

WHEN THE VICTIM IS "DEVIANT":
AN ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ON VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE, 1975-1993

by

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B.A. (Hons.), Simon Fraser University, 1992

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the School of Criminology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

November 1996

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When the Victim is "Deviant": An Analysis of Newspaper

Articles on Violence Against Women Who Prostitute,

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An Analysis Of Newspaper Articles
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ABSTRACT

The news media are important sources of knowledge. The manner in which the news media describe violence against women who prostitute can influence how government representatives, the police, and the community come to comprehend and respond to this problem.

This thesis examines how two newspapers, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* represent women who prostitute as the victims of violence in light of their “deviant” status. The content analysis includes news articles in *The Vancouver Sun* from 1975 to 1993 that mention prostitutes and/or prostitution related items. The findings reveal an increase in the volume of reporting on violence against women who prostitute, especially since 1985. I canvass several explanations as to why this trend in reporting occurred, such as the news media creation of a paper crime wave, the overrepresentation of the actual numbers of crimes due to their newsworthiness, and an increase in the reported numbers of crimes. A review of research on violence against women who prostitute leads me to conclude that *The Vancouver Sun's* increased coverage of murders and other violent crimes against women who prostitute was incident driven.

The discourse in *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* news articles from 1984 to 1993 about violence against women who prostitute were then analyzed. The ideological dimensions of news-making are revealed by examining the types of news sources utilized by journalists and why; how journalists construct a story about the sexual assault of a woman who prostitutes; and how the news media cover a prostitute versus a non-prostitute murder case differently. In deconstructing discourses in the news articles about violence against women who prostitute I found an

ideological framework that allowed journalists to blame the victim, dehumanize the victim, perpetuate the stigmatization of women who prostitute, and fail to discuss the gendered nature of violence against those women. Journalists tended to downplay both the seriousness of and the increase in violence against women who prostitute. I conclude that the victim's ascribed moral and social status greatly affects the news media's portrayal of a crime story. Yet I also argue that this preferred reading exists in a way that cultivates resistance to it.

DEDICATION

For my best friend and partner John Shewfelt.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who assisted me, either directly or indirectly, with this thesis: Sophie Mason, for her ongoing friendship; Cheryl Heinzl, Charlotte French, Sophie Dunbar, Grace Wolkosky and Barbara Thorburn for their support and academic input; everyone else at Academic Resources/Financial Assistance/Registrar's Office for always taking interest in my thesis topic; my family (Mom, Dad, Jim, June, Fred, Heather, Gord, Chris and the whole family clan back in Ontario); Geordon for the fun summer break away from my thesis work; Elizabeth Shields and Timothy Harrison for their continued friendship and insightful comments; Charles Veitch, Tiffany LaPierre, Jeff Purdie, Deirdre O'Sullivan-Goris, Linnea Doyle, Linda Antonuik, (in memory of) Jennifer Williams, and the rest of the "Lunch Bunch" gang whose friendships I continue to cherish; Professor Robert Menzies for his insightful comments on a preliminary draft of Chapter Four; Professors Joan Brockman, Dorothy Chunn, Brian Burtch and Doug Cousineau for enriching my undergraduate curriculum; Professor Robert Gordon (no relation!) for awakening my appetite to learn and for reminding me that 'An honest tale speeds best being plainly told'; and Kimberly Daum for her insights into the world of journalism.

Special thanks to Laura Fraser, who I am indebted to for all her hard work in collecting the news articles since 1985 and for her statistical assistance. I would also like to thank all of the students who, under the SFU work study program, also assisted in the collection of the news articles.

Special thanks also to my partner John Shewfelt for always supporting me and for all his thoughtful editing of my thesis.

I would also like to thank Professor Karlene Faith for her ongoing friendship, and support and for her academic insights into this thesis.

Finally, my sincere thanks to Professor John Lowman for being such a great mentor and friend and for his ongoing insights and wisdom in bringing this thesis to its final stage. It was a pleasure to work with you, John.

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CHAPTER 1

THE MEDIA AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE¹

We can best understand social phenomena by analyzing how knowledge is constructed and communicated. The media function as crucial sites for the construction and dissemination of what is accepted or refuted as knowledge. In this thesis I examine how *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*² from 1975 to 1993 represent violence against women identified as prostitutes. In the process I show how the prostitute's "deviant" status contextualizes the way journalists represent her as a victim of violence.

Deviance is a social construction. Social constructs are "interpretations which *men* collaboratively give to the objects and events around them" (emphasis added) (Rock, 1973, p. 19). According to Becker (1963), "...deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'" (cited in Rock, 1973, p. 22). In Canada, women who communicate for the sale of sexual services are criminally stigmatized. It is noteworthy that the act of prostitution *per se* is not criminalized, but virtually everything surrounding it is. Women who prostitute are told that they can "do it" but that they cannot communicate for the sale of such

¹ I use the word "women" to also include youth and teenagers. I use the phrase "women who prostitute" because of my commitment throughout this thesis to remind the reader that these victims are women and not just prostitutes. However, for grammatical reasons there may be times that warrant the use of the word prostitutes instead of the preferred women who prostitute.

² Hereafter referred to as the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province*.

services “in public” (*Criminal Code*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46, s. 213(1)); that their managers, partners or spouses cannot live on the avails of prostitution (s. 212(1)(j)); and that they cannot use any “place” to engage in prostitution on a regular basis (s. 210(1)).

Women who prostitute are labeled deviant not only because much of their behaviour is deemed illegal but because, historically, these women have been stigmatized because they reject their “natural” role as mothers and wives. A prostitute “represented the obstacles to the spread of the nuclear family” because she was the “autonomous working woman, free of moralistic sexual control and thus beyond the control of patriarchy” (Roberts, 1992, p. 246). Today, the illegalities surrounding prostitution ensure the continuation of the widespread abhorrence for such behaviour.

It is this backdrop that makes the examination of the victimization of women who prostitute so interesting. I examine how the prostitute’s perceived moral and social status affects the media’s construction of a story when she is victimized. Most of our knowledge about crime does not come from personal experience but from media accounts. It has become almost trite to say that the media is obsessed with crime reporting. Analyses of the media have revealed that crime is often the second most popular news category, with only government and politics ranking slightly higher (see for example, Surette, 1992 and Graber, 1979). Furthermore, Surette (1992, p. 32) found that crime was the largest subject matter covered on television entertainment shows.

The manner in which journalists report a criminal event can shape how readers make sense of deviancy and victimization. But in turn, news media representations are influenced by various key players, such as the police, judiciary, academics, politicians and the receivers or consumers of

the messages. The social construction of “realities” and the acknowledgment that the media engages in and is influenced by this construction forms the backdrop for this thesis.

Surette poignantly argues that the importance of studying the media lies in the recognition that we all participate in the social construction of reality. Therefore,

each individual constructs a social reality based upon interaction with an objective reality (the physical world) and information received from a culture’s symbolic reality (language, art, the media) to create a subjective reality that directs his or her social behavior...The mass media has evolved...to become the dominant player in the symbolic reality realm and, by default, in the subjective reality construction process.

(Surette, 1984, p. 133)

Our response to violence against women is greatly influenced by the media’s portrayal of crime. Calls for legal reform or mobilization of the criminal justice system against a particular behaviour often depend on whether it is constructed by the media as a “social problem.” But individuals outside the media can also influence what events journalists perceive to be social problems. This is evident in the 1980s public awareness campaign by feminists and various women’s groups who used the media as a forum for voicing their concerns about spousal abuse: “how news is constructed...may arouse strong public sentiments and impact public policy” (Wasserman and Stack, 1994, p. 70). But the opposite may also be true: the manner in which the media constructs crime may arouse little public concern and may neutralize public policy.

It is important not to hypostatize the media. The media are not separate from society but operate within it. The media are composed of people who take actual events and reconstruct them into news stories. Individuals writing news stories are influenced by their own biases, beliefs,

values etc., as am I. This is another important component influencing the theoretical core of my thesis. I am very much a part of this work. My biases, beliefs and values greatly shape the construction of this thesis, an issue taken up in the section entitled “A Qualitative Analysis of Discourse.”

Thesis Outline

Discourses are “historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth — what is possible to speak of at a given moment” (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p. 19). The analysis of discourse entails reading a text as “contextual, contingent and socially constructed” (Young, 1990, p. 158). Meaning is not “forever present in the text” but is “always-already negotiated” (Young, 1990, p. 158).

According to Foucault, “discourse is really only an activity, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second and exchange in the third” (1972, p. 228). To study newspaper articles as discourse “we must not imagine some unsaid thing, or an unthought, floating about the world, interlacing with all its forms and events” (Foucault, 1972, p. 229). Instead discourse should “be treated as a discontinuous activity,” where its manifestations may or may not coincide with one another (Foucault, 1972, p. 229).

Discourse is “a violence that we do to things” (Foucault, 1972, p. 229). Recognizing that discourse is socially constructed points to the importance of understanding social context when studying the media. The analysis of discourse does not entail the quest for a hidden meaning, but instead the grounding of the discourse in its “external conditions of existence...for that which gives rise to the chance series of these events and fixes its limits” (Foucault, 1972, p. 229). According to Young, reading a

media text in context reveals its perpetuation of local “necessary truths to seduce and capture readers” (1990, p. 158). The exposing of such media techniques would not be possible if one were to adopt an exclusively positivistic approach to the analysis of newspaper articles. The methodological techniques of contextualization and searching for discontinuity in discourse all share the rejection of “meaning as forever present” (Young, 1990, p. 157), and a rejection of neo-positivistic epistemology.

Quantitative methods have dominated the study of crime news. Many studies examining the media’s reporting of crime focus on either: 1) the amount of crime news by measuring article space (e.g., Harris, 1932), and/or the total number of news articles (e.g., Swanson, 1955; Cohen, 1975; Ditton and Duffy, 1983); or 2) comparing the amount of crime news with that reported to the police (e.g., Hauge, 1965; Jones, 1976; Antunes and Hurley, 1977; Roshier, 1981; Sheley and Ashkins, 1981; Smith, 1984; Windhauser, Seiter and Winfree, 1990). Some studies have combined the two approaches (e.g., Davis, 1952).³ Recently, however, a few studies have shifted their focus away from a quantitative analysis of crime news to include an analysis of the prose of crime news articles (e.g., Humphries, 1981, Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991, and Benedict, 1992).

Like these latter studies, I examine both the volume and characteristics of reports on violence against women who prostitute (a

³ Although outside the subject parameters of this thesis there is a fourth type of media analysis which looks at the effect(s), if any, the media has on its readers and vice-versa (e.g., Hughes, 1987). For example, whether media reports on violence increases readers’ (or viewers’) fear of crime (e.g., Doob and MacDonald, 1979; Stroman and Seltzer, 1985; O’Keefe and Reid-Nash, 1987; Liska and Baccaglini, 1990).

quantitative content analysis) and the vocabulary with which journalists choose to characterize or signify prostitute victims.

In this thesis I treat the media as a complex social institution that engages hermeneutically and hegemonically in the construction of knowledge; I am cognizant of the political functions of the media and I recognize the relationships between the media's portrayal of violence against women who prostitute and the social control of women more generally. "A discourse seeks power" and this "quest is always historical" (Inglis, 1990, p. 108). Hence, "we need to do history" (Inglis, 1990, p. 108). In this spirit I want to understand how, over time, the media portrays violence against women who prostitute.

Understanding Violence Against Women Who Prostitute - Chapter 2

Before analyzing the media's depiction of violence against women who prostitute I summarize the history of the law concerning prostitution in Canada. The law is a codified system of sign-posts where changes mark past and contemporary attitudes about prostitution. Prostitution law in Canada has not remained constant over the period examined in this thesis. As discussed, the media reports these changes as well as reporting how the law affects the criminal justice response to prostitution.

In this chapter I also review research that provides valuable insight into the violence characterizing prostitution. This research assisted me in developing the content coding scheme and it guided my analysis of newspaper discourse.

The history of the law concerning prostitution in Canada and research on violence against women who prostitute forms a backdrop to

both the content and discursive analyses. The following sections review the methods of these integrated analyses.

The Content Analysis - Chapter 3

Journalists select an event, construct it as news and we can then analyze the content of those articles. Content analysis “uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Weber, 1990, p. 9). According to Weber (1990), there are several key aspects of content analysis: “Measurement” involves numerical coding of various aspects of the content of the text (p. 70) and the descriptive data yielded by measurement is an “indication” of the text themes (p. 73).

My content analysis includes articles, columns, letters to the editor, wire service clips, and open editorials in the *Vancouver Sun* from 1975 to 1993⁴ that mention prostitutes (or other applicable synonyms like “hooker”) and/or prostitution related items (e.g., solicitation or communication arrests and trials, nuisance injunctions, tricks or johns, prostitutes’ rights organizations such as the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes, residents’ rights associations such as the Concerned Citizens of the West End, etc.).⁵ This yielded a total of 1607 news articles about prostitution. I decided to code only the *Vancouver Sun* news articles in determining the overall news trends on prostitution⁶ after I had coded articles from both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* from 1985 to 1987

⁴ Articles from both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* since 1985 were collected by Laura Fraser who performed daily searches through the newspapers. Articles prior to 1985 were collected from mass searches of microfiche by various work-study students, under the supervision of Professor John Lowman.

⁵ Appendix I provides the content coding scheme.

⁶ However, the *Province* articles are separated into “violence” and “non-violence” based on the coding scheme in Appendix I.

and discovered a substantial correlation in their coverage of violence against women who prostitute. Over this three year sample period there were 342 articles about prostitution-related issues in the *Province*, including 57 on violence (16.7%); in the *Vancouver Sun* there were 365 articles including 50 on violence (13.7%). I also choose to content code only the *Vancouver Sun* articles because it was more manageable in the time I had to complete this thesis. The *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* differ, however, in their visual display and linguistic articulation of stories. Therefore, both papers are examined in the qualitative analysis of discourse (Chapter 4).

A literature search has revealed only two previous content analyses of violence against women who prostitute as depicted in the Canadian news. Lowman (1984) examined prostitution in five Vancouver daily newspapers (the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province*, and *Vancouver Courier*, *Star* and *West Ender*) from 1978 to 1983. In total there were only 8 articles on violence against women who prostitute (Lowman, 1984, p. 92). This study does not provide details about the types of violence or the perpetrators of that violence.

In another study, El Komos (1984) examined the *Vancouver Sun's* coverage (along with many other newspapers across Canada) of prostitution from 1978 to 1983. Identifying 22 different prostitution news themes, "violence" (which included murder, rape, or crimes related to drugs) ranked eleventh in terms of the number of times it was mentioned (El Komos, 1984, p. 30). No other details about the articles are provided.

In this thesis, the *Vancouver Sun* articles were coded for a comprehensive range of news themes. This coding is an elaboration of a descriptive study of violence against persons who prostitute (Lowman and

Fraser, 1995), part of which examined prostitution news themes. I worked as a research assistant on this component of the study. The procedure we adopted was to code and re-code the news articles to expand the capacity of the coding scheme to summarize content. The final coding scheme included 29 variables. We coded all articles about prostitution for up to three major news themes. There were no formal checks for inter-coder reliability; however, we often coded together in the same room which allowed for input from all three coders. In retrospect, there certainly is room for some differences in interpretation. Inter-coder reliability checks would have allowed for identification of these differences, had they occurred.

Articles that have as a news theme at least one of the following, “violence”, “law enforcement issues - violence”, “Green River”, “Green River links to Vancouver”, “outcry about violence against prostitutes”, “alcohol murders”, and “living on the avails/procuring”⁷, are further coded for the details, where available, surrounding the violent incidents: the number of incidents discussed in the article; the sex of the prostitute(s); the type of sex trade worker(s); the type of offender(s); the type of offence(s); whether a serial murderer was suspected by police; number of offenders; the location that the victim(s) was picked up in; the location of the offence(s); age of the victim(s); age of the offender(s); name of the victim(s); name of the offender(s); stage of the proceeding(s); the trial plea(s); the disposition(s); and the sentence(s).⁸

⁷ “Living on the avails/procuring” did not always involve violence. The involvement of force had to be present for an article about living on the avails to be classified as violence.

⁸ See Appendix I.

The category “offence type” contains *Criminal Code* offences: first and second degree murder (s. 231), manslaughter (s. 232), attempted murder (s. 239), assault (s. 265), assault with a weapon (s. 267), sexual assault (s. 271), kidnapping/forcible confinement (s. 279), robbery (s. 343), uttering threats (s. 264), living on the avails (s. 212), and procuring of both children/youth and adults (s. 212). The category “procurement of children” is differentiated from “general procurement” because the inherent vulnerability of children often introduces elements of coercion that are not always present in adult procurement.

“Other” offence codes include: “general”, “drug overdose”, “forced into prostitution”, and “harassment.” Articles were coded as “general” if one of the three news themes was a “general discussion of violence against prostitutes.” These articles were usually about violence against women who prostitute without articulating specific offence types. The “drug overdose” code helps to capture articles dealing with the often violent lifestyles associated with prostitution. Drugs, either as an escape or as a form of control, are present in the lives of some women who prostitute. We added “forced into prostitution” because several news articles cover cases of procurement involving violence or force. This form of violent procurement differs from cases of general procurement in which a would-be prostitute is lured into the trade by another person(s) with promises of financial gain. Finally, “harassment” represents incidents where some citizen rights groups attempt to drive prostitution out of their neighborhoods by harassing the women and/or the customers.

Information about victims, accused persons and offenders, when available, was also recorded, including the age and sex of the offenders and certain characteristics of the offence (e.g., the “stroll” the victim was

picked up in, the location of the offence, and the number of perpetrators). We also coded the stage of the criminal proceedings (from police investigation of a crime report through to the sentencing of an offender). When an article contained information about the trial and/or its outcome we also coded several key pieces of information, such as trial plea, disposition, and sentence.

Because my main interest was violence, I developed a general code to record whether violence was mentioned at all. Of the 1607 news articles coded, 493 mentioned (to varying degrees) violence against women who prostitute. Violence appeared as the main news theme in 236 (48%) of these articles. Almost half of the articles that contained information about violence against women who prostitute are dominated by this topic (as oppose to a casual mention of it).

The content analysis findings in Chapter 3 reveal an increase in the volume of articles on violence against women who prostitute especially since 1985. I canvas several explanations as to why this trend in reporting has occurred. First, I examine whether the increase is due in part or in whole to the media creation of a paper crime wave. Second, I inquire whether the increase in reporting on violence against women who prostitute is a result of the media's overrepresentation of violence because of its newsworthiness. Finally, I review research on the known murders of women who prostitute in Vancouver to determine whether a rise in the murder rate is affecting the *Vancouver Sun's* increased reporting of violence. As I will demonstrate, the first two explanations fall short but the third argument — that the increase in reporting is incident driven — is the most plausible explanation of dramatic increases in the number of articles mentioning violence against women who prostitute.

The content analysis was limited in various ways. Content analyses are restricted to what can be “quantified.” Consequently, coding is limited to less complex items that easily conform to predetermined categories. Quantifying can result in a “rather barren counting of repetition without adequate attention” to the quality of the content (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 51). Therefore, it was important for me to include as many categories as possible to help capture the article’s content. It also became imperative to supplement the quantitative analysis with a qualitative analysis of article content.

An Analysis of Discourses - Chapter 4

The shortcomings of quantitative content analysis demand an alternative yet complementary approach to the study of the media representation of violence against women who prostitute. This takes the form of an analysis of discourse on violence against women who prostitute, and involves deconstructing and then contextually reconstructing “things said” about this category of victims. There are several advantages to this approach. First, a qualitative analysis “allows for [the] deconstruction of the common-sense categories in the news” and the “discovery of anomalous and peculiar detail[s] of stories, and a focus on their significance” (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 73). Second, a qualitative analysis “reveals subtle aspects, including how an item is ‘wrapped’ with other items to create a theme and espouse an ideology...” (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 74). Finally, a longitudinal qualitative analysis “clarifies the ways in which news texts are part of human action and help to constitute it...[It] is especially attuned to how human expression articulates social order...” (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 74).

With these advantages in mind, I examine how a prostitute's "deviant" status contextualizes the way journalists represent her as a victim. What makes this thesis unique is its focus on the media's portrayal of the victimization of women who prostitute. With violence against street prostitutes rising in Vancouver⁹ the reporting of such incidents in the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* offer fruitful sources for analysis.

The analysis of discourse examines the "context and the condition of the text's existence as a social and discursive practice constituted by certain institutional frames and directed to bring about certain effects" (Young, 1990, p. 158). I wanted to allow the content of the texts to influence the methods adopted here. Yet I did not approach this research devoid of ideological or conceptual "baggage" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). As a white, non-prostitute, female graduate student, I brought to my work certain assumptions about prostitution and the media. For example, I strongly support the decriminalization of prostitution in Canada, but this does not mean that I support the exploitation of women nor the operation of the sex trade unchecked by the law. A belief that prostitution should be decriminalized is not an endorsement of violence against women. After reading nineteen years of prostitution articles and determining which were violence-related and which were not, I came to the conclusion that the media are generally less than sympathetic in their reporting of violence against women who prostitute as compared with "respectable" women.

Benedict's (1992) work, which examines the way journalists report violent sexual crimes against women, supports my assertion about the

⁹ Lowman and Fraser (1995, p. 115) state that: "From a comparison of newspaper reports, Vice Unit files and RCMP data it would appear that at least 67 persons who had been involved in prostitution in British Columbia at one time or another were murdered since 1978, including sixty since January 1982."

media. Although she does not specifically look at the sexual assault of women who prostitute, Benedict's research indicates that journalists employ certain characteristics of a sexual assault to classify a female victim as either a "virgin" or a "vamp" (1992, p. 19). The "virgin" receives sympathy and support; the "vamp" is blamed for her own fate. Considering Benedict's findings, I examine how the perceived moral status of the prostitute is translated into the way she is characterized as a victim of violence.

In this vein, King's (1990) study of prostitution and AIDS in two prominent U.S. city newspapers from 1985 to 1988 is instructive. She concludes that news articles demonstrate little concern for the health of women who prostitute, characterizing them instead as disease transmitters (p. 155), even though medical evidence has "pointed to male-to-female transmission as being the overwhelming mode of sexual infection" (p. 175). In this sense, King (1990) argues that the news media perpetuate a "long-standing myth of female pollution, where sexual women are feared and despised by men as dangerous sources of contamination" (pp. 174-175). For example, in the 1860s British legislators,

passed the Contagious Diseases Acts, a medical approach to prostitution which gave the police broad powers to confine women on untried charges of prostitution so they could be tested for infections. The purported intent was to stamp out sexually transmitted diseases, but health measures were foregone in favour of punitive treatment of the women.

(Faith, 1993, p. 24)

Today, newspaper portrayals of women who prostitute as "despised" reveal how pervasive the prostitute stigma is, and lends support to my initial assertion: when the victim is "deviant" the media can construct her story in a way that tends to blame her for her own fate.

McCormick's (1995) research on social issues in the media also supports this finding. McCormick devotes an entire chapter to the qualitative analysis of prostitution in the Halifax print media. He concludes that the media's representation of women who prostitute "is very shallow, further stigmatizing and reinforcing the negative image of the profession" (McCormick, 1995, p. 36). Consequently, the praxiological thrust of my thesis is to resist the *Vancouver Sun's* and *Province's* dominant discourses on violence against women who prostitute. I do so by deconstructing how journalists (and social institutions at large) socially construct "woman", "prostitute" (or "hooker" as journalists often refer to her) and "victim."

Two hundred and sixty articles on violence against women who prostitute, from both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* from 1984 to 1993, were selected for the analysis of discourse¹⁰. All the articles selected had violence against women who prostitute as one of up to three main news themes.

In Chapter 4 I also examine the types of news sources used by journalists. The sources range from criminal justice personnel to individuals who represent community groups. I look at the kinds of information that these sources provide journalists. The second half of this chapter is devoted to examining the ideological dimensions of news-making. By disentangling the dominant news ideology from the construction of crimes against women who prostitute, I reveal the media's degrading representation of these marginalized victims. Some articles do not attach such negative labels to these victims. Indeed, they explicitly

¹⁰ I owe a debt to several authors whose research and methodologies greatly inform my own: Harvey, 1990; Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Sirauss and Corbin, 1990; and Young, 1990.

resist this type of reporting. I examine what is unique about these articles and how they resist the dominant news ideology.

For comparison to the depiction of a murder of a woman who prostitutes, newspaper coverage of a particularly notorious non-prostitute murder is also examined. Articles from both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* from January 1995, to February 1995, comprise the data for the non-prostitute murder case. During this period a young white woman (Melanie Carpenter) was abducted from her place of work in Surrey and later found sexually assaulted and stabbed to death. This abduction and murder of a non-prostitute victim is compared to the abduction and murder of a young First Nations woman (Cheryl Ann Joe) who worked as a prostitute in East Vancouver. Newspaper coverage of the Carpenter and Joe murders are not to be treated as representative of media treatment of all female murder cases. They do, however, compare and contrast well with each other because they are two opposing extremes on a continuum of newspaper coverage of violence against women. The comparison of these two murders is useful because the type of crimes committed (violent and situational) were similar yet the victims were very different: one was Native and worked as a prostitute and the other was a white non-prostitute. Finally, both cases were selected for practical, quantitative reasons: both stories received substantial newspaper coverage over long periods of time.

Before discussing the findings of both the content analysis and the analysis of discourse, I provide an overview of the history of Canadian prostitution law and a summary of the research on violence against women who prostitute.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE: A RESEARCH REVIEW

The focus of Canadian law enforcement on the “public” aspects of prostitution raises many concerns. The approach taken in Canada, and specifically in Vancouver, to curb prostitution harms women because they are forced to ply their trade surreptitiously. It is within an unprotected, unguarded realm that the abuse of women who prostitute is often carried out. In this chapter, I examine the history of the law concerning prostitution in Canada. When changes to the law surrounding prostitution are passed, the media’s coverage of prostitution sometimes increases (see Chapter 3 of this thesis and McCormick’s (1995) findings). Moreover, changes to the law create a temporal mapping of hegemonic responses to prostitution and reflects mainstream cultural understandings of it.

Also in this chapter I review several indices in determining the level and types of violence committed against women who prostitute, not only in Vancouver but also in the United States.

From “Vag-C” to the Communicating Law

In 1892 vagrancy, bawdy house and procuring provisions were included in the first *Criminal Code*. These provisions remained essentially unchanged for 80 years (Pilon and Robertson, 1992, p. 15). In 1971, the law concerning prostitution in the *Criminal Code* stated that:

- 175.1 Every one commits vagrancy who...
(c) being a common prostitute or night walker is found in a public place and does not, when required, give a good account of *herself*. [emphasis added]

The “Vag-C” law against prostitution was focused on female prostitutes, thereby ignoring male prostitutes and customers. The law was gender specific because a prostitute was defined as a female. This law was repealed in July 1972 because it criminalized a person's status rather than their behaviour (Lowman, 1989, p. 31).

The soliciting law (s. 195.1), which replaced “Vag-C” removed “female” from its wording. The law stated:

195.1 Every person who solicits any *person* in a public place for the purpose of prostitution is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.¹ [emphasis added]

This law attempted to allow charging of both male and female prostitutes (Boyle and Noonan, 1986-7, p. 229). According to the Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution², the

substitution of an offence which emphasized the element of soliciting was an attempt, it seems, to characterize the public manifestations of prostitution as a form of nuisance.
(Fraser Committee, 1985, p. 419)

Yet this new law left much to the interpretation of the courts.

Although the soliciting law targeted both male and female prostitutes, British Columbia customers (who were predominantly if not exclusively male) were not subject to s. 195.1 according to the decision in *R. v. Dudak*. Incredibly, the court stated that “there does not exist a problem of groups of potential customers soliciting and accosting people in

¹ *Criminal Code Amendment Act*, S.C. 1972, Chap. C-13, ss. 12, 15.

² Hereafter referred to as the Fraser Committee.

public places while looking for prostitutes.”³ In other words, the

only way a customer could have been punished was if he were convicted of being found in a common bawdy-house under section 193(2)(b).

(Boyle and Noonan, 1986-7, p. 235)

The B.C. judiciary chose to interpret the government’s new legislation as being consistent with past practices where the customer was not subject to criminal sanctioning for requesting the services of a prostitute.

Further judicial interpretation came in 1978 when the Supreme Court of Canada upheld a lower court decision that the definition of solicitation in s. 195.1 included only pressing or persistent behaviour.⁴

However, the police in

attempting to surmount the obstacle...evolved a wider interpretation of ‘pressing or persistent’ to include multiple solicitation. This involved charging persons with soliciting when they approached a number of potential customers over a short period of time.

(Canadian Advisory Council, 1984, p. 61)

This interpretation of pressing or persistent behaviour was later rejected by the Supreme Court.⁵ The court stated that the “pressing or persistent conduct had to be found in the actual approach to each person alleged to have been solicited” (cited in Canadian Advisory Council, 1984, p. 61). Each encounter would have to contain the elements of pressing or persistent behaviour. According to police, this together with the *Hutt* decision, made it impossible to gather enough evidence to charge someone under s. 195.1 (Canadian Advisory Council, 1984, p. 61).

³ [1978] 38 C.C.C. (2d) 172 (B.C. Co. Ct.), p. 175.

⁴ *R. v. Hutt* [1978] 2 S.C.R. 476.

⁵ *Galjot and Whitter* (1981) 64 C.C.C. (2d) 1 (S.C.C.).

In the early 1980s citizens groups such as Concerned Residents Of the West End or CROWE began to organize to convince police and politicians to do something to repress street prostitution. Similarly, law enforcement personnel also began to lobby the Federal government to amend s. 195.1. This pressure eventually led to the Federal government creation of a task force to determine what to do about the growing street prostitution trade. The Fraser Committee's "Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution" concludes that it was not the failure of the soliciting law that was responsible for the spread of street prostitution, but the contradictory nature of the law itself that was the problem. The Committee claimed that since prostitution is legal then the government must decide where to locate it. The Committee reasoned that nuisances associated with street prostitution would not be reduced if the current contradiction was not resolved.

The Fraser Committee further claimed that the laws on prostitution comprised a "sexist view of women" (1985, p. 531). The Committee states:

women are treated as 'whores' or 'madonnas' depending on male assessments of their relative worth, without any recognition of their views or feelings, let alone of the problems which give rise to prostitution.

(Fraser Committee, 1985, p. 531)

The Fraser Committee pointed out that s. 195.1 raised uncertainties as to its applicability to customers (Fraser Committee, 1985, p. 531) and that it favoured "those who have the resources to be discreet" (Fraser Committee, 1985, p. 533) such as escort agencies or massage parlours who operate privately off the streets. Law enforcement in relation to prostitution was not only sexist for targeting female prostitutes and ignoring male customers but also class-biased for targeting street prostitutes and ignoring escort agencies and massage parlours. Technically

these more discreet operations were subject to living on the avails of prostitution and bawdy house laws but enforcement was rare.

The Fraser Committee recommended that the Federal Government repeal s. 195.1 to remove the current contradiction in the law (Fraser Committee, 1985, p. 536). Even though the Fraser Committee agreed with continued criminal sanctioning of procuring and living on the avails, they did recommend a relaxation of the bawdy-house definition and that the criminalization of procuring and living on the avails should directly relate to violence (thereby removing non-coercive partners, spouses and boyfriends of prostitutes from the threat of being charged for living on the avails of prostitution) (1985, p. 536).

It would be eight months before amendments to the law concerning prostitution were given Royal Assent and came into force.

Impact Assessment - Part I

The somewhat liberal and feminist approaches of the Fraser Committee (Hughes, 1986) were not endorsed by the Federal Government. The Government did not decriminalize prostitution nor did it resolve the contradiction of “you can do it, but don’t do it here” (Lowman, 1986).

The new law states:

- 213.1** Every person who in a public place or in any place to public view
- (a) stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle,
 - (b) impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic or ingress to or egress from premises adjacent to that place, or

(c) stops or attempts to stop any person or in any manner communicates or attempts to communicate with any person for the purpose of engaging in prostitution or of obtaining the sexual services of a prostitute is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.⁶

On the Prosecution

Most charges fall under s. 213.1(c) (formerly s. 195.1(c)) which prohibits communication for the purpose of buying or selling sexual services, hence calling it the “communicating law” (Lowman, 1991a, p. 19).

In Vancouver prostitutes were much more likely to be arrested than their customers (Lowman, 1989, p. 55). From January 1, 1986 to December 31, 1987, 532 charges (11 repeats) were laid against customers in Vancouver for communication versus 1648 charges against prostitutes; 743 individual female prostitutes (both adult and youth) were charged during this period versus 95 male prostitutes (both adult and youth) (Lowman, 1989, p. A-332). Given that prostitutes are predominantly female and customers are predominantly male, gender bias within Vancouver law enforcement is evident despite changes to the law.

Both the crown and the police argue that the above differences in charges between customers and prostitutes are not due to selective targeting but due instead to the different time lengths required to catch and process the two types of offenders (Lowman, 1989, p. 60). However, Lowman found that the undercover police woman did not have to wait long before being approached by a customer (Lowman, 1989, p. 61).

⁶ *Criminal Code*, R.S., c. C-34, s.1.

Lowman concludes that more law enforcement time is devoted to the investigation of (female) prostitutes, than to the investigation of customers (Lowman, 1989, p. 62). According to Boyle and Noonan (1986-87, p. 242), “[e]nforcement figures ought to reflect the gender of persons actually engaging in the...behaviour.” Those demanding prostitution clearly outweigh those supplying it and those supplying it are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement agents.

On the Visible Nuisance of Street Prostitutes

The number of female prostitutes visible on Vancouver’s streets has not been significantly curbed by s. 213. Weekly counts performed from 10:00 pm to midnight every Thursday night from 1984 to 1988 reveals that the

enforcement of [s. 213] did appear, during the first eight months of its existence, to have had a significant impact on the incidence of street prostitution in Vancouver. But...after the fall of 1986, the number of persons working the street gradually increased so that by the summer of 1987 the average number on any given night had reached pre [s. 213] levels. The average counts for April, May and June 1987 were 126% higher than the counts made during the equivalent three month period in 1986.

(Lowman, 1989, p. 95-96)

Lowman concludes that the effect of s. 213 on reducing street prostitution was “relatively short-lived” (Lowman, 1991a, p. 21). Unfortunately for female street prostitutes, the violent hazards of the profession have not been short-lived.

Impact Assessment - Part II - Violence

Women who prostitute are often victims of violence, be it assault, robbery or murder. These women are also “victims” of discriminatory law enforcement practices.⁷

When the label of victim is applied to women who prostitute it is often done in an extra-legal way: “She is seen as a victim because of her life-style, her ‘immorality,’ or degradation...” (James 1978, p. 175). But many studies conducted in the United States reveal that women who prostitute are routinely victimized while on the job. For many of these women these “job hazards” become a way of life. The following is a review of the findings in the United States and in Vancouver concerning crimes against women who prostitute.

The View from the United States

Many scholars have argued that prostitution is the “economic exploitation and sexual abuse of [women] by men” (Erbe, 1984, p. 609). Women who prostitute are exploited by any or all of the following: customers, pimps, police officers, drug dealers, landlords, and other prostitutes. In a study done in 1981, Silbert and Pines (1981) interviewed 200 youth and adult women street prostitutes from the San Francisco area. Silbert and Pines report “extremely high levels of victimization of prostitutes related to their work” (1981, p. 397). The women were asked to consider their victimizations since entering prostitution. Their results

⁷ See also James (1978), who makes the same argument about law enforcement in the United States.

indicate that, of the subjects interviewed,

78% reported being victimized by forced perversion an average of 16.6 times each woman. Also, 70% were victimized by customer rape...an average of 31.3 times. Of the subjects, 74% reported being victimized by nonpayment an average of 5.2 times; 45% reported being victims of robbery an average of 3.6 times; 65% were victims of violence an average of 9.2 times...

(Silbert and Pines, 1981, p. 397)

In addition, 65% of the subjects interviewed were physically abused and beaten by customers (Silbert and Pines, 1981, p. 397). Half of the women in the study had pimps and two-thirds of these women reported having been physically abused and beaten by their pimps (18% were beaten constantly; 36% regularly) (Silbert and Pines, 1981, p. 397). "In over 50% of these cases, the women accepted it as a way of life, felt they deserved it, or were flattered by it as a sign of caring" (Silbert and Pines, 1981, pp. 397-398).

An extremely disturbing finding in this study was that "more than three-fourths of the victims stated there was nothing they could do about customer abuse; only 1% mentioned reporting to the police" (Silbert and Pines, 1981, p. 396). The laws against prostitution place these women and the police in an adversarial relationship. This results in a reluctance by women who prostitute to report instances of abuse against themselves to the police.

According to Silbert and Pines, the women in their study suffered from "psychological paralysis" because customer violence was often totally arbitrary with no warning signs at all (Silbert and Pines, 1981, p. 396). Many customers seem to enjoy the mixture of sex and violence. The violence appears arbitrary to the women who, like most people, associate violence with provocation. But for some customers, the mere sexual act

becomes the provocation to violence. According to a British study, provocation appears to come from an inability to ejaculate or from an inability or unwillingness to pay for services rendered, or from a woman's refusal to engage in a particular form of sexual behaviour (McLeod, 1982, p. 54). Whatever the reasons, violence by a customer can be particularly difficult for the woman to predict, leaving her even more vulnerable.

Similar findings were documented in studies reviewed by Weisberg. A report done by The Enablers (1978) in Minnesota on youth prostitution revealed that more than half of the sampled girls claimed to have been beaten by their pimps (cited in Weisberg, 1985, p. 108). The Enablers' study (1978) also revealed that most of the respondents had been abused or beaten by a customer. Of the sample, 40% claimed it occurred once, 25% a couple of times and 28% three times or more (cited in Weisberg, 1985, p. 109). The girls also reported being subjected to nonpayment, robbery and forced performance of noncontractual sexual acts (cited in Weisberg, 1985, p. 109).

In another U.S. study, Perkins and Bennett (1985) interviewed 121 female street prostitutes (all but two were over the age of 18). Of these, 34% reported to have been raped while working; of those reported to have been raped, 46.3% stated it happened 2 or more times (Perkins and Bennett, 1985, p. 295). When asked if there had been any other types of violence aside from rape, 48% of the respondents said yes; of these, 62% said it was either verbal or physical assault (Perkins and Bennett, 1985, p. 296).

Researchers have also focused on non-criminal abuses against women who prostitute, such as economic discrimination. According to James, prostitution is an "occupational choice for some women" (1978, p. 183).

Women, in choosing the occupation of prostitution, “are reacting to their victimization by...sex-based economic inequality” (James, 1978, p. 184). James cites a study by Pomeroy in which 93% of the 175 women interviewed “were motivated by economic factors” in entering this type of work (James, 1978, p. 184). Many women have fewer economic choices than men, and are socialized into a “traditional female service role” (James, 1978, p. 185). Consequently, James argues that prostitution is merely a “natural extension of the female sex role into the occupational arena” (James, 1978, p. 185). Due to economic victimization by a capitalist system which favours white males, many women *choose* prostitution but not in conditions of their own choosing.

The above findings demonstrate the existence of occupational hazards associated with prostitution. Similar levels of violence exist in Vancouver.

The View from Vancouver

There are various forms of exploitation that women who prostitute suffer as a result of their profession. It was demonstrated earlier that law enforcement agents are biased in the administration of prostitution laws in Vancouver. Being a target for criminal sanctioning can cause anxiety for some women and, if charged, could result in lost time on the streets (and consequently lost revenues). If found guilty of this charge, the punishment might be a fine⁸ resulting in a further loss of revenue. By targeting this group for criminal sanctioning we are harassing these women both physically (by removal from the streets) and economically (through the judicial order to pay fines).

⁸ Lowman (1989, p. 79) found that, for their first offence, 30.1% of prostitutes sentenced received a fine and 36.9% received a suspended sentence accompanied by a period of probation.

Women who prostitute in Vancouver are also subjected to violence. In self-report interviews, Lowman found that 67.7% of his sample who worked the streets since 1985 were victimized by their customers; of the 22 victims, 17 had been subjected to multiple victimizations (Lowman, 1989, p. 132). The percentage of women who worked in “off-street” locations (e.g., escort agencies, massage parlours, private residences, etc.) who were victimized was much lower (26.7%); however, none of the off-street victims worked for escort agencies (Lowman, 1989, p. 132).

Another source for documenting the level of violence against women who prostitute is the “Bad Trick Sheets” circulated by the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP), Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights (POWER) and the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS). When compared to the cases reported to the police, these sheets offer some insight into the *dark figure* of crimes against women who prostitute (although it is noted that even these sheets under-report the levels of violence).

Lowman found that during the first ten months of 1987, in the whole of Vancouver, 39 criminal reports were made to the police; during this same time period, 135 incidents were described on the Bad Trick Sheets which cover only the strolls on the East side of the city (1989, pp. 125-127). Some of the incidents described on the sheets did not involve an actual criminal act, but the woman feared that a crime could have been committed. Twenty-seven percent of the incidents described involved the presence of a knife, gun or some other weapon (Lowman, 1989, p. 127). Of the 135 incidents described, 39.7% were physical assaults; 28.4% were sexual assaults; and 20.7% were robbery for cash (Lowman, 1989, p. A-562). In 86.2% of the time, only one offender was involved (Lowman,

1989, p. A-563) and 79.3% of the offenders were white males (Lowman, 1989, p. A-562).

Currie, Laliberte, Bird, Rosa, and Sprung's 1995 study on violence against street-connected women in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside/Strathcona community also found that violence was widespread. Researchers conducted both group and individual interviews resulting in a sample of 85 women. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 55 years, almost 70% were aboriginal, and 71% were mothers (cited in Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 60). As demonstrated in the demographics of this study, First Nations women are overrepresented in the population of women who prostitute when compared to their numbers in the general public. When asked if they had experienced job related violence in the past six months, 65 of the respondents (77%) said yes; the average number of violent incidents experienced in the past six months was seven per person (cited in Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 60). Sixty-two percent of the respondents had been sexually assaulted while 48% had been beaten by a customer; only 49% of the women stated that they at one time told the police about their victimization (cited in Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 61). Often the women's involvement with police was not voluntary but was a result of having been hospitalized (cited in Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 61). Currie, *et al.*, study points not only to the extent of violence related to prostitution, but also to the persistently adversarial relationship between the police and women who prostitute.

In the most recent study of violence against women who prostitute in Vancouver, Lowman and Fraser (1995) conducted a victim survey of prostitutes working either the Downtown Eastside stroll or the Richards-Seymour stroll. The 65 respondents to the self-administered questionnaire

were between the ages of 16 and 43 years; 59 of the respondents were female, one was male, two were transsexuals and 3 were male cross-dressers (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, pp. 69-70). Sixty-nine percent of the respondents had experienced general harassment, 66% had experienced threats/intimidations, 51% had a knife used on them, 39% were beaten and 37% were sexually assaulted (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 74). The customer or trick was responsible for 43.1% of the violence against these respondents (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 75). When asked who they told about their victimization, 58.1% of the respondents working the Richards/Seymour stroll and 65.2% of the respondents working the Downtown Eastside stroll answered "a friend"; only 35.5% of the Richards/Seymour women and 43.5% of the Downtown Eastside women reported some of their victimization to the police (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 80). The majority of the respondents felt that the police needed to be more educated about both prostitution and violence and that the police needed to be more respectful towards women who prostitute (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 84). However, the majority of the respondents did feel that *some* individual police officers were concerned for the safety of women who prostitute (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 83).

Despite the efforts of some individual officers to circumvent the often adversarial relationship between themselves and women who prostitute, far too many victimizations appear to go unreported and when they are reported nothing is done. If a woman does report her victimization to the police, and if the police are able to arrest and charge an individual(s), the case may proceed to court. I examined a sample of cases

(ten in total) taken from 1986 to 1992 from “QuickLaw”⁹ (summarized in Appendix II), involving the sexual assault of women who prostitute. In eight of the ten cases where the facts were clearly articulated, the assault occurred either in a car which was parked in a remote area (e.g., industrial site, back alley, or remote parking lot) or in a remote area accessible by foot (e.g., stairway of a building entrance). Due to the nature of our prostitution laws, women willingly proceed to such remote areas to exchange sexual services for money for fear of being arrested. However, remote locations facilitate the commission of violent crimes. In all the court cases examined, the perpetrator of the crime was the customer. The facts in these cases are consistent with the research cited above.

In order to facilitate both the reporting and eventual conviction of offenders who sexually assault women who prostitute, Hatty (1989), in her Australian study, recommends that the police and the judiciary adopt a somewhat innovative approach to defining such crimes. According to Hatty, the usual definitions of what constitutes sexual assault of women are inadequate when applied to women who prostitute. Hatty offers a better description of what constitutes sexual assault of prostitutes: the “sexual abuse of prostitutes should be understood to be any sexual activity into which prostitute women are coerced in the context of their work...” (Hatty, 1989, p. 236).

With this definition of sexual assault in mind, Hatty (1989, p. 243) views a prostitute’s consent along a continuum rather than the binary approach adopted by the legal system (consent versus no consent). At one

⁹ This is a legal indexing service. The terms “prostitute” and “sexual assault” were input to generate the sample of cases.

end of the continuum there is “consensual sex” followed by “altruistic sex” (where the female agrees for reasons of pity or guilt), then “compliant sex” (where the female agrees out of anxiety or fear) and finally “rape” (Hatty, 1989, p. 243). It is the latter two which should lead to criminal charges for the sexual assault of the women involved. In the court cases reviewed here, there were several incidents where the woman “consented” to sexual intercourse “because she was afraid for her safety”¹⁰ thus constituting “compliant sex.” In other cases, the evidence clearly pointed to rape given the use of various types of weapons.

Hatty concludes that those who are the most vulnerable to attack are women “who work on the streets, especially those who perform ‘car jobs’ or accompany their clients to secluded locations” (1989, p. 237). All of the women assaulted in the court cases reviewed here were first picked up on the street and then taken to a remote area. Clearly violence against women who prostitute is facilitated by a legal system which forces women to operate in a clandestine fashion, including plying their trade in secluded environments.

Summary

Street prostitution is being forced into back alleys and abandoned parking lots because the law in Canada prohibits communication for the purposes of engaging in prostitution in a “public place” without identifying where this otherwise legal trade should take place. Lowman found that 53.3% of the prostitutes interviewed felt that their safety had been adversely affected by s. 213 because it disperses the women, making them

¹⁰ See *R. v. Pangilinan* (1987) 60 C.R. (3d) 188 (B.C.C.A.).

more isolated and vulnerable (1989, p. 132). The women also stated that they could no longer afford to be so discriminating in their choice of customers because the enforcement of the communication law made it more difficult to find a customer (Lowman, 1989, p. 132).

In a review of Canadian prostitution law, Freeman agrees with the above sentiment. She claims that s. 213 “isolates prostitutes by criminalizing communication” (Freeman, 1989-90, p. 81). She further states that the criminalization of the “companion activities” of prostitution is both dangerous and impractical for women “because it drives the trade underground” exposing the women to “more violence from both pimps and johns” (Freeman, 1989-90, p. 81). The law in Canada appears to contribute to the commission of violence against women who prostitute because it maintains the public/private distinction (Boyle and Noonan, 1986-87, pp. 246-247). Therefore, for the “individual prostitute, prohibiting prostitution is more oppressive than permitting it” (Cooper, 1989, p. 115).

The law also perpetuates violence against women who prostitute by placing the women and the police in an adversarial relationship. This concern was voiced prior to the enactment of s. 213. It was feared that women who prostitute would be less likely to report crimes committed against them to the police than they were before because they would have to identify themselves as a prostitute (Lowman, 1989, p. 125). Lowman states that the police find themselves in a “no-win situation” when faced with crimes of violence against women who prostitute because they have to protect a group of people whom they are “accustomed to treating as ‘criminals’” (Lowman, 1989, p. 133).

The adversarial relationship between police and women who prostitute and the secluded environment that the women are forced to carry out their transactions can perpetuate violence by customers, pimps or even police officers. These factors create a situation in which men know they can be violent towards women who prostitute with a lesser chance of being apprehended. Yet these specific factors exist because our society is fundamentally grounded in gender relationships based upon attempts to control female sexuality.

Anti-prostitution laws like s. 213 are the epitome of attempts to control female sexuality, and its impact in Vancouver has been widespread: street prostitutes are the most likely targets for law enforcement; the overall number of women working the streets in Vancouver has not decreased since the enactment of s. 213 in 1985; in carrying out transactions, the women are doing so in secluded environments making them more vulnerable to violence; an adversarial relationship exists between police and women who prostitute making it difficult for them to report crimes to police; and an overall attitude that women who prostitute are “expendable objects” persists. These factors lead me to agree with Lowman and Fraser’s (1995, p. 126) conclusions about the current state of violence against women who prostitute:

A woman working the street is particularly vulnerable to predatory misogynist violence, and all the more so in a milieu in which she runs the risk of criminal prosecution. This same risk makes women who work the street much more susceptible to violence when a conflict with a trick occurs. In a situation where he may use violence because he knows she is unlikely to report him to the police...conflicts may quickly elevate to the point of physical resolution.

Inevitably, it is female street prostitutes who suffer the most during such violent resolutions.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS FROM THE CONTENT ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING THE INCREASE IN ARTICLES ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE

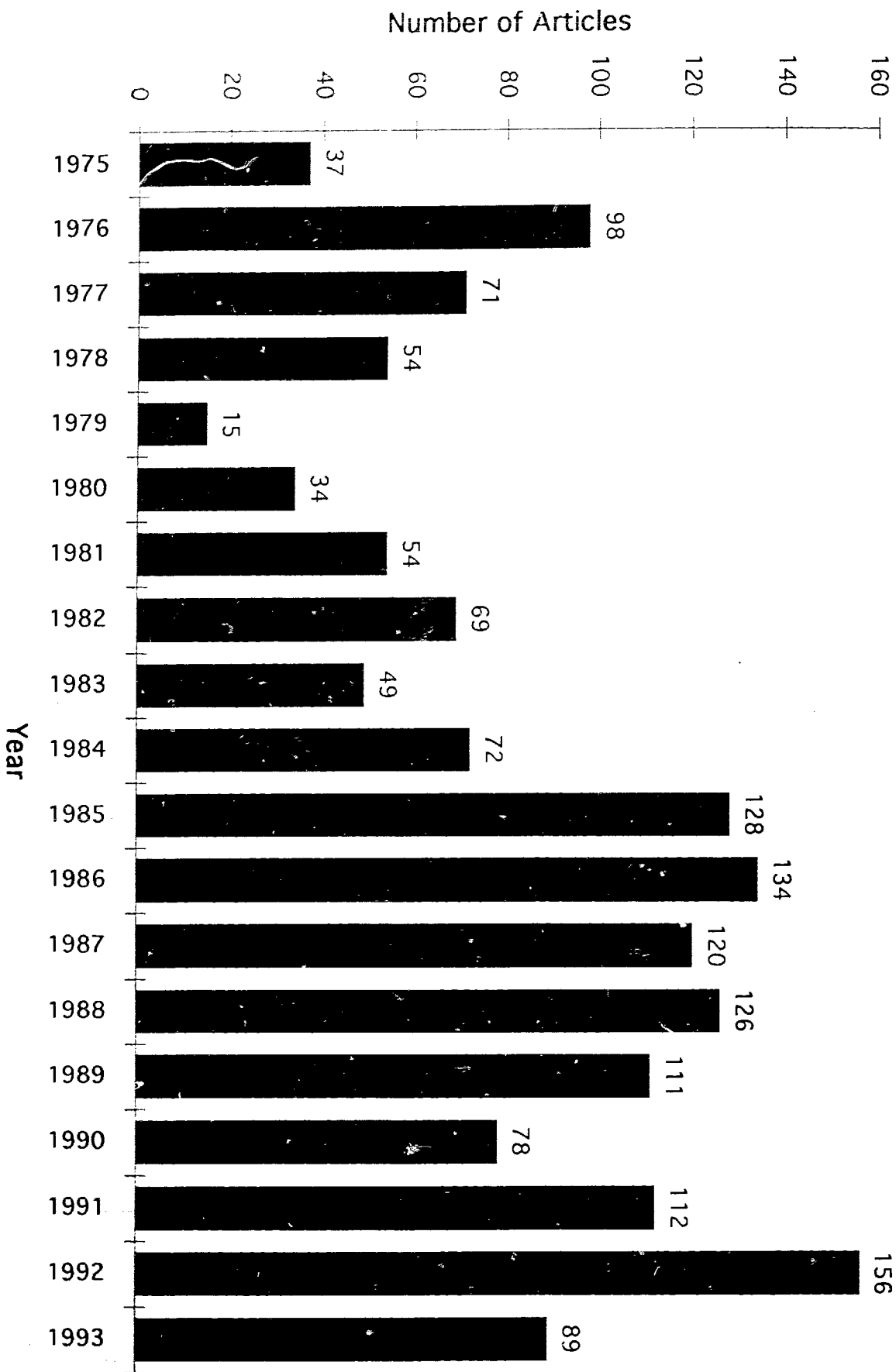
The criteria for selecting news articles about prostitution, as outlined in Chapter 1, yielded 1607 articles mentioning prostitution from 1975 to 1993. Figure 1 (p. 36) summarizes the number of articles mentioning prostitution over the 19-year study period. From 1975 to the end of 1984¹, the annual average number of articles appearing annually in the *Vancouver Sun* was 55. From 1985, the year in which the Federal Government enacted the communicating law, to 1993 the annual average number of articles more than doubled to 117. Clearly, the volume of “talk” about prostitution over this 19 year period has increased.

The increase in the number of news articles in the *Vancouver Sun* about prostitution contrasts with McCormick’s (1995) findings on the number of news citations about prostitution in the *Canadian News Index*. McCormick (1995, p. 50) found a sharp decline in the “coverage of prostitution issues as compiled from the *Canadian News Index...*” after 1985. In McCormick’s study, by 1991 the total number of articles about prostitution was similar to the 1977 total (approximately 48 articles), declining from a 1984 high of over 300 citations. Although my findings showed the same reporting increase as McCormick’s during 1984-1985, the number of *Vancouver Sun* articles did not decline after 1985. In fact, by

¹ It should be noted that from November 1978 to July 1979 there was a newspaper strike.

FIGURE 1

NUMBER OF ARTICLES IN THE VANCOUVER SUN MENTIONING PROSTITUTION, 1975-1993



1991, the number of *Vancouver Sun* articles about prostitution had increased by 66% compared to the 1977 total. When compared to McCormick's national picture the continued rise in the *Vancouver Sun's* coverage of prostitution since 1985 appears to be unique to Vancouver.

In Table 1 25 different news themes are articulated. In total 2150 themes appeared in 1607 news articles. "Violence against women who prostitute" is the most numerous theme, appearing 338 times (15.7%). Of the 338, this theme appears 236 times as the main theme. The average number of articles mentioning violence from 1975 to 1984 was 7.7 per year and from 1985 to 1993 it was 46.2 per year. The number of articles coded for having the theme "violence against women who prostitute" increased seven-fold over this period. The violence theme appears more often after 1985.

Table 1
News Themes for the *Vancouver Sun* Articles Mentioning Prostitution, 1975-1993
(n=1607)²

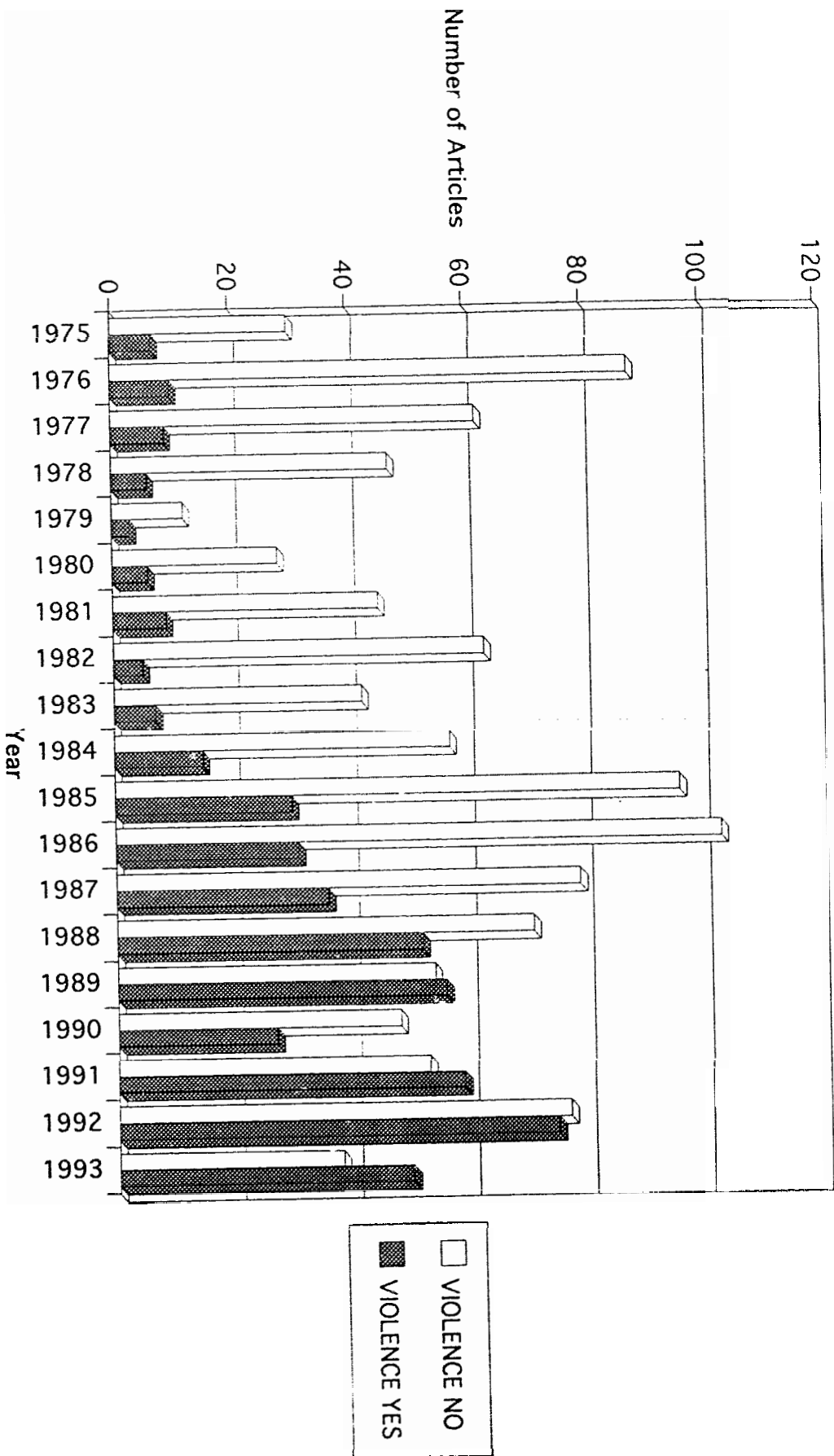
	Count	Pct of Responses	Pct of Cases
Violence Against women who prostitute	338	15.7	21.0
Law Enforcement Issues - Nuisance	222	10.3	13.8
Alternatives to present law (legalize/decrim.)	199	9.3	12.4
Other	191	8.9	11.9
Soliciting/Communication charges/trials	148	6.9	9.2
Government discussion of legislation	134	6.2	8.3
Youth prostitution issues	132	6.1	8.2
Living on the avails/procuring	117	5.4	7.3
Prostitution Mentioned Incidentally	116	5.4	7.2
Prostitution and AIDS	96	4.5	6.0
Penthouse Cabaret case	89	4.1	5.5
Bawdy House	77	3.6	4.8
Bill C-49 (communication law)	71	3.3	4.4
Outcry about violence against prostitutes	42	2.0	2.6
Law Enforcement Issues - Violence	34	1.6	2.1
Violence by a prostitute	29	1.3	1.8
Green River Killings	20	1.0	1.2
Fraser Committee recommendations	20	.9	1.2
Sun Special Series	15	.7	.9
Top Hat	16	.7	1.0
Bell-Younger	13	.6	.8
Green River links to Vancouver	10	.5	.6
Swaggart	10	.5	.6
Alcohol murders	7	.3	.4
Wuornos	4	.2	.2
Total themes	2150	100.0	133.8

Figure 2 (p. 39) shows the proportion of news articles mentioning violence against women who prostitute versus those articles that do not mention violence. This was derived by posing a simple yes/no question as to whether or not there was any mention of violence against women who prostitute in the article.

² Note that the total number of themes adds up to more than the number of incidents because of multiple responses per case.

FIGURE 2

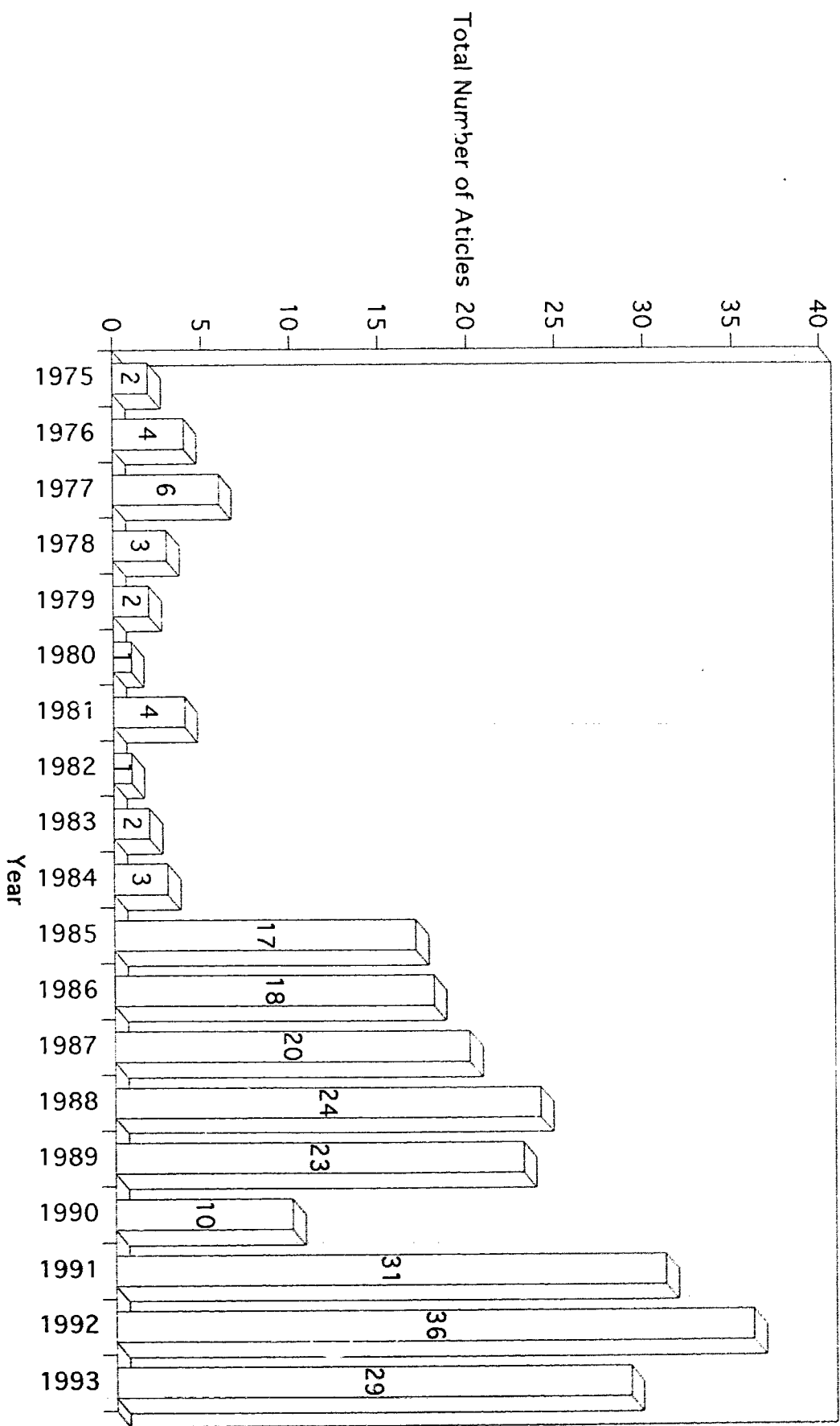
PROPORTION OF VANCOUVER SUN ARTICLES ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE VERSUS NON-VIOLENT ARTICLES, 1975-1993



In total 493 articles that mentioned prostitution also mentioned violence. This means that from 1975 to 1993 of the 1607 news articles coded, 493 (31%) had some mention of violence against women who prostitute. Figure 3 (p. 41) shows the number of articles with violence as the main news theme from 1975 to 1993.

FIGURE 3

NUMBER OF VANCOUVER SUN ARTICLES WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE AS THE MAIN NEWS THEME, 1975-1993



Over the 19 year study, articles mentioning violence against women who prostitute clearly increased in volume.

Women who Prostitute as Victims

The media's portrayal of a particular type of victim is rarely studied in media analyses. When victims have been examined, the victim group is usually quite broadly defined, such as the elderly (Fishman, 1978 & 1981) or women in general (Peck, 1987). Some studies narrow their focus to a specific type of crime, such as the sexual assault of women (e.g., Benedict, 1992 or Soothill and Walby, 1991). My thesis is unusual because it studies the media's portrayal of many forms of violence committed against a specific victim group.

Of the 493 news articles that mentioned violence against women who prostitute, almost 70% occurred in the Greater Vancouver Regional District. The remainder of the articles were outside the GVRD (British Columbia, Canada, United States and other countries). As well, the coding revealed that the majority (74%) of news articles about violence against women who prostitute were up to a quarter of a page in length.

Most forms of violence discussed in the news articles were *Criminal Code* offences. Of the 493 articles about violence, 411 contained enough details to determine the kinds of violence perpetrated against women who prostitute (Table 2).

Table 2
Types of Violence Against Women who Prostitute as Mentioned in the Vancouver Sun, 1975-1993
(n=411)

	Count	Pct of Responses	Pct of Cases
Murder	306	38.0	74.5
Sexual Assault	126	15.6	30.7
Assault without a weapon	48	6.0	11.7
Forced into prostitution	45	5.6	10.9
Living on the avails	45	5.6	10.9
Kidnapping/Unlawful confinement	43	5.4	10.5
Other	30	3.7	7.3
Assault with a weapon	26	3.2	6.3
General discussion of violence	24	3.0	5.8
Sexual procurement of children	24	3.0	5.8
Attempted Murder	17	2.2	4.3
Uttering threats	18	2.2	4.4
Harassment	15	1.9	3.6
Robbery	12	1.5	2.9
Procurement (not children)	11	1.4	2.7
Overdose	9	1.1	2.2
Manslaughter	7	0.9	1.7
Total Responses	806	100.0	196.1

Seventeen different kinds of violence appeared 806 times in 411 articles. Of these, the murder of women who prostitute received the most coverage (38%) followed by sexual assault (15.6%). This finding is not surprising given the conclusions of media research that newspapers tend to focus on more violent incidents like murder while ignoring the more mundane incidents like theft and robbery. For example, upon the completion of a content analysis of a local evening Los Angeles newspaper, Smith concludes that crimes against the person occupy over 50% of the space devoted by the newspaper to crime stories, yet constitute less than 6% of known crimes (1984, p. 290). Studies by Shelly and Ashkins (1981) and Roshier (1981) found a similar inverse relationship between the number of violent crimes known to the police and the number of violent crimes reported in the news.

According to Surette (1992, p. 63), violent crime is overemphasized in the media because it is more “newsworthy”; murder is more newsworthy because it occurs less often than other crimes. Windhauser, Seiter and Winfree (1990, p. 77) link the media’s relative overrepresentation of violent crime to the “apparent failure of newspaper reporters and editors to cover more than just the obvious, most accessible crimes in their communities.”

Because the murder and sexual assault of women who prostitute dominates the news coverage of crimes, I wanted to flesh out details about this victim grouping. As outlined in the coding scheme in Appendix I, I coded details (when given) about the prostitute’s age, gender, type of prostitution practiced (e.g., on the street, for a call service, etc.) and location of work. From this I was able to develop a typical victim profile in the *Vancouver Sun*: the prostitute victim was approximately 21 years old, female and worked the streets in the “East End” stroll.

Over 72% of prostitute victims in the *Vancouver Sun* articles worked as street prostitutes while 17% were “generic” or unspecified prostitutes. In the case of the latter, the prostitute was most likely a street worker, but the information in the news articles was too general to confirm this. Almost all of the prostitutes mentioned (97%) were female and only 2.2% were male. Ongoing “head-counts” by Lowman reveal that males dressing as males make up about 10% of prostitutes working on the streets in Vancouver (Lowman, 1991b) yet they represented only 2% of the prostitutes mentioned in the articles about violence. Male prostitutes’ victimizations are either underreported by the media or underrepresented in the reported crime statistics from which the media often rely upon for their news stories.

Twenty-four percent of the victims were under the age of 18 years; 43% were between the ages of 18 and 24; 21% were between the ages of 25 and 30; and 11% were 31 years or older. The youngest victim was 11 years old and the oldest victim was 40 years old. The mean age was 21 years old. The majority of the prostitute victims in the *Vancouver Sun* worked on the “East End” stroll (42.4%) followed by the “Mount Pleasant” stroll (27.8%). Women have worked out of the “East End” stroll throughout the period examined here. Some of the other strolls (“West-End Davie”, “Georgia-Hornby”, “Granville”, “Mount Pleasant”, and “Richards-Seymour”) have either been cyclical in nature, appearing at some moments and then disappearing at others, or did not appear until the 1990s (“Kingsway” and “Whalley”).

The Perpetrators of Violence Against Women who Prostitute

The typical offender was a male³ between the ages of 25 and 38 years old and a “customer” of a prostitute. “Pimp” was the second most common offender type depicted in the news articles (Table 3).

³ Due to a coding error I forgot to code the gender of the offender, however where available the names of the offenders were included as a category on the spreadsheet and were almost all male names. This finding is further supported by Lowman and Fraser (1995, p. 27) who found that it is mainly men who are the perpetrators of violence against prostitutes (88% of the offenders in the RCMP database examined by Lowman and Fraser were male).

Table 3
Offender Types as Mentioned in the *Vancouver Sun*, 1975-1993
(n=274)

	Count	Pct of Responses	Pct of Cases
Customer	184	47.2	67.2
Pimp	116	27.7	42.3
Police Officer	30	7.7	10.9
Other	27	6.9	9.9
Other Prostitute	18	4.6	6.6
Resident	8	2.0	2.8
Drug Dealer	6	1.8	2.6
Total Responses	390	100.0	142.3

The majority of the offences occurred outdoors in poorly lit areas (e.g., parking lot, park, alley, street or industrial area) as opposed to indoors (e.g., victim's home, offender's home or hotel room). Due to a coding oversight, not included in either of these classifications is the code for "car or van." Given that women who work as street prostitutes are often approached by potential customers driving cars or vans, a vehicle does play an important role in a potential offence being carried out (even if the offender and the prostitute depart from the vehicle before the offence is committed). Further, the code "other" was predominately comprised of offence locations such as a car or van making it the single largest code in this category.

The findings that most crimes against women who prostitute portrayed in the *Vancouver Sun* occurred in outdoor areas that are often dark and secluded is consistent with the research cited in Chapter 2. It is also not surprising given that: 1) it costs additional funds to rent a hotel, and sometimes neither party wishes to carry out the transaction in their own residences; and 2) the law encourages women who prostitute to accompany customers to secluded areas to avoid detection by police.

Canadian law does not criminalize the act of prostitution *per se* but instead the “public communication” for the purposes of buying or selling sexual services. This places women in vulnerable positions, susceptible to violence away from public view.

The majority of the cases involving violence against women who prostitute received coverage in the media at the stage of a police investigation (33.7%). This media reporting pattern appears similar to the coverage of any violent crime. The *Vancouver Sun* covers a story at key moments: the initial report or the search for an offender. This finding is consistent with Fair’s (1984) research on the *Vancouver Sun*’s coverage of crimes generally. Fair (1984, p. 65) concludes that,

there is very little follow up done on most crime stories...[M]ost crime stories are reported once, and generally do not warrant the type of coverage necessary to report on the post arrest outcome for a particular crime.

When the trial stage was covered (in 114 articles) most of the defendants charged with violent acts against women who prostitute pled not guilty at the remand hearing (in 79 articles). Yet in the majority of articles (87%) the defendants were found guilty. Only in two articles did these offenders receive probation while in the rest of the articles (86.9%) the offenders received custodial sentences ranging from 12 months to life (life was calculated as 25 years or 300 months). In 16.7% of the articles the court rendered indeterminate sentences or indefinite sentences (“dangerous offender”).

Whether covering the offence at the arrest stage or at the trial stage, generally, the volume of the *Vancouver Sun*’s coverage of violence against women who prostitute increased over time. The question is, what accounts for this increase?

Contextualizing the Content Analysis Findings

An increase in the number of articles on violence against women who prostitute might reflect a “paper crime wave” or an increase in the number of incidents reported by victims to the police (or a combination of the two). The increase might also represent media overreporting the number of events due to the potential newsworthiness of these offences. In the following sections I will consider which is the most plausible of these explanations.

A Paper Crime Wave

“Crime waves are little more than the continued and heavy coverage of numerous occurrences which journalists report as a single topic” (Fishman, 1981, p. 102). Fishman discovered an increase in the number of articles concerning crimes against the elderly in New York city and concluded that the print media was responsible for creating the appearance of a “crime wave.” Despite the increase in news reporting about violence against the elderly, crime statistics demonstrated a decrease in reported victimization (Fishman, 1981, p. 99).

Fishman points to several ingredients for the media to create the appearance of a crime wave. First, the presence of a “unifying concept” presents specific news events within a broader theme permitting “journalists to cast an incident as an *instance* of something” (Fishman, 1981, p. 102). Second, journalists can then organize other related issues around the already established theme (Fishman, 1981, p. 102). The “collaboration of other media reporting the same crime theme” and a “continuous supply of crime incidents that can be seen as instances of a theme” (Fishman, 1981, pp. 105, 107) further perpetuates the crime wave.

The interests of researchers in a crime wave are often provoked by a chorus of “talk” in the media. Investigations like Fishman’s focus on whether crime waves are real or imagined. Similarly, “moral panics” are usually identified by the rising level of “talk” about a particular “fear,” and the amount of chatter is taken as an indicator of the way an issue is constructed as a social problem. The general image created by this literature is that moral panics and crime waves operate largely independently of the reality of the phenomenon involved. Crime wave and moral panic perspectives thus argue that “the scale of [the media’s] response is disproportionately greater than the scale of the problem” (Waddington, 1986, p. 245). Yet this argument is made without precise attention to the scale of the problem itself.⁴

While this perspective on “social problems” as claims-making activity (Spector and Kitsuse, 1978) has borne important theoretical fruit, it has its limitations. By focusing on relatively short, high profile events, the literature on crime waves and moral panics ignores the significance of periods of relative quiet. Furthermore, crime waves appear to be short-lived. The amount of reporting required to create a theme leading to a crime wave would be difficult to sustain over many years. In Fishman’s (1981) study, for example, he only examined a six month period of news reporting.

Crime wave explanations are best suited to short periods of noise of a specific news theme. In contrast, I was interested in periods of silence as much as in periods of noise. Although violence against women who prostitute could qualify as a paper crime wave, and that related issues

⁴ See Waddington’s (1986) critique of Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978).

surrounding this theme could be developed by the media as such (e.g., the development of violence against First Nations women), the surge in reporting has occurred over a nineteen year period. A paper crime wave is simply that: a “wave” that rapidly peaks and then quickly breaks. A crime wave fails to explain long-term trends in news reporting because it focuses only on a short-term spattering of news reports drawn from crimes reported to the police. Therefore, the newspaper crime wave hypothesis falls short of explaining the increased volume of news articles about violence against women who prostitute.

Newsworthiness

Certain crimes are commonly overrepresented by the media. For example, a newspaper content analysis by Ditton and Duffy (1983, p. 162) comparing actual crimes to those reported in newspapers, reveals that violent crimes are overreported in newspapers by a factor of 22 to 1. It is arguable that the media overrepresents the occurrence of violence against women who prostitute simply because it is “newsworthy.”

According to Katz, newsworthy crimes contain one or more of the following traits (Katz, 1989, pp. 51-55): 1) “personal competence and sensibility” which includes “accounts of ingenious, vicious, and audacious crimes” perpetrated by “artful dodgers and cool killers”; 2) crimes that threaten the “collective integrity” of society. Crimes of this type occur “in contemporary centres of goodness, places symbolizing the...conception of the good life...”. Examples would be robberies at Disneyland or a murder at a MacDonald’s restaurant. These incidents are exceptionally newsworthy because they are apparently random acts of violence against the general public. 3) crimes that moralize political conflicts; an example would be

“bank robberies by members of the Black Liberation Army”; and 4) white-collar crimes. According to Katz (1989, p. 55), “the more categories that can be filled by a given crime, the bigger the news story.”

Crimes against women who prostitute are consistent with the first of Katz’s categories. However, the amount and the longevity of the news stories are dependent on many other factors. The factors articulated in Katz’s classifications of newsworthiness make no mention of the continual supply of “actual” incidents of violent crime.

Ericson, Baranek and Chan’s (1987) concept of newsworthiness is more inclusive than Katz’s account. According to Ericson *et al.* (1987, pp. 141-149), six factors contribute to the newsworthiness of an event: “simplification” in which an incident is viewed by the media as eventful and unambiguous; “dramatization” where an event is recognized as a dramatic development; “personalization” in which the media dramatizes the plight of the victim; “consonance” “where a reporter will visualize what is going to happen and then produce a report which makes that outcome apparent regardless of what else has transpired”; the “unexpected” event; and finally “themes and continuity” where an “event is more newsworthy if it is continuous with previous events, in the sense that the reporter is able to place it within a salient frame.” This latter category is missing in Katz’s description of newsworthiness and it is this category which comes closest to the findings of my content analysis. The newsworthiness of violence against women who prostitute appears to be connected to the continual supply of reported crimes thus creating a salient news frame. Increased coverage is also likely to result when journalists are able to personalize the victim’s plight and dramatize the story. The continued supply of actual

events alone does not lead to overreporting, but it does increase the likelihood of continued media coverage.

Research on Violence Against Women who Prostitute

The number of articles depicting the murder of women who prostitute increased considerably over the study period. Whether this change is the result of the *Vancouver Sun's* overreporting of murders when compared to actual crimes known to the police or an increase in the actual numbers of murdered women who prostitute is addressed here.

For comparative purposes, I had access to information concerning reported violence against women who prostitute in Vancouver. A 1995 Vancouver study by Lowman and Fraser used a multi-faceted approach to determine levels of violence against persons who prostitute. The first database discussed by Lowman and Fraser is the RCMP data on murders in British Columbia involving victims thought to be involved in prostitution. From 1975 to 1993, 29 murders were recorded in the database (1995, p. 30). From 1975 to 1984, there were only 5 reported murders. The remaining 24 murders occurred after 1985 (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 30). Of the 29 murder victims, all but one were female.

The RCMP database indicates an increase in the number of reported murders after 1985. This suggests that there was a larger number of murders for the *Vancouver Sun* to report. When the newspaper articles in this thesis (and in Lowman and Fraser's (1995) report) are cross-referenced with the murder victims in the RCMP data, only three of the murders were not reported in the *Vancouver Sun* (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 31). From 1975 to 1984, 4 articles appeared about the murder of

prostitutes. From 1985 to 1993, there were 146 articles about the murder of prostitutes.

The trend in the *Vancouver Sun's* reporting of murdered women who prostitute accurately reflects the RCMP data of reported accounts. This leads me to conclude that the increase in the *Vancouver Sun's* reporting of murders of women who prostitute is incident driven: the increase in the number of reported cases of actual violence drives the increase of the number of articles in the *Vancouver Sun*. It would appear that the media is simply responding to the “reality” of violence against women who prostitute. However, as I argue in Chapter 4, journalists nevertheless actively influence how we see violence against women who prostitute. By constructing a particular image of it, they influence how readers perceive this phenomenon.

In a second database (Vancouver Police Department information on deaths of persons known to have prostituted), Lowman and Fraser (1995, p. 41) found that, from 1975 to 1984, 10 murders were recorded; from 1985 to 1993, 24 murders were recorded.

Another source for documenting the level of violence against women who prostitute is “Bad Trick Sheets” circulated by the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) and Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights (POWER) from 1985-1988, and by the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) from 1988-1993. When compared to the cases reported to the police, these sheets offer some insight into the *dark figure* of crimes against women who prostitute. Since these reports obviously do not involve murder, the most frequently reported crimes are physical assault (246 occurrences from 1985-1988 and 328 from 1988-1993, 39.7% and 33.4% respectively) and sexual assault (176 occurrences from 1985-

1988 and 242 from 1988-1993, 28.4% and 24.6% respectively) (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 56).

It is difficult to determine if any of these cases were reported to the police. The goal of the Bad Trick Sheets is to provide offender profiles to women who prostitute so that they can avoid offenders. Given the serious nature of these incidents, some may have been reported to the police and therefore may be included in the sexual assault and physical assault cases found in the *Vancouver Sun*.

Lowman and Fraser (1995) collected self-report information from 65 respondents. One clear difference in levels of victimization in sub-samples of this population was victimization of on-street as compared to off-street prostitutes. The median rate of bad dates per every hundred for on-street women was 4 while off-street was 2 (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, p. 73).

Qualitatively there are also some important differences between on-street and off-street prostitution. According to Lowman and Fraser (1995, p. 74):

While working the street, a much larger proportion of respondents reported having been robbed, sexually assaulted, beaten, strangled, and kidnapped, and were more likely to have reported being involved in an incident where a weapon was used, or being the victim of an attempted murder. The highest incidence of off-street victimization was in the categories "Refused condom," "Threat/intimidation," and "General harassment".

These findings are consistent with the *Vancouver Sun's* reporting of violence against women who prostitute. Recall that 73% of the prostitute victims in the *Vancouver Sun* articles worked as street prostitutes while only 2.8% worked for an escort service or a massage parlor (the remaining victims were classified as "not specified" or "generic" due to a lack of

information in the articles). According to both news descriptions and victim surveys street prostitution appears to be significantly more dangerous than off-street prostitution.

The finding that the *Vancouver Sun's* increased coverage of violence against women who prostitute over the 19 year study period reflects actual violence is anomalous when compared to some research on crime in the media. For example, in a study of a random sample of two St. Louis newspapers from 1969 to 1973, Jones (1976, pp. 241-242) concludes that decreases or increases in the crime rate bear “no relationship to how much more or less year-to-year attention the papers devote to covering each type of crime [murders, forcible rapes, aggravated assaults, robberies and major property crimes].” Antunes and Hurley (1977), in their study of two daily Houston newspapers, claim there is a relationship between reported crime statistics and the media’s reporting of crime. They say, “the distribution of crime news in the Houston press is *inversely related* to the distribution of crimes reported to the police” [my emphasis] (Antunes and Hurley, 1977, p. 760). In other words, the media tend to overreport violent crime such as murder and sexual assault and underreport petty crimes. Ditton and Duffy’s (1983, p. 162) research discussed earlier also supports this finding.

With reference to my study of the media, for every murder reported in the RCMP database (29 in total) approximately 5 articles appear in the *Vancouver Sun* on the same issue (150 articles on the murders of women who prostitute during the 19 years studied). In the case of sexual assault, 45 incidents were reported in the RCMP database from 1991 to 1993, yet only 24 articles appear in the *Vancouver Sun* during the same time. In a relative sense, the media “underreport” sexual assault cases in comparison to murder cases.

Summary

The print media are reliant mainly on the police for information about criminal activity. An increase in the number of reports about murders made to the police would result in a larger pool of crime from which *Vancouver Sun* reporters could draw. Research by Lowman and Fraser (1995) demonstrates an increase since 1985 in the number of murdered women who prostitute in Vancouver. *Vancouver Sun* stories about murders have increased along with the increase in the number of murders. It is not plausible to say that the increase in reporting of murders is simply due to a paper crime wave or a reflection of overreporting due to increased newsworthiness. The *Vancouver Sun's* increased coverage of murders against women who prostitute, and other crimes, is therefore incident driven. An increase in the number of murders has led to increased coverage by the *Vancouver Sun*.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE: THE “DEVIANT” VICTIM

In this chapter I examine the ideological dimensions of news-making about violence against women who prostitute. “[N]ews accounts are ideological in that they are both selective and occlusive” (Knight, 1982, p. 33). Journalists’ exposure to different types of news sources contributes to the ideological dimensions of news construction. Fishman (1980, p. 134) points to several other factors that also collectively make news reporting an ideological process: journalists’ exposure to a beat territory; the meaning and relevance of what journalists are exposed to and not exposed to; what constitutes the facts in the case; what constitutes errors and oversights; and what generates controversy.

Ideology is a “way of knowing and, obversely, not knowing about the world that is structured by broader relations of power and control” (Knight, 1982, p. 17). Ideological news accounts are inclusive and exclusive to the point that this process appears natural (Knight, 1982, p. 17). Fishman’s above listed factors naturalize and institutionalize the ideological character of news-making. Selectivity of news is not an individualized process but, rather, a product of the method for knowing and not knowing the world (Knight, 1982, p. 34). The outcome is that news accounts are “partial accounts, structured according to the regnant rules of newsworthiness and format, rules which ‘automatically’ include certain data and exclude others” (Knight, 1982, p. 33).

My analysis is

premised on the fact that texts do not 'have' meanings, but are assigned meanings by language users, or, to be more precise, by the mental processes of language users.

(van Dijk, 1991, pp. 116-117)

"Language users" include both the journalists who construct the stories and the readers who consume it. It is the former group that is the focus of my analysis of the ideological dimensions of news-making. Hence, it is through an analysis of news sources and news discourses that the ideological characteristics of news-making are revealed. I argue that these characteristics are not only reflective of media ideology but also of our hegemonic culture more generally.

An Analysis of News Sources

The power of the news medium rests in its presentation of meaning as authoritative; the meaning of the news article is presented as "true" or "real" (Young, 1990, p. 158). Yet the newspaper article must be "treated as discursive, as a 'text', 'already-written', contingent, allegorical, referring not to one deep meaning or structure but to a plenitude of possibilities" (Young, 1990, p. 159).

Journalists possess a great deal of power in the dissemination of information, but the news media cannot exist without "news sources" and "news consumers" (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 13). The news media usually "do not themselves autonomously create news items; rather they are 'cued in' to specific news topics by regular and reliable...sources" (Hall, *et al.*, 1978, p. 57). News sources are "people who make news through their positions of institutional authority or involvement in newsworthy events" (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 13).

When reporting crime, journalists rely heavily on any or all the following: police, courts, government officials, individuals, community groups, and their own opinions or those of their fellow journalists. Although news media appear dependent on various news sources, journalists determine who is authorized to be a source (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989, p. 378). Moreover, journalists and editors determine how to present information to influence consumers' opinions or to better sell the newspaper.

Sources provide journalists with a variety of information which assists journalists in the construction of a crime story. In a random sample of 20 articles about violence against women who prostitute, I found that persons who were not members of government agencies or community groups were the most commonly cited source. These individuals were often neighbours, friends, or family of either the offender or the victim. Police were the next most commonly utilized source for journalists. The use of police officers as sources in crime reporting is not an unusual finding. The third most cited source was representatives of community groups. These individuals often provide opinions that can be represented in a point/counter point format, a style preferred by journalists in order to appear objective or fair.

The information provided from any source can be factual and/or opinionated. Journalists also use each other as sources at the beginning and end of an article. This knowledge is "derived from news accounts published previously and, to a lesser extent, from other sources who remain off the record" (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 188).

In a poignant article about the rise in the number of murders of

women who prostitute, two journalists state:

They had three things in common: They were women, they were prostitutes and they were found dead — dumped in back alleys, disposed of in bushes or discarded openly on dark industrial lots.

(*Vancouver Sun*, February 4, 1989, p. A1)

The journalists derived this opening statement from previously published articles about the murder of two women known to have prostituted. In another example, a journalist began her article by stating a fact deduced from unnamed sources:

Most West End hookers appear to have moved east of Burrard. The prostitutes say they are trying to thwart an application for an injunction which the provincial government has filed in court against hookers and their customers.

(*Province*, June 21, 1984, p. 10)

When it comes to crime-reporting, journalists rely heavily upon police officers for information. Ericson, *et al.* (1991, pp. 191-194), found that of all the criminal justice personnel that the media relies upon (police, crown attorneys, lawyers, judges, and correctional officials), the police are the most commonly used source. It is the police who provide facts about the victim, the offence, and the offender:

Vancouver police Const. Reg Harris said Friday the body of Black was found late Wednesday by a scavenger who was rummaging through the dumpster in a lane behind 2092 East Hastings.

(*Vancouver Sun*, March 6, 1993, p. A5)

Police officers also provide personal opinions about alleged crimes. When asked by a journalist his opinion about several fellow police officers being named on the Vancouver "Bad trick sheets" one officer stated: "Any cop who would do what prostitutes are alleging would be stupid..." (*Province*, August 1, 1985, p. 5). Journalists also use the personal opinions of police officers about investigations of crimes. In one article about the murder of

women known to have prostituted, one investigating officer stated that, “Murder is murder...It doesn’t matter if it’s a hooker or the mayor’s daughter. We only investigate murder one way” (*Province*, September 4, 1986, p. 5).

In turn the police have often relied upon the media as an avenue to reach the public for clues in an unsolved case. In an article about the murder of a woman described as a former city prostitute the police “asked that anyone with any knowledge of [the murdered woman] or her whereabouts the night of the killing to call the Esquimalt police...” (*Vancouver Sun*, March 8, 1986, p. A9).

Police officers are useful sources at the beginning of a crime investigation. Journalists often utilize judges, crown attorneys and defence lawyers as sources when covering a trial; however, the results in Chapter 3 show that the media do not regularly follow a case beyond the initial report of an offence. In cases where a trial does receive media coverage, statements made in and outside the court by the crown and the defence lawyers provide journalists with information that can be framed in a point/counter point format. In an article titled, “**Hookers lie, says lawyer**” (*Province*, March 31, 1992, p. A9), the defence lawyer argued in court that the accusation of sexual assault against his client should be rejected because the “three women making the charges are prostitutes...” and “Would the type of person who would agree to be a prostitute be honest?” The journalist devoted one line to the prosecutor’s response to such negative stereotyping: “The women have consistently picked the accused out of a lineup and in court.”

Judges are often quoted when a final decision is rendered in a case. For example, in a trial of a man accused of sexually assaulting and beating

several women who prostituted, the judge stated: "This is a very precise example of violence directed toward women" (*Vancouver Sun*, October 9, 1986, p. B8). A *Vancouver Sun* journalist quoted another justice as saying that "the profession of the complainant is not a mitigating factor in sentencing — prostitutes are entitled to the protection of the law" (December 13, 1985, p. A14). Both of these statements portray violence against women who prostitute as "gendered violence" or "femicide." It is unfortunate that journalists do not quote judges such as these more often.

Despite this contextualization of violence, reliance on judges, attorneys and the police for information about crime reflects "a law and order perspective, and an institutional perspective rather than those of victims, social organizations and other professionals" (McCormick, 1995, p. 30). Therefore, I was interested in seeing what other types of sources journalists relied upon for information.

Representatives from local community groups are a non-legal source used by journalists. This source provides journalists with reactions and opinions about crime in the community. The organization "Prostitutes and other Women for Equal Rights" (POWER) was very vocal in the media in the late 1980s. Journalists often quoted spokeswoman Marie Arrington in articles about violence against women who prostitute.

As a media source, Arrington appears in news articles in several different ways: sometimes she is only quoted once in an article, and other times she is frequently quoted; sometimes she is re-quoted in a letter to the editor or by a columnist, while other times her organization is the focus of an entire article. Each type yields different uses of the same source.

As an individual news source and also as the representative of POWER, Arrington is utilized by journalists for reactions to incidents of

violence against women who prostitute. Arrington's reactions are often to criminal events that are "already framed by institutional sources [such as the police] in the news" (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 196). Therefore, as a news source Arrington provides journalists with contextualized information about events already framed by a law and order perspective. In an article appearing in the *Vancouver Sun* (June 3, 1992, p. A6), the journalist states that, "Marie Arrington of POWER said 38 prostitutes have been killed in the Vancouver area since 1985..." Arrington also provides journalists with non-statistical information about the realities of violence against women who prostitute. One *Vancouver Sun* journalist quotes Arrington (October 3, 1988, p. A3) as stating that, "The tricks are getting weirder. They have knives, hammers, chloroform, guns with silencers. It's sick but it's a fact'."

As a news source, Arrington is critical of the police and the laws on prostitution. In response to another murder of a woman who prostituted, Arrington states to a journalist that,

'We've been predicting this...No one's been doing anything about the violence out there. Police haven't been listening to the women. Now they're [prostitutes] wondering who's going to be next.'

(*Vancouver Sun*, August 27, 1986, p. A3)

In reference to the new federal law passed in 1985 prohibiting public communication for the purposes of prostitution, Arrington "agreed prostitutes will be driven indoors [due to the new law], but said it will become more dangerous for the hookers as pimps start controlling them" (*Vancouver Sun*, December 23, 1985, p. A2). The journalist then continues by directly quoting Arrington: "Out of sight, out of mind until the bodies start turning up'..." As a news source Arrington provides a

more critical non-institutionalized picture of the law concerning prostitution.

Arrington also provides journalists and their readers with “tertiary understanding of other experiences” (Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 198). Several journalists made POWER and Arrington the focus of an entire article. In one article Arrington agrees to talk to the *Vancouver Sun* (January 16, 1984, p. A1) to tell her side of the story about the realities of violence against women who prostitute. In this article Arrington criticizes the media for sensationalizing violence against women who prostitute. She also attempts to personalize the women who are frequent targets of violence by quoting incidents from the “Bad Trick Sheets.” Arrington describes the harsh lives that these women lead on the streets and their often abusive childhoods that led them into prostitution as a means of survival. Arrington’s attempt in this article is not only to contextualize the violence committed against these women, but also to humanize them for readers (something often missing in other articles on violence against women who prostitute).

When interviewed by Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987, p. 109),
journalists,

asserted that their mission was to be ‘fair, but not objective.’
Fairness meant giving a source an opportunity to explain
his[/her] position, and to address any aspersions cast upon
him[/her] by another source.

Journalistic ideology towards fairness partially explains why the media use Arrington as a news source. Her popularity in the print media can also be understood given that journalists prefer a story construction in a point/counter-point format. Arrington’s opinions ensure the continuance of this format. However, sources do not control the forum that they

appear in. Journalists and editors determine which sources to use, and what information to use. Thus, journalists engage in “‘constructive interpretation’ that expresses their news outlet’s preferred reading” (Ericson *et al.*, 1991, p. 86). As a news source Arrington provides the media with contextualized information about violence against women who prostitute and criticisms of the criminal justice system’s role in preventing the victimization. Yet for any source the forum is not their own; journalists control the dissemination of information as provided by their news sources. A source’s ideas are bound by particular journalistic ideologies.

Because police are usually called upon for factual information concerning an investigation and not personal opinions, their information does not necessarily proceed through the same filtering process as Arrington’s. Personal opinions are often tested against journalistic ideologies and more often subject to the point/counter point format of reporting.

The Ideology of Crime News - Blaming and Dehumanizing the Victims of Violence

By disentangling ideology from the news process, the way something is said and what is not said are exposed (Heck, 1980, p. 124) In the case of reporting on violence against women who prostitute, two stereotypes emerged. Prostitute victims could be construed as “deviant” or “drug addicted” and thus deemed as being responsible for their own victimization. These images are often reinforced by individualizing violence through the stigmatizing label, “hooker.”

According to linguists, signs have two meanings: the direct and specific meaning of a sign is the denotative meaning and what the sign symbolizes or reflects is the connotative meaning (Berger, 1984, p. 48). However, to analyze discourse requires treating the text in a more complex way than this. The analysis of discourse examines the “relations between structures of text and talk...and of their cognitive, social, cultural, or historical ‘contexts’...” (van Dijk, 1991, p. 111). For example, in her analysis of news articles about prostitution and AIDS, King (1990) reveals that the media perpetuate a myth about “female contamination.” She does this by grounding her interpretations in the medical finding that the transmission from men to women of sexually related diseases is more easily accomplished than from women to men.

The “Deviant” Victim

The news media simplifies the world through the classification of complex events into simple categories. The categories only take on meaning when related to other classifications: “It is not ‘content’ that determines meaning, but ‘relations’ in some kind of a system” of classification (Berger, 1982, p. 18). This relationship is sometimes oppositional. For example, the category *vamp* denotes meaning only when compared to its opposite *virgin*. As Berger (1982, p. 18) points out, “[n]othing has meaning in itself!” The location of dichotomies within texts not only reveals the relationship that exists between various ideas but something about the attitudes, feelings and mental states of the writer and prevailing thoughts in society more generally (Berger, 1984, p. 174).

Women are still socialized within a sexual double standard which,

persistently encourages or condones sexual promiscuity of men (and boys) as a display of masculinity and male

aggression, whilst condemning it in women (and girls) as a sign of unfeminine, shameful...behaviour.

(Smart and Smart, 1978, p. 116)

Women continue to self-regulate their sexual activities out of a *fear* of sexual assault. This fear inhibits women's heterosexual initiative toward men. Furthermore, a "history of sexual activity is a negative mark that is used to differentiate *kinds* of women" (emphasis added) (Shrage, 1989, p. 355). We do not value women's sexual experience. Instead, women's sexual innocence is valued (Shrage, 1989, p. 355). This is seen in the persistence of child/youth pornography and youth prostitution.

In an article about date rape Pineau found that historically "women were taught to deny their sexuality and to aspire to ideals of chastity", and that things have not really changed:

Women still tend to eschew conquest mentalities in favour of a combination of sex and affection...[T]here is an expectation that women will be coy about their sexual desire.

(1989, p. 228)

The dichotomization of women based upon their degree of sexual activity is especially destructive to a victim when sexually assaulted. The "good girl" receives sympathy and support while the "bad girl" tends to be blamed for her own demise. Unfortunately for women who prostitute, the public attitude towards their work is consistent with a "bad girl" image. The interpretation of a news article about a sexual assault of a woman who prostitutes demonstrates the way the media perpetuate a deviant image of the victim.

Benedict (1990, p. 19) lists several "factors that lead the public, and the press, to blame the victim for the sexual assault and push her into the role of 'vamp'", or deviant victim. Such factors include: whether the victim *knew* her assailant; whether a weapon was used; whether she is "pretty"; and whether she in any way "deviated from the traditional sex

role of being at home with family or children” (Benedict, 1990, p. 19). An answer of “yes” to any or all of these factors can result in the victim being portrayed as a “vamp” and therefore blamed for her own victimization.

The sexual victimization of women, “is proven or disproven on the worth of her word, the test of her character, the chasteness of her past sexual life, the mode of dress, the glint in her eye, and the smile on her face” (Barry, 1979, p. 35). The “journalistic pattern of ‘victim-blaming’ is part of the ‘normal’ cultural construction of sexual assault where the woman is made responsible for the violent and ‘uncontrollable’ sexuality of men” (McCormick, 1995, p. 26). I argue that, by virtue of being a woman who prostitutes, the credibility of the victim of violence is damaged.

Benedict’s (1990) factors are applicable to other violent crimes committed against women because it is not only “rape victims who are categorized [by the media] as virgins or vamps but women in general are as well” (Benedict, 1992, p. 21). These factors demonstrate how victims of violent crimes can be categorized as either a “virgin” (innocent victim) or a “vamp” (blamed for her own demise).

I have applied Benedict’s criteria for analyzing the media’s coverage of a sexual assault to an article about the sexual assault of a woman known to be a prostitute to determine if her “deviant” status would prompt a “vamp” classification, thus blaming her for the violence committed against her. The headline of the article selected is: **“Man jailed 9 years for attack on pregnant hooker”** (*Vancouver Sun*, July 22, 1992, p. B8). I selected this article because it contained enough facts about the crime to apply Benedict’s analysis. The other articles about sexual assault were too general to apply Benedict’s analysis.

The use of the word “hooker” in the title along with the description of the facts in the case reveal that the victim willingly accompanied the assailant to engage in sexual services for money. Therefore, the victim could be classified as “knowing” her assailant. Also a weapon was not used to facilitate this assault. The assailant tied the woman up with her own clothing in order to sexually assault her.

Benedict’s next category, attractiveness, is quite subjective. Benedict claims that “people tend to be biased against attractive rape victims” (1992, p. 19). This proposition is difficult to assess; it is possible that some readers may have an image of women who prostitute as young, attractive, sexy, and wearing provocative clothing.

The next factor that influences how the victim is perceived is whether she “deviated from the traditional sex role of being at home with family and children” (Benedict, 1992, p. 19). The use of the word “hooker” in the headline places the victim squarely in the “vamp” category. The addition of the word “pregnant” could further damage this victim’s status. She may be viewed not only as a deviant woman (hooker) but also a bad mother to be.

In this news article there is clearly some negative information that can influence how the victim is perceived. Benedict’s analysis indicates that a “vamp” receives less sympathy from the media and its readers, and can be blamed for the sexual assault. The analysis of this news article also demonstrates how journalists simplify complex individual crimes and decontextualize them from their social and historical contexts for no other reason than quickness in reporting an event. I argue that this method of reporting is even more influential on the reader’s perception of the sexual assault victim than the victim’s status as a prostitute. Journalists use what

Barry (1979, p. 34) calls the “rape paradigm” where a sexual assault victim is treated as a “self-contained sociology of why men do what they do to women. No other explanations of social forces or male behavior [are] considered.” According to McCormick (1995, p. 25),

[w]hat is not seen in such accounts is any analysis of men as perpetrators of sexual assault, or sexual assault as a crime in general, of why women are blamed for not keeping themselves safe, or criticism of how the criminal justice system deals with this kind of crime.

The perpetuation of the “she asked for it” rationale by journalists contributes to a distorted cultural message about sexual assault: news consumers “buy into myths such as the victim was responsible, it only happens to bad women and only strangers commit the crime” of sexual assault (McCormick, 1995, p. 26). Blaming a woman who prostitutes for a sexual assault committed against her is destructive to all women: “Any woman can be branded a ‘whore’ if she steps out of line” (Roberts, 1992, p. 11) and hence blamed for a crime committed against her.

The “Drug Addict”

The “drug addict” is another victim-blaming stereotype used to characterize women who prostitute. An article entitled “**Streets of Death**” (which given the research reviewed in Chapter 2 should read “streets of violence”) (*Province*, March 7, 1993, p. A26) describes the murder of Vicki Black, who was left dead in a dumpster on East-Hastings. The opening paragraph states that,

Vicki Black would go anywhere, with anyone, and do whatever they wanted — as long as they gave her enough money to get stoned on home-made crack cocaine [emphasis added].

Black engaged in prostitution to get enough money to buy drugs, and although her murder remains unsolved, police believe she was murdered

by a customer. The opening paragraph of the article effectively blames Black for what happened because she “would go anywhere, with anyone” to fulfill her drug habit. She is represented as a “drug-addicted hooker”, the implication being that she asked for her fate. Nowhere in the article does it state that the assailant took advantage of the fact that Black “would go anywhere with anybody.” This is an opportunistic and possibly premeditated crime where a violent perpetrator preyed upon a vulnerable woman.

Another example of the media’s ideological connection between victimization and a woman’s drug habit appears in an article entitled “**Deadly mix on city streets**” (*Province*, April 11, 1990, p. 16). The journalist states that “Prostitutes, pimps, and drugs make a deadly mix on Vancouver streets...” A police Staff-Sergeant was reported, in this article, as saying: “That’s the human tragedy of the issue, somebody has to pay the price.” Unfortunately, rather than the male perpetrators of the crimes against them, it is the women, with little opportunity for decent employment and often with a childhood full of abuse, who have to pay the price (in the form of their lives) for turning to prostitution for income and drugs for comfort. Journalists often fail to include such contextualizations when reporting the murder of a woman who prostitutes.

The “Hooker”

Being labeled a “hooker” dehumanizes the victim, thus further removing the crime from its social, ideological and historical contexts. Some journalists assume that any violence committed against women who prostitute is a “hazard of the profession.” One journalist states that “If you knowingly swim with sharks, you don’t blame Mother Nature for making

them hungry” (*Vancouver Sun*, March 9, 1987, p. B2). This statement is detrimental to prostitute victims because the analogy implies that violence against women who prostitute is natural and should be an expected punishment for stepping outside the limits of proper female behaviour. It is also insulting to men, categorizing them as having uncontrollable voracious appetites for sex and violence.

This same journalist’s insensitivity continues when he says to all prostitutes,

Society doesn’t get into that black Camero with you, it doesn’t go up those worn stairs with you and the guy with the wad of bills. Society can’t help you when that sick John takes the knife out of his boot. Society has enough problems just being what society is: a group of people trying to make the most of ordinary lives.

(*Vancouver Sun*, March 9, 1987, p. B2)

The journalist unabashedly blames women who prostitute for violence committed against them; nowhere does he judge the perpetrators as culpable. Instead, he individualizes the violence. The result is a “media-generated version of reality” that infers “that some women live deviant lives and there are dangers associated with that lifestyle” (McCormick, 1995, p. 42).

On December 2, 1993, an article appears in the *Province* (p. A5) about a double murder with the following headline: “**Hooker, boyfriend stabbed to death in east-side suite.**” In the opening sentence, the journalist states that: “A Vancouver hooker and her boyfriend were found murdered in their east Vancouver apartment yesterday.” Both the headline and the opening statement of this article imply that the murders are related to prostitution. However, the article subsequently reveals that the murder has less to do with the woman’s alleged profession and potentially more to do with her boyfriend’s mysterious employment. The man apparently

owned several new sports cars and neighbours were unclear how he earned a living.

The media's inclusion of the word hooker in the above headline is sensationalistic. Violence and sex sell newspapers. The newspaper had the ingredient of violence (the double murder). The addition of the term hooker added the sex element. Yet the headline writer made the decision to categorize the murder victim as a hooker on very precarious evidence. The article states that: "Police who knew Humchitt [the murdered woman] said she *had* worked Vancouver streets as a prostitute *but did not know if she was still hooking*" (emphasis added). This comment by a police officer is enough evidence for the editor to use the term hooker in the headline and for the journalist to use it throughout the article.

The term hooker appears frequently in news articles about violence against women who prostitute. The term is a "condensing symbol...making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, or other symbolic device" (cited in Tuchman, 1991, p. 89; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Yet the use of hooker as a metaphor for women who prostitute is not "simply a descriptive word, but is used in a negative and derogatory sense" (McCormick, 1995, p. 43).

Metaphors enable the press to collapse "remotely similar elements together in a single figure, providing a single signified with two signifiers" (Young, 1990, p. 91). A particular image ("signifier") of the concept ("signified") under discussion can then be promoted. In other words, through the use of metaphors, the media substitute one idea ("signified") for another, because of the perceived similarities of the two. Although these ideas may appear similar they are also dissimilar, but the dissimilarities are repressed in order for the metaphor to "succeed"

(Young, 1990, p. 92-93). When used to describe a victim of violence, the result is a unidimensional image of violence against women who prostitute where “the role men play in the sex trade industry” and in the commission of violence is ignored (McCormick, 1995, p. 45).

The media’s (over)use of the word hooker in place of woman, victim or even the woman’s name, is a dominant feature of the 260 news articles examined. Thirty-two percent of the articles had the word hooker in their headline. Typical headlines of these articles were: **“Save your pity for real victims, not hookers”** (*Vancouver Sun*, January 18, 1984, p. A5); **“Slain hooker was on A-G list”** (*Vancouver Sun*, February 25, 1985, p. A1); **“A trail of strangled hookers”** (*Province*, October 5, 1986, p. 31); **“Slain hooker ‘too shy’ for streets”** (*Vancouver Sun*, April 6, 1988, p. A1); **“Hooker toll rising”** (*Vancouver Sun*, September 1, 1990, p. A2); **“3 hooker assaults work of one man, police conclude”** (*Vancouver Sun*, September 6, 1990, p. A16); and **“24 charges in hooker rapes”** (*Province*, November 6, 1992, p. A7). In the text of the article journalists might use the term prostitute as well as hooker when describing the victim.

Tracing the history of the word hooker has not been easy but several dictionaries do offer some insight into its meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines hooker as a number of different kinds of labourer: factory labourer, camp worker, coal mine worker, etc... *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* states that the word hooker is slang for “any old fashioned or clumsy vessel” or “any fishing vessel working with *hooks* and *lines* rather than nets” (emphasis added). Mills (1989) says that etymologists do not agree on the origins of

the term hooker as applied to prostitutes:

[One theory] suggests the word is based on the C16th *huckster*, meaning peddler, hawker or mercenary person, from the Middle English verb *huck*, meaning to bargain...Another theory proposes that *hooker* was the name given to the female camp-followers of General Joseph Hooker's division during the American Civil War. Yet another suggestion is that the source was the C19th red-light district in New York called Corleon's Hook. Webster's [dictionary] believes that [hooker] probably derives from the verb *to hook* in the sense of entrapping someone into improper, undesirable or foolish activity.

Mills (1989, pp. 119-120)

Historically, the word hooker might have meant labourer and was eventually appropriated for the slang meaning of a fishing vessel. This metaphoric connection is unclear, but the metaphoric use of hooker for prostitute may lie in the words "hooks" and "lines." In Western cultures women who prostitute have historically been classified as devious women who lead honest men (customers) astray by "hooking" them with their provocative "lines." It appears that the term hooker is a "metonymy" where a "relationship is suggested that is based on association" (Berger, 1982, p. 33). This association is possible because of the "existence of codes in people's minds that enable the proper connections to be made" (Berger, 1982, p. 33).

As a metonymy, the term hooker has become a well-entrenched abstraction in Western culture. Most people would associate the word hooker with its slang, meaning female prostitute as opposed to "labourer" or "fishing vessel." The number of times the word hooker is used in news headlines clearly demonstrates our understanding of the word to mean female prostitute. The newspaper's use of the word hooker has become so pervasive that it no longer requires its metonymic connection to give it meaning.

According to Mills (1989, p. 120):

As a term for prostitute, *hooker* suggests a means by which men absolve their guilt for seeking to satisfy their desire for illicit sex: a hook like a talon or a magical charm is difficult to escape from. Such an attitude is entirely reminiscent of a refusal to accept responsibility for one's own actions expressed in the childhood cry, 'But (s)he made me do it'.

The term *hooker* not only absolves men's guilt for illicit sex, but also society's responsibility for the lack of viable economic choices for women. Words that apply to an occupation that society disapproves of, "communicate[s] simultaneously a fact and a judgment on that fact...that is their effective connotations may strongly shape people's thoughts" (Hayakawa and Hayakawa, 1990, p. 48).

The use of *hooker* is a stylistic choice "between alternative ways of saying more or less the same thing by using different words" (van Dijk, 1991, p. 115). Such choices have ideological implications,

because they often signal the opinions of the reporter about news actors and news events as well as properties of the social and communicative situation...and the group membership of the speakers [or writers]...

(van Dijk, 1991, p. 116)

Earlier in this thesis I made the stylistic choice of "women who prostitute" over other possible options. This demonstrates my ideological commitment to see these victims of male violence as women and not just as prostitutes. The word *hooker* emphasizes the deviant profession of the woman. It also demonstrates the "cultural dimension of news language: the everyday, popular style of tabloids" (van Dijk, 1991, p. 116) that prefer concise words such as "cops" to police officers, "mobs" to demonstrators and "hookers" to women who prostitute. However, journalists only convey a "preferred" or "dominant" reading of the text "without negating entirely the (hypothetical) possibility of other interpretations" (Knight, 1982, p.

36). This might explain why journalists never refer to women who prostitute as “whores.” This word is not culturally fashionable.

The reader is not simply a ‘consumer’ of predetermined content, but rather an active agent, an accomplice of ideology, decoding the text in a seemingly independent way, but with tools and methods fashioned and imparted by others.

(Knight, 1982, p. 36)

When examining the realms of social acceptability for words like whore, hooker and prostitute, the word prostitute has a wider range of acceptance than the other two words. The word prostitute appears in the *Criminal Code* and is used in courts and the Parliament. The narrower range of social acceptability of words like hooker and whore is one indicator of derogatory meaning.

Feminist historical research has demonstrated the persistent stigma of being identified as a hooker. The criminalization of communication for the purposes of prostitution has further institutionalized the hooker stigma. Pheterson defines this stigma as “a mark of shame or disease on an unchaste woman” in which unchastity implies impurity and defilement (1987, p. 215). Rarely do journalists focus on the social conditions that lead women into prostitution, or the social and historical contexts of violence (McCormick, 1992 and Ericson *et al.*, 1991). The media also ignore the implications of violence against *women* who prostitute: the victims are not just hookers; they are women.

The murder of women who prostitute points to three factors: the vulnerability of this marginalized group of women, the persistence of violence against women, and the enduring wage gap between women’s and men’s economic status. Often journalists ignore these factors leaving women who prostitute in marginalized positions. With no connections to

the rest of society, the woman who prostitutes is viewed as contributing to her own violent demise.

Alexander (1988, p. 188) reminds us that prostitution exists,

at least in part, because of the subordination of women in most societies. This subordination is reflected in the double standard of sexual behavior for men and women, and is carried out in the discrepancy between women's and men's earning power...

By individualizing the woman's life, by treating it as immoral, readers do not have to feel responsible for her death or the conditions which may have led her into prostitution. The ideological implications are that society is not to blame for this murder but that the woman, through her immoral lifestyle choices, brought the fate upon herself. Reinforced in this process is the patriarchal myth that it is "up to women to limit their lives to 'non-dangerous' or unprovocative behaviour (as defined by men)" (Peck, 1987, p. 103). If women do not regulate their own morality, then "death [is] the righteous punishment...for a life of sin" (Roberts, 1992, p. 247). By perpetuating such myths, journalists do not merely participate in social commentary but, instead, actively engage in the social control of all women (Peck, 1987, p. 98).

Research on media representation of crime has demonstrated that journalists often present a one-dimensional picture of criminality. Crime is often connected to an individual rather than a social phenomenon: "Not only is the presentation of crime...severed from its underlying socio-economic conditions; it is also disconnected from its own historical development" (Barak, 1994, p. 249). Contextualizing crime is often the focus of activists like Marie Arrington who struggle for media attention among competing sources. However, even her rejection of a preferred ideological reading of a news article "is a response to the frame

promulgated by the media” (Tuchman, 1991, p. 90). Hence, the preferred reading or “cultural hegemony spawns the terms of its own rejection” (Tuchman, 1991, p. 91).

In this analysis I found that journalists blamed prostitute-victims for violence committed against them, failed to contextualize violence in its social, historical and economical contexts, and individualized the victimization of these women. But as McCormick reminds us, “it is not enough to show that the media gives us distorted knowledge; this knowledge, however distorted, exists for a reason” (1995, p. 33). The myths and the silences about violence against women who prostitute (and women generally) all operate to displace men’s individual responsibility for their violent actions back onto women.

Resistance to the Dominant Ideology

“[A]lthough the news media may unconsciously embed a ‘preferred reading’ in their stories, even that ‘preferred reading’ may constitute a ‘contested terrain’” (Tuchman, 1991, p. 88). Hence, there were some articles that did contextualize the pervasive phenomenon of violence against women who prostitute, thereby adding other dimensions to the construction of such crimes. In an article entitled **“Minister urges public outrage in wake of prostitute’s death”** (*Vancouver Sun*, April 22, 1989, p. A5), the journalist quotes a United Church minister as stating: “We need to feel and hear more outrage coming from the community, which has really been quite passive about what is happening to women on the streets.” The attempt of the article was to raise social concern over the murder of women who prostitute. Later that year, in a second article entitled, **“Violence against women: the facts speak for themselves”**

(*Vancouver Sun*, December 19, 1989, p. A11), the journalist contextualizes violence against women who prostitute as a form of gendered violence. The journalist quotes a prominent Vancouver lawyer who is sympathetic to the plight of these women: “Basically all of the women killed have been poor and have turned to this life [prostitution] in desperation. They’re on the low end of the political totem pole.” This article helps to point to our responsibility for the murder of these women.

Several articles about the work of the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) provide the opportunity for resisting dominant discourses about women who prostitute. In one article entitled, “**Hooker defenders tired of the abuse**” (*Vancouver Sun*, January 16, 1984, p. A1), the journalist states that Co-founders of ASP, Sally DeQuadros and Marie Arrington, “say the news media all too often use stories about prostitution as an excuse to titillate the audience’s fascination with the sordid.” ASP activists used the media as a forum for criticizing the media.

Resistance can also come in the form of excluding particular words or phrases when constructing a news article. Benedict’s (1992) study about the media’s depiction of female victims provided a standard by which to guide this search for the “absent.” During my examination of the news articles several paradoxes emerged.

Benedict (1992, p. 37) argues that the “language used about sex crime victims [is] often infantilizing and mocking.” Victims who are clearly *women* are described as being *girls*. In the articles examined here the victims are described as either women or prostitutes (or hookers), but never as girls. It appears that the media reserves the word girl for non-prostitute women, but not so discernibly as to afford a “girl-victim” automatic sympathy.

Newspaper journalists in the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* rarely describe prostitute-victims according to their physical attractiveness which Benedict (1992, p. 37) argues is a common occurrence in reports about female victimization. It is possible that the use of the word hooker to describe a victim already perpetuates an image of physical attractiveness. But, of course, not all readers regard women who prostitute as “pretty.” The newspapers’ description of the victim’s attractiveness sexualizes her for (male) readers whereas the word hooker (which makes the reader think of sex) may already accomplish this.

Descriptions of the victim as “pretty” and a “girl” are welcome absences. Some absences are not so welcome. For example, missing from the newspaper accounts of violence against women who prostitute are descriptions of these victims of violence beyond their involvement in prostitution. Their profession takes precedence over other characterizations such as mother, volunteer worker, employee, friend, etc. Unflattering comments, such as hooker, drug addict or alcoholic, appear often as descriptions of prostitutes who are victims of violence. For the journalists, this “process of abstracting, of leaving characteristics out, is an indispensable convenience” (Hayakawa and Hayakawa, 1990, p. 86). Yet it is through the “inclusion of selected features and exclusion of others, [that] the [news] accounts retroactively ‘accomplish’, or transform, the event into a crime” (McCormick, 1995, p. 29) and the woman into a “deviant.”

Resistance can often originate outside the media in the form of rallies, protests and vigils for the murdered women. Following the murder of Cheryl Ann Joe (a case discussed in more detail below), the First Nations community marched in protest against violence against Native women. The headlines of the two articles covering this march are:

“Native women’s struggle to survive recalled in spirit-cleansing ceremony” (*Vancouver Sun*, February 15, 1992, p. A4) and “Slain native mourned” (*Province*, February 16, 1992, p. A20). Both articles provide personal descriptions of Joe as quoted by family and friends, and thus resist media stereotypes about prostitution.

In another example, the front page of the *Vancouver Sun* features a picture of a mourner carrying a candle and the headline: “**Candles Burn for ‘Nickie’**” (February 28, 1985, p. A1). The text of the article is accompanied by a sub-headline: “**Marchers mourn slain hooker.**” Friends of Tatrai are shown leaving a memorial service. Despite the sub-headline the article does humanize Tatrai for the reader.

The impetus for the sympathetic and personalized reporting on the murders of both Joe and Tatrai came from community generated concern over violence against women. These two murder victims were not just seen as hookers but as women with ties to their communities. Community outcry provided the ingredients for resisting the usual style of reporting.

Letters to the editor, a common forum for resistance, demonstrate that some readers are enraged by the media’s coverage of violence against women who prostitute. However, letters from readers do not appear as frequently as articles by journalists. In Chapter 3 it was revealed that only 3.4% of items about violence against women who prostitute were letters to the editors compared to 55.5% written by staff journalists; the remainder of articles had no author, or were written by columnists.

A letter to the editor about a journalist’s coverage of Cheryl Ann

Joe's murder states:

Damn it, why the hell did it have to be "Cheryl Ann Joe, a prostitute..."? Nice epitaph! Why not, "Cheryl Ann Joe, an uncommonly good person," as you also described her?

(*Province*, February 25, 1992, p. A18)

The writer agrees that the placement of "prostitute" next to a murder victim's name is a sad commentary on someone's life. In order that the pervasiveness of violence against these women is recognized, their profession must be mentioned. However, the reader's complaint is over how the journalist chose to make use of the prostitute label. For these victims, prostitution becomes their identity; "[i]t is not that it is their livelihood or that [it] is their occupation, that is their identity, that is who they are" (McCormick, 1995, p. 39).

A second letter states the same point in an extremely poignant way. The headline for the letter states: **"More than hookers — human beings"**:

Recent issues of *The Vancouver Sun* contained several stories about women murdered in the past year. Perhaps if your reporters remembered they were human beings, not only hookers, public apathy toward such crimes would change. Mayor Gordon Campbell's statement about "these prostitutes or hookers being killed" reflects the administration's attitude and explains the lack of results to date. Those who mourn them do not remember them in your or the mayor's terms. I know — one was my daughter.

(*Vancouver Sun*, September 12, 1989, p. A12)

The concerns raised by this reader are also my concerns.

Other letters lash out at the media for failing to contextualize the murder of a prostitute as "gendered violence" or "femicide." In a letter to the editor entitled, **"Dead because she was a woman"** (*Province*, July 3, 1987, p. 26), the writer states: "Every woman knows that Carol [Davis] wasn't killed because she was a prostitute or a drug user. She was killed because she was a woman." In other words, she was a victim of male

violence. Unfortunately, poignant letters such as this one can be met with an uninformed backlash. In a letter entitled “**Feminist hypocrisy**” (*Province*, July 13, 1987, p. 14), a reader criticizes the above letter for sexually stereotyping men as violent. This author claims that “[n]either sex has a corner on violence...” He makes this statement despite the research that clearly demonstrates that men in Canada commit around 90% of all violent criminal acts. Progress towards educating people on the pervasiveness of femicide is a journey of two steps forward and one step back.

Resistance to the dominant ideology of news reporting on violence against women who prostitute is an important dimension of the representation of this topic. However, as stated earlier, a master status dominates the context of this resistance:

Even when news consumers use interpretive strategies that reject specific news frames, they react to the discourse of their culture. Like reporters and editors, they participate in the creation of news as a cultural response to structural conditions.

(Tuchman, 1991, p. 91)

As a form of resistance letters to the editor exist because the media are supposed to be “neutral” and “value-free.” A preferred reading or master status does exist, but it is one that cultivates resistance to it.

Deconstruction of news texts can take many different forms, but the goal of my research was not to reveal every possible interpretation of each text. In deconstructing articles about violence against women who prostitute I found an ideological framework that allowed journalists to blame the victim, individualize their victimization, dehumanize the victim, perpetuate the prostitute stigma, and fail to contextualize the violence as

“gendered violence.” In this way, journalists downplay both the seriousness of and the increase in violence against women who prostitute.

Narrative Analysis

Narratives have a beginning, middle and end, and it is how “one chooses to begin and end a narrative [that] can profoundly alter its shape and meaning” (Riessman, 1993, p. 19). Narratives can be analyzed over time, across several texts, and/or within a single text. All three approaches are adopted here in the analysis of two separate stories about the abduction and murders of two women: one was a prostitute while the other was not. Since the focus of this thesis is on the criminal victimization of women who prostitute, and not non-prostitute victims of violence, the former is discussed in more detail than the latter. The news articles about the murder of a non-prostitute woman are used to demonstrate how the perceived moral and social status of the victim affects journalists’ representation of different kinds of victims. These two murder victims are not meant to be representative of all victims. They are two polar opposites on a continuum of victim portrayals in the news media.

The Murder of Cheryl Ann Joe

On January 20, 1992, the severely mutilated body of Cheryl Ann Joe was found near a loading dock on Powell Street in Vancouver. Joe’s body was dismembered; police found some of her body parts in different locations around the city. An arrest of a suspect occurred two days later. It is after the arrest that the murder first appears in the news. Joe is immediately identified as a prostitute: **“Van seized after hooker is mutilated”** (*Province*, January 22, 1992, p. A5) and **“Stakeout leads to arrest of suspect in sadistic death of prostitute”** (*Vancouver Sun*,

January 22, 1992, p. B1). Apparently Joe had accompanied the man in his van to perform sexual services.

The day after the suspect's arrest, Joe's family spoke to journalists and provided a more balanced picture of this murder victim. In the articles appearing on this day Joe is referred to not as a "hooker" but as a woman "who sometimes worked as a prostitute" (*Vancouver Sun*, January 23, 1992, p. A1). The headline states: "**Slaying: Victim recalled as kind, gentle.**" There are several quotes from family members who spoke kindly of Joe as a good and loving mother, daughter and niece. This coverage of Joe helps to humanize her and solicit sympathy from readers. Unfortunately, many prostitutes are disenfranchised, cast adrift from their home, community and family members. When murdered, the family members of these victims are often silent or journalists never bother to speak to them. On the same day the above article appeared, another article which does not quote any of Joe's family members has the following headline: "**Man charged in death of hooker**" (*Vancouver Sun*, January 23, 1992, p. A9).

In February, an article by columnist Bob Stall appeared in the *Province* with the headline: "**Remember Cheryl's smile, besides her horrible death**" (February 2, 1992, p. A14). The article includes a large photo of Joe holding her son and cousin on her lap. Stall tries to elicit sympathy for this murdered woman, but does so in the context of the harsh life Joe led, placing the blame for her lifestyle on a poor family upbringing. Stall cites the child abuse Joe suffered and how, as an adult, she "drank too much" and "ate too much." I wonder on what basis Stall made these (moral) judgments?

Several readers responded to Stall's story, some criticizing him for not expressing enough sympathy for Joe, and others for expressing too much. One reader criticizes Stall for a lack of compassion:

In your story, you wrote: "When the person's whole life is summed up as 'hooker', it is another obscenity." [Your] caption was an obscenity.

(*Province*, February 25, 1992, p. A18)

Another reader felt that Stall had demonstrated far too much sympathy for a woman who 'tricked' "to support her habits" and not to survive financially (*Province*, February 25, 1992, p. A18).

Two excellent articles about Joe appeared three weeks after her murder. The headline of the *Vancouver Sun* article states: "**Native women's struggle to survive recalled in spirit-cleansing ceremony**" (February 15, 1992, p. A4). The article recounts the smudge ceremony performed by Joe's mourners followed by a march along Hastings Street to raise awareness for the plight of many Native women murdered in Vancouver. The terms hooker and prostitute do not appear anywhere in the article. It pointed to problems with laws that "criminalize women who are on the streets" and states that "poverty is at the root of the problem." The headline of the article appearing in the *Province* the following day states: "**Slain native mourned**" (February 16, 1992, p. A20). The journalist focused more on Joe's race and less on her prostitute status as the community rallied to mourn her murder. An excellent quote from John Turvey ends the *Province* story: "We need to make it unacceptable for men to come down to this area and *do this to women*" [emphasis added]. Turvey deliberately challenges the position of blaming the victim.

These two articles clearly demonstrate that even a woman who prostitutes, who is usually blamed for her own demise, can receive sympathy and support in the print media. Sympathy appears to be strongly connected to public display of community outrage over such violence, yet when public concern shifts, the theme of blaming the victim often re-emerges.

With one exception, no further articles appeared about Joe until her alleged killer came to trial a year and a half later. The exception is an article appearing in the *Vancouver Sun* on January 23, 1993 (p. B1), about violence in Vancouver. Joe's picture appeared amongst two other victims of violence. The caption beside the photographs states: "Cheryl-Anne [sic] Joe, 26 *died* in the Downtown Eastside, Michael Archer, 16, *survived a savage west-side beating*. Jess Cadman, 16, *was stabbed to death* in Surrey" (emphasis added). It is interesting given the gruesome details of Joe's murder that she is merely described as having "died."

The lack of sympathy for Joe persists as a theme during the trial of her murderer. By this time community outcry over Joe's murder was long silent in the media. In September 1993, Brian Allender was convicted of the first degree murder of Joe, and sentenced to life with no parole for at least 25 years. Sensationalistic reporting thrived during Allender's trial: "**KILLER: He watched Silence of the Lambs before slaying**" (*Vancouver Sun*, September 29, 1993, p. A2). Allender claimed that he had watched the movie before he murdered and mutilated Joe's body.

The media also promoted the contrast between Allender's murderous actions and his apparent normal lifestyle with headlines such as: "**Brutal killer honored as 'parent of the year'**" (*Vancouver Sun*, September 29, 1993, p. A2). This article was accompanied by a photo of the hockey

team that Allender helped to coach. The brutality of Joe's murder became secondary to such sub-headlines as: "The killing was a spontaneous act by a drunken man who couldn't explain why he subsequently mutilated the body" (*Vancouver Sun*, September 29, 1993, p. A2). With the First Nations' community outcry concerning Joe's murder over, the focus shifted away from the contextualization of her murder to something out of a Hollywood movie.

On September 29, 1993, the last article specifically about Joe's murder appears. The headline states: "**Justice is served' as killer gets life**" (*Province*, p. A5). With the sentencing of Allender, the media imposed its own ending to Joe's murder story. Unfortunately for the women who work on the streets of Vancouver as prostitutes, the violence continues. Five weeks after this article ran, another woman was found murdered in Vancouver: "**Hooker Dead — Man Held**" (*Province*, November 5, 1993, p. A4).

Cheryl Ann Joe and Melanie Carpenter

On January 6, 1995, Melanie Carpenter was kidnapped from her place of work, a Surrey tanning salon. It was afternoon and Carpenter had been working alone in the salon. Within days of her disappearance, police identified a suspect who was videotaped at an ATM machine withdrawing money from Carpenter's bank account. A Canada-wide search began for both this suspect and the missing woman. Several weeks later Carpenter's body was found in a wooded area outside Vancouver; she had been sexually assaulted and stabbed to death. The only suspect in the case committed suicide in Alberta and left no clues to his connection to Carpenter's murder.

The media played an important role in the search for Carpenter and the suspect. Everyday both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* ran stories about Carpenter, publishing her picture with the hope that someone might have seen her. Several factors contributed to the extensive news coverage of this case. First, as a young white, middle class woman, Carpenter was portrayed by the media as possessing considerable status. A victim's status is a dominant factor in the media's presentation of a crime story. Mawby and Brown developed the characterization of the "typical victim" portrayed by journalists: the victim tended to be young, a female and, when enough details were available, of a high social status (1984, p. 88).

The Carpenter case fits these characteristics exactly. However, as in the case of Joe, women who prostitute are rarely regarded as holding high social status. Women who prostitute are often marginalized by their "deviant" status. It is not just the criminal nature of their activities that places women who prostitute in a deviant classification, but also the undercurrent of moral condemnation of women who earn money by performing sexual services with strangers. Mawby's and Brown's study did include some victims that were ascribed a deviant status, including the prostitute victims of the British serial killer known as the "Yorkshire Ripper" (Mawby and Brown, 1984, p. 87).

A second factor leading to the extensive coverage of the Carpenter case is the description of her as a very attractive woman. An article by Bob Stall described Carpenter as, "five foot four, 112 pounds, with long blond hair, hazel eyes and a huge smile that contributes to making her strikingly beautiful..." (*Province*, January 24, 1995, p. A14). This description of Carpenter is in stark contrast to Stall's description of Joe as a

woman who drank and ate too much (*Province*, February 2, 1992, p. A14). Furthermore, unlike the media coverage of Joe's murder, a photo of Carpenter appeared in most articles about the case (even after she was found dead). This helped to humanize Carpenter and elicit more sympathy and support from readers.

A third factor leading to the newsworthiness of the Carpenter case was the fact that she was missing for three weeks before being found murdered. Joe, on the other hand, was found the morning after her murder.

The media's use of Carpenter's name (especially her first name) in headlines further humanized her for readers. Joe was often referred to in the headlines as a "hooker", while Carpenter was referred to as "Melanie." Examples include: **"Search still on for Melanie"** (*Province*, January 16, 1995, p. A5); **"No trace of Melanie in death note"** (*Province*, January 20, 1995, p. A10); **"Dad: Why I'm Sure Melanie is Alive"** (*Province*, January 24, 1995, p. A14); **"Melanie's killer a coward, father says"** (*Vancouver Sun*, February 1, 1995, p. A3). Referring to Carpenter by her first name personalized her for readers. She was not viewed as some unknown and alien murdered woman, but as a specific woman named "Melanie" with strong familial ties. This kind of media coverage would be welcomed when a woman who prostitutes is murdered.

Because Carpenter did not deviate from the ascribed female sex role, as Joe had for engaging in prostitution, she could be further humanized and legitimized. Carpenter's job, unlike Joe's, was morally acceptable. Her employment was not blamed for her abduction although she was working alone, and her abductor probably walked right into the salon. Carpenter's murder was constructed as a stranger crime where an innocent victim was

abducted by an artful dodger. It is Carpenter's *innocence* that helped the media personalize her.

Carpenter's family members, especially her father, were also very vocal in the media. This strongly connected Carpenter to her family. Joe's connection, however, was only to a minority community (downtown eastside First Nations) during the march against violence against women. The media's coverage of the Carpenter family's grief tugged at readers' emotions and aided a moral outcry. The existence of a moral outcry leads to a call for legal reform. Unlike Joe's case, where only one article briefly discussed legal reform, media coverage of the Carpenter case was often presented with legal reform in mind. According to a *Vancouver Sun* journalist, after Carpenter's funeral the focus for her family was to shift back to campaign headquarters in Surrey and fight for tougher penalties for repeat violent offenders (February 1, 1995, p. A3). It is easier for both the public and the media to avoid discussing crimes committed against the poor and the disadvantaged as a public policy issue (Surette, 1994, p. 142). For example, journalists did not call for the decriminalization of prostitution so that women who prostitute could be afforded safer working environments. To do so would have required discussing issues that are unpopular in mainstream society such as racism, sexism, discrimination, economic inequities and violence against women.

Carpenter's case and not Joe's became a forum for legal reform in the media because journalists tend to scan social problems only from a distance (Surette, 1994, p. 142). Journalist prefer to focus on less complex crimes where "prompt solutions could be achieved through direct, disciplined action" (Surette, 1994, p. 143).

The coverage of the Carpenter murder led to discussions of reform in relation to women working alone in places of business. A moral outcry was created over women's safety while working alone, yet Joe's murder did not create a moral outcry around women who prostitute working alone on dark and secluded streets.

Despite these dissimilarities between the media's coverage of the Carpenter and Joe murder cases, there was one similarity. In both cases the media focused on crimes that were predatory, unusual and sensational. Both the Carpenter and Joe cases were newsworthy. Yet despite this similarity, Carpenter's story was constructed in a more sympathetic way than Joe's causing Professor Bob Hackett to ask: "Do you think Melanie Carpenter would have received this much attention if she were a native woman who was abducted?" (*Vancouver Sun*, February 2, 1995, p. A1).

The Popular Narrative

The media coverage of both the Cheryl Ann Joe and Melanie Carpenter murders was patterned after a "popular narrative." Ericson *et al.* (1991), argue that stories of this type are often told in interesting and entertaining ways. Popular narratives consist of:

realism combined with the event orientation, personalization (moral-character portrait of the victim; reactions from the people), focus on procedures (of the police), and precedent (links draw together violent crimes to signify disorder). Sensationalism is also a part of this formula: the newspaper denounces the very activities and people it preys upon to generate its readership of vicarious voyeurs.

(Ericson, *et al.*, 1991, p. 78)

Although the media coverage of both murders followed the popular narrative style, it did so to varying degrees. For example, journalists personalized the murder victim Carpenter more often than they did in the case of Joe. However, journalists drew more links to other murdered

(prostitute) women when reporting on Joe's murder than they did in the case of Carpenter's murder. In both cases journalists focused on the efforts of police to apprehend the suspect(s) and utilized the sensational nature of the two murders to entertain readers. However, because Carpenter was missing for several weeks the media were able to sustain coverage of police activities over a longer period than they did in Joe's case. Finally, the manner in which Carpenter was abducted and the mystery surrounding her whereabouts sensationalized the narrative to a greater degree than was the case with Joe. Both the facts of a case, and the status of the murder victim greatly influence the popular narrative. In the murders of Joe and Carpenter this led to two different versions of the popular narrative style of reporting.

Conclusion

The media does not operate within a vacuum. As argued throughout this chapter, the,

news [media] does not mirror society. It helps to constitute [society] as a shared social phenomenon, for in the process of describing an event, news defines and shapes that event...
(Tuchman, 1978, p. 184)

Journalists' construction of news stories are muddled by their working ideologies which consist of several assumptions about the world:

that events are self-evident; exist independently of their knowers; are not created, altered, or otherwise affected by the process of discovery; and, occur logically and temporally before the event is detected.
(Ericson, *et al.*, 1987, p. 101)

By identifying and deconstructing these assumptions from news portrayals I uncovered a preferred reading whereby journalists tend to: 1) construct a story that blames the prostitute-victim for violence committed against her; 2) perpetuate prostitution as a stigma; and 3) fail to contextualize violence

within the social, historical and economic conditions of these women's lives.

Editors, journalists, their sources and readers need to ask more often what conditions led to a woman's murder. Poverty, abuse, patriarchal ideology, racism and sexism all contribute to the marginalization of women who prostitute. Marginalization makes women more vulnerable to violence. Stories about violence against women who prostitute should draw attention to this context rather than individualizing a victim's plight. We need to recognize that violence is *done to women* and not just to *hookers*.

McCormick (1995, p. 52) summarizes journalistic ideology about prostitution and violence against women who prostitute as follows:

The media labels and stereotypes women who work as prostitutes, presenting them as "hookers" engaged in deviant women's work. The media not only ignores the role of men, but it can also gloss over the violence and exploitation of the trade, focusing on deviance as the critical issue.

My goal in this chapter was to demonstrate that embedded in news-making are not only the values of individual journalists and their sources, but also the values of our culture. Swidler refers to culture "as a 'tool kit' of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (cited in Tuchman, 1991, p. 90). It is through the reproduction of "symbols familiar to their audience [that] reporters and editors proclaim the 'preferred reading' of a text" (Tuchman, 1991, p. 90). The manner in which journalists construct violence against women who prostitute shapes our reaction to it: "Public discourse is formed, to a significant extent, by discourse as presented in the media" (McCoy, 1993, p. 155). Since violence against women who prostitute appears to be on the rise, the

media's depictions of these crimes can all the more influence future responses by governments, the police, and the community.

CHAPTER 5

THE MEDIA, INCREASING VIOLENCE, AND BLAMING THE VICTIMS

Throughout this thesis I have tried to be cognizant of the power of the media in *cultivating* our attitudes and values. I use the word cultivate and not create because journalists do not by themselves invent ideology. But they do “nurture, propagate, and help the culture to maintain and adapt its values, to spread them among its members...” (Fiske, 1990, p. 150). The relationship between journalists and the public is dialectical. Journalists influence how participants in governments, community groups, the criminal justice system and the general public, all of which are sources for journalists, come to comprehend violence against women who prostitute. This may affect these groups’ reactions or inactions to the violence. These reactions or inactions may further influence journalists’ understanding of the phenomenon and may affect how in the future journalists construct events about violence against women who prostitute. Thus, “[n]ews organizations accomplish ‘discursive penetration’ into the source organizations they report on, but they are in turn penetrated in a ‘dialectic of control’” (cited in Ericson, *et al.*, 1987, p. 66).

Understanding this dialectical relationship between journalists and the rest of society formed the backdrop for my study of news articles about violence against women who prostitute. In the content analysis I found that all the victims in the sample were street prostitutes, as opposed to women working in escort agencies or massage parlours, and they were all female. The demographics of the victims in the news articles selected for analysis were not an artifact of the methods. Statistics from the Vancouver Police

Department on reported assaults on women who prostitute revealed the typical victim to be Caucasian or First Nations, female, between the ages of 21 to 24 years, working either the Downtown Eastside or Mount Pleasant strolls (Lowman and Fraser, 1995, pp. 39-43).

Further, I found that the number of articles mentioning this phenomenon increased considerably after 1985. I considered several explanations as to why this increase may have occurred. First, I considered whether the increase was due to the media creation of a “paper crime wave” or a “moral panic” (Fishman, 1981, and Hall *et al.*, 1978). I found that paper crime waves and moral panics are relatively short-lived in the news (e.g., 6 months or less), whereas the media’s coverage of the topic of violence against women who prostitute increased over an eight-year period, and received attention throughout the nineteen-year study period. Theories about crime waves and moral panics are inadequate for explaining this increase. McCormick further criticizes such theories for failing “to analyze deeper ideological constructions in the media and how these constructions reflect gender distortions which work to the detriment of women and society as a whole” (1995, p. 33).

The second theory I looked at as a possible explanation of the increase in news coverage of violence against women who prostitute was whether the media overrepresented this phenomenon due to its newsworthiness. Factors that determine the newsworthiness of an event often do not include the number of *actual* incidents of violence. I argued that in the case of violence against women who prostitute the amount of actual reported crime also drives “newsworthiness.” Hence, journalists are not overrepresenting the occurrence of violence, but merely reflecting the increase in crimes reported to the police.

To strengthen this argument, I returned to some of the research reviewed in Chapter 2 on violence against women who prostitute. Lowman and Fraser's 1995 report was most salient. I was able to cross-reference some of their statistical findings with the findings of my content analysis from the *Vancouver Sun* and found that the *Vancouver Sun's* increased coverage of violence against women who prostitute is incident driven.

Due to the shortcomings of content analyses — none or little attention is given to the nature of the discourse in the articles -- I turned to an analysis of the *talk* in *Vancouver Sun* and *Province* articles about violence against women who prostitute. In an analysis of news sources I found that the media rely heavily on the police for factual information about crime, but journalists often solicit other information from individuals including criticism of criminal justice figures and the law. These findings are consistent with other research on sources utilized by the media in crime reporting (see Ericson *et al.*, 1991).

By comparing the news media's coverage of a prostitute versus a non-prostitute murder I found that both cases fall within the "popular narrative" format as described by Ericson *et al.* (1991). However, despite a similar pattern of reporting, there were many differences in how journalists depicted the two victims. The comparison of these cases illustrated my conclusion that a victim's ascribed moral and social status greatly affects how newspapers portray her.

Overall, I found a reporting ideology that allowed journalists to blame the victim, dehumanize the victim, perpetuate the stigma of prostitution, and fail to contextualize the violence within the social, historical and economical conditions that may have contributed to it. This reporting style downplays both the seriousness and the increase of violence

against women who prostitute. I did find some articles that resisted this reporting style. These articles demonstrated that journalists do not have to cover the topic of violence against women who prostitute in a way that blames or degrades the victim, and that they can portray violence as being gendered.

My research has two main implications: that the volume of talk about violence against women who prostitute has increased in the print media since 1985 (which is the same year that the Federal Government enacted changes to the law in relation to prostitution) with very little significant media-generated moral panic about this increase; and that the moral and social status of the victim greatly affects how she is portrayed. The possible connection between these two points is interesting. With media coverage of violence against women who prostitute increasing since 1985, we might also see more articles that perpetuate a reporting ideology blaming prostitute victims of violence. I cannot conclude if the reporting ideology of blaming the victim is declining because I did not analyze the articles with that in mind. I do know that articles that resisted victim blaming occurred throughout the years since 1984.

I do have other reservations about how I conducted the research for this thesis. When conducting the content analysis, the three people involved in coding the articles (including myself) did not conduct inter-coder reliability tests. Without this testing it is difficult to know for sure that each person coded articles the same way. However, we did code the articles at different computers within the same room and often consulted each other about our coding decisions. This did help to highlight how we were each approaching problematic articles. Nevertheless, inter-coder reliability tests should have been conducted.

During the analysis of news discourses I spent an afternoon with a free-lance reporter, who has written articles for both the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province*, to discuss my findings. She provided me with an inside look at the world of journalism, including journalistic constraints and styles of reporting. One person is not representative; I would have liked to have done more direct research with reporters to grasp their understandings of violence against women who prostitute. For this type of analysis see Benedict (1990), who, in studying how the press covers rape, interviewed the reporters who wrote articles that she analyzed.

Despite these shortcomings, I believe my research has contributed original ideas to the field of criminology. I have used newspaper coverage of violence against women who prostitute as an avenue for capturing certain aspects of this phenomenon. My finding of an increase in the volume of talk about violence lends support to the findings of other studies in this field (Lowman and Fraser, 1995; Currie, *et al.*, 1995). My contribution to the field of media research also has been unique. I examined how the print media cover violence against victims who are classified as “deviant.” The field of media research has been fairly quiet in this regard. My research findings could lead to further studies about how the media depicts other minority or “deviant” victims of violence (such as First Nations women and gay and lesbian people). Researchers could examine who is being portrayed as an “innocent” victim, who is not, and why.

Looking Ahead

The future of research about print media lies in looking beyond the constructions on the pages and questioning why discourses are represented in particular ways.

Language is a powerful human tool and we must begin to ask what role it plays in maintaining and perpetuating existing social structures, what contribution it makes to our hierarchically ordered classist, racist and sexist world view.

Spender (1980, p. 51)

Questions that ought to be asked when conducting research about the print media include the following: What do news articles tell us about our culture? How does an article deviate from or complement the dominant cultural ideology? By examining the print media over time, what changes to our culture can be seen? And what aspects of journalistic ideology contributed to the construction of the story in a particular way?

The print media's coverage of violence against women who prostitute should compel "us to consider the meaning of sexuality in our culture" (Cole, 1995, p. 121). It should also lead us to consider the role gender plays in violence; the relationship between men and women; the construction of masculinity and femininity in the mass media; the power of journalists in shaping public debate; the social construction of the "innocent" victim; and the future legal responses to both prostitution and violence against women who prostitute. Throughout this thesis I have tried to be cognizant of all of these issues, but they will require ongoing attention in future research.

APPENDIX I

CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SHEET

- (A) **Date**
- (B) **Newspaper**
 2 Sun
- (C) **Section**
- (D) **Page #**
- (E) **Article Size**
 1 Wire Service Clip
 2 Small, up to quarter page
 3 Medium, up to half page
 4 Large, over half a page
 5 Extra-Large, more than one page
- (F) **Picture Size (in square centimeters)**
- (G) **Author**
 1 Editorial
 2 Columnist
 3 Staff Reporter
 4 Wire Service
 5 Letter
 6 Open Editorial
 7 None
 99 Other
- (H) **News Themes (Theme1 through Theme3)**
- (I) 1 Legislative
- (J) 2 Law enforcement issues - Nuisance
- 3 Violence Against Women who prostitute
- 4 General arrests/trials/sentencing (solicitation/communication)
- 5 Bill C-49
- 6 AIDS and prostitution
- 7 Violence by a prostitute
- 8 Alternatives to the present law
 (decriminalization/legalization/zoning/barracades/injunction by-laws)
- 9 Law enforcement issues - Violence
- 10 Youth prostitution issues
- 11 Fraser Committee Recommendations
- 12 Green River
- 13 Green River links to Vancouver
- 14 Outcry about violence against prostitutes
- 15 Alcohol murders
- 16 Bell-Younger
- 17 Swaggart
- 18 Wuornos (prostitute-serial killer)
- 19 Living on avails/procuring
- 20 Bawdy House
- 21 Penthouse Case
- 22 Sun Special Series

...continued

- 23 Top Hat
- 98 Prostitution mentioned incidentally
- 99 Other prostitution issues

(K) Area

- 1 Greater Vancouver
- 2 Outside GVRD
- 3 Canada generally
- 4 U.S.
- 5 International
- 6 B.C. Wide
- 7 Canada, not B.C.
- 77 Not specified
- 99 Other

(L) Type of News

- 1 Hard News
- 2 General prostitution article

(M) Number of Incidents Discussed

(N) Sex of Prostitute (Sexof1 through Sexof3)

- (O) 1 Male
- (P) 2 Female
- 3 Transvestite
- 4 Transsexual
- 77 Not specified

(Q) Type of Sex Trade Worker (Typeof1 through Typeof3)

- (R) 1 Generic
- (S) 2 Street Prostitute
- 3 Escort Agency
- 4 Massage Parlour
- 5 Exotic Dancer
- 99 Other

(T) Offenders (Offender1 through Offender3)

- (U) 1 Police officer
- (V) 2 Pimp
- 3 Customer
- 4 Resident
- 5 Prostitute
- 6 Drug Dealer
- 7 Land Lord/Hotel Manager
- 77 Not specified
- 88 Unknown
- 99 Other

(W) Offence Type (Type1 through Type5)

- (X) 1 Murder
- (Y) 2 Attempted murder
- (Z) 3 Assault with a weapon
- (AA) 4 Assault without a weapon
- 5 Sexual Assault
- 6 Robbery
- 7 Kidnapping/confinement
- 8 Forced into Prostitution

...continued

- 9 General
- 10 Harassment
- 11 Overdose
- 12 Sexual Procurement of children
- 13 Uttering Threats
- 14 Manslaughter
- 15 Living on the avails
- 16 Procurement
- 77 Not Specified
- 88 Unknown
- 99 Other

(AB) Serial Murder

- 1 Investigation
- 2 Speculation
- 3 Denial of Link

(AC) Number of Offenders (Numoff1, Numoff2)

- (AD)** 1 one
- (AE)** 2 two
- 3 three
- 4 four of more
- 77 Not Specified

(AF) Stroll Victim Picked Up In (Stroll1 through Stroll3)

- (AG)** 1 West End (Davie)
- (AH)** 2 Georgia-Hornby
- 3 Granville
- 4 East End
- 5 Mount Pleasant
- 6 Richards-Seymour
- 7 Kingsway
- 8 Whalley
- 77 Not Specified
- 88 Unknown
- 99 Other

(AI) Location of Offence (Location1 through Location3)

- (AJ)** 1 Victim's residence
- (AK)** 2 Customer's residence
- 3 Parking lot
- 4 Hotel room
- 5 Park
- 6 Alley
- 7 Street
- 8 Industrial Area
- 9 Car/Van
- 77 Not Specified
- 88 Unknown
- 99 Other

(AL) Age of Victim (years) (Ageof1 through Ageof3)

- (AM)**
- (AN)**

(AO) Age of Offender (years) (Ageof1 through Ageof3)

- (AP)**
- (AQ)**

- (AR) **Name of Victim (Nameof1 through Nameof3)**
 (AS)
 (AT)
- (AU) **Name of Offender (Nameof1 through Nameof3)**
 (AV)
 (AW)
- (AX) **Stage of Proceeding (Stageof1 through Stageof3)**
 (AY) 1 Police investigation of crime report
 (AZ) 2 Police investigation of suspect
 3 Arrest
 4 Bail Hearing
 5 Preliminary Hearing
 6 Trial
 7 Sentencing
 99 Other
- (BA) **Trial Plea (Plea1 through Plea3)**
 (BB) 1 Guilty
 (BC) 2 Not guilty
- (BD) **Disposition (Disp.1 through Disp.3)**
 (BE) 1 Guilty
 (BF) 2 Not guilty
 3 Stay
 4 Unfit to stand trial
- (BG) **Non-custodial sentences (N.C.1 through N.C.3)**
 (BH) 1 Probation
 (BI) 2 Suspended sentence
 3 Fine
- (BJ) **Custodial Sentences (in months) (C.S.1 through C.S.3)**
 (BK) 0 Death Penalty
 (BL) 999 Indefinite sentence (dangerous offender)
- (BM) **Violence Mentioned**
 2 Not mentioned
 1 Mentioned

APPENDIX II

LIST OF SAMPLED COURT CASES INVOLVING THE SEXUAL ASSAULT OF WOMEN WHO PROSTITUTE, FROM "QUICKLAW SERVICE"

CASE:	DATE:	LEVEL OF COURT:	CHARGE:	SENTENCE:
R. v. Grimm	26-Jun-86	B.C.C.A.	Sexual Assault with a weapon	N/A
R. v. Hoonjian	25-Mar-87	B.C. County Court	7 counts of forcible seizure, assault causing bodily harm, robbery and sexual assault	4 years and 7 months
R. v. Wardle	25-May-87	B.C.C.A.	Assault with a weapon	18 months plus 3 months time served
R. v. Pangilinan	1-Oct-87	B.C.C.A.	Sexual assault and unlawful confinement	Conviction set aside and new trial ordered
R. v. Marek	6-May-88	B.C. County Court	3 counts of sexual assault and 3 counts of attempting to choke - application to be declared a dangerous offender	Term of detention for an indeterminate period
R. v. Cox	20-May-88	B.C. County Court	Sexual assault	Five years
R. v. Andrews	9-Jun-89	B.C.C.A.	Common assault, sexual assault causing bodily harm (separate counts)	One year for first count and five years for second count
R. v. H/(H.M.) (Young offender)	10-Apr-91	B.C. Provincial Court	Sexual assault causing bodily harm	One year of secure custody followed by one year of probation
R. v. Smith	10-Mar-92	B.C.C.A.	Sexual assault and robbery	Four years
R. v. Mooney	11-Jun-92	B.C.C.A.	Sexual assault, robbery and uttering a threat	N/A

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