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Constructing Karla :
Exploring the Media's Representation of Karla Homolka When She Was Released from Prison

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**Constructing Karla:
Exploring the Media's Representation of Karla Homolka
When She was Released from Prison**

This thesis is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Criminology
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Abstract

Borrowing from standpoint and postmodern feminist epistemologies, this thesis proposes to deconstruct the concept “violent women” and challenge the traditional ‘bad’/‘mad’/‘other’ framework of understanding women who engage in violent behaviour. The concept decontextualizes differences between women who commit violence and the stereotypical framework hinders any alternative understanding of their individual cases. Using contextual constructionism and Best’s (2001) criteria for identifying claims as a theoretical framework, a qualitative content analysis of Canadian newspaper articles between July 2004 and July 2006 explored the news media’s representation of Karla Homolka when she was released from prison in July 2005. While the stereotypical concepts that this study sought to transcend (i.e. discussing Karla through the ‘bad’/‘mad’/‘other’ framework) emerged throughout the coverage, insights into how the media constructs “identities” that people come to “know” also emerged. The media’s representation of Homolka at the time of her release was concluded to be *hypereal*; a simulated character named “Karla” that most Canadians are familiar with. Yet this character may or may not resemble the actual Karla who currently resides somewhere in Montreal.

Preface

To contextualize the subject of this thesis and situate her story as an introduction to the discussion of women, violence, and media representation and to the media analysis of her release that will be conducted in this study, using the facts of her case, a timeline of Karla Homolka's case will be illustrated.

In 1987, 17 year old Karla Homolka met 23 year old Paul Bernardo at a hotel restaurant in Scarborough, ON while Homolka and a coworker were attending a veterinary conference. By the end of the night Homolka and Bernardo were having sex. Their relationship developed into a sexually deviant relationship, escalating to one similar to "master and servant" – Bernardo being the master and Homolka the servant. Two years later, they were engaged.

Unbeknownst to Homolka at the time, Bernardo was responsible for a series of sexual assaults against various women in the Scarborough area, marking him as the "Scarborough rapist". In November 1990, he submitted DNA samples as apart of a police investigation of the rapes.

In Dec.23, 1990 following a Christmas party at the Homolka family residence, Bernardo and Homolka drugged Tammy Homolka - Homolka's sister - with animal tranquilizers that Homolka obtained from the veterinary clinic she worked at. Bernardo and Homolka then raped Tammy while she was unconscious, and videotaped themselves in the process. Tammy subsequently choked on her own vomit and died. Her death was ruled as an accident.

In 1991, Bernardo kidnapped Jane Doe, brought her back to the couple's home and sexually assaulted her in the couple's bedroom before letting her go. The crime may have been videotaped. Later that year, he abducted 14 year old Leslie Mahaffey from outside her home, brought her back to the couple's home, where together, they sexually assaulted and murdered her. The crimes were videotaped. Later that month, the couple were married in a fairytale-esque ceremony. Around this time, Mahaffey's dismembered body was found encased in concrete blocks in Lake Gibson near St. Catharine's, ON.

In 1992, the couple kidnapped 15 year old Kristen French from a parking lot and raped, tortured and killed her, and videotaped the process. French's naked body was found two weeks later, disposed in a ditch with her hair cut off.

By 1993, Bernardo's abuse of Homolka had intensified to the extent that she stayed with him out of fear for her life, her families' lives, and out of fear that her family would find out what really happened to her sister Tammy. However, after Bernardo beat Homolka with a flashlight, leaving her with two black eyes, she left him and filed charges against him.

Bernardo was arrested, and the Toronto-Metro police were narrowing their investigation on the Scarborough rapes. However, the search warrant of the couple's house failed to retrieve the videotaped crimes. Bernardo's lawyer, Ken Murray, later retrieved them from a ceiling above a light fixture in a bathroom.

Later in 1993, Homolka's lawyers reached a plea bargain with the Crown. Homolka pleads guilty to two counts of manslaughter in exchange for a 12-year jail sentence for her role in the French and Mahaffey sexual assault and murders, and a testimony against Bernardo in efforts to secure a conviction.

In 1994, Ken Murray resigned and Bernardo's lawyer, handed the videotapes over to his replacement, John Rosen, who then hands them over to the police.

In 1995, Bernardo was found guilty of nine charges, including counts of first-degree murder for his role in the deaths of French and Mahaffey. He was subsequently sentenced to life in prison for first degree murder and designated in a separate proceeding based on the Scarborough rapes, was designated as a dangerous offender. The combination of a first degree murder conviction and a dangerous offender designation means that he will likely never be released from prison.

On July 4, 2005, Karla Homolka was released from prison after serving her full 12-year sentence. Restrictions were initially placed on her release, but were removed later that year, making her a free citizen.

“Far more frightening, than in a way that a male doing that sort of thing,
is a *woman*, who tortures, and kills young girls.”

-Dr. Raymond McNally
(Channel 5 Broadcasting 2002)

Introduction

The Sexual Scripting of Violent Behaviour

Naffine (1996: 6) states that engaging with crime is something that men are expected to do, because they are men, and women are expected not to do, because they are women. These gendered expectations arguably derive from socialized gender roles that designate criminal behaviour, aggression, and violence to 'masculine' and not 'feminine' roles. Men and masculinity have thus been the unchallenged yardstick for comparison when women use violence (Naffine 1987; Heidensohn 1995; Lloyd 1995; Comack and Balfour 2004). This has dramatic implications on reactions to violent women.

For decades, feminist scholars have argued that criminal behaviour is perceived as being within the domain of men and masculinity. For instance, Smart (1976: 66) wrote that boys are granted more freedom and encouraged to be aggressive, ambitious, and outgoing while girls are supervised more closely and taught to be passive and domesticated. In addition, Gelsthorpe (1989: 112) found that the 'ideal' girl is perceived as passive, emotional, caring, and sensitive with the general expectation that girls are to become mothers and homemakers. Gelsthorpe even reports one police officer as stating: "Girls are usually good so a complaint means trouble," (1989: 130). Furthermore, Naffine (1987: 43) states that the 'feminine' woman is thus expected to be passive, non-aggressive, and to not engage in the symbolically male activity of law-breaking. In sum, Gelsthorpe refers to these socialized gender roles as 'sexual scripts'.

Despite the use of generic language - i.e. "criminal" or the "offender" - Comack et al. (2002: 236) argue that researchers in the past had more or less assumed that violence was a male activity; it was something that men - especially lower class men - did to each other.

Despite this assumption, the relationship between men, masculinity, and the fact that the majority of violent crimes were committed by men – although still a minority of criminal behaviour - was never questioned. Lloyd (1995: xvii) states that this is because: “Man is the norm, the objective standard by which others are measured.” Likewise, Naffine (1987: 3-4) argued that law’s “reasonable man” notion represents the male point of view, and Heidensohn (1995: 33-34) adds that laws are made by and for men since middle-aged to upper-class men are largely the ones who set the agenda of lawmaking as well as administering it. Unsurprisingly, if men committing violence is seen as “normal” for men and masculinity, a problematization of masculinity was never an issue.

While some feminist scholars of the 1970s focused attention on men’s victimization of women, the context reinforced the stereotype that men use violence and women are non-violent. For example, to quote Brownmiller (1976: 5):

“Man’s discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear.”

In this context, women were viewed as being at the mercy of men and men’s genitals. By focusing on women’s victimization, Comack et al. (2002: 237) argue that this subsequently cast women as victims and men as offenders. While raising awareness of women’s victimization is a crucial step in combating the problem of male violence against women, the manner in which these crimes were constructed reinforced sexual scripts that designate men as violent perpetrators of crime, and women as non-violent victims of male perpetrated violence. While men do abuse women, Denov (2004: 3) argues that the overwhelming focus on men who abuse, and the construction of men as being the abusers of women, obscures the recognition of females as potential perpetrators of sexual abuse, as well as violence. As a

consequence of these constructions, Comack and Balfour (2004: 61) argue that the notion of a "Violent Woman" breaches the "masculinity = aggression" equation as well as the conceptualization of "ideal" womanhood. As Faith (1993: 95) warns, to betray one's gender by taking on the characteristics attributed to the opposite sex is an invitation to persecution. Comack and Balfour (2004: 62) note how this persecution typically involves violent women being cast as evil, sinister, cold, calculating, and manipulative on one hand and mentally ill on the other. Or in traditional prose, as 'bad' or 'mad'.

The Layout of this Thesis

The foundation for this thesis rests on this sexual scripting of violent behaviour that constructs violence as being a characteristic exclusive to men and masculinity, and uncharacteristic of women and femininity. Consequently, three outcomes surface: women are viewed as being less violent than men, or simply non-violent or incapable of violence (Denov 2004); women and men are seen as being equally violent (Straus, Gelles and Stenmetz 1980); or that women are perceived as being more violent and more shocking than men (Faith and Jiwani 2002; Lloyd 1995; Heidensohn 1995). The reverse is never the standard of comparison. Furthermore, Chapter 1's discussion of women, violence, and media representation will illustrate that when women's use of violence is acknowledged and discussed in feminist criminological literature, stereotypical explanations construct the women as being 'bad' (i.e. 'doubly deviant' because they are *women* committing *violence*) or 'mad' (i.e. their sexuality, bodies, or minds are pathologized from some condition such as nymphomania, pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), battered woman syndrome (BWS), etc.). Moreover, academics have recently drawn so much attention to 'women who kill' that this has become a topic in itself within criminological literature. Furthermore, within the

literature are discussions of the deviant images of violent women, and I argue that the boundaries between discussing them as images, and using the images to discuss the women's crimes, have become blurred. Consequently, the context of the deviant images is not clear: are the stereotypes and myths being recycled or simply discussed?

Chapter 1 will further illustrate how these deviant images fuel the criteria needed to satisfy the newsworthiness of crime stories in the news media, and as sexual scripts designate women as passive and non-violent, extreme cases of "violent women" who deviate from such roles - such as those of Lorena Bobbitt, Myra Hindley, and Karla Homolka - became notorious for their violent crimes through sensationalized media coverage. The resulting message evoked in the press arguably acts as an implicit reminder to all women: 'normal' women do not act like this. Moreover, such women confuse scholars: if they are not 'bad' or 'mad', then the conclusion is that they defy understanding (Birch 1994; Boritch 1994; Cameron and Frazer 1987; Frigon 2006), and must be something else; they are 'other'.

When such unrepresentative cases are sensationalized in the media, the myths about violent women are reinforced, and the women come to be cast as representing all women who commit violence. The inability of scholars to understand violent women is therefore met with further uncertainties because it further decontextualizes the concept of "violent women". This is the problem: academics have categorized women who commit violence into one group of offenders called "violent women". However, as these same academics often illustrate, women commit violence in difference ways, in different contexts, and for different reasons. Therefore, it is unsurprising that we cannot "understand" women who commit violence because they are not a unified group to be understood.

This thesis is designed to challenge this problem and begin a new approach to understanding women who commit violence, both methodologically and epistemologically.

Inspired by the postmodern feminist epistemology of acknowledging differences and celebrating pluralities, this thesis proposes a deconstruction of the concept “violent women”. This concept fails to acknowledge the differences between individual women who commit violence; differences that need to be recognized in order to develop a better understanding of who these women are and why they act the way they do. To replace the concept with a new one may only risk creating the same problem, so new semantics will not be proposed. Instead, this study focuses on one woman who has committed violent and sexual crimes: Karla Homolka. More specifically, as a case study guided by a framework of contextual constructionism and theories of claimsmaking (discussed in Chapter 2), and a methodology inspired by standpoint and postmodern feminist epistemologies surrounding individual women as subjects and sources of knowledge regarding their own experiences (discussed in Chapter 3), this thesis qualitatively explores how Karla Homolka was represented in the Canadian news media when she was released from prison in July 2005. The literature seemingly lacks studies that analyze the news media’s coverage of a woman when she was released from prison. This gap will be filled as it explores an understanding of this woman through the lens of the news media. Equally important, Homolka gave a televised interview the day of her release, and under the standpoint feminist epistemology of using a woman’s voice as a source of knowledge regarding her own experience, the coverage of her interview will be deconstructed to explore how her identity was constructed in the news media and if and how her own voice contributed to the construction.

Chapter 4 will present the findings of the media analysis. Explicitly and implicitly, stereotypes and myths surrounding violent women were found to have been produced and reproduced in the coverage, and although this study attempted to transcend the ‘bad’/‘mad’/‘other’ framework for understanding a violent woman, the qualitative analysis

found themes that reflected these very same concepts. The understanding of this “violent woman” was therefore plagued with the very concepts and constructions I hoped to avoid, to the extent that the notion of a hyperreal “Karla” cannot be ignored; an image of the woman that has been constructed in the media and one that everyone in Canada seems to be familiar with, regardless of whether or not it compares to the actual woman.

However, Homolka is one woman. As Chapter 5 concludes the thesis, recommendations for future studies will be provided, noting that the same theoretical and methodological approach may or may not find similar results when choosing different sources of data, or a different woman as a subject. The findings are not meant to be generalized to “explain” all violent women in the news media for this very reason. Doing so would contradict the postmodern epistemological approach to this thesis.

Chapter 1: Women, Violence, and Media Representation

The definition of the term “violence” is problematic in itself, and even more so when the context of discussions surround women who commit violent crimes. Therefore, to begin this thesis it is necessary to first settle on a working definition of “violence” before engaging in a discussion on violent women. The remainder of the chapter will then be comprised of three sections. The first introduces the notion of “violent women” research that has developed over the last two decades as a lead-in to the discussion of the stereotypes and myths that routinely get applied to women who commit violence. This includes the term ‘doubly deviant’, which leads into the ‘bad’ versus ‘mad’ framework for explaining women’s use of violence. Following this, current violent crime statistics that illustrate the infrequency women’s use of violence will be presented. This data suggests that the stereotypical imagery of violent women arguably over represents women’s actual violence as documented in statistics. This leads to the notion of the imagery as being a social construction. The second section will discuss how crime news stories are produced, with emphasis on how stories are selected using a criteria of newsworthiness, which includes: unusual, random, and sexual crime events that can be simplified, routinized, and presented in familiar themes; a story’s consonance; and its periodicity. The third section will review the literature that discusses violent women in the news media. In this research, a third conceptualization of violent women emerges where the notion of a violent woman who cannot be explained using the ‘bad’ versus ‘mad’ framework are rendered as “unexplainable” and therefore cast as “other”. The chapter will conclude with a critique of this quandary whereby a reconceptualization of “violent women” is proposed to allow for the differences between violent women to be

appreciated, and thus, to open possibilities of finding new ways to “understand” women who use violence.

1.1. Violent Women

1.1.1. What is “Violence”?

The Canadian Criminal Code’s classification of violent crimes includes both minor and major assaults. The former involve less serious offences such as threats to use violence, bullying, pushing or shoving (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 8). The more latter includes assaults may result in physical injury or death and include sexual assaults, robbery, or abduction which may involve a threat to use force, the display of a weapon, use of a weapon, and actual physical force (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 8). There are four types of Criminal Code offences that are associated with the crime of homicide: first-degree murder; second-degree murder; manslaughter; and infanticide (Dauvergne 2005: 2).

Hoffman et al. (1998) break down the description of the levels of murder. According to section 231 of the Criminal Code, murder is considered first degree when it is planned and deliberate. More specifically, first degree murder refers to when the victim is a police officer or a similar official acting in the course of his/her duties, death caused while committing or attempting to commit sexual assault, kidnapping and forcible confinement, hostage taking or hijacking an aircraft. Second degree murder refers to when the act is not defined as first degree murder, while manslaughter is culpable homicide which is not defined as murder or infanticide. Infanticide involves a woman causing the death of her newly born child at a time when she is not fully recovered from the effects of giving birth and lactation (Kramar 2005: 3). Later in this chapter, there will be more discussion on the different categories of homicide involving children.

Comack and Balfour (2004: 12) write that the Criminal Code's hierarchical order of crimes on the basis of seriousness contributes to the appearance of consistency, precision, and uniformity in law. While this suggests that what constitutes a violent crime is straightforward, in reality this is not cut and dry matter. As Comack and Balfour (2004: 12-13) note: "What counts as violence is culturally and historically variable." Furthermore, Shaw and Dubois (1995: 6) argue that reaching a definition of the term violence which everyone would agree with is difficult. For the purposes of this study, "violence" will refer to the behaviours responded to by the criminal justice system that involve the more serious assaults including assaults that may result in physical injury or death, and sexual assaults. The reason for this specific definition is that the literature discussing violent women typically centers on women who kill and/or sexually assault their victims. However, while women can and do commit violent crimes, sometimes the acts themselves may not have involved any physical aggression that typically characterizes violence. For example, Knellman (1998) writes that the majority of women accused of murder in the nineteenth century committed murder using poison; a rather passive and arguably "non-violent" means of committing homicide, but is still classified as a type of violent crime. And while sexual abuse may involve violence, Denov (2004) illustrates cases where the sexual abuse that women have inflicted was not always considered violent - even by their victims. Nonetheless, the acts do fall under Criminal Code classifications of acts such as sexual interference or invitation to sexual touching that are not violent but rather based on persuasion.

Furthermore, this definition of violence covers the violent crimes committed by women that the media afford sensationalized coverage, which - as this chapter illustrates - has many implications for not only the representation of violent women offenders, but also

for the construction of masculinity, femininity, and the 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviours that are ascribed to men and women in general.

Now that the term "violence" is defined, the remainder of Section 1 will discuss the stereotypical frameworks of understanding women that are often used in the literature on violent women, followed by recent violent crime statistics to illustrate how the imagery is arguably a social construction.

1.1.2. A Recent Trend in Crime Research

While the last few decades have seen the publication of numerous books that focus on women and crime (Smart 1976; Naffine 1987; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1995; Boritch 1997; DeKeseredy 2000; Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004), recent research has focused specifically on violent women as subjects for analysis. In addition to numerous chapters and scholarly articles, a noticeable amount of recent books have focused on violent women, particularly 'women who kill', including:

- *Browne, A. (1987) When Battered Women Kill*
- *Lloyd, A. (1995) Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned: Society's Treatment of Violent Women*
- *Mann, C.R. (1996) When Women Kill*
- *Myers, A., and Wright, S. (eds.) (1996) No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*
- *Artz, S. (1998) Sex, Power, and the Violent School Girl*
- *Knellman, J. (1998) Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press*
- *Davis, C.A. (2001) Women Who Kill: Profiles of Female Serial Killers*
- *Frigon, S. (2003) L'Homicide Conjugal au Feminin: d'hier a aujourd'hui*
- *Morrissey, B. (2003) When Women Kill: Questions of Agency and Subjectivity*
- *Robbins, T. (2003) Tender Murderers: Women Who Kill*
- *Kramar, K.J. (2005) Unwilling Mothers, Unwanted Babies : Infanticide in Canada*
- *Burfoot, A. and Lord, S. (2006) Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*

Such texts not only acknowledge, but demonstrate women's capabilities of committing violent acts. One of the traditional explanations is that these women are 'doubly deviant'. This will be discussed next.

1.1.3. Violent Women as 'Doubly Deviant'

Within more than a century's worth of criminological literature, there has been a myth and stereotype that women who commit crimes are 'doubly deviant'. For instance, in 1895 Italian scholars Lombroso and Ferrero theorized that the born female criminal is 'doubly exceptional'; that women are the exception among the criminal population and criminals are the exception among the general population (1895: 151). They argued that there is a "...superiority in the female born criminal over the male that lies in the refined, diabolical cruelty with which she accomplishes her crime," (1895: 148). Furthermore, while they conceptualized female criminals as *being* 'doubly exceptional', a century later, Lloyd (1995: 36) explains that when women commit violent crimes they are *perceived* as being 'doubly deviant' because they breach two laws: the law of the land, which forbids violence; and the more fundamental 'natural' law, which says that women are to be passive caregivers and not active aggressors (see also Heidensohn 1995; Jones 2003). While women are found to be typically less violent and less frequently violent than men, Lloyd (1995: xx, xxvi, 36) argues that when women do act violently, they appear freakish, 'unnatural', and 'truly' wicked to have deviated far from the norm of good womanhood. Faith and Jiwani (2002: 92) add that the closer a woman is to the ideals of femininity, the more shocking it is when she violently betrays her gender role. Moreover, while there are women who commit violent crimes that are so shocking that they are consigned to the 'evil monster' category, Lloyd (1995: xviii) argues that the revulsion, the stigma, the vilification are all greater when the offender is a

woman. Heidensohn (1995: 89, 103) argues that this is because the image created is more powerful and may leave a longer-lasting impression since the negative and deplorable aspects are potentially less stigmatizing or threatening to the identity of a man as it is for women in equivalent contexts.

In addition to the notion of violent women as being 'bad' (i.e. 'doubly deviant', criminal, evil), discussion of violent women often shifts to perceptions of them as being 'mad'; that they committed the violence because there was something inherently wrong with them. Stereotypically, their violence gets explained away as being a result of some pathological 'condition' in which her sexuality, biology, or mental state of mind had rendered her actions as beyond her control. These notions will be illustrated next.

1.1.4. From 'Bad' to 'Mad'

In many cases, especially with the more infamous and sensationalized crimes, the perception of violent women transcends that of her being 'bad'; they are not seen as ordinary women who have committed a crime. Instead, the perception is that here is something wrong with the woman; and therefore, she must be 'mad'. For example, Wilbanks (1982: 174) writes that when men commit murder, their crimes are explained in terms of economic reasons or poor socialization. But when women commit murder, there is a reliance on mythology or sexual stereotypes involving their mental instability or pathology (Wilbanks 1982: 175). Moreover, Lloyd (1995: 43) argues that the view that women are inferior and unstable because of their hormones and emotions makes it all too easy to see them as being by their very nature, unstable, irrational, neurotic or mad. Similarly, Frigon (1995: 21; 1996: 79) writes that criminal women come to be classified as disorderly because of their: evilness (such as in the case of witches in the Middle Ages); deviation from appropriate gender norms; horrible

deeds (such as in the cases of homicide and conjugal homicide); or because they suffer from a syndrome (such as the pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) or the battered woman syndrome (BWS)). The latter are rarely used as part of a legal defense, yet frequently get discussed in criminological literature on violent women. Furthermore, this section will discuss the notion of violent women as being 'mad' which often arises in feminist literature on violent women; that their crimes can get explained away due to their sexuality, biology, and/or pathological minds. To illustrate, attention will be given to diagnoses of particular 'conditions' or 'disorders' relating to nymphomania, psychosis, infanticide, PMS, and the BWS which are typical examples that emerge in the literature to illustrate this "understanding" of what causes some women to commit violent crimes.

Denov (2004: 85) argues that female sex offenders became real life representations of the horrors of femininity perverted from its 'natural' course. The crimes of a female sex offender may result in the treatment of the woman's sexuality as her 'master status'; that she is an out of control nymphomaniac suffering from some form of sexual 'madness' (Denov 2004: 86). Consider the following quotes from police officers in her study (2004: 86):

"This girl [female suspect] was obsessed with sex. Totally. Completely. She was over-sexed. She told me that she would sometimes spend all day masturbating," (Police officer).

"That woman [the female suspect] was a nymphomaniac. A real nymphomaniac. She was sleeping with four different guys regularly," (Police officer).

"I suppose the first idea that comes to mind when I think of a female sex offender is a nymphomaniac. That's the portrait I see, the typical case," (Police officer).

As these quotes suggest, these police officers see female sex offenders as sexual deviants; their crimes are a product of their out of control sexuality, and inevitably, they must be 'mad'. However, Smart (1989: 42) argues that men's sexual offences can be sexualized as well, but in the opposite spectrum where being a sexual predator and sexualizing all women is regarded as being normal and even desirable for men.

Denov (2004: 123-124) finds that when a female commits a sexual offense, the only way psychiatrists could make sense of the behaviour is to label it as 'psychotic':

"Most of the female sex offenders I have seen have been mentally ill in a fairly obvious way. They wouldn't do what they did if they weren't acutely psychotic. Most are psychotic," (Male psychiatrist).

"[sexual offending] is just not typically female behaviour. They would have to be quite warped and possibly psychotic to do something like that," (Male psychiatrist).

"I think female sex offender are more likely to be mentally ill than males. Some of them seem to flip in and out of psychosis... they are severely disturbed at least, if not formally psychotic," (Male psychiatrist).

In contrast to these comments, male sex offenders were not seen as having this condition (Denov 2004: 123). Denov (2004: 124) concludes that when a female commits a sexual offense, it is seen as such a flagrant deviation from 'normal', 'feminine' behaviour that the solution is to label it as psychotic. Essentially, the perception is that "real" women do not sex offend; only 'warped' and 'psychotic' women do (Denov 2004: 124).

In addition to pathologizing a violent woman's sexuality, the literature illustrates that - historically - her biology may be pathologized as well; suggesting that her use of violence was driven by hormonal changes (Boritch 1997; Comack 2006; Frigon 1996; Lloyd 1995; Shaw and Dubois 1995: 13). Whenever the notion of a female offender's mental stability surfaces in criminological literature, emphasis is typically drawn to how infanticide, PMS, and BWS can be used to argue that the woman's actions were beyond her control. As defined earlier, infanticide occurs when a woman causes the death of her newly born child at a time when she is not fully recovered from the effects of giving birth and her mind is disturbed (Hoffman et al. 1998). Boritch (1997: 34) notes that the crime only applies to females, and is an area of law that focuses on the biology and mental stability of the accused women. Depending on how old the child was and who the perpetrator is, the killing of a child can be labeled as different offences including the following: filicide, the killing of a child by parents

or parent-substitutes such as stepfathers (Wilczynski 1995: 167); neonaticide, the killing of a child aged one year or less; or infanticide, which is an offence exclusive to female perpetrators where the biological mother has killed the children (Kramar 2005: 3). As of 1948, the Canadian Criminal Code Section 233 included the infanticide provision, which reads:

“A female person commits infanticide when by a willful act or omission she causes the death of her new-born child, if at the time of the act or omission she is not fully recovered from the effects of giving birth to the child and by reason thereof or the effect of lactation consequent on the birth of the child her mind is disturbed,” (Kramar 2005: 3).

This legislation is based on the premise that women kill their children because of disturbed hormones after childbirth (Wilczynski 1995: 175), and as Allen (1987: 27) points out, is therefore an offence which can only be committed by an abnormal subject. Incidentally, if a woman was charged with this and found to have killed her child while being mentally normal, or disordered due to some other condition, Allen (1987: 32) notes that the jury would have to acquit her on this charge. However, she might be convicted of another charge.

Essentially, infanticide laws involve the female offender acquiring diminished responsibility against the charge of murder and being subjected to lesser penalties than other types of homicide offences (Allen 1987: 27; Boritch 1997: 35). Infanticide can therefore be treated as both a defense and an offence. During the sentencing stage of a trial, the defence counsel may try and raise evidence of social or psychological constraint on the defendant's human subjectivity to obtain a reduction in punishment, while the Crown will emphasize evidence of culpability to secure a conviction and punishment (Kramar 2005: 12). For instance, postnatal depression may be linked to maternal filicide both as a basis for infanticide and as a plea for diminished responsibility (Morris and Wilczinski 1994: 208).

This area of law has been met with much criticism from feminist scholars, with arguments that the notion of infanticide draws distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' women, and 'good' and 'bad' mothers (Kramar 2005; Morris and Wilczinski 1994). Morris and Wilczinski (1994: 215-216) write that the dominant or 'official' discourse on mothers who kill their children is rooted in the belief that all women are 'good' mothers. In this sense, if a woman kills her child, she has deviated from this script, and is therefore the target of persecution and punishment. However, by treating women's filicide as pathological, Morris and Wilczinski (1994: 216) write that not only can the criminal responsibility be reduced or removed in the cases where there may have been actual criminal intent, the attention is also diverted from the social conditions conducive to this crime. These include: poverty; inordinate childcare responsibilities; social isolation; lack of support; and the myths surrounding motherhood and the cultural standards of 'good' mothering.

Although rarely used, another example in criminological literature that describes how a woman's biology can be argued as a means of diminishing her responsibility for violence is that of pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Frigon (1996: 92) notes that PMS is a medical construct: a disorder under the DSM-IV with symptoms including depressed mood, anxiety, affective lability, anger, decreased interest in usual activities, lethargy, and other physical symptoms. While these symptoms may arguably occur in just about anyone – male or female – at one time or another, PMS has been (rarely) used to individualize and medicalize a violent woman's behaviour (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 13), which may enable her to escape responsibility for her crimes. Frigon (1996: 93) illustrates the infamous case of Lizzie Borden - the typical case that gets used in the PMS as a defence discussion involve - who in the early twentieth century murdered her father (30 wounds) and her stepmother (20 wounds) with an ax. It was determined that she had committed at least the stepmother's murder during

a seizure, and when asked during her why she had blood on her skirt, she stated that she had her period. It was said that she suffered from peculiar spells during menstruation and she was acquitted of both murders.

Frigon (1996: 91-92) further writes that the myths and taboos surrounding menstruation rested on the assumption that men were the norm and women diseased because men have historically been associated with mind and reason, and women have been associated with the body and lack of reason. This idea gained currency in the medical practice where women have been treated as non-rational beings at the mercy of their “raging hormones,” (Frigon 1996: 92). Likewise, Lloyd (1995: 191) argues that there is no parallel hormonal theory that can explain male violence; that men are the rational norm and able – or at least expected to – control their hormones and emotions. However, Langevin et al. (1988) note that elevated testosterone levels in males have been linked to sexually aggressive offenders, and found a trend of above normal levels of testosterone in sex killers. Furthermore, a number of critiques challenge the validity of classifying PMS as a mental disorder, that there is little empirical evidence which supports its association with crime, and that it reduces women’s behaviour to ‘irrational’ emotions and raging hormones (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 15; Faith 1993), as opposed to alternative explanations for their anger or violence (see Campbell 1993: 157-159). Faith (1993: 46) notes that if radical hormonal changes induce criminal behaviour, one would expect that menopausal women would dominate women’s prisons; instead they are absent from them. She also critiques the PMS defence, stating that it disempowers women by reducing them to irrational and helpless victims of their female nature (1993: 47).

The battered woman syndrome (BWS) is another ‘syndrome’ in which women’s use of violence can be psychologized. Although rarely used, as a defense it may exonerate her of

criminal responsibility for her actions. Lenore Walker (1984) coined the term 'Battered Woman Syndrome' and developed a theory of "learned helplessness" which refers to the means by which a woman becomes physically and emotionally incapacitated through processes of domination and abuse by her spouse. In this situation, the woman can neither defend herself nor escape, nor does she always want to because she just doesn't want to be hit, or experience worse forms of abuse, injury, or even death as a result of her leaving (Faith 1993: 102). Furthermore, Faith (1993: 102-105) describes the context in which abused women kill their abusers. She notes that relatively few women who kill their abusive spouses have succumbed to a state of passivity until the triggering moment when an opportunity arises for the act. Many women who have killed their abusive partners had called the police for prior assistance, went to family and friends for help, and that there are often inadequate amounts of space in women's shelters. Moreover, women who kill their abusers generally do so when their abuser is incapacitated (i.e. when asleep or drowsy from alcohol), which would disqualify them from being an "imminent threat". Yet if the women were to attack their abuser when they were fit and in good form, they would most likely be overcome by their abuser, get beaten up, or get killed themselves. In this context, Faith (1993: 104) argues that such women cannot be considered a "reasonable man" in the eyes of the law, which presents a problem when battered women appear as defendants in homicide cases and enter a plea of self-defence. Lloyd (1995: xxii) argues that the experiences of battered women therefore fall outside the scope of the law.

The BWS defense was also met with sexist backlash. Mann (1996: 126) references a paper presented by Thibault and Rossier at the 1992 American Society of Criminology meeting in which they argue that women are just as violent as men and challenge studies that stress the self-defense as a justification for female/male assaults:

“Although some women may kill in the home in self-defense, female killers in the home also plan to kill and kill because they want to. We need to take a close look at the courts that are letting these women get away with murder. Has our sexist society, by defending these female murderers made it open season for women to kill men, as long as the killing is in the home?”

This statement supports Faith's (1993: 99) comment that a battered woman is the offender in a case of homicide and an abusive husband is the victim. I would argue that the key word in the statement is “sexist.” While some women may kill their partners not in self-defense, sexism prevents cases that do involve self-defense from abusive situations from becoming acknowledged in this context. For example, in the context of BWS, Frigon (1996: 98) writes that women who kill can be seen as both *dangerous* (because they have killed) and *in danger* (from the violence against them), which blurs the boundary between victimization and criminalization.

While addressing the victimization of women in some cases may be necessary to understand the context and intent of her violence, it should not be the only approach to understanding women's crime. Shaw and Dubois (1995) argue that while women's violence tends to be framed largely as a response to an abusive situation or past abusive experiences, not all violent acts committed by women are in direct response to abusive relationships. Women may also use violence against children, acquaintances, people who hold authority over them, strangers, and even themselves (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 5). Despite engaging in violent behaviour for various reasons, they argue that some investigators feel challenged to ‘prove’ that women are just as violent as men and this contributes to the fiction that women who are violent must be extraordinary freaks. This fiction denies these women any agency or choice in their lives, and ultimately leaves the justice system with little understanding of their behaviour and little guidance as how to respond to these women (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 5).

Up until now, we have seen how the reactions to violent women transform and construct their acts into 'horrors of femininity' or as products of their pathological minds. However, as the next section shows, recent Canadian statistics offer a contrasting image of women in Canada who have been committing violence, particularly homicide. Since women commit a fractional amount of violent crime, the deviant images of violent women, the stigmatization, and the pathologies attached to violent women arguably paint a misleading picture.

1.1.5. Violent Crime Statistics

Research over the last century has discussed women's violence using stereotypes of badness and madness intertwined throughout them. Paradoxically, women have had consistently lower rates of officially recorded crimes than men across countries, across judicial systems, over time, at all ages, and in relation to different types of violence and aggressive behaviour (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 7; Heidensohn 1995: 2). Despite recurrent media claims that women are becoming more violent and serious offenders, Boritch (1997: 310-311) notes how statistics show that women continue to be incarcerated for less serious offences, their criminal histories are less extensive and also involve less serious crimes especially when compared to male prisoners. Yet, the most infrequent violent behaviour by women receives the greatest amount of attention: homicide (Shaw and Dubois (1995: 29). Therefore it is necessary to explore this 'phenomena' of 'women who kill'. Recent Canadian statistics derived from the *Juristat* (in Davergne 2005) will also illustrate the prevalence and context of homicides committed by women. In addition, when attention is drawn to women who have committed homicide - especially their partners - the criminological literature typically discusses the killings in the context of domestic violence, with the act being a form of self-

defence. Therefore it is also necessary to discuss the relationship between women's criminalization and their own victimization.

1.1.5.1. Homicide in Canada

According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics *Juristat* report 'Homicide in Canada, 2004' (in Davergne 2005), Canadian police services reported 622 homicides in 2004. Consistent with previous years, 90% of those accused were males, with the highest rates occurring between the ages of 18-24 years. The rate for female accused was constant for the age groups between 18 and 39 years of age. Furthermore, there were 27 homicide incidents involving multiple-victims in 2004, similar to the previous 10-year average of 28. Slightly more than half of the victims were male (55%) and the accused persons were male in all but 4 incidents. Lastly, males were more likely than females to have used alcohol and/or drugs at the time of the homicide, as both victims and accused persons (63% versus 39% for victims and 74% versus 61% for accused).

Most homicides committed against children in 2004 were perpetrated by both parents. 27 (or 73%) of the 37 child victims were killed by their mother or father, which includes step-mothers and step-fathers. In 6 of these incidents, the parent subsequently committed suicide. Of those child homicides committed by a parent, 8 were committed by a father, 5 by a step-father, 13 by a mother and 1 by a mother and step-father. Of the remaining child homicides, three were committed by another family member and five by a family friend, caregiver or acquaintance. There were no homicides committed against a child that police determined were perpetrated by a stranger, and two were unsolved.

Spousal homicides accounted for about 16% of all solved homicides and almost half (46%) of all family homicides. As is typically the case, women are still much more likely

than men to be killed by their spouse – the 2004 spousal homicide rate against females (0.71 per 100,000 female spouses) was 5 times higher than the rate for males (0.14 per 100,000 male spouses). While women do kill their partners, women are more likely to be killed by their partners. As the next section will show, a discussion of women's violence often requires a discussion of violence against women as well.

1.1.5.2. Violent Women and Violence against Women

Sev'er (2002: 164) writes that women are much more likely to be victims of violence than to perpetrate violence against others. For many female offenders, if not most, criminality and victimization are not discrete phenomena, but rather constitute a continuum of experience (Boritch 1997: 6). To illustrate this, the relationship between women's criminalization and victimization will be addressed using self-report statistics from the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) taken from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics *Juristat* report 'Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2004' (Gannon and Mihorean 2005: 7-8).

According to the 2004 GSS, 7% of Canadian women and 6% of Canadian men experienced some form of physical or sexual violence from their current or previous spouse or common-law partner in the previous 5 years. However, the survey finds that women experienced more serious, injurious and repeated violence than did men. More specifically, women were more likely than men to state that the most serious form of violence they experienced included being beaten, choked or being threatened with or having a gun or knife used against them (23% versus 15% of male victims). Women were also twice as likely as men to report experiencing more than 10 violent episodes (21% versus 11%), more than twice as likely to suffer an injury (44% versus 18%), and three times more likely to fear for their life because of the violence (34% versus 10%). In addition, the survey found that

victimization rates for Aboriginal women were 3.5 times higher than the rates recorded for non-Aboriginal women.

Furthermore, women experiencing violence at the hands of their partner is not a new phenomenon within criminological research. The notion of women killing their abusers as a result of the abuse is not a new notion either. Five decades ago, Wolfgang (1967a: 23, 1967b: 81) found that women were more likely to be killed by their husbands, but when women did kill, they were more likely to have been provoked by their husband-victims. Similarly, Sev'er (2002: 38) writes that the majority of women who kill their spouses do so in self-defence, whereas the majority of men who kill their spouses do so in a premeditated way. Moreover, Dobash et al. (1992: 81) note that men have been known to: perpetrate familicidal massacres where they kill their spouses and children together; hunt down and kill wives who have left them; kill their wives after lengthy periods of prolonged physical violence accompanied by other forms of abuse and coercion; kill their wives in a planned murder-suicide; and kill in response to revelations of their wife's infidelity. In contrast, women rarely, if ever, kill their husbands or male partners in these contexts (Dobash et al. 1992: 81).

1.1.6. Conclusion

This section has illustrated that women's use of violence tends to be interpreted and explained within a framework of sexual scripting that designates "appropriate" and "inappropriate" behaviour within the realms of masculinity and femininity. If women deviate from their scripts of 'non-violent', they are constructed as 'bad' through various stereotypical imagery (i.e. 'doubly deviant', evil, etc.). Moreover, depending on the context of the crime, the offending women's sexuality, biology, and mental stability are pathologized and she is seen as having something inherently wrong with her and must inevitably be 'mad'. However,

when analyzing crime statistics, these images become just that: socially constructed images of who violent women “are” and how they are to be perceived to “be”.

Considering these constructions, Section 2 will discuss the methodology of journalism: how crime news stories are made. One of the key elements of the ‘criteria of newsworthiness’ is a story involving crime that is violent and unusual (Chermak 1994). Section 1 has demonstrated that when women are violent, it is perceived as being extremely unusual, especially considering the stereotypes that routinely get applied to the offenders.

1.2. Newsmaking

There are criteria for newsworthiness which a crime story must satisfy in order to be selected as news. When crimes are serious in nature, violent, unusual, random, and involving celebrities (Sacco 1998; Chermak 1994), they are likely to be selected. Organizational constraints related to the production of news reports further affect how the story appears (Chermak 1998; Surette 1992). For instance, the ability of story to be simplified, routinized, and placed into familiar themes, its consonance, and periodicity all affect the story’s presentation and where it will appear within the four levels of news space: tertiary, secondary, primary, and superprimary levels. The tertiary stories are small fillers while the superprimary stories are the more sensational ones. Moreover, sensationalized news coverage risks becoming “tabloidized” (Fox and Van Sickle 2001) as news organizations compete with non-news organizations for audiences. Another significant factor is the relationship between news organizations and their news sources since the extent of a journalist’s coverage heavily depends on what information is provided by their sources for the stories.

The above concepts will be illustrated in this section, followed by critiques that the resulting crime news reports often distort and misrepresent realities surrounding crime and criminal behaviour. Since most people look to the news for their information on crime, the media arguably hold a level of power in the designation of crime and deviance (Ericson et al. 1987; Surette 1992; Schissel 1997). Furthermore, in order to talk about crime as news, a definition of “news” and the justifications for reporting crimes will begin the discussion on newsmaking.

1.2.1. What is ‘News’?

Ericson et al. (1987: 4) state that visualization is the “essence of journalism as a method”: making something visible to the mind even if it is not visible to the eye. They note that journalists visualize what happened, why it happened, what it was like to be there, what should be done about it, and what is likely to happen next, all while offering their own accounts of reality and their own version of events as they think should be most appropriately visualized (1987: 4). The news therefore brings to mind events in the world through journalist accounts and their sources (Ericson et al. 1987: 4). News then, Surette (1992: 62) argues, “is neither a pure picture of society nor a fully controlled propaganda message, but is instead an organizational product.”

1.2.1.1. Why Report Crime?

Printed news concerning crime and justice is about as old as printing itself. A detailed account of witchcraft trials has been recorded as early as 1587 (Surette 1991: p.53). The media has several justifications for reporting crime stories. Chermak (1994) explains that since the public has a right to know about crimes or criminals in their community - such as concerns regarding rapists and child abusers - crime reporting thus functions to provide the

public with knowledge of crime, criminals, and protection from both. He adds that crime reporting may also function as a deterrent to potential criminals. In addition, it is also entertaining. Surette (1992: 25) adds that it may even be a form of escapism for some people.

While these reasons imply that crime news is presented more or less as a service to the public, Schissel (1997) is more critical about the purpose of crime reporting. He states that media portraits of crime function primarily to:

- (1) create insiders and outsiders, acceptability and unacceptability, in order to facilitate public demand and consumption;
- (2) connect images of deviance and crime with social characteristics; and
- (3) decontextualize crime in anecdotal evidence that is presented as omnipresent, noncomplex truth (1997: 17).

What Schissel (1997) is alluding to are the processes in which crime stories go from being mere information about events, to being constructed versions of events whereby the generated product is designed to serve the interests of certain members or social groups in society, but under the guise of objectivity.

To illustrate the processes involved in newsmaking, the following section discusses the characteristics in which a crime story has to meet in order to satisfy the criteria for 'newsworthiness' as well as the organizational constraints that affect if and how the story gets selected and ultimately becomes news.

1.2.2. How are Crime News Reports Produced?

This section will discuss the criteria in which crime stories must meet in order to become crime news reports. This section will focus on: the dramatic features of the crime; its ability to be simplified, routinized, and placed into familiar themes; its consonance; and its periodicity. Next I will discuss the importance of the relationship between news

organizations and its sources, and the significance of “credible sources.” Finally, I will illustrate the four levels of news space: tertiary, secondary, primary, and superprimary levels.

On any given day in large metropolitan areas, there are a plethora of crimes that could be the object of media attention (Sacco 1998). While petty crimes can be newsworthy, they are typically not selected for reporting (Chermak 1994: 104). Instead, the dramatic value of crime stories heightens and the chances of the story being selected increases when the crime is serious in nature, violent, unusual, a random event, and if celebrity is involved (Sacco 1998; Chermak 1994). Such characteristics of stories also help newspapers sell (Chermak 1994: 99).

Furthermore, when a police officer or soldier is wounded or killed in the line of duty, this becomes news. While names, faces, and places of the event will change, the context is typically simplified to appear the same: an authority figure is cast as the victim during an act of self-defence against a criminalized and pathologized ‘other’. Doyle (2003: 40) writes that this law-and-order ideology fits the criteria for newsworthiness due to its simplicity, drama, emotiveness, violence, and easily identifiable villains. Much like reality crime television shows such as *Cops*, a law-and-order ideology shapes, reinforces, and evolves a system of meaning that is intertwined with an ‘us and them’ mentality where crime is seen as the problem of evil, pathological, strangers who are not like us (Doyle 2003: 38). The police - and arguably the military as well - are identified in the news as powerful authorities who stand between us and them. When any of their members become ‘fallen’, the message is one of punitiveness and retribution on part of the ‘other’. This in turn protects the image of these authority figures, thus sustaining the law-and-order ideology (Doyle 2003: 33, 38). Further discussion on this social construction of reality can be found in the section on the media’s relationship with its sources.

Mentioned above was a story's 'simplicity'. Moreover, a story's *consonance* refers to how an event ties in with prior news themes involving accepted public images and explanations (Surette 1992: 61). This is a crucial aspect within the criteria of newsworthiness: while unexpected or unusual events are attractive to journalists and editors, if stories can be simplified to fit into previously established themes, they are more likely to be selected for reporting (Fishman 1998: 59). In addition, themes provide news, shows, and newspapers with a presentational order: when stories fit into themes (i.e. "crimes against the elderly") they may relate to other themes (i.e. "youth crime" if the suspects were young) thus allowing the news stories to be placed near each other (Fishman 1998: 58-59) in the layout of the news. To contextualize what is meant by news "themes," the *folk devil* concept is useful. A folk devil is essentially the personification of evil (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1998: 31). While all folk devils are created out of some existing and recognizable elements, a full-scale demonology takes place by which members of a new evil category are placed "in the gallery of contemporary folk devils" (Cohen 1972/2002: 44). Once a category has been identified in the media as consisting of troublemakers, the supposed havoc-wreaking behaviour of its members reported to the public, and their supposed stereotypical features litanized (offering readers background knowledge of the crime, situation, and related events; spelling it out for the reader), the process of creating a new folk devil is complete and from then on, all mention of representations of the new category revolves around their central, and exclusively negative, features (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1998: 34). For example, Cohen's (1972) classic study of the mods and rockers illustrated how the media used evocative language and imagery to alert the public towards a *potentially* criminogenic youth, which he coined as folk devils. Once the folk devil was identified by the mainstream media, the context for "understanding" youth crime was thus established (Schissel 1997: 12). In short, folk devils

are deviants: they engage in wrongdoing; their actions are harmful to society; they are selfish and evil; they must be stopped and their actions neutralized (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1998: 34).

Once selected, the stories further compete against the time and space constraints faced by news organizations when producing the newspaper itself and the stories must therefore appear simple and unambiguous to increase its chances of further selection (Chermak 1994: 99). The lack of factual complexity associated with the ordinary individual crime allows it to be easily written and edited by news workers, especially if there are rigid deadlines to meet (Sacco 1998: 39). The organizational task then, is to 'routinize' non-routine events (Surette 1992: 61), where the production of crime news becomes a routine with a standardized format in which reporters simply change the details regarding what and who was involved, and what the authorities are planning to do about it (Chermak 1994: 97). Similarly, this *routinization* comes in handy for the layout of the newspaper since crime coverage can be used throughout the entire paper as filler if needed, whether it be comments by the editors or citizens in the opinions section (Chermak 1994: 100-101), or as Sherizen (1978: 221) finds, crimes stories can even be used as filler in obituary sections, due to the impossibility of planning an obituary page more than a day in advance.

Another organizational constraint surrounds the story's *periodicity*, where an event's time cycle occurs similarly to the publication cycle of a news medium, which thus matches its organization's scheduling needs and increases a story's chances of being reported compared to a story with a different time cycle (Surette (1992: 61).

1.2.2.1. Relationship between News and Source Organizations

There is a 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker 1967, Ericson et al. 1987; Loseke 2003) in newsmaking whereby those who are elevated in the hierarchy are assumed to know what is best. This establishes who is authorized to say what is good and bad, and what should be done about it, and certain sources may get filtered out of news reports if they are not considered to be "credible." Furthermore, news organizations and source organizations have a mutually beneficial relationship where the news organizations depend on sources to produce crime news and the sources depend on news organizations to cite their authoritative voice and appear credible (Chermak 1998; Surette 1992). For instance, newspapers seldom initiate reports about sexual assaults outside of some judicial context, and thus depend on the police and courts for information about these crimes (Soothill and Walby 1991: 15). However, before a journalist has a crime 'event' to possibly report on, that 'event' has been through the manufacturing process of the source organization (Chibnall 1981: 76; Ericson et al. 1987: 20). In this sense, news sources themselves function as reporters in that they prepare accounts already tailor-made for both their own purposes (Ericson et al. 1987: 9).

To conceal its relationship with its source, the media are less likely to critique the performance of a source organization (i.e. the police) (Chermak 1994: 115; Sherizen 1978: 213). The result is a prepackaged flow of information to the news media which promotes a biased positive image of the organization, thus holding a central position in the construction of crime and criminal justice (Surette 1992: 63). Moreover, Sherizen (1978: 212) notes how this positive image allows the authoritative position of the police to get reinforced in crime news and as crimes become more publicly known, it is almost instinctive for the public to seek more police activity. As mentioned earlier, this context of news reporting reinforces a law-and-order ideology which identifies certain people as powerful authorities (e.g. the

police), others as villains, and the role of the authorities in protecting “us” from “them” (Doyle 2003: 38).

In addition to promoting a positive self image, Chibnall (1981: 84) writes of *solicited informational aid* where the police may use the press to communicate with specific individuals or minority groups. For example, in the summer of 2006 when known pedophile Peter Whitmore was alleged to have abducted two boys from Saskatchewan and Winnipeg, news reports involved the RCMP urging him to “turn yourself in”¹. Similarly, Darrel Pink (a lawyer in Halifax) notes how lawyers may use the media to get certain information out to the public, which may cause the media to lose their objectivity (McCormick 1995: 183). And as the information gets processed through editors, combined with journalists’ lack of knowledge on how the justice system works, the resulting story may not resemble what has been initially presented to them (McCormick 1995: 180, 183).

1.2.2.2. Four Levels of News Space

To contextualize the combined pressures of a story’s newsworthiness and the various constraints of the news organization, Chermak (1994: 117-125) illustrates how reporters and media organizations consider each crime as potentially fitting into four different levels of news space: tertiary; secondary; primary; and super primary. Depending on the story’s newsworthiness and the accessibility of pertinent information from sources, stories becoming larger in size with each level, more detailed, more resources get used to develop the story, and the sensational aspect may increase as well.

¹ CBC Online. (Aug. 1, 2006). 'Turn yourself in,' alleged child abductor urged.
<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/saskatchewan/story/2006/08/01/pleas-whitmore.html>

Tertiary crime stories:

- short (3-5 inches) space fillers, appear in the news everyday;
- few sources are contacted, information is usually collected through morning calls to police departments, sitting in on a court session, or by calling a bailiff or attorney involved in a case;
- only basic demographics are provided about the victim and defendant; and
- reporters write these stories because it is required by the organization; and they have the unknown potential to develop into a higher level news story.

Secondary level crime stories:

- occur almost daily, take up more news space (6-12 inches) than tertiary stories;
- have potential to be important news, reporters go to greater lengths to generate them, number of resources exhausted to and gather information on a certain crime story;
- burdensome as sources cannot always be contacted, or they may refuse to provide information, i.e. out of fear of jeopardizing an investigation; may end up being a tertiary story instead; and they are
- not generally entertaining, yet not disposable due to their potential to expand, usually back page news.

Primary level crime stories:

- placed in the best sections of the paper – either the front page or metro section;
- they may include pictures, and editors are more liberal with how much space is granted to them;
- occur infrequently, covered across a number of stages of the criminal justice system and can be informative, entertaining; the ability to attract consumers;
- exhaustive list of sources may include: the police ‘mouthpiece’ who provided the story; homicide detectives; coroner, for information about deceased victim; hospital, for the status of victims; victims; district attorney for information on charges/proceedings; related community organizations; “experts”; etc.; and
- sometimes able to tie primary stories into some larger community concern.

Super primary crime stories:

- are sensational crime stories
- have national and sometimes international appeal
- may include several follow-up stories during the same day as the lead story that initially described the incident, including: community impact story; a victim impact follow-up; an analysis of the causes of crime; procedural issues that might come up at trial; editorials; etc.;
- involve a number of personnel resources of news organizations being diverted to cover all aspects of such stories; and
- reporters exhaust the sources that can provide information about the incident.

While on the topic of sensationalized stories, McCormick (1995: 78) writes that journalists are “more oriented towards sensationalism than education.” He quotes Darrel Pink (lawyer in Halifax) who states that if there is “no blood, no guts, no sex” the media does not cover it (1995: 183). If such qualities are present, the media will try and capitalize on this, and thus sensationalism occurs (McCormick 1995: 183). For example, McCormick

(1995) describes the aspects of serial murder sensationalism: seriality; a connection to other related crimes; evil hidden underneath conventional exterior; involvement of innocent victims, which gives a moral element; violence; and sexuality. Few to no accounts of legal procedures are offered and the languages used can melodramatize the crimes with phrases like “grizzly sex slayings” in reference to the Bernardo/Homolka crimes (McCormick 1995).

Furthermore, Fox and Van Sichel (2001: 59) note how newscasts are under time constraints and compete for viewers with sitcoms, dramas, and movie channels, leaving the viewer to choose between news and entertainment. Consequently, the lines that separate personal tragedy, important public events, and dramatic entertainment have become blurred by a “tabloidization” of the mainstream media (Fox and Van Sichel 2001: 55). Moreover, viewers can now get the latest developments of a trial on the nightly news, get more in depth reporting on the prime time newsmagazines, and then wake up in the morning to network news broadcasts to receive even more updates (Fox and Van Sichel 2001: 79).

As illustrated so far, the criteria for newsworthiness, the organizational constraints of the news agency, combined with the relationship between news organizations and its sources can have an impact on how a crime story is presented and developed as news. Consequently, there may be dramatic implications for the representation of the crime and criminal behaviour. This notion will be presented next.

1.2.3. Implications of Crime News Reporting

The processes of selecting crime stories, gathering information from sources, and producing the final news reports under the various organizational constraints, arguably have severe implications for how certain people and behaviours come to be perceived as deviant as well as how the nature of crime in general comes to be understood. For instance, Surette (1991:

63) notes that, paradoxically, the rare crime event gets turned into common crime images which resemble the image of the criminal often found in the entertainment media: e.g. violent predators. Moreover, Sherizen (1978: 204) argues that the simple and unambiguous nature of crime news stories is based upon an information-rich and knowledge-poor foundation where anyone interested in learning about crime from the media is treated to examples, incidents, and scandals with such a limited level of description that it becomes impossible to develop an analytical comprehension of crime. The nature of the facts surrounding crimes in the media thus limits rather than educates public opinions on crime (Sherizen 1978: 204). Consequently, the public may become more knowledgeable about irregular legal proceedings and less knowledgeable about the broader issues of the justice system (Fox and Van Sickle 2001: 79).

For the majority of the public population, Hall et al. (1978: 57) state that the media defines what significant events are taking place, but more specifically, they also offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events. For example, Schissel (1997: 15) illustrates that media accounts paint portraits of youth criminals as being nihilistic, pathological, and acting alone or as members of gangs, and are devoid of morality. Such imagery, he argues, pushes public discussion away from an understanding of youth crime that would include the effects of privation, disenfranchisement, and marginalization and pushes it towards an understanding based on individual morality or pathology (1997: 15). This decontextualization of youth crime also diverts public attention away from those with corporate and state powers who are largely responsible for the conditions that are detrimental to others (Schissel 1997: 15). Furthermore, Schissel (1997: 15) argues that media presentations of decontextualized events are a powerful way of legitimating punitive

discourse, and that moral panics may in fact drive public policy and be created to justify political decisions already made.

Ericson et al. (1987: 3, 4) state that deviance and social control are “core ingredients of news” and because there are large audiences to convey information and since there is a choice in regards to which information is to be conveyed, they suggest that journalists possibly have more influence in designating deviance and contributing to the control of it than some of the more obvious agents of social control, such as the police, prosecutors, judges, and prison officials. Moreover, as being apart of a “deviance defining elite,” they argue that the news media provides an ongoing articulation of appropriate boundaries of behaviour and by visualizing deviance; acting as “watchdogs” who police organizational life for deviations from their conceptions of social order and change (1987: 3, 5, 8). Furthermore, Surette (1991: 53) writes that the criminal justice system is frequently depicted as an ineffective and counterproductive means of dealing with crime. Moreover, Ericson et al. (1987: 8) argue that news of deviance is a discourse of failure, and as such, is essential in maintaining what might be better – the discourse of progress. Journalists thus become apart of the control institutions they report on, affecting social relations with ramifications for future control initiatives (Ericson et al. 1987: 8). For example, Welch et al. (1998) analyzed a sample of 47 crime topics spread across 105 feature articles and found a disproportionate emphasis on street crime. They concluded that their sample illustrates the process of crime becoming a social construction whereby crime is initially awarded the status of a social problem requiring massive policy attention. Also, that the crime problem is distinctively narrowed to include street crime and other forms of lawlessness (Welch et al. 1998: 89). And more specifically, that street crime is defined in ways that illicit criminal justice intervention (Welch et al. 1998: 89).

Ericson et al. (1987) write that the cultural and social organization of news work narrows the news aperture so that the news becomes ideological or 'partial' knowledge, in two senses. First, it is partial because it gives preferred readings to the ideological messages of particular source organizations either by omitting the ideological messages of other organizations that have an opinion on the matter or relegating them to a less significant status (Ericson et al. 1987: 9). Moreover, as the media become more monopolized, more concentrated and less competitive, the number of alternative voices and opinions diminishes, especially with respect to important political and social issues (Schissel 1997: 23). The news thus represents particular interests, as key spokespersons – "experts" – in the 'hierarchy of credibility' are used to who define what they think are significant problems as well as their solutions (Ericson et al. 1987: 7, 9; Loseke 2003; 36). The discourse of news thus tends to be morality-laden language and the talk of privileged people. This gives the media exceptional political and ideological power where it creates a world of 'us and them', insiders and outsiders, whereby stereotypical images of deviants and menaces are embedded in our collective psyches that inform us as we form opinions about crime and punishment (Schissel 1997: 14, 22).). Journalists thus become apart of the control institutions in which they report on (Ericson et al. 1987: 8) since they are apart of the framing process whereby some views are legitimated and others marginalized (Sacco 1998: 43). Moreover, Surette (1991: 49) figuratively argues that the mass media provides a distinctive social reality about crime that identifies certain groups as wolves, sheep, and sheepdogs: the evil and cunning predatory criminal wolves create mayhem and prey on the weak and defenseless sheep (women, the elderly, the general public), while the good crime-fighting hero sheepdogs (middle-class, white, males) intervene and protect the sheep in the name of retributive justice. In addition, Surette (1992: 214) posits that the media tend to frame the causes of crime within two

competing constructions: the *societal cause responsibility* and the *individual cause responsibility*. The societal cause responsibility framework casts crime as being a product of economic conditions, discrimination, racial inequality, or cultural institutions while the individual cause responsibility depicts the cause of crime as stemming from character deficiencies (e.g. greed, mental disorders, laziness) or lack of skills (e.g. uneducated, untrained) (Surette 1992: 214). However, since the media tend to portray crime almost exclusively in episodic terms – such as that of a specific individual and a violent predatory criminal act – the cause of crime is largely framed using the individual cause responsibility perspective (Surette 1992: 214).

While the news industry argues that its function is to present news accounts based on objective reality, Schissel (1997: 11) insists that the industry constructs news to appeal to the demands of a frightened audience and a political-economic system that casts blame. The consistent message in the media is that crime is caused by predatory individuals who are inherently different from the rest of us; they are more ruthless, greedy, violent, or psychotic (Surette 1991: 49). In the end, criminality is seen as an individual choice, which ignores any complexities of crime relating to social, economic, or structural explanations of crime (Sherizen 1978: 205-206). What is left is a gulf between realities and perceptions about crime (Schissel 1997: 11). The resulting crime stories found in newspapers thus represent a manufactured representation which is structured so that it appears to represent sufficient information for the reader (Sherizen 1978: 206).

While most people gain their images and opinions about the nature of crime through the media (Ericson et al. 1987; Surette 1992; Schissel 1997), the extent to which the media influences public perceptions is the subject of debate. Schissel (1997: 15) suggests that although the media may not directly control public opinion, they are certainly able to contain

the nature of discourses by establishing parameters of consensus on public issues. Moreover, Surette (1992: 201) writes that people tend to judge a social concern as significant to the extent that the media emphasize it and through the process of claims-makers forwarding their claims in the media, the media constructs the public agenda through *agenda-setting*. However, he notes that the effects of this agenda-setting approach have been variable. To better accommodate the relationship between the media and any particular social agenda he suggests that a more consistent factor in determining the impact of media on policy is to examine the relationship between the media and local policy-makers: a process he calls *agenda-building* (1992: 202). Nonetheless, Surette (1992: 203) suggests that the best hypothesis at this time is that the media, policy makers, and the public have an unspecified but mutually reinforcing causal impact on one another's views of the world.

1.2.4. Conclusion

This section has outlined the criteria for newsworthiness in which a crime story must satisfy in order to become processed as crime news. The key characteristics are that the story is unusual, serious, violent, random, victims can be empathized with, and that the crime is rare. In addition, fearing crime is a powerful and political tool that not only drives the publicity surrounding crime events (i.e. sensationalism) and crime coverage of them (i.e. spanning across the four levels of news space), but also involves assumptions about, and representations of, the causes of crime. Moreover, the *individual cause responsibility* is typically used which dichotomizes groups into 'us' and 'them' categories of understanding, not to mention, it further stigmatizes and ostracizes offenders. Likewise, as indicated in Section 1, women commit a fractional amount of all (recorded) violent crimes, yet some women are individualized, pathologized, and treated as unusual, manipulative, evil, or

simply unexplainable. These deviant images, the nature of the crime, and sexual stereotypes combine to satisfy the criteria for newsworthiness.

The final section of this chapter will review the literature that discusses violent women in the news media. It will illustrate how certain factors get emphasized in violent cases involving women (i.e. her appearance), and how some cases become sensationalized.

1.3. Violent Women in the News Media

Of all the offences that the criminal justice system is called on to adjudicate, it is crimes against the person – i.e. homicides and assaults – that are most likely to get featured regularly on the front pages of newspapers or as a lead item of evening TV news reports (Comack and Balfour 2004: 11). And while very few women commit homicide, it is this most infrequent behaviour by women that receives the greatest amount of attention (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 83; Shaw and Dubois 1995: 29); typically negative attention. Women as offenders involved in violent crimes seem to provide the press, film, television, and academia with some of their most compelling images of crime and deviance (Shaw and Dubois 1995: 86). Their crimes were serious, unusual, violent, sexual in nature, and many involved criminal justice processes that allowed for continuous coverage that was in line with the publication cycle of news organizations, thus meeting the periodicity component of newsworthiness. News coverage of women's violent crimes have typically been framed within previous news themes of other violent women and matched the 'accepted' images and explanations of female crime as illustrated in the first section of this chapter: that they are 'bad' or 'mad'. Frigon (2006: 3) sums this up precisely:

"Fallen women. Unruly women. Deviant women. Women who kill. They are dark creatures, dark characters who disturb and fascinate."

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the feminist literature on violent women in the news media, beginning with depictions of the murderess in the nineteenth century press. Particular emphasis will be placed on women who have been accused or convicted of homicide, since media analyses of violent women offenders have almost exclusively focused on 'women who kill'. In addition, the discussion will then be directed towards the news media's focus on how an accused woman looks and behaves during her trial. Frigon (1996) argues that in such cases, femininity is 'on trial' whereby such attention alludes to certain behaviours being appropriate and inappropriate for women; a reinforcement of sexual scripts. Also, the voices of violent women have been found to be either ignored, or their words are aligned with the already existing deviant images, both of which served to narrowly and negatively construct the crime coverage and representation of both the offender and violent women.

To illustrate how the media reacts to women who commit violence, the cases of Lorena Bobbitt, Myra Hindley, and Karla Homolka will be used to exemplify the extent to which the media can select, distort, and sensationalize a crime story with dramatic implications for how violent women, women in general, and gender appropriateness is constructed. The chapter will conclude with a critique of feminist scholars' arguments that these women do not "fit" into the stereotypical 'bad'/'mad' framework of understanding violent women (Birch 1994; Boritch 1994; Cameron and Frazer 1987; Frigon 2006), and are thus unexplainable. This marks the third categorization of violent women: they are 'other'. The chapter will end with a critique of this narrow conceptualization of violent women and propose a deconstruction of "violent women" to allow for the differences between violent women to be incorporated into discourses that "explain" women who commit violence.

1.3.1. The Murderess in the Nineteenth Century English Press

Historically, violent women have gotten negative news coverage. Knelman (1998: 1) states that women accused of murder in nineteenth century England “got bad press.” While the life conditions of these women almost always involved poverty, the press characterized them as inhuman (Knelman 1998: 4). When women engaged in murderous acts, these acts usually involved the killing of their own babies or children whom which they did not want or could not provide for (Knelman 1998: 5). Furthermore, child-murders by women were seen as a ‘private’ crime that society tolerated, however, the rarity and unexpectedness of murder of adults by women made exciting news (Knelman 1998: 4, 8). Whereas murder by a man frightened the public, murder by a woman, unless it could be explained by insanity, aroused indignation (Knelman 1998: 6). The tone of the press had an effect on law as well as public opinion, and being the voice of the people, newspapers supported the justice system but also alerted the public to perceived inadequacies in the law itself or its application (Knelman 1998: 43). It was not until later in the century that any attempt was made in the press to understand rather than merely condemn women accused of murder (Knelman 1998: 43).

The next section illustrates how since the nineteenth century, the press has devoted much attention and detail to an accused’s woman’s appearance, womanhood, motherhood, and behaviour in court.

1.3.2. ‘Femininity on Trial’

Shaw (1995: 123) writes of the apparent need for women who testify in court to appear ‘normal’. Frigon (2006) further argues that when violent women are on trial, femininity is also on trial: not just for the accused, but for women in general. Newspaper reports of the most sensational trials in the nineteenth century constituted a nagging reminder that

femaleness and criminality were not mutually exclusive (Knelman 1998: 254). During trials, the femininity of the accused was put into sharp focus and questioned by emphasizing appearance, behaviour, social status, feminine attitude, and mental instability (Frigon 2006: 9; Knelman 1998: 250). This appears to have been the case since the nineteenth century in Britain and Canada, the mid twentieth century in Canada, Britain, and the United States, through until the present day.

Knelman (1998: 254) writes that while hanged bodies were donated for dissection early in the nineteenth century, the dissection took place metaphorically *before* the execution. While what men accused of murder wore in court was rarely, if ever, dwelt on, female criminals received different scrutiny in the press (Knelman 1998: 250). The way she wore her hair, the movements she made with her hands, the tint of complexion, the focus in her eyes, the thickness of her lips, the firmness of her step, the construction of her frame (robust or delicate, depending on her class) – all these were described and commented on in the newspapers (Knelman 1998: 250). The breasts, the legs, the ankles were never mentioned, but crime reporting used synecdoche to summon up the whole figure (Knelman 1998: 250). Wherever it was in evidence, femininity is dissected and displayed in the press (Knelman 1998: 250). The discourse on what constituted femininity appears to have been a reflection of society's unsatisfied appetites and a sublimation for sexual activity (Knelman 1998: 254).

Certain ideals regarding women's sensitivity and emotional nature are reaffirmed in the courtroom drama: if she did not cry (or did not cry sufficiently), then she was seen as guilty (Frigon 2006: 11). Moreover, during the case of murderess Maria Manning, the *Observer* (Aug.26, 1849: 5, in Knelman 1998: 253) equates her lack of emotion with masculinity: her 'utter absence of any... depression' was a mark of 'very masculine

character'. The *News of the World* (Sept.2, 1849: 4, in Knelman 1998: 254) added that she walked firmly and took her place at the dock without showing the slightest tremor or want of self-possession. Additionally, what she wore during the trial was very much the subject of news reporting. While the attire of both her co-accused husband and herself were described (with much more emphasis and detail on hers), on the second and final day, his clothing was not mentioned while the *Morning Post* (Oct.26, 1849: 5, in Knellman 1998: 255) noted that she wore a black satin dress, a plaid shawl, a cap with black and yellow embroidered ribbons, and kid gloves.

Similarly, with quotes from newspapers during 1872, Frigon (2006: 9) illustrates how the Canadian news media paid close attention to violent women's appearance during the same era. Specifically, Phoebe Campbell's appearance was noted during her trial:

"She appears to be somewhat thinner than she was when arraigned; her hair is dressed in the same ringlet fashion as it was at the trial," (Globe and Mail, 20 June 1872).

"Her face still has the ruddy and healthful glow which it bore at the time of her trial," (Adviser, 19 June 1872).

"She was dressed in a black gown, without ornament, and her hair was done up in a plain manner after the fashion she has followed since her incarceration," (Adviser, 20 June 1872).

Such superficial details have been very much apart of crime reporting on violent women in the twentieth century as well. For example, Frigon (2006: 9) finds the emphasis on Evelyn Dick's appearance, as detailed in Ontario's *Hamilton Spectator* (Oct.8, 1946):

"Shiny black curls beneath her sequin-studded skull cap; a beauty spot on her right cheek; finely-shaped nose, large dark eyes. Her dress: black, sleeveless, perhaps revealing her gain in weight; toeless, heel-less shoes; matching lipstick and nail polish."

Such attractiveness did not ease emphasis on her criminality, as Frigon (2006: 9) adds that a comment from the documentary *The Notorious Mrs. Dick* linked her beauty to her evilness:

"Of course, she was as evil as she was beautiful."

Twenty years later in Britain, Myra Hindley, convicted in 1967 for her involvement in the murder of children in England with Ian Brady. Shaw (1995: 123) notes how Hindley was perceived as being too smartly dressed and too expressionless in court to be a repentant accomplice. Her own account of her appearance in court was that because of intense scrutiny, she cultivated an expressionless face, which was interpreted by others as evidence of her callousness (Shaw 1995: 123).

In addition to a violent woman's attractiveness, unusual appearances can equally garner media attention. Faith (1993: 264) argues that the media coverage of the 1969 Charles Manson case is yet another example of "media overkill," noting that while a gender analysis was neglected, the media instead focused on satanic symbolism surrounding the "X" that all female defendants had carved into their foreheads, their shaven heads, and the unanimity of their responses in court, which echoed Manson's own words (1993: 264). The young women were portrayed as She-Devils in cahoots with Manson, the Devil Incarnate who claimed to be the son of God, and under his control, led the drug induced women to kill seven affluent people in Beverly Hills homes (Faith 1993: 264).

The appearance and character of girls accused of violent crimes are not spared scrutiny in the press either. Given that teenage girls are seldom involved in actual killings, Faith (1993: 264) writes that the media have aggressively exploited such events when they occur. For example, there is the case of Kelly Ellard in British Columbia, which even contributed to the conceptualization of violent girls as 'nasty girls' (see Barron 2000). Faith and Jiwani (2002) recap the crime: on November 14, 1997 in a suburb of Victoria B.C., seven girls, aged fourteen to sixteen, and one sixteen year old boy attacked Reena Virk, a young girl of South Asian descent. As Virk left the scene to go home, she was followed by Kelly Ellard and Warren Glowatski who asked if she was okay. Ellard then allegedly

continued beating Virk, smashing her head against a tree-trunk, rendering her unconscious. Ellard and Glowatski then dragged Virk's unconscious body to a nearby body of water, where Ellard allegedly hit Virk in the throat and forcibly drowned her. According to Glowatski's testimony in his trial, Ellard stood in the water with her foot over Virk's head, while smoking a cigarette. Furthermore, Faith and Jiwani (2002: 100) note how the *Vancouver Sun* commented on how Ellard's initial court appearance did not fit her crime; questioning how the image of a short, sweet-looking teenage girl, who's a little heavy on the hips, and trembles on the stand, could be matched with the image of an accused killer. However, from the testimonies, the media later constructed an image of Ellard as a cold-blooded killer, who was the dominant aggressor that lead the assault, and that she deliberately murdered Virk (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 101).

When violent women are on trial, the women's femininity is also placed "on trial" as the press focuses on the aspects of their appearance and behaviour that relate – or deviate – from stereotypical images of womanhood. As the next section will illustrate, when violent women who are on trial speak, their words are often ignored in the press, or used to support the pre-constructed imagery, which leaves the deviant images to prevail in assessments of understanding women who commit violence.

1.3.3. The Voices of Violent Women in the Press

Violent women who speak of their crimes are often ignored, or their words are aligned with pre-existing deviant images of women who commit violence. As this section will demonstrate, when Ruth Ellis and Myra Hindley spoke of their crimes, the 'bad'/'mad' framework of understanding cannot make sense of their actions (Ballinger 1996; Wight and Myers 1996). Consequently, are rendered unexplainable; as 'other'. Also, as coverage of

Lorena Bobbitt's case demonstrates, as a woman involved in acts of extreme sexual violence, her own victimization was downplayed, which decontextualized the events leading up to her crimes. This illustrates the media's ability to frame news stories and construct violent women as 'bad' and illustrates the benefit to hearing the voice of the woman herself: to obtain an alternative perspective that may contrast with the media's version of events, and thus enhance understanding of the violent crime.

Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be hanged in England. She was a working-class hostess in a Soho club in London who was convicted of murdering her upper-class lover David Blakely. Birch (1994: 51) writes that the public was shocked when she appeared on the witness stand in a fur coat, with bleached hair, coolly stating: "It was obvious that when I shot him I intended to kill him." Moreover, her accounts of her crime appeared to be grounded in matter-of-fact logic and coherent rationality which ensured her exclusion from the 'mad' or 'victim who fought back' categories (Wight and Myers 1996: 4). Additionally, Ellis was by all accounts well-mannered, polite, and extremely cooperative towards the state servants who came into contact with her following her arrest, and her appearance consisted of exaggerated care over make-up, dyed hair, smart clothes, and stilettos (Wight and Myers 1996: 4, 14). Yet despite the conformity and 'ultra-feminine' image, she was nevertheless classified within the 'bad' category – unruly and subversive – because no other discourses were available through which she could be 'heard' (Wight and Myers 1996: 4). Ruth's calmness and composure during her trial, and her failure to seek redemption and show 'appropriate' feminine feelings became an endless source of fascination for the media (Wight and Myers 1996: 15). This was seen as "evidence" of her being a cold, calculating, and unremorseful killer (Wight and Myers 1996: 15).

Similarly, Myra Hindley could not be heard outside the 'mad' or 'bad' categories of explanation (Ballinger 1996: 4). Even today, decades after her trial and recent death, whatever she had to say appeared almost irrelevant. Her confession to two additional murders was interpreted and reinterpreted as evidence of her 'evilness' (Wight and Myers 1996: 23). As was the case with Ruth Ellis, Hindley also refused to excuse her crimes by claiming to be mad. Instead, she emphasized her own sanity; saying that she was no different from the rest of 'us' (Wight and Myers 1996: 23-24). Her acceptance of responsibility for her crimes and indication that she was otherwise 'normal', this can be taken as suggesting that under certain circumstances, all sane women are capable of heinous acts (Wight and Myers 1996: 23). Furthermore, Wight and Myers (1996: 4) write that the voices of women like Ellis and Hindley are not taken seriously due to the sheer hostility and opposition facing anyone who attempts to open discourses around the representation of female murderers since such action is invariably (mis)interpreted as condoning the violent nature of the crimes. They insist that feminist writers must acknowledge and confront the issue of violent women in order to facilitate the process of establishing a new language which will allow an analysis of women's violence that is outside the 'mad versus bad' framework, and thus challenge the imposition of silence which has dominated women's experiences with the legal system (Wight and Myers 1996: 5).

By classifying violent women as either "not-sane" or "not-women" because 'women are never violent', Grindstaff and McCaughey (1996: 150) argue that media discourse fails to challenge our cultural insistence on women's natural passivity, which permits women's violence only under conditions of extreme victimization. Even so, when it is known that women have been victimized before their use of violence, this may be used to distort their rationale. For example, when Lorena Bobbitt was questioned about her sexual experiences

with her husband the night in which she severed his penis with a knife, explicit descriptions of being held down, her underwear being ripped, and being forced into sex, were reconstrued by *ABC's 20/20* to suggest that the situation was a mere miscommunication about sex (Priest et al. 1996: 108). Consequently, the notion of male violence against women in this context was erased, if not normalized. Ultimately, this illustrates the need for a discourse that listens to violent women, takes what they are saying seriously, and uses them as a source of knowledge regarding their own experiences. Otherwise, we run the risk of 'understanding' violence against women and violence used by women only within the narrow range of explanations currently available.

1.3.4. Three Case Studies

To contextualize the discussion of violent women in the news media thus far, three case-studies will be used to illustrate the dominant images and the explanations (or lack of) surrounding women's use of violence in the news media. Three women will be the focus of these case studies: Lorena Bobbitt, Myra Hindley, and Karla Homolka. Their crimes were violent, unusual, sexual in nature, and became sensational news stories.

1.3.4.1. Lorena Bobbitt

While not classified under "women who kill", Lorena Bobbitt's controversial use of violence nevertheless sparked intense media reactions that is worth noting. Basically, she dismembered the penis of her then abusive husband John Wayne Bobbitt. This section will discuss the *ABC* channel's reporting and representation of the story.

Priest et al. (1996) critique an *ABC 20/20* report on the story, noting how her violence was described as "beyond belief", "abhorrent", "unthinkable", "an awful night in June" that was a "degenerate act" that "defies understanding". While severing a person's

body part is a serious offence, there was no social context applied to the crime. There was only a brief mention of the history of sexual abuse and domestic violence that Lorena experienced, the larger picture of wife abuse was cropped by framing John's severed penis as the focal point, with him being cast as the victim of mere craziness and vengeance (Priest et al. 1996: 107). Priest et al. (1996: 105) argue that this difference normalizes, and even erases, male violence while it demonizes female retaliation to it. Moreover, while Lorena claimed that her violence was in retaliation to his use of violence against her, some accounts positioned her as a feminist heroine (Grindstaff and McCaughey 1996: 142). However, Peter Jennings of ABC *World News Tonight* accused American feminists as using the Bobbitt Case for 'advancing their own agenda' – as if educating the public about wife abuse is neither a legitimate response nor an agenda worth advancing, as Grindstaff and McCaughey (1996: 146) remark. In this sense, Grindstaff and McCaughey (1996: 147) argue that the media used the Bobbitt affair to discredit feminism and reassert male sexual privilege. Even worse, John Bobbitt made a pornographic video - *John Wayne Bobbitt: Uncut (1994)* - in which the story of the night of the crime was adjusted to depict Lorena as having changed her mind and excited (instead of cutting his penis off) (Grindstaff and McCaughey 1996: 159-160). Bobbitt even promoted the video on talk shows such as *Geraldo* and *Rolanda*, reasserting that his 'manhood' still works (Grindstaff and McCaughey 1996: 159-160).

1.3.4.2. Myra Hindley

Myra Hindley is the most notorious female criminal in modern British memory (Birch 1994: 47). There is a photograph of her, which was taken at the time of her arrest in 1965 and reproduced in numerous articles and books written about the Moors Murders; a picture of which has become synonymous with feminine evil (Birch 1994: 32, 47). And more than a

quarter of a century after she took part in the 'Moors Murders' with her lover Ian Brady, Soothill and Walby (1991: 87) found that the crimes continued to appear in the media more than all the rest of the sex criminals in custody combined. For instance, the 'Moors Murders' garnered more coverage than the infamous 'Yorkshire Ripper' Peter Sutcliffe, whose crimes took place in the same vicinity as the 'Moors Murders'. Sutcliffe was sentenced to life imprisonment for the sexual assault and murder of thirteen women, which occurred between 1975 and 1980 (Birch 1994: 269-280). Yet the photograph of Hindley still triggered more controversy, even among those too young to even remember the case, while the name Ian Brady rarely makes the headlines (Birch 1994: 32). This section will discuss the 'Moors Murders', the media's coverage of the case, and the subsequent impact of the media's representation of Hindley as a violent female offender.

During the early 1960's in Manchester, England, Myra Hindley and Ian Brady sexually assaulted, strangled, and violently killed five children aged ten to twelve, then buried them in shallow graves in the Yorkshire Moors (Birch 1994: 36). Moreover, they tape-recorded and photographed the humiliation of one victim, and photographed their presence on the two secret graves (Cameron and Frazer 1987: 139). Furthermore, Hindley was a white, working class woman from Manchester, England who was above-average intelligence and Catholic (Birch 1994: 37). Brady was born in Glasgow, and came from a broken home, lived with foster parents, in detention centers, and had a history of criminal convictions (Birch 1994: 38). In a 1979 statement to the Parole Board, Hindley stated that Brady had become her god, her idol, her object of worship which she worshipped blindly (Birch 1994: 40). But it remains a mystery as to why she was attracted to his "theology" of fascism and participated in the brutal killings (Birch 1994: 42).

Birch (1994: 33) states that what Myra Hindley comes to represent, the symbolic weight she carries, exceeds the crimes of two individuals at a particular place and time. She asks: "Why, more than any other criminal this century, has Myra Hindley been singled out for vilification? What is it about this case that makes it so unique?" (1994: 33). While Lloyd (1995: 48) writes that it is also partly because she sought release from prison while Brady did not, others argue that the attention, the confusion, the curiosity about Hindley is a matter of gender. Birch (1994: 33) writes that there is an implicit assumption that for a woman to be involved in the killing of children is somehow worse, more unspeakable than it is for a man. Cameron and Frazer (1987: 144) add that no language exists that speak of a woman's lust to kill. Hindley's image thus strikes at our fears about unruly women, about criminality, and about the way gender is constructed; it symbolizes the threat of femininity unleashed from its traditional bonds of goodness, tenderness, and nurturance (Birch 1994: 32). Additionally, Birch (1994: 33) writes that the case of the Moors Murders has also become a kind of Gothic soap opera, with all the elements of fear, melodrama, and histrionics the term applies, and its leading lady is a monster beyond compare. As such, her case satisfies the criteria for newsworthiness.

1.3.4.3. Karla Homolka

Boritch (1997: 3) states that the case of Karla Homolka has attracted an unprecedented level of public and media interest. She further comments that - in Canada at least - Homolka herself remains an "enigma", since she is "so rare among female offenders" and based on what we know about women and crime, she is an "aberration in every sense" (Boritch 1997: 4). Similar to Hindley, from media perspectives Faith and Jiwani (2002: 98) argue that Karla Homolka personified evil: a kind of evil that the justice system cannot rehabilitate. Also

comparable, Boritch (1997: 2-3) notes how Paul Bernardo (her former husband and accomplice in her crimes) was depicted as the 'normal' serial murderer, yet Homolka was cast as the mystery.

Images of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka before their trials depicted them both as the "picture perfect pair" - like "Ken and Barbie" - who lived next door and how people could not believe that they committed such gruesome sex crimes against innocent girls (McCormick 1995), who were pretty, white, and came from good homes headed by parents who were solid citizens (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 97). These young women who were tortured, raped, and murdered were cast as not "deserving" their victimization (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 97). This is not to suggest that there are people who do deserve to be victimized, rather, that the implication in such cases is that certain people are *even less* deserving. Furthermore, a 1993 plea bargain was made between Homolka and the Crown which granted her a maximum twelve year sentence on manslaughter charges in exchange for information about her husband Paul Bernardo (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 95). He was given a life sentence for first degree murder, and was later designated as a Dangerous Offender following convictions of rape as the "Scarborough Rapist." However, Homolka did not reveal the full extent of her own role in the crimes committed against Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffey (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 95). After the deal was sealed, home videotapes were found in their home that depicted Homolka as a more involved and willing participant in the crimes. Much like the case of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley where most of the emphasis was consistently on Hindley, despite the brutality of the collective actions of Bernardo and Homolka, the media and public attention focused and continue to dwell, on Homolka (Boritch 1997: 3; Faith and Jiwani 2002: 96). This seems to be linked to the differences in criminal justice responses to them. Furthermore, Homolka's media representation initially alternated between heartless

killer and victim slave, making the story an exceptionally bizarre case of inconsistencies (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 96).

Homolka's "sweetheart deal" (Boritch 1997: 3) or "deal with the devil" (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 97) as it is commonly known, generated intense negative public reaction, which in itself became a media story (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 97). Each time she appeared in the public arena, the media scrutinized and communicated Homolka's behaviour to fit into a conception of her as either a cold psychopath or battered woman (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 97). At no time did the media engage in a critical analysis of the many women who are battered, murdered, raped, and mutilated throughout the world on any given day (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 97).

It should also be noted that the media bans during Homolka's trial had restricted "legitimate" publications from publishing details of Homolka's case, yet tabloids were free to publish what they wished (McCormick 1995: 189). Consequently, the story was left open to the most sensationalistic form of media (McCormick 1995: 192). The ban also did not stop information from being quickly made available on the internet and through American media (McCormick 1995).

1.3.5. Deconstructing "Violent Women"

As this chapter has illustrated, social reactions to women who use violence view them through a narrow stereotypical and gendered lens whereby the standards of judgment center around men and masculinity. Since violence is seen as a masculine characteristic, violent women are typically seen as violating the codes of 'ideal' womanhood and 'appropriate' femininity in terms of how women are stereotypically supposed to act, look, and express themselves. When they deviate from these 'norms' they are critiqued as being either 'bad'

(i.e. the inadequate mother, wicked, inhuman, evil), 'mad' (i.e. suffering from nymphomania, PMS, BWS, psychosis, having commit infanticide, etc.) (Birch 1994: 5; Denov 2004; Frigon 1996; Kramar 2005; Wight and Myers 1996), or their criminality is simply unexplainable (Birch 1994: 61; Boritch 1994: 4; Cameron and Frazer 1987; Frigon 2006: 4) and they become 'other'.

While there are dramatic limitations in the 'bad'/'mad'/'other' framework for understanding violent women, feminist scholars are indeed challenging this discourse. For example, Comack and Balfour (2004: 178, see also Comack 2006: 55) argue that we need to ask ourselves if our reactions to violent events are influenced by the dominant discourses in society; discourses that are gendered, racialized, and/or class-based. They call for a resistance to, and challenging of, discourses that accept violence as a natural or inevitable feature in our society. In terms of legal discourse, they suggest "perhaps we need to rethink our image of the law – our image of the kind of law we want" (2004: 174). To start, Lloyd (1995: 194) proposes changing the way masculinity is constructed in society, for instance, to reduce the tolerance of aggressive behaviour in males. Otherwise, if legal discourses continue to normalize violence as a male activity, Comack and Balfour (2004: 17) argue that nevertheless, when women appear before the courts on violent crime charges they appear as an anomaly (i.e. 'mad'/'bad'/'other') because they breach constructions of "normal crime" but also stereotypical feminine scripts. To further enhance understanding of women who use violence, Pollack (2006: 248) notes the benefit to analyzing processes of state power and punishment, and how the lives of criminalized women are influenced by globalization-informed policy shifts in the penal-welfare and immigration arenas. She notes that:

"Making connections to the wider socio-economic context helps shift the focus away from an exclusive view of psychological issues (i.e. of being 'mad') as being responsible for women's crime and allows for a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between gender,

racial, cultural, immigration, class, state policies and processes, subjectivity, and theories about women's crime and punishment," (2006: 248-249).

Lastly, Comack and Balfour (2004: 174) argue that the different structural contexts of people's lives need to be taken into consideration and as mentioned and Frigon (1996) illustrates this move through her conceptualization that women who kill may not only be seen as *dangerous* because they have killed, but also seen as being *in danger* from the violence against them. This approach moves beyond the stereotypical 'bad'/'mad'/'other' framework.

While efforts to move beyond the stereotypical 'bad'/'mad'/'other' framework do exist, the stereotypical understanding of women who use violence still prevails, especially since cases involving violent women satisfy the criteria of newsworthiness. Through media accounts, the creation of both "monsters" and icons are meant to simultaneously scare us, deter us, and entertain us. This occurs at the expense of continuous oppression and objectification of women's sexuality, bodies, and minds through longstanding sexual scripts that fall within the narrow conceptualization of understanding. As these concepts continue to be discussed in literature, the context and semantics used risk perpetuating the myths rather than dispelling them. In addition, any enlightening insight that may enhance our understanding of violent women is inevitably impossible because women who commit violence are categorized into one single group called "violent women". Yet as Section 1 illustrated, women (as do men) who have committed violence differ in their criminal activities, criminalities, and agencies to commit violence. To try and understand them all as one singular group, and through a narrow trilogy of concepts, creates an ongoing obstacle to understanding women who use violence.

While academics are struggling with how to define and discuss violent women, the media continue to use a narrow range of concepts to explain cases of violent women. Moreover, disproportionate attention is placed on the least representative cases of women who come into contact with the criminal justice system – i.e. Karla Homolka and Myra Hindley – and images of these women as “dangerous” and “violent” risk skewing the public’s perception of girls and women convicted of illegal behaviour (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 83). To put this into perspective, Sev’er (2002: 164) argues that while “there are a few Karla Homolkas in this world... the few exceptions do not represent general reality.”

This study seeks to challenge the roadblock to understanding violent women by calling for a deconstruction of the concept of “violent women” in an attempt to establish a new discourse that acknowledges the differences between women who commit violence. Perhaps the reason why we cannot understand violent women as a whole is that we need to try and understand them individually first. Chapter 3 further elaborates this notion by drawing upon postmodern and standpoint feminist epistemologies as a basis for researching “violent women”.

This chapter has illustrated how the notion of “violent women” is a social construction. The next chapter will present contextual constructionism and claimsmaking as the theoretical frameworks which this thesis will use to approach its media analysis in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In 1993, Karla Homolka's infamous 'deal with the devil' resulted in a manslaughter conviction and a twelve year prison sentence. Since then, she has been constructed by scholars and the media in various contexts ranging from manipulative, to psychopath, to a personification of evil, and even as an 'enigma'. Moreover, as a position of entry for this study's qualitative analysis of Canadian newspapers that covered Homolka's release from prison, the theoretical framework to be used derives from contextual constructionism. This framework takes into account discrepancies in the claimsmaking processes in which certain people, behaviours, and phenomena come to be defined - or not defined - as social problems that are in need of being controlled, and what actions are to be taken to prevent further (perceived) harm. To operationalize this concept, Best's (2001) criteria for identifying a claim will guide the qualitative content analysis of the selected Canadian newspapers as presented in Chapter 4. In addition, although not apart of the major theoretical framework of this thesis, this thesis borrows insights from postmodern feminist and standpoint feminist epistemologies as a means of contextualizing the problem with the "violent women" concept and how it prevents differences between violent women to be acknowledged (i.e. different use of violence, different motivations, different violent women's voices, etc), and therefore, prevents enhanced understandings of women who use violence. This will be further illustrated in Chapter 3. Lastly, the various contexts in which Homolka was found to be constructed inevitably called for a discussion of the findings in relation to Baudrillard's concepts of "simulation" and "hyperreality". This will be illustrated in Chapter 4.

To illustrate the relevance of using contextual constructionism and claimsmaking theories as a framework for analysis, this chapter will begin with a discussion of what it

means to be “deviant” and how one comes to be defined as such. Becker’s (1963/1973) theory of deviance and Goffman’s (1963) notion of a “spoiled identity” will lead-in to a brief introduction of social constructionism whereby essentialism will be differentiated from constructionism, and strict constructionism from contextual constructionism. This background will help contextualize the concepts of ‘social problems’ and ‘claims’ that will mark the core of my contextual constructionist framework.

2.1. Deviance and Labeling Theories

In essence, Becker’s (1963/1973: 9) theory of deviance is simple: social groups create social rules and when people break these rules the defining group labels the rule-breaker as “deviant.” Social rules therefore define social situations and the kinds of behaviours appropriate to them, with some actions being defined as “right” and others as “wrong” (Becker 1973: 1).

Conforming behaviour is simply behaviour that obeys social rules, and others perceive as obeying the rules (Becker 1973: 19). In contrast, when a person supposedly breaks the rules he or she may be viewed as someone who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed upon by the defining group (Becker 1973: 1). This person is then regarded as an “outsider”: someone who is judged to be deviant and thus outside the circle of “normal” members of the group (Becker 1963/1973: 15). Moreover, just how far “outside” the group one is deemed to be will vary from case to case. For example, Becker writes that a traffic violator will be tolerated more so than a thief, while murderers and rapists will be considered “true outsiders,” (1963/1973: 3).

There are two key notions to Becker’s theory that must be addressed. First, whether or not an act is defined as deviant depends on how other people react to it; other people have

to respond as if the act is a problem (1963/1973: 11-12). Deviance is therefore not a quality of an act the person commits, rather, it lies in the interaction between the person who commits the act, and those who respond to it through the application of rules and sanctions to the “offender” (Becker 1963/1973: 9, 14). Deviance is thus the product of an interactive process between someone who commits an act and those who respond to it (1963/1973: 14). Second, the response to an act may depend on the nature, duration, and salience of the act, leaving some acts being more prone to getting labeled ‘deviant’ than others. For instance, Pfohl (1994: 346) illustrates how the killing *of* a police officer and a killing *by* a police officer are both types of killing, but both behaviours may not be labeled as homicide since the form and content of what is seen as homicide varies within social contexts and circumstances (Pfohl 1994: 346, emphasis added). Taking Becker’s perspective, Pfohl (1994: 346) argues that what differs is not the behaviour (the killing), but the manner in which reactions to such behaviour are socially organized (i.e. from a police organizational perspective). The degree to which an act will be treated as deviant thus depends on perceptions of who commits the act, the perceived harm as a result of the act, and the differential application of rules towards some people and situations than to others (Becker 1963/1973: 12). Furthermore, as people occupy different social positions and statuses that include their age, gender, race, educational background, religion, class, political affiliation, and even their physical appearance, Pfohl (1994: 353) writes that such characteristics tell us about who people are considered to be, how they are expected to act, and that some statuses may override others in particular contexts. This reflects the discussions from Chapter 1 that illustrated how the sexual scripting of violent behaviour designates the use of violence to men and masculinity and not women and femininity. Therefore when women engage in violence, the behaviours tend to be treated as not only deviant, but ‘doubly deviant.’

A central theme of the societal reaction perspective revolves around the notion of understanding the interactive dynamics between people who condemn nonconformity and the people who are condemned (Pfohl 1994: 354-355). When someone breaks a social rule, they will be subsequently identified as deviant, as the identification proves to be more emphasized than other statuses because it raises the question of “What kind of person would break such an important rule?” followed by the answer “One who is different from the rest of us” – which generates an “us and them” mentality/ideology (Becker 1963/1973: 33-34). For example, Faith and Jiwani (2002: 84, 92) illustrate how the cases of Karla Homolka and Kelly Ellard were a focus of Canadian media reports, noting that the offenders were pretty middle-class white girls at the time of their crimes who were distinguishable from most other criminalized women. As Comack (2006: 58) argues, Homolka’s “whiteness” can be contrasted with the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women and women of colour in Canada’s prisons. Through reporting these women’s crimes, media accounts exacerbated the horror of the white majority, because as Faith and Jiwani (2002) theorize, after all “she’s one of us.” Ellard and Homolka “exuded danger” because they broke gender codes in the most extreme ways possible and their crimes were not comprehensible to the white middle class that bred them (Faith and Jiwani 2002: 84).

Furthermore, to be labeled a “criminal” one need only commit a single criminal offense (Becker 1963/1973: 33). Depending on the context, the label may become a controlling one that overrides other characteristics they may have, i.e. student, doctor, teacher, neighbour, etc. If successfully applied, the status of “deviant” or “criminal” may therefore come to act as the person’s ‘master status’ (Becker 1963/1973: 33-34). Such labels may constrain the deviants’ ability to manage a positive impression of themselves and depending on the context of the deviant act and the social reaction to it, people with the

“criminal” or “deviant” status may become stigmatized, bear what Erving Goffman (1963) describes as a ‘spoiled identity’. Moreover, a stigmatized individual is one that others reduce in their minds from a whole and usual person down to a tainted, discounted one; someone who is seen as not quite human (Goffman 1963: 3-4). However, there may be discrepancies between the constructed characterization of the stigmatized individual – the virtual social identity – and attributes that the person is proved to possess – the actual social identity (Goffman 1963: 3).

The above discussion has outlined the basic tenets of traditional two sociological theories of deviance: that one becomes labeled “deviant” or “criminal” as a result of other people reacting to the person’s behaviour. In particular contexts, the label may become the individual’s master status, which may affect how others see them, how they see themselves, how others act around them, and how they act around others. Using social constructionism, the rest of this chapter will discuss reactions to deviant behaviour, beginning with a brief comparison of essentialist and constructionist perspectives regarding what constitutes deviance. Emphasis will then focus on contextual constructionism and claimsmaking theories that will illustrate the strategies which agents of social control use when making claims about crimes and getting audiences to accept what the solutions to the problems should be. The definition and redefinition of deviance - the process of claimsmaking - will then complete the theoretical framework that will be used to approach the media analysis of newspaper coverage on Karla Homolka’s release from prison.

2.2. Social Constructionism

An individual, a group, or some kind of phenomenon can become defined as deviant, and perhaps even a social problem, depending on how people react to it. However, determining

what is actually a social problem and how it can and should be changed is debatable. The two main conflicting perspectives on this are those of essentialists and constructionists. Essentialists argue that phenomena have an underlying essence, truth, and reality that automatically designate the phenomena into predetermined categories (Goode 1994). From an essentialist standpoint, certain behaviours are viewed as being either naturally “criminal” or “non-criminal.” In contrast, constructionists argue that conditions become social problems only when they are defined or felt to be problematic, whether it be disturbing in some way, undesirable, or in need of remedy (Goode 1994: 59). In other words, constructionists theorize that social problems - and thus social reality - are simply made up. A social problem then, exists when people treat someone or something as problematic. Moreover, strict constructionists argue that, for analytical purposes, all claims about something being a social problem ought to be taken as equally valid and that no single claim should be accorded special status in defining reality (Goode 1994: 61). In contrast, contextual constructionists look at the discrepancies between claims in terms of claims made about objective seriousness of a situation (harm that can or is being done) and the subjective concern (perceived harm) of a situation (Goode 1994).

The following sections will further differentiate these conflicting perspectives. Since “social problems” is not a stable category (Loseke 2003: 4), contextual constructionism offers a more critical analysis of how phenomena become defined as deviant and social problems through claimsmaking activities. To compliment this perspective, a discussion of claimsmaking theories will follow.

2.2.1. Essentialism vs. Constructionism

Essentialism posits that all phenomena in the world have an underlying “essence” that automatically and unambiguously places them in specific, unchanging categories (Goode 1994: 32). They use the terms “true” and “real” when making reference to categories or their representatives (Goode 1994: 32). For example, essentialists would argue that there are certain inherent, unchanging characteristics that define “true” alcoholism, “true” homosexuality, or that a biological parent would be considered a child’s “real” parent (Goode 194: 32).

In contrast, *constructionism* advocates that categories be labeled as social constructs for which there is no underlying essence demanding particular classification (Goode 1994: 32). Nature does not classify, people do, and constructionists argue that the human classifications that are applied to natural phenomenon differ dramatically (Goode 1994: 32). Different criteria are used to generate categories and such criteria would depend on the definitions of the constructionist: definitions which have no absolute, objective validity; they are meaningful only within the context of the criteria spelled out by a particular classification scheme (Goode 1994: 33). For instance, alcohol can be a drug if the pharmacological definition is followed, or not a drug, if the social and legal definitions are followed (Goode 1994: 33). To the constructionist, reality depends on perspective, and perspective to a degree is arbitrary since no one definition is final and absolute (Goode 1994: 33).

Discussion of constructionism must differentiate between strict and contextual constructionism. These will be discussed next with emphasis on the latter.

2.2.2. Strict and Contextual Constructionism

Strict constructionists do not believe that there is such a thing as an “objective” dimension (Goode 1994: 61). No single claim has any special status in defining reality since they are all equally subjective; all are special pleadings for a certain cause, ideology, or political view (Goode 1994: 61). And since none can be referred to as “objectively” true, none can be verified as outside a system of values and ideologically based assumptions (Goode 1994: 61). It is this process that contextual constructionism alludes to in explaining how social problems become successfully defined.

Like strict constructionists, contextual constructionists also focus on subjective concern as a central issue in the study of social problems (Goode 1994: 62). However, contextual constructionists argue that it *is* possible to evaluate claims of the objective seriousness of various conditions, and that it is possible to examine the discrepancies between objective seriousness and subjective concern (Goode 1994: 62). For example, Loseke (2003) notes how the morning papers on Sept. 11, 2001 contained articles and pieces about problems with the social security system, costly medical prescriptions for the elderly, the problem with voting machines, crime, and the failure of the school system. Then all of these problems disappeared the next day as papers focused all of their attention on terrorism, national security, and war. Put simply, Loseke (2003: 4) comments: “today’s worries are not necessarily tomorrow’s worries.”

Contextualists may examine the differences between the claims made by the parties who wish to define the social problem and what the facts say (Goode 1994: 62). A number of relatively harmful (in terms of ostensibly harmful criteria) conditions are not defined as social problems, or they may have existed for a long period of time before being so defined, while some relatively benign conditions come to be seen by segments of the public as social

problems (Goode 1994: 63). Moreover, some objectively serious conditions may generate significantly less public concern because they are overshadowed by competing claims: illegal drug use attracts immense public concern while cigarette smoking generates far less public concern yet may cause more deaths (Goode 1994: 62). Furthermore, with regard to crime, chapter 1 distinguished discrepancies between reactions to men and women who use violence, and further illustrated that there are discrepancies between social reactions to women who use violence. Some women are treated as being more or less dangerous and therefore more or less concern to the public. For instance, Karla Homolka and Myra Hindley generated public outrage, especially with the help of media sensationalism, while most other violent women do not generate a comparable response. This may be due to the processes involved in newsmaking, characteristics of the cases, the gender of the accused, the sources of information in the articles (and therefore the framing of the articles), what other events were taking place during their trials, etc. Evidently, there are discrepancies between whom or what becomes defined as a social problem and contextual constructionism allows for these critical elements to be considered when analyzing the coverage on Homolka when she was released from prison.

Since contextual constructionism acknowledges the discrepancies within claimsmaking activities, the final section of this chapter will expand on this notion and discuss the processes involved in claimsmaking and how some phenomena successfully become defined as social problems while others may not.

2.3. Claimsmaking and Social Problems

Claims refer to the descriptions and explanations pertaining to the extent and nature of a given phenomenon (Surette 1998: xvi, italics added). A claim is any verbal (i.e. through

words or rhetoric), visual (i.e. through the use of pictures), or behavioural (i.e. by doing something to send a message) statement that seeks to persuade audience members to define a condition as a social problem (Loseke 2003: 26). Moreover, *claimsmaking* refers to the interactive processes whereby one party makes demands to another that something be done about an alleged condition that is alleged to be causing harm (Spector and Kitsuse 1987/2001: 78). In addition, as indicated in the previous chapter, there is also a hierarchy of credibility among *claimsmakers* (Becker 1963/1967; Ericson et al. 1987; Loseke 2003), which determines how news stories get framed, and potentially how they are received. Moreover, Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2001: 79) illustrate the types of people who may participate in claims-making activities:

“...protest groups or moral crusaders who make demands and complaints; the officials or agencies to whom such complaints are directed; members of the media who publicize and disseminate news about such activities (as well as participate in them); commission of inquiry; legislative bodies and executive or administrative agencies that respond to claims-making constituents; members of helping professions, such as physicians, psychiatrists, social workers; and sometimes social scientists, who contribute to the definition and development of social problems.”

These parties may construct as well as attempt to resolve social problems by making claims that may construct social problems as either existing or not existing (Loseke 2003: 31). Furthermore, the emergence of a social problem is contingent upon the organization of activities which assert the need for eradicating, ameliorating, or otherwise changing some putative condition: a condition that is alleged to exist, rather than a condition that sociologists are willing to verify or certify (Spector and Kitsuse 1987/2001: 75-76). Overall, as Best (2001: 8) and Loseke (2003: 6-7) illustrate, to claim that something is a “social problem” something must be considered to be wrong. The condition must be considered to be problematic and widespread. Some sort of action is seen as necessary to change the condition for the better. And most importantly, people must believe that the situation *should*

be changed Now that the term claims, claimsmaking, claimsmakers, and social problems are defined, the following section will outline: the importance of audiences in claimsmaking activities, and claimsmaking strategies used by claimsmakers, particularly the media. The chapter will then conclude by tying together the theoretical perspectives of this chapter with the notion of 'violent women' as a lead-in to the methodology of this thesis, which will be presented in Chapter 3.

Similar to Becker's (1963/1973) theory of how something gets defined as deviant through social reactions, Loseke (2003) notes that audience members are critical in the process of claimsmaking because a social problem is created only when audience members evaluate claims as being believable and important. Moreover, she discusses the *hierarchy of audience significance* whereby "audience" does not necessarily refer to a majority of people because what makes a claim effective is whether or not the audience are from powerful segments of society (2003: 28). Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2001: 81) add that if the audience does not treat the claim *as a claim*, then any desired changes put forth by the claimsmaker may go unattended. Furthermore, *diffusion* refers to the process by which information spreads among people, and all claimsmaking is a form of diffusion where claimsmakers (transmitters) try to persuade audiences (adopters) by making claims (via channels) about social problems (the object of diffusion) (Best 2001: 8). For instance, due to the range of media formats (books, magazines, movies, television, the internet, etc.), these sites offer claimsmakers the largest possible audiences; connecting them with events from around the world (Loseke 2003: 41). However, it cannot be assumed that audience members will automatically believe what they see or hear, for example, through televised images of reality that get absorbed from watching television (Loseke 2003: 28). As Loseke (2003: 29) explains:

“...audience members are practical actors who use our practical experience, popular wisdom, and general understandings of the ways the world does work and the ways the world should work to evaluate social problems claims.”

Practical experience refers to the personal experiences people have lived. Popular wisdom may include cultural themes, which are widely shared values and beliefs about the way the world should work (Loseke 2003: 30). This may include the sexual scripts discussed in chapter 1 regarding how men and women “should” act.

While the media may be used as a tool to communicate claims, the media themselves may participate in claimsmaking. Loseke (2003: 41) argues that it makes sense that claims presented through the mass media will influence public opinion for no reason other than the fact that it is now our primary source of information about the world around us. Moreover, Loseke (2003) explains that the mass media become claimsmakers in two ways. First, they can be primary claimsmakers: reporters who seek out information and write stories are taking the same role as social activists in constructing social problems (p.41). Second, as secondary claimsmakers, the social role of those working in the media are that of translators and packaging claims made by others (politicians, social change activists, scientists, academic researchers, etc.) (p.41). While these groups may benefit from having media coverage that get their ideas presented to an audience, Loseke (2003: 44) also raises the notion that media coverage can add credibility to claims because it implies that at least someone in the media thought that the cause was important enough to receive attention. However, through the process of translation for mass audiences, the initial messages of claimsmakers can shift gears when information gets processed through news organizational constraints (McCormick 1995).

When crime stories are presented in the news media, various strategies are used to support any claims that may be implied or directly communicated. The reports may be

presented through diagnostic or motivational frames where emphasis typically focuses on harsh experiences suffered by victims. This can strategically evoke emotion and fear in audiences. If claims are successful, they may shape people's perceptions of what social problems are, and also, public policies (Surette 1998: xvi).

Claims constructing a condition as a specific type of condition explicitly or implicitly construct blame and responsibility. This is called a *diagnostic frame* (Loseke 2003: 59). Diagnostic frames may allocate the cause of social problems as deriving from social structures (i.e. the social welfare system, school systems, the economy, etc), social forces (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia), or from individuals (i.e. resulting from their behaviour, personality, beliefs, etc) (Loseke 2003: 60). In addition, *motivational frames* try and convince the audience why they should care (i.e. because their safety is at risk) (Loseke 2003: 75). Such frames may be constructed as if simple solutions can solve the problems, which realistically, may ignore the complexity of the issue at hand (Loseke 65). For example, while claims in the news preach the "need" for stricter gun laws in order to "protect" members of the public from gang violence, this simple solution ignores the underlying reasons why people may use guns against each other in the first place; reasons that may be unaffected by the presence of any kind of laws, let alone "tougher" ones.

Victims and offenders can be constructed in ways that stimulate the emotions of audiences. People are motivated to think about what the offender has done, and depending on the crime and who the victims are, this may generate feelings of hatred, revulsion, hostility, and even the need to seek revenge (Loseke 2003: 77). The status of the victim and the emotion of sympathy therefore go hand in hand (Loseke 2003: 78). When victims are evaluated by the media as being moral, and constructed as innocent and undeserving of the harm they have experienced, the audience is then put in the position to sympathize with the

victim(s) (Loseke 2003: 78, 81), and feel hostility towards the offender(s). As mentioned in chapter 1, Faith and Jiwani (2002: 97) and McCormick (1995) wrote that Bernardo and Homolka's victims were pretty, white, young women who came from homes headed by parents who were solid citizens, thus implying that they were "undeserving" of the torture, rapes, and murders they experienced. Let it be clarified again, that I am not suggesting that some people are deserving of such victimization, rather, that in crime news reports the frames typically imply that certain types of victims are *more* undeserving than others. Furthermore, like other groups that create categories and disseminate knowledge, information, or news to the public, the media may be targeted by various groups who may be concerned over unfair, biased, or simply lack of coverage of certain social issues, which presents competing definitions of what constitutes and should be reported as news (Spector and Kitsuse 1987/2001: 21; Surette 1998: xvi).

In addition, successful claims can magnify the extent of the conditions, especially when the crime is constructed as being random, which can simultaneously construct anyone as being a potential victim of similar conditions (Schissel 1997: 29). Such constructions have multiple benefits for claimsmakers because it encourages audience members to evaluate the victims as worthy of sympathy, because if it was random, there was nothing they could have done to prevent their victimization (Loseke 2003: 80). Also, when crimes are constructed as random, it sends the message that anyone can be a victim: audience members, their fiends, families, etc. which encourages audience members to be fearful of not only themselves, but of others as well (Loseke 2003: 80). Fear is thus a powerful tool in claimsmaking (Schissel (1997: 11). For example, when a sex offender is released into a halfway house or moves into a new neighbourhood, the media has often reported the complaints and panic expressed by local residents who fear for their own and/or their children's safety, which implicitly makes

the claim that the offender is a threat to these people's safety. Constructing claims in crime news stories may strategically be drawn towards the offender too (Loseke 2003: 85). By constructing victims as moral, innocent, and undeserving of explicit crimes, this conjures up images of the offender(s) being extremely evil villains; dangerous outsiders who are not one of us, and are clearly less than human to have committed such crimes (Loseke 2003: 85).

The final section will tie together this discussion of constructionism and claimsmaking with claims about violent women made in the media, and illustrate how the theories presented in this chapter establish an appropriate theoretical framework for this thesis' analysis.

2.4. A Theoretical Framework for Analysis

Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2001: 74) view values as linguistic devices that participants use to articulate their claims, or to persuade others to legitimize them. Relating this back to chapter 1's discussion of violent women, sexual scripts that designate women as passive, non-violent, and nurturing can be interpreted as values that get reinforced through the illustrated news media's claims that violent women are masculine, 'not women', 'bad', 'mad', and/or if neither of these two, then they are 'other'. These values - implicitly or explicitly - are used to legitimize the claims of the claimsmakers in the coverage, i.e. the journalists themselves, the public, psychiatrists, lawyers, etc. Moreover, Kilty (2003: 47) argues:

“Women are socially constructed and reconstructed to suit the needs of the claims-makers. With respect to women who are both deviant or violent (dangerous woman) and yet also suffer from abuse (woman in danger), the myth of female innocence is shattered, leaving the woman as a non-woman or as a non-entity. She falls through the cracks of understanding. She is a substitute, lacking the gendered and socially constructed sex-role characteristics that are supposed to envelop the 'ideal' woman.”

In this context, when violent women and their actions (their crimes) are diffused (through news reports) to audiences as “unexplainable,” the resulting impression is that these women

must undoubtedly be problematic. In cases where violent women have been victims of abuse, the result is even more confusion as to how to explain them, thus reinforcing the notion that they are “other”; something to fear because they cannot be understood.

Social constructionists are not concerned with the “truth” behind claims (Spector and Kitsuse 1987/2001: 76), but rather, with what claims are *believed* to be true (Loseke 2003: 35, emphasis added). The objective condition does not even have to exist in order for claims to be made about it (Kilty 2003: 48). Contextualists are not concerned with debunking or disproving claims that certain conditions should or should not be regarded as social problems (Goode 1994: 63). Instead, the goal is to understand how definitions of social problems are generated, sustained, taken seriously, acted upon, and how certain claims of seriousness are advanced by specific agents and reacted to, or ignored, by different audiences (Goode 1994: 63). Likewise, the objective of this thesis is not concerned with supporting or refuting any claims made in the news about Karla Homolka. Instead, the objective is to analyze how Homolka, as an individual woman who had been convicted of violent crimes, and the fact that she was being released from prison, has been represented through media reports. For instance, if the media alleged that Karla Homolka is dangerous and would be a threat to public safety once released, this would be a claim. This thesis does not attempt to verify or refute such claims, rather, it tries to understand *how* and *why* such claims are being made. The literature review of women, violence, and news media representation illustrated that the media have historically drawn on sexual stereotypes that cast women as passive, non-violent, nurturers and when women commit acts of violence, it violates such gender codes and attention focuses on her appearance (Frigon 2006; Knelman 1998; Wight and Myers 1996), lack of femininity (Birch 1994), the notion of a ‘personification of evil’ (Birch 1994; Cameron and Frazer 1987; Faith and Jiwani 2002), and the graphic details of their crimes.

These findings from feminist research offer insights into how to approach an analysis of the context(s) in which Karla Homolka is constructed in the news media upon her release. As Boritch (1997: 4) points out, based on what we know about women and crime, Karla is an aberration in every sense. Therefore the sensationalism surrounding her case is not surprising, rather, it makes sense. In addition, the contextual constructionism and claimsmaking theories offer insights into perceptions of Homolka's release as a social problem, as reported in the news media. For example, the notion of claimsmaking as an interactive process (in this context, between news agencies and audiences), the impact of audiences, and the construction of victims and villains suggest certain themes that may emerge in the data. Using contextual constructionist theories of deviance and how claims about deviance spread, the two perspectives in this chapter solidify a sufficient and appropriate framework for analysis in this study.

The next chapter will illustrate the methods and methodology used to operationalize this framework into a qualitative media analysis. Postmodern feminist and standpoint feminist epistemologies will also be incorporated in a discussion on the problem with the "violent women" concept, as well as the relevance of analyzing the coverage following Homolka's televised Radio Canada Interview.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As chapter 1 illustrated, there are different types of violent offences, and as such, different types of violent women. While violent women share commonalities – primarily the fact that they have committed violent crimes – the group is fragmented in their characteristics. Therefore it is unsurprising that scholars cannot explain “violent women”: they are not a unified group to be explained. As feminist scholars have pointed out, there is a need for a new approach - a new language - to understanding violent women (Ballinger 1996: 5).

To answer this call for a new approach to understanding violent women, this thesis seeks to begin by exploring the media’s reaction to one specific violent woman, and asks a simple, yet strategic research question:

According to the Canadian news media, who is Karla Homolka?

Based on what we know about women, violence, and news media representation, and the newsmaking processes from Chapter 1’s discussions, the constructed image(s) of Homolka found in the media analysis, what these images potentially represent, and their implications will be explored. Moreover, Taylor and Willis (1999: 39) define representation as “the term used to describe the practice of placing different signs together in order to render complex abstract concepts intelligible and meaningful.” They write that this process is often referred to as one of selection and construction, and since choices must be made about what signs are to be selected and welded together to create meaning about the object or idea in question, the resulting text (i.e. news coverage) tells the reader something about those representing (i.e. Karla Homolka) as well as those being represented (i.e. violent women, women, women offenders, etc.) (1999: 40). It must be clarified that this research is not designed to critique the cause of Homolka’s past criminal behaviours, the extent of her role played in them,

whether or not she is guilty, whether or not she is a danger to society, nor ultimately whether or not she should be released back into society.

To explore the media's representation of Karla Homolka when she was released from prison this thesis utilizes a case study method that focuses on Canadian newspaper coverage of her release. The methodology involves a qualitative content analysis of all articles from three sources – the *Montreal Gazette*, *National Post*, and *Toronto Star* - between July 2004 and July 2006. The articles were coded in three stages – open, axial, and selective coding – which helped identify themes, frames, and discourses in the coverage. The qualitative analysis of this data was guided by contextual constructionism and claimsmaking theories, including Joel Best's (2001) criteria for identifying a claim. In addition, a deconstruction analysis of the coverage on Homolka's interview bridged this methodology with standpoint feminism and postmodern feminism. Standpoint feminism acknowledge women's voices as sources of knowledge regarding their own lives, while postmodern feminism acknowledges differences between women and rejects the notion of one women's experience as being representative of all women's experiences. In this sense, Homolka's own perspective (through her Radio-Canada interview transcript, see Appendix 2) regarding her own release was acknowledged in this study. "Privileging" the perspective of certain subjects over others clashes with the contextual constructionist notion of there being differences in claims made about what is harmful and what is perceived to be harmful, as well as which claims are successful and not successful. While privileging one source over others disregards potential differences in claimsmaking, in this thesis, Homolka's perspective is not taken as being strictly superior to others in the coverage. Instead, her interview is treated as a valuable opportunity to hear Homolka's perspective, and a deconstruction analysis was performed to see if and how the newspapers acknowledged her voice. This deconstruction analysis

complimented the contextual constructionist framework by illustrating how Homolka's voice fit into the claimsmaking activities of the coverage. And how her voice was reacted to has implications for the success of certain claimsmakers.

These epistemological perspectives illustrate the justification for challenging the "violent women" concept, and the value of pursuing a study that focuses on the experience (i.e. media coverage) of an *individual* violent woman (i.e. Karla Homolka), and purposely not using the findings to make generalizations about all violent women. As a means of illuminating the individuality of women who commit violence, this epistemological approach works to develop a new discourse on violent women by studying them as individuals with differences, instead of as a unified group. This chapter will present the method, methodology, and epistemologies of this thesis.

3.1. A Case Study Method

This section will discuss: Kilty (2003) and Farran's (1987) use of case study methods and the benefits of using this method to study violent women. Also in this section, will be discussion of the justification of using the *Montreal Gazette*, *National Post*, *Toronto Star*, and Homolka's RDC interview transcript as sources in this research's case study, and explanation of how the sources' articles were collected.

3.1.1. Violent Women as Case Studies

Kilty (2003) and Farran (1987) used case studies with individual violent women as their subjects, and this method proved to be promising. Kilty (2003) analyzed how Karla Homolka was constructed within three legal documents pertaining to her trial: the official trial transcripts from both *R. v. K. Homolka* and *R. v. P. Bernardo*, and the *Galligan Report*. She found that within these documents, Homolka was constructed as representing both sides of

three dichotomies: angel/demonic; Madonna/whore; and a dangerous woman/woman in danger. Moreover, she concluded that Homolka's characterization as both dangerous and in danger obscured the comprehension of her character and her roles in her crimes. Evidently, the case study method can be a valuable research method when the focus is on specific subjects, as it allows for a more thoroughly detailed outline of social constructions surrounding the subject by allowing the researcher to be immersed in a vast amount of data (Kilty 2003: 56). Similarly, Farran (1987) used a case study approach to analyze how the life of Ruth Ellis (the last woman to be hanged in Britain) was constructed during her trial. Using a thematic approach, she analyzed book biographies of her, newspaper accounts, police reports, and official documents from her trial and subsequent appeal and found that Ellis's character had been sexualized and constructed as deviating from the 'good woman' role (i.e. 'bad'), which reflects the images of violent women as discussed in Chapter 1.

Both studies illustrate how case study methods can generate valuable knowledge regarding how the characters of women who use violence can be constructed, which in these cases, were not easily understood using traditional frameworks of understanding. However, Kilty (2003) notes a limitation of her data sources: since Homolka's voice was expressed and documented through the law/courts questioning, her experience and knowledge was thus constrained within this discourse. Similarly, references to Homolka's RDC interview in news reports cannot be taken as representative of her full perspective because - unless the entire interview is transcribed - such quotes have been selected and processed through the newsmaking process, which risks constraining and/or altering the context of her words. Also, what she had to say during the interview was affected by what questions were asked and how, and the questions may or may not have been prescreened by Karla prior to being interviewed. Regardless, since the opportunity to hear Homolka's voice is a rare occurrence,

it is therefore necessary to analyze her interview transcript in its entirety to enable everything she did say to be heard. If Homolka constructs herself to be a particular way one during her interview, while subsequent media accounts of this interview, and media accounts otherwise, construct another image (or images) of her, this will potentially demonstrate how a subject's voice can and should be taken as a source of knowledge in case studies that surround the subject themselves. It offers multiple perspectives to understanding the topic and challenges the notion of using a single dominant perspective to understand the subject in question.

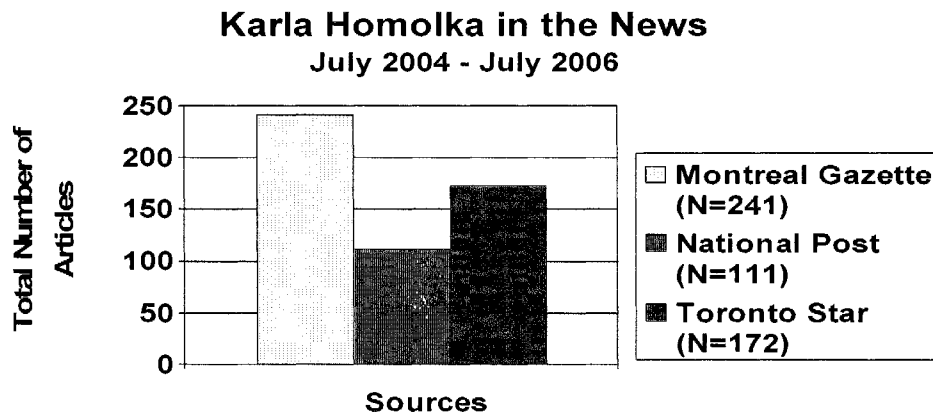
3.1.2. Data Sources

Best (2001: 2) writes that press reports and government documents are often key sources for constructionist researchers since national sources are often most visible, the most prestigious venues for social problems claims, they are far more likely to be saved in library collections, and they are more likely to be better-indexed than local materials. This justifies the use of newspaper articles as the data source for this study: they are easily accessible (i.e. online); the potential for labeling and claimsmaking to be present in news reports have already been illustrated in chapter 1; and most importantly, the media reach a vast audience, which has a crucial impact on the shaping of social reactions to crime (Ericson et al. 1987). Furthermore, this section will discuss: why the *Montreal Gazette*, *National Post*, *Toronto Star* and Homolka's RDC interview transcript were chosen as the sources for this case study; how the articles were collected; the total number of articles analyzed; and a preliminary analysis of CTV articles reporting Homolka's release. I will also discuss the significance of the two-year time frame, the decision to analyze every article within that period, and provide a justification for excluding pictures from the analysis.

Three newspapers were strategically chosen as sources for this study: a national paper (the *National Post*); a paper close to where she was released and currently resides (*Montreal Gazette*); and a paper close to where her crimes took place (*Toronto Star*). These different papers reflect different levels of circulation; from different communities, and arguably, from different cultures. Also, the *Toronto Star* was included to reflect the “tabloidization” of the news media (Fox and Van Sickel 2001). In addition, to ensure that her entire interview was acknowledged, Homolka’s RDC interview transcript was obtained from www.cbc.ca. These sources therefore allow for differing contexts of the coverage to emerge. Moreover, following the contextual constructionist framework which posits that social constructs can vary over time and between cultures, it is hypothesized that these different sources may offer varying accounts of Homolka’s release and exhibit different forms of claimsmaking. Lastly, using too many sources may generate a repetition of information, which would be redundant and unnecessary.

Using the keyword search “Karla Homolka”, every article from the *Montreal Gazette*, *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star* between July 2004 and July 2006 were collected from the Factiva online database. Using the same keyword search, the Canadian Newsstand online database was also used to retrieve *National Post* articles that were not available in Factiva. Also, since there are multiple publications of the *National Post* (i.e. national, Toronto only, Toronto area, etc.) only those articles marked “national” were selected for analysis because the purpose of using this title as a source was to include a national newspaper in the analysis. Figure 1 shows the total number of articles analyzed.

Figure 1 – Total Coverage Mentioning Karla Homolka



In addition, out of the 524 articles analyzed in this study, 27 had referenced her interview: *Montreal Gazette* (8); the *Toronto Star* (13); and the *National Post* (6). Direct quotes were cited as well as references to certain points. This coverage was deconstructed to find the contexts in which the interview – Karla’s voice – was referenced.

Homolka was released on July 4, 2005 and every newspaper article from these three sources was analyzed over a two-year time-frame between July 2004 and July 2006. This period captures the news coverage prior to, during, and after Homolka’s release, allowing for trends and themes to be identified over time that a selective data collection would miss. For example, a preliminary study of online CTV (www.ctv.ca) articles was conducted using news articles that were posted within this time frame. It was found that Homolka made the news during five key moments:

- 1) during the time of her release itself in July 2005;
- 2) in August 2005 when the media “found” her;
- 3) also in August 2005 when her employer at the time made allegations that she breached the conditions of her release, insisting he had incriminating evidence that would send her back to prison;
- 4) in December 2005 when all conditions of her release were lifted; and
- 5) coverage of the *Karla* movie when it was finally released in January 2006 after various rescheduling.

Other themes that were dispersed throughout these moments included the following: her attempt on having a media ban that would prevent the media publishing reports on her; her appeal to have the restrictions of her conditions removed; and the ongoing controversy surrounding if and when the *Karla* film would be released. These themes emerged sporadically, and were not necessarily widespread across the CTV coverage. Therefore these moments would potentially be overlooked and missed completely if a condensed source selection had been used, i.e. an article from every Saturday edition of sources, as Faith and Jiwani (2002) used. Equally important, the inclusion of every article also allows a full deconstruction analysis of the coverage of Homolka's interview to be done. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

And finally, while pictures may be counted and noted, they weren't analyzed for two reasons: they were not included in the data collection using online databases; and even if they were, it is difficult to interpret meaning/intention of pictures (Neuman 2004). Since Homolka is hidden from the public eye, it is assumed that there would be a limited selection of photographs on part of the media. Therefore any pictures used would arguably result less from a journalistic method, and more as a result of organizational constraints.

3.2. A Qualitative Methodology

While computer programs that are designed to scan articles for coded variables, i.e. particular keywords, can be helpful in searching for common words, they cannot think and therefore cannot derive meaning from the texts they are scanning and their operating logic forces researchers to make decisions about their data that may be premature (Altheide 1996: 31, 43). For example, a keyword search using the words "Karla Homolka" would find articles with her name in it, but it will not supply a context of how the name is discussed, i.e.

within the five themes listed above. By reading and analyzing each article over the two year period, no coverage was missed. The articles were coded using open, axial, and selective coding followed by a qualitative content analysis that uncovered themes, frames, and discourses used in the coverage, and thus, the representation of Karla Homolka. Best's (2001) framework for identifying claims regarding what constitutes a social problem was used to explore if the reports used diagnostic, motivational, and/or episodic frames to construct Homolka's release as a social problem, and if Homolka resisted such claims. These aspects will be illustrated next. However, to begin discussion of this study's qualitative methodology, a brief justification for choosing qualitative coding over quantitative coding is necessary.

3.2.1. Quantitative vs. Qualitative Coding

A content analysis is primarily quantitative, and uses objective and systemic counting and recording procedures with data derived from random samples (Silverman 2001: 122-123). It is non-reactive, systematic, and scientifically objective because it is not influenced by the researcher (Neuman 2004: 219; Taylor and Willis 1999: 45). Once the data are coded, the variables derived from the content are turned into numbers and statistically analyzed (Neuman 2004: 219). Moreover, manifest coding refers to the visible, surface content in a text (Neuman 2004: 221), which for this study could involve:

- counting the number of times Homolka's name is replaced with an explicit label (i.e. schoolgirl killer);
- counting the number of articles that fit into different themes
- counting the number of articles about Homolka from each source
- counting the number of references to her interview in subsequent articles

Such information can then be quantified compared. This manifest coding is highly reliable because the phrase or words in question is either present or it is not (Neuman 2004: 221).

However, this type of coding cannot extract from the data what is required to explore the research questions of this study; it cannot take connotations of words or phrases into account (Neuman 2004: 221; Taylor and Willis 1999: 47). A qualitative analysis would therefore be more efficient in understanding the contexts and meanings within the articles. In this sense, latent coding (also called semantic analysis) would be more effective, as it looks for the underlying, implicit meaning in the content of texts (Neuman 2004: 221). In addition, using a manifest coding to count certain words or phrases (i.e. “Karla is dangerous”) would risk forcing variables into categories for the purpose of being able to code and count them. Doing so would risk decontextualizing or misrepresenting the coverage, and therefore, the media’s representation of Homolka as well. Also, counting the number of variables would be irrelevant to this study since the number of times a certain variable (i.e. a label such as “schoolgirl killer”) occurs is not what is important. Rather, what is important are the ideas and themes communicated in the coverage, and would require a deeper analysis than simply recording the frequency with which certain words appeared.

In further contrast to manifest coding, latent coding involves the researcher deciding on a coding system, which determines which themes are found, and ultimately guides the interpretation of the texts (Neuman 2004: 221). While the reliability of latent coding may be less reliable than manifest coding, the validity of latent coding can actually exceed that of manifest coding “because people communicate meaning in many implicit ways that depend on context, not just on specific words (Neuman 2004: 221-222). While with latent coding, the coder requires knowledge of language and social meaning which makes it difficult to consistently identify themes and potentially reduces the study’s reliability (Neuman 2004: 221), this has already been accounted for. Moreover, Chapter 1’s discussion of women, violence, and news media representation and Chapter 2’s theoretical discussion of social

constructionism and claimsmaking provided sufficient knowledge of violent women and the social meanings of contexts within media accounts of violent women to allow for latent coding to generate data for a qualitative analysis.

The next section will illustrate the three levels of coding within the latent coding system that was used to qualitatively analyze the data: open, axial, and selective coding.

3.2.2. Three Levels of Qualitative Coding

All of the articles from each source were organized chronologically by the months in which they were published between July 2004 and July 2006. This was mainly for organization's sake, since there were hundreds of articles within the raw data to analyze. Neuman (2004) provided insights into the coding of the articles, which involved three stages. First, through *open coding*, where the articles were read at ease to grasp a feel for the tone of the coverage and locate themes, concepts, labels, and various codes to be used when condensing the rest of the data at a later level. Then through *axial coding*, the findings are organized and related to theoretical concepts. And with *selective coding*, examples are used to illustrate the findings. These three levels will be discussed in more detail next.

Essentially, open coding “brings themes to the surface from deep inside the data” which derive from the initial research question, concepts in the literature, terms used by members in the social setting (i.e. journalists), or new thoughts stimulated after being immersed in the data (Neuman 2004: 322). The deviant and stereotypical imagery applied to violent women (i.e. ‘mad’/‘bad’/‘other’, manipulative, etc.), knowledge of newsmaking (i.e. criteria for newsworthiness), and themes from studies on violent women in the media (i.e. focus on her appearance, aligning her voice with preconstructed deviant images, etc.) as discussed in Chapter 1 guided this process.

To further guide the open coding, Joel Best's (2001: 8) framework for identifying a social problem claim within the news reports was used. Here, a social problem claim is contextualized as an argument with four elements:

1. that some condition exists
2. that the condition is problematic (e.g. that it is troubling and ought to be addressed)
3. that it has particular characteristics (e.g. that it is common, has known consequences, or is a problem of a particular type)
4. that some sort of action should be taken to deal with it (2001: 8).

These four points are clear and concise; offering the tools needed to extrapolate any claims being communicated within the news reports. It is hypothesized that the media have constructed Karla Homolka's release from prison as a condition that is problematic, with perceived harm that results from her release, assumed to be based on knowledge of her previous crimes, and consequently, that some sort of social action is required to alleviate this social problem. A qualitative analysis allow for exploration of if and how such claims were communicated. This also raises the question of whether or not these claims reflect the three dominant images of violent women that were concluded from chapter 1's literature review: is Homolka 'mad', 'bad', or 'other'?

Furthermore, frames, themes, and discourse(s) can enhance the communication of claimsmaking. They are apart of the communication formats that are used in texts, which in the case of the mass media, refer to the selection, organization, and presentation of information (Altheide 1996: 29). To put this into perspective, 'discourse' refers to the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things, i.e. from a crime and punishment perspective (Altheide 1996: 31). 'Frames' focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and how it will not be discussed (Altheide 1996: 31). 'Themes' are the recurring typical theses that run through reports, with certain themes becoming appropriate if particular frames are adopted (Altheide 1996: 31). To illustrate this, if a news report depicts

Steven Harper as arguing to revamp the criminal justice system (criminal justice frame) by strengthening gun laws to ‘get tough’ on crime (discourse of crime and punishment), and the examples used justify this action pertain to homicides related to street gangs in Toronto (theme), then adding in a discussion on therapy or counseling for offenders or community education programs may seem out of place in the report (Altheide 1996: 31) because it counters the discourse and frame of the report (i.e. punishment vs. treatment). The data extracted from the news articles will be analyzed using this framework that notes the discourse, framing, and themes of how the articles surrounding Homolka’s release were presented. It is anticipated that the articles will predominantly be presented using a criminal justice discourse, themes of crime and punishment, and frames presenting concerns over “public safety,” i.e. her release conditions may be framed as a means of protecting the public, the public may feel unsafe about her release, etc. The themes of these articles may reflect those indicated above, as found in the preliminary study of www.ctv.ca articles.

After an open coding of the articles had been completed, *axial coding* took the analysis further by focusing more on the initially coded themes than on the raw data (Neuman 2004: 322). These themes included: discussion of Homolka’s plea bargain with the Crown, with emphasis on this being the reason why she is stigmatized; labels placed on Homolka (i.e. manipulative, celebrity, etc), which lead into discussions of her character; claims that she is dangerous, counterclaims that she is not dangerous, and even the theme that she is in danger (i.e. of going back to prison, of vigilantism, etc.); emphasis on her appearance (i.e. during court appearances, in her interview); the media’s critique of the media coverage; the notion of gender and crime; and the *Karla* movie release. After consolidating the findings, evidence in the data was located to strengthen connections between the themes and data by finding multiple empirical examples from the articles and

relating them to theoretical concepts (i.e. claimsmaking, social constructionism, hyperreality). Once the major themes were identified, a final stage - *selective coding* - involved selecting quotes, references, and representative examples to illustrate the themes and allow for discussion to ensue. These findings are presented in Chapter 4.

3.3. Epistemological Approach to the Qualitative Analysis

The objective of this study does not fall within the four traditional strands of feminist thought - Socialist, Marxist, Liberal, and Radical - and feminism is not used as a direct theoretical framework. However, feminism nonetheless plays a role in shaping the direction of this thesis epistemologically. Insights were drawn from postmodern feminism, which promotes the notion of differences between women, and standpoint feminism, which posits that the social position of women as an oppressed group renders the perspectives of women as a privileged source of knowledge. This study contributes to these epistemological perspectives by giving a voice to Karla Homolka by including her July 4, 2005 Radio-Canada interview transcript as a valid source of knowledge pertaining to her experience as a recently released woman who had been incarcerated for violent crimes. In addition, drawing from Derrida's notion of deconstruction, the news coverage was deconstructed to reveal if and how her interview - and thus, her voice - was referenced, as a means of illustrating how this violent woman's voice was heard, if at all, in coverage in which she is the subject. As a case study, the analysis benefited from this approach because it allowed the scope of the findings to range from seeing how Homolka potentially describes herself, to how the news media sees Homolka, to how the two accounts compare/contrast, which may offer further insights into how the news media have the ability to construct identities for people, in this case of one specific violent woman. Furthermore, since there is no cultural representation that can offer

access to the ‘truth’ about what is being represented, what representations do provide is an indication about how power relations are organized in a society at certain moments of time (Taylor and Willis 1999: 40). Moreover, when audiences (i.e. the general news-reading public) gain no further knowledge about a situation (i.e. Homolka’s release), person (i.e. Homolka herself), or group being represented (i.e. women; violent women), limited and potentially damaging assumptions (i.e. gender stereotypes) remain intact and unquestioned (Taylor and Willis 1999: 41). This section will discuss postmodern and standpoint feminisms and how their epistemologies guide the methodology of this thesis by offering insights into what constitutes knowledge and the role of women in this constitution. As well, these positions justify the inclusion of Homolka’s Radio-Canada interview in this study, and a deconstruction analysis of the coverage compliments the contextual constructionist theoretical framework by illustrating how this violent woman’s voice was heard in the coverage in her own release from prison.

Postmodernism is generally identified with its rejection of a foundational ‘truth’ to phenomena - such as knowledge, society, history, biology, nature, etc. - and it challenges the explanatory claims of a singular, unified meaning or cause (Beasley 1999: 85). Instead, postmodernists consider multiple determinants, plurality, diversity, and indeterminacy as sources of explanation (Beasley 1999: 85). In essence, Beasley (1999: 85) writes that postmodernist perspectives offer a critical gaze of modernism, which is “characterized by universalizing and totalizing (all encompassing/authoritarian) pretensions.” Moreover, feminist postmodernists link modernist thought with the conception of masculinity and the male biases of a universal truth (Beasley 1999: 86). Beasley (1999: 86) writes that from this perspective, claims to know the “truth” are not neutral, but are sexually specific and linked to power. Further, drawn from Enlightenment thought, modernism is associated with a

humanist perspective that assumes that human nature is founded in reason (Beasley 1999: 87). Feminist postmodernists suggest that because of the hierarchal duality of Western thought where man represents reason and woman represents intuition, man is therefore seen as subject and woman as object (Kilty 2003: 65). Modernism thus presents certain groups as lesser human beings, which suggests a sexual hierarchy (Beasley 1999).

Feminist scholars have argued that that a male world-view has distorted criminology's conclusions about women (Naffine 1987: 7). Missing from the labeling literature are the detailed accounts of the female experience which endeavors to invest women with a sense of intention and purpose since neither the criminal or the conforming woman has been given a voice: the opportunity to say in her own words how she perceives her own social reality (Naffine 1987: 87). Moreover, feminist standpoint epistemologies argue that although certain social positions (the oppressor's) produce distorted ideological views of reality, other social positions (the oppressed) can pierce through ideological obfuscations to attain a correct and comprehensive understanding of the world (Hawkesworth 2006: 56). Further, standpoint feminism posits a separate and superior female knowledge and way of knowing that results from the subjugation of women's experiences (Naffine 1996: 51). Kilty (2003: 66) adds that where women are situated in a subordinate position, they are able to see and understand more clearly the position of the repressed and the repressor. Accounts of female subjects are therefore taken into account as accepted forms of truths in the lives of those women (Kilty 2003: 66). Likewise, Harding (1987: 7) writes that a distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematic from the perspective of women's experiences, meaning, that it is women who should be expected to reveal for the first time what women's experiences are. From a standpoint feminist perspective, the identity of the subject matters: talking *to* women offenders rather than *about*

them treats these women as "...direct eye-witnesses to their own lives. They are reporters on their own experiences," (Naffine 1996: 47, 49). In sum, Naffine (1996: 51) writes, "women's expertise comes from being a woman." This is the reason for including Homolka's Radio-Canada interview transcript in the analysis: she gave the opportunity for her voice to be heard, she talked about her own experience *as* Karla Homolka; therefore this perspective is a unique form of knowledge. Through a deconstruction analysis of the coverage following this interview, it will be determined just how much credence was granted to this "privileged" source.

Referring to such a source of knowledge as "privileged" must be done with caution. To claim that a "distinct" women's perspective is "privileged" precisely because it possesses heightened insights into the nature of reality (women's experience) - a superior access to truth - is to suggest that there is some uniform experience common to all women that generates a univocal vision (Hawkesworth 2006: 63). However, since different women have different subject positions that create different world views, knowledge (of women's condition) never resides completely in a single (female) knower (Naffine 1996: 56). Moreover, Beasley (1999: 86) warns of the dangers of treating women's experiences as uniform:

"Overly unified conceptions of power and subjects of power within feminism are regarded as being dangerously authoritarian because they repress/exclude the possibility that oppression is not the same for all women. Accordingly, postmodern feminists assert that universalist assumptions could ironically produce in feminism a repetition of the very procedures of oppression feminism hopes to undermine. Their concern here is that making assumptions about Women as a group (regarding them as all the same) simply replaces the universal standard in traditional thought with another (feminine) controlling norm, against which some women are bound to be marginalized."

Essentially, when all women are discussed and viewed as being apart of one singular oppressed group, it fails to draw attention to the differences between women's experiences and this does a grave disservice to women (Naffine 1996: 53). For instance, if solutions are

attempted to alleviate the overall oppression of all women as a singular group, some women may continue to be oppressed while others may escape it. Feminist postmodernists therefore reject the notion of *a* truth about reality and advocate a profound skepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about the existence, nature, and powers of reason (Hawkesworth 2006: 57). Instead, they urge for the development of a commitment to plurality, and the play of differences (Hawkesworth 2006: 56-57).

Although differing in their ideologies of what constitutes realities and truth, both postmodern feminism and standpoint feminism share the view that all women should be given a voice and be heard, which can tell us something meaningful about their similar experiences - and their differences - as opposed to formulating one universal truth or theory regarding all women as if 'women' is a singular group (Kilty 2003: 66). Now recall in Chapter 1 the concerns feminists have noted: in addition to the deviant imagery of violent women being either 'mad' or 'bad', there is a lack of feminist understanding of violent women (Birch 1994; Boritch 1994; Cameron and Frazer 1987; Frigon 2006). Moreover, discussions typically reference the cases of Karla Homolka and Myra Hindley when emphasizing the quandary of feminists in explaining violent women. I argue that the continuous emphasis on these two women narrows the already narrow understanding of violent women and risks constructing them as a unified group, and casts these individuals as representations of the group. By stating that we cannot understand these individuals, the implication is that we therefore cannot understand violent women. Based on the standpoint feminist ideals mentioned above, suggestions to fill the gap include a new methodology that places violent women at the center of analysis and take what they have to say seriously and then comparing this account with additional accounts from other sources, including the media (Ballinger 1996: 3). This thesis operationalizes this need by placing a special

emphasis on Homolka's exclusive July 4, 2005 Radio-Canada interview given on the day of her release. The subsequent newspaper articles that followed to examine if and how her interview - her voice - was referenced and treated as source of knowledge regarding her own experiences, primarily in the context of her release. This epistemological approach, combined with the qualitative analysis of newspaper articles spanning two years worth of articles pertaining to her release, will allow for a more in depth understanding of how this woman has been portrayed in the news during this time because it ensures that the subject of analysis is providing a potentially alternative perspective that may (or may not) contrast with in the rest of the news coverage. While sensationalized coverage is anticipated, it is also anticipated that the media will be talking *about* her, with little to no references *to* her as a source, or in this case, using her interview since traditionally, the media tends to silence, distort or trivialize women's voices, in ways similar to women's experience with the law (Yeates 1996: 130). To approach these notions, deconstruction is a relevant analytical tool that assumes that ideologies limit the speech and actions of members of a culture, and the purpose of it is to expose these ideological limits (Feldman 1995: 63).

Deriving from Jacques Derrida's 'science' of writing which he refers to as *grammatology*, deconstruction introduces a radically different sense of knowledge, and as Ritzer (1997: 121) argues, "a different kind of world." Through the process of *decentering*, Derrida calls for a focus not on the core of a text, but instead, on aspects such as spacing (i.e. pauses, blanks, punctuation, etc.) (1976: 68), and on presences and absences in writing (i.e. of authors) (1978). While this may seem like a contradiction to the standpoint feminist notion of a woman-centered approach used in this research, it actually enhances it. Deconstruction is accomplished by looking at texts in different ways or "moves" which are analytical techniques that include looking at what is not being said, looking at silences or gaps,

analyzing disruptions, and dismantling dichotomies (Feldman 1995: 51). Moreover, as dichotomies divide the world into two categories, whether it be public and private, men and women, us and them, good and bad, hierarchal superior and subordinate, etc., they restrict what questions are asked because there are only two possibilities (Feldman 1995: 52, 60) to how a story can be framed, which thus affects how a story is presented and how it is received. Moreover, the dominant term may repress, exclude, and denigrate the other (Naffine 1996: 85), which Derrida conceptualizes as a “violence of writing” (1967/1976: 37). One of the forces of deconstruction as a qualitative research method then, is to confront the ideology of a culture, look through the holes in it, and see how it differs from what it claims to be (Feldman 1995: 62). The goal of deconstruction is not to reconstruct the text back into a revised, improved, and truer format because deconstructionists reject the notion that there is some ultimate truth to be discovered through deconstruction (Ritzer 1997: 10). As a result, in deconstructing texts, one can deconstruct categories endlessly again and again, with no sense of ever hitting bottom; of ever finding the truth (Ritzer 1997: 121).

Feminist criminologists drew upon these ideas relating to power and knowledge as a tool to focus on the subjugation of women that occurred through various forms of state institutional power that defined, classified, and constrained women (Naffine 1996: 80). For these reasons, deconstruction was used in the analysis of the newspaper articles since texts can be interpreted according to what is written, said, or done, but also by what is *not* written, said, or done (Feldman 1995: 51, emphasis added). Homolka’s interview was analyzed using this deconstruction technique whereby particular attention focused on if and how the subsequent news articles referenced her interview and in what context. Essentially, there was a deconstruction analysis of the coverage of Homolka’s release to see if her voice from the interview was referenced and how, and more importantly, if it was *not* referenced. Deriving

from the notion of a 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker 1963/1973; Ericson et al. 1987; Loseke 2003), what gaps are in the news coverage in terms of whose voice is selected, presented, and thus granted a status as a source of knowledge pertaining to Homolka's release?

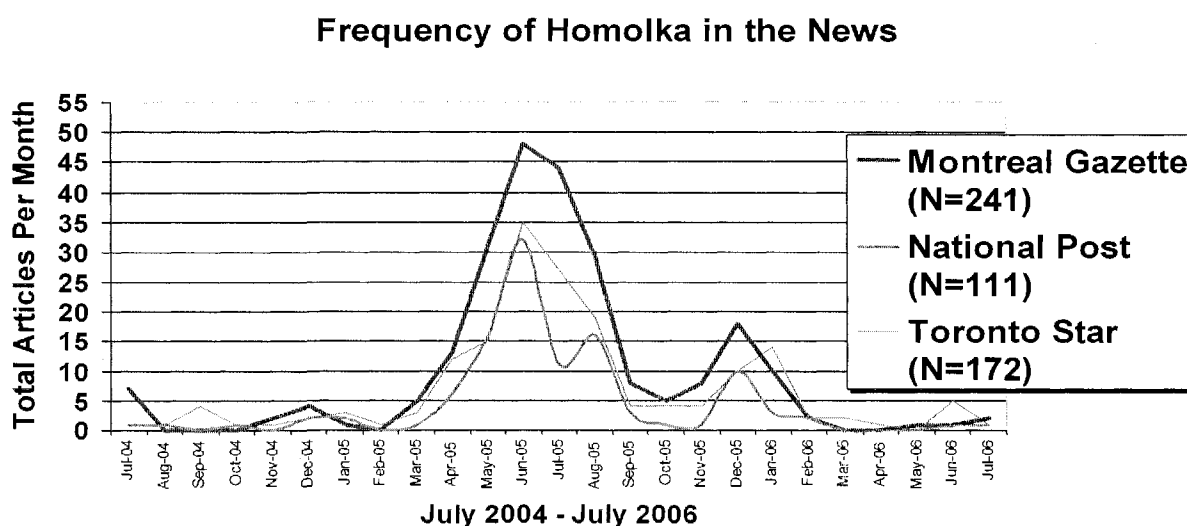
Taking this deconstructionist approach, I hypothesize that Homolka's interview will be minimally referenced in the news reports that follow after the interview. If referenced, I further hypothesize that her voice will be selectively cited to support any or certain claims/frames already constructed in the news media. By not making reference to detailed quotes, or by not referencing any at all - arguably a form of exclusion and silencing - this will allude to certain interests being supported while others being repressed. By disregarding what is said by the offending individual, their side of the story and any insights they may have will be avoided, which risks leaving what actually does get printed as the information that the public will consume. Ultimately, this may or may not be accepted by members of the public as being true. Such coverage would potentially construct a limited representation (Taylor and Willis 1999: 41) of Homolka that could limit an understanding of her case, who she is, and how others view her, and possibly view violent women in general.

If contrasting constructions surface, this will demonstrate the plurality of knowledges that are present when competing voices are heard. Ultimately, taking the postmodernist preference of plurality, this thesis not only appreciates that there may be multiple constructions of Homolka; it also seeks to illuminate them. The goal is to visualize what this one particular woman "looks like" through newspaper accounts and what image(s) have been presented to audiences through such claimsmaking activities. Neither account should be treated as being more "true" than the other because all further contribute to an enhanced understanding of how the subject was constructed in the news.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the themes found in the news coverage on Karla Homolka's release using a qualitative content analysis of articles from the *Montreal Gazette*, *National Post*, and *Toronto Star* between July 2004 and July 2006. As figure 2 illustrates, the majority of the coverage was localized and found in the *Montreal Gazette*; published in the city in which Homolka chose to start her life post-release.

Figure 2 – Monthly Frequency of Homolka Coverage



More importantly, Figure 2 also illustrates how the coverage escalated in the pre-release period, peaked at the time of her release in July 2005, and quickly diminished afterwards in the post-release period. Within this trend, there were six key moments in which she became news:

- in December 2004 when the National Parole Board (NPB) denied her an early release, stating that she continued to pose a threat to public safety due to a relationship she had in prison with a man convicted of murdering his girlfriend, and due to her lack of talking during her therapy sessions. These points were frequently referenced in the pre-release coverage;
- in May/June 2005 during the pre-release media frenzy leading up to her release in July 2005;

- the third week in August 2005 when she was “found” in public, and when her employer claimed to have evidence that she breached the conditions of her release;
- in December 2005 when all of the conditions of her release were lifted;
- in January 2006 when the *Karla* movie was released; and
- in July 2006 when she was “found” at a bus stop in Montreal.

Although outside of this study’s time frame, it is worth noting that in February 2007 Homolka gave birth to a baby in Montreal. Despite the intensity and hostility of the coverage surrounding her release, which routinely emphasized her crimes and victimization of young girls, there was seemingly minimal coverage on this at the time of writing this thesis. This suggests that her release was sensationalized, her behaviour did not live up to the notoriety of the claims made against her during the sensationalism, and her story subsequently lost newsworthiness.

Furthermore, distinct themes emerged throughout the key moments of coverage:

- hostile commentaries of her crimes and plea bargain;
- themes relating to Homolka’s character:
 - labels placed on Homolka which constructed her character (i.e. variations of “Canada’s most notorious...”, “schoolgirl killer”, psychological labels);
 - Karla is “dangerous”: Best’s (2001) criteria for identifying a claim is effectively satisfied through claims that she is dangerous, initiated primarily by a December 2004 National Parole Board (NPB) report, and maintained by Tim Danson (lawyer representing the victims’ families); references to the restrictions of her release were integral to the claimsmaking;
 - Karla is “manipulative”
 - counter-claims (i.e. from Homolka herself) that she is not dangerous;
 - the notion of Homolka being in danger (i.e. of media hounding, vigilantism, going back to jail);
 - Karla is a “celebrity”;
 - the *Karla* movie further constructed her as mysterious, as ‘other’;
- emphasis on Homolka’s physical appearance;
- a brief gender analysis/commentary, primarily from the *Toronto Star*;
- (minimal) references to her televised Radio-Canada interview; and
- the media’s critique of the media’s coverage on Homolka’s release (i.e. the frenzy may have a negative impact on her reintegration; risk of vigilantism).

A qualitative analysis of the above themes found that Homolka was not reviled because of her gender as hypothesized, but instead, for her crimes and primarily for the 1993 plea bargain that allowed her to be released. Hostile commentaries of her plea bargain as found in the coverage will be discussed shortly. However, as hypothesized, the deconstruction analysis found that her interview was minimally referenced, and when it was, it was criticized and/or realigned with the prior constructions of her (i.e. that she is manipulative). Moreover, while discourses of “crime prevention” and “public safety” were maintained in the overall coverage of the three sources, individual articles were typically comprised of a plethora of information that mixed recycled details of her past trials, assessments, and relationships with whatever new details about her that could be included. As a result of this sensationalized and tabloid-styled coverage, many articles appeared to be a clutter of information without a specific frame. Regardless, both the individual articles and general coverage had an “anti-Karla” tone which can be classified as a discourse in itself in this study and this will become apparent throughout this chapter. Essentially, anything Homolka said or did, or even thought about doing, was reinterpreted as her manipulating the system or public perceptions to her benefit, which is one of the defining stereotypical characteristics of violent women: that they are cold, calculating, and manipulative (Comack and Balfour 2004); that they are ‘bad’.

While the objective of this thesis was to try and surpass the stereotypical and constraining ‘mad’/‘bad’/‘other’ framework for understanding a woman who has committed violent crimes, much of the context of the coverage inevitably recycled and perpetuated the very concepts I sought to avoid in hopes of developing a new discourse for understanding a woman who commits violence. However, as a case study this thesis did reveal how the news media functioned to report on a high-profile female criminal and constructed a dangerous

character that most Canadians have come to be familiar with. One of the consequences of this sensationalized coverage is a construction of a hyperreal “Karla Homolka”; a character that is so real and familiar to people that they think they actually know who she is, yet who they “know” is arguably based on representations presented by the media.

This chapter will illustrate the above themes using examples and quotes from the news coverage. Afterwards, the research question “Who is Karla Homolka?” will be addressed based on the findings, and a discussion of the media’s representation of her in relation to Baudrillard’s (1988/2001) conceptualization of *simulation* and *hyperreality* will conclude the chapter.

4.1. Hostile Commentaries of Homolka’s Crimes and Plea Bargain

Throughout the coverage between July 2004 and July 2006, readers were consistently reminded that Homolka’s crimes were notorious, that her plea bargain was controversial, and that she still is reviled for it to some degree. If people are unaware of the details, all they would have to do is read one or two news articles from any of the three sources in this study to get a quick background check (or a refresher in case they forgot) to develop an idea about what she did and why people were concerned about her release. The following quotes typically characterized the coverage and set the tone for her release:

“I’ve never heard anything positive about the woman,” local man in Joliette, QC (NP June 3, 2005, A1).

“It has been the crime of our lifetime,” Kirk Makin, *Globe and Mail* justice reporter (MG June 2, 2005, A1).

“Her case arouses strong emotional reactions... I have rarely seen anything like it in my career,” -Ruth Gagnon, director the Elizabeth Fry Society of Quebec. (MG July 9, 2004, A7).

“...the woman best known for her role in assisting her husband, Paul Bernardo, in the kidnappings, rapes and murders of two teenage girls in the early 1990s,” (NP July 10, 2004, RB8).

"...Homolka is no ordinary criminal. Her crimes, by any measure, were monstrous. She and her husband, Paul Bernardo, gleefully tortured two teenage girls to death in an orgy of grotesque perversity. Homolka also helped Bernardo drug, rape and murder her own 14-year-old sister," (MG Apr.18, 2005, A20).

"The only two people in the courtroom who have seen those videotapes are Karla Homolka and me... The crimes she committed cannot be summarized in a paragraph. They are horrific beyond comprehension," -Tim Danson (TS June 3, 2005, A06).

In addition, some articles refrained from discussing Homolka's crime in great detail because it is assumed that Canadians already know:

"Karla Homolka is one of the most notorious killers in Canadian history. There is no need to go over the depravity of her crimes here -- they are *seared into the memories of most Canadians*. Suffice it to say that she is a virtual *poster girl* for Section 810," (NP Dec.1, 2005, A20, italics added).

"This [her crimes] is something that is profoundly affected the psyche of Ontarians. These criminal acts were despicable," -Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty (TS June 1, 2005, A15).

Lastly, if an article did not include similar comments, it was because Homolka's name appeared in the context of another story, such as discussion of Criminal Code Section 810 release conditions being applied to another offender, i.e. Karl Toft (NP June 3, 2005, A5), or the issue of making deals with other offenders, i.e. a person affiliated with Satan's Choice (TS Nov.27, 2005, A10).

Homolka's plea bargain was routinely referenced in most articles and was typically presented as being the basis for public and political outrage concerning her release. Phrases such as 'willing participant' and 'deal with the devil' contextualized the frame and theme of "failed justice system" that characterized the tone of media coverage. Consider the following statements:

"Justice in Canada has already suffered a black eye courtesy of Karla Homolka. It was a travesty when, 12 years ago, Crown prosecutors entered into a plea deal with a woman who had actively participated in the rape and murder of two Ontario teenagers, as well as the deadly drugging and rape of her own teenage sister," (NP June 3, 2005, A18).

"What kind of system do we have, where a serial killer will come to our community?" asked a resident of Notre Dame de Grace in Montreal, "If a system will allow a killer to be free, than who's at fault? Is it the killer or the system?" (TS May 6, 2005, A03).

Additionally, Alan Young, a lawyer who fought to have Karla's plea bargain overturned, was quoted in the *Montreal Gazette* as saying: "She, kind of, *slipped through the cracks* and really probably got one of the *best deals* in Canadian history," (May 9, 2005, A09, emphasis added). The *Toronto Star* wrote that: "Many Canadians regard the plea bargain she made with the Ontario authorities as a 'deal with the devil' that spared her from being locked away for life. The public has reason to be concerned about her release," (June 1, 2005, A18). Similarly, the *National Post* elaborated with: "The *public's ongoing revulsion* toward Homolka *stems from the widely held belief* that she failed to disclose her true role in the girls' killings and she has not been adequately punished for her crimes," (June 2, 2005, A4, emphasis added). Such quotes appear to speak on behalf of public opinion and were presented as fact, which leaves readers without the need to think critically about what they are reading. While the theoretical framework of this thesis was designed to uncover claims about social problems and solutions to them, the above quotes illustrate that while Homolka herself is problematic, her release is more symbolic than problematic. She is not so much a social problem in and of herself, rather, she embodies a social problem. Her release symbolizes a perceived failed justice system where lenient decisions enable people "like Homolka" to "slip through the cracks" and walk free, leaving society in fear of being harmed. People see her plea bargain as an example of a lenient system, and she is the personification of if failed justice.

While Karla was convicted of manslaughter and not homicide itself, this did not stop the press from labeling her as a "killer" or "serial killer", and among other labels that helped construct Homolka's character. This will be illustrated next.

4.2. Karla's Character

The news coverage from all three sources contained multiple themes relating to a construction of Karla Homolka's character that was negatively skewed towards her being dangerous and manipulative. Her character, as depicted through the coverage, will be discussed through the following contexts: the theme of labeling Homolka with various nicknames and psychological terms; using Best's (2001) criteria for identifying a claim as a guide, the claim that Homolka is dangerous, which includes the notion of her being manipulative; counter-claims that she is not dangerous; the notion that she is in danger; and the conceptualization of Homolka as a celebrity. This section will conclude with discussion on how the Karla movie was created around her character development, left audiences to decide who she "is", which further constructed her character as 'other'.

4.2.1. Labeling Karla

Throughout the coverage, particularly the pre-release coverage, Homolka was referenced using a variety of labels that aided in the negative construction of her character.

In the prerelease coverage particularly there were a variety of colourful names applied to Homolka, especially involving variations of the label "Canada's most notorious...." (i.e. "Canada's most notorious female offender", "Canada's most notorious female inmate", etc.). Other labels included: the felon (various *Toronto Star* articles); killer; sex killer; serial killer; school girl killer; convicted killer; convicted sex killer; monster; devil incarnate (MG May 7, 2005, A7); femme fatale (TS Apr.9, 2005, A01); diagnostic mystery (TS June 3, 2005, A01); public figure (various *Gazette* and *Star* articles); "the proverbial 'wolf in sheep's clothing'" (NP Apr.23, 2005, A17); "an enigma," (MG Jan.17, 2005, A9); "a vampire who has nourished on the blood of youth" (TS July 6, 2005, A02); a "female

Hannibal Lecter” (MG June 30, 2005, A7); etc. In contrast, the post-release coverage toned down the name-calling and seemed to settle with “schoolgirl killer”. Perhaps this is due to the prerelease coverage being highly sensationalized, where “anything goes”. Yet after Karla was released, she disappeared from the public eye. Routine media claims of her “dangerousness” eventually subsided, possibly due to other news stories taking the spotlight and/or new information on Homolka being limited or non-existent. The ability or desire to be sensational and explicit potentially declined as well.

Numerous psychological assessments have been conducted on Homolka since she came into contact with the criminal justice system. While references to her initial battered woman syndrome allegations were almost non-existent in media coverage, there were references to disorders, often derived from contradicting assessments, which seemed to support allegations that she is abnormal and further cast her as a mystery. During the time of the December 2004 NPB assessment the *Montreal Gazette* (Dec.16, 2004, A1) reminded readers of an earlier NPB 2001 order to keep Homolka incarcerated which was based on reports from psychologists and psychiatrists who determined that she had an antisocial personality or even a form of psychopathy. Months later, the *National Post* (May 28, 2005, A6) quoted Dr. Graham Glancy, a forensic psychiatrist, who suggested that Karla “appears to be a classic example of hybristophilia, an individual who is sexually aroused by a partner's violent sexual behaviour.” Additionally, the *Toronto Star* (May 31, 2005, A06) quoted retired FBI profiler Greg McCray as saying that Paul Bernardo supplied “the spark” to bring out the killer in Homolka. Describing her as a psychopath, he doubts that the university degree she earned behind bars will change her: “The only thing we get when we educate a psychopath is an educated psychopath,” he said (TS May 31, 2005, A06).

Not all “experts” were in agreement on Karla’s psychological state of mind. For instance, the *Toronto Star* (June 3, 2005, A01) quoted Dr. Angus McDonald as stating: “Karla Homolka remains something of a diagnostic mystery. Despite her ability to present herself very well, there is a moral vacuity in her which is difficult if not impossible to explain.” Whatever the case may be, the *Toronto Star* (June 6, 2005, A02) wrote that “[Karla] is, however much the experts might disagree among themselves, a pathological human being.” Likewise, Tim Danson felt that Quebecers who sympathized with Homolka were significantly misinformed: “They’re just not aware of the sadistic brutality of the murder of my clients. Once a psychopath, always a psychopath.” (MG July 6, 2005, A8). It should be noted that while the term “psychopath” came up in the coverage, the definition or background of the term was never elaborated on. Petrunik and Weisman (2005: 79) note that the term is one of the most problematic concepts in the history of psychiatry because it bridges together two different kinds of understanding: the moral and the medical. For instance, a person may be considered to be profoundly ‘mad’ and in need of therapy in a mental health setting, or seen as ‘bad’ or “criminal” and requiring punishment in a penal justice setting (Petrunik and Weisman 2005: 80). However, they further note that a person diagnosed as being a psychopath may be considered more ‘bad’ than ‘mad’ and therefore not suited to an insanity defense, and because psychopathy is considered to be virtually untreatable, civil mental health hospitals are no longer seen to be appropriate places to confine psychopaths (2005: 91, see also Arrigo and Shibley 2001). In this context, calling Homolka a “psychopath” reinforces not one aspect of the ‘bad’/‘mad’/‘other’ framework for understanding violent women, but rather, reinforces all three: she is both ‘bad’ and ‘mad’, and due to the controversy over the term, she may be cast as ‘other’.

As indicated in Chapter 1, a ‘mad’ woman is not responsible for her actions due to biology/mental elements rendering her actions beyond her control. Interestingly, a comment from a local teen in the *Toronto Star* (July 16, 2005, L06) stated: "Homolka is not a psycho... A psycho is someone who can't tell the difference between killing someone and breakfast." Yet if “experts”, professionals, and the public cannot “figure out” who Homolka “is”, the context results in a construction of her as ‘other’, especially when there are continuous references to conflicting “expert” assessments, combined with labels such as “diagnostic mystery”. Regardless, an explicitly dominant theme through the prerelease coverage and initial post release coverage was that Karla Homolka is “dangerous” and “poses a threat” to society. Claimsmaking activities were employed in such constructions. In contrast, both explicit and implicit themes of Karla as being not dangerous, and in danger, were simultaneously found as well. The next section will illustrate these themes surrounding Karla and “dangerousness”.

4.2.2. Karla is “Dangerous”

Leading up to her release date, a construction of Karla Homolka as “dangerous” was heavily based on the December 2004 NPB report which was often communicated through discourses of crime prevention and law and order. This theme satisfied Best’s (2001: 8) criteria for identifying a claim:

1. that some condition exists (Karla Homolka is getting out of prison);
2. that the condition is problematic (Karla is dangerous; at risk of reoffending; poses threat to public safety);
3. that the condition has particular characteristics (based on the videotape evidence disclosed after her plea bargain, she has since been viewed as being dangerously manipulative; the NPB says she has not been rehabilitated, etc.); and
4. that some sort of action should be taken to deal with the condition (Criminal Code section 810 used to place restrictions on her freedom once released, justified through crime prevention discourse).

These notions will be illustrated in the order as listed above.

4.2.2.1. A Condition Exists and is Problematic

While it is arguable that Karla was deemed to be dangerous ever since the videotapes of her crimes surfaced back during Paul Bernardo's trial in the early 1990s, the NPB report in December 2004 set the tone for Karla's prerelease media coverage. The following is a recap of the report as written in the *Montreal Gazette* (Dec.16, 2004, A1):

Karla Homolka is still a risk to reoffend - even as she is nearing the end of her sentence, the National Parole Board says.... In a decision rendered Friday and made public yesterday, the board noted that while Homolka has made progress toward rehabilitation, there are concerns that justify keeping her at Joliette. The prison offers work programs in which inmates are given a degree of autonomy to prepare them for life after incarceration. "You are efficient in your work and perform well in your studies," a parole board report on Homolka noted. "However, you still maintain a written correspondence with an inmate incarcerated in a federal establishment who is serving a lengthy sentence for offences related to conjugal violence." The parole board is concerned Homolka has chosen to do this, despite knowing that it heightens her risk of committing future crimes.... According to the parole board, she has completed four of the program's five stages. But there are concerns the program has had a limited effect on diminishing Homolka's potential to reoffend. "You have demonstrated adequate motivation and collaboration," the board members wrote in their summary. "But certain aspects have not been treated because you censor yourself, (and because of) your need to keep a part of your personal life secret and your strategy to remain silent."

This NPB report was referenced continuously in the newspapers in the months that followed and lead up to Homolka's release. As the above excerpt illustrates, any efforts of rehabilitation on her part were disregarded and attention was instead focused on her choice of men and her lack of openness about discussing her feelings. The fact that the NPB was voicing this claim added credibility to the claimmaking since it is arguably a source high up in the hierarchy of credibility. For instance, an editorial in the *Toronto Star* (Apr.17, 2005, A16) states that:

"Canadians are justifiably outraged that in less than three months Karla Homolka will walk free.... Last year, the National Parole Board refused to release her, ruling she still was likely to commit a crime causing death or severe injury. Canadians, already aware of her past, are rightly alarmed by that assessment."

4.2.2.2. The Condition has Perceived Consequences

In May 2005 the identity of Karla's choice of men was revealed to be Jean-Paul Gerbet, a man who had been serving a prison sentence for killing his ex-girlfriend. This functioned to fuel the claims that she is a danger to society once released because it echoed the relationship that lead her to prison in the first place.

The father of the woman murdered by Gerbet – whom Homolka allegedly called her boyfriend – claimed that he is another Paul Bernardo (TS June 3, 2005, A06; TS July 1, 2005, A01). Moreover, this concerned Tim Danson: "...if [Homolka] meets a particular type of personality like Paul Bernardo ... it's like playing with nuclear fuel. And I believe we are at serious risk," (TS May 31, 2005, A06). Also, according to Claude Lachapelle, an attorney representing Quebec, Homolka was warned several times to end her relationship with Gerbet but did not do so. Lachapelle argued that her relationship with a convicted murderer behind bars *raises the fear she may kill again* (TS Oct.25, 2005, A02, emphasis added). Perceptions of these potential consequences strengthened fears of what may happen once Homolka was released. Restrictions were placed on Homolka's release and this solidified Best's (2001) claimsmaking criteria.

4.2.2.3. Actions Should be Taken to Deal with the Condition

Combining information about Karla's past criminal behaviour, her infamous plea bargain, and now her association with a new man who is allegedly "another Paul Bernardo," there were ingredients for further controversy, not to mention, a leading news story. In the final months leading up to Homolka's release, pressure for legal action from criminal justice professionals, politicians, and victims' rights advocates to impose conditions upon Karla's release, as well as praise for the conditions once they were imposed, communicated

discourses of crime prevention with law and order frames which inevitably constructed Karla as dangerous and in need of control, and solidifies Best's (2001) criteria for identifying a claim. In addition, these restrictions were also met with criticism from lawyers and these will conclude this section on claimsmaking.

In the *Montreal Gazette* (Apr.12, 2005, A10) and with similar reports in the *Toronto Star* (April 17, 2005, A16; May 6, 2005, A03), Ontario Attorney-General Michael Bryant was quoted as saying:

"The court-ordered conditions would be the first step in ensuring that a nationwide set of eyes monitor one of Canada's most notorious criminals.... No matter where she goes, our justice system is going to be watching her. She's been convicted of the most horrific, ghoulisic crimes imaginable to humankind. And the parole board has made findings that she may pose a risk to the public. So we want to make sure we're doing everything to protect the public upon her release.... We will be seeking the strictest conditions possible.... We will bring an order in every province she intends on traveling to. The point is to monitor her. Surely the police authorities in whatever province she lives in will ensure there is no going underground."

Likewise, Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty was quoted as saying the Ontario government was being pressed to impose as many restrictions as possible after Karla was to be released from prison: "...*People are very concerned* about what she might do again, and we have a responsibility to protect the public interest.... As a matter of principle, *the more restrictions the better,*" (MG June 1, 2005, A13, emphasis added). Furthermore, the *Toronto Star* (June 4, 2005, A04) reported Quebec Court Judge Jean R. Beaulieu's justification for setting the restrictions: "The respondent had the opportunity to end this relationship, she did not. She received warnings, but did not take them into account," he also ruled that the Crown's fears were "reasonable and founded." Similar quotes were found in (NP June 4, 2005, A4). See Appendix 1 for the list of her release conditions. Continuing a crime prevention discourse and using a law and order frame, Michael Bryant insisted praised the restrictions: "Today, Canada's justice system acted - not reacted - to prevent harm upon Homolka's release and to protect the public upon Homolka's release," (MG June 4, 2005, A3).

In addition to the section 810 restrictions, Priscilla De Villiers, a victims' rights advocate whose teenage daughter was killed in the early '90s, said that the government needs to rush through a bill that would allow for DNA samples to be taken before Homolka's release as "a way of signaling that there is some control.... I think we have to realize that Karla Homolka is sort of a poster child of other very dangerous offenders who are coming out all the time," (MG May 9, 2005, A9). Similarly, the *National Post* (Dec.1, 2005, A20) stated: "Suffice it to say that she is a virtual poster girl for Section 810."

While the objective of this thesis is not strive to find truths about "who" Karla Homolka "is", but rather, to illustrate how "she" is constructed, it should be noted that this effort at claimsmaking is flawed with misinformation coming from seemingly credible sources. First, Karla is not a Dangerous Offender. To be legally classified one the offender must go through the legal process that reaches a Dangerous Offender designation. Second, all Dangerous Offenders - with the exception of two women - have been men, and are in prison indefinitely. Therefore, Karla is not a "poster child of other very dangerous offenders who are coming out all the time." Yes, offenders who are dangerous do get released from prison. But with this slight flaw in semantics, the distinction between a designated Dangerous Offender and an offender who is dangerous is lost. Also, this misconstruction fuels the existing "dangerous" construction of Karla Homolka. Moreover, when certain words or phrases are misused like this, the result is a distortion of the reality of aspects about the justice system, as well as the status of this particular offender, and arguably, public perceptions of people who do not know the difference.

While the section 810 restrictions placed on Homolka were constructed by various sources (i.e. Tim Danson, Michael Bryant) as being valid, appropriate, and necessary, if one were to follow the coverage in detail they would find that concerns were also expressed over

the negative implications of placing conditions on Homolka's release. For instance, George Walker – Homolka's lawyer who negotiated her 1993 plea bargain with the Crown - expressed concern that Attorney-General Michael Bryant "is establishing a dangerous legal precedent that could reduce public safety by making it difficult for his prosecutors to reach such formal agreements in the future," (MG Apr.15, 2005, A12). An editorial in the *Montreal Gazette* expressed similar concern: "If defence lawyers can't rely on the Crown to keep its word, they might become reluctant to counsel clients to rat out accomplices. Then it would be more difficult to get criminals like Paul Bernardo behind bars for good." (MG May 10, 2005, A23).

4.2.3. Karla is "Manipulative"

The entire coverage surrounding Karla's release echoed the 'violent women = manipulative' stereotype. Everything she did was interpreted against her; any display of resistance was treated as deviant. It was as if she was incapable of bettering herself; that she was only capable of continuing her deviance. Such frames tended to be constructed using the same source: Tim Danson, the lawyer representing the French and Mahaffy families. While continuous downplaying of Karla's every move seems rather fitting to his role, this in itself raises the question of the viability of his continuous claims. Interestingly, many of his claims against Karla's actions were counter-argued within the coverage, but audiences may have missed this had they not consistently followed the coverage. Furthermore, this section will illustrate the various contexts in which she was deemed to be manipulative: her request to have court hearings in French; her move for a media ban injunction; the notion of a pardon for her convictions; her televised interview following her release; and her successful appeal of her release restrictions. Any counter-arguments will be included as well.

4.2.3.1. Karla Speaks French Now

Although her native language is English and her crimes took place in English-speaking Ontario communities, Karla became fluent in speaking French while in prison. This is not surprising, considering she had served time with mostly francophone inmates. She requested to have her June 2005 hearing of the Crown's application for her section 810 restrictions to be conducted in French, which forced Tim Danson to bring in an interpreter. He called the language decision another example of her attempts to manipulate the system (NP June 3, 2005, A1), and of "getting the last laugh," (TS May 31, 2005, A06). This claim is not new, as the *National Post* (June 3, 2005, A4) also noted how Dr. Bertrand Major concluded in a 2001 report to the Correctional Service of Canada that "Homolka even designated French as her language of choice to manipulate the system."

4.2.3.2. Karla's Media Ban Attempt

In June 2005 Karla attempted to have a media ban placed on the press, to prevent reporters from covering her release and to allow her some privacy in the development of her new life outside of prison. Tim Danson said Homolka's true motive in seeking the injunction may have been to distract from the threat she poses to public safety: "What we don't know is whether this is simply part of Karla Homolka being the master manipulator to change the focus from the real problem - the threat she poses to public safety - by trying to portray herself as the victim," (TS June 29, 2005, A02). Moreover, he was later quoted as saying: "She's actually demonstrating that she is heartless and has no remorse." (TS July 4, 2005, A09).

Karla was unsuccessful in obtaining the injunction. Quebec Superior Court Justice Paul-Marcel Bellavance stated that Karla must face the Canadian public and the media,

because “Preventing the media from taking her picture or reporting on her address would endanger freedom of the press... The public's right to the information takes precedence over her right to privacy,” (TS June 30, 2005, F06).

4.2.3.3. A Pardon for Karla’s Convictions

The *National Post* (June 9, 2005, A2) referenced a 2001 report where Dr. Lucinda Presse, a Correctional Service of Canada psychologist had noted that Karla “...has been thinking about possible careers she might pursue, and she hopes ultimately to earn a pardon.” The article also noted that for someone who has been convicted of an indictable offence and avoids any kind of criminal activity or misconduct within the five years following the end of their sentence, they may become eligible for a pardon which in effect seals their criminal conviction, preventing employers and others from having access to it, unless the person later commits another crime. It is seen as a way to help law-abiding former offenders reintegrate into society. However, for Tim Danson the notion of a pardon for Karla’s crimes “...reflects her continued mindset of denying and minimizing her role in the murder of my clients' daughters and the rape of Jane Doe," (NP June 9, 2005, A2).

4.2.3.4. Karla Gives a TV Interview

Within hours of being released from prison on July 4, 2005 Karla entered Radio-Canada television studios to conduct an interview (in French) which was broadcast on television. For a full transcript of her interview, see Appendix 2. The findings of a deconstruction analysis of the subsequent post-release coverage of this interview will be presented in the later sections of this chapter. Furthermore, while Homolka’s lawyer Sylvie Bordelais stated that the intention of Homolka giving the interview was so that “...she can talk for herself and explain what her goals are and what it's been like for her,” (CBC July 4, 2005), the following

quotes illustrate the backlash and reconstruction of her stated intentions. It appeared as if her voice was irrelevant because people already had an image of her in their minds, and/or that her choice of words were unacceptable (to those quoted above). Karla's resistance to prior constructions of her was unsuccessful since her decision to give the interview, as well as her "performance", was criticized – especially by the *Toronto Star* - as a means of her manipulating the public's perception. Consider the following quotes:

"For her to come out expressing remorse now is part of her modus operandi - to deceive and manipulate public opinion," –Tim Danson (MG July 6, 2005, A8).

"The victims' families called Homolka's idea of remorse 'just empty words'," –Tim Danson (TS July 6, 2005, A12).

"Homolka's clever gambit to seize the day - by bestowing an exclusive interview on Radio-Canada immediately upon her emergence from prison - had its intended effect. She effectively took the media hostage and ensured that her words, her pre-emptive spin, would appear on front page stories across the country... She is a polished manipulator, consummate actress and cunning tactician," (TS July 6, 2005, A02).

"Homolka may not have tightened the strangling ligature around the necks of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy. But she was clearly pulling the strings in this Radio-Canada scoop, a tactic to get the baying media hounds off her tail," (TS July 5, 2005, A01).

4.2.3.5. Karla Successfully Appeals her Conditions

The appeal document filed by Karla's lawyers in August of 2005 called the conditions of her release "exorbitant" and "essentially punitive", arguing that they violated her rights under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (MG Aug.17, 2005, A1; MG Oct.24, 2005, A1). Four months later in December 2005, the appeal was successful and all conditions were lifted. Christian Desrosiers, one of her lawyers, was quoted in the *Montreal Gazette* (MG Dec.7, 2005, A1) as saying he hopes the ruling may finally bring his client's legal saga to a close, and that Quebec will not be driven to further appeals by what he called "misinformed public opinion." He further commented that "If they know the facts and the [plea bargain] agreement my client had with the Attorney-General of Ontario, they would understand a deal

is a deal. She served her sentence.... Now she's a citizen like any other," (MG Dec.7, 2005, A1). However, Tim Danson's opinion on the appeal was that "Karla Homolka is a master manipulator and con artist and the justice system has been too generous with her... Anyone who thinks she's not still dangerous is sorely mistaken... [The families] are very, very worried there's going to be another victim," (MG Dec.7, 2005, A1).

In contrast to the persistent claimsmaking that constructed Karla as dangerous, manipulative, and a threat to public safety, competing claims from other sources - including Karla herself - insisted that she was not dangerous and posed little or no threat. This will be discussed next.

4.2.4. Karla is *Not* "Dangerous"

During her Radio-Canada interview, Karla was asked: "You figure you're not a danger today?" to which she replied with "Not at all. Not at all," (CBC Online June 4, 2005). The next question was: "You're not likely to 'follow' again, as you say?" with which Karla simply stated "No," (CBC Online June 4, 2005). More specifically, she later stated: "I don't want people to think that I am a dangerous person who's going to do something to their children," (CBC Online June 4, 2005). So in the words of Karla Homolka herself, she did not pose a danger to society upon her release from prison. Likewise, Ruth Gagnon of the Elizabeth Fry Society in Montreal, who had frequently visited Karla when she was in custody, was quoted in the *National Post* (May 28, 2005, A6; May 10, 2005, A5) as saying: "There is no risk. [Homolka] is not a sexual predator. There is no danger. I am convinced of that." In response to the attention she has received, a post in an online chatroom raised a critical point: "Now that everybody knows her, how could anybody be kidnapped by her?!" (MG June 30, 2005, A7).

Furthermore, discourses that communicated the notion that Karla is not dangerous and therefore not a threat to society tended to be expressed mostly from her own legal representatives, which was unsurprising since their role was to defend their client. Sylvie Bordelais, one of Homolka's lawyers, argued that she was a model prisoner who poses little risk to reoffend and was no danger to the community. Bordelais said it was unreasonable to place any limits on a woman whose violent former husband turned her into a killer (TS June 3, 2005, A06). Although rejected in the hearing that gave birth to Homolka's release restrictions, a testimony from defence psychiatrist Louis Morissette posited that Homolka posed little danger of reoffending and showed no evidence of sexual deviancy, psychopathy, or anti-social behaviour (TS June 4, 2005, A04). In defense of the appeal of her restrictions, arguments from Christian LaChance, another one of her lawyers, were presented:

"The entirety of these proceedings is based on Ms. Teale's [her name had been legally changed to Teale] actions in the past, for which she has already been punished.... Ms. Teale is a free woman now. She has served her time. Without evidence of a clear and imminent danger, she must be left alone," (MG Oct.25, 2005, A9).

Moreover, while Mr. Justice James Brunton of Quebec Superior described Homolka's crimes as "unspeakable depravity" and found that the possibility she may reoffend "cannot be completely eliminated," after a careful review of psychologists' opinions in December of 2005, and on a balance of probabilities, he ruled it unlikely: "She does not represent a real and imminent danger to commit a personal injury offence," (NP Dec.1, 2005, A1; TS Dec.1, 2005, A28).

At the time of writing this thesis, Homolka has no further experiences with the criminal justice system.

4.2.5. Karla is *in Danger*

Frigon (2005) writes that the iconography of Karla Homolka balances between constructions of a dangerous woman and woman in danger: a paradoxical representation of being a narcissistic dangerous woman and a woman who was in danger of being victimized herself (Kilty and Frigon 2006). Moreover, Frigon's (1996) concept of the violent woman as being simultaneously dangerous and *in danger* was complimented in the coverage: while Karla was constructed as being both dangerous, and not dangerous with regard to the likelihood of violence, she was further constructed as being in danger of vigilantism, media hounding, and going back to prison. The *Karla* movie was even in danger of being censored.

In June 2005, Karla's lawyers attempted to have a media ban injunction imposed on the media outlets. In her affidavit for a media ban, Karla was quoted as saying:

"Given the events that have happened throughout my incarceration and the interest in my upcoming release, I believe there are people who want to do the public a favour and kill me... I've lived in a climate of hatred and revenge for more than 12 years... Even if my contact with the outside was limited, I know that newspapers, television, radio and hundreds of chat rooms on the Internet incite and maintain this climate of hatred toward me," (MG June 29, 2005, A1; see also TS July 4, 2005, A09).

Michele Pilon-Santilli, national media director for the federal prison system, said in an interview that a case management team develops an exit plan for all inmates, but the intense media interest in Homolka has meant extra care for her safety (MG June 10, 2005, A12). More colorfully, Christine Champagne of the Elizabeth Fry's Quebec office states: "She will be like a mouse in a lion's cage. It's going to be very hard for her; that's why she will deserve some support and help," said (NP May 10, 2005, A5). Lastly, the *Montreal Gazette* writes that the rest of us have an obligation too: to tone down the rhetoric and to avoid anything like a witch hunt or vigilante-ism; Homolka has to obey the law, but so does everyone else (June 7, 2005, A20).

In addition to attention from the news media, Homolka was garnering similar attention through the internet. Moreover, Correctional Service of Canada spokeswoman Michelle Pilon-Santilli was quoted in the Post saying: "Go on Google, type in her name and see how many hits you get. You'll get some death pools, you'll get hits that say 'Kill the demonic bitch'.... that kind of reference," (NP May 20, 2005, A10). However, criminologist Neil Boyd at Simon Fraser University critiqued the online threats, saying: "It's mostly people who feel they don't have a voice. That's why they spend a lot of time on the Internet," (NP June 20, 2005, A5). While online threats like that can't be ignored, the police were referenced in the *Montreal Gazette* (June 13, 2005, A10) as saying that the real danger to Homolka is from those who are not making public declarations of hatred. Furthermore, in contrast the *Toronto Star* (TS July 6, 2005, A02) countered this notion of vigilantism against Karla, saying:

"there exists not a single documented case of a felon ever being slain by vigilantes in modern Canada, according to Corrections officials. The only shooters Homolka might reasonably fear are those packing cameras and they are generally harmless if annoying..."

After falling out of the media spotlight, Homolka resurfaced in August of 2005 with another threat: of going back to prison. Richer LaPointe had hired Karla to work in his hardware store in August 2005, and only after three weeks on the job, he went to the *Toronto Sun* with claims that he had audiotape recordings that provided evidence that she had breached some of the conditions of her release. Among the details that Lapointe told the *Sun* were allegations that Homolka had asked him to help her find a temporary home for a son of a woman convicted of murder, had cooked a week's worth of meals for her boyfriend in Laval - whom Lapointe believed was imprisoned killer Jean-Paul Gerbet - and that Homolka was in touch with another person convicted of murder whom she met in a prison in western

Canada (MG Aug.24, 2005, A1). Despite such allegations, a police investigation found no evidence to support LaPointe's allegations and that was the end of that matter.

To conclude the discussion on Karla Homolka and the notion of dangerousness, the above themes illustrate that Karla Homolka can - within the two years of coverage - be seen as simultaneously representing danger, a lack of danger, and being in danger, all at once; images that conflict with, and even contradict itself. Evidently, this illustrates how Karla Homolka has been constructed, rather than merely presented to the public.

4.2.6. Karla is a "Celebrity"

With all of the notoriety surrounding her case and her release within the media frenzy, criticisms within the same coverage emerged stating that a celebrity had been born of the infamy. "She's basically a celebrity," criminologist Scot Wortley of the University of Toronto was quoted as saying in the *Montreal Gazette* (June 14, 2005, A14), "For the next few years, she is going to be subject to a lot of spying; a lot of reporters will be after her." A comment from the opinions section of the *Toronto Star* (June 1, 2005, A17) was more figurative: "Now after 12 short years in prison, Homolka has returned to the spotlight and her comeback tour is making headlines and in the process she retains a perverse, celebrity status." Moreover, the *Toronto Star* (June 10, 2005, B01) wrote:

"Movie stars, killers, corrupt politicians, terrorists, newlywed bimbo pop singers: If all these are of more or less equal value as news, in the current news-as-showbiz environment, they are also more or less equal as spectacle. That's the thing that really made breakfast hard to swallow those mornings: the very idea of Karla Homolka, the image-obsessed accomplice to torture and murder, as a star."

In addition, the *Toronto Star* (Jan.23, 2006, E01) had this to say when the *Karla* movie was finally released in theatres:

"It's official. Karla is a one-name celeb. You know, like pop stars Britney and Beyonce and Madonna. Only the first name is needed. But Karla is not a pop star. She's a serial killer."

Karla is even developing a fanbase. "I'm not a Karla stalker. I haven't even tried writing her. I just think it would be pretty cool to have sex with her if she was an escort." one man wrote in an online chat room (NP June 20, 2005a, A5). Another "fan" added: "I just hope she gives some back to her loyal fans who have been with her all these years... We love you Karla!!" (NP June 20, 2005a, A5). Criminologist Neil Boyd commented on such attention: "I don't understand that particular group of people... I think it's probably teenage boys who are thinking here's a cute bad girl," (NP June 20, 2005a, A5): He noted that much of the discussion of bedding Homolka is simply "Internet bravado," and doubts that many of the men would actually follow through on their supposed fantasies (NP June 20, 2005a, A5). He further comments: "I think there's a fascination with the cult of celebrity and certainly there's a perverse sense in which Homolka is a celebrity... She's an attractive woman if you ignore, of course, what she's all about. There's no shortage of men who are stupid and shallow enough to be interested," (NP June 20, 2005a, A5). Furthermore, despite such criticisms, these comments paradoxically reinforced the status of Homolka as "celebrity" because attention is still being drawn to her within this same context.

4.2.7. Karla the Movie

Graphic scenes of torture and the murders committed by Homolka and Bernardo are not depicted in the film *Karla*. There were simply too many details in the Homolka and Bernardo cases to be covered in one movie (TS Jan.23, 2006, A02). Instead, the movie focuses on Karla's character, which arguably leads to a construction of Homolka, or more theoretically, a construction (character in the film) based on a construction (a reviled criminal). This will be discussed next, along with an unanticipated finding: the notion of Karla Homolka as

representing "artistic injustice" (in addition to criminal injustice) due to the problems in releasing the film and the threat of the film being censored.

Michael Sellers, the film's writer/producer, insists that the movie does not glorify Karla and expressed his reasoning behind making the film:

"I was interested in the psychological process by which Karla went from a schoolgirl with no criminal record to the woman who a few years later helped Bernardo first capture, then kill, Kristen French. What happened on that journey? What took her from one step to another?" (TS Aug.13, 2005, A02).

Sylvain Gagne, vice-president of marketing and distribution for Christal Films, the company that brought the film to 100 theatres across Canada on Jan. 20, 2006 stated that the objective of the film was for: "...people to see it and make up their own minds about Karla and the way the justice system works," (MG Jan.11, 2006, D5; TS Jan.11, 2006, F04). On one hand the film stripped the story of the graphic details that garner public outrage, then focuses exclusively on Homolka's character, with the intention to "not be sympathetic" yet let audiences decide what to think of her. This inevitably deconstructs Karla's character and reconstructs it further towards her being mystifying, and in effect, as 'other'. The most this film can accomplish is to further leave audiences wondering "who" she "is".

While the media could not seem to report enough about Karla the person, the *Karla* movie was at risk of being censored. In March 2005, long before the movie was released, and without actually seeing the film, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty asked Ontarians to boycott the movie. "I certainly will not be viewing that movie and I guess my advice, and my encouragement to Ontarians, is that they would do the same," McGuinty said (MG Mar.24, 2005, A12; MG Mar.26, 2005, A26; NP Mar.28, 2005, A18). Consumer Minister Tim Watson pressed further, urging distributors in Canada not to show the "despicable" movie in their theatres (MG Mar.24, 2005, A12; TS Mar.24, 2005, A07). Likewise, Tim Danson

viewed that the festival's decision to host the international debut of the film in August 2005 "...as being extremely exploitive and sensational," said (MG July 27, 2005, A5; MG Aug 4, 2005, A7; TS July 27, 2005, F02). However, the premiere was cancelled. McGuinty even congratulated the Montreal film festival organizers for canceling the screening, which had been slated to take place in August 2005 (MG Aug.5, 2005, A7).

Quantum Entertainment producer Michael Sellers said he knew Air Canada, a sponsor of the Montreal festival, did not want its logo to be posted during the screening of *Karla*, and he believes the airline was among those sponsors pressing the festival to drop the movie (MG Aug.5, 2005, A7). He further argued that "It shouldn't be up to corporations or governments to determine which films Canadians can see," and that "It does raise rather interesting questions about free speech, artistic expression (and) government - and here, corporate control over access to art," (MG Aug.5, 2005, A7; TS Aug.5, 2005, D11). After all, he does raise the point that: "No one's being tied up in a chair and being forced to watch this film," (TS Aug.5, 2005, D11).

Within the news coverage on her release, Karla Homolka was initially found to represent injustice within a criminal justice context. Now, the *idea* of Karla (through celluloid representation) has come to symbolically represent injustice of artistic expression: "This is starting to elevate itself to the level of an injustice against the rights of artistic expression," Sellers argued, adding that "We need to work hard to make sure (*Karla*) does get a chance in Canada." (TS Aug.5, 2005, D11). This expands Frigon's (1996) notion of violent women as being both dangerous and in danger. In this case, the woman herself (Homolka) is *constructed* as being dangerous (i.e. through news coverage) and cast as in need of control (i.e. with release restrictions), while further constructions (i.e. the movie) were in danger of being censored, another form of control.

This marks the end of the discussion of Karla Homolka's character. Next will be a discussion of an unanticipated finding: the media's critique of the media's coverage on Homolka's release.

4.3. Emphasis on Karla's Appearance

The *Toronto Star* quoted a blogger who posted their view on the attention surrounding Homolka: "Well, of course the devil doesn't come dressed as a 300-lb., hairy, smelly, unattractive woman. That wouldn't be tempting, now would it?" (Apr.9, 2005, A01). In addition, the *National Post* wrote:

"...what makes the Homolka coverage particularly lurid is the distinct sense that she's being afforded a certain mystique deriving heavily from her physical appearance. It may not be conscious. Certainly, one hopes not. But if Karla looked like most inmates, rather than a photogenic blond, it's hard to imagine media outlets counting on photos of her to sell copy," (June 3, 2005, A18).

These quotes echo the findings of studies that analyzed news coverage on violent women and found that the women's appearances were emphasized during their trials, to the extent that their femininity appeared to also be 'on trial' (Frigon 2006; Knelman 1998). Similarly, this section will illustrate a distinct theme across the coverage in this study was the emphasis on Homolka's attractive appearance during specific episodes: a June 2005 court hearing - Karla's first public appearance since her 1993 testimony against Paul Bernardo - had sparked comments and critiques about Karla's "new look" from the press; her televised interview on July 4, 2005; in August 2005 when she was "found" working at a hardware store in Longueuil; during her December 2005 successful appeal of her release conditions; and in July 2006 when she was tracked down by a journalist.

4.3.1. Karla's June 2005 Court Hearing

It was Homolka's first appearance in public since she testified at Bernardo's trial almost exactly a decade ago. June 3, 2005 articles in all three newspapers had been devoted to her appearance at the hearing (MG June 3, A1; NP June 3, 2005, A1; TS June 3, A01). Later that month, a *Toronto Star* graphic artist Raffi Anderian even gave Homolka a variety of new looks by changing her makeup, hair colour and style (June 25, 2005, A16). Clearly preoccupied with this woman's appearance, the media dissected and critiqued her attire, hair, the look on her face, and her body. Reporters for the *National Post* gave a vivid description of Homolka's appearance, with emphasis on what she wore at the hearing:

"Clad in a tan-coloured suit and black turtleneck, the 35-year-old looked older but still fit, attractive and in command of herself. She entered the courtroom in leg irons and handcuffs, the hardware jangling loudly as she moved. The handcuffs were taken off soon after she arrived, but the leg irons stayed on. She wore her shoulder-length dark blonde hair straight, rather than curly," (NP June 3, 2005, A1).

Furthermore, "Everyone is saying her hair is black now," commented a sketch artist amongst the reporters who were waiting outside the Joliette courthouse (MG June 3, 2005, A4). The *Toronto Star* even gave a play-by-play commentary of Homolka's hair:

"Gone is the hard yellow Barbie-hair, crimped and coiled, replaced now with a sleek and tamed style that flips fetchingly around her face and shoulders, with a sculpted fringe tapered to one side. When she lowered her head as the details of her little sister's drugging and choking death were recounted - a white hanky pressed to her face - the hair fell forward like a curtain. But when she straightened back up, there was no evidence of tears, no dampness on her cheeks, no reddened eyes," (TS June 3, 2005, A01).

Judging Homolka by the look on her face, the *Montreal Gazette* noted that apart from one tear-streaked incident, Homolka sat mostly stone-faced in the prisoner's dock throughout the day-long hearing (June 3, 2005, A1). What hasn't changed, the *Star* wrote, are "those deadened eyes, that flat affected look. If the eyes are portals into the soul, then Homolka doesn't have one," (TS June 3, 2005, A01). Moreover, the *Star* continued to report: "so pale and slack-faced yesterday that she looked embalmed, her skin giving off a waxy sheen - left

the courtroom with just the slightest toss of her hair," (TS June 4, 2005, A01). In addition, a local in Joliette told the *Toronto Star*: "She didn't look like that horrible picture," referring to the familiar shot of Homolka doing that "wicked sideways glance" with her eyes (May 31, 2005, A06). Moreover, the *Gazette* further elaborated on Homolka's appearance through a comparison to Myra Hindley:

"Homolka is Canada's Myra Hindley... Like Homolka, England's Myra Hindley was a pretty bleached blond at the time of her crimes. There is a particular photograph of Hindley's face, like the photograph of Homolka with her eyes half-open, which became transformed into an instantly recognizable icon of evil," (MG June 30, 2005, A6).

This mirrors the conceptualization of Hindley's infamous photograph as an iconography of evil (Boritch 1994). In addition, Tim Danson had this to say about Karla that day in court: "She showed what I would call contrived emotion... As soon as those facts [about the crimes] were over, it was like snapping your fingers. She was right back without a scintilla of emotion.... That has a lot of the hallmarks of psychopathy," (NP June 3, 2005, A1).

Lastly, the *Toronto Star* was critical of her body that day:

"From the neck up, Homolka appears an attractive if largely expressionless woman, so cool and poised as a courtroom full of reporters takes her measure. The passing of time is more evident from the waist down, in the broadened hips and the doughy buttocks that are a couple of inches lower than they were back in '95, when last she appeared for public scrutiny," (June 3, 2005, A01).

4.3.2. Karla's Televised July 4, 2005 Radio-Canada Interview

The same afternoon that Karla was released from St. Anne-de-Plaines, she gave a televised interview to Radio-Canada in Montreal, and the media took this as an opportunity to critique her appearance. For instance, the *Montreal Gazette* reported: "Looking highly stressed and even fragile, speaking recognizable French, Homolka was not the inscrutable hard-eyed killer we have come *to think we know* (July 5, 2005, A16, italics added). This quote raises

this study's research question: "Who *is* Karla Homolka?" However, the *Toronto Star* persisted with the "familiar" Karla construction:

"Despite the way it has been portrayed in some quarters by Homolka rookies, that was no contrite criminal settling her buttocks comfortably into a talk-show style seat, crossing one capri-clad pant leg over the other, looking a little tired but hardly prison pasty. Not at all tremulous with nerves - the woman has nerves of steel - or po'-faced, as suggested by correspondents who had never before witnessed Homolka in Showtime mode. They don't realize that blanched is pretty much how she's always looked, save for the pseudo-punk period of teenage rebellion before she met a boy called Paul Bernardo," (July 6, 2005, A02).

4.3.3. Karla "Sighting" in August 2005 in Longueuil, QC

After the initial media frenzy alleviated in July 2005, there was little coverage on Homolka because nobody knew where she was or what she was doing. However, she was "found" the following month working at a hardware store in Longueuil in Montreal and the *Toronto Sun* splashed numerous photos of Karla licking ice cream, her new appearance, and her new dog. While a salesman who works across the street from the store, told the press: "She seemed like someone who had known a better life. I actually thought she was the co-owner," he said (MG Aug.23, 2005, A1), another local emphasized her attractiveness: "She's definitely a sight to see, *she's beautiful. Otherwise, I wouldn't have noticed her....*I thought she was bigger. ... This woman was small. She did not say a word. Just took her tea and left," (MG Aug.23, 2005, A1, italics added). Furthermore, since Karla's boss alleged to have evidence that she had violated her release conditions, attention quickly focused on that.

4.3.4. Karla's Restrictions Appeal Hearing

In December 2005 Karla successfully appealed all of the conditions that were imposed on her release in the previous June. There was no focus on her appearance in court that compares to the details discussed above. Tim Danson, however, insisted that Homolka "attempted to stare me down" in the courtroom, noting: "The same look that was on her face

as she was trying to stare me down in court was the same look on those videotapes," he said. "In my view, the risk is there," (TS Dec.1, 2005, A01). He believes he will see Homolka again, that the evil look he says he saw in the videotapes and in the Quebec courtroom will reveal itself again at some point. "I think it's inevitable," he said (NP Dec.29, 2005, A2).

4.3.5. Karla Confronted by a Global Reporter in July 2006

After months of being "out of the spotlight", Karla was "found" again in July 2006. This time by a Global reporter who had apparently been waiting for his chance to confront her since receiving a tip regarding her apartment's location the previous December. The journalist confronted her at a bus stop and her only reported words were "I have nothing to say," (MG July 26, 2006, A2). Instead, the reporter detailed what she was wearing: brown pants and a white top; her blond hair was tied back; and she carried a beige suede purse (MG July 26, 2006, A2). He also maintained her dangerous construction by saying that her neighbours are concerned.

Within the above findings lies an implicit gendered connotation; that there is something shocking about an *attractive* woman who commits violence. The *Toronto Star* took builds on this notion with a brief gender analysis/commentary that matches Homolka's with the infamous femme fatale character. This will be illustrated next.

4.4. Gender and the Media Coverage

One of the hypotheses of this study was that the media's intense reaction to Homolka's release was due to the fact that she was a woman who had engaged in violent crimes. When asked if she understood why people are so interested in her, comments from Karla herself supported this hypothesis: "I am a woman and it's very rare for a woman to do the kinds of

things I have done,” (CBC Online June 4, 2005). However, the hypothesis was arguably refuted since the qualitative analysis of the coverage found little direct mention of gender in relation to Homolka, her crimes, or the media frenzy around her release. And of the few articles that did, they mostly came from the *Toronto Star*, which recycled myths and stereotypes about violent women in its discussions. While this may suggest that gender *was* a factor on the media frenzy over her release, as indicated earlier, the hostility and revulsion towards her appeared to be primarily in response to her plea bargain and the feelings of injustice resulting from it; not simply due to the fact that she was a violent woman.

Seemingly in an effort to contextualize the media’s fixation on Karla Homolka, an article entitled “Long Before Feminism, Fatal Attraction” in the *Toronto Star* (July 9, 2005: H03) connects the media’s coverage on Homolka to the infamous *femme fatale* of the film noir era:

But the femme fatale - both fictional and actual - can still stop us dead. She fascinates us because she turns conventional morality on its head, and because she forces us to reconsider our most stubbornly enduring notions of what constitutes proper behaviour for men and women. Her remorselessness, intelligence, sexual appetite and naked ambition: as much as ever, these are the qualities that define outlaw femininity. As much as one may be made uneasy by the current media fixation with Karla Homolka, it is really only to be expected. Her case exhibits these qualities in pitch-black spades, and she is only the latest in a long line of cunning female criminals who rivet public attention in a way men so rarely do.

While the correlation may or may not have served to enlighten audiences in their understanding of who Karla Homolka is, such a correlation arguably blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction and inevitably perpetuates our perception of violent women by using fictional and stereotypical variables of understanding. While Karla’s crimes were sexual in nature, comparing her to the *femme fatale* decontextualizes the complexity of her case (which involved a male accomplice, one who also abused her, etc.), and places it into an all-familiar frame of understanding whereby the woman is assumed to defy femininity and achieves devious empowerment through manipulation of her sexuality. In addition, this

further blurs our understanding of Karla now, twelve years after the so-called femme fatality: leaving any potential to understand her in another context (if there is one) to be hindered.

Continuing with the gender stereotyping, an earlier article in the *Toronto Star* (May 29, 2005, A02) asked:

“How could an intelligent, attractive and ordinary young woman be involved in some of the most appalling crimes in Canadian history? Can her involvement in the killings be attributed to her being a battered spouse? Or is evil bred in the bone?”

Such questioning outcasts Karla from the gender role of “feminine” and ponders whether or not she is absolved of culpability because she is ‘mad’ (battered spouse) or guilty because she is ‘bad’ (evil). Again, the *Star* is maintaining the gender stereotypes that narrow the scope of understanding of violent women. Additional *Star* articles revisited the notion of Karla as dangerous, coupled with the fact that she is a woman. For example, quoting David Paciocco, a criminal law professor at the University of Ottawa: “There is no doubt a sincere concern about a woman with the capacity she's demonstrated to be simply walking out on the street,” (TS Apr.13, 2005, A01). Also in the *Star*:

“Because *there still exists this paternalistic view that a woman wouldn't commit such abominable crimes*, such sexually infused crimes, if not at the behest of a controlling and domineering man; as if Homolka can't make her own bed and assault victims in it,” (June 6, 2005, A02, emphasis added).

Furthermore, localizing this notion of female dangerousness, after hearing rumours that Karla expressed interest in settling in the Notre-Dame-de-Grace area of Montreal, a concerned mother, who has lived in N.D.G. for 40 years, stated: “We're not going to move because she's here, but we definitely will tell our (16-year-old) daughter to be careful of ladies her age... Usually we say beware of men; now we have to say beware of women also,” (MG May 6, 2005, A3).

Despite the *Toronto Star's* efforts in engaging in a gender analysis - or gender claims - the overall findings refute this hypothesis that Karla's gender fueled the media's

sensationalism. Instead the primary cause for her notoriety, appeared to be her plea bargain (which enabled her release), as indicated by quotes at the beginning of this chapter. The outrage seemed to thus be a result of “she got off easy for her crimes” as opposed to “a *woman* committed those crimes??”

4.5. Deconstructing the Coverage of Homolka’s Interview

In Homolka’s televised Radio-Canada interview on the afternoon of her release on July 4, 2005, she discussed her mindset during her crimes, her activities while in prison, her feelings about her crimes, claims that she is not dangerous, and what she would like to do now that she is released. Summarizing what I think were the main points arguably risks misinterpreting, decontextualizing, or even silencing certain comments. Therefore, her interview’s transcript is included in Appendix 2 to allow all of her words to be seen. Furthermore, while references to her interview are found throughout this chapter, and under different contexts of analysis, the following is a discussion of the subsequent coverage that followed the interview and contained references to it. Taking a deconstructionist approach, I hypothesized that Homolka’s interview would be minimally referenced in the news reports that followed the interview. I further hypothesized that if referenced, her voice would be selectively cited to support any preconstructed claims/frames about her in the news media. Both hypotheses were supported. Moreover, of the 27 articles referencing her interview, 13 referenced her desire to have a Tim Horton’s ice cappuccino. While she offered constructions of her character that countered the hostile constructions illustrated in this chapter, the media’s decision to focus mainly on the cappuccino illustrates how certain voices and perspectives get ignored and silenced in media coverage on crime. It also it illustrates how small details can be emphasized, reinterpreted, and used against the speaker

as a means of drawing attention away from more important parts that speaker may have wanted emphasized, which in this case, was used to reinforce the construction of Homolka as a “villain”. Each newspaper’s coverage of her interview will be discussed next.

4.5.1. *Montreal Gazette*

Between July 5 and Oct.24, 2005 eight *Montreal Gazette* articles referenced Karla’s interview using direct quotes, or to something she said. Two articles (2/8) summarized the interview (MG July 5, A1; MG July 6, 2005, A8), and without an “anti-Karla” tone. Moreover, the *Gazette* was the most humanistic of the three sources, as three (3/8) articles chose to focus some attention on the statements Karla had made regarding her feelings specifically, for example: “I cry often.... I’m unable to forgive myself,” and “I think of what I’ve done, and then often I think I don’t deserve to be happy because of it,” (MG July 5, 2005, A1). Furthermore, two editorials (2/8 articles) criticized the purpose of the interview, saying she played the “the poor-me-I-was-a-victim-card” through her “sanitized version of events” (MG July 8, 2005, A21), later critiquing that “...it’s the repentant’s form of the insanity plea: She was an innocent bewitched by a devil,” (MG July 7, 2005, A19). Lastly, a trend across all sources was reference to her desire to have an iced cappuccino from Tim Horton’s. Six *Gazette* articles (6/8) made indirect references (i.e. not direct quotes) to this, including:

“As Karla Homolka giggled in her first, exclusive post-prison TV interview that she was dying to try a Tim Hortons iced cappuccino, Dan Mahaffy was at his murdered daughter’s graveside,” (MG Oct.24, 2005, A1).

The *Toronto Star* (TS July 6, 2005, A12) referenced this quote as well. Going to Tim Horton’s is something which Canadians frequently do in their daily routines. Yet this was arguably yet another newsmaking tool for journalists to reinterpret against Homolka as a means of casting her as a villain.

4.5.2. National Post

Between July 5 and Dec.17, 2005, six *National Post* articles referenced Karla's interview using direct quotes, or references to something she said. The day following the interview an article summarized the interview (NP July 5, 2005, A1), but afterwards the focus shifted onto her desire to have an iced cappuccino from Tim Horton's (3/5 articles), calling the request "painful" (NP Dec.29, 2005, A2). Also, similar to the *Toronto Star's* focus, the *Post* noted that a Tim Hortons spokesperson insisted that there is "no relationship between ... a successful company and her comments," (NP Aug 24, 2005, A3). Moreover, Ken Wong, a marketing professor with Queen's University critiqued the comment: "If anything it just ensconces them [Tim Horton's] as a Canadian icon," (NP July 6, 2005, A1). These comments imply that going to Tim Horton's is something that Canadians do, that it is iconic; a characteristic of this country, similar to the stereotype that we all love hockey. It also implies that it is something characteristic of "us" and that Homolka is thus undeserving of being one of us and sharing a common identity.

Lastly, two articles (2/5) involved criticisms of her interview. In a letter to the editor, a woman from Richmond Hill, ON hoped: "I can only hope people aren't buying her act," (NP July 6, 2005, A15). Moreover, Tim Danson had more explicit views:

"...no one should be fooled by the killer's calculated performance in her televised interview... she is still a danger.... Karla Homolka... will find other people like Paul Bernardo or the Bernardos of the world will find her," (NP July 6, 2005, A4).

Danson's comments not only maintain the anti-Karla discourse which he was responsible for promoting throughout the entire coverage, but also, he is making claims with which people can easily digest and identify with. The result is a damaged perception of anything to the contrary that Homolka may have attempted to communicate in her interview.

While the media frenzy surrounding Homolka's release continued into August of that summer, one would be left in the dark about the fact that she had given the world a chance to hear her perspective because Karla's voice about her own experience as Karla Homolka was for the most part, silenced. While there were summaries of the interview, references tended to criticize her comments through frames that constructed her as dangerous and manipulative. The news coverage therefore did not fully represent Karla Homolka's perspective and it illustrates how the news media have the power to communicate certain perspectives (i.e. "Karla is dangerous") over others (i.e. "I don't want people to think I am dangerous...") which resulted in this woman's constructed "identity" being skewed towards dominant interests (i.e. those that insist she is a danger to society). Moreover, it suggests that the media are willing to talk all about her, but without her involvement. She was a subject for the media's inquiry but was often not accepted as a credible source, despite the fact that she was the subject.

4.5.3. *Toronto Star*

Between July 5 and Sept.24, 2005, thirteen *Toronto Star* articles referenced Karla's interview using direct quotes, or references to something she said, making it the source with the most references. Only one (1/13) article (TS July 5, 2005, A08) summarized the interview, while the most targeted issue was the notion of dangerousness, found in nearly half of the coverage (5/12 articles). One article noted that she said she can never forgive herself, maintained she is not a dangerous woman, with the quote: "I don't want to be hunted down," (TS July 5, 2005, A01; TS July 5, 2005, A07). Similar quotes include: "insisting she's not at risk to reoffend" (TS July 9, 2005, A24), "...she did her best to persuade the public she is no longer a dangerous person (TS July 5, 2005, A14).

The second most referenced element was her desire for an iced cappuccino from Tim Horton's (4/12 articles). Two of these articles shifted the discussion towards the various products that known criminals enjoy (TS July 9, 2005, H09), and any impact this correlation may have on the business. Greg Skinner, the spokesman for Tim Hortons insisted: "We had faith in our customers that they knew there was no association with Tim Hortons and her," (TS Sept.24, 2005, D01).

Two articles (2/12) entailed explicit criticisms of her statements about her feelings of remorse, calling her a "Shameless little liar" who is "Out of jail, still pulling the strings" (TS July 5, 2005, A01) in her "televised seduction," (TS July 6, 2005, A02). And finally, one article (1/12) played with the notion of her gender as the reason for the media interest:

But she's not home free. The burnished image of Homolka as remorseful penitent will fade quickly enough and a competitive press will awaken from its collective trance to pick up the scent. Because, as Homolka put it herself: "I am a woman and it's rare for a woman to do the kinds of things I've done," (TS July 6, 2005, A02).

The last section relating to the notion of Homolka's character is discussion of coverage on the Karla movie. The film focused on (constructed) character development as opposed to graphic violence pertaining to her crimes, with the purpose of leaving the "truth" up to the audience. This arguably further constructs the Homolka as mysterious; as 'other'. Also, an unanticipated finding in this coverage emerged: the notion of Karla Homolka as representing "artistic injustice" (in addition to criminal injustice).

4.6. The News Media's Critique of the News Coverage on Karla's Release

In the midst of the media circus and competitive reporting surrounding Karla's release, an unanticipated finding involved criticisms of the news coverage. While the typical justification for the coverage was that the public "has a right to be informed" (MG June 30, 2005, A6; NP June 30, 2005, A4; TS July 5, 2005, A14), and that it responded to the public's

fears (MG July 5, 2005, A16; TS Apr.9, 2005, A01), comments from journalists and various sources criticized the media for various issues, including: how the media had turned Karla into a celebrity; how competition for details created sensationalized coverage, and compromises the public's trust in journalism; how the media frenzy distracted attention away from her plea bargain; criticism of the coverage from teenagers; surveys indicating that the public wanted the frenzy to be over, and the notion of this frenzy having a negative affect on her successful reintegration was raised.

Various "expert" sources and journalists themselves criticized the magnitude of the coverage and amount of details about Homolka that were being reported. For example, Christine Champagne of the Quebec Elizabeth Fry Society commented: "I have seen very serious criminals in the past... but this is the first time I've seen it amplified this way in the media," (MG June 20, 2005, A3). Moreover, the *National Post* (June 3, 2005, A18) commented:

"Through it all, we've been treated to an abundance of childhood photos, analysis of her love life and detailed descriptions of her clothing and hairstyles. For those who've never picked up a copy of *Us* magazine, this is what an extremely macabre edition would look like."

Likewise, despite being criticized by its competition, the *Toronto Star* even criticized its own contribution to the media frenzy, calling it "exploitation and sensationalism":

"...the stories are clearly little more than tabloid-type ploys to boost audiences. What's more, everybody's got an "exclusive" - a nyah-nyah term for "we have an interview with Homolka's high school principal and you don't." As if those tellings add anything to the public interest. It's a cliché to say this but it's true: it's as if Bernardo and Homolka's victims, 15-year-old Kristen French and 14-year-old Leslie Mahaffy, are *being victimized over and over again*. *There's even a media frenzy over the media frenzy*. (Even writing this column makes me feel a little sleazy.) But *much of what is now making the news is exploitation and sensationalism* (May 10, 2005, C05, italics added).

Also, the *Gazette* even implied that such coverage was actually diverting attention from those who struck the deal with her that allowed her release to be happening:

"The hysteria, ridiculous rumours (Horrors, she dyed her hair black!!!) and fear -mongering of recent weeks (fuelled, I'm embarrassed to say, by the media, which were so desperate for

stories from Joliette that some reporters interviewed each other) have successfully diverted attention from those responsible for this fiasco - much to their relief, no doubt," (MG June 5, 2005, D8).

The newsmaking aspect itself - the journalism behind the coverage on Homolka's release - was criticized as being celebrity journalism that makes a mockery of journalism. For example, a *National Post* (June 3, 2005, A18) article entitled "Making Karla a Star" criticized the newsmaking:

"...obviously, the release of a serial killer into some unsuspecting community is newsworthy in and of itself. But what we've seen in the past couple of weeks goes beyond the way crime stories are normally covered. What it is, instead, is a rather nauseating brand of celebrity journalism in which we're making a star of a notorious rapist and murderer in order to sell copy."

Similarly, the *Toronto Star* (Apr.9, 2005, A01) quoted Robert Thompson, a popular-culture professor at Syracuse University, as saying: "...excessive coverage begins to create its own culture of pathology and makes celebrities of criminals...Do you feed the public interest or do you serve the public interest, and what is the best interest of the public? Those are the questions for the media." In addition, almost two months after she was released the *Toronto Star* asked: "Is the media going too far in its pursuit of convicted killer Karla Homolka?" (Aug.26, 2005, A04). In that same article, John Miller, a professor of journalism at Toronto's Ryerson University, was quoted as saying that "most of the coverage surrounding Homolka is overkill." He went so far as to say that "...to get pictures of Karla in the street and find out all the dirt we can on her? I think that descends into a mockery of journalism." He blamed poor ethical decisions by the country's news media, which he said is eroding the public's trust in journalism (TS Aug.26, 2005, A04).

In addition to comments from expert sources and self-criticism from journalists, quotes from teenagers - the very people that were alleged to be threatened by, and afraid of Karla once she was released - also criticized the coverage. For instance, Elyse, a teenager in

Montreal, criticized the frenzy, saying that "People in general make it seem like she's gonna come out and kill us all." (TS July 16, 2005, L06). Mike, another teenager believed that the intense media coverage and discussion surrounding Karla's release encourages evil: "People who read about this stuff get corrupted," he warns, "They're making a lot of people scared by constantly talking about it." (TS July 16, 2005, L06). Moreover, a local resident in Joliette, QC disregards the hype: "Karla Homolka isn't scary. What's scary is how the media decides what people should be scared of," (MG June 3, 2005, A4).

Comments from the public even demanded that Karla be left alone (NP Aug.25, 2005, A17; NP Aug.23, 2005, A17; TS July 16, 2005, L06). Moreover, even before her release date, a poll of *Montreal Gazette* readers found that 61% of respondents thought that the media was paying too much attention to Homolka (MG June 4, 2005, A2). Similarly, according to a telephone survey of 1,500 people between July 5 and July 11, 64% of Canadians believed the media devoted too much coverage to Homolka's release from prison on July 4th (TS Aug.29, 2005, A20). Despite being constructed as dangerous, once Homolka was actually released, people were eventually getting tired of hearing about her, which implies that the media's representation of her was built on constructed claims about concerns that failed to materialize into realities.

In addition to criticizing the media frenzy, and despite the anti-Karla discourse employed within this frenzy, various "credible" sources were also used in discussion surrounding the risk that the frenzy posed on Karla's reintegration, and what needs to be done to ensure a successful reintegration. Moreover, comments on the potential negative impact the media frenzy had on Karla's transition into society was noted by various sources:

"I think there are far more dangerous people than her who are released on a fairly regular basis who don't garner nearly as much attention. The attention awaiting Homolka upon her

release could make her reintegration into society a difficult prospect," -Steve Sullivan of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (MG June 14, 2005, A14).

"The media have to be aware that [Karla] is in a period of rehabilitation, and the greater the pressure on her, the more difficult her rehabilitation will be. She has a right to rehabilitation... Beyond the law, is it ethical to deprive someone of that?" -Denis Barrette, Quebec Civil Liberties Union (MG June 30, 2005, A6).

Likewise, Johanne Vallee, executive director of l'Association des services de rehabilitation sociale du Quebec, a Montreal umbrella organization of 50 Quebec groups that provide services to convicts and ex-convicts, said Dalton McGuinty's comments [i.e. "more restrictions, the better"] were hurting Homolka's transition into Canadian society and that "We must not create a context where we contribute to her social isolation," (MG June 1, 2005, A13). Even Karla herself noted the importance of having social support: "...it's true that I am less well known here [in Quebec] and that is an advantage for me. I think I can re-make my life.... I have a support network here that is very important," (CBC Online June 4, 2005). In addition, Ruth Gagnon, executive director of the Elizabeth Fry Society (EFS) Quebec, noted that "Ensuring a smooth transition will also better protect the public by making it less likely she might re-offend," (NP May 10, 2005, A5).

4.7. Discussion

The above findings will now be used to address this study's research question: "According to the Canadian News Media, who is Karla Homolka?" Homolka was constructed in various contexts throughout the two years of news coverage, and the various claims were made about her. This information was used to create a profile of her and this will be presented next. Considering the numerous contexts in which she was discussed, especially the severe and hostile claims made about her character and the implications of her release, the notion of a character that Canadians are "familiar" with and have come to "know" extends the current academic understanding of this woman. A discussion of the media's representation of

Homolka in relation to Baudrillard's *simulation* and *hyperreality* conceptualizations will conclude the chapter.

4.7.1. Who is Karla Homolka?

Following a qualitative content analysis of the *Montreal Gazette*, *National Post*, and *Toronto Star* articles covering Karla Homolka's release from prison between July 2004 and July 2006, it is concluded that according to the Canadian news media, Karla Homolka is:

- one of Canada's most notorious female offenders
- best known by most Canadians for her role in assisting her former husband Paul Bernardo in the kidnapping, raping, and murders of Kristen French, Leslie Mahaffey, and her own sister Tammy Homolka in the early 1990s
- reviled for her 1993 plea bargain
- manipulative
- a danger to the public / threat to public safety
- a celebrity/star

These are the dominant themes found in the coverage that construct a representation of "who" Karla Homolka "is".

If anyone was unfamiliar with the highlights of the Karla Homolka case, or perhaps needed their memory refreshed, all they had to do is read one of the articles from any of the newspapers analyzed in this study where Karla was the subject. Since most articles are routinized with Karla updates and recaps of specific episodes that typically present her in a negative tone, it can be argued that the coverage of this woman was a discourse in and of itself: an *anti-Karla* discourse, a production and reproduction of one-sided frames that construct her character negatively, regardless of whether or not they actually were/are. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the level of knowledge about Karla and her release that readers would have obtained by the news coverage would have depended on how much they followed the coverage. Unless people followed the coverage in detail (daily, different sources), they may have missed valuable criticisms communicated by and against the media

which may have had an impact on their perception of her and her release. Minor attention, such as skimming articles, may have left audiences with a repetition of information about her crimes and her case which would have resulted in a limited representation of what was communicated in the overall coverage, and therefore, an even more limited representation of Karla Homolka.

4.7.2. “Karla” vs. Karla

My qualitative analysis of two years worth of coverage on Karla Homolka’s release, suggested to me that Baudrillard’s notion of *simulation* cannot be ignored, for the news media may have simulated a “Karla Homolka.” If she is not as much of a risk to society as the media portrays, then she is assumed or pretended to have what she does not have: a high level of risk to reoffend; a threat to public safety, etc. Therefore the difference between what is presented as real in the news reports and what may be real in reality, has become blurred.

Berger and Luckman (1967: 131) posit that individuals are born into an objective social structure whereby definitions (i.e. media portrayals) of what is to be accepted as objective reality are imposed on them by ‘significant others’ (i.e. news agencies and sources) who filter aspects of the world to them in accordance to their own location in the social structure (i.e. organizational constraints of newsmaking). Pfohl (1994: 355) simplifies this, noting that through the process of objectification there is a socialization whereby these ‘filtered aspects’ - or symbols - become experienced as natural realities; forgotten is the fact that these symbols were an arbitrary way of naming something, a derivative of prior symbolic externalization. And as institutionalized versions of social reality, these symbols operate as controls over what we experience as real. Relating this to the study, consider the following quotes found in the coverage:

"Most *everyone* alive in Canada today *knows* about her case..." (TS Apr.9, 2005, A01, italics added).

"This story has somehow become so personal to Canada, it's somehow like all of Canada has become the extended family of the victims ... so it seems like so many Canadians have *internalized this story as personal* to them," (TS Jan.17, 2006, C06, italics added).

"I am not interested in the punishment of Homolka, I am vitally interested in seeing that she does not have the opportunity ever again to commit the horrible acts *we know her to have committed*," (NP June 4, 2005, A21, italics added).

"...the woman *best known* for her role in assisting her husband, Paul Bernardo, in the kidnappings, rapes and murders of two teenage girls in the early 1990s," (NP July 10, 2004, RB8, italics added).

"Karla Homolka is one of the most notorious killers in Canadian history. There is no need to go over the depravity of her crimes here -- they are *seared into the memories of most Canadians*," (NP Dec.1, 2005, A20, italics added).

"Looking highly stressed and even fragile, speaking recognizable French, Homolka was not the inscrutable hard-eyed killer *we have come to think we know*," (MG July 5, 2005, A16, italics added).

The interview... identified her with the place where she hopes to resume a normal life, Quebec, a place where much of the populace has little idea *who or what Homolka is...*" (MG July 7, 2005, A19, italics added).

"She may be the devil incarnate, but *she's the devil we know*," (MG May 7, 2005, A7, italics added).

"Now that everybody *knows* her, how could anybody be kidnapped by her?!" (MG June 30, 2005, A7, italics added).

These quotes imply that there is a consensus that Canadians know who Karla Homolka is, and that "someone" is a kidnapper, rapist, and killer of girls. The mere mention of her name will stir emotions. Following Becker (1963/1973), he might conclude not only conclude that her master status is "deviant" or "criminal", but also that her own name is a master status in itself since it is well-known and has the ability to stir people's emotions and trigger memories and thoughts about the crimes she was involved in. The following quote from the *Gazette* sums up this notion:

"The thinking is that Homolka reckons Quebec to be an easier place to live than the rest of Canada, where *her name is equated with depravity*. We predict that she will discover to her dismay that her new neighbours are well acquainted with *her reputation*," (MG May 7, 2005, A30, emphasis added).

While Homolka noted how she was a peer counselor while in prison and wishes to help people once released (CBC Online July 4, 2005), her own words suggest that there is more to her character than the media represents; that she may not even be the same person - to the extent, or at all - that the media and certain sources claim and construct her to be. Her virtual social identity may thus not equate with her actual social identity (Goffman 1963). However, as Frigon (2006: 3) writes:

“throughout modern history, representations of women who kill oscillate between fascination, eroticization, pity, disgust, and repulsion. Straddled between these characterizations, the actual women who kill in this visual culture, in fact, disappear; they are effectively erased.”

In this sense, the virtual social identity of women who kill envelops the actual, leaving their identities ‘spoiled’. Likewise, Homolka’s interview was dissected and realigned with pre-constructed images of her, or simply ignored: an erasure of her own perspective, and preservation of stigma. Derrida (1976: 36) writes that:

“Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where... one thinks as of the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin become ungraspable.”

Taking Derrida’s perspective, my findings suggest that people may not be able to distinguish between the news media’s representation of Karla Homolka and the actual Karla Homolka because the media only offer one representation: the ‘spoiled’ Karla. Evidently, it appears that the news media has not so much represented Karla Homolka, but rather, socially constructed a *simulation* of Karla Homolka: a character named “Karla” that Canadians have all come to “know”; a *hyperreal* character that is more “real” and familiar to Canadians than the actual Karla (because we do not actually know her). This “Karla Homolka” represents the real, actual, and physical Karla Homolka who resides somewhere in Montreal, under a different name, and now mothers a child; details which seem irrelevant because most people

will never know her, get acquainted with her, and will never know if there is a distinction between the Karla we “know” and the Karla that “is”. Furthermore, Baudrillard writes that to simulate is to pretend to have what one does not have - as in going to bed and pretending you are sick when really you are not - and says that simulation threatens the difference between what is “true” and “false,”; between what is “real” and imaginary,” (1988/2001: 170-171). Moreover, he writes that representation starts from the principle that the sign (i.e. media constructs of Karla Homolka) and the real (i.e. the actual Karla Homolka) are equal, and representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, whereas simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum (1988/2001: 173). This occurs in four stages:

- 1) an image reflects a basic reality, it is a good appearance, a representation;
- 2) the image masks and perverts a basic reality, it is an evil appearance;
- 3) the image masks the absence of a basic reality: it plays at being an appearance; and
- 4) the image bears no resemblance to any reality whatever, it is its pure simulacrum: a simulation (Baudrillard 1988/2001: 173).

Constructed images of Karla Homolka may have absorbed realistic representations of her (if they existed at all), distorted them, and thus created a simulation of her: a “Karla” that we have all come to “know.” However, “Karla” the representation still has and may always have an affiliation to the flesh and blood Karla since identities of both characters are defined by the same crimes; the master status of each character is the same. So “Karla” may or may not be a true simulation of Karla in Baudrillard’s terms.

The creation of the film *Karla*, further validates this notion of “Karla Homolka” as being a social construction, and shifts the image further towards hyperreality than reality. If anything, the film adds to the mystery, the “enigma” that has come to characterize “Karla Homolka.” The movie is an artistic expression, an interpretation, of Karla Homolka’s role in her infamous crimes with Paul Bernardo, leaving the viewers to decide what they think her

role actually was. The film has taken advantage of the sensationalized media coverage (of “Karla”) and reconstructed the events in such a way as to try and get viewers to make “real” analyses about what actually happened to Karla; what lead her to commit the crimes, or, what prevented her from allowing them to commence. Arguably, if people watch the film, they are still left wondering who or what Karla “is”, thus leaving preconceived ideas and images to influence what people “know” or think we know about this woman. Myths and stereotypes surrounding explanations of violent women (i.e. she is manipulative, dangerous, ‘bad’) are thus granted opportunities to perpetuate through the hyperreality of “Karla Homolka.”

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This chapter will address the highlights of this study in relation to its objectives, the limitations of this study, and conclude the thesis with recommendations for future research.

For over a century now, scholars have been talking about and trying to explain women using who use violence using the same concepts: she is 'bad' or 'mad'. If neither of those two fit, she is 'other', a fail-safe category that ceases to enhance any understanding of these people because placing them in that category, in itself, implies that we do not understand them and had no other category of explanation to assign them to. The conclusion is often reached that these people cannot be understood and scholars (and journalists) resort to recycling these myths, whether it is intentional, consciously, or not. Therefore a new methodology is needed (Ballinger 1996) to think outside of this narrow box and to enlighten our understanding as to "who" violent women "are". I proposed to start by dismantling the plural concept "violent women" by acknowledging the plurality of the concept itself, and how differences between violent women render them incapable of being understood using a generalizing formula. One violent woman was selected as a subject for analysis and this was approached through a qualitative media analysis of Karla Homolka's release from prison as a case study, since the media are one of the top sources of information of crime for the public (Ericson et al. 1987; Schissel 1997). This thesis has demonstrated that our understanding of this one specific violent woman at the time of her release could not be enhanced through information presented through the analyzed news coverage because the very framework of understanding violent women that I sought to surpass ('mad'/'bad'/'other') was found to actually characterize the news coverage on Karla's release, making references to such concepts unavoidable.

However, what this media analysis did accomplish was an understanding of the newsmaking processes involved in reporting Homolka's release (i.e. the use of sources, play-by-play updates) and how the Canadian news media sensationalized her story (i.e. through tabloid-style journalism, 'celebrity journalism', competition to report details, criticisms of the coverage itself, etc.). Moreover, this study illustrated the benefits of including each individual article within a selected time frame in a qualitative analysis. Essentially, if one were to garner their knowledge of this woman from the news media within the two years surrounding her release, their understanding of her would have been biased from dominating discourses of crime prevention and law and order, which was the backbone of the anti-Karla discourse umbrella. While conflicting and sometimes contradicting perspectives were offered, they were buried within these discourses, to the extent that they may be overlooked, leaving audiences without the need to think critically about what they are absorbing. However, the qualitative analysis of each article allowed these perspectives to be heard (i.e. the media's own critique of the media's coverage), and illustrated how Homolka's voice (i.e. through her interview) was dissected and silenced as a source. This all-inclusive case study therefore illustrates the dynamics of story-telling in crime newsmaking and how valuable information can be missed if a selective method was employed. What can be derived from the findings then, is not an understanding of who Karla Homolka "really" is, but rather, who the media constructed her to be.

5.1. Implications for Future Studies

The claim that Karla was dangerous and posed a threat to public safety raises the potential for at least two areas of further studies. First, a qualitative survey of public opinion, through various sampling methods, could be used to measure the public's opinion/perception on

Karla Homolka and to also find out how these perceptions developed to find any correlation with the media representation found in this study. If people come to “understand” her through other means, what are they, and what would such finding indicate about the relevance of sensationalized media coverage? Second, the question of what affect the media coverage may have on the reintegration of offenders should be further explored to find out if the media have a negative impact on the recidivism rates or even the mental health of offenders. If the media do have a negative impact, ways to alleviate such impacts could be explored. Moreover, the ideal extension of this research would be to interview Karla Homolka herself and ask her questions about her experience of being released from prison into society, with emphasis on how she feels about the media coverage surrounding her. For instance, does she think that the media has had a negative impact on her reintegration, if so, how? Did the “hype” die down to the point where it was/is not a concern for her? Does she feel she is constantly being watched by the news media? Such knowledge may humanize this violent woman, and challenge the media constructions and well as the ‘bad’/‘mad’/‘other’ framework of understanding women who commit violence.

Overall, different theoretical and methodological approaches used in understanding women who commit violence increase the likelihood of enhancing our understanding of them as individuals. Until we accomplish this, we may continue to face difficulties in developing an understanding them as a group if we cease to acknowledge the differences between them first.

5.2. Limitations of this Study

There were risks and limitations associated with my qualitative framework for analysis, and my source selection. First, there was the risk of a researcher bias, where certain themes being

analyzed may have unintentionally been given privilege over others in the analysis of the articles. In addition, the issue of a potential source selection bias cannot be ruled out. Although there is justification for the choice of newspapers to analyze, they were not randomly chosen. Their accessibility through online databases was a deciding factor. Less accessible sources may or may not have achieved similar findings. Also, the findings may or may not be biased towards the Canadian English press since French media were excluded. The all-English source selection therefore risks neglecting to analyze for a potential cultural difference between how English and French newspapers constructed Karla Homolka.

Lastly, this work is entirely exploratory; a qualitative endeavor that sought to visualize the picture that the media has painted of this woman during this moment in time. The findings will therefore not be able to be generalized beyond the scope of this study, which may be seen as a limitation. However, the findings cannot and should not be generalized to encompass the experiences of other or all violent women because the subject is not all violent women; she is Karla Homolka.

Appendix 1

Conditions Placed on Karla Homolka's Release²

On June 3, 2005 Quebec Judge Jean Beaulieu imposed the following conditions on Karla Homolka, upon her release from prison. They were to be in effect for one year following her release, but all were subsequently lifted six months later.

1. She must keep the peace and be of good conduct
2. At her departure from prison [Homolka] must report to the police station closest to her residence, either in Montreal or another city, between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., and confidentially advise police of her address, her occupation and the names of people with whom she lives. She must advise police of any changes in that regard and of any changes to her first or last name.
3. Report to police on the first Friday of every month, between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.
4. Must advise police four days before any change of address or change of occupation.
5. If she plans to leave her home for more than 48 hours, she must provide police with a detailed itinerary 72 hours in advance. The itinerary must specify her destinations, the route she will take, addresses where she will stay and names of people who accompany her and the length of her stay.
6. If she leaves Quebec, she must give police four days in advance an itinerary that specifies her destinations, the route she will take, addresses where she will stay and names of people who accompany her and the length of her stay. If traveling by plane, she must provide flight number, time of departure and time of arrival. If by train or bus, she must give time of departure and arrival. If by car, must give licence plate number.
7. She cannot associate with or contact, directly or indirectly, people she knows to have been convicted of violent crimes, except in the context of her therapy.
8. She cannot contact, directly or indirectly, Paul Bernardo, also known as Paul Teale, or the members of his family.
9. She cannot contact directly or indirectly the victim known in proceedings as Jane Doe, or the members of her family; the victim Nicole T., or the members of her family; the families of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French.
10. She is prohibited from possession of drugs.
11. She is prohibited from occupying a job where she has access to tranquilizers like the ones used to assault her victims.
12. She is prohibited from accepting a job or volunteer position where she will be in position of trust or authority over people under 16 years old.
13. She must actively participate in all therapy as designated by the therapist who has been seeing her during her incarceration. Judge Beaulieu recommended that the government pay for her therapy.
14. As agreed to by Homolka, she must submit a DNA sample before her release.

² Blackwell, T. (June 4, 2005) 'Beautiful' relationship with inmate: Homolka: Prison officials have warned her about boyfriend. *National Post*, national edition, A4.

Appendix 2

Karla Homolka's Radio-Canada Interview Transcript³

JOYCE NAPIER: Journalist, Radio-Canada

So, Karla Homolka and Sylvie Bordelais it's been about two hours since you've been out of jail. This is the first phase of this beginning. Ms. Bordelais, why have you chosen to come here?

SYLVIE BORDELAIS: Lawyer for Karla Homolka

Because it was important to sensitize people to the fact that my client has two choices. Either she lives like a trapped animal, and we don't know what could happen, or she takes the time to come here and meet people and give them her point of view and perhaps to explain a little who she is and what she wants to do. So, we chose this second option and to come to what we consider a serious media outlet and that's why we're here this afternoon, so she can take the time to speak to you and to present herself to the people as well. We've heard a lot about her from all kinds of people who said they knew her and have all kinds of different reasons to talk about her, whereas now she's here and she can talk for herself and explain what her goals are and what it's been like for her.

NAPIER:

You told me there are people you want to thank because they helped you.

BORDELAIS:

That's true and my client will tell you more about that, but speaking for me personally, I have received many e-mails, letters and phone calls from people who wanted to offer her a place to live: they've offered apartments, people offered jobs and money to my client and I have not had a chance to thank them personally. There are people from across Canada and even farther away, and I have to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them. Because, there have been times when there were just the two of us, before other lawyers became involved, we were alone and often we'd receive a letter or a phone call and people would say, 'What you are hearing in the media does not reflect what everyone thinks.' But I also need to mention that there are people who are ready to open their homes and to offer support to allow for a successful social rehabilitation.

NAPIER:

Karla Homolka, you've been in jail for 12 years for crimes that have received a lot of media attention across the whole country. And with the whole media frenzy that has occurred over the last few days, what was it like to leave jail?

HOMOLKA:

I think I don't fully realize that I am out yet. I'm nervous, anxious. It's hard to describe.

NAPIER:

But how did you get out? Was it a car? Did you have to hide? How did you get out? Were you followed? How did it happen?

HOMOLKA:

We were hidden. Ms. Bordelais had a plan and we followed it and we were not followed and we came here without any problems.

NAPIER:

And you stayed hidden in the car until you arrived here?

³ CBC News Online (July 4, 2005) INDEPTH: BERNARDO - Homolka Interview Translation. http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/bernardo/homolka_interview.html. (Translation provided by CBC Montreal).

HOMOLKA:

Yes, yes.

NAPIER:

Where were you hidden?

HOMOLKA:

In the back of, I don't know what you call it, in the back of the car.

NAPIER:

So, you know the media were really waiting for you outside the prison. They were even camped outside the detention centre at Ste-Anne-des-Plaines. Do you understand why people are so interested in you?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, and no. Yes, because I've done terrible things, that's for sure. And I am a woman and it's very rare for a woman to do the kinds of things I have done. And no because there are a lot of people who get out of jail every day who have also done terrible things. But I think I understand more that I don't understand.

NAPIER:

It's been 12 years. We heard you under cross-examination, we heard you through affidavits and through the voice of your lawyers, but never from you directly. How come you decided today, two hours after being freed to finally speak to us in the media and through us, to the public?

HOMOLKA:

It was a very difficult decision to take because I am a very private person and I don't like to talk about my feelings. I want to keep things to myself but it is not possible. So I decided, with my lawyer, that this was the best thing to do because I don't want to be hounded and I don't want people to think that I am a dangerous person who's going to do something to their children. I think it's time I talk.

NAPIER:

When you decided to speak, you chose to speak in French. Why in French?

HOMOLKA:

Usually I don't watch the news or read the newspapers, but each time I watched the news in French and especially Radio-Canada they were not as sensational. They don't shout, it's serious and I want to re-start my life in French.

NAPIER:

You've chosen Quebec because you think we judge you with more clemency here?

HOMOLKA:

It's certain that the mood in Quebec is not like the mood in Ontario. But I have a support network here that is very important.

NAPIER:

Is it also because in English Canada, the Karla Homolka, Paul Bernardo affair was covered on a daily basis and all of the details were made public? It was very spectacular at the time, especially in the English media. In Quebec we were not as familiar with the details, horrible details, of your case before the courts. Isn't that partly why you chose to live here in Quebec where you are not as well known as you are in Ontario?

HOMOLKA:

Not really because everybody is starting to talk about the details. And if anyone wants to know the details, it's very easy to find them out. Yes, it's true that I am less well known here and that is an advantage for me. I think I can re-make my life.

NAPIER:

It's easier to live here. Do you think it's possible for Karla Homolka to re-make her life even in Quebec, to start over or continue a life anonymously, peacefully, quietly after all this media coverage and what you've done?

HOMOLKA:

I hope.

NAPIER:

You think it is still possible?

HOMOLKA:

Well, everything is possible in life.

NAPIER:

And that is what you are wishing for?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, yes.

NAPIER:

And you honestly believe that starting, maybe not tomorrow, but after a certain amount of time, that things will calm down? And that other events will take over and people will forget you? In your head, is that the ideal scenario?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, for sure that's the ideal scenario but I don't think everybody will forget me. I can hope.

NAPIER:

And now you're out. It's been a few hours. Karla Homolka is free now. Do you think you've paid your debt to society?

HOMOLKA:

That's a difficult question. Legally yes. Emotionally and socially no. No.

NAPIER:

What do you have to do to pay your debt emotionally and socially towards a society that is still obviously judging you?

HOMOLKA:

I think socially I have to do as much as possible to help people. But emotionally I am constantly living with what I have done and that will never end.

NAPIER:

When you say helping people, how would you hope to help people?

HOMOLKA:

I don't know for sure, but I know that in jail I did things. I was a member of a team of peer counsellors. It was a group of women who are trained to help other inmates. I did many things like that in jail and I want to continue outside. I can't do the same things and I don't know exactly how I am going to do it.

NAPIER:

If you're coming to see us today, it's because you want to tell people that you are no longer a threat to society and that is one of the things people are afraid about and you know it. So, the question is, who are you? If you are not the person you were, are you that person, an exemplary inmate or a criminal?

HOMOLKA:

I was an exemplary detainee. There is no doubt about that. I did all my programs. I even did those that weren't

part of my rehabilitation program. I did volunteer work. I went to school. I helped other women. I never received an internal report. I did all kinds of things. I went to school. I got my BA. I improved my French.

NAPIER:

You said a few minutes ago that you will always have to live with what you did. Do you feel any remorse?

HOMOLKA:

Yes.

NAPIER:

How does it manifest itself, that remorse?

HOMOLKA:

I cry often. I can't forgive myself. I think about what I did and often I think I don't deserve to be happy because of what I did.

NAPIER:

How do you judge now what you did? When you think about it, how do you judge yourself?

HOMOLKA:

What I did was terrible and I was in a situation where I was unable to see clearly, where I was unable to ask for help. Where I was completely overwhelmed in my life and I regret it enormously because now I know I had the power to stop all of that. But when I was living through it, I thought I had no power.

NAPIER:

To stop even what you did? You didn't have the power to stop yourself?

HOMOLKA:

Well I didn't initiate the crimes. I followed. Yes, I did what I did but

NAPIER:

You figure you're not a danger today?

HOMOLKA:

Not at all. Not at all.

NAPIER:

You're not likely to "follow" again, as you say?

HOMOLKA:

No.

NAPIER:

And what makes you say that today you would not follow, like you did in the past?

HOMOLKA:

Well first of all I am an adult. Back then I was 17 years old. I didn't know much. I was afraid of being abandoned. I absolutely wanted to have a relationship. I did not have self confidence. There are a lot of things about myself that I didn't know then that I know now.

NAPIER:

You had a relationship in prison with someone who killed his wife. Have you continued this relationship with Jean-Paul Gerbet?

HOMOLKA:

I am not prepared to talk about people I knew in prison.

NAPIER:

Why? Is there a particular reason you don't want to talk about it?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, because I have lived through the whole media circus and I don't want the friends I had in jail to be subjected to that. I am not here to talk, but ...

NAPIER:

Are you still communicating with him in any way?

HOMOLKA:

I have already answered that question.

NAPIER:

Do you consider that today you are rehabilitated?

HOMOLKA:

Yes.

NAPIER:

Today you are coming out of prison, you say you don't read the newspapers. But in the newspapers, there is this analysis of the agreement you had with the Crown. I'm sure that even if you haven't read newspapers you've heard of this, about this agreement with the crown that your ex-husband's lawyer has called the "Deal with the Devil" that was even the title of a book that was written afterwards. You had reduced charges in the murders of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffey. Twelve years reduced sentence. And finally your role was as big as Paul Bernardo's. We talked about you as the woman who had the battered wife syndrome, and that you were under his influence. When you think about it today, do you still see yourself as having been a victim back then?

HOMOLKA:

First of all, everybody who says I had a role equal to him do not know the case. That's the first thing. And secondly, yes I was under his influence.

NAPIER:

Before moving onto your new life, because there is a future, you received threats. Do I understand correctly that you've received death threats? What kind of death threats, and did you receive them directly, and if so in what way?

HOMOLKA:

Well, because I spent the last month and a half by myself in a men's prison, I have not received any threats. My mail was intercepted, read, all that. The threats I received in Joliette were by telephone, and they were directed to the guards because people cannot call us directly in prison. I was told the two people who called said I was going to die. In the past, often the threats I received were from inmates, who told me that they would kill me.

NAPIER:

This was in Joliette?

HOMOLKA:

No, it was in Kingston and in Saskatchewan when I was there. I spent four years in Kingston in isolation because of the threats. Also, when I was transferred to Saskatchewan, I was in isolation for the same reasons. My parents also received death threats about me.

NAPIER:

Your parents have moved, they still live in same place?

HOMOLKA:

No, they haven't moved.

NAPIER:

Do you have a relationship with your family?

HOMOLKA:

Yes.

NAPIER:

Good relationships?

HOMOLKA:

Yes.

NAPIER:

With your father, your mother, and you have one sister?

HOMOLKA:

Yes.

NAPIER:

Will you see them soon? They are here, your family is here?

HOMOLKA:

Yes. My mother is here.

NAPIER:

Have you maintained a good relationship with your mother in these 12 years? Your mother came to visit you?

HOMOLKA:

My whole family has visited me.

NAPIER:

Your relationships with family are difficult?

HOMOLKA:

In what way?

NAPIER:

In the sense of what happened with your sister. You had a little sister.

HOMOLKA:

Yes.

NAPIER:

You took part with Paul Bernardo in the death of your little sister and in the rape of your little sister. Hence my question as to whether your relationship with your family is difficult.

HOMOLKA:

No, my family loves me, and my family has also lived with my ex-husband and my mother had no idea what happened in my relationship with him. My parents' friends had no idea. Everybody thought he was number one. My family has never rejected me for what I did. My mother only said that she hates what I did, but she loves me and we have a very beautiful relationship. I am very lucky.

NAPIER:

And with your father too?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, the same thing.

NAPIER:

Well, where will you settle down?

HOMOLKA:

I'm not answering this question.

NAPIER:

Is it in Quebec?

HOMOLKA:

It's in the province of Quebec.

NAPIER:

And why don't you want to answer this question? Are you afraid?

HOMOLKA:

Would you give your address on television?

NAPIER:

I'm not asking you for your address. I'm asking you where you're going to settle down.

HOMOLKA:

No, no, I don't want to.

NAPIER:

Are you going to work?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, I'd like to.

NAPIER:

What kind of work would you like to do?

HOMOLKA:

I'm ready to do anything, except the only things important to me are first that it be legal. Second that it is moral. And third that it doesn't go against my conditions.

NAPIER:

And what kind of support or help are you going to have? Because it's been 12 years that you've been inside prison. Are you going to need help or support? And if so, where will you find it?

HOMOLKA:

I already have people in my life who are giving me all kinds of help. I also see a psychologist.

NAPIER:

Are you afraid of this new life that awaits you?

HOMOLKA:

Yes, yes.

NAPIER:

And what will be the first thing that you'd like to do?

HOMOLKA:

This is stupid. I'd like to have an iced cappuccino. An iced cappuccino from Tim Hortons, that's what I'd like to do.

NAPIER:

So, you are today, Karla Homolka, a free woman, a truly free woman?

HOMOLKA:

No, no. I think I will never be truly free. Because there are different kinds of prisons. There are concrete prisons, and there are internal prisons. And I think I will always be in an internal prison.

NAPIER:

Why?

HOMOLKA:

Because of what I did. I would like to go back in time and re-do things, but I can't.

NAPIER:

So it's something you'll never forget?

HOMOLKA:

Never, never. I think about it all the time. At every anniversary, every Christmas, all the time.

NAPIER:

And with the years it hasn't faded?

HOMOLKA:

I thought that it would happen, but I realize that it's not true. It just gets harder.

NAPIER:

Thank you.

HOMOLKA:

You're welcome.

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