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The Karla Homolka Case: Framing Female Criminality

Josée Labelle

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Sociology and Anthropology

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
at Concordia University
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ABSTRACT

The Karla Homolka Case: Framing Female Criminality

Josée Labelle

This thesis is a qualitative textual analysis of the mass media and popular culture sources emphasizing an in-depth reading of stories about the Karla Leanne Homolka case. Unveiling patterns of coverage proved useful in establishing which ideas about women and crime the mass media and popular culture promote in an attempt at producing a particular understanding of female criminality. This study has shown that the mass media and popular culture produce a dichotomous understanding of female criminality. On the one hand, the media encourages us to recognize that women who find themselves in extraordinarily violent circumstances feel generally helpless and compelled to adopt violent behaviors and engage in criminal activities. But at the same time, the media encourages us to understand that women who commit crimes are inherently evil, callous and remorseless. In the end, this study has successfully shown that the understanding of female criminality produced by the media can result in having us perceive women in trouble with the law as either innocent victims or as contemptuous outlaws.

DEDICATION

To Ronny and Grandma

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Three young women from Ontario were killed in 1990, 1991 and 1992, Tammy Lyn Homolka, Leslie Erin Mahaffy and Kristen Dawn French. Two people were found guilty of murder: Paul “Teale” Bernardo considered a sexual sadist, and Karla “Teale” Homolka, an alleged compliant victim of this sexual sadist. Paul Bernardo is currently serving two life term jail sentences. Karla Homolka is currently serving a twelve-year jail sentence, and extensive psychiatric reports confirmed she has a difficulty controlling her violent sexual impulses, appears to feel little remorse and is incapable of assuming any responsibilities for the crimes committed. Despite the potential danger Homolka still represents, she is scheduled to be released in less than three years.

Tammy Lyn Homolka was 15 years old when she met her untimely death in the basement of her parents’ house. After having consumed several cocktails during the evening—cocktails she did not know were laced with Halcion—Tammy fell asleep. Her sister, Karla and soon to-be brother in law, Paul, rushed to undress the sedated youth in order to assault her. The couple maintains the plan that evening was not to kill Tammy but rather sedate her enough so that they could assault her without her having any recollections of the event. Unfortunately Tammy aspirated the content of her stomach leading her to choke to death. Luckily for Karla and Paul, the death was ruled accidental.

In 1991, 14-year-old, Leslie Mahaffy returned home from an evening out with friends and found herself locked out of her house. Paul Bernardo who was in the neighborhood approached Leslie and they began talking. Soon after, Bernardo forced

Leslie into his vehicle and brought her to his house and sexually assaulted her. While in captivity, Leslie met Karla Homolka, who also took part in the assault on her. After two days of gruesome physical and sexual assault, the couple had to find a way to be rid of Leslie who, Karla voiced, would likely upon release be able to identify them. The possibility that Leslie might be able to identify the people who assaulted her, and the dinner engagement the couple had were two events, which sealed Leslie's faith. On June 16, 1991, Leslie's severed body with its parts encased in concrete was retrieved from Lake Gibson.

The third young woman to fall prey to the couple was 15-year-old Kristen Dawn French who was lured towards Bernardo's car by Karla who pretended she was lost and in need of directions. Kristen's ordeal was very similar to that of Leslie. She too was repeatedly assaulted both sexually and physically. Kristen, just like Tammy and Leslie, suffered an untimely death. Kristen had been missing fourteen days when officials found her body, on April 30 1992, on the side of a deserted road near Burlington.

On January 6, 1993, Karla left Paul and never returned. Why Karla left the matrimonial home that day had nothing to do with the murders of three young women. A beating inflicted on her by Paul was the reason. Shortly after Karla was separated from Paul the Metropolitan Toronto Police, who at the time were investigating a series of sexual assaults which occurred in the Scarborough area, contacted Karla whom they hoped would provide some information about their prime suspect, Paul Bernardo. Karla met with the officers and provided them with little information relevant to their inquiry of the Scarborough rapes. After meeting with the Metro Police officers Karla became unsettled and fearful that the authorities might soon make a connection between the

Scarborough assaults—which she knew, but omitted to say, were perpetrated by Paul—and the murder of Leslie and Kristen. So Karla immediately contacted a lawyer, George Walker, and scheduled a meeting. At the meeting Karla divulged details about the deaths of Tammy, Leslie and Kristen and also told Walker that her husband was without a doubt the infamous Scarborough rapist. Karla's confession to Walker was intended to demonstrate her willingness to assist the authorities in their prosecution of Paul Bernardo. Yet, Karla's admission of guilt was motivated by a desire on her part to avoid being held responsible for the murders, and as such she requested blanket immunity if she were to testify against her estranged husband. The negotiations between the Crown prosecutor, Murray Segal and George Walker began soon after. The Crown would not agree to Karla's request. The most they would do was to offer her a lesser charge—entailing a lenient sentence—in exchange for her testimony. A resolution agreement was soon drawn up and signed by all parties involved. Karla, in accordance with the agreement, provided the police with much information. The information was considered crucial, because it helped connect Bernardo to both Leslie and Kristen. Without such information, it is alleged the authorities would have had a difficult time prosecuting Bernardo.

Furthermore, Karla, upon complying with her duty as specified in the resolution, was sentenced to twelve years in prison. The nature of the crime, along with the publication ban of most events related to this case, made it intrinsically attractive to the media. As such, the media interest after her sentencing was not bound to dissipate.

The media waited patiently until an opportunity emerged to put Homolka back into the spotlight and simultaneously subject the judicial system to close scrutiny.

Photographs of Karla parading in an evening gown, celebrating a birthday party, which were sold to a newspaper by a fellow inmate, was the break they were waiting for. The outcry generated by the photographs depicting the person who had come to be known as, “Canada’s most notorious female criminal”, was immense. Soon after the release of these pictures Canadian officials announced that Homolka was to be transferred from the Joliette prison to a maximum-security prison for a psychiatric evaluation. The officials claimed that the decision to transfer Karla around the same time as the pictures were released was a coincidence, while some critics claimed that the decision to transfer Homolka was motivated by a need to curtail the outrage of Canadian. Regardless of the reason, the authorities recommended that Karla be transferred for an evaluation. The series of evaluations aimed to establish, explains John Vandoremalen spokesman for the National Parole Board, “...whether the individual has achieved some understanding of what impact a crime has had; do they understand what motivated it within themselves and do they understand why it happened?”(Tibbetts, 2000: A8). Both the National Parole Board and psychologists concurred: Karla appears to show little remorse, remains unable to control violent sexual impulses and fails to “assum[e] responsibility for her crimes” (Tibbetts, 2000: A8). The assessment prompted the evaluators to recommend that Karla be not granted statutory release and remain behind bars until the expiry of her sentence in July 2005.

Why Homolka?

The reasons why I selected the Homolka as a case study for an analysis of mass media and popular culture narratives are essentially threefold. For one, Karla Homolka represents a women whose criminal demeanors has exposed me to the existence of

violent crimes committed by women, and as such her case fuelled my desire to explore in greater depth the construction of female criminality through the media. Secondly, the Karla Homolka case drew an excessive amount of media attention and the availability of various and numerous sources is a vital component of a narrative analysis. And lastly, mass media and popular culture narratives on the Karla Homolka case advance particular ideas about women and crime, and I am interested in uncovering how these ideas operate together in producing a particular understanding of female criminality.

Thesis statement

Mass media and popular culture sources pertaining to the Karla Homolka case, while advancing ideas about women and crime, produce a particular understanding of female criminality.

Research question (s)

This study endeavors to answer several questions: How have media sources framed the Karla Homolka case? Which ideas about women and crime do the mass media and popular culture publications advance? What did mass media and popular culture coverage of the Homolka case provide the Canadian public? What have we learned from this case?

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to explore the social discourse that surrounds our cultural attitudes toward women and crime, using the Karla Homolka case as a case study. Media coverage and popular culture publications are significant examples of the discourse. Unpacking the elements involved in producing the discourses will provide an opportunity to discern underlying assumptions about women and crime. In doing so, this

study will investigate how these ideas operate together to produce a particular kind of meaning about female criminality; and this will provide an opportunity to gain insight into our cultural understanding of this issue.

Information about the Homolka case

Author Stephen Williams has published two true crime books on the Homolka case; Invisible Darkness: The Horrifying Case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka and Karla: Le Pacte avec le diable. The narrative provided by Stephen Williams in his book might be said to be "...a self-consciously literary encounter with murder and depravity...seek[ing] to explore both the depths and the resilience of the human psyche..."(Biressi, 2001: 71). The first book describes the nature of the offenders and their crimes. The second volume focuses on the nature of Homolka's experience as an inmate. A third true crime book written about the Homolka case is Deadly Innocence, by Scott Burnside and Alan Cairns. This book provides readers with a greater understanding of the relationship between Paul and Karla and serves to reinforce the belief that women are often victims driven by men to become offenders. Unlike Williams' book, which included graphic details of the crime, Deadly Innocence barely discusses the crimes and thus omits the details surrounding their commission.

Offered in most true crime narratives is a lengthy discussion of all matters relevant to Homolka and Bernardo. On the surface it certainly would appear as though the true crime sources' main purpose is to ultimately offer anyone who is interested a compelling occasion to obtain some information about Canada's most sinister couple. All three volumes, however, revealed the presence of prevailing ideas about women and crime.

There are several other key literary sources, which provided some information pertaining to Karla Homolka. Their central theme, however, was female criminality and not the Homolka case. These sources provided information pertaining to female offenders and relied on the Homolka case as an example to support several contentions. Several sources drew on her case, for instance, to exemplify how criminal experts and feminists alike downplay the involvement of women in murderous crimes by means of stressing that female offenders commit crimes because they are victims in one way or another (Adler, 1975; Bertrand, 1979; Smart, 1979; Leonard, 1982; Denno, 1994; Comack, 1996). And finally, there are some authors who drew on the Homolka case so as to demonstrate how female offenders use some of society's preconceived ideas about women's lack of criminal predisposition to their own benefits (Blatchford, 1996; Crosbie, 1994; Pearson, 1995, 1999). In other words, some female criminals appropriate the pre-established notion about their lack of criminal disposition so as to evade any accountability for their actions.

Contribution

The analysis proposed is important for a number of reasons. For one, it provides an opportunity to examine whether mass media and popular culture sources, as reported by Robyn A. Goldstein in The Essentials of Sociology, in narrating events continue to strive to offer "...information about the people, the events, and changes occurring in society and the threat they sometimes pose to the existing social order"(1998: 19). Secondly, this research seeks to supplement studies, which have previously explored the way stories of female criminals are construed by the mass media and further encourage the interrogation of the type of consequence particular construction entails. I suspect

this research will contribute studies, which strive to show how narratives pertaining to female crime use frames in order to reinforce “appropriate conceptions of femininity” (Halkias, 1999:305). Fourthly, I anticipate this study will show that perhaps women are becoming increasingly recognized as being a risky segment of the population. Further, this research provides an opportunity to demonstrate that studying the topic of female criminality is not limited to the discipline of criminology but that a combination of perspectives from the fields of cultural studies, mass communication, criminology and sociology enriches research on female criminality. And finally, the most important contribution of this study will be to demonstrate how mass media and popular culture holds a persuasive power which can influence the structure of ideas circulating about women and crime and in so doing produce a particular understanding of female criminality.

Chapter breakdown

Chapter One establishes the principal elements of the Homolka case, the crimes, the victims, court proceedings, and recent developments in the case as proffered by the media. Also, it establishes the study’s main thesis, research questions and overall purpose. This chapter includes a brief review of the literary works on the Homolka case. Lastly, this chapter highlights the contribution of this study. Chapter Two is dedicated to providing a literature review, methodology to be used in the analysis, and a theoretical framework meant to establish the perspective used to explore media framing techniques. Chapter Three is designed to offer readers with some background information about Karla “Teale” Homolka. The next chapter, Chapter Four, discusses three dominant features of narrative retrieved from the many newspaper articles and books reviewed.

The dominant features are “descriptors used to characterize Homolka”, “characterization of Homolka’s relationship to Bernardo” and the “incompetence of law enforcers”. Chapter Five seeks to demonstrate how mass media and popular culture sources employ the “problem frame” as a method by which to disclose information pertaining to the Canadian judicial system’s dealing with Karla Homolka. Chapter Six discusses the particular ideas about women and crime articulated in mass media and popular culture coverage of the Homolka case. The concluding chapter, Chapter Seven, features a brief review of the contents of previous chapters and discusses two particular understandings of female criminality, which were simultaneously produced by mass media and popular culture sources.

CHAPTER TWO

A GENERAL REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the criminological and media literature. It outlines the methodological framework selected for this analysis of mass media and popular culture sources and the theoretical framework employed to uncover the notions about female criminality different sources covering the Homolka case promoted in their coverage. Finally, this chapter outlines which items should be retrieved from the various sources in order to discern the underlying assumptions about women and crime that ultimately produce an understanding of female criminality.

Literary review

Research on female offenders has, in the past, been neglected. Several factors hindered the advent of research on female criminality. One such factor was "...the difficulty which society as a whole, as well as academic disciplines [had] in seeing violence or aggression, even anger, as part of the female character" (Shaw and Dubois, 2003) In other words, criminality and femininity were often seen as mutually incompatible. Another factor impeding research is the fact that men were and still are, primarily responsible for most violent offences (Shaw and Dubois, 2003). To support this assertion, in Canada in 1977, 87% of all those charged with homicide were men, and 13% were women (Statistics Canada, 1999). In 1987, 86% of all those charged with homicide were men and, 14% were women (Statistics Canada, 1999) Even the most recent comparative statistics, revealed that in 2001 men accused of homicide accounted for 87% of all homicides (Statistics Canada, 2002). Another element, which hindered research in the area of female criminality, is "...the very legitimate focus on violence

against women, and the need to sensitize society to its extent and seriousness” (Shaw and Dubois, 2003). The consequence of having allocated a great deal of attention to issues related to violence against women is that the topic of violence perpetrated by women has been avoided (Adler, 1975; Bertrand, 1979; Smart, 1979; Leonard, 1982).

In the last two decades, significant scholarly work on female criminality has been done. Indeed, there has been an alarming increase in the number of violent offences committed by women; and this increase, scholars argue, is indicative of a need to work towards being rid of the stereotypical belief that women, by virtue of their nature, are not capable of committing violent crimes (Yeoman, 1999; Pearson 1995, 1997, 1999; Blatchford, 1996; Broidy and Agnew 1997; Chesney-Lind 1998; Crosbie 1994). In fact, violent crime statistics confirmed that the percentage of violent crimes committed by women has been steadily increasing. In 1987, 10% of violent crimes were committed by women and in 1997, violent crimes committed by women rose to 13% (Johnson and Rodgers, 1993: 99, 103). More recent statistics revealed that in 2001, women committed 16% of violent crimes (Statistics Canada, 2002). These alarming figures recently have compelled experts and researchers alike, to research women’s everyday life situations which are said to leave women feeling entrapped, helpless and compelled to resort to violent offences in order to overcome the position in which they find themselves (Denno, 1994; Shaw, 1995; Comack, 1996). The differences between the old and new literature are considerable. The old literature argued that women’s violence was defensive and so it was perpetuated in self-defense and, more often than not, in response to male violence. The new research points out that women’s violence is similar to men’s,

committed for money, or due to intoxication, jealousy, anger and hatred, and stated that there are female serial killers too.

Moreover, a review of sources from the disciplines of mass communication, cultural and media studies reveals that criminologists are not the sole researchers of matters relating to female criminality. In fact, studies exist to analyze the way mass media and popular culture sources utilize specific framing techniques to construct stories about female offenders that promote particular notions of femininity (Halkias, 1999; Grabe, 1999; Welch, Fenwick and Roberts, 1997). Other scholars who reviewed framing techniques used by reporters to communicate details about crimes admit having found that frames, in general, are responsible for the creation of narratives, which merely reinforce particular stereotypes about criminality, lack objectivity and often appear virtually unable to inform the public without simultaneously generating panic and fear (Williamson, 1990; Altheide, 1997; Steeves, 1997; Biressi, 1999).

Sources for analysis

Using the Homolka case as a case study of prevalent ideas about female criminality calls for a narrative analysis of multiple mass media and popular culture sources. Conducting this type of analysis will help detect particular ideas about women and crime, which are put forth by the media and produce a particular understanding of female criminality.

In seeking to obtain a significant and representative database of mass media and popular coverage of the Homolka case, I examine narratives from two major newspapers and one magazine: the Globe and Mail, National Post, and Maclean's. The newspapers were selected because of their large circulation and their reputation for offering readers a

national coverage of news, while the magazine was selected because it was the magazine which featured an abundance of articles about the Homolka case. A total of 34 newspaper and 13 magazine articles about the Karla Homolka case were selected and their publication date ranged between 1993 and 2002. Originally, the search for articles on this case generated over five hundred pieces. Because reviewing them all was unfeasible I decided to narrow the sample size. The sample of newspaper articles about the Homolka case included only those which featured Karla and/or Homolka in its heading. Articles that did not feature Karla and/or Homolka were discarded. Further, as part of this analysis, I chose to explore three popular culture sources, Stephen Williams' Invisible Darkness: The Horrifying Case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka and his second book Karla: Le Pacte avec le diable, and Scott Burnside and Alan Cairns' Deadly Innocence. The review of these popular culture sources along with some forty-seven newspaper and magazine articles provide a significant and representative database of mass media and popular coverage of the Homolka case.

Establishing the study

The Karla Homolka case, despite the ordering of a temporary publication ban, drew excessive media attention. The crimes committed by Homolka, stipulate Davey, although unfortunate and horrendous, were not what compelled the media to take on "...such extraordinary interest..." in the case (1994:4). One of the factors that enticed the media to focus attention on this case is "...the implication of a female in the crimes" [causing the death] "...of at least three young women in their early teens". The feminine ruthlessness involved here has jolted the country out of its sleep" (Theissen, 1994: 3 ; Davey, 1994:1). A second factor was the publicity ban issued by the judge presiding

over the Homolka case, a ban forbidding representatives of the media from disclosing to the public most details of the case. Another tantalizing factor was that Homolka is the estranged wife of a serial rapist and sadistic murderer: Paul “Teale” Bernardo, who at the time when the Homolka case had begun capturing some attention had been arrested and formerly charged.

What led me to consider the Homolka case for a case study of a narrative analysis are not the particulars of her case. It was the release of numerous newspaper and magazine articles and the publication of several books on the Homolka case that influenced the selection. In effect, the availability of various and numerous sources, which discussed the Homolka case, was perceived as a vital component of a narrative analysis, which retains two basic functions. The first is to exemplify how mass media and popular culture sources construct narratives involving a woman offender. And the second is to establish how media workers promote particular ideas about women and crime and how these notions, in turn, produce a particular understanding of female criminality. Conducting a narrative analysis with limited sources is perceived as likely to impede the quality of an analysis and prevent the analysis from achieving these fundamental purposes.

The approach selected for this narrative analysis is known as the “critical approach”. There are two main reasons why this approach was chosen. For one, the “critical approach”, argues Kate Wild, has

...reintroduced into communication research a preoccupation with the construction of “the real” through the media... [and one that] argues that the media, by representing themselves as conveyers of reality, function to maintain the status quo by reiterating the terms and conditions offered by the dominant ideology, or hegemonic order (Wild, 1994: 23-4).

Secondly, the critical approach seemingly guided the studies of Alexandra Halkias, H. Leslie Steeves and Anita Biressi. The critical approach enabled Halkias to discover that frames used by reporters failed to avoid the perpetuation of stereotypes about criminals and especially their gender (1999). Furthermore, a critical approach to the study of print media's coverage of a crime, which occurred in a "secondary high school in Kenya", provided Steeves with ample evidence to contend that the mass media's framing practices "reinforce patriarchal hegemony" and reflected it also (1997: xi, 40). Writer Anita Biressi, in adopting a critical approach to the study of contemporary true crime literature in Britain, observed that true crime literature

...in its attempt to interpret or explain notorious criminal and the violent event within society (for this is its 'common theme')...construct and define the good citizens in relation to its others: miscreants, criminals, immigrants, spongers and fraudsters (2001: 107-8).

My research in aiming to decipher coverage patterns inherent in narratives and the particular notions about female criminality the coverage simultaneously promotes coincides with the aims of the above-mentioned studies, that is to detect, analyze and interpret the ideas about women and crime narratives put forth and ascertain whether they produce a particular understanding of female criminality. Consequently, I will adopt a critical approach to analyzing mass media and popular culture coverage of the Karla Homolka case.

This study does not seek to establish how readers might come to be influenced by the narratives nor does it seek to explore how one might come to interpret the information provided by the narratives. How the information provided by the mass media and popular culture sources may affect readers, although interesting, in this context, is not a realistic goal. To support this assertion, Brian McNair argues that

... media effects can only begin to be understood (far less predicted!) when we know the nature of the reception environment into which messages are 'injected'. Without such knowledge statements about the effects of journalism (or any other form of media output) are strictly limited in their usefulness (1998:35).

Reception is certainly an important issue; but the limitations imposed by a failure to conduct extensive interviews with readers so as to gather some information about the way they make sense of the message compelled me to proceed with an analysis of narratives for the strict purpose of assessing how mass media and popular culture sources put forth ideas about women and crime and how these ideas systematically produce a particular understanding of female criminality.

Prior to conducting the narrative analysis it is important to establish several fundamental facts about the construction of narratives. For one, it is argued, "media workers...adhere with more or less willingness and certainty to a set of values which are embodied in their output, structuring or 'framing' their accounts of the world" (McNair, 1998:23). Preconceived ideas about particular issues, such as crime, predispose media writers to disclose information in ways which are far less objective than one would expect. The details given about an event, McNair maintains, are nothing but "... selective, partial and vulnerable to bias"(1998:51). Charlotte Ryan further supports this idea when stating,

far from being an objective list of facts, a news story results from multiple subjective decisions about whether and how to present happenings to media audiences. Newsmakers engage in a selection process, actively making sense out of an immense quantity of experience, selecting some points as critical, discarding or downplaying other (1991: 54).

On the surface crime narratives appear to disclose as much details about an event as possible. Yet, examining the depth of a narrative reveals that it does not matter how

much effort journalists and reporters invest in disclosing the finest details of an event “the picture...of an event may not be—cannot be—the whole picture” (McNair, 1998: 51). Ryan suggests that, “...it is common to downplay framing as a value-laden ordering process” (1991: 54). The problem, however, is that “those of us who question the naturalness of the packaged world are ignored or attacked, rarely believed (Ryan, 1991:54). What leads to this consequence, explains Ryan, is quite simple “...frames are not consciously or deliberately constructed, but operate as underlying mindsets that prompt one to notice elements that are familiar and ignore those that are different” (1991:54 footnote).

Carrying out a representative narrative analysis of frames necessitates basic structure. A list that specifies which items should be extrapolated from mass media and popular culture sources in order to establish precisely which ideas about women and crime are being promoted and produce a particular understanding of female criminality will provide the necessary structure. Put differently, the guideline will help me identify which “...issues raised by the incident the...[reporters] chose to emphasize, which issues were ignored... (Steeves, 1997: 26). I will review each source in attempts to identify how sources provided details about the case, what descriptors they used to characterize Homolka and other criminal women referred to in the narrative, how the narrative chose to characterize Homolka’s relationship to Bernardo and the victims, and assess whether the narrative made reference to past media trials and past accused (Surette, 1990; Williamson, 1990). And lastly, I will assess whether media workers employed the problem frame in structuring their discussions of the Homolka case and if so, what aspect of the case did they establish as problematic (Altheide, 1997).

Chapter summary

The review of criminological works served to outline two main trends figuring within the existing literature. The first trend is to equate criminality with maleness and consequently failing to explore the depth of femininity and associating women with crime. The second trend is to argue that some women are violent and endowed with an ability, like some men, to carry out violent crimes. The review of media studies confirmed that an analysis of media sources helps detect particular patterns of coverage. This chapter noted the appropriateness of selecting mass media and popular culture narratives as the prime source of analysis and the suitability of adopting the critical approach as the main theoretical framework. As noted in this chapter, the purpose surrounding this analysis is to unpack the meanings about women and crime different media sources ultimately promote in an attempt to produce a particular understanding of female criminality and both the method and the approach facilitate the detection, analysis and interpretation of these particular notions.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HOMOLKA CASE

This chapter seeks to familiarize the readers with the particulars of the Karla Homolka case. First we will explore Homolka's family background, relationship with friends and Paul Bernardo. Second, we will review the crimes committed against Tammy Lyn Homolka, Leslie Erin Mahaffy and Kristen Dawn French. Also, discussed will be the prosecution of the case, the sentencing and Karla Homolka's eligibility for release. Providing some details about the case, that is establishing the local context, prior events and the crimes themselves were necessary before presenting my analysis of the mass media and popular culture sources. Two main sources were drawn upon to produce this chapter. The first source is Stephen Williams Invisible Darkness: The Horrifying Case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. Williams offers the most detailed description available in the popular media. The second source is a Report to the Attorney General of Ontario on Certain Matters Relating to Karla Homolka, a legal factual report put together by the Honorable Justice Patrick T. Galligan. In the process of drawing upon these two sources to provide an overview of the case I am conscious that I am, in effect, generating my own narrative of the case, as I am inevitably engaged in a process of selection and omission of information pertaining to the case. However, I am not seeking to construct a truth, but rather attempting to provide a baseline for understanding the Karla Homolka case.

Introducing the family

Karla Leanne Homolka was born on May 14 1970. Her sister Lori Priscilla was born June 22, 1971 and her youngest sister Tammy Lyn was born on January 1st, 1975.

Karla's father, Karel Homolka, was born in 1943 in Stokov, Czechoslovakia. His parents immigrated to Canada with him in 1950. Karla's mother Dorothy Christine Seger Homolka was born in Toronto in 1946. When Dorothy first met Karel she worked as a secretary at the Lakeshore Psychiatric hospital and he "was trading in trinkets and trash—framed Elvis and mulatto girls on black-velvet backgrounds—from sidewalks in shopping malls" (Williams, 1996:41). When Karla was born, however, things changed, Dorothy became a housewife and Karel became a "self-employed traveling salesman, selling lamps and lighting fixtures to furniture stores around the province"(Williams, 1996:41). Karla was always highly regarded by her mother and would use words such as "...smart, sweet, active, fun loving, outgoing, a leader, an instigator, always surrounded by friends, academically and socially successful" to describe her daughter Karla (Williams, 1996: 43). At school Karla also held a reputable standing and was "routinely" described by her teacher as "'...eager and enthusiastic, a good student'"(Williams, 1996:42). Notwithstanding her academic success, Karla allegedly became disaffected in grade twelve, at which point she decided to go to school part-time and work full-time. Karla found full-time employment at the Number One Pet Center.

In October 1987 Karla met Paul for the first time. They met while Karla was in Toronto for a convention for people employed in the pet industry. After having left the cocktail party that preceded the conference, Karla and her friend Debbie, a young woman employed part-time at the Number One Pet Center, went out to a disco and met two men they eventually brought back to their room. The two guys were apparently drunk and they were eventually chased out of the room by security. Once the guys left, Karla and her friend decided to go out. It was on their second outing that same night,

that Karla met Paul Bernardo and his friend. Karla and Debbie asked the boys to come up to their room to watch a movie, at which point Karla proceeded to have sex with Paul. That night marked the beginning of a love relationship between Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo.

After they met, Karla and Paul became almost inseparable. Paul and Karla were not bothered by the fact that they lived in different districts—Karla in St.Catharines and Paul in Scarborough. Paul had his own car and so he drove to St.Catharines to see Karla every weekend. Karla's mother was rather impressed with the young suitor and has claimed that Paul was a "...polite, slightly older, well-to-do, educated, beautiful young man with a good job" (Williams, 1996: 89). Paul's charismatic features and polite manners eventually prompted Ms. and Mrs. Homolka to suggest he sleep over on weekends so that he did not have to drive back and forth from Scarborough to St. Catharines.

Tammy Lyn Homolka

Five years after becoming romantically involved—Saturday December 9, 1989 to be more precise—Paul proposed to Karla. Almost one year after proposing to Karla, Paul

...began making bizarre suggestions to Karla...telling her that he wanted to have sex slaves available to him...he wanted girls brought to him at the Homolka home...he also started asking her to pretend she was her younger sister, Tammy, while they were having sexual relations (Galligan, 1996:16).

Paul's sexual fantasies about Tammy did not dissipate with time. In the fall of 1990 Paul Bernardo told Karla he wanted to have sex with Tammy. Karla maintains that she felt obligated to succumb to Paul 's demands. The young couple knew, however, that

Tammy would not consent to having sex with Paul but he was relentless and had it all figured out: he would use drugs to sedate Tammy and then assault her without her ever having any recollections. Paul instructed Karla to find out which drug would sedate Tammy. At the time, Karla held a job at a veterinarian clinic. At work, Karla was in charge of the drug registry and she had access to the *Compendium of Pharmaceuticals and Specialties*, the medical reference work that gave detailed information about every possible drug on the market (Williams, 1996:148). Every couple of years the compendium was updated and so Karla was able to take one of the outdated versions home without anyone noticing it was missing. She brought it home and began studying which drug could be administered to Tammy so that Paul could have his way with her.

On December 23, 1990 Tammy Lyn consumed several drinks laced with Halcion¹ that sedated her into oblivion. Soon after Tammy fell asleep, Karla reached for Halothane² bottle, soaked a cloth with the substance and held it to Tammy's face while Paul proceeded with assaulting her (Galligan, 1996:17). During the sexual assault, however, Tammy began vomiting. When she started vomiting what appeared to be the food and alcohol she had eaten earlier in the evening, both Paul and Karla started to worry. But then Karla remembered that animals were never fed before an anesthesia. Karla was frantic; she then thought Tammy needed to be "...held upside down, because that was what you were supposed to do with an animal who aspirated its stomach contents while under" (Williams, 1996:157). Karla and Paul tried holding Tammy upside

¹ Halcion is a "well-known sleeping pill...[with] the fewest contraindications of all the sleeping potions, and the compendium said it was safe"(Williams, 1996:148).

² Halothane is an "inhalant anesthetic" used to "...put animals out for surgery...[and] Karla knew all about Halothane. It was part of her job to administer the anesthetic to animals during surgery...vaporized in a very low ratio—one or two parts per hundred parts oxygen—was the only way Halothane was to be used. It could be very dangerous in concentrated form"(Williams, 1996:148).

down and Paul tried to clear Tammy's throat. Their efforts were unsuccessful: since Tammy had stopped breathing. Faced with the inevitable fact that they stood before a lifeless body Paul and Karla dragged Tammy across Karla's bedroom floor. Once in the room, Paul and Karla proceeded with dressing Tammy, performed mouth-to-mouth and finally Karla picked up the phone and dialed 911. While waiting for the ambulance Karla hurried and got rid of all incriminating evidence and so she poured the halothane down the sink, hid the empty bottle and the bottle of pills. After the ambulance's departure from the Homolka's residence, Paul and Karla were left having to explain to the police what had happened. They told the officers, that Tammy had vomited shortly after having fallen asleep and then she stopped breathing. In the end, the coroners ruled Tammy Lyn's death accidental.

In January, Dorothy Homolka went back to work and decided to tell Karla it was perhaps better for the family if Paul moved out. Tammy Lyn's death left Karla's parents yearning for some privacy so they kindly asked Paul to come visit only on weekends (Williams, 1996:177). A week after his departure from the Homolka's household, Paul came back to drive Karla to Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School where a memorial service was being held for Tammy. That same night Paul suggested to Karla they find a house so that they would never have to be apart. On the weekend of January 18, 1991 Paul and Karla found their dream house and they moved in soon after. When Karla moved out of her parents' house she was quite angry with them. In fact, in a letter to her friend Debbie, Karla stated

"My parents are being assholes. They pulled half of the money out of the wedding, saying they can't afford it. Bullshit... And for the real reason we moved out. My parents told Paul and I that they wanted him to stay at their house until the wedding. They told us that they didn't

want him to go back to Toronto. So he stayed. Then a week before we moved they were driving me to work one day and asked me when he was leaving. They said they needed their privacy (after they told him he was their son) and they needed me as a 'daughter?!' They wanted him to go home during the week and come back on weekends only. AFTER THEY TOLD US HE SHOULD STAY UNTIL THE WEDDING!! 1st they took away ½ the wedding money, then they kicked us out. They knew how much we need, we needed to be together but they didn't care. What assholes. Now they wonder why I don't phone them or come to visit... Love, Karla" (Williams, 1996:176-177).

Leslie Erin Mahaffy

On June 14 1991, Leslie Mahaffy's mother drove her daughter and a friend to the funeral of an acquaintance. After having spent approximately one hour at the funeral parlor Leslie left and went to the Rock³. At the Rock Leslie drank some beers and socialized and then a friend offered to walk her home. Once Leslie got home she tried both the back and front door of the house, but unfortunately, they were locked⁴. At this point, Leslie's friend announced he had to go home. Upon finding herself locked out of her house and by herself, Leslie went to the closest pay phone and contacted her friend Amanda to ask if she could come over and spend the night. Amanda declined and so Leslie went back to her house. Unfortunately for her, nothing had changed at the house; all lights were out and all doors remained locked. Leslie was standing at the door when she saw Paul Bernardo. They started talking about Leslie's unfortunate predicament; locked out of her house with no place to go. She asked Paul for a cigarette and Paul told her he had some in the car. When Leslie got to the car Paul blindfolded her, pushed her into the backseat and then drove to 57 Bayview Drive (Galligan, 1996:18). Paul took

³ "...a wooden area...dubbed "The Rock"...well hidden...[providing teens with a spot where] they could smoke cigarettes and drink booze" (Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 22)

⁴ Prior to going out that night Leslie "...had debated with her mother about curfew—her mother was adamant she should be in by 11:30 P.M. at the latest" (Williams, 1996:207). Leslie had told her friend Amanda that she had left the "Rock" at around 12:30 A.M. at which point she had already blown her curfew.

Leslie inside the house and woke Karla. He told Karla about having brought a guest home and advised Karla to stay put for a while. Curiosity got the best of Karla and so she crept down the stairs and, from where she was standing, she could see Leslie in the living room but Karla decided to go back to bed (Williams, 1996:214).

By lunchtime the following day Leslie's mother was really worried. Ms. Mahaffy called some of Leslie's friends. Unfortunately, the calls generated no information about Leslie's potential whereabouts. Ms. Mahaffy then contacted the police. The police were a little uncooperative and told Ms. Mahaffy that it was not the first time Leslie did not come home and suggested it was perhaps a little "...bit premature to take Leslie's disappearance to heart" (Williams, 1996:217). All Leslie's mother could do was wait and hope her daughter was safe and sound. Unfortunately, Leslie was not about to get home nor was she safe. She was at that time being held captive in a house on Bayview Street. While in captivity, Leslie was assaulted by Paul Bernardo and obliged to perform sexual actions with Karla Homolka and some of their activities were recorded on videotape.

Two days after her abduction, Sunday June 16, 1991, Leslie was drugged, strangled and then her body was dismembered and its parts were encased in concrete. Both Karla and Paul carried the body parts to nearby Lake Gibson and threw them in the water. Thirteen days after having disposed of Leslie's body Karla and Paul said "I do" at St. Mark's Anglican Church in Niagara-on the-Lake. That same day, June 29, 1991, a couple, while putting their canoe into Lake Gibson, made the gruesome discovery of concrete blocks which contained what they claimed looked like "...some kind of peculiar fish unlike anything...[the men] had seen before; moist, it was a purplish flesh

color” (Williams, 1996: 225, 226-227). What the couple discovered was not fish. In fact, it was Leslie Mahaffy’s severed body encased in concrete blocks. Authorities quickly retrieved from the water seven concrete blocks which were immediately shipped off to the pathologist at Hamilton General Hospital.

On July 10, 1991 the police, after having identified the body parts encased in the concrete, notified Ms. Mahaffy that the body retrieved was without a doubt⁵ Leslie Mahaffy.

Kristen Dawn French

Thursday April 16, 1992, Donna French, mother of 15 year-old Kristen drove her daughter to school and then went to work. Kristen was a well-mannered athlete and had an unprecedented habit of never dawdling after class. It took Kristen fifteen minutes, at the most, to get home and she always took the same route. Doug French, Kristen’s father, knew his daughter always came straight home after her classes, which ended a little before three o’clock. At three thirty Mr. French started to get a little worried. Mr. French decided to go out and get stamps and use the same route Kristen took when she went to school. Unfortunately, Doug French did not spot his daughter. When he got home he called his wife and asked her “...if she knew where Kristen was. But Donna did not know. She should be home by now, Donna said. She’s probably talking to someone” (Williams, 1996:277). Around 4:30 p.m., on April 16, Mrs. French got home but Kristen was not. By 5:55 p.m. Mrs. French, called the police to report Kristen missing.

⁵ Prior to having conducted a complete identification of the body parts found in the cement block, all the officials knew was that the eyes of the girl were brown, so the police went ahead—perhaps it was a little premature—and “...assured Ms. Mahaffy that it was not Leslie in Lake Gibson. But Debbie Mahaffy had not believed them. She instinctively knew that death and cement could turn even the bluest eyes dirty brown” (Williams, 1996:240).

Kristen was lured towards Karla and Paul's vehicle under the pretense that Karla was lost and in need of directions. Paul who was sitting in the driver's seat, came out of the car with a knife and grabbed Kristen, who was leaning over the map trying to help Karla. At which point Karla jumped into the backseat, Paul tossed Kristen onto the passenger seat and Karla grabbed her hair leaving Kristen unable to move (Williams, 1996:282).

The police had no idea where Kristen was. Earlier during the day, the police had retrieved one of Kristen's loafers from the Grace Lutheran Church parking lot. That night the police received a phone call from "the mayor of West Lincoln [who] remembered seeing what seemed to be a struggle in the parking lot of the Lutheran church which she had put down to kids fooling around (Williams, 1996:292). The mayor told the police about the car she had seen. It looked like a Camaro or a Trans Am or a Z28. That night the police issued a "...province-wide alert...[for a] 1982 or later model two-door ivory or cream Camaro or Firebird..." (Williams, 1996:295).

While being held captive Kristen was sexually assaulted by Paul Bernardo and forced to engage in other sexual acts with him and Karla Homolka. Much of that activity was videotaped by them (Galligan, 1996:19). But on April 19, 1992 Kristen was strangled and her body was washed to remove potential evidence. That night Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka took Kristen French's body to a country road near Burlington and left it there (Galligan, 1996:19). Her body was discovered on April 30, 1992.

Karla and Paul separating

On January 6, 1993 a call was issued to the police to report an altercation between a wife and husband. The wife and victim was Karla Homolka. The night before, on January 5, Paul Bernardo had physically assaulted Karla. After the fight Karla was left with eyes so black they looked like “raccoon eyes⁶” (Williams, 1996:353 and Galligan, 1996:20). Despite the severity of her injuries, Karla stayed home that night.

The next day, Dorothy Homolka visited her daughter and insisted she leave the house and convinced her to go and stay at Lori’s—Karla’s sister— friend’s house for a while. That night Karla was advised by her friend’s husband—a Metropolitan Toronto Police officer—to go to the hospital and have her injuries examined by a medical professional. The severity of the injuries due to Paul’s beating caused Karla and her subsequent deposition led the police to issue an arrest warrant for Paul Bernardo. The police located Paul at 57 Bayview Drive and they immediately proceeded with his arrest and charged him with assault with a weapon but Paul was soon after his arrest “released on his own recognizance” (Galligan, 1996:21). On January 9, 1994 Karla left the hospital and went to stay with an aunt and uncle (Galligan, 1996:21).

Closing in on a suspect

A call issued on February 1, 1993 by a scientist from the Centre of Forensic Science provided the Metropolitan Toronto Police with breaking news about the identity of the potential Scarborough rapist. The scientist confirmed that the DNA found on

⁶ An eye condition of this sort is the result of “...a very hard blow or blows to the back of the head. They are caused by a contra coup, which means that the blow from the rear causes the brain to move rapidly forward and collide with the front of the skull, causing bleeding or haemorrhaging [sic] into the tissue around the eyes” (Galligan, 1996:20).

three sexual assault victims "...matched [Paul] Bernardo's DNA⁷...there was no doubt Paul Bernardo was the Scarborough rapist" (Williams, 1996:360). This break in the Scarborough rape case led officials to track down Paul and put him under surveillance. While Paul was under surveillance, the police conducted a background check and learned Paul had recently separated from his wife whom he had been charged with assaulting (Galligan, 1996:21). At this point, the Metro Police became eager to meet with Paul's estranged wife. On February 5 Karla contacted the Metro Police and scheduled a meeting for February 9. The officers were expected to get

Karla's account of Paul's activities during the time periods June 15 to 29, 1991 (the two weeks between Mahaffy's disappearance and the discovery of her body parts in Lake Gibson), and April 16 to 30, 1992 (the period during which Kristen French was abducted, raped, murdered and dumped in the ditch along Sideroad One)(Williams, 1996:370).

In addition, the officers were expected to get "...Karla's fingerprints...the task force had found a piece of a map at the scene where Kristen French had been abducted and there were latent unidentified fingerprints on it" (Williams, 1996: 370). And lastly, the officer were expected to "...ask Karla about the Mickey Mouse watch...she had been wearing...when [she was] photographed by Niagara Regional Police at the hospital on January 6..." (Williams, 1996:370-371). The Mickey Mouse watch Karla was wearing intrigued the force who found it looked like the one worn by Kristen when she disappeared.

⁷ During the Scarborough rape investigation a "...composite likeness of the rapist..." was released (Galligan, 1996:14). The composite "bore a striking resemblance to Paul Bernardo"(Galligan, 1996:14). Soon after the composite appeared in the "Toronto Press" the police received a tip that "Paul Bernardo was the person represented in the composite"(Galligan, 1996:14). Officials tracked down Paul Bernardo and interviewed him (Galligan, 1996:14). No much came out of the interview with Paul on November 20, 1991, except, Paul "...voluntarily provided samples of saliva, blood and hair to the police"(Galligan, 1996:16). It was that sample that was eventually matched to the victims and the sample that incriminated him.

The day Karla met with officers from the Metropolitan Toronto Police they told her they were investigating Paul Bernardo for a series of violent sexual assaults which occurred in the Scarborough area. Karla told the police about her life with Bernardo and the abuse he made her endure. She did not, however, tell them anything about the murders. The series of question the officers asked Karla, however, led her to quickly suspect that the police were not just investigating the Scarborough rapes they were seeking potential information about the murders in St.Catharines. After the officers left Karla's aunt and uncle's house she panicked. The interview, having led Karla to uncover the officers' ulterior motive behind the interview, led her to openly admit to her aunt and uncle that she knew Paul was the Scarborough rapist. This was one important piece of information she had not disclosed to the Police. In fact, she had made it abundantly clear to the officers that, she did not really know. At this point, Karla thought it best to contact a lawyer.

Plea bargaining

February 11, 1993, Karla met with George Walker a prominent criminal lawyer in Niagara Falls. During the meeting, Karla confessed

...there was much more to her visit than abuse by her husband. She disclosed in substantial detail her complicity in the death of her sister, Tammy, the confinement, sexual abuse and death of Leslie Mahaffy, and the abduction, confinement, sexual abuse and death of Kristen French. She also told him about the admissions that her husband had made to her that he was the Scarborough rapist (Galligan, 1996:26).

Furthermore, Karla told Walker that the assault—and not the murder—against Tammy, Leslie and Kristen had been videotaped. Finally, Karla told Walker she was hoping, despite her complicity, to get immunity. George Walker agreed to represent her. Soon after having met with Karla, Walker approached Murray Segal, the prosecutor assigned

to deal with George Walker, and informed him about Karla and the information she provided him with regards to the rapes and murders. Walker made it clear to the Crown and police that Karla was prepared to provide assistance if it was to her advantage to do so (Williams, 1996: 29). The Crown rejected a request for total immunity but they were willing to deal. After all,

...the police had no legally admissible evidence against either Paul Bernardo or Karla Homolka in respect of the deaths of Leslie Mahaffy or Kristen French ...they were convinced that Karla Homolka had evidence which could establish a case against both of them (Galligan, 1996:29).

Still, Segal felt there had to be a limit. Segal realized that Karla

...from the time of her first disclosures through her lawyer...fully described her participation in the deaths of her sister, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French, and the surrounding events. While she contended from the first that she was, in effect, forced by Paul Bernardo to do what she did, she has never once attempted to deny her role or evade her complicity in those atrocities (Galligan, 1996:27).

No matter how honest Karla had been and how crucial her knowledge was to the case immunity was not an option. Disclosure of all details of the crimes known to her in return for a lighter sentence was what Segal had in mind.

On February 25, 1993 all details of a resolution agreement between Karla and the Crown were established and submitted to Karla's lawyer. In the resolution agreement the Crown specified that Karla was expected to disclose all the information known to her about her estranged husband's activities and consent to the two manslaughter charges. The deal it was made clear "...would be contingent on Karla's absolute truthfulness. She would disclose the full extent of all her participation and impart all her knowledge. Any perjury—any lie—would scuttle the agreement" (Williams, 1996:439).

George Walker was worried, however, about “the advisability of Karla Homolka entering into any resolution agreement until she had been assessed by a psychiatrist”(Galligan, 1996:35). Murray Segal respected Walker’s request. Yet, Segal warned Walker that

... the police investigation would continue and the police would be free to pursue such charges as their investigations justified... It was understood, however, that there were no guarantees that the resolution which had been discussed earlier would be available if and when negotiations resumed (Galligan, 1996:35).

Karla was admitted to Northwestern General Hospital in Toronto on March 5, 1993 for a psychiatric assessment. Her stay at the hospital was much longer than anyone anticipated. Karla was released on April 23, 1993. Karla was under the care of Dr. Hans Arndt while in the hospital (Galligan, 1996:36). Dr. Arndt reported that Karla, while in the hospital, appeared to be suffering from “...dysthymia⁸, also known as reactive depression, and a serious post traumatic stress disorder...” (Galligan, 1996: 36). During her hospitalization Karla was assessed by another medical professional, “Dr. Andrew Malcolm...a psychiatrist with extensive forensic experience” (Galligan, 1996:36). In his report Dr. Malcolm noted that Karla is “...anxious and depressed but both of these states make sense in terms of her recent history and her present situation...” (Galligan, 1996:36)

As expected, the police investigation continued while Karla was hospitalized. Because Karla’s stay at the hospital was long the Crown’s case against her grew quite

⁸ Some of the symptoms associated with this condition, as described by Dr. Malcolm are, “...sleep disturbance, a low energy level, low self esteem, a diminished ability to make difficult decisions, and a marked feeling of hopelessness” (Galligan, 1996: 36)

considerably. In fact, Segal told Walker that the investigation produced evidence that rendered Karla,

... liable for first degree murder in relation to the French homicide and second degree murder in relation to the Mahaffy homicide and that the evidence also substantiated charges of abduction, aggravated sexual assault, confinement and offering an indignity to a human body (Galligan, 1996: 40-41).

At this point, the Crown prosecutor told George Walker he had no more than

a week to discuss a resolution agreement with Karla Homolka and advised him that, unless he heard from him by... May 12, 1993, at 10 a.m., Karla Homolka would be arrested, taken into custody and formally charged with all offences (Galligan, 1996:40).

George Walker, realized that it was probably in Karla's best interest to take the two manslaughter charges. On May 5, when Walker met with Karla, he told her that

Whatever abuse or beatings she had sustained would only go so far with a jury. Given the crimes, and the fact that she could have saved the dead girls' lives—that Kristen French would probably have never been kidnapped but for Karla's participation—a jury would invariably ignore the abuse, of which there had been only one provable incident... there was also the distinct possibility that witnesses would come forward and give testimony that she [Karla] was into kinky sex, that she herself was sadistic (Williams, 1996:439).

In the end, Karla, although she was frightened to go to jail, accepted the terms of the plea bargain. It had been settled: Karla would face two manslaughter charges, one for Leslie and one for Kristen, to be served concurrently and she would "take two for Tammy"⁹ (Williams, 1996:463)

⁹ Requesting that Karla serve an additional two years was propelled by Segal's reasoning that "...lorsque la participation de Karla aux crimes serait connue publiquement, la situation serait encore plus embarrassante si aucune mention n'était faite de la mort de Tammy... Walker accepta un ajout de deux ans à la peine de Karla... Karla était devenue passible de deux peines concomitantes de douze ans au lieu de dix" (Williams, 2002: 184).

On May 14, 1993 Karla was scheduled to meet with the authorities and uphold one part of the deal made with the Crown, that is, provide the officers with an Induced Statement. This statement was expected to be no less than a

...full, complete, and truthful account regarding her knowledge and/or involvement or anyone else's involvement in the investigations into the deaths of Leslie Mahaffy; Kristen French; alleged rapes in Scarborough; alleged rape on Henley Island; the death of Tammy Homolka; and any other criminal activities she has participated in or has knowledge of (Williams, 1996:469).

This statement, however, could not be used as evidence against her. As part of the resolution agreement¹⁰ Karla was also expected to provide officials with cautioned statements. Cautioned statements are ones, which could be used against Karla Homolka at her trial (Galligan, 1996:43). On May 15, 16 and 17, Karla fulfilled her obligation and "...gave lengthy cautioned statements" (Galligan, 1996: 45)

The meeting where she was to give an induced statement lasted about four hours (Galligan, 1996:44). The information and details Karla gave the police during the meeting were extensive and very useful. In fact, Karla told the officers that

...on June 17, 1991 when Paul Bernardo bought the cement in which to encase Leslie Mahaffy's body parts he paid cash for it and he bought too much of it... He returned the excess for a refund... However, in order to get his refund, he had been required to give his name... The police immediately investigated. They found that the retailer identified by her had a record showing that on June 17, 1991 Paul Bernardo had returned a number of bags of the kind of readymix which had been identified with the recovered concrete (Galligan, 1996:45)

¹⁰ The Resolution Agreement also featured four additional items, which will not be reviewed in their own respect, and they are provision "(D) Charge Plea and Sentencing. It was agreed that after the police received the cautioned statements, Karla Homolka would be charged with two counts of manslaughter. At her trial, the Crown would read in the facts of such other crimes as the Crown deemed appropriate, and the sentence would take those other crimes into account. A joint submission for a total sentence of twelve years would be made to the court, which was subject to acceptance by the trial judge. (E) Post Sentencing Matters. The resolution agreement obliged Karla Homolka to testify at the trial of Paul Bernardo and to tell the truth. She agreed that while in custody she would continue to fully assist the police. (F) Other Matters. Karla Homolka agreed not to profit from her crimes by participating in the production of any books, movies, or like endeavors" (Galligan, 1996: 42).

The main reason why this information was essentially crucial was in part due to the fact that prior to the disclosure of these details the police, "...had no evidence other than Karla Homolka directly connecting Paul Bernardo to either Leslie Mahaffy or Kristen French" (Galligan, 1996:44). The information provided by Karla, provided the police with an opportunity to directly connect Bernardo to the girls.

Karla's trial and publication ban

On May 18, 1993 Karla Homolka appeared

...in the Ontario Court of justice (Provincial Division)...[and] was charged with two counts of manslaughter in the deaths of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French...waived her rights to a preliminary hearing, was committed for trial and was released on bail pending her trial (Galligan, 1996: 45).

It was "while on bail pending trial" that Karla fulfilled "...her duty under Item (C) of the resolution agreement, that is provide the police with "ongoing assistance...in their efforts to find further evidence"(Galligan, 1996: 43,45). On June 17 Karla escorted by the police, returned to 57 Bayview Drive. During the house visit Karla offered the police information which led them to discover evidence which directly connected Paul Bernardo to Kristen French..."(Galligan, 1996: 45). For instance, Karla pointed out to the officers

...an area where Kristen French had vomited while she was in captivity... There was no mark on the carpet indicating anything unusual about it. Karla Homolka told the police that she had cleaned the carpeting after Kristen French had been sick. The carpet was marked and that section was later removed for testing. The investigation found that, some of the vomit had soaked through and left traces on the underside of the carpet. When these traces were examined, they were found to contain vomit matching Kristen French's DNA and semen matching Paul Bernardo's DNA (Galligan, 1996:45).

Without Karla's assistance the police would not have made the discovery of such incriminating evidence.

On June 28, 1993 Karla Homolka appeared in the St.Catharines, Ontario Courtroom. When the court opened Crown prosecutor Murray Segal spent several hours arguing in favor of the publication of evidence, while Paul Bernardo's lawyer, Timothy Breen, spent some time explaining to the court that his client wished to withdraw his initial application for a publication ban of evidence and would like to see the evidence against Homolka made public. The next day, George Walker, Karla's lawyer, stood

...before Kovacs to say that he support[ed] Segal's application for a publication ban. Forget about case law and legalese, he t[old] the court, and think about the psychological damage the publication of the evidence would inflict on the community (Nemeth and Owen, 1993:16).

On Monday morning, July 5, 1993 Kovacs,

...spen[t] almost three hours reading his decision, responding to each of the lawyers' arguments and citing previous cases and precedents to support his position. Teale's [aka Bernardo] right to a fair trial supersedes the media's right to freedom of expression, he conclude[d] (Nemeth and Owen, 1993:16).

Mr. Justice Kovacs, in ordering a publication ban, declared who would be allowed in the courtroom and who would not. The list stated,

The Canadian media may be admitted to the trial. The public is excluded from the courtroom except (a) the families of the victims; (b) the families of the accused; (c) counsel for Paul Bernardo Teale; (d) three police officers; (e) the courts' law clerk. The foreign media is excluded from the courtroom. There will be no publication of the circumstances of the deaths of any persons referred to during the trial (Davey, 1994:72).

The ban it was argued was "...ostensibly intended not to threaten the media at all but rather to protect Paul Bernardo's right to a jury trial uncontaminated by other judicial proceedings..." (Davey, 1994:62).

Karla's trial began on July 6, 1993 and she "...pleaded guilty to two counts of manslaughter and she was convicted of those charges. She was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment, concurrent on each charge"(Galligan, 1996:45). On the first day, Crown prosecutor Murray Segal told the court,

...in his opinion, the evidence against Karla Homolka was sufficient to found murder charges but that, in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion, the Crown would accept convictions for the lesser offences of manslaughter (Galligan, 1996: 48).

The Crown, it was made ostensibly clear, had greatly needed Karla. Furthermore, the Crown, explained Segal,

...in deciding to lay manslaughter charges, rather than murder charges... took into account Karla Homolka's disclosure, without which the totality of the facts might never have been known. The Crown also took into account the fact that, while Karla Homolka was present at the time of the killings, she did not cause the deaths of either of the two young women (Galligan, 1996:48).

Upon addressing the court, George Walker, first "...acknowledged the horrific nature of Karla Homolka's conduct and did not try to minimize it" (Galligan, 1996: 49). Also, Walker acknowledged that "...a twelve year sentence may appear to some to be lenient, but argued that it was a significant period of time for a person with no criminal record or evidence of prior criminal conduct and for someone who had been of "utmost" assistance to the authorities..." (Galligan, 1996:49).

Mr. Justice Kovacs upon "...accepting the pleas of guilty to manslaughter and imposing the proposed twelve year sentence" proceeded with offering "detailed reasons" for his decision (Galligan, 1996:50). The judge admitted that he had taken into account

the aggravating factors prior to having decided to accept the guilty plea and the sentence proposed¹¹. As such, Mr. Justice Kovacs declared,

The conduct of Karla Homolka was monstrous and depraved. The impact upon the families of the victims was unimaginably tragic. He noted the impact of the crimes upon the community. He took into account the callousness of her conduct and the covering up after the crimes (Galligan, 1996:50).

Prior to rendering his decisions and despite his obvious abhorrence, the judge stated that he had taken into consideration the mitigating factors. Those factors were

...her early guilty plea, her youth and prior good record and the fact that she was a battered wife. The most significant mitigating factor was Karla Homolka's cooperation with the police (Galligan, 1996:50).

Keeping track of Karla

September 2000 Karla Homolka's name resurfaced in the press. A Montreal newspaper released photographs it had purchased from a former Joliette prison inmate, which showed Karla Homolka and fellow inmate Christina Sherry¹² in black cocktail dresses celebrating a birthday party.

After the pictures were released Karla Homolka was informed by prison authority that "...she would be moved to the Regional Psychiatric Center at maximum-security Saskatchewan Penitentiary to undergo a 45 to 60 day "psychiatric assessment""(Bellamy, Archive 5). Karla was transferred to Saskatoon's Regional

¹¹ Despite the fact that an agreement was reached by the Crown and Karla Homolka about a plea and a sentence "the approval of the trial judge" remained mandatory" (Galligan, 1996:43). In other words, "The law is clear that a sentence is not imposed by the Crown. A sentence can only be imposed by the court"(Galligan, 1996:43).

¹² Christina Sherry, at the time, was "...serving a five year sentence that began in April 1997 after pleading guilty to kidnapping, forcible confinement, sexual assault and sexual assault causing bodily harm"(Bellamy, Archive 5). Other photographs displayed Sherry's accomplice Tracy Gonzales who "...was sentenced to just under eight years" (Bellamy, Archive 5). Both Sherry and Gonzales reports Bellamy were "ironically...convicted for luring girls to a Montreal apartment where they were tortured, sexually assaulted and forced to be the sex slaves of James Medley, who [just like Paul Bernardo]—was convicted of the crimes, sentenced...and labeled a dangerous offender" (Archive 5).

Psychiatric Center in October. Karla's clear discontent with the transfer led her to refuse outright to co-operate with doctors. Homolka's lack of co-operation was not without consequences. In fact, Corrections Canada perceived her lack of co-operation as an act of defiance and this act combined with their firm belief that she was likely to "kill again" led them to recommend she be kept in prison for another four years—until the expiry of her sentence (Bellamy, Archive 6). Before Corrections Canada recommended that Homolka be detained until her sentence expired, Homolka's new counsel—Marc Labelle—expressed to the "...media that his client feared being killed by vigilantes if she was freed from prison" (Bellamy, Archive 6). Corrections Canada's recommendation that Karla be detained, however, did not provide Karla with any relief. Her counsel said she was now "...petrified that she'd be murdered" (Bellamy, Archive 6). At last, Labelle claimed, "...the only place Homolka felt safe was in Joliette prison" (Bellamy, Archive 6). The National Parole Board, on May 8, 2001,

...released its ruling after a review of the case, ordering that Homolka remain detained past her July release eligibility date. "The board is satisfied that, if released, you are likely to commit an offence causing the death of or serious harm to another person before the expiration of the sentence you are now serving..." (Bellamy, Archive 7).

In their report, the board further noted,

...the gravity of her crime is part of the reason she was detained. "The judge described those acts as monstrous and depraved," said the report. "All these crimes are extremely grave...the fact that you continued your crimes after the death of your sister, which occurred during your sexual abuse of her, demonstrates clearly your difficulty monitoring your violent sexual impulses to the point of putting in danger the safety of others. Your modus operandi demonstrates a high degree of indifference to the consequences of your acts." (Bellamy, Archive 7).

Karla Homolka's current whereabouts are unknown. What is known is that Karla is scheduled to be released sometime in July 2005.

Chapter summary

This chapter provided information about Homolka's relationship with her family, details about her upbringing and childhood friendship she formed exploring these aspect of the case and the fine details of Homolka's relationship with Bernardo and the crimes committed against Tammy, Leslie and Kristen will be helpful in understanding the content of mass media and popular culture sources. Also, describing Homolka's prosecution and subsequent sentencing, helped underline the complexity surrounding judicial procedures. Supplying information about her recent eligibility for statutory release was intended to shed light on recent development and explore another facet relevant to the judicial system.

CHAPTER FOUR

DOMINANT PATTERNS OF COVERAGE

This chapter will deal with the principal items extrapolated from the analysis of the mass media and popular culture narratives. This chapter includes subcategories which correspond to each item. The first set of elements pertains to descriptors sources used to characterize Homolka. The second group of items relates to the way the sources characterized the relationship Homolka maintained with Bernardo, while the third set of items pertains to the way the investigation into the death of Leslie and Kristen was carried out by law enforcers.

Descriptors—Homolka is the worst female criminal

Narratives' selection of certain descriptors sought to characterize Homolka as many different types. In opting to use descriptors such as, *Canada's most notorious female prisoner*, *Canada's most infamous female convict* and *the country's most notorious female killer*, reports sought to characterize Homolka as an individual who is unique. A narrative which notes that Karla is or was *Canada's most* indicates that no other *female killer*, *female prisoner* or *female convict* in Canada can be said to be an equal or worse offender than her: Karla Homolka is invariably the worst female offender known in Canada. A desire to classify Karla amongst other criminals, however, would require the selection of a descriptor such as *One of Canada's most...* This descriptor would, alternatively, suggest that Homolka is merely one criminal among many others in the country. A narrative, which opted not to employ a similar descriptor as the one noted above, denotes that it distinctively sought to portray Homolka as an offender beyond compare.

Descriptors—Homolka is one of the worst criminals

Homolka's gender, participation in horrendous criminal acts, and conviction are traits which clearly distinguished her from other criminals. For instance, it sets her apart from male offenders, offenders who have committed petty crimes, who have entirely evaded conviction or who have not yet been prosecuted. Homolka's status as a murderer, however, failed to supply her with an opportunity to retain a unique position. To illustrate how she lost her privileged status—one seemingly provided by her gender—one narrative employed *One of Canada's most notorious killers* as a descriptor and thus characterizing Homolka as belonging with other killers. In other words, Homolka may be considered the "country's most notorious female killer". Yet, when sources omit displaying her gender, she fails to qualify as the "country's most notorious killer". This implies that other criminals, possibly males and some of their crimes might have surpassed Homolka's crime in both numbers and cruelty. It is clear that Homolka's criminal standing took precedence over her gender stature in selecting these particular descriptors to characterize her.

Descriptors—Homolka is more than simply a murderer

Other descriptors found in narratives pertaining to the Homolka case were *sex-killer*, *serial killer*, and *serial sex offender*, all serving to characterize Homolka as an individual having committed sexual and murderous crimes. A narrative which appropriated Homolka's offences so as to create a descriptor, seemingly characterized her as an individual who is twice as dangerous and twice as guilty of criminal offences. Furthermore, narratives in using two descriptors to characterize Homolka sought to highlight that she was not simply a killer; she was a sexually inclined killer. In adding

the word *convicted* to the equation, as one narrative did when referring to Homolka as a *convicted sex-killer*, denotes that the narrative sought to stress that she is a *sex-killer* who was captured and prosecuted. The selection of these specific descriptors may be said to give the narrative an opportunity to, once again, differentiate Homolka from other criminals. Criminals, who may have committed a single crime, one type of crime, be it sexual or lethal, and may not have been caught or yet prosecuted for their offences.

Descriptors—Homolka displays features atypical of a criminal

Descriptors that relate to her appearance retained two fundamentally related purposes. On the one hand, these descriptors sought to characterize Homolka as an individual displaying features atypical of a criminal, while other descriptors attempted to characterize her as displaying unusual attributes—ones stereotypically associated with criminality. Examples of descriptors employed to characterize Homolka as possessing traits different from ones possessed by criminals were *a pretty middle-class girl, an attractive 23-year-old woman, a young woman from a stable middle-class family, blond and beaming, an animal lover and a former veterinarian assistant*. The selection of these descriptors characterizes Homolka as someone unlikely to commit violent crimes. These descriptors overtly challenge what it is our culture expects of a criminal, that is, we “...expect to see someone with a bad eye, with green teeth, preferably with a couple missing” (Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 548). Adherence to stereotypes has led us to believe “that the beautiful is good, and the ugly is evil; and conversely that the morally good is physically beautiful (or ‘good looking’) and the evil is ugly” (Synnott, 1993: 78). The truth of the matter is “...serial killers and rapists are not the ignorant, stupid, ugly, miscreant oafs our imagination tell us they should be...most are intelligent, witty and

charming”(Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 548). Descriptors such as these, and others similar, however, fail to acknowledge that criminally inclined individuals may be female or male from lower, middle or upper class backgrounds, may be young, middle-aged or old and may be despicably ugly, just fair or divinely good looking—it does not matter.

Descriptors—Homolka displays features associated with criminality

The review of narratives have evidenced that not all descriptors sought to characterize Homolka as displaying features different from those we stereotypically foolishly expect to find in criminals. To illustrate this assertion, some narratives claimed that Homolka possesses a *psyche too deranged*, a *conscience too unaffected*, an *antisocial personality*¹³ or *that of a psychopath*, an *elevated degree of indifference*, and a *proclivity for sending friends gifts of dog tails collected through her job*. Other descriptors used characterize Homolka as *too dangerous*, as a *cold-blooded murderer*, *out of touch with reality*, *manipulative*, *conniving and deceitful*, *egocentric if not narcissistic*¹⁴, *icy and impenetrable* and *indifferent to her monstrous crimes*. The descriptors used were intended to characterize Homolka, as sick and therefore wicked, attributes we have come to associate with criminality.

¹³ An “antisocial personality” as define in the DSM-IV—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition—entails “...un motif récurrent de comportement irresponsable et antisocial ayant débuté dans l’enfance ou au début de l’adolescence, et se poursuivant jusqu’à l’âge adulte. Pour que le diagnostic soit posé, le sujet doit être âgé d’au moins dix-huit ans et faire preuve d’antécédents de troubles de comportement remontant avant son quinzième anniversaire de naissance. Par définition, les symptômes d’un trouble de comportement commencent avant l’âge de quinze ans. Chez les femmes, les premiers symptômes se manifestent à la puberté tandis que, chez les hommes, les troubles de comportement se manifestent, dans la plupart des cas, dès l’enfance” (Williams, 2002 : 320).

¹⁴ A “narcissistic” personality disorder as define in the DSM-IV comprises several features. Williams reports, “La caractéristique essentielle de ce trouble est un motif récurrent de grandeur (virtuelle ou réelle), une hypersensibilité à l’avis des autres et un manque d’empathie débutant à la fin de l’adolescence, et qui se manifeste dans divers contextes. Les individus affectés par ce trouble ont un sens démesuré de leur propre importance. Ils tendent à exagérer leurs accomplissements, leurs talents, et s’attendent à ce qu’on les trouve remarquable, sans pourtant avoir rien accompli qui pourrait le justifier. Ces individus sont obsédés par des fantasmes de succès prodigieux, de pouvoir, d’intelligence, de beauté, de l’amour parfait. Ils éprouvent également un sentiment d’envie envers tous ceux qu’ils perçoivent comme ayant plus de succès qu’eux-mêmes” (2002: 321-322).

Both sets of descriptors featured in sources, which discussed the Homolka cases, include those which seemingly sought to characterize her as possessing features we would seldom associate with criminals, while others sought to characterize her as possessing which we would more likely associate with criminality. In selecting opposing sets of descriptors narratives seemed to suggest the need to reject the idea that “the face is the clue to the criminal self” (Synnott, 1993: 78).

Characterization of Homolka’s relationship with Bernardo

Most narratives offered details about Karla’s relationship with her estranged husband. Centering on this feature was to establish two precise arguments about Homolka’s relationship with Bernardo. For one, Karla was involved in a physically, verbally and sexually abusive relationship that led her to become helpless and incapable of not complying with Bernardo’s requests despite their horrendous nature and fatal consequences. And secondly, Karla’s allegations of abuse perpetuated by Bernardo remain questionable.

Characterizing Homolka as suffering from physical abuse

An example of a narrative which sought to provide details about the abuse Karla was subjected to, was written by Kirk Makin who reported,

...there was a jarring escalation in the level of violence Mr. Bernardo inflicted on her [Homolka] after the killings of 15-year-old Kristen in April, 1992...[after a while] Ms. Homolka said, her beatings at the hands of Mr. Bernardo were becoming a daily ritual”(1995: A6).

On a similar note, D’arcy Jenish and Sharon Doyle Driedger further explored the alleged abuse while reporting,

Homolka portrayed herself as someone who was dominated and enslaved by her violent husband...[she claimed the] escalating physical and psychological abuse that culminated in almost daily beatings, with objects

ranging from flashlights to pieces of firewood, before she left Bernardo on Jan. 5, 1993 (1995: 13).

Both narratives have demonstrated that the abuse was continuous and becoming far more frequent as the relationship evolved.

Characterizing Homolka's claims of abuse as questionable

By exploring the patterns of abuse, most narratives promoted the need to remain skeptical about Homolka's claim that she was regularly subjected to physical abuse, namely because they are questionable. To support this assertion, Mary Nemeth and Anne Marie Owen's report noted one person saying "...when the marriage ended abruptly last January, after Teale was charged with assaulting his wife with a flashlight and she left him, her friends were surprised..." "we were shocked when she told us" (1993:19). Another example taken from D'arcy Jenish's article also promoted suspicion when it noted,

...Dorothy and her sister, Lori, both of whom testified about the relationship between Karla and Bernardo...mother and daughter conceded that Bernardo's abuse of Karla occurred only in the last six months of the relationship, after the murder of Mahaffy and French. Until then, they acknowledged, Homolka and Bernardo appeared to be a happy, loving couple (1995: 51).

In a similar vein, Williams' narrative offers a graphic account of the abuse directed at Homolka by Bernardo, stating that

...docteur Ardnt que Paul la frappait régulièrement, de manière imprévisible, qu'il la forçait à manger des excréments et à boire de l'urine et qu'il la mettait dehors toute nue sur la pelouse, à trois heures du matin, tandis qu'il la surveillait de l'intérieur en se masturbant dans la pénombre du salon (2002 : 84).

Unlike most narratives, which allowed for the details to speak volumes about the cycle of violence, another passage taken from Williams' narratives overtly questioned its prominence when stating, "Comment peut on être certain que ces histoires sont vraies?"

À ma connaissance, Bernardo n'a sévèrement battu Karla qu'une seule fois, et elle l'a quitté aussitôt après" (2002: 84). This passage cast doubt on Homolka's claim of perpetual abuse while rendering clear that no matter how grave she claims her experience to have been, no one was able to corroborate her claims of abuse suffered at the hands of Bernardo.

A desire to question the viability of Homolka's claims of abuse was well served in another report, which stated,

In spite of everything—the whippings, the kicks, the hair-pulling and smashes to the temple with a flashlight—in spite of Karla's repeated testimony that she hated and feared her husband, she still craved a good-night kiss. The sentiment was laid bare in dozens of love notes and letters...Karla had a ready answer for the apparent inconsistency. Because she couldn't leave Paul and he wouldn't let her go, Karla said, she figured the next best thing was to try to convince him to act as if he loved her. If she could convince him of his love, then maybe he wouldn't need to do anything else, Karla explained (Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 442).

This passage highlights the unusual affection Karla retained for Paul and leads one to question whether indeed the abuse was as unbearable as she claimed it to be.

There was one other narrative, which in providing some details about her relationship, sought to stress how unlikely she was to have been severely abused. Yet, this narrative not only questioned her claims, but also found them incredible. For instance, Makin reports

Ms. Homolka also used Mr. Bernardo's purported psychic powers to explain why she never told anyone about the hell she was living through. "If I thought something he would think of the same thing 10 or 20 minutes later—and that scared me," she said"(2000: A3).

The latter passage depicted Homolka's rationale as very weak.

Characterizing Homolka as unaffected by the abuse

Another way narratives sought to render questionable Karla's allegations of abuse was by providing evidence that Karla may have liked to be threatened into submissiveness. To support this assertion, Burnside and Cairns reported a discussion Karla had with friends where she

...explained that Paul like to play games during sex. In one game he was a successful businessman and she was the little girl who sexually pleased him when he came home from the office in his suit, briefcase in hand. He liked Karla to wear her long, blond hair in ponytails, tied with ribbon to make her look even younger than she was. He liked to use handcuffs during his game, Karla confided. And sometime a dog chain was part of their sexual landscape. [One of her friends openly admitted] "...that's really weird. Why does he want to play that?"..."Oh, I think it's fun," she said...(1995:132).

In a similar vein, one narrative further noted that Karla was not necessarily unhappy to be with Paul when noting,

...one video scene from the trip [the honeymoon] belies Karla's story of abuse and terror. While staring out at a glorious Pacific Ocean sunset, Karla videotaped a loving soliloquy while Paul showered for dinner. "The beauty of the ocean, and the beach, and everything here doesn't even come close to the love I feel for you. I love you sweetheart," Karla said in a dreamy voice (Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 435)

On a similar note, Maclean's D'arcy Jenish reports

Homolka was so obsessed with Bernardo...their relationship began to deteriorate following the death, on Dec.24, 1990, of Homolka's 15-year-old sister, Tammy...following that tragedy...Bernardo began to assault and mistreat Homolka. But far from hating him, she became even more devoted to Bernardo... (1995:49).

What the above passages seems to suggest is that Homolka and Bernardo had "...a passion that survived all his beatings and abuse"(Jenish, 1995: 49).

Incompetence and stereotypes

Several narratives discussed the ways in which law enforcers handled the French / Mahaffy murder investigation. The information offered to this effect seem to suggest that the officials were inept. The narratives, which suggested a high level of inadequacy amongst the officers also noted it, were, in fact, a result of a strong adherence to stereotypes about criminality. For instance, adhering to the stereotypical belief about women's lack of criminal intent failed to compel officers them to consider Karla—just like they were beginning to suspect Bernardo—as a potential suspect in the murders of Leslie and Kristen. To support this assertion, Williams states

...les inspecteurs Metcalfe, Whitefield et Smollett étaient entièrement concentrés sur l'affaire des viols de Scarborough. Les meurtres de St. Catharines avaient été commis en dehors de leur territoire et ne les concernaient pas directement. C'était l'ADN de Paul Bernardo qui avait été associé à trois des victimes de viol, pas celui de Karla. Et Karla n'avait pas de penis. Les chances que ce petit bout de femme ait été une violeuse et une meurtrière étaient fort minces. En fait, l'idée de leur était jamais passée par la tête (2002: 137).

The passage highlights how the commonly held stereotype that woman are not possibly apt to perform violent crimes proved detrimental to the Mahaffy / French murder investigation.

The idea that the officials' investigation was hindered by a second misconceptions about criminals which led them to look past the obvious was reported in Makin,

Mr. Bernardo told her [Homolka] that the investigators were obviously disarmed by his charm and openness... "They saw photographs of this nice, young, happily married couple and they thought there was no way he could be involved in this," she said" (Makin, 1995: A6).

The above passage highlights how law enforcers failed to take into consideration the utmost need not to let looks and status entirely establish whether a person is a criminal. Status and physical attributes are often misleading.

Chapter summary

This chapter demonstrated how narratives, in selecting particular descriptors, intended to characterize Karla as the worst female criminal in Canada displaying gentle, feminine and kind traits, features we seldom associate with criminality while at the same time stressing she displayed traits we would be inclined to associate with criminality such as manipulative, conniving, indifferent and narcissistic. Furthermore, this chapter illustrated how disclosure of information pertaining to Homolka's relationship with Bernardo retained two fundamentally contrasting purposes. On the one hand, the focus sought to explore her allegations of abuse. On the other hand the focus enabled other source to cast doubt Homolka's allegations of physical and psychological abuse by Mr. Bernardo. This chapter illustrates how narratives stressed the incompetence of law enforcers in investigating the crimes committed against Leslie and Kristen. To this effect, this analysis has shown that the officers in charge of the murder investigations were generally incompetent and jeopardized the investigation in failing to set aside two separate stereotypes about criminality. The first stereotype is that women do not commit sexual assaults nor do they possess an aptitude for killing. And secondly, criminals exhibit traits that are easily recognized. This in-depth reading of stories pertaining to the Homolka case was intrinsically valuable in detecting patterns of coverage. In addition, it revealed one interesting tendency, that is, reports provide a representation of Homolka which keeps changing.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROBLEM FRAME AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The previous chapter discussed three patterns of coverage that transpired the narratives when Homolka and facets of her life and relationship were disclosed. This chapter will explore the fourth pattern of coverage discerned and it pertains to the way media packaged the information relayed to readers about the judicial proceedings in the Homolka case. This chapter will show that the Homolka case encompassed judicial proceedings: sentence, plea bargain and prison, which were problematized. This chapter will show that narratives that employed the “problem frame” in discussing the judicial proceedings relevant to the Homolka case aimed to formulate “...social complexities as simplistic problems” (Altheide, 1997: 655). To do this, the mass media and popular culture sources noted that the mere ‘existence’ of the sentence, plea bargain and prison condition were “something undesirable” (Altheide, 1997:655). Secondly, it noted that “many people are affected by this problem—the “undesirable something”. A third point stressed is that the case encompasses “unambiguous aspects” (Altheide, 1997:655). The narratives in following through with the “problem frame” emphasize that “the situation can be changed or “fixed”” (Altheide, 1997:655). Further, the narrative is likely to stress that there exists “...a mechanism or procedure for fixing the problem” (Altheide, 1997:655). And lastly, narratives in discussing the case using the “problem frame” contend, “the change or repair agent and process is known (usually government)” (Altheide, 1997:655).

Sentence / Plea bargain / Prison

There were three aspects surrounding the Homolka case, narratives explored using the “problem frame”. Those three aspects include the sentence of twelve years imposed upon Homolka, the plea bargain the Crown prosecutor offered Karla Homolka and the unrepressed prison order in which Karla found herself. In making use of the “problem frame” as a means by which to structure narratives pertaining to the above-mentioned aspects of the case gives rise to the belief that Canada has a judicial system which fails to anticipate the undesirable outcome of its procedural judgments. The tendency for this framing technique to trigger such a view is barely surprising when considering how the “...media more often than not construct the criminal justice system and its people negatively and as ineffective”(Surette, 1998: 226).

Something undesirable—Sentence

The sentence of twelve years to be served concurrently handed down to Homolka aroused considerable public fury, since the sentence was regarded as inadequate. A narrative by Gay Abbate illustrates these feelings of dissatisfaction: the reported opinion of one member of the public, ““There’s no way you can call 12 years justifies the killings of these two girls...””(1993: A2). The source held responsible for the inadequacy of the sentence was not solely the sentencing judge. The judicial system, which is expected to provide citizens with a fair sense of “justice”, was promoted as being partially responsible for the unsuitability of the sentence. To support this assertion, one source noted, it is “...the “craziness” of the Canadian justice system, which will allow a killer such as Ms. Homolka to be freed by 2005” (Peritz, 2002: A14). To demonstrate how much Canadians trust the judicial system to provide them with a

fair sense of justice and this through the handing down of adequate sentences, Abbate reports that while Justice Kovacs was exiting the courthouse “an angry group of onlookers booed and hurled insults, calling: “is that what you mean by justice?””(1993: A2). The judge, in handing down what some people perceived as an unfair sentence, simultaneously compels the public to question the integrity of the judicial system in which they vest so much trust.

Something undesirable—Plea bargain

The narrative also advanced the idea that the plea bargain was “something undesirable”. What made this judiciary procedure even more undesirable, reports Stephen Williams, is the officials’ failure to nullify the agreement reached with Homolka once it had become abundantly clear that her testimony against her husband was not longer necessary since they had gained sufficient evidence to prosecute Bernardo. To illustrate how a narrative sought to suggest that the subsistence of the plea bargain was something undesirable Williams states “...Karla Homolka’s testimony was irrelevant...[the reason why she still testified was] to substantiate the prosecutor’s official version of events that Karla Homolka herself was an unwilling victim of Mr. Bernardo. They did this even though they knew it to be false”(1999: A23).

Furthermore, narratives, which promote the idea that the plea bargain is something undesirable, put emphasis on its suspicious nature. The overwhelming tendency to consider plea bargains as somewhat suspicious is a common practice, explains Surette. He suggests that, “closed institutions and proceedings and secret information and sources are automatically viewed with suspicion and challenged”(Surette, 1998: 228). Whether resolution agreements are always considered

untrustworthy is difficult to assert. Yet, many narratives which discussed the Homolka case clearly promoted the idea that it ought to be considered questionable and as such it ought to be regarded as something undesirable. To illustrate this tendency, Anne-Marie Owens reported,

Homolka's deal raised a number of long-standing concerns about such negotiations, particularly when they involve serious crimes. Many lawyers admit that such privacy negotiated plea bargains create skepticism about the justice system. But they also argue that pre-arranged guilty pleas and sentences are essential to keep the system working (2000:A7).

The above passage clearly indicate that one of the main reasons why this procedure ought to be perceived as undesirable is due to the benefits such critical proceedings offer accused and system

Something undesirable—Prison order

The unrepressed prison condition afforded to Homolka is another aspect of the case which was depicted as inherently problematic and highly undesirable. In an attempt to promote the idea that inmates are provided with unwarranted comfort, Paul Cherry offered one former inmates' description of the conditions,

...Joliette prison is an "adult daycare"...inmates can go for long strolls on the institution's spacious grounds, and can play baseball. Ten cottages on the prison grounds house eight to 10 inmates each. There are no bars on the windows, and each inmate has a key to her room and a key to her personal mailbox. There are no guards on the prison ground (Cherry, 2000: A1).

The narrative provided details, which may leave some Canadians, dissatisfied with the liberal order provided to inmates. Once again, the target of much criticism is the judicial system that failed to limit the comfort inmates such as Homolka benefited from in prison. To illustrate how narratives sought to promote the idea that people firmly believe that the liberal incarceration conditions are undesirable—if not questionable—Paul

Waldie and Mary Vallis reported Doug French commenting that the release of pictures of Karla in prison celebrating cannot help but validate what “A lot of people say [that is] Canada is a haven for criminals. You look at something like that, and I guess it is...” “I think it’s an absolute disgrace to the people of Canada”(2000: A1).

People most affected by the problem

Every narrative which provided details about the sentence, plea bargain and prison conditions and supplied evidence that each aspects were considered “undesirable” also tended to stress the fact that the people left the most affected by the lenient sentence, benefits of plea bargain and the unautocratic prison order, were the victims’ families. The Frenches and Mahaffys are the people most likely to feel improperly served by justice.

People most affected by the problem—Sentencing

The victim’s families are reported as having “...no life left...” (Abbate, 1993: A2). Their children have been deprived of life, and the sentence handed down seemingly failed to punish adequately one of the parties responsible for their untimely deaths. The families were caused to experience an unnecessary sense of powerlessness and injustice, but most importantly, they also find themselves bound to feel this way “...for the rest of their lives...”(Abbate, 1993: A2).

People most affected by the problem—Plea bargain

The stress the plea bargain imposed upon the family was not made abundantly clear in most sources. Yet, some sources did provide subtle indication that the judicial system failed the families in many ways. For one, it failed to provide the family with an alternative. They were compelled to accept that the Crown proffered Homolka with a

plea bargain and that such an option was necessary. That the plea was necessary was well articulated by Williams who stated,

...Inspector Bevan...went directly to the French and Mahaffy families. He told them about the exact terms and conditions of Karla's deal. He was candid about circumstances, as far as he and the police were concerned. The question was whether the families wanted to take a chance and hope they found hard evidence in the house or do the deal. He told the Frenches and the Mahaffys that the police had learned a great deal about the nature of the relationship between compliant victims such as Karla and sexual sadists such as Paul Bernardo. Inspector Bevan elaborated on what they had learned...about the bizarre nature of the relationship between Paul and Karla Bernardo. In the final analysis, Inspector Bevan said taciturnly, it was really up to them. They could wait or take the deal. The families told him they were prepared to accept the Crown attorney's best advice (1996: 442-443).

The narrative clearly promotes the fact that the families had little choice—their option extended to choosing the lesser of two evils. Secondly, the families were left having to accept that the plea bargain granted Homolka an opportunity to obtain a reduced charge. The judicial system failed the families while offering Karla Homolka a plea bargain. Providing Homolka with a plea bargain entitles her to a reduced charge and this means she will much earlier be eligible for statutory release—this means there a chance that she be freed before the end of her twelve-year sentence. That Homolka must undergo a series of psychological evaluations to assess whether she is eligible for early release, unfortunately, did little to reassure the family. The evaluation revealed that experts believe that Karla continues to pose a threat and as such is likely to re-offend if released. The experts' reports raise fundamental questions about the plea bargain. To support this assertion, one narrative stressed that if indeed Karla were found likely to re-offend upon release 'clearly it were a mistake to sign'

...une entente avec elle et en ne la condamnant pas à la peine maximale dès le début! Depuis qu'elle est en prison, on s'ingénie à trouver des

moyens de contourner les règles normales pour racheter cette première erreur. Mais deux torts ne ramènent pas la justice (Williams, 2002: 372).

The narrative sought to highlight one problem associated with the agreement and the difficulty associated with an attempt to remedy it. It clearly advances the idea that the judicial system caused the families additional undue stress when we think that nothing can be done to revoke the resolution agreement even though Karla was recently considered likely to re-offend.

People most affected by the problem—Prison order

The unrepressed prison order also left the families most affected. The narratives rendered this fact quite clear when they reported Mr. French as stating when referring to the birthday party photo "...do Kristen and Leslie have birthdays now? No, they don't. And the same thing with her [Homolka's] sister. She doesn't have a birthday anymore, either." (Waldie and Vallis, 2000: A1). The families caught a glimpse of Homolka's life behind bars and could do little other than be outraged at the thought of her being afforded some pleasurable times. The full extent of the emotional impact these new developments bestowed upon the family was nicely captured in a narrative which noted,

...Mrs. French said emotion comes back in waves when there is a new development in Homolka's status. Seeing pictures of Homolka celebrating birthdays and wearing make up... "It's hard to see laughter on her face knowing what she's capable of doing... It just makes it obvious there is no remorse there, even now." (Bellavance and Vallis, 2000: A1).

Their child suffered at the hands of this offender and nonetheless she is afforded some fun times. It is clear from the passage that the family finds the exposure of Homolka's well-being very painful.

Some aspects are unambiguous

Media workers may sometimes, in covering the complexities of the judicial system, try to simplify some of its aspects by means of displaying some of its components as unambiguous. Unfortunately, much valuable information gets lost in the process.

Some aspects of Sentencing are unambiguous

The narratives succeeded in depicting the whole sentencing procedures as somewhat unambiguous when they noted people's discontent with the sentence they deemed far too lenient. In noting the discontent the narratives did not spend time exploring the procedural complexity of sentencing. The narrative gave the impression that sentencing is simple; all the judge presiding over the case has to do is sentence appropriately. Absent from the narratives are mentions of all the factors that ought to be considered when a judge sentences. For instance, the judge when assessing the suitability of the sentence must take into account both mitigating and aggravating factors. Further, the judge is required to set aside his/her own prejudices. In other words, the judge must not allow his/her feeling get in the way of his/her assessment of the suitability of a sentence proposed by the Crown. The Homolka case made it difficult for the judge to fulfill his obligation: find a suitable sentence. Depicted as troubling was the handing down of a sentence considered adequate for the nature of the crime and a sentence which would entail a punishment which did not extend beyond that which is customary because the crimes were viewed as depraved and monstrous. The difficulties faced by the sentencing judge were nicely captured in one narrative which reported Justice Kovacs admitting,

“No sentence I can impose would adequately reflect the revulsion of the outrage the community feels, and rightly so... It is the court’s responsibility to be objective and to consider the special circumstances of this case and the accused” (Globe and Mail, 1993: A4).

The above passage evidently sought to promote something other than a concrete attempt on the part of the judge to set aside prejudices. The narrative, while offering the judges’ own opinion of the sentence, provides some indication that the sentence might rightfully be considered inappropriate. Still, most other narratives limited their discussion to illustrating how inadequate the sentence appears to be without ever stressing how complex it tends to be.

Some aspects of Plea bargaining are unambiguous

The narratives when exploring the aspects surrounding the plea bargain sought to depict it as unambiguous when arguing that plea bargains exist because it saves time. In effect, Sean Fine in the Globe and Mail reported, “...by accepting the standard plea bargain—a guilty plea in return for a reduced charge or penalty—the system avoids becoming clogged”(1995: A9). This narrative further highlights that plea bargains provide the judicial system with an opportunity to limit the number of cases that need to be tried. These arguments and others similar found in mass media sources tend to advance the idea that there is nothing ambiguous about plea bargains. Plea bargains are a legitimate and useful option for court officials. Furthermore, many narratives stressed how court officials allocated little time whenever offering an offender a plea bargain assessing the impact it may bestow upon the victims and their families. Furthermore, while disclosing further details about the plea bargain narratives advanced the idea that evidence, which provided grounds upon which to nullify the resolution, was grossly disregarded. To support this assertion, Williams states, “in reality, Karla Homolka’s

testimony was never about convicting Paul Bernardo...rather it was about police and Crown embarrassment” (1999: A23). Williams argue that court officials’ fear of ridicule led them to decide against initiating the necessary step towards voiding the unwarranted resolution agreement. In an attempt at depicting the nullification of a plea bargain as unambiguous, the narrative failed to mention that the resolution agreement contains within it a clause which specifies under which conditions it could potentially be voided—perjury. In other words, unless Homolka were caught lying the Crown had no choice other than follow through with the plea bargain. Still, some narratives seemingly sought to downplay the complexity surrounding plea bargains and as such promoted it as unambiguous when noting, “...such deals are put before a judge, who is not bound by plea bargains made between the Crown and defence” (Fine, 1995: A9). This passage clearly stresses the idea that a plea bargain may at anytime be disregarded by the judge, and that there are no reasons why an unwarranted plea bargain—controversial—like that of Homolka could not have been voided. Yet, the narratives in seeking to depict this aspect of the case as unambiguous failed to mention that a judge cannot challenge the legitimacy of a plea bargain unless he/she has a valid reason to do so.

Furthermore narratives, which succeeded in demonstrating that resolution agreements are unambiguous failed to address the likelihood that a resolution if canceled may impede the prosecution of another offender. All narratives, except one, failed to explore this aspect. Williams’ narratives did so when stating that a nullification could “...créé un borbier jurididque qui, selon elles, menaçait sérieusement de faire avorter l’ensemble de la poursuite de Paul Bernardo” (2002: 276). The impact one’s testimony might impose onto another person’s trial could not have been dismissed and this is what

the narrative promoted, that is that the plea bargain, although it is a common enough practice, can be quite complex. Nonetheless, the majority of narratives, with the exception of one, tended to downplay the impact of a cancellation and promote the idea that far from being ambiguous plea bargains are simply convenient.

Some aspects of Prison order are unambiguous

Most narratives when covering the details of Homolka's prison order failed to explore the reason why it were thus. In failing to explore the reason and promoting the idea that the lack of restrictions in a prison is unacceptable, the narratives may be said to have rendered this aspect of the case seem unambiguous. Some narratives did mention that the unconstrained conditions provided to inmates are there for the purpose of easing their eventual release into society. To support this assertion, Waldie and Vallies noted what the spokesman for Corrections Canada stated, that is ""The vast majority of female inmates will at some point be re-integrated into the community""(Waldie and Vallis, 2000: A1). Unfortunately, most narratives tended to focus attention on the inadequacy of the systems in failing to limit the amount of comfort allocated to female offenders. Most narratives failed to explore the fact that liberal orders may serve another purpose other than provide inmates with all sorts of comfort. In this respect, narratives failed to highlight the effects incarceration may impose upon inmates. It failed to mention that alternative conditions might render offenders far more dangerous than they were when they entered the prison and these are conditions one may want to avoid imposing on female criminals like Homolka who is soon to be released back into society.

Procedure to remedy problem

The mechanism or procedures to remedy the problem are in many cases difficult to decipher from narratives. Surette claims, “Entertainment and news portrayals that expound social changes...are rare”(1998: 82). What is often promoted whenever the media “...paradoxically [inform the public that] the traditional criminal justice system is not effective...[is that] its improvement remains the best solution...”(Surette, 1998:82). Most mass media and popular culture sources discussing the sentence, the plea bargain and prison conditions advocated a need to improve the judicial system, which fails—as is—to provide an adequate sense of justice. One interesting observation pertaining to remedies is that “...although the media portray the criminal justice system unfavourably, the solutions they depict as being the most effective...entail expansion of the existing criminal justice system”(Surette, 1998:50).

Procedure to remedy problem—Sentence

The solution to the problematic sentencing as implied in the narrative is harsher sentences for criminals. It seemed clear from the narrative that citizens would feel best served if the courts adopted a more punitive approach when sentencing offenders and as such lengthen the sentences. One narrative captured the need for lengthier sentence in this case when noting one person’s outrage “...the sentence is “way too lenient. That’s a slap on the wrist. The crime far outweighed the punishment” (Abbate, 1993: A2).

Procedure to remedy problem—Plea bargain

Resolution agreements are not highly regarded by members of the public and further their “...confidence in the system...[is] being undermined by plea bargain practices” (Cohen and Doob, 1995: 190). The best solution remains a lessening of the

Crown and police discretionary power with regards to plea bargain so that this option may not be abused.

Procedure to remedy problem—Prison order

The analysis pointed out that a great number of Canadians find prisons conditions too comfortable. Canadians have come to think of offenders as “...morally repugnant...bring[ing] a deadly threat to society’s moral order...” and as such they believe that comfortable prison conditions should not be offered to those who do not deserve it (Melossi, 2000: 314). In other words, they would see fit that “those who have broken society’s laws...experience more pain and deprivation than any of those who have adhered to the rules” (Gomme, 1995: 490). That criminals have an opportunity to sustain a better living than that of some citizens is considered an absolute disgrace.

Change / Repair agent known

The narratives promoted the idea that the agent best suited to bring about adequate changes to problems relating to sentencing, a plea bargaining and prison condition is the government.

Change / Repair agent known—Sentencing

The government is expected to ensure that the courts uphold one of their fundamental duties in regards to sentencing, which is to punish in accordance to the nature and gravity of the crimes. Yet, it seems the government should help ‘create safer societies’ and this involves the establishment of new ways to ‘punish’ prisoners, ways which are deemed adequate enough to discourage criminals who are remotely inclined to threaten societal order and its citizens from ever attempting to break the law (Snider, 1998: 45).

Change / Repair agent known—Plea bargain

The narratives suggest that the government is expected to take action to revoke some of the Crown's discretionary powers in offering resolution agreement. Reforms in this area may alter people's view of plea bargain, which is currently solely viewed as "...a mechanism by which people receive lower levels of punishment than they deserve" (Cohen and Doob, 1995: 195).

Change / Repair agent known—Prison order

The government is expected to make prison conditions a lot less enjoyable. The public's failure to grasp how prison is supposed to rehabilitate inmates, combined with an overall dissatisfaction with the severity of punishment imposed onto criminals, leads society to demand that the system considers finding a way to "exclude" criminals from societal sight and this without society having to feel any remorse for "...assum[ing] an attitude of distance/antipathy towards the criminal..." (Melossi, 2000: 300).

Each narrative reviewed which used the "problem frame" to construct narratives about the Homolka case all seemed to suggest that Canadians clearly find the judicial system faulty in one fundamental way: its ability to provide citizens with a fair sense of justice. The great majority of reports while exploring the problems inherent with the sentence, plea bargain and prison order as they pertain to the Homolka case, promoted one solution, that is a better "punitive criminal justice" strategies (Surette, 1998:82).

Chapter summary

This chapter has shown how the problem frame allowed reporters to stress that Homolka's sentence, opportunity to plea bargain and unconstrained prison conditions are elements, which are 'undesirable', leaves many 'people affected', but most importantly

it leaves the victims' families most affected. Further, to frame a situation as problematic provided media workers with an opportunity to stress how sentencing, plea bargain negotiations, and prison order, in the Homolka case, are uncomplicated processes. This chapter has shown that narratives in emphasizing how undesirable all three judicial procedures were further highlighted how the situation can be altered and there exist procedures that will help achieve this end. Lastly, the narrative noted that the government is the main actor, which may help repair and/or bring changes to the situation considered "undesirable": sentence, plea bargain, and prison conditions.

CHAPTER SIX

NOTIONS ABOUT FEMALE CRIMINALITY

Previous chapters, in accordance with a structural guideline, extrapolated items from numerous mass media and popular culture sources on the Homolka case and this subsequently led to the unveiling of certain patterns of coverage. This chapter encompasses the findings and interpretation of these patterns generated. Discussed will be the ideas mass media and popular culture sources through the Homolka case advanced about women and crime and this for the purpose of displaying what ideas shape our understanding of female criminality. This chapter contains subheadings which correspond to the notions about women, and crimes that have been unmasked and one, which will be explored. The particular notions advanced in mass media and popular culture reports include the idea that female criminals are often helpless and compliant, that women are sometimes held responsible but not necessarily accountable, that men are far worse than women, that female criminality may still be a sickness, that some female criminals display features which bear a resemblance to those of a monster, and lastly there is a need to acknowledge that not all crimes committed by female offenders are necessarily anomalous.

Notion of helplessness

An apparent notion advanced in the narratives is that female offenders often find themselves in awkward situations predisposing them as such to feeling helpless. One source promoted the idea that Homolka was indeed helpless when quoting a psychologist,

“She [Homolka] knew what was happening but she felt totally helpless and unable to act in her own self-defence or in anyone else’s defence.

She was in my opinion paralysed by fear and in that state she became obedient and self-serving.” Homolka, he said, is a “passive, non-violent person” who even in her extremity could not attack Bernardo in a “final attempt to protect herself from what seemed certain death.”(Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 373). [sic]

This passage, besides promoting the idea that Karla was helpless, also sponsored the idea that Homolka featured an invariable incapacity to assume any responsibility for the situation in which she found herself.

Notion of compliance and victimhood

The idea that female criminals are more often than not “compliant victims” is another notion transpiring reports on the Homolka case (Pearson, 1995: 2). The belief that female offenders are not instigators of crimes but rather compliant victims, explains Pearson, is perpetuated by a failure on the part of feminists to “...confront female aggression” (1995: 2). While quoting Joyce Carol Oates, Pearson highlights how ““most often, [women] are merely the distaff half of a murderous couple whose brain-power is supplied by the man””(1995: 2). The latter passage suggests that feminists have not yet come to terms with the idea that “neither men nor women are exempt from killing...”(Farrell, 1993:255). To demonstrate how narratives may at times promote the idea that female offenders are often motivated by men, Burnside and Cairns reported,

Soon Paul told Karla that he wanted her to be the aggressor, to initiate their sexual activity, not just respond. Determined to please Paul in every way, Karla said she began sending him suggestive letters and cards (1995: 405).

The above passage clearly points to the idea that Karla may not necessarily have participated in the perpetuation of some unspeakable crimes against Tammy, Kristen and Leslie if it were not for her estranged husband Paul Bernardo.

Another passage taken from an article written by Blatchford further promoted the idea that Karla was a compliant victim when quoting a psychiatrist stating, Homolka is

...a battered woman and the “compliant victim of a sexual sadist.” She was so young; she was so naïf. All these things her defenders said, almost invariably male, almost all of them adding, “she would have been all right if only she’d met the right guy.”(1999: A8).

Once again, this passage suggests that Bernardo was responsible for having enticed Karla to commit criminal offences. The narrative clearly promoted the idea that Karla on her own, never would have contemplated such actions.

Karla was further depicted as a compliant victim in a report, which stated “Ms. Homolka insisted she did everything Mr. Bernardo ordered her to do—including luring Kristen into their car, guarding victims with a mallet and assaulting one of them with a bottle”(?)2000:A3). The passage nicely captured the extent of her subservient nature. However, it did not render clear whether a failure to comply would have necessarily triggered victimization. Still some narratives promoted the idea that Karla Homolka was subservient namely because she too happened to be one of his victims. To support this assertion, Burnside and Cairns popular culture narratives reiterated an argument made by Karla,

“I would be on my hands and knees with the collar around my throat and he would be pulling it while he had intercourse with me. It was tight. Sometimes I had to ask him to let up because I couldn’t breathe,” she said. She explained that he would climax in this position, whereas he wouldn’t in others. For Karla, the bizarre sex twists were simply part of maintaining the most important thing in her life—her relationship with Paul. Whatever he needed or wanted, she fulfilled” (Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 409).

The above segment, although it noted that Karla was submissive and displayed some victim-like features, avoided speculating that she obeyed in fear of being victimized. In

other words, Burnside and Cairns appear to want to suggest that Karla complied with her estranged husband's request namely because she feared that a lack of subordination would be considered unsuitable and he would as a result terminate the relationship.

The review of narratives, which noted that Karla was a compliant victim, further seemed to endorse the commonly held belief that "violence...serial or sex murder, like fetishism, is a perversion of male intelligence" (1994: 55). Yet, the fact that Karla was indeed involved in the crimes committed against Tammy, Leslie and Kristen which led to their untimely death speaks volume about the need whenever discussing criminality to "...reject entirely the myth of female superiority"...We are inherently capable; we can be as venal and vicious as men. The bottom line, the very bottom line, is that there is nothing innately superior or moral or better about women..."(Blatchford, 1996: 2).

Most narratives reviewed thus far clearly "...styled [Homolka] as the natural victim of a man destined to kill..." (Biressi, 2001: 135). There were some narratives, however, which sought to digress from the "network of dominant discourses, which aligns women with vulnerability and victimhood" and promote the idea that Homolka is nothing short of 'culpable of her own fate' (Biressi, 2001: 136). To support this assertion, Burnside and Cairns reiterated a point made by Rosen—Crown Prosecutor at Bernardo's trial—during Homolka's cross-examination,

"You're living with someone you hate, and who is talking about abducting a girl right off the street, and yet you don't rush into the police station and say, "I'm living with a maniac and you've got to stop him before somebody else gets hurt'?" "No," Karla replied. Untypically, she offered no further explanation (1995: 501)

The above passage suggests that the circumstances Homolka found herself in supplied her with both a legitimate excuse for her participation in the crime committed against her sister, as well, as a legitimate reason to end the relationship with Bernardo.

There is yet another narrative which sought to promote the idea that Homolka was the one solely responsible for her ordeal when arguing,

By her very actions, Karla Homolka proved true all of Paul Bernardo's twisted beliefs about himself and women. Paul Bernardo thought he was the king, and Karla licked his feet and offered up her sister as proof that he was. Paul Bernardo believed that women were bitches, sluts, whores, and Karla Homolka told him over and over again that she was just that (1995:559).

The above passage seemingly sought to promote the idea that Karla has no one else but herself to blame for the relationship she maintain with Bernardo and the sordid crimes that were born out of that liaison.

Notion of responsibility and accountability

The review of narratives, about the Homolka case, unveiled the presence of some sources, which sought to "...contradict the popular idea that extreme violence is an exclusively male preserve" (Wittmeier, 1999: 39). Williams narratives achieved in doing so when noting,

En ce qui concernait les meurtres de Leslie Mahaffy et Kristen French... Karla mettait la faute sur Paul, et Paul sans doute accuserait Karla. Des preuves troublantes semblaient cependant indiquer que c'est lui [Bernardo] qui pourrait avoir raison. Le cadavre de Leslie Mahaffy présentait des ecchymoses symétriques dans le dos, qui pouvaient correspondre aux genoux d'une personne de la taille de Karla pesant fortement pour écraser et étouffer la victime pendant son sommeil. Quant à Kristen French, elle avait aspiré du sang jusque dans ses poumons, preuve qu'elle avait été frappée violemment au visage et sur la bouche. Dans ses nombreuses déclarations à la police en vue du procès de Bernardo, Karla ne mentionna jamais que son mari avait frappé Kristen au visage. Sur les épaules, dans le dos et sur le côté de la tête, oui, mais jamais sur le visage ou la bouche... Lors du contre-interrogatoire à la barre des témoins au procès de Bernardo, en 1995,

Karla ne put fournir d'explications valables pour les observations faites par l'équipe médico-légale. Les ecchymoses symétriques dans le dos de Leslie Mahaffy et le sang aspiré dans les poumons de Kristen French demeurent donc, encore aujourd'hui, des énigmes irrésolues" (Williams, 2002: 187-188).

This passage provided some indication that Karla might have caused the death of both Leslie and Kristen. Williams stresses that an unwillingness to consider that a woman might have been responsible for the death of two individuals inhibited anyone from taking on the task of exploring the causes of the deaths more closely.

Another narrative sought to promote the idea that a capacity to abduct and assault is not an "exclusively male preserve" (Wittemeir, 1999:39). To support this assertion, Williams provided a reiteration of Karla's statement,

« Il aimait les grandes brunes car c'était l'opposé de moi. Il les aimait vierges aussi... » C'était faux. En réalité, Bernardo préférait les blondes. C'est d'ailleurs pourquoi il avait « forcé » Karla à s'abstenir de permanentés et à se teindre les cheveux en blond platine. La seule victime aux cheveux foncés était celle que Karla avait elle-même choisie: Kristen French (2002 :191).

The above passage made use of apparent inconsistencies in her claims to promote the idea that she might, despite what anyone thinks, have been far more involved in the crimes committed against three teenage girls than anyone could possibly imagine. The two passages featured in this section also illustrated that

... we live in a culture that can barely acknowledge robust female sexual desires, let alone the presence amongst us of female sexual predators. Nasty desires in women have to be the fault of a man. Or blame it... on mental illness, on depression, childhood abuse, on something. Just not on libido, nor taste for the thrill, nor on a will to power (Pearson, 1999: A14).

Women vs. Men

Running parallel to the common conviction that males commit most violent and sexual crimes is the idea that females seldom kill and so they are often considered far less bad than men. One reporter noted that media reports usually

...discussed Homolka's conduct only in terms of her ex-husband's, as if by dint of his brutality, she was less to blame in the deaths of her kid sister, Tammy (who died as Bernardo and Homolka sexually assaulted her, having earlier drugged her unconscious) and Leslie and Kristen (Blatchford, 1996: 2).

Many narratives clearly wanted to establish that Bernardo was the root of all evil and Karla was merely a compliant victim forced to partake in the commission of unspeakable crimes. An example of a narrative, which promoted this idea, highlights how the accused [Homolka] was charged with manslaughter and

...the maximum sentence is life in prison. The maximum sentence in law is reserved for worst offences committed by worst offenders. This accused [Homolka] has committed the worst crime. However, she is not the worst offender, for whom the maximum sentence is designed (Globe and Mail, 1993: A4).

Presupposed above is that Bernardo will obtain the worst sentence, namely because he will rightly be considered the worst offender in this case. Karla Homolka happened to be considered the lesser of the two evils, so to speak. Bernardo might have committed the great majority of the crimes; yet Karla participated and did little to stop him. Above all, this makes Karla an accomplice, willing or not.

Notion of female monstrosity

In an attempt at defying pre-established notions of victimhood and vulnerability some narratives promoted the idea that some female offenders are not victims but rather monsters. In advancing particular notion of female criminality it has been argued that

“media’s lurid presentation...” of women offenders, such as Karla Homolka, fail in their attempts to illuminate us about these women’s psyche, but at the same time, succeed in “...support[ing] traditional cultural ideas about female monstrosity” (Crosbie, 1994: 55). Indeed, some passages offered in the articles, which discusses Homolka provides support for this tendency. Describing Homolka as featuring unusual characteristics was a common practice in narratives, which sought to depict this accused as a monster. An example taken from Blatchford nicely captures this tendency when stressing,

She is what she was at 19, beyond the reach of all societal norms and moral codes, beyond the pull of family, beyond even the older sibling’s instinctive need to protect the younger one, the one who trails a few feet behind in mute adoration. Warm blood does not circulate in her small lush body (2000: A6).

In another effort to promote the idea that Homolka, like many female offenders, is nothing short of a monster one narrative specified, “Karla Homolka is a cold-blooded murderer indifferent to her “monstrous” crimes...”(Mofina and Aubry, 2001:A3). Abducting and sexually assaulting girls many people would agree are monstrous acts. To depict Karla as a monster, the narratives pointed out that she displayed enthusiasm at the thought of abducting and assaulting young women—like her sister. To support this assertion, Jenish reported that one tape made by Homolka and Bernardo, featured them

...having consensual sex...and she [Homolka] seems willing—even enthusiastic—participant in her future husband’s fantasies. She declares that she “loved” it when he had sex with Tammy, dons her dead sister’s clothes for Bernardo’s amusement—and suggests that they abduct other young virgins for the man she calls “the king”(1995:50)

There is another passage which retained the ability to stress that Homolka was nothing short of a monster when stressing,

... Paul and Karla recorded two bizarre sex clips in which Karla appears to play an assertive role. In the first tape...Karla describes various sex

acts she'd like to help Paul perform, including the kidnapping and raping of virgins. "If you want to do it fifty more times, we'll do it fifty times more," Karla coos to her betrothed. They could abduct young girls every weekend in the summer, Karla offers on tape, because it's easier to find virgins when it's warmer... The tape also reveals Karla describing how "proud" she was of Paul when he raped Tammy and how "horny" the event made her...her voice and her thoughts sound genuine. "I love it when you took her [Tammy's] virginity..."(Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 419-420)

The dialogue captures the essence of both Paul and Karla's fantasies, all the while promoting the idea that Karla was aroused by despicable thoughts and seemingly appears to be willing to go to any length—regardless of its monstrous nature—to see those fantasies put into action. Depicted is the idea that Karla is certainly, if indeed capable of committing those acts as proposed and becoming aroused by the sexual assault of her sister, nothing short of a despicable person—one fit to be labeled a monster. Another narrative, which promoted the idea that Homolka, was clearly deranged if not irrevocably wicked, is one, which reiterates a point made by an old friend of Karla recalling that she once said.

« Tu sais ce que j'aimerais faire? murmura Karla à l'oreille de Tracy un après-midi dans la cafeteria. Je voudrais dessiner des points partout sur le corps de quelqu'un, prendre un couteau et jouer a "relier les points". Je verserais ensuite du vinaigre partout. » (Williams, 2002 : 49).

The narrative illustrates the thoughts of someone who is clearly deranged.

Criminality or mental instability

A common facet of true crime narratives contends Biressi is a tendency to treat

...the criminal who committed spectacular or 'unnatural' acts or murder, rape or atrocity... [as a] favourite object of true crime's attention and scrutiny... from the eighteen and more particularly the nineteenth century onwards this criminal would have been identified variously as suffering from dementia, homicidal mania, moral insanity, diminished responsibility or a psychotic disorder" (Biressi, 2001: 63).

Reports about the Karla Homolka case are intriguing partly because they often sought to establish her as a criminal who suffered from mental problems. In doing so, they treated criminality in a fashion which is assumed to have long dissipated. An example of a source which sought to establish Homolka as suffering from some form of mental sickness, was provided by Williams, who reported Dr. Allan Long admitting,

Karla's MMPI¹⁵ [Minnesota multiphasic personality inventory] profile was characteristic of severely disturbed people... Karla's score was "814362*79'0-/5#.L#F"K". These kinds of people, Karla's kind of people—people who score "814362*79'0-/5#.L#F"K"—harbor feelings of hostility and aggression but are unable to express them. "They feel socially inadequate, especially around member of the opposite sex... They lack trust in other people, keeping them at a distance and feeling generally isolated and alienated." People with Karla's MMPI score are most often diagnosed as schizophrenic... They are people who respond as Karla did, tending to be unhappy and depressed and they "have a flattened affect"... Neither Dr. Long nor Dr. Arndt thought Karla was schizophrenic. In their view, she was hardly "socially inadequate." She did harbor "feelings of hostility and aggression," but she was more than able to express them. Karla seemed to be nothing like her MMPI profile (1996:452)

The narrative further promoted the idea that several diagnoses are often important to stress. In an attempt to illustrate the common tendency amongst narratives to dwell on the psychological profile of criminals Williams offered the opinion of three doctors whose task was to unmask what might have propelled Karla to participate in the crime against young women. (Williams, 1996: 461). To this effect, Williams points out that that Dr. Arndt in an attempt at enticing another doctor—Dr. Malcolm—to evaluate Homolka came up with

...the idea that once Tammy was done, the rest became automatic... "You see, once she was an accomplice, it didn't make any difference what happened afterwards... You see, she had to go on—so that is the one thing I was looking for—the hook... The hook? It was Tammy..."

¹⁵ Williams asserts that the MMPI test is "the most important. It established the benchmark against which all other results would be measured"(1996:451)

That's the argument that I proposed—and that's what got our Dr. Malcolm on line—because he was looking for how come that all of these various things happened —where is this lady coming of? What is this woman?... The doctors [all] agreed that Karla was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, dysthymia or “reactive” depression and alexithymia, which literally means “no words for mood.” The condition is “typified by difficulty recognizing and verbalizing feelings, a paucity of fantasy life and speech and thought that are concrete and closely tied to external event.” (1996:461)

The above passage clearly displayed the importance attributed to the psyche of the criminal in attempts at making sense of the actions undertaken by him/her. Indeed, psychological evaluations are a component of true crime narratives.

Most such narratives tend to promote the idea that most criminals invariably manifest a deranged psyche. One narrative, however, failed to follow through with the commonly established trend. (Biressi, 2001: 64). The narrative alternatively sought to promote the idea that Homolka may not have been suffering from any disorder, after all, when noting,

The crucial question, then, is whether Karla Homolka sold her soul for the promise of that Cap Cod home, the handsome husband, and the rottweiler puppy; whether that dream was worthy anything, even the deaths of three young girls, one of whom was her sister. It's a notion, which suggests mental illness. Yet, when one considers her character at age seventeen, prior to meeting Paul, Karla does not even register a trickle on either the Antisocial Personality Disorder criteria of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist scale (Burnside and Cairns, 1995: 559).

Most narratives, with the exception of one, incorporated a discussion of a psychiatric evaluation performed onto Karla and this has come to demonstrate that discourses surrounding women and mental health are still very present.

Homolka is not an anomaly

This review of mass media and popular culture sources revealed that numerous sources promoted the idea that Karla is certainly bizarre and arguably one of a kind. An

effort vested into constructing Karla in such fashion, argues Crosbie, is a legitimate practice. To support this assertion, she claims “the impulse to compose someone like Karla Homolka as an anomaly is understandable...”(1994: 57). Notwithstanding the legitimacy of such claim, Crosbie notes it is equally important to acknowledge that Homolka, “...is but one of a number of women who have participated in nightmarish, sexually sadistic *folies à deux*¹⁶ “(Crosbie, 1994: 57). Narratives which explored the Homolka case seemingly attempted to highlight the prevalence of this idea while illustrating how Karla and Paul might have had a connection which enables them to be fitted into the above mentioned category. To demonstrate how some narratives sought to promote the idea that Bernardo and Homolka appear to have perpetuated nothing but a “*folies à deux*”, Burnside and Cairns argues

...one gets the feeling that Paul and Karla together formed an incomparable bond, becoming more than their individual parts would have indicated. If Paul Bernardo was a fire of evil and hatred, then Karla Homolka seemed to be the accelerant that fanned the fire to an even greater frenzy (1995: 559).

In an attempt to provide an additional example of a narrative which acknowledge the nature of their crimes as nothing short of “*une folies a deux*” Williams notes,

Paul parlait à Karla des jeunes vierges qu’il aimerait violer et Karla l’encourageait à vivre ses fantasmes. Depuis le tout début de leur relation jusqu’au moment de leur arrestation, Karla fut l’ange maudit qui inspira Paul Bernardo à violer au moins dix-neuf femmes, toutes des inconnues. Selon le témoignage de Paul, aucune femme n’a été tuée à la suite de ces viols. Aucune ne mourut quand il agissait seul... (Williams, 2002 : 406).

Promoted in the above passage is the connection between Karla and Paul. Without Paul, Karla would not have, she claims, participated in the crimes committed against Tammy,

¹⁶ Williams admits that the concept known as “*folie à deux*” has long existed. And in quoting A.A. Brill specifies, “...que la folie à deux ou « double démente » apparaît lorsque « des patients paranoïdes ou paranoïaques arrivent non seulement à faire entrer leurs proches dans leur délire, mais aussi à les infecter au point où celui qui est nouvellement atteint se met à nourrir ce même délire...”(2002 : 50)

Leslie and Kristen. Without Karla, Paul would not have, he claims, been found guilty of having taken the life of anyone of his sexual assault victims. It seems clear that they had a connection one, which without fail imposed a deadly spell on the young women they set eyes on. They acted together.

Chapter summary

This chapter showed that a review of the Homolka case revealed that media workers were provided with “a compelling occasion” to advance particular ideas about female criminality (Halkias, 1999:289). This chapter showed how ideas, which have subsisted in the literature that is new and old about female criminality, have not yet dissipated. The notions that female criminals find themselves in a helpless predisposition and simply comply with what is asked of them, barely responsible are thoughts that have, time and again, been stressed and transcended the coverage of the Homolka case. This chapter demonstrated how the mass media and popular culture featured a gender comparison; promote the idea that female criminality is still associated with mental illness and monstrosity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

There was a time when direct experience with violent crime largely determined the degree to which a person felt the effects of such crime; today, however, this is not longer necessarily the case. Through the media we are increasingly exposed to information about violent crime that we are unlikely to experience personally (Surette, 1997:197). As a result the effects of violent crimes are felt by an even greater number of people. As, "...accounts of violent crimes receive far greater attention in the media...the overall effect is to increase the sensitivity of the public to such violence"(Shaw and Dubois, 1995).

This analysis on the framing of the Homolka case has shown that mass media and popular culture sources go beyond informing and sensitizing the public to incidents of violent crimes involving a female offender; it produces particular understandings of female criminality.

The methodological framework selected to uncover those understanding of female criminality was a "qualitative textual analysis emphasizing an in depth reading of stories about..." Karla Homolka and the approach selected was a "critical approach" (Steeves, 1997: 22). Both the method and perspective helped establish the most dominant ideas about women and crime mass media and popular culture sources in narrating the Homolka case put forth in their attempts at producing a particular understanding of female criminality.

Carrying out a representative narrative analysis of mass media and popular culture coverage of a criminal case involving a female offender necessitated some

structure. And as such I constructed a guideline specifying which elements from the narratives needed to be extrapolated in order to detect dominant patterns of coverage, which contained within themselves ideas about women and crime that produce a particular understanding of female criminality. The guideline specified a need to identify how sources provided details about the case, what descriptors were used to characterize Homolka and other female offender referred to in the narrative, how the narrative chose to characterize Karla Homolka's relationship to Paul Bernardo and the victims, assess whether the narrative made reference to past media trials and past accused, notice whether media workers employed the problem frame in structuring their discussion of the Homolka case and if so, what aspect of the case did they establish as problematic.

Before presenting the analysis of mass media and popular culture sources, I provided an overview of the Homolka case. The information about the Homolka case contained within the review were drawn from Stephen Williams' Invisible Darkness: The Horrifying Case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka and the Honorable Justice Patrick T. Galligan's Report to the Attorney General of Ontario on Certain Matters Relating to Karla Homolka. In seeking to make sense out of a wide range of details about the Homolka case, I am conscious that I constructed my own narrative. However, I was not striving to construct "a truth" about the case but instead aimed to offer a baseline for understanding the case.

This analysis of mass media and popular culture narratives established the presence of four patterns of coverage. The first pattern was the characterization of Karla Homolka through the uses specific descriptors. Some sources sought to characterize

Homolka as the worst female criminal and so they selected descriptors such as *Canada's most notorious female prisoner*, and the *Country's most notorious female killer*, while sources which aimed to characterize Homolka in relation to other criminals selected descriptors such as *One of Canada's most notorious killers*. Moreover, sources, which sought to characterize Homolka as a sexually motivated predator, as oppose to simply a murderer, selected descriptors such as *sex killer* and *serial sex offender*. Finally, it is clear that some narrative sought to characterize Homolka as possessing traits which are atypical of criminals and as such they selected descriptors such as *pretty middle-class girl, an attractive 23-year-old, woman, blond and beaming*, while at the same some tried to ascertain that she possessed traits which may be stereotypically associated with criminality, their choice of descriptors in such case included, Homolka is *indifferent, conniving and deceitful, egocentric if not narcissistic, manipulative, and possesses a psyche too deranged*.

The second pattern of coverage unveiled pertains to the way media workers characterized Homolka's relationship with Bernardo. Readings on the Homolka case characterized the relationship as one, which fostered psychological, verbal and physical abuse, which led Karla to become Paul's subservient accomplice. Reviewing how mass media and popular culture sources established and characterized the relationship Homolka maintained with Bernardo has also shown how that the media further questioned her allegations of abuse by means of claiming that the reasons why she remained with Bernardo were invariably preposterous.

The third pattern of coverage relate to the way law enforcers were perceived has having handled the Mahaffy/French murder investigation. The analysis has shown that

media workers were highly critical of the law enforcers' efforts and expertise and tended to stress that the officers' incompetence, which proved detrimental to the investigation, stemmed from an adherence to stereotypes about criminals. The two stereotypes which were found to have hindered the investigation were that women are not apt to assault let alone kill and that criminals display unusual features which makes them stand out and unable to evade detection.

The fourth pattern of coverage uncovered pertains to the media use of the problem frame to structure some of their narratives. This analysis has shown that the Homolka case's judicial proceedings: sentence, plea bargain and prison order were problematize by various media sources. In so doing, some sources stressed that Karla's twelve-year sentence, the resolution agreement afforded to her by the Crown and the liberal prison order she benefited from, all constitute something undesirable. In an attempt at sensitising people to the extent to which these three features ought to be considered problematic—as such undesirable—the sources further stressed that many people are affected, but the people left most affected by the injudiciousness of the criminal justice system are the victims' families. Finally, this analysis has shown that media workers laid emphasis on the fact that the sentence, plea bargain and prison order are problematic but remain amendable through the establishment of punitive laws, which is expected to be implemented by the government. Laws, which would essentially lengthen sentences, impose limits on the Crown's discretionary powers to offer plea bargains and ensure that the primary function of prison remains punishment.

The guideline specified other items, similar to these, that should have been extrapolated from the various sources. Those items included, descriptors used to

characterize other criminals, characterization of Homolka's relationship with the victims, information pertaining to past media trials and accused and mention of extra legal facts. Unfortunately, those elements were not produced by the sources. The structural basis of this guideline was previous media analysis emphasizing readings of stories, which, differed in style and content. Failure to uncover every item as specified in the guideline did not pose a problem. In fact, the items that were extrapolated from the narratives allowed me to uncover dominant patterns of coverage and this allowed for the detections of notions about female criminality that media sources promote in an effort at producing a particular understanding of female criminality.

The analysis undertaken here unravelled the subtle and complex ways in which notions about women and crime are articulated in mass media and popular culture narratives. The ideas about women and crime that were detected from the analysis are essentially two-dimensional. In the first instance, we have the articulation of ideas, such as women are invariably gentle and passive and do not resort to violence out of self-interest. Narratives, which these types of ideas about female criminality, stressed that the root cause of Karla's involvement in the crimes committed against Tammy, Leslie and Kristen was the abusive relationship she maintained with Paul Bernardo. The relationship's dynamic it was argued rendered her helpless and as such unable to resist becoming Bernardo's subservient accomplices. At last, the analysis revealed that mass media and popular culture narratives seek to demonstrate that men and women are not equally predisposed to violence and so these sources advance the idea that men are more violent and as such they pose a far greater than women. In the second instance, we have the articulation of ideas such as women have the potential to be violent and women are

nowhere near exempt from killing (Farrell, 1993: 255; Shaw and Dubois, 1995). This analysis of mass media and popular culture sources has shown that some narratives in attempts at challenging the stereotypical belief that women by virtue of their nature do not commit violent offence put forth ideas, which remains stereotypical. For instance, the analysis has demonstrated that some narratives maintained that Karla was a monster namely because she proved amply capable of assaulting Tammy, Leslie, and Kristen. Further, the analysis has shown that stereotyping by the "...criminal justice continues to exist with regards to women and mental health" and so another idea promoted is that women who commit violent crimes cannot be held responsible for their actions because it is likely they are mentally unstable (John Howard, 2001)

Reviewing how mass media and popular culture sources employed the problem frame in constructing and structuring some of their narratives was not helpful in detecting the advancement of particular notions about women and crime. Nevertheless, analyzing sources, which employed this method, remains valuable in that it provided an advantageous perspective by which to view a criminal case involving a female offender. The representation of the case from the victim's family perspective personalized the crime committed by Homolka and as such, it fostered greater feeling of 'sympathy' for the victims and their family (Melossi, 2000). As well, exploring how journalist and reporters employed the problem frame has shown how the media achieve in their attempts at problematizing some of the criminal justice system's procedures. But most importantly, it may not have been helpful in establishing notions about women and crime which may produce an understanding of female criminality yet it has certainly

been useful in detecting notions which arguably produce a particular understanding of the criminal justice system as a whole.

An in-depth reading and analysis of stories pertaining to the Homolka case have shown that mass media and popular culture sources offered a representation of Karla Homolka, which is paradoxical, as some sources sought to depict her as a compliant victim, other sources portrayed her as a monster; devoid of a conscience. This study in having established this dualistic representation of Karla Homolka has succeeded in demonstrating how she remains some kind of an enigmatic figure. But most importantly, this dualistic representation has come to help determine upon which basis the media produce particular understandings of female criminality. This study has unmasked two separate, but equally, conspicuous understandings of female criminality. In the first instance, we are encouraged to understand that women who find themselves in extraordinarily violent circumstances feel generally helpless and compelled to adopt violent behaviors and engage in criminal activities. We are at the same time, however, encouraged to understand that women who commit crimes are inherently evil and nothing short of indifferent to the pains inflicted upon others. The first understanding of female criminality produced by mass media and popular culture is one which is based upon the key cultural assumption that aggression and or violent behavior are not a natural female responses. The analysis has shown that some sources in an effort to digress from the network of dominant stereotypical ideas, ones which stress that women are devoid of any criminal abilities and intents, have put forth ideas about women and crime which are equally stereotypical. As such, these sources have come to produce an understanding of female criminality, which is based upon the assumption that women

who perpetuate crimes must be evil, callous and mad. While the intention here has by no means been to discredit the value of media coverage of criminal cases involving a female offender my concern has been with the ways in which female criminality is constructed and simultaneously understood. And this study has shown that what we are ultimately left with, is a dichotomy in which female criminals may be seen only either as innocent victims or as contemptuous outlaws.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF KARLA HOMOLKA STORIES ANALYZED

<i>Headlines</i>	<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
<u><i>Globe and Mail</i></u>			
Homolka found guilty	Gay Abbate	7/7/93	A1-A2
Homolka doesn't fit category of worst offender, Kovacs says	N/A	7/7/93	A4
Odds against granting earliest parole for Homolka	N/A	7/12/93	A4
Homolka to reveal details, court told	Kirk Makin	4/6/95	A4
Bernardo felt 'omnipotent' and gleeful, Homolka testifies	Kirk Makin	6/29/95	A6
Killing timed for alibi, Homolka says	Kirk Makin	6/28/95	A4
Homolka reveals plea bargain	Kirk Makin	6/30/95	A1-A8
Homolka's deal with Crown likely to stick	Sean Fine	7/1/95	A9
Homolka not home free, some suggest	Kirk Makin	11/7/95	A1-A14
Homolka bid for B.C. move rejected	Henry Hess	6/20/96	A1-A18
Outcry has Homolka 'sad'	Ingrid Peritz Erin Anderssen	11/4/99	A1-A7
Seeing Karla for what she is	Stephen Williams	11/4/99	A23
Homolka gives up lawsuit over leaving jail	Sean Fine	11/19/99	A22
Canadians in no mood to show any leniency toward Homolka	Sean Fine	11/20/99	A7
Homolka bid for privacy cites safety fears	John Saunders	11/27/99	A1-A8
Homolka faces transfer for psychiatric test	Kirk Makin	9/28/00	A1-A8
Homolka's bid to halt transfer shot down	Tu Thanh Ha	10/7/00	A7

<i>Headlines</i>	<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
Homolka to police: 'He pretty much had me under his thumb	N/A	4/12/00	A7
Homolka transcripts tell a chilling tale	Kirk Makin	4/27/00	A3
Homolka wants out of Canada	Ingrid Peritz	1/04/01	A1-A6
Homolka likely to find nation of refuge	Estanislao Oziewicz	1/05/01	A1-A4
Homolka judged too risky to release	Colin Freeze Ingrid Peritz	3/9/01	A1-A19
Homolka denied parole again	Estanislao Oziewicz	3/14/02	A12
<i>National Post</i>			
Homolka sues Ottawa for violating her rights	Janice Tibbetts	11/03/99	A1-A8
Homolka's request is both shocking and unsurprising	Christie Blatchford	11/03/99	A8
Attorney-general refuses to revoke Homolka's plea bargain	Andrea Baillie	4/22/00	A4
Homolka transfer rattles patients	Robert Remington	10/04/00	A8
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<u>Deadly Innocence</u>	Scott Burnside Alan Cairns	New York: Warner Books, 1995
<u>Invisible Darkness: The Horrible Case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka.</u>	Stephen Williams	Toronto: McArthur & Company, 1996
<u>Karla: Le pacte avec le Diable.</u>	Stephen Williams	Montreal: Trait D'Union, 2002