all of the participants. Thus, I began by asking if they experienced stigma in any form; it was only if/when they acknowledged stigmatizing experiences that I probed further; if they believed that they did not experience any sort of stigma, I did not ask related follow-up questions.

<sup>72</sup> Through symbolic interactionism, it would be insufficient to study solely the representations and interpretations of relatives as presented by others. It was imperative to explore the population by speaking with them directly.

#### 4.5 - Interviews

As noted earlier, this appears to be the second known Canadian study in which researchers have interviewed relatives of offenders, and the first to specifically include relatives of *sex offenders*. Thus, a major implication of studying under-researched groups is that there is limited prior research that one may consult.<sup>73</sup> With this in mind, in order to learn about certain marginalized or vulnerable groups, the best way is to neither make assumptions regarding them nor rely on secondary information, but rather to speak with them directly. Moreover, qualitative interviews employing open-ended questions<sup>74</sup> are useful for “accessing individuals’ attitudes and values” as they tend to receive “a more considered response... and therefore, provide better access to interviewees’ views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions” (Seale, 2012, p.209; see also Aresti et al., 2010).<sup>75</sup>

The sample for this study consisted of nine female relatives of Canadian male sex offenders.<sup>76</sup> Participants for this research were recruited using two sampling techniques. The first was

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<sup>73</sup> Instead, understanding that the topic was of a sensitive nature, it was important for me to learn how to properly conduct interviews with this group. In other words, while it was difficult to determine how to appropriately conduct an interview with a relative of a sex offender, I was able to sharpen my own skills at conducting interviews overall. Thus, prior to the interviews, I consulted numerous studies outlining the important steps and the ‘do’s and don’t’s’ of conducting qualitative interviews (see Roulston, 2010; Roulston et al., 2003; Lincoln, 1995; Briggs, 1986). Roulston et al. (2003) discuss the issues surrounding novice interviewers; in particular, they found that some interviewers struggled to maintain their focus as active listeners during the interview process (p. 661). They further discuss the difficulties that the novice interviewers faced in maintaining emotions throughout the interview, as some topics were of a sensitive nature. In light of the findings of these studies, I prepared myself beforehand in order to conduct the interviews with care and sensitivity.

<sup>74</sup> Questionnaires or structured interviews do not necessarily provide a space in which to explore these attitudes or values. This is precisely because participants must force their response to fit into one of the pre-determined answers; this technique also does not allow participants to discuss or provide in-depth feelings or experiences (Seale, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Additional benefits of conducting semi-structured interviews lies in attaining “respondents’ views ‘in their own words’” wherein they are able to “speak in their own voices with their own language” (Seale, 2012, p.209). Seale (2012) elaborates further by stating that qualitative interviewing is highly valued by researchers looking to “explore voices and experiences which they believe have been ignored, misrepresented or suppressed in the past” which essentially forms the underlying intentions of this project (p. 209).

<sup>76</sup> Hannem (2008) states that any researcher attempting to speak with relatives of offenders will be faced with difficulties and issues in reaching them. Likewise, while the hope was to have a full sample of 10 participants, this was difficult to obtain. Given the challenges associated with accessing a vulnerable population, coupled with the limited duration of a Master’s program, this intention proved unfeasible. However, the given sample was sufficient for the aims of this study and was able to meet the research objectives. Moreover, several of the participants shared their doubts regarding participation due to potential problems that may arise regarding their loved one’s case and/or exacerbating their own personal struggles. However, in order to mitigate the concerns, I explicitly informed them that I would not be inquiring about their loved one’s sex offence. In fact, since asking about the offence was not within the scope of the research, I maintained the distinction that the study was based on how the media coverage of their loved one’s behaviour had

purposive sampling.<sup>77</sup> I contacted several Ottawa-based support groups for families and/or relatives of offenders. The first and only group to provide contact with potential participants was the ‘Mothers Offering Mutual Support (MOMS).’ This group consists of mothers “who meet to share practical information and advice about the justice and corrections process” (MOMS). Other participants<sup>78</sup> were recruited through the professional contacts of the thesis supervisor<sup>79</sup> and snowball sampling.<sup>80</sup>

Potential participants and support groups were sent a ‘letter of information’<sup>81</sup> along with a copy of the recruitment poster<sup>82</sup> in order to determine whether they met the criteria for this study.<sup>83</sup> Once potential participants decided to participate in this study, I offered to send them the consent form<sup>84</sup> and interview guide<sup>85</sup> in order for them to understand the study process and requirements. In order to minimize the risk of participants feeling uncomfortable during the interview, I sent them these documents prior to the interview; reviewing the interview guide in advance allowed participants to determine *how* they would answer the questions. Moreover, it gave them the opportunity to voice their concerns beforehand and to inform me of any questions that they did not

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influenced and impacted *them*; this clarification seemed to ease the concerns regarding their participation in this study.

<sup>77</sup> This refers to the process wherein “the researcher selects participants who are considered to be typical of the wider population or have a significant relation to the research topic” (Seale, 2012, p.587).

<sup>78</sup> I also uploaded posters on Craigslist and Kijiji in order to recruit potential participants; however, this method did not yield any participants.

<sup>79</sup> Christine Gervais, Associate Professor, Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa.

<sup>80</sup> This is when the researcher “relies on referrals from earlier participants to others whom they know” (Seale, 2012, p.595; see also Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, p.144; Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> See Appendix A – Letter of Information.

<sup>82</sup> See Appendix B – Recruitment Poster.

<sup>83</sup> I also offered to visit their organization in order to discuss and explain my study in person. However, I was informed that speaking to them directly might be intimidating and more importantly, it would identify them as relatives of sex offenders to both myself and their fellow group members who may not have known. As an alternative, my e-mail contact suggested that I let them contact me if they desired. Interestingly, I considered this a testament to their classification of ‘hidden and vulnerable populations’.

<sup>84</sup> See Appendix C – Informed Consent.

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix D – Interview Guide. Given that the interview guide was extensive with many questions and categories, it may have been more structured than typical semi-structured guides. However, this was necessary due to the population I would be interacting with. For example, some may not have known what to share as was the case in many of the interviews with participants’ questioning whether I wanted to hear certain stories or not. Thus, the extensive interview guide allowed for them to think about certain ideas and develop an understanding of what I would be asking. Moreover, having a guideline ensured that the same elements of each participants’ story would be discussed or touched upon at some point within the interview. However, as with all semi-structured interviews, a space to deviate from the guide was offered and many interviews led to new directions with participants sharing additional stories with me.

want to answer.<sup>86</sup> Following the interview, participants received a thank you letter with support-oriented resources and services that they could contact following the interview<sup>87</sup> along with a ten-dollar gift card and a reimbursement for parking costs (if applicable) as compensation.

The interviews were intended to range from one to two hours; however, several interviews spanned several hours due to the ease of conversation. While face-to-face interviews were preferred, with the majority of the interviews conducted in this way, this method was not feasible or comfortable for all of the participants.<sup>88</sup> Two out of nine interviews were conducted using an online Instant Messaging program with which the participant was most comfortable.<sup>89</sup> Both participants were advised to ensure that they were securely connected to the system.<sup>90</sup> Instant Messaging interviews allow for further anonymity (Berg, 2004, p.59-60), as well as comfort of not “having to

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<sup>86</sup> Within this study, I adhered to a particular methodological approach set out by Shenton (2004), Pittaway et al. (2010) and Mander (2010) who have promoted and employed inclusive methodologies. They have explored individuals' experiences in the context of human rights, similar to the experiences of the participants in this study. In this light, I also attempted to be as inclusive as possible throughout all of the phases of this study. Moreover, by providing the participants with the interview guide beforehand, they were able to prepare their complete answers. In other words, it gave them the opportunity to reflect on all aspects of the questions ahead of time rather than being put uncomfortably ‘on the spot’ and potentially forgetting key details in the moment of the interview. Additionally, given the sensitivity surrounding this subject matter, having the interview guide beforehand would likely have decreased any anxiety that they may have been experiencing regarding the interview. As many participants were concerned about speaking with an ‘outsider’, the ability to look over the questions highlighted the intentions that I had regarding the interview and the overall collection of data. However, in light of all of the advantages presented, there are several potential disadvantages to sending the interview guide to participants prior to conducting the interview. For example, it is possible that genuine responses and credibility may have been compromised (see Spradley, 1979; Seidman, 2006). Specifically, by receiving the guide, participants are able to ‘rehearse’ answers, which have the potentiality to lessen the authenticity of their answer. Nevertheless, given the inclusive methodology employed in this study, the ability for participants to rehearse their answers was not considered to be a drawback. Rather, in light of the stresses that the participants have encountered regarding their communities and the media wherein they were put ‘on the spot,’ it was essential that they felt that the interview was a safe space in which to share their thoughts and experiences.

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix E – Thank you letter.

<sup>88</sup> Face-to-face interviews pose several advantages for researchers; for example, “social cues such as voice, intonation, body language, etc. of the interviewee [which] can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question” as well as the ability to conduct the interview without time delays (Opdenakker, n.d.). Moreover, while questions can be explained easily in person, certain disadvantages are also prevalent with face-to-face interviews such as certain biases emerging through the ways in which questions are asked which can subconsciously change the way a respondent may choose to answer (Seale, 2012, p.183). For example, an unknowing smile, nod, or flicker of shock (on part of the researcher) can drastically alter the respondent’s answer or account.

<sup>89</sup> Instant Messaging based interviews provided several advantages for this study. For example, I was able to access participants outside of my home city with the added benefits of no background sounds, costs or transcription time (Opdenakker, n.d.; Fontes and O’Mahony, 2008) as well as having a “satisfying response rate” (Stieger and Görizt, 2006, p.552). However, while many benefits emerge from online interviews, I found that oftentimes either the participant or I would notice the other person typing a message while we were attempting to do the same, which prompted both of us to stop typing our respective messages. This may have resulted in a loss of information shared with me, as the flow of conversation was mildly affected.

<sup>90</sup> Using an ‘https’ connection ensures a secure connection to a chat system (Gmail Support).

verbalize” their experiences, making this a more suitable and preferred interview technique for some individuals, especially in light of the topic of this study (Bestard, 2008, p.54). Of the nine interviews, one was conducted over the telephone, which was particularly useful for the participant, given her concern with online communications and the geographic distance.

#### **4.6 - The Participants**

The nine respondents in this study were all adult females who had a familial relationship (three mothers, two daughters, three current partners and one ex-wife)<sup>91</sup> with an adult male convicted of a sex offence in Canada including a young offender and a ‘dangerous offender’.<sup>92</sup> Of the nine females, six identified as Canadian and three as Canadian citizens of Latin American descent. Furthermore, eight of the participants stated that they lived in a city while one participant stated that she lived in a smaller town at the time of her loved one’s offence and now resides in a large city. While I did not ask probing questions regarding the sexual offence that their loved one was convicted of, they were asked to share, to whatever extent they were comfortable, the circumstances under which they understood the sexually offending behaviour.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout the interviews, I found myself falling into the category of “sympathetic other” (Goffman, 1963, p.28). I found this in cases where respondents felt comfortable enough to disclose personal information with me; in some instances, the participants would elaborate on details

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<sup>91</sup> Additionally, due to ethical considerations, I was not made aware of their true identity; with that in mind, all statements and experiences presented are based primarily on the respondents’ accounts without consulting other sources for their specific cases.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Dangerous offender’ has been presented in single quotation marks in order to highlight the social construction as well as the labeling effects of the term (see Petrunik, 1982). Such labels place “the threat of abuse within the individual” instead of the “social, cultural or bureaucratic institutions” that must be considered (Kitzinger, 1999, p.218). Thus, it must be acknowledged that the term itself has stigmatizing effects for both the criminalized person, as well as their relatives. In light of this, the term ‘dangerous offender’ is used to characterize a small number of specific offenders “who are neither deterred nor reformed by ordinary punishment and who pose a serious risk to the mental or physical well-being of other members of society. The indeterminate sentence permits these offenders to be controlled until their dangerousness abates” (The Canadian Encyclopedia). It is also the highest and most serious designation a criminalized person in Canada may receive.

<sup>93</sup> Some of the participants revealed that they did not want to share too much information regarding their loved one’s situation or offence because they believed that there would be too many identifying markers and they worried for the safety of their incarcerated loved one.

regarding the type of sex offence and intimate circumstances underlying their loved one's cases. Specifically, I found myself counted among 'the wise' by many of the participants.<sup>94</sup> Hannem (2008) suggests, "to be counted among the wise is perhaps the greatest honor and confidence that a research participant can bestow upon the researcher" (p.109). This was made evident when interviews spanned several hours; it was in these lengthy conversations that participants appeared to be comfortable and willing to confide more of their experiences and feelings.

#### **4.7 - Data Collection**

Through the data collected from the nine interviews, it was evident that the study appeared to reach the point of theoretical saturation – the point at which "no new categories or relevant themes are emerging" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.148). This was accomplished when I noticed relatives of family members raising similar issues, feelings, and themes in their respective accounts of managing media coverage of their loved one's sexually offending behaviour. While I believe that a larger or more diverse sample would have yielded varied results, many experiences were similar amongst the participants of this study. However, this may be attributed to the similarities in gender, geographic region, cultural background or any other number of reasons.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) further claim that, "eventually a researcher has to say this concept is sufficiently well developed for the purposes of this research and accept what has not been covered as one of the limitations of the study" (p.149). In light of this, the data collected and the subsequent analysis do not imply that the themes that have emerged are indicative or reflective of all relatives of sex offenders nor are they exhaustive of all of the possible consequences experienced by a relative of a sex offender.

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<sup>94</sup> As discussed earlier, Goffman (1963) presents the idea of 'the wise'; these are individuals who are "normal but whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance" (p.28).

#### 4.8 - Ethical Concerns and Safeguards

Ethical considerations constitute an important and necessary undertaking of any researcher<sup>95</sup> since a failure to do so may create risks for researchers to be trusted in the future (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p.261; see also Palys and Lowman, 2000; Haggerty, 2004; Israel, 2004). Full ethics approval was obtained from the University of Ottawa's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board on June 19, 2013.<sup>96</sup> This section briefly discusses the potential psychological, emotional and, in some cases, legal risks undertaken by participants of this study followed by an overview of the measures taken to mitigate these harms and risks.

Participants received copies of the consent form along with the interview guide<sup>97</sup> in advance. They were advised and encouraged to thoroughly read the documents in order to make an informed decision regarding their choice to participate. Once interview dates, times and locations were organized,<sup>98</sup> I further advised all of the participants that they did not need to disclose their real identities to me. They were given the option to introduce themselves to me using the pseudonym that they expected me to use in all further publications or copies of the research. Of the six interviews that were conducted face-to-face, two were held in a private meeting room on the University of Ottawa campus; one took place in a private meeting room at a public library in Toronto, and three were held in the privacy of the respondents' homes.<sup>99</sup> For the interviews conducted over the telephone and Instant Messaging,<sup>100</sup> I obtained recorded verbal consent over the phone and then proceeded with the online interview.

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<sup>95</sup> In fact, prior to conducting the interviews, various texts regarding ethics were consulted. This was to ensure that relatives would be treated fairly and I would be prepared for any potential challenges that may have emerged (Thome, 1998; Brownlow and O'Dell, 2002; Flicker, 2004; Mantzoukas, 2004; Shaw, 2008; Wiles et al., 2008; Mander, 2010; Pittaway et al., 2010; Sheftel and Zembrycki, 2010; Mazzei and Jackson, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix F – Ethical Approval.

<sup>97</sup> See Appendix C and D, respectively.

<sup>98</sup> They were all discussed and decided upon over e-mail; some may have chosen to use un-identifying e-mail addresses to correspond with me in order to maintain their privacy.

<sup>99</sup> As a safety measure, my research supervisor accompanied me to the interviews that were conducted in the personal residences of the participants.

<sup>100</sup> Instant Messaging conversations and the phone interview took place in a private room at the University of Ottawa.

Each interview began with an explanation of the informed consent, wherein I clarified any concerns that they may have had. Participants were informed that in the case of any interruptions or obligations, the interview could be re-scheduled.<sup>101</sup> From the onset, the participants were informed of the opportunity to a follow-up/clarification interview. This was a mutually beneficial decision, as they may have wanted to amend, alter, delete, or add to previous statements. In addition, it gave me an opportunity to clarify and/or gather more information regarding their statements. For example, in one interview, a participant had claimed that she had received persistent phone calls, which she originally attributed to media harassment. However, upon re-reading and reflecting on the transcripts with her family, she came to the conclusion that they could not rightly blame the media, as they had not answered the phone calls. With this in mind, they chose to remove that assumption from the transcript, as they did not want to unfairly accuse the media of harassment.

Through the consent process, the participants were informed of the potential risks and possible benefits of their participation in this study. Moreover, they were also advised of the confidentiality and anonymity measures undertaken for the interview, while at the same time understanding the various limitations of both aspects. First, in order to protect the participants to the best of my ability, I ensured them that all names and identifying features of their loved one's cases would be altered so as to not reveal them. Additionally, participants were informed that the information would be confidential between themselves and the researchers, while noting at the same time that this information would culminate in a research project wherein their words may be used in future publications. Furthermore, participants were also guaranteed anonymity on my part, as I did not request their true identity; however, they were informed that if they chose to disclose their participation in this study to others, complete anonymity would be compromised on their part. In the case of telephone or Instant Messaging interviews, participants were briefed prior to the interview

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<sup>101</sup> Of the nine interviews, eight proceeded with no time constraints while one had to complete the interview within two hours due to child-care.

regarding the risks of using telephone and Internet connections to discuss personal information; at the same time, they were advised of the possible measures that could be taken to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

Of the nine participants, eight consented to the audio-recording<sup>102</sup> of the interview that would be later transcribed for analysis,<sup>103</sup> and all of the participants consented to my usage of their direct quotes.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, all participants were given the opportunity to receive and review transcripts of the interview in order to alter or amend any comments that they made as well as to delete any information that they believed may identify them.<sup>105</sup> Transcripts were sent to six participants via e-mail and personally hand-delivered to three.<sup>106</sup> Many participants took advantage of this option to verify and edit their transcripts before analysis.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, participants were informed that they were under no obligation to participate in the interview. They were also given the option to refuse to answer any questions, as well as withdraw from the study at any point.<sup>108</sup> In sum, given the culmination of all of the above precautions, I believe

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<sup>102</sup> One participant was not comfortable with her voice being recorded for the interview; thus, I took notes while she spoke and she was given the opportunity to review my notes prior to my analysis of the interview data.

<sup>103</sup> The two interviews that took place over Instant Messaging were not applicable to this section, but they consented to this nonetheless. In regards to the telephone interview, I placed the call on speakerphone and used a tape recorder to manually record both sides of the conversation. While iPhone applications are available to record phone conversations, the necessity to protect participants to the best of my ability prevented me from using third-party applications.

<sup>104</sup> In regards to the interview that was not recorded, the thesis supervisor was also present at the interview. By combining the hand-written notes taken by the supervisor and myself, we were able to document most of the account in its true form. The participant also received the transcript and was able to make her clarifications to the notes we had gathered regarding her interview.

<sup>105</sup> This was especially important because in many interviews participants became comfortable with me and shared more than they would want published in the project. By reading and reviewing the transcript later, they were able to properly consider the implications of allowing certain information to be published. For example, one of the mothers interviewed in this study, read over her interview transcript with her husband and amended some of her answers.

<sup>106</sup> Interviews conducted over Instant Messaging did not need to be transcribed; however, they were still sent to the participant in case any amendments or changes needed to be made on their part.

<sup>107</sup> Fine (2003) suggests that in order to alleviate issues of credibility, individuals participating in interviews should receive transcripts of the interview to review. In this sense, participants are able to ensure that the text is reflective of what they intended to say to the researcher or interviewer. For example, in one interview, the participant felt as though she revealed many unique circumstances of her relatives' case that would be identifiable. By reviewing the transcript, she was able to alter/remove the details that posed a concern to her.

<sup>108</sup> While none of the participants chose to withdraw, they were informed that they would be able to allow or disallow me to use the information that had been collected up until the point of withdrawal.

that every reasonable effort was made to protect the interests, along with the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

#### **4.9 - Data Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that researchers must conduct analyses using the most appropriate method that will help produce the most suitable answer to their research question. Utilizing a thematic analysis allowed me to place the emphasis of the study on the “content of a text” (Riessman, 2005, p.2). In other words, I was able to conduct a thorough analysis wherein the relatives’ accounts and experiences would be utilized to their highest potential. Moreover, a thematic analysis allows the researcher to delve deeper within a text and focus on themes and specific matters (Guest et al., 2012).<sup>109</sup>

The analysis process began with the transcription of the interviews. I chose to do this myself immediately following the interview so as to also include physical details and other notes made throughout the interview. For example, during all of the face-to-face (and telephone) interviews, I noted the body language, tones, hesitations and gestures that occurred during the interview.<sup>110</sup> This was of particular importance, as hesitancy in the respondents’ accounts appeared to convey a sense of discomfort or unease with talking about certain aspects of their experience. In a similar vein, Poland (1995) argues that “the audiotape itself is not strictly a verbatim record of the interview” and that they must be combined with the interviewer’s field notes in order to present a “fuller description of the emotional context and other aspects” (p.291-292). Thus, the jotted notes during the interview served to support the stories presented, as well as provide a more reflective and nuanced account of

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<sup>109</sup> I utilized a ‘constructionist’ method in my thematic analysis; I was able to examine “the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81). Additionally, I also used an ‘essentialist’ method which “reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81).

<sup>110</sup> In addition, within the process of transcription, I also included the “pauses and interjections” as well as the “uh-hmms” (Poland, 1995, p.297), as these were reflective of the emotional and psychological re-telling of their experiences. In other words, I chose to include these because I believe that they shed light on the hesitancy and struggle to convey certain experiences to another person.

their experience. Furthermore, Poland (1995) also notes that a common issue arising in the transcription process is “mistaking words or phrases for similar ones that may or may not make sense in the context of what is being said, and may even reverse the meaning of what is said” (p.298). This was partially alleviated by sending transcripts of the interviews to the respondents in order for them to clarify any transcription errors.

For this study, a qualitative thematic analysis was employed for the purpose of data analysis using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage method. The first phase, based on reading and re-reading the data, was conducted following each interview. Moreover, each time I read a transcript, I recorded preliminary ideas. When analysis first began, these ‘initial ideas’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.88) formed a starting ground for my codes. The second phase of my analysis process was conducted using manual coding<sup>111</sup> of “interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87). Moreover Seale (2012) suggests using a combination of “deductive and inductive coding” (p.371).<sup>112</sup> In other words, I studied the data deductively in the sense that I was aware that certain themes would emerge from the data due to the prior literature as well as the questions that I had posed to the relatives. Additionally, this study was also largely inductive wherein I allowed other themes, which I may not have considered originally, to emerge from the interview data. The transcripts had produced 727 respondent-text-segments and within these segments I generated 102 initial codes.

The core of a thematic analysis lies in the search for themes; “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some levels of patterned response or meaning with the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). During this phase, I

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<sup>111</sup> I utilized a color-coded technique to indicate patterns or similar ideas; in addition, I recorded notes and “memos” referring to patterns or similarities in the data on the transcript itself (Seale, 2012, p.368).

<sup>112</sup> The intention of coding my interview data was “theory-driven”; in this sense, I approached my data with my research questions in mind and found myself coding around these questions. However, significant portions of the interview data were not directly related to the questions, as the interviews delved into stories and recollections of their experiences and thus, in this sense, coding was also “data-driven” wherein themes were based on the data that I had collected, not necessarily fitting a preexisting coding frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.88-89).

combined the codes that I had located throughout the interview data into over-arching, potential themes. Within this phase, I also noted *how* I had interpreted the codes and the exact parameters that I would use to define the themes. More specifically, I collated my codes into potential themes resulting in 77 general themes.

Following this phase, I reviewed the themes that I had accumulated (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.88). During this step, I also further collapsed my potential themes into 11 broadly encompassing overarching themes. This two-step phase required me to first ensure that the themes worked with the coded extracts and second, ensure that they complemented the entire data set. By determining the scope of themes through the extracts and overall data, I was able to ensure that an accurate account and analysis of the experiences would be conveyed and presented. Prior to developing my analysis with my selected transcript extracts, I constructed definitions and names for my themes as well as any sub-themes that were developed (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.88).<sup>113</sup> The final stage of ‘producing the report’ by interpreting the themes to answer the research questions is presented in the following chapter.

#### **4.10 - Limitations, Disadvantages and Advantages of a Thematic Analysis**

A potential limitation in conducting a thematic analysis is that researchers may generate or produce themes using the questions from the interview guide; in this way, the researcher does not engage in any analytical work (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.94). Thus, given the open-ended and specific questions, I was reflexive of the way in which I understood a theme, as it was imperative for me to neither force extracts into themes, nor have overlapping themes.

Likewise, one of the most important disadvantages and limitations is the capacity in which researchers develop their own themes. In other words, the production of themes is entirely in the hands of the researcher (Pawson, 1995). However, measures were taken in order to mitigate this

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<sup>113</sup> See Appendix G – Coding Table.

issue. For example, I coded and re-coded my data several times in order to uncover new themes and essentially, to keep coding deeper into the data. This is an important concern as this type of analysis is largely based on the researcher's interpretations. In order to alleviate this concern, I ensured that all of the themes were explicitly defined, supported, and presented.

In light of the disadvantages, there are several benefits to conducting a thematic analysis. For example, this technique allows for the analysis of a large set of data as well as allowing the researcher to study and understand themes beyond individual experiences. For example, a thematic analysis requires the researcher to code every part of the text; thus, themes that arise in accounts that may not be in direct relation to the research questions may also be presented.

#### **4.11 - Validity, Generalizability and Reliability<sup>114</sup>**

This study is qualitatively-based with minimal statistical representation that differs in the evaluative criteria of quantitative studies (reliability and validity). However, it is possible to adapt these quantitative measures in order to evaluate a qualitative study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Golafshani, 2003, p.602). For example, the term credibility replaces internal validity; transferability for generalizability and dependability for reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Golafshani, 2003, p.602).

Maintaining credibility in qualitative research can involve many different steps; the most pertinent to this study is ensuring honesty from the participants. One of the ways that this may be accomplished is by giving each recruited individual the opportunity to refuse participation in the study. This approach ensures that individuals are given a choice to participate, which in turn

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<sup>114</sup> While reliability or validity are not common terms associated with qualitative data, terms that are 'qualitative-research-friendly' have been introduced to suggest 'reliability' such as "trustworthiness, relevant, credible, and representative" (Guest et al., 2012, p.83). In addition, the notion of 'credibility' is typically the term most used to signify 'validity' in qualitative research. Credibility is defined as "confidence in the truth of findings, including an accurate understanding of the context" (Ulin, Robinson, and Tolley, 2005, p.25). As I did not ask for specific and personal details regarding the relatives themselves or their loved ones, all of the participants were considered 'reliable'/trustworthy and their accounts 'valid'/credible as they self-identified as 'relatives of sex offenders' thereby making them eligible for this study.

safeguards the idea of credibility (Shenton, 2004, p.66-67). For example, participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point throughout the interview without suffering any negative consequences. Thus, by allowing the interviewees to dictate their participation in the study, as well as receiving the interview guide beforehand, it was anticipated that they were not or at least less tempted to find “the right answers” (Shenton, 2004, p.67). Additionally, Shenton (2004) suggests that in order to maintain credibility, researchers should examine “previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project’s results are congruent with those of past studies” (p.69). As presented within the literature, many of the experiences shared by the participants in this study, resonate with the findings of prior studies.<sup>115</sup>

While I neither could nor wanted to generalize the experiences of the relatives interviewed as being relevant and similar to experiences of all relatives of sexual offenders, it is important to note that due to the exploratory nature of this study, generalizability was not crucial. However, certain ideas and themes are predominant amongst the participants that would suggest certain aspects as being generalizable to *my sample*. Furthermore, while reliability in *quantitative* studies is of high importance so that others may replicate their work in the future (Shenton, 2004, p.71), I have nevertheless provided sufficient information<sup>116</sup> related to my *qualitative* study in order for future researchers to conduct similar research on a larger scale.

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<sup>115</sup> It is important to acknowledge that maintaining ‘credibility’ in a qualitative study can be problematic. Even complying with Shenton’s (2004) suggestions, it is likely that in receiving the interview guide or having the option to withdraw at any point, may have led some participants’ to develop a story that would be easier to share instead of revealing potentially distressing personal stories. Moreover, as this study also focuses on the impacts of media coverage on relatives, an avenue that does not appear to have been explored in the past, much of the prior literature does not speak to this aspect. Thus, consulting prior studies was not possible. Shenton (2004) further suggests that field notes taken by the researcher (p. 68) may also aid in maintaining credibility. In light of the extensive notes I took during the interviews, I contend that the credibility of the participants in this study was maximized as much as possible.

<sup>116</sup> I have detailed the steps of my research design, participant recruitment, coding table, and analytical process.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined the constructionist epistemological concerns underlying this research. Moreover, it presented a detailed account of the interview process, the participants and all of the ethical measures and reflexive practices undertaken in order to protect the interests of the participants. This section also provided a detailed account of the analytical process used in the study while also acknowledging the associated advantages and disadvantages of this technique. By theoretically and methodologically situating this research, an appropriate and thorough analysis of the data can now be presented. The following chapter focuses on the various themes that emerged in my interviews among relatives of sex offenders in Canada.

## **Chapter 5: Collateral Consequences of Sexually Offending Behaviour**

Many of the difficulties faced by the wider population of prisoners' families are magnified for the relatives of serious offenders<sup>117</sup>, by the seriousness and stigmatising impact of the offence itself, and by the severity of the consequences, which often include a long prison sentence (Condry, 2007, p.2-3).

My interviews with the relatives<sup>118</sup> of sex offenders revealed a variety of experiences regarding the overall collateral consequences of their loved one's offence and the media coverage associated with the offending behaviour; these aspects make up the two distinct components of this analysis. While the mothers, partners, and daughters who took part in this study all shared common experiences of having a relative convicted of a sex offence, they also revealed a diverse range of experiences that were specific to their respective role as a mother, partner or daughter of a convicted sex offender. For example, it was noted that all of the mothers in this study found themselves struggling to put their sons' actions into words (Victoria, Lynn, Anne-Marie) while the majority of the partners and ex-partners of convicted sex offenders noted a loss or diminishment of trust towards the offender (Tracy, Talia, Julie). However, one partner rejected the claim that her husband had committed a sexual assault at all (Frida); similarly, the daughters who participated in this study also did not believe that their fathers were responsible for the offences of which they were convicted (Suzanne, Rosie).

The numerous collateral consequences experienced by the relatives of sex offenders, while overlapping, may be divided into two broad categories: the internal impacts and personal feelings (section 5.1) and the external impacts and fears (section 5.2). The internal impacts and personal feelings expressed by the participants<sup>119</sup> included their emotional impacts and difficulties, family dynamics and disruptions, impacts on children and/or siblings, psychological impacts, financial impacts, and restriction impacts and confusion of the system. The external impacts and fears that the

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<sup>117</sup> Condry (2007) describes 'serious offences' as acts that were violent or sexual in nature (p.10).

<sup>118</sup> See Appendix H – Participant Overview.

<sup>119</sup> All references made to 'participants' refer solely to the participants of this study and should not be generalized to all relatives of sex offenders.

participants experienced are related to friendships and public interactions, followed by the overall fears and concerns resulting from their loved one's actions.

Before attempting to discuss the role of the mass media on the relatives of sex offenders, recognition of the overall consequences of criminal offending must be explored. The findings of this study echo the results of prior research studies surrounding collateral consequences of offending for the families of offenders (including but not limited to Bakker et al., 1978; Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008). The following section presents personal viewpoints<sup>120</sup> that shed light on the internal feelings of the participants; they are viewpoints that the general public is typically not privy to. Moreover, the external impacts presented in this chapter focus on the stigmatized interactions that relatives experience while also highlighting the fears and anxieties shared by the participants.

### **5.1 - Internal Impacts and Personal Feelings**

Relatives encounter a myriad of problems when a loved one engages in sexually offending behaviour. The following selection provides a brief glimpse into the personal struggles that a relative experiences when a loved one has sexually harmed another individual(s):

*You sort of want to run and hide, um, I actually think I went to bed, I just couldn't feel like I could cope with much more... I certainly went through ummm, I think it was the grieving process... well, the, the anger, the disappointment. Certainly went through some denial, then acceptance, just basically trying to re-accept him as my son (Victoria, mother).*

Here, Victoria expresses the very personal emotional challenges that she experienced following the disclosure of her son's offences. Her comments highlight the betrayal and shock that many participants in this study also shared. Victoria's initial "denial" of her son's actions and subsequent attempt to "re-accept" him speaks to the inner turmoil that she faced as a mother coming to terms with the harm that had occurred as a result of her son's offence.

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<sup>120</sup> I have chosen to include entire quotations from the respondents in order to let them "speak for themselves" (Hannem, 2008, p.101). This was done in an attempt to minimize the risk of conveying a message that the participants did not intend.

### 5.1.1 – Emotional Impacts and Difficulties

*A couple of years into this experience, I had a very close friend die of a non-stigmatized illness and it was a totally different experience for me in terms of grieving, to grieve without stigma. It was sad but it was healthy, I could talk about it, we could have a public memorial, we did all kind of things that we couldn't do for the loss of your family member to prison, especially over a sexual offence (Julie, ex-wife).*

Julie's comments are illustrative of how the stigmatizing nature of her husband's *sex* offences limited her ability to grieve and manage her loss properly in comparison to the loss experienced in a non-stigmatizing situation. Julie's comments emphasize how some types of losses, including those experienced by relatives of sex offenders, are considered less 'legitimate' than others (Condry, 2007, p.207).

The emotional implications that emerge as a result of a loved one's offending behaviour and the subsequent involuntary separation through incarceration (the likely legal consequence for convictions of sexual offending) can be devastating for family members. Many of the participants understood this involuntary separation in terms of an emotional rollercoaster (Tracy, Victoria, Anne-Marie, Lynn) or through a grieving process (Victoria, Julie) whereby they had lost a loved one to imprisonment. Additionally, Hannem (2008) states that involuntary separation is not exclusive to prisoners and their families. For example, military families experience involuntary separation as well; however, in that instance there is community support and understanding from others as their loved one is viewed as heroic. By contrast, relatives of prisoners are often shunned and stigmatized as their loved one is viewed as "shameful" (Hannem, 2008, p.151). In light of Julie's experience, Hannem (2008) suggests, "the public tend simply to be neither concerned about nor generally sympathetic to the emotional difficulties that accompany the incarceration of a family member and this social indifference often exacerbates the effect of the emotional turmoil that family members experience" (p.151).

The collateral consequences of sexual offending occur almost immediately upon the discovery of the incident(s). The emotionally paralyzing effects that relatives of offenders encounter are reflective of the harm that their loved one's behaviour has caused; in fact, many participants' related feelings of shock and being 'truly blindsided' upon learning of their loved one's offence. For example, when Lynn stated that "there was shock," she echoed Talia's statement of "[I] was shocked and totally floored at first." In particular, Victoria stated that, "it was shell-shock, and I was certainly very devastated; we sort of lived in a numb zone for that time period from the time he was charged." These emotions parallel Bakker et al.'s (1978) findings which claim that lives are "plunged into chaos" when a loved one is convicted of a crime and sent to prison (Bakker et al., 1978, p.147). Likewise, Anne-Marie and Tracy shed further light on the paralyzing impacts of the initial shock:

*I couldn't believe that this son that I loved so much would do this. Um, it was a terrible shock to all of us. This was like a bomb hitting our family... I was sick for two weeks, so I, I didn't go to work, my husband did, God love him, but uh, I- I couldn't. I couldn't function and so um, yeah I was uh frozen, I was frozen. I suppose that and I would say it took me about six months or more to get out of that state of frozenness, you know, to be able to start functioning a little, functioning properly, well, functioning a bit better (Anne-Marie, mother).*

*Initially, it was a huge shock and I felt a deep sense of betrayal. I felt that I no longer really knew my husband; that he wasn't the person I thought I had married. I was angry and horrified and in a state of disbelief (Tracy, wife).*

The profound extent of shock and disbelief as experienced by the participants in my study are similar to the findings of related studies (see Fishman, 1982; Braman, 2002; Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008). In particular, Anne-Marie's and Tracy's comments are illustrative of the complete and utter 'unexpectedness' of their loved one's actions, a notion that lies in stark contrast to the typical assumptions that loved ones are 'in the know' when it comes to their relatives' offences (Condry, 2007). Conversely, relatives recounted similar feelings of being unaware of their relatives' 'true character' in light of their offending behaviour. Thus, while the community experiences a sense of betrayal and distrust towards relatives for their loved one's actions, the relatives themselves are also

struggling to come to terms with their respective situations.

### 5.1.2 - Family Dynamics and Disruptions

*At the point of disclosure, we had been married for just under four years, and had dated for two years before that. We had our regular marital challenges (ie. distribution of household duties, budgeting, etc.) but in general we were very happy. ... After disclosure, ... He resigned from his job and was required to move out of our home immediately as per Family & Children's Services requirements. He was to have no contact with anyone under the age of 18, including our daughter. We had no idea how quickly the police investigation would occur, or even if he would be arrested and put in jail that very night (Tracy, wife).*

Tracy's experience illustrates how when a loved one commits a serious offence, the lives of those closest to the offender are thrown into disarray (Girshick, 1996; Cunningham, 2001; Condry, 2007) and that the experience can be "confusing, shameful, disturbing and sometimes tragic" (Fishman, 1990, p.113). More devastating is that families are torn apart with minimal ability to sustain or recreate those familial bonds again (Legislative Assembly for the ACT, 2004, p.29).

Several participants shared similar experiences:

*This event has fractured my family. My husband has turned to drinking to dull the pain, shame and anger. Ummm, it's strange between my husband and myself – it is not something we talk about, umm, 'cause it just stresses him visibly so we don't talk about it (Victoria, mother).*

*In our family, whenever, we always like to talk to each other so that we understand each other and at one point our family was almost divided because we had different emotions about how we felt about this thing. Some of them were negative, some of them were positive (Suzanne, daughter).*

Victoria's and Suzanne's accounts illustrate the impacts on communication within the family as each member understands the offence differently; oftentimes family members must come to terms with their relative's actions on their own because they are unable to discuss their feelings and thoughts regarding the criminalized behaviour and harm that has occurred. Additionally, while some participants shared notions of familial dissolution, some participants discussed the repercussions of

their relatives' offence in terms of loss.<sup>121</sup> For example, Julie and Lynn described the loss suffered by each of their family members due to their loved one's actions:

*I would say like, fundamentally, my closest family members had a similar reaction to my ex-husband, which was shock and horror, but not, um, he's an inhuman person kind of thing. Like we had a very similar kind of reaction in terms of we need to understand this, or how are we going to work through this. I think that the fact that my family is intact still is a statement in itself about our resilience. Uh, you know I had a lot of support from my family; certainly there was stress and strain because the whole situation created stress and strain for everybody, like everybody experienced loss, loss of a son-in-law, loss of a brother-in-law, you know loss of, a loss of their privacy. Different family members have different um, levels of privacy so, uh it was just experienced differently by different people and I think uh, our ability to get through it is that we for the most part were able to allow people to respond in a different way and have respect. ... There's been very different stressful points but mostly around coping and moving forward (Julie, ex-wife).*

*You don't even know how to share amongst yourself because we're sort of all on time bombs of our own emotions... It's a loss of a son, it's a loss of a brother, it's a loss of an uncle and you just don't know always how to share because everybody has their own baggage on this, you know, and their own hurts (Lynn, mother).*

Illustrative of Jones et al.'s (1984) dimension of stigma termed 'disruptiveness', Julie and Lynn found that each member in their family experienced the situation on different levels and to different extents making normalcy harder to achieve. In fact, both women shared the struggle and strain of interpersonal relationships within their respective families. Alternatively, some participants found solace in "sympathetic others" (Goffman, 1963, p.19) as they shared experiences of growing closer as a family. In relation to Goffman's (1963) notion of 'wise' individuals, Anne-Marie described "closing ranks"<sup>122</sup> to those individuals who wanted to be in her life. Furthermore, she explained the support that her and her husband were able to offer each other:

*Well, I think we're pretty lucky, my husband and I didn't end up divorcing... This is a life-changing event, so we're very lucky...that we were able to support each other. So our family closed ranks, our friends closed ranks and I would say that's how we managed... We didn't do as much public stuff as we used to. We volunteered a lot in the community, and we don't do that anymore (Anne-Marie, mother).*

<sup>121</sup> For the purposes of this paper, notions of loss refer to the loss of an individual to incarceration.

<sup>122</sup> 'Closing ranks' is a popular idiom used to refer to joining with others or moving closer together in a show of support. Specifically, it has been used in terms of soldiers or police officers to imply the following: "come close together in a line, unite in order to defend common interests" (Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p.237).

The support that Anne-Marie and her husband were able to provide to each other is demonstrative of ‘sympathetic others’ referred to as the ‘own’ (Goffman, 1963). In other words, they were able to share the stigma as they both described similar (parental-based) experiences and consequences of their son’s offending behaviour. Moreover, Anne-Marie’s comment claiming that her family no longer participates in various public activities is reflective of the stigmatizing interactions that relatives actively attempt to avoid. Her comments describe a clear example of one of the ways in which relatives are unable to maintain their lifestyle or hobbies as a consequence of the stigmatization that results from a loved one’s offending behaviour.

Additionally, as households are often disrupted in light of a loved one’s offence and subsequent incarceration, the family’s dynamics are often difficult to manage even upon the offender’s release. Aaron and Dallaire (2010) state that, “when an incarcerated parent returns home, dynamics must shift once again, and stress levels at home may continue to be elevated for some period of time” (p.1472). For example, Tracy explained the impacts of her husband’s release on their family’s dynamics:

*Many of our disagreements and much of the tension that arises in our relationship is due to the restrictions or extended family dynamics that are a direct result of my husband's offenses. For example, he is not welcome at his extended family gatherings as two of his four sisters want to have no contact with him. However, the kids and I still go, as we are welcome, so there is usually tension when I am gone all day to a family event that he can't go to (Tracy, wife).*

The type of tension shared by Tracy can often cause undue hardship for close relatives as they attempt to maintain bonds with extended family members, while at the same time, trying to rebuild their relationship with their offending relative. Tracy’s comment also sheds light on the complicated repercussions that she encounters due to other relatives’ stigmatizing reactions; in other words, the exclusion by her sisters-in-law has caused tensions between her and her husband. Tracy further revealed that she had established a friendship with one sister-in-law prior to the disclosure of her husband’s offences. While they have maintained a friendship, she stated that, “it has certainly

complicated things, as she is unwilling to be in direct contact with him ... she is willing to support me through my journey, even though she has made it clear that she would not make the same choice to stay in the marriage if she was in my place.” In this light, being placed ‘in the middle’ represents an additional collateral consequence of Tracy’s husband’s offences as she faces challenges while attempting to balance her relationship with her husband and her friendship with her sister-in-law. Furthermore, Tracy’s experience highlights the difficulties even within one’s ‘own’ group (Goffman, 1963). For example, some relatives do not benefit from ‘sharing’ a stigma when they are ostracized and stigmatized by one of their ‘own’.

As is evident through the participants’ experiences, some of the most devastating collateral consequences of a loved one’s offending behaviour are the ones that impact one’s family. In particular, the search for normalcy and closeness is often missed and longed for within these “fractured families” (Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2002, p.115). Thus, the effects of a loved one’s incarceration are often felt among all of the family members as they attempt to maintain their family structure during the incarceration and post-release phases. However, families are unable to ‘simply pick up’ as though a serious offence has not occurred (Legislative Assembly for the ACT, 2004); the consequences are long lasting even following the release of a loved one. For example, Anne-Marie’s belief that “time does heal all wounds” resonated with Victoria working on “rebuilding” her relationship with her son; both are reflective of the extended time needed to re-establish familial bonds upon a loved one’s release.

### **5.1.3 - Impacts on Children**

While the ramifications of serious offences affect those closest to the offender, these consequences are further heightened for young children and siblings; children are “innocent, but vulnerable and very impressionable” (Canadian Families and Corrections Network, 2010, p.4). Numerous scholars have studied the impacts of imprisonment and criminalized offending behaviour

on children (see Murray, 2007; Boswell, 2002; Frigon, 2010).<sup>123</sup> Common findings suggest that children exposed to the incarceration of a parent are at high risk of maladjustment issues (Aaron and Dallaire, 2010, p.1471; see also Cunningham, 2001). This is largely attributed to the incarceration-based separation between parent and child, which diminishes important bonds.<sup>124</sup> In fact, Genty (2002) states that forms of separation caused by imprisonment have an everlasting effect on young children, as their childhood may never be recovered (p.1671). Moreover, the non-incarcerated spouse must face the challenges of their new and often suddenly imposed role as a single-parent while their partner is incarcerated. In particular, they must manage the limited visits<sup>125</sup> and the resulting strained relationship that the incarcerated parent is allowed to have with their child(ren):

*He was not allowed to see our daughter (who was two at the time) for five months, so I was effectively a single parent for that time. It was five months before he was allowed to have any contact with our daughter, and in the beginning it was only during scheduled visits at the Family & Children's Services offices. After a period of time, a short list of approved supervisors was allowed (including my parents and his parents) to supervise family visits once or twice a week. Anytime I wanted to spend time with my husband I had to arrange for childcare (Tracy, wife).*

In addition, due to the fact that children as young as three or four are essentially “old enough to pick up information in a playgroup or by overhearing adults talking,” the incentive and necessity is stronger for a parent or guardian to personally inform their child(ren) about a parent’s incarceration (Action for Prisoners’ Families, 2013, p.8). One of Tracy’s major complications was in having to explain her husband’s actions, as well as the circumstances and the conditions of his release to their children:

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<sup>123</sup> See Wright and Seymour, n.d.; Parke and Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Liebling and Maruna, 2005.

<sup>124</sup> It is important to note that in some instances, incarceration-based separation between the offender-parent and their child are necessary for the best interests of the child; for example, if the child was a victim of the offender.

<sup>125</sup> In fact, Rosie shared that her husband does not want her to bring their children to the prison to visit their grandfather. She stated that, “my husband and I are not on the same page on that [bringing their children to the prison] but I choose my battles ... rather than creating a fight over it. ... I have to respect my husband’s wishes.” Thus, in order to alleviate “tension,” Rosie does not bring her children to visit their grandfather in prison; thus, it is difficult for a grandparent/grandchild bond to be maintained.

*Because she was so young at the point of disclosure, she really didn't understand what was going on, beyond knowing that I was upset a lot of the time... By the time my husband was incarcerated, my daughter was old enough to understand that Daddy had to go to jail. We explained it to her by saying that he had made some bad choices a long time ago, and that he was going to jail to learn how to make good choices. Certainly she, and my son, felt the consequences of living without a father in the home for many years. I was dealing with the emotional, practical and interpersonal challenges that come with this territory and was often exhausted and easily frustrated and when dealing with both of my children. She knows (and my son as well, although he is still young), that there are many things we can't do as a family because of Daddy's "rules" ie. He can't come to school events, we can't go to the park together, he doesn't come to family gatherings, etc. For both of my kids, they understand that this is just how our family does life, and that it might be different from other families, but it's okay for us. I do worry about what will happen when her peers / school friends discover our story, and if she will be ostracized or bullied because of it (Tracy, wife).*

Here, Tracy vocalizes her fears regarding her children's future and the potential stigmatizing interactions that they may experience as a result of her husband's actions. Whereas Tracy was able to explain her husband's offence to their young children, other parents were not afforded the same opportunity. For example, Lynn shared that oftentimes parents do not want to tell their children any more information than is necessary (likely due to the age of the child or the gravity of the offence). However, this can become an additional consequence for the non-incarcerated parent when the child hears this information elsewhere (Actions for Prisoner's Families, 2013):

*I have a daughter that's young, um who has really no clue, only that something really bad happened, and sometimes when you do really bad things you have to go somewhere else and not come home, that's basically what she knows. The kids on the street know more, maybe than what they really need to know. But every once in a while, little shots will come out about her brother and she'll come home and want to know what do they mean by that or why are they saying stuff like that? And, it's to give her a little bit more information but not too much information because she's just little um and you know, you try to protect, you caution like you have to be careful out there... You tend not to even let her have friends either, um though you want her to have friends, you want to protect her and you don't want her to be bullied by comments that are made (Lynn, mother).*

As Lynn explains above, while parents have to focus on the overall consequences of their child engaging in sexually offending behaviour, they also face the additional consequence of fearing stigmatizing interactions to which their other children may be exposed. While relatives feel isolated

from society as a result of their loved one's offence, participants found that they also purposely isolated themselves from others in order to avoid stigmatizing interactions (Lynn, Anne-Marie, Julie, Suzanne). Lynn's experience with her youngest child exemplifies the challenges that arise when attempting to protect young children from the hurtful words of others and finding that the only way to do so is by isolating them. As illustrated in Tracy's and Lynn's comments, the stigmatizing consequences that relatives' sex offences have on children are burdensome, particularly because they can be long-lasting. Parental concern over the potential risk of further isolation and exclusion of their children is evident as they attempt to also protect their non-offending children.

While the impacts of parental incarceration on children may be detrimental and lead to many adverse outcomes for children, there is a similar, although less investigated, impact on the siblings of incarcerated males (Meek, 2008, p.265). Scholars such as Brown et al. (2010) attribute the limited knowledge in this area to the notion that siblings are "more often than not hidden and ignored" (p.1), even though the harms on sibling-relationships may be equally damaging. Anne-Marie described the social impact of her son's actions on her other children; for example, oftentimes others would say "the rudest things" to them as a result of their brother's sexually offending behaviour. In this way, relatives' assume a certain level of 'guilt-by-association' (Condry, 2007; Hannem; 2008) and a 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1963) as they are treated differently as a result of their loved one's actions; in essence, the stigmatizing reactions against 'sex offenders' were transmitted onto the relatives, resulting in their difficult interactions with others. Similarly, Lynn shared the impacts of her son's incarceration on his younger sister,

*My child; she ended up saying that um, she was going to visit her brother who lived in a complex in Kingston and that's how she saw it... Not that we were going to a prison, not that's where he was but her little innocent understanding is we just go in, and it's a complex, and I think that made me look at it differently, you know. That we are good people, and bad things happen to good people... I think, in her little innocent way, made it, yeah, lessen that stigma, you know (Lynn, mother).*

Lynn's comments further emphasize the overall desire to lessen the stigma that relatives of sexual

offenders experience. For example, by paralleling the ‘prison’ as a ‘complex,’ and a “university because he’s learning life,” Lynn was able to visualize a less stigmatizing situation for her family and herself. Moreover, the ‘innocence’ of her youngest child allowed her to minimize the secondary stigma (Condry, 2007) and blame that she was placing on herself by understanding that they are good people who cannot be blamed for another individual’s actions and that some situations cannot be controlled or prevented.

In addition, this study found confirmation of Brown et al.’s (2010) findings suggesting that siblings experience “tighter constraints and more pressures because their parent does not want them to follow in their imprisoned sibling’s footsteps” (p.69). These scholars further elaborate that siblings may face increased pressure to “be ‘good’ to make up for the disappointments caused by the imprisoned sibling” as well as feeling “neglected because there is a focus on the needs of the imprisoned brother or sister” (Brown et al., 2010, p.69). Lynn and Anne-Marie explained the pressure that was placed on their other children, as well as the neglect that their other children faced, respectively:

*It’s almost like with normal things, if there’s you know how kids can be in school, you know or um always be nice, and not that I would never not say that to her. But in my mind, don’t bring any more shame to this family... Don’t even get a speeding ticket because it will be broadcasted on the news and I’m sure it’s not, but you know what I mean... It’s almost like I catch myself with her because yeah ‘just don’t do anything’... I don’t want her to be a nice girl, I want, I want her to stand up for herself and be a strong young lady and not be afraid and not be hiding. I want her to be strong and be out there and yet in [the] back of my mind, it’s just, like don’t you do anything or say anything (Lynn, mother).*

Lynn’s comments underscore her fear of potential stigmatizing interactions that may arise in the future if her children were to bring ‘any more shame’ onto their family. Moreover, her story highlights the conflicting emotions that she has through her expectations for her other children to not ‘do anything or say anything’ that will stigmatize them further, while still wanting them to be strong individuals. In fact, her comments emphasize the overwhelming stress that she experiences

as she attempts to both minimize the existing stigma on her family, while preventing any future stigma. In a similar vein, Anne-Marie shares about the impacts on siblings within her family:

*It was very difficult for the siblings because my son had had an extended social network and it was his siblings that ended up having to cope with all that. In fact, watching the news and seeing your family member with the picture on the news, it's devastating. And the difficult thing is you're in such shock yourself that it's in retrospect now that we did not support our other children very well throughout that. That we were in such shock, and trying to just cope ourselves, that we didn't give our other children the support that they needed, and it's only this past year that we've been able to say to them, "wow, we weren't there for you," 'cause it's not in the parenting book (Anne-Marie, mother).*

The repercussions of a child's sexually offending behaviour can often extend far beyond the offender himself and onto his siblings. As can be seen from Anne-Marie's and Lynn's comments, the impacts of criminalized and mediatized offending behaviour on siblings may be detrimental for these individuals, especially for those of a young age. In addition, the increased pressure placed on the other children or feelings of neglect can greatly impact a child's future.

#### **5.1.4 – Psychological Impacts**

*I fear for the safety of my family always [silence]... I wanted to hide, I wanted to stay underneath my sheets forever and yet I knew that I couldn't. I remember that the doctor had called and said, you know, if I would be needed to be prescribed anything, like that was no problem there and probably was recommended and I refused to; not that I wanted to be sadistic on myself, but I wanted to be sharp, I didn't want to be hazed in any way, I wanted to be sharp and aware of everything that was going on, for my family's sake and of course, for my son's sake. That I was going to be represented in for him, as "I am your mother, I am strong, and I am here for you. Um, love to stand beside you but right now I have to stand behind you, but I'm going to." And I think that was um, that value that I have as a mother to my children, I think was more strong than what I was even dealing with in my privacy of when no one was in the house. I wept like crazy, I cried, I screamed out, but what am I supposed to do?<sup>126</sup> (Lynn, mother)*

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<sup>126</sup> From personal researcher notes taken during the interview: Lynn's psychological internal battle was explained with such strong, heartfelt emotion. With just one question, her difficulty of coping with her personal feelings, how to help her son, her role as a mother for her son and her other children and back to the internal coping with everything that occurred were shared in such vivid detail. Lynn's psychological impacts sustained from her son's offending behaviour sheds light on the importance of a family member being supportive to their loved one while at the same time, acknowledging and recognizing that they must be held accountable for their actions. Importantly, Lynn's approach parallels that of many parents including, former Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien and his wife Aline. Following the sexual assault charges laid against his son, Michel Chrétien, Chrétien stated, "as any parents who love their children, we have suffered when our son has suffered... We have offered all of our care and support to him in good times and bad, and we will continue to stand

Common impacts that relatives encounter are the psychological difficulties and consequences<sup>127</sup> that emerge as a result of their loved one's offending behaviour. For the purposes of this paper, psychological impacts refer to both the diagnosed conditions, as well as the internalized feelings of guilt, anger, stigma, or shame.<sup>128</sup> Psychological impacts may also be understood as psychological trauma, which refer to the "results from an event that caused great distress or an emotional wound leading to psychological injury" (Whitfield, 2010, p.195). In other words, it occurs following traumatic events or situations and essentially "overwhelms the individual's ability to cope" (Giller, 1999). In Lynn's experience shared above, the psychological impacts she suffered resulted from stress related to the well-being of her son, her other children, and finally, her own.

Additionally, the interview data revealed that different family members experience varying degrees of psychological impacts. Resonating with Condry's (2007, p.29-30) findings, the partners of sexual offenders in this study revealed that their understanding of self was impacted as they struggled to come to terms with their personal identity following the disclosure of the offences. For example, Julie describes comments from others as "attacking [her] sense of self." Likewise, Tracy describes how she felt as though she was to blame for her husband's actions. Moreover, she, along with Talia, further explain how their husbands' actions made them question their personal judgment,

*I doubted my own judgement [sic] and ability to make good decisions – if I could have missed all the signs about my husband's past, how could I be trusted to make good decisions in the future?... I dealt with a lot of self-doubt and insecurity... I also feel like the shame of what happened will never go away. It has certainly decreased over the years, but that shame will always be there. More of a shame because of other people knowing (Tracy, wife).*

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with him" (CBC News, 2002). This notion of standing beside their child out of love, while not condoning their actions, was shared amongst all of the parents in this study.

<sup>127</sup> While the psychological struggles recounted by the participants could constitute a separate research study, it was important to highlight some of the main impacts confronting these relatives. Psychological impacts were categorized as an 'internal impact and personal feeling' primarily because the experiences shared by the offenders' relatives' suggest that these are their innermost feelings; in other words, these are not feelings that a stranger would automatically become privy to or to which they would gain access. Rather, the devastating impacts that they have endured appear to be experiences that they struggled with privately, and for some, these impacts continue to be a challenge to manage.

<sup>128</sup> Drawing on Davies' (1980) work, Fishman (1990) suggests that oftentimes, the terms 'stigma' and 'shame' are incorrectly alluded to or used. More specifically, she states that there is "confusion between the subjective feelings of shame (or fear of being ostracized) and actual hostility" (p. 284).

In fact, having heard others describe her husband in a negative way, Talia shared that,

*[I]t initially made me feel shame, now it just makes me angry that they cannot see the work he is doing to change. About how they always knew he was a perverted monster. That he is dangerous. At first it felt like they were saying that of ME as well for the association and that i was stupid for choosing to stay with someone that in their opinion is worthless [she elaborated] it made me feel somewhat ashamed and confused how i could not have seen it and how long it could have been going on without my knowledge .... i know it is not my fault, not my actions but it does make one question how they could not see changes like this [sic] (Talia, wife).*

Talia's belief that others were insinuating or implying that she was similar to her husband reflects Link and Phelan's (2001) work emphasizing the variations of stigma and the ways in which stigma is shaped and formed. They understand stigma as "the co-occurrence of its components – labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination" (p.363). The second component, *stereotyping*, occurs when sex offenders and their families are grouped together and considered to be one and the same, which is effectively highlighted through Talia's comment. Moreover, Talia's explanation of the ways in which she understood her own identity (in light of the perceptions that others held of her) resonates with Mead's (1955) understanding of symbolic interactionism wherein individuals tend to see themselves as others see them (p.115).

In other instances, relatives of sex offenders may also develop mental health or psychological challenges as a result of their loved one's offence. For example, Julie explained how she was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder<sup>129</sup> following her husband's offences,

*I was diagnosed with having post-traumatic stress disorder, and lived on a daily basis with the images of the violence, the sexual violence that he committed going over and over and over in my mind. Even to this day, years later, uh, I still cope with extreme sensitivity to sexual violence or violence of any type... while I have made a huge recovery, I still feel like there are parts of me that are permanently scarred and damaged from this experience (Julie, ex-wife).*

She further recalls how the psychological impacts of her ex-husband's offences continued to affect

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<sup>129</sup> Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is "an anxiety disorder characterized by reliving a psychologically traumatic situation, long after any physical danger involved has passed, through flashbacks and nightmares" (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014).

her while she was planning her second wedding; she experienced anxiety over planning as she worried about the perception that others held of her. While Julie was ‘completely positive on her decision to remarry’, the paranoia and memories of others “saying things publically” were difficult for her to cope with. Moreover, Julie’s experience is illustrative of Blumer’s (1969) tenets of symbolic interactionism; in other words, her prior interactions with individuals directing hurtful comments towards her altered the meaning that her second marriage had for her. Furthermore, Julie elaborated by stating that she often wondered if others would question her choice of partner as well as her decision to re-marry. Julie’s comments provide a glimpse into the long-lasting psychological challenges that relatives must deal with as a result of their loved one’s offending actions. What is disconcerting is how their desire to move forward with their lives is hampered by their ongoing fear of other’s potential reactions. In short, Julie’s inability to experience complete joy during the preparation of her second marriage highlights the ongoing and lasting struggles of coping with the collateral consequences of a loved one’s sex offence.

Conversely, mothers of sex offenders shared distinct psychological impacts that involved shame, blame and guilt as a result of their son’s offending actions. Three mothers who participated in this study conveyed the anguish they struggled with because of the way in which “crime by a family member is taken as evidence of bad parenting and familial socialization” (Austin, 2004, p.181):

*I don’t feel guilt, um, my husband and I probably feel shame; my husband, to a very large degree... he has not really come to terms with that (Victoria, mother).*

*I’m the mother, mothers do guilt!... Right, you know, I gave birth to him, I raised him, of course [cries a little]. I think if you were to talk to a mother, of any offender, not just a sex offender [cries], the guilt is just a natural component of having that happen [silence, sniffs] (Anne-Marie, mother).*

*It was just, your, “Could I or should I, why didn’t I see that? I thought something”, but you don’t run to the cops, and say “Hey, I- I am suspecting something” ... I think there’s doubt that I experience in the way, I even parent, because of “Shouldn’t I have seen that, shouldn’t I have known?” ... I think being a mom you do hold yourself responsible in some way like I said, “Should I, could I have seen something, did I see something and not?” (Lynn, mother).*

The accounts shared by the mothers in this study are illustrative of the seemingly inescapable “guilt” and “shame” that haunts them when their child commits a serious offence. Their comments also highlight the ways in which the stigma of a loved one’s engagement with any sort of criminalized action is enough to trigger these emotions. In essence, the guilt and shame that the mothers’ in this study experienced emphasized a different type of secondary stigma; specifically, the idea that their sons were capable of committing offences, particularly sex offences, was perceived as a reflection of their role in raising their children. However, Lynn also shared that “he [her son] does express his shame of what he’s done and he has said, ‘mom, no matter what you would have done, I was gonna [do] what I did.’” The feelings of secondary guilt and blame are still considerably strong and evident throughout Lynn’s experience despite her son’s claim that he would have engaged in his offending behaviour regardless of her actions.

### **5.1.5 – Financial Impacts<sup>130</sup>**

*I had to handle all of the household bills and expenses... etc. I felt strongly stigmatized for having a husband in jail. I was lonely and hurt and felt isolated. Every phone call was collect and very expensive (Tracy, wife).*

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<sup>130</sup> It is important to note that the collateral consequences of penal responses should not be confused with the consequences of sexually offending behaviours. In other words, there is an important distinction between the consequences resulting directly from the relative’s sexually offending behaviour and the consequences resulting from the penal measures that have been employed as a response to those behaviours (such as the financial impacts (section 5.1.5) and the restriction impacts (section 5.1.6)). This distinction is significant because sexual offending is so heavily stigmatized; thus, relatives of sexual offenders are often faced with harsher societal reactions, which can compound their own feelings of anger, betrayal, and disappointment. However, within this paper, societal reactions and penal responses have both been presented under the same subsection (5.1 - Internal Impacts and Personal Feelings), due to the ways in which the participants shared these consequences simultaneously during their interviews. For the participants, both the financial impacts and the restriction impacts played a large role within their internal and emotional impacts. Additionally, for many of the participants, the financial and restriction consequences highly impacted their internal and personal feelings about themselves and the ways in which their personal lives changed as a result of these impacts. In other words, these aspects were shared as impacts and changes on their personal identity. As the participants did not emphasize a distinction between these types of resulting consequences, I chose to present them accordingly. In short, it is important to note that the collateral consequences of sexually offending behaviour result simultaneously from the actual behaviour and the resulting imprisonment itself.

*You have your lawyer fees, you have travelling back and forth to court, you have time taken off to go to court ... I travelled when he was just local, um, I would go and see him once a week. I drive to Kingston every Thursday to see him and have since his incarceration. Umm, so there's a cost (Lynn, mother).*

Financial difficulties are commonly associated with the incarceration of a loved one as found in the prior literature (see Arditti et al., 2003; Withers, 2003; Hannem, 2008). In fact, financial costs can range from prison visits to long distance phone calls to their incarcerated relative, while diminished financial resources such as becoming a single-income household or requiring child-care can also greatly contribute to financial difficulties (Canadian Families and Corrections Network, 2010; Hannem, 2008). Moreover, while it is possible for a relative to have a zero to minimal financial impact, albeit rarely (Victoria), spouses face the difficulty of becoming a single-income household (Frida, Tracy). Additionally, they struggle with the financial pressures of supporting their family (Tracy), which is further heightened by the loss of their job (Julie, Talia). Furthermore, financial struggles are usually an added consequence of offending to marital partnerships as oftentimes the primary provider is incarcerated causing an increase in strain and anxiety on the non-incarcerated partner (Bloodgood, 1928; Hannem, 2008). For example, Tracy explained her husband's role as the primary provider and hers as a stay-at-home mother; however, due to his offence and incarceration, she had to begin working in order to provide for her family. Moreover, when children are involved, there is added pressure in order to ensure that their needs are being met.<sup>131</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned financial concerns, a significant worry that was raised among some participants was the potentiality of their loved one finding meaningful work upon their release. In particular, one participant shared her concerns of having to financially support her son for the rest of his life:

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<sup>131</sup> Additionally, in some cases, if the child is too young to visit the jail, then the non-incarcerated parent must arrange for childcare in order to visit their partner (Tracy).

*What are we in for, and in fact, are we going to have to support him for the rest of his life, right? So that's a consideration you know, how do we make sure that uh, he'll be able to live? Hopefully, independently, but if not, you know, that's a concern. ... Pardon laws, you know, have changed and uhh, tough to get a good job without a pardon, so that's a concern actually is uh, is his ongoing financial support that will we have, how will we manage that? (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Contrary to the predominant findings that suggest that financial impacts are among the most ruinous consequences (Hannem, 2008), these impacts were not as catastrophic or unmanageable for the participants in this study.<sup>132</sup> However, it is important to shed light on the extent of relatives' worry and how they must plan financially for the future with their loved one in mind. Furthermore, in specific regard to 'sex offenders', the label of being placed on the National Sex Offender Registry (discussed later in this chapter) upon release, dictates the limited opportunity for them to find meaningful work.<sup>133</sup> In light of this, relatives must bear the financial burdens throughout their loved one's incarceration as well as following their release.

### **5.1.6 – Restriction Impacts and Confusion of the System**

In Canada, certain organizations such as the *Canadian Families and Corrections Network* and the *John Howard Society of Canada* provide families with several resources and information packets regarding a loved one's arrest, conviction and/or incarceration. However, one of the consequences of a loved one's offending behaviour, as faced by the relatives in this study, is confusion regarding the various processes involved within the criminal justice system. In fact, "family members are scared, overwhelmed and confused with the complexities of the correctional system and processes... families members experience intrusive processes and procedures throughout the entire prison experience, even though it was not their crime" (Canadian Families and Corrections Network, 2010, p.4). Importantly, when relatives are not given the information that they require

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<sup>132</sup> This could have occurred for several reasons based on the participant sample size and the cities in which they reside. The demographics of the participants in this study may have played a role regarding the financial impacts that they experienced.

<sup>133</sup> Many applications for jobs in Canada ask the applicant to state whether they have been convicted for a crime for which they have not been granted a pardon.

regarding their loved one, they are further burdened with the task of learning the ‘in’s and out’s’ of the system in order to keep up with the progression and updates of their loved one’s case. For example, Suzanne recalls learning of her father’s accusation:

*Uhh... this person didn’t come home, and then we get a phone call saying that they’re at, uh, the station, a police station, and uh, saying that he’s not coming home that day so we were you know wondering how long he was going to be there? And then next thing I know, like maybe a day or two later, we hear it on the radio, um and, then it was in the newspapers which shocked everyone (Suzanne, daughter).*

Suzanne’s memory of how this incident was experienced by her family sheds light on the lack of importance placed on informing families and relatives of the circumstances surrounding their loved one’s alleged offence at the time that it was disclosed to them. In this way, relatives of offenders are kept in the dark regarding their loved one’s case and are unaware of how to further proceed.

Likewise, Tracy recalls her confusion of the justice system:

*I often felt powerless throughout the legal proceedings – we never knew what to expect at the next court date, and there was often conflicting information about his restrictions in the early days. That was all very frustrating and demoralizing (Tracy, wife).*

Tracy’s feelings were similar to those of one of Condry’s (2007) participants who felt as though she was a “second-class citizen” (p.61). These experiences illustrate how the limited guidance provided by the criminal justice system perpetuates relatives’ feelings of inferiority and dejection as they are often ignored in the legal proceedings.

In addition to having to deal with the confusion of the criminal justice system, relatives may also have to deal with constraints to their own mobility as a result of stipulations set by the criminal justice system. The restrictions<sup>134</sup> placed on sex offenders upon release may often restrict the relatives as well; for example, family members must cope with legal conditions and constraints handed down to their relative, such as living arrangements in accordance with distance guidelines

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<sup>134</sup> Essentially, the purpose of sex offender restrictions aims to “manage the perceived risk of sex offenders loose in the community” (Durling, 2006, p.317). Moreover, the issues mentioned in this section are not to be confused with the issues that the offender themselves encounter and face. For the purposes of this paper, the difficulties faced are those directly experienced by the relatives.

from certain public spaces (Roberts, 2006, p.1; Farkas and Miller, 2007, p.91; Blagden et al., 2011, p.574). In Canada, “current legislation does not limit where a sex offender can live. However, the sex offender may be placed on these conditions through forms of release, probation, and parole” (Halton Regional Police Service, 2008). For example, some of these conditions may restrict a convicted sex offender from working or living near a school or park. The main restrictions experienced by the participants were related to residency and employment. Talia described some of the impacts that she had to manage regarding her husband’s offences:

*[A] lot of places we cannot go anymore some hobbies we cannot participate in at all or at least not the same way we used to. Even tasks like walking the dog are difficult because his punishment included lifetime ban on parks for example... I felt i had to cancel the internet because he was not allowed to have access to the internet [sic] (Talia, wife).*

Talia’s comments also highlight the social restrictions imposed on her as a result of her husband’s conditions. Specifically, in having to ‘cancel the internet,’ her ability to communicate virtually with others was impeded. Similarly, Tracy shared the difficulties that she encountered as a result of her husband’s offences:

*It took him about a month to find a new job where he wouldn’t be in contact with anyone under the age of 18. It was a minimum paying job and he had to find a bachelor apartment across town. He could barely afford to pay for his own expenses and had no money to contribute to any of my household expenses. I had to rely on financial support from my parents and other generous friends as my home childcare business was insufficient (Tracy, wife).*

Whereas Talia speaks to the ways in which these conditions impact the relatives of offenders. Tracy found that the restrictions created a physical distance between her husband and herself. Given the conditions that were placed on her husband upon his release, they had to reside separately, thereby increasing the financial strain on her family.<sup>135</sup> It is in these instances that relatives encounter further consequences as a result of their loved one’s actions. As Bakker et al. (1978) state, the fact that relatives are negatively impacted by another individual’s actions is a ‘crime’ in itself (p.148). As

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<sup>135</sup> Tracy’s husband was unable to find meaningful work, due largely to the restrictions and his prior profession as “the children’s pastor” and being “involved with the children’s ministry” at their church.

Tracy emphasizes, the conditions placed on her husband and further imposed on her family, put their overall well being at risk.

The above restriction-based impacts are reflective of Condry's (2007) 'guilt-by-association' as relatives in this study found that a certain level of guilt was imposed on them when they were also made to abide by the conditions placed on their loved one. Moreover, these feelings of guilt, resulting from the restrictions, often add to the 'secondary stigma' that relatives' experience as they are made to feel as though they have also engaged in criminalized behaviour (Condry, 2007). These imposing restrictions that relatives must comply with are extremely distressing and disruptive, especially when one considers the fact that they are legally innocent.

## 5.2 - External Impacts and Fears

Guided by the theoretical contributions of Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and Goffman's (1963) stigma, the following section presents the challenges and stigmatizing consequences that relatives encounter through their interactions with others. Tracy and Julie illustrate the complex consequences that they experienced regarding their husbands' offences:

*There have been many times when people have said negative things to me about my husband, sometimes in the presence of my children. It's difficult to hear, especially if I feel that they are making assumptions or generalizations about sexual offenders as a whole. I readily admit that I had many of the same assumptions before the point of disclosure, and have only become aware of the many nuances and opportunities for support because of my husband's process. It's difficult to hear that kind of negative talk from friends and relatives because if I try to defend or explain our situation, it can sound like I'm making excuses, or that I'm downplaying the impact or severity of his actions, or that I've been "duped" again and that I'm not being realistic... I don't feel safe in speaking up because to do so would only expose myself to criticism (or so I fear). I think because it was labeled as a sexual offense, there is a general misconception that this kind of criminal activity is "uncurable". A drunk driver can be rehabilitated, a thief can learn not to steal, but once a sexual offender, always a sexual offender – or so it seems (Tracy, wife).*

*I think in general terms to be related in any way to a sexual offender is the worst level of stigma, with pedophiles being at the top, because it's the most stigmatizing, because they are the most perverted disorders. You would far rather be the um, family member of a murderer than a sex offender (Julie, ex-wife).*

Similar to the beliefs of many of the participants in this study, relatives revealed their distinctions between offences of a sexual nature and those of a non-sexual nature. Many of the relatives believed that the stigmatizing interactions that they experienced were due in large part to the distinction of ‘sex offender’ as opposed to any other offender population. As Tracy shares, the stigmatizing distinction of her husband’s *sex* offence influenced her fears of ‘speaking up’ and risking criticism from others. In this way, relatives come to fear interacting with others as they are silenced and unable to defend their loved one. Thus, one of the most challenging external impacts, as shared by the participants in this study are the challenges associated with the ‘blemish’ on their character<sup>136</sup> based solely on their relation to a sex offender (Goffman, 1963). At a conference in 2014,<sup>137</sup> keynote speaker Shannon Moroney spoke of the distinctions between sex offending as opposed to other forms of offending. For example, she stated that sex offending is considered to be the “most perverse” type of offence that is known to us. Ms. Moroney recalled an instance where she was speaking at an event, after which a mother of a sex offender approached her and confided that any offender is ‘better than being a sex offender’. She further recounted how this mother would not divulge the real reason for her son’s incarceration and would state that it was related to gang activity, thefts, or murder instead of disclosing his sex offence.

Relatives of sex offenders face unique criticism compared to relatives of other types of offenders; this is largely due to the stigma and brutal nature of sex offences. Similar to Tracy’s experience shared above, sex offences seem to bear lifetime consequences for everyone involved, including the victim, the victim’s family, the offender, the offender’s family, and the community at large. In the case of the perpetrator, these consequences range from diminished trust to the overall

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<sup>136</sup> This is considered as an external impact because once a ‘sex offender’ is known in the community and in the media; they are automatically viewed as ‘sex offenders’, with their relatives known as ‘*relatives of sex offenders*’. Moreover, because the type of offence is usually publicized, relatives’ are not always given an opportunity to conceal the type of offence that their loved one has committed.

<sup>137</sup> The Voices of Parents Affected by Youth Sexual Offending: What Are They Telling Us and How Can We Respond? Held on April 4, 2014 at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Social Sciences Building.

label of sex ‘offender’ that follows the individual wherever they may go in the future. Jones et al. (1984) explain the long-term implications through the ‘course of the mark’ dimension of stigma which suggests that the label of ‘sex offender’ and the consequences that arise from such stigmatized offending behaviour may have lasting consequences for everyone involved. Thus, while relatives often have a desire to speak out on behalf of their loved one, they are unable to do so because they fear that their words may be misconstrued as ‘defending the offender or making excuses for them’. This further stigmatizes participants in their communities, as members of the public may perceive the defensive comments as a relative condoning their loved one’s offending behaviour. As such, Lynn and Victoria share their views on the ‘offender labels’:

*When you want to say “yeah, but” it makes you feel like you’re excusing or making excuses or belittling what you know what he did and it’s not that. But you want to make big big big announcement, like “he didn’t do that!” you know what I mean and so it’s hard because you want to defend him and yet he has no business being defended and yet you don’t want to brush with that quick swipe of a paintbrush to be the same (Lynn, mother).*

*You’re just dealing with that constant dark cloud, like a ricocheting ball that just keeps hitting at you, somebody has a conversation, and they flip out [at] the word pedophile, and you’re going “yeah but but you know”, just in your mind, you’re trying to argue that there’s different degrees [laughs lightly] of it and then you think well, you’re not going anywhere with this, so I let it go (Victoria, mother).*

Thus, another challenging hardship encountered by the relatives of sex offenders was the inaccurate usage of the term ‘sex offender’ as they believed it encompassed a wide range of offences. Condry (2007) found that relatives of serious offenders found comfort in placing their loved one’s actions on a hierarchy or spectrum of offences, wherein the offence was bad, but not *as bad* as other offences (p.120). Thus, while the participants in this study acknowledge the extent and gravity of the harm caused by their loved one, they also found it unfair that their relative was ‘painted with the same brush’ as a notorious sex offender such as Paul Bernardo.<sup>138</sup> Lynn explained:

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<sup>138</sup> Paul Bernardo is a notorious Canadian serial ‘rapist’ and ‘murderer’. Moreover, “by the time of his arrest, Bernardo, with the aid of his wife, was responsible for the sexual assaults and deaths of three teenage girls, one of whom was his wife’s sister” (Pardue and Arrigo, 2007, p.387-388).

*I wouldn't want to be known that my son took someone's life for sure... I think that would impact us greatly too... but I think because of the label of offender but a sex offender, you don't get to... sex offender could be just a very minor offence, or you could be a Paul Bernardo, that whole wide again, is painted with the same brush and there's a big difference in... But it's too broad of a titlement... Of all sex offences, I don't think they're all equal (Lynn, mother).*

The term 'sex offender' denotes all of the negative characteristics that have been discussed up until this point. However, relatives found it challenging to frame their understanding of their loved one under the umbrella term of 'sex offender,' when 'there were worse sex offenders out there' (Victoria, Lynn). While the difficulty of having a loved one engage in sexually offending behaviour is ever-present, the range of sex offences was very important for relatives to emphasize. In fact, many participants attributed their secondary stigma and strained relationships with others to the overly general label of 'sex offender' that is affixed to their loved one; they shared beliefs that the general public and those among their extended family members and friends were 'quick to jump to conclusions' once the term 'sex offender' was used (Julie, Anne-Marie, Talia).

### **5.2.1 - Impacts on Friendships<sup>139</sup>**

*After the incident, (and still to this day), I hate meeting new people, because I am afraid that once they find out, they will no longer want to be my friend and/or that they will feel that I have deceived them by not telling them when I first meet them. I did lose friends, including a very dear, long-time friend, because she could not accept that I was staying in the marriage. She believed that people who have offended sexually will "never get better" and that I was being misled and manipulated by my husband, that I was being naive, and that I was putting my children at risk by exposing them to a convicted pedophile. I had to increase my privacy settings on my Facebook account and my personal blog after receiving an anonymous comment on my blog berating me for remaining married (Tracy, wife).*

Tracy's comment is illustrative of the undue stress that relatives experience as a result of stigmatizing reactions from others. For example, the stigmatizing reactions that Tracy encountered as a result of her husband's offences caused her to fear future interactions with others. Moreover, as a result of the

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<sup>139</sup> While this section could have been included in the 'Internal Impacts and Personal Feelings' section instead, it is important to recognize that the experiences shared within this section relate more to the relatives' ability/inability to meet new people or cultivate new friendships/relationships. Moreover, in the selected excerpts, the issues often occurred in groups wherein the emotion and experience was more public than what 'internal impacts' would have encompassed.

‘secondary stigma’ (Condry, 2007), Tracy also had to cope not only with the loss of her prior friendships, but also with the hesitancy and wariness towards meeting new people.

A sex offence can have devastating consequences for relatives’ external friendships. While some participants’ appreciatively acknowledged their supportive friends (Rosie, Tracy, Lynn, Julie, Suzanne) and some participants believed that various friends may not have known exactly how to interact with the relative in light of their loved one’s actions (Anne-Marie, Lynn), other relatives found themselves in uncomfortable situations which required them to re-evaluate the presence of certain individuals in their lives:

*[A] few of our friends accosted me with accusations of how could i not have known and whether i was involved... we both lost a lot of friends from the fall out. we had a number of social circles related to one of joint hobbies but we had to pretty much eliminate that after this hit the public ... due to the nature of his offence [sic] (Talia, wife).*

Relatives of sex offenders often encounter harsh criticisms from others due to their relation to a sex offender and in particular, for choosing to maintain contact or a relationship with the offender. Girshick (1996), drawing on Koenig’s (1985) work, states that “reaction to the man’s offence may include shock, disgust, curiosity, pity, and fear ... people may wonder why a woman would stay with or choose such a man” (p.44, cited in Girshick, 1996, p.37). Talia and Tracy shared their experiences with this type of criticism:

*I definitely experienced both secondary stigma or guilt by association. Many people questioned how I could have been married to him and not have known what was going on. Some people assumed that I must have known somehow and was either covering for him or knowingly ignoring his actions. I had people question my ability to satisfy my husband's sexual needs as a reason for him offending sexually. All of the above statements were said directly to me at some point, and I questioned myself many times as well... About six months after disclosure, I discovered that I was unexpectedly pregnant. My husband and I had quietly resumed sexual activity in the meantime, but we were definitely not trying to conceive. This added a significant complication to our situation. Some people (friends and family) who had initially been supportive, changed their minds once they found out that I was pregnant. They could not understand how I could be with my husband in that way after all that had happened (Tracy, wife).*

*[D]uring his incarceration, i faced shunning to varying degrees from my community due to my decision to stay with him. i did get asked repeatedly how i could choose to stay... [T]here are a couple of former friends who no longer wish any contact with us, especially after i returned to living with him [sic] (Talia, wife).*

The friendships that are put at risk when a loved one offends are often associated with negative consequences for the relatives, particularly as they lose an individual they may have counted on for support. Moreover, Tracy's comment highlights the scrutinizing judgment that she experienced, as others perceived her as 'guilty-by-association' (Condry, 2007) by questioning the role she played in her husband's offences. Furthermore, Tracy found that she was stigmatized because of the stigma against her husband; in other words, her decision to maintain contact with her husband jeopardized her relationships with others.

Thus, while relatives may want to count certain friends and family members among the "wise" (Goffman, 1963, p.19), they find that they are unable to do so as it may threaten their relationships. The Canadian Families and Corrections Network (2010) attributes this to the fact that, "members of society often do not know how to respond to family members, serving to further isolate family members who have usually been abandoned from friends and family. It is difficult for them to support what they do not understand" (p.4). It is through these isolating and exclusionary ways that relatives of sex offenders are negatively impacted and subsequently suffer alone for their loved one's actions. In such instances, relatives strive to find support and understanding among individuals, who are known as 'own sympathetic others' because they "share their stigma," (Goffman, 1963, p.19).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Due to the limited space of a Master's thesis, I was unable to explore coping mechanisms and measures undertaken by the participants in this study. However, one of the levels of support as experienced by the participants was in their 'own' support system (Goffman, 1963). Talia, Anne-Marie and Lynn continue to be part of peer support groups that help relatives of offenders cope with their loved one's actions. Keeping in mind the stigmatized nature of sexual offending, it is apparent that relatives of sex offenders find healing and solace with others who have been through similar situations. Moreover, many relatives explained the benefits of speaking with and having support from others who are either currently going through the situation, or have been through it in the past, as it offers them a space in which to speak freely and openly.

### 5.2.2 – Impacts on Public Interactions

*When the sentencing was going to happen, I went to a friend's [house] who was having a birthday party for her daughter and a lot of the people that I know were there. Obviously, everybody knows what's going on but I felt like eyes were on me. You know and I turned around to my friend and said, "Are they looking at me because of this?" I'm not shy about it, you know ... if I don't feel comfortable then I will let you know because I mean, I'm not going to stick around, I said, "I don't need this". So she's like, no no no but it's almost like that sixth sense that you can feel it (Rosie, daughter).*

Here, Rosie's statement of feeling as though 'eyes were on her' exemplifies the ways in which relatives experience and perceive stigmatizing interactions with others. Following Mead's (1955, p.115) notion, Rosie's perception of the above situation was largely shaped by the reactions of others; in particular, her comment highlights an almost constant fear of stigma within her relationships that is based on how others have reacted towards her. Furthermore, in keeping with Blumer's (1969) tenets of symbolic interactionism, many relatives' found negative changes within their interactions with others in their community. In fact, many of the relatives with whom I spoke described the ways in which their public interactions with others were compromised when their loved one's actions came to light. For example,

*As for the volunteer organization, one of the people I volunteered with, whom I had told early on, decided that she was unable to continue volunteering with me (we were co-leading a weekly group). When she learned that I was staying in the marriage. She included a link to the newspaper article in an email she sent to all the other volunteers saying that I was no longer suitable for the volunteering position as I was not willing to leave my husband (Tracy, wife).*

*I saw people like cross the street once when they saw me and they whispered and crossed the road ... people just turn away. Mostly it's like an absence, of never hearing from people again (Julie, ex-wife).*

Both of the above experiences demonstrate the way in which relatives are stigmatized and subsequently ostracized. In both women's situations, members of their community judged them for their relation to a sex offender and as a result, both women were shunned or ignored in their respective communities. In particular, Tracy's comment is illustrative of Jones et al.'s (1984) 'course

of the mark' as it highlights the extent to which she was stigmatized and judged for choosing to maintain a relationship with her husband; in other words, her exclusion resulted in strained and disrupted relationships with those in her volunteer group. It is in instances such as these that relatives are held accountable for their loved one's actions when they are likely innocent.

When a loved one commits a serious offence such as a sex offence, the diminishment of relationships and friendships is often quick to follow. Moreover, relatives are often forced to 'pay' for their loved one's offence whether it occurs through stepping down from a volunteer or work position (Tracy, Anne-Marie, Julie) or through discomfort at a social gathering (Rosie). According to Mead (1955), individuals understand themselves through their interactions with others; thus, it is in these instances that relatives of offenders are made to feel as though they are also guilty for their loved one's offence. Moreover, Jones et al.'s (1984) 'disruptiveness' dimension of stigma is further substantiated by the testimonies above as they reveal how relationships with others became strained and difficult following the disclosure of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour. Thus, an important collateral consequence of a loved one's sex offence is the isolated and solitary position that relatives are often forced into. The loss of friendships is indicative of the stigma of 'sex offending' transferring onto the relatives as they find that their friends 'no longer want anything to do with them' (Goffman, 1963).

### **5.2.3 – Fears and Concerns**

*If somebody has a reaction to me that I perceive as negative, then I just always assume it's because of this, so there's definitely a trust issue... I find it a challenge to trust new people (Julie, ex-wife).*

Relatives of sex offenders typically experience a wide range of fears and anxieties<sup>141</sup> as constant fears and paranoia of 'who knows?' and 'what do they know?' begin to emerge. Many of

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<sup>141</sup> While many of the relatives' experiences in this section could be considered in light of 'psychological impacts,' I found that the vocalized concerns expressed by the participants were important to acknowledge in their own right. This was primarily done in order to recognize the very real and noticeable fears that relatives experience as a result of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour.

the participants described their inability to easily trust (if at all) other people. In particular, Julie's comment highlights the challenges that she encounters in trusting new people in light of the stigma associated with her former husband's offences. Additionally, Victoria spoke of how, even to this day, her husband and herself find it hard to trust their son and so she must keep watch of him without becoming a "prison guard". Moreover, Talia shared that "trust was a big thing for a bit, especially now that we are living together again after two years separation". Through Victoria's and Talia's experience, it is evident that trust between themselves and their loved one is precarious, even after lengthy periods of time have passed; such was also the case with Tracy:

*At first I didn't know if I could manage to stay in the relationship, or even if I wanted to. It was such a serious breach of trust and massive betrayal - I felt like I was married to a stranger. Some of his victims were dear friends of mine, people I had introduced him to and encouraged the friendship between our families. I was angry and afraid of all the unknowns. It's hard for me to trust my husband after all we've been through, even though we're working on it. It's hard for me to trust other people I know or meet, because I know how easy it is for someone to hide a secret for a long time. It's hard for me to trust my own judgement [sic] because I was misled for so long and didn't know it (Tracy, wife).*

The participants' inability to trust is reflective of the secondary harm that is brought upon them when a loved one commits a serious offence. As seen earlier in the chapter, relatives feel betrayed and conflicted upon discovery of the offences. The feelings of betrayal appear to extend to others in their lives as they are made to feel cautious about each individual that they encounter. Moreover, it is this cautiousness that serves to further isolate the relatives. For example:

*To the time his trial came up... there was just a numbness ahh you know, a distancing from him in and from what happened. Umm, and a fear of walking in the neighbourhood... it was almost impossible to leave the house without paranoia, wondering who knew, who didn't know, um what did they think? Did they know and weren't saying anything? Did they know and would never talk to us? (Victoria, mother)*

*You're always looking around the corner of what might come down and who might know, and will you run into somebody that wants to bring it up and be hurtful and so there is that... where it used to be "let's go here," "let's go there," [it's] "let's just stay here" (Lynn, mother).*

For several participants in this study, many fears and concerns were based on the possibility that they may encounter stigmatizing interactions with others and thus, having to exercise caution in these instances. For Lynn, her lifestyle changed as she was not able to participate in social activities in the same way that she did prior to the disclosure of her son's offences. Moreover, Victoria's and Lynn's accounts echo Fishman's (1990) findings that "wives anticipated derogatory evaluations from community members more often than they actually encountered them" (p.119). Specifically, Victoria's comments revealed her constant anticipation of others approaching or interacting with her negatively; however, her family was relieved and considered themselves fortunate when stigmatizing interactions did not occur.

In a similar vein, reiterating Morris' (1965) findings, participants disclosed their fear of being stigmatized when leaving their houses and/or meeting new people:

*I think, because you don't know who knows? How much they know, and if they even know at all? You become closed and you can't, it's very difficult to make a friend. If you've already got your friends and they know, okay; some are going to be the same, some are going to be more supportive, some just feel awkward and so they sort of stay away, they stay in touch but not, not the way it used to be. But the biggest thing is meeting new people or allowing people in your life that don't know... because you have to be honest; you have to be open; you have to let people in your life and this is a big thing to talk about, ... and then it'd be like... as soon as I leave their house or we leave one another, they'll be on the internet looking it up and then you've got another person that you just don't know how they're going to think or feel (Lynn, mother).*

While Lynn's fear stemmed from the anticipation of having to reveal her son's actions to new people she met, Julie's and Talia's fears were related to worries of rejection:

*I didn't know if I walked down the street, is somebody gonna embrace me because they know what happened? Is somebody going to cross the street because they don't want to talk to me, because they think that it's contagious, uh, or because they think that I'm a lunatic or because they got the impression that I was going to visit [him]? Like any of it, like they thought that I was somehow part of it, or I should have known or, oh when I went back to my house, "oh that's disgusting, how can she be there?" ... I was constantly anxious ... to the point that I left my community (Julie, ex-wife).*

*[I] panicked and was afraid of people calling me to task for it... it was hard to keep going out and taking care of tasks that required me going out alone... some people just looked sideways at me, some avoided me. Some questioned me why i was staying [sic] (Talía, wife).*

Here, the participants emphasize their fear of public stigmatization that they experienced within their everyday lives. In particular, Julie highlights her constant fear of stigmatizing interactions in her community. As a result of both Julie's and Talía's loved one's offence(s), both women suffered rejection from others in their community, which caused them to go out in public with extreme trepidation. By extension, their lives were further disrupted because their schedules were constrained by their cautious selection of times to go out when they felt it would be less busy and therefore 'safer'.

Another fear, and in some cases a paranoia that was commonly experienced by the participants was related to their loved one committing another offence, or the past offence being brought to light again. For example, Victoria spoke of the constant fear of the police and the dread of going through their son's offence again. Likewise, Lynn emphasized her fear surrounding her son's case being brought to light again:

*Umm, there is a terrible paranoia that goes into the minds of not only the offender but into the family. Every time a police car comes anywhere within a mile of our neighbourhood, we're on alert wondering "oh no, oh no" ... anticipating that the next one could be this all over again (Victoria, mother).*

*It could be brought up again ... we've had the storm, we have the calm right now, the waves have settled and yet once the time, you know, if I think about it, I get scared (Lynn, mother).*

The fears that the relatives shared regarding reliving the entire experience is reflective of a fear that will likely never dissipate for them; in other words, relatives of sex offenders whom I interviewed will likely experience the lasting effects of the 'course of the mark' dimension of stigma (Jones et al., 1984) for an indeterminate amount of time. In particular, while many relatives acknowledged that new charges against their loved one would likely not occur, the possibility is

always present.

Additionally, while several participants shared the deep desire to gain a sense of normalcy in their lives, a unique and timely fear that emerged through the interviews was related to the impending Canadian Conservative government's plan to release the names and addresses of some sex offenders<sup>142</sup> (particularly those who commit child sex offences). Victoria shared her fear:

*Today's paper [early September 2013] kind of, I don't know if you read it, if you read the front page of the paper, but it's all about the Harper government making public the sex offender's registry... There is nothing secure in life, there really isn't. Um I've resigned myself ... fact that any day, any time, this might just come back and gobsmack us again, from who knows? Somebody who reads that registry, who's reading it, to see who lives on their street or whatever ... we'll have to deal with it or we won't, one or the other (Victoria, mother).*

Typically, the issue of public registration<sup>143</sup> is experienced most by Canada's southern neighbours. However, this issue is becoming an increasingly important topic in Canada with the recent proposal from Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper who stated that a "national, online database accessible to the public listing the names of high-risk child sex offenders" should be available (Moore, Globe and Mail, 2013). While a vast number of researchers have studied the impacts of registration in the

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<sup>142</sup> After an Inquest into the death of Christopher Stephenson (who was abducted and killed by Joseph Fredericks in Brampton, Ontario in 1988), the Solicitor General "opted to not create a sex offender registry, but instead to improve the existing Canadian Police Information Center (CPIC) system to give police access to more information on high-risk offenders" (Petrunik et al., 2008, p.117). In 2000, Bill 31 was introduced by the Government of Ontario to serve as an act in memory of Christopher Stephenson (Petrunik and Weisman, 2005, p.92; Hannem and Petrunik, 2007, p.156). This required all those "convicted (or found not guilty by reason of mental disorder) of specified sex offences to provide information about themselves to the police for the purpose of registration" (Petrunik et al., 2008, p.119). Christopher's Law allows police officers to release certain information *only* "for the purposes of law enforcement or crime prevention" (Petrunik et al., 2008, p.119). The Ontario Sex Offender Registry was established in 2001 (Petrunik, 2002), similar to the Federal Sex Offender Information Registration Act (equivalent to a national sex offender registry) that was passed in 2004 (Murphy et al., 2009, p.61), under the purview of the RCMP. This database does not include the names of those convicted of a sex offence prior to this Act coming into effect. Moreover, local law enforcement officials are only granted access via permission from the RCMP (Petrunik et al., 2008, p.119). Thus, within Canada, given the lack of a public registry, released convicted sex offenders are primarily discovered through media coverage and exposure. In other words, one's sexually offending behaviour is not public knowledge by law, but rather through media attention.

<sup>143</sup> Sex offender registries "are databases of information about persons convicted of sex offences who have received probation or completed the incarceration portion of their sentence and now reside in the community" (Petrunik et al., 2008, p.112). These registries require offenders to "register with the local police, provide personal details, and report any changes in the information presented. Personal details may include information such as the offender's photo, description, date of birth, aliases, offence type(s), and home address" (Petrunik et al., 2008, p.122).

United States,<sup>144</sup> it is not within the scope of this work to discuss the positive and negative impacts of registration on a societal level. However, Victoria's fears of a public registry are relatable to all of the perpetual and everlasting unknowns placed on her collaterally as a result of her son's sex offence. Additionally, it is this potential public registry that exacerbates the 'course of the mark' dimension of stigma (Jones et al., 1984) for relatives of offenders as they continue to fear the potential stigma that they may experience in the future.

### **Chapter Summary**

Relatives of offenders are forced to cope with a wide range of difficulties and challenges. These collateral consequences of offending affect all parts of a relative's life when a loved one is convicted of a sex offence. This chapter outlined the various internal impacts and personal feelings experienced by mothers, spouses, and daughters as a result of their loved one's sexually offending actions as well as the external consequences such as the impacts on friendships and public interactions, and overall fears held by the relatives.

The interview data revealed that relatives experienced extreme fears of stigmatizing interactions with friends, family members, and members of their community. Moreover, 'disruptiveness' appeared to be the most prevalent dimension of stigma for the participants (Jones et al., 1984) as several relatives spoke of hampered and strained relationships. Another key finding of this research was the fear that the 'sticky stigma' of their loved one's actions would impact children in the future. In other words, relatives expressed fears that their children would be ostracized and excluded in the future as a result of the stigma of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour. Furthermore, relatives vocalized psychological challenges as they negotiated their identity in light of their loved one's actions. For example, mothers and partners questioned their ability to have

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<sup>144</sup> See Petrunik, 2002; McAlinden, 2005; Travis, 2005; Mustaine et al., 2006; Schiavone and Jeglic, 2008; Freeman and Sandler, 2010; Nellis, 2011, to name a few.

prevented their loved one's offending behaviour and expressed the self-blame and guilt that some still continue to experience. Finally, the imposition of restriction impacts and conditions on the relatives resonated with Condry's (2007) conceptualization of 'guilt-by-association'. In other words, many of the conditions placed on sex offenders negatively affected the relatives either through mobility impacts or physical separation from their loved one.

The aim within this chapter was to first highlight how each of the aforementioned served as collateral consequences to a loved one's offence, but also to shed light on the actuality that these individuals are legally innocent, thereby making the consequences that they encounter extremely difficult and unjust. While much of the research presented here echoed findings from previous studies (Bakker et al., 1978; Arditti et al., 2003; Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008), it contributes to the prior literature by presenting a viewpoint from relatives of a particular sub-population of offenders in Canada, that of sex offenders.

While this chapter highlighted several important difficulties that arise from a loved one's sexually offending behaviour, the following chapter focuses on a particular consequence for the relatives of a sex offender: the role and impact of media coverage. Specifically, it illustrates the ways in which media content exacerbates the many challenges and the extent of stigmatization that relatives of offenders encounter.

## **Chapter 6: The Role of Media Coverage Within Collateral Consequences of Sex Offending**<sup>145</sup>

The news media are a vital part of the process by which individuals' private troubles with crime – as victims or offenders – are transformed into public issues (Sacco, 1995, p.141).

While the last chapter focused primarily on the collateral consequences to emerge from a loved one's sexually offending behaviour, one of the ways in which the consequences are made increasingly challenging for relatives of sex offenders is through the inclusion of these offences in media coverage. As stated earlier in this study, there appears to be only two published Canadian studies conducted with relatives of offenders (see Hannem, 2008; Withers, 2003) with neither study placing emphasis on the role of the mass media in the lives of their respective participants.<sup>146</sup> Given this gap in the literature, this chapter focuses on the ways in which relatives of sex offenders perceive the media coverage generated by their loved one's case. Moreover, it emphasizes the role that the media plays in affecting relatives' public interactions and private family dynamics. More specifically, I attempt to further the claim<sup>147</sup> that media coverage *exacerbates* and in a sense, perpetuates, the consequences for many of the participants.<sup>148</sup> The interview data presented below<sup>149</sup> suggests that while the media is neither a sole contributor of stigma or blame,<sup>150</sup> nor are they a

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<sup>145</sup> The 'role of the media' throughout this paper implies and refers to the *perceived* role of the media as recounted by the participants in this study. Much of the literature attributes societal understanding of sexual offending to the media (Sacco, 1982; Boda and Szabó, 2011). In light of this, it appears that the relatives in this study perceive the media to have played a large role in creating or perpetuating their negative and challenging experiences within their communities and families.

<sup>146</sup> Much of the previous literature and investigation into this topic focuses on how public registration in the United States impacts the relatives of offenders. This appears to be the first known study to explore how the media impacts the relatives of offenders. Moreover, in a country where we do not have a public registration system for convicted and released sex offenders, media coverage is the main avenue through which citizens and the public learns of sex offenders and their relatives.

<sup>147</sup> This notion was found in Condry's (2007) study in the United Kingdom. As it was not thoroughly investigated in her study, this study serves to provide more detail regarding the media's role from a Canadian perspective.

<sup>148</sup> A qualitative study of this kind is neither able nor expected to determine the exact extent to which the media is responsible for generating or facilitating experiences for relatives of offenders. However, it is able to provide and present the perceived notions that the participants have towards the media based on the coverage that their loved one's case might have received and their own interactions with members of the press.

<sup>149</sup> It is important to note that the issues and harms discussed are based on the perceived notions and experiences shared by the relatives. While certain experiences may arise as overall consequences of offending or incarceration in general, the excerpts and stories reflect the relatives' perceptions of the media's role in their respective situations.

<sup>150</sup> In other words, this research did not find the media to be a specific collateral consequence for many of the participants. Rather, the media exacerbated the pre-existing challenges and difficulties that they experienced and encountered upon disclosure of their loved one's offence.

separate collateral consequence for relatives of sex offenders, they do intensify the existing problems that the participants experienced while at the same time directly producing additional fears and concerns.<sup>151</sup>

Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and Goffman's (1963) stigma, this chapter explores the role that the media plays in facilitating and influencing relatives' interactions with others, as well as highlighting the ways in which stigma may be perpetuated through media coverage. The first section of this chapter provides a brief discussion on the general content and extent of media coverage in each of the participant's cases (section 6.1). Following this, I present a discussion on the various perceived harms caused by the mass media as shared by the participants. Following a similar outline as the previous chapter regarding the collateral consequences arising from a loved one's sex offence, this section emphasizes how the media exacerbates those consequences in terms of psychological impacts (6.2.1), impacts on children and/or siblings (6.2.2), and impacts on association, safety, and relationships (6.2.3). Unique to this chapter are the aspects that emerge in light of media coverage such as: fear of the media (6.2.4), power of the media (6.2.5), necessity for clarification due to inaccurate reporting (6.2.6), the distinction between sex offender and offender (6.2.7) concerns surrounding technology (6.2.8) and current and future concerns (6.2.9). These harms caused by the media lead into a discussion on the ability for relatives to manage these harms through stigma management techniques (6.3). The chapter concludes with the positive impacts of media coverage experienced by the relatives (6.4).

## **6.1 – Overall Media Coverage and Extent**

*It was on the television, it was in newspapers, it was in the free newspapers, it was on the internet, uh, anywhere it could get in your face, it was there... oh, it was on the radio (Rosie, daughter).*

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<sup>151</sup> This notion was explicitly stated by Victoria, Tracy, Anne-Marie, Lynn, Julie, Frida, Rosie, and Suzanne.

The media coverage for the majority of the participants was deemed as heavy<sup>152</sup> (Lynn, Anne-Marie, Julie, Frida, Rosie, Suzanne) while some relatives' cases received moderate coverage (Talia and Tracy) and one case received minimal coverage (Victoria). Even though Victoria's son's case received minimal coverage as it was covered once in the local newspaper, Victoria still found the experience "devastating" as the media announced the fact that her son was living with her and published her name. However, she did state that due to the "less offensive" nature of her son's sexually offending behaviour,<sup>153</sup> the media coverage was "straightforward." Alternatively, Anne-Marie's son's case received heavy coverage in the media through the television, newspaper, and Internet; she was unaware of any radio coverage as she was too 'distracted by all of the media coverage by that point to follow the news on the radio.' On the other hand, Tracy found that the moderate media coverage of her husband's offence was "fair and accurate" as there was "nothing that could have been identified as untrue or even misleading."<sup>154</sup> In addition, Talia's husband's case was covered in the media twice within their local paper and she found that her husband "was called out and harassed by the community while the trial was going on," reactions that she attributed to the media exposure. Julie and Suzanne also recall the coverage that their relatives' cases received:

*The media coverage at the time of the offences was immediate; it was sort of front page of the paper. There was a photograph of my house surrounded by yellow crime scene tape. It would be very easy to identify it based on the description of the house. The street number was never printed, but the street name was and it was a very small street. Umm, the details of the assaults were recounted in very graphic detail (Julie, ex-wife).*

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<sup>152</sup> See Appendix H – Participant Overview. The Participant Overview provides the coverage extent for each participant's relative in the media: minimal (1 known instance of the case being presented in the media through television, radio or newspaper); moderate (2-5 instances of media coverage); heavy (5+ instances of media coverage). After getting rough estimates of appearances in the media coverage from the relatives during the interviews, I placed them into ranges.

<sup>153</sup> Victoria's son was convicted of viewing child pornography.

<sup>154</sup> Tracy's husband's case was covered for a few days after the disclosure of his offences, at the times of being charged, pleading guilty, and finally, when he was convicted and sentenced.

*It started out slow; it was on the radio first, and that's when they announced his name. And then after that, it exploded in the newspapers. Then they went on the internet, grabbed a picture, put that on the internet, and after that, it was pretty much in every area that you could think of that had a newspaper stand. It was at my work, it was at the hallways, like there was nowhere to hide myself. I was completely consumed by all this media nonsense (Suzanne, daughter).*

The above comments illustrate the speed and intensity at which media coverage can escalate. This can be challenging for relatives to manage as they themselves are unsure of the details surrounding their loved one's alleged offence, such as in Lynn's son's case that was covered from their local papers to national ones across Canada.<sup>155</sup> In other words, in some instances before relatives are able to understand the charges that have been laid against their relative and the status of the case, they are forced to learn these details through the media. This is yet another example of the lack of respect afforded to relatives of offenders as they are ignored throughout the various processes.

### **6.1.1 – Different Media Outlets**

*On the television broadcast you could see the disgust on the faces of the broadcasters. And I thought, how would you feel if it was your son that someone was talking about like that? How would you feel? And it's so easy for people to pre-judge without knowing the facts and they make all kinds of assumptions... they categorize us as being despicable, guilty too, because that's what your son is (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Many participants shared their views on the various media outlets<sup>156</sup> that covered their loved one's cases. While Anne-Marie felt as though the coverage on television broadcasts were far more damaging, Julie and Lynn found the newspaper coverage to be the most difficult to cope with:

*I think print media in my experience and my opinion is usually the worst, [and] has the greatest impact because they get the most wrong. It's not your voice, and um, and then it's on print (Julie, ex-wife).*

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<sup>155</sup> Both Lynn and Julie shared that the media gained access to far more information about the specifics and details of their relatives' cases than they were ever privy to; the media was able to publicize this information even before relatives understood the scope and details of their loved one's offences.

<sup>156</sup> 'Media outlets' refers to news coverage through a variety of mediums such as, television, radio, newspapers and online news websites. Furthermore, 'media portrayal' consists of the content that is derived through these mediums.

*[The newspaper was] very graphic compared to the TV. The TV was for sure, and even that was enough... the radio was more short facts. But the newspaper, it was front page, and then it's on the city page, and it's you know, on like the third page and it's just like please already? (Lynn, mother).*

Lynn also shared that the print media was extremely damaging, as she believed the reporters had essentially “grabbed other stories that [were] similar to hype the story line.” Moreover, while she explicitly stated that she was not attempting to ‘downplay the seriousness of her son’s offences’, she felt as though the media coverage was extremely “overwhelming” as a lot of the information that they published was not presented in the courtroom, leading her family and herself to question the source of the media’s content and information.

## **6.2 – Harms Caused by the Media and their Coverage**

*They don't say anything positive. They protect the victim but attack the accused. They can throw all the garbage on you... They don't think about the long-term impact on you (Frida, wife).*

*It was sensational, it was inaccurate, it was cruel, it was distorted, it was mean-spirited; I'm not making excuses for what my son did but... I think it was simply tabloidism all around (Anne-Marie, mother).*

While many relatives did not directly blame or hold the media responsible as a collateral consequence, it was often a source of added stress and anxiety that exacerbated the overall collateral consequences of their loved one’s sexual offence. In other words, the majority of the participants in this study found that the media *heightened* and *intensified* the negative repercussions resulting from their loved one’s actions.<sup>157</sup> Media coverage may be extremely harmful for relatives as they may share a last name with the convicted individual, they may live in a small city/town where everyone is well known or they may be featured in the coverage themselves. These possible identifying characteristics may create unease in the minds of relatives. For example, Julie explained that the media coverage caused, and continues to cause her anxiety in terms of if and when her children (with

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<sup>157</sup> However, as stated earlier, they did not believe that the media was the sole contributor of the consequences that they experienced, as there were likely many other factors involved.

her current husband) are “not invited to play dates.” She fears that others may have read the news coverage about her ex-husband and no longer want to invite her or her children to events.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, in Anne-Marie’s case, the media coverage led her to fear the public to a degree; she stated that the “callousness of the media” caused her to experience anxiety and worry over attending a colleague’s funeral as others she knew would also be attending. Likewise, once a loved one’s case is published in the media, relatives are often in a constant state of anxiety as they wait for others “to say or do something” in regards to the coverage (Victoria). In a sense, relatives experience the ‘disruptive’ dimension of stigma as the media coverage can often “hamper interaction and communication” in one’s life as they anxiously anticipate and fear encounters and interactions with others (Jones et al., 1984, p.24). In other words, the interview data suggests that given the stigmatizing nature of sexual offences, the interactions between relatives of sex offenders and others will often be strained and uncomfortable. In light of this fact, it is likely that many relatives fear these interactions and are thereby vulnerable to their occurrence.

### 6.2.1 – Psychological Impacts

As discussed in the previous chapter, extreme events or experiences (such as those related to a loved one committing a sex offence) are typically coupled with upsetting emotions and feelings of vulnerability and helplessness (Helpguide, 2014). Some of these emotions may often translate into feelings of guilt, shame and blame:

*I think, we’ve been put on trial or like, ‘What was wrong with us?’ Or ‘What kind of people are we?’ ‘How could we have given birth to this monster?’ or you know that type of thing. You sort of want to become defensive, you want to always like explain yourself even more... For the longest time, and it’s shame on me because I didn’t want to say I had a son, because I couldn’t say where he lived \*sniffles\* (Lynn, mother).*

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<sup>158</sup> Julie did acknowledge that these instances might not be the result or a causal impact of the media coverage at all; however, she does instinctively believe that it is caused by the media coverage of her ex-husband’s actions.

*It was like plunging a dagger through me, every time, you know, something was said. I mean it builds your own sense of guilt and blame and shame and stigma. I mean, you feel that anyway but it magnifies it. I can't explain to you how it hurt to the core. Swords through your heart, like right through you, because they [media reporters] don't know us, and they just make those assumptions. It magnified the feelings I already had of stigma and rejection for sure. I would say in terms of well-being [laughs] there wasn't much well-being... I can't even explain how it makes you question everything [sniffs deeply] (Anne-Marie, mother).*

The above comments highlight the mothers' personal perception and understanding of the media coverage of their loved one alongside the sense of shame and stigma that was transmitted onto them. In particular, Anne-Marie appears to hold the media accountable for exacerbating her feelings of shame and stigma while also making her question her own sense of self-blame and guilt. It is in this way that the media contributes to and further intensifies the overwhelming psychological consequences that the relatives experience. Likewise, the Action for Prisoner's Families (2013) states that, "some newspapers will see prisoners' families as being morally corrupt just because they are related to prisoners. This means they see them as having less human rights, for example less of a right to privacy and therefore they become easy targets for negative stories" (p.2). Lynn echoes these same sentiments as the media coverage also led her to question her son's actions and whether she should have suspected that something was wrong. In this light, while the media influenced the public's perception of offenders and their families, the media also ultimately influences the way in which relatives identify and understand themselves. Drawing on Mead's (1955) work, individuals perceive themselves as others perceive them; thus, the media's ability to (likely unintentionally) depict relatives as guilty will often result in relatives embodying this guilt and perceiving themselves as guilty.

However, despite the coverage that causes relatives to question themselves and perpetuate cyclical emotions of guilt and shame, many participants felt as though they required constant updates of any media coverage regarding their relative (Julie, Suzanne, Rosie, Frida, Tracy, Anne-Marie). This need to follow the media coverage may be considered as a protection mechanism undertaken by

the relatives. For example, Julie shared, “I mostly read the articles because I felt I had to arm myself with knowing what other people know.” Likewise, Anne-Marie followed the coverage to “know what they were saying... being prepared to defend my family, including my son.” Given the extensive collateral consequences presented in the previous chapter, the need for relatives to protect themselves from others due to the media coverage is disconcerting. The overwhelming emotional impacts stemming from a loved one’s offence illustrates the ongoing hardships that relatives encounter as they prepare to defend themselves against the media coverage.

In line with the claim that the media and its coverage exacerbate the impacts experienced by relatives of sex offenders, some participants found that the media emphasized their emotions and prevented them from grieving with the loss (to incarceration) of their loved one (Anne-Marie, Rosie, Suzanne, Julie). In addition, for the majority of the participant’s loved one’s cases, the media coverage continued to an almost excessive level;<sup>159</sup> this is challenging and difficult for relatives to manage as they are confronted with a constant rehashing and publicizing of their loved one’s case without truly having time and space to come to terms with everything that has occurred. For example, Rosie and Julie shared:

*The media to me emphasizes your feelings, or it just increases any anger or any sadness or anything a lot more because... you can’t grieve the process alone because it’s out there. And because of where we are and it’s a smaller city, you feel like everyone knows. So you don’t know if you turn around, you get on the bus and someone’s looking at you for a specific reason, you’re not sure why they’re looking at you. If they feel maybe they recognize you from somewhere else? Or because of their understanding of what they’ve just been reading? Because once something happens in the media, that’s all you ever see for like 10 days straight. As I explained to my family, right now we’re the ‘hot thing,’ and then something else is going to happen and that will be forgotten (Rosie, daughter).*

*The media just makes everything public so you just lose your ability to cope with privacy or have choices about the way you cope and you have this feeling of living in a fishbowl and having your most crisis-like moments [exposed], like that’s a very painful experience. Like I think as a family, we really need to grieve and we couldn’t really do that, we certainly couldn’t do that publically (Julie, ex-wife).*

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<sup>159</sup> This was true for the participants whose relatives’ case received heavy coverage.

Rosie's and Julie's experiences illustrate the difficulties regarding the very public nature of their loved one's cases as well as how the media attention limited their ability to cope with the loss of their loved one as a result of incarceration. Recalling the idea of involuntary separation, the loss that one experiences when a loved one is incarcerated is often ignored and considered less important. Moreover, while relatives' require the opportunity to grieve privately, the media is a large part of the reason that they are unable to do so. Indeed, as Julie reveals, "it is incredibly painful to be put up for public scrutiny"; essentially, relatives are forced to stand by and watch as the media transforms their private lives into public spectacles (Sacco, 1995) and they, themselves become 'public figures' (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore, both Rosie's and Julie's comments emphasize their inability to 'conceal' their stigma (Jones et al., 1984) as a result of the media coverage. For example, they both expressed fears regarding stigmatizing interactions with others. Essentially, the idea that the media makes 'everything public' thereby 'exposing' them leads relatives to experience high levels of paranoia and vulnerability.

An important psychological impact that emerges in light of media coverage is the process of othering.<sup>160</sup> For example, Julie's (now ex-) husband was on parole at the time of his second set of offences. The media coverage surrounding this set of offences opened up a new avenue through which Julie was affected as she was seen as the person who should have known he was going to re-offend, even though his past offence was non-sexual in nature. In particular, the coverage did not explain that her husband had been on parole for several years with a large amount of time passing between the sets of serious offences.<sup>161</sup> Julie shared:

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<sup>160</sup> Othering "includes not only stereotyping the other, but also simply distancing oneself – for example, referring to the other as *they* or *those people* ... Othering refers to the process of making generalizations regarding a particular group; it is essentially the idea that the "other is not like us" (emphasis in original, Briscoe et al., 2009, p.53).

<sup>161</sup> In fact, Julie shared that because the media did not share the length of time lapsed between convictions / incarceration and release, the neighbours and community members were more likely to blame her for bringing an ex-offender into their community. In other words, this blame was further heightened when others were under the impression that his previous release from prison was recent.

*My situation offers people the opportunity to say, “I’m not like her, I never would have married someone with that history. I would have known, I would have seen it, so I’m safe, I’m not her” and it’s just a process of othering.<sup>162</sup> When the fact is, that it can be anybody... like nobody is safe and some people are better or worse at accepting that (Julie, ex-wife).*

The media’s decision and ability to include and exclude certain information<sup>163</sup> regarding an individual’s case plays a large role in the process of othering that occurs in a society. Moreover, Girshick (1996) suggests that the media often does not share the redeeming qualities about an offender as it ‘humanizes the offender.’ Thus, by framing them as the public, those who are ‘good’ versus the offender and their relatives, believed to be ‘evil’ (Eschholz et al., 2003), the process of othering can occur relatively simply. In this way, the general public does not have to visualize and understand the offender as anything more than a ‘bad’ individual. Additionally, this process is strongly linked to notions of stigmatization due to the division that a label such as ‘relative of sex offender’ may create, such as an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ distinction (Link and Phelan, 2001, p.370). Similarly, Lynn shared, “I think we’re just too quick to try to find out, ‘oh thank God, they’re worse than me... so I must be okay.” This process of othering gives way to Goffman’s definition of stigma as a ‘deeply discrediting attribute’ (1967, p.3); this attribute serves as the division between relatives of offenders and the rest of the public. Lister (2004) suggests that for the ‘us,’ “othering helps to define the self and to affirm identity” (society) while the ‘them’ is ‘diminished of their stereotyped characteristics’ (sex offenders and their relatives) (p.102). This process of othering that is often a result of the media coverage serves to perpetuate the stigma towards relatives and preserve the feelings of isolation and alienation that they experience.

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<sup>162</sup> While the process of othering may occur for any offender and their relatives, Julie’s experience offers a specific avenue in which this process occurred for her.

<sup>163</sup> This idea will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter. See section 6.2.6.1 – Inaccurate Reporting.

### 6.2.2 – Impacts on Children and/or Siblings

As discussed in the previous chapter, the impacts of a sex offence on the offender's siblings or children are extremely challenging. In this light, it stands to reason that when there is any sort of media coverage, children tend to suffer to a higher degree as well. Rosie shared that she has become very protective of her children, as they will one day have to learn of their grandfather's conviction. On the other hand, Anne-Marie felt as though her other children had to cope with the external ramifications of her son's offending behaviour immediately following the disclosure of his actions. Anne-Marie believed that "had there not been any media coverage at all, it would have been much easier for them to cope" due to all of the questions that they were receiving. Lynn, in particular, shared in detail the challenging situations that all of her children were put in following the disclosure of her son's offence. For example, her children received Facebook messages stating, "they should lock him up and throw away the key" and "he should be held down and raped." Lynn's experience is indicative of the ways in which media transforms a 'private person' into a 'public figure' (Goffman, 1963, p.71) who is taunted and attacked by others. In particular, Lynn found that the media coverage allowed people to search for her other children online (as they share a surname) and then verbally attack them. She further shared her understanding of the impacts on her youngest child:

*She's never been invited to a birthday party since, [sniffs], never invited on a play date since. And why in daycare, did she have invitations to play dates and birthdays and parties and now she doesn't? And so you wonder, what's been said within the school, um, community? And how do you explain, "Why don't I get to go to birthday parties?" and I think I know why, I think it is due to it being in the paper so much, like how could you not put the name associated with us? (Lynn, mother).*

Here, Lynn highlights the devastating social implications of extensive media coverage on her daughter's interactions with others. Specifically, Lynn's comments reflect the ways in which relatives attribute stigmatizing and subsequent ostracizing interactions with others to the media coverage of their loved one. Moreover, her comments speak to the strong influence that the media has on others in the community and further dictates the ways in which others interact with or avoid

relatives of sex offenders. Additionally, due to the media coverage, Lynn shared that her children often questioned themselves and harboured feelings of guilt as they questioned whether they should have suspected any telltale behaviour of their brother. Siblings are often considered to have an extremely tight bond with each other and thus, they likely experience copious amounts of self-blame similar to the mothers in this study.

In a similar vein, Tracy expressed concerns for her young daughter's future education in light of her husband's sex offences. These potential future impacts resonate with Jones et al.'s (1984) 'course of the mark' dimension of stigma, which suggests that relatives and their offspring will likely have to manage these challenges later on in their lives:

*I do worry about what will happen when her peers / school friends discover our story, and if she will be ostracized or bullied because of it. When we moved last year, she started at a new school. On the first day, we ran into one of the teachers, who lives on the same street as my parents (and where we had lived also), who knew of my husband's offenses and had been very vocal with other neighbours about how horrified she was and how she wanted nothing do with us. Thankfully we've had no further incident, but if my daughter is ever assigned to her class in the future, I will have to explain to the principal why I'm not comfortable with having that particular teacher. I should add that the teacher... may have been someone who might not have known had it not been in the newspaper [sic] (Tracy, wife).*

While in some cases the child or sibling might be too young to understand their relative's offending behaviour, they may still be impacted to varying degrees; in Tracy's case, her children may be impacted in the future as well. For example, while her young children are not yet capable of understanding their father's offences, the notion that they may one day experience negative consequences due to the ever-present media coverage is alarming.

### **6.2.3 – Impacts on Association, Safety, and Relationships**

Relatives of offenders, and of sex offenders in particular, encounter a myriad of problems stemming from the media coverage of their loved one and their offence regarding their association

with the offender, both their personal / familial safety and that of their incarcerated relative, and finally their relationships with others.

### Association

*I feared that my identity would be linked to his in the media, that i would face accusation for participation when i was not ... that they would question me as an accessory perhaps ..... but it didnt happen and eventually [I] was able to just let it go [sic] (Talía, wife).*

A difficult challenge that arises from media coverage of sex offences is the association that relatives bear to the offender. Condry (2007) explores five avenues through which relatives of offenders may find stigma attached to them.<sup>164</sup> This section emphasizes the relevant aspects of association, genetics and continuation. Families of offenders automatically experience the impact of ‘association’; this refers to the idea that relatives are “perceived to be the same as the offender by virtue of their kin relationship, to come from the same ‘stock’ as the offender and to therefore be tainted or contaminated by sharing a background or household” (Condry, 2007, p.66). In this sense, they are perceived “as though they’ve done something as well” (Condry, 2007, p.67) and in this way, they are also burdened with what Goffman (1963) has termed a ‘courtesy stigma.’ While the media is likely not a direct cause of the impacts of association for relatives of offenders, the media often tends to heighten the impacts of association for relatives. For example, Lynn discussed how her eldest daughter fears returning to work as she believes that if others find out about her brother’s offences they may “call her the names that they called him in the paper.” Lynn emphasized that the fear of “being related” intensifies the challenges that her family experiences regarding public interactions with others. Lynn’s comment exemplifies the lack of ‘concealability’ (Jones et al., 1984) afforded to her family as a result of the media coverage. Moreover, her comments illustrate her family’s inability to ‘pass’ (Goffman, 1963) because the media coverage has publicized their relation to a ‘sex

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<sup>164</sup> The five avenues are association, genetics, omission, commission, and continuation (Condry, 2007, p.66-79).

offender.’ Additionally, Victoria shared about her other son who bears physical resemblances to his brother (convicted of a sex offence):

*He also has been suffering from the after effects of this, um because they look alike... [He’s always] wondering if somebody’s read that and remembered the last name or sees him on the streets and thinking “there’s that guy”, so he too has been dealing with that, and it’s been stressful for him (Victoria, mother).*

Victoria’s son’s experience is illustrative of the way in which media coverage has made his life more challenging as he finds it difficult to ‘conceal’ his stigma (Jones et al., 1984). Moreover, Victoria’s story highlights the paranoia and anxiety that her son experiences as a result of his ‘association’, which leads to a fear of stigmatizing interactions with others. Similarly, Julie shared the fear of having her name published as her ex-husband’s ‘wife’ and being known as a ‘sex offender’s wife’:

*Everything about me, my character, almost like my trust-ability, my ability to judge other people, my status, all of those things came under scrutiny. Even though, like I say, my name wasn’t in the paper, we didn’t have the same last name - it would not be hard to link us together and figure it out and tons of people knew and rumors and information went like wildfire. The best that I can say, is like, the day before the crimes happened, I was a respected home-owner, community member, volunteer, professional on my way up in in my field, happily married, and a family person, all this, that was my identity. And then, the next day, I was the wife of a sex offender and then everything that would immediately come to your mind, that disgust that we have for sexual offences, perversion that we have towards [sex offences ... ] then belonged to me (Julie, ex-wife).*

Julie’s comments are indicative of the media’s ability to influence one’s identity. In other words, Julie found herself struggling to ‘manage and negotiate her identity’ in light of her husband’s crime and the subsequent media coverage (Hannem, 2008). Moreover, her experience is illustrative of the ‘secondary stigma’ (Condry, 2007) that relatives assume or embody once their identity shifts to ‘relative of a sex offender’.

In a similar vein, Lynn shared that her family does not want to “have the offence tagged on us because of the name that was out there” and “we just don’t want to a lot of time [to] have our names associated with him.” Lynn further shared, “you don’t really want to be associated with that or if you’re associated with that, then are you okay with what he did.” These sentiments are indicative

of the life changing impacts that relatives experience and the ways in which it may impact future family generations. For example, Lynn's daughter who is married with children is concerned with the protection her children currently have at home, and the realization that it will likely dissipate once they begin school. Furthermore, the 'association' experienced by the relatives in this study reflects Goffman's (1963) 'courtesy stigma' in that relatives believe that the label and stigma of their loved one's offence is transferred onto them. Moreover, while they know that they have not committed an offence, the media coverage and difficult interactions with others lead them to this conclusion in which they are 'tainted' as well.

Additionally, Condry's (2007) idea of 'genetic/biological' connection parallels May's (2000) notion of 'familial toxicity' wherein relatives feel implicated in the offence that their loved one has committed; this moral stigma is termed as 'failed family' (May, 2000, p.199). This notion of "bad blood" that is shared among the family can often cause families to experience further stigma (Condry, 2007, p.68). Similar to Condry's (2007) findings that mothers of offenders experienced blame due to the biological connections to their offending son, Anne-Maria shared:

*There's some secondary stigma because the way the press presents it, that we're guilty too. And so, how could your son do that? What did you do to him as a child? ... There is guilt and stigma that we must be a terrible family and that's what made me so upset is that they don't know our family, they don't know us. We're a good family, we're good people, my son's a good young man, he did a terrible thing, but he's a good young man and so, how dare they judge us? ... They have no right to judge us; they don't know us at all (Anne-Marie, mother).*

In this way, relatives, and in particular mothers, experience 'guilt-by-association' (Condry, 2007) as the media coverage heightened their sense of stigma through blame and guilt. These emotions are reflective of the additional consequences of media coverage as they are made to feel responsible for their son's actions, as they were the 'ones that brought them into the world.' As noted in the previous chapter, mothers of offenders are troubled by the very notion that they gave birth to an individual who had the ability to commit a sex offence.

Participants in this study also found that stigma was attached to them through ‘continuation’ (Condry, 2007); for example, by choosing to continue their relationship with the offender, they were further stigmatized. While Julie kept in touch with her husband and was questioned by others for maintaining contact and a relationship, Tracy and Frida felt stigmatized for staying in their marriages. In addition, Tracy felt further stigmatized for being intimate with her husband (and conceiving her second child) post-disclosure. Likewise, Talia shared how she was questioned for staying with her husband, and recalled an incident wherein her friend was treated poorly because of his association with her husband:

*[T]hose who choose to stay or even remain in contact are thought to be bad by association .... my best friend got accosted by cops and had to show ID to prove tghat he was not my husband .... and had someone spit at his feet for being associated with my husband... there are a couple of former friends who no longer wish any contact with us, especially after i returned to living with him [sic] (Talia, wife).*

Talia’s comments are reflective of the ‘courtesy stigma’ that Goffman (1963) suggests is transferred onto relatives and friends as a result of a loved one’s offending behaviour. In order to counter the ‘courtesy stigma,’ relatives are often forced to defend and justify their decision for maintaining contact with the offender. Participants shared the difficulty and inability to simply sever ties with their offending relative, as many circumstances need to be considered, such as children.

### Safety

*The big fear is that everybody knows and we’re now not safe. I think that was the biggest thing, now that it’s public... we did not feel safe (Lynn, mother).*

One of the direct impacts of media coverage for relatives of sex offenders, as reported by the participants, is the sense of safety that is taken away from themselves and their family. Once a loved one has been thrown into the media spotlight, family members often become collateral damage as reporters attempt to gain information from loved ones. However, another risk resulting from the media coverage is the actual physical safety that diminishes for relatives. Frida expressed fear of others harming her daughters and herself once her husband’s case received media attention; her

family experienced high levels of stress and felt as though they were in danger, which they attributed to the media coverage. Furthermore, Lynn and Rosie shared:

*Because of the media, you have the crazy kids who want to be vigilante or whatever; we had penises drawn all over one of our cars, we had a rock thrown through one of our windows, we had a letter written to my daughter that they were going to grab her and tie her up and rape her. And you know, we reported it to the police and we did have the police that would follow and drive by often... We were so in the open and so I think, I can't really say it was **because** of the newspaper, but because it was out there, the name is definitely, you know, like first, second, and last name was used... We were identified and that's why I think, these events since then occurred. I remember, it was twice, there was a knock on the door and the doorbell rang and then there was a note left and I went out and there was [no] one; I just fell on [in] the middle of the road because of the impact, that how am I supposed to keep my children safe with all of this going on?... And having the police come to take your son away, now sit outside your home making it feel like we're protected because of what was happening and you just didn't want no police presence even close, like I don't even want to ever ever talk to one of them again, you know (Lynn, mother).*

*I would say that the fear is more the safety. Because people read, there's lunatics everywhere right; it's the media [that] doesn't understand that they are the ones who are initiating whatever violence is out there because they're the ones that create the seed, plant the seed for that one person who's looking to see who they're going to harm. So, them, announcing to the world that so and so has come home and this is their name again, we have the tools to look up and research everything, you put our lives, our families at risk right? So they don't understand that they're the ones that are creating even more (Rosie, daughter).*

These experiences are reflective of the sense of blame that is placed on the relatives for their loved one's offence when their safety is compromised. While participants recognized the necessity for the general public to be made aware of the sexually offending behaviour for their own personal safety, the safety risks for relatives tend to heighten as a result. Likewise, Jones et al.'s (1984) 'peril' dimension of stigma referring to the 'dangerousness of the mark,' is reflected in such instances when relatives experience threats to their safety. The safety and protection that is compromised and put at risk for relatives is highly disturbing as they are innocent in the eyes of the law and yet, they must live in fear of harassment as others learn of their loved one's case through the media, thereby isolating the relatives.

In addition to their personal safety, some of the participants found that the media coverage also put their incarcerated loved one at risk within the prison institution.<sup>165</sup> For example, Frida stated that her husband's case was a "scandal" and claimed that threats were made against her husband in prison. Moreover, she stated, "he's scared to ask for rights and things because he doesn't want to make his life harder in there." Regarding similar situations, other participants shared:

*When [my son] was in prison... [other prisoners] found out what his name was and someone in one of the cells had someone else Google his name. Then, he from that moment on was a marked man in that block and that's when he went into isolation. He asked for it; he said "here there are prisoners there are [serious] drugs users, who are people with serious mental conditions." They've got the x on his back. It's interesting how that information gets out, even to people in jail. In a place where people are serving time for rape, armed robbery, violent crimes etc., a man who is believed to be a child molester is at the bottom (Victoria, mother).*

*When he was transferred from here to where he was going until he got his [sentence], they mistakenly put him on the wrong bus, and he got the crap beaten out of him... The only reason why this happened is because the others saw the newspaper, the news on the incident... So he came out and you know, his eye was totally in and nose completely screwed up and stuff and he was bleeding and the guard says to him... "Well, did you want to press charges?" and my dad was thinking, "Yes, I would like to bring more attention to myself and come and sit in a courtroom [sarcasm]"... Those are the times where I feel powerless. I cannot do anything... I feel like no matter, any time that I may open my mouth, I have to be very careful of how public it may be looked at, you know because, if anything, your words can be twisted around for anything (Rosie, daughter).*

While the scope of this study does not include the impact of media coverage on the offenders themselves, it is important to recognize, just as Condry (2007) found in her research, that an offender's safety, or lack thereof, may impact their loved one on the outside. With the media being highly accessible (through television, radio, print, internet), the risk of one's safety being compromised in prison is further heightened. Thus, as illustrated above, relatives experience helplessness as they are unable to provide any sort of assistance for their loved one as they are caught

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<sup>165</sup> It is important to be aware of the fact that many of the consequences highlighted by the relatives regarding safety within prison are most likely not caused by the media; however, they are perceived by the relatives as being exacerbated by the media. For example, it is well documented that sex offenders are often the main targets in prison settings (see Stevens, 1997; Stevens, 2013; Stevens and Ward, 1997; Condry, 2007), with child sex offenders being primary targets (regardless of media coverage).

between ‘not drawing attention to the offender by speaking up’ and ‘speaking up in order to protect their loved one’ (Rosie). In light of this, the media coverage (especially that which features identifying information) increases the safety risks for an offender and their family, which may far exceed the incarceration period and may be a consequence that they must cope with for an extended period of time, often for as long as the coverage is accessible. Thus, the interview data suggests that Jones et al.’s (1984) ‘peril’ dimension of stigma is ever-present for the relatives as they experience ongoing fear for their safety.

### Relationships

The mass media has the ability to shape and alter the perceptions of the general public; as such, a stigma associated with a sex offender that is then transferred onto their relatives often impacts their relationships with others. For example, when the media content suggests guilt or blame for relatives of offenders, the public often follows suit (Levenson et al., 2007; Schiavone and Jeglic, 2008). One of symbolic interactionism’s tenets states that meaning is “derived from social interactions one has with others” (Blumer, 1969, p.2). In this way, others in society may react and interact with relatives of offenders in accordance with the perception that they have generated of the offender and/or his family; thus, if there is media coverage of a sex offender and their offence, the public’s perception of the relatives may be altered, which in turn affects the way that they will interact with the relative. For example, Tracy shared how her relationship with those she had volunteered with changed upon disclosure of her husband’s offences; she faced difficulties when “bumping into them at the store” and found that she lost Facebook friends as well. Similarly, Talia stated that, “a lot of the ones that turned their back found out in the paper. those who knew us well, stayed though were a little distant for while... some of them just stopped talking to us and a few of them attacked me verbally (online) [sic]”. Additionally, Talia faced stigmatization as others in her life stated, “they always knew heh was a perverted monster that he is dangerous [sic].” Moreover,

some participants recall how their relationship with others changed both positively and negatively.

Anne-Marie shared that,

*It was very challenging for me at work; I ended up changing jobs. It was very uncomfortable that all of a sudden, there were stares, and not to say that there weren't some people who were incredibly kind to me... That's life right, but there were some kind people... couple of other colleagues just came and gave me a big hug after 'cause of course, it was all in the press, other people not so much, but that's life (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Anne-Marie's comments are illustrative of how media content is able to create stigmatizing and 'uncomfortable' situations for relatives. In other words, her comments suggest that the media exposure instigated her strained and difficult interactions at work. Similarly, some relatives stated that due to the media coverage, they were in a constant state of worrying that others would approach them to ask about their loved one's offence (Suzanne, Julie, Lynn). In particular, Suzanne shared that

*I had to stay away from everybody else. I disconnected myself from people I cared about. I decided never to use the internet and all social medias. I tried to stay away from the newspapers as much as I could, but they were always everywhere. It was just really, really terrifying and then you would come home and it's like, you constantly have to wonder when is it gonna end, and how long are we going to go through this?... It's still to this day I always have that fear, somebody's watching me and that's had an impact on my lifestyle 'cause I don't trust anybody anymore (Suzanne, daughter).*

In this way, relatives are no longer capable of moving forward with their lives or building bonds and connections with others; essentially, the media coverage isolates relatives at a time when they most require the support of others. Moreover, the media also affects relatives' ability to trust others in their life; for example, Frida stated "it's affecting my trusts; I take more precautions now [when it comes to telling others about her husband]". The impacts on relationships are illustrative of Jones et al.'s (1984) 'disruptiveness' dimension of stigma, which suggests that the relation to a sex offender often hinders and strains relatives' relationships with others, and thereby adds to the difficulty of maintaining these relationships. In other words, this relationship between the stigmatized (relatives) and non-stigmatized (others in society) is often fractured as a result of the media coverage.

The constant reminder of their loved one's case in the media discourages relatives from forming friendships and sharing their emotions with others.

#### **6.2.4 – Fear of the Media**

*I didn't think they [the reporters at the courthouse] were looking for me, so I didn't really react, but my husband certainly did. He says that "I thought they were looking for me, to grab me" and, um, so that that fear, it's a horrible fear (Victoria, mother).*

*I just felt angry, powerless. Shame in not doing enough. It was shame because they [media] say negative and bad things about him. They assume everything, but I feel angry, very angry because you don't know what to do, they're not helping you. They put you against a wall (Frida, wife).*

One of the resulting consequences when a loved one commits a sex offence is the media coverage that will undoubtedly follow. All of the participants in this study expressed a genuine fear of the media. More importantly, while the majority of participants claimed that they did not directly interact with the media, they felt as though they were always in fear of a possible encounter with the media or with reporters. In particular, their fear was validated based on what they had witnessed in prior media coverage of others in similar situations. For example, Julie stated, "just from having seen it happen to other people in the media... like on the day it happened, it was very high profile, on national radio, and TV and stuff, so I just basically went on that. Like I am now this spouse of a high profile sex offender and I know what happens to those people." Moreover, Tracy shared her fears regarding the media based on what she had seen previously in the coverage and elaborated, "I was afraid that I would say something that would either negatively influence my husband's court case, or that I would be misquoted or have assumptions made about me. I was afraid that they would be aggressive and unkind." Moreover, she explained,

*Initially, right after disclosure, I was certainly afraid of that [attention from the media]; afraid of reporters at my front door, or calling my house, but it never happened... In the early days, I did not answer the phone if I did not recognize the caller on the display. I tried to avoid being alone at home... Part of my reason for not attending court with my husband was to avoid having to deal with the media there (Tracy, wife).*

While Tracy did not attend court and was thereby able to avoid the media, Lynn found herself in a different situation wherein she had to “hide” herself from reporters. Lynn shared her experience where she felt as though there was “somebody always over your shoulder” because her son’s case received extensive coverage. Moreover, the media coverage frightened her to such a high degree that she was “always looking around the corner of what might come down and who might know.” Likewise, Suzanne harboured a ‘constant fear’ of “people watching you.” She shared that her family coped by “always [looking] out our windows, constantly [checking] phone calls, [figuring] out who are we supposed to trust.” These fears were further echoed by Anne-Marie’s “sleepless nights” due to fear of the media trying to speak with them. Even though many participants’ fear regarding the media did not come to fruition, the constant anxiety and paranoia proved to be extremely exhausting and draining on the relatives. These emotions tended to enhance the overall levels of stress and difficulty that already accompanied the disclosure of their loved one’s sexual offending behaviour.

#### **6.2.4.1 - Media Harassment**

*It is like celebrities, I mean, I get we’re not celebrities, but you see people dying you know, photographers dying just to get that one picture of this... and put their own safety at risk... I don’t know if they do it for thrill or what, but really at the end of it, one more picture of the same person that we’ve been seeing in the newspaper, does it really change anything? (Rosie, daughter)*

Fear of the media is often increased by media harassment. While only two of the participants shared experiences of media harassment, their stories shed light on the additional anxiety, stress, and fear that is forced onto relatives of offenders regarding media coverage. Similarly, the ‘peril’ dimension of stigma as presented by Jones et al. (1984) suggests that relatives are often placed at risk or in danger by the media coverage of their loved one. For example, Lynn shared that she had personal external circumstances and an urgency to protect her family’s identity that was made impossible by the media coverage and content:

*They were always there at the court; when we left, they were there, they basically were climbing trees to get pictures of us... part of that problem, again is the insensitivity to the actual families, because they don't know the whole dynamics of what's going on in the family (Lynn, mother).*

In addition, Rosie recalls an incident wherein her sister was 'attacked' by the media:

*When my sister came out with my dad and they were leaving [the court], a photographer literally chased them down. They had to separate at one point, but she was trying to protect my dad from the picture being taken and the photographer pushed her... When my dad went to jail, a couple of weeks after, we had a police officer call us and the photographer was actually threatening to file a harassment complaint against my sister. I was sitting there and I'm watching her face, and of course, she's completely breaking down and she was just like "Are you effing kidding me?" she's like, "I'm protecting myself, and she pushes me and I'm in the wrong?" so he's like, "Well, you know, you pushed her back... they wanna bill you because what if their equipment gets broken?" and she's like, "What happens if their equipment gets broken?" She's like, "This is my life, I don't care if your camera breaks. You've decided to take this on as your job, these are the risks that you're taking if you are going to be ballsy enough to like chase somebody down to get a picture"... The way I see it is they're there for the show, for what's happening, but they don't understand that we have to live through this, we have to go through this all of the time. That one picture is not going to talk about how they got it (Rosie, daughter).*

Rosie's sister's experience with the media 'attacking' her is significant especially when considering the information that is presented to the public compared to the information that is left out. The public is rarely informed of the struggles and challenges that are involved in the retrieval of media content; in other words, the public is rarely made aware of the danger that relatives are put in when the media attempts to 'get the story'. Furthermore, Rosie's account reiterates Condry's (2007) participant's experience as a "second-class citizen" (p.61) as media reporters "'attack" and "bully" to get the information for their story, having little regard for the well-being and safety of the relatives.<sup>166</sup> In addition, following relatives and staking out their homes further perpetuates the fear that the relatives

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<sup>166</sup> The extent of media harassment was evident in Ariel Castro's aggravated murder, rape, and kidnapping case in May 2013 in Cleveland, Ohio. Castro kidnapped and "chained the women, beat and raped them" (BBC, 2013), for a decade. Following the release of the victims and the disclosure of his crimes, media reporters swarmed Lillian Rodriguez (Castro's mother) as she was leaving her home. While Rodriguez was attempting to drive away from her home, media reporters thrust cameras and microphones in her face, expecting her to make a statement. At this time, Rodriguez stated, "I'll tell you, I have a sick son who has committed something very grave. I'm suffering very much ... I'm suffering over my son's pain. My son is sick and I have nothing to do with what my son did" (Reuters, 2013). Again, the media's ability to harass the relatives of offenders is disconcerting; relatives' find themselves unable to move forward with their lives when the media harasses and hounds them at every opportunity.

experienced, as they are considered ‘less important’ due to their relationship to an offender. Moreover, this incident may also be linked to the idea of media power and discretion (discussed in the following section); the mass media is often given free reign upon reporting techniques and content. This unrestricted freedom can often cause undue hardship for the relatives.

### 6.2.5 – Power of the Media

*The media, they destroy your reputation. You don't get that back and how can you get it back?* (Suzanne, daughter)

The claim that media often influences many people while also impacting others is not new (see Sacco, 1982; Ojo, 2006). In fact, this research found that the relatives of ‘sex offenders’ often experience negative consequences and repercussions as a result of the media coverage, with very few positive impacts to be gained.<sup>167</sup> Media coverage essentially draws attention to these relatives and oftentimes puts them in the spotlight forced to answer questions and clarify any misconceptions that others may have. Specifically, the participants felt as though the media was given extensive power and discretion when it came to reporting on their loved one's case. For example, Lynn shared the idea that while her son committed a “horrible” offence, neither her nor her family did anything wrong. Anne-Marie shared the impacts of the media coverage on her children, while Julie shared about how the media coverage made her want to switch places with her incarcerated loved one because he was isolated from the “community backlash”:

*First of all, the media coverage expanded the audience well beyond, especially with the Internet, right? It expanded the audience of those who would be privy to this. So, had there been no media coverage, we would have been able to close ranks and save our other children a lot of grief and stress and tension. I would say that was most damaging to my other children, because they had to field it. They had to field all the questions... [The crown] identified us by profession, and they put that in the article. We were shocked that they were permitted to do that. That no editor would say, “families off bounds”... And what do you do? It's there, forever... You have to come up with a coping strategy, and so we did but that was shocking to know that they could do that* (Anne-Marie, mother).

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<sup>167</sup> Positive perceptions of media coverage is discussed in a later section of this chapter (section 6.4 – Media Positivity).

*He didn't deserve the protection that he actually got by going to jail where he was protected. 'Cause he didn't have to have the newspaper laying on his door, he was in solitary confinement; he didn't even have contact with other people, and there were times that it was so awful to be in the aftermath of what he did, that I wanted to trade places with him and be in solitary confinement myself because I needed to be protected from what happened, as a victim of his crime and as a collateral victim of his major assaults on other people, I just needed to be protected and I was left totally vulnerable (Julie, ex-wife).<sup>168</sup>*

Julie's comments highlight the influence that the media has in its ability to unintentionally protect the offender and in doing so, harming their relatives while trying to disseminate the information to society. In fact, Julie's story echoes Condry's (2007) findings that suggest that stigma experienced by the relatives is more powerful as the relative is "left on the outside" forced to "continue everyday life" as others are aware of their relation to a sex offender, which increases a relative's internal shame (p.80). In addition, offenders are imprisoned in an environment where their actions are "in some sense, 'normalized'" and so, they are sheltered from the judgment of others on the outside (Condry, 2007, p.80). In this way, the repercussions of the media deflected off Julie's husband and onto herself as she experienced a 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1963). In other words, while her incarcerated husband did not have to experience the stigma resulting from his actions, Julie was forced to bear the displaced or transferred stigma from others in her community.

Likewise, the following sentiments reflect the influence that the participants believe the mass media had and the subsequent impacts:

*They took the picture from Facebook and we [were] thinking the media could help but they made it worse. We didn't know how to handle it. We were scared and shaken... It's very scary – they damage the dignity of people (Frida, wife).*

*I think having it in the newspaper, as much as it was, was wrong, and that they didn't respect the rest of the family. They didn't respect that they bullied us basically and it's okay that they got to because they're the press (Lynn, mother).*

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<sup>168</sup> Given the dire conditions of solitary confinement (UN News Centre, 2011), the fact that Julie wanted to 'trade places' with her then husband is illustrative of the extent of the challenges that she faced within society as a result of the media attention. For more information on the gravity and harmful consequences of solitary confinement, see UN News Centre, 2011; Grassian, 2006; Smith, 2006; Shalev, 2008; Metzner and Fellner, 2010; Katel, 2012.

*I think I realized in my experience that the media have an extraordinary amount of power, and privilege that is so often misused that even just thinking about it now, I just feel really really angry... It angers me to [no] end and so many journalists and news companies - it's just purely about getting sales, and the more sensational they can make something, the more fear they can instill in the reader. The more newspapers or TV programs or whatever they'll sell, and I think that is criminal. I think it's criminal, I think it's, at the very least, irresponsible and at the most, it's harmful to a criminal level that the way the news is allowed to report things and monger fear and mistrust when it just doesn't have to be that way (Julie, ex-wife).*

There is a considerable amount of harm inflicted when the mass media are given such a vast amount of power to report in whichever way they choose. In a similar vein, Haggerty (2004) discusses the extreme boundaries and discretion afforded to journalists and the rigorous ethical scrutiny to which they are not subjected (p.395).<sup>169</sup> This level of power often causes additional and undue harms on legally innocent individuals in society. Therefore, while attempting to cope with their loved one's actions and maintain their own family dynamics, they must also learn to cope with the unwanted media attention. Moreover, given the immediate and constant accessibility and prevalence of media through various mediums, relatives are never truly able to manage or escape the media content.

### **6.2.6 – Necessity for Clarification and Speaking Out**

*They harass. They don't know really what happened, they just assumed, we don't even have any right to talk, to say our side (Frida, wife).*

Many of the participants in this study shared a desire to speak out to the media, but found that they were not afforded such an opportunity. Rosie shared:

*I just feel like I have to be mum about everything and, yes, talk about my feelings and stuff, but in the background, I just want to scream at the top of my lungs and tell everybody what the real story is because I don't feel like we get that chance... I said it with my other sister too that I almost want to go knock on this person's door [the victim] and say "let's have a real talk and let's actually talk about what happened that day" (Rosie, daughter).*

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<sup>169</sup> The central focus of this article is in contrasting journalists to academic scholars. This article is of value to this research as it showcases the limitless avenues available to journalists, which may often elicit fear, harm and anxiety for those featured.

Frida's and Rosie's experience highlight the media's ability to silence them as they were not allowed to speak out and discuss their respective circumstances surrounding their loved one's case. Both women found that they wanted the chance to speak with the victim as well as inform the public of their loved one's innocence but did not have an avenue in which to do so.<sup>170</sup>

As explored in an earlier chapter, Fishman (1990) found that the media tended to place a certain degree of expectation on the relatives of sex offender's to account for their loved one's actions (p.119), by either speaking out to the media or defending their loved one. The desire to speak out resonated with many of the participants in this study; in fact, the majority of the participants in the study expressed interest in speaking out to the media,<sup>171</sup> but they were afraid of the potentially negative impact that their statement would have on their loved one's case. As the participants' accounts reveal, the stigmatization of an individual who commits a sexual offence often hinders the relatives from speaking out as they fear the backlash that may result from the general public; in fact, many participants feared that their relationships and interactions with others would become 'more difficult' if they spoke out. Alternatively, Victoria stated that she was not given a chance to speak out to the media, though she strongly feared that they would approach her; several other participants also echoed this fear. For example, Julie was in constant fear of reporters; she shared that "I always was like 'who's going to be at the courthouse when I get there? Is someone going to be at my home? What's going to happen to me?' Like I had all those fearful images, but none of that ever happened."<sup>172</sup> However, with the media choosing to not approach Julie, she felt as though she had "absolutely no voice" and thus rendering her "powerless."

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<sup>170</sup> While the scope of the study is not to determine the participant's loved one's guilt or innocence, it does speak to the necessity of relatives having a safe space in which to speak out publically without fearing backlash from others.

<sup>171</sup> This topic did not come up in my interviews with Talia and Victoria. This could be attributed to the fact that their husband and son, respectively, received minimal to moderate coverage. Moreover, while Tracy's husband's case also received moderate coverage, she did state that she did not want to speak out of fear of the media and hurting her husband's case.

<sup>172</sup> Similar to Tracy, Julie had these fears in her mind based on how she had viewed or heard the ways in which other relatives of offenders were treated through the mass media.

On the other hand, one of the participants in the study did contact the media and found that the results did not work in her favour as she and her family had to deal with the consequences of her decision to speak out. Suzanne contacted the radio station that was broadcasting the details of her father's case and requested that they stop; however, she stated, "they just used my words against me when I was an emotional mess." Furthermore, she shared, "that was the first mistake [speaking out], I became part of their game, I became part of their little trap and I was lured in and now I'm becoming a victim of... what their words are putting out to everybody else." She shared her story:

*I was a big fool because I shouldn't have but I was so full of rage and anger and I just wanted to protect who I could... The guy who was on the phone [radio broadcaster], I was just asking him "Can you please stop saying that?"... and instead, he asked me questions. At first I was like, "Why are you asking me these things?" and then I was too blindsided to see that he's actually giving me a secret interview, it was terrible... The next thing I know, it's on the internet saying "quoted by daughter of so and so", and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I feel like a fool," it was just so bad. I still regret that and I have to live with that and it sucks (Suzanne, daughter).*

Instead, while she was speaking out in order to protect her family against what was being broadcast about her father, she felt as though she was "doing a really crappy job because I pretty much put our family in danger by exposing ourselves and that was the worst thing I could have done." In a report titled "Action Guide for Prisoners' and Offenders' Families – Dealing with the Media," the Action for Prisoner's Families (2013) states, "a journalist is not there to take down everything you say to them and then repeat it back to their readers; after an interview they will go through their notes and pick out the key paragraph or even line which is 'the story'" (p.1). When the media misuses and misrepresents the words of relatives that have found the courage to speak out, it can often lead to feelings of frustration as they have to manage the challenging aftermath of their (incorrectly presented) words. Moreover, incorrectly reported stories tend to heighten emotions of helplessness and hopelessness, as they are silenced and unable to share their experiences. Rosie stated, "if I voiced anything, it wasn't going to be for the positive, it was just going to be completely bounced around... At the end of the day, they are not there to ask you, to be a friend, you know? They're here to get the

dirty part of it all.” Likewise, Lynn stated that “sometimes I wish I had done an interview to make it straight, yet I wouldn’t have trusted them to report it the same way, so it was always best just to be like protective and don’t give them anything.” The media’s misuse of relatives’ statements tends to manufacture or increase the stigmatizing effect that relatives experience; in other words, when media content is unfair or inaccurate, an incorrect perception of the relatives is presented to the public. In light of Blumer’s (1969) tenets of symbolic interactionism, an incorrect perception still influences the ways in which the public chooses to interact with relatives – thus, a negative and incorrect view often results in strained and hostile interactions, as found amongst several participants’ accounts.

#### **6.2.6.1 – Inaccurate Reporting**

*It was extraordinary – what was just factually inaccurate. But then you know, even things that were accurate were reported in such an inhuman way; the constant going over of violent acts and details was like to what end? What was it for? It was just to make people more and more afraid and to polarize people. And they got [it]; if that’s what their goal was, then they achieved it (Julie, ex-wife).*

Participants in this study revealed that one of the main reasons that they wanted to speak out and share their experiences was in order to clarify misconceptions and/or inaccurate reporting. In many of the cases, relatives found themselves becoming reporters for their loved one’s case as they had to explain, clarify, and/or defend the stories that were published in the media. For example, Rosie stated that “to me, because the media provided details, that [many] more questions came back to us. ‘Um, what about this?’ ‘They said this and they said this, and is this true?’” The very act of clarifying details of their loved one’s case forced Rosie and her family to assume some degree of responsibility and obligation in order to rectify the inaccuracies presented in the media content. In addition, further responsibility is placed on the relatives, as they have to defend themselves and their loved ones against the incorrect content, due to the media’s inability to ‘check their facts’.

Additionally, Lynn stated that the media appeared to find “little gems” that they would embellish for readership and/or viewership and would often make these into “another storyline.” She

believed that they were “grains of truth” and further elaborated, “they’ve made it to be so much bigger than it really was, and you can’t go in and say ‘wait wait wait, stop the presses, let’s reprint this, let’s correct that’ and you felt like you wanted to, but there isn’t that avenue for sure.”

Similarly, many of the participants in this study found that the media coverage of their loved one’s case contained many reporting issues. With the exception of the three women (Frida, Suzanne, and Rosie) who believed that their loved one was innocent, all of the participants acknowledged and emphasized that their loved one committed an offence and that harm had occurred. However, all of the participants experienced a level of distrust in the media due to the fact that they ignored important circumstances of the case. For example, Victoria and Anne-Marie felt as though the media ignored the fact that their sons were medically ill at the time of their offences, while Victoria, Talia, and Tracy felt as though the media did not report the good and positive measures undertaken by their relative to right their wrongs such as therapy and support groups. In addition, Tracy and Julie found that the media did not emphasize the fact that their husbands had turned themselves in. Julie found this lack of information extremely “harmful” and stated that, “what the media left out was sometimes more harmful even than what they put in”, she shared:

*One incredibly important piece of information about my husband’s case was that he turned himself into police that he called 911 to report what he did, to ask for help, to rescue the women he had assaulted and kidnapped. The media never, not once, did they ever ever report that he turned himself over to police. My feeling is that if they had’ve, um, I would have been treated quite a bit differently... I think we have some respect for people who own up to what they did; but it doesn’t sell as many newspapers as a manhunt or as a monster. So that was just never reported and the reality that that set for me was that when people in the community would see me or hear that I was going to visit him or that I wasn’t filled with rage and anger or that I had any complexity at all, they just assumed or jumped to conclusions that there must be something incredibly wrong with me. They wouldn’t have known I was going to talk with someone who was remorseful, who was taking responsibility, who was saying “I am guilty,” they didn’t know that piece of it. So, that almost like, the absence of information by the reporters, by the media, created huge problems for me, and complications (Julie, ex-wife).*

Julie's experience implies that the missing details in the media content made her life far more challenging than was necessary. In this light, many of the participants felt as though the news content of their loved one was factual, but lacked important information that perhaps would have eased the challenges that they faced as a result of the coverage. In this way, while the media have the ability to provide a "public forum for debate" (Kitzinger, 1999, p.220) and initiate discussion about the root causes of criminalized behaviour thereby generating community awareness and support (Kitzinger, 1999, p.218), they instead ostracize and create stigmatizing experiences for the relatives of sex offenders. For example, Lynn claims that the missing details in her son's case made her feel as though she had to "defend him," even though she did not want to, given the harm he had caused. She shared, "I feel like the news ends up making you do [this], you do end up defending him and I don't want to defend him in that sense. I want to stand by him, but I don't want to defend him. He did wrong." When relatives are seen defending their relative, even out of necessity due to the media coverage, they are further alienated or stigmatized from society and depicted as condoning the actions of their loved one, which is likely not the case. Moreover, when the media dispassionately publishes the news and excludes important information such as in Julie's and Tracy's cases, the media may create stigmatizing interactions between relatives and others in their community as others may question why relatives choose to maintain contact with or visit their incarcerated loved one.<sup>173</sup> For example, relatives experience the 'disruptiveness' dimension of stigma when media content is inaccurate or incorrect, which may lead to further strained relationships and interactions (Jones et al., 1984).

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<sup>173</sup> It is important to recognize that there is a strong possibility that even if these details were presented in the media, the participants may still have had the stigmatizing interactions. However, the point to be emphasized is that the media does not allow the public to reach a conclusion independently. In other words, by simply disregarding information, they influence the public's perception, without offering them the entire story.

### 6.2.7 – Distinction of Sex Offender and Offender

*With a sex offence, it's a lifetime offence; even though you serve your time, you're forever... You're a sex offender for life (Lynn, mother).*

While the media coverage of any serious offence can affect families of the offender to varying degrees, the relatives of convicted sex offenders appear to experience unique consequences regarding media coverage. In fact, “individuals classified as sexual predators are the pariahs of the community. Sex offenders are arguably the most despised members of our society” (Cucolo and Perlin, n.d., p.3; see also Petrunik et al., 2008, p.111). As discussed earlier, oftentimes, the media coverage does not present all of the necessary information regarding a case; this in turn can lead to further questions for the relatives, thereby making the situation more challenging to manage. Tracy shared:

*If the media coverage had never specified what kind of offense had occurred (ie it could have been theft, domestic violence, drunk driving, etc) instead of identifying it as a sexual offense involving children then I think we could have dealt with it more privately. Also, by simply identifying him as a sex offender, the article did not distinguish clearly the severity of his actions, and I did have at least one family member question just exactly what he had done, as their imagination was far worse than the truth (Tracy, wife).*

Many of the participants in this study shared the opinion that the media coverage often insinuated and framed their loved one as a ‘monster’ due to their *sex* offence. For example, Talia acknowledges that her husband’s offence was a “big mistake”; however, “portraying him as some sicko monster was harsh.” Moreover, other relatives also found that the media described their offending relatives as ‘monsters’:

*They portrayed him truly as a monster. It's totally, totally because of the media coverage; and I felt myself saying to people, “he's not a monster, he's not, he was ill, very ill.” He's portrayed as a crazed lunatic, you know, demented monster... They made it very sensational, you know. The kind of thing you would read in a trashy tabloid (Anne-Marie, mother).*

The concerns regarding the permanence and accessibility of online media content expressed by the mothers in this study are illustrative of the worries that they experience regarding the long lasting

‘course of the mark’ (Jones et al., 1984). Other participants shared their views regarding the stigmatizing portrayal of sex offenders in the media:

*[G]iven how the public sensationalizes violence in general but seems to view sexual deviance as disgusting... even one sexual offence someone is branded as a monster and irredeemable ... its not often viewed or portrayed as it being the result of an illness, or an addiction - they are just lumped as a bad egg, rotten, bad [sic] (Talia, wife).*

*In general, I believe that the overall tendency in media to portray people who have offended sexually as "monsters" or "incurable" has contributed to the way our extended family members have reacted. They have no context in which to understand the support or therapies that are available, or that there is hope for rehabilitation in the long run (Tracy, wife).*

Additionally, Rosie believed that if her father had not been convicted of a *sex offence*, there would not have been very much media attention. Alternatively, Frida expressed her belief that the media reporters were ‘monsters’, not the offender or their relatives. She stated, “I was scared, shaking... the media made it worse. They are monsters that attack the family. There is the person accused but not the family. There [are] others impacted.”

While media coverage affects relatives in many different ways, the consequences that arise from **sex** offences appear to be heightened due to their stigmatizing nature; for example, relatives must cope with the representation of their loved one as a ‘monster’, an idea that is fueled and emphasized by the media coverage. As Eschholz et al. (2003) suggest, “the media often described the offenders as animals or monsters, symbolically severing the shared human connection between the offender and his or her community” (p.173). The human connection can often be lost or diminished, almost by proxy, for the relatives of the offender as the offender is incarcerated and the relatives must manage the aftermath of the offence on the outside. In this way, relatives once again experience the ‘disruptiveness’ dimension of stigma (Jones et al., 1984) as their interactions with others are affected and strained as a result of the ‘sex offender’ label.

### 6.2.8 – Technological Concerns

Another prevalent collateral consequence of media coverage as experienced by the relatives in this study was a fear of consequences resulting from technological advancements. In this day and age, the accessibility of online news content is extremely predominant and widespread among those in Canada. Moreover, when news content is available online, it is accessible through a variety of mediums such as smartphones, mobile devices and tablets, to name a few. In this light, news content is available and accessible anytime (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) and anywhere (internationally).<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, online content can be updated almost immediately, and due to online news archives, the content is often available for lengthy periods of time. Essentially, the archival mode of online content and the ability for individuals to post comments and opinions anonymously is a challenging and difficult reality for many relatives of offenders to cope with. For example, Rosie shared the difficulties that her family encountered due to the online news coverage regarding her father; she explained how her extended family members “believe whatever they read” and this was problematic as she was not given a “chance to rebuttal”:

*Our family, I mean Internet is available everywhere, reads all of this. You don't get the chance to speak or say what you need to say to your family members to believe anything. They've already believed whatever, based on whatever they read right? So it's almost like you're now trying to clean up the mess that they've created on top of the mess that is really happening (Rosie, daughter).*

Moreover, relatives stressed the permanence of online content:

*I do always wonder if people I meet will Google either my name or my husband's name, and make the connection. And that's nerve-wracking because the articles are there, forever available on the Internet... There is also a sense that my husband's past will always be a part of our family, and this is true in part because of the permanence of the newspaper articles and the internet links (Tracy, wife).*

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<sup>174</sup> In fact, a 2011 study of 1,682 randomly selected adults, conducted by the Canadian Media Research Consortium found that 38% of those surveyed preferred the television for news, while 30% preferred to go online to access news content and information (CMRC, 2011).

*On the Internet, it's there forever; it never goes away. I remember somebody said to me one time, "Oh today's news; tomorrow fish wrapping," you know, implying that newspapers got used for fish wrapping but it's not that way anymore. It's not that way and that applies to a lot of people, you make one silly mistake and it's there forever (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Essentially, the nature of online news content has a sense of permanence that extends the 'course of the mark' dimension of stigma for relatives of sex offenders (Jones et al., 1984). In other words, the stigmatization of one's association and connection with an individual who has committed a sex offence will likely exist for as long as the content is accessible, with a minimal capacity to diminish over time. In addition, the fact that the news content was and continues to be easily accessible to anyone with an Internet connection also produced fears of the content being discovered by children in the future. In this way, media content can limit a relative's ability to 'conceal' their stigma (Jones et al., 1984), and thereby impeding their ability to move forward in both the short and long term. For example, Rosie and Tracy vocalized their fears and anxieties regarding their children being able to type their relative's name into an online search engine and learn about their loved one's offence(s):

*The fact is that my boys at any point in time can Google my father's name and read up on all the articles and read up on all the comments. So, it's never going to go away 'cause at one point when they're old enough we'll have to explain (Rosie, daughter).*

*[I]f my husband had simply been identified as an offender as opposed to a sex offender involving children, there would be less chance of long-term negative impact from anyone accessing the media reports in the future (ie my daughter's classmates)... For example, if, in six or seven years, a classmate of my daughter's decides to Google my husband's name, and the article only lists a generic offense, then it would be easier for my daughter to acknowledge it and say that it happened in the past and he's received help. Whereas if the article identifies him as a sexual offender involving children, all the stigma and misconceptions about sexual offenders would be more likely to be an issue (Tracy, wife).*

Rosie's and Tracy's concerns for their children's futures is extremely challenging in light of their lack of control over online content and its ability to have long-lasting stigmatizing impacts. Furthermore, the permanent media content often creates fears of future stigmatizing interactions either for themselves or their children. With the constant access to news content, relatives are often

left questioning ‘who knows?’ as others can learn of their loved one’s offence at any time; in turn, this emphasizes a relative’s sense of vulnerability as they are fearful of meeting and interacting with others. Moreover, it also leaves relatives guessing as to how widespread their loved one’s case may have become. In addition, the anonymous comments that are published online also present a further concern for relatives:

*I still never know what people are going to read ‘cause now with everything being electronic... stuff is there forever. And online commenters, I mean that’s also extremely harmful; this sort of culture that we have now, where you can just be at home and kind of mindlessly comment on a knee-jerk reaction and not put your real name, and just and be incredibly mean to people... Knowing that it’s out there continues to create a sense of vulnerability (Julie, ex-wife).*

Likewise, the permanence of online content is a source of further emotional stress and anxiety for those relatives attempting to rebuild their lives:

*I know that people have access; all they have to do is go home and Google. That can create a continued sense of vulnerability and re-victimizing... Even now, although it’s far diminished... let’s say I meet somebody new, now I have children, so I meet people [at] my kid’s playgroups. When someone says, “What do you do for a living?” and I explain [it], if then that person doesn’t talk to me the next time, or they don’t invite me for a play date after that, little things like that, I will always always assume it is because they’ve read something about me that they are disturbed by, or they they’ve judged me because of my ex-husbands offences and because of my choice to marry him... I always have a trauma reaction and I always have that vulnerability... I don’t know when or if I’m ever going to not have that ... It’s just that kind of exposure is very scarring, so I do my best, like I have those scars and I do my best to manage them but I don’t know that they’re ever going to go away (Julie, ex-wife).*

Technology provides constant concern and anxiety for relatives when meeting and interacting with others, as well as a lasting fear for their children in the future. It is the concerns with online news content that makes relatives especially vulnerable to difficult and stigmatizing interactions with others in their community. Julie’s comments emphasize the idea that the stigma of having a loved one engage in sexual offending never truly escapes the relatives due to the permanence of online content. In short, as long as the media content is accessible online, any individual is capable of typing a name into a search engine and learning about a loved one’s offence, thereby heightening and

lengthening the ‘course of the mark’ dimension of stigma for relatives of sexual offenders for an uncertain and indeterminate amount of time (Jones et al., 1984). Julie’s comments emphasize the vulnerability and helplessness that is caused by the media and technology; in particular, she faced the harsh reality that the media content regarding her ex-husband’s offences that likely associate her as well, are forever available and accessible.

### **6.2.9 – Current and Future Concerns**

Many participants in this study recognized that the media coverage likely had devastating consequences for the primary victims. The concern that the relatives expressed regarding the victims sheds light on the notion that even while coping with the shock and sadness of a loved one committing a serious offence, many relatives also acknowledge and recognize that harm has been caused at the hands of their loved one and thus, they are deeply concerned for the victim.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, Eschholz et al.’s (2003) work with relatives of murderers found that “media coverage was a continuous reminder of the trauma that both families suffered, and it prevented movement toward closure. In addition, family members rarely felt that their side of the story was told. Instead, they saw the media as sensationalizing the event and twisting the truth to the detriment of victims’ and offenders’ families” (p.173). Additionally, relatives’ concern for the victim(s) may, in a sense, reflect a desire to minimize both stigma and ‘guilt-by-association’. In other words, the remorse emphasized

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<sup>175</sup> In fact, Shannon Moroney’s (2011) personal story illustrates the constant concern that she has for her husband’s victims and the numerous times that they have crossed her mind while she was coping with the fallout and aftermath of his offences on her as his wife and his victim (of voyeurism). Moreover, recalling Ariel Castro’s case (see footnote 166), Lillian Rodriguez expressed her concern for her son’s victims: “I ask for forgiveness to those mothers, may those young ladies forgive me. I suffer because they suffered” (Reuters, 2013). Additionally, recalling Michel Chrétien’s sexual assault case (see footnote 126), his parents also expressed their concern for the victims through their public statement: “[we] have been deeply concerned by any harm that may have come to others as a result of his conduct” (CBC News, 2002). Within these three examples, it is evident that relatives seize the opportunity, however difficult, to acknowledge the harm caused to the victims. Importantly, while Moroney, Rodriguez, and Chrétien were all offered the opportunity to have their concern for the victim(s) featured widely in the media coverage, many of the participants in this study were not given an avenue in which to speak out. In this light, all of the concerns that the participants’ shared for the victims were important and compelling, and thus, worthy of mention in this thesis. Additionally, this research offered many relatives the opportunity to vocalize their feelings and, in a sense, address the victims.

in their comments may be illustrative of their desire to release any guilt that they may be experiencing. Moreover, there is the possibility that if others understand that relatives are also expressing deep concern for the victims, the stigmatizing interactions may slowly diminish.

Likewise, the participants in this study echoed similar thoughts:

*You have that shame that he hurt families; I'm hurting so I can imagine how they're hurting... I wish that I could have held them and tell them how sorry, whatever impact it was going to be for them, that I wish them well, and I do. I wish I had an opportunity to have said that to them that I wish them well and I wish that they are doing well and that they have moved on... that they were young, they can find healing and I hope that they have. That doesn't leave me, the impact that [it] would have had on the other families and of course for the victims for sure. That races through my mind wondering are they well and have they moved on? (Lynn, mother)*

*I was angered by the media; I thought that their constant repetition of the graphic violence of the assaults was very traumatizing for the victims, who could never be named but who certainly would know and people in their lives would know... I thought it was incredibly insensitive (Julie, ex-wife).*

*I thought that if I were the parents of the victim, I would have been really angry because they revealed some details that if I were the family member, I wouldn't have wanted that in the paper. So, it was very, I thought, indiscreet and cruel to both families (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Interestingly, Lynn shared that she would have liked to apologize to her neighbours and community members. Lynn believed that her son's actions had the potential to impact their lives as well as "they didn't move on that street thinking it [a sex offence] was going to happen in their community."<sup>176</sup> Lynn's overwhelming concern for those around her and how they might have been impacted by her son's offending behaviour speaks to a side of relatives that is neither depicted nor understood through the media content; in other words, the media rarely highlights the emotional struggle that relatives experience in attempting to come to terms with their loved one's actions. Many of the participants in this study expressed deep concerns for the victims and many shared that they would have liked to offer apologies but found that they were not given an avenue in which to do so. Additionally, the relatives emphasized the devastating consequences that the media content likely

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<sup>176</sup> Lynn shared the apology she would have liked to offer her neighbours, if she was ever afforded the opportunity: "I'm sorry for whatever shame it's put on you, or how you felt about it or how you might have to deal with it."

had on the victims' relatives, let alone the victims themselves. In this light, the detrimental role of media within the collateral consequences of sexual offending encompasses not only the offender and his family, but also the victims.

As seen through this research, the media plays a large role in generating the stigma that relatives experience; however, the media does not consider the impact of their words on those directly affected by the content. In this way, the relatives are ostracized, when in fact, they bear the same concerns and worries for the victims that the rest of the community likely does, as they are equally shocked and disconcerted by their relatives' actions. However, while the media is able to play an important role in voicing the concerns and experiences of those in the community (Kitzinger, 1999, p.209), they neglect to feature some of the voices that need to be heard thereby diminishing their potentiality for positive impacts and influence.

#### Future Concerns

*I'm still scared. I hope they never remember us. In the future when he comes back, I hope they don't still pick on him (Frida, wife).*

Relatives also shared a variety of future fears and concerns regarding media coverage. For example, Tracy believes that further accusations against her husband regarding his offences will not emerge, but she also knows that "the possibility is always there." In a similar vein, while contemplating the future and her father's eventual release from prison, Suzanne understands that he will always "be in some kind of risk because of what they've [the media] said, how they've had it shown in the world." Rosie and Lynn share about the media waves:

*[Regarding public parole hearings] At any point in time, the media can go in and take down notes, and decide to publicize it everywhere. So, we're never really done with the issue because it could at any point in time, if they have no story for that week, they will come up with something. You know, "I heard so and so is going to be coming out of jail, we should talk about that"; so, it's really not done for us ever... We can never really escape it... The only thing I can hope for is that they [the media] forget about us (Rosie, daughter).*

*They [the media] had no business with any family member because it's nothing to do with them, they just happen to be a family member, they're innocent, they're victims of it too ... Having them try to take pictures ... they have no idea what that family might be going through or if there is you know a strange husband, or a strange family member anywhere else.... Why look at my face? Why do they need to see how I'm coping with anything? ... It's crazy because the calm is here. He's doing his time, but we know that when he comes to be released, the media can be right on it again and they can then portray you know, 'sex offender back in the community'; so we're living with a sigh right now. But once he's released, you have no idea, if it's the flavor the day, let's do this, if there's not a bigger story out there, we'll drag this one and make it bigger than what it needs to be (Lynn, mother).*

The waves of media coverage surrounding their loved one appeared to be a serious concern and a source of anxiety and anticipation for Rosie, Frida, Tracy and Lynn. The realization that their loved one's cases could easily be published in the media without consent or warning was also deeply challenging, as relatives will never truly be free from the media attention and exposure. In fact, Suzanne's comments suggesting that the information published about her father has already been released, thereby placing her entire family at risk creates a lasting sense of stigma for her family; in other words, while the 'course of the mark' is substantially lengthened for Suzanne's family in light of the media coverage generated by her father's case, the 'peril' dimension of stigma is also presented as the content may produce dangerous situations for her entire family (Jones et al., 1984). In this sense, the stigma will never truly go away as this information is easily accessible, and already 'out there'; as suggested earlier, the permanence of the media content ensures the permanence of stigmatizing characteristics for the relatives of sexual offenders.

### **6.3 – Stigma Management Techniques: Secrecy versus Disclosure**

As discussed in Chapter 3, stigma management offers relatives of offenders' techniques with which to minimize feelings of stigma. Condry (2007) suggests "relatives' experience of secondary stigma and their strategies for managing it will depend on whether the status is known" (p.81). In cases of sexual offending, difficulties arise when a family name is shared, the size of the community is small enough for information to travel relatively fast among members, or there is media coverage

(Condry, 2007, p.81). Among the participants in this study, both Lynn and Julie found that the media content in their respective cases published a picture of their home, leaving them more vulnerable to criticism and judgment from others. In Julie's case, she shared that a media article specified the name of the street she lived on, and given that it was a small street, it would have been "extremely easy" for someone to locate the house. This type of identifying media coverage may cause extreme anxiety, stress, and potential danger (due to vigilantism) for the relatives of offenders, thereby heightening their 'peril' dimension of stigma (Jones et al., 1984).

In addition, Goffman (1963) suggests that the media plays a central role wherein they are able to "make it possible for a 'private' person to be transformed into a 'public' figure (p. 71). In light of becoming a 'public' figure, relatives must determine how to manage the information regarding their loved one and in some instances they are offered a chance to 'pass'<sup>177</sup> (Goffman, 1963, p.73). Thus, the ability to 'pass' can often help a relative manage the stigma of association to a sex offender. For example, Lynn's daughter found a way in which to 'conceal her stigma' (Jones et al., 1984) when she opted to take her husband's name following marriage after strongly declaring all throughout her life that she would keep her maiden name. In this way, the media content stating her brother's name could no longer be linked to her. Yet, while Lynn's daughter took concrete steps to 'conceal her stigma', she was nevertheless emotionally burdened with guilt as she negotiated between her own need to protect herself and to disassociate herself from her brother.<sup>178</sup>

In addition to 'concealing their stigma,' (Jones et al., 1984) other stigma management techniques include individuals maintaining "physical distance" in order to prevent others from

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<sup>177</sup> The concept of 'passing' is discussed in length in the 'Theoretical Framework' chapter.

<sup>178</sup> In fact, Lynn further shared, "afterwards when she [her daughter] took her vows and they announced like the, introducing the new [couple], like she did step aside and she said "[I] just need a moment for myself" and she went into the washroom and she cried because she felt she betrayed herself and betrayed her brother." Lynn's daughter's experience highlights part of the struggle involved in trying to conceal one's stigma as relatives sometimes encounter moments wherein they feel as though they must deny their association to a person convicted of a sex offence.

identifying them (Goffman, 1963, p.99). For example, Victoria shared that her immediate family and her husband's family are unaware of her son's offence, as they do not live in the same town.

Finally, relatives' may "voluntarily disclose" their stigmatizing characteristic (Goffman, 1963, p.100). For example, Tracy and her husband disclosed the allegations to both of their families and their community early on; in doing so, the media content that was published served as corroboration and confirmation of the information that they had shared with them. Tracy justified their voluntary disclosure:

*I think that if they had found out from the media first, it would have been worse, as they could easily have though[t] that I was trying to keep it all secret. Because I was able to tell most of my friends and family directly before the media, they did not have to question if I had been trying to hide it... I did hope that by being pro-active and telling people directly, it would limit the possibility of mis-information and rumours (Tracy, wife).*

Tracy's account is illustrative of Goffman's (1963) notion that those who 'pass' may often find themselves in problematic situations wherein they are seen as duplicitous for maintaining their secrecy. Since Tracy revealed her husband's offending behaviour to others in their community prior to the media content, she did not have to face this risk.

Essentially, media content has the ability to present relatives as 'discredited persons'. In other words, while relatives of sex offenders could often fall under the term 'discreditable persons,' it is the media coverage that makes one's relation to a sex offender 'known' thereby preventing them from 'passing' (Goffman, 1963, p.16). Moreover, while 'passing' may seem deceitful to some, media coverage also limits the ability for relatives to disclose the information themselves, especially to other family members and close friends. Relatives stated that by not having the opportunity to disclose the offences on their own terms, others made judgments of their loved one based on the media content and disallowed the relatives from presenting 'their side of the story' (Frida, Rosie). Thus, keeping in line with Blumer's (1969) understanding of symbolic interactionism, media coverage encourages the general public to form an opinion of the offender before offering relatives a

chance to share their version or to even disclose the information privately to those closest to them. In turn, this creates strained interactions and relationships between relatives (the stigmatized) and others (the non-stigmatized) in the community.

#### 6.4 – Media Positivity

*I think, although yeah the media bombarded us with stuff, you kind of find out who those people who are really there for the right reasons or those who are there to find out information from you and then just go gossip even more elsewhere (Rosie, daughter).*

While most of the participants could not pinpoint any direct positive results to arise from the offending behaviour or the media coverage (Talia, Lynn, Anne-Marie, Frida, Victoria), some of them did express minor positives that emerged as a result of the media coverage (Tracy, Suzanne, Julie, Rosie). For example, Tracy found that the media coverage proved that her husband and her were “not hiding anything” and that with the very public media coverage, ‘there were many people who were able to vouch for their compliance with all restrictions’. Moreover, Julie shared the following:

*When it comes to the media, let’s say on the first day what stands out in my mind, the very day that the crimes happened, there were police in front of my home and a reporter interviewed the police officer and said “You know, we understand that this man was newly married, what can you tell us about his wife?” and the police officer said, and was quoted in the paper as saying “All I can say is she has absolutely nothing to do with this” and that was excellent, that that was printed ... That probably saved me [from] what I can only imagine would have been ten times worse; I think that in my specific case, the precedent that was set by Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, put it into the minds of Canadians that the wife is usually a guilty party, and so it became really important for that to be clear like not only did I have absolutely nothing to do with it, I wasn’t even in town at the time, when these happened (Julie, ex-wife).*

Julie’s story emphasizes the influential role that the media, as well as the police, are able to play in limiting and diminishing the negative impacts that relatives may experience following a loved one’s offence. In fact, media coverage plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences for relatives of sex offenders, as well as in shaping the interactions that they have with others. In fact, Frida’s earlier

comments regarding the ability of the mass media to protect relatives,<sup>179</sup> but not doing so is underscored by Julie's experience.

### **Chapter Summary**

Individuals face a myriad of collateral consequences that arise when a loved one engages in criminalized activity. As seen in the previous chapter, relatives encounter a variety of internal and external impacts. Relatives shared experiences of emotional difficulties along with the innumerable ramifications on children and siblings of sex offenders. Oftentimes, children and siblings are unable to comprehend the gravity of the offending behaviour that has occurred, but must come to terms with the separation from their loved one. More importantly, the separation can often have an immeasurable influence on the well-being and growth of a young person (Cunningham, 2001). As found throughout the interview data, relatives shared numerous experiences of strained interactions and loss of friendships as a result of their loved one's actions. In particular, interview data corroborated Mead's (1955) and Blumer's (1969) theoretical understanding wherein relatives embodied the reflection of themselves believed to be held by others in their community; in other words, relatives experienced emotions of guilt, blame, and stigma when they felt that others perceived them in this way.

Additionally, the goal of this project was to uncover the stigmatizing impacts of media coverage on the relatives of sex offenders in their private and public lives. The interview data suggests that the media coverage of a loved one's criminalized behaviour severely exacerbates the already difficult and challenging consequences that arise from the disclosure of a loved one's sexual offence as suggested by Condry (2007). The interview data further suggests that relatives experienced many of the dimensions of stigma as highlighted by Jones et al. (1984). For example, media content made 'concealability' extremely challenging for relatives, as their relation to a sex

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<sup>179</sup> See section 6.2 – Harms Caused by the Media and their Coverage.

offender was made known to the public. Moreover, the accessibility and permanence of media content ensured the longevity and fear of stigma for relatives thereby extending their 'course of the mark'. In addition, several participants in this study experienced, and continue to experience, the 'peril' dimension of stigma as it created, and continues to create, dangerous situations for them within their community as well as for their incarcerated loved one.

Finally, while prior literature suggests that individuals may be able to engage in stigma management techniques such as secrecy, disclosure or 'passing' (Goffman, 1963), the interview data suggests that media content limits a relative's ability to utilize these techniques, and in some cases renders it almost impossible as they are unable to maintain secrecy of their loved one's actions. In this light, media not only exacerbates the challenges for relatives of sex offenders, it also extends and lengthens the stigmatization period for the relatives, often for an indeterminate amount of time.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 - Summary & Overview**

This chapter offers a brief summary of this study and situates it within the available literature. I also present relatives' suggestions for future media reporting practices regarding sex offences. Finally, I conclude with directions for future research regarding new avenues that require further study by drawing on the strengths and limitations of this study.

Through the experiential accounts of nine women, this research empirically substantiated Condry's (2007) claim that the media exacerbates the already challenging consequences that arise from criminalized offending behaviour. Specifically, this thesis explored the impacts and consequences of media coverage for the relatives of adult male *sex offenders* in Canada while at the same time highlighting the overall collateral consequences that emerge for relatives as a result of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour. Rooted in the theoretical frameworks of Herbert Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism and Erving Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, this research uncovered the often (and most likely, unintended) devastating harms caused by the media through their coverage and the impacts on relatives' interactions within their personal and public lives.

#### **7.1.1 – Overall Collateral Consequences of a Loved One's Sexually Offending Behaviour**

The findings from the in-depth interviews conducted for this study revealed that the overall collateral consequences of a loved one's sexually offending behaviour strongly echoed those found in prior research (Condry, 2007; Hannem, 2008). For example, relatives shared difficulties of emotional, psychological, and financial impacts, of changes in the family structure with an emphasis on the impacts on children and/or siblings; as well as of impacts on friendships and public interactions and overall fears and concerns.

While there is a significant body of literature exploring the collateral consequences of criminally offending behaviour, this research focused on a particular type of offending behaviour.

Given the disrepute associated with sexual offending, this research explored the impacts of this behaviour on the relatives of sexual offenders. While the impacts for all relatives of offenders cannot be generalized, the findings of this study suggest that the relatives of sex offenders within this study experienced a unique and, in their perception, a higher degree of challenges as a result of their relation to a convicted sex offender.<sup>180</sup>

The interview data suggests that the relatives of convicted sex offenders experienced high levels of the ‘disruptiveness’ dimension of stigma (Jones et al., 1984). For example, relatives found that many relationships and interactions with others in their community were extremely strained and difficult following the disclosure of loved one’s sexually offending behaviour. Moreover, parents of offenders shared the belief that children and siblings experienced the collateral consequences of a loved one’s sexual offending behaviour and the eventual separation to a higher degree. Additionally, many participants felt as though the stigma of their loved one’s actions had transferred onto them, resulting in a ‘courtesy stigma’ (Goffman, 1963), which further impacted their interactions with others (Blumer, 1969). For example, relatives would often have negative comments directed towards them that would later increase their personal feelings of guilt, shame and blame.

Additionally, relatives experienced a ‘guilt-by-association’ (Hannem, 2008) wherein they were forced to cope with a loved one’s restrictions upon release. For many participants, the restrictions hindered their ability to maintain and develop familial bonds as the restricted individual was prevented from certain public spaces. In addition, when relatives are forced to abide by these restrictions, they often feel as though they are also being punished for their loved one’s actions, even though they have likely not engaged in any criminalized behaviour.

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<sup>180</sup> Uggen et al. (2004) found that they were unable to make claims regarding reliability and external validity of their interview data as they also conducted semi-structured interviews. Moreover, they cite their non-representative sample as an additional justification for the absence of strong claims in their work. I borrow their term of “illustrative evidence” as a way in which to situate my findings (Uggen et al., 2004, p.265).

### **7.1.2 – The Role of Media Coverage within Collateral Consequences of Sex Offending**

As Canada does not follow its American counterpart's public Sex Offender Registry,<sup>181</sup> the mass media works as the primary source through which the majority of individuals learn about their society and the citizens within it. Given this research's emphasis on the consequences of media coverage, the interview data revealed that media content heightened the overall psychological and familial impacts caused by a loved one's sexual offence; media also impacted relatives' personal safety and that of their incarcerated relative as well as their relationships with others.

Several relatives' found that the media content generated courtesy-based stigmatization within their interactions with others; for example, relatives shared experiences of 'weird looks' and 'negative comments' as a result of their loved one's actions. Moreover, the inaccurate reporting on the part of the media or the lack of details in the media content also appeared to cause stigmatizing experiences for the relatives of offenders. For example, the lack of details in the media content (such as the offenders turning themselves in or receiving therapy) appeared to lead to criticism from members of the public regarding the relatives' decision to maintain contact with the offender. Moreover, the inaccurate and incorrect media content rendered interactions and relationships for relatives more difficult.

In addition to directly exacerbating the overall collateral consequences of criminalized offending behaviour, the media coverage also exposed relatives to a unique and specific set of harms. For example, many relatives' revealed that they had a strong 'fear of the media'; in fact, many participants revealed that they had never come into contact with media reporters, and found themselves suddenly inundated with harassment and negative media related experiences. Moreover, relatives encountered the 'peril' dimension of stigma (Jones et al., 1984), as they experienced palpable fears through their own physical confrontations with media reporters. Furthermore, the

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<sup>181</sup> In light of the prior scholarship and research conducted regarding the disadvantages of a public sex offender registry (see Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009; Comartin et al., 2010; Tewksbury et al., 2012, among others), the consequences of such a registry in Canada would be of considerable concern.

permanence and accessibility of online news content presents a long-lasting ‘course of the mark’ (Jones et al., 1984) dimension of stigma for the participants in this study, as the content has the potential to be detrimental for themselves, their relative, and their children in the future.

Additionally, this research found that relatives believed the mass media had a considerable amount of influence in exacerbating difficult situations for relatives of offenders and the subsequent interactions that they had with others in their community. For example, relatives experienced a ‘sticky stigma’ as they found that following the coverage of a case, individuals tended to treat them differently and in a negative manner whether it was crossing the street to avoid them, verbally insulting them, or spitting at their feet.

Finally, the concept of stigma management techniques as presented by Goffman (1963) were found to be close to impossible to utilize given the media coverage of their loved one. Exposure garnered from the media coverage oftentimes made secrecy impossible and disallowed relatives the opportunity to ‘pass’ and ‘conceal their stigma’ (Jones et al., 1984). In particular, media content often transformed relatives from ‘discreditable’ individuals into ‘discredited’ persons; in other words, by making a relative’s association to a convicted sex offender ‘known and visible’ to the general public, relatives became ‘discredited’ (Goffman, 1963).

## **7.2 – Participants’ Recommendations for Media Coverage in the Future**

Within this exploratory research, participants were invited to offer recommendations regarding future media coverage and the treatment of relatives of offenders within the media content. As seen throughout this research, the stigmatized interactions along with the various dimensions of stigma that relatives experience can be extremely devastating, disruptive, and harmful to one’s overall well-being. By providing the following recommendations, the underlying intention is that the stigma that is experienced by relatives of offenders may be minimized. With this in mind, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that given how many of the participants in this study are members of

support networks and advocacy groups, they are uniquely situated to offer relevant advice on behalf of relatives of offenders who may be affected by media coverage and media practices in the future.<sup>182</sup>

The relatives with whom I spoke all shared similar ideas for improvements regarding both media coverage and support services. Importantly, many of the participants suggested a change in the way the media reports offending behaviour. Some recommended ‘dropping the negative and harsh headlines’ and presenting the details of the case fairly:

*Perhaps members of the media might look at their reporting as more than just creating a dramatic plot. Instead they might bear some compassion in their hearts for the consequences of their words on real people and real lives (Victoria, mother).*

*Stop coming up with the ridiculous sensational headlines. So if it's part of your duty to report what's happening at the courthouse, please do so with consideration that there are multiple families involved here (Anne-Marie, mother).*

*It should be an absolute requirement at every single journalism school for journalists to undergo sensitivity training... and understand the capacity that they have to increase or decrease the ripple effect of violence and crime – that's a first step... Quite often, because the media don't have access to the accused person, they instead report on the family, they draw inferences. It's just not right. I think that family members of offenders and in particular sexual offenders, it needs to be stated and restated over and over again that they're not, they can't be guilty of someone else's crimes. The media has the duty, like the civic duty, and a human duty to contribute to a better understanding, and some compassion and outreach for people who are so harmed than to create circumstances for other people to be judged and ostracized and shunned from their communities... it could have been so different had a reporter in a human way said what a terrible thing this was, the victims are suffering, the family is suffering, who was this person really? What really happened? (Julie, ex-wife)*

Relatives of offenders also shared their thoughts on the inclusion and/or treatment of relatives of offenders in the media coverage:

*I think behind the accused ... there is a family and I think they deserve to be protected and not shed on the paper as if they're guilty too (Lynn, mother).*

*If the media wanted to do something better then they would try to look at what they've done because I don't even think they know how much they've actually destroyed families with their stuff (Suzanne, daughter).*

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<sup>182</sup> More importantly, it should be emphasized that many of the participants in this study found the necessary courage and strength to speak out on behalf of themselves and others. Given the negative experiences that they have shared, this was likely not an easy task as they do not want to bring further attention to their families but continue to do so and take that risk in order to help others in similar situations.

*I feel strongly for both sides for victims and for the families of victims and families of offenders; the public doesn't need to know that [the names of those involved aside from the offender], it's not the public's business and the media might say it's out obligation to report. So report who was arrested and then the outcome of that, but beyond that it's pure titillation, it's just tabloidism at its worst (Anne-Marie, mother).*

Moreover, participants also explained the necessity of the accountability of the media generally, as well as of the type of information they present to the public:

*I really hope that something that can come out of this study is that a collective ability to stand up together and be seen together and be seen by the media; hold them to account for the way that they report on things (Julie, ex-wife).*

*I would want the media to show accurate statistics about the actual recidivism rates of people who have offended sexually, especially those who have received treatment or therapy, as they are actually much lower than most people realize. And I would want the media to better advocate for the programs run at places like Ontario Correctional Institute and the benefits of those programs, as opposed to non-treatment centres like most jails (Tracy, wife).*

Hannem (2008) suggests that “Canadians are generally ignorant about the effects of imprisonment on families and a general social apathy has resulted. It is possible that if the general public was better informed about the issues, over time a more sympathetic and supportive social environment may emerge” (p.205). In relation to this study, perhaps the media may one day recognize their ability to lessen the stigma for the relatives of sexual offenders by presenting nuanced and factually correct aspects of a case, thereby doing their part in helping the general public understand the circumstances of the offending behaviour and the experiences faced by their relatives. In turn, this may lead to a better treatment of relatives, one of respect and compassion as opposed to blame and avoidance.

### **7.3 – Strengths and Limitations**

As with any research, the limitations of the study must also be considered; in other words, that which does not fall within the scope of the study but which bears importance to the overall area of study must be acknowledged. Given the vulnerability of sex offenders and their families, gaining access to the relatives of sex offenders was extremely challenging. Yet, despite the relatively small

sample size (Falls, 2001), the depth of the nine participants' experiences explored through qualitatively-based interviews was invaluable as profound complexities were brought to the forefront.<sup>183</sup>

Given how the participants voluntarily responded to an invitation to share their experiences and stories, a particular selection bias may be evident within the sample as some of the participants may have utilized the study as an avenue to critique the media, especially if they had a particularly negative experience (Tewksbury and Lees, 2006; Burchfield and Mingus, 2008; Levenson and Tewksbury, 2009). In light of this, the results of this study cannot and should not be generalized to all relatives of sex offenders as motives for participation may vary, thereby altering the stated impacts of media coverage amongst various relatives. In other words, there may be especially positive results to be gained from media coverage that were not found through this study.

Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned limitations, the project's strengths lie in its fulfillment of the research objectives and the answering of the research questions. Moreover, as Tracy and Anne-Marie shared, this study provided a 'safe space' in which they were able to speak freely about their experiences without fear of being misrepresented. Providing a safe space for relatives, as they are not afforded such within the media is a significant strength of this project on both methodological and social levels. Finally, this exploratory study informs and contributes to the growing body of criminological and sociological literature regarding the collateral consequences of criminalized offending behaviour on the relatives of offenders by studying and presenting the lived experiences of an important sub-population of criminalized people in Canada, one that is rarely considered: convicted sex offenders and their innocent families.

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<sup>183</sup> Additionally, given the length of a Master's program (2 years), I was unable to continue recruiting. Moreover, given the feasibility of this project, the nine individuals who participated offered a well-rounded sample.

#### 7.4 – Directions for Future Research

Given the understandable challenges associated with the recruitment of relatives of offenders as research participants, scholars should be constantly developing better ways to provide comfortable and safe spaces for relatives to share their accounts (see Mander, 2010; Pittaway et al., 2010). Without minimizing the devastating impacts on victims and their families, future studies with the relatives of sex offenders should continue to explore as openly and as inclusively as possible other stigmatizing dimensions of their experiences.

One of the main intentions of this study is to develop a new area of study based on the unique impacts on relatives of *sex offenders* as well as the impacts of media coverage. With this in mind, future research may consider a comprehensive and well-rounded approach<sup>184</sup> that involves simultaneously studying media content, interviewing relatives who have been featured in the media content, interviewing the journalists involved in the reporting of such offences, and interviewing members of the general public in order to gain each population's understanding of all those impacted by sex offending and of the influence of media on their respective perceptions. Moreover, future research should explore the impact of media on sex offenders themselves, paralleling the American scholarship regarding the impacts of public sex offenders' registries on sex offenders and their families.<sup>185</sup> In addition, the impacts of media coverage on victims of sex offences should also be explored. Furthermore, other related populations for investigation may be relatives of women sex offenders and relatives of wrongfully convicted sex offenders.

In closing, I share the following excerpt from my interview with Tracy regarding her suggestion for media reporting in the future: "I would want the media to remember that every person, no matter the crime of which they are accused, is human, with fears, strengths, and weaknesses, and

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<sup>184</sup> Part of the original scope of this study was to conduct a content analysis of news coverage involving relatives of sex offenders in addition to the interviews with relatives themselves. However, given the feasibility of a Master's thesis, this was not possible.

<sup>185</sup> See Tewksbury and Lees, 2006; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009; Tewksbury and Zgoba, 2009; Comartin et al., 2010; Tewksbury et al., 2012.

people who love them.” In this regard, the intention of this research was to shed light on the impacts of media coverage and at the same time better inform and initiate the much needed improvements of media reporting practices in the future. More importantly, this research hoped to humanize the relatives of sex offenders in light of the dehumanizing consequences of media coverage. It is my understanding, through the accounts of the participants in this study, that if the media work in tandem with the relatives of sex offenders, clarity and compassion may replace judgment and stigma. Finally, I draw attention to the core of AFFECT’s (2002) statement: relatives of sexual offenders have not committed an offence; they are not guilty of anything except their relation to someone who has engaged in criminalized behaviour. While the public may view these relatives as ‘monsters’ by association, it is imperative to recognize that relatives’ of sex offenders are humans beings who are deeply affected by the actions of their loved one, the risk that may have been posed to the safety of the general public, and the overall harm that has been caused to the victim.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Information

June 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to share some information with you regarding this study. The study is entitled “Media Portrayals and their Impact on the Relatives of Sexual Offenders.” The research will explore the impact that media coverage of sexual offending has on the relatives of sexual offenders. This study is a master’s thesis in Criminology conducted by Marshneil Sarah Vaz, under the supervision of Dr. Christine Gervais, an Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of Ottawa, whose research explores the collateral consequences for the families of sexually offending youth.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the collateral consequences of media coverage of a sexual offence on the lives of the alleged/convicted sexual offender’s relatives. The research aims to provide relatives of sexual offenders with an avenue in which they are able to explain their experiences in their own words.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview with the researcher for approximately one hour to a maximum of two hours. During the interview, you will be requested to answer questions regarding the ways in which the media coverage of both, the accused/convicted sexual offender and yourself (if applicable) as a relative of this individual has impacted and influenced your life, personally and publically. The themes that will be discussed during this interview are those of stigma, shame, blame, and responsibility that may have been fostered or experienced as a result of the media coverage.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and the information that you share will remain confidential and anonymous. Please note, you are under **NO** obligation to participate in this study. Moreover, please be advised that the researcher’s supervisor may be present at the interviews. Given her research experience with families of youth who sexually offend, her role will be to serve as a supportive guide. Interviews will be conducted via telephone, in person or Skype/ Instant Messaging, based on your preference. Details surrounding consent and confidentiality as well as the interview questions may be provided to you prior to the interview for your review, at your request.

If you are interested in participating in this study or would like more information, please contact Marshneil Vaz or Dr. Christine Gervais, at the numbers or e-mails listed below. These interviews will take place approximately between September 2013 and January 2014.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  
Sincerely,

Marshneil Sarah Vaz  
(M.A. student)  
University of Ottawa, Criminology

Dr. Christine Gervais  
(Associate Professor & Thesis Supervisor)  
University of Ottawa, Criminology

## **PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A STUDY ON THE Impact of media portrayals on the relatives of sexual offenders**

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study on:  
the impacts and influences of media coverage in the lives of relatives of sexual offenders.  
As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in an interview (approximately 1 hour).

**GUARANTEED CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

### **ELIGIBILITY**

- \* **18+** years of age
- \* **Anglophone Canadian Citizens** (interview will be conducted in English only)
- \* **Related** (biologically, adoption, marriage) to an accused/ convicted sexual offender in Canada (with the crime occurring in Canada)
- \* There must have been **media coverage** of the crime (newspaper, TV, radio and/or internet news)  
-- *Please be advised that participants will be selected on a first-come, first-serve basis --*

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:  
**Marshneil Sarah Vaz, Master's Student -- University of Ottawa, Department of Criminology**



uOttawa

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the  
**Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa.**

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

### **Marshneil Sarah Vaz (M.A. Student and Principal Investigator/Researcher)**

Department of Criminology – University of Ottawa

### **Christine Gervais, Ph.D (Associate Professor and Thesis Supervisor)**

Department of Criminology – University of Ottawa

#### **This consent form:**

- ↳ Will help you decide whether you should participate or not
- ↳ Will help you understand what the study is for
- ↳ Will inform you of the potential personal benefits and risks associated with this study

#### **Invitation to Participate:**

I am invited to participate in an interview for a study entitled “Media Portrayals and their Impact on the Relatives of Sexual Offenders.” This study explores the impact that media coverage on sexual offending has on the relatives of sexual offenders. This study is a master’s thesis in Criminology conducted by Marshneil Sarah Vaz, under the supervision of Dr. Christine Gervais, an Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of Ottawa. By being a part of this study, I as a relative of a sexual offender will be given an opportunity to discuss my experiences and feelings related to the actions of my loved one and the resulting media coverage of both my relative and myself due to that relation.

#### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to construct a knowledge base surrounding the impacts and influences that media coverage on a sexual offence has on the lives of the alleged/convicted sexual offender’s relatives. Additionally, first hand accounts of the experiences that these individuals go through as a result of the media coverage will be explored and studied in order to determine if and how the media is a collateral consequence of a loved one’s sexual offence. The research aims to provide relatives of sexual offenders an avenue in which they are able to portray their own experiences.

#### **Participation:**

My participation will consist of one interview with the researcher for approximately one hour to a maximum of two hours. However, upon my request, the interview can be interrupted due to other obligations and it will be re-scheduled. During the interview, I will be requested to answer questions regarding the ways in which the media coverage of the sexual offence and/or myself as a relative of an accused or convicted sexual offender has impacted and influenced my life, personally and publically. The interview will be scheduled in consideration of my personal schedule and availability. If I am not comfortable with an in-person interview, I may participate in the interview via telephone or Instant Messaging/Skype. Moreover, I will be reimbursed for any parking costs associated with my participation in this interview (to a maximum of \$15.00 CAD).

Finally, I understand that I may want to make changes to the description of my experiences that I share, or that the researchers may have follow-up questions or a need to clarify certain statements. Regarding this, I will be given the chance to allow/disallow for a follow-up meeting or conversation.

**Follow up / Clarification**

- I consent to a follow up interview if the researcher requires additional information, or needs to clarify any information
- I do not consent to a follow up interview if the research requires additional information, or needs to clarify any information.

**Risks:**

Given that the interview requires me to discuss the impact that media coverage has had on my life in relation to an accused or convicted sexual offender, it may cause minor discomfort. In light of these potential concerns, I will be provided with a list of support-oriented resources that I may consult after the interview.

**Risk (mandatory)**

- Due to the sensitive nature of the topic regarding my personal experiences, I understand that some questions may cause me sadness or emotional discomfort. As a result, I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question that may cause me such discomfort. The researchers will respect my choices. If I do answer questions that make me uncomfortable the researchers will take care to treat me with dignity and respect and they will provide a safe and helpful environment for me. Moreover, I am aware that I may withdraw from this study at any time.

**Benefits:**

While it is not known whether this study will benefit me directly, my participation in this research may help me reflect on my experience as an adult relative of a sexual offender. My voice may be better heard and understood through this study as I will be given the opportunity to speak out and shed light on how the media has impacted my life. I will be able to disclose the information that I may not have been given the chance to share during any media coverage of my loved one's actions. As a participant in this study, I will also have an opportunity to suggest recommendations as to how the mass media should best address the relatives of sexual offenders in the future.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

The information that I will share will remain strictly confidential between the researchers and myself. The contents of the interview will be used only for the purposes of this master's thesis project and my anonymity will be protected. All the information that could identify myself will be excluded from the final paper; my name will be replaced by a pseudonym. The extracts from my interviews quoted in the thesis will be identified only by the pseudonym attributed to me. Only the two researchers identified above will have access to my personal information. Moreover, my answers to questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications, but I will not be identified. Anonymity is guaranteed for those who do not consent to the release of their names and personal information. Thus, if I prefer to have my name identified in the research, I will be given this option in the informed consent.

**About the confidentiality and anonymity of the data:**

- I agree to participate in this study as long as my confidentiality and anonymity is preserved in accordance with the information presented above. Thus, a pseudonym will be used to replace my name and no information that may lead to my identification may be published in the final thesis in case the researcher quotes extracts of my interview.
- I authorize the release of my personal identification, such as my name, in this research. In this case, if the researchers quote any extract of my interview, my name and identity will be used in the final paper, presentations, and publications.

**Audio recording:**

The interview will be audio-recorded, with my consent. This can avoid interruptions in the course of the interview and will also facilitate the analysis of the content afterwards. However, if I prefer to not have the interview recorded, I can choose to do so. In this case, only notes will be taken.

**About the audio recording of the interview:**

- I consent to the audio recording and transcription of this interview and to the further analysis of its content.
- I do not consent to the audio recording and transcription of this interview and I will only allow the researcher to take notes of it.

**Direct Quotes:**

In order to not lose sight of the experiences I am sharing, the researcher may want to include my quotes verbatim in the final paper

**Direct Quotes**

- I consent to direct quotes being transcribed and their further use in the final thesis
- I do not consent to direct quotes being transcribed and their further use in the final thesis.

**Transcripts / Interview Notes for Clarification:**

I will also have the opportunity to review the processed transcripts/notes from interviews (audio recording, Skype, telephone, or in-person) for amendments. Moreover, I will have the opportunity to edit or delete any information that I believe may identify me.

**Transcripts / Interview Notes**

- I would like to receive transcripts/interview notes of my interview via email (that I will provide to the researchers). I understand that through email it will be a password-protected file, with a password I will choose and inform the researcher of. Moreover, I understand that external security risks are involved through the email process and password protection is the extent of privacy that can be afforded to the transcripts being sent to me via email and thus, I cannot hold the researcher accountable for these external security risks
- I would like to receive the transcripts/interview notes by secure postal mail and will provide my mailing address at the end of the interview. Moreover, I understand that external security risks are involved through secure postal mail and thus, I cannot hold the researcher accountable for these external security risks
- If it is possible and/or feasible for the researchers (to be determined between the researchers and myself) to hand deliver the interview transcripts/notes, I would like them to do so and we will arrange a convenient meeting for this.
- I would not like to receive the transcripts/interview notes of my interview via email/mail / in person. However, my personal information will remain completely protected.

**Conservation of Data:**

The hard copies and electronic copies of data/material will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the supervisor at the University of Ottawa for a period of 5 years at which point they will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:**

I am under no obligation to participate in the study, and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, I will have the opportunity to either allow the release of all information offered up until the point of the withdrawal or for all data gathered until the time of the withdrawal to be destroyed and not used in any manner for the final project.

**Other Information: Please tick the  corresponding to your choice, and initial at the end:**

I am over the age of 18:

 YES  NO \_\_\_\_\_

The researcher has explained the purpose and content of the interview:

 YES  NO \_\_\_\_\_

I understand the purpose and content of the interview:

 YES  NO \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that the researcher's thesis supervisor will be present during my interview:

 YES  NO \_\_\_\_\_

If I have any other questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor using the contact information at the beginning of this form.

**Ethics:**

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Tel.: (613) 562-5387 Email: [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)

**Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_(participants name), agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Marshneil Sarah Vaz of the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, which is under the supervision of Dr. Christine Gervais, under the conditions established above. I understand that by accepting to participate, I am in no way waiving my right to withdraw from the study.

*There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is for me to keep.*

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Researcher: Marshneil Sarah Vaz Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

“Media Portrayals and their Impact on the Relatives of Sexual Offenders”

**Interview Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

To begin: are we under a specific time restraint (anything that may interrupt the interview)?

### **BASE QUESTIONS**

- Can you please explain your relation to the relative who has been accused or convicted of a sexual offence? How are you related to a person who sexually offended? (Biologically through adoption, or marriage)
  - (if by marriage) Can you explain your relationship with this individual at the time of the offence? And now?
- Without revealing specific cities/towns, where do you live? (urban or rural setting)
- Can you state your ethnicity?

### **PRELIMINARY OFFENCE**

- If you feel comfortable sharing about this can you please describe your understanding of the alleged sexually offending behaviour?
- How has your relationship with this person changed as a result of the offence?
- In brief terms, what are some of the impacts you have had to deal with as a result of this individual’s alleged or actual actions?

### **MEDIA AND PUBLICITY**

- Can you explain the media coverage that this case received?
- How publicized was your family member’s apprehension, conviction, incarceration and release?
- Was there media content about yourself or another relative of the sexual offender? If so, did you follow it?
- How do you perceive the media coverage, of your relative and yourself (if applicable)?
- Given that there was media coverage of the offence, the offender and/or yourself, how did your family react? Your friends? Community? Employer?
- How fairly and accurately do you think the incident was portrayed in the media?
- How fairly and accurately do you think you were portrayed in the media in regards to your relationship with this individual?
- How did the media treat you regarding this offence and your relation to the offender? Specifically, did reporters harass you in any way? For example, did they call your home, or wait outside your home or harass you at court?
- Did you experience any fear of the media? Now?
- Did/do you experience any secondary stigma due to the media coverage?
- Do you believe you experienced guilt-by-association due to the media coverage?
- Do you believe you experienced secondary shame or blame due to media coverage? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you believe you experienced any secondary responsibility due to media coverage? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you believe you experienced any stigma or shame due to media coverage? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How did you cope with the media coverage?
- Do you feel as though different outlets (television, radio, etc) treated you differently? Please explain.

- What is the size of your community? Do you think it played a role in the way you were treated in public? By this I mean, do you think a smaller/bigger community size influenced the way you were treated? If so, how?
- Were there any positive gains to be had from the media coverage? If so what?
- Did the media attention affect your feelings of stigma or rejection? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - Terms of well-being, functioning in daily activities (work, home), immediate family (partner, children), relationship with person, friends and/or extended family? Community?

### **PUBLIC INTERACTION**

- Please describe your relationship with others before the incident? After? After the media coverage?
- Can you explain the influence that you believe the media had in your interaction with others?
- Please elaborate on the impact that this coverage has had on your public and/or social life?
- Can you explain any negative social experiences that you have had to go through because of the incident? Regarding employment or other everyday activities, including your social life, your family's routine, and your community involvement?

### **PERSONAL LIFE**

- Please describe any personal changes in your household since the incident? Such as what was your family life like at the time of the offence in terms of the relationships among members? Now?
- How much of both of the above questions, can you attribute to media coverage of the crime/relative and/or yourself?
- What do you feel are the biggest issues that you have had to deal with since the incident?
- Please elaborate on the impact that this coverage has had on your personal / family life?
- If you have children, were they affected by the media coverage? If so, how? If not, why not? Any change in family dynamics?
- How has the incident affected you socially? Emotionally? Financially?
- Have you heard others describe your relative in negative ways? Such as, other family members? Friends? Acquaintances? How does this make you feel?
- Do you think the media is responsible for the feelings you have expressed? And to what extent?
- Have you experienced any side effects as a result of the media coverage of your relation to a sexual offender? If so, how?
- Do you believe that a distinction between 'offender' and 'sexual offender' affected your interactions with others or in your personal life?

### **MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY / RESPONSIBILITY / FUTURE CHANGE**

- If you were given the chance, what would you want to say to the media given this incident and how you and your family were treated?
- Is there anything you would have liked to have been able to clarify to the public / readers / viewers about inaccurate media portrayals of themselves and their loved ones?
- What do you think the media could have done differently regarding this incident or in order for them to provide better context surrounding the incident?
- Do you have any recommendations for what the mass media can do differently in the future regarding the relatives of sexual offenders?
- What is your perception of the mass media now?
- Is there anything else you would like to add relating to this topic? Do you have anything else to share about your experience that you may want others to know?

*Thank you for your time in answering these questions.*

**Appendix E: Thank you Letter**

Dear [Participant's Name]

I would like to sincerely thank you for your participation in my study entitled “Media Portrayals and their Impact on the Relatives of Sexual Offenders” as it would not have been possible without your involvement. This research will culminate in my Master’s thesis in Criminology at the University of Ottawa. My intention is that the stories collected throughout our interview will develop a new knowledge base that will inform and promote understanding of the challenging experiences of the relatives of sexual offenders.

As a reminder, please ensure that you securely store any documents pertaining to the study in order to maintain the privacy of any identifiable information. Moreover, only pseudonyms will be used in the final paper. Once all the information has been compiled and analyzed for this paper, the information may be shared in conferences, seminars, presentations and publications. Again, quotes will not be linked to you by your actual name and so, it will not be possible for you to be identified in the study.

If you would like to receive more information on the content of the study, or if you have any questions, comments or concerns, please contact me at the email address provided at the bottom of this letter. Moreover, if you would like to receive a copy of the thesis, please let me know and we can make arrangements for you to receive it securely and confidentially. The expected date of completion for this paper is September 2014.

Finally, this study was conducted in order to understand more about the experience of being related to someone who has either been accused of or has been convicted of a sexual offence. The interview you have participated in today has asked you to detail your experience, both in your personal life and your social life. If you are experiencing emotional discomfort, we encourage you to call your primary care physician and/or consult the resources offered on the back of this letter.

In accordance with the ethical policies at the University of Ottawa involving human participants, this project was reviewed and received ethical clearance through the Research Ethics Board. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this research, please contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Tel.: (613) 562-5387 Email: [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)

*If you have questions about this study, please contact Dr. Christine Gervais.*

With thanks,

Marshneil Vaz, University of Ottawa – Criminology

**LIST OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES**  
**Canadian Crisis/Distress Hotlines\***

**Ontario**

Kingston: 613.544.1771  
London and District: 519.667.6711  
Ottawa: 613.238.3311  
Toronto: 416.408.4357

**British Columbia**

Provincial: 1.800.SUICIDE  
Crisis Line Association of BC: 250.753.2495  
Kelowna: 1.888.353.2273  
Northern BC: 1.888.562.1214  
Vancouver Island: 1.888.494.3888

**Alberta**

Doctor Margaret Savage Crisis Centre: 1.866.594.0533  
Southwestern Alberta: 1.888.787.2880  
Calgary: 403.266.4357

**Manitoba**

Klinik Health Care: 1.888.322.3019  
Mobile Crisis Unit: 1.888.379.7699

**Saskatchewan**

Saskatoon: 306.933.6200  
Hudson Bay & District: 1.866.865.7274  
Prince Albert: 306.764.1011  
Regina: 306.525.5333

**Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia Helpline: 902.521.1188  
Mobile Crisis Team: 902.429.8167

**Québec**

Centre de prévention du suicide de Québec: 1.866.277.3553

\* This list is not intended to be a complete or exhaustive list of possible resources in your area.

\* Neither the researchers nor the University of Ottawa are endorsing the agencies/resources presented in this list

**Appendix F: Ethical Approval**

File Number: 05-13-06

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/19/2013



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

**Ethics Approval Notice**  
**Social Science and Humanities REB**

**Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)**

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Christine	Gervais	Social Sciences / Criminology	Supervisor
Marshneil Sarah	Vaz	Social Sciences / Criminology	Student Researcher

**File Number:** 05-13-06**Type of Project:** Master's Thesis**Title:** Manufacturing Stigma and Constructing Responsibility: media portrayals and their impact on the relatives of sexual offenders

<b>Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Approval Type</b>
06/19/2013	06/18/2014	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

**Special Conditions / Comments:**  
N/A



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/consent.html>.

Please submit an annual status report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/consent.html>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).

**Signature:**

Kim Thompson

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
 For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

### Appendix G: Coding Sheet

This appendix includes the coding sheets that were developed and utilized in this research study. The final layer of coding (the broad codes) is presented along with the categories and themes. The codes were compiled inductively, based on findings from prior literature and studies, and deductively as I analyzed the interview transcripts. I have also included the guiding questions that led to the development of each theme, as well as the guiding question(s) for the two broad analytical sections: the collateral consequences for relatives of sex offenders and the impacts of media coverage on the relatives of sex offenders.

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Third Layer Thematic Analysis Broad Codes</b>
<b>Collateral Consequences of Sexually Offending Behaviour</b>  <b>Guiding Question:</b> What are the impacts and collateral consequences for a relative of convicted sex offender?	<b>Base</b>  <b>Guiding Questions:</b> n/a	Participant Demographics	<b>Codes:</b> Ethnicity; Geographic Location; Relationship; Offence  Interview data was placed in this category if it presented some level of demographic information regarding the participant. This category was to develop a general understanding of each participant and their relatives' case.
	<b>Internal Impacts and Personal Feelings</b>  <b>Guiding Questions:</b> How does one's relation to a sex offender impact their personal life and family structure?	Emotional Impacts and Difficulties Family Dynamics Impacts on Children Psychological Impacts Financial Impacts Restriction Impacts and Confusion of the system	<b>Codes:</b> 'Own Support; Community Support; Community Ties; Faith Support; Overall Support; Pet Support; Family Dynamics / Effects; Internal Impacts; Lifestyle Impacts; Psychological Impacts; Financial Issues/ Impacts; Impacts Of Incarceration; Impacts Of Restrictions; Impacts On Children; Pet Help; Elimination; Need To Apologize; Parental Role; Perceptions / Individuals; Personal Spectrum; Personal Values; Relationship Restructuring; Reminder; Responsibility; What-Ifs; Confusion Of System; Connections; Family On Trial; Loss; Maintaining Roles.

			<p>suggested some degree of emotional and psychological difficulty; changes in their familial structure and with children and siblings of their loved one (if applicable). Finally, data relating to finances and restriction related impacts were also included. This category was understood as “internal impacts,” as all of the above had to do with their personal lives and that of their families. For example, relatives shared experiences of their family being unable to participate in certain activities due to their relatives’ conditions and restrictions upon release (Tracy). Moreover, relatives shared stories of isolation and the difficulties that their children or the offender’s siblings experienced due to the offending behaviour (Victoria, Lynn, Anne-Marie).</p>
	<p><b>External Impacts and Fears</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> How does one’s relation to a sex offender impact their interactions with others in their community and with friends? What are the overall fears that emerge when a loved one commits a sex offence?</p>	<p>Impacts on Friendships</p> <p>Impacts on Public Interactions</p> <p>Fears and Concerns</p>	<p><b>Codes:</b> Public Image; Public Interaction; Criticisms; External Relationships; Community Impacts; Friends Impacts; Social Impacts; Social Media Impacts; Employment Impacts; Housing Impacts; Trust; Safety; Prison Reality; Prison Safety; Current/Future Concerns; Initial Fear; Initial Impacts; Identification; Association; Relief.</p> <p>Interview data that suggested an impact on participants’ friendships and public interactions were placed in this category. Moreover, any fears and concerns that the participants revealed were also placed in this category. This category was labeled “external</p>

			<p>impacts” as these were impacts that were prevalent outside of their personal lives and dealt more specifically with the general public and the relatives’ community. For example, several participants shared similar notions of being shunned in their community (Talía) and having friends turn their backs on them as a result of their relatives’ offending behaviour (Frida, Julie).</p>
	<p><b>Coping Measures</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> How does the relative of a person who has committed a sex offence come to terms with and cope with their loved one’s sexually offending behaviour?</p>		<p><b>Codes:</b> Protective Measures; Coping Process; Emotional Rollercoaster; Acclimatization; Blindsided; Negativity; Normality; Guard; Post Release Impacts; Reconciliation; Positivity; Manage; Negotiate; Humanity; Meditation.</p> <p>Experiences of attempting to cope with their loved one’s offence were placed in this category. For example, relatives stated that they followed a strict meditation routine in order to help them properly cope with the serious offences committed by their loved one (Victoria). Other relatives explained coping in terms of their relationship with the offender either through talking to them and hearing them accept responsibility for their actions (Lynn), or closely watching them upon their release due to a fear/concern that they may re-offend (Victoria).</p>
	<p><b>Media</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> n/a</p>	Base	<p><b>Codes:</b> Media Extent; Coverage; Coverage Extent; Different Outlets; Media Perception.</p> <p>Interview data was placed in this category for developing a base range of the frequency and</p>

<p><b>The Role of Media Within Collateral Consequences of Sex Offender</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Question:</b> How are relatives of a person who has committed a sex offence impacted by the media coverage?</p>	<p><b>Harms Caused by Media and their Coverage</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> How are the relatives of a convicted sex offender impacted by the media coverage of their loved one?</p>		<p>extent of the media coverage for each participant's loved one.</p>
		<p>Psychological Impacts</p> <p>Impacts on Children and/or Siblings</p> <p>Impacts on Association, Safety and Relationships</p> <p>Fear of the Media</p> <p>Media Harassment</p> <p>Power of the Media</p> <p>Concern for Victim</p> <p>Necessity for Clarification and Speaking Out</p> <p>Inaccurate Reporting</p>	<p><b>Codes:</b> Media Coping Process; Media Emotional Process; Media Protection; Media Interactions; Media Manage; Positivity In Offender; Community Size; Unfair/Incorrect Reporting; Technology; Media Disdain; Media Confusion; Media Issues; Media Power; Fear Of The Media/Media Fear; Fear Of Others; Guilty Before Trial, Innocence, Clarifying; Reporters; Media Children Impact.</p> <p>Interview data was placed in this category if participants perceived the media coverage to have affected them psychologically or emotionally. Moreover, if they shared the belief that the media impacted their children, safety or relationships, it was included in this section. Furthermore, any data relating to the media's interaction with the participants or any experiences of inaccurate reporting were also placed in this category. For example, almost all of the participants felt as though the media exacerbated the already difficult consequences of their loved one's offence and increased the challenges they faced and encountered; however, participants' also reported harassment and 'attacks' by the media reporters (Rosie).</p>
		<p>Distinction of Sex Offender and Offender</p>	<p><b>Codes:</b> Comparison To Others; Comparisons; Circumstances; Distinction Matters; Distinctions/Spectrums; Monster; Offender</p>

			<p>Accountability; Offender Perception; Media Distinctions And Spectrums.</p> <p>Interview data that suggested a participant feeling as though there was or was not a distinction between offenders and <i>sex offenders</i> were placed in this category. For example, one participant believed that there was no distinction between the sex offences and the regular offences, claiming that any offence would have hurt them her family to the same degree (Victoria). However, many participants' shared the notion that their loved one committing a sex offence was significantly harder to cope with, as opposed to an offence that was not sexual in nature (Anne-Marie, Lynn).</p>
		Technological Concerns	<b>Codes:</b> Future Fear; Technology Fear.
		Current and Future Concerns	<p>Interview data relating to the current or future fears were placed in this category. Technological fears were separate from the other fears listed due to the prevalence, accessibility, permanence, and speed of technological advancement. For example, while one participant shared a fear of her daughter being ostracized at school in the future due to her father's sex offences (Tracy), many relatives shared fears regarding members of the public having the ability to access news content regarding their relative as all of the information was readily available and accessible online (Suzanne, Rosie).</p>
	<b>Secrecy versus</b>		<b>Codes:</b> Church Disclosure;

	<p><b>Disclosure</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> Do relatives disclose their loved one's sex offender status to others or maintain secrecy and why?</p>	<p>Disclosure / Secrecy; Family Disclosure; Justification / Secrecy; Justification / Disclosure; Prior To Disclosure; Post Disclosure.</p> <p>Interview data that suggested relatives disclosed their relatives' status as a sex offender to others, or chose to maintain secrecy were placed in this category. For example, one participant did not tell her relatives about her son's offence, as the geographical distance between them was too great. Moreover, they would not have heard the story through the media, as it was a less publicized case (Victoria). Alternatively, one participant chose to inform her friends and family immediately in order to be proactive and disallow the media from influencing their thoughts regarding the offence and, in some cases, her husband; in this way she was able to answer the questions that they had, as well as emphasize the notion that she was not hiding his offences from them (Tracy).</p>
	<p><b>Media Positivity and Current Media Perception</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> What are the positive impacts to emerge from the media coverage of a loved one's sex offence? How do relatives perceive the mass media and their content following the</p>	<p><b>Codes:</b> Media Positivity; Media Perception.</p> <p>Experiences relating to positive impacts of media coverage, the overall perception of the media institution and news in general were placed in this category. For example, one participant felt as though the media coverage helped her in determining 'who her real friends were' (Rosie). However, the majority of participants did not find any positive gains to arise from the media coverage. Participants'</p>

	coverage of their loved one's offence?		shared that they no longer read the news (Frida) and/or have strong disdain for the entire institution (Anne-Marie, Lynn).
	<p><b>Recommendations / Participants</b></p> <p><b>Guiding Questions:</b> What do relatives want from the media in the future? Why did these participants choose to participate in this study?</p>		<p><b>Codes:</b> Participation; Services; Public; Media.</p> <p>Recommendations for media coverage and for relatives of sex offenders in general were placed in this category. This category also included the reasons as to why each participant chose to participate in this study. The latter was to discover the difference in their decision to speak out in an academic study as opposed to the media.</p>

## **Appendix H: Participant Overview**

*The following participant overview discusses the participants' cultural background, their geographical location, their relation to the offending relative, and the extent of coverage that their relative's case received<sup>186</sup>.*

**Anne-Marie** (Canadian, city)

**Interview Format:** Face-to-Face

**Duration:** 1h 26m 3s

**Coverage:** Heavy

Her son was found guilty and subsequently incarcerated of a sex offence; he has since been released. At the time of the offence and during his incarceration, Anne-Marie stated that her family drew closer together. Soon after disclosure of her son's offence, she changed jobs due to uncomfortable interactions at work. She shared in regards to her son's offence, "*it's life changing for the whole family... absolutely the relationship changes.*" Anne-Marie participated in the study to serve as an advocate for relatives of offenders, as well as to raise awareness of the challenges that relatives encounter.

**Frida** (Latin American, city)

**Interview Format:** Face-to-Face

**Duration:** 1h 35m 23s

**Coverage:** Heavy

Her husband was convicted of sexually assaulting a woman and is currently serving a four-year sentence. They are still married and have three children who have also been impacted by the reaction to the sexually offending behaviour. When asked about her relationship with her husband, she simply stated, "*no change; of course it's difficult, but our relationship was beautiful before and it still is.*" Frida participated in this study because she hopes to help those who find themselves in similar situations.

**Julie** (Canadian, small town)

**Interview Format:** Face-to-Face

**Duration:** 1h 21m 40s

**Coverage:** Heavy

Her husband was convicted of aggravated sexual assault, assault with a weapon, kidnapping and voyeurism. Having been declared a dangerous offender, he is currently incarcerated for an indeterminate amount of time. While they were married at the time of the offences, they were retroactively legally separated to the date of the offence with their divorce being finalized 3 years later. Prior to the offences, she worked in the education field; following the offence, she was laid-off. When asked to speak about how her relationship with her husband changed in light of the offence she stated, "*well it was... shattered! [It] changed my identity, they changed like to myself, to other people... there was no way I would [be able] to trust him again... I feel compassion for the person that I knew, but I never condoned the offences that he committed.*" She participated in this study in order to serve as an advocate for relatives of offenders; she also sought to emphasize the importance of holding the media accountable for the ways in which they report.

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<sup>186</sup> Coverage extent: minimal coverage is limited to one instance of media coverage (newspaper, television, or radio); moderate coverage consists of 2-5 instances of media coverage (through any means); heavy coverage consists for over 5 instances of media coverage (through any means).

**Lynn** (Canadian, city)

**Interview Format:** Face-to-Face

**Duration:** 2h 2m 40s

**Coverage:** Heavy

Her son was convicted of a sex offence in his late teens. Her son is still currently incarcerated, and had served approximately 5 years of his sentence at the time of the interview. She is also the mother to three other children, all of whom have been impacted by her son's offence. With the disclosure of her son's offence, Lynn was laid off from her job. Regarding her relationship with her son, she shared, "*our relationship definitely has changed but ... I'm still his mother; he's still my son.*" She participated in this study because she wanted to support and advocate for the relatives of offenders. She shared that she would like to be part of a change in the way relatives of offenders are treated and perceived.

**Rosie** (Latin American, city)

**Interview Format:** Face-to-Face

**Duration:** 2h 48m 12s

**Coverage:** Heavy

Her father was convicted of sexually assaulting a woman and is currently incarcerated having served a year and a half of his sentence at the time of the interview. Rosie is currently married with two children who are too young to know the specifics regarding their grandfather's conviction. When asked if her relationship with her father had changed, she replied, "*no it did not change. If anything, it just made me understand how screwed up life is.*" Rosie participated in the interview as a way to relieve the pain she has experienced; she noted that the interview provided her with an important outlet because prior to her participation in this study, she did not have another avenue through which she could speak out.

**Suzanne** (Latin American, city)

**Interview Format:** Face-to-Face

**Duration:** 2h 39m 52s

**Coverage:** Heavy

Her father was convicted of a sexual assault against an adult female and is currently serving a four-year sentence. When asked whether their relationship had experienced any changes, she stated, "*it didn't change (laughs). Not at all, I wouldn't say it did change anything because that's how close I am with [him].*" Suzanne participated in this interview because she wanted to relieve the pressure she has felt regarding the reaction to the incident in which her father was implicated, as well as to advocate for changes within the criminal justice system. For example, she believes that the accused individual needs to be granted the opportunity to speak and fight for their rights.

**Talia** (Canadian, city)

**Interview Format:** Instant Messaging

**Duration:** 2h 50m 53s

**Coverage:** Moderate

Her husband was convicted of being in possession of and distributing child pornography. He was found guilty and subsequently incarcerated for 8 months, and has since been released. She explained that her husband's offence caused her to be distracted at work, resulting in the termination of her employment. At the time of the interview, they had no children and had recently started living together after a two-year separation. She is now part of a support group that offers her a space in which to discuss her experiences and feelings. When asked about their relationship, she stated, "*I was very angry for a long while ... felt very betrayed ... still do sometimes.*" She participated in the study because she wants draw attention to the way in which 'the media and offences by a loved one affect the offender's family.'

**Tracy** (Canadian, moderate sized city)

**Interview Format:** Instant Messaging

**Duration:** 4h 12m 16s

**Coverage:** Moderate

Her husband was convicted of sexually molesting young boys and was given a two-year sentence. He has since been released and is participating in support groups and therapy. They had been married for approximately four years prior to disclosure of her husband's offence and they are still married. At the time of the interview, they had recently moved back in together after having lived separately for 5 years following his release. Following her husband's offence, Tracy had to step down from a volunteer position, manage her new role as a single-parent, and move back in with her parents as she could not financially manage on a single-income. They had one child prior to disclosure, and had conceived their second child six months after disclosure. When asked about their relationship, she stated, "*overall, we have been forced to deal with many difficult issues in our marriage, and we have become stronger as a result.*" She shared that her participation in this study was due to the lack of available opportunities for relatives of sex offenders to have their voices heard, as well as to provide moral support for those in a similar situation. Moreover, she hopes that a more accurate representation of sex offenders may one day be presented through the media.

**Victoria** (Canadian, city)

**Interview Format:** Telephone

**Duration:** 56m 1s

**Coverage:** Minimal

Her son was convicted of viewing online child pornography and was given a 3-month warning sentence and has since been released from custody. Her son is currently part of a support group where he is able to "*cycle through his feelings.*" She explained that she has a 'strange relationship' with her husband in that they do not discuss the offence. In addition, she stated that they have another son who has also been impacted negatively as he bears similar physical characteristics to the offending son. She describes her family as conservative, while she is of a more liberal mindset. When asked about her relationship with her son she stated, "*[Son's name] and I have rebuilt our relationship to a large degree.*" She participated in this study because she believes that every experience, inclusive of negative experiences, is a learning experience, and that there is always "*good in the bad,*" and hopes that she can help others by sharing her story.