

**The Social Construction of Female Online Child Sexual Offenders in Canadian
Newspapers from 2010 to 2017**

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A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts (MA) degree in Criminology

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the social construction of female online child sex offenders within Canadian newspapers from 2010 to 2017. While child sexual exploitation is not a new phenomenon, the nature of this threat, in terms of the ways in which it is facilitated, has changed significantly over the past decade. Notably, a key factor contributing to the sexual exploitation of children in today's society is the Internet. The anonymity afforded by the Internet, the accessibility to the Internet, and the lack of accountability associated with the Internet (Cooper, 1998) all work together to create a social environment that is conducive to child sexual exploitation. This research explores this new phenomenon, as perpetrated by women. Informed by the social constructionist approach, relevant findings from a review of literature on the media representation of female offenders are then compared to findings from the examination of Canadian newspaper articles pertaining to female online child sex offenders to recognize similarities and differences between respective representations in the media. The results of this work suggest an increase from 2010 to 2017 in the number of Canadian media articles about female online child sex offenders as well as an increase in teacher representation in those crimes. As a result, a progression in the social construction of child sex offenders as well as teachers in Canada is presented.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One page is not enough to thank the wonderful people in my life without whom, this thesis could not have happened. First, thank you to my supervisor, Professor Michael Kempa for believing in my research project since day one, guiding me through my uncertainties and providing your expertise when most needed. Thank you to the evaluation committee members, Professor David Joubert and Professor Sylvie Frigon, for your insightful comments which contributed to this much stronger version of my research. Thank you to my RCMP colleagues who encouraged me to pursue my studies and supported me through this journey. A very special thanks to my Manager and friend, Dr. Roberta Sinclair – you are my mentor and daily motivation. Your support greatly contributed to my success and development as a researcher.

Merci à mes parents, Dominique et Sylvain (‘mêmen et pêpet’), et à mon frère, Louis-Félix (‘peanut’) qui m’ont toujours encouragé dans mes études et qui m’ont enseigné l’importance de la persévérance, de la patience et surtout de profiter des petits bonheurs quotidiens. Je n’aurai jamais pu accomplir tous mes rêves et aspirations sans vous trois à mes côtés. À mes girls qui ont dû m’endurer toute l’année, durant les hauts et les bas - merci pour les rires insatiables qui ont su faire de cette dernière année stressante, une expérience positive et mémorable (#crispyzuchini #momo).

Enfin, merci au meilleur mari et futur papa du monde. Marc, tu es un homme remarquable qui fait de moi une meilleure personne à chaque jour. Ton humour, ton encouragement et ta force sont les raisons pour lesquelles j’ai été capable de surmonter le plus gros challenge de ma vie. À notre fils qui se joindra bientôt à nous - je te souhaite de profiter de ton enfance, de rire, de jouer, d’imaginer et d’explorer sans craintes ni inquiétudes. C’est par la recherche et la collaboration qu’on fera de ce monde un endroit où les enfants peuvent réellement être des enfants.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW OF ISSUE

“Usually when someone is raped and abused, the abuse ends. But since (offender name) put those pictures on the Internet, my abuse is still going on. Anyone can see them. People ask for them and are downloading them. Day after day. People want to see me abused.” (Excerpt from victim statement from a 13 year-old anonymous victim)
(Canadian Centre for Child Protection [C3P], 2017)

Sexual offences, especially against children, are often thought of as the most heinous and gruesome offences in our society. Considering the particular characteristics that are attributed to children, behaviour that places children at risk of harm appears more harmful than those that exposes adults to risk (Ost, 2009). Such characteristics include the social construction of childhood as innocence. Archard (1993) claims that “the sexual abuse of children is seen as horrific precisely because it robs children of the innocence that is naturally and rightfully theirs” (p.4). The very definition of childhood innocence plays a significant role in shaping social and legal reactions to this crime; once lost, innocence cannot be regained (Ost, 2009). To this, Goodman, Tobey, Batterman-Faunce, Orcutt, Thomas & Sachsenmaier (1998) even argue that protecting children from harm, particularly sexual abuse, is the utmost moral imperative in a society. This is particularly the case when the sexual abuse is immortalized by a picture or video, and becomes a permanent record of a child’s victimization, which can be circulated indefinitely. Ost (2009) proposes that “images that challenge or threaten the idea that children are innocent beings cause controversy and discomfort” (p.12). Consequently, children and youth who are sexually exploited online experience rather unique impacts (C3P, 2017). Once content is uploaded, there is a loss of control over what happens to it and with whom it is shared. This loss of control exacerbates the fear and guilt that victims may feel, as they fear that the images could be seen by other people they know. In fact, in a study by the Canadian Centre for Child

Protection (2017), 69% of survey respondents who were victims of online child sexual exploitation indicated that they constantly worry about being recognized by someone who has seen the abusive material, and sadly, 30% of victims reported that they had been identified by someone who had viewed the images.

With recent advances in technology, online communication technologies such as the Internet now provide child sex offenders with a new means to gain access to children, to interact with them and to potentially sexually exploit them (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). This technological growth also means that youth are more connected than ever and they rely heavily on electronic devices and the Internet for entertainment, school work, communication with their friends and family, and sharing media (Steeves, 2014). Since behaviour is less inhibited when using technology and the Internet, teens are not passive users, but rather content producers and will share images, some sexually explicit, as part of a need to fit in and be accepted by their peers (Johnson, Steeves, Shade, & Foran, 2017). Children are increasingly more sexually aware at an early age and “may be more eager to escape the over-protection of their parents than we are willing to see” (Ost, 2009, p.13). Therefore, as explains Ost (2009), clinging to the accepted social construction of innocence blurs reality. “Child sexual abuse is not a new phenomenon, but the perception of it is and always has been, socially constructed” (Gavin, 2005, p.396).

In addition, UNICEF (2011) acknowledges that electronic communication is increasingly considered to be as normal as face-to-face encounters. For instance, youth often make no distinction between their online and offline sense of self; the relationship between the virtual and physical world become seamless (Cable News Network [CNN], 2015). Notably, forming friendly

and intimate relationships with strangers online has become socially acceptable for youth (Visser, Antheunis, & Schouten, 2013; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). As a result, the accessibility, affordability and assumed anonymity that offers the Internet has turned the online world into a convenient environment for child sexual offenders, offering them the ability to interact with children and youth, and manipulate them through a virtual presence (Bocij & McFarlane, 2003; Suler, 2004; Joinson & Paine, 2007; McGuire & Dowling, 2013; Mullen, Pathe & Purcell, 2009). Children are said to be particularly vulnerable, even more so online, “because of their immaturity of judgement, lack of authority in relation to adults and physical vulnerability” (Goodin, 1985, p.191).

It is a “commonly held assumption, stated implicitly and explicitly in both public debates and scholarly research, that child sexual abuse is typically perpetrated by male offenders” (Martellozzo, Nehring & Taylor, 2010, p.2). Although partially true, as compared to men, only a small percentage of women sexually abuse children (Matravers, 2008 in Martellozzo, 2012). However, this fuels the misconception that since female sex offending is so remarkably rare, “the problem must simply not exist” (Martellozzo et al., 2010, p.3). Media, especially newspapers, tend to reinforce and solidify these fallacies; yet, research on sexual offending and particularly on female sex offenders has shown that there is more to sexual offending than its sensationalistic and perceived overly masculine nature. Reframing the notion of child sex offenders in a modern society means challenging traditional social constructions, by acknowledging that women are also capable of engaging in illicit sexual activities with children, including online, and that it is not only limited to male perpetrators.

“We’ve only just started to see them (women) being caught for these types of offenders (online child sexual offences). We’ve known they’ve participated because there’s

material from the 60s and 70s of women in pornography with children but they are only now, I think, starting to come out as a result of investigations into offences on the Internet. So maybe if you interviewed me again in 5 years' time, I hope it's not, it will be very sad if it is, but I fear that we will have a different landscape” (Criminal Prosecutor) (Martellozzo et al., 2010, p. 2)

In light of this reflection, the topic of online child sexual exploitation and more particularly as perpetrated by women, is explored from a constructionist approach¹. Since studies show that one of society's primary sources of information is the news media (Clarke, 2006; Cole and Daniel, 2005; Lotz, 1991), this research examines the social construction of female online child sexual offenders in Canadian newspapers, in an attempt to contribute to the sparse and limited knowledge in this area. Existing research on the media representation and social construction of female sex offenders in newspapers hails from other jurisdictions, notably the United Kingdom, Ireland, Scotland and the United States. In addition, the bulk of the literature on the media representation of female offenders focuses on a plethora of crimes, such as murder, infanticide, robberies, fraud, assault, sexual assaults etc.; however, it does not include women who sexually exploit children online. Furthermore, much of the criminological and sociological literature on the representation of female offenders in the media was written in the 1990's and early 2000's; therefore, this research aims to update findings in this area. This is necessary, as crime reporting may have changed over the past two decades, as well as the nature of sexual offending against children, progressively moving to the online realm. Moreover, very little Canadian data is collected specifically about women who sexually offend against children online and national statistics (i.e Statistics Canada) do not include all child pornography and luring offences as defined in the *Criminal Code* of Canada². Hence, this research has significant academic and

¹ Readers should note that comparisons to men are not part of this research. An exclusive focus on female offenders, particularly female online child sex offenders, is the main focus.

² This statement refers to Statistics Canada; some statistics are collected; however these have to be requested and are not exhaustive.

practical relevance, filling in a gap in current literature as well as informing professionals, law enforcement and the public with some novel data about female online child sex offenders in Canada.

Online child sexual exploitation perpetrated by women constitutes a clearly significant, but surprisingly underdeveloped field of research. As demonstrates Chapter 2 of this thesis, many studies relating to the media representation of female offenders tend to draw from a social constructionist approach. This framework is therefore also applied to explore the phenomenon of online child sexual exploitation, one that has never been looked at with a constructionist lens. Social constructionism tells us how news stories manufactured by the media are socially constructed portrayals of events, leaving room for bias, inaccuracy and misrepresentation (Rafter, 1990). Hence, in this research, alternative, and potential misrepresentations and stereotypical social constructions of female online child sex offenders, are explored. Ultimately, this research aims to: increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of female perpetrated sexual crimes, especially against children and online; recognize the underreporting, multi-representation, and social construction of such crimes and offenders in the Canadian media; contribute to and rejuvenate the current body of literature on media representation of female offenders; and raise questions and interest for future empirical research in this area.

1.1 Online Child Sexual Exploitation – Definitions and terminology

Before exploring the issue of online child sexual exploitation and examining its extent within our society, it is important to outline the topic of this research by defining relevant terms. First, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a “child” as any person “below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier” (United

Nations, 1989). However, it must be cautioned that the definition of a “child” is not equivalent to the notion of “consent”. In Canada, the age of consent to legally agree to sexual activity is 16 years old³. Without consent, any sexual activity, regardless of the person’s age, is considered a criminal offence (Department of Justice, 2017). This being said, Ost (2009) explains how the notions of “child” and “childhood” have been referred to as social constructions since the late 1980’s, recognizing that there is no universal definition for both. As states James and Prout (1997), “writers or researchers who do not acknowledge the constitution of childhood within socially and historically situated discourse or who fail to give weight to its variability and relativity are currently more or less guaranteed a much more critical reception than was previously the case” (p.x).

Child Pornography and Luring Offences

In the *Criminal Code* of Canada, *Child Pornography (Article 163.1[1])*, is defined as any material (including digital or paper or art) that depicts a child or someone depicted as being a child, involved in sexual activity or depicting the sexual organ of that person for a dominantly sexual purpose. This definition encompasses several offences such as to making, printing, publishing, transmitting, make available, distributing, selling, advertising, importing, exporting or possessing any child pornography. As compared to other countries, Canada is particular in the sense that an adult over the age of 18, who is depicted as a child involved in sexual acts, could be

³ There are several exceptions to this definition. A 14-15 year old child can consent to sexual activity as long as their partner is less than five years older, and not in a position of trust, authority or dependency over this child. A 12-13 year old child can consent to sexual activity with a partner as long as their partner is less than 2 years older and again, not in a position of trust, authority or dependency over this child.

charged under this offence⁴. Also unique to Canada is the inclusion of written material and any other forms of visual representation as part of the official definition; these include drawings, cartoons, whether made by hand or by use of a computer, paintings, sculptures as well as dolls⁵ (Criminal Code, 1985).

Although the term *child pornography* remains within the legal definition, there is growing concern among academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and law enforcement agencies regarding the appropriateness of commonly used terms related to online child sexual exploitation, how these have the power to shape how a particular phenomenon is presented to the rest of the society. For instance, it can be argued that the term *child pornography* does not accurately reflect the abusive and exploitive realities of the material, and may implicitly imply consensual activity (Taylor & Quayle, 2003). According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017), the word *pornography* is defined as the “the depiction of erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement”. Since this definition suggests that the material is intended to be erotic for the purpose of sexual excitement, it is the offender’s view of the content that is emphasized when referring to child pornography, when in fact the material exclusively depicts the sexual abuse of a child. In addition, from a constructionist perspective, Ost (2009) explains how “constructions of the child and the harms of child pornography come into being through social and legal structures, culture, politics, and last but not least, the media. Through communicating these constructions to each other, we ensure that they gain further credence and strength” (p. 4). Therefore, the use of alternative terms such as *child sexual abuse material* or *child sexual exploitation material* (CSEM) would be considered more appropriate. For this research, CSEM is

⁴ The only workable approach is to read “depicted” in the sense of what would be conveyed to a reasonable observer. The question is: would a reasonable observer perceive the person in the representation as being under 18 and engaged in explicit sexual activity? *R. v. Sharpe*, 2001 SCC 2 (CanLII), [2001] 1 S.C.R. 45 at paras. 42-43.

⁵ These dolls are typically child-like sex dolls with orifices intended for sexual penetration.

the preferred term, unless referring specifically to child pornography offences within the *Criminal Code* of Canada.

The sexual exploitation of children and youth online may take many forms from the sharing of sexually explicit images to sexual conversations, to luring. In Canada, it is illegal to employ the use of a computer to lure a child to engage in sexual activities, either online or in person (see *Criminal Code of Canada*, Article 172.1). In light of technological advances, new issues arise such as *self-produced child pornography*, which refers to sexually explicit images and videos produced by children and youth and then shared with friends, acquaintances, and/or strangers (Leary, 2010). Gallagher (2007) and Gallagher, Fraser, Christmann, & Hodgson, (2006) propose a comprehensive typology to classify child sexual exploitation offences that occur on the Internet (see Appendix A). Briefly, the typology summarizes some of the offences which are further examined throughout this thesis, and describes how they may be initiated by utilizing the Internet.

Accordingly, online child sexual exploitation includes “situations that encompass any forms of sexual abuse, violence, and exploitation directed toward children and youth that are facilitated through the use of the Internet or other file-sharing and mobile communication technologies” (Ospina, Harstall & Dennett, 2010, p. vi). Essentially, it refers to ‘sexual abuse by proxy’, according to which the offender does not need to be physically present when the depicted abuse occurs (Ly, Murphy and Fedoroff, 2016). To this, Ost (2009) explains how the social construct of “violation” is redefined with this new crime, as the actual body of the child is not being violated. However, the image of a nude child, for example, may convey an imagined violation of the child’s body and by the viewer being sexually aroused, violation still occurs.

Paedophilia

In several media outlets, the terms ‘paedophile’ is frequently used interchangeably with child sex offenders, to describe individuals who sexually exploit children. As explains Gavin (2005), the notion of child sex offender, the negative connotation associated with this term, and its affiliation to pedophilia are the product of a social construction; a deviant behaviour associated to sexual morality, as socially constructed (Jefson, 2008). In fact, paedophilia is considered a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) which refers to those who have persistent and recurrent sexual interest, fantasies or behaviours towards children and not necessarily those who take action based on this sexual interest (Healy, 2004). It must be noted that pedophilia itself is not a criminal act. Therefore, the use of terms such as ‘child sexual offender’ or ‘child sex abuser’ to refer to those who are engaged in the sexual exploitation of children as well as ‘online child sex offender or abuser’ for those who sexually exploit children online is encouraged (Franguez et al., 2015; Sugar & Sinclair, 2005).

Grooming

Child sex offenders are known to groom their victims online before attempting to sexual exploit them, both online and offline (Bennett & O’Donohue, 2014). Despite the limited research on online sexual grooming and the lack of consensus on how to clearly distinguish between normal and abusive adult-child interactions (Bennet & O’Donohue, 2014), especially online, it has been defined as part of the luring process, whereby a person prepares a child, other involved adults and the environment for the eventual abuse of this child (Williams, Elliot, & Beech, 2013; Quayle, Allegro, Hutton, Sheath & Lööf, 2014) by assessing various aspects of the child’s life that may make them most vulnerable (i.e. dependent of their parents, lack of or poor relationship, problems at school, etc.). Interestingly, Ost (2009), explains how “children’s vulnerability is, in

part, a structural vulnerability socially constructed by their lack of civil status” (p.7), as they may be unable to make their own decisions, exercise rights and are dependent on adults (Jackson, 1982). As such, grooming is a “patterned behaviour designed to increase opportunities for sexual assault, minimize victim resistance or withdrawal, and reduce disclosure or belief” (Tanner & Brake, 2013, p.1). Ultimately, the goal is to gain the child’s trust and cooperation for the purpose of initiating an online and/or offline sexual interaction⁶. In fact, a strong overlap between on-line grooming and sexual assault was demonstrated by recent studies (e.g. see Williams et al., 2013).

Despite the varying definitions of grooming, the literature in this area seems to agree on a certain process of online grooming, where the offenders first present themselves as being similar to their victim in order to break the age barrier between them and build a friendship or relationship based on “pretended” common interests (Williams et al., 2013; Sinclair & Sugar, 2005), which tends to facilitate compliance with the adult’s advances (Berson, 2002). For the most part, offenders will appear harmless, responsible, caring, playful, polite, sensitive and as having good intentions (Williams et al., 2013; Sinclair & Sugar, 2005; Tanner & Brake, 2013). Eventually, the offender creates a sense of exclusivity and isolates the child from its family environment by inviting him or her to join a private chat or exchange phone numbers (Sinclair & Sugar, 2005; Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell & Ybarra, 2008), where more sexually explicit conversations and images/videos may be introduced to gradually normalize this behaviour (McGuire & Dowling, 2013). Given the similarities between the online grooming process and the general process of forming a friendship or relationship, it then becomes hard for the child to avoid uncomfortable questions as he/she might truly believe in the friendship or love established with the offender

⁶ It is suggested that all acts of sexual exploitation involve grooming in some form, and at some point in time, although the actual elements of grooming may vary across victims (e.g. age) and the length of the grooming period (Tanner & Brake, 2013).

(Tanner & Brake, 2013; Williams et al., 2013; Quayle et al., 2014). The child's response to sexual content lowers the threshold needed to engage the child in sexual interaction and establishes the special (sexual) relationship between them (Tanner & Brake, 2013). In some cases, since the offender has gained the child's trust already, he/she might start using more forceful techniques to scare the child into participating in sexual activities (Williams et al., 2013), utilizing fear, embarrassment and guilt, to confuse the victim into feeling responsible for the abuse (Department of Children and Families, 2014). By doing so, the offender may keep the child in the victimizing role for as long as one can (Tanner & Brake, 2013). Interestingly, a 2010 survey on American youth online victimization found that 16% of online sexual solicitation (or grooming) of children is carried out by women (Mitchell, Jones, Finkelhor & Wolak 2014). Thus, evidence exists to show women also use this technique to build trust (Knoll, 2010) and consequently, increase opportunities of online child sexual exploitation.

1.2 Scope of the issue

While violent crime in Canada has decreased overall in recent years, Statistics Canada indicates that the number of police reported sexual violations⁷ against children have risen 76% since 2010, and 30% simply from 2015 to 2016⁸. The greatest increase is reported for incidents of sexual interference which increased by 40% from 2015 to 2016, followed by incidents of luring a child via a computer, which increased by 21% since 2015. In addition to sexual violations against

⁷ Sexual violations against children include sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, making sexually explicit material available to children for the purpose of facilitating sexual offences against children and youth, luring a child via a computer and the agreement/arrangement by means of telecommunication to commit a sexual offence against a child. This does not include child pornography offences. Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2016, Statistics Canada <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/54842-eng.htm>

⁸ This increase may be partly attributable to changes in the determination of the most serious violation for these offences with the implementation of Bill C-26 in July 2015, which increased the maximum penalties for most types of sexual violations against children. Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2016, Statistics Canada <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/54842-eng.htm>

children, the number and rate of child pornography incidents continues to rise from 4,830 incidents in 2015 to 6,245 incidents in 2016. As a result, the rate increased by 41% since 2015, representing a 233% higher rate than the rate reported in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Moreover, in a 2017 UNICEF report, it states that 92% of all child sexual abuse URLs were hosted in five countries, Canada being the third country after the Netherlands and the United States.

Cybertip.ca, Canada's tipline to report suspected online sexual exploitation of children, which is operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P), also observes an increase in reporting. In 2017/18, Cybertip.ca processed 139,897 reports from the public regarding concerns involving the online sexual exploitation of children, which represent a 248% increase since the previous year. Even more so, as of March 31, 2018, Cybertip.ca had already processed 362,398 reports (C3P, 2018a). In a review of 153,000 reports of online child sexual exploitation from 2008 to 2015, Cybertip.ca found that 78.3% of children in the images and videos were estimated to be under the age of 12. Half of images and videos depict sexual assaults against children and the younger the child, the more intrusive the abuse (C3P, 2016).

The National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre (NCECC⁹), Canada's main portal for all reports of child sexual exploitation on the Internet, has also seen a 350% increase in reports from 2011 to 2016 (i.e. 6,072 to 27,300 annually) (Virtual Global Taskforce [VGT], 2016). Similarly, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), the NCECC's American counterpart, received 4,403,657 CyberTipline reports from the public and electronic service providers in 2016, representing a 298% increase from the number of reports received in 2014.

⁹ The NCECC "validates national and international requests and prepares and disseminates investigative packages to the proper jurisdiction within Canada" (RCMP, 2013, see www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ncecc-cncee/about-ausujet-eng.htm).

Almost all (99%) of those reports were about incidents of apparent child pornography involving children (NCMEC, 2015). These statistics validate literature on this topic, such as a study by Ost (2009) where the author claims that: “the avoidance of adult corruption of a child’s innocence by way of child pornography or grooming has become paramount, a major societal and legal concern” (p.13).

Despite the several increasing statistics, a debate remains as to whether or not online child sexual exploitation has increased in recent years or if society, especially youth, is more inclined to report it. There is currently no evidence that the expansion of the Internet has correlated with an increased prevalence of child sex offenders or a new demand for this type of illicit material that did not previously exist (Ly et al., 2016). But, “the Internet has simply opened up an opportunity by which people could rapidly and anonymously access child pornography” (Ly et al., 2016, p.74).

1.3 Canadian efforts

Canada was one of the first countries to recognize the severity of the threat to children and youth posed by online sexual exploitation and to take action through the adoption of the *National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation on the Internet (National Strategy)* in 2004, a horizontal initiative that brings the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Public Safety Canada (PS), the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the C3P together to provide a comprehensive, coordinated approach to enhance Canada’s efforts (Public Safety Canada, 2015)¹⁰.

¹⁰ Under the National Strategy, each partner serves a different but complementary function. PS coordinates and oversees the Strategy’s implementation, which includes ongoing policy development; coordinating research and reporting; and monitoring current and proposed legislation. The NCECC functions as the point of contact for investigations related to the online sexual exploitation of children in Canada, and those international investigations

On December 9, 2011 Bill C-22: *An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service* came into force. Under this legislation, any Canadian company providing Internet services to the public is legally required to report any child sexual exploitation material made available using its services and notify a police officer or report it to C3P (An Act Respecting the Mandatory Reporting of Internet Child Pornography by Persons who Provide an Internet Service, 2011; C3P, 2018a). This Act has certainly contributed to the increasing number of reports submitted to C3P and the NCECC each year.

Online child sexual exploitation is truly a borderless crime (Lanning, 2010). Previously under-connected regions of the world now have access to the Internet, putting an even larger group of vulnerable children at risk of victimization, and increasing the number of offenders online as well as providing new methods of offending (European Commission, 2013). Thus, efforts and initiatives to counter global networks of online child sex offenders extend well beyond Canada's borders and demand for a strong collaboration between countries who share a similar commitment to protecting children and youth from online sexual victimization. Specifically, the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT), is an international alliance of dedicated law enforcement agencies, non-government organisations and Industry partners, working together to keep youth and children safe online. Since its establishment in 2003, the VGT country members¹¹ have worked collaboratively to ensure the online world is a safe environment for youth, to identify,

involving Canadian victims or offenders, and also provides a number of services to domestic and international law enforcement. As a registered charitable organization, C3P operates Cybertip.ca for the public to report suspected cases of online child sexual exploitation, through which it examines and triages reports to appropriate law enforcement officials, and provides public awareness and education programming. The DOJ rounds out these efforts by developing and reviewing legislation and providing training, legal advice and support to federal Strategy partners (Public Safety Canada, 2015).

¹¹ Currently, the VGT country members include: Australia, Canada, Colombia, Europol, Interpol, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America and Switzerland.

locate and assist children at risk and to hold offenders accountable for their unlawful online behaviour (VGT, 2016). As a founding member, Canada is represented via the RCMP's Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children/Behavioural Sciences Branch (CPCMEC/BSB). The CPCMEC/BSB has been involved in numerous international initiatives since 2003, providing a Canadian perspective on this issue and allowing Canada to benefit from effective strategies developed by other member countries (VGT, 2016).

In the 2012 VGT Environmental Scan, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) and Europol recognized the increasing amount of research being conducted on “females with a sexual interest in children” (European Cybercrime Centre & Europol, 2013, p.5) (see Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008 and Elliott & Ashfield, 2011). Sparse data exist on this topic, and it is only in recent years, especially with highly publicized cases in the media involving inappropriate sexual contact between female teachers and their male students (Frei, 2008), that concerted efforts have been made to study female child sexual offenders (e.g. Cortini & Hanson, 2005; Eldridge & Saradjian, 2000; Gavin, 2005; Gannon, 2008; Goldhill, 2013; Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Mathews, Mathews & Speltz, 1989; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Saradjian, 1996). Since female online child sex offenders are still rare in criminal justice systems (Elliott & Ashfield, 2011) and as result, very little research has focused on them (Martellozzo et al., 2010), the following paragraphs examine pertinent academic studies relating to female sex offenders in general. This body of research allows for a better understanding of female-perpetrated sexual crimes against children, and a premise to examine those who utilize the online realm to commit them.

1.4 Female Child Sex Offenders – Rare or simply underreported?

The fact that women engage in sexually abusive behaviours against children has been established for many years (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005), even though some authors may doubt this fact, such as Freund, Heasman, Racansky & Glancy (1984), who claim that “pedophilia... does not exist at all in women” (p.193). A review of recent literature did not yield compelling evidence of any increase nor decrease in child sexual abuse, as committed by women. Thus, the prevalence rates of female child sex offenders remain very low, uncertain and controversial (Denov, 2003). First, many studies on this topic do not break down their data according to the age of the victim (e.g. adult or child), which further complicates analysis and synthesizing data from various studies. Hence, for the purpose of this research, female sex offender also refers to those who sexually offended against children¹². Second, many female sex offenders’ offences remain ‘unnoticed, unreported, or diverted from the criminal justice system’ (Ashfield, 2011; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). This lack of awareness of female perpetrated child sexual exploitation is a particular barrier to professionals identifying and responding to this type of abuse (Ashfield, 2011). “The dominant narrative construction, in Western societies, concerning child sex offenders identifies such individuals as purely male, inherently evil, inhuman, beyond redemption or cure, lower class, and unknown to the victim (who is most often than not constructed as female)” (Gavin, 2005, p.395). Therefore, the present study proposes to examine these historical, and arguably stereotypical, social constructions. Who are these women? How prevalent is this crime committed by women in our society? A large body of literature exists on female sex offenders, most of which revolves around the prevalence rate, various typologies of sexually abusive

¹² Since official data is not available on the prevalence of women sexually offending against children vs adults, female sex offenders in general were studied. In spite of this methodological concern, research has demonstrated that women more often offend against children (Vandiver & Walker, 2002), therefore supporting the broad use of the term female sex offenders.

women, different treatments specific to women, but above all, researchers mainly publish studies comparing female sex offenders to their male counterparts. Since sexual crimes actors have traditionally been presented as male perpetrators and female victims (Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Matravers, 2005; Robinson, 1998), empirical knowledge in this area remains largely specific to men. For this reason, attempts have been made to apply current male sexual offending findings to female offenders; the results have been criticized for the lack of gender-specific knowledge (Gannon & Rose, 2008; Gannon, Rose & Ward, 2008). Nevertheless, several studies are briefly reviewed in the following section, to provide a general depiction of the subject of interest in this research, the female sex offender¹³. Comparisons with men were excluded from this project to focus exclusively on females.

Prevalence

Prevalence rates of female child sex offenders can be assessed by examining a variety of sources such as arrest trends, caseload data from criminal justice agencies, sex offender treatment programs, victimization reports, police-reported statistics, and many more. To date, however, this number remains unclear since prevalence rates vary widely from one study to another, especially when data collection methods and sample sizes are divergent (Gannon & Rose, 2008). Notably, the prevalence rates of female sex offenders in relevant studies range from 1% (Ford, 2006) to as high as 23% (Schwartz & Cellini, 1995) of all sexual offences in a given sample. Moreover, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006) indicates that women could be implicated in as much as 40% of sexual crimes involving multiple offenders. Specifically for Canada, Kong,

¹³ Since the literature on female online child sex offender is close to non-existent, the subject of interest has been defined in a broader approach, by looking at women committing sexual offences in general. In addition, many studies do not differentiate between women committing sexual crimes against children or adults, although most state that women more often offend against children. Therefore, for this section, female sex offenders, in the general sense of the term, is examined.

Johnson, Beattie, & Cardillo (2003) note that women are responsible for 3% of all sexual offences reported to police and Badgley (1984) claims that 2.8% of sex offences are committed by women. Overall, police-reported statistics tend to show lower prevalence rates as compared to victimization reports or self-report studies (Denov, 2003; Mendel, 1995), mainly because one only calculates charges that were laid against an offender and convictions received while the latter sources also include allegations¹⁴. In one of the largest self-report studies on childhood sexual abuse, Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith (1990) found that 17% of men and 1% of women surveyed were victimized by a woman. Overall, these statistics do not represent the full nature or scope of child sexual exploitation committed by women, nor do they indicate an increase in the number of female child sex offenders, but they do raise awareness to the broader issue of female-perpetrated sex crimes.

A critical question remains as to whether these estimates of sexual abuse by women go underreported or are formally undocumented for reasons directly related to the perpetrator's gender (Gannon & Rose, 2008, p.9). Hetherington (1999) outlines common cultural beliefs that serve to perpetuate the denial of sexual abuse by women, especially against children such as women socially constructed as caring and nurturing human beings (a behaviour that is not labelled as abusive) (Denov, 2004). As such, their abuse can be being disguised as a form of care (e.g. inappropriate touching while bathing and dressing children), viewed as being less harmful (Bunting, 2005), and a sexual relationship between a woman and an adolescent child can be viewed as consensual and non-abusive (Elliott & Longman, 1993). Furthermore, the way sexual victimization is socially constructed may only reflect behaviours that involve male perpetrators, therefore failing to also consider female-specific sexual offending behaviour (i.e. non-penetrative

¹⁴ Since this type of offence is highly under-reported, allegations are considered an exceptionally valuable source of information to estimate the scope of the problem (Eldridge et al. 2009).

sex) (Anderson & Struckman-Johnson, 1998; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2006). For example, Cortoni and Hanson (2005) note that even victims often fail to identify the behaviour of female sexual offenders as a crime. Similarly, Denov (2004) demonstrates how cases of female child sex offenders are three times more likely to be concluded as “unfounded” as compared to men. This may contribute to a never ending circle of social misconceptions carried through the criminal justice system; since less women are convicted for these offences, the sample of women accessible to research is also reduced, which as a result, also reduces the possibility to build knowledge about this topic (Bunting, 2007). In depth Canadian research highlights how “at a societal level, the issue of female offending, in particular child sex offending, is met with a culture of denial which either minimises or dismisses it, or focuses on the monstrous aspects of these women” (Denov, 2003, p.255).

Thus, it could be argued that women are involved in more sexual offences against children than official statistics suggest (Eldridge, Elliot & Ashfield, 2009); however, based on available data, an increase in the number of female child sex offenders in our society has not been demonstrated. In light of the complexity and intricacies of this issue, child sexual exploitation is reduced to the stereotypical male paedophile representation, thus closing off from public consideration, other manifestations and constructs of the problem, namely the issue of female offenders (Martellozzo et al., 2010). However, “even if arguments that there is a hidden iceberg of female abusers have some validity to them, to reverse the gendered asymmetry would require an iceberg of literacy of incredible proportions” (Kelly, 1996, p.46). Thus, the present study is an imperative step towards mitigating this gap.

Reframing the notion of “stranger danger”

Since family is traditionally represented as a safe haven for children, and an environment designed for nurturing and protecting them against harm (Gavin, 2005), sexual abuse and exploitation at the hands of family members challenges the core construct of a family. In fact, research shows that child sex offenders tend to be family members, or at least adults in a position of trust or authority over the child, and this is no different for female child sex offenders; an assertion contrary to popular public perception of abusers being strangers (Gavin, 2005). For example, a study on child sex offenders found that 94% of offenders abuse their own children or a child they knew (Wortley & Smallbone, 2012). More specifically in Canada, in the 2012 police-reported sexual offences against children and youth in Canada, it was determined that about 88% of all sexual offences are committed by an individual known to the victim. In Ashfield’s (2011) study on child sexual exploitation, mothers are the perpetrators for 4% of sexual offences against girls and 20% for boys. This also applies to victims of online child sexual exploitation, who are often abused by someone they know. For example, a parent or guardian produces 18% of the sexually explicit content and neighbour or family friend produced 25% (NCMEC, 2013). Despite such evidence, the social construction of child sex offenders persists as a crime committed by strangers, which is considerably reinforced by the popular notion of “stranger danger”¹⁵ (Gavin, 2005¹⁶). Jackson (2000) explains how, still today, parents still fear

¹⁵ The origins of this term can be traced back to the 1960’s when stories of horrific crimes against children, such as abductions, sexual assaults and murder perpetrated by individuals unknown to the victims’ families, made the headlines in many newspapers. Suddenly, “stranger danger” became a real threat, and parents used this expression to teach their children about safety (Ginneken, 2013). Moreover, the expression was used in the United States in various campaigns which later spread to other parts of the world, including Canada. As a result of these past threats, the term “stranger” has often been associated with “bad,” “mean,” or “ugly” (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2018a). These misconceptions can misguide children, as not all strangers are bad or dangerous.

¹⁶ In her research about child sex offenders, Gavin (2005) found that participants would attribute the actions of family member abusing a child to illness or would deny their responsibility in the crime. Despite the serious

the risk of paedophiles, advising their children not to talk to strangers. Thus, this indicates a strong need for reframing the notion of “stranger danger”, the social construction of a child sex offender, to better protect children and youth from being victimized.

Typologies

Historically, female sex offenders were ignored by criminologists, which led to a paucity of data on sexual crimes perpetrated by women (Ahuja, 2000). However, since the late 1980's, a few professionals and researchers have shifted their interest towards women and have attempted to identify typologies of sexually abusive female offenders; empirically validated classification systems based on female sex offenders' victims, deviant sexual behaviour, rational, offending pathways and much more (Mathews, Matthews & Speltz, 1989; Faller, 1987; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Sarrel & Masters, 1982; Syed & Williams, 1996; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Of these, Mathews and colleagues (Mathews et al., 1989; Mathews, Matthews, & Speltz, 1991), are recognized as the most influential and commonly cited framework. They identify three main subtypes of female sex offenders: *male-coerced*, *predisposed* and *teacher/lover*¹⁷. Vandiver and Kercher (2004) later on added to this research by examining the largest sample of female sex offenders to date (471 female sex offenders registered in Texas)¹⁸. They propose six statistically-derived typologies, some of which are consistent with Mathews and al. (1989), such as the *heterosexual nurturers* which is similar to Mathews et al.'s (1989) *teacher/lover* classification. The other typologies that emerge from their research are the *non-criminal homosexual offender*, *female sexual predators*, *young adult child exploiters*,

offending behaviour, participants attempted to keep the family together by being supportive and understanding (Gavin, 2005).

¹⁷ These typologies were developed from interviews with 16 female sex offenders in Minnesota, United States. One woman in their sample was attributed the typology of *psychologically disturbed*, however, due to lack of relevant evidence, this typology was excluded from their results (she was the only one with mental health difficulties during the time of the abuse).

¹⁸ The women in the sample were followed for a period of 7 years to capture recidivism data.

homosexual criminals, and *aggressive homosexual offenders*. These typologies are briefly explored below to better understand the subject of interest, and demonstrate how female child sex offenders are not a homogeneous group¹⁹.

Male-coerced

One of the largest sub-group of female sexual offenders refers to women who are coerced by a male co-perpetrator to sexual offend against someone, more often than not, their own child(ren) (Mathews et al., 1989). These women are described as passive, dependent, powerless, and have histories of sexual abuse (past and/or current) and relationship difficulties (Mathews et al., 1989; Vandiver and Kercher, 2004). These characteristics are said to increase women's vulnerability and accentuate prior vulnerabilities (e.g. poor mental health), making them highly susceptible to being manipulated and persuaded to sexually offend against children, even their own (Gannon, Rose, & Ward, 2008; Martellozzo et al., 2010).

The reasons for offending are related to fear of abandonment, constant pressure and various types of abuse perpetrated by their partner (psychological, physical, sexual, and financial) (Mathews et al., 1989). Some coerced female sex offenders believe that in order to obtain intimacy with their partner, they must please them sexually, by abusing children²⁰ (Ganon, Rose, & Ward, 2008). Thus, the ultimate responsibility of the crime is usually attributed to the male partner²¹ (Martellozzo et al., 2010). The relationship is based on control and domination (Elliott, Eldridge, Ashfield & Beech, 2010). As compared to women who act alone, coerced female sex offenders tend to have multiple victims, target more females and family members and in addition

¹⁹ This claim is also supported by several studies. See Adshead et al., 1994; Becker, Hall & Stinson, 2001; Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2006; Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004.

²⁰ The coercion may even be so strong that women are willing to sexually abuse their children themselves, record the abuse, and offer the sexually explicit material to their coercive partner as a 'gift' (Gannon et al., 2008).

²¹ Research shows that coercive male offenders target women with low intellectual ability, mental disorders, or 'women in crisis' in order to gain access to children (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010).

to sexual charges, may also be charged for other non-sexual offences which occurred during the sexual abuse (Vandiver, 2006²²).

Despite extensive research demonstrating how rare lone female sex offenders are (see Martellozzo et al., 2010), Elliott's (2004) study concludes that more than 75% of the victims included in the sample were abused by a woman acting on their own, without any male involvement. Statistics like these challenge traditional social constructions of women as sexually passive (Martellozzo et al., 2010). Turton (2008) also argues that it is easier for women to play the coercion card to avoid full responsibility for the abuse perpetrated with a male co-offender. However, Jones's (2008) study found that 33% of the female child sex offenders in the sample asserted their willingness to participate in the sexual abuse. Thus, more research is needed, with larger samples of female sex offenders, to better understand their involvement and level of responsibility in a co-offending situation.

Teacher/lover

Women included in the *teacher/lover* typology occupy a teaching position and are described as struggling with peer relationships. They may take advantage of their current occupation and position of authority and trust over a child, to sexually exploit them (Gavin, 2005). These women mainly offend against adolescent boys, which seems to be their sexual preference (Mathews et al., 1989). Ergo, they are described as hebephiles, which means they have a 'sexual and erotic preference for pubescent young people' (commonly aged 11 to 14 years for girls, and 15 to 16 years for boys) (Powell, 2007). In addition, these women perceive themselves as having a romantic relationship with their victims, an "affair", an adult-like relationship, and therefore they

²² In this study, Vandiver (2006) did a comparative study of over 200 female sex offenders, to identify differences between women who acted alone and women who were coerced.

do not consider their acts as being criminal in nature (Mathews et al., 1989; Saradjian, 1996). Some may genuinely fall in love with their victims (Gavin, 2005) or believe the abuse is a mutually enjoyable experience (Saradjian, 1996). This typology refers to what Vandiver & Kercher (2004) label as the *heterosexual nurturers*. They are motivated by love and a strong desire for intimacy.

Predisposed

The predisposed type is defined as women with histories of incestuous sexual victimization (Mathews et al., 1989). They tend to independently initiate the abuse against their own children or younger members of their families (Mathews et al., 1989). As a result of past sexual abuse, these women may also develop cognitive distortions and think that children enjoy sexual activities with adults (Gannon & Rose, 2008). This typology is also referred to as the *inter-generationally predisposed group*, where repeated incestuous victimization occurs (Eldridge, Elliott and Ashfield, 2011; Saradjian, 1996). They are characterized by anger, low self-esteem and instability (Mathews et al., 1989).

Vandiver & Kercher's (2004) additional typologies

Vandiver and Kercher (2004) propose additional typologies to classify female sex offenders, ones that are inspired by Mathews and al. (1989). According to Gannon et al. (2008), they propose the most empirically robust typological distinction.

The first typology is the *non-criminal homosexuals* which are described as female child sex offenders who victimize post-pubescent girls, and who generally do not hold a generic criminal background. Those who mainly offend against young male victims are labelled as *female sexual predators* and as opposed to *non-criminal homosexuals*, they tend to have a long criminal history

inclusive of a variety of criminal activities. Moreover, female sex offenders who offend against either sex are included under the *young adult child exploiters* typology. The last two typologies refer specifically to women who commit sexual offences against adults, and therefore not relevant for this research²³.

Limitations

Significant limitations are identified when exploring female sex offender typologies. First, many studies are largely based on clinical observations of a small sample of women. Thus, the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population of female sex offenders is compromised (e.g. see Mathews et al., 1989)²⁴. Second, although highly cited, typologies such as those proposed by Vandiver and Kercher (2004) are generally based on personal characteristics, criminal records and/or clinical observations. Therefore, the motivations and external or situational factors that impact their offending behaviours are not thoroughly explored (Sandler & Freeman, 2007).

Although significantly relevant for the study of female perpetrated sexual crimes, Vandiver & Kercher (2004) were also unable to obtain information regarding whether or not women were acting alone. This shortcoming is considered an issue given the wealth of information demonstrating that women often perpetrate sexual offences with a male co-perpetrator (see section above, and Gannon & Rose, 2008; Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Green & Kaplan, 1994; Vandiver, 2006). Notwithstanding these limitations, typologies provide an organized means to study offending behaviours of female sex offenders.

²³ The two typologies are *homosexual criminal subtypes*, who offend against adult women, typically for economical purposes (e.g. prostitution) and *aggressive homosexual offenders*, who sexually assault adults, typically within intimate relationships.

²⁴ In a Canadian study, Syed & Williams (1996) attempted to test the validity of Mathews et al.'s (1989) three typologies; however, due to the lack of information about the women in the sample, they were unable to provide particularly rigorous results. Nevertheless, they suggested differentiating between coerced women and women who acted on their own (in Gannon & Rose, 2008).

Recidivism

In their study about female sex offender prevalence, Cortoni and Hanson (2005) reveal that recidivism rates are extremely low for female sex offenders; approximately 1% of the women in their sample were charged again for a new sexual offence. However, they found that general recidivism rates are high (around 20%), indicating that female sex offenders engage in a variety of offending behaviour, not limited to sexual in nature. Recidivism may also be influenced by the above mentioned female sex offender typologies.

1.5 Female Online Child Sex Offenders

Very little to no empirical research and academic studies have been conducted specifically about women sexually offending against children online. There is considerable debate about whether the Internet has created a new type of sexual offender, or whether online child sexual offenders are simply typical sex offenders using the current technology to commit their offences (Aiken, Moran, & Berry, 2011; Seto & Hanson, 2011)²⁵. Although women's involvement in online child sexual exploitation remains obscure, and cases within the judicial system rare, there is an increasing amount of research on females with a sexual interest in children (European Cybercrime Centre & Europol, 2013); nevertheless, this increased interest does not necessarily equate to an increased number of female online child sex offenders. For example, Elliott and Ashfield (2011), explain how some female offenders believe that children may initiate sexual activity and that children depicted in online child sexual exploitation material may in fact enjoy the sexual abuse they are experiencing since they are seen smiling. In their research, the authors

²⁵ Interestingly, Aiken et al. (2011) propose a unique definition of online child sex offending as a "co-morbid state of classic sex offending and technology induced acceleration, evolving at digital speed, where doubling abnormal pleasure is experienced from the known rewards associated with the deviancy, compounded by online stimulation" (p.9).

also found that some female child sex offenders believe sexual activities involving a child and an adult are not morally wrong but simply illegal in their country (Elliott & Ashfield, 2011). From a constructionist perspective, this reflects the contributions of Becker (1963) who states that “social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance” (p.9). As such, female child sex offenders may not be concerned with the morality issue of the sexual offending; rather they consider this behaviour as illegal simply because it constitutes a crime within a particular society. Hence, the notion that an individual may not be inherently deviant, but rather labelled as such, is important for this study. Since women have long been labelled as victims, it may take time and several high profile cases before female online child sex offenders are also deemed as deviant.

Although predominantly committed by men, there is still a small percentage of females who sexually abuse children via the Internet (Martellozzo et al., 2010), and are in fact involved in the actual making and production of child sexual exploitation material (Martellozzo & Taylor, 2009). In 2016, *Netclean* published a report based on the findings of a survey from 370 police officers in 26 countries, about online child sexual abuse crimes. Nearly half of the respondents (47.5%) had worked on cases involving female offenders. Furthermore, 20.9% of the respondents thought the number of female offenders was increasing, although no formal evidence exists. To this, some respondents commented that the increasing awareness of female offenders may lead to more women being arrested, which in turn, may lead to “an experienced, but not actual, increase” (n.p.), as female online child sex offenders already exist but are unfamiliar to society. One respondent in particular, a Behavioural Analyst from the United States Marshals Service stated that:

“Women can be paedophilic, sadistic, cognitively slow, or have personality disorders that may influence their decision to abuse children. However, as a society we have a hard time believing that females offend because we tend to see them as maternal, nurturing, and protective. As a result, women fall out of the system at every step. Women are less likely to be detected, less likely to be arrested, less likely to be charged in court and less likely to be convicted of a crime against a child. This is also the reason behind the old and discounted belief that female offenders are always induced by men. They are not. We have worked on a number of cases where women are acting on their own – writing stories, producing and uploading sexually explicit material, and sexually abusing children. Female offenders open up doors for much needed research” (Netclean, 2016, n.p).

Moreover, in the 2017 ECPAT²⁶ report on online child sexual exploitation, several studies are reviewed and prevalence rates for online-specific offences as committed by women, are compiled in a table (see Appendix B). The data in the table demonstrates that although the prevalence of female online child sex offenders remains difficult to measure, women are engaging in illegal sexual conducts online, ranging from less than 1% to 30% of all offenders online, depending on the behaviour or act perpetrated. Notably, in CEOP’s 2013 “Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse” report, it is noted that 24% of the child sexual exploitation material examined between January 2010 and December 2012, depict contact sexual activities between a child and an adult female. There is also evidence of women actively participating in the live streaming and ordering of online child sexual exploitation. For example, there are several incidents of women “forcing children to perform sex acts online, or live streaming their own child sexual abuse” primarily in South-East Asia (such as the Philippines – see European Cybercrime Centre & Europol, 2013), and more recently in the United States (see Seales, 2012) and the UK (see Robertson, 2016). Although these studies show that women do sexually abuse children online, there is no evidence of an increase in recent years.

²⁶ ECPAT is a non-governmental organisation exclusively dedicated to the combatting the sexual exploitation of children around the world.

As explained in the previous section, typologies of female child sex offenders are explored in numerous studies. But what about women who offend online? A thematic analysis of a female paedophilia website concludes that female online child sex offenders exhibit clear sexual interest and attraction to children, have a strong desire for sexual contact with them, and even encourage early sexual behaviour (e.g. normalizing the behaviour at a young age) (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008). Just like male child sex offenders, female child sex offenders display similar cognitive distortions such as seeing the child as a seducer, perceiving the sexual relationship as consensual, natural and educational. By reviewing comments posted on the website, the authors also found that female sex offenders recognize society's dismissal of women as abusers. For example, they discuss how women have greater freedom in their physical interactions with children (e.g. easy access to children as caretakers, mothers, etc.), how society tends to be more suspicious of men, how female behaviour may be difficult to interpret as abusive, how female online sex offenders can easily groom their victims, and much more (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008).

Nevertheless, empirical data on the online behaviour of female child sex offenders remains extremely scarce and typologies for online female child sex offenders are non-existent. In addition, no official national statistics are gathered about female online child sex offenders²⁷, and as a result, no significant academic research has been conducted on this topic. Unless women are arrested and convicted for an online sexual offence against a child, or their crime disclosed in victimization surveys, any relevant information about their offending, or increase in female offenders, remains unknown and is not captured in any shape or form. This represents an immense gap in current knowledge about female child sex offenders, and their involvement, in

²⁷ Upon request, Statistics Canada is able to produce some statistics relating to women who were charged and convicted of child pornography offences. However, these statistics are rudimentary and do not equate to every sexual offence committed by women against children online.

particular regarding emergent forms of online abuse. Our current knowledge about female online child sex offender's behaviour and prevalence could equally reflect official statistics and a social construction provided by the media. As such, this research is concerned with exploring the social constructions of female online child sex offenders where prevalence and harm posed by female online child sexual exploitation may conflict with current knowledge on the subject. By utilizing the social construction framework, this research explores the media constructions of online child sex offenders, which differ from current knowledge.

In summary, Chapter 1 provides an overview of the issue of online child sexual exploitation, such as recent statistics, some Canadian and international social and policing efforts, and a brief description of the subject of interest, female sex offenders, as informed by recent academic research. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature inclusive of the media representation of female offenders. In this chapter, the theoretical framework of social constructionism is explored and applied to current topic of research. Chapter 3's purpose is to provide a detailed methodological overview of the current research project; a thematic analysis mainly informed by Braun & Clarke (2006) as well as a series of logistic regressions. The chapter concludes with the methodological limitations. Chapter 4 outlines the results of this research and explores four main themes identified within the Canadian newspapers analyzed. In Chapter 5, data is discussed and compared to scholarly research as explored in Chapter 2, from a constructionist approach, and as a result, the research questions are answered. The final chapter, Chapter 6, summarizes the study and provides limitations as well as recommendations for future research in the area of female-perpetrated online sexual crimes against children.

CHAPTER 2: MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE OFFENDERS AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST FRAMEWORK

2.1 Preamble

The initial intent of this literature review was to explore how various female offenders are represented in the media, more specifically in print media. The researcher's preliminary assumption was that depending on the crime committed, women would be represented differently. For instance, female murderers would convey a harsher representation than female shoplifters. However, after completing a thorough review of academic and scientific articles on this topic, it was discovered that regardless of the crime committed, with some exceptions, the media uses comparable representations when reporting about women and crime. Consequently, for the purpose of this research, all deviant women in the media are grouped under one broad descriptor of "female offenders". Thus, in this chapter, media representations of female offenders, inclusive of all types, are elucidated and in the analysis chapter of this research (see Chapter 5), these are explored in relation to the media representation of the female online child sex offenders in Canada.

Moreover, the broad term 'media' is often used interchangeably for all types of media in the literature. For instance, unless specifically stated, it is oftentimes unclear if studies are strictly examining newspapers, or if they are also including other types of media, such as books, magazines, television, movies, blogs, etc. Although the only media type chosen for this research are newspaper articles, some academic articles reviewed only refer to 'media', without further clarification about the specific type. Considering their significant relevance to this research, they are nevertheless included in the sample of literature reviewed in this chapter. One should

therefore be cautious and mindful of the terminology, and should consider this limitation when assessing the findings of this chapter.

Overall, the media representation of female online child sex offenders is viewed from a social constructionist perspective as this framework allows the researcher to reflect and view how this type of female offender is represented in the media, and how this representation may have changed with time, may differ from the media representation of other crime-types as well as differ from available data and statistics on the topic. This framework is further discussed below.

2.2 Social Constructionism: Media and Crime

The roots of social constructionism

It can be argued that all knowledge and meaning in our society are constructed or are the result of a social construction; also referred to as social constructionism. Over the last decade, many theorists, researchers and academics from a number of disciplines²⁸ have contributed to this framework, which is now widely utilized to also explore criminological issues, especially in qualitative research (Ost, 2009). Notably, it has a relatively long history with roots in philosophy (see Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1977), sociology (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934) and also psychology (Gergen, 1982; Collin & Young, 2000; Guichard, 2005; Savickas, 1994; 2000). Not to minimize the contributions of theorists to the social constructionist framework, the following section focuses on the most relevant and influential of them for the present research.

Berger and Luckmann (1966), in *The Social Construction of Reality*, were the first ones to formally introduce the term “social construction”, although the theoretical core derives from ideas from Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead, and is influenced by the social

²⁸ According to Rafter (1990), in large part, constructionism has been developed by scholars from other fields than criminology, and this approach will probably survive the discipline’s growing insularity (p.385).

phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (see also Rafter, 1990). Berger and Luckmann use the term *social construction of reality*, to describe how an individual's perceptions of reality are influenced by their beliefs, natural attitudes and background. They contend that reality is socially defined, the result of human activity and explain how 'knowledge' within a society, as socially produced, becomes established as 'reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). This concept is further studied by Garfinkel (1967), the founder of ethnomethodology, who claims that our background provides us with some basic assumptions that influence our perceptions of reality. He influenced the social constructionist perspective by encouraging researchers to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions and explore alternative methods to understanding the society they live in.

Moreover, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx also completed foundational research for social constructionism. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1954) and *Primitive Classification* (1963), Durkheim argues that systems of classification reflect the social organization of the societies in which they occur. In addition, although not explicitly constructionist, Weber's reflection on rationality, social action and knowledge helps to create "a space wherein subjective meaning could be considered a legitimate topic of study for social science" (Weinberg, 2014, p.4). Among these three classical theorists, Marx probably had the greatest impact on social constructionism by "linking the putative legitimacy of ideas to the interests of actors who are sufficiently powerful to influence the standards by which their legitimacy is measured" (Weinberg, 2014, p.5). In fact, the linkage of power and knowledge is perceived in some social constructionist research, such as Foucault's studies of power and knowledge (see *Discipline and Punish*, 1977; and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1979) and Erving Goffman's studies of labelling (see *Labelling of Deviance, Evaluating a Perspective*, 1975). Particularly, Foucault's discourse analysis encourages "reflection upon why we construct

and perceive phenomena in the way that we do” (Ost, 2009, p.4). Introducing the notion of framing, Goffman (1974) explains how the mass media and the audience use certain methods to organize, define and make sense of social events and issues (Reese, 2001). Media framing is later referred to as “social constructionism” (Scheufele, 1999). Goffman argues that “the media plays a key role in helping to construct social reality, meaning framing and organizing the social reality under common and predictable patterns (Pozzan, 2014, p.6).

Social constructionism also draws from George Mead’s pragmatic perspective where the self is socially constructed and reconstructed through various interactions, also known as Social Interactionism. He argues that “a self only exists, when it interacts with itself and the other selves in the community” (Mead, 1934, p.138). Blumer (1937) then extends this concept to explain how meanings are in fact produced, something Mead had originally failed to elucidate. Outlining the symbolic interactionism, Blumer (1937) explains that “meaning...arises through the ways individuals interact with each other as they utilise and interpret the symbolic forms” (p.517). Finally, in *Constructing Social Problems* (2001), Spector and Kitsuse²⁹ propose that social problems can be seen as claim-making activities of individuals regarding social conditions that they consider as unjust or harmful, and that should be addressed. They suggest that social problems are the result of a process of interaction and are entirely produced. As such, from a constructionist approach, they encourage researchers to study the process by which these social problems are produced³⁰.

²⁹ John Kitsuse, specifically, has exercised a profound and productive influence on contemporary social constructionism and social problems theory. The Kitsusian legacy, as described by Weinberg (2009), had inspired researchers to identify and explain the claims made about social problems, and how these claims go well beyond the putatively determinant nature of their referents (p.72).

³⁰ They provide examples of the construction of different social problems such as the removal of homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in the American Psychiatric Association.

In sum, the above-mentioned theoretical contributions have influenced and broadened the concepts comprised within the social constructionist framework. This progression has enabled researchers from various disciplines to explore new phenomenon through a constructionist lens. Consequently, providing a single and concise definition of this analytical frame of reference and its parameters is not easily conceivable. Instead, the following section outlines the core concepts and notions it entails to offer a better understanding of its applicability to the current research project.

Definition of social constructionism

Social constructionism can be defined as a theoretical approach whose purpose is to uncover “the processes by which social information is produced, disseminated, verified, and disconfirmed” (Rafter, 1990, p.376). It tends to be used interchangeably with the term constructivism, which has a more individual rather than social standpoint. As compared to social constructionism which claims that knowledge and meaning are constructed through social processes (Rafter, 1990; Young & Collin, 2004), constructivism focuses on how “the individual cognitively engages in the construction of knowledge” (Young & Collin, 2004, as cited in O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p.18). However, both terms are often subsumed under the generic term “constructionism” (Charmaz, 2000). This approach challenges the core concepts of determinism which claims neutrality and scientific objectivity to knowledge; a knowledge immune to social influences (Rafter, 1990). Constructionism rejects the idea of an ultimate truth to consider differing versions of reality, “swathed in the gauze of social preconception” (Rafter, 1990; also see Kaye, 1986). Rafter (1990) explains how constructionism is sometimes “misconstrued as a rejection of empiricism and knowable “truth” (p.385). Although many natural scientists, in particular, defy the notion of “social construction” as an antiscientific approach (e.g. Best, 1987),

constructionism is not equivalent to pure subjectivism. On the contrary, Rafter (1990) argues that constructionism "...does claim that apprehension is influenced by social position (class, gender, and race) and historical circumstance. But that claim is based on data, and it is falsifiable" (p.385). "While it challenges the notion of value-free science, it does so on the basis of empirical evidence and in order to enhance, not obscure, understanding of the world" (Rafter, 1990, p.385). Thus, this theoretical framework leads the researcher to a great self-consciousness and reflexivity, to better examine the social construction of a specific phenomenon.

Social constructionism, media and crime

What is reality? Whose reality is it? *The Social Construction of Reality*, by Berger and Luckmann (1966), provides an exceptional foundation to this conceptual framework, frequently utilized in social sciences for understanding various social concepts, such as the media construction of crime. As explain Berger and Luckmann (1966), what is considered real depends on what is socially acceptable. The media, as a business, facilitates the social construction of knowledge and understanding of current issues in our society and as result, may suggest what is acceptable or not, and subsequently what is a crime or not (Rosenfeld, 2014).

The media is a remarkably influential set of institutions (Black, 2009), a complex and multi-faceted industry continually adapting in light of modernisation and technological developments (McQuail, 2007). Thus, the media is capable of representing crime and criminals in a chosen manner, creating a dominant image, oftentimes disproportionate representations of the true incidence (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzati, 2006). Inaccurate reporting can have negative repercussions (Black, 2009). For example, female violence tends to be over-reported in the media when compared to official statistics (Boulahanis and Heltsley, 2004). Violent, sensationalist, rare and horrifying crimes capture the audience's attention and as a result can

capture the media's attention for long periods (Cecil, 2007; Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson & Ackerley, 2004). Consequently, those offences for which women are typically convicted are under-represented (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004). To this, Mason (2006), claims that prison population is not representative of actual crime rates, but rather of political decisions on sentencing practices informed, in part, by inaccurate representations of crime in the media. Hence, media's construction of crime and representation is highly influential (Black, 2009). "The media does not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy in themselves. 'News' is the end-product of a complex process" (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978, p.53). Therefore, atypical events receive more coverage (Cohen, 2002; Duwe, 2005) and specific representations are utilized by the media to present its audience with a simplified product (Hall *et al*, 1978).

As a result, academics have questioned the role of newspapers in their reporting of crime suggesting that "instead of representing reality, they instead provide a media representation of reality" (Peelo et al, 2004, p.261). By presenting articles in a documentary style, Markovitz (2006) suggests that newspapers create an illusion of authority or objectivity, convincing the consumers of the truthfulness of the story. As such, newspapers not only deliver information to society, but also present the readers with certain representations of the news, with the arguably intentional purpose of guiding their ideological stance (Reah, 2002). As a result, Surette (2007) explains how the media influences society to defy or support certain policies of the criminal justice system, which therefore has an effect on the social constructions of crime. Applied to criminology, this perspective allows researchers to investigate how the facts of crime and crime control are socially produced (Rafter, 1990), and how the relationship between the media and

society contributes to the criminalization of certain behaviours (Hall, 1997; Pollak and Kubrin, 2007).

2.3 Social constructionism, Gender and Media

When exploring the representation of female offenders in the media, one has to consider the very concept of gender, which has become increasingly more controversial with time. How do we define a woman in a modern society? What is the feminine gender role identity? Profound disagreements prevail amongst theorists when exploring the relation between gender, crime and the media. West and Zimmerman (1987) explain how gender is a performance, an overt display constrained by social norms (social constructs) and values rather than something inherently present within the individual. Research shows that gender norms and expectations are not static; they are rooted in the cultural and socioeconomic environment of a particular point in time (Deutsch, 2007). This concept refers to “doing gender”, meaning the gender is not equivalent to the biological sex identity but is rather performed by and for a specific society at a particular point in time. In accordance with this perspective, males and females perform gender differently during different time periods (Twenge, 1997) to adjust to social and temporal contexts (Deutsch, 2007). For example, Twenge’s (1997) research findings show how gender norms and expectations for women experienced a dramatic shift over the years, especially after the 1950’s and with the feminist movements. Women went from stay at home wives and mothers to women of career and higher education, increasingly more comfortable taking on what was once considered as masculine traits and roles. As a result, the “performance” of doing gender has changed and women are redefining their roles in the society; therefore, changing the social construction of a woman in a given society.

This concept of ‘doing gender’ is particularly relevant in the case of female offenders whose gender expectations are violated in their displayed deviance (Deutsch, 2007; Pozzan, 2014). They tend to break free of the gendered boundaries through what Deutsch (2007) calls ‘undoing gender’³¹. Hence, feminists who contributed to the constructionist approach claim that gender can be viewed as a social construction (Chesney-Lind, 1986) and consequently, so does the concept of a female offender.

2.4 The Media Construction of Female Offenders

Although not explicitly stated in most studies reviewed for this section, constructionist concepts are discerned when researchers and academics study female offenders in the media. It can be argued that much of what is known and believed about female offenders, society has learned through media (Dowler et al., 2006). Since media is a more readily accessible source of information to the general public, statements, even if erroneous, may become reality in a given society. But as Gavin (2005) explains, “the social construction of reality at any one time does not necessarily depend on one view of any one object or being, but can be based on a multiplicity of views” (p.395). Thus, in a similar manner, the multiplicity of media constructions of female offenders are further examined in this section. The findings suggest that the realm of literature is predominantly divided into two main media representations: on one side, women’s deviant behaviour is the result of external factors such as mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse, past victimization and coercion by a male co-offender. On the other side, female offenders are presented as doubly deviant by the media since they defy traditional and ideological social

³¹ Pozzan (2014) explains how male offenders ‘do gender’ by being overly aggressive, violent and dominant. However, when women are aggressive, violent and dominant, their gender performance does not conform to the socially constructed standards of a given society.

constructions of womanhood and motherhood. This restricted range of representations in the media is said to obscure complexities (Peter, 2006), allowing the audience to more tangibly make sense of women's deviant behaviour. According to Maras (2014), 'these typologies force women into categories, which they often do not fit into, creating a seemingly general profile about women and the motives behind their crimes' (p.31). By restricting the terms used to represent a specific crime or offender, the media thus facilitates the marginalization of competing views and reiterates its construction of reality and knowledge about this crime (Sacco, 1995).

2.5 Female Offenders: Victims of Circumstance

Many researchers found that external factors are utilized by the media to excuse, justify, or rationalize the criminal behaviour of women by representing them as either victims of circumstance or simply not entirely responsible for their actions (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglioni, 2008; Pozzan, 2014; Naylor, 2001). For instance, the deviant behaviour may be presented as the result of mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse, past victimization (physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or sexual) and/or coercion by a male co-offender. Because these representations all convey a sense of sympathy, one may conclude that these women are presented as more amenable to cure to the consumers (Cavaglioni, 2008), and should not necessarily be punished for their criminal actions (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Researchers in agreement with this general standpoint refer to women's agency as being reduced (Cavaglioni, 2008; Peter, 2006). In this context, the women's agency refers to her capacity to act independently and to make her own free choices, such as perpetrating a particular crime (Barker, 2005). If women are reduced of their agency, from a

social constructionist perspective, then the media functions to maintain traditional gender stereotypes (Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995).

To further expand on this idea, women are therefore inevitably considered incapable of committing crime on their own volition. Female offender's crimes are often represented as trivialising, non-threatening, propagating the idea that women are not capable of masculine violence (Copeland, 1997; Wykes, 2007). The social construction of women over time has driven society to treat this gender as less capable of crime (Crew, 1991). Notably, in a content analysis of 54 front-page newspaper articles, Brennan & Vandenberg (2009) found that 40% of the stories denied or minimized the female offender's responsibility for the crime. This is particularly relevant considering that crimes committed by individuals who are considered 'able' to commit them are less capturing and unable to create, affect and strengthen the audience's perceptions of, predominantly, unusual crimes (Chermak, 1994).

Furthermore, chivalry theories in social sciences, which some concepts derive from constructionist contributions, also uphold the idea of the female offender's reduced agency in the media. These theories imply that female offenders experience significantly higher levels of leniency and sympathy, as well as understanding attitudes when going through the criminal justice system (Herzog & Oreg, 2008). These principles are said to have emerged from historical American values according to which women were thought to be unable to defend themselves and to be in the inevitable need of support from men (Herzog & Oreg, 2008; Pozzan, 2014). There is a long lasting socially constructed assumption of women being helpless victims in the eyes of the society and therefore, when engaged in criminal behaviour blatantly going against gendered expectations, they are thought to have been unwillingly pushed towards this behaviour,

inconsistent with traditional feminine gender role identity (Herzog & Oreg, 2008). In short, these concepts demonstrate how a “number of gender-related variables can influence the social construction of offenders and the treatment they receive” (Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995, p.384). This has been the case, specifically for female serial killers whom, according to Pozzan (2014), are portrayed as receiving more favourable treatment in newspapers because of their gender. This is also noticeable for female child sex offenders. The media tends to use terms such as sexual affair or relationship to define the offence, rather than abuse, sexual abuse, rape, pedophilia, as is the case for male offenders (Chiotti, 2009; Landor, 2009; Plumm, Nelson & Terrance, 2012). These gender-related media representations tend to lessen the abusive aspects of the crime and convey a sense of tolerance, a need for help and guidance, rather than convey pure outrage and a need for punishment (Cain & Anderson, 2016). Kilty & Frigon (2016) offer an intriguing take on this claim. They explain how the infamous violent Canadian female offender Karla Homolka exaggerated the abuse she experienced in her life to cast doubt on her agency and responsibility in the offences. However, the authors illustrate a continuum where both agency and victimization can coexist. As such, Karla Homolka’s deviant behaviour is explained as occurring within a climate of violence; however, her victimization does not render her harmless. This perspective allows for a more holistic understanding of female offending where women are seen as capable of committing crimes but are also highly impacted by past and current victimization. The following sections discuss external factors motivating deviant women, as presented in the media.

The “Mad” Female Offender

To garner sympathy for women who commit crimes, the media is likely to attribute criminal behaviour to a biological disorder or medical issue (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Berrington

& Konkatukia, 2002; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglioni, 2008; Collins; 2014; Edwards, 1986; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor 2001; Wilczynski, 1991). Women are socially constructed as nurturing and caring human beings; however, when they commit a crime, the media attempts to make sense of both the offender and the crime, presenting the woman as mad rather than bad (Peter, 2006). In a content analysis of American newspapers, Brennan & Vandenberg (2009) found that many women were found not guilty by reason of insanity. For example, when reviewing the case of a woman who drowned her children, an article described how ‘she was possessed by the devil’ and that she had ‘well-chronicled history of mental problems’, including post-partum depression (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). In another article, the female offender’s husband was quoted saying she was psychotic when the crime occurred and was ‘ordinarily a loving mother, who was crippled by disease’. Thus, the readers are left with the impression that the female offender’s actions were provoked by psychological factors out of her control (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009) – a mother could not have deliberately drowned her own children. In this sense, female offenders are considered more relevant for the attention of psychiatric institutions rather than the criminal justice system (Teplin, Abram & McClelland, 1996). This is specifically the case for female offenders who commit murder as the media frequently tends to pathologize them to rationalize their extreme violent behaviour (e.g. psychopath, deemed insane, brain abnormality, etc.) (Collins, 2014).

Media discourse tends to represent female offenders as emotionally unstable or insane (Barnett, 2006; Farr, 2000). In a study of articles from four Irish newspapers, Black (2009) reveals that 11.1% of articles about female offenders allude to the woman’s mental state. Various mental health illnesses are mentioned such as depression, manic-depressive disorders and schizophrenia. Interestingly, the researcher found that the degree to which the reporter accepts the psychological

issue to be valid influences the representation of the female offender in the media. Boundaries are blurred between victimization and offending depending on the credibility of the mental health assessment of a specific female offender. From a constructionist approach, as claim Spector and Kitsuse (2001), these studies demonstrate how social actors, such as the media, might influence a social problem depending on how they represent them.

Moreover, female offenders are often presented as at the mercy of their hormones or their biology (Black, 2009) as it is an effective way to reduce the female offender's culpability (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002). According to this representation, only men have the social agency to express violence and aggression and female offenders are violent only when they have mental unbalances (Picart, 2006). However, Naylor (2001) notes a gradual shift in the representation of female offenders from bad, to mad, and then to sad³². She suggests that newspapers are less likely to accept the female representation of mentally ill, since it makes a story more complex, less appealing and less capturing of the imagination. As such, the media may change the representations associated to female offending, depending on public receptivity of the news story³³. This illustrates how "crime is socially produced, implemented, evaluated, revised, combined, replaced, forgotten and so on (Weinberg, 2009, p.61)".

The Female Drug and Alcohol Abuser

Owens and Hawes' (2015) suggest that abuse of drugs and alcohol is found in several media articles as either a direct cause of offence or a significant contributing factor to female offending. Substance abuse may be largely responsible for the disorganisation of the female offender's life,

³² Female offenders represented as "sad" should be understood in the context of victims of violence. Their deviant behaviour can be explained by a long period of abuse.

³³ This objective of this research is not to capture how society perceives the phenomenon, but rather how it is presented by the media.

which may eventually lead her to commit a crime. The correlation between drugs and alcohol as well as female offenders is not novelty in newspaper reporting. In some instances, it is used to reduce the woman's culpability, as a mitigating factor to neutralize or explain her deviant behaviour (Worall, 1990). It is also a means through which the media can present her acceptance of any wrong doing, show how she learned from her mistakes and altered her life choices, therefore reducing her guilt to the eyes of the readers (Picart, 2006). On the contrary, the media may use the female offender's addiction to further censure her actions (Owen & Hawes, 2015). Yet, South (2007) suggests that addiction among female offenders is under-represented in the media due to concerns that children may be placed in care if their mother is publically exposed as addicts. This illustrates how an already destructive problem can be magnified by media representations, and have serious repercussions for female offenders who are also mothers.

The "Sexualized" Female Offender

The media may promote an overtly sexualized representation of the female offender (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Conboy, 2006; Gordon, 2008; Mason, 2006) by accentuating promiscuous behaviour or over sexualizing her body image for instance (Conboy, 2006). Notably, Collins (2014) reviewed 1,190 articles in four Canadian newspapers over a span of 30 years, and noticed that female offenders are oftentimes represented as sexualized objects. Conversely, not once is a male offender's appearance the primary focus of an article. Likewise, Black (2009), Berrington & Honkatukia (2002) as well as Owens & Hawes (2015) found that numerous newspaper articles depicting female offenders mention the woman's clothing or style, hairstyle, makeup, body movement or even make note of a change of appearance following the offence. As such, women are more likely to be associated to physical descriptors, whereas men

are more often defined by their occupation (Owens & Hawes, 2015). To this, Witten (1993) proposes that narrative functions so as to construct social reality and that “the vocabulary we use impacts its own values” (as cited in Gavin, 2005, p.395).

The Coerced Female Offender

Female offenders who are accomplices to a particular crime are often represented by the media as coerced or emotionally dependent on a male co-offender (Hayes & Baker, 2014), and therefore, not intrinsically responsible for the offending. Although the female offender is presented as having “failed” as a woman, socially constructed as the gatekeeper of morality, she nevertheless secures a degree of mitigation in the media for her part in the offending, by virtue of her gender. This notion seems to trigger debates in the literature specific to female killers. Gurian (2011) believes that after years of abuse, women may end up giving in and wittingly become their partner’s accomplice. In these situations, the media may represent the female offenders as victims of domestic abuse (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003), further alluding to the agency and victimization dichotomy presented by Kilty and Frigon (2016).

Conclusion

To conclude, one strain of feminist theory has applied constructionist concepts to examine how gender affects criminal justice (Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995). Although feminist criminologists view female offenders as capable of being ‘conscious, intentional, responsible, and potentially dangerous and culpable subjects of the law’ (Allen, 1998, p.66), one might wonder if by focusing on the female offenders’ mental health, drug or alcohol addiction, and/or past or current victimization, the media is reducing women’s agency or rendering them powerless (Rafter &

Heidensohn, 1995)? Is the media attempting to rationalize female offending or not representing women as truly capable of crime?

2.6 Female Offender: the “Doubly” Deviant

As opposed to victims of circumstance, female offenders are also often represented as the “other” in the media, the ‘bad’ woman, someone who does not conform to what the media presents as ‘normal’ for a woman, transgressing feminine social expectations and gender roles, as socially constructed (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). These women are described as doubly deviant (Collins, 2014; Naylor, 2001; Weatherby, Blanche & Jones, 2008) or as “doubly deviant and doubly damned” (Lloyd, 1995). Consequently, they are represented as “responsible for their actions and therefore deserving of punishment” (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009, p.145) rather than their behaviour rationalized to the audience. Literature suggests that when female offenders deviate from the acceptable expression of femininity, the media reporting style is then more condemning (Kaceviciute, 2014); they are represented as a prevailing threat to womanhood and motherhood, and as a result, are masculinized or dehumanized.

The Female Offender: A Threat to the Ideal Womanhood

Culture delineates the tolerable expressions of womanhood (Black, 2009). Accordingly, women should be passive, submissive, innocent, nurturing, caring, compassionate, emotional, cooperative, maternal, married, and monogamous (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan, 2002; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Huckerby, 2003; O’Donnell, 2016; Naylor, 2001). Society expects purity and goodness from women (Copeland, 1997). These roles reinforce traditional sexual

constructs of the female (Hayes & Baker, 2014), which are accepted by the public and maintained by the media (Black, 2009). If or when they deviate from these expected gender roles, women face severe censure in the media (Kaceviciute, 2014). As such, a woman who commits a crime is stigmatized both for having committed that crime, and more particularly, for breaking the societal norm of how a woman should behave (Black, 2009; Collins, 2014; Kaceviciute, 2014; Kilty & Frigon, 2016). She is subjected to labels of double deviance (Copeland, 1997). In other words, “gendered ideals of behaviour derived from cultural ideas about femininity do not include the commission of crime” (Easteal et al., 2015, p. 32) as violence is incompatible with current constructs of a ‘good’ woman (Brennan, 2002).

By virtue of their socially constructed gender, women were traditionally responsible for the maintenance of the household, taking on roles of nurturers and protectors of children, child-minders, as well as mothers, teachers and wives (Hayes & Baker, 2014; Hayes & Carpenter, 2013). Such roles entail being in a position of trust in regards to the youngest and most vulnerable group of population in a society – children and youth. Consequently, when a woman perpetrates a crime against a child, media represents it as an outright breach or abuse of trust (Hayes & Baker, 2014). Their behaviour therefore “profoundly challenges deeply held assumptions about women and their capacity to nurture others” (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004, p.9). As such, their deviant behaviour becomes even more perverse, and berated in the media (Black, 2009; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Heidensohn, 1996). Specifically for female murderers, Creed (1996) asserts they are represented as an aberration of true womanhood: man-hating, lesbian vampires, demented castrators, unnatural mothers” (p.120). Several authors consider this media approach towards female crime reporting as an effective method to “cast out female

offenders of the “protected” sphere of femininity, while celebrating the assumed passivity of the rest of womanhood” (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006, p.45).

“The woman who commits a crime is perceived as having perpetrated an act that is diametrically in opposition to the traditional characterisation of her sex as gentle, nurturing and angelical. She is far closer to the ‘whore’, the ‘bad’ woman end of the scale, since her behaviour is deviating from the ‘natural’ feminine traits” (Easteal et al, 2015, p.22).

In short, womanhood is a social construction which defines female behaviour and social activities in a society, in which crime is not enclosed.

The Female Offender: A Threat to the Ideal Motherhood

As opposed to an inherent and biological status, motherhood is also defined as a socially constructed notion (Cowdery and Knudson-Martin, 2005). Particularly, being a mother is often emphasized by the media when reporting on female offenders, as women who deviate from ‘loving’ motherhood remain a societal taboo, presented as a threatening expression of motherhood or non-maternal mothers (Black, 2009). Gordon (2008) notes that motherhood features strongly as a theme in the press and this is reinforced in Black’s (2009) study, in which more than one third of the articles examined view the female offender through the prism of motherhood.

Being a mother is intrinsically tied to the social construction of being a woman; the paragon of womanhood (Black, 2009). As such, a violation of the norms and expectations of motherhood could potentially mean a negation of womanhood (Pozzan, 2014), which is defined as a threat to the patriarchal systems and structures of our society in this chapter. Thus, to further expand on

the ‘doubly deviant’ notion, mothers who commit crimes could be seen as ‘triple deviant’³⁴ as they not only committed a crime as a woman, violating the seemingly natural law of womanhood (Lichtenstein, 2006), they also fragmented the socially constructed ideology of motherhood. Thus, they not only break the law in a legal sense, but also in a moral sense (Lloyd, 1995). If motherhood is, as Cecil (2007) describes, “one of the ultimate signs of femininity (p.251)”, then mothers who do not exhibit such instincts must be unnatural (Black, 2009). For instance, Naylor’s (2001) study findings on maternal filicide suggest that the women’s intellectual disability is often dismissed by the media who believe that the maternal instinct occur naturally. In this research, the women’s inability to be selfless is represented as unnatural. Through her role as a mother, the woman becomes even more abject.

In some instances, compassion is afforded to mothers who commit offences to provide for their children. In other words, maternity could mitigate moral culpability (Kaceviciute, 2014), especially if the rationale for the deviant behaviour stems from an inability to provide for the children by using a common and legal avenue. Signs of maternal love are at times used by the media to neutralise the perceived threat of a female offender (Cecil, 2007).

Although it was previously mentioned that women often receive more favourable treatment in newspapers, the media also favours harsher sentences and negative representation for those female offenders who are also mothers, as they have failed to meet the social expectations of being a ‘good’ mother. This is particularly the case for women who killed their own children (Pozzan, 2014). This concept, which goes against the chivalry theories, is also observed by Kaceviciute (2014) whose analysis of newspaper articles reveals that a mother who murdered her

³⁴ This term was never mentioned in the literature. It is a new concept proposed by the researcher to define specifically mothers who offend, which surpasses the “doubly deviant” construct attributed to women in general.

five children received more media coverage than the doctor who murdered between 150 and 350 patients. As such, the gravity and newsworthiness of the crime is not defined by the act committed nor the number of victims, but rather by the existing maternal relationship between the offender and the victim. Emphasis on relationship is also noted by Easteal et al., (2015) whose research considers whether the media portrayal is affected by the women's relationship with the victim(s); a violent partner, a child, or a non-family member. These examples demonstrate how the social construction of reality is based on the meaning assigned to perception and experience (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), by oftentimes, the media.

Alternatively, if a mother offends against someone else than her own children, she nonetheless becomes target of scrutiny and stigmatization by the media, as mothers are expected to prioritize their children's emotional, physical, and financial needs ahead of their own (Hay, 1996). By being engaged in deviant behaviour, this implies that the children's needs are not necessarily a first priority, or first concern (Pozzan, 2014). Notably, Hayes & Baker (2014) provide an example of a woman who slept with her son's 12 year old friend. In the newspaper articles, the emphasis is not only placed on the sex offences against a minor but more particularly on the socially unacceptable behaviour of the female offender as a mother. As such, she is represented as a bad mother for showering her victim with gifts and affection, and depriving her own son of this privileged treatment.

The "Masculinized" Female Offender

Since the female offender deviates from an idealised social construction of femininity by committing a crime, and is considered a threat to womanhood and motherhood, the media occasionally also 'masculinize' the woman to ensure appropriate gender expectations are not

questioned as a result of the deviant behaviour (Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Chesney-Lind, 1986; Farr, 2000; Grabe, Trager, Lear, & Rauch, 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynki, 1991; Willemsen & van Schie, 1989). Notably, Cavaglioni's (2008) study on maternal filicide demonstrates how female offenders who lack emotions during trial face harsher criticism in the newspapers articles than those who publically display them. The idea of a prescribed female reaction is linked to the idealised view of women and their emotionality (Black, 2009). For instance, their seeming coldness is represented as suspicious (Cavaglioni, 2008) and reinforces perceptions of guilt (Black, 2009; Kaceviciute, 2014), considering the social construction of women in a society as emotional and sensitive human beings. These findings support literature about 'inappropriate' female reactions represented in the media as damning indictments; such as composure and inappropriate joviality (Kaceviciute, 2014; Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008). In contrast, for female offenders who exhibit their emotions during trial, the media reinforces representations of their innocence, presenting tears as a symbol of redemption, causing strong resonance (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008). "The weeping women is a powerful symbol, a figure of redemption in the Christian Bible. It seemed the more she was shown to be crying, the more palatable and transparently obvious her innocence became" (Lambert, & O'Halloran, 2008, p. 242). In these cases, the media asserts acceptable feminine traits and those which are considered as unfeminine (Sacco, 1995), as socially defined or constructed.

The "Lesbian" Female Offender

Another way the media rationalizes female offenders' actions, is to rely on the woman's sexual orientation. Homosexuality is used to help ease the audience into seeing and accepting non-

compliance towards socially constructed gender role (Hindley, 2013). More masculine traits (i.e. lack of empathy and emotions) are then used to describe the disobedient woman to bring her closer to what men are more capable of, which is being violent and being able to commit crimes (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Farr, 2000). By doing so, the female offender's behaviour is further condemned. Jewkes (2004) notes that female offenders become more newsworthy when they can be further marginalised by reference to their sexuality, even more so if their sexual preference is for other women. According to Jewkes (2004), there is an inherent association between lesbianism and violence that has led to the media attempting to explain violent and aggressive female behaviour by way of lesbianism and attributes of masculinity. Seal (2009) supports this argument stating that females who commit murder and whom are believed to be lesbian are further masculinized in the media. There seems to be a negative connotation associated with lesbians, as the woman's sexuality is offered as an indicator of her immorality (Black, 2009).

Farr's (2000) research also claims that lesbians are overrepresented in atypical death sentence cases (50% according to Anderson, 1996 and 33% according to Brownworth, 1992), describing it as a 'targeted group for capital punishment' (p.62). These female offenders are described in the media as manly and man-hating women who occupy additional marginalized statuses and have an irrational desire for revenge. In this research, the homosexualized representation of the female offender is presented as an aggravating circumstance which may affect sentencing decisions (e.g. death penalty instead of life imprisonment). By focusing on the female offender's manly sexuality and demeanor, Farr (2000) explains how prosecutors defeminize the offender to convince the jury that she is deserving of the death penalty – the jury may forget that she is a woman and treat her like any other offender. From a constructionist approach, this statement

illustrates how crime and offenders are social artifacts (Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995). Threats to patriarchal control, including the abandonment of both hetero-feminine behaviour and heterosexual commitment are harshly portrayed in the media. In fact, after World War II, criminologists increasingly focused on lesbian prisoners as ‘menacing social types’ to the social construction of the woman (Freedman, 1996).

Finally, Wykes and Gunter (2005) report that physical social constructions of femininity such as youth, slenderness, and beauty are valued by the society and media, and when a female offender does not conform to this stereotype, she is vilified by the media. However, as explains Jewkes (2004), regardless of the physical appearance of the female offender, she is never held in high regard. When female offenders do conform to social stereotypes in relation to physical attractiveness, they are often represented as ‘femmes fatales’; cold, morally vacuous, dangerous, and capable of crime (Jewkes, 2004). As such, female offenders are dichotomized into sexualized (lesbian) bad girls or malicious black widow characters (Collins, 2014).

The ‘Dehumanized’ Female Offender: The ‘Other’

The depiction of women as witches is one of the earliest examples of the concept of “other” in female offender representations (Naylor, 2001; Heidensohn, 1996). The media has evolved since; however, the representation of deviant women as “non-women” remains a staple when depicting the non-conforming woman (Heidensohn, 1996). By reporting on the shocking nature of women committing crimes, the media is creating fear in the society, a type of moral panic, towards an emerging category of offender; female offenders (Collins, 2014). Given the theoretical framework, moral panics can be viewed as social constructions (Weinberg, 2009). The notion of moral panic was originally developed by Jock Young and Stan Cohen (1971, 1972) who “argued

that the combined effect of the media's coverage of a phenomenon, public opinion and the reaction of the authorities can have the spiral-life effect of creating a moral panic" (as cited in Ost, 2009, p.16). Specifically, when female offenders consistently make headline news, social concerns towards particular issues are raised. In this case, the female offender is represented as an outsider, a deviant female, who does not conform to social expectations and roles. This is echoed by Collins (2014) who explains how female offenders are represented as abnormal or extraordinary in the media, to mitigate societal fear by also constructing the event as something a 'normal' woman could not possibly be involved in. This idea is shared by Kerby (1991) who suggests that popular narrative influences the understanding of the "other", which also forms an integral part of the construction of self. In this sense, the media may suggest to the consumer whom they should fear (e.g. the pathetic mother, the female bandit, the provocative teacher), presenting a visual representation of the 'other', for the reader to compare to him/herself and reiterate the normalness of self (Collins, 2014). This woman may have been a wife, mother, sister, or grand-mother; however, at some point in her life, she deviated from the social constructions of femininity and therefore became a female 'other'³⁵.

Conclusion

It is unlikely that there will ever be a complete agreement on how female offenders are represented in the media. Consensus varies with time and space, but more pertinently, because all the women featured in the media and all contributors to the debate are subjective human beings (Owens & Hawes, 2015), representations are left for interpretation. In brief, a deviation

³⁵ Sacco (1995) provides an interesting analysis of the media constructions of crime and how media coverage of crime may be implicated in public anxieties. From a constructionist perspective, Sacco (1995), claims that it would be inappropriate to assume that readers and audience respond passively to media constructs of crime in news media.

from restrictive notions of womanhood and motherhood renders women problematic (Black, 2009). Furthermore, underlying social issues and factors which contributed to the offending behaviour are often not included in the media representations of female offenders (Easteal, et al., 2015). As informed by social constructionists, the media tends to represent reality through a selective process, by omitting certain information or context to create a unified and limited picture (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Sacco, 1995). As such, in the literature reviewed, the media emerge as a significant engine in the social construction of female offenders.

2.7 Media and Victims of Female Offenders

In a research conducted by Owens & Hawes (2015) on the ways females offenders are depicted in newspapers, the authors found that the media persistently use the term ‘boy’ when the male victims are under-aged. As this term refers to both age and gender classification, it tends to evoke added sympathy for the victims on the basis of their ‘tender’ age. In contrast, Brennan and Vandenberg (2009), argue that when the crime is perpetrated by a female, the media sometimes tends to neutralize the vocabulary by using non incriminating terms which as a result, minimizes the harm done to the victims. For example, 30% of the articles in their sample do not specifically state the offence committed nor if anyone was harmed by the female offender’ criminal behaviour, leaving the readers wondering whether the victim was truly victimized. In another example, the researchers explain how the victim, in this case an adult male, is portrayed as a powerful employee in a technological company with mentions of his dubious actions and aggressive behaviour. This portrayal leads the readers to question the accusations brought against the female offender, as to whether or not they are justified. And finally, the findings from their research reveal that 16.7% of the front-page newspaper articles featuring female offenders deny

or considerably minimize the victim's injury, with some articles reporting that no one was harmed (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009).

2.8 The Social Construction of Female Online Child Sex Offenders

As established in the review of literature, numerous researchers and academics use concepts from the social constructionist approach to explore how female offenders are represented in the media. However, never before has the online sexual exploitation of children perpetrated by women been examined through this theoretical framework, especially within a Canadian context. Thus, by examining Canadian newspaper articles published since 2010, the same theoretical framework is applied to fill a practical and theoretical gap, about the social construction of this new phenomenon in Canada. Specifically, considering the core concepts of social constructionism and the dominant media representations of female offenders in the literature, three questions arise:

1) Are female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspapers also represented as victims of circumstance (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglioni, 2008; Pozzan, 2014; Naylor, 2011) or as doubly deviant (Collins, 2014; Naylor, 2001; Weatherby et al., 2008) or are new media representations emerging from Canadian newspapers in relation to this phenomenon?

2) What is the link between specific aspects of the online child sexual exploitation cases, as reported in the Canadian media, and the probability that each theme identified in this study be present in the description?

3) What changes, if any, can be observed between 2010 and 2017?

Social constructionists have taught us that human knowledge is an evolving product of history, is socially defined and organized, and is therefore unquestionably susceptible to change

(Rosenfeld, 2014). Thus, this framework allows us to see how the media representation of female online child sex offenders has evolved over time, since 2010, and how it is now defined in our society. It can be argued that up until recently, online child sexual exploitation was under-recognised and misunderstood in Canada, especially when committed by a woman. However, with the increased media attention, especially with recent highly mediatized cases of female teachers “sexting” with teenage students, the media began recognizing this issue, and as a result, anticipates law enforcement and criminal justice system responses, to combat this issue and better protect children and youth (Islam, Banarjee & Khatun, 2014). As explained in this chapter, these solutions will most likely be motivated and driven by media representations of the female online child sex offender. As a result, by exploring how the media represents female online child sex offenders in Canada, considerations relating to future efforts in this area of crime are raised. Moreover, since child sex offenders are mainly represented in the media as male, offending against female victims, this research also aims to raise awareness towards female-perpetrated sexual crimes against children (male and female) in Canada, to reduce cultural denial, as social constructionism would suggest (Gregoriou, 2012; Potter & Kappeler, 1998).

CHAPTER 3: METHDOLOGY

The online world has changed the media and how the media represents certain crime types. From the review of literature detailed in Chapter 2, we now better understand how female offenders in general are represented in the media. However, since the sexual exploitation of children online is a relatively new offence, it is unknown how female offenders perpetrating those crimes are presented in Canadian newspapers. Has the media representation of female offenders changed considering the online component of the crime? Additionally, has this representation changed since 2010³⁶? Informed by a social constructionist lens, the research questions probe the social construction of female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspapers from 2010 to 2017. The research design of the current study has been developed so as to best operationalize the research questions. Hence, the following chapter discusses the epistemological aspects of the research and explains the rationale for and use of a mixed design methods; an inductive thematic analysis and logistic regressions. The process of sampling and analysis chosen for the current study are also outlined. Finally, limitations of the study are included together with a discussion of ethical concerns.

3.1 Study Design

Due to the nature of this research, an exploratory approach is used with some comparative components to the analysis. Rather than attempting to explain why a particular phenomenon occurs, exploratory research tends to indicate what may be occurring and how this happens, which is also in accordance with the constructionist perspective. As such, the current study aims to examine how female online child sex offenders are represented in Canadian newspapers, as

³⁶ The reason why 2010 was selected as the first year for analysis is further explained in the *Data Collection* paragraph.

informed by the review of literature and framework chapter. Exploratory research “tends to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done” (Brown, 2006, p.43). As this is the first study to explore the social construction of these female offenders in Canadian newspapers, it is important to perform a broad inquiry into the topic, identify codes and themes, and present areas for future research. The final intent is to have a better understanding of how the issue is socially constructed.

3.2 Data Collection

For the present study, data was collected from Canadian newspaper articles published between 2010 and 2017 about Canadian women who committed online sexual offences against children. To begin, an open source search through Google was used to locate the articles for inclusion. A combination of specific search terms was employed to generate the desired results, such as “female”, “woman”, “mother” and “child pornography”, “luring”, “sexual communication”³⁷. This yielded hundreds of articles that were then reviewed to ascertain relative fit based on specific inclusion criteria. First, only articles published between January 1st, 2010 and December 31st, 2017 were considered. This timeframe allowed the researcher to build a large enough sample to ensure well-founded analysis, and observe any changes in representations over time while also ensuring feasibility considering the effort and time needed to review and analyze each article. Second, only Canadian newspapers were examined. Although numerous articles relating to female online child sex offenders were published in the United States and other countries around the world, this research aimed specifically at examining the Canadian media. Fourth, only sexual offences against children perpetrated online were considered for analysis. These offences include: possession, distribution, accessing and production of child pornography, making child

³⁷ The same terms were also searched in French, to generate articles from both official national languages. These included “mère(s)”, “maman”, “femme(s)” and “pornographie juvénile”, “leurre d’enfants”, and “crimes sexuels”.

pornography available to children, and communicating with a child for a sexual purpose, most commonly known as luring a child. Finally, both French and English articles were included for analysis as the researcher is fully bilingual and wanted to capture the reality of this phenomenon as presented by newspapers published in both official national languages.

Once all potential articles were collected, a search in ProQuest³⁸ was conducted to ensure no articles overlooked. This strategy was deemed successful as an additional 25 articles were located. Finally, a search by identified female offender's name was also conducted and again, more articles were found and added to the sample. Ultimately, 273 articles met the inclusion criteria. These were saved in a PDF format and basic information was captured using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, specifically to capture the title of the newspaper in which the article was published, the date, the title of the article, the name of the journalist, and if mentioned, the name of the offender, age, occupation, city and province of offence, charges and/or convictions, sentence details, conditions added to the sentence, number of victims, relationship to victims and incident time (when the offence occurred)³⁹. This table was used to generate the quantitative statistics in Chapter 4 and facilitated the analysis components⁴⁰.

Excluded articles

Several media articles were excluded from the sample for various reasons. First, any duplicates, meaning entirely identical articles but published in different newspapers, were excluded. In most

³⁸ ProQuest is a powerful database which provides researchers, academics, and professionals' access to journals, databases, and eBook resources from library's collection (for more information, see www.proquest.com).

³⁹ It is worth noting that not all articles included basic information captured in the table, even from the same newspaper about the same offender. For example, although the researcher knew the age of the offender based on other articles published, if a specific article did not include this information, it was marked as "unknown or not mentioned" in the table. In other words, for this step, the researcher examined all news articles individually.

⁴⁰ After completing the project, it was discovered that using NVivo for this portion would have been extremely more efficient. However, this was unknown to the researcher at that time.

cases, only the original article was kept⁴¹. Second, any article that did not specify the city, province or country of offence was excluded to ensure only Canadian cases and female offenders were included in the sample. Third, only child pornography and luring offences, as defined in the *Criminal Code* of Canada, were considered, and articles pertaining to contact sexual offences against children only⁴² were excluded. Fourth, articles published on non-journalistic websites⁴³ (i.e. radio stations, blogs) were excluded. Finally, few articles did not include enough substance to perform any meaningful analysis, such as articles that mention the female offender's name or the offence only in passing⁴⁴. Consequently, these articles were also not included in the dataset.

3.3 Data Analysis

Critical Content Analysis

According to Powers & Knapp (2006), content analysis is a general term to define a number of different strategies used to analyze data. However, compared to critical discourse analysis⁴⁵ where the link between language and contemporary processes of social change is explored (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), critical content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). The added ‘critical’ term reinforces the researchers’ position and critical lens when reading a text; trying to expose the manner through which a dominant

⁴¹ Although some articles published similar contents, if they appeared significantly different from the other, they were included in the sample. This exclusion process is subjective and relies on the researcher's ability to determine if an article is simply duplicated or if information is selectively excluded or added.

⁴² For example, Sarah Allt Harnish from Nova Scotia was charged with invitation to sexual touching, sexual assault and sexual interference. Some news articles suspected the use of a cellphone to commit the offence, however she was never charged for child pornography or luring offences. For this reason, all articles relating to her case were excluded.

⁴³ The inclusion-exclusion decisions were at the discretion of the researcher. These online pages were not considered legitimate sources of information by the researcher.

⁴⁴ For example, only the name of the offender was mentioned in relation to a larger investigation (no context, charges or convictions).

⁴⁵ Through the analysis of particular linguistic and semiotic features of the data (in a broad sense), critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to explore processes of social change (Fairclough, Jessop & Sayer, 2004).

culture distorts, constructs and represents people and institutions (Beach, Enciso, Harste, Jenkins, Raina, Rogers, Short, Sung, Wilson, Yenika-Agbaw, in press). Beach et al. further explain how:

“The theories and methods of critical discourse analysis can provide insight into not just what is written and illustrated but how they are written and illustrated. Writers and illustrators make choices, intentional or not, that privilege some perspectives and marginalize others” (p.18).

Critical content analysts use analytic constructs or inferences, derived from the theory or previous research, to transform the data into answers to the research questions (White & Marsh, 2006). There are no exact definitions of this methodology, thus leaving room for interpretation and variance. As such, thematic analysis, which does not appear to exist as a named method, tends to erroneously fall under the critical content analysis group since both methods analytically examine trends and patterns in data and allow for the interpretation of the findings (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). However, as compared to critical analysis, the analysis conducted for this research was inductive, enabling themes and constructs to emerge from the data instead of using pre-existing constructs.

Thematic Analysis

The current research project employs a media thematic analysis approach, as mainly informed by Braun and Clarke (2006), in order to most effectively investigate the proposed research questions. As an independent qualitative descriptive method, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how a thematic analysis can be conducted within a constructionist paradigm, and provides numerous advantages to qualitative researchers such as accessibility and flexibility; accessibility in the sense that those who are unfamiliar with qualitative approaches can follow the guidelines of thematic analysis without difficulty and flexibility in how the method can be applied within

various theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lyons & Rohleder, 2014).

The thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a six-phase approach⁴⁶ “for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.58), rather than *within* a data item. A thematic analysis is an effective method to reflect on reality and how reality is socially constructed. It is a way to examine how meanings and experiences are the effects of a wide range of discourses within a given society (Braun & Clarke, 2006), such as conveyed by newspaper articles. The following paragraphs outline how these steps were applied to examine and analyze the articles for this research.

Before outlining the thematic analysis steps, it is important to define two main terms which are essential in understanding this method. First, a code refers to “a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.63). A code can describe a statement as it is presented by the author (i.e. journalist) or move beyond the initial meaning and provide an interpretation about the data (latent meaning). Second, a theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). As such, creating a theme is an active process, whereby codes are combined under a broader concept or idea, contributing to the elucidation of the research questions. The key for developing themes is consistency, which means all statements included under a theme must be compatible with the specific definition provided for this theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

⁴⁶ The titles for the six phases are ones provided by Braun & Clarke (2006) in *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*.

Phase 1: *Familiarising yourself with the data*

As a first phase, the researcher read the 273 articles numerous times to fully understand them, familiarize herself with the sample and highlight potential items of interest, especially in relation to the research questions. It was not simply a passive reading, but rather an active and critical reading of the articles, trying to make sense of the articles as single units and as a whole. At this stage, the researcher also took down some notes; thoughts and ideas that could inform future codes and themes.

Phase 2: *Generating initial codes*

As a second phase, the researcher read through the articles again and identified numerous initial codes. Some codes mirrored the journalist's terms and others were more interpretative, invoking the researcher's theoretical framework and concepts from the reviewed literature. As new codes were being identified, the researcher often went back to modify existing codes, using more precise and pertinent terms. Following Braun & Clarke's (2006) advice, the researcher coded for as many potential patterns as possible, to ensure the possibility of an in-depth and all-inclusive further analysis. Moreover, a single statement could bear more than one code⁴⁷.

Phase 3: *Searching for themes*

In this third phase, the researcher started joining codes together, to form broader overarching themes based on relevance given the initial research questions. These clusters of codes were produced based on similarity; they were created by the researcher as compared to simply discovered or emerging from the data. Social constructionists recognize there are no objective means of developing themes (Best, 1987), extracting themes is rather a subjective process.

⁴⁷ For example, if an offender's quote related to past abuse and current relationship with her husband, two codes were created for the same statement (e.g. offender's past victimization and offender married).

Sub-themes were also generated to further specify a theme. Any outstanding codes were merged into a miscellaneous theme and revisited once each individual theme was properly defined. As a result, four dominant themes were created.

Themes were identified in an inductive way (e.g. Frith and Gleeson, 2004) which means they derived directly from the data as compared to a deductive approach (see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997) where the data gets classified under pre-existing themes established from the review of literature, the theory or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. This approach is particularly valuable when exploring unfamiliar subject matter, such as the sexual exploitation of children online by women. In addition, Braun and Clarke's (2006) article on using thematic analysis explains how themes can be identified at two levels: at a semantic or at a latent level (see also Boyatzis, 1998). A thematic analysis that follows a semantic approach proposes that themes be identified and named based on the surface meanings of the data, without going beyond what was originally written by the author. In contrast, a thematic analysis that interprets the data to identify underlying meanings and assumptions, seeks a latent level. In the latter, which tends to come from a constructionist paradigm, the analysis progresses from a descriptive to an interpretative level, theorizing the broader meanings and implications of the entire data set (Burr, 1995; Patton, 1990). For this specific research, the inductive thematic analysis focused on a latent level.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

During this fourth phase, the researcher thoroughly reviewed and refined the themes created to ensure these cohere together meaningfully. Like stated by Braun & Clarke (2006) "there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes" (p.91). Where some extracts caused confusion, they were discarded or relocated under another theme. If need be, some themes'

boundaries were redrawn to more meaningfully capture the relevant data. The authors often refer to this activity as creating a ‘thematic map’ where themes are moved, divided, new themes are created, and codes are refined, until the researcher feels satisfied with the final map of themes. According to Krippendorff (2004), this recursive progression of “decontextualizing, reinterpreting, and redefining the research until some kind of satisfactory interpretation is reached” is referred to as a *hermeneutic loop* (p.87-88). Once the final ‘thematic map’ is created⁴⁸, it should be an accurate representation of the overall sample, in relation to the research questions.

Phase 5: *Defining and naming themes*

Following the guidelines of Braun & Clarke (2006), this phase involved defining and naming each theme individually. The definitions and names should be clear, concise and should truly capture the “essence of what the theme is about” (p.92) and what it is not about, in relation to the other themes. Above all, the themes should address the research questions. This phase is a crucial analytic component of the thematic analysis where data needs to be interpreted and linked to the initial questioning and purpose of the research. The “analysis needs to be driven by the question ‘so what’? (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.67).

Phase 6: *Producing the report*

The last phase involves writing the final report, the analysis which not only provides a ‘story’ about the overall data, but also makes an argument in relation to the initial research questions and appropriate literature. Only the most relevant extracts from the data were used to illustrate the various themes, and further advance the discussion.

⁴⁸ In relation to knowing when to stop, Braun & Clarke (2006) stated “when your refinements are not adding anything substantial, stop! If the process of recoding is only fine-tuning and making more nuanced a coding frame that already works, recognize this and stop” (p.92).

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Qualitative methods are highly appropriate when the ultimate goal of the research questions is to generate new ways of seeing existing data, without losing the context and complexity of this data. It allows the researcher to understand a phenomenon in detail, as well as analyze and interpret the data rather than simply describing a situation (Atieno, 2009). For this research, a mixed method design was applied, employing both qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the data. Although some social sciences researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1989) do not believe both methods are compatible, others (Patton, 1990; Reichardt & Cook, 1979) believe “that the skilled researcher can successfully combine approaches” (Atieno, 2009, p.15). The qualitative analysis provides a more in depth and rich description of the data while “combinations of both qualitative and quantitative content analysis are seen as to be an ideal approach to examine the text” (Schreier, 2012, p.57), as it helps to turn data in less abstract forms and explore the data for further comprehension (Neuendorf, 2002). In reality, all qualitative data can be assigned a meaningful numerical value and can be coded quantitatively⁴⁹ and all quantitative data is eventually interpreted and transformed into qualitative statements. Therefore, “qualitative and quantitative data are, at some level, virtually inseparable” (Atieno, 2009, p.17). As a result, while inherent limitations and complex assumptions are recognized, this amalgamation of methods is employed to further examine and interpret the data collected on Canadian female online child sex offenders.

⁴⁹ For example, being a mother could be coded as 1 and not being a mother as 0.

Instruments

For the quantitative analysis component, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was first used to capture basic information about each article, allowing the researcher to then conduct basic filtering combinations to generate significant descriptive statistics (see Chapter 4)⁵⁰. However, after completing the analysis, these statistics based on raw frequencies were deemed too simple, did not take into consideration the numerous articles published about a same female offender, and as a result, yielded dubious results. To mitigate this bias and to determine whether a link exists between specific aspects of the cases reviewed for this study and the probability that each theme identified is present in the description, a series of logistic regressions were performed for each theme using a sub-sample of cases consisting of 205 articles pertaining to 36 Canadian female online child sex offenders. Articles published about each female offender equate to one case for the purpose of this analysis. The purpose of logistic regressions is to identify predictors associated with a change in the odds that a specific case would be associated with values of a binary outcome; in this case, the presence or not of a particular theme. Since this study consists of panel data⁵¹, time was a component of the design and was therefore used as a predictor itself. Particularly, the Odds Ratio (OR) was examined. A lack of association between a predictor and an outcome yields an OR value of 1. Deviations from 1 in either direction mean that the predictor is associated with an increased (values over 1) or decreased (values under 1) odd that a theme is present (Everitt & Hothorn, 2009; Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The results from this analysis are reviewed in Chapter 4.

⁵⁰ The researcher did not feel the need to utilize a quantitative analysis software, such as SPSS a software which allows researchers to conduct advanced statistical analysis, as the main analysis was qualitative in nature.

⁵¹ Panel data contain observations of multiple phenomena obtained over a time period for the same case, or in this study, the same female online child sex offender.

As for the qualitative analysis portion, rather than performing a manual analysis, the researcher utilized the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo. NVivo is a powerful tool that allows the researcher to import various types of files, review, organize and uncover connections in the qualitative data, in a more efficient way (QSR International, n.d.). There are mixed views relating to the use of computers for qualitative data analysis. Some concerns relate to the software possibly “guiding” researchers in a particular direction (Seidel, 1991) while, on the contrary, the software may allow researchers to distant themselves from the data, and promote a more homogenous approach to social sciences research (Barry, 1998; Hinchliffe, Crang, Reimer & Hudson, 1997). The electronic coding process allowed the researcher to then combine the codes in a rapid, coherent and organized manner. This method minimizes the chances for mistakes and therefore, provides more accurate and reliable results.

Generalizability

The current research is built specifically within a Canadian context, between 2010 and 2017, and therefore, the findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to other settings, times, etc. The findings of this research thus serve primarily heuristic purposes of highlighting the existence of this crime at the hands of women in Canada, describing its representation in the Canadian newspapers, exploring female online child sex offenders in relation to other female offenders in the media, examining the link between themes and specific aspects of cases and paving the way for further, more extensive research.

3.4 Limitations of this Study

While reviewing the findings of this research, readers should take into consideration several limitations that may have influenced the results. Although such limitations are, indeed, a recognized problem with qualitative and media analyses, the researcher believes that by identifying them and considering them in the analysis, these are minimized.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, all articles for inclusion were collected for analysis. However, it is possible that some articles were not captured via Google or ProQuest. Therefore, the statistics and themes may not represent the entirety of all articles published on this topic in Canada but a proportion of it. In addition, the vast majority of newspaper articles collected for analysis were published in local online newspapers. These newspapers oftentimes copy the content of articles from more popular, mainstream newspapers. However, as previously mentioned, duplicates were removed from the sample. Readers should nevertheless keep this in consideration when examining results and statistics.

It is accepted that the researcher could influence the study in some way, by bringing their own experience and beliefs into consideration of data. Boyatzis (1998) states that thematic analysis is subjective in terms of the researcher's interpretations. It can be argued that themes do not just 'reside' in the data; rather, they 'emerge' as a result of researchers making links as they understand them (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). To limit the bias, the researcher tried to remain objective when identifying themes in this study by analyzing the data with an open mind. The "15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was also reviewed to ensure the methodology was applied rigorously and systematically (see Appendix C). Despite this limit, thematic analysis remains a suitable method to utilize in this research as it

is flexible and allows for rich detail, creating a broad potential for analysis. There could also be unconscious researcher bias, perhaps reflecting our own pre-existing hypotheses and theory from the wider female sexual offender literature. In order to minimize these effects, the themes were reviewed by a second rater⁵² and discussed with the lead researcher until both were satisfied in terms of validity and appropriateness of each theme.

To conclude, the sub-sample examined for the logistic regressions excludes most articles published about mothers who sexually abused their own children, since names were kept confidential by the media to protect the identity of the victims. These articles did not allow for the creation of specific cases pertaining to distinct female offenders. Consequently, the results of this analysis are not representative of the entire sample as being a mother, as a nominal variable within the analysis, is mainly discounted.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research involves non-intrusive and unobtrusive research methods and the information gathered on each female offender is publicly available. For this reason, confidentiality and anonymity are not a source of concern. In addition, the research did not involve human participants, and as such, the researcher cannot directly impact upon the phenomenon under scrutiny. Considering the scarce ethical considerations, and since the ethics guidelines, policies and procedures were not applicable for this research, no assessment from the Research Ethics Boards (REB) at the University of Ottawa was required.

Conflict of interest

⁵² The second rater is a colleague of the primary researcher, also a Research Analyst for the RCMP.

Although the researcher works for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in a unit that specializes in online child sexual exploitation investigations and major crimes, female-perpetrated crimes of this type are not studied. No research was ever conducted on female online child sex offenders nor was any statistics gathered at the unit. Therefore, the researcher declares that she has no conflict of interest with this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

A total of 273 Canadian articles, pertaining to 36 known⁵³ female online child sex offenders were collected from a wide range of Canadian newspapers accessible online. A series of variables, as outlined in the Methodology chapter, were then explored to present qualitative and quantitative data about each article to better capture the media representations of these female offenders from 2010 to 2017. Thus, this chapter summarizes the findings from the initial data collection and concludes with the four main themes identified by performing a thematic analysis.

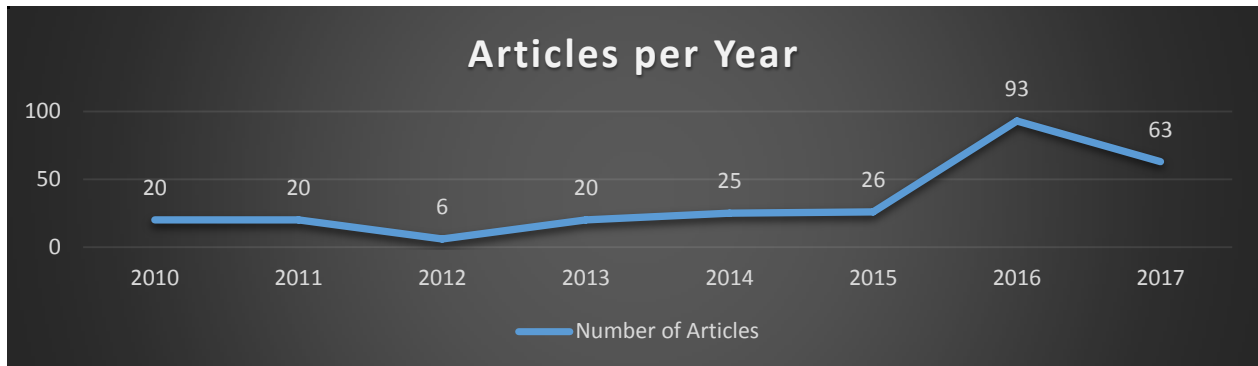
4.1 Yearly Review

The table below indicates a general trend between 2010 and 2015 of 22 unique articles published on average every year about female online child sex offenders, with a noteworthy increase in 2016 (93 articles, 34% of the dataset) and 2017 (63 articles, 23%). For some unknown reason, only six articles were published in 2012⁵⁴. In future research, it would be interesting to further examine the Canadian political and social context relating to online child sexual exploitation for each year, to better understand why so few articles were published one year and so many for the last two years examined.

⁵³ 36 indicates the number of female offenders for which a name was provided in the media article. Several female offenders' identities remain unknown.

⁵⁴ Because of the low number of articles, it was challenging to conduct statistically significant analysis and examine trends. These articles were still included to have a complete set of data since 2010.

Table 1: Distribution of Articles per Year

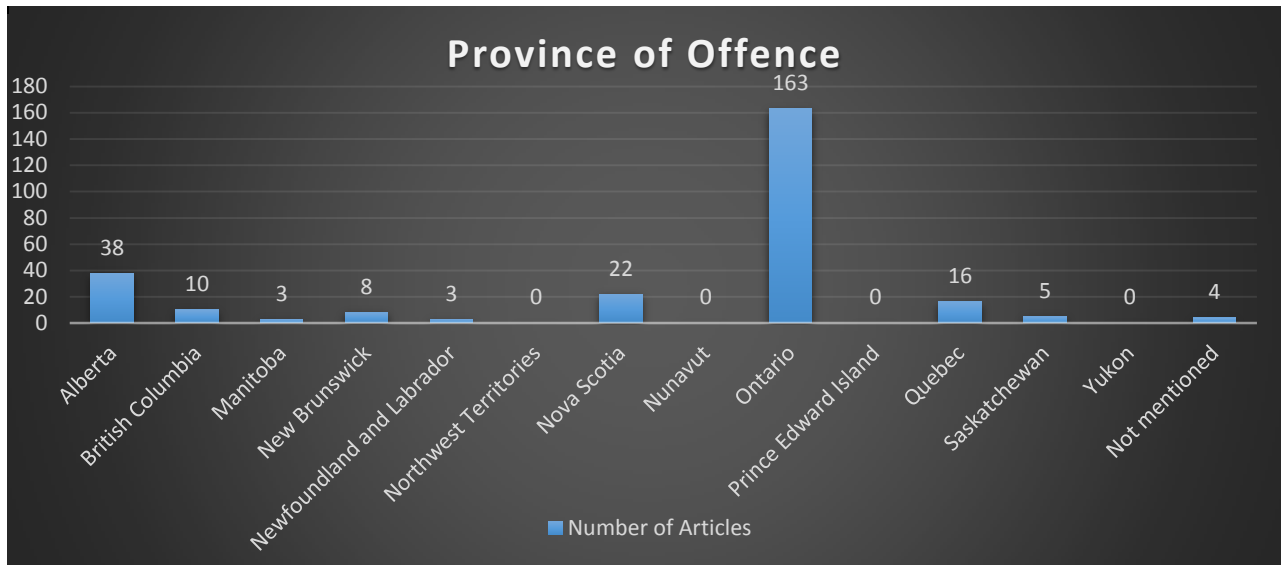


Provinces of Offence

Where an incident occurred in Canada is visibly an important factor for the Canadian media when reporting on a child who was sexually exploited online by a woman. Only 1% of the media articles did not specify the city or province of offence. When looking at the distribution of articles per province and territories, a significant representation from Ontario is identified, with 60% of all articles within the dataset, whereas no articles were found for Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon⁵⁵. A Canada-wide representation would have been ideal but unfortunately, there no were known articles published in these regions during the selected timeframe for this study. Moreover, Alberta had a high number of articles published in early 2010 and 2011, but as the years went on, fewer articles were published about female online child sex offenders (from 60% in 2011 to 8% in 2017). Articles about cases in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick only appear starting in 2014, and cases in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2016, which may indicate a belated media interest about this crime in the East coast. To the researchers' surprise, a large province like Saskatchewan had very few articles about this crime-type committed by women, comprising only 2% of the dataset.

⁵⁵ This may be due to accessibility and local newspapers not being published online.

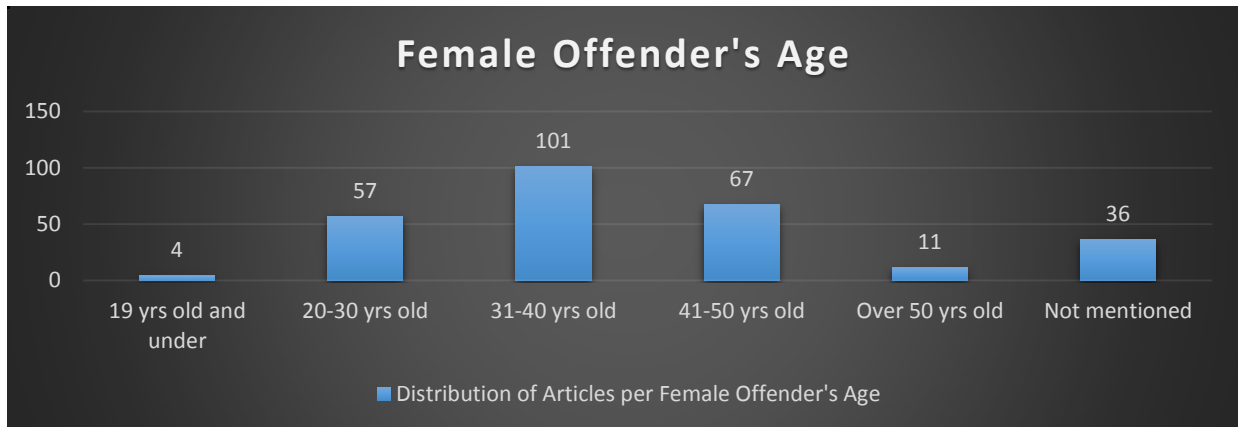
Table 2: Distribution of Articles per Province of Offence



Age

The overall most prevalent age category for Canadian female online child sex offenders in the media is 31- 40 years old, comprising 37% of the dataset, with an average of 36 years old. This result goes against the traditional social construction of child sex offenders as older individuals in the society (ECAT International, 2016; Sinclair & Sugar, 2005). A yearly review shows that the media increasingly reports on older female offenders (41-50 years old, from 11% in 2015 to 30% in 2017) and less about the average aged female offender (31-40 years old, 70% in 2015 to 19% in 2017). Besides, it is not before 2013 that a woman over the age of 50 was charged for child pornography-related offences. Only 13% of the articles did not include the age of the female offender.

Table 3: Distribution of Articles per Female Offender's Age

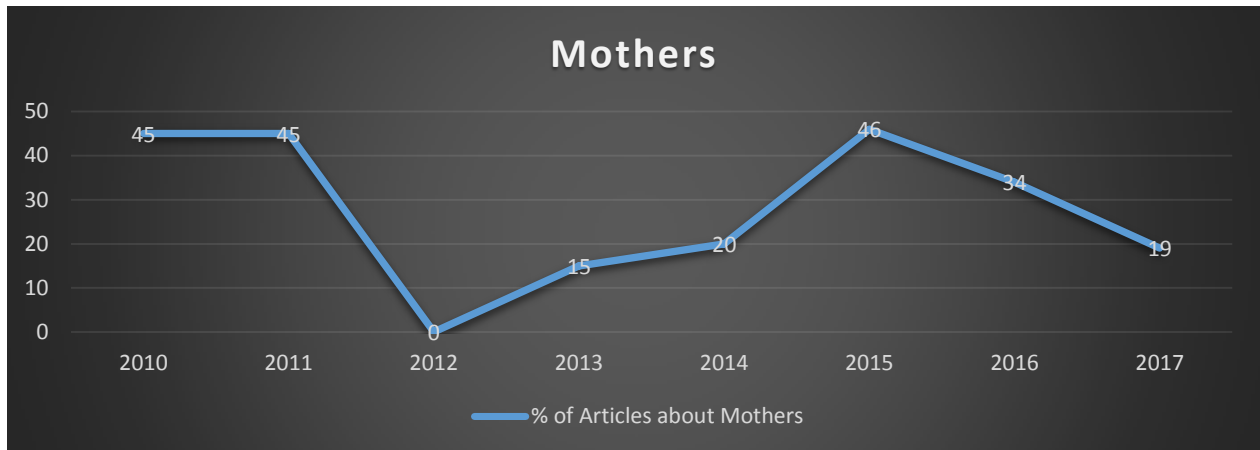


Motherhood

In total, only 30% of the articles pertain to female offenders who are also mothers, regardless of their relationship to the victim(s)⁵⁶. One must consider the limitation that many articles about the same female offender did not mention motherhood, while others did. Therefore, the results reflect what the media provided to readers in each separate article. As seen in the table below, 2010, 2011 and 2015 are the years with the highest percentage of articles about mothers, and a significant decrease is observed in the last two years of the dataset (from 46% of the articles published in 2015 to 19% in 2017). Interestingly, although 46% of the articles published in 2015 were about mothers, the large majority pertain to a daycare educator and a teacher who sexually exploited students at their school. This finding illustrates a clear transition in the media representation of female online child sex offenders, from mothers to teachers (will be further discussed in this chapter).

⁵⁶ Not all mothers offended against their own children.

Table 4: Percentage of Articles about Mothers

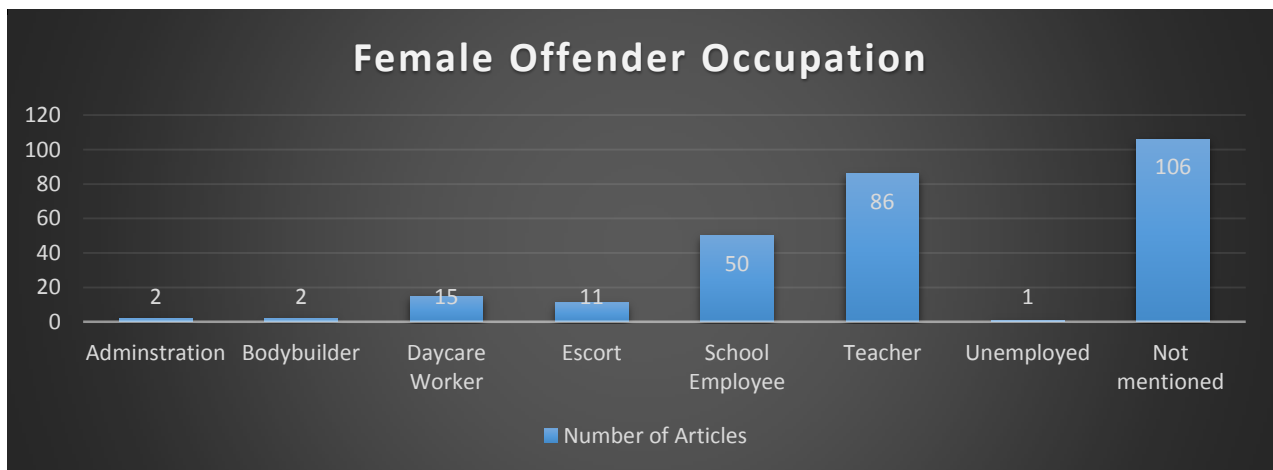


Occupation

Within the 273 articles examined, only six occupations are mentioned: administrative assistant (1%), bodybuilder (1%), daycare worker (5%), escort (4%), school employee (which includes educational assistants, cross guard, and secretary) (18%), and finally, teacher (32%). When looking at occupations which entail a frequent and direct access to children such as daycare worker, school employee and teacher, these women comprise more than 50% of the articles in the dataset. Consequently, the female online child sex offender is strongly represented in the Canadian media as someone who interacts with children everyday as part of her employment. She is someone who has authority over the child, who parents conceivably trust and expects to protect their children while they are at work and someone who contributes to their education and development. She is also someone who has opportunities, as part of her occupation, to sexually exploit children. Furthermore, 39% of the articles in the dataset do not specify the occupation. Of those articles, 41% pertain to offenders who victimized unknown children to them and 33% to mothers. These illustrate the only two scenarios where occupation is not a significant factor in Canadian newspapers.

While a decrease in the number of articles about mothers is observed in the last two years examined, this also corresponds with a momentous increase in the number of articles about teachers (from 8% of the articles published in 2014 to 52% in 2016 and 41% in 2017). Therefore, one could argue that being a mother decreased in significance through the years in Canadian newspapers, as compared to occupation, which is specific to online child sexual exploitation, as compared to media articles about other crimes committed by women. In addition, the occupation of escort emerges only in 2017 which, apart from the female bodybuilder mentioned in 2013 and 2014, is the only occupation mentioned in the Canadian media since 2011 that is not associated to having frequent and direct access to children, such as school employees and teachers.

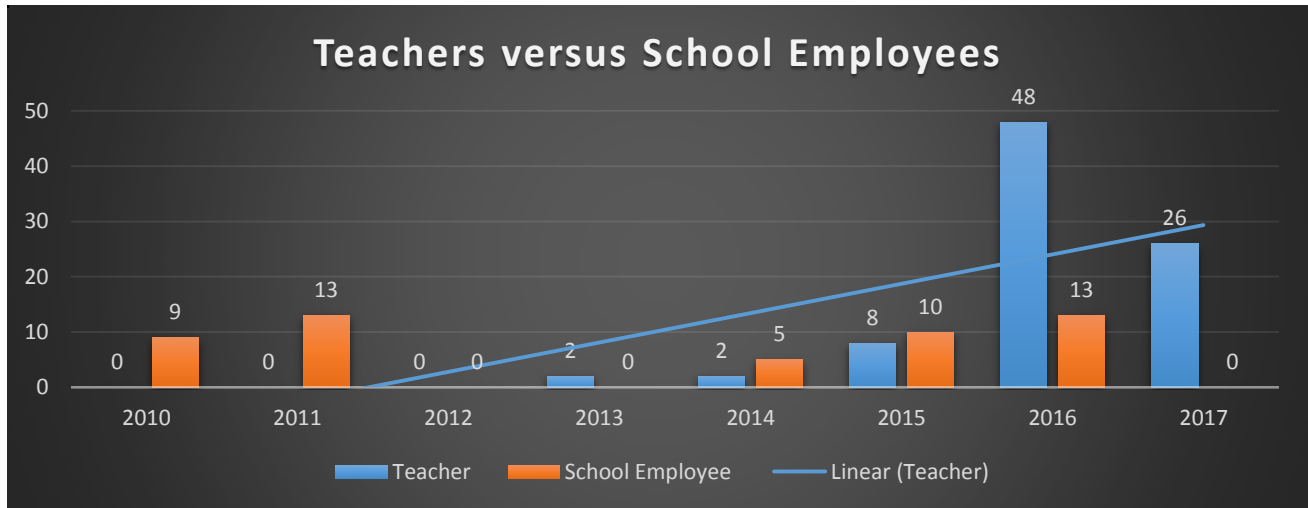
Table 5: Distribution of Articles per Occupation



The school employee category is mainly comprised of educational assistants otherwise known as women who help deliver educational programs in school systems, but that are not accredited teachers. The graph below shows a visible shift from 2010 to 2017 in the number of articles about teachers, as compared to school employees. Before 2013, there are no articles about teachers, only about educational assistants charged or convicted of sexually exploiting a child. However, starting in 2014, a significant increase is illustrated in the number of articles about

teachers, so much so that in 2017, there are no articles about educational assistants or school employee, only about teachers.

Table 6: Distribution of Articles for Teachers and School Employees

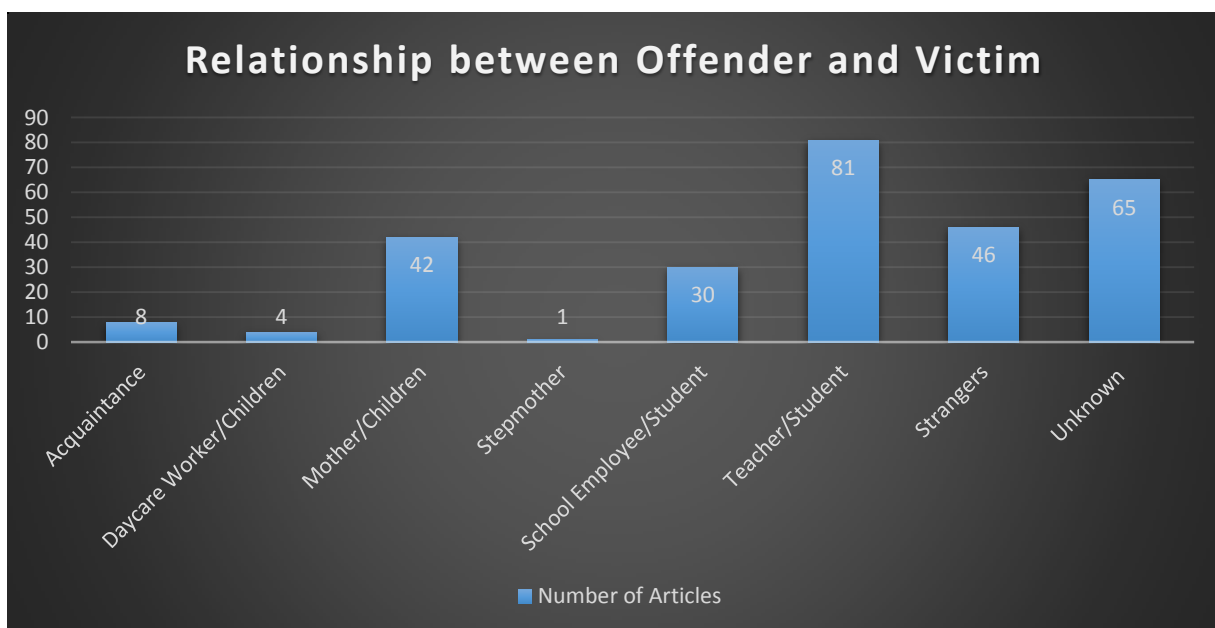


Relationship

The relationship between the female offender and the victim is indicated in 76% of the articles within the dataset. In fact, a 69% decrease in the number of articles not specifying the relationship is observed from 2014 to 2017 (from 52% of the articles to 16%), demonstrating an increased media interest towards the relationship between an online child sex offender and their victim(s). Two main relationships stand out which coincide with the overarching main media representations of female online child sex offenders in Canada. First, 30% of articles reported on female teachers who sexually exploited their student(s). In addition, another 11% of the articles pertain to school employees offending against students, with a combined total of 41% of the abuse occurring between an adult within a school environment and an underage student. Second, mother-children relationships comprise 16% of the dataset; 8% are male victims, 4% female victims and 4% both genders. Acquaintances, which include babysitters and caretakers in this

sample, only account for 3% of the dataset which is significantly lower than numbers provided in the literature about child sexual abuse (C3P, 2017; Lanning & Dietz, 2014). In terms of female offenders who sexually exploited children unknown to them, a decrease is observed from 2013 (30%) to 2016 (1%); however, this number increases back to 30% in 2017⁵⁷. Interestingly, there is one case about a female offender who was charged for accessing child sexual exploitation material online and her occupation, teacher, is again emphasized in the articles. This is interesting because it shows that even if the victim is not a student, the occupation of teacher remains a significant factor for this crime-type in Canadian newspapers.

Table 7: Distribution of Articles per Relationship



Lone Offenders vs Co-Offenders

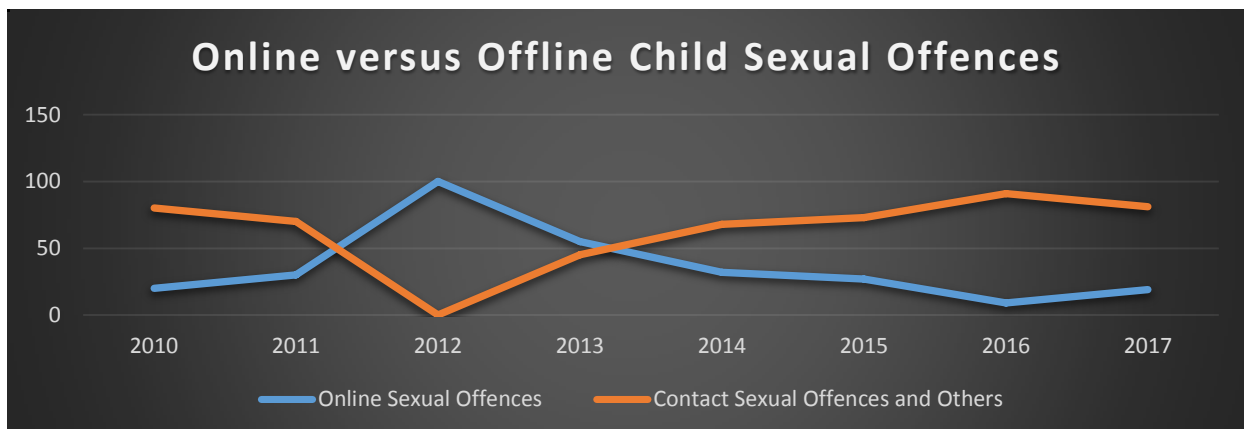
Online versus Offline Sexual Offending

⁵⁷ The significant increase is due to multiple articles published about a female offender who targeted female teens online by impersonating a young and attractive male, to obtain self-produced sexually explicit material from them. The remaining were about an escort who was hired to participate in the sexual abuse of a young girl advertised on Craigslist for sexual purposes. The victim's identity, and age, were unknown to the female offender prior to the incident. And finally, all six articles published in 2012 pertain to women who were caught in possession of already produced child sexual explicit material found on the Internet.

Results from this study show that female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspapers are very rarely only charged with child pornography-related or child luring offences, as defined in the *Criminal Code* of Canada, while only 19% of the articles published from 2010 to 2017 pertain to women who were strictly charged or convicted for online sexual offences against children. In 76% of the articles, the female offender was also charged or convicted with a contact sexual offence against a child such as sexual interference, sexual exploitation and/or sexual assault. As a result, physical sexual abuse may occupy a higher position with respect to severity and newsworthiness in Canadian newspapers as compared to online sexual offences. This finding is pertinent when examining research on the correlation between online and offline child sexual offending (Elliott, Beech, & Mandeville-Norden, 2013; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005). Moreover, in only 5% of the articles additional charges for non-sexual offences were also added such as drug trafficking, extortion, uttering threats and bestiality.

As demonstrated in the graph below, as the years go by (with the exception of 2012), fewer articles are published exclusively about child pornography and luring charges and an increasing number of articles are published about women who also physically sexually abused children or committed other offences.

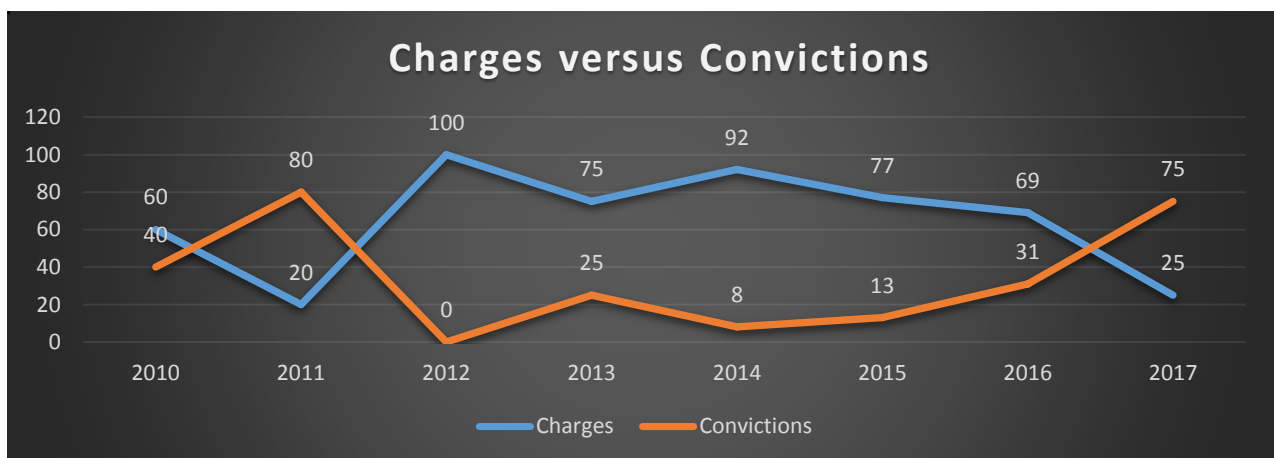
Table 9: Percentage of Articles per Offence Type



Charges versus Convictions

A review of the dataset reveal that 58% of the articles pertain to charges laid against female online child sex offenders, whereas 42% of the articles report actual convictions. When reviewing the graph below, between 2012 and 2014, the percentage of articles about charges is significantly higher than the ones about convictions. However, a gradual decrease is noted from 2014 (92% of the articles) leading to 2017 (25%) where the large majority of articles report on female offenders who were convicted for the sexual offences committed against children⁵⁸. This finding suggests an over-representation of convictions in the media as compared to current official statistics that demonstrate how very few women are convicted for sexual offences. Female child sex offenders, including those who offend online, are more often released on strict conditions, or the charges are withdrawn during the judicial proceedings for various reasons (Eldridge et al., 2009). This being said, the number of articles about charges and convictions may fluctuate each year depending on the judicial status of the female online child sex offenders who comprise most of the dataset⁵⁹.

Table 10: Percentage of Articles per Charges and per Convictions



her story throughout the judicial process. In 2014, many new cases came to light in the media which caused the increase in articles pertaining to charges.

Although the aim of this study is not to look at criminal sentencing for Canadian female online child sex offenders, it is worth noting that 24% of the articles in the dataset provide details about sentencing. Women were given prison sentences ranging from 90 days (intermittent⁶⁰) to eight and a half years, for their illegal sexual behaviour against children⁶¹. Apart from criminal convictions, several other female online child sex offenders were released on probation with a number of strict conditions, such as restricted interactions with children (including online), avoiding public places frequented by children and youth and limited access to the Internet.

4.2 Word Frequency

An interesting feature in NVivo is the ability to search the frequency of occurrence of specific words within a given dataset. This allows researchers to better understand the dataset from a linguistic and basic quantitative perspective, without having to conduct a thorough discourse analysis. When looking at the 20 words⁶² that most frequently appear within the 273 articles, pertinent terms that arise include “child” (1747 counts), “sexual” (1234 counts), “pornography/*pornographie*/porn” (1210 counts), “police” (912 counts), “sex” (903 counts), “teacher/teachers” (921 counts), “woman” (848 counts), “charges” (815 counts)⁶³, “student”

⁶⁰ An intermittent prison sentence means the female offender can complete her sentence during the weekends, and be out of jail during the week.

⁶¹ The highest sentence was given to Sonya Lucas who pleaded guilty to making and possessing child pornography, as well as sexual touching, for her role in the sexual abuse of a seven-year-old girl advertised on Craigslist for sexual purposes.

⁶² Words with less than three letters were added to the stop list, which means they were excluded from the word frequency algorithm. Examples of these include: ‘or’, ‘if’, ‘to’, ‘a’, etc.

⁶³ The word ‘charged’ had another 692 counts.

(663 counts) and “school” (577 counts). “Luring”, one of the offences considered for this study, is mentioned 240 times; however not enough times to make the most frequent list of terms⁶⁴.

This study found that several alternative terms to child pornography and luring are used in Canadian newspapers to refer to the act of sexually exploiting children online, notably the terms “abuse” (369 counts), “exploitation” (315 counts), “relationship” (130 counts), “intercourse” (22 counts), “affair” (10 counts), “misconduct” (9 counts), “sexting” (9 counts). Surprisingly, although several mothers sexually exploited their own children, the word “incest” is mentioned only once in the dataset.

Similarly, female online child sex offenders are not all presented in the same manner. Other terms such as “woman” (848 counts), “teacher” (884 counts), “mother” (286 counts), and “predator” (16 counts) are frequently mentioned. “Female” is also mentioned 130 times and “offender”, 111 times. The findings from the word frequency assessment support the dominant themes that are presented in the following section.

4.3 Main Themes

During the data collection phase, when “woman” or “female” were typed in Google in combination with “child pornography” and/or “luring”, hardly any results appeared and most articles pertained to male child sex offenders who victimized girls and young women. However, when the terms “mother” or “teacher” were entered in combination with the same key words, the number of relevant articles for this study nearly tripled. Thus, before even examining the articles and performing analysis, two dominant representations of the female online child sex offenders stood out from the Canadian media; the mother and the teacher. After completing further

⁶⁴ A latent semantic analysis would have been more informative given the research questions however for the purpose of this research, a simple overview of frequently used words was deemed sufficient.

analysis, it was revealed that the Canadian female online child sex offender does not consist of binary representation, but is rather comprised of four female offender sub-types; the mother, the teacher, the school employee and others (which includes all other occupations and non-mothers). These four sub-types yield different representations in the Canadian media articles which are further explored throughout this chapter.

This being said, by completing the coding and analysis phases (as detailed in the Methodology chapter), four dominant themes were identified: aggravating factors, mitigating factors, consequences of abuse, and children safety. These were established based on recurrence in the dataset⁶⁵ and are presented accordingly. More specifically, 419 references⁶⁶ are coded under the aggravating factors theme, 375 under mitigating factors as well as under consequences of abuse themes, and 119 under the children safety theme⁶⁷. In addition, the themes are further examined in relation to the four previously-mentioned Canadian female online child sex offender sub-types to provide an in-depth analysis. The themes, as well as some sub-themes, are described below and further analyzed in the Discussion chapter, in relation to the research questions.

Theme #1: Aggravating Factors

This study found that Canadian newspaper articles about online child sexual exploitation by women tend to include additional details about the offences for the purpose of increasing the severity of the crime committed and/or to increase the culpability of the female offender. These aggravating factors are often mentioned by the media in reference to the sentencing, as they

⁶⁵ The themes were identified not only based on the number of times they were coded within the dataset (references) but also the number of articles in which they were appear. Distinctions should be taken in consideration when reviewing the findings. Only the most prevalent themes were considered for this section.

⁶⁶ A reference is a word, sentence or paragraph in a media article that was associated to a specific code.

⁶⁷ There could be differences in the number of articles counted for each theme below since some teachers are also mothers. Therefore, the article may be counted twice (once for the mother category and once for the teacher category). This should be taken into consideration when looking at the results.

could have an impact on the sentence given to the female offender in court. This theme was identified in articles about each female online child sex offender sub-type, although the recurrence of articles for each differs. Articles about teachers have the highest percentage of references⁶⁸ to aggravating factors with 33% of the references, followed by mothers with 26%, school employees with 22% and others with 19%.

Overall, the three foremost sub-themes relating to aggravating factors that emerge from Canadian articles are the age of the victim(s), or the age difference between the victim(s) and the female sex offender, the reoccurrence and duration of the offence, and being in a position of trust. Additional less common sub-themes are also listed at the end of this section, specific to each female online child sex offender type.

Victim's Age

First, although all victims were naturally below the age of 18 when the offence occurred, a total of 54 newspaper articles repeat and/or emphasize the age of the victims if they are under 12, and even more so if they are babies and toddlers. Notably, the age of the victim(s) is more often than not included in the article title, further highlighting its status as an aggravating factor. This is specifically the case for teachers who comprise 47% of the articles within this sub-theme, as compared to only 7% for school employees. A good example to illustrate the emphasis on age is the following article title: “The charges involve students as young as 12 years old” (Morales, 2016). One article even states that “police refused to say anything about the numbers or ages of the alleged victims” (National Post, 2016), validating the importance of age in the determination of the severity of the case. And finally, a teacher was convicted for possession of child

⁶⁸ These percentages do not take into consideration the numerous articles published about a same female offender. The logistic regression analysis on a sub-sample partially mitigates this limitation.

pornography and her collection was said to contain images and videos of children from “one month to 14 years; five-year olds being the most common age found in the collection” (Devoy, 2013). Again, the article stresses the lower end of the spectrum for victim’s age.

Mothers also comprise 28% of the articles within this sub-theme. For instance, an article titled: “a mother guilty of sex crimes against young daughters” (Langley, 2017), emphasizes the daughters as minors which, as a result, presents the case as more severe than if the daughters were adults. Another article about a mother who sexually assaulted her children mention that “one of the children allegedly abused was only four years old” (CBC News, 2016). Although both her children were sexually abused by their mother, only the youngest child’s age is mentioned in the article, reinforcing the current sub-theme as an aggravating factor. As demonstrates the table below, this sub-theme only became significant in 2016 and 2017.

Table 11: Number of Articles about the Low Age of Victims per Year

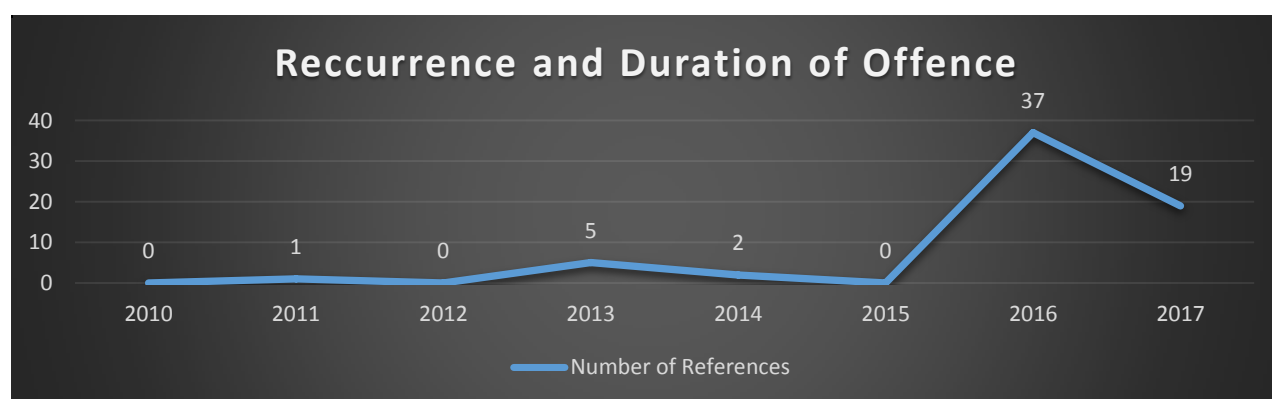


Recurrence and Duration of Offence

Second, if a child was sexually exploited over a long a period of time (i.e. several months or years), the duration is highlighted in the article as an aggravating factor. For example, a teacher sexually exploited children “over a three-year span from 2013 to 2016” (Morales, 2016) and a ready-to-learn educator’s “actions continued from 2001 to 2011, and after a decade when an offence goes on for that long, it offers a chance for reflection.. But the act persisted” (Devoy,

2013). In these cases, the notion of time has a negative connotation and is represented as detrimental since the female offender had opportunities to end the abusive situation but did not. This is specifically the case for teachers comprising 35% of this sub-theme, followed by school employees with 28% and finally mothers with 25%. Particularly, an article states how some of the charges laid against a mother “date back six years ago” (Cheevers, 2016), implying the sexual exploitation may have been occurring for several years. In addition, another article specifically mentions the aggravating factors presented in court against a mother that was sentenced to three years in prison for sexually exploiting her children, which include the recurrence and duration of the behaviour⁶⁹ (Morabitos & Gilbert, 2011). Nevertheless, the recurrence and duration of the offence does not seem to be a significant aggravating factor for the others sub-type, representing only 11% of this sub-theme. A total of 51 articles in the dataset report on the recurrence and duration of the offence as an aggravating factor, and as seen in the table below, most of the references appear in the articles published in 2016.

Table 12: Number of References about the Recurrence and Duration of Offence per Year

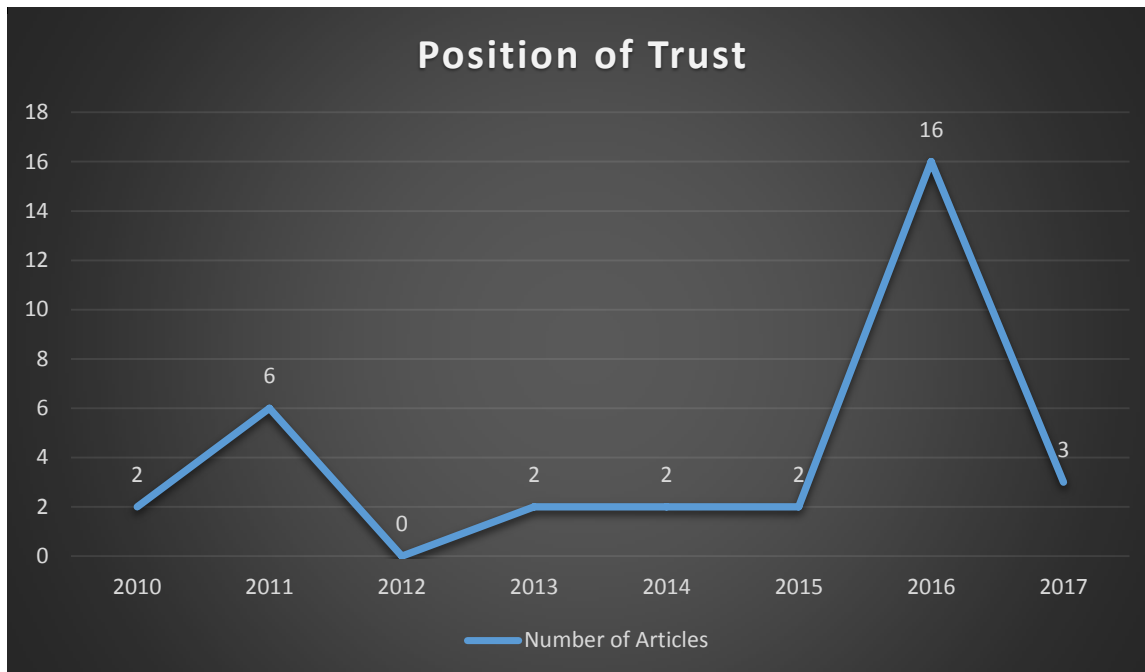


Position of Trust

⁶⁹ This statement was part of a French article, therefore it was translated by the researcher.

The third most significant sub-theme refers to the female online child sex offender being in a position of trust. Not only is being in a position of trust a legal aggravating factor for sexual offences against children but it is also specified in several articles in relation to the female offender breaching the trust initially given to her by the victims' parents. This is particularly the case for teachers and school employees who comprise 64% of the articles in this sub-theme. Notably, a victim's mother said not once did it cross her mind that she was dropping her son off "with a predator" (Petrick, 2017). About another case, a Crown prosecutor stated: "our children go to school, they are entrusted to teachers" (CTV News, 2016c). And finally, an article mentions how the ex-teaching assistant "was entrusted to be his [the victim's] mentor or tutor" (Hempstead, 2014). Thus, the notion of trust and how these women breached the trust, is considered an aggravating factor for the media reporting on online child sexual exploitation in Canada. Overall, this sub-theme appears 44 times in 34 articles within the dataset, most of which were published in 2016.

Table 13: Number of Articles about Female Online Child Sex Offenders in a Position of Trust



Specifically for mothers, the notion of trust in the media largely refers to their commitment and responsibility as a parent to protect their children from harm. Ten articles report on mothers who took advantage of their position of trust over the victims, oftentimes their own children, to sexually exploit them. Notably, referring to a mother who webcasted sex acts with her son, a judge called the offence “an abhorrent breach of trust” (CBC News, 2010). A Crown Prosecutor also stated the following about another mother arrested for child sexual abuse: “this is a person who was in a sensitive position. She made a decision and decided to breach trust” (CTV News, 2016c). And finally, a British Columbia Supreme Court Justice did not support a lenient sentence for a mother who sexually exploited both her children, describing her actions as “a gross breach of (the woman’s) trust obligations to her children” (The Province, 2016).

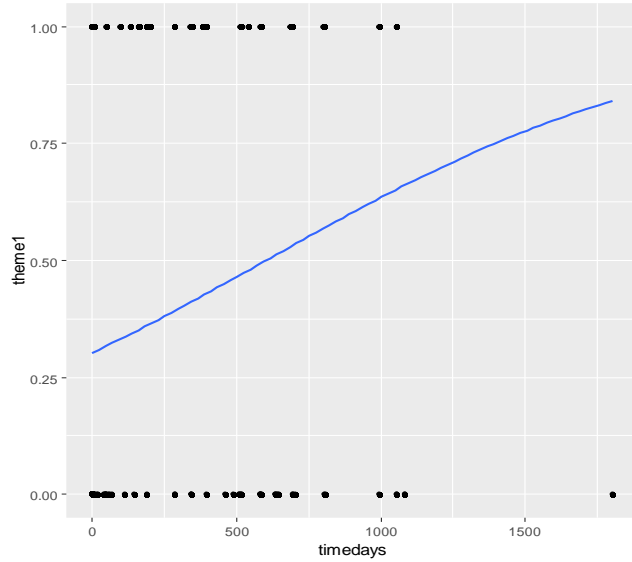
Associated to the notion of trust are 23 articles alluding to the fact that the female offender was fully aware of the crime being committed. In these cases, which are more prevalent for teachers and school employees, the illicit behaviour is described as planned, repeated, and deliberate and

the female child sex offender actively believed to be pursuing the victim for a specific sexual purpose. Thus, the offence is not represented as a lapse of judgement nor the result of an unstable mental state by the media, but rather as a measured act. For example, a judge is quoted saying: “The relationship was fostered through repeated text messages. Ms. Kitts wasn’t questioning her judgment during the 15,000 text messages? The sexual encounters couldn’t have been spontaneous because they required planning in order to keep them secret” (CBC News, 2016). The judge then pointed to one instance where the female offender brought an inflatable mattress with her in her van to sexually assault a student. In this case, the combination of aggravating factors such as the age of the victim, the recurrence of the offence, her position of trust over the child and her knowledge of the crime being committed intensify the condemnation of the female sex offender’s behaviour in the media articles.

Some mothers also comprise this sub-theme such as a Red Deer mother who is described by the Crown Prosecutor as someone with a high moral culpability: “this was planned and deliberate. She was searching, accessing, downloading and distributing child pornography. She is the only person responsible for the sexual assaults on her son, depicting them in photographs and then sending them” (Red Deer Express, 2017). The only articles pertaining to the others sub-type are related to one female offender in particular who willfully participated in the sexual abuse of a seven year old girl and recorded the incident.

Sub-Sample Logistic Regression

As evidenced in the graph below, results from the logistic regression analysis of the sub-sample indicate that increase time is associated with slightly higher odds that this theme will be represented in media coverage about female online child sex offenders, although this effect is not statistically significant.



In addition, although the thematic analysis shows a possible link between aggravating factors and the occupation of teacher, when conducting a logistic regression on a sub-sample, no statistically significant association is found.

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>O.R.</i>
<u>Occupation</u>			
Teacher assist.	-0.04	0.31	0.97
Teacher	-0.02	0.23	0.98
Mother	0.06	0.10	1.06
Conviction	0.24	0.44	1.28
Victim gender	0.17	0.56	1.18
Time (days)	0.000	0.000	1.000

Additional Aggravating Factors

Although not as prevalent, some additional aggravating factors were identified in the media articles, which are specific to each sub-type of female online child sex offenders in Canada. These are worth mentioning but should not be considered relevant findings of this study.

Teacher and School Employees

For teachers and school employees, if the victim(s) is currently their student(s), this seems to be considered an aggravating factor by the media. For example, an Eastern Ontario teacher had sexually exploited eight male teens and the media articles specified that “six were her students” (CBC, 2017). Moreover, an educational assistant “threatened to fail (the student) if he ended things” between them (CBC News, 2016). This statement was read in court by the Crown to further establish the abusive and coercive relationship between the teacher and her current student and victim.

Mothers

Additional aggravating factors specific to mothers pertain to the type and volume of child sexual exploitation material accessed and/or produced. To illustrate this, a mother was convicted of producing child sexual exploitation material, more than 250 photographs, and “police also found a computer with 447 images of child pornography, including 251 of the woman’s teenage daughter taken while she was bathing, and 87 videos of child pornography” (Carmichael, 2015). This detailed description of the evidence emphasizes the importance given to the volume and nature of the sexually explicit material seized. On this note, if the material was also created for a personal gain, this rationale seem highly reprimanded in the media by being highlighted in the first few sentences of the articles. This is the case for a Niagara mother who created sexually explicit images of her daughter and made her available to be sexually assaulted by others in exchange for money (Sawchuk, 2017).

Others

The personal gain rationale is also noticed in the articles about a particular female offender, who is neither a teacher/school employee nor a mother, since she was paid as an escort to film and participate in the sexual abuse of a seven-year old girl. Interestingly, 11 out of 13 articles published in 2017 about her also comment on a prior conviction for sexually assaulting a child as well as already being already registered to the Canadian national sex offender registry. She is the only female offender in the dataset who is identified as having a criminal record, and considering the nature of her previous offence(s), this is presented as an aggravating factor. Finally, some sexual preferences are defined as problematic and as a result, condemned in the media. For example, in one article a female offender is described as someone who would frequent several fetish websites (Gillis & Kwong, 2016), and in another female offender's apartment, law enforcement found baby dolls with anatomically correct genitals (O'Reilly, 2017). Interestingly, the sub-theme of controversial sexual preferences is never raised in media articles about teachers and school employees.

Theme #2: Mitigating Factors

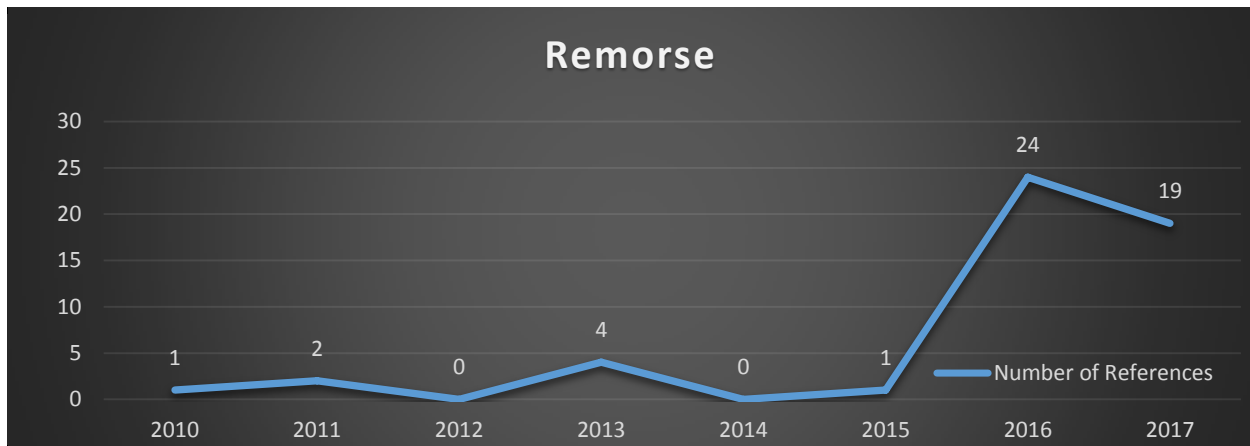
Despite the numerous aggravating factors listed above, just as many mitigating factors were identified in the articles within the dataset for each female online child sex offender sub-type. Mitigating factors tend to be utilized by the media to rationalize or explain the sexual offending behaviour of the female offender, or to diminish accountability. Just as aggravating factors, articles about teachers also have the highest percentage of references⁷⁰ to mitigating factors with 45% references, followed by mothers with 32%, others with 32% and school employees with

⁷⁰ Again, these percentages do not take into consideration the numerous articles published about a same female offender. The logistic regression analysis on a sub-sample partially mitigates this limitation.

20%. For this theme, three dominant sub-themes were recognized, namely remorse, mental health and life experiences.

The most prevalent sub-theme related to mitigating factors refers to remorse, which appears in 38 articles in the dataset (mainly pertaining to three female offenders who received high media coverage). Most of these articles include direct quotes from the female offender describing how remorseful she felt following the incident(s) and how much she regrets the pain she caused to the victim(s). For instance, an offender stated: “I deeply regret not doing something to help her instead” (Clementson, 2017), another mentioned in court she felt tremendous remorse (Loriggio, 2017) and a third female offender is quoted saying “I want to reiterate my deep and immeasurable remorse for my actions that led to these charges... It is something I will feel regret for every day for the rest of my life” (Chronicle Herald, 2016). On that note, the lack of remorse is definitely presented as an aggravating factor in one article where the opposing lawyer states: “this is not a case where we are looking at genuine remorse or insight” (Devoy, 2013), reiterating the importance of this factor for the media. The table below shows the distribution of references about remorse per year. As shown, this sub-theme appears most frequently in 2016 (24 references), followed by 2017 (19 references). In all, 84% of the references about remorse are presented during those two years.

Table 14: Number of References about Remorse per Year



When looking at the female online child sex offender sub-types, teachers have the highest number of references to remorse with 34 references, mothers following closely with 31 references, and school employees with 21 references. As a result, remorse is not a sub-theme closely associated to female offenders included in the ‘other’ category (only 15 references) in the Canadian media⁷¹.

The findings suggest that Canadian newspapers frequently associate remorse to references about the female sex offender taking responsibility for her actions. A total of 17 articles award positive acknowledgement to female online child sex offenders for pleading guilty, not only since they spare the victims from having to testify in court (suffering through a prolonged trial), but because they assume full responsibility for their behaviour and begin planning their rehabilitation. Specifically, 71% of these references are observed in relation to teachers. For example, one article claims the teacher “did the best thing that she knew to do and that is to plead guilty and take responsibility for her actions” (CBC News, 2016). Speaking about another teacher, a lead investigator stated in court that the female offender “took responsibility right from the time that the officers were executing the search warrant. She appeared to be, otherwise, of good character”

⁷¹ One should note that several references could pertain to articles about the same female offender; calculating the odd ratios would have been better to indicate proportionality,

(Devoy, 2013). Also mentioned in court, a teacher's assistant from Ottawa was going to work hard to build a new career in the construction business, saying incarceration would ruin her chances at building a new life (Dimmock, 2016). Hence Canadian newspapers tend to represent taking responsibility as an indication of remorse, resulting in a more lenient representation.

Mental Health Issues

The second most common aggravating factor sub-theme relates to mental health issues, with 47 references in 25 articles. For some female online child sex offenders, there are arguments presented in the media articles questioning their criminal responsibility for the sexual crimes committed against children. For example, an article indicates how a judge was examining “the woman’s slide into mental illness and theories of whether she was criminally responsible for the crimes” (Rhodes, 2016), before convicting the former school teacher for her behaviour. Bipolar disorder, severe depression, including post-partum depression, mental instability, and severe manic episodes, are amongst the reasons provided in the media articles to justify or question the female offender’s illicit sexual behaviour. As an example, a female offender’s lawyer is quoted several times in newspaper articles saying: “at the time of these alleged acts, my client was suffering from a mental, a disease of the mind, which rendered her incapable of appreciating the nature and quality of her act or knowing that her act was wrong” (CTV News, 2015). According to other media articles, the female offender herself “believes none of it would have happened if not for the onset of bipolar disorder” (Rhodes, 2016). The current findings suggest that mental health issues as a mitigating factor in the media is most significantly correlated to teachers (16 articles), as compared to mothers (10 articles), others (four articles) and school employees where only one article mentions this theme.

The yearly distribution of references about mental health issues shows a significant increase in 2015 (from 0-5 references from 2010-2014 to 17 references) and 2016 (20 references), with a drastic decline in 2017 (only one reference). This is surprising since 41% of the 2017 sub-set is comprised of media articles about teachers which, as demonstrated in the paragraph above, most often consider mental health as a mitigating factor, as compared to the other female online child sex offender sub-types. Hence, this sub-theme may have emerged due to dominant cases presented in 2015 and 2016, such as one female offender in particular, whose mental health is highly discussed in the majority of the articles published about her.

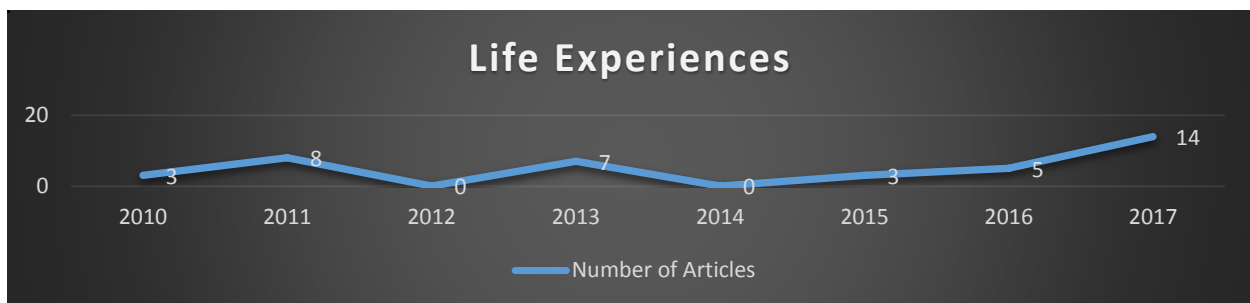
Life Experiences

The third most common mitigating factor sub-theme refers to the female offender's past, or life experiences, which consist of 40 references about numerous life experiences that may have negatively affected the female child sex offender and played a determining role in her sexual offending against children. Notably, a difficult childhood (e.g. bullying and residential school survivor), a history of abuse (physical, mental and/or sexual) , perpetual financial struggles , a consistent lack of affection and overcoming drug and alcohol abuse are some examples provided by the Canadian media. For example, in a media article about a teacher who was found guilty of viewing child sexual exploitation material online, the article specifies that her viewing "was a symptom of bullying suffered as a child, and that she would often put herself in the place of the child while viewing the material" (Devoy, 2013). For another female offender, "her personal background of being sexually assaulted, abused by her mother, and her exposure to ongoing violence" (Bennett, 2017) as well as "her struggle with booze to cope with her own abusive childhood" (Hunter, 2017) were brought forward by the defence. These examples are

only a few to illustrate life experiences that are presented in the Canadian media as mitigating factors, conveying a more lenient representation of female online child sex offenders.

As shows the table below, the number of media articles referencing to the female offender’s past or life experiences fluctuates throughout the years. However, there is a clear increase starting in 2015, and this sub-theme is most frequent in the 2017 sub-set.

Table 15: Number of Articles about the Female Online Child Sex Offender’s Past per Year



The distribution of media articles for each female online child sex offender type shows that this sub-theme is not as relevant for teachers (three articles) and school employees (four articles), as it is for mothers (nine articles), or even for female online child sex offenders that are neither mothers nor teachers/school employees (20 articles). This finding thus highly differs from the previously presented results where teachers comprise the majority of the sub-themes. Specific to mothers, a history of abuse and a lack of affection or failed marriage are the most pertinent life experiences presented in the media relating to mitigating factors. For example, a mother was sentenced for making child sexual exploitation material of her children and the media article indicates she “was suffering from low self-esteem as the result of a failed marriage” (Nielson, 2016). A failed marriage and lack of affection is also the only life experience sub-theme presented by the media for the school employee sub-type.

Contrary to the findings above, some articles stipulate that negative life experiences are not enough to justify the harm that was done to the victim(s). For example, the Assistant Crown Attorney in one female offender's case is quoted saying she: "recognized the horrific upbringing of Lucas, but it is not a mitigating factor for someone to abuse another child" (Clementson, 2017). As well, the Crown Attorney in another female offender's case "found that she used her complaints of bullying in elementary and high school to be a crutch" (Devoy, 2013).

Some mitigating factors presented in the media are almost exclusive to the 'other' female offender sub-type. For example, only one female offender completely denied the charges laid against her, "blaming the incident on a house guest who compromised her computer" (Gleeson, 2012). A similar statement is noticed in the articles about another 'other' female offender who attempted to minimize her role in the sexual abuse of a seven-year old girl, stating she was unaware of the age of the victim before attending the scene, and putting the entire responsibility on the two male co-offenders. Despite arguing a lesser involvement in the offence, the Crown did not agree on the details around her participation and she received one of the highest sentences for this type of offence in Canada (Hunter, 2017). This mitigating factor was not presented in relation to any other female online child sex offender sub-type.

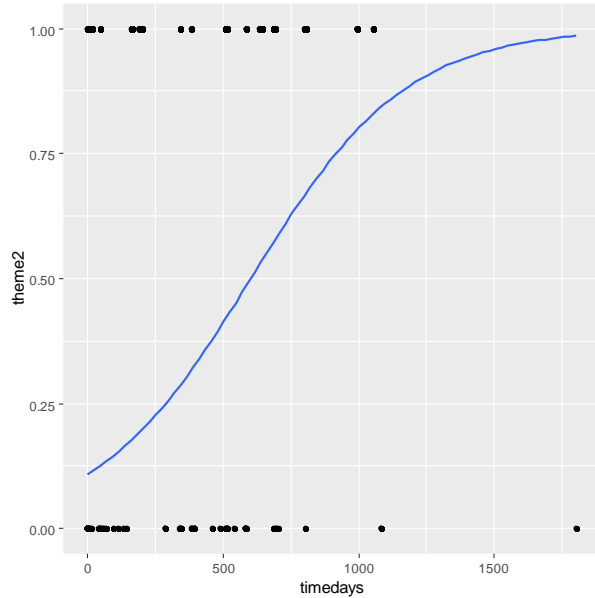
Finally, several other aspects such as having no previous criminal record (mainly about mothers⁷²), a low risk of reoffending, cooperating with the police, not physically harming the victims, not knowing the age of the victim at the time of the offence, having a minimal or unknown involvement in the offence, as well as offending against older victims (i.e. 16 years old and up) and children unrelated to the female offender (e.g. not a family member or her student), are presented as mitigating factors in the Canadian articles reviewed.

⁷² Only this mitigating factor is specific to mothers. The other ones mentioned in the paragraph are not associated to a particular female online child sex offender sub-type.

Further, some articles specify the consensual nature of the sexual relationship between the female offender and underage victim(s), removing the focus from the criminal aspects of the relationship. For instance, one article indicates that “the boys had consensual sexual intercourse with Cosette” (Van Rassel, 2011) and another mentions, “the sexual encounter was not forced and there were no victim impact statements filed for court” (CTV News, 2011a). To add to this, two articles even report that the female offender and the victim had professed their love to each other (National Post, 2017; The Canadian Press, 2017). These examples are only a few illustrating how certain aspects of the sexual offending are used by the media to minimize the severity of the female offender’s behaviour and convey a more lenient representation.

Sub-Sample Logistic Regression

Results from the logistic regression analysis of the sub-sample indicate that time is a significant factor, as the probability of theme 2 being present rises sharply between 250 and 1000 days, before subsequently levelling off. In other words, as days go by since a first article is published about a female online child sex offender, higher are the probabilities of observing mitigating factors within the articles about her.



In addition, there is a strong correlation between the sub-type “other” and the presence of theme 2. In fact, not being a teacher or school employee is 2.3 times more likely to be associated with mitigating factors.

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>O.R.</i>
<u>Occupation</u>			
Teacher assist.	-0.01	0.15	0.99
Teacher	-0.10	0.11	0.90
Mother	0.08	0.08	1.09
Conviction	-0.50	0.36	0.61
Victim gender	-0.12	0.30	1.59
Time (days)	0.001	0.000	1.001***

*** p<.001

Theme #3: Consequences of Abuse

Apart from the charge(s) and/or conviction for child pornography or luring-related offences, numerous additional consequences of the abuse are mentioned in Canadian newspapers in relation to the offender, the offender’s family and the victim. A total of 375 references are

included under this theme, thus, making it the third most dominant theme in Canadian newspapers about female online child sex offenders.

Consequence for the Female Offender

First, the most significant impact on the female online child sex offender presented in the articles is the loss of employment (99 references). Most female offenders are either suspended from their current position, or if convicted, their employment is terminated. For example, a teacher was “placed on paid suspension at the school” pending the outcome of the investigation (Chia, 2016), and in an article about an educational assistant, the Ottawa Carleton School Board stated they had “started the process of terminating her employment” (CBC News, 2016). In fact, the loss of employment is often specified in the article’s title by stating “ex-school worker charged for...” or “former teacher convicted of...”, validating the prominence of this consequence in the media following child-pornography and/or luring related offences. Since more than 50% of the articles in the dataset pertain to teachers and school employees who have direct access to children on a daily basis, the loss of employment unsurprisingly prevails as an outcome. Notably, 75% of all references within this sub-theme relate to female teachers and educational assistants, and 25% to mothers⁷³. There is no mention of a loss of employment for female child sex offenders comprised in the ‘other’ sub-type although they also have an occupation. Further, most references about the loss of employment appear in the 2016 sub-set (47 articles) which is surprising as the large majority of the 2017 sub-set relates to teachers and the loss employment seems to be mostly correlated to teachers.

⁷³ Some mothers are also teachers or educational assistants. Therefore, they most likely lost their employment due to their profession and not because they are mothers.

The second most prevalent sub-theme pertains to the loss of children (32 references).

Considering the fact that many female offenders are also mothers, and some of them victimized their own children, the loss of children's custody is not necessarily uncommon. For example, an Alberta woman who sexually abused her 4-year old son and distributed images of the abuse online was "released with strict conditions to not contact the child, who is currently staying with family" (Gilligan, 2016). Another article covers the story of a woman who produced child sexual exploitation material of her children for a man she met through an Internet dating site. In her case, the children, now adults, "both want no contact with the woman" (The Province, 2016). Therefore, based on Canadian media representation, female online child sex offenders are either legally denied the custody of their children or following the sexual offences, their children deliberately elect not to have any interaction with them. Interestingly, half of the articles about mothers published in 2016 also mention the loss of children as a consequence.

A third dominant sub-theme relates to the female offender having to undergo psychological and/or sexual assessment or treatment, following her arrest. A total of 26 articles include references related to this sub-theme, and mainly pertain to mothers (11 articles) as well as teachers (nine articles), and less for school assistants (four articles) or 'others' (two articles). In some cases, the assessment is also taken into consideration during sentencing process. For example, an ex-teacher was "set to be sentenced May 19 after undergoing a sex offender assessment" (Loriggio, 2017). This assessment may impact the sentence given to the female offender, since the federal system (for sentences of two years and over) often offers a sex offender treatment program whereas the provincial/territorial systems rarely do. For instance, before commenting on sentencing a judge said she "intends to be guided by the recommendations of a psychologist and sex offender expert who will comment on programming

available for sex offending in the provincial and federal jail system” (Hagget, 2017). In other cases, the female offender is prescribed specific counselling as part of her conditions, following a conviction. Notably, an Ontario woman had to “...remain under the care of a psychiatrist, while completing psycho-sexual counselling” (CBC News, 2010). These statements are interesting since they suggest treatment programs for sex offenders, although the female offender is never specifically referred to as a child sex offender in any of the articles.

Lastly, many female online child sex offenders have conditions added to their sentence that largely pertain to access to children and the Internet, as well as being registered to the National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) for a court-determined number of years (i.e. 10 years). The articles reviewed include a total of 87 references about conditions added to a sentence, such as: “the woman was released from court on strict conditions limiting her access to the Internet and to unsupervised contact with minors” (Gleeson, 2012). In addition, an ex-teacher was “ordered not to attend any place frequented by children for the next 10 years unless accompanied by an adult” (Toronto Sun, 2016). Specifically for the NSOR, there are 25 references similar to the following: “she was also ordered to provide DNA samples to the authorities, and her name will be added to the sex offender registry” (Devoy, 2013). This sub-theme is recurrent for all sub-types of female online child sex offenders identified in the study, throughout the years examined, with a slight higher prevalence for teachers and mothers and less for ‘others’.

Consequences for the Female Offender’s Family

In addition to the female offender having to live with the consequences of her illicit sexual behaviour towards a child, family members are also impacted. Public humiliation experienced by the offender and her family, following the media coverage of the incident, is mentioned in 11

newspaper articles, eight of which were published in 2016⁷⁴. For example, an article states how the allegations devastated the parents of an Ontario teacher found guilty of sex crimes against students. In the article, her lawyer claims: “it has been a horrible time for her and her family”, (Hunter, 2017). Another article mentions the female offender had “a tremendous amount of publicity – negative publicity – a lot of it was unfair” (Rhodes, 2016). Interestingly, some articles argue the female offender suffered enough given the amount of negative publicity in the media, and this factor should be taken into consideration during the sentencing hearing. As an example, the Ottawa Citizen reports that the female offender had “...been shamed for her sex crimes and will forever wear an online scarlet letter” (Dimmock, 2016). Half of the articles under this sub-theme relate to mothers and the other half to teachers and educational assistants. This theme is not significant for ‘others’ in the Canadian media.

Finally, the general pain and difficulties experienced by the female offender’s family also appear in nine articles, seven of which were published in 2017. For instance, the media includes statements from children of female offenders, who were not their victim(s), expressing their pain and shame towards their mother’s illicit behaviour. One article quotes a female offender’s son who had difficulty forgiving his mother. “I would have to say that someone who does those things to children is a monster” (Forani, 2017). Despite the embarrassment following the allegation(s) or conviction(s), some family members remained supportive of the female offender. For example, in one article, a family friend told reporters on behalf of the female offender’s family: “it’s been incredibly embarrassing for them, but they continue to support their daughter” (Miller, 2017). In brief, the Canadian media includes negative impacts experienced by family

⁷⁴ These articles are almost all about Amy Hood, a former Nova Scotia teacher who was found guilty of online and contact sexual offences involving former students.

members and friends, thus conveying that there are many layers of victims to this type of offence.

Consequences for the Victim(s)

Certainly none other than the victim(s) is more directly impacted by the sexual exploitation perpetrated by the female offender, although references to victim impact are less prevalent than statements referring to consequences for the female offender herself. Specifically, 72 references found in 47 articles, most of which were published in 2016, comprise this sub-theme, which consists of different types of victim impacts depending on the circumstances of the victimization. On one side, some negative consequences for the victims (40 articles) include no longer playing sports at school (loss of interest), being suspended from school for behaviour issues, being stressed, scared, distant from friends and family, tired, withdrawn as well as experiencing a loss of respect for women and for oneself. For example, a victim's mother stated that her son's "respect for woman, and respect for himself, is not realistic" as a result of the experience (Petrick, 2017). Another article includes a victim impact statement from a student who was sexually exploited by his teacher where he speaks about his recollections of the abuse: "I sealed them deep inside my heart and brain, and waited for high school to be over. I had never felt so alone. I lost connections, lots of friends and family because I never wanted to hang out or get too close because they might figure out my secret" (Canoe News, 2016). This statement suggests serious and long-lasting interpersonal issues, developed as the result of the sexual exploitation. Interestingly, a large discrepancy is observed between teachers and school employees, where the latter comprise most of this sub-theme (6% versus 33%).

On the other side, some victims are described as not being impacted by the sexual exploitation experienced. Of the seven articles that include statements of this nature, all of them relate to male victims. For example, one of the victim's mother told the court "her son was fine and not traumatized" (CTV News, 2011b). Another article includes a mother's statement about the impact on her son: "He's not traumatized, he's fine. He's a teenage boy, it was offered to him and he took it" (Careen, 2011). With these statements, the Canadian media represent online sexual exploitation at the hands of women as non-traumatizing, where the victims, particularly boys, were not impacted by the behaviour. As such, this raises questions pertaining to gender stereotypes and the inability to perceive women as offenders and men, in this case boys, as victims.

Nonetheless, the victim's loss of innocence is the predominant representation in regards to victim impact, with 14 references in 12 articles (30% of the overall sub-theme). Notably, a judge was cited in an article saying: "If I could bring back her innocence, I would" (Bennett, 2017). Also, a victim's aunt said: "my niece has been robbed of her innocence" (Clementson, 2017). Similar statements are also included in an article about a student who was sexually exploited by his teacher and tutor: "my innocence and happiness was destroyed by Mrs. Kitts and all I am now is empty" (CBC News, 2016). The loss of innocence has long been associated to sexual crimes against children (Archard, 1993; Ost, 2009) and again, even with the online component and within a Canadian context, this theme prevails. In fact, the social construction of childhood evokes the notion of innocence (Archard, 1993) which has been challenged by contemporary culture and media who have documented the increasing sexualisation of children. The erotization of children in contemporary society means that the "ideal of childhood innocence has entered a crisis" (Higonnet, 1998, p.7). The social construction of sexuality is also unavoidably triggered

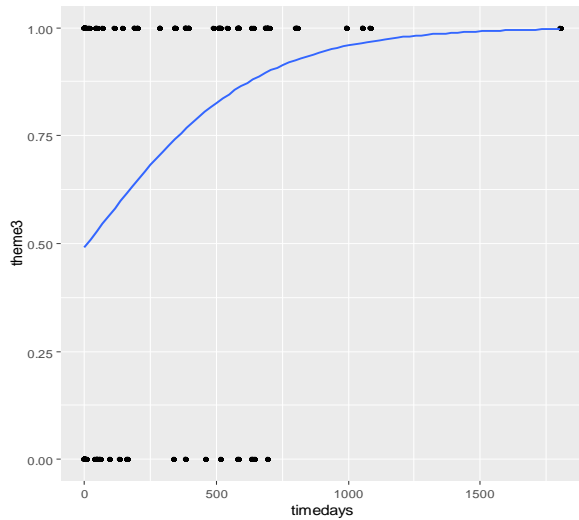
in this type of crime. Is sexuality a choice or a biological fact? This remains a point of serious contention within modern society and puts child sexual offending into perspective. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1(1976)*, Foucault questions what is considered normal sexuality and what would be a deviant one? As such, paedophilia could be seen as a non-mainstream sexuality, or a deviant behaviour, as socially constructed (Jefson, 2008).

Specific to the current study, the indefinite existence of child sexual exploitation material on the Internet is also identified as a central sub-theme. Notably, an Inspector from the Sex Crimes Unit of the Toronto Police Service told reporters: “the investigation has resulted in the rescue of children that were not only being sexually abused, but then further exploited by having this abuse permanently captured by the recording of it” (Gillis and Kwong, 2016). A Crown Prosecutor also said the victim was: “...going to be victimized over and over and over because of what she has done” (Bell, 2017). This seems to be a unique impact on victims of online child sexual exploitation, as compared to sexual abuse victims.

When examining female online child sex offender sub-types in relation to victim impacts, teachers have the lowest correlation rate, with only few articles reporting impacts, negative or positive, on the victim(s). Of these, three references are very general and refer to the counselling and support offered by the school to students who were victimized by them. To illustrate this, a spokesperson for the school board is quoted in Belleville news stating, “the school board is supporting students impacted by this case, and counsellors are being made available” (Petrick, 2016). Based on the findings of this study, mothers and school employees are reported in the media as having the highest negative impact on victims.

Sub-Sample Logistic Regression

When looking at the logistic regression findings for theme 3, mothers are more likely to be characterized by this theme than educational assistants; perhaps not surprising since this theme has to do with consequences for both the offender and the victim(s). Time-wise, this theme is more likely than themes 1 and 2 to be encountered at the beginning of the coverage. However, there is still an increase in probability that this theme will be present as a function of time, although most of the increase occurs within the first two years from the initial article. Overall, the effect of time is not statistically significant. In addition, mention of a conviction in the description of the case is associated with 2.5x increased probability that this theme will be present in the media narrative.



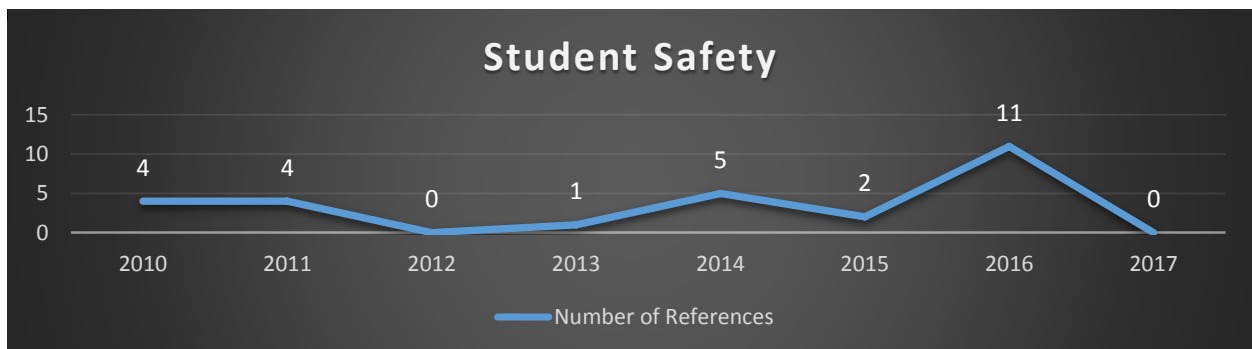
Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>O.R.</i>
<u>Occupation</u>	0.05	0.22	1.06
Teacher assist.	0.07	0.16	1.07
Teacher			
Mother	0.19	0.09	1.21*
Conviction	0.91	0.39	2.47*
Victim gender	0.47	0.36	1.59
Time (days)	-0.000	0.000	1.000

* p<.05

Theme #4: Children Safety

The last dominant theme identified in Canadian newspaper articles about female online child sex offenders pertains to children safety. A total of 119 references are included in this theme, which is divided into four sub-themes: student safety, additional victims, the need to remain in custody and online risks. First, since a large majority of the female offenders in the dataset are teachers or school employees, many of these articles conclude with a sentence pertaining to student safety being a priority. For example, a school principal stated: “the number one priority is the continued safety and well-being of each student” (Chia, 2016). Another article includes a statement from the Ontario school board which claims that: “student safety and well-being are always our first priorities at all times” (Hendry, 2016). And to reassure the parents, a school mentions in another article that “they will continue to cooperate with the police in their investigation on this matter, and parents need to have confidence that their children are safe at school” (DeLaire, 2016). The table below shows the distribution of these references per year. Interestingly, 2017 marks the highest percentage of articles about teachers, yet there are no references made in regards to student safety being a priority for the school or law enforcement in the media that year.

Table 16: Distribution of Student Safety References per Year



In addition, when considering the occupation of the female offender within this theme, it seems like educational assistants who sexually offend against children generate greater media concerns over the safety of students as compared to teachers.. Notably, 14 newspaper articles about educational assistants mention student safety as a priority, as compared to only eight articles for teachers.

Additional Victims

Second, the likelihood of additional victims is included under the children safety theme, since a main aspect of protecting children is identifying all victims and providing them with the help and support they need. A total of 46 newspaper articles include a sentence on this matter, and most of them also provide law enforcement contact information to report additional victims. For example, a police officer is quoted saying: "...it's quite possible there could be more victims. Anyone with information is asked to contact police" (CBC News, 2014a). Additional articles mention that: "police fear there may be other victims..." (National Post, 2016) and "...police believe there are other victims..." (CBC News, 2016). Interestingly, 50% of the articles concerned about additional victims pertain to the 'other' female offender sub-type. This is surprising as mothers and teachers are most likely the ones who have access to a greater number of children on a daily basis (higher likelihood of additional victims), yet the media does not report such concerns. Only 9% of the articles concerned about the risk of having additional victims pertain to school employees and 37% to teachers. Only two articles pertain to mothers. Therefore, the media representation of mothers does not include the risk for additional victims.

Remain in Custody

Third, 16 articles indicate how the female child sex offender needs to remain in custody throughout the court process, or the Crown is opposed to her release, as a way to safeguard

children and specifically protect the victims against whom she sexually offended. For example, an article states how a mother and a daughter were arrested for making and distributing child sexual exploitation material videos online and “have been in custody ever since” (CBC News, 2015). Again, most of these female sex offenders (nine articles) are not mothers nor teachers. Only four articles about a mother and three articles about a teacher mention the female offender would not be released from custody while she awaits trial. One of them about a mother also specifies that: “the child is safe, no longer with his mother” (Postmedia News, 2016). Like previously described under the *Consequences of Abuse* theme, the loss of children’s custody is a possible consequence to sexual offending, and in some cases, it is necessary in order to protect the child(ren). However, the dominant representation for mothers in Canadian media is not one that presents a high risk for the victim(s), as compared to school employees.

Online Risks

The fourth dominant sub-theme comprises articles pertaining to online risks. More specifically, there are 27 references in 18 articles alluding to the fact that the Internet now provides a greater opportunity for offenders to target children and exploit them, to meet other child sex offenders and is an accessible platform to access and share child sexual exploitation material with anonymity and minimal hurdles. For example, a judge of the Ontario Court of Appeal is quoted in an article saying: “the Internet is providing greater opportunity to produce and distribute images of child abuse” (Sacheli, 2010). Articles about a male and female co-offending scenario state that police are “concerned the pair connected with other like-minded people on the Internet” (Gillis & Kwong, 2016), and maybe “more people met with the accused and are involved in the sexual exploitation of children (Fox, 2016). Also associated to these references are articles that caution parents to be more involved in the education of their children, especially when it comes

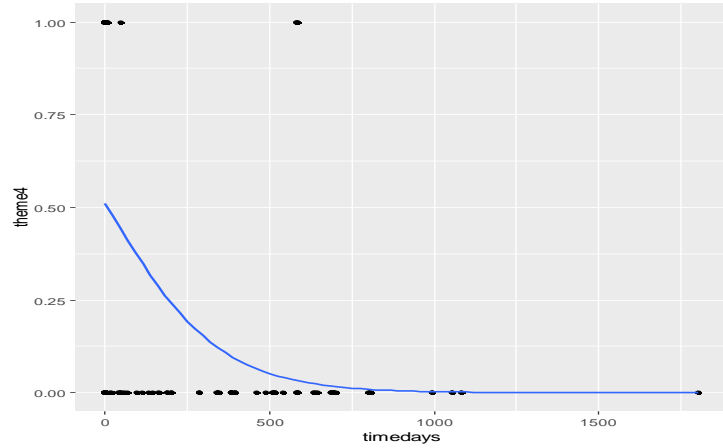
to online activities and sexually explicit behaviour. Since media applications and the online world are now accessible to children at a very young age, and oftentimes, without the supervision of an adult, children are in constant interaction with not only friends, but also strangers and adults, who may not all have good intentions. To cite one example, the Ontario Provincial Police is quoted in one article urging parents to “proactively increase their own awareness of online safety issues, and take a closer look at children’s digital life” (CNW, 2014). Another article includes a police officer statement indicating that “with the vast array of predators out there, whose prey have no physical boundaries online, it’s becoming more evident society had to take a role in preventing the exploitation of kids over the Internet” (O’Brien, 2014).

Statements about online safety in the Canadian media are more significantly correlated with the ‘others’ sub-type, with 59% of the references. Only 11% of the comments reported in Canadian newspapers are associated to female teachers and school employees, and 30% about mothers. Finally, a query was done to examine the distribution of this sub-theme since 2010 and the results are intriguing. 59% of the references within this sub-theme are noted in 2014. Conversely, this theme is not present once in the articles published in 2017. As previously shown in this chapter, there is a significant number of contact sexual offences presented in the 2017 articles. Therefore, perhaps the media representation of female online child sex offenders focuses more on the contact sexual offences than the online component of the crime, which could partly explain the nonexistence of this sub-theme in 2017. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to further study popular social media applications and youth online behaviour in 2014 to better understand the media’s need to promote online safety in newspaper articles about female online child sex offenders.

To conclude this theme, eight articles include comments pertaining to public satisfaction towards the police work in the case, especially in relation to protecting children from further victimization. For example, the Ottawa Citizen states: “moments after a shaken Kitts was handcuffed and led to the cell blocks, her victim’s mother said she was relieved the painful case was finally over and expressed her thanks to Ottawa police” (Dimmock, 2016) and a school Superintendent is quoted saying they “have been satisfied with the police investigation” (Chuck, 2010). The only reprimanding statements (seven articles) are observed in relation to the criminal justice system with respect to the unfairness of convictions and sentencing of child sex offenders in Canada as compared to the consequences for the victims. For instance, a parent mentions, “It was heart wrenching to think that’s all it is. It is a life sentence for the kid so how is it that [she] gets to walk away with six and a half years? A lot of us have been through this. We want to see justice. We don’t want to see our kids hurting” (Bennett, 2017). Another article includes a statement from a lawyer about the delays due to the court process: “These court house aren’t sitting for enough days, there aren’t enough judges. So the administration of justice moves very, very slowly” (CTV News, 2011). This is represented by the media as having an impact not only on the victims and their families seeking justice and closure, but also on the mental health of female online child sex offenders, having to wait, sometimes years, for their fate.

Sub-Sample Logistic Regression

Results from the logistic regression show an inverse time effect wherein a sharp decline in representation is observed for theme #4, which starts immediately after the first instances of coverage of the case, before levelling off at around 500 days. At that point, the theme of children safety is hardly ever encountered in the media description of such cases.



As seen in the table below, no statistically significant correlation is found between the children safety theme and the specific aspects of the cases observed for this analysis.

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>O.R.</i>
<u>Occupation</u>	-0.01	0.25	0.99
Teacher assist.	-0.08	0.19	0.92
Teacher			
Mother	-0.04	0.08	0.96
Conviction	-0.00	0.34	1.00
Vict gender	-0.25	0.45	0.78
Time (days)	-0.000	0.000	0.999*

* $p < .05$

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

A review of academic literature on the representation of female offenders in the media revealed that women are either presented as victims of circumstance (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglioni, 2008; Pozzan, 2014; Naylor, 2011) or as doubly deviant (Collins, 2014; Naylor, 2001; Weatherby et al., 2008) depending on a number of factors. Although various crime-types are studied, female offenders who sexually exploit children online, and more specifically in Canada, are not part of this body of literature, mainly due to the novelty of the phenomenon. Therefore, this research seeks to mitigate a gap in literature and criminological knowledge by examining the relationship between the media representation of female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspapers and literature on the media representation of female offenders in general. It also explores the progression of media representations from 2010 to 2017, as inspired by the social constructionist framework which recognizes that a representation of a certain crime or offender is bound to change with time. To answer these questions, a thematic analysis of the dataset was considered best suited and as a result, this chapter discusses the themes and findings in relation to the research questions and justifies its significance in the academic realm.

5.1 Typologies

After completing a thorough examination of the four female online child sex offender sub-types identified in the dataset, affinities with the three main subtypes of female sex offenders recognized by Mathews et al. (1989) are noted. Specifically, the male-coerced, predisposed and teacher/lover subtypes also appear in the Canadian dataset about female online child sex offenders, and are reviewed below.

Male-coerced

According to literature, a large portion of female sex offenders' deviant behaviour is attributed to coercion by a male co-perpetrator (Mathews et al., 1989; Vandiver and Kercher, 2004). Although not as predominant, some Canadian articles pertain to female online child sex offenders who were coerced into sexually exploiting a child. Notably, a female offender is said to have been "pressured by her husband" (Armstrong, 2016). She is also described as intellectually impaired which, as revealed by literature about female sex offenders, increases the woman's vulnerability, making her highly susceptible to coercion (Gannon et al., 2008; Martellozzo et al., 2010).

Another female offender mentions being "scared and cowardly" after sexually abusing a child with two other male co-offenders (O'Reilly, 2017). Fear of the male co-offender as well as powerlessness are two known motives for female sexual offending (Mathews et al., 1989).

Ganon et al., (2008) suggest that many female sex offenders sexually abuse children to obtain intimacy and guarantee a favourable relationship with a man, oftentimes a child sex offender. Some articles within the present study describe relationships that could allude to this type of offending motivation. Notably, a mother within the sample produced child sexual exploitation material for a man she met through an Internet dating site (The Province, 2016). Another mother sexually abused her son and sent the sexual abuse material to a male offender after being groomed and lured, through promises of a romantic relationship (Red Deer Express, 2017).

These examples⁷⁵ illustrate how powerful needs for love and affection are for female offenders as well as for female online child sex offenders, compelling them to commit atrocious offences against children.

⁷⁵ Many additional articles also mention a relationship with a male co-offender, but they not provide details about the nature of this relationship (e.g. coercive or not).

As it is the case for female sex offenders in the media, the ultimate responsibility of the online sexual offending in this study is also largely attributed by the media to the male partner (Martellozzo et al., 2010). Specifically, Canadian articles about female and male co-offenders mainly cover the male's sexual offending behaviour and tend to merely mention the name of the female offender involved and charges laid against her. Very few details, context or background information is provided about the female and her involvement in the offence. This finding provides some evidence to the idea of the social construction of women as incapable of acting independently and incapable of sexually offending without a male co-offender, nearly denying their responsibility in the offence and therefore reinforcing the socially constructed idea that only men are capable of sexually exploiting children (Elliott et al., 2010), even online. Nevertheless, contrary to research demonstrating how rare lone female sex offenders are (see Martellozzo et al., 2010), in the present study (n=273), 72% of the female online child sex offender in the articles offended against children without the participation of a co-offender. These findings challenge traditional social constructions of the woman as a sexually passive person (Martellozzo et al., 2010).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, most lone-offenders within the entire dataset (n=273) are either teachers or school employees (70%), whereas 48% of all the female offenders in a co-offending situation are mothers. As a result, it can be argued that the Canadian media has generated two strong representations of the female online child sex offender; the lone teacher and the co-offending and/or coerced mother. A co-offending novelty also emerges from the current dataset where two women, a mother and a daughter, are found guilty of producing child sexual exploitation material. In this case, none of them were coerced, no male offenders were involved and they were not in a homosexual relationship, a female sex offender sub-type identified by

Mathews et al. (1989). This mother-daughter dynamic does not emerge from the literature on female offenders, and seems to be exclusive to this specific dataset and crime-type.

Finally, when further examining coerced female online child sex offenders, similar traits are identified in relation to literature about female offenders in the media, such as low self-esteem, emotional dependence, vulnerability but also fear, power and control, and threats. In these cases, the representation provides a plausible justification for the online sexual offending, reinforcing traditional social constructions of the woman as incapable of committing crime, if not under significant coercion (Copeland, 1997; Wykes, 2007). Nevertheless, coercion is difficult to determine when only media articles are examined, which include few details about the nature of the relationship between the offenders and if actual coercion took place or not.

Teacher/Lover

The teacher/lover female sex offender sub-type is the most dominant common sub-type between the literature and the present study, especially considering that school employees and teachers represent more than 50% of the dataset. In fact, the Canadian media representation of these female online child sex offenders accurately reflects the description provided by Mathews et al. (1989), as well as Vandiver & Kercher (2004) for the teacher/lover female sex offender subtype. For instance, Gavin (2005) explains how female sex offenders who are teachers take advantage of their occupation and position of authority and trust over a child, to sexually exploit them. A perfect example from the current study stems from articles about a teacher's aide who offered to tutor a young male student, in exchange for sexual favors, and threatened to fail him if he ended

their so-called “relationship” (Nease, 2016)⁷⁶. Moreover, four articles specifically mention the teacher taking advantage of her victim(s). For example, a judge stated that “Cosette [female offender] was old enough to know better and took advantage of the boys” (CTV News, 2011).

Mathews et al. (1989) explain how teacher/lover female sex offenders mainly offend against adolescent boys. This is also the case for female online child sex offenders. Apart from one specific case where a teacher collected child sexual exploitation material depicting young males and females, and one teacher who lured a female student, the other teachers sexually offended against male teenagers (e.g. 12-17 years old), most often their own students. Powell (2007) describes these female sex offenders as hebephiles; females who have a sexual preferences for young teenagers. Particularly in the current study, one female offender’s lawyer mentions in court that she was diagnosed with *ephebophilia* which refers to a primary sexual interest towards mid-to-late adolescents (Careen, 2011).

As described by Mathews et al. (1989) and Saradjian (1996), teacher/lover female sex offenders often perceive themselves as having a romantic relationship with their victims. This idea is also reinforced within Canada media articles about female online child sex offenders as terms such as “relationship”, “intercourse”, “affair”, and “misconduct” are used to describe the sexual abuse that took place between a teacher and a student, minimizing the criminal nature of the act (see word frequency in Chapter 4). Interestingly, for those who are not teachers nor a school employees in the data, such terms are not used by the Canadian media, establishing an exclusive association between teachers and a “less abusive” situation, one that is essentially represented as

⁷⁶ The breach of trust is also a sub-theme under Theme #1 of this study as teachers and school employees comprise 64% of all articles about this matter.

consensual between both parties involved⁷⁷ (also discussed in Saradjian, 1996). Even more so, articles about one female online child sex offender in particular, mention how both her and her student victim “were professing their love for each other while exchanging sexually explicit messages” (The Canadian Press, 2017). This finding is in accordance with Gavin (2005) who argues that some female sex offenders may genuinely fall in love with their victims.

The only disparity between Mathews et al.’s (1989) teacher/lover sub-type and the current study refers to the online component of the sexual offending. Teachers examined for this study utilize communication technologies and social media applications to gain access and communicate with their victims after school hours, to facilitate and foster a so-called “romantic relationship” as well as physical sexual encounter(s). The omnipresence and role that technology plays in the offence is unique to this crime-type.

Predisposed

According to Mathews et al. (1989), predisposed female sex offenders are women that were sexually victimized during childhood, most likely by a parent, and as a result, have developed cognitive distortions about sexual activities between adults and children (i.e. normalizing sexual encounters between adults and children, promoting early sexual activities, etc.). Thus, they tend to pursue the victimization continuum by sexually exploiting their own children. In the current study, only one female online child sex offender is said to be “biologically predisposed towards this type of behaviour” after being diagnosed with *ephebophilia*, as defined earlier (Careen, 2011). However, there is no mention of past sexual abuse or incestuous abuse to explain her sexual predation such as describes Mathews et al. (1989). Despite this important factor, there are

⁷⁷ This finding could also be in part an artefact of a lesser perceived age gap, contributing to a more favourable media representation, as compared to female offenders abusing younger children.

mentions of feeling lonely and a low self-esteem issue because of a problematic marriage, which are emotional states characterized by this sub-type of female offender (Mathews et al., 1989).

Also relevant to this sub-type is a mother who photographed her daughter while she was bathing. At the end of the article, it mentions the mother was sexually abused as a child (Carmichael, 2015). Based on literature about female sex offenders, especially those who are mothers, past sexual offending is an important factor in understanding the current sexual behaviour.

Nevertheless, in this case, past sexual abuse is merely included at the end of the article, without any further details given to the statement. Another female child sex offender, who filmed and participated in the sexual abuse of a young girl was reportedly sexual assaulted as a child, abused by her mother and exposed to ongoing violence throughout her life (Bennett, 2017). An article about her also mention that she was “broken” at the same as her victim (Clementson, 2017). Although her victim is not her daughter, her background situation is used by the media to rationalize or make sense of her illicit behaviour, of her pre-disposition to sexual abuse and violence in general.

In terms of cognitive distortions, a mother who broadcasted sexual activities with her toddler is said to have “very disturbed set of thoughts about sexual activities” (Sacheli, 2010). For this specific case, there is mention of past physical abuse by her father with no indication of any sexual abuse⁷⁸. When talking about the child sexual exploitation material she had been viewing, another female offender mentioned “she knew that they [the children] were being harmed, but they didn’t look like they were being harmed” (Devoy, 2013). Her lack of insight and concerning rationalization of her behaviour are noted in the media articles based on two psychologists

⁷⁸ It would be interesting to complete a throughout analysis of this female offender’s past to determine if incestuous sexual abuse occurred to better understand the lack of empathy towards her son and banalisation of her sexual offending behaviour towards him.

consulted in the case who also testified in court (Devoy, 2013). Hence, these media representations allude to some cognitive distortions, however not in relation to past sexual abuse.

Finally, as explained in Chapter 1, this sub-type is also referred to as the *inter-generationally predisposed* group, where repeated incestuous victimization occurs (Eldridge et al., 2009; Saradjian, 1996). In the current study, 30% of the articles pertain to mothers, and of these, 53% intra-familial sexual abuse occurred, meaning the female child sex offenders victimized their own children. Contrary to literature, only one article within the dataset about a mother who offended against her own children, mention past sexual abuse. Moreover, the dataset includes two articles about a mother and a daughter who sexually abused young girls under their care, yet inter-generational or predisposed factors are never mentioned. Thus, the findings of this research show that either most female online child sex offenders are represented by the media as not having been victims of past sexual abuse or that the Canadian media does not consider past sexual abuse a relevant or newsworthy factor for this crime-type.

5.2 Paedophilia

As previously explained, the media tends to use the term pedophile to describe any and every individual who sexually exploits children (Hayes & Baker, 2014). However, this is not the case for female online child sex offenders. Within the entire dataset, the terms “paedophilia” and “pedophile” are only mentioned six times: four times to refer to a male co-offender involved in the incident, once to clarify the female offender is not a pedophile, and once to describe a female offender’s pedophilic tendencies. Thus, even in the last example, the female sex offender is never truly referred to as a paedophile (but rather her illicit behaviour may have been caused by a paedophilic tendency).

Moreover, found on the webpage of most articles in the dataset are links to other news articles about male child sex offenders who were charged or convicted child pornography offences or luring. Contrary to females, most of these articles refer to the male offender as a pedophile. For example, article titles for male offenders indicate “Another pedophile arrested for...” or “A pedophile sexually abused a child...”, whereas for female offenders, the article tends to be titled “A woman arrested for...” or “A mother who...”. Although a comparison of male and female media representation is not part of this study, it is interesting to consider this significant difference in terminology to report about similar offences committed by two different sexes. Ironically, in one article, a female online child sex offender is quoted saying that her attraction is merely to images of children (in a sexual context) but not the children themselves (Devoy, 2013). To this, the Crown Attorney in the article explains how troubled he is that she “denied sexual attraction to children when she masturbated to children being abused on screen” (Devoy, 2013). This finding illustrates how Canadian newspapers may be reluctant to refer to female online child sex offenders as paedophiles. Although these women sexually offended against children, they are not be represented as someone sexually attracted to them in the media.

5.3 Grooming

Although not specifically referred to as “grooming” in the current dataset, several aggravating factors are comprised within the media articles which could potentially fall under the definition of grooming, as defined in Chapter 1. For example, a teacher “began exchanging text messages with the boys that were friendly at first, but quickly progressed to sexually explicit, including provocative pictures she sent of herself” (Rhodes, 2016). She eventually engaged in oral sex with one of the boys. This quote supports the gradual escalation from casual conversations to sexually explicit online interactions, to off-line sexual activities, as described by Williams et al. (2013) in

the literature. Another female offender would buy beer and drink with her victims before engaging in sexually explicit activities with them (CBC News, 2014). Using incentives such as alcohol or drugs before engaging in sexual activities is a typical grooming behaviour, especially for young males (Tanner & Brake, 2013). Moreover, another female offender gave one of her victims an old Black-Berry and paid the bills to enable continuous communication via texts (Windsor Star, 2017). She also provided them with gifts and smoked marijuana with them. This is considered a non-sexual grooming effort, utilized by the offender to create or preserve a relationship with the child (Hazelwood & Lanning, 2009).

5.4 Prevalence

Media articles are not a reliable nor valid source of information to determine the prevalence of female online child sex offenders in Canada. Nevertheless, arguments pertaining to prevalence in Canada appear in multiple articles. For instance, in one article a member of the RCMP describes the investigation as “unique”, adding how child pornography cases involving women are rare (Inwood, 2010). Another article mentions that back in June 2010, only three women had been charged by the Ottawa police since 2005, and although 265 people had been arrested in 2009 with child pornography offences, only one was a woman. Moreover, a police officer of the OPP child exploitation unit is quoted saying: “It’s very rare. I’ve been in this business for 19 years and I only recall less than half a dozen. You get the odd one, but it’s very, very uncommon” (Hurley, 2011). Another article quotes a Windsor police detective who said “The predominant offender in Internet child exploitation is male. They’re out there, but if you do get a female offender, you’re surprised” (Sacheli, 2010). And finally, a McMaster researcher who specializes in counselling sexual offenders stated the following:

“Cases of women producing child pornography are extremely rare. This is a very uncommon crime that happens very infrequently. We would expect this to happen much more often in men. That it’s alleged to be a woman is shocking. The fact that it’s a woman suspect who’s a parent is even more shocking” (CBC News, 2013).

Articles like these support evidence on the low prevalence rates of female online child sex offenders (see Martellozzo et al., 2010) as well as studies arguing the high prevalence of male online child sex offenders as compared to females (Bunting, 2007; Gannon et al., 2008; Martellozzo et al., 2010). Despite these statements, few media articles argue that online child sexual exploitation by women is not as rare one may think. For example, following the arrest of a mother who sexually abused her son, the lead director of the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre said: “sadly enough, I’m not surprised. I think the reality is, these types of cases happen way too often. 47% of the cases that come through our doors, kids are abused by a parent of caregiver. It’s not just a male-dominant crime” (Gilligan, 2016). About the same case, another article mentions that:

“While female sexual abusers are rare in the court system, those who deal with child abuse know the woman is not unique. She may be the first Ontario woman to be jailed for making child pornography featuring her own offspring, but she’s not the first mother to sexually abuse a child” (Sacheli, 2010).

And finally, the executive director of the Windsor-Essex Children’s Aid Society was also quoted saying: “Do I think it happens a lot more than we hear about? Absolutely!” (Sacheli, 2010). In the same article, a social worker discusses how in her past employment in federal prisons, she would ask inmates about any childhood sexual abuse and “many men had been abused by women” (Sacheli, 2010). These quotes put forth by the media support victimization surveys showing higher prevalence rates for female child sex offenders, as compared to official statistics (Denov, 2003; Mendel, 1995).

5.5 Recidivism

As demonstrated in the literature on female sex offenders, recidivism rates are extremely low (Cortoni and Hanson, 2005), and this representation is no different in the present study. Only one female online child sex offender in the sample is represented as a recidivist since she had prior convictions for sexually assaulting teenaged boys (Toronto Sun, 2017). However, there are no mentions of prior child pornography or luring convictions. Another case of recidivism is found in the dataset, but the female online child sex offender was charged for breaching her release conditions (being in contact with a child) (The Province, 2011). This is not a repeated sexual offence against a child, and therefore not considered sexual recidivism. As a result, one can argue that female online child sex offenders are represented in Canadian media as first-hand offenders, and offenders who do not re-offend against children once charged and/or convicted.

5.6 Victims of Circumstance

As previously defined in Chapter 2, victims of circumstance are characterized as female offenders for whom an explanation or mitigating factor is provided in the media in an attempt to comprehend the contextual illicit sexual behaviour, and/or minimize her accountability for the offending (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglioni, 2008; Pozzan, 2014; Naylor, 2011).

It was previously explained that female offenders tend to receive more favourable treatment in newspapers because of their gender, and this can be seen with terminology used by newspapers to describe the abuse perpetrated by a female sex offender (Pozzan, 2014). When it comes to female online child sex offenders, the findings are similar. First, the female child sex offenders in the dataset are almost always referred to by their gender, either as “woman” or “female”, or by

their occupation (e.g. teacher). Therefore, just like literature on female offenders, female online child sex offenders are represented in the media as less threatening, and less monstrous by using such neutral terminology. Only one female offender is referred to as a “full-on sex predator”⁷⁹, which represents a small fraction of all female online child sex offender designations in the dataset.

The “Mad” woman

Literature shows that media tends to attribute female offenders’ criminal behaviour to a biological disorder or medical issue (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglion, 2008; Collins; 2014; Edwards, 1986; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor 2001; Wilczynski, 1991). As described in theme #2 in Chapter 4, mental health issues are also used in the Canadian media to reduce the female offender’s culpability. Bipolar disorder, severe depression, including post-partum depression, mental instability, and severe manic episodes, are amongst the reasons provided to justify or question the female offender’s illicit sexual behaviour, and this is specifically relevant to teachers in the sample. The accountability and culpability of the female offender is therefore minimized. As mentioned by a female online child sex offender’s lawyer, “a person who has no mental health illness, who is ‘normal’ so called, their moral blameworthiness is higher than a person who is affected by mental illness” (CTV News, 2016a).

The Female Drug and Alcohol Abuser

In contrast to Owen and Hawes’ (2015) research demonstrating how the media characterizes drugs and alcohol as a significant contributing factor to female offenders offending behaviour, in

⁷⁹ Katherine Kitts, an Ottawa teacher’s aide was called a “full-on sex predator” by one of the victim’s mother after a court hearing, which was then quoted in three news articles.

Canadian articles about female online child sex offenders, this mitigating factor is hardly present. Specifically, the abuse of substances is mentioned in relation to only two female online child sex offenders; one who had been drinking and consuming drugs during the offence and the other who had been struggling with alcoholism for some time, to cope with her own abusive childhood. For the first female offender, the abuse follows Worall's (1990) argument which states how alcohol or drug abuse can be used by the media to explain the deviant behaviour while for the latter, the abuse reduces the female offenders guilt to the eyes of the readers (Picart, 2006). It is therefore argued that drug and alcohol abusers are not a significant representation of female online child sex offenders. Consequently, as South (2007) also raises, addictions among female offenders remain under-reported in the media.

The 'Sexualized' Female Offender

Contrary to literature about female offenders in the media, there is only one sexualized representation of a female online child sex offender in the present study. Specifically, a female offender who participated in the sexual abuse of a seven-year old girl is described in the media as a "prostitute" and a "blond hooker" who would respond to Craigslist advertisements and perform any sexual activity for money (Hunter, 2017). The focus on this specific occupation may be an attempt from the media to create a link between illegitimate occupations related to sexuality and the sexual abuse of children – the oversexualized social construction of the female online child sex offender, as seen in media representations of female offenders (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Conboy, 2006; Gordon, 2008; Mason, 2006). Moreover, another female offender is defined as a "sex-obsessed teacher" (Hunter, 2017b) and another one as a woman who frequents several fetish websites (Gillis & Kwong, 2016). Again, the emphasis relies on a sexualized representation of the female offender. Conboy (2006) as well as Owens and Hawes (2015)

suggest that female offenders' physical appearance is oftentimes overly sexualized in the media or highlighted for no substantial reason. In a similar manner, there are some references to female online child sex offenders' appearance in the dataset. Details about the female online child sex offender's hair colour and length, approximate height and weight, clothes she is wearing and if tattoos are visible, is provided in over 15 news articles. This being said, these descriptions do not accentuate a sexual or promiscuous behaviour (Conboy, 2006); they rather seem to be included in the article out of general interest towards female offender's appearance, like noted in some studies about female offenders in the media (see Black; 2009; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Owens & Hawes, 2015).

Owens and Hawes (2015) also suggest that compared to female offenders, male offenders are most often defined by their occupation. Contrary to this statement, female online child sex offenders' occupation is a predominant detail and is virtually always included in the media article title, demonstrating its utmost importance for this specific type of offence committed by women, as compared to other crime-types.

The Coerced Female Offender

For details about the coerced female offender, refer to the coerced female offender sub-type in Section 5.1 pertaining to typologies⁸⁰.

5.7 Doubly Deviant

Literature suggests that contrary to victims of circumstance, some female offenders may be represented in the media as doubly deviant; as female offenders have not only committed a crime, but as women, have also transgressed feminine social expectations and gender roles

⁸⁰ All references and examples about coerced female offenders were combined into one section to avoid duplication of information.

(Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). However, in the current study, Canadian newspapers tend to provide minimal details about the female offender's illicit sexual behaviour, and commonly focus on the court process instead. Despite this lack of details and justification of the female offender's offending behaviour, the idea of a doubly deviant female online child sex offender is reviewed below in relation to the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

A Threat to the Ideal Womanhood

From the review of literature on the representation of female offenders in the media, a key aspect emerges; female offenders are depicted as a threat to the ideal womanhood as they deviate from the socially constructed roles and traits attributed to women in a society (Hayes & Baker, 2014). By committing a crime, the female offender defies expected and acceptable femininity traits such as passivity, innocence, morality, and compassion (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan, 2002; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Huckerby, 2003; O'Donnell, 2016; Naylor, 2001). Additionally, this social defiance is even more flagrant when a crime is committed against a child, since women have been traditionally accountable for their protection and wellbeing (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013).

The findings from the present study yield comparable although slightly different conclusions. Some statements allude to a doubly deviant offender; however, these are mainly presented in relation to the female offender's occupation, rather than her gender. Since more than 50% of the articles pertain to female teachers and school employees, an education-related occupation is predominantly presented as an aggravating factor, and one of the central aspects contributing to the female offender's condemnation in the media. In fact, if a female online child sex offender occupies a position within a school (e.g. teacher, teacher's aide, secretary, etc.), her occupation is very often stated directly in the article's title, emphasizing its significance for this specific crime-

type. For example, only one article out of 19 about a school employee mentions the fact that she is also a mother of two children, a seemingly important fact considering the offence committed. Since her occupation is directly associated to children, and since her victims are also students, being a mother does not seem as significant in the media articles, as compared to her occupation. Thus, being a teacher, or working within a school environment, seems to prevail on the severity scale for this crime-type over being a mother. Furthermore, not being a teacher is used in one media article as a mitigating factor, stating the female offender “while she was at the school, she was not a teacher” (CBC News, 2010), alluding to the fact that being a teacher would have made this offence even worse, and the representation more negative.

Ergo, when it comes to female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspapers, they are not necessarily represented as a threat to the ideal womanhood, but rather as a threat to the ideal “teacherhood⁸¹”. Teachers are not only responsible for the education of children, both scholarly and morally, but they tend to take over the parenting role during school hours. In addition, historically this occupation has been highly associated to women. Precisely, women comprise 84% of the teaching staff at elementary and preschool levels, and 65% of all teachers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising to notice many similarities and social expectations between these two entities, such as being in a position of trust, being compassionate and tolerant, and protecting children from harm. Notably, as described in Chapter 4, female teachers’ offending behaviour in the current dataset are presented as an outright breach of trust, as female teachers have daily access to and authority over children via their occupation. Parents interviewed for some media articles expressed their concerns with respect to trust towards female teachers such as: “...it makes me worried because you put your trust in these people with your

⁸¹ For the purpose of this research, “teacherhood” refers to teachers as well as teacher’s assistants and other school employees.

children” (Rosella, 2017), “...her breach of trust towards the parent of the victim and society at large has very real and long-lasting effects” (CTV News, 2016a), “...our children go to school, they are entrusted to teachers. This is a person who was in a sensitive position. She made a decision and decided to breach trust” (CTV News, 2016d), and “...not once did it cross my mind that I was dropping my son off with a predator” (Petrick, 2017).

Women with illegitimate sexual tendencies, coupled with the evolution of communication technologies, as well as the novel friendly relationship that students often have with their teachers during and outside of school hours, highly contribute to an increased risk for online child sexual exploitation in this day and age. For instance, a teacher within the dataset had been previously warned by the school to disengage from communicating with students on social media, but persisted until she was caught and charged years later for sexually exploiting some of her students (Hunter, 2017; Pazzano, 2017). With such a high representation of teachers within the Canadian newspapers, the social construction of female online child sexual exploitation is increasingly more about women who occupy positions with schools.

[A Threat to the Ideal Motherhood](#)

As previously stated, 30% of the female online child sex offenders in the dataset were also mothers at the time of the offence but contrary to the findings in the above-section, the occupation does not seem to be a significant factor for this sub-type. It seems like their role as mothers in combination with the charge(s) or conviction(s) for an online sexual offence against a child are enough for the media to chastise their illicit behaviour. In addition, the literature about female offenders clearly shows how the media reinforces the social construction of the mother as being children’s main caregiver and protector (Owens & Hawes, 2015). In the current dataset,

some articles include statements about social expectations towards mothers in our society. For example:

“She gave him life and was the only parent he ever knew. In the way she snapped photos of him sleeping and playing happily, she was like any other adoring mother” (Sacheli, 2010).

“Society expects the mother of a toddler would do everything in her power to make sure her child is protected from harm” (Sacheli, 2010).

“It is absolutely disturbing – it’s a heinous crime committed on a child by a person meant to protect them” (Calgary Herald, 2016).

“This is a heinous crime that was committed on a young child by the one person they should be able to trust the most” (Fletcher, 2016).

These statements equally support the traditional social construction of motherhood, defined as someone who is maternal, kind, protective of her children and in whom, children have complete trust. By sexually exploiting their child(ren), or other child(ren), these mothers violate the seemingly natural law of womanhood (Lichtenstein, 2006), and fragment the socially constructed idea of motherhood. However, it must be noted that most articles about mothers seem to further reprimand the women because of their sexual predation towards children, which is socially and indisputably intolerable, rather than their status as mothers. Hence, as compared to female offenders in the literature, Canadian female online child sex offenders’ motherhood is not as harshly condemned or chastised, as compared to their illicit sexual behaviour towards a child. In fact, an article states that a female offender was a “devoted mother who had made a very big mistake” (Dimmock, 2016). In brief, being a mother is mentioned only once as the main aggravating factor, specifying she “has moral culpability for these charges” (Bell, 2017). In accordance with Lloyd’s (1995) arguments about mothers who commit crimes, they not only break the law in a legal sense, but also in a moral sense.

The 'Masculinized' Female Offender

As previously stated in the review of literature, Cavaglioni's (2008) study on maternal filicide demonstrates how female offenders who lack emotions during trial face more harsh criticism in newspapers articles. In the present study, a lack of emotion is also present in three media articles about a mother who sexually abused her son and who is described as sitting emotionless in court, appearing to not fully grasp the severity of her actions. Following this description, a statement from the female offender's lawyer is added saying: "She appears to show no emotion whatsoever, but that's just part of her personality..." (CBC News, 2010). Although it first seems like having no emotions in court is presented as an argument to reinforce a negative representation of the female offender, or a deviation from gender expectations towards women as emotional human beings, the following quote revokes this argument, and provides a valid justification for the lack of emotions. Thus, instead of being presented as suspicious (Cavaglioni, 2008), or as an indication of guilt (Black, 2009; Kaceviciute, 2014), it is attributed to the female offender's typical personality, perhaps a more "masculine" one. An ex-teacher is also described as appearing "very subdued during her court appearances, showing no emotion even after her lawyer told her she had been found guilty" (Rhodes, 2016). Once again, this statement does not contribute to a harsher representation in the media, but is rather used to illustrate the female offender's disbelief with respect to the charges laid against her and the guilty verdict. In this case, the lack of emotion is presented as consternation and shock rather than insensitivity.

In contrast, for the female offenders who exhibit their emotions during trial, literature shows how this reinforces representations of innocence, presenting tears as a symbol of redemption (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008). In the present study, numerous media articles describe the emotions displayed by female online child sex offenders in court such as having red and puffy

eyes, breaking into sobs after hugging a parent, weeping openly, being shocked and tearful, and keeping their chin up despite the tears in her eyes. By further analyzing the articles that include emotion descriptors, statements about remorse are also located. Thus, similar to the literature about female offenders (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008), the findings from this study support a possible correlation between emotions such as crying and representations of remorse (Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008).

The 'Lesbian' Female Offender

Although several female online child sex offenders in the dataset sexually exploited young girls (same-sex sexual offences), their sexual orientation is not discussed once in the Canadian media articles examined. Thus, an association between lesbianism and violence in the media, as demonstrated by Jewkes (2004), does not exist in the studied Canadian dataset about female online child sex offenders.

The 'Dehumanized' Female Offender: The Other

Literature on female offenders in the media demonstrates how the media tends to report on the shocking nature of women committing crimes to portray them as outsiders and deviant females, who do not conform to social gender expectations and roles, as a result, are considered abnormal compared to the rest of the feminine population (Collins, 2014; Heidensohn, 1996). In the current study, several statements allude to the horrific and shocking nature of the crime committed by the female offender, particularly mothers; however these do not seem to ostracize the woman herself. For example, an article suggests that the sexual exploitation of a child is “repugnant, reprehensible and cry out for punishment” (Rhodes, 2016). Another article calls the crimes “appalling and abhorrent” (Sacheli, 2010). Amongst other terms, the Canadian media also

describe the child sexual exploitation material as graphic, horrific, shocking, disgusting, disturbing and troubling. Therefore, the act itself, the online sexual exploitation of a child is represented as “unhuman” and intolerable, but not the female offender herself. On the contrary, the Canadian female online child sex offender is often presented as someone who is part of the community, who plays a significant role in children’s lives and someone that did not raise any red flags prior to the incident(s). This is particularly the case for teachers and school employees, but not so much for mothers. For instance, following the arrest of a high school teacher, her students claimed “she was good at her job and more of a friend than a teacher” (Chia, 2016). Other teachers are described as “well-liked among students and staff” at school (Rosella, 2017), someone with a good character and reputation (Devoy, 2013), and someone compassionate and morally upright (Dimmock, 2016). An educational assistant is also referred to as someone who was helpful and always smiling, describing how shocked the students were by the allegations (CBC News, 2014). “I never would have thought she could be involved in anything like this” is mentioned after a young woman was arrested for child pornography-related offences (McLaughlin, 2013). As well, a parent stated: “that’s the shocking part of it. It is shocking to think that... these situations can be going on and nobody have a clue. Nobody overheard anything, no parents overheard anything, nobody’s radar went off, and it’s just puzzling” (Morales, 2016). This quote accurately embodies the issue of online child sexual exploitation by women in Canada; unexpected. A judge told the court how female offenders’ charming traits are in fact part of the problem of child exploitation, “making the exploitation of the vulnerable possible” (Devoy, 2013). Thus, female online child sex offenders are not commonly dehumanized by the Canadian media, on the contrary, the representations tend to

reinforce their “normalness”, showing how online child sex offenders could be virtually anyone in a society.

5.8 Canadian Media and Victims of Female Online Child Sex Offenders

Even though studies have proved the opposite (C3P, 2017; Wortley & Smallbone, 2012), a common misconception is that child sex offenders are male, and strangers. Notably, a study found that 90% of parents warned their children about strangers, while very few parents suggest child sex offenders could be people known to them (Wurtele, Kvaternick and Franklin, 1992).

With the current study, it is hoped that some of those misconceptions are now invalidated.

Precisely, the 273 Canadian media articles reviewed confirm that women do sexually offend against children, online and offline, and that the large majority are not strangers to their victims. In fact, only 17% of the media articles pertain to children who were victimized by female online sex offenders unknown to them (no known relationship).

Terminology used in the media may also convey different representations. For example, Owens & Hawes (2015) explain how the media uses the term “boy” when male victims are underage to evoke sympathy for the victims on the basis of their ‘tender’ age. In terms of word frequency, “young” is mentioned 176 times, “teen” 105 times, “minor” 117 times, “youth” 39 times, “underage” 21 times, and “toddler” 34 times in the dataset. These terms may also highlight youthfulness and innocence, and as a result, further chastise the female online child sex offender. On that note, a debate exists within the current dataset where some victims are portrayed as truly victimized while others are not depicted as having experienced any harm. On one side, many articles describe the abuse and trauma experienced by the victim(s), such as the loss of innocence, friends, isolation from family, and much more (see Chapter 4, consequences of abuse

on victims). To this, a few articles describe the online-specific impacts on the victims. “It’s not a victimless crime. These are real children, as we saw today, suffering real abuses...it doesn’t take a lot of imagination to understand the psychological impact on those victims. Every time someone downloads or views an image, they (the children) are re-victimized” (Devoy, 2013). On the other side, some articles, all about teachers and school employees, state the victims were either not physically harmed, or did not seem to be traumatized by the incident. A victim even stated he was flattered when the female offender began exchanging sexually explicit messages with him. The findings support Brennan & Vandenberg’s (2009) study about newspapers considerably minimizing the victim’s injury when the perpetrator is female. Many of the victims are male and articles like these may discourage young male victims from reporting a sexually abusive situation, especially if the perpetrator is female and even more if she is a teacher.

5.9 Major projects

Three major operations which resulted in the arrest of several online child sex offenders, including female offenders, first appear in the present study starting in 2015. First, according to media articles Project Iceberg, led by Niagara Regional Police Service, resulted in the identification and rescue of six children, age four to 17, who were victims of a wide range of offences, such as online sexual exploitation and sexual assault. Six individuals were arrested and charged during this operation; five males and one female who was the biological mother of two of the victims (Langley, 2017). Second, Project Links involved the Ontario Provincial Police, Niagara Regional Police, Waterloo Police Service, Chatham-Kent Police Service as well as the United States Department of Homeland Security. This multi-jurisdictional investigation resulted in the arrest of nine people, including two females, for their involvement in the sexual abuse and exploitation of a seven-year-old girl (Clementson, 2017; Clementson, 2017b; CTV News, 2017).

Third, Project Spade is a major international operation launched in the fall of 2010 by the Toronto Police Service, following allegations of a man sharing images of child sexual abuse over the Internet. This allegation led to the discovery of a network of producers and consumers of online child sexual exploitation material. After years of investigation and collaboration between 90 police agencies, over 400 children were removed from harm, and more than 100 suspects were arrested in Canada only, including several women⁸² (Alexis, 2015).

These operations elucidate the sophistication of offenders and collaboration between like-minded individuals involved in the online sexual exploitation of children. Despite the success of these investigations, the media articles still reduce the female offenders' agency often by disregarding their name as well as the role they played in the offence. For example, one article provides specific personal information about male offenders involved such as their name, birthday, and city where they reside etc., whereas the female offender is listed as 'the female'. From a constructionist perspective, these articles maintain the traditional gender stereotypes by promoting a dominant representation of the male offenders, as the main responsible for the abuse.

5.10 Themes that did not emerge from the entire data set

Several themes that were noted in the literature about the media representation of female offenders are not found in the present dataset about Canadian female online child sex offenders. For example, the race or ethnicity of the female offender is not mentioned once in the dataset, neither is the level of education. The marital status of the female offender is also omitted from

⁸² Brian Way, from Toronto, was the man at the heart of this investigation. He was running a company called Azov Films since 2005, which would allegedly contract people from around the world to create child sexual exploitation videos involving children, largely young boys. Most videos were shot in Ukraine and Romania, and then distributed from Toronto, through mail and the Internet, to customers around the world.

the large majority of the media articles about female online child sex offenders. Only few women are said to being married or divorced (oftentimes as a result of the charges and/or convictions). Thus, these aspects are not part of the media representation of this specific crime-type in Canada. Finally, there are very few articles about offences that occurred several years prior to being discovered and/or investigated. With some exceptions, the sexual exploitation of a child, online and off-line, is allegedly disclosed within a weeks or few months after the offence took place, and in some case, disclosed while it is still occurring. Therefore, it can be argued that online child sexual offences against children by women in Canada are presented in the media as crimes rapidly disclosed by victims. This result is contrary to victim surveys showing how disclosure frequently happens years after the abuse, often during adulthood (C3P, 2017).

CHAPTER 6: LIMITS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Findings

The aim of this research project was to consider the core concepts of social constructionism and the dominant media representations of female offenders in the literature to determine if female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspapers are also presented as victims of circumstance (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Cavaglione, 2008; Pozzan, 2014; Naylor, 2011) or as doubly deviant (Collins, 2014; Naylor, 2001; Weatherby et al., 2008) and to see if new media representations would emerge from Canadian newspapers in relation to this phenomenon. The findings reveal that although this specific type of female offender shares similarities with female offenders in general in the media, it remains a heterogeneous and unique group in the Canadian media because of the novelty and nature of the crime. The tables below summarize the number of references to mitigating and aggravating factors per year, as well as per female online child sex offender sub-type.

Table 17: Number of References to Aggravating and Mitigating Factors per Year

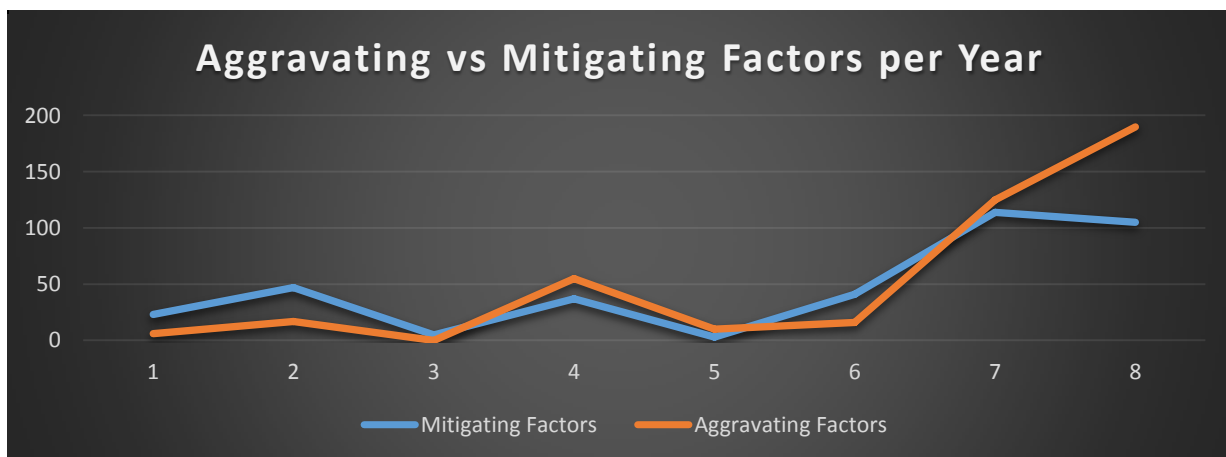
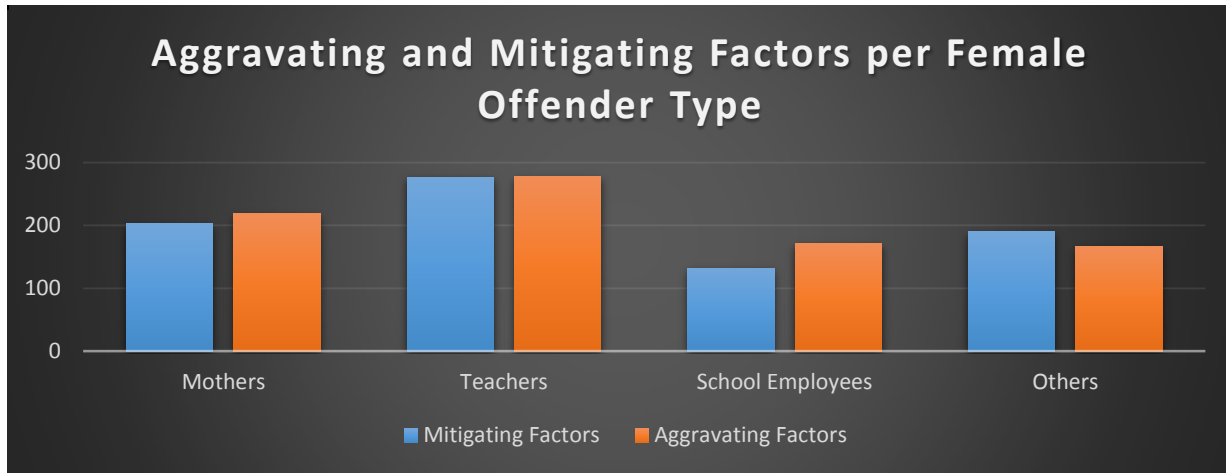


Table 18: Number of References to Aggravating and Mitigating Factors per Female Offender Sub-Type



The results are interesting as teachers represent 26% of the dataset and hold 35% of the references to mitigating factors and 33% to aggravating factors, whereas the ‘others’ comprise 33% of the dataset but only hold 24% and 19% of the mitigating and aggravating factors references, respectively. This being said, when looking at the results from logistic regression analysis, the only statistically significant correlations are found between theme #2, mitigating factors, and the “other” female online child sex offender sub-type, as well as theme #3, consequences of abuse, and mothers. All other sub-types are not found to be statistically correlated to any of the themes.

In addition, every year examined, statements alluding to mitigating factors and aggravating factors seem consistent and equivalent except for the last year, 2017, where a significant increase is seen for the aggravating factors and a decrease for mitigating factors. Could the Canadian media be moving towards a more critical and incriminating social construction of the female online child sex offender? More research, particularly longitudinal, would be required to corroborate this statement. Moreover, teachers are equally presented as victims of circumstance

and as doubly deviant, while mothers and especially school employees seem to convey more condemning representations. The only female online child sex offender type that may result in a more lenient representation are the women who are not mothers, nor teachers or school employees; the 'others'. Moreover, during the timeframe examined, 2010 to 2017, the social construction of female online child sex offenders significantly progressed and a shift was observed from few females working in education being arrested for child pornography and/or luring offences to an over-representation of teachers and exponential growth in the number of articles published each year about them. As compared to literature about female offenders in the media, the importance given to occupation, specifically teachers, is without doubt a novelty. In fact, no research has investigated the employment occupations of online female child sex offenders (ECPAT, 2017). The present study concludes that more than 50% of the female online child sex offenders in Canadian newspaper articles are either teachers or school employees. Even though the occupation of female sex offenders is not captured in Statistics Canada's Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey, there is no reason to believe that teachers and school employees comprise such a large portion of female online child sex offenders in Canada. There are no official Canadian statistics to support the substantial representation of teachers, neither are there official statistics demonstrating the increase in the number of women involved in child pornography and luring offences in Canada since 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Therefore, it can be argued that the Canadian media presents a disproportionate number of female offenders, and most particularly teachers and school employees, arrested and/or convicted for online child sexual exploitation, and as a result, influence and generate a biased and distorted social construction of the Canadian female online child sex offender.

At the same time, child sex offenders have been erroneously presented in the media as odd and older men, targeting children in their neighbourhood for the last decades (Greer, 2003; Silverman and Wilson, 2002; Thomas, 2005). These stereotypical misconceptions, or historical social constructions, can misguide children and parents who then may put their guard down when children interact with good looking, young, polite, and pleasant individuals, and most particularly, females and online. The results from the current study demystify some of these misconstructions about online child sex offenders by offering new representations of the child sex offenders; female teachers and mothers. This result aligns with Max Weber's conclusions showing how different kind of interpretative understandings are the basis of sociological knowledge and (Weber, 1977), how various factors interconnect to establish social constructions. Hence, the social construction of the child sex offender has evolved, and as reveals the current study, now includes a strong online component and a less masculine representation.

Limitations and Recommendations

The present study holds limitations that could be addressed by conducting additional and more specific research. First, many female online child sex offenders included within the current sample had also been charged and or convicted with a contact sexual offence against a child. There were few female offenders who had exclusively offended online. Therefore, further research should be conducted on female child sex offenders who did not commit a contact sexual offence against a child, to determine if differences exist between online female child sex offenders and dual female child sex offenders (who sexually exploited children online and offline) in the Canadian media. Second, some teachers in the dataset were also mothers. Due to limitations within NVivo, it was challenging to create a separate sub-group which would combine female online child sex offenders from two previously identified sub-types (mothers

and teachers). For future research, female online child sex offenders with an occupation within a school that are also mothers, should be closely examined to see if the combination of factors impacts the social construction of these offenders as either victims of circumstance or doubly deviant offenders. Third, most media articles examined did not specify if the co-offending relationship between the female online child sex offender and her partner (female or male) is based on coercion or not, making it difficult to compare with literature about coerced female offenders. As a recommendation, perhaps other sources of information (e.g. court transcripts) should be consulted to determine the nature of the relationship between both offenders, and if coercion is the main motive for the online sexual offending. Additional sources of information should also be consulted for this crime-type in the media considering that most articles lack basic information about the female online child sex offender such as her occupation, number and gender of victims, relationship to victims, and much more. These details were of interest for this study as they were identified in the literature about female offenders in the media and literature about female child sex offenders. If articles had included this information, it would have improved the final results and depth of analysis conducted. Notably, by consulting court transcripts, the official charges and convictions could have been uncovered and could have led to a deeper comprehension of the treatment of female online child sex offenders within the Canadian justice system. Although such study surpasses the objective and methodology for the present study, it would be of interest for anyone interested in this sub-type of child sex offenders. Fourth, many examples provided in this study derive from a limited number of articles within the dataset. As previously mentioned, many articles did not include information about the female online child sex offender, providing only details about charges, convictions and/or sentences. For this reason, the four dominant themes mainly emerged from a certain percentage of the entire

dataset. For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct more extensive quantitative analysis to mitigate this limitation and to offer a better overview of the dataset as a whole⁸³. Fifth, comparisons with men are not part of this thesis and should be considered for future research. There is no data pertaining to the Canadian media construction of male child sex offenders. Therefore, it was impossible to compare the current results to those of their male counterparts. It would be interesting to conduct a study on the Canadian media construction of online male child sex offenders and compare the findings with the general representation of male offenders in the media, as well as the representation of female online child sex offenders in the Canadian media. Sixth, due to time constraints, only Canadian media articles published since 2010 were included within the dataset. Since very little research has been done on online female child sex offenders, it would be recommended to conduct a research on a larger sample (e.g. include newspaper articles since 2000) to uncover the emergence of this crime-type in Canadian newspapers, specifically for women, and examine the longitudinal shift in the social construction since its inception in the media.

Seventh, future researchers should consider how the packaging of crime stories (e.g. headline size, use of photographs, story length) may differ between various crimes committed by women. While scholars have examined how certain crime stories receive more or less print media attention (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Chermak, 1994; Grabe et al., 2006; Naylor, 2001), there has not yet been a study on how presentations may differ specifically for female offenders, female sex offenders (see Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009) and definitely not for female online child sex offenders. And finally, future research could investigate the public's and law

⁸³ The researcher attempted to mitigate this limitations by examining not only the number of articles that included statements about each main theme, but also references. 14 references may have been identified in one article. This limitation should be taken into consideration when reading the Results and Discussion chapters.

enforcement members' perception in regards to online female child sex offenders. By doing so, researchers could better understand the impact media has on various individuals' perceptions within our society, in regards to online child sexual offences committed by women.

Conclusion

It is said that social constructionism is closely related to modernisation since both processes encourage society to continuously reassess how various individuals and situations are represented, as new information is produced and made available (McQuail, 2007), arguably, by and large, the media. The media has the power to shape societal attitudes and change existent social constructions, such as crime, and specifically for this study, online child sexual exploitation in Canada. This concept reflects Foucault's discourse analysis which encourages "reflection upon why we construct and perceive phenomena in the way that we do" (Ost, 2009, p.4). Recent media cases, as illustrated in the 273 articles reviewed, have brought to public light the existence of women taking advantage of the Internet and communication technologies to sexually exploit children. With the use of various technological apparatus, female online child sex offenders have the opportunity to explore the dark side of their sexuality, increasing the chances to succumb to the temptation and sexually exploit vulnerable youth in this new cyberspace reality. Research indicates a very fine line between online and off-line sexual offending (Eke, Seto, & Williams, 2011; Houtepen, Sijtsema & Bogaerts, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Merdian, Moghaddam, Boer, Wilson, Thakker, Curtis & Dawson, 2016; Seto & Eke, 2015), and as shown in this study, many female online child sex offenders do not limit their sexual offending behaviour to the online realm. Children and teens do not have a fully developed understanding of sexuality and cannot interpret or identify an adult's true intent, especially online. These risk factors coupled with a lack of supervision of online activities and parents' lack

of awareness and knowledge of potential dangers put children at greater risk of being victims of online sexual solicitation and exploitation (C3P, 2018a)

Gavin (2005) states that “if we all hold perceptions that are erroneous or at least not supported by full and openly received evidence, then who knows what misperceptions are causing difficulties in our homes, communities, countries?” (p.412). Thus, to better protect children from online sexual victimization, it is essential to be aware of and understand behaviours and situations that present risk (C3P, 2018b). This risk is often identified by parents through main sources of information, such as the media. Notably, a recent Canadian study found that the media was the only source of information for 33% of all sexual abuse cases committed against children by school personnel over the last 20 years. Therefore, information provided in the Canadian media about female online child sex offenders dictates which female poses the highest risk to children. Based on the findings of this study, teachers and mothers seem to personify the highest threat.

Perpetual anxiety and unease in public is only one of the long term impacts experienced by this specific group of victims, and a new reality for victims of sexual abuse. Therefore, parents, children as well as anyone playing a role in the life of a child should never refrain from expressing their concerns about a strange encounter between an adult and a child, male or female, familiar or not, online or offline. There is a “tendency for people to avoid addressing concerns of inappropriate behaviour by adults working in schools often arises out of not wanting to cause trouble, the fear of upsetting the individual, or not wanting to make an allegation. Questioning inappropriate boundaries with children does not equal an allegation of sexual abuse” (C3P, 2016, p.32). With this study, we now know that victims are not strictly females anymore and men are not the sole perpetrators of crime in our society. The social constructions of victims, offenders and child sexual exploitation offences have evolved and will continue to evolve. It is

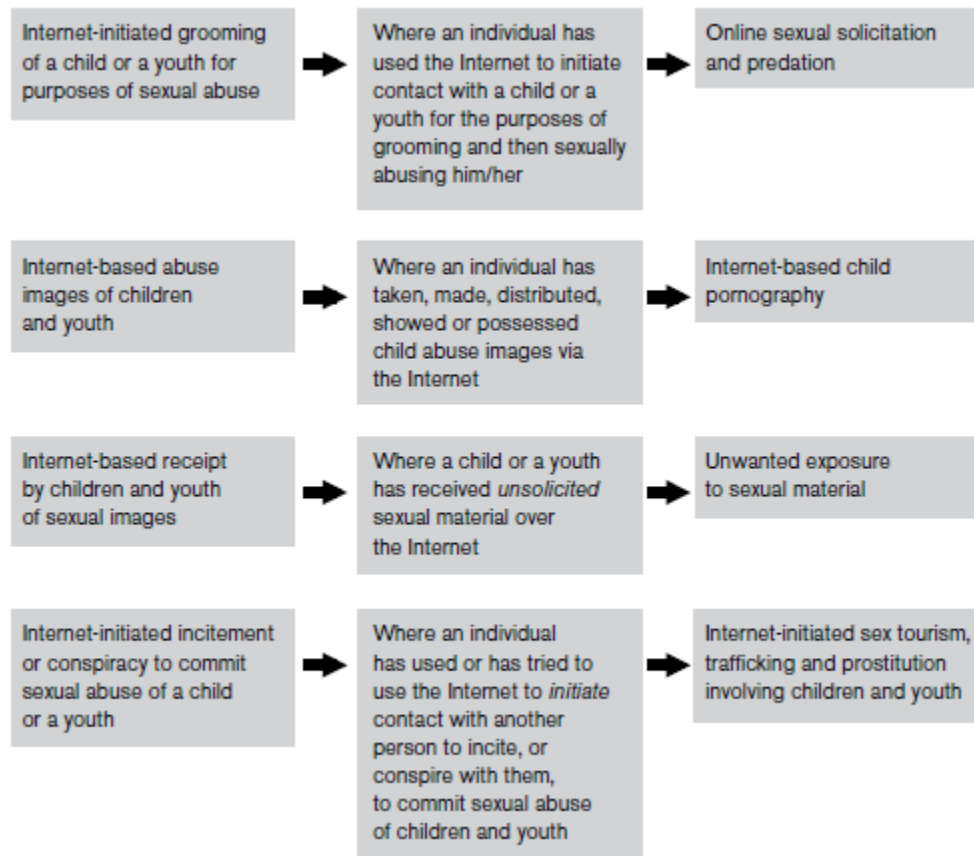
through research and increased awareness that misrepresentations conveyed by the media, amongst other sources of information, can be rebutted to better protect children in our society.

It is hoped that additional research in the area of online child sexual exploitation will further raise awareness about this modern issue and encourage national and international collaboration to reduce the availability of this material on the Internet. There is a need for gender-specific child sex offender programs to be offered within and outside custodial settings which include an online-crime module. These programs should also be offered to online-specific child sex offenders, and not exclusively to those who commit contact sexual offences, such as sexual assaults⁸⁴. Increased knowledge and education is also crucial to demystify the current social construction of child sex offenders and their victims as mainly produced by the media, and empower youth to recognize and respond to these incidents appropriately, especially when it comes to female perpetrators. Children and youth deserve our time and efforts to safeguard their innocence and allow them to grow up as children, without having to worry about individuals with sexual deviances. Research in this area is one step towards a safer world – never underestimate the difference you can make in child protection.

⁸⁴ Research by Burdon and Gallagher (2002) recognizes that empirically-based data is lacking relating to female sex offenders' psychometric profiles, how they differ from other female offenders (e.g. non-sexual offences) or from male offenders, what factors lead to their offending and/or re-offending, and consequently, what type of specialized and gender-based treatment they would require (Eldridge et al., 2009; Gannon & Rose, 2008). There is currently no evidenced-based guidance or consensus about the most effective approaches to work specifically with female child sex offenders (Ashfield, 2011).

APPENDIX A

A typology of Internet Child Sexual Abuse



Source: Gallagher et al. (2006)

APPENDIX B

Prevalence Rates for Online Child Sexual Exploitation Incidents Committed by Women

Study/Source	Country	Type of sexual crime	Sample/Type of data	Proportion female
Babchishin, Hanson and Hermann (2011) ^{iv}	Australia, France, Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Canada and the United States	Online child sexual abuse and exploitation	27 different samples/ convictions, arrests, charges and self-report	<3%
CEOP (2013) ^v	UK	Production of child sexual abuse material	Child abuse images collected	24% of the images of child abuse analysed, depicted sexual contact between a child and an adult female
Seigfried-Spellar (2013) ^{vi}	United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada	Consumption of child sexual abuse material	Respondents to online survey	18.7%
Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor (2014) ^{vii}	USA	Aggressive sexual solicitation	Youth interviewed by telephone	16%
Leukfeldta, Jansenb and Stolc (2014) ^{viii}	Netherlands	Child sexual abuse material	Police files	<2%
NSPCC (2015) ^{ix}	UK	Online child sexual abuse and exploitation	Convictions	<2%
Schulz et al. (2016) ^x	Germany, Sweden and Finland	Sexual solicitation of minors	Respondents to online surveys	Soliciting adolescent: 30.6%; soliciting child: 17.2%
Study/Source	Country	Type of sexual crime	Sample/Type of data	Proportion female
Alexy, Burgess and Baker (2005) ⁱ	USA	Trading child sexual abuse material	Cases published in news media	5.3%
Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor (2005) ⁱⁱ	USA	Possessing child sexual abuse material	Arrests reported by law enforcement agencies	<1%
Seigfried, Lovely and Rogers (2008) ⁱⁱⁱ	USA	Consumption of child sexual abuse material	Respondents to online survey	5.5%

Source: ECPAT (2017)

APPENDIX C

A 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Table 2: A 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed - interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other - the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done - i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as <i>active</i> in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

Source: Braun & Clarke (2006)

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