

Who is Karla Homolka?
A Case of Media Identity Transformations

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Abstract

On May 19, 1993 Karla Homolka was charged with manslaughter in the murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. Since that day, Homolka's actions have been the centre of public interest and her involvement in the murders has played a central role in the media reports on female criminal behaviour for almost two decades. Using a grounded theory approach, this research project analyzed newspaper articles on Homolka and her crimes taken from The Toronto Star and The Standard. The data analysis revealed that Homolka was conceptualized in the media as 'victim', 'mad', 'evil' and 'subhuman'. These media identities supported other research claims that, when a woman commits an act of violence, her gender serves as the lens through which all of her actions are understood (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007; Myers and Wight, 1996).

As my grounded theory analysis progressed, I began to realize that Homolka was not subject merely to the whims of media insight or public condemnation. Instead, media portrayals of Homolka reveal changing presentations of self that challenged others' conceptualizations of her. Further examination of media descriptions of those self-presentations revealed three (3) theoretical categories of identity transformations which I call 'complimenting' identities, 'combating' identities, and 'rejecting' identities. Thus, as a work in interpretative sociology, this thesis provides three (3) different categories that can be used to understand further the complex relationship between existing socially constructed personal and social identities. In regards to the Homolka case, it offers a stronger knowledge of the images of female sexual abusers within the criminal justice system and the general public at large.

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Introduction

There are a number of things that can be known for certain about Karla. She is equally, if not more, responsible for the crimes she and her partner committed. No one died until Paul Bernardo moved in with Karla Homolka. She could have chosen not to do what she did to her sister. She did what she did with full knowledge that her actions put her sister's life at risk. She had many opportunities to save her sister, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. (Williams, 2003; p.519)

On May 19, 1993 Karla Homolka was charged with manslaughter in the murders of Kristen French, 15 and Leslie Mahaffy, 14. Homolka who was a young attractive Caucasian middle class woman surprised the public with her involvement in the crimes. Since that day, Homolka's actions have been the centre of public interest and her involvement in the Mahaffy and French murders has played a central role in media reports of female criminal behaviour. As Paul Bernardo has faded from the media, Homolka has always remained a predominant figure. A major question of concern is why the public still possesses an interest in learning about Karla Homolka's participation in these crimes and hearing about her daily activities and present life.

This research project began with an inquiry into whether or not Karla Homolka was considered a sex offender. I wanted to know if the Canadian public believed that a woman could commit a sexual offence and, subsequently, how they would view sexual abuse when perpetrated by a woman. In this way, the theme of female criminality emerged from the data and became part of the data analysis presented in the study. Similar to the research literature on how violent woman are conceptualized, Homolka was portrayed by the media as a 'victim', 'mad' and 'evil'. These portrayals supported research claims that, when a woman commits an act of criminal violence, her gender serves as the lens through which all of her actions are understood (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007; Myers and Wight, 1996). In such cases, the actual violent act has less to do

with the perception of the woman than the claims made in regard to her lack of “womanhood”. Moreover, women who commit violent crimes are often constructed in a sensationalistic fashion that serves to reinforce standard stereotypes and myths about the inherently violent nature of women criminals (Dell, 1999).

In conducting this research project, I found a continuum of changing images in how Homolka was conceptualized in the media from the beginning of the case until present day. Examination of these changing images gave me an understanding of how Homolka was conceptualized by the media, and hence, the public at large, over time. To explain, at the beginning of the case Homolka was portrayed by the media as a ‘battered wife/victim’ of Paul Bernardo but as details surrounding the case unfolded, media portrayals of Homolka started to change. She was considered ‘mad’ after the discovery of the videotapes; this image changed to an ‘evil’ portrayal after pictures of her partying in prison were released. The final portrayal constructed by the media after Homolka’s release from prison was ‘subhuman.’ She was depicted as being so beyond evil that she could not possibly be considered a mother. In this way, media portrayals of Homolka seemed to reaffirm traditional female gender roles, until, at the very end of the case; others could not understand her as a human and began to refer to her as a ‘monster’.

Something else seemed to be going on, however. Using a grounded theory approach in my examination of newspaper reports of Homolka and the Bernardo case, I began to realize that Homolka was not a ‘puppet’ subject to the whims of media insight or public condemnation. As events of the trial unfolded and new media reports of her behaviour appeared, she also appeared to change her own image. I needed a more inclusive theoretical framework for understanding the interaction existing between Homolka and the press. In seeing that framework, I turned to the

symbolic interactionist approach and its concepts of self, identity and presentation of self to explore these relationships.

Building upon previous works on female criminal behaviour, and a symbolic interactionist theoretical analysis of changing media portrayals of Homolka, I offer a further examination of Homolka's actions in terms of how public images of her crimes affect, and are affected by the social construction of self and identity. After applying a grounded theory approach and coding newspaper articles from The Standard and The Toronto Star the emergent themes of self and identity became evident. As such, this thesis focuses on the analysis of identity formations and transformations by questioning the relationship between how Karla Homolka appears to present herself to various significant others (e.g. the judge, members of the criminal justice system) and how the media constructs her social identity for the public at large.

From this perspective, my case study of Karla Homolka also questions the relationship between how one perceives self and how one presents self as an acceptable social being within the public domain. How are these personal and social identities negotiated through social interactions and over time? How does the social context, especially, the social constraints presented by the criminal justice system and the media affect these identity transformations?

In this research study, I critically examine the social construction of Karla Homolka's social identities and how those identities are altered through her interactions with the media, the police, and the criminal justice system. Using a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, I recognize that identities are not stagnant but continually changing through social interactions. Using a grounded theory approach in my analysis of newspaper articles, I examined media portrayals of how Homolka consistently presents identities that appear to portray her in a favourable manner (Goffman, 1959). Specifically, I demonstrate that Homolka's presentation of

self does not remain the same throughout time but rather is constantly changing in response to others', especially media, reactions to her. By incorporating data from the beginning of the Homolka case to after her release from prison, I trace a pattern by which Homolka can be seen to uncover how she changes her presentation of self in response to the various reactions that she receives from the media, the criminal justice system and the public at large. This examination, in turn, highlights how key events of the case serve as a backdrop by which Homolka appears to reconstruct her presentation of self and alter the identity that she ultimately portrays.

Given the sensitive nature of the Homolka case, I chose to conduct a newspaper analysis to capture as many different interpretations of Karla Homolka (i.e. criminal justice system, lawyers, public, victims' families, Homolka and her family) as possible. However, authors of media accounts can pick and choose what to print. Thus, some interview accounts may have been taken out of context and only part of the interview reported. Similarly, some quotes were not complete and only included what the media deemed important for the public to know (Tuchman, 1978).

Since I did not interview Karla Homolka, I had to rely on others' interviews with Homolka and how the media interpreted those interviews and reported on them. As such, I cannot be sure if the media articles used Homolka's quotes out of context as well as why media chose only certain parts of Homolka's interviews to report. Thus, Homolka's presentation of self may have been skewed by the media reports in how they use Homolka's words. Specifically, I cannot read her mind but I do believe it is possible to make reasonable inferences about Homolka's behaviour through the detailed accounts of that behaviour as presented in the press and described by individuals who either knew her or observed the events at the time of their unfolding.

This research project recognizes that a dualism exists between Homolka, as a media character and that her ability to offer certain role identities enables her to minimize her involvement in the crimes she committed. Significantly, the media presents Homolka as never wavering from presenting herself as ‘victim’ of Paula Bernardo. Furthermore, as more information about the case unfolded, Homolka appeared to adapt her presentation of self to fit the social context of the new events thereby still trying to present a more socially acceptable self. Homolka’s social identity is also continually reconstructed through the media. As events surrounding the case are released, others apply different social identities upon her that fit their new perceptions. Thus, for example after the discovery of the videotapes, Homolka’s identity is socially reconstructed from ‘victim’ to ‘mad’ woman.

My use of a grounded theory approach highlights the relationship existing between one’s presentation of self and other’s response to those presentations. With regard to Homolka, I identify three (3) specific social responses involved in the interaction existing between media portrayals of Homolka and Homolka’s changing presentation of self. These categories are discussed in terms of identity transformation and are labelled in the thesis as, complimenting identities, combating identities, and rejecting identities. Each category details the relationship existing between Homolka’s personal and social identity. For example, the complimenting identity section details the process by which Homolka presents the personal identity of a ‘naive, innocent, young girl’ and how the media compliments this identity by constructing the social identity of ‘battered wife/victim’ for her - an identity that she appears to ultimately accept and present in future social interactions as part of her own personal identity. In this way, my analysis focuses on the interactional process by which identities are constructed and reconstructed to fit the social context of which the actor is a part.

The following chapters describe my analysis of how these social processes occur.

Chapter one sets the stage by summarizing the historical context of the Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka case. The chapter gives an overview of Karla Homolka's life, and the crimes she committed. I provide a detailed biography of Karla Homolka prior to her meeting Paul Bernardo, until she is released from prison and ultimately bears a child. This chapter also includes an analysis of research completed on female criminality with a particular summary of a study completed on Homolka that considers her both as a person who is in danger and a dangerous person. Specifically, in this chapter, I consider how violent women have been historically portrayed and how their gender acts as the lens through which their violence is conceptualized. Notably, this chapter considers three main images by which a woman's violent act is portrayed, that is the 'victim', 'mad' and 'evil' woman. The chapter ends with a suggestion that Karla Homolka is conceptualized by others in all of these ways but after being released from prison, her behaviour is viewed as so vicious that she can no longer be seen as a woman and is reconceptualised as 'subhuman'.

Chapter two outlines the methodology used in the study. It begins with a consideration of the literature on the media as a method that is important for understanding a social phenomenon. Specifically, I review the literature on the importance of the media as a discourse in creating commonsense stories that are easily interpreted by the public. I also consider how female violent crimes are portrayed in the media and how women who commit such crimes are depicted. Next, I discuss how, using the grounded theory approach and Clarke's (2005) situational analysis method, were used to analyze data from The Standard and The Toronto Star. This section sets out the steps I took in collecting and analyzing data and how themes of identity formation and transformation emerged. I conclude this chapter with a description of ethical considerations.

Chapter three, titled “Self, Identity and the Reflections of Others” examines the symbolic interactionist standpoint on self and identity. The chapter begins with a description of Mead’s (1934) paradigm of the self as a social process, always evolving and changing. Then, I consider how Goffman (1959) conceptualizes the self as an interactional process that is dependent on the situation or social context. Goffman’s model leads to the consideration of both social and personal identities, how they are constructed and why individuals need to have an identity legitimized by others. As such, the theoretical basis of role-identities is examined, especially, in terms of how Homolka presents herself. Again, the discussion turns to Goffman (1959) and his theoretical contribution of ‘presentation of self’ for further clarification of the relationships existing between personal and social identity. The chapter concludes with a summary of how both personal and social identities are important to understanding the identities that Homolka appears to offer and media portrayals of her case.

The remaining chapters describe these processes of identity transformations. In chapter four, I discuss the first category of complimenting identities. This chapter considers the three major identities presented initially in the media of Karla Homolka. The analysis begins with the first identity that Homolka presents at the beginning of the case, that is, the identity of a ‘naive, innocent, young girl’. The second identity constructed is the portrayal of ‘battered wife/victim.’ The battered wife/victim identity is supported by various contributors (e.g. psychiatrists, defence lawyer) and it becomes the identity that Homolka tends to present as her personal identity. As such, the chapter’s focus on the concept of ‘complimenting identities’ as appropriate for describing Homolka’s apparent identity transformation as well as the interactional process occurring between Homolka and significant others by which a presentation of that new identity appears to emerge. In this way, the theoretical category of ‘complimenting’ highlights an

interactional process of identity transformation existing between one's personal and social identity.

Chapter five considers the next process of identity transformation, which I called 'combating identities'. This social process involves the emergence of a social identity that 'combats' a personal identity found to be unacceptable by others. After the discovery of the videotapes, Homolka's identity of a naive, innocent 'victim' was no longer acceptable to the public. Through a process that I have termed combating identity, both she and the public at large were bombarded with different social identities offered by the media to explain her role in the torture and sexual abuse of Mahaffy and French. It was during this time period that we see the media portraying Homolka offering a new identity of 'rehabilitated prisoner'. This new identity appears to fit the new situation within which others perceived her because it included an acknowledgement by her of her active participation in the sexual assaults and murders. Still, becoming rehabilitated also permits one to accept 'negative' social identities in a more socially acceptable manner. As such, this chapter examines the combative identity transformation process created between Homolka's presentation of self as a 'rehabilitated inmate' and the two different derogatory social identities applied to her by the press, that is, the social identity of a 'mad' woman and the social identity of 'evil'.

The final analysis is presented in Chapter six and explains the third emergent theoretical category of rejecting identities. Using this category, I examine two identities of Homolka after she was released from prison that appear to be polar opposites, that is, the identity of 'normal' and the identity of 'subhuman'. Through a social process that I term 'rejecting identities', I describe how the public rejects Homolka's presentation of self as 'normal' and imposes the identity 'subhuman' upon her. Specifically, the personal identity that she offers in her action of

becoming a mother is so abhorrent to the public at large that it totally rejected and the public reformulates her as being 'subhuman', that is, incapable of any maternal instinct at all.

The research project concludes with a summary of the major findings and the importance of this data analysis for a stronger theoretical understanding of the interactional process of identity formation and transformation especially in media portrayals of public figures. I then consider the meaning of these findings for future research on female sexual abusers and, significantly, for the understanding of identity transformations in response to changing social contexts. Finally, I detail some limitations of this study and provide suggestions as to how these limitations may be overcome in future research.

Who is Karla Homolka?

This chapter describes Karla Homolka and the crimes she committed with Paul Bernardo. The purpose of the chapter is to inform the reader of the events surrounding the Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka case, and provide details of Karla Homolka's life that enable a stronger understanding of the theoretical implications involved in the identity transitions discussed in my analysis. Drawing on different sources, I highlight different parts of Karla's life including the crimes committed by this couple, information regarding their victims, the sentencing disparities between the couple after Paul Bernardo's trial, and the details of Karla's prison term and her life after prison. As noted previously, these accounts exist in the media and Karla Homolka has not been able to confirm or contradict them. They do, however, represent how the media portrays Homolka, and, in consequence, how it has constructed her social identity for the public at large.

This chapter is divided in six sections. The first section discusses Karla Homolka's life before meeting Paul Bernardo. The next section describes how Bernardo and Homolka met and their early relationship. That section is followed by a summary of the crimes committed by the couple and a description of their victims. Subsequently, in section four, I discuss media accounts of why Homolka eventually left Bernardo and how she obtained a twelve-year prison sentence. In contrast, section five highlights Homolka's time in prison and what life was like for her after prison. The chapter concludes with an outline of the typical theoretical frameworks that have been applied to violent woman, specifically Karla Homolka. This knowledge sets the reader up for understanding how female criminality is understood, and provides the reader with the necessary background information to appreciate the alternative framework of analysis offered in this research project.

Early Years

Karla Homolka is one of Canada's notorious criminals (Williams, 2003; French, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). She grew up in St. Catharines Ontario a city nestled in the Niagara peninsula with a population of approximately 132 thousand people. The city is a relatively small rural community situated in close proximity to Toronto, the central hub and provincial government residence of the province. Thus, when Homolka and Bernardo were arrested it not only made news in St.Catharines but was breaking news across south eastern Ontario.

Born in 1970 to Dorothy and Karel Homolka, Karla is the eldest daughter with two younger sisters, Tammy and Lori (later changed to Logan) (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). According to sources, Karla, who was an attractive young Caucasian girl, displayed golden blonde hair, and was viewed as an intelligent child (Vronsky, 2007). Friends have described Karla to be a bossy little girl who was called "the princess" (Vronsky, 2007; p.329). They considered her to be the "cleverest, prettiest and most popular" girl (Vronsky, 2007; p.329). As a young woman, she became part of a club known as the Exclusive Diamond Club (EDC) whose members had one objective, that was, to find a rich, slightly older, good-looking man. The EDC girls were to find this man, get a diamond, marry and live happily ever after (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007).

Karla was known for her love of animals and, worked part-time at a pet store (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). William's (2003) biography of Homolka discusses how she enjoyed reading true crime stories, an interest that continued into her adult life. Similar to many teenage girls, she was obsessed over boys and around the age of 15/16 she became rebellious. After her parents refused to let her visit her boyfriend in Kansas, she went without permission and called

her parents when she arrived (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). Although not so atypical to raise strong concern at the time, these types of behaviours have been identified as the foundation stone for her attraction to men who might also be inclined to break the rules or act outside the norm.

Meeting Paul Bernardo

In 1987, Karla went to a pet store convention in Toronto and this is where she met Paul Bernardo (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). On the first night of meeting, Karla and Paul made an instant connection and engaged in sexual intercourse later that first evening (Williams, 2003). According to the EDC objectives, Karla had found her slightly older, good-looking man. She was only 17 years old and he was 26 years old. They began dating exclusively. As the relationship progressed, Paul Bernardo who lived-in Scarborough Ontario would make the 130 kilometre trip to St. Catharines' at least once a week to see his new girlfriend. He was adored and loved by everyone, including her parents who began to refer to him as their 'weekend son' (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007).

In 1989 Karla graduated from Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School. Karla wanted to become a police officer and attend the University of Toronto to study Criminology. But this dream was abandoned when Paul Bernardo told her he did not want his wife to have such a dangerous job (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). Instead Karla went to work as a vet assistant in an animal hospital. In 1990 Paul asked Karla to marry him. Karla and Paul had a fairy-tale wedding in Niagara-on-the-Lake, with a horse and carriage as their vehicle. Their fairy-tale wedding became a focal point after the couple's arrest. The fairy-tale wedding added to the shock value after the couple was arrested because they were an attractive young couple. The

press also made a big deal out of Karla's 'selfishness' and having everything go her way even after her sister's death which had occurred less than a year prior to the wedding.

The Crimes and Victims of Karla Homolka & Paul Bernardo

As Homolka and Bernardo celebrated their marriage with family and friends no one knew that they had sexually assaulted and murdered Tammy Homolka, Karla's sister. Coinciding with Homolka's and Bernardo's wedding day, the couple's second victim Leslie Mahaffy was pulled from Lake Gibson in St. Catharines. The couple looked picture perfect and everyone was blinded to the crimes. No one suspected the attractive couple of the crimes for which they were later convicted.

Tammy Homolka

It was no secret to Karla that her future husband had a sexual interest in her little sister Tammy Homolka who, at age of 15 was 5 years younger. During the summer of 1990, both Tammy and Paul had disappeared for hours during a barbecue leaving Karla at home (Williams, 2003). Knowing that Paul wanted to have sex with her sister, Karla gave Tammy to him as a Christmas present on December 23rd 1990 (French, 1996; Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). Throughout the evening of December 23rd 1990, Karla spiked Tammy's drinks with animal tranquilizers. After everyone had retired to bed, Tammy passed out in the basement of the Homolka home with Paul and Karla (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). Karla applied stolen halothane over the Tammy's face to ensure she would not awake (Williams, 2003). Karla had obtained the stolen halothane and tranquilizers from her work at the veterinarian clinic.

Passed out from the tranquilizers and halothane, Tammy was videotaped being sexually assaulted by Paul and Karla (French, 1996; Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). While unconscious Tammy began to choke on her vomit and died. The couple called an ambulance but no foul play was suspected and her death was ruled an accident (Vronsky, 2007). Only after Karla was interviewed by the police about Bernardo and she had obtained legal assistance did she disclose the real cause of her sister's death. Homolka received an additional two years on her sentence for her role in the death of her sister (Williams, 2003).

"Jane Doe"

On June 6th 1991, Karla invited a 15-year-old girl, who became known in the case as "Jane Doe" to come to her home for a sleepover (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). After Jane Doe arrived, Karla called Paul to come home. In similar fashion to Tammy, Karla spiked Jane Doe's drink with sedatives while the three of them watched movies. After Jane Doe passed out Karla applied halothane over the girl's face to keep her unconscious (French, 1996; Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). The couple then videotaped themselves sexually assaulting the unconscious girl. Unlike Tammy Homolka, Jane Doe survived the sexual assault, and the next day she awoke feeling sick but unaware of what had happened to her the previous night (Vronsky, 2007). She became knowledgeable of the sexual assault, after the police had identified her in the videotapes and contacted her (Williams, 2003).

Leslie Mahaffy

Leslie Mahaffy is described as being a "cute girl with long, straight honey blonde hair, with a warm smile" (Davey, 1994; p.4). She was also viewed as spirited, independent and

rebellious. At age 14, Leslie Mahaffy was kidnapped by Paul Bernardo in Burlington, on June 15th 1991 after she had been locked out of her house by her parents for missing curfew (French, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Mahaffy was taken back to St. Catharines' and held captive in Paul and Karla's home.

While being held captive in the couple's home, Leslie Mahaffy was videotaped being sexually assaulted and tortured for twenty-four hours by both Bernardo and Homolka (French, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). It is alleged that she was then strangled to death by a black electrical cord by Paul Bernardo ¹(French, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Her body was cut up into ten pieces, encased in cement and dropped into Lake Gibson, a small lake on the outskirts of Brock University in St. Catharines.

Kristen French

Fifteen year old Kristen French was abducted in a church parking lot on April 16th 1992, on an Easter weekend, when walking home from school. On this occasion, Karla played a more active role in the kidnapping by calling Kristen over to their car and asking for directions. When Kristen approached the car, Paul got out, circled behind the girl, pushed her into the car and drove her back to the couple's house (French, 1996; Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007).

Both Karla and Paul held Kristen captive the entire Easter weekend and continually sexually assaulted and tortured her (French, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Similar to their previous pattern of abuse, Kristen's assaults were documented on videotapes. Despite her videotaped participation in Kristen's sexual abuse and torture, Karla has repeatedly claimed that the murder of Kristen was harder for her because it was like they had become friends, putting on makeup,

¹ Paul Bernardo pleaded guilty to all charges except for the murders. He maintains that Karla Homolka committed the murders, although he was convicted of all murders and sentenced to life in prison.

giggling and laughing together (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007; The Toronto Star). However, Karla did not release Kristen even when Paul left the house to get some food (French, 1996; Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). She alleges that she was too afraid of Paul to cross him by setting Kristen free.

After a weekend of enduring sexual assaults and torture, Kristen was strangled to death with a black electrical cord (French, 1996; Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007; The Toronto Star). Her body was then submerged in the couple's bathtub to clean it of any evidence that could link the couple to the murder (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). Later, the body was dumped in Burlington Ontario, a small community several kilometres away from St. Catharines, to make the police believe the murderers lived-in Burlington (Williams, 2003). Kristen's body was found fourteen days after she had disappeared.

The purpose of highlighting the crimes committed against each victim is to illustrate certain events surrounding the case that are used often in the press when describing Homolka. Thus, the incidents of videotaping the sexual assaults, Homolka not releasing Kristen, how Tammy Homolka and 'Jane Doe' are drugged and abused have become pivotal events in the case that affect changing conceptualizations of Homolka's social identity. Knowing the details of these events provides the reader with a stronger understanding of the theoretical implications of the identity transformations described in later chapters.

The Beating that led to the Deal

Karla has continuously claimed that she was a victim of Paul Bernardo's physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Nevertheless, the only documented abuse existing between Karla and Paul came on January 5th 1993 (Williams, 2003). In this case, Karla alleges that she was

severely beaten with a flashlight and, in consequence, ran away from Paul. After being taken to the emergency ward at the hospital, Karla decided to live with her aunt and uncle outside of Toronto (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). Karla claimed she just wanted to forget everything that had happened over the past couple of years (Williams, 2003).

Paul Bernardo, who still lived in the couple's home in St. Catharines, had a been suspect in the Scarborough rape cases, a series of at least 11 rapes that had taken place in that community from 1987 to 1990. DNA tests proved Paul was responsible and on February 17th 1993 he was arrested and charged for the rapes (French, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). After being charged with the Scarborough rapes, it did not take long before the police suspected Bernardo of the rape and murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. While interviewing Homolka, the police probed her with questions about the murders of Mahaffy and French. After the police interview, Homolka made a confession to her aunt and uncle who suggested she retain a lawyer (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007).

On their advice Homolka retained counsel from George Walker, a leading criminal defence lawyer in St. Catharines (Williams, 2003). Walker helped Homolka get a 12-year prison sentence for her part in the rape and murders in exchange for her testimony against her husband Bernardo. Karla disclosed the information about her sister's death and that case was also changed from an accident to a homicide (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). After Karla's confession, everyone around her including her lawyer said she was obviously a victim of Paul Bernardo (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). As will be demonstrated in the data analysis below, it was an identity that Karla presented often during Bernardo's trial and in her interactions with others during her prison term (e.g. psychologists, educators, and criminal justice staff).

From very early on in this case, Homolka presented herself as one of Bernardo's victims (Vronsky, 2007). This identity was reinforced by her beating from Paul as well as the comments of many people who told her that she suffered from battered wife syndrome (BWS)² and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Williams, 2003). Karla's battered wife/victim identity was supported by her claims of memory loss, specifically about the memory of the sexual assaults of Jane Doe. Although psychological reports taken during her early incarceration confirm her claims, many others, especially the media, have suggested that Karla, who was intelligent as a child, had begun to read up on both BWS and PTSD, and used this information to strengthen her portrayal of self as a victim (Williams, 2003).

Based upon information given to him by his client, Paul Bernardo's first lawyer Ken Murray had recovered the videotapes from the home of Paul and Karla a week before Karla's plea bargain (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). However, the tapes remained a secret until he handed the case over to John Rosen in 1995 (Williams, 2003). These tapes contained recorded accounts of the sexual assaults and torture of all the couple's victims. The tapes were used to convict Paul Bernardo. More important for my analysis, they also paint a different portrait of Karla Homolka than the one she initially presented. Specifically, during Karla's testimony against her former husband Paul, she continually presented herself as his victim and was reported by others to be suffering from BWS and PTSD (Williams, 2003). After the court reviewed the videotapes, Homolka's victim identity was no longer accepted by others and she came to be viewed as a willing participant who actively participated in the rapes and tortures of her young female victims (Williams, 2003; Vronsky, 2007). The description of how Karla's presentation of

² Battered Woman Syndrome is defined as a "woman who is repeatedly abused 'learns helplessness' and is effectively paralysed by fear. Woman who suffers cumulative violence doesn't leave." They go through a 'cycle of violence' described in three phases: 'tension building,' acute battering,' and 'remorse on the part of the abusing mate who promises it won't happen again' (Lloyd, 1995; p.105).

self was affected by this change in others' attitudes toward her forms the basis of much of the data analysis presented in my thesis.

Despite public objection raised over her 'light' punishment, Karla's 12-year prison sentence for manslaughter was upheld by the court; she served her time and was released. In contrast, Paul Bernardo was "convicted of murder, kidnapping, forcible confinement, aggravated sexual assault and even the unusual offense of doing an indignity of a human body. "Paul Bernardo was declared a dangerous offender" (French, 1996; p.33). He was given a life sentence and is still incarcerated. The Bernardo and Homolka case serves as an example of large sentence discrepancy, specifically those surrounding gender relations in the Criminal Justice System. As my case study of Karla Homolka reveals, the manner in which the media presents gender and female gender roles also has an effect on how a woman's criminal behaviour is likely to be socially tolerated.

Prison Life and Release from Prison

Karla arrived at Kingston Penitentiary on July 6th 1993, with the classification of medium security (Williams, 2003). While in prison, Karla undertook several psychological tests and was evaluated by numerous psychologists and psychiatrists (Williams, 2003). Despite the brutality of her crimes and her transfer to numerous prison institutions after Kingston Penitentiary closed down, she always remained in medium security prisons, (i.e. Joliette, in Quebec, Regional Center at Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, Regional Psychiatric Center in Saskatoon) (Williams, 2003). Her criminal classification as a 'non-violent' offender supported her medium security incarceration. It also contrasts significantly with the dangerous offender status label applied to Bernardo, her co-participant in these crimes.

During Karla's stay in prison, Williams (2003) has said she was the 'poster girl for Canadian penology'. Karla took every course available at the prison as well as completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology through Queen's university correspondence program (Williams, 2003). Karla continued to read true crime books while surrounded by pictures of her favourite Disney characters (Williams, 2003). As will be discussed in this thesis, these types of contrasting actions supported her presentation of self as a naive girl and an unwilling victim in the criminal acts perpetrated against Tammy Homolka, Jane Doe, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French at the same time as it imparted an identity of being a mature, adult woman with strong intellect and future goals.

While staying at Joliette the prison dubbed 'Club Fed', Karla worked and lived-in cottage style residences where the inmates had to do their own cooking and cleaning (Williams, 2003). During her incarceration at Joliette, photos were released to the newspapers showing that Karla was partying in prison and was having a lesbian relationship (Williams, 2003; The Standard). However, when she transferred to Regional Center at Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, it was reported that she was having a love affair with a male prisoner convicted of killing his girlfriend (Williams, 2003). Once again, contradictory media reports of Karla's behaviour as a 'model' prisoner and a 'party girl' and her ambiguous sexual preference creates confusion in the minds of others who still ask "Who is Karla Homolka?"

Toward the end of Karla's 12-year prison term, she waived her right to be considered for early release (Williams, 2003). Although this decision appears inconsistent with the majority of prisoners who wish to free as soon as possible, it also meant that her release from prison held no state parole, supervision or surveillance terms. On July 4th 2005 Karla Homolka was released

from prison to continue her life in any legal manner that she desired (The Standard, July 4th 2005; p.A1).

After being released from prison, Karla remained in Montreal, Quebec. Karla was still monitored by the media but, she managed to keep a relatively low profile. In 2007, Karla remarried and gave birth to a baby boy. As I will discuss in Chapter 6 below, her new identity of mother brought further media attention affecting her ability to present self as a normal woman, who had been rehabilitated for her crimes. The last media reports of Karla indicate that she had left Canada to a Caribbean country (The Standard, December 15, 2007; p.A2).

The purpose of this historic review of Karla Homolka and the crimes that she and Paul Bernardo committed is to present the reader with the necessary information for understanding the data analysis provided in this thesis. To the best of my ability I have provided the reader with a factual account of Karla Homolka's life and the details surrounding the murder case of Tammy Homolka, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. Given the limitations of the source of my data, it should be emphasized that these are accounts presented within the media and Karla Homolka has not had the opportunity to revise or retract them. The accounts are significant, however, because they frame the social context by which the public at large has formed its perception of Karla Homolka and applied particular social identities to her.

I have highlighted key events that occurred as the trial of Paul Bernardo unfolded such as the discovery of the videotapes and, Karla's partying in prison in an effort to aid the reader in understanding my research analysis, especially the key events affecting the formation and transformation of Homolka's public identities. Similarly, I have emphasized the sentence disparities between Homolka and Bernardo as an important aspect to my analysis. Specifically, Homolka's social identity was first constructed by the press as a victim but after her release from

prison her social identity became that of an individual who is 'subhuman' and someone who could not possibly be a woman. In this way, I demonstrate how Homolka's social identity emerged in the media through a process of negotiating tradition female gender roles and normative expectations of criminal behaviour.

Images of Violent Women

The Homolka case has the elements of both the deserving victim and the condemnation of the villain. It appears that Homolka not only actively participated in the sexual assaults of all victims but also played a role in the murder of all the victims (Williams, 2003). My research explores how both Homolka's presentation of self as well as her social identities is affected by various claims makers, especially the media. Many of the social identities constructed of Homolka are similar in regard to research done on violent women. Thus an examination of that literature also informs the analysis presented in this thesis.

Drawing upon theories of images of violent women, this research attempts to understand how Homolka's social identity is constructed by the media. Although females who commit violent crimes have rarely been characterized as anything but criminal, they are captured in stereotyped fantasies which deny their agency and reify gender stereotypes and subordination (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007).

Frigon (1995) argues that to be a woman is to be, somehow, mad. Women tend to be positioned as the 'other', as the outsider, as the second sex (p.20). Schur (1984) adds that being a woman means forever being deviant and that women will continue to suffer from regulation of their bodies and minds in order to achieve this 'ideal femininity' (Schur, 1984). Women are not expected to be violent in current gender relations, and social structures built on those relations

are premised on women's non-violence. But when women are violent, these fundamental structures are challenged (Naylor, 1995).

Considering Loseke's (2003) framework on constructing female villains and Sjorberg and Gentry's (2007) argument that women are rarely considered criminals, females who commit violent crimes are likely to be seen as 'mad' or 'bad' (Wilczynski, 1995; Myers and Wight, 1996; Dell, 2001). When a woman commits an act of criminal violence, her gender serves as the lens through which all of her actions are understood (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007; Myers and Wight, 1996). The actual violent act has less to do with the perception of the woman than the claims made on her lack of "womanhood". As such, Homolka's crimes are likely to be portrayed by the media through a gender lens that focuses more on her inability to be a "real" woman than upon the crimes she committed.

Allen (1987) argues that women appearing in courts are approximately twice as likely as men to be dealt with by psychiatric means than by penal ones. Through prison, psychiatry, the institution of marriage, medicine, and electro-convulsive therapy society pathologizes and criminalizes women's bodies and minds (Naylor, 1995; p.22). Thus, we would expect Homolka to be portrayed through the media in a manner that pathologizes her crimes rather than describing them solely in the penal terms attached to her twelve year prison sentence.

Throughout history, women who have committed violence have been portrayed in three ways, that is, as "mad"/ "evil" or in some cases a "victim" (Myers and Wight, 1996; Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007; Dell, 2001; Ballinger, 1996; Stanko and Scully, 1996; Naylor, 1995). Heidensohn (1985) suggests there are two moral purposes for classifying a woman's criminality as 'bad' or 'mad'. The first moral purpose is to emphasize appropriate gender roles and the

second is to serve as a warning to young women against the dangers of flirtation or to older women against adultery or new ideas (Heidensohn, 1985).

When women are portrayed as “mad” or “unnatural,” they are also portrayed as having some kind of biological flaw, whether that is raging hormones, pre-menstrual syndrome or some kind of mental illness (Ballinger, 1996; Kendall, 1991; Singer et al., 1995; Walklate, 1995; Dell, 2001). As such, they are less likely to be responsible for their crimes and the female image of ‘goodness’ is maintained.

Sjorberg and Gentry (2007) characterize “mad” and/or “unnatural” as a woman’s violent act that stems from a biological flaw that disrupts her femininity. Thus, if a woman is labelled ‘mad’, she is not responsible for her violence because there is something wrong with her womanhood. In consequence, she may be over-medicalized and pathologized (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007, Dell, 2001; Naylor, 1995).

Given this perspective, the ‘mad’ portrayal of women may draw out sympathetic treatment within the press (Naylor, 1995). For instance, Naylor (1995) found that the battered wife who commits a violent act may receive the benefit of the ‘mad’ label, provided she bases her argument on diminished responsibility arising out of the long term horrors she has suffered. In the Homolka case, many psychologists and psychiatrists also diagnosed Homolka as suffering from being a battered wife (Williams, 2003). As such, it is highly likely that the ‘mad’ portrayal will be evident in media reports of Homolka and her participation in violent crimes.

The second way females who commit violence are portrayed is through images of being “bad” or “evil” women. The idea of the offender as evil, or a ‘monster’ or a ‘witch’, seems to be an umbrella explanation for the ‘badness’ of women which is felt to be otherwise inexplicable (Naylor, 1995: p.88). As such, the portrayal of women as evil excuses the female of her violent

act by blaming it on her inability to be a “real” woman (Ballinger, 1996; Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007). This “bad” portrayal has also included images of the inadequate mother, the lesbian or the inherently evil woman (Myers and Wight, 1996; Naylor, 1995), thereby accentuating lack of ‘real’ womanhood (Ballinger, 1996). Here the female perpetrator is described as failing to fulfill gender role expectations, such as being passive, nurturing, non-sexual and non-aggressive (Ballinger, 1996; Abramovitz, 1988; Denov, 2004).

Heidensohn (1985) suggests that women are no longer hunted as witches, however the witch image remains. It sits on top of a pyramid of related images of deviant women as especially evil, depraved and monstrous. As a result, a woman’s violent act is characterized as her inability to fulfill her role as a wife and mother, thus not of her own doing but the product of some unknown ‘evil’ which is so dehumanizing that she is driven to violence (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007). Given the predominance of this view, I expect public portrayals of Homolka will include images of ‘mad’, ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ especially after her release from prison when fear exists within the community at large that she may perpetrate new crimes.

The alternative to either the “mad” or “bad” portrayals of violent women is the image of a ‘victim.’ The victim explanation portrays a woman’s violent act as a result of being in an abusive situation or having an abusive experience (Ballinger, 1996; Bungay, 1998; Shaw, 1995). This portrayal of female violence often shows up under the legal defence of battered-woman syndrome (Allen, 1987, Comack, 1993). Denov (2004) challenges the victim portrayal:

However, by overemphasizing women as victims, there is the risk of depriving women of their moral agency. By realigning the offenders’ behaviour within margins of victimhood, whether a victim of circumstance or a victim of a male partner, the female sex offender and her offence were more easily placed in accordance with tradition scripts regarding gender and sexuality (p.114).

Previous research has been conducted on Karla Homolka. Specifically, Kilty and Frigon (2006) explored the dichotomous construction of endangerment and dangerousness as applied in the socio-legal construction of Karla Homolka. Their research included analyzing trial transcripts of Homolka's plea bargain, Homolka's examination in Chief cross-examination and re-examination at Bernardo's trial, and the Report to the Attorney General on certain matters relating to Karla Homolka. Kilty and Frigon's (2006) research found this dichotomy of endangered and dangerous modulates the understanding of Homolka, and ultimately leads to the creation of an even more extreme characterization than that of a sexual violent female predator. Their research found initial acceptance by the media, the police, and the courts of her endangerment, but this acceptance was eventually abandoned for the belief and focus on her dangerousness. Kilty and Frigon (2006) conclude that through her participation in the sexual assaults and murders, Homolka transgressed the social norms of 'accepted' femininity. More important, she violated human moral values. They argue that, "in the end, Karla seemingly represents two opposing constructions of dangerousness where her endangerment actually comes to define her dangerousness" (Kilty and Frigon, 2006; p. 58). As such, their study supports standard conceptualizations of female violence.

Building upon these previous works on female criminal behaviour, I offer a further examination of Homolka's actions in terms of how public images of her crimes affect, and are affected by the social construction of self and identity. Specifically, I use newspaper accounts of Karla Homolka to assess how the media transformed her identity over time and what events surrounding the case initiated these transformations. The media analysis presented in this research study considers how a wide range of people construct her identity in the press using everyday perceptions of womanhood. In particular, my use of newspaper accounts allows for

different voices to emerge from the articles, that is, the police, lawyers, the media, and the public at large. In this way, this research project attempts to understand the relationship between a highly publicized person's presentation of self and the public identities presented in the media of that person. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach upon which those social processes emerged from the data.

Grounded in the Media

This thesis investigates the ways in which the media socially constructs images of women who have committed a violent act, specifically the way in which media constructions of Karla Homolka change over time as more information is learned about her life and her involvement with Paul Bernardo. Various claim-makers attach meaning out of others' claims and their goal is to construct claims that audience members evaluate to be believable and important (Loseke, 2003). Anyone can make a claim to an audience but there is a hierarchy of credibility within claim-makers. However, the three major types of claim-makers are: 1. Social activists; 2. Scientists; and, 3. People in the mass media (Loseke, 2003). Using newspaper accounts, this thesis examines how the media makes claims through the use of different portrayals of Karla Homolka from the time period of her confession to the police until after her release from prison and her delivery of a son. It also examines media reports describing how her presentation of self appeared after these media claims occurred.

Media

The media can be seen as a powerful tool used to relay messages to the public. Much work has been conducted on the media and its role in the construction and maintenance of dominant institutions and ideologies (for example Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Hall, 1978). By selecting and examining problematic events, that is, events which contravene assumed consensual values, the media plays a powerful role both in defining the consensus and identifying the nature of deviance (Naylor, 1995).

The research data used in this study emerges from an examination of The Standard (St.Catharines' major newspaper) and The Toronto Star newspapers from 1993 when Homolka and Bernardo were charged to 2009 when the study ended. Young (1990) stresses the importance of doing analysis of newspaper publications because of the ubiquity and consumability of the medium for defining public views and public values. According to Young (1990), "the discourse of the press is an important subject for analysis in the inquiry into the construction of definitions of deviance and their representation because of its pervasive, non-specialist and everyday nature" (p.viii). I therefore chose to examine newspaper reports because this medium attempts to give a narrative of the entire Homolka case while, at the same time influencing social perceptions of the crime and its perpetrators.

Chibnall (1977) explains the importance of newspapers:

The power of newspaper interpretations lies in their ability to make events intelligible at a mundane, 'commonsense' level, to provide a guide for practical activity and to alleviate the need for further investigation and consideration. The self-confident and assertive style in which the interpretations are communicated complements their general claim to represent the opinions of the right-minded people and encourages their ready acceptance as self-evident and 'obvious'... this commonsense mode of understanding trades off myths and stereotypes which provide simple, comfortable, ready-made pictures and explanations of things (p.44).

Given this perspective, my reliance on newspapers to examine how the general public views events surrounding the Homolka case, especially how it defines her as a person, is appropriate. My use of newspaper articles also provides an easily accessible, ready-made picture and public explanation of the Bernardo and Homolka crimes.

Chibnall's statements do not suggest, however, that all individuals will interpret media content in a uniform way. People create the relevance of their past to their present and future by invoking elements of the past to justify the present (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In other words, individuals are not blank slates; they bring their own personal biographies to the situation

at hand to make judgements of the issues that lay before them (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). As a researcher, I recognize that not all individuals will interpret or believe the information conveyed by the newspapers. Still, newspaper analysis provides me with the ability to capture different voices surrounding the Homolka case. Both The Standard and The Toronto Star interviewed many different individuals such as representatives of the public, police, lawyers, and Homolka, herself, in their attempts to capture the bigger picture. As such, I believe the use of these media accounts is appropriate for the data collection and data analysis presented in this thesis.

Tuchman (1978) highlights the point that we take for granted the existence of centralized news for “it not only defines and redefines, constitutes and reconstitutes social meanings but also defines and redefines, constitutes and reconstitutes ways of doing things”(p.196). These meanings are produced through the activities of individuals within institutions, organizations, and professions that can produce and reproduce, create and recreate the understanding of a social phenomenon (Tuchman, 1978; Goffman, 1974). Thus, I studied newspaper articles to examine how Homolka’s identity is socially constructed and re-constructed over time. Additionally, I sought to understand how these newspaper articles changed their conceptualizations of Homolka’s social identity in relation to the gradual release of information on her participation in these crimes and previous conceptualizations of violent female offenders. For example at the beginning of the case Homolka was presented in the press as a ‘victim’ but after the discovery of the videotapes this construction was no long acceptable and Homolka’s public identity changed to that of a ‘mad’ woman. In this way, media accounts of these events gave me an interesting opportunity to understand the conceptualization of violent female offenders within the

community at large at the same time as I interrogated the details of a specific, high profile criminal case involving an individual female perpetrator.

The media plays a powerful role in highlighting social issues where the audience then has to evaluate the information learned through this source and use their personal references to make sense of that information. Using articles appearing in The Standard and The Toronto Star, this thesis considers the social transformation of Karla Homolka's personal and social identities from 'battered wife/victim' to 'evil'. It also explores media descriptions of how Homolka's presentation of self changes during the time period that these media reports occurred. As previously noted, various contributors, (i.e. the media, the police, public opinion editorials) play a role in accepting, supporting or rejecting both the social identity presented by the media and the personal identity offered by Homolka. Depending upon the audience members' personal histories, experience and pre-conceived notions, public interpretations of the media's presentation of Homolka will be different. However, the lack of noticeable public dispute against these media presentations indicates an unwavering public acceptance of the alter-casting initiated against her.

In the following pages, I describe how I used newspaper accounts taken, specifically, from The Standard and The Toronto Star, to explore how Karla Homolka's identity is socially constructed by the media throughout time. Tuchman (1978) uses the analogy that "The news is a window on the world" and:

[t]he view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard. The unfolding scene also depends upon where one stands, far or near, craning one's neck to the side, or gazing straight ahead, eyes parallel to the wall in which the window is encased (p.1).

The news is not just dependent on how it is reported but is also dependent on the individual's interpretation of that reported information. The goal of the news is to tell individuals what they want to know, what they need to know, and what they should know (Tuchman, 1978). As such, this research study interrogates the media outlets The Standard and The Toronto Star, to understand how Karla Homolka's identity is socially constructed and what the media deems important for the public to know about her.

The media tends to allocate a lot of coverage to issues of death and violence (Naylor, 1995). Hall (1978) argues, "Crime news is news, its treatment evokes threats to, but also reaffirms, the consensual morality of society" (p.66). Significantly, violence by women tends to be doubly fascinating and criminal women are more 'horrifying' in a way that violent men generally are not (Naylor, 1995). This factor is demonstrated in the Bernardo and Homolka case where Bernardo has been dropped from the limelight but the media has consistently maintained its gaze on Homolka (McGillivray, 1998). For example, the research data presented here indicates that after the end of Paul Bernardo's trial, Homolka was continually reported upon whereas Paul Bernardo received minimal mention in the articles once he had been tried, convicted and sentenced.

Another important factor to consider in response to the question of why Homolka remains in the limelight is the fact that she was an attractive, young, Caucasian female at the time these crimes took place. Duncan Campbell notes (Guardian, August 4, 1992) "when a violent crime has been committed 'an attractive young white woman remains the likeliest person to attract media coverage'" (In Naylor, 1995; p.93). This factor is addressed in my analysis of Homolka's presentation of self and how, initially, others were so ready to accept, without question, her social identity as a naive battered wife suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder. Additionally, the victims of these crimes, Tammy Homolka, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French were attractive, young Caucasian women who are portrayed as undeserving of the torture and brutal acts perpetrated against them. From this perspective, both victims and perpetrator serve as candidates of public interest deserving of special media attention.

Generally violent acts incorporate the drama, human emotion, and the shattering of 'normal' expectations that is needed for a story to be newsworthy and attractive to producers of newspapers (Naylor, 1995). But when a woman commits violence 'normal' human expectations are not only breached but so are gender expectations (Naylor, 1995). Naylor (1995) claims that, those stories given prominence in the press tend to speak of current anxieties about women and their role and activity in society.

Claim Making Strategies

The media exhibits claim-making strategies that are involved in constructing typifications of social problems by persuading audience members that some victims deserve sympathy and some do not (Loseke, 2003). Within media content, a victim is portrayed as being highly moral, pure, and not responsible for the crime and deserves the audience member's sympathy (Loseke, 2003). This victim typology is also extremely important to the portrayal of villains because if this standard of purity is met then the villain will be seen as evil. The Bernardo-Homolka case has strong elements of a victim deserving sympathy due in part to the fact that all of the victims are Caucasian, innocent teenage girls who are viewed as not deserving of the crimes committed against them. Significantly, Homolka was also portrayed as a victim of wife abuse in the media until the media discovered that she played an active role in the sexual abuse of the three girls.

Her presentation of self as 'victim' was initially accepted and validated because it fit within the purity standards by which young, Caucasian women are generally envisioned.

The counterpart to 'victim' is 'villain'. The media tends to construct the villain either as pure evil or in need of medical help. The media also has the ability to show a particular incident as either an accident and downplay the role of the villain (Loseke, 2003). Furthermore, in constructing the social identity of villain, the media can present the villain's motivation as either a "good reason" or "for no good reason" when deciding if that villain deserves social condemnation (Loseke, 2003). Specifically, the media constructs images of extremely evil villains in the case of killers, rapists and child sexual molesters (Loseke, 2003). Thus, despite her gender, if a woman has committed a sexual assault or murder, she too can be constructed as pure evil by the media.

Naylor's (1995) study examined how violent woman are typically portrayed in the media. Naylor (1995) suggests there are a number of 'common-sense' stories used in press writings about women that are inherently gender-based. In Naylor's (1995) study, the themes of violent woman found were 1. Madonna/Whore; 2. Sexual passion/love as an excuse; 3. Reproduction and madness; 4. The figure of evil-the witch-the monster; 5. The criminal woman as 'not-woman;' and, 6. The female as devious and manipulative (Naylor, 1995; p.81). The predominance of these media themes indicate a strong likelihood that many of them will be applied in media portrayals of Karla Homolka.

Grounded Theory

This thesis addresses how different identity formations and transformations emerged in the newspaper accounts on the Homolka case. A grounded theory approach, the use of coding,

constant comparison and memo writing were utilized in analyzing newspaper accounts. In taking that approach, I relied on the original text of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss entitled The Discovery of Grounded Theory, published in 1967. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) basic position is to begin with the data and through the research process arrive at a theory. Thus, grounded theory is a process where categories and themes emerge from the data to describe and explain a formal or substantive theory. The theory should provide clear categories and hypotheses so that they can be verified in present or future research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose, "generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to data during the course of research"(p.6). This research project did not begin with the objective of placing newspaper accounts of Homolka into predetermined categories, specifically those categories existing on violent woman. Neither was it expected that the analysis would employ a symbolic interactionist theoretical standpoint thereby offering a different model for understanding Homolka and the public views held towards her.

Researchers who utilize grounded theory advocate starting with the data and allowing concepts and categories to emerge from the data. Grounded theory works from the bottom up (inductive approach), with the end result being a substantive theory or a formal theory, as opposed to starting with a theory and testing the data within that theory (deductive approach). The use of constant comparison of the data is meant to lead to the emergence of concepts and hypotheses that will generate a theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this study, the use of grounded theory allowed for the emergence of three identity transformation processes: complimenting, combating, and rejecting identities. Further explanation of these processes will be discussed in the following analysis chapters.

In grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe a substantive theory, as a theory grounded in a particular substantive area (work, education, mental health), that might be taken to apply only to that specific area. In contrast, a formal theory represents the conceptual level or an area of sociological inquiry (stigma, deviant behaviour, identity) that has more general implications and relevance (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The difference between these two types of theories exists on the distinguishable levels of generalizability, but a substantive theory may become a springboard or a stepping stone to a formal theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The substantive theory that emerged in this study focuses on how deviant women, specifically Karla Homolka, are portrayed in the media. However, more formal theory using concepts of identity transformation also emerged. My examination of newspaper accounts indicated a relationship between personal and social identity and in a series of changing media portrayals, internalization of social identities can be seen to be complimented, combated or rejected through one's presentation of self.

In combination with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original text, I also referred strongly to the methodological works of Kathy Charmaz (2006) Constructing Grounded Theory and Adele Clarke (2005) Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn. This combination introduced a constructivist grounded theory approach that emphasizes the studied phenomenon, takes a reflexive stance on modes of knowing and representing studied life and gives attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them and locates oneself in these realities (Charmaz, 2005).

A crucial part of the grounded theory process is memo writing. Memo writing begins at the data collection stage, and continues throughout the research process. Memos are used to capture immediate ideas and fresh insights that can lead to operational directions (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967). By combining field notes and memos the aim is for a theory to emerge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The works of Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2005) provided me with specific strategies to engage in memo writing that reinforced the emergence of the identity transformation concepts described in my data analysis chapters.

Memo writing is essential to the grounded theory approach because researchers are actively engaging with the material to develop ideas and fine tune the data collection stage of their research (Charmaz, 2006). For this reason Charmaz (2006) observes that “memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (p 72). Grounded theory is not a rigid methodology and writing memos can guide researchers through their project and enhance the researcher’s ability to organize his or her research project theoretically.

Memo writing was crucial to my research project because it prompted the analysis of my data and codes early in the research process (Charmaz, 2006). To remain as unbiased as possible, I used different strategies of memo writing. These strategies not only recorded the process involved in my analysis but also highlighted my preconceived notions, as well as my personal thoughts. These memos allowed the data to ‘speak for itself’ and for the concepts and hypotheses to emerge. More consideration of memo writing strategies I employed will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Importance of Grounded Theory

I chose a grounded theory approach because it allowed me to analyze the data in a fresh way and to explore ideas through early analytic writing (Charmaz, 2006). Taking a grounded

theory approach in my study of newspaper articles on Homolka gave me an interesting opportunity to move through the data over time.

This methodological approach suits this particular research because not all media content is understood in the same way for all of its audience. By investigating the different interpretations of each media account, I was able to highlight many interpretations, thereby discovering how The Standard and The Toronto Star gave meaning to the Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka case, especially events surrounding Homolka's involvement.

Grounded theory also provided me with a cost efficient and an unobtrusive method. The newspaper articles sampled allowed me to capture a wide range of perceptions regarding Homolka's social identity without using interviews and focus groups. Specifically, the newspaper articles contained a wide range of views and opinions (e.g. public, Crown, police, defence and victims) in regard to information provided on Karla Homolka. Additionally, given the sensitive nature of Homolka's crimes, I was able to conduct research on different perceptions of Homolka throughout time without having to question individuals on a highly sensitive topic.

The Sample

I began my study by gathering newspaper articles from The Standard. I used the search word "Karla Homolka" to obtain all newspaper accounts that mentioned her name. The search yielded three hundred and twenty-three articles. All the articles were then coded. These newspaper articles included all reported news stories, editorials, public opinion pieces, Canadian Press (CP)³, to ensure I captured as many voices as possible. This process revealed that there were many different contributors in the social construction of Karla Homolka's social identity

³ Canadian Press is a news service that distributes news on the hour every hour to all newspaper, radio and television. The Standard picked stories from the CP regarding Karla Homolka to put in their newspaper.

(e.g. public, Crown, police, defence and victims). It also, revealed how Karla Homolka presented self to these ‘others’.

I chose The Standard because the newspaper represented the geographical area where, both Homolka and Bernardo resided and where the rape/murders of all of the victims occurred. I divided the articles into four categories (1) prior to the discovery of the videotapes, (2) the discovery of the videotapes, (3) Homolka’s imprisonment, and (4) her release from prison July 4th 2005. No newspaper articles existed on Homolka prior to December 10th 1996 in The Standard and I had to use another Canadian newspaper to fill in the first time period. To fill in the gap, I examined articles appearing in The Toronto Star.

As I coded the newspaper accounts from The Standard, I began to see a pattern where different social and personal identities emerged for Karla Homolka. Specifically, the discovery of the videotapes was a pivotal event where I saw the press transforming her social identity from ‘battered wife/victim’ to ‘perpetrator’. It was while examining newspaper reports appearing during this time period that I realized I had an interesting opportunity to compare how Homolka was portrayed by the media and how she appeared to present self in response to those portrayals. To fill the missing time period I chose The Toronto Star because it is published in the closest Canadian metropolitan city to St.Catharines, it covers major Canadian events, and the trial of Paul Bernardo was held in Toronto.

I also obtained a theoretical sample of newspaper articles from The Toronto Star, by using the search words “Karla and/or Homolka” with the parameters for prior to December 10th 1996. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain, “theoretical sampling as the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes their data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it

emerges” (p.45). After coding and analyzing the data from The Standard, I noted there were continual references to an early presented identity of Karla Homolka as a ‘victim’. Using theoretical sampling I gathered fifty articles from The Toronto Star prior to December 10th 1996 that had the words ‘Karla’ or ‘Homolka’ within the title of the articles. The Toronto Star accounts were then coded and analyzed to fill in the first time period. By incorporating newspaper accounts prior to the discovery of the videotapes, I was able to confirm a dominance of early references of Homolka’s social identity as a ‘battered wife/victim’ in the media during that time period.

As previously mentioned I had recognized there was a gap in the data from The Standard, and used The Toronto Star to ensure no missing time periods existed in my study. As such, this research project exhibits theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation occurs when “the categories are ‘saturated,’ that is, when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, and does not reveal new properties of core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006; p.113). Thus, I analyzed each time period until no new insights or themes were revealed.

The use of constant comparison with newspaper reports also allowed me to go back and forth over time and explore how media portrayals of Karla Homolka’s personal and social identities evolved as new developments in the case were revealed. In this way, the process of data collection and data analysis became part of my emerging theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Continual coding and memo-writing of the data also became increasingly essential to this research project as themes and categories emerged.

Memo Writing

Researchers who advocate grounded theory use memos to organize their thoughts throughout the data collection stage, data analysis stage, and even guide researchers in producing

the final product. Memo writing is not restricted to a certain framework but is considered a creative process. Memo writing can be free flowing, short, informal, and use unofficial language as ways of catching fleeting ideas about the data (Charmaz, 2006). Memo writing is essential to the grounded theory methodological approach because researchers are actively engaging with the material to develop ideas and insights throughout the entire research process.

During the process of this research project, I drew upon many different strategies of memo-writing to facilitate the emergence of different themes and identities of Karla Homolka. Using this data analysis strategy, I captured many different interpretations of the case exhibited through the media and gained a strong understanding of how Homolka's presentation of self, and hence, her role identity hierarchy were transformed over time.

While conducting my data analysis, I relied heavily on memo writing. For example, my previous exposure to media portrayals of Homolka and my own experience as a person living close to the community at the time in which these crimes were perpetrated may have influenced my interpretation of the data. Thus, my decision to write personal, as well as interpretive memos was imperative. For this reason, consideration of the research practice of memo writing is central to my research design.

There are many different strategies used for memo writing. For this research project, I used strategies employed by Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2005). Charmaz (2006) suggests the use of free writing as a strategy for memo-writing. She defines this process as "a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, and fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering" (p.72). I wrote free writing memos because this strategy encouraged me to write down all ideas and insights as quickly as possible. This strategy allowed me to 'talk out' all ideas and information that came from the data. Thus, for example, in one memo, I wrote:

“Her role” this is continually mentioned but seems not to be defined what actually was her ‘role’. What is her role? Do they know what her role is? Is there ambivalence here? Why does murder take precedence over rape? Seemed that there is some acknowledgement in the sexual assaults more times than not. But tends to say sexual nature without much detail. Also refers to the assault without using the word sexual in reference to Homolka. Are they denying that she had any part in the sex crimes? (January 19, 2010)

The use of free writing memos includes defining all categories and themes, detailed processes subsumed by the codes, making comparisons between data, codes, categories and themes, giving empirical evidence to support my definitions of the category and identify any gaps in the data (Charmaz, 2006). This strategy became particularly important for me when I began analyzing the four different stages in the cases. It also identified pivotal events in the case that contributed to my understanding of how the press transformed Homolka’s social identities.

For example, I wrote in the following memo:

After reading through newspaper articles, the reports of Homolka’s ‘role’ have changed. They no longer use the words ‘her role’ but actually refer to her as an accomplice. But there is still a big question mark surrounding her actual involvement in the crimes. When describing Homolka they are using medical terms like suffering for Battered Wife Syndrome. It seems like they are trying to find excuses for what she has done. It seems like there is so much surprise that a woman could commit these crimes (January 24, 2010).

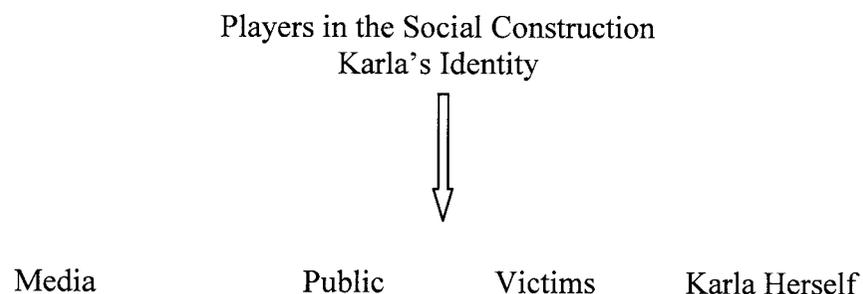
I noted another example of how Homolka’s social identity was transformed by the press between the time periods of her imprisonment and her release from prison. During her late imprisonment Homolka was referred to as ‘evil’ but toward the end of her prison term and into the time period of her release from prison, press portrayals of Homolka’s identity was referred to as ‘subhuman’ and someone who could not possibly be a mother. The following memo outlines how I responded to this process:

Many people in the public are outraged that Homolka will soon be released from prison. The victims’ family lawyer claims Homolka is way too dangerous to be released from prison. Homolka seemingly is not fighting to be released early and is going to serve out her whole sentence. The issue of public safety is continually being

raised, as if Homolka is some kind of monster going to grab all children. When they speak about Homolka, Paul Bernardo's name is totally removed. It's only about her and her icy eyes, cold-blooded, and dangerous. They believe she hasn't paid for her crimes and rather enjoying her stay in prison and this reference her partying in prison for another inmate's birthday. When she was released, blame is placed on the criminal justice system for not protecting the innocent Canadian people. And she begins to transform to this beyond evil character. That God will have to deliver justice because Homolka is so manipulative and continues to play the victim that the Canada has been fooled by something that could not possibly be human (February 2, 2010).

Another strategy utilized in this research project was Clarke's (2005) procedure of situational analysis. Situational analysis involves drawing maps of concepts, categories, themes, relationships, social worlds, and positions in the data. Maps are an analytic strategy used to write down all information related to concepts and themes. Maps tend to look like charts which connect codes and themes that emerge from the data (Clarke, 2003). The purpose of these maps is to open up the data and stimulate the researcher's thinking and form an analysis. Clarke (2005) presents three types of maps. The first map is a situational one that includes both human and nonhuman elements that are quickly plotted on a piece of paper. With quick plots of different categories or themes, I was able to map out relationships between each category and theme.

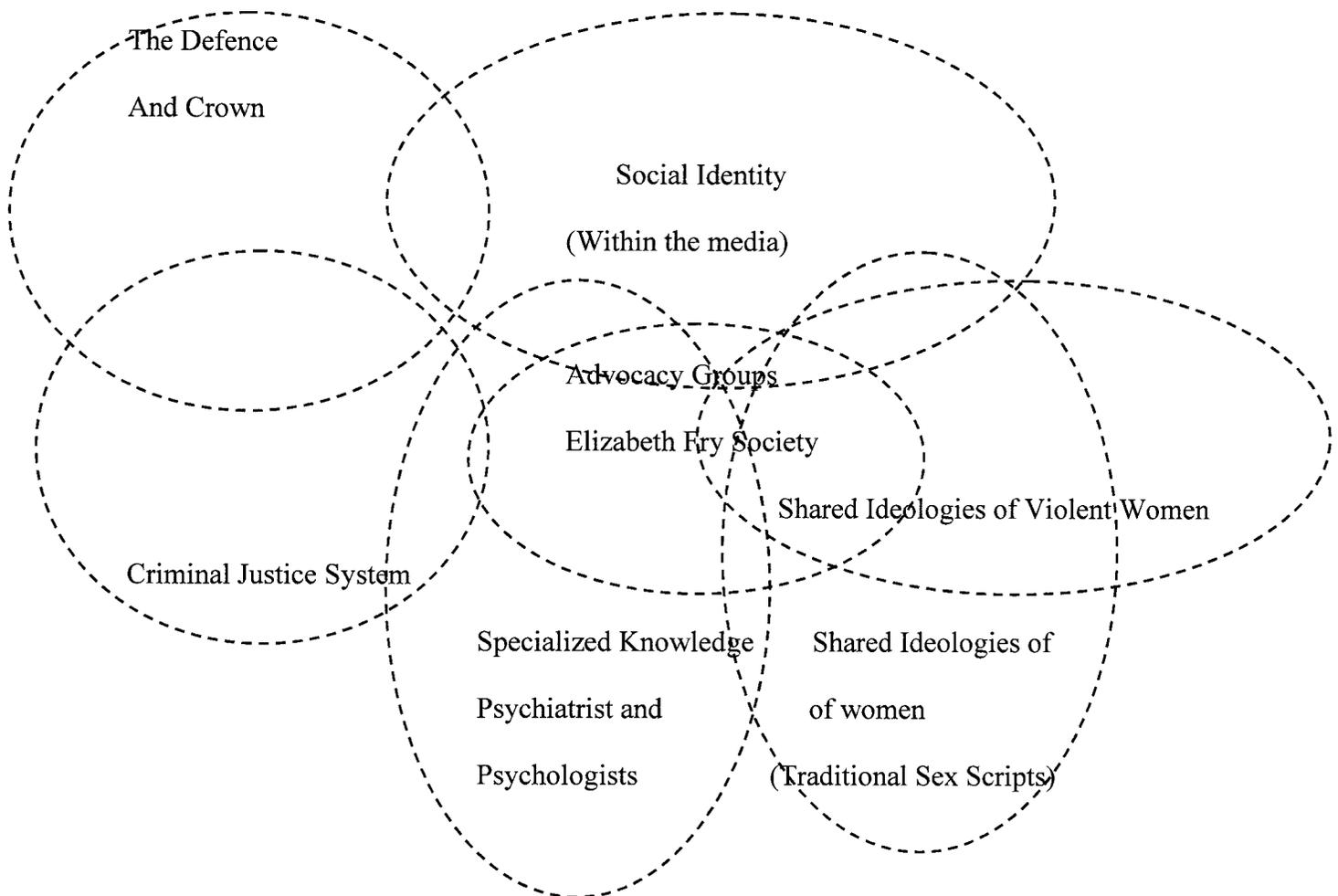
Throughout the study, I created situational maps to illustrate the various contributors in the social construction of Karla Homolka's identities. The following diagram is an example of an early situational map:



The Defence	Paul Bernardo	Police	the Crown
Elizabeth Fry Society	Two Jurors	Stephan Williams	
Friends of Hers	Psychologists/ Psychiatrists		

The use of a situational map allowed me to plot out all major contributors that were involved in the social construction of Homolka's identities. Notably, during the coding process, all of the different interpretations and voices identified in my situational map emerged as major contributors in the social construction and transformation of Homolka's social and personal identities.

The second map Clarke (2005) proposes is the social worlds/arenas maps. Social worlds/arenas maps are concerned with how people organize themselves at the meso-level, their social actions, and how they are constituted through discourse. Social world/arenas maps allowed for fluidities and actions among structures and agencies to become visible (Clarke, 2005). This procedure allowed me to visualize the bigger picture and consider other social actions influencing my research project, specifically around media discourses in presenting woman who commit violence. The following exemplifies a social world/arena map created at the beginning of my research study.

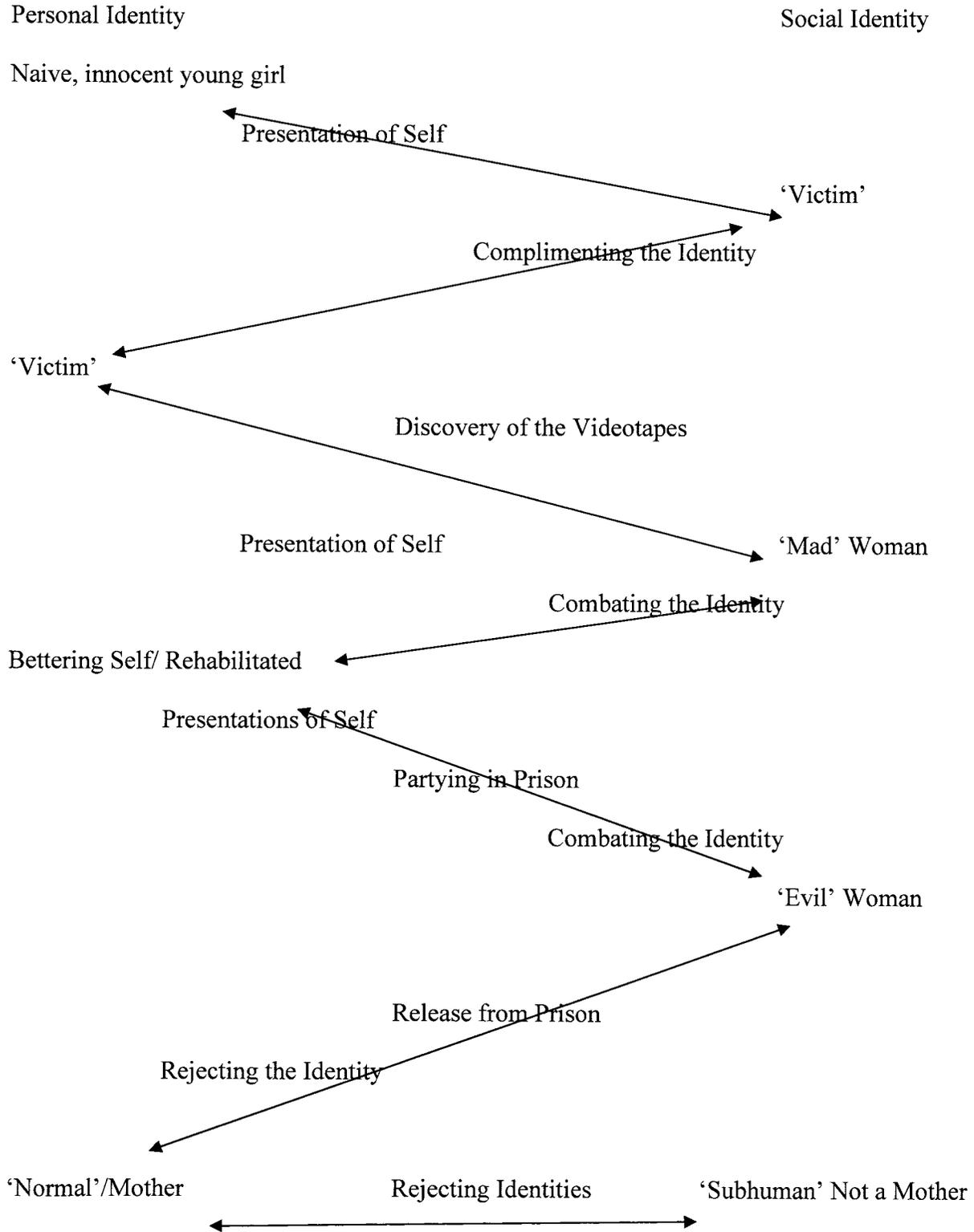


This particular map helped me identify how the public's social construction of Karla Homolka's identities was affected by many institutions, ideologies, and discourses. Specifically, this social world map highlighted the fact that these identity transformations are the result of shared ideologies of traditional female gender roles. I hypothesized that, if this fact was true, then, media presentations of Homolka's identity would transform as more details of the case were revealed. This transformation process would also be negotiated through a gender lens that conformed to specific gender stereotypes (e.g. Homolka is 'mad'). Moreover, these institutions,

ideologies and discourses would not act independently but would inform each other and contribute to the various identities of Homolka put forth by the media.

Drawing upon Clarke's strategy of mapping out an analysis, I created a social process map. This map considers how Homolka's personal and social identities change over time. Thus I created this map to understand the identity transformation in a linear manner. On this map, I attempted to highlight all information relating to how Homolka's identities were formulated and what were the social interactions occurring between how the media constructed a social identity and how Homolka would then present self and construct her personal identity in response to those social constructions. Thus, this map encouraged me to plot a visible representation of my analysis and conceptualize all the different factors involved in the transformation of Homolka's identity by the press. By drawing the social process map, the theoretical categories of complimenting, combating and rejecting identities emerged. In this way, I gained a new understanding of identity transformation as the result of an interaction process existing between social and personal identities based on how the influence of significant others.

Social Process Map



Researcher Reflexivity

Since the publication of grounded Theory in 1967, Glaser and Strauss have operated under different epistemologies. Glaser is viewed as operating from an objectivist grounded theory approach where “the researcher takes the role of a dispassionate, neutral observer who remains separate from research participants, analyzes their world as an outside expert” (Charmaz, 2006; p.188). In contrast, Strauss and his adherents (Charmaz; Corbin; Alasuutari; and Clarke) operate under a constructivist paradigm that addresses how realities are socially constructed. The constructivist paradigm assumes that everyone, including the researcher, constructs realities and these realities can have many interpretations (Charmaz, 2006). To clarify, I operated under the constructivist paradigm and the view of knowledge that “meanings are made rather than found” (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; 414). I also recognize that not all interpretations of the data will be the same. Given this view, I tried to be conscious of my own role in the research process, and how my own perceptions may have influenced my data collection, data analysis, and data presentation.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) generally assume that researchers bring their personal experiences and interests into the research and draw upon and reflect upon this knowledge. Consideration of reflexivity is crucial, therefore, to any constructivist grounded theory research project especially when addressing the differences and certainties within the data including those of power and authority (Clarke, 2005).

To ensure an appropriate response to reflexivity, I turned to Kirby and McKenna’s (1989) concept “conceptual baggage”. Taking note of one’s conceptual baggage occurs through a record of the experiences and reflections of the researcher that relate to the research project, it encourages free flowing thoughts, certainties or uncertainties, self-descriptions or descriptions

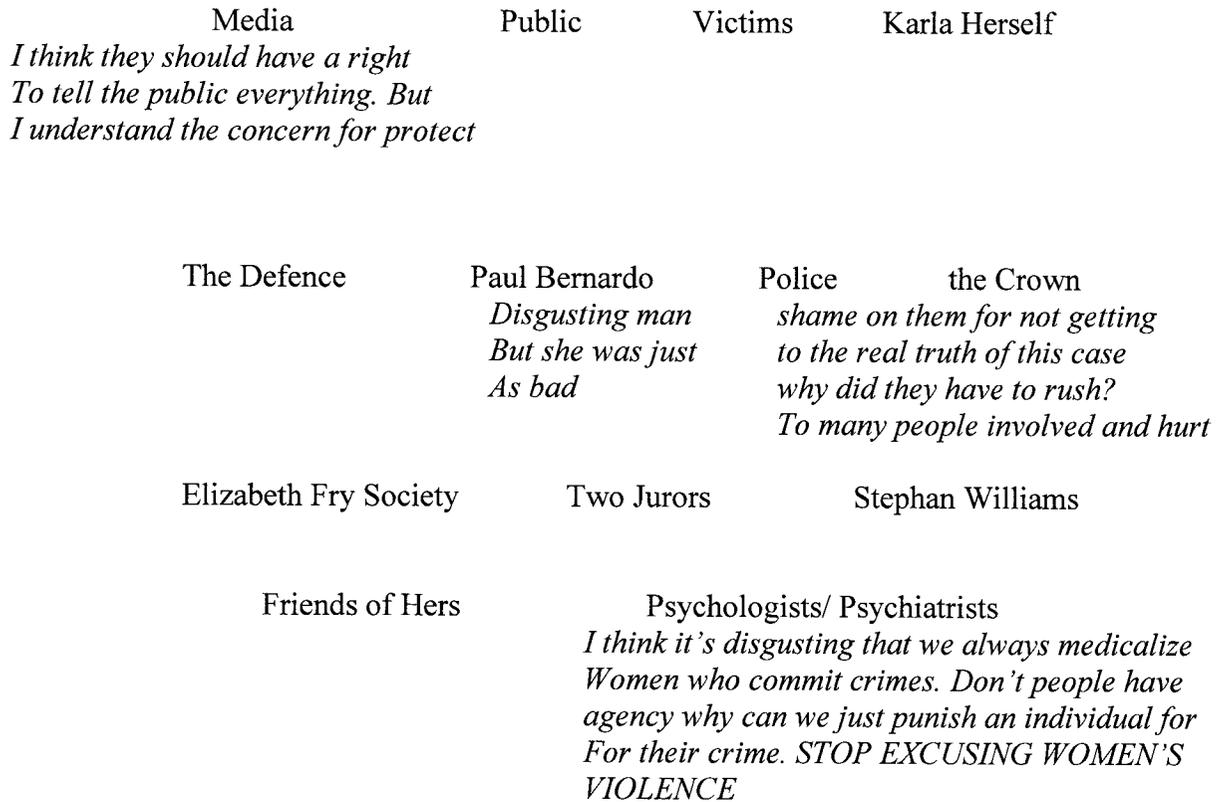
about the research project (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Similarly Mauthner and Doucet (2003) discuss how reflexivity can be operationalized within one's data analysis. They suggest starting with a blank piece of paper and dividing it in half. On one side, you have the data or coded data and on the other side, you have the researcher's reflections corresponding to specific data (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). This technique encourages the researcher to recognize how the data is interpreted and points out pre-conceived ideas and assumptions brought by the researcher to the analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

Drawing upon Kirby and McKenna's (1989) conceptual baggage approach and Mauthner and Doucet's (2003) technique of recording reflexivity, I created a reflexive map modelled after Clarke's mapping approach. My reflexive map takes all of the data maps drawn through the research project and highlights my reflections corresponding to specific data. This technique encouraged me to recognize how the data was interpreted and pointed out pre-conceived ideas. The reflexive map demonstrated where my personal experiences and prior knowledge informed my concepts at the same time as it encouraged my understanding of which concepts inspired which thoughts. The following map demonstrates my reflexive map design:

Reflexive Map
 Players in the Social Construction

Karla's Identity

This case is hard to investigate. Growing up 20 minutes for St. Catharines, this case affected how even today I live my life. I never walked alone always nervous when a car comes up. Now reading the actual details of the crimes makes me want to cry, scream and shake my head that she could have been released. In this research I need to keep my personal feeling about the case to myself but it's hard because everyone who talks to me about my thesis thinks I have some insight into her guilt which is not what I'm trying to do here.



- *Italics indicates reflections*

Ethical Considerations

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (1998) states that “research about a living individual involved in the public arena, or based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works, performances, archival materials is not required to undergo ethics review” (1.1). The Standard and The Toronto Star are newspapers existing in the public realm and open for public consumption. For this reason this research did not require ethical approval by the Carleton University’s ethics board. However, there are still many ethical considerations that need to be considered for this research project.

A researcher is obliged to maintain and demonstrate a respectful sensitivity towards the purposes, vulnerabilities and privacy of the individual even though the information is publicly accessible (Elgesem, 2002). Consequently, even though the research data was considered to be in the public realm, I maintained a respectful sensitivity toward each newspaper article I examined. For example, some newspaper accounts were graphic in detailing the rape/murders of Tammy Homolka, Leslie Mahaffy, and Kristen French but I decided to omit some of these details in my data analysis presentations in respect for the victims’ families.

Many newspaper articles, specifically the public opinion pieces, were very emotionally charged and I attempted to respect all opinions and perceptions put forth in these newspapers but my overall goal was to respect the victim’s families and the general public given the sensitive nature of these crimes.

Again, I did not require ethical clearance to conduct this study. Karla Homolka is an individual with a personal life, but she is also a public figure and, as such, is well-recognized and open to public discourse. Similar to other public personalities such as politicians, media

personalities, and sport figures, she has been discussed extensively in the media. For example, within 0.11 seconds in a Google search of 'Karla Homolka,' her name yielded 79,600 hits. Further, Homolka's name appears in 2377 articles within The Toronto Star, and The Standard has published more than 273 newspaper articles on her. Her gender and her participation in crimes involving extreme sexual abuse have placed her in a category of women such as Myra Hindley, Aileen Wuornos, Genene Jones, and Velma Barfield who have been studied extensively as women who commit violence (Vronsky, 2007; Myers and Wight, 1996). The images presented of Homolka in the media have often been quite harsh. My inclusion of particular events and actions is meant to contribute to my analysis not to defame or harm Homolka in any conscious way. It is reasonable to assume that others conducting research on media portrayals of Karla Homolka would report similar findings.

The next chapter outlines the theoretical standpoint that emerged from the data using a grounded theory approach. It examines the symbolic interactionist perspective on self and identity. I consider how Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) conceptualize the self as an interactional process that is dependent on others and the situation or social context. As such, the theoretical basis of personal and social identities, role identities and presentation of self is examined, especially, in terms of the media's changing portrayal of Homolka over time.

Self, Identity and the Reflections of Others

Symbolic interaction, the central theoretical perspective used in this study for understanding the social construction of Karla Homolka's personal and social identities addresses how these identities are formulated and reformulated. This approach recognizes that the self and identity are social products and are maintained through social interactions with others (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Meltzer et al., 1975; Rosenberg, 1981). Symbolic interaction addresses the idea that the individual is not treated in isolation but is acknowledged as a social being who is both a product of being human and being a member of his/her society (Rosenberg, 2009).

Mead (1934) contends that the self is not a structure but rather a process that arises out of social experiences and activities. According to Mead, the process of self-formation can be seen as an internal conversation that takes place when we feel caught between what we want to do and what others want us to do, thus the self is a process (Hewitt, 2007). The self is not stagnant but rather always evolving and changing. When a person enters a social situation, the self changes in response to the social experiences and the internal conversation between what a person wants to do, what he/she thinks he/ she ought to do, and his/ her assessment of the social responses of others.

Mead regards the self as both a subject and an object of self. Individuals can be an object of themselves and have the ability to act socially toward themselves because they have the capacity to be reflexive, that is, they are able to view self from the perspectives of others and judge self accordingly (Mead, 1934). Thus, an individual can act upon oneself, for example a

man can be angry or happy with himself according to his social experience. Mead supports this conceptualization of self through his notion of the self being divided into two parts the “I” and “Me”. Mead (1934) explains that the “I” is the impulsive tendency of the individual, whereas the “Me” represents the incorporated other within the individual. Thus, Mead’s division of self highlights the recognition that an individual is a social being and product of a social process.

The essence of the self as a product of a social process can be seen more effectively through Mead’s incorporation of ‘the generalized other’. Mead (1934) defines the “‘generalized other’ as the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his or her unity or self” (p.154). Specifically, the attitude of the generalized other represents the attitude of the whole community (Mead, 1934). Mead (1934) describes the importance of the ‘generalized other’ for an individual’s sense of self in the following passage:

He takes the attitudes of other individuals towards himself and toward one another, takes their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which as members of an organized society or social group they are all engaged. And he must then by generalizing these individuals attitudes of that organized society or social group itself as whole act toward the various larger phases of the general social process which constitutes its life and of which these projects are specific manifestations (p.154).

Thus an individual must incorporate the attitude of the ‘generalized other’ when entering a social situation. In this form the ‘generalized other’ influences the actions of individuals and the larger community of others becomes a determining of factor of an individual’s thinking (Mead, 1934; p.155).

The generalized other is significant because all individual actions are formed on the basis of viewing oneself from the standpoint or perspective of the other, and this implies defining one’s actions in terms of others’ expectations (Meltzer, 1972). To quote Meltzer, “in the process of such viewing of oneself, the individual must carry on symbolic interaction with himself,

involving an internal conversation between his impulsive aspect and the incorporated perspectives of others” (1972; p.18). Thus, Mead’s framework and those of other theorists (including this analysis of Homolka) depends upon understanding the relationship/interaction/impact of others on the formation and transformation of self.

Goffman seems to agree with Mead in regards to the ‘self’ being a social process but adds to Mead’s conceptualization by dividing the self into three levels of abstraction (Rosenberg, 2009). Goffman approaches the individual in three (3) ways: personality (core individual), interactions (strategic actor), and social structure (institutional agent). Goffman (1959) views the personality as the core individual that unsocialized being whom acts on impulses of self interest (Rosenberg, 2009). The next part of self Goffman (1959) describes is the strategic actor who engages in controlling the situation and playing certain role identities. Here the strategic actor is concerned with having self control; this is where the actor exerts control over his/her impulses to achieve his/her goals. The third section of Goffman’s self is the institutional agent. The institutional agent represents the moral expectations embedded in the institutional norms and organizations that act as a set of boundaries for action (Goffman, 1959). Although Goffman believes that the strategic actor will never fully internalize his/her institutional agent (Goffman, 1959; Rosenberg, 2009), the strategic actor needs to negotiate between self interest and the moral expectations of society or the social group to achieve satisfactory goal attainment (Rosenberg, 2009). In contrast, the core personality tends to be suppressed during the process of socialization as individuals begin to learn that overt self-interest is less successful than impulse control in obtaining what they desire.

According to Rosenberg (2009), “Goffman treats the self as a set of institutionally located and interactionally situated activities and resources whereby moral images of character,

personality, reputation, worth and competence are displayed to others” (p.9). Similar to Mead’s conceptualization of self, Goffman views self as continually developing through social processes whereby the self is always changing and being altered to fit the situation at hand. In this manner, self will manifest differently according to one’s definition of the situation and one’s perception of how others will either accept or reject that manifestation.

To summarize this social process, the development of self requires an awareness of others and possesses the ability to continually observe, reflect upon and take into account other perspectives (Mead, 1934; 164). Because individuals enter their own experiences of self indirectly through the standpoint of others (Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), they use that standpoint as a platform for getting outside oneself and assessing their own self-presentations (Meltzer et. al., 1975). Consequently, we cannot study Homolka’s actions as just a product of herself rather it is also a product of the responses that various contributors in her society provide. To understand this process further requires consideration of personal and social identity.

The social process in which the self arises is important in the formation and transformation of an individual’s identity. People tend to act toward themselves and others act toward them on the basis of their perceptions, and in doing so, they jointly create various forms of identity (Hewitt, 2007). Specifically this research study of Karla Homolka considers two forms of identities: personal and social.

Social identities are created by the audience and placed upon the person as a system of categories that refers to the persons ‘social statuses’ and ‘social types’ (McCall and Simmons, 1978). There are three identifying attributes of a social identity. First, a social identity locates a person in a social space and this positioning lasts longer than any situation in which the person is

involved in (Hewitt, 2007). Second, a social identity places an individual into a social category, such as, for example, a musician or a member of Catholic Church (Hewitt, 2007). Placing individuals into a social category allows others to identify a person either 'like' or 'not like' oneself. This type of identification implies that individuals search for common values or purposes of each other (Hewitt, 2007). The third attribute of a social identity consists of an identification that converts social categories into functional communities (Hewitt, 2007). In "the classic sociological sense, a functioning community is a set of people who live in close proximity to one another over a prolonged period of time" (p.104). As such, this third attribute of social identity allows members of a social group to have a shared purpose and maintain well-defined relationships.

Social identities are constructed in many ways. One way in which a social identity is constructed involves the everyday experience of self with relation to the establishment of place or location in relation to other people (Hewitt, 2007). Typically, an individual in a situation can name the others, sometimes by their personal names. According to Hewitt (2007) we can interact with others only by knowing on some level how we fit with the others who are present. Thus, naming one another and accepting the name assigned to us allows others to know how to act toward one another and to be able to identify the kind of social object the other is (Hewitt, 2007; p.92). Naming is a key way a social identity is constructed because it allows other to understand that individual by placing him/her into a social category.

Naming is supported by the social process of self narrative. All individuals experience their sense of self through narratives, that is, through "stories told and retold polished embellished trimmed and refurbished" (Hewitt, 2007; p. 93). This conceptualization of self narrative reinforces Mead's theoretical point that the self is involved in a social process and is

continually changing. It also highlights that the “self is an emergent reality- an object brought about over time as people tell and retell stories about themselves. It is periodically revised and edited” (Hewitt, 2007; p.93). The development and reinforcement of self through narrative demonstrates how self is always changing and adapting and allows others to place the individual into a social category based on specific events taken from that narrative.

In this manner, social identities come to rely on announcements and placements. Through self narratives, an individual is making an announcement of a social identity. But in order for that social identity to be accepted, others must also accept the narrative and place the individual into the social category that the narrative supports. Social identities are accomplished when announcements and placements coincide (Hewitt, 2007). However, although announcements typically precede placements, the reverse can also be true. Some social identities may not depend on the coincidence of announcements and placements. In other incidents a social identity may be desired but the individual knows that he or she cannot reveal it without being drastically transformed and/or rejected by others (Hewitt, 2007; p.93). To quote Stone (1981), “one’s identity is established when others place him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or announces” (p.399). Thus, the audience holds certain expectations of an individual and has the ability to accept or reject the identity offered (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

Social identities exist because they provide the audience with “pre-packaged” appraisals of individuals that allow us to understand others and form expectations of their behaviour without starting from scratch each time we enter new interactions and must begin to decipher the potential meanings of that individual for our own social worlds (McCall and Simmons, 1978). In

this way, stereotyping and personal reputations are important to the construction of a social identity.

Defined as “a set of personal characteristics and behaviours expected of an individual who occupies that position” (McCall and Simmons, 1978), stereotyping is employed to categorize and deal with the flow of events around a person. In contrast personal reputations or indirect knowledge about the individual precondition the audiences’ view of the individual (McCall and Simmons, 1978) and, serves to place the individual within a range of social actions and social expectations. Stereotyping and personal reputation are not separate when the audience constructs a social identity but are, instead, intertwined in the appraisal of an individual thereby helping both the individual and others create satisfactory patterns of social interaction.

In this study, the social identity of Homolka is examined using the concepts of both stereotyping and personal reputations. Homolka’s crimes act as the lens through which the audience (i.e. others) socially constructs an identity for her. Their sense of her personal reputation creates the opportunity for the audience to construct an identity that is related to her crimes. In contrast, stereotypes of female behaviour create a standard of expectations that defines the audiences’ view of her criminal behaviour that leads them eventually to define her socially as ‘evil’ and ‘subhuman’.

This research project not only considers Homolka’s social identity but it also examines how others assist in constructing her personal identity. I chose to study Karla Homolka because I am interested in how the public perceives female sexual abusers and she is a public figure who has drawn considerable media attention for her active participation in sexual abuse crimes. Although I did not interview Homolka directly, I offer an examination of her social identity by analyzing how media portrayals of her change over time in response to new information of her

behaviour. As part of that examination, I note corresponding changes occurring in Homolka's presentation of self that provide clues about her personal identity. Ultimately, by considering the interactive relationship existing between how the media presents Homolka and how Homolka presents herself, my goal is to gain a stronger understanding of the interactive relationship existing in the social construction of personal and social identity.

Personal identity is derived by identifying an individual in terms of a set of categories thereby referring to their uniqueness (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Hewitt (2007) stresses that a personal identity represents "uniqueness and difference and personal identities are more likely to locate the individual within the society as a whole rather than any of its component communities" (p. 106). Personal identity is constructed through reference to an individual's life story or biography. The main themes of one's personal identity give meaning to that individual's actions (Hewitt, 2007). Thus a personal identity is regarded as an individual's property that is; the individual creates, owns, and can modify his/her personal identity as he/she sees fit (Hewitt, 2007).

A personal identity is derived through the process of experiencing one's impulsive tendencies toward oneself at the same time as one experiences the social responses of others. In other words, one's personal identity is formed through self reflections and social interactions with others. As individuals we tend to be part of many social interactions daily. As such, our personal identity relies strongly on our past social experiences but can be modified by interactions that occur in the present.

Similar to social identities, personal identities rest on shared ideas about what people can be or become as well as their participation in a cultural world shared with others (Hewitt, 2007). Thus social confirmation is required as a component of a personal identity even if the individual

is seeking as much autonomy as he or she can get (Hewitt, 2007). Since a personal identity needs to be located in the social world, it is also dependent upon announcements and placement. An individual must announce his or her social location to others, and others must in some way place him or her in terms of it (Hewitt, 2007).

This process of identity announcement and others' acceptance of one's identity announcement indicates that personal and social identities are not mutually exclusive. Significantly, each individual in contemporary society also acquires and exercises a variety of identities in his or her life due to the complexity of our society and the passage of time (Hewitt, 2007). Consequently, an individual can possess multiple personal and social identities. More important, an individual may form a strong personal identity that dominates all other identities. Additionally, some individuals may manage one or two social identities whereas, others may have several social and personal identities that they rely upon and use in response to the different social situations in which they find themselves (Hewitt, 2007).

An individual may perform many different identities depending upon their particular social location and the social situation at that time. McCall and Simmons (1978) refer to these as role identities. According to McCall and Simmons, a role identity is an imaginative view of oneself that runs heavily toward vicarious performances of the role in question. In other words, a role identity is the individual's idealized imaginative view of self as he/she performs/enacts each particular role performed i.e. this is how he/she would like to be seen and assessed when performing that role (McCall and Simmons, 1978). A role identity can also serve as a link between the individual self and society (Callero, 1985).

In every social interaction an individual must make claim to some kind of role identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978). However, specific personal and institutional contexts constrain

one's performance by setting the parameters and the content of a role-identity. Moreover, these contexts and parameters continually change and alter as one passes through life (McCall and Simmons, 1978). The content of a person's role-identity provides criteria for appraising his own performance at the same time as one must adjust to the social responses of others (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

McCall and Simmons (1978) make the point that role-identities are not purely idiosyncratic but actually include many conventional standards and expectations that would be held toward a particular status. Thus one's role-identities are acquired through socialization and being a member of a particular community or society as a whole. But because role-identities also represent an idealization of self, the social acceptance/rejection of one's role identity is constantly jarring against this ideal. Inadequate presentations of self may raise difficulties and embarrassments for the individual thereby causing personal discomfort or, in extreme cases, a negative view of self (McCall and Simmons, 1978). If an individual conducts himself or herself in a consistent manner the imaginative view of self may become legitimate (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

Possession of a set of role-identities is important because individuals must make claim to some identity. If they do not, others will force them into some social identity that may be disadvantageous to the individual (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Specifically, when entering into interactions with others, an individual must make claim to some kind of identity. Otherwise, social interaction will not proceed smoothly.

Role identities are needed when individuals enter an interaction to define the situation and to set up expectations of how each individual will perform (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman (1959), each individual will play a role in a calculating manner, expressing himself or

herself in a manner that is likely to evoke a desired response (Goffman, 1959). Thus, for example, we would expect Homolka to make claims about self and to present role identities that will minimize her actions in the crimes and present herself more as a victim than a perpetrator of these criminal acts. Her role identity as a 'criminal' indicates these parameters and these types of actions. Similarly, we would expect members of the criminal justice system to use any damaging evidence against her and proceed to convict her on the basis of that evidence. Their perception of her role identity as a 'criminal' indicates this social response.

According to McCall and Simmons (1978) for a role identity to be successful it needs to have role support, that is, the expressed support of a claimed role identity by the audience which holds certain expectations of that role identity. Role support does not just involve claims of status, prestige, and social approval. It is also measured by an audience's set of reactions. In other words, for a role identity to be legitimized it needs support from various audience members (McCall and Simmons, 1978). If a role identity is supported an individual will continue to play that role. If it is not supported, the individual is likely to change his/her presentation of self in a manner designed to gain stronger social acceptance. Thus, for example, we would expect Homolka to present a self that minimizes her involvement in the crimes and portray a woman who was a victim of Bernardo. Similarly, if her presentation of self is rejected, we would expect her to alter her identity in an attempt to gain more positive social acceptance from others and create a more favourable sense of self.

Significantly, different roles do not stand alone but are understood in relation to counter-roles played (Lindesmith and Strauss, 1956). Role identities also contain many different concrete actions or performances that the individual may draw upon as he/she attempts to present self, as being the person he/she likes to think of oneself as being (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Thus, an

individual may not play just one role but may have multiple roles built into a single performance within a social interaction (Lindesmith and Strauss, 1956). A person may have many conceptions of the ideal self, and use different roles in a combination to sustain their personal identity. For example, as the trial of Karla Homolka begins, we see her presenting herself as a ‘victim’, ‘naive’ ‘young lady’ and ‘school girl.’ This presentation of self supports the role identity of an unwilling participant in the murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. All of these presentations involve separate role identities but, when merged together, they strengthen an image of self as a guiltless person.

Throughout the data analysis presented in later chapters, I demonstrate the media’s portrayal of how Homolka offers a particular role identity, but when that identity is rejected, she appears to adjust her presentation of self and draw upon another role identity to fit the social context in a more socially acceptable manner. In this way, she attempts to alter her presentation of self to maintain an image of self as a guiltless person.

As McCall and Simmons (1978) note, however, not all role identities are equally important but differ in their prominence. Thus role identities can be either tightly or loosely related and organized within a hierarchy (McCall and Simmons, 1978). “[T]he determinants of prominences, is the degree to which the individual has committed himself to a particular content of this role identity and has gambled his regard for himself on living up to certain imaginations of self” (75). If an individual desires a certain social position, he/she will invest more into that role identity thereby giving it a higher position of prominence and a stronger likelihood that it will be performed.

The higher the prominence given to a role identity depends on the material or social benefit the individual is gaining from its performance (McCall and Simmons, 1978). McCall and

Simmons (1978) theorize that in order for a role identity to be high in prominence, the individual needs support of the identity and, intrinsic and extrinsic gratification for its performance. Support for an identity was defined earlier as the expressed support of a role identity by audience members. Intrinsic gratification includes the individual gaining the sense of efficacy in having done something with reasonable competence (McCall and Simmons 1978). In contrast, extrinsic gratification comes from rewards like money, labour, favours, and prestige (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

In response to McCall and Simmons's contention that need for role support and intrinsic and extrinsic gratification for a role identity must be legitimized, I propose that Karla Homolka tries to enact role identities that minimize her crimes such as victim, school girl, model inmate, and even mother because these identities are more socially acceptable and, in consequence, provide her with more intrinsic and extrinsic gratifications and role support than the role identity of criminal, murderer, or female sexual abuser. Additionally, Homolka continually makes public claims of her innocence while enacting these role-identities because this claim helps her maintain an 'ideal self' as a person who is guiltless and does not deserve to be punished.

To understand the process of role identity and presentation further, one needs to take into account the concept of situated identity (Hewitt, 2007). A situated identity occurs when a person's announcements of self coincides with the placements of that person by others in a particular situation (Stone, 1981). Thus, similar to personal and social identities, situated identities are dependent on announcements and placements. The relative ease of establishing self and others in a routine social situation depends on this very invisible and familiar social process, that is, whenever an individual makes an identity announcement, others will potentially interpret

this identity announcement as a role that the individual intends or wants to enact in that particular social situation (Stone, 1981; Hewitt, 2007).

Consequently, when individuals enter into social situations they are constantly seeking information about each other. This information helps each individual define the situation and enables others to know in advance what the individual will expect of them and in return what they can expect of the individual (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) refers to this process as 'presentation of self.' He also notes "if unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or more important to apply untested stereotypes to him" (p.1-2). In this way, presentation of self becomes important in every social situation. Thus, for example, in media accounts of her co-operation with the police and her testimony at Bernardo's trial, Homolka will make claims to particular situated identities through what Goffman (1959) terms 'presentation of self'.

Presentation of self involves individuals making a claim about whom and what they are and how others should relate to them (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman, to create a more satisfactory presentation of self, individuals make claims about self at the same time as they try to control the conduct of others, especially with regard to the treatment of oneself (Goffman 1959). In other words, individuals carefully present a self that will control other's treatment of them in favourable terms. Regardless of the overall objective of any social interaction, individuals always have an interest in controlling the conduct of others especially others' responsive treatment them (Goffman, 1959; p.3).

Goffman (1959) states that, "this control is achieved largely by influencing the definitions of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this

definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead others to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan”(p.4). Specifically, this process of self-presentation can be seen in media reports during the early stages of the case when Homolka appears to portray herself as a battered wife thereby taking on the role of ‘victim’. ‘Others’ acceptance of this presentation appears to allow her to relinquish responsibility for the murders committed and ensures her of a twelve year prison term rather than the life sentence that others believe she should have received after the videotapes of the crimes were revealed.

Throughout the entire time period of examined media reports, Homolka continually appears to make claims of innocence and fair treatment by presenting herself as a victim. Using Goffman’s paradigm, we can state that she does this as a mechanism to control the impressions that others have of her thereby ensuring a lighter sentence than her participation in the crime may deserve (Rosenberg, 2009 on Goffman). To gain social acceptance of this role-identity, she must exert enough self-control to suppress the unsocialized, self-interested ‘self’ (Goffman, 1959). Moreover, within such interactions there is a domain of moral expectations that serve as a foundation of social order that influence others’ acceptance or rejection of this self presentation (Goffman, 1959; Rosenberg, 2009).

According to Goffman (1959), “To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of society in which it occurs, we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, as a ceremony – as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of moral values of the community” (p.35). Within social interactions, an individual must adhere to the moral contract and perform or act in good faith and not misrepresent oneself (Goffman, 1959; Rosenberg, 2009). By adhering to the moral contract within social interactions one will be able to maintain a desirable self (Goffman, 1959). Thus, for example, when Homolka presents herself

as the victim of Bernardo, she is able to maintain a desirable self that fits within this moral contract. It is not until the videotapes reveal her actual participation in the crime that others refuse to accept her 'victim' claims.

A pivotal event affecting this moral contract occurs during the discovery of the videotapes. The videotapes contain the rapes of all three murder victims, Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French, and Tammy Homolka. After this information is released, the audience no longer finds Homolka's presentation of self creditable and the 'innocent' role identities she offers are no longer accepted (Goffman, 1959). Her audience, in this case, the media, police, lawyers and public, cast her into other roles, such as murderer, monster, and evil. In her attempt to maintain a satisfactory presentation of self, Homolka must present alternate, more socially acceptable role identities.

The process by which others apply negative social identities to Karla is termed altercasting. Altercasting is defined as "projecting an identity" onto another person which is congruent to the 'other' goals (Weinstein and Deutschberger, 1963, p.454). In this case, 'others' refers to the audience members of Homolka's performance that is the media, the police, criminal justice system and the public. To summarize, the 'innocent' identities that Homolka presents are no longer socially acceptable after the videotapes of the crimes are found, and through the media, various contributors cast her into other identities which reflect her guilt. Thus, for example, claims are made by various contributors through the media that construct Homolka's criminal social identity as 'mad' and 'bad' (Kilty and Frigon, 2006).

Using a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, this thesis recognizes that identity formation is not stagnant but continually changing through social interactions. Specifically, Homolka's social and personal identities do not remain the same throughout time but constantly

change in response to others' reactions to her presentation of self and their knowledge of her actions. By incorporating data from the beginning of the Homolka case (her confession to police) to after her release from prison; I track how she changes her presentations of self in response to the various images of her offered through the media, the criminal justice system and the public at large. This examination, in turn, highlights how key events of the case influence the social identity created for Homolka by significant others and the personal identity that she ultimately portrays.

The videotapes of the crimes serve as a pivotal event in the social acceptance of Homolka's identity as Bernardo's naive/battered wife/victim. The audience members, specifically the various contributors of the media, no longer find this presentation of self acceptable and through the process of altercasting force more negative social identities upon her. Thus, for example, Homolka's presentation of self as being rehabilitated is discounted and the media casts her into the social identity of an 'evil' woman.

Another example of altercasting occurs when Homolka presents herself as a model prisoner. The audience uses key events occurring during her incarceration to redefine her once more. Images of her partying in prison and having love affairs are released by the media and present her as an unremorseful 'evil' individual who, rather than taking responsibility for her crimes revels in her ability to avoid them. Similarly, when she presents self as a mother, the audience rejects this identity by socially constructing Homolka as a monster, who should not have had a child because her murders indicate she has no sense of emotion or compassion for others.

The next three chapters provide a detailed analysis of the identity transformations that emerged from the data. The next chapter, Chapter Four, begins with an analysis of the time

period prior to the discovery of the videotapes and describes how Homolka's presentation of certain role identities are complimented by the construction of her social identities within the newspaper reports. Chapter Five, includes two time periods, the discovery of the videotapes and Homolka's imprisonment. During this stage, transformations that occur in the role identities presented by Homolka are described as combating and a detailed analysis regarding the process involved in combating identities is provided. Finally, Chapter Six considers Homolka's presentation of self after her release from prison. The social process used to describe the interactional changes in identity formation during this time period is termed rejecting identities. The last concluding chapter presents a summary of the main points raised by this study and some recommendations for considering these types of identity transformation processes in future research.

Complimenting Identities

This chapter focuses on the transformation involved in the process of forming complimenting identities. The concept of complimenting identities is examined through a discussion of the three major identities (i.e., 'naive, innocent, young girl', 'battered wife/victim' and self as a 'victim') presented in the media in its description of Karla Homolka. The analysis begins with a description of the first identity of a 'naive, young, innocent girl' that Homolka presents at the beginning of the case. The second identity is the 'battered wife/victim' identity that is constructed by various significant others who are quoted in the media, such as the personal friends of Karla, psychologists and psychiatrists, and members of the criminal justice system. After the videotapes of the crimes become public, Homolka is portrayed in subsequent media reports to be altering her presentation of self from 'young/naive/innocent' to 'battered wife/victim'. It appears she incorporated the battered wife identity offered by others more fully as part of her role identity hierarchy. She is able to do this more easily because each identity offers traits that compliment the other. In fact later media reports of her behaviour at Bernardo's trial indicate that she gradually dropped aspects of both role identities and began to present herself mainly as a 'victim'. Although we cannot attribute motive to this transformation of self process based on media reports alone, it appears that role identity of 'victim' took prominence for Homolka because it offered her the most satisfactory presentation of self during social interactions involving discussion of her participation in the deaths of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy and, ultimately, her sister, Tammy.

Based on my grounded theory analysis of media data, I have conceptualized the concept of complimenting identity as an identity socially constructed by an individual, in this case Karla Homolka, in response to an ineffective presentation of self. The individual takes the behavioural requirements and social expectations of others, integrates those expectations as part of his/her role identity repertoire, and reformulates a new identity that is likely to be more socially acceptable. In this way, the individual offers a personal identity that matches others' social expectations and 'compliments' others' definition of the situation thereby gaining a more satisfactory presentation of self.

In Homolka's case, the creation of complimenting identities can be observed through media reports of others' (e.g. psychologists, lawyers) reactions to the identity announcements made by Homolka and her subsequent self-presentations. Similar to all social actors, Homolka is aware of others and has the ability to continuously observe, reflect upon, and consider others' perspectives when presenting a more socially acceptable self (Goffman, 1959). Specifically, as can be seen in media reports of Bernardo's arrest and trial, others' assessed and responded to Homolka's initial presentation of self as a 'naive, innocent girl' in a positive way. They did not appear, however, to find her youth and innocence to be completely satisfactory explanations for her behaviour and tended, instead, to emphasize her identity as a 'battered wife/victim'. Before long, Homolka could be seen to also highlight all of these personal characteristics (i.e. youth, innocence and fear) in her discussions of her relationship with Bernardo.

Notably, the transformation process involved in the creation of complimenting identities includes consideration of social context, that is, normative social expectations of individual behaviour. Thus, for example, in the Homolka-Bernardo case, before the videotapes were released, Homolka's presentation of self as a 'naive, innocent young girl' who had been beaten

by her husband was understood within a social context involving violence against women and spousal abuse. In this way, others' acceptance of Homolka's early presentation of self as 'young/innocent/naive' and others' understanding of her in terms of traditional female gender agreed. Homolka could be seen to possess an identity upon which others could rely and one that could be easily recast by others into the social identity of a 'battered wife/victim'. The similar traits characterizing these two role identities also made it possible for Homolka to accept the identity of 'battered wife/victim' more easily as a part of her own role identity repertoire. In fact, as can be seen toward the end of Bernardo's trial, she downplayed many of those traits and presented self as a victim more often than not.

"Naive, Innocent Young Girl" as a Personal Identity

Just after Bernardo's arrest, media reports of Homolka's behaviour indicate that she presented self mainly as a naive, innocent young girl who had become involved in these crimes because she had been forced by Bernardo, a man with whom she was madly in love. Notably, in response to this identity presentation, significant others (i.e. the police, prosecutors) made a plea bargain with Homolka for her help in aiding the police to build a sufficient case against Bernardo for prosecution, and for being the Crown's star witness at his trial. The plea bargain included a 12-year prison sentence of two counts of manslaughter in the deaths of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French.

Homolka's presentation of self as a 'naive/innocent/young girl' can be seen in media reports of her behaviour during her sentence hearing. For example, media descriptions of Homolka indicate that she appeared before the judge, "wearing a knee-length plaid skirt and a

blue blazer with a black barrette in her blonde hair, glanced back and nodded at her parents and sister seated in the first row” (The Toronto Star, May 19, 1993; p. A6).

Homolka’s clothing style during her sentencing hearing portrays an image of her that closely resembled the dress worn by students at a reputable Catholic high school in the area. Her parents were also present and sitting behind her in the courtroom. Homolka’s frequent glances toward them during her hearing demonstrated a reliance on family common to young offenders. These types of actions created a presentation of self that suggested an image of youth, in need of support, that is, the personal identity of a young woman who was vulnerable to Bernardo’s control and not responsible for the murders.

Homolka’s presentation of self during her sentencing hearing seems to have been accepted by both the media and the criminal justice system for neither appears to have questioned the somewhat lenient sentence she received. Thus, for example, The Toronto Star described Homolka’s sentencing in the following manner:

The 23-year-old veterinarian’s assistant was convicted of two counts of manslaughter in the deaths of the teenage schoolgirls. Her estranged husband Paul Bernardo... has been charged with first-degree murder in the slayings. Homolka faced a possible life sentence for her part in the killings, but Kovacs said that while the slaying were the ‘worst of crimes...she is not the worst offender’ and doesn’t deserve the maximum penalty... After she was sentenced, Homolka walked quickly from the courtroom, followed closely by her sister Lori and parents Dorothy and Karel (July 7, 1993; p.A1).

“Battered Wife/Victim” as a Social Identity

Before the discovery of videotapes of the crimes, interviews with people who knew Homolka personally (e.g. her previous boss; friends; schoolteachers; neighbours) appeared in the press. These individuals assessed Homolka’s presentation of self as ‘innocent’ and responded to it by constructing the identity of being one of Paul Bernardo’s victims. In this way, the personal

identity that she presented was legitimized and complimented by the social identity applied to her by significant others who had known her intimately. Thus, for example, The Toronto Star reported, Homolka's former boss saying, "Somebody who works with animals, and particularly, someone who wants to make it a profession – I think one can use that as a measure of her sense of caring for life. Regardless of what happened, Karla Bernardo is another victim" (February 22, 1993; p.A1).

In comparison, media interviews with professional consultants (e.g. psychiatrists/psychologists, academics, women's group leaders) constructed her identity as a 'battered wife/victim' who appeared not to be responsible for the crimes, and described her as a timid, naive young woman who had also fallen prey to Paul Bernardo. In fact, these significant others constructed Homolka as a person who was not dangerous but rather, one who was in danger herself. Moreover, in response to pictures released in the media of Homolka's injuries from a beating by Bernardo, these significant others explained her involvement in the crimes as a result of being a battered wife. Consequently, early in the case, Homolka's responsibility for the crimes was denied publically, and her participation in the crimes was minimized.

At this stage in the case, Homolka's treatment did not deviate from previous cases involving women and violence where being a 'battered wife' was used by others to mitigate a woman's responsibility in her crimes (Frigon, 1996). Thus, for example, two jurors of Paul Bernardo's trial wrote "I do not believe (Karla) is a threat to society now... It would be my hope that, one day, Karla will reach a point where she will find a way to help other young women who are trapped in abusive relationships", another wrote, "I personally believe (Karla) was manipulated, controlled and battered. I sense she has the strength in her to survive" (The Standard, November 4, 1999; p.A1).

The application of the identity of 'battered wife/victim' by significant others offered a sympathetic understanding of Homolka's involvement in the crimes that matched traditional female gender roles. Historically, woman who commit violent crimes are rarely characterized as pure criminals. Instead, they are captured in a stereotyped fantasy that denies their agency and reifies gender stereotypes and subordination (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). The portrayal of a woman as a 'victim' casts a woman's violent act as the result of being in an abusive situation, or having an abusive experience (Ballinger, 1996; Bungay, 1998; Shaw, 1995). The woman is socially constructed as someone who deserves sympathy; that is, someone who possesses an innocent or moral standard and, as such, is someone who cannot be responsible for the harm she has performed (Loseke, 2003).

Given this definition of the situation, early within the Homolka case, many people used these social stereotypes, characterized her as a victim of Paul Bernardo and drew upon the social identity of young naive battered wife/victim to explain her involvement in the sexual assaults and murders. For example, after the police had released the news that Karla Homolka was arrested and charged with two counts of manslaughter, the media interviewed many individuals who knew Homolka prior to her arrest. Personal friends described her as "always cheerful and friendly" (Toronto Star, February, 22, 1993; p.A1). Friends of the family also stated "you know who I really feel sorry for? It's Karla!" (The Toronto Star, February 22, 1993; p.A1).

To summarize, the media drew upon past personal experiences of Homolka and others' intimate knowledge of her to form a social identity that complimented Homolka's original presentation of self as a 'naive, young girl'. Moreover, the existing social discourse on female violence and traditional gender roles provided the public at large with a "pre-packaged" appraisal of Homolka that helped them understand her without starting from scratch when deciphering

potential meanings about her actions (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Consequently, the identity of 'naive, innocent, young girl' was supported by stereotyping and personal reputation. Media quotes provided by friends, family and a former boss contributed to these stereotypes by supporting Homolka's personal reputation as friendly, cheerful and hard working. More important, however, the process of stereotyping Homolka occurred when significant members of the public, such as Homolka's lawyer, and Judge Justice Kovacs, categorized her as a 'battered wife/victim,' and 'not the worst offender.' Through this process of stereotyping, these very prominent significant others in the criminal justice system minimized her role in the events surrounding her relationship with Bernardo, and underestimated her involvement in the sexual assaults and murders of Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French and Tammy Homolka.

The Importance of Social Context and Traditional Female Scripts

Homolka's identity as a 'battered wife/victim' was supported by the fact that many individuals in our Western society believe that women are not capable of committing such crimes (Burfoot and Lord, 2006). Based on traditional female scripts and from a Western cultural standpoint there has been a normative emphasis that women are warm, nurturing mothers who do no harm (Larson and Maison, 1987). To be feminine or a woman means to be nurturing, protecting, caring, nonaggressive, and nonsexual (Denov, 2003). In this manner, traditional female scripts have led to a societal belief that women are incapable of violence and sexual aggression (Anderson and Struckman-Johnson, 1998).

Our Western societal belief that women are not capable of sexual or violent crimes can be seen in articles appearing in The Toronto Star during the time of Homolka's arrest before the videotapes were discovered. For example, The Toronto Star reported that Homolka's former boss

referred to her “as a compassionate animal lover ... (that) can have her job back whenever she likes... was a pleasant quiet lady... (who) is not capable of homicide” (The Toronto Star, February 22, 1993; p.A1). Homolka’s boss supported his perception of her as ‘innocent’ by reflecting on how Homolka behaved prior to her arrest. As such, Homolka’s former boss (and the media’s inclusion of these reports) incorporates a set of positive appraisals of her for the public at large. He constructs her as a wonderful, compassionate person who is incapable of committing the crimes of which she was accused. Given this perspective, his only rationale for her behaviour is that she must have been abused by Bernardo and in fear of her life.

Significantly, Homolka’s former boss was not the only one to construct the social identity of a ‘battered wife/victim’ for her. The media reported that many people were in shock that a woman could commit such crimes. Thus the public at large tried to understand Homolka’s actions and used its own normative pattern of expectations as a reference point (Mills, 1940). The social context during the time of Homolka’s arrest favoured the view that a woman was incapable of such sexual, violent aggression. For example, it has only been recently that sexual offences committed by a woman have been considered a crime in English and Canadian law (Edwards, 1984; Nelson, 1994). Before 1983, the Canadian Criminal Code was gender-specific and only male sexual behaviour came within the boundaries of statutory law (Nelson, 1994). As such, only a man could be charged with rape and the victim could only be a female. In this way, previous legal discourse contributed to public belief that, as a woman, Homolka was not capable of committing a sexually violent crime.

This legal discourse is combined with the fact that the known prevalence of female sex offending is significantly smaller than male sex offending thereby supporting the overall image that women are incapable of committing sexual violence (Byers and O’Sullivan, 1998; Pierce

and Pierce, 1985). Thus Homolka's arrest in 1993 came at a time when the public was less likely to believe that a woman was capable of committing a sexually violent crime. Consequently, media articles on her arrest indicate the shock and curiosity felt by the public over the possibility that a woman could commit these sexually violent acts. The Toronto Star reported,

Karla Homolka's day in court took on a circus atmosphere as dozens of people sought a glimpse of the woman accused of taking part in the killing of two teenage schoolgirls. About 70 people and a throng of media were outside the courthouse here yesterday when the Homolka family arrived to show support for the 22-year-old estranged wife of Paul Bernardo... At one point during the wait outside the courthouse for the accused woman, the crowd made a mad dash for the front of the building after a reporter mistakenly remarked that Homolka was coming out the door. When she finally made her appearance, the crowd gave chase (May 19, 1993; p. A6).

As the quote above demonstrates the general public considered Homolka to be an oddity; a phenomenon to be gawked at and explored. Moreover, the initial vocabulary used by the media to describe Homolka's behaviour in these crimes (e.g. 'her role'; 'Bernardo's wife'; 'Bernardo's accomplice') minimized her involvement and distanced her from these violent acts. Mills (1940) states, "Along with rules and norms of action for various situation, we learn vocabularies of motives appropriate to them" (p.909). It appears that the public did not have a vocabulary of motives appropriate for describing Homolka's sexually abusive behaviour and was not ready to acknowledge her as a murderer or someone who had committed sexual assault. Consequently, Homolka's presentation of self as a 'naive young girl' who had been coerced by Bernardo became an acceptable social identity and her responsibility in the crimes was minimized by others.

Homolka's participation in the crimes could not be denied totally, however, and her presentation of self as 'naive/innocent' could not be entirely accepted. In consequence, others constructed a more socially acceptable identity for her. Specifically, the media combined

descriptions of Homolka made by her former boss, friends, and parents with normative societal expectations that women are incapable of committing sexually violent crimes. This social identity matched Homolka's personal identity so closely that a transformation process occurred through which a new complimenting identity emerged for Homolka. In the eyes of others, she became a victim of Bernardo and an unwilling participant in the torture and murder, that is, she was assigned the social identity of a 'battered wife/victim' who was not responsible for her actions. From this perspective, the twelve year sentence applied to her was considered to be an appropriate sentence for her involvement in these crimes.

The image of Homolka as a 'battered wife/victim' was strongly supported by pictures taken of her on the night that Homolka alleges she was beaten by Paul Bernardo. These photos are "graphic photographs of Homolka, showing 'raccoon-like' bruises around her eyes and welts on her neck, back, arms and legs, pictures take after she left Bernardo in January, 1993" (The Toronto Star, May 30, 1995; p. A1). These photos present the image that Homolka endured a horrible beating on the night of January 5th 1993 and give physical evidence that Homolka was a battered wife/victim. As such, the photos of Bernardo's physical abuse became combined with the normative societal belief that women are incapable of being sexually or violently aggressive. Merged together, the two strongly supported the transformation process involving in the formation of complimenting identities.

Defence Attorney Walker, lawyer of Homolka, contributed strongly to the social acceptance of Homolka as a caring person who was incapable of perpetrating these crimes. For example, Walker explained to the media that "Homolka wanted to deal with the case in an 'expeditious manner' to help ease the 'anguish and trauma' of the relatives of the two victims (The Toronto Star, May 19, 1993; p. A6). By taking a plea bargain, Homolka was presented as a

woman who is capable of displaying warmth and a caring attitude toward the girls' families, that is, she sacrificed her potential freedom by not going to trial and took the plea to minimize their suffering. As such, Homolka had fulfilled her traditional female roles by being warm, caring and self-sacrificing (Abramovitz, 1988).

Walker also constructed Homolka as a 'battered wife/victim' by highlighting the fact that "Homolka has recently undergone seven weeks of hospital treatment after becoming suicidal and suffering from depression" (The Toronto Star, May 19, 1993; p.A6). By describing Homolka as a woman who had suffered abuse and in need treatment for the ordeal she had experienced, Walker presented Homolka as the stereotypical 'battered wife/victim' who still suffered at the hands of Bernardo and, hence, was not deserving of further punishment (Loseke, 2003).

During Homolka's sentencing, Judge Justice Kovacs contributed to this image when he made a public statement that, "The accused did not personally inflict the deaths, although she was responsible in law and in fact" (The Toronto Star, July 7, 1993; p. A1). This statement implied that, even though Homolka was guilty under the law, she was somewhat less guilty than Bernardo because she did not commit the actual murders. Additionally, Kovacs' lack of reference to Homolka's role in the sexual assaults of the victims maintained the normative standard that women do not commit sexual abuse.

Kovacs also noted "that while the slayings were the 'worst of crimes ... she (Homolka) is not the worst offender' and doesn't deserve the maximum penalty" and "(that) he felt Homolka would not be a danger to society and hoped she can be rehabilitated" (The Toronto Star, July 7, 1993; p.A1). As such, in the eyes of the court, she did not deserve a more severe sentence than she had bargained for. In this way, Kovacs' closing statements concerning Homolka appeared to

correspond with the stereotype that women do not commit sexual or violent crimes and her violence was likely due to her victimhood.

Self as a "Victim"

After the videotapes were discovered, Homolka's presentation of self as a 'naive, innocent, young girl' was no longer acceptable to the public and the 'battered wife/victim' identity was considered as a more reasonable explanation for her participation in the crimes. To regain the social approval of others, Homolka needed to reconstruct her personal identity by adapting her presentation of self. We can see this identity transformation process occurring in media reports of her behaviour during the time period when she was serving as the Crown's key witness in the Paul Bernardo trial. For example, after the videotapes were revealed, she wrote a letter to a friend in which she described herself as a woman who had suffered physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. She also wrote in the letter that she was 'madly' in love with Bernardo early in their relationship and had been unable to leave him because she feared for her life. Additionally, during her testimony at the trial, Homolka noted, "It was love. It was devotion. It was, um, fear. And yeah, it kinda felt good... making Paul happy... feeling happy in return. I loved him. And I wanted to make him happy. At the time." (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A9).

These types of media reports depict the emergence of Homolka's role identity as a 'battered wife/victim.' The similarity in timing between the publication of these media reports and the release of the videotapes indicate that she may have considered performance of the role identity of 'battered wife/victim' would provide her with a more satisfactory presentation of self in the eyes of others than the role identity of 'naive/innocent young girl.'

Homolka did not, however, relinquish her early identity of a 'naive, innocent young girl' entirely. Instead, she appears to have added the role identity of 'battered wife/victim' to her role identity repertoire. Role identities were defined earlier as a role that individuals devise for themselves as occupants of a particular social position (McCall and Simmons, 1978). In every social interaction an individual must make claim to some kind of role identity. However, specific personal and institutional contexts constrain one's performance by setting the parameters and the content of a role-identity that one is able to perform. Thus the content of a person's role-identity provides criteria for appraising one's own performance at the same time as one must adjust to the social responses of others (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Depending upon the situation (i.e. the specific questions asked of her), during the early stages of Homolka's testimony during Bernardo's trial, she appears to alternate her presentation of self as a 'battered wife/victim' with her earlier presentation of self as a 'naive, innocent young girl'.

As the trial continued, however, Homolka appeared to blend these two role identities together to form a more consistent and more socially acceptable presentation of self. Thus Homolka did not just play one role identity but incorporated certain role identities into each social interaction depending upon the social situation and the social reaction of others (Lindesmith and Strauss, 1956). Specifically, Homolka appears to have taken this action to fit the new social context created by discovery of the videotapes. Thus, during her early interactions at the trial, Homolka adjusted her role identity of 'innocent' to include aspects of 'battered wife' thereby creating the most effective and most preferred presentation of self possible. For example, during Bernardo's trial a photo is shown where,

Bernardo is seen having intercourse with Homolka from behind. A rope of some sort is tied around her neck. She then described what her lover had in his right hand. 'He's holding a knife to my head,' she said. Houlahan then asked why she is smiling in many of the photographs. 'Looking happy for the camera, also partly because I

was also happy at the time, I believe,' she replied (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A1a).

McCall and Simmons (1978) have theorized that role identities can be either tightly or loosely related and organized in a prominence hierarchy. Since the public had already complimented Homolka's 'naive, innocent young girl' identity with the identity of 'battered wife/victim', Homolka was able to play each of these role identities in a corresponding manner and juggle her presentation of self according to the situation at hand. More important, given the overwhelming public support of this social identity for her, she was able to accept and merge the role identity of 'battered wife/victim' more easily as part of her role identity repertoire. Once the videotapes were released, her torture and sexual abuse of the three young women became a public reality and her identity a 'naive, young girl' became even more difficult for others to believe. To gain a more satisfactory presentation of self, she had to find another more socially acceptable identity. The role identity of 'battered wife/victim' created for her by others offered her a viable alternative. As the trial proceeded, however, and more and more evidence about her on sexual abuse of the three young women was revealed, the 'victim' role identity became more prominent. The social characteristics of victimhood offered a stronger explanation for her involvement in these crimes and a more satisfactory presentation of self.

As noted previously, the 'battered wife/victim' identity became more evident as the trial of Paul Bernardo proceeded. Homolka began her testimony against ex-husband Paul Bernardo by offering the role identity of a 'naive, innocent young girl' and slowly moderating it with the 'battered wife/victim' role identity. For example, Homolka described to the court that "I was physically attracted to him... he has this magnetism. It sounds stupid, but the night I first met him, I knew I was going to marry him. It's like, this power he has over women. He just draws them to him. It's his personality. He's very charming" (The Toronto Star, June 20 1995; p.A9b).

Later, however, Homolka told the court how much she was in love with him and that she continued to stay with him while being abused in hopes that he would eventually change.

The above examples demonstrate how Homolka's role identities changed positions of hierarchy and became intertwined during her testimony as she presented herself to the court. Homolka continued to present the earlier role identity of a 'naive, innocent young girl' through words such as "physically attracted to him" and "he's very charming" at the same time as she introduced her other role identity of a 'victim' in the use of words such as "he has this magnetism" and "It's like, this power he has over women". The combined effect was the presentation of self as an innocent woman who could not defend herself against this man and, hence, had become a 'victim' of his control.

Media reports of Homolka's explanation of why she could not leave Bernardo also reveal a strong interconnection between the role identities of 'naive, innocent, young girl' and 'battered wife/victim'. For example, one media report of her testimony claims "she endured his beatings and physical abuse during their courtship, but never left because of her love for him and the hope things would get better" (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A1a). Such reports indicate how the press integrated also her early identity of a 'naive, innocent, young girl' who was so in love Paul Bernardo with the later more socially acceptable 'battered wife/victim' identity in explanations of both the physical and verbal abuse she had endured. Thus, Homolka described their courtship to be normal, "He treated me like a princess... like I was the only girl in the world" (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A1a) as part of her reason for staying with Bernardo after she had learned of his crimes.

In contrast, after the videotapes were released, the media reported that while on the stand, "Homolka occasionally dabbed her eyes as she painted a self-portrait of a battered woman,

dominated by an abusive husband” (The Toronto Star, July 15, 1995; p.A1). This presentation of self appears to have become more prominent than the ‘naive, innocent young girl’ identity previously offered in support of her plea bargain.

Notably, in a letter sent to a friend during Bernardo’s trial, Homolka suggested that her friend read the books The battered woman and Perfect victim. Homolka also wrote in the same letter,

I’ve highlighted the parts that are directly applicable to me. It's frightening to know there are so many of these men out there. But it's also a relief to know that I’m not the only one who has ever gone through this ...I really, really hope that this article, the books... help you understand more. I don’t know if you’re following the media coverage at all. If not, watching it when the doctors testify may help even more (referring to expected testimony of psychiatrists) (The Toronto Star, August 2, 1995; p.A8).

The content of this letter indicates that her enactment of the role identity of a ‘battered wife/victim’ offered Homolka a mechanism for presenting herself in a more favourable manner. Specifically, she places herself in the social context of ‘normal’ in her statements that ‘it’s frightening to know there are so many of these men out there. But it’s also a relief to know that I’m not the only one.’”

Because the discovery of the videotapes made her role identity of a ‘naive, innocent young girl’ even more unacceptable to the public, Homolka appeared to modify her presentation of self to gain stronger social acceptance and the ‘battered wife/victim’ role identity became higher in her prominence hierarchy. For instance, on the witness stand, she described the sexual requests Bernardo would ask of her and how she did not want to perform these acts until he made her. Homolka noted,

He wanted me to perform fellatio and I didn’t want to... He stopped caring about what I wanted sexually. It was all for him. Anal sex was next on his list of sexual demands... He told me because I wasn’t a virgin, this would be a way of making it up

to him. He used it as a threat. He knew it was painful and I didn't like it (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A1a).

Such presentations of self place the role identity of 'victim' in a more prominent position than the one of 'naive/innocent.' Moreover, Homolka's presentation of self as a woman who was sexually abused emphasizes her claim that she would never commit a sexual assault unless she was forced into it because she knew what it was like to be sexually assaulted.

Homolka also presented self as 'victim' on the stand when she provided explicit details of the verbal and physical abuse she suffered from Bernardo. She testified that Bernardo often called her names, referred to her as stupid, ordered her to say "My name is Karla and I'm a 17-year-old cunt" (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p. A1a). These descriptions of verbal abuse were strengthened her descriptions of the physical beatings that she suffered from her husband. For example, Homolka testified that Bernardo would constantly beat her, he would cut her, throw knives at her (one time just missing her head), beat her with a flashlight "because his fists hurt from hitting her so much" and would continually target "favourite spots: the chest, head and upper arms" (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A1a). These accounts of extreme abuse strengthened her presentation of self as a 'battered wife/victim'. Specifically, the powerful images created by these accounts emphasized Homolka's 'victim' identity more than her 'battered wife' identity and supported her placement in that social category more strongly (Hewitt, 2007).

The prosecuting attorney questioned Homolka at great length about why she didn't leave Bernardo or help the victims escape. Consistent with her presentation of self as a victim, her responses to these questions drew upon 'victim' stereotypes. Homolka described herself as suffering from low self-esteem and needing to be loved (The Toronto Star, June 20, 1995; p.A1). Similarly, she explained that she did not attempt to free Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French

because she was frightened of Paul. When she was asked by the defence why she had ignored Mahaffy's pleas, Homolka replied, "I didn't feel that I was able to help her ... Because I was too afraid of Paul" (The Toronto Star, June 23, 1995; p.A1). In this manner, Homolka portrayed her inability to save the victims as the result of being in an abusive situation herself and justified her involvement in the crimes with descriptions of her own victimhood.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have highlighted how media reports of Homolka show her transforming her hierarchy of role identities in response to others' perceptions of her participation in the sexual assault and murder of three young women. At the beginning of the case, Homolka is shown presenting the identity of a 'naive, innocent, young girl' who had minimal involvement in Bernardo's crimes. As Bernardo's trial proceeded, interactions with her lawyer, members of the criminal justice system and the psychologists and psychiatrists who had to evaluate her behaviour provided her with, a strong awareness of the social identity of 'battered wife/ victim.' This new identity complimented her established 'naive/innocent' identity and she was able to integrate it easily as part of her role identity repertoire. Finally, toward the end of her testimony at Bernardo's trial, Homolka appeared to suppress many of the characteristics of 'battered wife' and drew more strongly on the characteristics of 'victim.' Specifically, after the videotapes were revealed, she drew upon the role identity of 'victim' more often when responding to specific questions on why she had remained with Bernardo and what involvement she had in the crimes. The close similarity of characteristics existing among these three role identities meant that each one complimented the other and the transformation of Homolka's role identity hierarchy was facilitated. Depending upon the situation and the types of questions asked of her, she could move

quickly from one role identity to another thereby maintaining a more satisfactory presentation of self.

These identity transformations were not created in isolation. At the beginning of the chapter, I noted that early in the case, many people did not believe that, as a woman, Homolka was capable of committing a sexually violent crime. Specifically, as events of the case unfolded and the 'naive, innocent young girl' identity became less socially acceptable, significant others complimented Homolka's presentation of self by calling upon the social identity of 'battered wife/victim.' This identity also offered the public at large a plausible explanation of her crimes in terms of traditional female gender roles. Additionally, the legal discourse and the media portrayals of Homolka during her trial created a social context that made it possible for Homolka to reposition these role identities and, eventually, present a stronger 'victim' identity that minimized her personal responsibility in the torture and deaths of Leslie Mahaffy, and Kristen French.

As media reports of Homolka show her adapting and modifying her presentation of self and her role identity hierarchy in response to the discovery of the videotapes and the public's reaction to them, a new process of identity formation emerged. The next chapter discusses this identity transformation process through its examination of combating identities, that is, the competition existing over others' assignment of the social identities of 'mad' and 'evil' to Homolka and her attempt to present self as 'rehabilitated'.

Combating Identities

This chapter focuses on the theoretical concept of ‘combating’ identities that emerged in my grounded theory analysis of media reports on Karla Homolka after she was sent to prison. In this chapter I examine the concept of ‘combating’ identities through a discussion of three major identities (i.e. ‘mad’, self as ‘rehabilitating’ and ‘evil’) presented in media accounts of Karla Homolka. My analysis begins with the description of the ‘mad’ identity, an identity assigned to Homolka by various significant others who are quoted in the media, after the discovery of the videotapes. The second identity is the ‘self as rehabilitated,’ an identity that Homolka presents during her term in prison. As additional information about her life in prison is revealed and Homolka’s pending release approaches, the media publishes accounts that ‘combat’ her ‘rehabilitated’ identity with an identity of ‘evil.’ This ‘evil’ identity is assigned to her by various significant others (i.e. family members of victims, public opinion pieces, psychologists, and the parole board) who express fear and anger over her original sentence and her potential release. Unlike the theoretical concept of ‘complimenting’ identities, little similarity exists between the personal identity of ‘rehabilitated’ that Homolka presents and the social identity of ‘evil’ assigned to her by others. Additionally, the identity of ‘evil’ is composed of such negative traits that it is not an identity that anyone would easily accept. My analysis reveals a ‘combating’ identity transformation process whereby Homolka’s personal identity offering of ‘rehabilitated’ is opposed by the social identity assignment of ‘evil’ and the evil identity becomes the dominant public view of Homolka.

Theoretically, the social process of combating identities occurs when others fail to accept an individual’s presented identity and cast the individual into an identity that they believe to be

more appropriate to the given social situation. However, any individual who has been cast into an 'unwanted' identity can also 'combat' that identity by seeking a more socially acceptable identity that offers a more favourable presentation of self (Goffman, 1959). In the case at hand, this social process began soon after the discovery of the videotapes when significant others (e.g. parole board, general public, psychologists) began to question their previous acceptance of Homolka's identity announcements as a 'battered wife/victim' and began to define her as 'mad.'

The social process of 'combating' identities revealed through the grounded theory approach used in my data analysis incorporates two stages of social identity construction. First, others must recognize previously presented identities, acknowledge those identities as socially acceptable, and alter those identities in favour of identities deemed more suitable to subsequent information learned about the person. Second, the new social identity applied must be an identity that the person is not able to easily integrate as a part of his or her role identity repertoire because that new identity threatens a satisfactory presentation of self. A 'combating process occurs between the individual and others over which identity will be socially acceptable.

Media reports published after the discovery of the videotapes indicate that others' assessed and responded to Homolka's presentation self as 'battered wife/victim' by defining her as 'mad.' During her early time in prison Homolka appears to acknowledge this 'mad' identity and take aspects of it (i.e. the need for therapy and educational workshops) to reconstruct self as 'rehabilitated'. To cite Goffman (1959), being aware of others and having the ability to continuously observe, reflect upon, and consider others' perspectives of her behaviour, Homolka seems to have adapted her behaviour to gain social acceptability within this new social environment. In other words, within the confines of prison life, the 'rehabilitated' identity offered a more favourable presentation of self than that of 'mad' woman.

Social acceptance of Homolka's presentation of self as 'rehabilitated' began to collapse after the media released photos of her partying in prison. Others' responded to what they considered to be inappropriate behaviour (i.e. a non-repentant woman who was enjoying her prison experience). In the eyes of others, Homolka had not been reformed and her identity of 'rehabilitated' was unacceptable. For example, one media article reported individuals' reactions to Homolka's jail party, "It doesn't look like she has paid for the crime, I'm a little outraged. It almost looks like she is having fun... It upsets me a lot, if you look at the picture, it could be taken at any bar... Their clothes don't make them appear to be prisoners... Karla's having a wonderful life (The Standard, September 23, 2000; p.A1). It was then that the media began portraying her as 'evil' and ultimately, a 'mad' woman. These identities tended to match public perceptions of her crimes and her subsequent actions as a woman who appeared to be unremorseful by laughing and having fun in prison.

'Mad' as a Social Identity

The discovery of the videotapes depicting the torture of Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French and Tammy Homolka revealed that Homolka was more involved in these sexually violent crimes than the public had originally thought. In response, significant others began to reassess Homolka's presentation of self as a 'young, naive, battered wife/victim.' None of these identities included a set of characteristics that could adequately explain the types of sexual abuse and violence perpetrated by Homolka on the tapes. Criminal justice experts (psychiatrists, lawyers, prison staff) began referring to her as 'mad' and she was offered extensive psychiatric care while in prison. The social identity of a 'mad' woman offered a way of including the symptoms of battered spouse syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder previously assigned to her while, at

the same time, explaining criminal behaviour that deviated so strongly from appropriate gender norms. Notably, these new identity assessments relied strongly on traditional female gender role stereotypes. In fact, the identities of 'mad' and 'evil' correspond closely with social identities that are often used to explain female criminal behaviour (Ballinger 1996; Kendall 1991; Singer et al. 1995; Walklate 1995; Dell 2001).

Similar to the process involved in the transformation of complimenting identities, understanding the process of combating identity assignment includes consideration of social context. The 'mad' identity presents a woman's violence as an action caused by some biological flaw, whether that flaw is raging hormones, premenstrual syndrome, or some mental illness (Ballinger 1996; Kendall 1991; Singer et al. 1995; Walklate 1995; Dell 2001). As such, the social identity of 'mad' woman gave the public at large a "pre-packaged" appraisal of Homolka that explained her torture and sexual abuse of the three young girls through a standard lens of female criminal behaviour.

The groundwork for beginning to stereotype Homolka as 'mad' can be seen during Paul Bernardo's trial after the videotapes were discovered and Dr. Chris Hatcher testified that Homolka suffered from battered spouse syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder. The media described Dr. Hatcher's testimony in the following manner:

Battered women often suffer memory loss of traumatic events, but detail can gradually surface over time... The phenomenon is a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, which women who live in an abusive relationship suffer. The stress disorder, which is triggered by a traumatic event, can lead to depression, stomach problems and headaches... A woman living in an abusive relationship could forget some events she endured, but would eventually remember, sometime quite suddenly...a woman forced to have sex with her sibling was consistent with the post-traumatic stress disorder. That a woman in that situation would pretend afterward to be happy about what she did, but only to avoid further beatings from her spouse. In a battered woman's situation there is a need to avoid future battering experiences. The ordeal would leave a woman with low self-esteem and a feeling of being

‘contaminated’. Staying in abusive relationship is an extremely onerous moral choice that most people find hard to understand (The Toronto Star, August 12, 1995; p. A7).

Dr. Hatcher assessed Homolka’s inability to remember her sexual assault of Jane Doe as a ‘symptom’ of psychological disturbance. This diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder laid a foundation for others to construct a ‘mad’ identity for Homolka during her initial time in prison. According to Dr. Hatcher, Karla Homolka was suffering from stress and abuse at the hands of Paul Bernardo. Dr. Hatcher then medicalized Homolka during his explanation of her actions in the sexual assaults, by labelling her as an extremely abused wife who exhibited the psychiatric symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. In this way, Dr. Hatcher called upon the stereotype of female ‘madness’ to explain how a woman could sexually torture other women, especially, her own sister. He used that stereotype to explain Homolka’s violence in a manner that helped the audience understand her involvement in these crimes in standard normative terms.

Similar to Dr. Hatcher, other psychiatrists and psychologists who examined Homolka concluded “there was virtually incontrovertible evidence that Karla Homolka was a severely battered spouse” and some experts said “she’d been so severely tortured, physically, mentally and sexually, by Bernardo she became the psychological equivalent of a slave or prisoner of war” (The St.Catharine’s Standard, June 13, 1998; p. A1). Media reports of these assessments created a situation where Homolka’s violent acts became classified more and more in terms of medical diagnoses. This process of media medicalization made Homolka’s violence appear less threatening in the public mind. It served to minimize her culpability in the crimes and alleviate public anxiety that ‘normal’ women were not capable of these types of acts (Myers and Wight, 1996). In conclusion, she must be ‘mad.’

Dr. Hatcher's testimony supported the social designation of a 'mad' woman because it also explained Homolka's ability to carry on with a normal life during the time period between the murders of all of the victims. Dr. Hatcher testified, "that battered women will often attempt to carry on a normal daily routine, even though they are engaging in 'bizarre behaviour' in order to make themselves feel they are no different from the rest of society" (The Toronto Star, August 12, 1995; p, A7). By explaining that a woman suffering from battered spouse syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder will engage in 'bizarre behaviour' for a prolonged period, Dr. Hatcher normalized Homolka's involvement in these crimes as a 'mad' woman who did not fully realize the enormity of her acts.

The criminal justice system appeared to agree with Dr. Hatcher's view that Homolka was in need of medical treatment/therapy. While in Kingston Prison for Women, she was offered therapy and psychological counselling. When Kingston Prison for Women closed and Homolka needed to be transferred to another prison, criminal justice officials decided to send her to Joliette prison (dubbed Club Fed) in Quebec, "a new \$12-million prison that stresses rehabilitation over punishment" (The Standard, June 12, 1997; A.1). To quote media reports, Joliette had "no armed guards, no watchtowers, no steel bars and no bedtime. Homolka must be in her room by 10:30 p.m. but can go to sleep whenever she wants. She can hang curtains or venetian blinds on her windows; sit on her balcony or under one of the dozens of trees surrounding the complex" (The Standard, June 12, 1997; A.1).

As the quote above demonstrates the criminal justice system did not consider Homolka to be a threat or else she would have been placed in a higher security prison instead of a medium security prison. Since this new prison stressed rehabilitation, it appears that members of the criminal justice system accepted the 'mad' identity assigned to her by the psychiatric

community. Despite concrete evidence revealing her involvement in the torture and sexual assaults of Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French, and Tammy Homolka on the videotapes, she was deemed to be in need of treatment much more than in need of harsh punishment.

The Importance of Social Context and Traditional Female Scripts

The social identity assignment of ‘mad’ woman became evident in my data after the videotapes were discovered. During that time period, significant members of the psychiatric medical community began to describe Homolka in terms such as ‘suffering from depression,’ ‘having low self-esteem,’ ‘feeling contaminated’ and ‘pretending to be happy.’ In contrast, during his trial, Paul Bernardo admitted his guilt to the sexual assaults but denied that he had murdered the victims and claimed that Karla Homolka had killed them. Paul Bernardo’s lawyer also attempted to expose Homolka’s identity as a woman capable of committing murder. For example, the defence referred to Homolka as a “black widow” a spider that devours her mate (The Standard, April 19, 2000; p. A1). To quote Rosen,

She is ranked among the top 2 percent of the population in intelligence...She had sex with Bernardo within two hours of meeting him... After leaving Bernardo, she had plenty of opportunity to tell authorities about the killings, but didn’t. Early on, she knew police were anxious to talk to her but she delayed the interview and went out partying. She picked up a man and had sex with him that day. When she finally talked to police - for four hours - she made no mention of the abduction and sex slaying of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy, and the assault and death of her sister Tammy (The Toronto Star, July 5, 1995; p.A1).

In this quote, Bernardo’s lawyer tried to combat the ‘mad’ woman identity by portraying Homolka as the exact opposite. He described her as an intelligent, sexually independent person who was capable of murdering three young women. The defence’s tactics did not work. Bernardo was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. In comparison, Homolka received the twelve-year prison sentence achieved during her plea bargain.

If we look at the social context by which women's criminal behaviour is defined, we can see why Bernardo's lawyers were unable to change others' perceptions of Homolka. As previously noted, female criminal behaviour is socially constructed as the product of a biological flaw. Bernardo's lawyer could not combat Dr. Hatcher's testimony because Hatcher offered a conceptualization of Homolka and her behaviour that followed traditional female roles and was, in consequence, more socially acceptable to both the court and the public at large. Homolka was not perceived as a murderer because she closely fit the definition of a 'mad' woman who, due to her mental illness, could not be held fully accountable for her participation in these crimes.

This definition of the situation was supported by media presentations of Homolka occupying a secondary position in relationship to Paul Bernardo. For example, when referring to the sexual assaults and murders of the victims the newspaper accounts referred to Homolka as "ex-wife of killer Paul Bernardo"; "Helped her ex-husband rape and murder"; "Married couple sexually assaulting"; "Paul Bernardo's accomplice"; "Her role". The language used by the media highlighted Homolka as the less culpable of the two. Her participation in the crimes became diminished by her position as Bernardo's marriage partner and, hence, his subordinate. Significantly, the vocabulary used in the press to describe Homolka fit the traditional rules and norms of action for the situation, that is, normal women do not perform such violent acts (Mills, 1940). By drawing upon this vocabulary, the media reinforced the belief that without Paul Bernardo initiating the crimes, Homolka would have not committed sexual assault or participate in another's murder.

Another example of the language used to describe the Homolka's crimes came from Jacques Belanger an employee of Corrections Canada, who told the paper, "I [he] don't know of a lady that's committed such a terrible crime" (The Standard, April 25, 2000; p.A1). This quote

illustrates the disbelief that members of the public felt when trying to understand how a woman could commit sexual assaults and murders, especially against three young Caucasian teenage girls. Including a quote like this one from a man who had intimate knowledge of criminal behaviour supported the perception that Homolka was not entirely like other criminals. She must, therefore, be 'mad.'

To summarize, even after the videotapes of Homolka's participation in the torture and sexual abuse were revealed, the media presented her crimes in reference to a social identity described to them by significant others (e.g. the psychiatric community, criminal justice authorities) and through its perception of the normative patterns of expectations (Mills, 1940) occurring in 'abnormal' couple relationships (e.g. battered spouse syndrome). It also accepted and presented the traditional female gender role expectations provided in others' explanations of her behaviour in relationship to Bernardo when they were not engaged in these criminal activities (i.e. she carried on with a normal life). From this perspective, she was defined as participating in the torture and sexual abuse of the three girls because she was vulnerable to men such as Paul Bernardo and suffered from battered spouse syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). Given this stance, Homolka became designated in both the media and in the public mind as a 'mad' woman. As can be seen in the next section, Homolka appeared to be unwilling to completely accept the 'mad' identity cast upon her but entered a combative process of identity transformation in prison whereby she tried to gain a more favourable presentation of self as 'rehabilitated.'

Self as 'Rehabilitated'

Previous research on prison life reveals a pattern of interaction whereby prisoners must cooperate with the criminal justice system if they are to gain any personal advantage from being incarcerated (Lloyd, 1995). During Homolka's prison term of twelve years, we can see her engaged in similar actions. For example, she took university courses and attended psychiatric sessions. These actions present the identity of a person who is becoming 'rehabilitated' and 'bettering self'.

In similar process of presenting self as a battered wife or victim, the identity of 'rehabilitated' also appears to have become a part of Homolka's role identity repertoire taking a position of prominence in her role identity hierarchy. For example, Homolka incorporated others' descriptions of her as 'mad' in her statements about how she was going to therapy and taking courses to 'better herself' when released from prison.

Since Homolka was still in prison at the time that others assigned the 'mad' identity to her, she was not able to negate it entirely. She needed to cooperate and be compliant if wished to combat this more unattractive and devalued identity and replace it with another, more socially acceptable one (Goffman, 1959, 1974). Slowly, however, reports of Homolka's actions in the press reveal a process in which she can be seen trying to replace the negative identity of 'mad' with the more socially valued identity of 'rehabilitated.' This attempt at identity transformation involved a process of combating components of the socially imposed identity of a 'mad' woman. For example, the media reported, "while in prison Homolka earned a degree in psychology and had completed programs on self-esteem, anger management, improving her inner self and surviving abuse and trauma" (The Standard, November 3, 1999; p.A1). These types of reports

highlight all the different courses and educational options that Homolka had completed in prison in combating the social designation of 'mad' and reconstructing self as 'rehabilitated.'

Significantly, Homolka did not seem to relinquish early role identities but incorporated all of her prior identities into her prominence hierarchy of role identities calling upon the identity most likely to gain a more satisfactory presentation of self in each particular social situation. Similar to Charmaz's (1991) study of chronic illness, media reports indicate that Homolka controlled her presentation of self to maximize her sense of self-worth, especially during her struggle to combat her 'mad' identity and in her assignment of it to a low position of role identity prominence. Charmaz (1991) describes patients who maximize self-worth by keeping their illness in the background, rather than in the foreground, of their lives (p.45). In a similar manner, Homolka can be seen to control her presentation of self by keeping the crimes she committed in the background and presenting the 'rehabilitated' person she had become. Thus, for example, a newspaper article included wording taken from Homolka's application for early release: "I learned to get rid of my mistrust, self-doubt and defence mechanisms... I am now completely in touch with my inner feelings. My self-esteem is quite high and I am fairly easily able to deal with confrontation" (The Standard, November 3, 1999; p.A1). In other words, she may have possessed 'mad' characteristics but she presents herself as having combated these characteristics through therapy and being 'rehabilitated.'

Notably, media reports of Homolka's behaviour indicate that she also appeared to create a role identity prominence hierarchy in relation to time. Thus, early reports in the case indicated that Homolka presented self as a 'naive, innocent girl' who was too much in love with Bernardo. This identity fell in prominence behind the 'victim' identity after the discovery of the videotapes. During her time in prison, she appears to give her identity of 'rehabilitated' self a higher position

of prominence than the ‘mad’ identity assigned to her by significant others. Her identity of ‘rehabilitated’ self had to include reference to her past experiences of naive innocence and abuse, however, at the same time as it opposed her incarceration because being rehabilitated requires possession of characteristics in need of reform.

Homolka’s enactment of these role identities were not isolated but rather intertwined to form an overall presentation of self as a ‘rehabilitated’ person. Within all social interactions, an individual must adhere to the moral contract that stems from societal values, act in good faith, and not misrepresent oneself (Goffman, 1959; Rosenberg, 2009). Homolka’s identity as ‘rehabilitated’ fit the moral contract required for prison release. Since Homolka’s audience (i.e. media, the police, the lawyers and the general public) had cast her into a ‘mad’ identity, she had to combat that identity to maintain a satisfactory presentation of self at the same time as she sought freedom. By enacting the role identity of ‘rehabilitated,’ Homolka could acquire a way of combating the ‘mad’ identity and maintain a more satisfactory presentation of self. For example, The Standard reported that Homolka said “the survivors-of-abuse program helps her deal ‘with the physical, sexual and psychological abuse that I (Homolka) suffered’” (November 4, 1999; p.A1). Here Homolka can be seen to combat the ‘mad’ identity by complimenting her “rehabilitated” identity with her ‘victim’ identity to present self in a positive way (Hewitt, 2007).

Another example of how Homolka gained social affirmation for this new identity can be seen in her mother’s interview with the media. Dorothy Homolka states, “She’s matured—grown as a person. She has a lot more insight into how and why this happened” (The Standard, November 4, 1999; p. A1). Media publications of statements of support made by a woman who knew her intimately (i.e. her mother) and could tell if she was ‘faking it’ gave public credibility to Homolka’s presentation of self as ‘rehabilitated.’

In sum, to create a more agreeable life in prison and gain suitable release, Homolka had to adhere to societal values and present an identity that fit with the moral contract of the public at large, a public which does not condone the sexual abuse, tortures and murder of teenage girls. To do this, media reports of Homolka's behaviour in prison indicates she constructed a hierarchy of role identities (e.g. naive/battered wife/victim/rehabilitated person) that she could draw upon to alleviate her culpability in these crimes. Homolka's imprisonment meant she could not ignore or fully deny the 'mad' identity assigned to her when she was sentenced. Because this identity carries few social and personal rewards, placing it in a very low position of prominence in her role identity hierarchy was advantageous. The structure of prison reform offered her a way of combating her 'mad' identity because it incorporated an aspect of needing therapy. By enrolling in therapy and furthering her education, she would be able to create a new, more socially acceptable identity of 'rehabilitated' person. This tactic was undermined, however, when the media released photos of Homolka partying in prison, at the same time as the public at large began to realize she might be eligible for early release.

"Evil" as a Social Identity

Toward the end of Homolka's imprisonment, public frustration and anger grew over her eventual release and the plea bargain she had made. Many significant others (i.e. media; parole board; psychologists and the public) expressed outrage over the fact that there would not be any kind of parole supervision for her, especially in light of the lifestyle portrayed in pictures released by the media of Homolka enjoying herself in prison and reports of her sexual affairs. The identity of 'evil' began to be assigned to her. This identity served to 'combat' the social identity of 'mad,' and, hence, not entirely responsible for her crimes. It also offered a stark

contrast to, Homolka's presentation of self as a 'naive, innocent victim' who had been 'rehabilitated'.

In my data, the social identity assignment of 'evil' is connected to the public's awareness of the videotapes of the sexual assaults; a picture of Homolka celebrating a birthday in prison; knowledge of her having a lesbian relationship; and information about her having an affair with another inmate who was convicted for murdering his girlfriend. It was a social identity that became more apparent in media publications just before Homolka was to be released and appears to stem from the public's fear of its lack of control over her future behaviour.

The identity of 'evil' is based on the assumption that a woman's violent act stems from her inability to be a 'real' woman (Ballinger, 1996; Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007). In response to the information released by the media about Homolka's personal life in prison, others began to express comments relating to her failure to fulfill the gender role expectations of, being passive, nurturing, non-sexual and non-aggressive (Ballinger, 1996; Abramovitz, 1988; Denov, 2004). Significantly, part of being a 'real' woman is to be nurturing and Homolka's failure to protect innocent teenage girls was emphasized by Homolka's failure to protect her own sister. In combination with the sexual and violent nature of her crimes, Homolka's prison behaviour of 'rehabilitation' came to be viewed by others as a mask for her true identity as an 'evil' woman.

The social assignment of an 'evil' identity combated both the 'rehabilitated' and 'mad' identity presented by Homolka in prison. As previously noted, Homolka created a 'rehabilitated' identity from the 'mad' identity assigned to her by others. Within prison walls, this identity offered a more satisfactory presentation of self and more social and physical rewards during her imprisonment. Although these two identities were often in conflict (i.e. Homolka tended to present herself as 'rehabilitated') they could not be totally separated because the need to be

rehabilitated stems from the possession of socially undesirable traits. Therefore both became part of the role identity hierarchy upon which Homolka could draw in her social interactions with various others (i.e. media, parole board, psychologists and the general public). Notably, as will be demonstrated below, the social designation of 'evil' created a situation where Homolka can be seen to engage in a social process of drawing upon her entire role identity hierarchy to combat this extremely detrimental one.

Homolka's presentation of self as a 'naive, innocent victim' who had been 'rehabilitated' was not accepted by the parole board. For example, late in Homolka's prison term, when consideration of her early release was reviewed by the parole board, the board denied her request stating, she "still considers herself a victim and that attitude is part of the reason she remains behind bars" (The Standard, January 5, 2004; p. A2). This statement demonstrates how Homolka's presentation of self as 'victim' and 'rehabilitated' may have been acknowledged previously but were no longer validated by the social responses of others, in particular, members of the criminal justice system who could determine her future fate.

On the basis of their assessments of Homolka's partying and her sexual behaviour in prison, the parole board concluded, if she "were released now, she could commit a crime involving 'the death or serious harm' to another person before the end of her sentence" (The Standard, January 5, 2004; p.A2). The parole board 'combated' Homolka's presented self as 'rehabilitated' and labelled her as dangerous, even though she had not been considered a 'dangerous offender' at her sentencing. In fact, the 'dangerous offender' label did not appear in any media accounts until the end of Homolka's prison sentence when she was eligible for parole.

This change in labels by parole board members who are quoted in the media suggests that through time, as new events surrounding the case were revealed, others' perceptions of

Homolka had also changed. Thus, for example, the media reported, “Homolka’s crimes were qualified as ‘monstrous and depraved’” and “demonstrates clearly your [Homolka] difficulty in controlling your violent sexual impulses to the point of putting in danger, the safety of other” (The Standard, March 9, 2001; p.A1).

At this point in the case, the parole board considered Homolka as a public danger and recognized her as playing a more active role in the crimes than previously thought. The parole board members had entered into a process of evaluating and denying (i.e. combating’) all of the identities that Homolka presented and cast her into the social category of ‘dangerous,’ ‘monstrous,’ and ‘depraved.’ A process of ‘combating’ identities had begun between Homolka and significant others whereby Homolka’s previous presentations of self (i.e. ‘victim’, ‘rehabilitated’ and ‘mad’) were now completely denied and the ‘evil’ social identity began to be applied.

Significantly, the psychiatric community contributed to this new identity assignment. Homolka had been re-evaluated by psychiatrists and psychologists in prison and these reports were given to the parole board. According to one of these psychological reports published in the media, Homolka was described “as an intelligent person, polite, courteous, but superficial... with a tendency to control” (The St.Catharine’s Standard, March 9, 2001; p.A1).

In response to this psychological report, the parole board stated, “Homolka had no immediately identifiable ‘mental or physical sickness” (The St.Catharine’s Standard, March 9, 2001; p.A1). These new ‘facts’ of the case combated both the social identity of ‘mad’ woman and Homolka’s rehabilitated identity as a woman suffering from battered spouse syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder. In response, another explanation was needed for Homolka’s crimes. The process of transforming her into an ‘evil’ person had begun.

Furthering this formation of an 'evil' identity, Dr. Menzies, the main author of the psychological report, assessed Homolka,

she [Homolka] is narcissistic, emotionally superficial, self-centered 'somewhat entitled individual', with limited insight and empathy, minimal understanding of the dynamics of her offences... she probably suffered from some form of post traumatic stress disorder or battered spouse syndrome but it is not clear when symptoms arose ... I believe that in the circumstances and considering the gravity of the offences, it is important to err on the side of caution (The Standard, June 3, 2005; p.A2).

Dr. Menzies' assessment undermined Homolka's portrayal of self as a mentally ill woman whose violence could be explained through her sickness. After this 'official' denial of her 'madness' in the press, it became much easier for others to 'combat' the 'mad' identity and reconstruct Homolka as 'evil' and 'monstrous'.

Dr. Menzies' report also 'combated' the 'mad' portrayal of Homolka through an identity transformation process in which he publically acknowledged and drew into question previously constructed identities (i.e. 'victim' and 'mad'). During this process, he used personal reputations and stereotypes (McCall and Simmons, 1978). For example, Homolka's personal reputation was used to show that she was not remorseful, that she was a narcissistic and intelligent woman who should be capable of understanding the magnitude of her crimes. From this perspective, Homolka no longer appeared to have suffered from battered spouse syndrome or posttraumatic stress disorder, or, if she ever did, one could not tell if it was actually the result of Bernardo's behaviour. More important, Dr. Menzies' report questioned the 'mad' identity attributed to Homolka in an authoritative language that could be used by the public to 'combat' Homolka's presentation of her other role identities and construct an 'evil' identity for her.

The press also contributed to the social construction of the 'evil' identity through its release of photos of Homolka partying in prison and having romantic relations with others, especially a lesbian and another man who had been convicted of murder. Public reaction to the

pictures was extremely negative and members of the community began to question Homolka's presentation of self as 'rehabilitated,' and to refer to her as an 'evil' person. Consequently, when Homolka claimed to be 'bettering self,' the media combated her claims with suggestions that she was having fun in prison and had no remorse for her crimes (i.e. she was having fun rather than mourning the death of the girls).

Importance of Social Context and Traditional Female Scripts

Notably, Paul Bernardo was no longer attached to Homolka's name when the media reported on her. Although earlier articles had referred to Homolka as 'his accomplice,' now the media referred to her individually and described her role in the crimes with more detail. Homolka was also portrayed in these articles as one of many 'evil' women "disorderly because of their evilness, such as in the case of witches in the Middle Ages. Disorderly because criminal women deviate from appropriate gender norms. Disorderly because of their horrible deeds, such as in the cases of homicide and conjugal homicide" (Frigon, 1996 p.79). As such, the media cast Homolka into a role that denied her agency and reified gender stereotypes and subordination (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007).

The social designation of 'evil' was solidified through media publications of public opinion editorials provided by members of the community at large. As Homolka's release date became more definite, a public outcry started to form and many members of the St.Catharine's community started to write public opinion articles that were printed in the newspaper. My analysis of this data revealed themes of manipulation, disbelief, never forgiving, needs to pay for her crimes, protection for children, and will receive God's justice. For example, one woman wrote, "Homolka manipulated the system to serve her needs, just as she manipulated her victims

to suit her sexual perversion” (The Standard, April 11, 2005; p.A6). Another citizen responded, “Homolka is extremely cunning; she duped the system. She made fools out of many people, and the biggest fool is Bernardo. They were equal in their sins” (The Standard, April 2, 2005; p.A10). In these submissions, Homolka stood alone, without Bernardo, as an active participant who should take personal blame for the crimes. The ‘mad’ woman identity had become unacceptable. Only ‘evil’ women can manipulate the system, make fools out of people or use others for sexual perversion. Homolka had become an ‘evil’ woman.

Assignment of the ‘evil’ social identity was especially evident in public opinion pieces that called for God’s justice to punish Homolka. One man wrote, “Everyone rest assured, God will administer his justice to Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo when it comes time to pay the piper, even if the justice system doesn’t” (The Standard, April 26, 2005; p.A5). This man contrasted implicit norms of good and evil in his statements that Homolka would receive the ultimate punishment. The criminal justice system may have failed to protect society from this ‘evil’ woman but not to worry God, the ultimate authority over good and evil, would have the final say.

Similar to other public opinion pieces, one concerned citizen wrote “she may be human, but she is not like us. We didn’t murder anyone... Her day of judgement will come” (The Standard, April 15, 2005; p.A6). Another man wrote, “I have a Jack Russell terrier who is a lot more human than Homolka is” (The Standard, May 2, 2005; p.A6).

Homolka had become much more than an evil person in the public mind. Her very humanity was drawn into question. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this vision of ‘inhumanity’ became the ultimate portrait of Homolka presented in the press and in the public mind after her release from prison.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted how significant others responded to Homolka's presentation of self as a 'victim' and a 'rehabilitated' person. Through a process of social designations after the videotapes were released, others' (i.e. psychologists, criminal justice system and the public) 'combated' Homolka's presentation of self as a 'victim' and socially constructed the 'mad' identity to explain her sexual abuse and torture of Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French, and Tammy Homolka. Homolka did not accept the assignment of this social identity entirely. Instead, while in prison, she took parts of the 'mad' identity, entered therapy, and presented self in a more favourable light by becoming 'rehabilitated'. Thus, Homolka added the 'rehabilitated' identity to her role identity repertoire. In fact, as her prison sentence continued, Homolka's original role identities of 'naive, innocent young, battered wife/victim' became less prominent and her role identity of 'rehabilitated' took a more prominent position

As time passed, others' responses to Homolka's presentation of self as 'rehabilitated' was influenced by their knowledge of her 'partying' behaviour in prison and her sexual affairs. Notably, realization of her release without any public constraint created latent concern over her future behaviour. Homolka was placed in a situation where others combated her 'rehabilitated' identity with the application of the more negative social identity of 'evil.' This 'evil' identity emerged as a response by the public to new definitions of her criminal behaviour by members of the criminal justice system and the medical community (e.g. the parole board, psychiatrists). It drew upon stereotypical images of 'evil women,' media public opinion pieces and letters written by community members.

When Homolka was released from prison, she became a 'free' woman without formal criminal constraint or parole regulation. She needed to adapt and modify her personal identity in response to this new status (Hewitt, 2007). Additionally, the community at large had to confront its latent fear that she might commit new crimes. A new transformation process of identity formation emerged. The next chapter discusses this identity transformation in terms of a process of 'rejecting' identities and the application of the social identity of 'subhuman' and 'not a mother'.

Rejecting Identities

This chapter focuses on the transformation process involved in ‘rejecting’ identities. The process of ‘rejecting’ identities is explored through a discussion of two major identities (‘normal woman’ and ‘subhuman’ not a ‘mother’) presented in the media in its discussions of Karla Homolka. The analysis begins with a description of the identity of a ‘normal’ woman that are presented in media reports of Homolka’s statements during a television interview after she had just been released from prison. The second identity of ‘subhuman’ not a ‘mother’ is then explored. This social identity emerged in my grounded theory analysis of quotes presented in the media of significant others, such as the victims’ families and their lawyer, and editorial pieces written by members of the general public concerning why they believed Homolka should not have been released from prison.

The concept of ‘rejecting’ identity encapsulates the social process involved when the personal and social identities offered for a specific individual are polar opposites and represent a rejection of one another. After Homolka was released from prison, she tries to present herself in a media interview as a ‘normal’ member of society. No longer under the control of the criminal justice system, she is able to ‘reject’ the previously imposed social identities of ‘rehabilitated’ and ‘evil.’ In response, others (e.g. media reporters and the public-at-large) reject the identity announcements of ‘normal’ made by Homolka and construct a new social identity (i.e. ‘subhuman’ and ‘not a woman’) for her. In this manner, the process of ‘rejecting’ identity occurs when a common definition of the situation cannot be found and both actors refuse to accept the identity position made by the other.

Similar to the social process involved with combating identities, rejecting identities illustrates self and identity as social products maintained through social connection with others and mutual appraisals of others' actions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Mead, 1934; Meltzer et.al., 1975). However, the process of 'combating' identities relied on Homolka's past socially constructed identities based on a common definition of the situation recognized and acknowledged by both Homolka and others. For example, despite the negative implications involved in accepting the 'mad' or 'evil' identity assigned to her by others, Homolka could not totally deny aspects of those identities if she was to gain a reasonable life in prison. In contrast, after being released from prison, Homolka no longer needed to cooperate with criminal justice officials and, could completely 'reject' the 'evil' identity previously assigned to her. She was able to construct a more pleasing sense of self without stipulation and try to present herself as a 'normal' person. In response, various significant others constructed a totally opposite identity for her, that is, 'subhuman'. These individuals appeared to consider Homolka's presentation of self as 'normal' to be so objectionable that they rejected this identity entirely.

To take an example, after her release from prison, Homolka participated in a CBC French-language network interview. This is the first time we hear Homolka speak openly about herself without the constraint of criminal justice supervision. During this interview, Homolka observed that "she was not the monster she'd been made out to be" (The Standard, July 5, 2005; p.A1) and people should not be afraid of her. She was 'normal' like other women. In making such statements, Homolka rejected others' identity claims that she was an 'evil' person who they needed to be protected from.

After the interview, the media reported, "When will they realize that she is a danger to anyone with whom she comes in contact? The children of our community will now live under the

shadow of fear, for no one will know where she is at any given point” (The Standard, December 13, 2005; p.A.6). In this manner, both Homolka and the media made identity claims for her that matched their definition of the new social situation of Homolka becoming a free woman. Both of these identities represented polar opposites of the other. Neither could be aligned. Acceptance of one meant rejection of the other.

“I AM Normal”

In prison, Homolka had to cooperate with the criminal justice system and manage the social identities assigned to her by representatives of that system. As noted in the previous chapter, rather than accepting the socially unattractive and devalued ‘mad’ or ‘evil’ identities assigned to her, she engaged in a social process of ‘combating’ those social designations. As part of that process, Homolka took on the more socially valued identity of ‘rehabilitated’ and achieved a more satisfactory presentation of self. However, Homolka was a free woman and no longer lived in a constrained environment where she needed to be as cooperative and compliant. She could ‘reject’ these previously imposed identities and place them in a low position of prominence in her role identity hierarchy. This identity transformation process is described in the following paragraphs through an analysis of statements made by her during a CBC French language network interview and excerpts taken from media reports of her behaviour after leaving prison.

On July 4 2005 Homolka was released from prison and took up residence in Montreal Quebec. After serving a 12-year prison term, Homolka participated in one interview with CBC’s French-language network (The Standard, July 5, 2005; p.A1). During this interview, Homolka described herself as remorseful; that she was not a dangerous woman and she wanted to get on

with her life. For example, Homolka stated “I think of what I’ve done and then often I think I don’t deserve happiness. I think I never will be really free... There are different prisons. There are prisons of stone and there are interior prisons. I think I will always be in an interior prison” (The Standard, July 5, 2005; p.A1). In this manner, Homolka made claims that, although she was free, she was continuously punishing herself. Notably, Homolka’s statement incorporated others’ descriptions of her as an unremorseful person, who was lucky to be in a ‘nice’ prison by stating she was very sorry and would always be locked up in an interior prison due to her participation in these crimes.

Although one may only speculate, it appears from the interview that Homolka was trying to change others’ perceptions of her. She was trying to “normalize self” (Goffman, 1963) by portraying herself as a woman who experienced such deep regret that she was haunted by the memory of her crimes. By making specific reference to self as “not a monster” and “not deserving of happiness”, Homolka presented herself as having similar thoughts as others, and, in consequence, no different from them. Additionally, Homolka made claims of being a ‘normal’ woman in her presentation of self as remorseful and unhappy with her life. By making these statements, she positioned herself as being capable of recognizing her responsibility in the crimes, and demonstrated an attempt to gain role support for her identity of a ‘normal’ woman (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

Homolka also appears to ‘reject’ the ‘negative’ social identities previously assigned to her by others. For example, Homolka assured the public that she was not a dangerous person and wanted to be left alone. As she explained, “I don’t want to be hunted down...I don’t want people to think I am a dangerous person who's going to do something to their children” (The Standard, July 5, 2005; p.A1). In these subtle ways, Homolka ‘rejected’ the ‘evil’ identity that the public

had cast for her toward the end of her imprisonment. In fact, she had turned the tables by presenting self as, not only rehabilitated and, hence, normal, but also a victim of others' hostility (i.e. I don't want to be hunted down).

Additionally, Homolka demonstrates a rejection of her 'evil' identity by calling upon previous role identities and reminding the public she was not the 'mastermind' behind these crimes. For example, Homolka said, "I didn't initiate the crimes... I followed" (The Standard, July 6, 2005a; p.A1). With the use of statements such as 'not being the mastermind,' and 'didn't initiate,' Homolka drew upon her role identity hierarchy to present the identities of 'naive, innocent girl' and 'victim' of Paul Bernardo thereby strengthening her presentation of self as a less guilty and, hence, a more 'normal' person.

Another example of Homolka presenting herself in a more favourable light during the interview and drawing upon her previous role identities of 'young, innocent, naive,' 'battered wife' and hence, 'guiltless' person occurred when she told the reporter, "Back then I was 17 years old. I didn't know much. I was afraid of being abandoned. I absolutely wanted to have a relationship. I did not have self-confidence... There are a lot of things about myself that I didn't know then that I know now" (The Standard, July 11, 2005; p.A2). In this way, throughout the interview Homolka continued to minimize her role in the crimes and present herself as a woman who was 'rehabilitated' and was now 'normal'. Notably, it appears that Homolka drew upon all of the social identities previously assigned to her by the public to construct the ultimate presentation of self as a normal person who had paid for and continued to suffer from her crimes.

Homolka's interview with the CBC French network was her last interview. Subsequently, she attempted to live a 'normal' life by finding employment, applying for a passport, and attempting to change her name. After a series of unsuccessful attempts at anonymity, she slowly

faded from media attention until, in 2007, it was reported that Homolka had remarried and given birth to a baby boy. This event sparked new public debate over Homolka's identity and her capacity to be rehabilitated. Although motherhood may have allowed Homolka to present herself as being capable of acting like a 'normal' woman, the public at large did not sanction this new identity. Thus, for example, The Standard reported, "How disturbing when someone like Karla Homolka can bring a child into this world" (February 23, 2007; p.A12).

The public demonstrated distress that Homolka had become a mother and many people raised concerns for the child. For example, one woman wrote, "How very sad it is to hear that Karla Homolka has chosen to bring an innocent child into this world, only subject him to the horrific mental pain and anguish he will endure, all of his life, when he learns of his mother's heinous crimes" (The Standard, February 16, 2007; p.A10). The public's outcry over Homolka's motherhood contributed to the construction of Homolka's social identity as being one of 'subhuman,' someone who could not possibly be considered a 'mother.'

Eventually, Homolka left Canada to live in the Caribbean. This action matches Breakwell's (1983) model of responses to threats of identity and the tactic of mobility. Mobility occurs when an individual physically moves to evade threats to his or her identity thereby ensuring that the threat no longer has access to self (Breakwell, 1983). Homolka's physical move to a country where she could be anonymous helped her evade further Canadian attention and, the continued social disparagement of the Canadian public at large. She could live in a place where her motherhood and her presentation of self as a 'normal' woman might be accepted more easily.

"Subhuman/ Not a Woman"

The process of 'rejecting' identities also occurs in the Homolka case when others' 'reject' Homolka's attempt to be normal and construct the social identity of 'beyond evil/subhuman' for her. Significantly, Homolka cannot gain a satisfactory presentation of self if she accepts this 'beyond evil/non-human' identity. Moreover, others' rejection of her 'normal' identity creates a dissatisfactory presentation of self. To gain positive satisfaction, she has to find a new reference group who would accept her identity claims (Hewitt, 2007). Ultimately, her move to another country represents a final attempt at rejecting the identity designations assigned to her by others.

The 'rejecting' identity transformation process by the public can be seen after Homolka's interview with the CBC French network in response to her attempt to present self as 'normal.' Notably, the CBC interview had two participants and, hence, two people interacting with each other. Later, Donna French, the Kristen French's mother, gave her opinion of Homolka's interview. She renounced Homolka's presentation of self with the comment, "She remains a manipulative, insincere, self-centred individual who's always in control...I suppose it played to her advantage when horns didn't sprout out of her head during the TV interview" (The Standard, July 6, 2005; p.A3). With these statements, Donna French rejected Homolka's claims of remorse and portrayed her as a person who 'manipulates' everyone to get her way. Significantly, Donna French's use of the metaphor of 'sprouting horns' repudiated Homolka's request for others' compassion and placed her, instead, into the category of 'subhuman' (i.e. a member of the human race does not possess horns). At this point, Homolka's social identity began to move beyond the category of 'evil' and she begins to be portrayed as the source of all evil itself.

Similar to Donna French, Tim Danson the lawyer for the victim's families described Homolka's eyes as "empty" and "dead" (The Standard, July 6, 2005; p.A3). This description of

Homolka's eyes as 'dead' contributed to the social construction of the 'subhuman' identity by implying that she was not like other people whose eyes can reveal their soul.

Together, the comments made by Donna French and Tim Danson illustrate the social designation process involved in rejecting identities. Both of these people held prominent positions in the community at large. Both had experienced personal contact with Homolka. Their dismissal of Homolka's presentation of self as 'normal' carried considerable weight in the public mind. Their use of 'subhuman' references in their descriptions of both Homolka's character and her physical traits contributed strongly to the image of Homolka as 'subhuman.'

Notably, both French and Danson drew upon social stereotypes to categorize Homolka negatively and to deal with the flow of events surrounding the case (McCall and Simmons, 1978). They used stereotypical 'subhuman' categorizations which then translated into the public images that she could not be trusted and her claims of being 'normal' should be rejected. Thus, for example Donna French's reference to Homolka as the devil and Tim Danson's description of her eyes as being dead and empty damaged Homolka's personal reputation in significant ways. It set up a 'pre-packaged appraisal' for the public at large to decipher potential meanings about Homolka and reject her presentation of self as 'rehabilitated,' 'free,' and, therefore, 'normal' more easily (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

Importance of Social Context and Traditional Female Scripts

After Homolka was released from prison, members of the general public contributed strongly to the process of rejecting her 'normal' identity and to constructing her as 'subhuman'. For example, two major themes that emerged from individual letters published in The Standard after her release were that Homolka did not deserve anyone's sympathy or pity and that she

should still be in prison. As one man wrote, “Karla Homolka is undeserving of such luxuries that a normal life provide” (The Standard, December 13, 2005; p.A6). More important, the public demonstrated outrage that Homolka was a free woman and there was nothing that could be done about her release from prison. To quote one woman, “Personally, I do not believe that Homolka has any rights. In my mind she gave up her rights as soon as she took the lives of her sister, Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy. Don’t understand why this country should care if her rights were violated when she didn’t even care about the rights she violated when she took the lives of those three girls” (The Standard, December 3, 2005; p.A9).

Through media publication of such letters, the public at large engaged in the identity transformation process of rejecting Homolka’s presentation of self as ‘rehabilitated,’ ‘free,’ and, hence, ‘normal.’ It constructed a social identity for her that held certain expectations of her future behaviour based on her past behaviour and expressed their fear that she might reoffend (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Based on that fear, the social designation of ‘subhuman’ appeared to be more appropriate and Homolka’s presentation of self as ‘normal’ was ‘rejected’.

As noted in the previous chapter, at the same time as Homolka’s release from prison became more likely, the media began discussing her as an individual actor separate from Bernardo. When Homolka’s name appeared in the press post-release, the previous social designations of “accomplice”, “her role” or “Bernardo’s ex-wife” were missing. Instead, newspaper articles in The Standard used language that described her as an individual, such as, “convicted killer;” “young lives destroyed by evil;” “palpable hatred for Homolka;” “school girl killer;” and “notorious teen killer”. The new language used by the press and the removal of Bernardo’s name from these reports demonstrates the movement toward a more general public acceptance of her as someone who was beyond ‘human’ that is, a ‘monster’, and an ultimate

rejection of any of the other role identities that had been previously accepted of Homolka including her presentation of self as ‘rehabilitated,’ ‘free,’ and, thus, ‘normal’ within the community at large.

In a continuation of the social process of rejecting identities, the public made specific claims that denied Homolka’s right to become a ‘mother’. When word was released that Homolka had given birth to a child, the public ‘rejected’ her claim to motherhood. For example, people were reported in the press saying “it’s disgusting, there’s no way that somebody who could do something like that...knows anything about having a kid” (The Standard, February 14, 2007; p.A7). Most reports presented in the media expressed repulsion by the idea that “someone like Karla Homolka can bring a child into this world” (The Standard, February 23, 2007; p.A12).

The role of mother involves much more than childbearing; mothers serve as the primary caregivers who nurture and socialize the children (Levine and Estable, 1990; Rich, 1986). As Abramovitz (1988) explains proper women are defined as ‘moral mothers,’ and, as such, are responsible for the maintenance of family health, family ritual, and family ties (Rich, 1986). Homolka’s failure to protect three teenage girls, especially her own sister, from Paul Bernardo indicated to others that she was not fit for the motherhood role. Consequently, even though Homolka was capable physically of bearing a child, the public ‘rejected’ her identity as a ‘normal mother.’

“A Sexually Violent Female Predator”

Kilty and Frigon (2006) argue that the new or emergent category for understanding a woman’s criminal act is the ‘sexually violent female predator.’ However, I did not find evidence in the media reports of Homolka to indicate that the term ‘sexually violent female predator’

dominated public descriptions of her behaviour. Instead, I found that the vocabulary used in the media reports of Homolka tended to construct the social identity of 'subhuman,' this is, a creature incapable of remorse or rehabilitation.

In their analysis of the case, Kilty and Frigon (2006) claim, "in the end, Karla Homolka has emerged as a character to be feared because this paradox crystallizes the recent panic surrounding the newly emerging category of woman criminal, that being the 'sexually violent female predator'" (p.58). Although I found the public expressed fear of Homolka's potential to reoffend in the media editorials and published letters to the editors, my findings suggest that it is Homolka, herself, who the public socially constructs as the source of 'evil,' and who is viewed as 'dangerous,' and 'subhuman.' It does not use the category of 'sexually violent female predator'. Instead, media descriptions of Homolka, editorial letters, and citizens' accounts of her case reveal a discourse that condemns her for her inability to fulfill social expectations of 'proper' femaleness, especially social expectations of motherhood. Sexually violent female predator may be implicit in those descriptions but it is not a term used or part of the social identities applied to Homolka in these texts.

Once again, in my explanation of these data findings, I return to Mills' (1940) argument that vocabularies used in a social situation must fit the rules and norms of action for that situation. The term 'violent female sexual offender' is a term used in professional settings by those who study criminal behaviour and may not yet be part of the discourse available to the public at large. I propose that Homolka cannot be understood as a woman or, even a human being by the general public because it lacks a standard, everyday vocabulary for describing her behaviour in those terms. In consequence, the public turned to a vocabulary with which it was familiar and created an identity of 'beyond evil' and 'subhuman' to explain Homolka's actions.

From the perspective of the general public, women do not physically and sexually abuse others, especially, women who desire motherhood. Those women who perform such acts may possess the physical characteristics of 'female' gender but they cannot be 'female'. They must, as a matter of course, be 'subhuman.'

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted how Homolka presents self and constructs a personal identity in response to other's perceptions of her. After being released from prison, Homolka presented herself as 'rehabilitated,' 'free,' and, hence, 'normal'. This presentation of self was demonstrated by Homolka in a media interview in which she 'rejected' others' claims that she was a monster, evil, and subhuman. It was reinforced by her decision to bear and raise a child of her own without any apparent consideration of how her past criminal behaviour or her other role identities might affect that child or influence others' acceptance of her motherhood. In contrast, Homolka's presentation of self as 'normal' was assessed negatively and 'rejected' by others. Specifically, the public at large cast her into the social identity of being 'subhuman' and a woman who was incapable of motherhood. Both of the identities presented in this chapter (i.e. 'normal' and 'subhuman') are polar opposites. Acceptance of one signifies rejection of the other. Brought together, neither party achieved social agreement and the process of everyday discourse became problematic (Goffman, 1959). Homolka had to change residence and find a new reference group if she wished to maintain a satisfactory presentation of self.

The following chapter concludes with a summary of my major findings and the importance of this research project for understanding the responses of the community at large to

female criminal behaviour of the type exhibited by Karla Homolka. Specifically, the chapter discusses how the data analysis presented in this thesis offers a stronger understanding of the social process involved in identity formation and transformation. It also considers the meaning of these findings for future research, specifically, in the understanding of identity transformations that occur in response to changing social contexts. Finally, I conclude with some limitations of this study and possible ways to overcome these limitations in future research.

Conclusion

In this research project, I used a grounded theory approach to analyze newspaper articles taken from The Toronto Star and The Standard as a means of obtaining a sense of how the public at large viewed Karla Homolka, who is arguably Canada's most notorious female criminal. Specifically, I coded 373 newspaper accounts of Karla Homolka starting from 1993 (before her arrest) to December 2009. My initial goal was to examine whether or not Karla Homolka was portrayed as a female sex offender and, if so, how 'female sexual offender' was conceptualized by the public at large. Instead, I found significant changes occurring over time in media accounts of Homolka's criminality and in how the media portrayed Homolka's presentation of self. In this way, the theoretical orientation of identity transformation emerged from my data.

My data analysis indicates that, similar to other female criminals, Homolka's media image was constructed in a manner that used her gender as the lens through which all of her actions are understood (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007, Myers and Wight, 1996). Additionally, portrayals of Homolka in the media focused less on the sexual violence of her crimes than on her inability to be a 'real' woman, that is, her inability to fulfill standardized norms of female behaviour.

Interestingly, the social construction of Homolka's social identities occurred through a transformation process affected by media interpretations of the case over time. This transformation process also occurred in relationship to traditional female gender role expectations. Historically, a woman's violent act has been classified in less threatening terms than a man's (Myers and Wight, 1996). In a similar fashion, the media initially constructed

Homolka's criminal behaviour in less threatening terms but in a manner that fit the social context of time. Thus, for example, before the videotapes were released, Homolka's identity was socially constructed by the media in a manner that helped the public understand female criminality as it existed for them, that is, as a battered wife/victim.

After the discovery of the videotapes the 'battered wife/victim' identity was no longer acceptable and the 'mad' identity was applied. However, as the date for Homolka's release from prison neared, the general public began to perceive her in more threatening terms. Combined with evidence of her apparent lack of remorse through media pictures of her partying in prison and publicized information on her sexual affairs, her social identity was reconstructed as 'evil.' Ultimately, media reports of her motherhood appalled the public's sensitivities so greatly that she was designated as 'subhuman.'

Although I found acknowledgment of the sexual nature of Homolka's crimes throughout my data analysis, she was rarely referred to as a rapist or sexual offender. Notably, the term 'sexually violent female predator' never appeared and descriptions to support this categorization were absent. I found more evidence for Denov's (2003) argument that a cultural denial exists over the possibility that a woman can commit sexual crimes than I did for Kilty and Frigon's (2006) argument that a new category of female sexual offender has emerged. Specifically, my data revealed that the public at large perceived Homolka less as a sex offender and more as a woman who had defied and broken all of the normative rules of female conduct. From this perspective, the public's designation of a 'subhuman' identity became appropriate. The term 'sexually violent female predator' may be gaining recognition within 'professional' fields (i.e. psychologists, psychiatrists, criminology experts), but my data analysis indicated that the public has either not accepted or is not yet aware of this term. More research regarding the idea of

‘sexually violent female predator’ needs to be explored both in the professional fields and with the public at large to obtain a stronger sense of how this category is conceptualized.

Given the perspective of female criminality offered by my data analysis, this thesis builds on the symbolic interactionist literature through its integration of concepts such as personal identity, social identity, role identity hierarchy and presentation of self. The identity transformation process discovered through the use of grounded theory methodology indicates stronger analysis of media portrayals of public figures using these concepts and this theoretical approach.

My data analysis indicates that Karla Homolka was not a ‘puppet’ dependent upon the whims of media insight or public condemnation. Neither was the community at large subject entirely to these media images. In fact, my analysis reveals that Homolka changed her presentation of self and, hence, her personal identity, in response to new trial evidence and in response to published portrayals of her in the media. Additionally, members of the community at large appear to have responded to media presentations of Homolka through a process of defining and redefining her social identity as a criminal offender.

The data analysis presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six illustrates how the media portrayed Homolka and how those portrayals influenced the creation of different social identities used by the public to define her (Goffman, 1959). Examination of the media descriptions of how Homolka presented herself in different social situations also demonstrates the theoretical process involved in McCall and Simmons’ model (1978) of role identity prominence hierarchy. Homolka enacted specific role identities that reflected an occupancy of particular social positions (i.e. a naive, innocent girl; a victim; rehabilitated; normal woman). Those role identities were not separate or stagnant but tended to be placed in a prominence hierarchy to be called upon to gain a

desired response from 'others' (e.g. understanding, forgiveness, and acceptance). Specifically, it appears in the media reports that Homolka alternates these role identity presentations to make claims about self and to present self in ways that minimized her role in the crimes committed.

Overall, the media reports I analyzed indicated that Homolka's presentation of self and, hence, her role identity hierarchy experienced a transformation process through time as various stages of the case unfolded. Each new identity added to Homolka's role identity repertoire appeared to offer her a means of keeping her crimes in the background and presenting herself in more favourable terms (Goffman, 1959). As mentioned in chapter five (5), this process of identity transformation is similar to the one found in Charmaz (1991) study of chronic illness, whereby individuals control their presentation of self to maximize their sense of self-worth.

In this thesis, I offer an examination of how the media portrayed both Karla Homolka and others' reactions to her. Specifically, the thesis includes an examination of how public images of Homolka's crimes affected and were affected by the transformation process involved in the social construction of social identities. In this way, my analysis focuses on the process by which identities are constructed and reconstructed through the media to fit the social context of which the actor is a part. As a work in interpretative sociology, this research provides three different concepts to explain this process of identity transformations - complimenting, combating, and rejecting.

The first concept of identity transformation identified in media descriptions of Homolka was complimenting identities. The transformation process involved in the creation of complimenting identities emerged in the data during my examination of significant others' (e.g. psychiatrists, lawyers) original acceptance of Homolka's identity announcements and their construction of the 'battered wife' identity for her. This social identity closely matched

Homolka's own presentation of self as a 'young/innocent/naive woman.' In fact, these two identities complimented each other so closely that, after the videotapes of the torture and sexual assault of Tammy Homolka, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French were released, Homolka appears to have merged the battered wife/victim identity as part of her own role identity hierarchy placing it in a more prominent position than the 'innocent/young/naive' identity.

The second transformation process involved combating identities. This concept emerged through an examination of media reports published after the videotapes were revealed. A combating identity occurs when others' find an individual's presentation of self unacceptable. They then cast the individual into what they believe is a more 'accurate' identity. However, because the individual combats this social identity by presenting a personal identity that he or she perceives to be more favourable and can provide a more positive sense of self worth. The individual enters a process of 'combative' identity transformation in which both the individual and others contest identity claims.

In the Homolka case, the creation of 'combating' identities occurred when others (e.g. parole board, general public, psychologists) began to contest the 'battered wife/victim' identity announcements made by Homolka and the media began to portray her as a 'mad' woman. The 'mad' identity appeared to fit the new social context created by the discovery of the videotapes. Reports of Homolka's initial behaviour in prison indicate her partial acceptance of this 'mad' identity. She took on aspects of it by attending therapy and taking psychology courses. She combated that identity, however, by presenting self as a 'rehabilitated' rather than a 'mad' prisoner. This 'rehabilitated' identity struggles against and stands in opposition to the 'mad woman' identity assigned to her.

Ultimately, Homolka's resistance of the 'mad' identity became unsuccessful when the media released photos of her partying in prison and information about her lesbian and heterosexual relationships. Within the social context of her sexual abuse and torture of Leslie Mahaffy, Kristen French and Tammy Homolka, such behaviour challenged her presentation of self as 'rehabilitated.' In fact, the public interpreted her actions so negatively that she was assigned a much harsher identity to combat. She became viewed as a physical representation of pure 'evil'.

The final identity transformation process that emerged from the data was the process of 'rejecting' identities. The process of 'rejecting' identity occurs when one's personal and social identities are polar opposites. After Homolka was released from prison, she engaged the media by participating in a CBC French language network interview. During this interview, Homolka tried to present herself as 'normal.' Media analysis of this interview rejected her identity offerings. In fact, quotes taken from Homolka's interviewer called forth an image of 'subhuman' when she noted the possibility of 'horns sprouting out of her head.'

The process of 'rejecting' identities also occurred through media publications of community members' reactions to knowledge of Homolka's motherhood. Generally, achievement of motherhood represents a positive status change for women and realization of this identity establishes them as normal members of their society (Rich, 1986; Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). Homolka's identity as a 'normal' mother was discounted, however, by the larger public in the press through publication of editorial opinion pieces and letters written by community members who portrayed her as 'subhuman' and, therefore incapable of motherhood. In response, it appears that Homolka rejected this social identity assignment by leaving Canada and residing in a country where she could present herself as a 'normal' person.

All of the identity transformations discussed in this thesis depended upon a social context that supports traditional female gender roles. As different events surrounding the case occurred (i.e. discovery of the videotapes, Homolka's testimony, photos of Homolka partying in prison, her release from prison, and bearing a child) the media portrayed the actions of both Homolka and significant others from a perspective of gender stereotypes and gendered perceptions. For example, discovery of the videotapes revealed that Homolka played a large role in these crimes than had been originally perceived. In response, significant others' reassessed her actions and assigned to her the social identity of 'mad' woman. The 'mad' woman social identity offered certain explanations of Homolka's behaviour that others could accept more easily. Similar to other research findings (Sjorberg and Gentry, 2007; Myers and Wight, 1996), the data in this thesis confirms the fact that when a woman commits a violent act her gender serves as the lens through which both she and her crime are conceptualized.

In this particular case, Homolka was socially constructed by others on the basis of the three main images by which woman's a violent act is typically portrayed (i.e. victim, 'mad', 'evil') and the normative expectations of gender were applied to her. Consequently, understanding the social context became increasingly important for evaluating Homolka's presentation of self and consideration of gendered normative expectations became imperative in assessing the public's response to her. Thus, for example, after the discovery of the videotapes, Homolka needed to account for her participation in the sexual assaults in a more socially acceptable manner and offered the identity of 'victim' to gain a more satisfactory presentation of self. Others' could not accept this identity as a rationale for her behaviour and in turning to traditional female gender roles stereotypes assigned her the identity of 'mad' woman.

Study Limitations

Given the sensitive nature of the Homolka case, I chose to conduct a newspaper analysis to capture as many different interpretations of Karla Homolka (i.e. criminal justice system, lawyers, public, victims' families, Homolka and her family) as possible. However, authors of media accounts can pick and choose what to print. Thus, some interview accounts may have been taken out of context and only part of the interview reported. Similarly, some quotes were not complete and only included what the media deemed important for the public to know (Tuchman, 1978). This factor becomes particularly important for understanding how the media portrayed Homolka's presentation of self. Thus, my analysis of Homolka's presentation of self and her personal identity only considered how the media presented Homolka to the public. I cannot make conclusive judgements on her motives but rather report on how she 'appeared' to present herself.

Ideally, it would have been beneficial to this project if I had been able to interview Karla Homolka, particularly, to confirm the media's portrayals of Homolka's presentation of self. Since I did not interview Karla Homolka, I had to rely on others' interviews with her and depend upon media interpretations and reports of those interviews. I cannot be sure if the media articles used Homolka's quotes out of context or why the media chose to publish the parts of the interviews that they chose to publish. Thus, my analysis of Homolka's presentation of self may have been skewed by the media reports and in how it used Homolka's words.

I cannot read Homolka's mind. It is possible, however, to make reasonable inferences about Homolka's behaviour through the detailed accounts of that behaviour as presented in the press and described by individuals who either knew her or observed the events at the time of their unfolding. It was not my objective to conduct a character study of Karla Homolka. My

research focus is on media images and the identity transformation processes presented in media portrayals of her and her criminal behaviour. The community at large has discovered, become acquainted with, and formed perceptions of Homolka and her crimes from how she has been portrayed in the media. An examination of the social impact of those images offers a further understanding of the social construction of female criminals and female criminal behaviour.

Questions also may exist about the use of a symbolic interactionist approach in a study of media images. Most studies of identity and identity transformation involve observational or interview data whereby the interviewer may ask if his or her interpretation is 'correct' (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Loseke, 2003). As noted previously, however, the themes of complimenting, combating and rejecting identity emerged from the grounded theory approach used to analyze my data. I turned later to the concepts offered by symbolic interactionism because they seemed to offer the most effective means of framing my findings theoretically. Recognizing the limitations of not being able to probe for the reasons behind the behaviour that I observed in these media reports, I tried not to attribute motives to either Homolka or the other individuals named in my study. Instead, I have focused on public presentations of self and the impression those presentations have made (Goffman, 1969, 1974; Hewitt, 2007; Lindesmith and Strauss, 1956).

For future research, I would consider conducting interviews to gather a better understanding of how one presents self; specifically how they respond if others apply an unwanted social identity to them. In this way, I would be able to understand better not only how one presents self but also how one manages the impact of being cast into a 'negative' social identity. This type of focus might offer a stronger technique for understanding how one changes, modifies, and adapts self in accordance with the social situation.

Still, “the discourse of the press is an important subject for analysis in the inquiry into the construction of definitions of deviance and their representation because of its pervasive, non-specialist and everyday nature” (Young, 1990; p.viii). Given this perspective, knowledge of how the media portrays female sexual abuse and how the community at large responds to those images is increasingly relevant for understanding the social construction of deviance and deviant identities. This factor is important because images of a woman’s violent act are especially evident in media articles and are explained in commonsense language that provides less consideration than a man’s (Chibnall, 1977). As a woman who has been regularly portrayed in the media for her involvement in the sexual abuse and torture of three young women, Karla Homolka offers a strong test case.

Future Research

As highlighted above, this thesis contributes to the understanding of identity transformation through a process of media portrayals. The emergent themes of ‘complimenting’, ‘combating’, and ‘rejecting’ identities offer a prototype upon which future research can be developed. Thus, I suggest more examination on the process of identity development and identity transformation occurring as a result of media portrayals, especially, in terms of how the public comes to perceive and socially define sexually abusive behaviour and violent crimes perpetrated by woman.

Drawing upon the three types of media identity transformation found in this thesis, future research could investigate whether other public figures engage in similar transformation processes. Within the media, do discrepancies between public figures’ personal and social identities exist? How do individuals presented in the media demonstrate an attempt to maintain a

satisfactory presentation of self in response to changing media portrayals? Do these public figures devise strategies by which they accept, fight off, or modify any the 'negative' social identities projected upon them by the public at large? If so, which strategies appear to be most effective and which bring on more negative identity attributions? Gaining further understanding of these social processes provides us with a stronger knowledge of the relationship between individuals, society and everyday life.

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