

**Analyzing the portrayal of child sexual abuse in *La Presse*:
The shifting dialectics of silence and denunciation**

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Abstract

Analyzing the portrayal of child sexual abuse in *La Presse*: The shifting dialectics of silence and denunciation

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This thesis explores the discursive entanglements and juxtapositions around child sexual abuse victims, perpetrators and disclosure observable in the past ten years in *La Presse*'s coverage in Québec. Using a mixed methodology, I first examine the number of news stories published on this topic between 2001 and 2010, and subsequently use a critical discourse analysis to scrutinize over a hundred news stories that were printed over this span of time. In assessing this material, my questions concern whether the media portrayal of child sexual abuse might have helped, at a first level, to de-stigmatize the taboo surrounding this social phenomenon in the popular culture; and second, whether and how the press might be propagating false representations about the prevalence of child sexual abuse by dwelling on particular details and misrepresenting this issue. Further, I explore how social representations of child sexual violence are structured, both around victims and their aggressors, and the role of local mass media discourse in influencing a culture of denunciation regarding such abuse.

Table of contents

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	VI
INTRODUCTION	1
THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL EFFECT OF NATHALIE SIMARD'S STORY	2
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, MOTIVATIONS AND INTENTIONS	6
HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD AND SEXUALITY	8
<i>Broad historical notions of childhood</i>	9
<i>Sexuality and children</i>	10
NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL LEGAL EVOLUTIONS AFFECTING DISCOURSES	13
CSA AS A SOCIETAL ISSUE: CONSTRUCTION OR NATURE?	16
CHAPTER 1: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE QUÉBEC CONTEXT	19
THE NATHALIE SIMARD STORY	19
DEFINING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE	20
<i>Intra- and extra-familial abuse</i>	21
PREVALENCE AND STATISTICS	22
<i>Canadian and Québec contexts</i>	23
VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS AND DISCLOSURE	27
<i>Perpetrators</i>	27
<i>Victims</i>	29
<i>Disclosure</i>	31
SOCIAL RESPONSE	35
<i>Judiciary process</i>	36
<i>Prevention and help</i>	37
CHAPTER 2: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE MEDIA	39
DISCOURSE, POWER AND KNOWLEDGE	39
LANGUAGE, HEGEMONY AND THE MEDIA	41
<i>Ideology and naturalization</i>	42
<i>Dynamics of power and struggle</i>	44
NEWS MEANING: ENCODED AND DECODED	45
(MASS) AUDIENCES AND THE "EFFECTS" OF MEDIA	46
NEWS DISCOURSE ABOUT CRIME AND VIOLENCE	49
<i>Media and CSA</i>	50
<i>Media hypes and sensationalism</i>	51
<i>Moral panic</i>	52
<i>Social workers as Folk Devils</i>	54
<i>Contradictory portrayal of perpetrators</i>	55
<i>Stranger-danger vs. intra-familial abuse</i>	57
<i>Quantitative analyses of news coverage</i>	59
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	61
CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS FROM CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	62
<i>Framing</i>	62
<i>Valence vs. position, multi-accentuality and quotations</i>	63
<i>Linguistics and syntactic structures</i>	64
CHAPTER 3: ANALYZING LA PRESSE (2000-2011)	69
LA PRESSE - CONTEXT, PRODUCTION AND IDEOLOGY	69
<i>Power Corporation</i>	71

METHODOLOGY	72
<i>Quantitative</i>	72
<i>Qualitative</i>	73
QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	75
<i>Quantitative treatment of qualitative dataset</i>	77
QUALITATIVE RESULTS	80
<i>Intra-familial abuse</i>	80
<i>Conception of childhood and sexuality</i>	84
<i>Conceptual and effective violence: Destruction of childhood metaphors</i>	86
<i>Victims and disclosure: conflicting discourses</i>	88
<i>Celebrities: The fine line between positive and sensationalist representations</i>	91
<i>Child molesters: contradictory figures</i>	97
<i>Internet</i>	102
<i>Clergy</i>	103
EVOLUTION OVER 10 YEARS.....	105
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION	109
QUANTITATIVE OBSERVATIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF CSA REPORTING	109
DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CSA	111
<i>Childhood, innocence and the distinction between conceptual and effective violence</i> ...	112
<i>Perpetrators of abuse: "Les pédophiles sillonnent les rues!"</i>	114
<i>The stigma of intra-familial abuse</i>	115
<i>Celebrity victims and regular people: Encoding and decoding disclosure</i>	117
<i>Episodic and wave-like treatment</i>	120
<i>Sensationalism versus sensibility and education</i>	122
<i>Expert opinions, valence and naturalization</i>	124
<i>CSA not only misrepresented, also overrepresented</i>	127
CONCLUSION	130
LIMITATIONS	132
PANEL DISCUSSION EXPERIENCE.....	134
RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE THOUGHTS.....	138
REFERENCES	142
APPENDICES.....	150
APPENDIX I: <i>LA PRESSE</i> STORIES CITED	150
APPENDIX II: NEWS STORIES PER MONTH IN <i>LA PRESSE</i> (2000-2011)	153
APPENDIX III: SAMPLE NEWS LOG.....	154

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1 - Number of stories in <i>La Presse</i> per year (2000 - 2011)	75
Table 2 - Thematic distribution in <i>La Presse</i> (2001 - 2010).....	78
Figure 1 - Trends in the number of stories in <i>La Presse</i> (2000-2011).....	76
Figure 2 - Monthly count in <i>La Presse</i> (2000 - 2011)	77
Figure 3 - Sexual infractions in Québec (2001 - 2009)	111

Introduction

Since the early 1980s, "[t]here has been an explosion of research on child sexual abuse" (Alaggia & Millington, 2008: 265). However, the portrayal of this phenomenon in the media has not been overly scrutinized in recent research. In Québec, the coverage of child sexual abuse (CSA) has been scarcely examined. The potential relationship between media coverage and rates of disclosure is even less present. In this thesis, I explore this underexposed terrain within an interdisciplinary framework, mainly guided by the analysis of discourse. While recent data show decreases in rates of CSA in Canada, statistics have been substantially rising in Québec. The various reasons explaining these shifts are currently being thoroughly examined from a social sciences standpoint, yet the discursive constructions articulated by mass media are under-investigated in both national and provincial research landscapes.

The point of departure of my analysis on the CSA media discourse in Québec is primarily of a positive nature. The fact that this highly stigmatized phenomenon has recently received significantly more coverage in the press, radio, television, social networks and in other outlets has had a positive influence in helping past and current victims to break the silence about their experience of abuse, and allowing them to denounce their aggressor and reach out for help. On a more structural level, it appears that such a shift has helped to reorganize the collective discourse and representations of CSA as being something so unacceptable that we cannot continue to ignore or silence it.

However, despite acknowledging the positive aspects of such disclosure, there are some critical aspects that deserve further examination. First, while the phenomenon of CSA should be portrayed in the news from a deeper, more educational standpoint, this certainly is not always the case. The mercantile nature of mass-media institutions too often privileges a sensationalized coverage that neither helps the victims, nor the providers of services. It also makes popular understanding and representations of this phenomenon more complex to apprehend. On the contrary, such sensationalized coverage may end up neutralizing the message that needs to be sent. Additionally, there are many more prevalent forms of child maltreatment, such as negligence or exposure to domestic violence, but since these do not impact public opinion, and overall sales, as much, they end up being under-represented as if CSA was the singular nuisance requiring more public, research and policy focus. Finally, high-profile but uncommon cases make the headlines while more frequent forms of CSA, occurring inside the family circle for instance, seem to be relegated – or sustained – behind the closed doors, thereby sustaining the stigma surrounding such abuse.

The epistemological effect of Nathalie Simard's story

In early 2005, a very well known Québec celebrity singer and former child star, Nathalie Simard, divulged that she had been sexually abused during her childhood and her case received an enormous amount of attention from the media for more than a year. As the signal-event that propelled my inquiry, the embryonic vision I had for my research was built on the "Nathalie Simard effect", a widely shared hypothesis that the specific case of

this celebrity had a direct impact on increasing the reporting of sexual offense trends in Québec (Rioux, 2007). From the very beginning of this research journey, I wanted to explore this scientifically unproven yet assumed causal relationship between the highly exposed case of this public persona's experience of CSA and the rising rates of public condemnation that have been articulated by both local police and the Centres Jeunesses¹. My initial hypothesis was that such a relationship did exist and it should confirm and emphasize the importance of media discourse and the collective representations of CSA that are being articulated.

My aim was to conduct a purely quantitative analysis of the media coverage of CSA in Montreal from 2004 to 2006 in order to better grasp the amount of space and coverage given to this phenomenon during this specific time span. I was also looking at contrasting these results with monthly numbers of CSA cases disclosed to Montreal authorities, both from child protection agencies and the police. The embryonic vision for this project was therefore articulated around the direct causal and quantitative effect between media coverage and rates of disclosure. However, as Teun van Dijk points out, "a superficial content analysis, limited to quantitative data about superficially defined units, can yield useful but incomplete insights into the nature of the coverage" (van Dijk, 1988: p. 66). Thus, the outlook and method of analysis needed to be broadened with a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

¹ In Québec, Centres Jeunesses are provincially managed and financed organizations that deliver child welfare services under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

I first investigated the media effects framework, so well in line with this notion of an "effet" Nathalie Simard. However, further examining this outlook of analysis spurred doubts about claims of direct relationships between what we see, read or listen in the media and our very actions:

(...) theories of media effects abound, but there is no theory that models in detail the processes of media discourse understanding, the formation of knowledge and beliefs, the interaction of personal or social opinions or attitudes on that process of acquisition, and hence upon the 'effects' consisting in the transformation of knowledge, beliefs or attitudes. (van Dijk, 1985: 7)

Hence, I opted for a much more encompassing approach to news research, which is discourse analysis; specifically, critical discourse analysis. While a media effects model implies a direct behavioral impact between what news says and what people do, discourse acts as a structuring agent, as a mediator between the constructed self and an idea of a multilayered and never fully actualized social reality. The initial relationship with the "media effects" theoretical perspectives resulting from such examination is still insightful, but the scope of my analysis is much broader. Discourse analysis seems to yield insights that were not previously considered, yet are fruitful to my present inquiry.

Analyzing content on a purely linguistic basis is one thing, but linguistics only tell one part of the story; one where the ideological forces at play are not necessarily apparent. This is why apprehending news analysis both discursively and critically seems to better fit my research intentions as well as enable me to rearticulate my main research questions. The contrast in discursive formations around victims and molesters appears as one of the most promising angles to investigate. For instance, how does the innocent, naive child relate to the stranger-predator paedophile? And how can we situate the

multilayered dynamics of dominance, power, struggles, and contradictions? While the "order of discourse" suggests a hierarchy of appraisal (Foucault, 1969), I want to examine and potentially map the collision points where such constructed discursive trends collide and become naturalized into everyday discourse, and where the social processes shaping these constructions are made invisible.

Victims first and gender considerations

The aim of this research is not to glorify victimization and solely focus on the difficulty to reach out for help and cope with social stigma as a victim, but it is extremely crucial for me to voice and represent victims in the most positive light possible, even though such practice might not necessarily embed itself in the most fluent way within the epistemological framework of critical discourse analysis. I have noticed in related media studies literature that victims are often pushed aside when researchers' critical inquiries focus too much on the exaggerated representations of paedophiles resembling moral panic and general risks of abuse conveyed in the media. Hopefully, the discourse of disclosure presented here will be situated in this dialectical production, in exploring how social cognitions partly articulated through mass media discourse might influence the act of denunciation.

I strongly acknowledge the feminist framework in this thesis, and believe its epistemological foundations are firmly tied to the inequalities and power struggles inherent to both my chosen method of critical discourse analysis and the multifaceted problematic of CSA. While a feminist outlook will not be specifically employed

throughout this research, I will use feminine semantic referentials – such as subjects and pronouns – when referring to victims as an acknowledgement of the substantial majority of female victims of CSA in comparison with boys, as well as a recognition of the overwhelming majority of male offenders, and the subsequent unequal power relations based on gender differences that contribute to the complex predicament of CSA.

Personal experience, motivations and intentions

I have been working for more than five years now at a research centre at McGill University's School of Social Work that principally conducts studies related to child abuse and neglect. This experience has not only sparked an interest in the wide field of child maltreatment research, but has also made me aware of different gaps and hurdles in how to interpret strong statistical shifts. I have had the chance to work with Dr. Delphine Collin-Vézina, a leading Canadian researcher in the area of CSA. I have also been sensitized to the overall issue of children's maltreatment, which goes far beyond physical and sexual abuse, because my mother has been working in that area for as long as I can remember and is very passionate about children's wellbeing and social equity. Early in my life, this family-based dedication sparked my awareness of the issue of child maltreatment as a social taboo that needs to be confronted and revealed to the public at large.

There is also another motivation that is much more difficult to explain on a rational level. I have always been interested in the specific phenomenon of CSA. "Interested" probably is not the best word as "disgusted" might be more revealing of my true apprehension.

Yet, as much as I am disgusted and cannot understand in any intelligible or satisfying way what can truly motivate a child molester, I am extremely impressed and fascinated by the level of strength and resiliency displayed by some of the victims. A few people I know have been victims as well and they are simply remarkable people. I cannot imagine how traumatic it can be for a child or adolescent, or anyone for that matter, to have been sexually abused. I believe those who are able to go on with their lives with such trauma are true role models for our society. Having said that, I am fully aware that such strong emotional response needs to be tamed a bit in my personal research inquiry, because otherwise it becomes arduous to rationalize the treatment of CSA in the media, and articulate a critical outlook on some of its exaggerations and misrepresentations.²

Engaging myself with this subject requires knowing where to delve into the constructed social stigma of CSA, but also where to keep some distances. I know I am personally not emotionally equipped to, for instance, provide clinical treatment to children who have been molested. I have a tremendous respect for professionals who are strong enough to help and guide children and adult survivors of CSA. Hopefully this respect will transpire in my writing of the following chapters, even though I may sometimes tilt away from some of my emotional engagement to rationally and critically examine how media framings can sometimes derail when overexploiting or misrepresenting some highly sensitive aspects of CSA.

² Throughout this thesis, I use the term "misrepresentation" with the research literature discourse presented in the following chapter in mind as a ground basis for comparison. I am aware that social sciences' representations of CSA are also constructed and, therefore, am not pleading for any ontologically "real" representation of CSA.

Before outlining the specific profile of CSA in Québec, I turn to a critical examination of the construction of childhood as it underpins contemporary understandings and responses to the issue of sexual abuse. In particular, I trace the conceptual shifts that have impacted legal discourse in more recent times. Indeed, articulating ideas about the protection of children from sexual abuse requires a deeper reflection on wider concerns about children's status as societal wards in order to better situate the origin of this notion of protection.

History of childhood and sexuality

Foucault argues that a "mise en discours" of sexuality, emerging towards the end of the 16th century, produced increasing incitements rather than restrictions around sexuality (Foucault, 1976). The growing objectivist orientation of science to unravel, instead of leaving what should be considered taboo in the dark, provided the impetus to rigorously disseminate "polymorphous sexualities" rather than solely focus on its more regular and morally accepted manifestations (Foucault, 1976: 21-22). There is a lingering contradiction in modern times where sexuality is constantly being talked about but also simultaneously sustained as *the secret* (Foucault, 1976: 49). Indeed, a duality lies in the fact sexuality is considered absolutely crucial because it defines the true essence of the self, yet it needs to be pushed aside while thoroughly being surveyed, and kept silent while constantly being referred to *à demi mot*.

Broad historical notions of childhood

Prior to the 19th century, many agree that children were simply absent from society; there was no such "thing" as children, but rather some kind of scaled-down, miniature adults. Phillipe Ariès (1962) argues that childhood is a relatively new concept that was non-existent in Medieval times, barely explored in later centuries that subsequently, but very slowly, made its way to upper classes in the 18th century to eventually crystallize into a defined entity much later. The disagreements between historians arise as to the precise meaning of such absence, namely in whether or not children were infused with a unique essence or specific nature. Yet, there was an overall sense of relative indifference towards children. Childhood was not very long back then, as children were expected to start contributing economically at a very early age.

However, later, many others argued that the fact childhood was not then recognized as a special and delineated stage did not mean that there was an absolute rejection of childhood insofar as a lack of ideas surrounding the nature of the child (Jenks, 1996). On the contrary, children often were associated with concepts of evilness, corruption and sinfulness. Such discourse around evil constitutes one of Meyer's three main discursive trends in her examination of the historical perspectives on childhood, the two others pertaining to discourses around the innocence and the rights of the child (Meyer, 2007). However, before further unraveling such key discursive formations, let us first make a little Foucauldian detour.

Sexuality and children

As previously noted, the idea of children being infused with an essence – or soul – specific to them was first integrated in upper classes and only made its way to working classes much later on. This class differentiation over time was also present in conceptualizing sexuality as something not exclusive to adulthood: "c'est dans la famille 'bourgeoise' ou 'aristocratique' que fut problématisée d'abord la sexualité des enfants ou des adolescents" (Foucault, 1976: 159).

Both Ariès and Foucault agree on a general absence of constraints in how adults expressed or even performed sexual acts and behaviors in front of children. However, both authors differ in how they interpret such behavior. While Ariès links this attitude to a belief articulated around notions of children as being indifferent to or ignorant of sex, Foucault argues that, on the contrary, it indicates a recognition of children's sexual awareness. Nonetheless, Foucault recognizes a strong contradictory dialectic or "pédagogisation", in that children's sexual activity was considered unequivocal yet also unseemly because it was deemed contrary to nature, "à la fois 'naturelle' et 'contre nature'" (Foucault, 1976: 137-138). This unresolved dual recognition resulted in a war against children's onanism³ that would last for nearly two centuries.

The growing obsession of adults on children's sexuality seemed more directed to children's active role or agency in discovering sexual pleasure and awakening their own knowledge about it:

³ This term widely used by Foucault refers to a sexual act committed without procreation purposes or, more simply put, masturbation.

(...) on a installé des dispositifs de surveillance, établi de pièges pour contraindre aux aveux, imposé des discours intarissables et correctifs; on a alerté les parents et les éducateurs, on a semé chez eux le soupçon que tous les enfants étaient coupables, et la peur d'être eux-mêmes coupables s'ils ne les soupçonnaient pas assez. (Foucault, 1976: 57-58)

Not being able to define children's sexuality contributed to a lingering unease that could only be tamed with repressive practices, such as intensive surveillance in institutional settings (e.g., schools, residential homes). The very concept of childhood itself was blurry, making it arduous to apprehend the idea of a sex that is both present (in terms of anatomy) yet absent (from a physiological standpoint); also active on an onanistic level yet deficient in its basic reproductive functions. This "jeu essentiel de la présence et de l'absence" tainted notions around children's sexuality up to a point where discursive measures were needed to disentangle these contradictory forces (Foucault, 1976: 202).

Conceptualizing children as pure and devoid of any adult vice settles this debate now that children are defined as being asexual or, at the very most, pre-sexual. Yet, as pointed out by Foucault, the sexuality of children and adolescents was a constant preoccupation, "un enjeu important autour duquel d'innombrables dispositifs institutionnels et stratégies discursives ont été aménagées" (Foucault, 1976: 42), or as Meyer puts it, a "contradiction of denial and regulation, silence and obsession" (2007: 32), typical of the Victorian period.

Foucault pushes his thesis on children's sexuality further, positioning it directly in relation to adults' self-reflexivity towards their own sexuality. In the institutional discourse concerning children's sexuality, which manifested itself, for instance, in the

psychiatrist-parent rapport in the form of confessions, advice and surveillance warnings, adult sexuality also gets redefined and even re-questioned in the process. Following this line of thought, Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers argue that post-Freudian liberal humanism in North America has reinstated innocence to the child, "the price of which has been the desexualization of the child and collective unbridled anxiety about adult sexual misuse of children" (as cited in MacMartin, 1999: 522).

However, while Foucault's discursive work on sexuality structurally positions children's behaviors as sexual, the discourse of innocence powerfully negates, or at the very least silences, such a thesis. Foucault concedes this shift, but does not see it as a negation or silence *per se*, but rather as a "nouveau régime des discours" (Foucault, 1976: 38). The discourse of innocence emerges with Romanticism, when the inherent goodness of children is proclaimed: children now are "close to nature, inherently virtuous, pure, angelic and innocent" (Meyer, 2007: 31). Children personify morality and purity to a point they almost need to be worshipped. The ideas of children's "needs" and "protection" actually emerge during this period, though they do not yet reach the level of significance that we see today.

Far from the earlier discourse of evil, innocence presupposes naivety and, to a certain extent, vulnerability. Christensen (cited in Meyer, 2007) sees vulnerability as a predominant theme in the Western conceptualization of childhood, as it embodies both nature and construction. Children are biologically vulnerable because they are weaker and physically underdeveloped, but they also are structurally and socially vulnerable

because of their knowledge deficiencies and their asymmetrical relation with adults.

Innocence and vulnerability emphasize children's asexual nature, a negative approach that essentially defines children by an absence, by "what they do *not* or should *not* possess" (Meyer, 2007: 43). This explains why, viewed in such a context, the presence or discovery of sexuality can put an end to childhood.

National & international legal evolutions affecting discourses

The discourse of human rights became much more prominent after the Second World War with the emergence of the welfare state. The derivative concept of children's needs led the way to a chain of concrete legislative decisions that now strongly impact on how children are treated at both national and international levels. The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* enunciates unprecedented fundamental rights for each and every human being. One particularly relevant article stipulates that "[m]otherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection."⁴ Built from that very article, the later *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959) put forth powerful principles such as "[t]he child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief", and "[t]he child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation."⁵ Since 1991, the Canadian government has formally committed to ratifying this Declaration, although protection services are not federally provisioned since they fall under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial authorities – as shown by Alberta's

⁴ Article 25, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).

⁵ Principles 8 and 9, *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959).

decision to hold out for nearly a decade before ratifying the UN agreement (Hansard, 1999).

This shift to the recognition of rights not only operates discursively but also conceptually as children migrate from their status as *objects* now into *subjects* of their own. While the discourse of innocence is "about children having things *done to* and *for them* by adults" (Meyer, 2007: 50) and stresses their neediness and incapability, the rights discourse repositions children as participative agents of society, as "active, strong and competent" beings that need to be integrated (Meyer, 2007: 53). With an emphasis on the rights of the child, the intertwined notions of needs and protection become increasingly strengthened through international and local legislative commitments and initiatives, while coalescing overarching auras of morality and righteousness. While the discourse of innocence seems to affect the shaping of specific boundaries and the construction of childhood itself, the discourse of rights rather influences how society responds to child abuse with a concrete apparatus of policy and protection.

Children entangled in discourses

This last discursive distinction should remind us that it is very important to understand concepts of discursive entanglements, since the defining line can admittedly become blurry. Discourses around children's innocence and rights are not sequentially exclusive, but rather juxtaposed in time, and while one discursive formation might precede the other, they both exert influence and constantly reshape one and another. And in the case of both discourses of children's innocence and rights, it is their very juxtaposition that

articulates modern theorization and subsequent practices around child wellbeing and protection. The societal response to CSA, whether in the judiciary process or public culture, is inevitably embedded in such constructed articulations.

A striking example can be extrapolated from Foucault's notion that sexuality is seen as defining the true essence of the self, which could partly explain why sexually abusive behaviors in general pull at our collective heartstrings in such a profound way.

Additionally, when children are involved, a sort of discursive aggravation on the gravity of the abuse is produced, especially if we adhere to the concept of children being asexual. Hence, CSA is considered worse than adult sexual abuse or other forms of child maltreatment such as physical abuse and emotional maltreatment. At a further level, a metaphorical act of destruction operates in two ways: both on the child and on the *concept* of childhood. While a sexually abused child is figuratively destructed because of her individual trauma, the abstract and more impersonal notion of childhood also gets symbolically shattered. Thus, childhood as a conceptual stage of innocence and asexuality is abruptly terminated because of the experience of abuse.

Others appropriate these dynamics into a "sacralization" of children (Zelizer, 1985).

Grounded in the highly emotional responses to child deaths in the early 20th century US, this concept emerges from a transformation of what children mean, both essentially and symbolically, so that children become sacred objects "invested with sentimental or religious meaning" (Zelizer, 1985: 11). This anthropomorphic idea of the sacredness of the child transpires as a form of ironic appraisal on the importance of children as societal

wards. I would argue further that children represent society's continuity and sustainability, somewhat rooted in a Darwinian consideration on the future of the species. When applied to issues around intra-familial abuse, and more specifically incest, this culturally derived sacralization rather seems to stem from biological imperatives, corresponding to Lévi-Strauss' (1967) "tabou universel" which speaks to the globally consensual condemnation of incest, rooted in concerns about in-breeding and manifested through harsher punishments levied on such transgressions.⁶

CSA as a societal issue: Construction or nature?

Meyer argues that it is "not radical" to claim that "[p]aedophilia is not a 'natural' problem but a socially constructed one", in the sense that both the concept itself and those who commit abuse need to be holistically apprehended as social constructions (Meyer, 2007: 1). I can only partially agree with such claim, and I feel it is important to position myself at this early stage of the investigation. While the phenomena of CSA and paedophilia are constructed, they cannot merely be reduced to purely structuralist concepts. Child molesters are often misrepresented – and unraveling such portrayals will be a focal concern in the following chapters – but appraising them on a purely structuralist level negates some key biological concerns that could very well be integrated in this oft-negated, yet self-admittedly, corrosive concept of "nature". With that being said, I do subscribe to the notion that CSA, as a societal issue, is the product of a complex set of constructions, but it is crucial to underscore MacMartin's observation, which is not made

⁶ The *Canadian criminal code* points to a possible additional four years to a sentence where CSA involves incest.

explicit enough in Meyer's work, that "[s]exual abuse is no less real for being viewed as a social construction" (MacMartin, 1999: 506).

Summary

In exposing the problematic of this thesis, I introduced the epistemological framework of my analysis as well as my personal motivations. I argued that articulations around children and sexuality are first and foremost socially embedded and firmly rooted in historical discursive trends that often coexist in contradictory ways. Children were initially considered evil beings or simply devoid of any particular essence. Later, children have been defined as innocent, naive and asexual. Yet, more recently, children have been empowered with discursive trends articulated around rights framed within overarching imperatives calling for their protection. These discursive juxtapositions bring particularly arduous layers of complexity when apprehending the phenomenon of CSA, yet clear the way in examining how it is constructed and socially represented in Québec.

In the first chapter, I begin by contextualizing Nathalie Simard's story and problematizing the issue of CSA in the wider social sciences research context in order to better grasp narratives on victimization, disclosure and perpetrators of abuse. Thereafter, in the second chapter, I explore the hegemonic nature of news media and how it exerts its influence on both social and cognitive levels. I follow this with an examination of the specific relationship between the news media and CSA, and a later discussion of the specific tools of critical discourse analysis that are used as part of my methodological approach. This sets the stage for the third chapter, where my quantitative and qualitative

results are presented based on the analysis of CSA-related stories published in *La Presse* over a ten-year period. In the fourth and final chapter, I discuss these results in relation to both social sciences literature as well as the particular media practices emerging from *La Presse's* coverage.

Chapter 1: Child sexual abuse in the Québec context

In this chapter, I situate the problematic of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the local, national and international contexts. Nathalie Simard's story is first introduced to expose how this celebrity's public disclosure of her childhood experience of sexual abuse is relevant to understanding Québec's response and popular conceptions of CSA. CSA is then situated in contrast with other forms of child abuse, both ontologically and in terms of prevalence in the Canadian context. To accomplish this, I examine what traditional social sciences research has to say about CSA on four main levels: what it is, how prevalent it is, who is involved and how society responds to it.

The Nathalie Simard story

In May 2005, Nathalie Simard, a former Québec celebrity singer and former child star, publicly divulged having been sexually abused countless times throughout her childhood by her longtime manager and well-know showbizz tycoon, Guy Cloutier. Cloutier had already been denounced in early 2004 and sentenced to three and a half years (42 months) in prison on December 20th of that same year, but the court imposed a ban on the victims' identities. Rumors were increasingly roaring that Simard was one of the victims and it ultimately became unbearable for the singer to continue hiding what many already knew. From her very first public outing, Simard's disclosure immediately generated an unprecedented amount of media attention for a case of CSA, her story being scrutinized from every possible angle for more than a year by every major media outlet in Québec.

This eventually led to what has been crystallized as the "Nathalie Simard effect", a widely shared hypothesis that Simard's highly mediatized disclosure had a direct impact on provincial sexual offense trends (Rioux, 2007). As reported by Québec's Ministry of Public Security, the rates of disclosure went up by a huge 14,4% in 2005 after three years of relative stability; this hike was causally attributed to Simard's decision to share her experiences of CSA (Rioux, 2007).

Defining child sexual abuse

CSA refers to any form of sexual activity with a child by an adult, and sometimes by another peer but without the consent of the child. In tracking the incidence of cases of CSA, the *Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS) differentiates eight forms of sexual abuse: penetration, attempted penetration, oral sex, fondling, sex talk, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exploitation. See *Box 1* for further details.

Box 1 – Eight forms of sexual abuse in the CIS

- Penetration: penile, digital or object penetration of vagina or anus.
- Attempted Penetration: attempted penile, digital or object penetration of vagina or anus.
- Oral Sex: oral contact with genitals by either perpetrator or by the child.
- Fondling: touching or fondling of genitals for sexual purpose.
- Sex Talk: verbal or written proposition, encouragement, or suggestion of a sexual nature (included face to face, phone, written and internet contact, as well as exposing the child to pornographic material).

- Voyeurism: included activities where the alleged perpetrator observes the child for the perpetrator's sexual gratification.
- Exhibitionism: included activities where the perpetrator is alleged to have exhibited himself/herself for his/her own sexual gratification.
- Exploitation: included situations where an adult sexually exploits a child for purposes of financial gain or other profit, including pornography and prostitution.

(Trocmé et al, 2005: 37-39)

Defining CSA also involves determining a cutoff age for childhood as well as a minimal age of discrepancy between a victim and her perpetrator to exclude sexual activity between peers (Stoltenborgh, 2011). According to Canada's *Tackling Violent Crime Act*, the age of consent for sexual activity is 16 years old.⁷ When the person is younger than 16 years old, the partner has to be less than five years older for it to be legally consensual – otherwise, it is considered a criminal offence.⁸ On this age-related note, adults are still considered child victims in Québec police annual accounts even if they report their experience of childhood abuse after reaching adulthood (Collin-Vézina et al, 2010).

Intra- and extra-familial abuse

CSA can occur either inside or outside the direct family circle. Intra-familial sexual abuse happens when the perpetrator is from the child's family, and often – but not always – resides in the same house as the victim. Perpetrators can be parents, siblings, other blood relatives, and also stepparents. Extra-familial sexual abuse involves any people from

⁷ The age of consent was raised from 14 years old on May 1st, 2008 (S.C. 2008, c. 6).

⁸ Information retrieved on April 30th, 2012 [<http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/dept-min/clp/faq.html>]

outside of the family, which can include teachers, friends and strangers (Fischer & McDonald, 1998). When CSA happens inside the family, victims are usually younger and the contact between the victim and the abuser often lasts longer and is more regular. On the other hand, the use of physical and verbal force seems more frequent in cases of extra-familial abuse, though it should be noted victims often feel more pressure to remain silent when the abuse occurs inside the family (Fischer & McDonald, 1998).

There is no universal consensus concerning the upper age limit, the criteria used to determine whether a sexual experience is abusive or not, the decision to include or exclude experiences with peers of similar age, and distinguishing criteria for incidents occurring during childhood and adolescence (Wyatt & Peters, 1986). Also, specific definitions of CSA used by researchers in their reports have shown to significantly affect prevalence rates (Stoltenborgh, 2011). The very act of crystallizing definitions of what constitutes child abuse played a key role in the dramatic increases of reported cases after a uniform definition of abuse was legislatively adopted⁹ throughout the US in the mid-1970s (Finkelhor, 1990; Nelson, 1984).

Prevalence and statistics

When considering statistics regarding CSA, it is crucial to first understand the difference between prevalence and incidence. Studies on *prevalence* examine the estimated number of people who have been victimized, and this data can be gathered through self-reports or other informants, e.g. siblings or child protection services (CPS) for instance. Studies on

⁹ Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), 1974.

incidence rather estimate the number of *new* cases, often reported to agencies, gathered over a specific period of time (Fallon et al., 2010). The source of information, whether emanating from self-reports of the victim herself or an informant source such as administrative data from a CPS or the police, will greatly influence rates of prevalence.

This last distinction should help appreciate the quite astonishing discrepancy in reporting rates gathered very recently in a global meta-analysis of over 200 publications. When using self-reports from the general population, an overall estimated prevalence of 12,7% of CSA was found. When the source of reporting was based on informants, this rate dropped to 0,4% (Stoltenborgh et al 2011). This obviously emphasizes how varying methods of detecting CSA shed entirely different perspectives on the phenomenon. According to Stoltenborgh's study, more than twice as many girls had been victimized in comparison with boys in the self-reporting sample. This finding corroborates the literature in terms of prevalence in gender difference (Finkelhor, 1994a; Putnam, 2003). As will be further detailed in the next section, these data can come from victims prior to or after adulthood because disclosure of CSA is often delayed to a much later period after the occurrence of the abuse.

Canadian and Québec contexts

The available national statistics have shown a steady decrease of CSA occurrence in Canada in the last decade while Québec data have displayed an opposite phenomenon. On top of population-based or retrospective research, there are two main sources of information to distinguish: data from child protection services (CPS) and the police.

Police data generally, but not exclusively, concern extra-familial cases of CSA, and only involve cases where criminal charges are laid. They also include retrospective cases, i.e. when the victim discloses her childhood abuse once she has reached adulthood. CPS statistics mostly represent cases occurring within the family and do not involve retrospective data at all.

Based on CPS data, the multi-cycle epidemiologic *Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS) is a precious source of information in reporting national statistical trends over large periods of time, but also in precisely defining and differentiating various forms of child maltreatment. The estimated numbers are based on samples of substantiated investigations, which amounted to 6,163 cases in the most recent report released in 2010. These do not include referrals made directly to the police as the CIS only identifies cases reported to child protection authorities. In the CIS-2008 statistical compilation, sexual abuse was the primary form of maltreatment¹⁰ for only 3% of all substantiated¹¹ child welfare investigations (an estimated 2,607 investigations or 0.43 per 1,000 children). In contrast, neglect of children¹² was the primary type of maltreatment in 34% of all investigations while physical abuse occurred as the primary form in 20% of them. For comparison purposes, the previous CIS cycles found an estimated rate of 0.89 per 1,000 children in 1998 and 0.62 in 2003 for CSA. These

¹⁰ When multiple forms of maltreatment may be found in a case reported to child protection authorities, the investigation usually identifies a main or "primary" type of maltreatment that is judged more salient than other co-occurring types.

¹¹ Substantiation refers to the final stage where a referral is confirmed through a specific investigation process. If a case is not substantiated, it can remain suspected or deemed unfounded.

¹² Neglect basically refers to situations where a child has suffered harm, or their safety or development has been endangered as a result of the caregiver's failure to provide for or protect them (Trocmé et al, 2005).

numbers obviously portray a steady decline with the most recent 2008 rate of 0.43 substantiated investigations for CSA as the primary form of maltreatment per 1,000 children.

As problematized earlier, such declines in Canadian rates of CSA are not being mirrored in the Québec context over the past ten years. Rather, in Québec¹³, an increase of 21% of cases has been reported – but not necessarily substantiated – to CPS between 1998 and 2005 (Collin-Vézina et al, 2009); however, between 1992 and 1998, there had been a remarkable 41% decline in substantiated of CSA cases in the province (Wright et al, 2000). Also, it is interesting to note that between 1998 and 2003, the number of cases of child physical abuse decreased by 70% in Québec, which indicates that the rise in CSA cannot be understood as a general increase of child maltreatment (Collin-Vézina et al, 2010). According to police data, between 1998 and 2004, the number of sexual offenses involving children increased by 34% (Collin-Vézina et al, 2009). It is interesting to note that in 2005, the year Nathalie Simard disclosed having been abused during her childhood, a total of 5,144 sexual offenses¹⁴ were recorded by the Québec Ministry of Public Security, which constituted an increase of 14.4% after three stable years (Rioux, 2007).

Four potential explanations for this recent increase in the number of CSA cases reported to and substantiated by CPS in Québec have recently been identified (Collin-Vézina et al, 2010). First, CSA could actually be more prevalent than before in Québec, but there have

¹³ In Québec, the *Observatoire sur les mauvais traitements envers les enfants* provides statistics for both CPS and police data.

¹⁴ These numbers are not restrictive to child abuse.

been no major crime trends changes observed, so the CSA increase would be isolated. Secondly, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) – related to the victims of child sexual abuse – between the Québec police services and the Québec child protection services was revised in 2001, which could have impacted how CSA cases are calculated and created a double-counting effect, at least more than before. Thirdly, repeat allegations¹⁵ could partly account for the increase, because only Québec includes these new referrals in already ongoing cases. Finally, and this is the part where my own investigation is situated, victims and their confidants may be *more willing* to bring their accounts and suspicions to the authorities, which would imply that more cases are coming to CPS attention. *There may be overall change in public culture*, encouraging people to be more inclined to report CSA, not only to the police, but also to the CPS. It is important to stress that all these hypotheses need to be further investigated, as they only constitute possible explanations that need verification (Collin-Vézina et al, 2010).

Examining these statistical data represents a key point in my embryonic methodological intentions and the subsequent shift needed to be undertaken in this research: while the differences in prevalence trends between Québec and Canada initiated my quantitative inquiry, the actual gaps between rates of CSA and other, more frequent forms of maltreatment display a different phenomenon, one that needs to be further qualitatively examined.

¹⁵ Repeat allegations refer to new incidents of maltreatment on cases that are already opened.

Victims, perpetrators and disclosure

The focus of this section is to unravel the actors involved at both ends of the spectrum of abuse, from a victim to her molester. I also explore the multilayered dynamics of disclosure.

Perpetrators

One of the main goals of my study is to contrast what media, and indirectly society, tell us about who abuses children in contrast with what research actually says on the matter. Because the perpetrator, the person considered to have abused the child, is often someone the child knows and trusts, the abuse more often than not occurs within the family or household.

In the context of cases reported to CPS, which represent the main sources of detection of intra-familial CSA, the CIS-2003 found that 22% of perpetrators were biological fathers or stepfathers, while another 40% were other relatives, and the remaining 38% were not related to the victim. This basically means that whenever the abuse is not directly reported to police authorities, two thirds of abusers tend to be in the victim's family circle. On that note, as pointed out by Finkelhor (2009), "the notion that molesters use public venues or approach unknown children is (...) misleading:" only 14% of children whose sexual abuse has been reported to the police have been victimized by an unknown perpetrator (2009: 172). Thus, the threat widely assumed in popular culture around unknown and anonymous child molesters, or "stranger danger", conflicts with empirical research.

In addition, we usually think of strangers when considering perpetrators from outside the family, but they can also be friends, teachers and other professionals in regular contact with children. In fact, more recently, there has been a significant amount of social concern articulated about perpetrators who work with children, especially considering the proximity and frequency of these contacts and the need for a more informed and responsible recruitment of personnel working in these settings. One study found that extra-familial abusers who are professionals working with children tend to be particularly highly preoccupied and emotionally identified with children compared to intra-familial perpetrators (Sullivan et al, 2011). The study also found that these professional workers had distorted sexual attitudes about their victims (e.g., beliefs that can justify their behavior) compared with a wider population of extra-familial offenders. Finally, it is often assumed child sexual abusers are "incurable recidivists" even though research contradicts this oversimplified notion (Finkelhor, 2009: 172) and rather indicates much lower re-offense rates than with criminals charged with other types of felony. For instance, it was shown that a strikingly low 2.8% of child sexual offenders re-perpetrated any form of sexual crime in the state of Washington, whereas felony offenders of all other crimes were recidivists in 48% of cases (Barnoski, 2005, cited in Finkelhor, 2009). Aggregated findings from meta-analyses also confirm such low numbers, albeit less strikingly, estimating a rate of only 14% of offenders committing another sexual offense after five years (Harris & Hanson, 2004).

Victims

There is a wide variety of ways in which children are victimized and cope with their experiences of abuse. While most victims will actively, or at the very least unconsciously, struggle in dealing with the burden of abuse, others demonstrate high levels of resilience.¹⁶ When reports have proved to be substantiated, the CIS-1998 shows that the most common problems a child displays, following the abuse, are depression or anxiety (29%), age-inappropriate sexual behavior (17%), behavioral problems (14%), negative peer involvement (13%) and irregular school attendance (10%).

Sally Hunter distinguishes four differing narratives about CSA victims' experiences: narratives of silence, narratives of ongoing suffering, narratives of transformation, and narratives of transcendence. While both narratives of silence and ongoing suffering involve a victim remaining quiet throughout childhood and adolescence, the former refers to an active choice of sustaining this silence and denying past experiences – up to a point where it no longer makes sense – while the latter rather implies finding a voice in adulthood "sometimes through the painful process of recovering memories" (Hunter, 2010: 183) that is often accompanied by a very strong and painful emotional response. The narrative of transformation or "survivorhood" implies that the victim resiliently deals with the abuse and the act of disclosure and chooses to utilize her experience to seek help for herself and even becoming a protector of others. The narrative of transcendence is of particular interest. This model "reflects a social constructionist approach which challenges the dominance of the victim and survivor discourse" (Hunter, 2010: 187) in

¹⁶ A victim of CSA is resilient when she remains capable of thriving or remaining healthy – demonstrating good cognitive, social, and emotional development despite experiencing such adversity.

the sense that the victim neither sees herself as a victim, nor a survivor. She will often be reluctant to talk about her experience publicly unless it has a specific function, such as helping others. The person "transcends" her special label of victim, not to sustain a state of denial, but rather to contest the restrictiveness imposed by such predicament. I will refer back to this form of "discursive resistance" later when considering discourses of victimization in the context of media.

The stigma of intra-familial abuse and the origin of a "victim discourse"

In her analysis of legal records of CSA cases between 1870 and 1914 in the UK, Jackson (1999) found that the great majority involved extra-familial abuse. Incest was underreported because of three main reasons: the shame and disgrace that would be brought to the family, the complexity of applying concepts of evil abuser to a family member, and the legal context during this historical period. In the early 1950s, incest was still viewed as a very rare phenomenon. It probably was not even acknowledged as a taboo because people were rather oblivious to it. To mobilize against this "social denial", feminist groups began emphasizing the rights of the child as well the suffering of victims, concepts that were still recently integrated in popular culture at the time (Hunter, 2010: 177). Terms such as "rape victim", "serial offender", "perpetrator" and "child witness" began to be integrated in the court discourse and legal framework. Such acts of semantic crystallization were necessary to enable societal changes.

The CSA victim discourse was born. People were now encouraged to articulate experiences that were normatively internalized when no viable channel was available to

exteriorize the trauma, and also to report the abuse to authorities. This eventually generated another form of stigma that was shaped around a victim-blaming discourse, typically "seen as female, trapped by powerlessness and passivity" (Hunter, 2010: 177) and potentially leading to a re-victimization (Reavey & Gough, 2000). The survivor discourse then emerged in the 1980s as a way to avoid the pitfalls of the victim's discourse. In a way, it glorified the courage and resilience in women and children who were able to tackle their past experience of abuse, recover from it and come out even stronger (Hunter, 2010). As previously mentioned in Hunter's typology of narratives, since the 1990s other discursive declensions have emerged in the literature to further portray the myriad of complexities around the possible experiences of CSA victimization.

Disclosure

To explore the relationship between disclosure of CSA and the media, it is important to better define and understand what disclosure means and what the literature reveals about it. Learning about how the disclosure process unfolds and varies from self-reports is of a primary importance, because these narratives are often the only reliable sources of information due to the lack of witnesses and physical evidence when the abuse is reported.

Three very broad different categories are commonly accepted and used around disclosure in the literature: (1) accidental, (2) purposeful, and (3) prompted or elicited. There also are other, more inconsistent and disputed forms of disclosure such as spontaneous, vague and delayed (Alaggia, 2004). It is estimated that between 30% and 80% of CSA victims

purposefully decide not to disclose before reaching adulthood, both for populations receiving clinical services and for those who do not (Alaggia, 2004). Research has widely examined why disclosure gets delayed so much and under which specific circumstances. It was also found that in 2006, nearly half of all documented disclosures took place more than five years after the abuse occurred (Hébert et al, 2009).

Many factors inhibiting disclosure, which explain the aforementioned delay, have been identified in recent research. These include factors such as: the age of the victims; whether the abuse happened inside the family; the victim's feelings of shame, guilt or responsibility in relation to the experience of abuse; fear of negative outcomes such as retaliation; the victim's feelings of alienation and isolation; and when the victim feels the need to protect others while not trusting who might be able to help (Goodman-Brown et al, 2003; Collin-Vézina et al, 2012). There are also gender considerations, which will be discussed in more detail later, as boys are commonly found to be less inclined to disclose than girls.

Prior to the 1990s, many factors were identified as hindering disclosure. These included the heavy stigma around anything sexually deviant, a more rigid construction of gender roles, as well as the general lack of support from adults who could potentially help (Hunter, 2010). The most pertinent factor in the context of my research, one that has been briefly mentioned in the previous section, is the sheer absence of commonly used terms to either describe the abuse or shape clear representations around the experience of

victimization. I believe this linguistic poverty is particularly important in reference to my examination of CSA discourse in *La Presse*.

Staller & Nelson-Gardell (2005) detail the many negative outcomes that victims experience following disclosure. There is sentiment of losing control as well as disrupting their immediate entourage. Additionally, victims often experience denial from others in their immediate surrounding after disclosing abuse, especially when it is perpetrated by someone inside or close to the family. On a more positive side, victims also report feeling acknowledged and supported once they are introduced to a clinical setting. An important aspect worth noting is that the processes of disclosure and intervention are very much *part of* the victimization experience, not *outside* of it, especially when harsh negative reactions and a lack of support follow a child's act of disclosure. In such negative environment, the feeling of being betrayed and stigmatized inherent to the abuse itself is likely to extend to the whole process of disclosure (Finkelhor & Browne, 1986).

A firm distinction needs to be made between adult and childhood disclosures, as they involve very different variables and outcomes (Hunter, 2010). For instance, the term "disclosure" generally refers to a child's official reporting of abuse while "telling" is more commonly used when adults share their childhood experience of abuse (Alaggia, 2004: 1214). The concept of disclosure is therefore often disputed as inadequate because of these semantic concerns on both the wide variation of its usage and its lack of clarity (Jones, 2000). Is a victim disclosing just by the very act of telling someone or does this need to involve some kind of authority?

As was mentioned in the earlier prevalence section, it is crucial to distinguish disclosures made to police authorities and those made to CPS. On the one hand, a disclosure reported to authorities when the victim is now in her adulthood always involves the police. On the other hand, disclosure made to CPS implicitly assumes the victim is still in her childhood. This key distinction is crucial to consider when considering the prevalence rates of CSA.

False and recanted allegations

Often mentioned in the context of divorce and child-custody battles, a false allegation refers to accusing someone of perpetrating CSA that in the end proves to be untrue.

While false allegations have captured public attention in the past, it is important to point out that many studies suggest an overall rate of under 10% of such cases, with only a mere fraction originating from the child (Ney, 1995). Recanting allegations are different because they take place before any investigation can prove the abuse to be founded or not. We have seen that the negative climate around disclosure of intra-familial abuse can be so difficult to bear for victims. This can therefore lead to recanting. However, as Summit (1983) speculates, children may also recant their allegation because of prevailing societal attitudes pertaining to the unreliability of children's fabricated stories, whereas an adult denying having abused a child is more likely to be taken seriously than the accusing child.

Gender considerations on victims and perpetrators

As been mentioned earlier, at least two thirds of victims are girls, according to self-reports (Stoltenborgh, 2011). An overwhelming majority (90%) of CSA perpetrators are males (Finkelhor, 2009; Finkelhor, 1994b). However, many researchers talk about a much higher prevalence of male victims of CSA than what numbers tell (Hunter, 2010; Alaggia, 2008). Boys seem more likely to hide their experience of victimization from authorities; the reasons range from societal expectations that men are strong and can deal with such a burden themselves, to the fear of being labeled homosexual (Hunter, 2010; Alaggia, 2008). Hence, prevalence rates by gender do not necessarily present the real gendered victimization ratio.

Social response

In addition to the criminal laws emanating from the Canadian *Criminal code*, each province and territory has its own legislation to protect children from sexual abuse. Cases of CSA go through different procedures before an initial referral ends up substantiated. These can be deemed unfounded or remain suspected yet never reach the final substantiation stage. In Québec, cases of CSA, as well as any other forms of child maltreatment, are dealt with by the Direction de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ) under the *Loi sur la protection de la jeunesse*. Under this legislation, protection services can intervene – which can lead to removing a child from parental custody – if the child is subjected, or at a high risk of being subjected to, sexual abuse.

Judiciary process

The majority of cases of CSA that are referred to CPS also involve a police investigation. In some Canadian jurisdictions, when a case of sexual abuse involves a perpetrator from outside the family, such as a relative who does not live in the home, a baby-sitter or a stranger, the investigation will be conducted by the police and CPS will only be involved if there are some lingering concerns about the child's well being and safety, such as the inability of the parents to provide further protection (Trocmé et al, 2010). However, there are also cases when CPS are not involved at all and rather, are entirely taken care of by police forces and the subsequent judiciary process. These cases include retrospective accusations, as when a victim is now adult and the perpetrator is a stranger.

The *Criminal Code* differentiates three distinct categories of offense: sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching and sexual exploitation. The first two offenses can lead to a maximum of ten years of prison, while sexual exploitation cannot lead to more than five years.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that cases of incest are considered more severely, since they can lead up to fourteen years of imprisonment.¹⁸

In 2004, the *Sex Offender Information Registration Act* established the National Sex Offender Registry, a database that gathers data on convicted sex offenders to provide police forces easily retrievable background information during an investigation or prevention of sexual offenses. With the *Protecting Victims from Sex Offenders Act* (Bill

¹⁷ Criminal Code. R.S.C. 1985, ss. 151-153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 155.

S-2) adopted in April 2011, the registry is now strengthened with new items such as automatic inclusion and mandatory DNA sampling of convicted sex offenders.¹⁹

Prevention and help

Many prevention programs addressing CSA have been developed and implemented in Canada and more specifically Québec. These programs are often school-based, and information is typically delivered in the form of tool kits and often introduced locally by community organizations. They are also disseminated much more widely in governmentally initiated media campaigns. However the impact of these programs is generally debatable (Finkelhor, 2009).

Many victims- and research-oriented groups and centres also exist to address issues related with CSA in Québec. These include the *Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel* (CALACS), the *Centre d'expertise en agression sexuelle Marie-Vincent*, the *Groupe de recherche sur les inadaptations sociales de l'enfance* (GRISE), the *Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les problèmes conjugaux et les agressions sexuelles* (CRIPCAS), the *Regroupement des intervenants en matière d'agression sexuelle* (RIMAS), among others.

Summary

In this chapter, I have defined CSA, examined its prevalence and explored the variety of experiences lived by victims, and imposed by different types of perpetrators. I have then

¹⁹ Protecting Victims from Sex Offenders Act. S.C. 2010, c. 17.

briefly exposed how CSA is detected, responded to and prevented, most specifically in Québec. The substantial research literature on CSA evidences the acknowledgement of an increasingly worrying reality. However, this begs the question as to whether this focus points to reality itself, or rather an image or construction of reality. Also, most would agree that the public understanding of CSA has evolved in Québec's culture in the past 20 years or so. Yet, considering statistics, societal response and the way it has been integrated in a much less stigmatized way in public discourse, it is unclear whether this evolution testifies to an increase in the incidence of CSA or rather a shifting capacity to observe and detect the abuse.

Chapter 2: Child Sexual Abuse and the Media

In this chapter, I locate the role of media in terms of the dynamics of discursive power that underpin social representations of child sexual abuse (CSA), paying particular attention to the role of hegemony and competing discursive constructions in the news, as well as related aspects of news analysis, such as mediated meanings and mass audiences. In the process, I outline the epistemological foundations guiding my research inquiry, and situate the use of critical discourse analysis to the news texts that I analyze. Thereafter, I examine the existing literature to outline the relationship between news and crime coverage, specifically focusing on the news coverage of CSA. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the conceptual and operational tools that I use from the method of critical discourse analysis to later decipher the underlying discursive trends of *La Presse's* coverage of CSA.

Discourse, power and knowledge

To situate and analyze the role of media in representing CSA in the Québec context, the framework of discourse analysis is used to approach my problematic. Discourses are inherently tied into the practices of mass media, as conveyors of meanings as well as unequal and struggling relations of power. From a Foucauldian perspective, a discourse is an entity of meaning that emerges from a repeated use of words, sentences, ideas and even images. It exists inside and beyond the singular usage of any of these "énoncés" (Foucault, 1969) and is strengthened through its constant reproduction over long periods

of time. Discourses therefore gain impact as they are conveying different ideas and representations at several levels of society, and the way various discourses become juxtaposed or entangled with each other produce increased levels of complexity when appraising a social phenomenon like CSA. When certain patterns or discursive trends start emerging, we can refer to "discursive formations" (Foucault, 1969) in the identification of regularities that embed discourses into wider bodies of knowledge.

We can also better understand what is a discourse by contrasting it to a language-system. A system is a structure of elements ruled in an arbitrary set of relations; these elements being combinable and identifiable from each other based on established conventions. Discourses are rather "the different kinds of *use* to which language is put", which then inevitably leads to considerations about how they are produced and consumed, based on historical, political and social "determinants" (Hartley, 1982: 5-6). Discourse, in a way, embodies the structuralist thesis in its ontological rejection of a "natural" or deterministic rapport to the formation of knowledge and social reality. Needless to say, I am rejecting here modernist perspectives that essentially apprehend discourses at a functionalist level as simple liaisons or translators of a "true" and positivist version of nature (Strega, 2005).

As an instrument of power and conveyor of representations about social reality, discourse is inherently tied to the construction and production of knowledge. However, that is not to say that discourse precedes knowledge, or inversely. Both are in a mutual, nearly organic interaction: "discourse production and understanding is impossible without knowledge, and knowledge acquisition and change usually presupposes discourse" (van

Dijk, 2003: 87). Discourses produce shared representations or figures that embody pieces of knowledge, such as how we conceive "dangerous" molesters or victimized human beings.

Language, hegemony and the media

According to critical linguistics, language has an ideological function. If this statement is accepted, it follows that discourses bear ideological effects and therefore contribute to, and even reinforce, relations of power. Before further exploring the relationships between discursive and ideological productions of meaning, it is necessary to first delineate Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony and how power and meaning are inextricably intertwined.

Hegemony has to be understood as the translation of power into authority, and the subsequent exercise of this power for the interests and benefits of those who, infused with such translated authority, "rule" over the subordinate. We are not talking here about direct coercion, which is basically the last resort of a hegemonic regime functioning on the naturalization of power inequities, but rather, of an exercise of power where ideological labor is involved and geared at obtaining consent from the governed. In order to be truly effective, this quest for legitimacy needs to appear natural and represented in a "neutral" fashion where the ruled classes do not feel the actual exertion of power from the ruling institutions (Hartley, 1982: 58).

As a key conveyor of hegemonic relations and representations, discourse is never fully actualized or crystallized. It is always in a potential state, in a process of constant negotiation, structured by shifting relations of power and dominance. Therefore, hegemony does not transfer itself in a uniform, unidirectional way. There are struggling dynamics of resistance that constantly renegotiate how ideological forces are being transmitted and imposed. According to Foucault, there is a complex and unstable dynamic where discourse is simultaneously an instrument and effect of power, yet also a stubborn impediment, a point of resistance where opposed strategies start emerging:

Le discours véhicule et produit du pouvoir; il le renforce mais aussi le mine, l'expose, le rend fragile et permet de le barrer. De même le silence et le secret abritent le pouvoir, ancrent ses interdits; mais ils desserrent aussi ses prises et ménagent des tolérances plus ou moins obscures. (Foucault, 1976: 133).

Ideology and naturalization

At a point in the twentieth-century, the mass media has gained an unprecedented relevance in the cultural sphere, especially since they have surpassed other existing channels in facilitating exchanges of images and concepts among societal groups and classes. They also eventually have been able to bring together traditionally fragmented, uncommunicative pieces into the seemingly accurate representation of a coherent whole. This mirage of a "social totality" forms the basis of what Stuart Hall considers the first significant cultural accomplishment of modern-day media: "the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge" (Hall, 1977: 340-341).

Ideology of the news is often understood as a "partisan" ideology. While news ideology does select and elevate certain opinions, it mostly operates in acts of translation and

generalization. As Hartley puts it, "news naturalizes the (fairly narrow) terrain on which different sectional ideologies *can* contend – it constantly maps the limits of controversy" (Hartley, 1982: 62). And these seemingly "natural" limits are not only excavated by what they contain, but also by what they exclude. Thus, news ideology should not be understood as a set of finished, objectified meaning products; rather, it floats in a constant potential stage. News texts will only coalesce into "ideological meanings" once they are translated or actualized into our subjective consciousness, as it integrates the realm of social knowledge (Hartley, 1982: 142).

The process of naturalization is always accompanied by a derived act of invisibilisation (Hartley, 1982). This process operates on many different levels in news discourse: in wider discursive and institutional practices but also inside the news discourse itself, by voicing certain perspectives and silencing others. This process of invisibilisation relies on the successful disguise of institutional voices that become "naturally" knit together with all other accessed voices. In order to remain credible, this process needs to appear perfectly neutral and transparent by putting forth representations of "factual" realities without explicitly letting it be known that an institutional discourse is in fact being implemented (Hartley, 1982). The use of statistical figures in news stories is a particularly salient example of this type of practices, as it gives an added authoritative value to a reported event yet does not present other, less "factual" alternative information that could contribute to constructing a more transparent and holistic presentation of the phenomenon. Indeed, what is meaningful in news discourse does not exclusively pertain

to the printed content alone, "but also by what is absent, not selected, discursively repressed" (Hartley, 1982: 117).

Dynamics of power and struggle

The authority of media is often taken for granted. Discourse analysis questions this assumption by looking at the inner, deeper structures that shape the way events are reported, discussed and eventually impact public discourse while imprinting themselves in collective knowledge. And, as van Dijk points out, "[k]nowledge is not only mental, but also social (...) without such a social basis, knowledge would be no more than personal belief" (van Dijk, 2003: 86).

This hegemonic struggle of exerting and maintaining power is particularly present in the interaction between media discourse and politics. According to Fairclough (1998) this struggle occurs both "internally" – within the "order of discourse" (Foucault, 1969) of the political system – and "externally" – in how a multitude of different systems and orders of discourse get articulated to each other. When political discourse gets translated in the news, a myriad of subtle yet observable and hierarchically related variables emerge, such as genres and agents. A close analysis of such complex interactions will reveal the sometimes struggling or barely visible dynamics of hegemonic power, and such an analysis is made possible with critical discourse analysis.

It is one thing to observe, scrutinize, identify and bring out the variety of discourses and genres interplaying in the terrain of coverage pertaining to CSA conveyed by the mass

media, but one also has to consider the social and institutional formations shaping, or at the very least influencing, such discursive trends. Otherwise, as Bourdieu says, it would be "superficial (at best) to try to analyse discourses or ideologies" if we "fail to take account of the sociohistorical conditions within which the object of analysis is produced, constructed and received" (as cited in Fairclough, 1998: 142-143). Retracing the historicity and shifts in policy, legal and public discourses also appears crucial. It is something I hope to have at least partially accomplished in previous sections in an attempt to disentangle some of the scientific, historical and legal discursive practices around childhood, sexuality, violence and protection.

News meaning: Encoded and decoded

Meaning is produced when both a text (or speaker) and a reader (or listener) dialogically interact in a negotiation and transformation of signs in their starkest state (Hartley, 1982). In news discourse, such interaction is crucial because a story needs to be read for any meaning to become actualized, to burst out of its suspended, potential state. News meaning is also shaped by the contextual social structure in which it is enunciated, and as both the text and reader carry their own baggage of circumstantial variables in the process, we can say that "the *encoding* and the *decoding* of the message are socially determined in some way" (Hartley, 1982: 36). Therefore, the way a news message is initially encoded is by no means guaranteed to be decoded in the same way, or have the same meaning.

Individuals can read news discourse precisely in the way it was institutionally intended (*preferred reading*), accept some of its greater dominant schemes but apply their own "local conditions" (*negotiated reading*) or entirely reject the intended hegemonic meaning and "retotalize" it through an alternative reference framework (*resisted reading*) (Hall, 1980: 136-137). Readers can consciously resist information encoded in a certain way by the media apparatuses. However, a news story template embedded with a preferred encoded meaning can still imprint itself, ending up unconsciously memorized in that intended way. Hence, even if a framing is resisted, i.e. initially viewed as incorrect or constructed in any exaggerated manner, it "does not mean that the media have no influence" (Kitzinger, 2004: 119).

(Mass) audiences and the "effects" of media

To make further sense of how meaning is appropriated in media discourse decoding – whether in a preferred, negotiated or resisted way – it seems particularly important to understand and hopefully better define what exactly is meant by "audience" or even "mass consumers." First, the concept of "'the audience' as a single homogeneous mass is a myth" (Kitzinger, 2004: 185), or a "caricature" that "singles out only the safe 'common denominators' of orientation" (Westergaard, 1977: 108), while conveniently suppressing a complex set of layers and ambiguities. This conception of a homogenous mass of individuals hides a crucial constituent, which is that the "public" is actually shaped and defined by unequal sources of power. Also, it is often taken for granted in mass media organizations that "The" audience as a whole wants this type of news program, or this form of entertainment, which leads us back to what Hall referred to as the modern mass

media's ability to create a "mirage" of a social totality made out of unrelated, fragmented bundles. Notwithstanding the fact that I reject this concept of a homogenous audience, it does not mean that I embrace the Enlightenment notion of pure individualistic empowerment, where anyone acts and talks from her/his own immaculate self, separate from sociopolitical constructions of culture and language; a construct that McKinley (1997: 240) defines as the "fiction of the autonomous self."

Kitzinger (1999; 2004) supports the relevance of active audience and media effects models, insightfully bridging notions of textual reading and media-based influence in her focus group interviews exploring the effect of CSA coverage in UK tabloids. Other media theorists such as Hartley and van Dijk criticize the relevance of such models, and prefer approaching media texts and individual cognitive participation in a much less consciously driven and active structure. Kitzinger's careful effort to defend the "unfashionable" notion of media effects is commendable, as she argues for a somewhat linear correlation between what is disseminated in the media and a shaping of what people think while constantly remaining aware of the polysemic nature of reading media texts (Kitzinger, 1999). However, as a framework for my analysis, I prefer aligning myself with Hartley's approach to news discourse, namely, that it holds "its 'effect' in the same way as language has its effect: not directly on behaviour, but as a structuring agent of mediation between the discursive self and the social/physical world" (Hartley, 1982: 138). Indeed, while media effects imply direct behavioral impact, media discourse acts as a mediator and conveyor of representations between a constructed, heterogeneous audience and a multilayered, never fully actualized social reality. While still remaining able to shift away

from direct and linear media influence, some form of causal, participatory relationship can still be defended from a critical discourse analysis perspective: news discourse "help[s] shape social reality by shaping our views of social reality" (Richardson, 2007: 13), and therefore needs to be taken very seriously.

In the specific context of CSA, instead of saying that the media influence us into adopting specific positions or even committing definitive actions (such as disclosing abuse), I prefer the notion that the media "possess the power to disseminate ways of thinking about [paedophilia]" (Meyer, 2007: 84). This resonates with Hartley's suggestion on the core functioning of ideological forces in media: to make institutional discourse appear natural, the media need to "map" the terrain where a determinedly limited spectrum of opinions on a given issue can contend. When the media try too hard to advocate specific positions, the invisible processes become apparent and the subtlety of ideological discourse turns into propaganda. And while we know that "propaganda is contestable (...) common sense tells us, 'nature' is not" (Hartley, 1982: 106). Yet, one always has to keep in mind that "common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes" (Gramsci, 1971: 422).

When the news is successfully able to mediate through individual knowledge as well as personal experiences and inclinations, its discursive power is reinforced. When individuals become interested enough in certain media discourses that they become imprinted, we can talk of impact (Meyer, 2007). However, there are two other factors that complicate the relation between media impact and personal position. First, personal

circumstances and experiences can enhance disbelief in media discourses. Second, multiple and contradictory positioning generates a juxtaposed outlook on issues such as the danger of paedophilia and how much children are at risk. These influence the complexity of discursive entanglements and the socio-cognitive processes involved in resisting or challenging media texts.

News discourse about crime and violence

As previously stated, it can be tempting to apply some form of "low-flying" behaviorism, like a "tap on the knee cap", when conceptualizing the encoding-decoding process (Hall, 1980: 131). Hence, it is particularly insightful to contemplate George Gerbner's (1970) epistemological separation when explaining that representations of violence on television, which can be applied to news discourse in general, "are not violence but messages about violence" (as cited in Hall, 1980: 131). With such a crucial distinction integrated, how are the media "talking" about violence? In news stories, violence is more often than not articulated in crime-related context.

In publicizing government orientations and legislative reforms on crime-related matters, as well as disseminating normative definitions of what constitutes violence, news media maintain a close relationship with power. Through framing practices, mainstream media then has the ability to prescribe how violence should be understood and discussed in public discourse, defining "those aspects of violence that are sanctioned and those that need to be defused or punished in this process" (Jiwani, 2006: 6). It is worth pointing out that an overwhelming 95% of the population considers the media as the principal source

of crime-related information (Graber, 1980), which reinforces the saliency of news discourse in translating violence to the public, both in terms of its prevalence and discrete characterization.

Crime stories usually follow a specific template, or "narrative cycles" (Hall et al, 1997: 274), in news reporting. After the crime has been discovered and the suspect arrested, charges are laid, followed by a trial and subsequent conviction and final sentencing.

Towards the end of a case's narrative cycle, the media reporting enables a "cleansing of the collective morality and a closure of the terrible stories" (Hall et al, 1997: 275).

Additionally, this discursive process strengthens the efficiency of law reinforcement and its relation to hegemonic power. In cases of child abuse, although a similar narrative process occurs, Hall et al argue there is an additional step: a search for a source or figure to blame. The idea of a child being maltreated invokes many of the concepts about childhood brought up earlier and fuels popular demands for immediate policy response, harsher punishments for the perpetrator, as well as additional waves of accusations that are often directed at the local child protection agency.

Media and CSA

The relationship between media and CSA has not been much examined in both provincial and national research landscapes. Most research on the subject has been conducted in the UK, where the press has its own unique dynamics. Historical perspectives were previously outlined on how sexual abuse, as a taboo subject, took time to become accepted in public discourse. In earlier days, the channels of dissemination to educate

society about this issue were so limited and likely hindered victims to disclose, let alone bring up the subject in everyday conversation. This certainly accentuates the crucial role the mass media had to assume in shattering the overwhelming and multilayered stigmas around CSA. As the phenomenon slowly transitioned from a purely secretive and shameful experience into a matter of public consciousness, it is safe to say the media brought some positive light, for instance, in partially de-stigmatizing victimization and raising overall awareness of the issue. However, it did not take long before the inherently sensationalistic nature of news media pushed the issue of CSA into realms of false or exaggerated representations. Below, I examine some of the literature on this topic.

Media hypes and sensationalism

While the ontological gravity of CSA does not lend itself to "infotainment" coverage, the literature still indicates varying degrees of sensationalist media treatment. Often driven by media hypes, major CSA events disseminated in the news have often fetched disproportionate amounts of coverage and questionable forms of reporting, especially in the UK. Drawing on Costin et al (1996), Chris Goddard argues that by focusing on sexual abuse cases, the media transforms child abuse "from a social problem into a social spectacle" (Goddard, 1996: 306). These intensive media practices can then influence policy-making through a process Franklin & Lavery (1989) call "legislation by tabloid," which is truly worrisome when considering the lack of journalistic rigor often applied in this form of mass-mediated coverage. Similarly, such campaigns can lead to "policy development by press release" (Goddard and Liddell, 1993: 24) rather than responses thoroughly developed through community-based research and consultation. These

appraisals obviously denounce such types of journalistic practices, driven by editorial lines, time constraints and most importantly, the constant need to catch the lucrative public eye and retain it. As important translators and mediators of reality, Edwards et al consider reporters' accounts as "powerful wheels for generating emotions of panic and anxiety able to create their own separate reality with their own momentum" (2004: 117). It will be interesting to investigate how these concerns, articulated in international research, resonate in the context of my own analysis.

Moral panic

Cohen's theory of moral panic (1972) seems well suited for the media treatment of CSA, having informed a significant amount of social scientific research on paedophilia (Meyer, 2007). The model suggests that when a deviant form of behavior is "discovered" in a society, it can be subjected to a series of processes that include exaggeration, symbolization, sensitization and eventually the emergence of a controlling and exploitative culture. For instance, prior to the 1970s, the word "paedophile" was confined to medical academia, whereas nowadays, it has crystallized into a household term (Cobley, 2000; Jenkins, 1992; Moscovici, 1998), a change facilitated by media coverage of such cases. The mass media obviously play a key role as both instigators and sustainers of such fear, as well as creators of the negative figure of the "folk devil" (Cohen, 1972).

Moral panic is an insightful heuristic tool, but it apprehends the media as a monolithic agent outside the complex and multidirectional processes of influence involving

audiences and on a wider level, society. Yet, moral panics still rise and subside. Every time there is a paedophile in sight and there is a high profile case of CSA, there is a moral panic generated, which then subsides when the government steps in and introduces legislative measures.

Edwards et al (1994) have thoroughly examined the impact of mass-mediated moral panics on people's perceptions of how CSA cases are undertaken by child welfare practitioners. Through a feminist perspective, they utilize the construction of the "folk devil" in trying to disentangle discursive deformations between the portrayal of parents (positive) and professionals (negative) involved in two specific European case studies, one being the 1987 infamous Cleveland (UK) case where an "epidemic in the diagnosis of child sexual abuse erupted", the other less internationally familiar one that took place in Vlaardingen, Netherlands (Edwards et al, 1994: 104). In the former case, child protection workers ended up being blamed in the media for such a sudden and undesirable event. As will be developed further, this specific event was a clear indicator of a societal denial around the taboo phenomenon of intra-familial sexual abuse, a denial made public by a media report's focus on incongruous interventions and issues in professional diagnosis, as well as the children's own false accusations and false memories (Goddard, 1996). In the end, the main losers in this media debate were the children themselves (Nava, 1988).

While I intend to generally avoid a "moral panic" standpoint, the concept of a "folk devil" remains intriguing. In the literature pertaining to CSA, this concept is portrayed in two

emblematic yet diametrically opposed figures. On one hand, is the paedophile, the child molester and the various mythical constructions around familiar locations such as children's parks (space), the perpetrator's manipulative and cunning behavior (grooming) and the work-related environment allowing proximity with children (employment) (Meyer, 2007). On the other hand, are the child welfare interveners, who are situated in opposition to the "good" parents who are victimized by these outsiders' intrusions (Kitzinger, 2004; Edwards, 1994).

Social workers as Folk Devils

While I acknowledge the relevance of examining media representation of child protection workers in my examination, I privilege instead Meyer's and Kitzinger's "stranger-danger" paradigm, which is also loosely rooted in Cohen's theorization of moral panics. In order to properly incorporate the literature on public representations of social workers conveyed by media in my own analysis, I would need to give it a prominent space, which I do not have here. Therefore I attend to this subject at a superficial level and instead concentrate on concepts of others, strangers and folk devils in exploring the victim-aggressor dyad.

Before moving onto the rich discussion of the media portrayal of child molesters, it is worth noting that when media discuss child protection professionals, the focus is usually framed in terms of major hiccups, missed opportunities for interventions and false allegations. This practice reinforces the representation that the real issue of CSA comes from the outside or through the failures of incompetent "others", and that the sacred

concept of the family remains immaculate. The emphasis on false allegations also leads us back to earliest discursive root of the child as evil, which in the current milieu, residually transfers into the construction of the child as unreliable and as lying constantly.

Contradictory portrayal of perpetrators

The portrayal of child molesters in the media is one of the main elements I want to explore in my thesis. As stated in the previous chapter, perpetrators of this specific type of abuse often represent a key link between victimized children, or adults bearing the stigma of past childhood abuse, and their willingness or inhibition to disclose to authorities, especially when the aggressor is still present inside the victim's circle.

The literature on the discursive constructions around child abusers in the media is rich and replete with fitting examples of the "folk devils" articulated by the moral panic model. While available research on media portrayals of victims of CSA is very scarce, the multilayered figure of "the paedophile" (Meyer, 2007) has been examined from all possible angles.

Returning to ancient constructions around childhood, the constructed figure of the paedophile is deeply rooted in the discourse of evil. This way of depicting CSA perpetrators is very elementary and can be extended, through a discourse around animality, to positioning them as irrational predators who go out to hunt their prey and satiate their most primary biological needs. Paedophiles are then constructed as subhuman or even "a breed apart" (Hebenton & Thomas, 1996), which separates them

from the other agents of society. These kinds of discursive practices are problematic because they dehumanize perpetrators and, in a way, legitimize demands for their inhuman treatment and a denial of basic human rights (Meyer, 2007). However, it has also been shown that paedophiles in news media are also depicted as highly rational and calculative beings, utilizing what Meyer calls the "cunning discourse." This discursive trend is regularly portrayed in stories on cyberpaedophilia and abductions, where perpetrators manifest considerable degrees of technological skills as well as a careful, meticulous and manipulative mindset. Attributing these very distinctive human traits inevitably "restores humanness" to the paedophile (Meyer, 2007: 84), and such juxtaposing practices end up complicating the public's perception of these child molesters. Their dual identities, as both unpredictable animals and calculating human beings, make it difficult to grasp the societal risk they pose and how they should be dealt with. Rather than being situated in a straightforward and uniform fashion, "[t]he dangerousness of 'the paedophile' is located in these ambiguities and contradictions" (Meyer, 2007: 106); a duality that also manifests itself in their construction as "simultaneously knowable and unknowable" (Meyer, 2007: 102) because they hold specific and recognizable characteristics, yet are perfectly impossible to identify in a crowd. They are, then, modern-day devils in disguise.

These discursive practices raise further concerns regarding how society should articulate its response. Personifying paedophiles as evil or devilish monsters generates a process of exclusion by individualization: "such evil can be exorcised by exclusion of these individuals from society" (Kitzinger, 2004: 156). The focus therefore narrows to these

few, very peculiar and dangerous outcasts, and on the methods to hunt them and prevent children and families from being exposed to their likely presence – hence the term "neighbour from hell" (Kitzinger, 1999). In turn, the attention shifts away from tackling the issue of CSA on much wider scales of analysis, which should systematically include concerns about social, institutional, cultural and even biological issues. The reality is that sensationalism usually sells more copies, which pushes journalists to *identify* key individuals that embody the problem rather than holistically *examine* society's untapped and unresolved issues that contribute to these patterns of abuse. This tendency towards episodic, misrepresenting and individualistic coverage has been documented for the coverage of other kinds of violence, especially against women in cases of domestic violence (Jiwani, 2006; Kitzinger, 2004).

Finally, constructing child molesters as these societal outcasts further strengthens the myth of the stranger-abuser. Ultimately, portraying the problem of CSA within a stranger-danger paradigm steers it away from "a problem *of* the family to a problem *outside* the family" (Meyer, 2007: 9).

Stranger-danger vs. intra-familial abuse

The fact that sexual violence against children is more often perpetrated by someone they know is sometimes acknowledged in the media reports, but on an episodic level.

Kitzinger & Skidmore (1995) have found that an astounding 96% of news articles focus on random threats from strangers, where the mythic and unidentifiable "pervert on the loose," offering sweets or even abducting children, puts each and everyone at risk

(Kitzinger, 2004: 128). The appealing nature of such a framing is undeniable and further confirms that sensationalism sells more copies. Stranger-danger stories are "thus complemented, reinforced and reiterated through everyday conversation" (Kitzinger, 2004: 140), which definitely contrasts with the highly private and complex dynamics of sexual abuse occurring within the family home.

Incest cases are not easy to report for media outlets, and are "often not reported at all" (Kitzinger, 2004: 129). In the UK, the Press Complaints Commission's guidelines mentions that "[t]he word 'incest' must not be used where a child victim might be identified" in media reporting on court cases involving sexual offences (Press Complaints Commission, 2011). Therefore, even if a court case does get some media exposure, the incestuous relationship between the victim and her perpetrator might not be mentioned at all. In the end, such practices end up reinforcing the stranger-danger paradigm, the social stigma on intra-familial abuse and an overall "deep-seated resistance to publicising this aspect of sexual abuse" (Kitzinger, 2004: 129). It will be interesting to explore how this resonates specifically with *La Presse's* coverage as well as the wider public understanding in Québec.

Aside from purely sensationalistic and commercially-driven motives, why is the stranger-paedophile the object of so much more media interest and near-fictional constructions than the incestuous father? In line with some of the burdens around disclosure on the part of victims, mentioned in the previous chapter, Meyer suggests that it is much more arduous to demonize a parent who is so well integrated in both familial and societal

traditional structures: "the stimulation of anxiety is only pleasurable as long as it is somehow limited, either by being invoked through fiction or by ideas of the recognisable 'Other'" (2007: 105). In addition to these concerns about strangers, existing constructions of child molesters also contribute to the erasure of gender agency. The fact the overwhelming majority of abusers are males becomes so integrated in discourse that this acknowledgement operates invisibly and does not generate any disturbance in men's status in society: "[m]aleness (...) is constantly present yet absent" (Meyer, 2007: 101). Hence, by distinguishing maleness from paedophilia, the danger is confined to this "othered" status, while "normal" men can continue assuming their role of protectors of both women and children (Cowburn & Dominelli, 2001).

Quantitative analyses of news coverage

Recent research conducted in Québec examines the news coverage of child maltreatment and/or sexual assaults (Saint-Jacques et al, 2010; Saint-Jacques et al, 2009; Boudreau et al, 2010). These studies relate both thematically and geographically to some of the main research questions investigated here and are helpful in making sense of my quantitative data. Saint Jacques et al (2009) found relationships between waves in news coverage of child maltreatment and fluctuations in the reports made to Centres Jeunesse.

Interestingly, their study notes a greater amount of referrals emanating from non-professional circles, such as families and the general public, during a media hype following the release of the blockbuster documentary *Les voleurs d'enfance*; a virulent opinion piece portraying the flaws in the province's child protection system with horrific stories of undetected abuse and neglect. Boudreau et al (2010) explore longitudinal

relationships between news coverage and legislative reforms on the rates of sexual assault (not specifically towards children), and found that the media coverage appears consistently nurtured by trends of sexual abuse from previous years.

However, by privileging a strictly quantitative treatment of news coverage, these researchers miss out on crucial qualitative information located *inside* the news stories that would better inform their research questions. Most importantly, these studies fail to take into account crucial sociopolitical, institutional and cultural aspects inherent to the functioning and dissemination of news media. That said, Saint-Jacques et al's study (2010) yields insightful findings for my research, as they found that stories on sexual and physical abuse of children are much more prevalent than other, more frequent types of maltreatment. Their findings also corroborate results from aforementioned UK studies in that most of the time, perpetrators in these articles are strangers to the child, although these stories are not exclusively about sexual abuse.

Cheit's work (2003; 2010) examines the longitudinal magazine coverage of CSA in the United States. A relative infrequency of stories that deal with issues of psychology or more systemic issues is noted, which singularly demonstrates the propensity of the media to focus on criminal aspects of CSA. This tendency to focus on sensationalized angles of CSA leaves more educational issues untapped, "such as the impact of CSA on children, the manner in which people involved may seek help, or larger societal trends" (Cheit et al, 2010: 115). In a previous study, Cheit (2003) found that "the most unusual cases receive the most coverage, while the most common cases receive little to no coverage"

(2003: 620). Cheit draws some of his work from Beckett's use of frame analysis techniques, a form of content analysis, to measure quantitative variations in the CSA framing over a long period of time (Beckett, 1996). Beckett's insightful research on the culture and signifying dynamics of CSA (which is further detailed in the following section) also delves into many discursive explorations very much in line with my own analysis.

Critical discourse analysis

The method of critical discourse analysis enriches the framework of discourse analysis by linking "linguistic analysis to social analysis" (Woods & Kroger, 2000: 206), and more specifically by bringing a sociolinguistic approach to newspaper texts. Fairclough characterizes critical discourse analysis as a combination of two commitments, one critical and the other interdisciplinary, and he aims at mapping three separate forms of analysis onto one another: first, as a linguistic analysis of texts (written, spoken or even intertextual); second, as an analysis of discursive practices based on the processes of production, distribution and consumption; and third, as an analysis of discursive events shaped by sociocultural practices (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 1998). Critical discourse analysis therefore not only allows analyzing the coverage of CSA in the media by considering wider social practices as well as applying concrete critical linguistics tools and concepts, but it also inherently calls for an interdisciplinary research approach, i.e. linking media with different levels and disciplinary frameworks.

At a first glance, analyzing how CSA gets translated in public culture through the media does not necessarily seem to lend itself fluently to critical discourse analysis, at least not as prominently as more politically oriented news themes. CSA is constructed as a valence issue in the media, and therefore is not subject to any defined partisan ideology.

However, the interpersonal exertion of power involved in cases of CSA, mostly determined by unequal and struggling relations based on age and gender differences, epistemologically links my thesis subject with the analytical framework put forth by critical discourse analysis.

Conceptual and operational tools from critical discourse analysis

In this section, I briefly discuss some of the concrete tools and concepts of critical discourse analysis that are used in analyzing a selection of news texts. In particular, the following heuristic tools highlight patterns and specific discursive practices *inside* and *amongst* news articles in *La Presse*.

Framing

Framing in the news derives from the concept of preferred meaning. It can be defined as a rhetorical package or template used to promote or discourage certain readings of the text. Framing can essentially be defined in terms of "selection" and "salience," where particular elements of a perceived reality are picked apart and made more prominent than others in a news text. In this sense, frames organize reality on multiple layers of a given item by promoting "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993: 52). Frames can also be

seen as "cognitive windows" through which news event can be observed (Pan & Kosicki, 1993: 59) or as maps that help navigate an ocean of plural realities (Gamson, 1992).

Framing extends beyond questions of bias and accessed voices; it is about how one selectively organizes reality. From an editorial perspective, a frame can be apprehended as the "angle" adopted by a journalist when reporting a story (Kitzinger, 2004: 14-15).

This idea of editorial perspective is particularly relevant in my research considering that *La Presse* has a specifically delineated and long-lasting editorial mandate, a point further addressed in the next chapter. Examining framing techniques allows for a focus on the quality of the coverage rather than the quantity of coverage that CSA receives.

Valence vs. position, multi-accentuality and quotations

It is important to distinguish practices around *valence* versus *position* issues: while the former relates to issues where there is some general consensus in the public sphere, the latter refers to dividedly opinionated issues, based on a particular position. As is evident, child maltreatment is overwhelmingly positioned as a valence issue: "there is no 'pro-child abuse' lobby" (Beckett, 1996: 57). However, such a framing can be highly problematic. While valence implies uniformity, it does not necessarily mean that the overall framing of child abuse remains entirely static: it can undergo significant transformations over time and generate uncomfortably contradictory positions. For instance, in using frame-analysis techniques of longitudinal major US magazines coverage, Beckett found that CSA was once dominantly portrayed as a collectively denied and underreported phenomenon, but that later coverage of this topic focused on

how false accusations and false memories emerged as the dominant ways of interpreting claims of abuse, thus representing the issue itself and its prevalence as highly dubious.

The problems around the practice of valence framing highlight the "multi-accentual" nature of social issues such as CSA. *Multi-accentuality* derives from Saussure's arbitrary and purely constructed nature of the sign and sends us back to Hall's notions of preferred meanings, which on one hand remind us that what we read in the news is inevitably open to alternative readings, yet on the other hand, that institutionalized discursive practices persuasively try to "fix" and essentialize this meaning-potential: "[t]he trick is to make multi-accentual connotation look like uni-accentual denotation" (Hartley, 1982: 27). In this light, it is interesting to examine whether *La Presse* positions CSA as a valence issue, and if contradictions or highly multi-accentual framing bundles emerge over the time frame of analysis.

As part of the multi-accentual process, quotations in news stories play a particularly important role in discursive intentions and reading. This role changes whether the accessed voice is considered expert or an "everyday" person. However, aside from who is commenting in a given story, quotes are used "to naturalize all the parts of the discourse that are *not* in quotation marks" (Hartley, 1982: 110).

Linguistics and syntactic structures

In analyzing a news report, it is important to distinguish macro- (topics, overall thematic schema) and microstructures (semantics of words, sentences and sentence connections).

The *headline*, as the highest macroproposition, carries the macrostructure of an article or cognitively establishes a representation of that macrostructure (van dijk, 1988). Sub-headlines go beyond the main topics by carrying more specific and secondary themes. Often put in bold, the *lead* concisely expresses with "thematical sentences" the entire macrostructure as a sort of extension of a headline (van dijk, 1983: 34). A news article can also be dichotomized into a story and a summary. While the summary is mainly composed of a headline and lead, the story rather refers to the main body of text. A story usually is structured with both *situational information* – the main episodic event contextualized in larger background – and *comments*, which comprise the evaluation and expectations about the story (van dijk, 1988).

Also, in its structure of importance and relevance, daily news discourse is diametrically opposed to argumentative (or academic) discourse. In the latter, the important content, usually shaped into a conclusion, is kept for the end while the former's structure prioritizes salient items at the very top of the article. As we approach towards the end of an article, sentences become progressively less important because they usually depict the event with less crucial details and will be the first to be cut by the editor, if need be (van dijk, 1983).

Attributions and discursive heterogeneity

Attributional practices are very common in news discourse and can easily slip from the inattentive reader's mind because they are usually very subtly manifested. However, this subtlety makes attributions so effective when unconsciously integrated. van Dijk points

out that, "action descriptions referring to anger of the actor will typically favor situational attributions, whereas descriptions of accomplishments will tend to focus on attributes of the persons themselves" (van Dijk, 1989: 176). Repeatedly using *nominalizations* – when a word or group of words is transformed into a noun, usually at the beginning of a sentence or proposition – also play a crucial role in the attribution process, in part because their absence, usually in the form of a passive syntactic structure, typically evokes intentionless and agentless activities.

To concretely portray Foucault's concept of "order of discourse" (Foucault, 1969), which was introduced in the earlier epistemological section, I use Fairclough's notion of *discursive heterogeneity*. The latter implies shifts in discourses, genres and agency. A news story is discursively heterogeneous, for instance, when a story uses a legal discursive tone at first but then shifts into the "lifeworld discourse," or the everyday person discourse, and becomes reformulated through the quoting of "expert" opinions (Fairclough, 1998). Mixing genres in mass media texts can be highly manipulative by generating ambiguity and reinforcing certain preferred readings over others. These practices ultimately have substantial implications regarding how audiences are being addressed. Practices of categorization are also crucial to bear in mind when analyzing news text. Categorical statements are usually articulated through unmodalized, declarative sentences, which can be problematic because they "authoritatively claim knowledge of events" (Fairclough, 1998: 154). These types of statements restrict news events and agents to monological interpretations and inherently reject multiple possible

readings, for instance, by avoiding modal terms such as "may", "could" or any other conditional referents.

Analogies, metaphors and other figures of speech

Analogies are commonly used in various shapes and forms in media discourse. Because of their strong ability to evoke emotional reactions, analogies need to be carefully examined as they can predispose people to making conclusions with the least amount of analysis (Neustadt & May, 1988). As is evident thus far, the inherently sensitive complexion of CSA lends itself to highly emotional readings, which can easily be accentuated by a powerfully evocative metaphorical and analogical treatment. It will later be interesting to explore concepts brought up in earlier sections with high metaphorical potential, around the "destruction" of childhood for instance, and see how these resonate in the *La Presse* coverage.

Photographs and graphic design

Analyzing images and graphic layout in newspaper coverage has been integrated in the context of critical discourse analysis and can be related to the framework of social semiotics. However, as will be further specified in the next chapter, the present analysis solely focuses on the written text because the web-based method of news data collection limits access to visual content.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the inherent functioning of news media, based on unequal and hegemonic exertions of power, and exposed how news texts are socially and cognitively transmitted to ultimately yet controversially exert influence. Key notions of mass audiences as well as encoded and decoded meanings were further examined to better situate my analytic approach to news text, one mainly informed by critical discourse analysis. I also reviewed existing literature, from both local and international research, on the relation between the press and instances of child abuse, and more specifically CSA. In the following chapter, I examine the coverage of CSA in *La Presse* from 2001 to 2010, using the tools of critical discourse analysis that were outlined above.

Chapter 3: Analyzing *La Presse* (2000-2011)

In this chapter, I explain the combined set of methods – quantitative and qualitative – that were used to collect news data in *La Presse*. The idea behind using mixed methods stems from my initial hypothesis of a quantitative causal relationship between the amount of coverage of child sexual abuse (CSA) and the increased rates of disclosure. Now, I turn to a more encompassing outlook to examine the actual content *inside* the news articles; a qualitative approach to news text now constituting the core part of this research, derived from discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. Before discussing the details of my methodology, I introduce the *La Presse* newspaper, retracing its history, format, readership as well as other relevant facts pertaining to its production, distribution and consumption.

***La Presse* - Context, production and ideology**

La Presse, founded in 1884 by William-Edmond Blumhart, is a broadsheet newspaper, aimed at a francophone middle-class readership. The daily paper comprises several sections, dealing individually with arts, sports, and other themes. Its Saturday edition can have over ten sections. The editorial board of *La Presse*, on which André Pratte is the current editor-in-chief, has been consistently supportive of federalism,²⁰ even though

²⁰ For several decades, the political landscape in Québec has been dichotomized between *nationalism*, in favor of Québec becoming sovereign from Canada, and *federalism*, privileging the constitutional *status quo*, and retaining membership within the nation-state.

individual columnists may "freely"²¹ express less sympathy. The federalist option was endorsed in both the 1980 and 1995 Québec referendums, which can be rooted back to 1967 when the paper positioned itself in favor of the Canadian Constitution. *La Presse's* direct competitors in the Montreal region are *Le Journal de Montréal*, a francophone tabloid or down-market paper owned by Quebecor and aimed at more popular audiences, and *Le Devoir*, a limited circulation journal broadsheet with a nationalist editorial line, which tends to serve a more educated and elite readership.

In 2010, *La Presse* had 937,169 readers. Its direct competitor, *Le Journal de Montréal*, has an estimated readership of 1,247,186. The other main francophone broadsheet – *Le Devoir*, owned by Le Devoir inc. but distributed by Quebecor – has a readership of 217,989. In 2010, the average circulation of *La Presse* was established at 202,863 copies from Monday to Friday, with 266,569 copies on Saturday (Centre d'étude sur les médias, 2010). These circulation numbers closely mirror those of 2008, with 203,500 copies from Monday to Friday and 272,716 on Saturday. In 2008, however, there used to be a Sunday edition, which sold an additional 221,870 copies, so the overall numbers are definitely declining.

In the province of Québec, three national groups and consortiums (Transcontinental, Quebecor and Gesca-Power Corporation) own more than two thirds of all publications, while accumulating more than three quarters of the overall circulation (Centre d'étude sur

²¹ The term is derived from the description of *La Presse* in Wikipedia. Retrieved on March 30th, 2012 at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Presse_\(Canadian_newspaper\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Presse_(Canadian_newspaper)).

les médias, 2011). *La Presse* is owned by one of these three, Groupe Gesca, a subsidiary of Power Corporation.

Power Corporation

Incorporated in 1925, Power Corporation of Canada is a diversified international management and holding company operating in North America, Europe and Asia, with interests in companies in the financial services, communications and other business sectors. Paul Desmarais has been the chairman and chief executive officer of Power Corporation's since 1968. The company currently owns fifteen subsidiaries such as Gesca, and many financial and insurance companies such as Group Investors, Putnam Investments, London Life and Great-West Lifeco. In 2011, Power Corporation was rated the 4th largest Canadian company, generating a revenue of \$33 billion, and ranking 37th in profit (\$907 million). The company also employed 33,087 workers last year.²²

While I do not want to go into much further detail about the company, it is interesting to note that Power Corporation has been criticized for its involvement in Canadian politics at the international level (Western Standard, 2005) and its defense of federalism in Québec, as evident in its employment of former Canadian Prime Ministers Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin. At the provincial level, the Québec Liberals were in power for three consecutive mandates until 2012 under former Prime Minister Jean Charest, and there was a strong relationship between Power Corporation and the

²² Retrieved on May 11th at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-magazine/top-1000/2011-rankings-of-canadas-top-1000-public-companies-by-profit/article2071184/>.

government. During Québec's tuition hikes and subsequent social crisis in 2012, *La Presse's* editorial position in support of the former Charest Liberal government was particularly explicit.

Methodology

In the present analysis, I employ both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. As outlined in the previous chapters, both of these methods contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how CSA is portrayed in the newspaper.

Quantitative

For my quantitative analysis, I searched all CSA-related articles published in *La Presse* between 2000 and 2011 inclusively. I used Eureka, an online newspaper archiving retrieval resource, and searched for each month of that 12-year span using an algorithmic keyword function.²³ Each month of each year yielded a certain amount of "raw" hits, and I had to read across all stories to make sure each one specifically pertained to CSA, or at the very least involved a prominent aspect of it. Many news articles were discarded because words like "pédophilie" or "agression sexuelle" were enunciated once or twice, but outside of the story's main focus. Sometimes the results would yield stories about sexual assaults on young women, but also on teenagers older than 15 years old. Referring

²³ (enfant* OU jeune* OU adol* OU bebe*) ET ((agress* OU abus* OU viol*) @sexu*) OU pedoph*.

back to the *Criminal Code*, these stories were rejected since they do not constitute prototypical cases of CSA, even prior to recent legislative reforms.²⁴

Qualitative

For the qualitative analysis, data from *La Presse* was collected using the same search function and the Eureka archive resource, the search being limited in this instance to the period 2001 to 2010. Thousands of articles related in one way or another to CSA during that time span, and thus my collection was narrowed to twelve stories per year – one for each month of each year. Some months had more than one extremely relevant story, while other months were not producing results that matched the selection criteria, but a consistency was maintained throughout my data collection process. This method yielded a more random selection of news stories, and thus allowed a wider examination of how an issue like CSA is reported over a long time.

In order to maintain consistency, for each month I opted for stories that were close to the 350 word-count, with preferably more words than less.²⁵ Stories that were not written by an in-house journalist were mostly rejected – most stories written by the *Canadian Press* or the *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), for example, were eliminated. However, stories published by a press agency were included if the reporter's name was specified and its content related directly to the Québec context. Preference was also given to stories that

²⁴ See Chapter 1.

²⁵ Priority was given to an article of 450 words rather than one of 250 words.

were more likely to be read, ideally published in the *cahier Actualités*,²⁶ though all retained stories were not exclusively extracted from this section. Furthermore, stories based on the "pertinence" order established by the Eureka retrieval system were privileged.²⁷

The last criterion, which is more qualitative in nature, has to do with the type of story. Court- and crime-related stories represented a huge proportion of articles yielded in the raw search results, and inform my research inquiry in technical and factual ways. Therefore, when two stories equally met my selection criteria, the story that was not framed in a trial setting was privileged.²⁸ Nonetheless, there is still a high volume of court-related stories in my corpus; over the course of more than ten years, some months generated fewer results that matched my other selection criteria. Additionally, if all court-related stories were to be removed, some crucial framing practices of CSA in *La Presse* would be absent from my analysis.

Each news story was categorized in an excel sheet with all the relevant information inserted: date, name of reporter, section and page, word count, headline, general themes and keywords, gist or lead, key representations or framing of the topic, salient quotes, accessed voices including expert/authoritative opinions, descriptions of the

²⁶ The *cahier Actualités*, or *cahier A*, is *La Presse*'s primary section. It generally contains the day's most salient news items.

²⁷ Pertinence basically prioritizes stories in which the most relevant and numerous combinations of keywords are found and pushes back stories in which only one of the keyword algorithms is found towards the bottom of the list.

²⁸ I decided to include Op/Ed or "Forum" pieces in my data collection when they constituted the best monthly candidate based on my other criteria. Even though these stories were not exclusively authored by an in-house reporter, there still is an editorial decision behind their publication.

victim/perpetrator, age and gender. Accordingly, all this information was organized using a template provided by my supervisor, Dr. Jiwani. This allowed me to quickly and easily retrieve all the raw material for my research. An example of the template I used is available in the appendix.

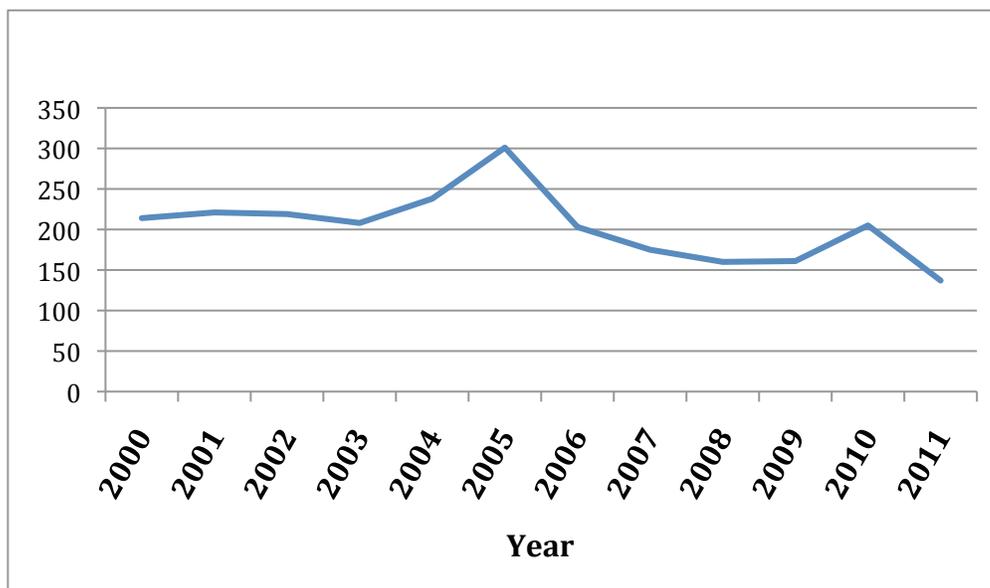
Quantitative results

After narrowing the data by removing all stories not directly or generally related enough to CSA, my net results yielded a total of 2,442 articles. *Table 1* shows the number of CSA-related news articles in *La Presse* for each year between 2000 and 2011, and *Figure 1* displays the overall trend over that time span. There were a total of 221 articles published in 2001, and this number peaked at 301 in 2005. There was another relatively significant number in 2010 with 205, but thereafter the yearly count reached an all-time low with only 137 news stories printed in 2011.

Table 1 - Number of stories in *La Presse* per year (2000 - 2011)

Year	Number of stories
2000	214
2001	221
2002	219
2003	208
2004	238
2005	301
2006	203
2007	175
2008	160
2009	161
2010	205
2011	137
Total	2,224

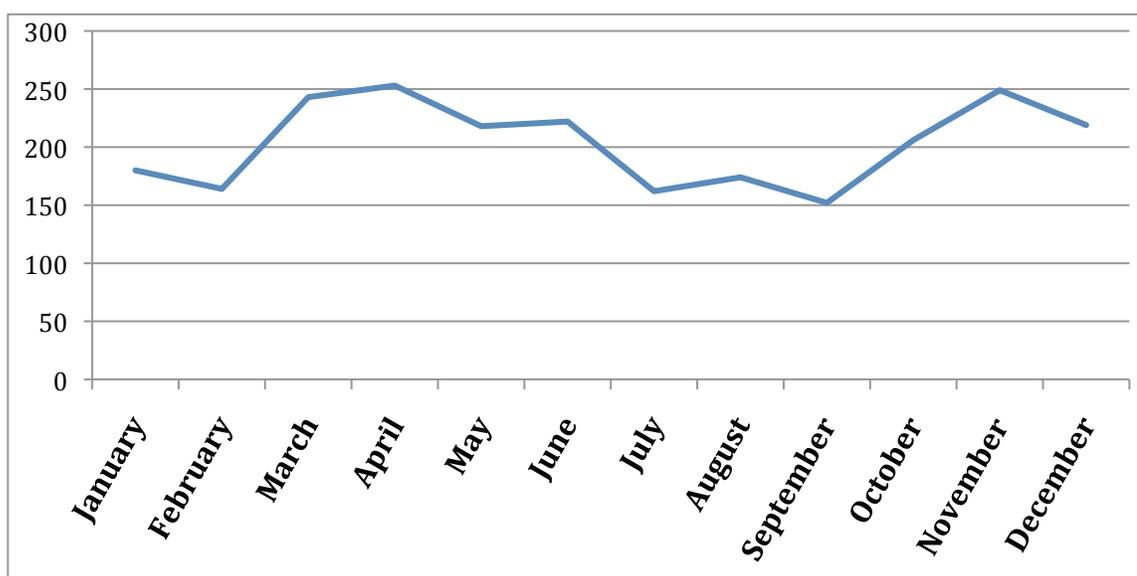
Figure 1 - Trends in the number of stories in *La Presse* (2000-2011)



It is particularly interesting that the first half of the quantified span (from 2000 to 2005) yielded a total of 1,401 stories, while the second half (between 2006 and 2011) only provided 1,041. Based on these results from *La Presse*, the hypothesis that CSA is being "talked about" more on a purely quantitative level can be refuted. However, and most relevant to this thesis, it is apparent that the 2005 peak occurs during the same year as Nathalie Simard's disclosure of abuse.

When looking at the most prevalent months in CSA coverage, *Figure 2* shows that summertime is not a "high" season to address this issue. Early spring and late fall seem to be more active periods. However, I am not clear as to why these seasonal variations occur.

Figure 2 - Monthly count in *La Presse* (2000 - 2011)



It is important to stress that these findings are of purely quantitative nature, and while they do inform part of my research inquiry, they constitute a mere piece of the puzzle. Comparisons between child protection services and police data were not made because of a lack of available figures after 2005 and the epistemological pitfalls of assuming linear causality of impact. However, it is noteworthy that, overall, there are significant increases in disclosure rates since the late 1990s, confirming the need to pay close attention to how the phenomenon of CSA translates and evolves in Québec's popular culture.

Quantitative treatment of qualitative dataset

Below are some quantitative thematic observations stemming from the 120 news stories retrieved between 2001 and 2010. *Table 2* shows the thematic occurrences within the 120 retained news stories. It is worth noting that these stories can be tagged with multiple keyword entries; thus, the themes are not mutually exclusive.

Table 2 - Thematic distribution in *La Presse* (2001 - 2010)

Themes/Keywords	Number of occurrences	Percentage (%)
Celebrity	13	10,8
Disclosure	14	11,7
Court	49	40,8
Internet	17	14,2
Legal issues	14	11,7
Media involvement	9	7,5
Incest	23	19,2
Societal trends	16	13,3
Victimization	21	17,5
Murder	6	5,0
Clergy	12	12,0
Sports	7	5,8
Total	120	

Many interesting considerations stem from these thematic results. First, it is striking that stories relating to celebrities are not as prevalent as I would have presumed, with only 13 occurrences within the corpus of 120 news stories. However, as argued earlier, news stories involving celebrities are often episodic and generate huge waves of interest for relatively short periods. By collecting only one story per month for the qualitative inquiry, I was not able to validate these episodic tendencies. For instance, 92 stories were published in April and May 2005, many of which directly or indirectly pertained to Nathalie Simard's public disclosure. In contrast, only 24 stories on CSA were released in July and August of that year.²⁹ In the end, each single month was represented by only one story on which a thorough thematic coding was conducted. Yet, the previously noted quantitative breakdown shows that the CSA coverage peaked in 2005, suggesting that perhaps many of the stories printed that year dealt with the Simard case.

²⁹ See appendix for a full picture of monthly counts throughout the decade.

The victims are mentioned in the great majority of the stories. However, most of these stories do not go beyond the level of identifying the age and gender of the victim, as well as her status or relationship with the aggressor. Out of the 120 articles in my corpus, only 21 detail the experience of victims further than reporting mere factual information. This rather small proportion shows that an in-depth understanding of the victims' trauma is not being prioritized in *La Presse's* coverage. The fact that more than 4/5 of all collected stories between 2001 and 2010 fail to detail the process of victimization in any way is quite significant. On the other hand, out of these 120 articles, 23 relate to incest in one way or another, which would seem to contradict my previous hypothesis that the phenomenon was greatly silenced, especially since they constitute almost a fifth of the qualitative data. However, it needs to be said that the great majority of these articles treat incest in a very factual way, which will be further explored when the focus shifts to news discourse.

Three key thematic stories' occurrences in *La Presse* were examined: stories involving celebrities, incest and victimization. Findings indicate that stories about celebrities are published in much more coveted spaces in the newspaper. In more than half of all news stories, they are published in the first four pages of the main section (*Cahier A* or *Actualités*). This is not particularly surprising given the sensationalistic and commercial aspects related to any form of "celebrity talk" in the mainstream media. Incest stories are almost always relegated to later pages or sections, unless they involve celebrities in one

way or another.³⁰ Only four of the 23 incest stories are in the first four pages, and 14 are published outside of the first 10 pages or in other less prominent sections. Stories that focus on victimization in one way or another, similar to incest cases, are often relegated to less visible sections unless they involve celebrities, which was the case for six of the 21 victimization stories (two of these are outside the first 10 pages of the main *cahier*). When no celebrities are involved, stories that report victimization experiences are pushed back to less accessible sections: only one of these stories made it to "page 4" while the overwhelming majority were published outside the first ten pages or simply in another *cahier*.

Qualitative results

In the next section, I examine the discourses employed *inside* specific stories as well as trends and recurrences *among* many stories. I begin with stories that are clustered around particular themes to illustrate how journalists report on them.

Intra-familial abuse

The following story largely contradicts wide-spread opinions regarding incest as being silenced in the media and denied representation in popular knowledge. This story presents several poll results conducted by CROP³¹ and the CSA research- and awareness-focused *Fondation Marie-Vincent* as part of the Universal Children's Day (November 20th):

³⁰ One of these cases does not involve a celebrity, but discusses female paedophiles, a rare phenomenon that can also draw irregular attention.

³¹ A Canadian polling and market research firm based in Montréal.

[L]'attitude des Québécois face à l'inceste **a évolué** de façon remarquable, tant sur le plan de **l'ouverture** à en parler que des connaissances acquises sur le sujet. En effet, 83 % des Québécois disent ne pas trouver que le sujet de l'inceste est **trop délicat** pour en parler **ouvertement**, 72 % trouvent "**audacieuses et courageuses**" les personnes qui témoignent de leur agression dans les médias et 81 % estiment que le fait d'admettre publiquement avoir été victime d'agression sexuelle dans l'enfance contribue à **faire changer les choses** au sein de la société (...) C'est seulement dans une société qui permettra **l'ouverture** au vécu et au récit de la victime d'inceste, à son partage dans un **contexte socialement acceptable** que celle-ci pourra s'accepter intimement (...) plus on parlera d'inceste **ouvertement**, plus on préviendra les cas et plus on aidera les victimes à guérir (...) les Québécois sont **prêts à parler d'inceste** dans la mesure où ça permet d'améliorer le sort des victimes (...) Une forte majorité des répondants (85 %) croit par ailleurs, avec raison, que l'agression sexuelle dans l'enfance est **davantage le fait de proches et non d'inconnus**. Une majorité de 56 % se dit **choquée d'entendre parler d'inceste dans les médias**, mais ce sont davantage les gestes posés par les agresseurs (74 %) qui choquent que **le traitement sensationnaliste des médias** (18 %). De plus, 68 % des répondants affirment que s'ils avaient été agressés sexuellement par un membre de leur famille, **ils n'hésiteraient pas à dénoncer celui-ci**. (CNW, 21 November 2003: ACTUEL4)

This story, published in 2003, displays certain lexical practices that resonate with the coverage of CSA throughout the 10-year span and seems to contradict notions that incest is submitted to a process of double denial, both in public opinion and news coverage. The notion of open-mindedness is strongly suggested through the repetitive use of terms such as "ouvertement" (once in the headline³² and twice in the main body), "ouverture" (five times), and other locutions such as "l'inceste, parlons-en", "prêts à parler d'inceste" and "contexte socialement acceptable".

The repetitive and authoritative use of statistical figures in the text strengthens the general proposition, especially considering that most numbers convey near unanimity on these questions. These numbers contradict what the literature indicates, including that most people are actually aware that people close to the victim, rather than strangers,

³² Headline: "83% des Québécois d'accord pour parler d'inceste **ouvertement**".

generally commit abuse. Thus, if solely focusing on this story, my previous hypotheses regarding the tabooed nature of incest among the general population would have to be refuted. However, it is worth noting that this story was not authored by any of *La Presse's* in-house journalists, but rather by Group CNW – a commercial news release service known as *Canada NewsWire* until 2004. Further, the story did not appear in the *cahier A*, the broadsheet's main section. This is in keeping with the overall coverage of intra-familial abuse, as portrayed in the earlier quantitative results, stories of incest are often relegated to lesser viewed sections of the newspaper.

Furthermore, in the great majority of these stories, the concept of incest is indirectly stated in the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, and very little analysis of this stigmatized subject is offered. In this regard, it is worth noting that in only three of the stories did the word "inceste" appear in the headline. The majority of stories dealing with incest, in one way or another, are court-based articles that present the details of the events in a technical and factual style. Yet, some of the most objectively appalling stories are the ones involving incest. They often portray the youngest victims of CSA, and the most recurrent abuse. This can be observed in the following story reporting the court of appeal's decision to uphold the sentences given to a couple who were found guilty of perpetrating a long-lasting incestuous relationships with a 5-year-old girl. The young girl contracted herpes because of the abuse:

La cour d'appel a maintenu la condamnation et les peines infligées à un homme de 38 ans et une femme de 42 ans, qui ont eu des **relations sexuelles à répétition la fillette du premier, âgée de 5 ans**. (Desjardins, 29 May 2003: E3)

The tone of the whole story does not vary much from the factual way in which this lead is enunciated. There is also a subtle twist of nominalization, where the "cour d'appel" is promoted as the main influential agent, while both of the accused are being somewhat lexically pushed aside as indirect perpetrating agents. As a result of this nominalization, the incestuous relationship, while certainly identified, is made much less prominent.

In another story, while the same reporter acknowledges the harsh reality a victim's suffering, who was abused nearly twenty times a year during a span of six years and endured multiple sequelae because of it, the style of reporting remains extremely factual; the reporter does not articulate any judgment on the matter, or quote any authorized voice that could have expressed any kind of condemnation:

L'une a subi ces attouchements environ **20 fois par année pendant six ans**, tandis que l'autre a été agressée quatre ou cinq fois. Toutes les victimes, incluant les enfants de l'accusé, gardent des **séquelles morales et psychologiques** de ces agressions. (Desjardins, 19 April 2003: B9)

However, later stories evidence a departure from straight, factual accounts to elaborations on the details of the crimes, which provide additional information about the victims and perpetrators. Before delving too deeply into the well-delineated terrain of victimization, disclosure and how they intersect with news media, it is necessary to return to the wider discursive practices concerning childhood as a powerful construction capable of reproducing contradictory representations.

Conception of childhood and sexuality

Within my corpus of 120 stories, the constructed nature of childhood is often present, sometimes revealing contradictory discursive tendencies. For instance, recurrent depictions of the child, not only as an individual being but also, semiotically, as a bearer of wider concepts of childhood and innocence, are observable. This duality is reflected in this story about Nathalie Simard's double status as a child star and victim:

L'enfant-objet a fait sensation. Mais quelques années plus tard, **il n'y avait plus d'enfant. Ne restait que l'objet.** (...) Ne restait que cette enfant perdue, apeurée, **dépossédée de son enfance.** (Boisvert, 27 May 2005: A3)

This discourse of innocence and naivety of children is also widely portrayed in other stories. One story straightforwardly states "**l'innocence** à laquelle on s'attend de la part d'un enfant de son âge" (Cédilot, 9 mars 2005: A15) referring to a 4-year-old girl's strikingly honest testimony about her father's repeated aggressions. Another story, about a teenage girl being sexually assaulted by a man she met on the Internet, goes much further by quoting the victim herself and including her repeated use of words and locutions that refer to children's naivety, vulnerability and their need to be monitored and protected from their own lack of judgment:

À 13 ans, c'est tellement facile de **tomber dans un filet**, c'est l'âge où nous voulons plaire aux garçons et c'est facile de **se faire embobiner** par de belles paroles (...) les parents ne savent pas tout ce que font leurs enfants sur l'internet, que **les enfants sont vulnérables** et qu'il faut **protéger leur naïveté.** (Charbonneau, 23 August 2008: A21)

However, as noted earlier, discursive entanglements often occur and provide more complex and even contradictory positions on the status of children. In the following excerpt, Julius Grey, a lawyer specializing in human rights, brings a counter-perspective

on the widespread conception of children as asexual, innocent beings: "L'enfant a droit à la **liberté d'expression**, ce qui inclut l'expression de sa sexualité. Il n'est pas légitime de prohiber toute sexualité juvénile" (Gamache, 5 July 2001: A5). Here, the discourse of rights is expressed by an expert to challenge perceptions of the powerlessness of children with regards to sexual expression. While the story brings up a legitimate concern pertaining to the protection of children from cyberpaedophilia, a concern that focuses on their incapacity to discern the potential pitfalls of web-surfing, Grey's authoritative voice counteracts this opinion. The lawyer worries about strengthening parental control by limiting children's access to the external world. His voice counterbalances the discourse of innocence, which stresses children's naivety and their inability to be active agents in society. According to this discursive trend, children need to be passively protected, as portrayed by this poll director's quote in a story about Québec's public opinion on CSA-related issues: "On ne se mêle pas des affaires des autres, **mais on se mêle des affaires des enfants**" (Sirois, 19 April 2001: A12).

However, the debate over children's rights versus their naivety and need for control also includes extremist views. Activist organizations like "Boy Love" use the discourse of children's rights to justify paedophilia by sending a "message positif sur l'amour des garçons et **les droits des enfants à la sexualité**" (Gagnon, 25 August 2006: A4). The way this particular story is framed is interesting because it represents the epitome of what a valence-positioned article should be, yet the reporter – Katia Gagnon, who is now an editorialist – does not voice her opinion as much as in most other CSA-related stories, and rather lets an ironic use of quotations emphasize the absurdity of this organization's

claims: "Sex is good. Abuse is bad." (...) les pédophiles se décrivent comme une "minorité sexuelle opprimée", victimes de "l'inquisition du XXI^e siècle" (Gagnon, 25 August 2006: A4).

Ironic quotations are also used in a story about the long running case of Daniel Cormier, a sect preacher who defended himself from criminal charges for having abused a 10 year-old girl based on his claim of being legitimately married to her. The story represents a quintessential example of how notions of children's maturity and independence conveyed by the discourse of children's rights are enunciated: "il affirme que la fillette, **qu'il appelle "mon épouse"**, voulait être sa femme, était **assez mûre pour prendre cette décision** et était heureuse dans le mariage" (Desjardins, 22 January 2005: A22). In the headline itself,³³ the reporter indirectly delegitimizes Cormier's claim by inserting the word "épousé" inside quotes and, directly, by qualifying the marriage as "bidon."³⁴ While most people will agree with the reporter's ontological perspective in this specific case, these types of journalistic practices still link back to notions of discursive naturalization and manipulation both through the use of quotes and the headline's cognitive prominence.

Conceptual and effective violence: Destruction of childhood metaphors

The theme of violence, whether actual or conceptual, is overwhelmingly present in the *La Presse* discourse. As noted earlier, only a minority of CSA cases involve real events of physical violence. In some stories, death is a metaphorically enunciated to express how

³³ Full headline: "Le mariage **bidon** de Daniel Cormier célébré par son bras droit. Il a "**épousé**" la fillette en 1999, alors qu'elle n'avait que 10 ans".

³⁴ The term *bidon* can be loosely translated by "phony".

sexual abuse can terminate the childhood phase of a victim's life, a view in accordance with the discourse of innocence. "Les agressions sexuelles **tuent l'enfance**" (Guillemette-Munger, 27 April 2007: A14), cries the lead in one story on an awareness campaign about the devastating effects of CSA. The campaign used white traces to mark the silhouette of a little girl on the streets of Montreal to mimic a murder investigation. Another example figuratively linking CSA to a murder is apparent in a particularly poignant story on past victims of Catholic priests:

L'un des frères "était un véritable **Hitler**, il a fait des **massacres** sur des enfants pendant des années", assure (...) un ancien pensionnaire qui se souvient d'enfants suivant le religieux comme "**des moutons à l'abattoir**." (Pertuiset, 27 March 2002: A16)

By using words like "Hitler", "massacres" and an evocative locution like "moutons à l'abattoir", the quoted victim definitely exacerbates his own – and his peers' – experiences of abuse, by not only strongly invoking the imagery of violent deaths, but also referring to a genocide and its association with extermination camps reminiscent of the Nazi regime. Another particularly poignant locution is the use of "bourreau d'enfants"³⁵ (Cousineau & Manseau, 3 April 2002: A17), which again conveys a form of metaphorical assassination or execution of childhood.

The following excerpt strikingly portrays the relationship between sexual abuse and a metaphorical violence that does not necessarily reflect or imply the effective use of violence during the abuse itself. It further references allegories of death or destruction of abilities to sustain a life course and have a meaningful existence. The story is about an Internet predator who met a young teenager in a chat room and eventually physically met

³⁵ Children's butcher or executioner.

and sexually assaulted her. Here, the reporter's and the victim's voices interplay in conveying such allegorical themes of destruction and death:

Allan Tirado, qui a **détruit** la vie d'une adolescente en l'agressant sexuellement alors qu'elle était âgée de 13 ans" (...) elle a tenté de mettre fin à sa vie "**qui n'en est plus une afin de mettre fin à cette douleur** qui jamais ne me quitte." (...) Tirado lui a **déchiré le coeur à tout** jamais (...) "J'avais le sang glacé, **je croyais en mourir**. Entre ses mains **destructrices** le sens de ma vie s'est échappé, ce sens n'est jamais revenu." (Charbonneau, 23 August 2008: A21)

Other more concise examples of metaphorical death or destruction carry over concepts that include, but go far beyond childhood: "[p]ersonnellement, ma vie entière a été **détruite** à cause d'un prêtre" (Handfield, 25 October 2010: A13); and "[d]énoncer ce deuxième père aux pouvoirs magiques (...) c'était se **détruire** soi-même" (Boisvert, 27 May 2005: A3). The allegory of death also emerges in stories concerning false allegations: "[c]'est comme si la **mort** était passée dans la maison" (Mathieu, 20 June 2008: A4). Other images convey these notions without necessarily invoking harsh physical violence: "[the victim] est **marquée** pour la vie" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4).

Victims and disclosure: conflicting discourses

The term "briser" (literally translated as "to shatter" or "to break") is worth examining, as it invokes powerful yet very simple images on the traumatizing effects of sexual abuse on a child and to the people around her, such as the devastating effect on the family: "on a **brisé** une famille au lieu de parler des vrais enjeux" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4); or the link between a child and her parent: "le lien qui les unissait à leur enfant est **brisé** à jamais" (Gruda, 25 May 2008: PLUS3). However, symbols related to

shattering can also carry more positive connotations towards CSA taboos, especially in reference to scandals where such scandals "contribueront à **briser** les tabous au Québec" (Pertuiset, 27 March 2002: A16). Following this line of thought, the multilayered stigma surrounding CSA commonly pushes victims to silence for years, and the act of disclosing abuse is often discursively illustrated as a form of metaphorical violence and rupture. The locution around "breaking the silence" came up several times in the corpus of stories:

J'ai **brisé le silence** parce que je n'ai plus peur désormais et que je suis en mesure d'en parler. (Lachapelle, 12 August 2004: A1)

L'étape la plus difficile à franchir pour les victimes, c'est de **briser le silence**. (Champagne, 18 November 2004: A4)

(...) chez les jeunes filles, **briser le silence** prend souvent plus de temps. (Péloquin, 24 March 2009: A12)

Il n'est pas rare que des victimes de pédophilie vivent plusieurs années avec leur secret avant de **briser le silence**. (Meunier, 13 April 2006: A3)

These past excerpts bring us to the victimization discourse, especially surrounding the act of disclosure and the complexity of its aftermath. Representations of victim disclosures in news stories can present different narratives of CSA. On the one hand, the above metaphors about "breaking the silence" wholeheartedly invoke disclosing abuse and also resonate with narratives of survivorhood that highlight the courage and strength of the victims. On the other hand, the focus on the word "silence" portrays the ongoing suffering of victims who sometimes live in denial or keep their abuse a secret, and therefore ultimately refrain from disclosure. This notion is well articulated in the following excerpt that powerfully conveys how Nathalie Simard was confined to silence by the stigmatizing gravity of the secret she could not let anyone know about: "elle était **prisonnière de son secret**" (Boisvert, 27 May 2005: A3).

The silencing that occurs on a personal level also reflects wider social perspectives and practices surrounding the subject of taboo. Narratives of survivorhood stress the empowering effect that an individual victim may experience upon disclosure, as well as the emancipating influence that she may have on others who have not yet disclosed or are still struggling with the stigma. Through the mediating agency of news discourse, this collective and liberating influence can be amplified and thereby reach a wider societal level to help dissolve some of the lingering opacity and taboos surrounding CSA. Otherwise, a "silencing wall" is likely only to benefit perpetrators, and be sustained at the expense of the victims: "Le **mur du silence** qu'on érige autour de l'inceste, un sujet tabou, profite aux agresseurs et nuit aux victimes" (CNW, 21 November 2003: ACTUEL4). This last passage, taken from the earlier story on the province's polled reaction to incest and quoted from the director at *Fondation Marie-Vincent*, communicates how collective silence on a societal level can sustain silence at a micro-level in preventing the emergence of a comfortable enough atmosphere for an individual to disclose abuse. It is interesting to note that this story was published in late 2003, before the media circus around Guy Cloutier's condemnation and one of his victim's, Nathalie Simard, decision to publicly disclose her abuse. This specific event will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

Another image, which emerges from the corpus and could be translated as "coming out of the closet", draws an interesting parallel (which seems more of a Freudian slip by the accessed expert) between the unease and isolation experienced by homosexuals before

they feel comfortable enough to tell people around them: "Les gens ont besoin de soutien **pour sortir du placard**" (Gagnon, 18 March 2010: A2). This analogy still stresses the stagnant and silencing forces of shame and stigma partly attributable to a familial and societal lack of understanding and an inability to adequately provide support.

The following citation resonates with this image of being let out of a closet with a "door opening" through some form of social support. However this time, interestingly, the identified main liaising agent conveying the support is the media: "De l'avis de plusieurs intervenants, **un évènement aussi médiatisé ouvre la porte** aux victimes d'agressions sexuelles qui **se terrent dans l'ombre** depuis de nombreuses années" (Champagne, 18 November 2004: A4). Playing on the sense of sight rather than the sense of hearing, the latter part of this excerpt emphasizes victims hiding in the dark. This contrasts with previously discussed metaphors concerning the theme of silence, on the sheer absence of speech imposed on victims of CSA, and how all this can be overturned through the process of disclosure. Other images also play on the visual dimension of a shadow-light dichotomy, as for example, "encouragé la présumée troisième victime à **sortir de l'ombre**" (Meunier, 13 April 2006: A3).

Celebrities: The fine line between positive and sensationalist representations

The following story also uses this visual metaphor of coming out of the shadow, and involves many other larger themes, such as the relationship between celebrities, the media and popular reception:

Cette **sordide** histoire, et le fait qu'elle implique des gens **archi-connus du showbizz** québécois, aura tout de même eu **un impact positif** au sein de la société

québécoise. En acceptant de **dévoiler** son identité, une des victimes, Nathalie Simard, a posé un geste **courageux** qui a sûrement **inspiré** plusieurs autres victimes à **sortir de l'ombre** (...) La campagne menée par l'ex-enfant star au cours de la dernière année a eu l'effet d'une **onde de choc** et explique **en partie** les hausses enregistrées par Statistiques Canada et le SPVM. (Collard, 23 July 2006: A12)

On a lexical level, this excerpt displays many recurrent semantic tendencies mentioned thus far, such as the use of terms verbs like "dévoiler" and the "sortir de l'ombre" image, which both convey the unveiling of deeply rooted secrets as well as an emergence from the silencing darkness into the truthful light. Additionally, the reporter makes positive attributions to Nathalie Simard with words like "inspiré" and "courageux" and the resulting "impact positif," which is in opposition to the "sordide" experience she endured. Nominalizations – "Nathalie Simard"; "la campagne menée par l'ex-enfant star" – are also used to forcefully connote this positive impact.

On a deeper level, this passage also leads us back to wider considerations articulated in the earlier chapters, namely the impact between media coverage of cases of CSA and disclosure rates as well as the public acknowledgment of this taboo and willingness to break some of the stigmas around it. These previous examples on themes of disclosure and victimization talk about silence and denial, but also promote stories of survivorhood that highlight courage, resilience³⁶ and transformation through individual and collective emancipation: "**De victime**, Nathalie Simard est donc devenue un **exemple** aux yeux de sa communauté. Voilà une femme qui a décidé avec beaucoup de conviction **de transformer son drame en outil de bienfaisance**" (Collard, 23 July 2006: A12). This

³⁶ "La **résilience**, cette faculté de surmonter les pires épreuves, est une chose qui fonctionne à vitesse variable. Nathalie Simard nous dit qu'en tout cas, c'est faisable" (Boisvert, 27 May 2005: A3).

excerpt constitutes a prime example of an inherent function in news reporting: a story personalized through the example of an individual.

However, the following story, which continues the coverage of the Nathalie Simard case, questions why Cloutier's (her abuser) charges were laid more than 25 years after the first episodes of abuse, and critically appraises some of the media practices:

La médiatisation des causes d'agression sexuelle provoque une **survictimation**, explique Mme Gaudrault. Même si le nom de la victime n'est jamais **divulgué**, ce qui n'arrive presque jamais, les comptes rendus faits par la télé, les journaux et la radio sont généralement si **indélicat**, que c'est comme si on forçait la victime à **revivre littéralement l'agression en public** devant des milliers de spectateurs (Péloquin, 27 March 2004: A12)

The criminologist quoted here articulates the multilayered impact of news media in certain cases of CSA. A reverse phenomenon occurs when the over-scrutinizing and "indelicate" news discursive practices inhibit rather than empower victims. In this story, the expert's quote speaks to this "overvictimization" through sensationalism, which is endured by the victim when her story is released in the media. The media then need to be criticized for exerting this other form of violence, this time more discursively and symbolically, yet still literally in how Simard, whose identity was still kept secret at the time this story was published, is left emotionally stained and wounded. The amplification effect enabled by the over-scrutiny of this story of public disclosure thus ends up perpetrating another, more psychological victimization.

The next two passages specifically address the aforementioned influential impact of Nathalie Simard's high-profile disclosure on other victims' decisions to end their silence:

(...) la sortie publique de Nathalie Simard a non seulement fait **explorer** le nombre d'appels dans les succursales de l'organisme, mais a peut-être aussi **encouragé** la troisième victime à **sortir de l'ombre**. (Meunier, 13 April 2006: A3)

La jeune femme s'est décidée à porter plainte en 2006 **après la médiatisation** de "l'affaire Guy Cloutier." (Touzin, 1 December 2009: A17)

While the first quote *suggests* a causal link between Simard's public story and rates of disclosure as well as the decision of a victim to "sortir de l'ombre," the latter actually shows an *effective* relationship between the media treatment of a high-profile CSA case and the willingness of a specific victim to disclose her past experiences of abuse. Should this statement be interpreted as proof of the media having direct impact? If one theme has been "confirmed" so far in this thesis, it is that contradictions usually constitute the rule. Simard's celebrity status certainly plays a role in exploring these interrogations, and will be further dissected in the discussion chapter.

In the same line of thought, the following, more recent excerpt revisits the Nathalie Simard effect five years later:

Les deux commandants doutent cependant que la campagne soit à l'origine de la recrudescence du nombre de plaintes pour agression sexuelle, **pas plus qu'ils n'attribuent les hausses à l'"effet Nathalie Simard"**. "C'est bien personnel, avance le commandant Rose, mais j'ai plutôt l'impression que c'est parce que **les gens ont moins de préjugés**. Peut-être ont-ils moins peur aujourd'hui de **se faire juger par leurs proches**." (Leduc, 11 June 2010: A3)

This passage is interesting on many different levels. First, it provides a quintessential example of heterogeneous discursive genres. By saying "c'est bien personnel", the commanding police officer's discourse slides away from his expert or authoritative standpoint to rather integrate the terrain of the "everyday, normal people" discourse. Such discursive heterogeneity makes it more complex to decode the message as to whether or

not the Nathalie Simard disclosure had a direct effect on the culture of denunciation. Furthermore, by saying "c'est parce que les gens ont moins de préjugés" and not explaining why there are fewer taboos, the police officer leaves out the likely possibility that high-profile cases do contribute in breaking some of the popular stigma around CSA.

However, this discourse around the reduction and elimination of taboos was also present in the early 2000s, as evident in one of the oldest stories captured in my dataset: "Il y avait une espèce de **tabou** qui entourait ça, et je pense qu'il est **en train de tomber**, a ajouté M. Simard." (Sirois, 19 April 2001: A12). It is important to note that this story talks more about violence against children in general and not specifically sexual violence, yet the lead still mentions "enfant (...) victime de violence ou d'agressions sexuelle"; therefore, the notion of taboo can still be applied to CSA.

The contrast between the portrayal of CSA and other forms of child maltreatment is further developed in this story dating back to 2002, following the release of new statistics on the prevalence of child maltreatment in Canada: "Les abus sexuels tiennent les **devants de la scène** dans les médias. Mais c'est une proportion plus petite en fréquence qui vient bien après les **autres formes d'abus et de négligence**" (Canadian Press, 6 October 2002: C8). This excerpt is interesting on many different levels. First, as in the previous passage, we can observe that themes of media recognition of CSA and diminishing taboos surrounding it were also present in the early 2000s, preceding many high profile cases that have since then received intense scrutiny. Additionally, the quote is by an expert, a pediatric neurologist, commenting on the mediatization of CSA, a

subject he is most probably not specialized in and yet feels comfortable enough to make attributional correlations between both phenomena. Nonetheless, this quote also raises the issue of CSA being given additional importance in the media in comparison to the more prevalent yet less sensational and "marketable" forms of abuse. It is hard to fathom the commoditization of issues so delicate yet so integral to the social fabric, but stories about celebrities are always tempting for recuperation on a sensationalistic level.

The following passage, cited from a blog, clearly exposes a double-edged sword. The media are trying to catch the public eye, but in doing so, end up missing the opportunity to dig deeper into the causes and wider contexts of CSA, such as gender-disproportionate and intra-familial types of abuse. Instead, the focus is aimed at more marketable and anecdotal consequences:

(...) on a brisé une famille **au lieu de parler des vrais enjeux**: "On a oublié de se **pencher sur l'essentiel**. Il y a des milliers de jeunes enfants dans le monde qui subissent à l'instant le même genre de traitement. **Les communiqués de presse sur les chicanes de famille intéressent peut-être les médias, mais pas la cause**" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4).

The status of celebrities as the main protagonists in CSA stories, both as victims and perpetrators, provides an interesting perspective in gauging media influence and sensationalistic practices. On the one hand, victims like Nathalie Simard and Theoren Fleury³⁷ "activate" their celebrity status to disseminate their personal experiences and help benefit other victims as well as themselves through narratives of survivorhood and positive disclosure. On the other hand, commercially driven sensationalism is observable in the way celebrity molesters such as Guy Cloutier, David Hilton, Graham James and

³⁷ Fleury is a former NHL hockey player who was victim of CSA during his teenage years, and disclosed having been molested by his former coach, Graham James, decades after the abuse.

abusive members of the clergy are portrayed in essentialist and sometimes contradictory ways.

Child molesters: contradictory figures

Resonance with some discursive tendencies surrounding the multilayered figure of the paedophile emerged throughout my corpus of data. Following one of the main discursive figures discussed in the previous chapter, paedophiles are often portrayed using animal-like analogies and images in *La Presse* stories, with widely used words like "prédateur", "monstre", "bête", "tanière" and "proie" – the latter two indirectly linking to this discursive trend by referring to molesters' "den" and their "animalized" victims. Three particularly striking examples include: "Il savait que sa **proie** était seule à la maison" (Charbonneau, 23 August 2008: A21), "le **monstre** qui se cache derrière l'homme" (Lachapelle, 12 August 2004: A1), and "vieux **cochon**" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4). It is interesting to note that in no less than five stories³⁸ the term "prédateur"³⁹ was present in the headline itself. Considering the visual saliency and cognitive impact conveyed through headlines, such practices can definitely fuel and amplify public anxiety.

³⁸ "Arrestation d'un présumé **prédateur sexuel** (...)" (Laroche, 15 February 2002: E3); "Libérations de **prédateurs sexuels** (...)" (Normand, 13 June 2002: A5); "Chalfoun exultait à l'idée de s'associer à un **prédateur sexuel**" (Desjardins, 26 June 2003: E3); "Le nouveau visage des **cyberprédateurs** (...)" (Croteau, 18 February 2008: A10); "Quatre ans de prison pour un **cyberprédateur**" (Charbonneau, 23 August 2008: A21).

³⁹ The term "cyberprédateur" appears relatively recently as it was not present in any early 2000s stories, yet was used in two headlines in 2008 (Croteau, 18 February 2008; Charbonneau, 23 August 2008). It appears in 12 of 17 related stories printed after 2006.

The use of these bestial and near-devilish terms demotes paedophiles to the status below that of normal human beings and subsequently justifies a harsh critique, and even a negation, of how the justice system handles these cases: "Je ne conçois pas qu'il [the perpetrator] retrouve sa liberté" (Meunier, 13 April 2006: A3); "[the perpetrator] s'en tire, selon moi à très, très bon compte" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4). This validates a form of "inhuman" judiciary response, such as legal castration – "Guy Cloutier devrait être castré" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4) – a practice inherently associated with animals.⁴⁰

These discursive forms of demonization send us back to historically inspired forms of populist justice. A prime example comes from a "Forum" piece⁴¹ titled "L'envie de lyncher..." that was published following the extensively covered story of a paedophile school-bus driver who was severely beaten by the father of his victim. Using these few words in the headline ("the urge to lynch") is particularly powerful and definitely follows previous arguments concerning the figure of the paedophile and the legitimization of inhuman treatments for molesters. For example, the statement: "À une autre époque, il aurait déjà **lynché** et il se trouve certainement aujourd'hui bien des personnes très respectables pour déplorer discrètement qu'on ne soit plus **au bon vieux temps du Far-West**." (Gravel, 31 August 2001: A10) sends a powerful message. Yet, one thing the author does not take into account is that in another era, the molester might have ended up

⁴⁰ It can be argued castration in this context is not associated with animals, but rather speaks to the stripping of legal rights and exclusion from the political community of men and in particular, normative characterizations of masculinity.

⁴¹ While these opinion pieces differ from stories reported on other pages of the newspaper, there still is an editorial decision to have them published. The Op/Ed page often includes writers from outside the newsroom.

being lynched, but the taboo surrounding CSA and more specifically incest or intra-familial abuse would probably have prevented the disclosure of such abuse in the first place. However, most interestingly, this article contradicts the discourse of demonization by sending the message that it does not matter how "evil" a crime is and how it invokes emotive urges for "old-school" types of punishments, every single person is equal in front of the law. Therefore, the author of this opinion piece engages in a discursive interplay between irrational motivations and the responsibilities of the legal system to respond to the emotional connotations surrounding CSA as an epitome of evil. The complexity of this position also resonates with this other Op/Ed column published three months later:

Il est certain que la clémence de cette sanction pour un délit **aussi dégoûtant** s'ajoutant à l'incrédulité voire l'ébahissement devant le fait qu'on ait confié le transport d'écoliers à un **tel maniaque** aura contribué à accroître **l'écœurement général** devant cette **pénible** affaire. Et provoqué un vaste mouvement de sympathie spontanée pour ce brave homme qui n'a pas pu résister à **l'envie de "casser la gueule de ce monstre"**. De là en faire un héros, il n'y a qu'un pas que de larges pans d'une **opinion publique dégoûtée** n'ont pas hésité à franchir (...) en applaudissant à ce qu'il a appelé **"la justice du peuple"**, il a plutôt cautionné l'impression d'un verdict découlant de l'humeur du moment. Doit-on en conclure qu'il s'inclinerait tout aussi volontiers devant une même justice populaire qui voudrait **lyncher** un accusé moins sympathique dont il aurait pris la défense? (Gravel, 17 November 2001: A20)

This long passage references the aforementioned themes of evilness and animalization, but it also raises some interesting points about how paedophile stories are socially represented and received. The "people's justice" can lead to very dangerous paths resulting in excessive and legitimized irrationality and, in doing so, generate widely inconsistent and emotionally-driven governance responses, such as the recent crusade by the Federal Conservative Party against child molesters. The author uses powerful lexical tools to express the deeply rooted public disgust with terms like "dégoûtant", "tel

maniaque" and "écoeurement général", to somehow justify these ideas of populist justice. Yet, even composed perspectives that advocate a toning down of popular and populist justice following the same event borrow lexical usages from an animalistic discourse: "le but de tout cet exercice: **chasser des écoles les prédateurs**. Et non partir une **chasse aux sorcières**" (Ouimet, 17 December 2001: A14).

In another story, the quote "Chien! Salaud! Tirez-le! Pendez-le par les couilles! Tu ne mérites pas de vivre!" (Faucher, 2 August 2005: A7) is taken directly from a crowd gathered outside of a tribunal. It graphically portrays public perceptions of the perpetrators, especially in the invocation of the discourse of animality. While it would be widely unprofessional for a *La Presse* reporter to spew such exaggerated comments, the very fact they were reported from the event and partially used to constitute the headline⁴² is still highly significant.

The specific portrayal of showbizz tycoon Guy Cloutier definitely raises concerns when compared to the previously established discursive figures of paedophiles. Cloutier does not necessarily embody the typical beastly predator or the dissimulated and cunning molester, in part because he is such a public figure. Yet, the star manager is attributed with a cunning discourse as a result of his wealth and power, reminiscent of controversial superstar Michael Jackson, through stunningly direct nominalizations: "Le pédophile multimillionnaire" (Hirtzmann, 23 November 2005: ACTUEL4); as well as his controlling and manipulating ways:

⁴² Full headline: "'Salaud! Tu ne mérites pas de vivre!' Des centaines de badauds fustigent le présumé agresseur d'une fillette de 11 ans."

Guy Cloutier, c'était **le père Noël** (...) Cloutier n'a pas seulement évincé le père Simard du foyer familial pour **prendre sa place** (...) **Il l'a sortie** de l'école à 13 ans. Tout ce qui était susceptible de générer un esprit critique: dehors. "**Cloutier contrôlait toute ma vie.**" (Boisvert, 27 May 2005: A3)

It is interesting to revisit the following excerpt published more than a year earlier, when charges were first laid against Cloutier. This was before any of the victims' names were made public. Ironically, in this story, his colleague and friend René Angélil⁴³ adds to this view, without being aware of the discursive construction of paedophiles as cunning.

Angélil boasts of Cloutier's ability to "spread joy" around him:

"**Guy est une bonne personne, qui sème la joie autour de lui.** Je ne crois absolument pas à toute cette histoire" (...) M. Angélil a ajouté que **les gens connus publiquement**, comme lui et M. Cloutier, "**sont facilement attaquables.**" (Péloquin, 24 March 2009: A12)

The second part of this quote conveys the added layer of complexity involved when the main CSA protagonists are celebrities; a complexity, as we have seen so far, that is not necessarily defined by strictly positive or negative connotations.

Other examples of the cunning discourse proliferate in *La Presse's* coverage: "l'agresseur utilise toutes sortes de **stratégies** pour réduire sa victime au silence" (Meunier, 13 April 2006: A3); "c'est facile de **se faire embobiner** par de belles paroles" (Charbonneau, 23 August 2008: A21). Yet, aside from a strictly manipulative figure of molesters, other discursive constructions also emphasize their unfathomable nature and how they can be disguised and perfectly integrated in the community: "C'était le grand ami de mon père (...) Marcel Robert **passait pour un 'dieu' dans le quartier**, selon les victimes et leur

⁴³ Céline Dion's husband and manager.

entourage" (Desjardins, 10 September 2010: A15), which seems very reminiscent of the discursive entanglements around Cloutier discussed above.

The following excerpt presents another good example of discursive intertwining that portrays the paedophile as both cunning and animal-like: "C'est sous un balcon que l'individu a **attiré** l'enfant qui jouait dehors, afin **d'assouvir ses bas instincts**" (Gervais, 12 August 2002: E3). The term "attiré" refers to a strategic and rationally executed plan reminiscent of the cunning discourse while "assouvir ses bas instincts" directly reminds us of the untamable, non-calculative and instinct-driven animalistic being.

Internet

The cunning discourse is particularly present in cyberpaedophilia stories. These articles often focus on the rational and calculative aspects of cyberpaedophile organizations:

"C'est que les pédophiles **connaissent extrêmement bien** les rouages d'Internet. **'Ils sont super bien organisés et ils se protègent entre eux'**" (Dumas, 21 January 2002: A1).

Even if mentioned between quotes, as the opinion is cited by a police officer, the term "explode" utilized in the headline suggests a phenomenon worth panicking about, as well as one that is newly emerging. Added to these worrying practices, this story is supposed to deliver facts about the emergence of a phenomenon, yet we read in the lead that: "les policiers sont surpris par la rapidité avec laquelle les pédophiles **domptent** les nouvelles technologies pour **assouvir leurs fantasmes pervers**." This opinionated formulation would normally be utilized in an editorial piece rather than a story published on the front

page (*la Une*), a very rare feature among my news data.⁴⁴ The lexical choice here serves the need for a sensationalistic framing that catches the reader's eye. It is worth pointing out that the verb "dompter" sends us back to the animal discourse, though the idea of taming is used in reverse here, and reminds us that while Internet-based news stories focus on the cunning discourse, there is always a lingering connection between child molesters and animals: "Internet est devenu une véritable **tanière** pour les pédophiles" (Gamache, 5 July 2001: A5).

If cyberpaedophiles are increasingly constructed as worrying discursive figure, the portrayal of Church-related stories of molestation have been fueling other societal concerns for a long time now, especially in 2010 when a myriad of scandals were exposed in the Vatican, around Europe and inevitably by ricochet, in Québec.

Clergy

The great majority of the coverage of Church-related stories revolves around the following keywords: silence, denial, secrecy, authority (unequal rapport), retrospection (almost always in historically rooted events), isolation (residential schools), redemption and reparation. Again, what unites all these concepts is the act of disclosure. Some excerpts bring back previously mentioned concepts about secrecy and silence through the use of familiar terms and metaphors: "le **silence coupable** de nos évêques" (Cousineau & Manseau, 3 April 2002: A17); "les abus sexuels faits par des membres du clergé ont été glissés **sous le tapis** dans la société québécoise" (Doucet, 22 July 2002: A4).

⁴⁴ Only 4 out of all 120 stories made it up to the front page.

More recently, in 2010, *La Presse's* editor-in-chief André Pratte utilized the Op/Ed section to weigh in on the wave of Church-related scandals, and cited the pro-catholic media outlet *The Tablet* on the specific issue of media coverage:

"Toute **institution** qui subit une **offensive soutenue** des médias est tentée de se **retrancher derrière une mentalité de forteresse**; une telle attitude n'est **jamais édifiante** et ne règle rien", souligne l'hebdomadaire catholique américain *The Tablet* (Pratte, 6 April 2010: A22)

The first part seems to establish an oppositional relationship between the "institutional" aspect of the clergy and the willingness of the media to shed light on well-kept stories. What this quote fails to counterbalance is that media constitute an institution as well, one closely in line with other forms of hegemonic power, and therefore conveying a sentiment of disengagement with reporting what is comfortably hidden. The second part of the quote offers an almost playful oxymoron on themes of authority and opacity with "mentalité de forteresse" and "jamais édifiante". Besides, the *La Presse* editor inscribes this citation with an image that builds on the same levels: "l'Église catholique aurait besoin **d'ouvrir toutes grandes ses fenêtres pour laisser entrer l'air** du monde moderne."

La Presse's coverage of the clergy's involvement in cases of CSA has not exactly been linear through the 10-year span of my analysis. I will now explore some of the key differences observable in clergy-related stories, as well as in the CSA coverage in general.

Evolution over 10 years

Over the course of many years, numerous news stories have referenced scandals involving catholic priests, but more as a side-story or simply mentioned in enumerations of negative "outcomes" in anti-clergy editorials and sometimes Op/Ed responses. More recently, CSA represents the central focus rather than side-stories in clergy-related coverage. This is obviously attributable to recent scandals where waves of disclosure and accusations poured in all over Europe, provoking even the current Pope Benoit XVI to get involved. An example of how CSA is now a focus is apparent in the many stories that report non-CSA related events but include the word "pédophile" at least once in the main body of text; or stories that mention a paedophilia-related angle or side-story in the lead and/or the image caption.

When focusing on representations of perpetrators of CSA in the early 2000s, the *La Presse* coverage appears to yield stories that express particularly great concerns over ideas of popular justice. CSA being recently "discovered" at the time, such a focus likely reflects a need to articulate responses to and open up a terrain on this still widely unknown phenomenon. In the later 2000s, stories around popular justice almost vanish, and instead the focus shifts to the "new" worrying and growing phenomenon of cyberpaedophilia.

Earlier in this chapter, I noted that incest stories are almost always relegated to later pages or sections, with the exception of a few stories involving celebrities. However, I found that in the later 2000s, the incestuous or intra-familial relationship between

convicted molesters and their victim(s) is more explicitly mentioned in the headline: "Reconnu coupable **d'inceste** quarante ans plus tard. 'Si tu le dis à ta mère, elle ne t'aimera plus'" (Desjardins, 17 August 2010: A11); "Six ans à l'ombre pour avoir terrorisé et **agressé ses trois filles**" (Desjardins, 21 November 2008: A15). In contrast, most headlines of stories from earlier years only indirectly recognize that CSA occurs, or that it also involves a family member as the perpetrator: "Un homme de 83 ans condamné à deux ans de prison pour agressions sexuelles" (Desjardins, 19 April 2003: B9); "Appel rejeté. Les peines de deux agresseurs sexuels maintenues" (Desjardins, 29 May 2003: E3). Both these stories report intra-familial abuse incidents, and while this theme is clearly stated in the lead, it is entirely absent from the headline. Returning back to the cognitive prominence attributed to the reader's headline processing, this observation appears as strikingly relevant.

As portrayed in these excerpts, some key differences emerge in how court- and trial-based stories were framed between the early and late 2000s. This is particularly relevant when considering that, out of 120 news articles collected for my qualitative inquiry, no less than 49 were related in one way or another to a trial setting.⁴⁵ Authored by a handful of long-time *La Presse* journalists, the court coverage framing employs a highly factual, technical and uninvolved tonality. Crime reporter Christine Desjardins produced a high proportion, 20%,⁴⁶ of all news stories collected for my analysis. Her ways of framing trial stories of CSA seems to have evolved; the projection of a hard, factual and technical

⁴⁵ Fourteen stories also involve broader legal issues, but these were more about policy and government issues rather than specific victims and aggressors.

⁴⁶ This is a significantly high number of stories considering no other reporter authored more than a third of what she published.

coverage leads the way to a different approach marked by deepening understanding of the victim's perspective and trauma. This is portrayed in these two recent excerpts from 2010:

Jocelyne **a trouvé la force de le** [perpetrator] **dénoncer à la police** (...) [the victim] se dit **libérée d'un grand poids**. (Desjardins, 17 August 2010: A11)

Il n'est **pas facile** de faire ressurgir **un passé douloureux**, et certains hésitent à s'embarquer dans la machine judiciaire. (Desjardins, 10 September 2010: A15)

While these discursive twists might appear quite subtle, this specific reporter's efforts to convey the victims' perspectives and trauma with a more involved and sensitive tone still contrasts significantly with her earlier, more factual and emotionally disengaged coverage of CSA-related court stories. These key observations will be further investigated in the coming chapter.

Summary

In discussing both quantitative and qualitative results, I have attempted to reveal the multilayered nature of the coverage of CSA in *La Presse* over the past 10 years. The initial research inquiry of comparing news stories volume with rates of disclosure did not yield satisfying insights. Therefore, the examination of thematic and lexical recurrences as well as framing techniques accommodated by the method of critical discourse analysis allowed me to further unpack discursive shifts and trends *inside* and *amongst* the selected stories. The Nathalie Simard story permeates the news coverage in most key CSA-related themes, whether around the contradictory portrayal of victims and perpetrators, or the representations of disclosure narratives and intra-familial abuse. Court-framed coverage and Op/Ed pieces also provide contrasting but insightful glimpses on the current state of

media discourse and everyday talk relating to CSA. In the next chapter, I provide a more nuanced analysis of public perceptions and understandings of CSA in *La Presse*, focusing on the role of the paper as both a conveyor of social (mis)representations and as exerting hegemonic influence.

Chapter 4: Discussion

In this chapter, some of my quantitative results are extracted to wrap up observations on how *La Presse's* coverage of child sexual abuse (CSA) evolved over the past decade. A new angle on the "Nathalie Simard effect" is then proposed. Subsequently, I synthesize different discursive constructions around CSA by focusing on the role of language and other semantic considerations. Different narratives of victimization are investigated, mainly through the lens of celebrity-based news framing, namely the Nathalie Simard story. Additionally, I revisit Hall's encoding-decoding model to propose an exploratory bridge linking the main themes surrounding CSA and its media coverage. The latter part of this chapter is dedicated to a further examination of some of *La Presse's* reporting practices and how they contribute to CSA being often misrepresented or over-reported.

Quantitative observations on the evolution of CSA reporting

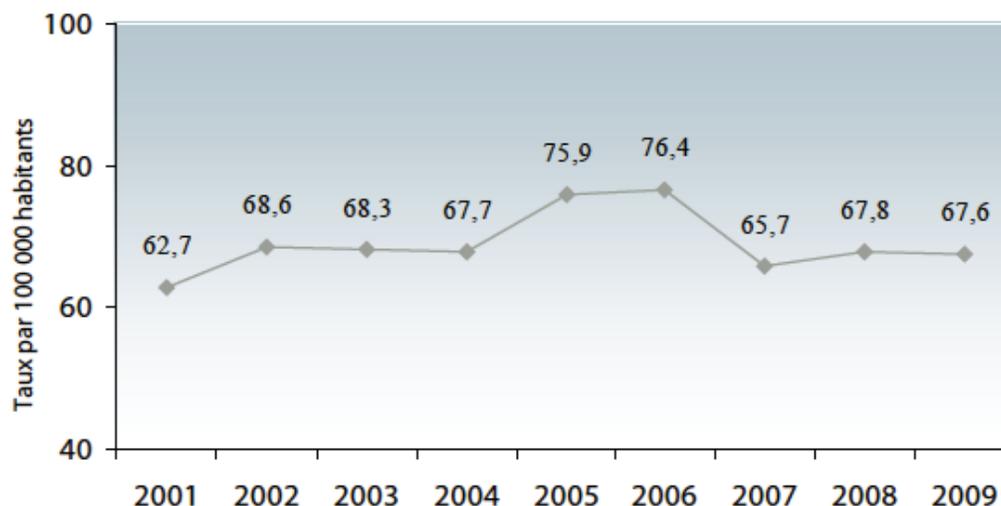
Before actually starting this research, I nurtured a preconceived notion that CSA, as a taboo and highly sensitive subject, was significantly under-reported in the media, and even more so 10 years ago. Gathering data from the early 2000s made me rapidly realize that it was not necessarily under-reported then. According to the literature, while CSA media coverage has been subjected to many thematic or framing changes in other Western societies (Beckett, 1996), it seems that taboos surrounding this topic were in fact broken around the 1980s (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Hunter, 2010). Since then, the

amount of CSA-related stories has drastically risen and the numbers have remained consistent since the 1990s (Silverman & Wilson, 2002; Critcher, 2003).

On a purely quantitative level, the data shows that CSA was being reported in *La Presse* ten years ago about as much as it is now. Actually, if any specific quantitative distinction emerges, it is the increasing number of news stories in the first half of the decade (1,401 in 2000-2005 compared to 1,041 in 2006-2011). This finding underscores the necessity to focus more on qualitative coverage, as no kind of conclusive statement concerning shifts in discourse can be made purely on these quantitative results. This is not to say that Nathalie Simard's public disclosure did not have any impact on representations of CSA. However, as shown in *La Presse's* news discourse, there were already notions of "breaking taboos" and destigmatization around certain aspects of the phenomenon, even in terms of intra-familial abuse.

That being said, new police data have been released since the initial gathering of statistical information, as demonstrated in *Figure 3*. A relative stability in rates of sexual infractions can be observed throughout the past decade. However, a clear contrast jumps out in 2005 and 2006, where rates are almost ten points higher than in previous and subsequent years. It is crucial to note that these rates concern all forms of sexual infractions in Québec, and do not solely involve children and adults disclosing their childhood experiences of abuse.

Figure 3 - Sexual infractions in Québec (2001 - 2009)⁴⁷



Considering that the Nathalie Simard case received a high level of media scrutiny in *La Presse* in those years, some form of relationship clearly emerges. However, epistemological nuances and doubts surround this claim, so this is not an argument for a perfect correlation. Yet, some relationship with the chronological sequence of events in the Nathalie Simard story still seems to coalesce. The significant drop of nearly eleven points between 2006 and 2007 also speaks to, and definitely raises curiosity about, provincial disclosure practices and the episodic nature of the news coverage of CSA, a point discussed later in this chapter.

Discursive constructions of CSA

In the previous chapter, recurrent discursive constructions were identified in *La Presse's* coverage, both in semantic uses and overall representations, around different levels of the CSA phenomenon. It is crucial to keep in mind that the way the Nathalie Simard story

⁴⁷ Ministère de la Sécurité publique, 2011.

was articulated in the newspaper constitutes a major mirroring lens on how CSA is constructed and communicated in public discourse. Again, discursive entanglements reflect contradictory practices rather than a unified and simplistic take on such a complex and multilayered phenomenon. These practices resonate on many different levels, such as narratives of victimization and disclosure, episodic coverage and issues of sensationalism. While the Simard case is not the only source of CSA discourse in *La Presse*, it acts as a catalyst on the discursive trends observable through the time-frame of my investigation. The following sections present a synthesis of how the language used as well as the framing and other organizational practices in *La Presse* influence the portrayal of CSA. I pay particular attention to the discursive trends from which paradoxes and misrepresentations emerge.

Childhood, innocence and the distinction between conceptual and effective violence

How society discursively constructs CSA has shifted over the past few decades. In his work on social representations, Serge Moscovici argues that the way we conceive a social phenomenon is inherently tied to the terms that are used to define it: "on parlait du *child abuse* et de l'inceste bien avant que le thème ne se cristallise" (Moscovici, 1998). These constructions eventually produce new meanings. It is interesting to note that in cases of child abuse and paedophilia, where child welfare agencies and police forces usually get involved, this relationship between semantics and social representations has a direct effect on how these issues are dealt with. The theory then becomes quite practical.

Several recurrent lexical practices were emphasized in the previous chapter. Locutions such as "briser le silence" and other widely known images around disclosure in popular language contribute not only to de-stigmatizing the issue itself and the willingness to disclose, but also in facilitating victims to actually express their own internal debate in deciding whether or not to disclose. Indeed, metaphors and more widely used symbolisms are often part of the disclosure process (Staller, 2005). This leads us back to Hunter's (2010) observation that prior to the 1990s there was a lack of semantic tools for victims to articulate their own experience, for themselves as well as for others, namely those on the receiving end of disclosure, who were not professionally trained to provide appropriate support.

Additionally, many discursive patterns around effective and metaphorical violence emerge throughout my results. The burdening trauma of abuse has been extensively discussed throughout this study, but "the discourse of violence incorporates the idea that paedophiles do not just traumatize children but destroy them" (Meyer, 2007: 82). However, such destruction remains metaphorical in most cases and does not cause physical death, though it may lead to the victim committing suicide. Rather, the metaphor of destruction suggests "the destruction of a concept, childhood, and its defining element of innocence" (Meyer, 2007: 83). Recurrently resorting to such powerful metaphorical usage strengthens the predominance of the discourse of innocence and evokes highly emotive public responses, which do not necessarily fit well with certain victims' experiences. Also, the media focus on the discourse of violence reinforces the notion that physical violence is always involved in cases of CSA, and it sustains a misconception

that does not accurately represent the complexity of the phenomenon: such forms of violence actually rarely occur (Yun, 1983; Luther & Price, 1980). Nevertheless, the sexual abuse of children is deeply rooted in unequal relations of power, and, most of the time, based on gender and age differences.

Perpetrators of abuse: "Les pédophiles sillonnent les rues!"

In a television interview in April 2012, Conservative senator Jean-Guy Dagenais articulated this statement, which can be loosely translated to "paedophiles are wandering down the streets",⁴⁸ when he was lobbying for the tightening of the National Sex Offender Registry. It perfectly embodies popular misconceptions of child molesters in privileging the stranger-danger paradigm utilized to fuel irrational reactions. This focus on more repressive mobilization against perpetrators of CSA is particularly interesting in the context of Internet paedophilia, a phenomenon that has received increasing attention over the past decade in *La Presse*. The Internet was still viewed as a relatively new information-sharing platform in the early 2000s. As the Internet becomes increasingly acknowledged as a hidden space of perversion and multifaceted risks for children, certain semantic usages crystallize in news discourse. Terms like "cyberpaedophilia" and "cyberpredators" are now integrated in everyday talk yet were non-existent a decade ago.

As shown throughout my results, *La Presse's* coverage of perpetrators of CSA, or paedophiles, very often resonates with the literature's findings on their paradoxical, binary and essentialist portrayals in mainstream media. Perpetrators are indeed portrayed

⁴⁸ Radio-Canada, *Le Téléjournal*, retrieved April 19, 2012 from <http://www.radio-canada.ca/widgets/mediaconsole/medianet/5872830>

in contradictory ways, not unlike Meyer's (2007) depictions, where constructions of the instinct-driven street animal or the Internet manipulative groomer get entangled in discursive tendencies. This inability to fix the "real" nature of paedophiles, a nature defined by simple and recurring patterns as well as identifiable and essential characteristics, creates a climate of confusion under which moral panic can develop and folk devils subsequently crystallize. Ultimately, perpetrators of CSA in *La Presse's* news coverage are mostly represented under the axioms of stranger-danger and paedophilia, which often are not representative of the most prevalent recurrences of CSA: intra-familial abuse.

The stigma of intra-familial abuse

Although several stories do mention incest, the issue itself is not as discursively developed and explored in as much depth as themes of disclosure and violence. Naming incest is one thing, and *La Presse* certainly is not guilty of hiding the facts, as shown by the relatively high prevalence of stories that identify this phenomenon. However, is naming powerful enough to de-stigmatize incest? I would assume not. While it is certainly preferable to rendering incest entirely invisible, as it was prior to the 1980s, the identification needs to be followed by explanation and analysis, which were not consistently apparent in *La Presse's* coverage.

Incest is more present in *La Presse* compared to what was found in the British press, for instance, where 96% of stories report abuse that occurs outside the family home (Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995). However, we can still observe the editorial decision of

moving these stories away from the mainstream public attention, relegating these stories to pages which are not as widely read. While Québec's media may not operate under a strict journalist ethics guide as in the UK (Press Complaints Commission, 2011), which prevents reporters from actually using words such as "incest" in their stories, this effectively hinders the press' social responsibility to raise awareness. It could be argued that the reluctance to use the label of incest is likely rooted in notions of the sacredness of the family. The family circle is supposed to constitute the most reliable and secure safety net for children to fully develop. Acknowledging leakages in that net generates irreversible societal anxiety. This anxiety can be maintained at a rather vague level if the issue is kept muted, or at least not exhaustively represented.

That aside, while people can be intellectually aware that CSA happens everywhere, and not only in the axiom of stranger-danger, this fact is rarely integrated to people's ways of thinking. Kitzinger makes an interesting point that "[a]lthough the notion that sexual abuse might happen in normal homes is acknowledged as a fact, it is rarely developed at the level of symbolism" (Kitzinger, 2004: 124). This is particularly interesting given the many powerful metaphorical discursive practices *around* the act of disclosure or victimization and *against* perpetrators of abuse that emerge in my analysis. It is particularly striking that, while intra-familial abuse is indeed recognized as a social issue, this rarely goes beyond the surface. The definite lack of discursively produced images to powerfully convey and symbolize the harsh reality of incest confirms the unwillingness of a mass media outlet such as *La Presse* to acknowledge it beyond a mere societal fact. Deepening people's understanding of intra-familial abuse, and more specifically incest,

requires emotionally oriented discursive techniques, which should be enhanced with a more acute and responsible use of symbolism. As mentioned earlier, general themes around victims' disclosure and inhibiting silence are decently metaphorically developed in the coverage of *La Presse*. Increased symbolic richness around intra-familial abuse could help construct better socially defined representations of this factually acknowledged, yet poorly integrated phenomenon in public knowledge.

As evident in the present analysis, the multidimensional stigmas around CSA are both disengaged and sustained in the way they are discursively articulated. They are sustained when stigmas remain poorly developed in terms of images and wider social representations. However, the use of symbolic constructions in mainstream media can also help people make better sense of their own experience and find the appropriate semantic tools to express a response. This, in turn, may increase the possibility of disclosure.

Celebrity victims and regular people: Encoding and decoding disclosure

As noted in my results, stories involving celebrities have more exposure, often being published much closer to the front page. This is not necessarily a reprehensible practice. Celebrities making front pages as abusers, but mostly as victims, can have a positive impact. First, these stories provide excellent opportunities to talk about events which are too often invisible, either absent from mainstream news coverage or simply relegated to less popular sections of newspapers. It was previously argued that the issue of CSA is no longer a taboo as much as it was in earlier decades, before my data collection began.

However, there are still enormous stigmas surrounding its complexities and any stories involving celebrities inevitably force the news media to acknowledge the issue.

In addition, many people deeply identify with well-known personae. Celebrities are often the vanguard and, hence, their behavior can set the tone. In this regard, they can be positively influential. Audiences can better relate with someone they "know" through experienced meanings, and actually become more aware of the reality of being a victim as a result. Throughout her decisions to disclose, reveal her identity and, most importantly, talk about her experience extensively on multiple platforms, Nathalie Simard personified – at different times and varying degrees – several narratives of victimization, which were quite easily identifiable in *La Presse's* coverage. Simard embodied discourses around denial and silence when she decided to disclose her childhood experience of abuse at the age of 35, after holding the secret for so many of her adult years. It has been shown that, when public figures share their experience of CSA in the media, past victims find it particularly arduous to maintain a narrative of silence and act as if this traumatic experience did not really affect them (Trotter, 2004; Hunter, 2010). Therefore, the fact that Simard spent so much of her energy in publicly talking about the whole process, with an explicit intention to raise awareness in helping and empowering other silent or struggling victims, strongly evokes the survivor discourse. The word "break," as in "breaking the silence," is particularly relevant, as it semantically communicates recurrent symbolic practices in *La Presse* around disclosure, or the end of silence and de-stigmatization, and resonates with the narrative of transformation conveyed by the survivor discourse.

On the other hand, despite embodying these positive narratives and representations, a celebrity figure's disclosure still does not manage to tame some of the deeply ingrained media processes and their impacts on victims: "[w]hile happy to exploit off-the-peg voyeuristic presentations of suffering, highly pressurised media production processes are unlikely to create conditions under which survivors might assert more positive and critical representations" (Kitzinger, 2004: 199). Incidentally, when further scratching the surface, another more complex narrative emerges: the narrative of transcendence, where a person challenges both her status as victim and survivor. While not specifically labeled by symbolic locutions such as "breaking the silence" in the case of disclosure, this narrative occurs when victims in news stories resist these traditional ways of coping with pain and stigma. Interestingly, this form of discursive resistance resonates with Hall's (1980) model of encoding and decoding media messages; in particular, his notions of negotiated and resisted readings, as when news information is decoded in only partial agreement or the intended encoded meaning is rejected in its entirety.

In a similar but more general way, we have to keep in mind Hall's notions of preferred readings because "[a]spects of the coverage which impact on most people in one way may have the opposite effect on others" (Kitzinger, 2004: 185). The portrayal of victims in the news incidentally leads us back to distinctions between quantity and quality of coverage. On the one hand, increased media focus may empower people to speak out about their experience of abuse, but on the other hand, it also has some negative counterpoints in how narratives of victimization and survivorhood become appropriated,

exploited and sometimes misrepresented (Kitzinger, 2004). I would further argue that Hall's model (1980) can, again, be loosely applied to the process and experience of disclosure: the victim (encoder) has her own baggage of mental and social cognitions and processes when articulating and making sense of her trauma and encoding its expression, but the relative or friend (decoder) also needs an appropriately developed set of cognitive and experiential tools and schemes to properly receive and decipher such a call for help, especially if that person is not a trained professional. Models around disclosure reflect several layers of constructed complexities that can loosely be linked to the multifaceted schemes of encoding and decoding news discourse.

Kitzinger's observations on the undesirable effects of victimization narratives disseminated in the press are often quite subtle. In other instances, however, more flagrant misrepresentations are directly produced and sustained *because* of some of the practices inherently tied to the mainstream outlet's economic interests.

Episodic and wave-like treatment

As evident in the occasional peaks in my quantitative data,⁴⁹ it appears that the coverage of CSA comes by waves, often fueled by scandals: the "media interest in CSA is episodic, driven by events, rather than genuine and consistent" (Meyer, 2007: 104). This is typical of how media operate under such circumstances, squeezing out all the potential juice from a sensationalist event over a short amount of time. This aligns with what has been identified as the "deviancy amplification spiral" (Cohen, 1972; Hall et al 1978),

⁴⁹ See chart in appendix.

when, for a brief time span, a phenomenon like CSA gets disproportionate media attention. Events that would not be usually newsworthy are reported; minor problems appear more serious and rare events now seem common. Eventually, public interest dies out, as shown by the drop of CSA coverage in the years following the Nathalie Simard scandal, and the media reports less about it, even though the issue still remains real and worthy of public exposure. Ultimately, the quantity of superficial reporting over the short term creates an "abuse fatigue" (Kitzinger, 2004: 36) that ends up compromising the quality of public understanding over the longer term. It is even argued that debates around CSA emerge almost instrumentally, as they fill specific needs at certain points in time in adult society (Kincaid, 1998).

Nathalie Simard's story and, to a lesser extent, the more recent clergy scandals of 2010, represent typical examples of this episodic, flavor-of-the-month-type of media practices. In contrast, court-based journalism does not need to obey these wave effects. It simply reflects local, day-to-day trial stories as they unfold, without being subjected to any pre-established editorial intentions and framing. They occur when police divulge a specific case or when a court trial is scheduled for a related case, and remain impermeable to current trends and waves in public interest.⁵⁰ This is one of the reasons why these court stories, even if they are not always the most appropriate vector for deepening an understanding of CSA, still constitute a key framing that is worthy of analysis. However, as noted previously, these stories are not usually as symbolically developed or

⁵⁰ It is important to specify here that I am referring to the low profile, daily yet isolated court stories. Extraordinary court cases such as the recent Shafia family trial, which garnered a huge amount of media interest and scrutiny, are submitted to similar reporting practices where sensationalistic and episodic coverage also prevail (Jiwani, in press).

purposefully embedded into the political economy of a mass media outlet such as *La Presse*. In other words, they do not sell nearly enough copies. This leads to considerations of balanced reporting and the fine lines between sentimentalizing CSA and sensitizing people to CSA, and privileging sensationalistic rather than well-balanced educational and factual information.

Sensationalism versus sensibility and education

Stories concerning celebrities, such as the Nathalie Simard case, proliferate by waves, fueled by scandals. They are often situated in the very first pages of daily editions. By garnering immense amounts of media scrutiny and highly emotional public reactions, the phenomenon is magnified and can easily lead to misrepresentation. However, sensationalist coverage of CSA is not only apparent in cases involving celebrities. The way perpetrators are portrayed as worrying discursive figures, embodied as folk devils (Cohen, 1972), undoubtedly embeds itself in the dynamics of sensationalism. Molesters are often demonized and portrayed as both instinct-driven animals and cunning strategists, in the most simplified and shocking ways.

Yet, it is important to always keep in mind that the mass media resorts to sensationalism in accord with the established order, not to defy it. The traditional articulations between discursive power, the press and social representations are being continuously sustained. For instance, while it could be deemed "sensationalist" for media outlets such as *La Presse* to focus much more on intra-familial abuse because of its highly disturbing nature and potential to garner public attention, my results show quite the contrary. And this

again reflects the contradictory loophole of CSA-related issues in society. It is both located on the forefront of research and public interest, as well as hidden when the way it manifests itself involves family ties and therefore challenges the most ancient form of institutional and organizational stability (Lévi-Strauss, 1967). One would normally think that an explicit condemnation of incest would prevail considering that it is such a universal interdiction. However, this is not actually the case in *La Presse's* coverage over the past ten years. As was shown in how incest is generally framed, located and discursively articulated and constructed, sensationalism yields the way to a more uninvolved, somehow emotionally detached form of media coverage. The symbolic poverty of how incest is discussed sustains the difficulty in emotionally deepening and integrating the phenomenon in public consciousness. This testifies to a gap between how sensationalism prevails upon certain types of CSA events, while presenting an uninvolved and strictly factual framing in other cases, as shown in the contrast between the reporting of extraordinary events involving celebrities and day-to-day court-related stories.

Having said this, in contrast with low-end tabloid practices particularly observable in the UK (e.g., Meyer, 2007; Kitzinger, 2004; Edwards, 2004), *La Presse's* sensationalist coverage of CSA is mostly "neutralized," as it presents very few obvious slippages. Instead, a subtle deference to the victims was mostly observable in how the phenomenon was approached, probably out of respect for the complex experiences of victimization. However, this deference reflects a lingering unease towards CSA, an unease that reminds that it was still very taboo and discursively repressed merely two decades ago. These

polarizing practices in privileging sensitivity and education over sensationalism are still far apart. Building knowledge-based public sensitivity rather than fuelling disproportional emotive reactions seems only accomplishable through better education and a more systemic and multifaceted reporting of the phenomenon. This need for more comprehensive coverage inevitably implies the use of experts, who are already substantially accessed as authorized voices in the news stories that were analyzed. However, resorting to expert opinions also involves relying on the natural authority of constructed knowledge, which raises its own issues.

Expert opinions, valence and naturalization

As discussed in the previous chapter, quotes from experts – often academics, jurists or organization leaders – do not necessarily reflect faulty practices. On the contrary, on most occasions they provide in-depth knowledge and perspectives on a given situation. Expert voices are often used to balance or contrast quotes from direct protagonists of a news event. The majority of news stories collected from the 10-year span involve some kind of authoritative or educational framing, often from expert voices but sometimes also in the way that the journalistic tone is employed and articulated. One or several of these practices were identifiable in all but 25 stories out of the total of 120 articles.

One particularly crucial issue occurs when expert opinions are used to naturalize what the journalist, or editorial board, is trying to say. Expert voices bear an authoritative value that is much harder to resist than political editorial messages for any casual reader decoding a news story. Even in *La Presse's* "balanced" reporting, the importance that

should be given to certain issues is purely constructed, as is "the axis of debate, the range of relevant experts called upon to comment and the spectrum of reasonable opinion" (Kitzinger, 2004: 190). Authority can also be given to reported news "facts" through the use of statistics. Several (19) stories prominently used statistical numbers in my corpus of articles. Statistical and expert quotes encourage and sustain a naturalizing process where the constructed and subjective nature of such "facts" ends up hidden, and greatly impinges on the casual reader's ability to critically and ontologically separate news discourse from *the* reality. Yet again, a contradictory dialectic re-emerges since these cited statistical figures and expert opinions remain "highly provisional," and their nascent-potentiality helps to naturalize the reporter's discourse *outside* quotation marks (Hartley, 1982: 110).

The pitfalls of naturalization lead us back to the notion of valence in news framing. We can all agree that "there is no 'pro-child abuse' lobby" (Beckett, 1996: 57). However, a static stance on CSA hinders the adoption of more critical perspectives if discourses around CSA are further position-oriented. Such positions would be easier to identify and deconstruct to later form our own judgment. When naturalized, discursive constructions become integrated into common sense, and their premises end up socially absorbed with a minimum of critical filtering. This portrays a major issue with children's sexuality: its absence or non-existence is naturalized while it is in fact historically constructed. When manifested, children's sexuality is automatically linked to devious and problematic behaviors, while such statements should basically be articulated as matters of opinions. One always has to keep in mind the process at play and how these opinions get embedded

into common sense, because they are not extracted from an objective, "natural" outlook on life.

Constantly naturalizing constructions of abusers through valence framing raises highly problematic considerations (Hartley, 1982; Beckett, 1996). When such oppositions are conveyed in a binary way, the overall message gets decoded without any shades of grey and produces essentialist and polarized positions in the public debate. CSA obviously is not a matter of position in terms of determining whether or not a child is responsible or even "deserving" to be sexually molested or abused in any other shape or form.

Nevertheless, since there are so many variables to assess for each specific case, framing the relationship between perpetrators and victims in essential, and binary ways do not provide enough complexity to allow readers to shape their own outlook on the issue.

Besides, many documented cases of wrongly accused molesters show that these unequivocal essentialist positions can lead to immensely traumatic experiences. The case of Michel Dumont, who spent three years in prison because of a sexual assault he never committed, perfectly testifies to these pernicious effects.⁵¹ Having observed multiple instances where CSA, in specific aspects or as a whole, gets misrepresented, other distortions also manifest themselves through an overrepresentation of CSA in the press in contrast with other forms of child maltreatment. As this hypothesis was not verifiable with my own data, I turn to alternative research findings from Québec to further explore its validity.

⁵¹ This story was recently narrated into a fictional movie, *L'Affaire Dumont*, released in 2012.

CSA not only misrepresented, also overrepresented

As previously mentioned, research on CSA exploded in the 1990s, and to this day still occupies a great portion of the child maltreatment research focus. The amount of research and support groups on CSA has increased to a point where it is almost impossible to keep track of them all. During the last ACFAS annual conference,⁵² three out of eight (nearly 40%) panel discussions on child maltreatment specifically addressed sexual abuse.⁵³ As demonstrated in the Canadian Incidence Study (CIS), substantiated cases of CSA are far less prevalent than cases of neglect or emotional maltreatment. A meta-analysis on child maltreatment interventions conducted by Québec researchers found very few reviews on child neglect, emotional maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence, yet "[o]ther types of maltreatment, however, were addressed more fully, particularly interventions targeting child victims of sexual abuse and interventions targeting parents who physically abused their children" (Dufour & Chamberland, 2003).

Conveniently for the present purpose, St Jacques et al (2010) examined the representation of child maltreatment in Québec news coverage and found that less frequent forms of maltreatment such as physical and sexual abuse are over-reported. In contrast, more prevalent forms of maltreatment, such as emotional maltreatment and neglect, are much less covered. Among 451 news stories, St Jacques et al note that sexual abuse was the most frequently mentioned type of maltreatment, occurring in a stunning 44,2% of stories. For comparison purposes, the second most frequently mentioned form of abuse was physical abuse, appearing in 20,9% of these stories.

⁵² Association francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS) Conference, 80th edition, May 7-11 2012.

⁵³ *Colloque 402*, full schedule retrieved July 15, 2012

[<http://www.acfas.ca/evenements/congres/programme/80/400/402/c>]

Therefore, solely relying on the media portrayal of child maltreatment to assess the occurrence of its various forms produces a skewed version of reality, which I consider highly problematic. Having said that, it is crucial to keep in mind CSA is a phenomenon that is very often hidden to authorities, and that the prevalence gap with other forms of maltreatment might not be as significant as shown by incidence data (Stoltenborgh, 2011; Finkelhor, 1994b). Where child maltreatment is concerned, what is rare is often what gets the most media attention (Franklin & Parton, 1991). This directly sends us back to the idea that discursive constructions around childhood and sexuality inevitably lead to disproportionate scrutiny. It is particularly striking to consider that, after decades of societal silence and taboo, the inverse phenomenon now seems to prevail.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to situate the past decade's news coverage of CSA in *La Presse* in a wider, interdisciplinary context of both social sciences and media studies research. In revisiting the Nathalie Simard "effect", other analytic avenues were explored to assert notions of media influence and impact, ones that do not remain static in linear causal relationships. The qualitative portion of my inquiry allows for a closer examination of specific semantic uses in the articulation of contending discursive trends, especially surrounding key CSA themes such as disclosure, victimization narratives and paedophile figures. Focusing on some of the most important misrepresentations emerging from my corpus of news stories, certain journalistic and institutional practices were

subsequently questioned. These practices appear tainted by socio-cultural predispositions, which enable the articulation and maintenance of a misrepresentative portrayal of CSA.

Conclusion

Throughout this research project, I have tried to shed light on how the socially constructed and historically rooted phenomenon of CSA has influenced public discourse in Québec.

The point of departure of my inquiry was fueled by the intense level of media scrutiny that followed the Nathalie Simard case in the mid-2000s and the subsequent increases in disclosure rates that occurred around the same period. However, a narrow interpretation of a potentially direct correlation between these two phenomena was relinquished in favor of a more encompassing focus on the origin and evolution of CSA media discourse in Québec.

The inquiry involved tracing the historical discursive formations around childhood, sexuality and mediated violence, while constantly bearing in mind how these constructions are embedded in a multilayered dynamic of power, knowledge and inequities. Through a Foucauldian lens, I explored the often contradictory and juxtaposed discursive trends around children's evilness, innocence and rights, and how these constructed perspectives contributed to shaping the articulation and expression of CSA in the research domain as much as in public talk.

Subsequently, in the first chapter, the Nathalie Simard case was situated within Québec's shifting prevalence of, and response to, CSA, as well as within other Canadian and international contextual considerations. To firmly provide a basis for an interdisciplinary

analytic approach, narratives around victimization and disclosure were explored, and key characteristics of perpetrators were debunked. In the second chapter, several theoretical models on media influence, reading (encoding and decoding) and audience reception were discussed with a view to obtaining insights pertinent to my research questions. The methodology of critical discourse analysis was then further explored, with its specific conceptual and operational set of tools and its application and relevance to the current research inquiry. I also outlined studies that specifically examined the relationship between press media coverage and issues of violence and child maltreatment, and more specifically CSA.

In the third chapter, I first established *La Presse's* relevance and context in terms of its political economy and journalistic practices, and then presented the methodological process through which I gathered my corpus of news stories related to CSA. The rest of the chapter was devoted to a presentation of my results, both quantitative and qualitative, the latter being broken down into thematic clusters, such as the portrayal of agents (victims, molesters), of concepts (childhood, violence) and other recurrent CSA topics (incest, celebrities, clergy, the Internet). Several semantic patterns and hierarchical practices regarding the framing of CSA emerged. In the subsequent discussion chapter, I dealt with issues such as sensationalism, episodic treatment and misrepresentations pertaining to my results. Media theoretical models, Foucauldian discursive considerations as well as insights from local and international literature were integrated in relation to media discourse and CSA.

From a general perspective, *La Presse's* overall journalistic tone appears quite respectful towards victims and not overly sensationalistic in expressing fears and evaluating potential risks. I found positive representations of victims throughout the corpus of stories and, as pointed out in previous chapters, intra-familial abuse is not nearly as hidden or muted as the literature suggests in press coverage from other nations. It is entirely plausible that these findings would vary if this study had focused on analyzing more tabloid-like outlets such as *le Journal de Montréal*. This leads to a discussion of some of the hindrances and limitations emerging from the methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions of this thesis.

Limitations

If my intention had been to compare the coverage of a specific political issue, for which *La Presse* has specifically delineated editorial guidelines, findings would most definitely have been easier to emphasize and criticize. The valence nature of CSA framing in the media makes it quite arduous to identify clear conflicting positions and perspectives, as well as any kind of unequal hierarchy in accessed voices in relation to specific positions privileged or muted by the newspaper's editorial mandate. Having said that, this also allowed further reflection on the underlying structures of news institutions and the pitfalls of the naturalization of valence framing.

One of the major hurdles in this study was the potentially enormous amount of data. Therefore, in order to obtain a legitimate in-depth examination of *La Presse*, let alone other major Québec newspapers, it unfortunately became impossible to cover other

newspapers outside of Québec. Results most certainly would have been more concrete if I had opted to analyze a tabloid such as *Le Journal de Montréal*. However, as someone who never reads tabloids, I felt it was more important to attend to a well-known object – a newspaper I consult online on a daily basis – rather than being immersed in an unknown terrain that I am already fairly critical of. Having said that, mere technical reasons are the main reason why the coverage of *Le Journal de Montréal* was not examined. Since there are no online retrieval resources, such as Eureka for *La Presse*, available for this tabloid, it would not have been possible to conduct any similar longitudinal investigation. Using microfilm archiving retrieval methods was not an option for this thesis considering the scope of data. Nonetheless, my examination would have been more comprehensive if this daily tabloid had been incorporated into the data collection. It would also have been pertinent to collect similar news data from the *Montreal Gazette*, which is comparable to *La Presse* in both its format and editorial lines. Having data from two major Montreal newspapers that appeal to each main language audience would certainly have strengthened insights stemming from my findings. In the end, having already and irreversibly engaged with so much data from *La Presse*, I opted to intensively analyze one outlet's coverage rather than skim the surface of multiple papers.

Additionally, collecting only one article per month allowed access to data on a longitudinal basis. However, this form of sampling certainly limited the scope of analysis during periods of intense CSA coverage. Hence, the randomness of my collection method prevented a form of selection bias but also restrained my ability to scrutinize certain short-lasting media hypes.

Finally, while online retrieval resources are much more convenient than other newspaper archiving platforms such as microfilm, the end result is not the same as consulting actual physical newspapers. Putting different iconic signs together, such as the combination of a story with a picture and a headline, modifies or reinforces each of these elements' significations (Hartley, 1982). New meanings emerge out of these articulations, and online resources do not holistically render this potentiality. News stories collected in my analysis did not include pictures, even though more recent archives now attach visuals. Furthermore, even if all elements are included when retrieving a given story online, it still is not possible to situate a specific article in relation to or in contrast with other iconic signs in the same paper. The size of the headline, the location of the picture and sub-text, the other stories or advertisements presented above, below and beyond, etc. – these key elements are usually not available, or only partially, when retrieving news articles online.

These minor yet crucial factors certainly limited the scope of my analysis. However, the experience described in the following section enriched my inquiry into *La Presse's* functioning, allowing me to better contextualize and understand its organizational and journalistic practices.

Panel discussion experience

Back in November 2011, I attended a discussion panel involving a handful of renowned journalists covering provincial and federal politics for *La Presse*. Even though my research is not politically oriented in the traditional sense, it appeared pertinent to hear

what these well-known reporters had to say, considering that my analysis is centered around the institution that pays their salaries and influences their writings based on pre-established editorial lines. Obviously, CSA was not going to be the subject of the evening. Yet, the discussion became increasingly interesting, and the conversation between all four political journalists and the host – a celebrity columnist in *La Presse* – accelerated some of my thought processes on subjects such as journalistic rigor and responsibility, institutional and commercial imperatives, the impacts of new technologies, etc., all quite inherent to key dynamics put forth by the framework of critical discourse analysis.

For starters, Katia Gagnon ridiculed the notion of Power Corporation directly interfering with the newspaper's discourse: "Les gens s'imaginent qu'on a un téléphone rouge au bureau, et que Paul Desmarais⁵⁴ y appelle régulièrement." This reminds us that, while news outlets might be owned by private corporations, they are still mostly subject to specific commercial interests and fluctuations, and the ideas or ideology of any given news media owner, such as Paul Desmarais, will "play second fiddle to a more imperative commercial dictate, namely financial survival" (Hartley, 1982: 48). On that note, Vincent Marissal, the most talkative panel participant that evening, pointed out pretty clearly: "un journal, c'est une business" and "sans intérêt commerciaux, on n'a pas d'intérêt à se dépasser." In other words, the business aspect of a news media institution is absolutely central, and commercial interests constitute the main driving forces to its core functioning. However, in order to sell copies, you first have to grab your potential readers' attention. Three key practices were identified during the panel discussion. They

⁵⁴ As a reminder, Paul Desmarais is Power Corporation's longtime CEO and *La Presse*'s owner.

emphasize the media institution's commercially focused dynamics and ultimately contribute to how CSA is (mis)represented.

First, there appears to be an increasing tendency of "fait-diverisation", a term brought up by one of the panelists, in *La Presse's* reporting. This phenomenon could be loosely related to an increased focus on trivial news events, where local crime stories, for instance, end up being more prevalent than more deeply investigated political stories. It was explicitly mentioned by one of the journalists that he only considers himself as a "messenger", a simple liaison agent with the news event, a role which somewhat justifies privileging a focus on delivering hard facts rather than exploring the depth and layers of complex social issues such as CSA. Second, it was mentioned that currently there are significantly more graphic designers on staff than actual journalists. This is particularly interesting when trying to situate *La Presse* among the three most widely accepted categories of newspapers: broadsheets or up-market papers, mid-market papers and tabloids or down-market papers. While *La Presse* would normally not be considered a tabloid-type of newspaper, the fact that so many resources have shifted towards graphic design and visual appeal certainly raises questions on the current state of the newspaper and where it is heading in the near future. Finally, the panelists adamantly referred to a more recent lack of resources, coupled with "up to the minute" editorial expectations, especially at the present time with the ever expanding presence of social media such as Twitter. The already bumpy terrain for the in-depth exploration of alternative perspectives is getting even narrower. Indeed, there seems to be an inverse proportional relationship between this growing need for instantaneity and the decreasing quality of

coverage. Coupled with an ever more present competition between multiple media outlets over exclusivity and "scoops", events are increasingly being covered based on rapidity and immediacy rather than quality and an exhaustive examination of "newsworthy" events.

These practices lead to the issue of "soft journalism", characterized by under resourcing, time constraints and crumbling employment conditions for journalists, among many other issues. As this type of journalism expands, we can observe a proliferation of superficial coverage, banking on highly emotive pointers, eschewing the more thorough practices of actually exploring conflicting perspectives that would enrich rationalization and more knowledge-based sensitivity towards the phenomenon. As valence framing informs us, CSA does not lend itself "naturally" to critical debate and contradictory reports; it rather essentializes the narrow hermeneutic spectrum, dissimulates the constructed nature of such media texts and ultimately complicates the possibility of negotiating and resisting even the most modest propositions in mainstream discourse.

The outcomes put forth in this panel discussion resonate with some of the most prominent items that were examined throughout my thesis. What these journalists meant to say obviously is not shaking the institutional columns of mainstream media, but the expressed constraints within which they are working have relevance to how CSA is currently portrayed in this major newspaper. This panel discussion helps to decrypt what is at stake practically when a social issue such as CSA makes the news. It also allows a better understanding of the implications for all actors involved, from media professionals

to casual readers, and shows that most misrepresentations around the issue are structurally tied to the organizational and institutional dynamics and practices at *La Presse*.

Recommendations, implications & future thoughts

Understanding the broad dynamics of CSA in the popular culture and its manifestations in the press always throws us back to paradoxical explanations. CSA both fascinates and repulses. These strong sentiments are deeply rooted in the historical discursive entanglements around sexuality, violence and children as both innocent and in need of care and protection. These contradictory dynamics of public fascination and repulsion end up generating complex layers of misrepresentation, mostly due to the overwhelming sentimentalization embedded in these polarizing reactions. The semantic use of the word "paedophilia" greatly portrays this misrepresentative dissemination; the term being used out of context but mostly outside of its actual signification, often in order to fit some person's or organization's agendas. Indeed, essentializing the issue can almost be comforting, because it simplifies its otherwise complex nature, and demonizing "the paedophile" rather than apprehending the multifaceted aspects of child molestation sustains popular misconceptions. Tagging every instance of CSA as an act of "paedophilia" constructs the phenomenon in terms of its rarest manifestation. Meanwhile, children are still being victimized – and not exclusively sexually or through physical violence – inside the walls of their household, and most of the focus is geared towards street hunting and obsessed with populating the ever-growing National Sex Offender Registry. In an unequivocal collusion with the news media, these practices help maintain

the concealment of what is grounded at the roots of CSA: unequal power struggles mostly based on age and gender.

However, my aim here is not to criticize the recent media coverage of CSA on a purely negative note, even though the latter part of this investigation greatly focused on misrepresentations and superficial coverage. As Goddard puts it:

[I]t is easy to be critical of the media's coverage of child abuse. The media, however, have assisted in increasing public awareness of all forms of family violence, and have made it more acceptable to talk about and disclose child abuse. (Goddard, 1996: 307)

The media did not discover CSA, but they gradually integrated it and legitimated its presence in everyday talk. Media also cannot be deemed solely responsible for all outbursts and backlashes around different actualizations of CSA, "[w]hat they did do was bring their own contribution to the dynamics" (Kitzinger, 2004: 70-71).

Examining CSA coverage both quantitatively and qualitatively in a major Québec newspaper is indicative that the media do talk about the phenomenon, more so than any other form of child maltreatment. As was shown quantitatively, the taboo surrounding CSA was not recently lifted, at least not during the investigated period. However, this observation somewhat justifies my earlier methodological shifts from a purely quantitative examination to a more encompassing qualitative outlook on the phenomenon. Ultimately, the important aspect is not so much the fact the media talk about CSA, but rather *how* they talk about it (e.g., the various discursive and framing techniques). When the discursive tactics through which CSA is discussed in the news are identified, as I have tried to

demonstrate throughout my thesis, the question evolves to other heuristic levels: *why* are the media talking about CSA now, in this specific fashion, rather than in alternative ways? And why are they covering only certain aspects and letting others remain invisible? No matter how much ink is spilled on certain facets of CSA, sometimes with imaginative vigor and near obsession, other less "sensational" manifestations are being kept on the sidelines, barely acknowledged and poorly articulated.

The ways in which CSA is being discussed in *La Presse* contributes to increasing general awareness in the population, a phenomenon particularly identifiable through the lens of the Nathalie Simard story. When decoding media discourse, victims can relate to these narratives of victimization and disclosure. One could further argue that past, current and even future abusers are being vigorously informed that their slightest moves and attempts to dominate and silence victims are now under scrutiny. Once this complex issue is "discovered," we can no longer pretend it does not exist. Ultimately, however, media outlets consistently need to fill daily space with news that can be talked about. While some form of knowledge transfer and other educative content does shine through some of the news stories that were analyzed, commercial imperatives usually prevail. The daily circulation of papers needs to be optimally exhausted. However, as was argued earlier, these commercially driven motives only justify part of the blurring of this issue. Other structuring forces such as editorial lines and general societal attitudes towards intra-familial abuse, for instance, facilitate certain constructions and angles in the framing and depth of coverage.

On a closing note, I notice that the phenomenon of bullying, or intimidation, has recently started occupying a much more prominent space in Québec's mainstream media. In the past year or so, everyone has started talking about this form of intimidation, analyzing it from a myriad of rational and emotional standpoints. Even at the political level, the Québec ruling Liberals heterogeneously recuperated this concept during the most recent tuition hikes crisis, bombarding mainstream media platforms such as *La Presse* with constant discursive accusations of "violence and intimidation" against students' groups. This leads me to wonder if bullying will become CSA version 2.0, the new media obsession constructed on children and youth's innocence and vulnerability. Even though both issues are ontologically and structurally separate, it should prove interesting to observe if the valence-framed phenomenon of bullying will be submitted to similar practices over the next few years in *La Presse*, as well as in alternative sources of media discourse.

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Appendices

Appendix I: *La Presse* stories cited

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Appendix II: News stories per month in *La Presse* (2000-2011)

