

# Having Your Porn and Condemning it Too: A Case Study of a “Kiddie Porn” Expose

*Ummni Khan*

Department of Law, Carleton University

---

In 2005, the Toronto Police Department’s Sex Crime Unit embarked upon the unprecedented move to go public with forensic evidence related to an on-going child pornography investigation. This strategy provided the public with exceptional glimpses into the taboo arena of child pornography. In this article, I trace the media coverage of this investigation to highlight the rhetorical and aesthetic components that, I posit, are related to a pedophilic logic. My goal is to reveal the latent but omnipresent desire encoded in the media narratives to imagine children and childhood in sexualized contexts. In particular, my analysis maps the literary and photographic aspects of the coverage to highlight the “performative contradiction” of the texts; though the media articulated a one-dimensional story of outrage and condemnation, the rhetorical and pictorial aspects of the story produced meanings that undermined the purported censure of child sexualization.

**Keywords:** child porn; narrativity; media; police; Voyeurism; taboo

---

When the Toronto police released edited child pornography images to the media in February 2005, the public was allowed an unprecedented peek into one of the most reviled crimes of our time. Though child pornography cases are ubiquitous in the media, this was the first time that this kind of forensic evidence was disseminated to the public in order to track down the victim and her abuser. Police explained that they were resorting to these measures in order to rescue a young victim who was being repeatedly abused in the production of child pornography. The case would later be dubbed the “Disney World Girl” case based on the discovery that the publicized child pornography pictures had been captured at a Disney resort in Florida. The lurid nature of the evidence, the novelty of the police tactics and the urgency of the investigation were big news. It made headlines across the nation.

That the media *makes* news, and does not merely relate facts, has been widely posited among media and criminology experts.<sup>1</sup> Newsmakers are

---

**Address for correspondence:** Ummni Khan, Department of Law, Carleton University, Room C473 Loeb Building, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1S 5B6. E-mail: [khan@carleton.ca](mailto:khan@carleton.ca)

1. See H.J. Gans, *Deciding What’s News* rev. ed. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 2004), Y. Jewkes, *Media and Crime* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2004), P. Mason ed.,

not purely fact-finders disseminating the “truth” to the public, but are implicated in for-profit business values and structures that influence, if not completely overdetermine, a hegemonic social construction of reality.<sup>2</sup> Put succinctly, the mass media is invested in “the reproduction of the status quo from which they greatly benefit.”<sup>3</sup> This status quo is maintained and buttressed with the use of simplistic narratives that traffic in “symbolic consumer goods.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, in order to sell their product, the media must entice the imagination of the consumer with an entertaining story, and at the same time, must employ familiar, reassuring cultural frameworks that support their target audience’s world view.

This critique of the media is particularly applicable with regards to news stories about crime and the justice system. Criminal incidents translate easily into sensational plots with stock characters: the good guys (police, law abiding citizens), the bad guys (the suspect, the accused, the convicted), and the victims (ideally a middle-class female or a child).<sup>5</sup> With this familiar narrative framework, the media tends to deploy two intersecting binaries.<sup>6</sup> The first dichotomizes the diabolical criminal with the heroic law enforcement officer, and the other dichotomizes the diabolical criminal with the tragic and sentimentalized victim. In both sets of binaries, a morality tale of good versus evil is conveyed that emphasizes individual deviance and downplays societal responsibility or context.<sup>7</sup> Concomitant with these fairy tale binaries is the crime story’s underlying mission to entertain its audience with voyeuristic glimpses into forbidden and taboo arenas.<sup>8</sup>

In this article, I examine a sensationalistic media story that gave exceptional glimpses into the forbidden and taboo arena of child pornography. In the case of the “Disney World Girl,” I argue that the media reports, the law enforcement agencies, and the public became implicated in a pornographic logic – and not just any pornographic logic, but a pedophilic pornographic logic at that. Amy Adler has argued that “child pornography law and the eroticization of children exist in a dialectic of transgression and

---

*Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice* (Portland, Oregon: Willan Publishing, 2003), G.W. Potter & V.E. Kappeler eds., *Constructing Crime: Perspectives on Making News and Social Problems* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1998), R. Surette, *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice: Images and Reality* 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub., 1998).

2. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 4 and Potter & Kappeler, eds., *Constructing Crime*, “Introduction,” p. 20.
3. Potter & Kappeler, *Constructing Crime*, p. 17.
4. G. Barak, “Media, Society, and Criminology” in G. Barak, ed., *Media, Process and the Social Construction of Crime* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1994), p. 3.
5. For a discussion on what makes a “newsworthy” victim see M. Innes, “Signal Crimes’: detective work, mass media and constructing collective memory” in P. Mason, ed., *Criminal Visions*, p. 55.
6. Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, p. 45.
7. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 47 and Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, p. 45.
8. Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, p. 36.

taboo ... [that] may have heightened pedophilic desire.”<sup>9</sup> I draw upon this counterintuitive insight to deconstruct the social reality perpetuated by the press coverage of the child porn case of the “Disney World Girl.” My goal is to reveal the latent but omnipresent desire encoded in the media narratives to imagine children and childhood in sexualized contexts. In particular, my analysis maps the literary and photographic aspects of the coverage to highlight the “performative contradiction”<sup>10</sup> of the texts; though the media recounted a one-dimensional story of outrage and condemnation, the rhetorical and pictorial aspects of the story produced meanings that undermined the purported censure of child sexualization.

Ultimately, I end my analysis by arguing that the media coverage served not to protect children, but to protect adults from acknowledging the primary role that mainstream society, and in particular the institution of the family, play in making children vulnerable to child sexual abuse.

For this study, I engaged in a qualitative analysis of the discursive and symbolic elements in media articles that addressed the investigation and conclusion of the “Disney World Girl” case, primarily in Canada. I studied Canadian articles in *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, *The Hamilton Spectator*, *The Edmonton Journal*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Calgary Herald*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *The Dose*, and *The Toronto Sun*. I also examined some American articles from cities where the story was particularly prominent: *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Seattle Times*, and *The Atlanta Journal*. The American articles were drawn upon primarily for their more extensive quotations of American police officers. Finally, I studied transcripts from television media from *CanWest News Service*, *CTV television*, *CNN*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Most of the articles were culled from the two major Canadian news databases, Factiva and Canadian Newsstand, in which I attempted to locate every article or transcript on the topic.

While I do not purport to have done an exhaustive study of the media coverage of the case, I did attempt to examine all of the major print news coverage on the case in Anglophone Canada from February 2005, when it began, until June 2005, when the case was resolved and fell out of the media spotlight (although not out of the media radar). I supplemented these with an examination of a few key American articles and television coverage of the case. In this way, I endeavored to cover the major institutional story tellers in English in Canada’s print media, with a peppering of how television media grappled with the case. In particular, *The Oprah Winfrey Show’s* coverage of the case represents a key site of cultural sense-making in the United States and Canada. From this research, I hoped to capture how dominant media outlets,

---

9. A. Adler, “Perverse Law of Child Pornography,” *Columbia Law Review* 101 (2001) 209, p. 212.

10. Judith Butler describes a “performative contradiction” as “an act of speech that in its very acting produces a meaning that undercuts the one it purports to make.” *Excitable Speech* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 84.

whether in Canada or disseminated in Canada, constructed the story of the “Disney World Girl” case, paying particular attention to which pleasures were harnessed and which anxieties were managed in the media spin.

Part I begins this article with a background of the salient (and salacious) facts reported by the media story of the police investigation to locate a victim of child pornography. Parts II, III, IV and V make up the bulk of my analysis. Part II considers the rhetoric of the coverage in which sexualized language and infantilized storylines were used to describe the victim, her abuser, the police, and the crime. Part III interrogates the pictures distributed by the police, employing John Hartley’s perspective on the discursivity that underlies imagery. He states, “No picture is pure image; all of them, still and moving, graphic and photographic, are ‘talking pictures,’ either literally, or in association with contextual speech, writing or discourse.”<sup>11</sup> Using this reasoning, I attempt to discern what these photographs are saying and what pleasures they might gratify. Part IV addresses the connotations of the literary imperatives to a classic story, and how this affected the reporting of the “climax” of the media story. Part V considers two epilogues to the “Disney World Girl” case story. Despite the fact that the investigation was complete in May of 2005, the case continues to generate new discourses in the media and new incitements to speak of the scandal of child pornography.

Having presented a draft of this article at a conference, and having heard the concerns of my esteemed associates, I would like to provide a brief caveat before launching into the analysis. My thesis – that there is an unacknowledged yet latent desire to sexualize children and to feed off of the atrocity protected by the shield of denouncement in the “Disney World Girl” case – is not meant to detract from the laudable intent of the journalists, the police or the concerned citizens. I certainly do not wish to imply that the people who seek to eradicate the abusive practice of child pornography are consciously and intentionally employing a façade of outrage in order to get their kicks from their work and their narratives. Rather, the purpose of this article is to reveal the media texts as *perverse*. They are sites where direct gratification is absent and yet displaced satisfaction and desire are engaged. As Judith Butler notes, “... prohibition does not seek the obliteration of prohibited desire; on the contrary, prohibition pursues the reproduction of prohibited desire and becomes itself intensified through the renunciations it effects.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, renunciation itself operates as a sexual spectacle that keeps the prohibited desire on center stage. Understanding prohibition and condemnation from this vantage point, the goal of my article is to make conspicuous what I argue is inconspicuous, but extant, in the “Disney World Girl” media story; that although the story’s tone was clearly one of denunciation, its rhetoric further cultivated the sexual allure of children.

---

11. J. Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: the creation of the public in the age of popular media* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 28.

12. J. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 117.

## I. A Debauched Disney Story<sup>13</sup>

Since 2002, the Toronto police sex-crime squad had been repeatedly confronted by the distraught face and violated body of an unidentified girl whose image had showed up in approximately half of the vast collections of child pornography seized during arrests in the past few years. They had catalogued two hundred pictures of her. According to forensics, the photos spanned two years of her life, between the ages of nine and eleven. Throughout this time, the police were investigating this girl’s plight, hoping to rescue her from the on-going nightmare of sexual abuse and exploitation. Unfortunately, trying to find the girl posed logistical challenges. While they had technological resources to track down people who were downloading and possessing child pornography that featured this young girl, they were initially stumped on how to track down the girl herself. In 2005, searching for a breakthrough on this three-year case, they were inspired to embark on an unprecedented move.

The police decided to elicit help from the media and the public to assist them in locating the missing girl using the crime itself – the child pornography pictures – as their tool. They chose six illegal pornographic images that featured the girl and released them to the media. But they modified them. The police consulted forensic experts to doctor the pornographic photos of the girl and digitally remove the actual people in the photos, so all that remained was the setting where the abuse had taken place. These six images were then disseminated to all major newspapers in Canada and the U.S. Within days, the authorities had received enough tips to identify the locale as a Walt Disney resort in Florida. When this information was revealed to the public, the media bestowed the sobriquet of “Disney World Girl” on the missing victim.

At this point in the investigation, Toronto police began collaborating with the Orange County Sheriff’s office in Florida, meticulously combing through old guest lists at the Disney World resort in their effort to solve the mystery of their missing victim. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. custom’s office were also involved in the effort. Weighing on all of their minds was the disturbing knowledge that the longer they took, the longer this young girl – this ruthlessly coerced “porn-star” – remained in the hands of her abuser.

---

13. The background facts of the case were pieced from the following newspaper articles: T. Huffman, “Police use ‘CSI gimmicks’ to help find abused girl; Appeal ‘a bold strategy,’” *The Toronto Star*, February 4, 2005, p. A01, M. Philp “Police identify hotel seen in photos of abused girl,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 5, 2005, p. A1, M. Ien, “Child porn investigators release photo of girl,” Canada AM English © Copyright 2005 CTV Television Inc, April 28, 2005, N. Kohler, “Police move closer to releasing abused girl’s photo: ‘If you do nothing, she’ll continue to be victimized’: detective,” *National Post*, May 3, 2005, p. A12, M. Farley, “Disney World Girl’ child-porn victim makes new life: Gutsy 12-year-old gives information to put adoptive dad away, help others,” *Edmonton Journal*, June 19, 2005 p. D11, and W. Mariano, “Photo may crack child-porn case, investigators say,” *The Orlando Sentinel*, April 28, 2005,

A few months later, emboldened with the progress that had been made by releasing the doctored child pornography images, the Orange County Sheriff's Office released another photo, this time undoctored. The photo featured a different girl the police hoped would lead them to their missing victim. This new girl's image had been found on the internet in the same collection as the child pornography victim, photographed on the same couch on which the missing victim had been abused in a pornographic picture. The police were quick to assure the public that this newly-released picture was *not* pornographic. The image featured a fully clothed girl sitting on a couch and playing a portable electronic game. The police surmised that she was a material witness to the case, most likely a friend of the missing child pornography victim. They hoped that if the witness-girl could be identified they could contact her for information regarding the identity of their unknown victim. A few weeks later, the witness-girl, who remained anonymous, the child pornography victim, Masha Allen, and the abuser, Matthew Mancuso, were identified and located. How this came about will be explained in the last section of the paper.

## II. The Social Construction of Child Pornography Abuse as a Fairy Tale

The narrative that was perpetuated by the media regarding the "Disney World Girl" was characterized by fairy tale rhetoric and child-like language. Archetypal motifs of heroes, villains and damsels in distress formed part of the symbolic consumer goods that imbued the subtext of the media stories. The police became the "good guys," pedophiles and child pornographers the "bad guys," and the victim the "damsel in distress." My analysis of the narrative structure examines four labels used by the media: "kiddie porn," "bad guy," "good guy," and "Disney World Girl." I consider how the use of these terms contributed to a semantic field where childhood discourse and fairy tale structure became perversely and explicitly sexualized.

The term "kiddie porn" is not unique to this story, yet I believe an interrogation of this ubiquitous colloquialism will elucidate how narratives about child pornography become covert opportunities for mainstream society to sexualize children through utterances of concern. "Kiddie porn" can be understood as a diminutive nickname for child pornography frequently used by the media, by legislators and by academic literature.<sup>14</sup> A Google search of the term "kiddie" reveals that in the first twenty hits, if the website did not

---

14. For example, with regards to the "Disney World Girl" case the headline of an article by S. Agrell was, "Police desperate to Find Girl in 'Must Have' Kiddie Porn Pics," *CamWest News*, Feb 4, 2005, p. 1, in legislative debates see member of parliament's Jason Kenney's comments in the *House of Commons Debates*, February 4, 1999 at p. 1455 when he stated, "Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, the cancerous effects of the Shaw decision on kiddie porn are spreading," and in academic literature see S. Persky and J. Dixon's book, *On Kiddie Porn: Sexual Representation, Free Speech and the Robin Sharpe Case* (Vancouver: New Star Books Ltd., 2001) [my underlines].

have kiddie in its actual web-address, every single instance of the term was conjoined with the term “porn.”<sup>15</sup> The locution “kiddie porn” has thus become a collocation, that is, a reiterative co-occurrence of two separate words that in essence become glued to one another in our cultural discourse.<sup>16</sup>

What is curious is why “kiddie” has come to be collocated with “porn.” It uses more syllables than “child porn,” it does not employ alliteration, nor does it rhyme. From a rhetorical perspective then, it does not employ mnemonic devices to make the collocation stand out in the mind. What then, is its purpose?

One explanation could be that the collocation “kiddie porn” is a way to circumvent the distasteful phrase, “child pornography,” by employing a euphemism. The speaker thus avoids becoming contaminated by the offensive category and spares the reader the brutal images that might otherwise be conjured by the technical and legal category of “child pornography.” And yet, as Ann Coughlin has argued, sexual euphemisms do not extinguish the naughtiness or the taboo of the subject.<sup>17</sup> As she asserts, “Circumspection, omission, and silence are conventional gestures that supply, rather than remove, sexual connotations ...”<sup>18</sup> If “kiddie porn” is a euphemism, a way of talking around a repugnant subject, it in turn spins another form of sexual speech.

The word “kiddie” on its own is affectionate slang, often used to address or refer to young children. And yet, when this cutesy child-language is juxtaposed with the heavy sleazy adult abbreviation “porn,” the collocation creates an oxymoron: two linguistic realms, normally thought of in our cultural imagination as mutually exclusive, are welded together to create a kind of jarring dissonance. However, oxymorons are not simply contradictions of terms, they are rhetorical devices used to bring about aesthetic and semantic effects.

Thus, the righteous politicians and moralistic journalists who employ the term “kiddie” when condemning sexual representations of children are appropriating the realm of child-like discourse (“kiddie”) and tainting it, sexualizing it, and corrupting it by juxtaposing it to the word “porn.” On the one hand, the very thing that is being objected to – the sexualization of childhood – becomes the thing that is produced.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, pornography (significantly also known as *adult* material) becomes infantilized. The term “kiddie porn” then becomes a perverse linguistic utterance where the connection between children and sex becomes further entrenched. Its use reveals the extent to which circuitous language – “kiddie porn” instead of “child pornography” or indeed instead of “sexual abuse images” – does not hamper sexual speech, instead it proliferates it,

---

15. [www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca), Google search of term “kiddie” on July 12, 2006 at noon.

16. D. Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), *s.v.* “collocation.”

17. A.M. Coughlin, “Representing the Forbidden,” *California Law Review* 90 (2002) 2143, p. 2161.

18. Coughlin, “Forbidden,” p. 2161.

19. J. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, “... sexuality prohibited becomes the sexuality produced,” at p. 94.

creating new avenues to signify the prohibited desires. In Foucauldian terms, the incitement to speak sex, in particular taboo sexuality, is amplified with the reiteration of this collocation. While the intent of the speaker may be condemnation, the utterance of “kiddie porn” unwittingly continues in the project of eroticizing the child.

If the “kiddie” in kiddie porn insinuates child-like language, the term “bad guy” firmly invokes it. This facile label came up frequently in media coverage quoting police investigators in both Toronto and Orange County. The term denoted either a specific child abuser or, in the plural, child pornography consumers in general. For example, Detective Sergeant Paul Gillespie stated of the popularity of the “Disney World Girl” pornography: “This is like the must-have if you are a bad guy.”<sup>20</sup> Matt Irwin, a detective with the Orange County Sheriff’s Office, stated of an apprehended child abuser and pornographer, “The bad guy is locked up.”<sup>21</sup> And, in an article that focussed on American admiration of the Toronto police tactics, *The Toronto Star* reported that, “special agent Dougher [of the FBI] is always looking for any new ways to save the children and catch the bad guys.”<sup>22</sup> The appellation of “bad guy” firmly puts the story of child pornography within a symbolic framework of a childhood story.

Yet, the reiteration of this childish category “bad guy” not only demonstrates how news media’s discourse has become imbricated with entertainment discourse in the reporting of child pornography crimes, but its use also distorts the reality of child abuse. In their bid to draw the reader into a dramatic story, the media distorts the reality that the vast majority of child sexual abuse (whether in the context of child pornography or not) is perpetrated by family, friends or a trusted member of the child’s community.<sup>23</sup> The term “bad guy,” as with other sensationalist labels that attach to child pornography criminals such as “monster,” “pervert” and “predator,” constructs the sex offender as a dangerous outsider, someone easily discernible as “Other.”<sup>24</sup> It further individualizes the crime and disassociates it from the social context of the nuclear family, the entertainment media’s sexualization of youth, and the hegemonic power relations between adults and children enshrined in our culture. As

---

20. S. Agrell, “Police launch frantic search for girl seen abused on the Web: Photos have become ‘must-haves’ for pedophiles,” *National Post*, February 4, 2005, p. A5.

21. CBC, “Girl In Disney Abuse Photos Safe,” Orlando, Florida, May 14, 2005.

22. J. Sher, “Child porn strategy catches FBI’s eye; Toronto police altered photos U.S. agents support ‘innovative’ move; Photos hold many clues ‘Everybody has a piece of the puzzle,’” *The Toronto Star*, February 12, 2005, p. A26.

23. See R.J.R. Levesque, *Sexual Abuse of Children: A Human Rights Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 154, M. Taylor & E. Quayle, *Child pornography: an Internet crime* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), p. 23, and J. Kitzinger, “Media Representations of Sexual Abuse Risks,” *Child Abuse Review* V Issue 5 (December 1996), pp. 319–333.

24. See, C. Greer, “Sex Crime and the media: press representation in Northern Ireland” in P. Mason, ed., *Criminal Visions*, p. 103. For a discussion on the language used to describe pedophiles, See M. Lynch, “Pedophiles and Cyber-Predators as Contaminating Forces: The Language of Disgust, Pollution, and Boundary Invasions in Federal Debates on Sex Offender Legislation,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 27 (2002), pp. 529–562.



Jewkes has argued, the media “personalizes” the criminal offender as a decontextualized deviant instead of engaging in more complex cultural, political or sociological explanations of the behavior.<sup>25</sup>

There is a further more insidious effect of the use of “bad guy” in media stories about child pornography. By casting the pedophile, the child molester and the child pornographer as “bad guys,” the cops speak in the language of a children’s story. Yet the police were not addressing children when they spoke of “bad guys”; their target audience comprised of reporters and law-makers.

As with the word “kiddie,” one plausible interpretation of this linguistic choice is that the police and the media seek to circumvent the harsh reality of the crime of trafficking in child sexual abuse images. It might be too jarring to say pedophile, child pornographer, or child rapist. And yet, the term “sex offender” with its legalistic undertone would presumably suffice in sanitizing the topic. “Bad guy” does more than simply euphemize a distasteful topic. It also has an aesthetic component that functions to tease out a sexual subtext from childhood narratives.

The realm of children’s stories, where wolves gobble up young girls and heroes storm in with shining swords to save distressed damsels, has often been interpreted as being drenched in sexual undertones. As Derek Brewer states of the wolves in fairytales, and in particular in “Little Red Riding Hood,” “they are ... easily symbolised as sexually predatory men.”<sup>26</sup> In this case, the use of the fairy tale designation “bad guy” as a stand in for child abusers and pornographers makes explicit what was implicit in fairy tales: that the plots, involving “bad guys” or “big bad wolves” and victimized females, often revolve around the issue of sexual danger. What is perverse is that, in the context of fairy tales, such euphemisms presumably took into account the sensibilities of young children while still functioning as cautionary tales. In the context of this media story, the euphemism “bad guy” allows for the sensibilities of adults, who can revisit childhood narratives, but this time with an explicit sexual gloss.

The term “good guy,” though less frequently used in the media coverage than “bad guy,” still managed to make an appearance. Detective Sergeant Gillespie explicitly referred to police officers as “good guys” who will save the day, and implicitly suggested that they actualize this role. In an interview with American news show “ABC Tonight,” Detective Sergeant Gillespie stated that, “... we need to use the strength of the Internet for the *good guys*’ advantage. [my emphasis]”<sup>27</sup> A more vivid invocation of the “good guy” motif is found, indirectly, in how Detective Sergeant Gillespie

---

25. Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, p. 45.

26. D. Brewer, “The Interpretation of Fairy Tales” in H.E. Davidson and A. Chaudhri, eds., *A Companion to the Fairy Tale* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 18. See also M. Tatar’s “Sex and Violence: The Hard Core of Fairy Tales” in *The Hard Facts of the Grimm’s Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, 2003) Expanded 2nd Ed., p. 3.

27. “Hunt For A Child Catching Pornographers,” ABC News: World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, February 4, 2005.

self-constructs himself and police work. For example, Detective Sergeant Gillespie claims after the photos were first released, “We [the police] can put this to an end and save her [the missing child pornography victim] from a life of misery.”<sup>28</sup> Detective Sergeant Gillespie contemplates the police as the only heroes who can save the missing victim. When this tactic did not reap the desired result, a few months later Detective Sergeant Gillespie considers future police action and portrays the law enforcement officers as the proverbial knights in shining armor. In an interview he asks the rhetorical question, “At some point, might we have to go the next step and release victims’ faces to rescue them?”<sup>29</sup> He answers himself with another rhetorical question, “If that child was related to you or known to you, would you want the police to run in, kick the door down and save that child . . . ?”<sup>30</sup> Detective Sergeant Gillespie’s hypothetical scenario recalls Hollywood movies where tough cops storm into a crime scene to rescue a helpless victim in the nick of time. Detective Sergeant Gillespie portrays himself and his profession as the real-life heroes who will bring about this happy ending to the sad story. And, he also makes a leap of logic, suggesting that the unprecedented move of releasing the image of the missing girl will necessarily actuate this climactic rescue.

While the terms “kiddie porn,” “bad guy” and “good guy” employ childlike vernacular that heightens the taboo of pedophilic sexuality, the sobriquet “Disney World Girl” makes a direct reference to a capitalist apparatus that specializes in the trafficking of children’s stories. As mentioned earlier, the name “Disney World Girl” was bestowed on Masha Allen when the police discovered that the pornographic pictures they had released to the public had been taken at a Walt Disney World resort in Florida.<sup>31</sup> “Disney World Girl” is then, not exactly child speech, but a reference to a specific and emblematic cultural arena associated with childhood. Yet, like “kiddie porn,” an oxymoronic juxtaposition between innocence and corruption was invoked by the term to render the taboo of child pornography all the more titillating.

Disney World on its own belongs within the semantic field of family recreation and childhood innocence. Yet, the term “Disney World Girl,” contextualized in the media story, references a girl molested and exposed to thousands of pedophiles on-line. The discovery that the missing victim was

---

28. S. Agrell, “Frantic Search,” *National Post*, February 4, 2005, p. A5.

29. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move made to solve child porn case: Florida shows ‘witness’: Original photos discovered by Toronto authorities,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

30. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

31. For example, see M. Farley, “New life,” *Edmonton Journal*, June 19, 2005, p. D11, M. Ien, “Child porn investigators release photo of girl,” April 28, 2005, Canada AM English © Copyright 2005 CTV Television Inc, where host Marci Ien begins by saying, “They call her “the Disney World Girl”. Toronto police don’t know her real name...” and “Girl faces abuser as verdicts delivered,” *Calgary Herald*, [Final Edition] August 24, 2005, p. A.4 where the article states, “... she became known as the ‘Disney World Girl...’”.

abused right on Disney grounds is antithetical to the resort’s wholesome image. The setting of the abuse becomes that much more ironic. There is a semantic incongruity encoded in the descriptor “Disney World Girl” between what the label describes on the surface and what the label signifies within the narrative of a sexually molested child. By slyly referring to the setting of the crime, “Disney World Girl” perversely sexualizes what had been a symbol of family fun and, at the same time, discursively anchors the identity of the victim to this scene of abuse.

The terms “kiddie porn,” “bad guy,” “good guy,” and “Disney World Girl” all exploit rhetorical devices to heighten the aesthetic pleasure of the text. Oxymorons, euphemisms and irony are subtly employed to sexualize the lexicon of child narratives and childhood associations, allowing for pedophilic satisfaction in the corruption of these childhood signs. String the terms together, and one can extrapolate a plot-line for a perverse fairy tale: *The good guys have to catch the bad guy who’s kidnapped the Disney World Girl to make kiddie porn*. While the narrative clearly demarcated the good from the bad, it also allowed for a subtext of discursive ambiguity where the sacred arena of childhood (invested in the terms “kiddie,” “bad guy,” “good guy,” and “Disney World”) rubbed up against the profanity of adult criminality (invested in the word “porn” and in the context of the case).

The media narrative that surrounded Masha Allen’s case not only oversimplified the issues involved, but capitalized on child-like vernacular to translate *unspeakable* abuse into a framework that was both more palatable and more stimulating. The oxymoronic dissonance between “kiddie” and “porn”; the euphemistic conversion of pedophile/child pornographer into “bad guy”; the self-aggrandizing label of “good guy”; and the ironic subtext of “Disney World Girl,” which underscored the incongruity of sexual abuse taking place in an iconic childhood arena: all these point to rhetorical strategies that heightened the semantic tension of each term. A pedophilic logic is encoded in these rhetorical choices: what is childish becomes sexually tainted, and what is sexual becomes childish inflected.

### III. The Child Pornography Photos: Less is More

While the recurring use of “kiddie porn,” “bad guy,” “good guy,” and “Disney World Girl” by the police and the media compel the concepts of sexuality and childhood to share the same signifying field, the doctored pornography photos released by the Toronto sex crimes unit offer up more direct voyeuristic pleasures. It is worth noting that print media, unlike television and radio, has historically tended not to partake in “citizenship participation programs” and “Amber Alerts” where the police seek to publicize certain aspects of a crime with the goal of amassing more clues and leads from the public.<sup>32</sup> Surette suggests that this is because the print

---

32. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 172.

media traditionally understands itself as being more of a watchdog of law enforcement actions, rather than a collaborator.<sup>33</sup> In addition, newspapers usually profited less than broadcast media from cooperating with the police. Yet with the “Disney World Girl” case, newspapers eagerly joined the broadcast media to cooperate in publishing all the photos that police were willing to release.

I posit that the print media blithely abdicated its watchdog role because this crime stopper initiative not only replicated the evidence of the crime, it replicated the crime itself. The media was given license to exhibit a glimpse of “kiddie porn” on their front pages which could be used as a visual enticement for potential customers. Most crime stopper programs involve a re-enactment of a crime or a video surveillance that caught the commission of the crime. But with this case, the evidence that was disseminated – doctored pornography pictures – allowed the reader to partake in the taboo of “kiddie porn” without being tainted by it; the obscenity was brought “on scene” in the newspaper articles.

Linda Williams coined the term “on/scenity” to signal the way “unspeakable” texts have been brought out of hiding and onto the public scene in contemporary discourses of sexuality.<sup>34</sup> She draws upon Butler’s observation that censorship discourse, in its effort to circumscribe certain text as obscene, inevitably states what it purportedly does not want to be stated.<sup>35</sup> On/scenity then, marks the unwitting paradox that the desire to prohibit a sexual representation is implicated in the desire to re/produce it, albeit resignified within a framework of outrage. As such, the distribution of child pornography photos, doctored though they were, still displayed for the public gaze the most maligned texts for voyeuristic consumption. As Lisa Z. Sigel has observed, stories about perverse desires “allow the ‘good’ people of society to discuss, relish, pity, reconstruct, and narrate the deviant from a position outside.”<sup>36</sup> And, in this particular case, the purported ‘outside’ vantage point gave permission to delve deeply *inside* the vilified texts. The reader was encouraged to scrutinize the images, offered shadowed glimpses of “kiddie porn,” and provided with vague yet alluring descriptions of the atrocities that had been digitally removed.

### 1. *What was shown in the photos*<sup>37</sup>

The six photos released by the Toronto police vividly bring on/scene shocking forensic evidence of child exploitation. The reader learns that

---

33. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 172.

34. L. Williams, “Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction” in L. Williams, ed., *Porn Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 3–4.

35. J. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 130.

36. L.Z. Sigel, “Autobiography of a Flea: Scrutiny & the Female Porn Scholar” in M.L. Johnson, ed., *Jane Sexes it Up: True Confessions of Feminist Desire* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), p. 242.

37. Photos obtained from CBC news archives: [http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/news/victim\\_gallery/](http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/news/victim_gallery/) (August 7, 2007).



Photos courtesy of the Toronto Police Department accessed through the Canadian Broadcasting Centre website from their news archives: [http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/news/victim\\_gallery/](http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/news/victim_gallery/) (August 7, 2007).

each picture documents an instance of child abuse: the elevator, the arcade, the edge of a fountain, the hotel room, the hot tub, and the bed have all been the backdrops for child pornography and consumed by thousands of pedophiles.

In considering the entertainment dimension of the construction of crime in the media, Surette argues that when the media portrays a criminal incident, particularly in visual form, it often panders to an audience’s interest in observing “backstage” behavior.<sup>38</sup> He defines backstage behavior as informal and private actions to which only trusted associates will be privy, as opposed to frontstage formal actions that one presents when in public or with strangers. Crime is then understood as the ultimate backstage behavior. Surette goes on to suggest that,

... the backstage nature of crime inherently increases its entertainment value and popularity. The more serious a crime, the more backstage it is – and the more novel an audience is likely to find its portrayal. Portrayals of crime also allow audiences voyeuristic glimpses of rare and bizarre acts – often coupled with lofty discussions of justice, morality, and society.<sup>39</sup>

38. R. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 18.

39. R. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 25.

The doctored child pornography pictures released by the Toronto police are thus acutely backstage images, particularly so because the crime is a sexual one. Child pornography and other crimes against children are currently considered one of the most serious and pressing issues of our day, generating moral panics about the safety of “our” children.<sup>40</sup> The child pornography images are also rare, in the sense that entertainment shows as well as news media coverage usually cannot visually represent the issue, as doing so would be participating in the crime of disseminating child pornography. Here, the doctored images allowed the media consumer an unprecedented look at the backstage of child pornography production. Voyeurism could be indulged, while the ostensible purpose of the publication – to save a little girl from child pornography abuse – justified the action, absolving the reader for any vicarious voyeurism.

The voyeurism is all the more enticing because though the pictures have been appropriated by law enforcement to track down a missing child and her abuser, the reader is aware that that was not their original intention. These photos have not been taken by police or forensic experts, but by a child molester and pornographer for his own pedophilic gratification. Thus the pictures represent a perverse fusion of function of child pornography images and crime scene photos.

There is another perverse fusion of conflicting semantics encoded in the images. The images represent crime scenes, and yet the settings fall into a culturally recognizable family motif: a Walt Disney resort. In particular, the images of the arcade or the fountain could have been backdrops in a typical family vacation shot. These two antagonistic cultural symbols – crime scene imagery and family vacation shots – draw on an insightful historical precedent regarding the evolution of photography as a consumer good. According to Deborah Jermyn, “the development of photography has been entwined with that of criminal identification [and] so too has it been entwined with Western culture’s representation and construction of the family.”<sup>41</sup> In both cases, identity is constructed, either in opposition against the criminal Other, or in affinity with the idealized vision of family. These dual foundations of photography are both invoked in these images, harnessing pleasures in the semantic contradictions that inhered in the images. The photographic pleasures thus pivot around the unfamiliarity of a child pornography image mapped onto the familiarity of an idealized familial scene. The images can be understood as a sick and shocking “family album” – where the innocence of a Walt Disney family vacation is perversely corrupted by the context of horrific child sexual abuse.

---

40. See S. Cohen, “Introduction to the Third Edition” in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. xiv–xvi for a discussion of the moral panics currently operating around children’s safety.

41. D. Jermyn, “Photo stories and family albums: imaging criminals and victims on *Crimewatch UK*” in P. Mason ed., *Criminal Visions*, p. 176.

## 2. *What was enticingly not shown in the photos*

Any explicit depiction of sexual abuse, however, was digitally removed by forensic experts. And yet, the imagery does not show clean and unadulterated representations of the sites of abuse. A quick glance at the photos reveals a washed out, blurry area where presumably the victim and possibly her abuser appeared in the original photos. We can discern that in the elevator picture, the blurry area suggests the victim was standing by the buttons. In the arcade picture, she was likely sitting and playing a game. In the fountain picture, the whitened out area suggests that she was sitting at the edge. The hot tub picture is perhaps more ambivalent, but the knowledge that it was a hot tub indicates that the victim was likely dressed scantily, if at all. The discolored area of the wardrobe image suggests that she was standing in front of it. And, most disturbingly of all, the large slightly curved blurry area in the bed photo strongly implies a sexual scene.

Though on the surface the images are non-pornographic, in a way, they are “on/scenely” erotic. They bring onto the public scene and for public consumption the most unspeakable obscenity, and compel it to speak within a suggestive framework. Like lingerie, the images call attention to the dirty bits by obscuring the explicitness with a tantalizing bit of blur. As James Kincaid has suggested in his treatise on the mainstreaming of the sexualized child, “... those protecting the child and those exposing it play for the same team. Eroticizing exists in symbiotic relation with sanitizing, and the veiling and the exposing exist in an encircling doublespeak.”<sup>42</sup> The eroticism is heightened by what has been left to the imagination. In addition, the reader does not have to guess blindly about what scenes of horror have been digitally removed. What is smudged out in the actual photos is amply filled in by the commentary that surrounds the text.

## 3. *What was revealed in the descriptions of the photos*

In the media coverage of the case, the newspapers quoted police and child pornography experts who had been privy to the uncensored images. These snippets provided tantalizing clues as to their contents. A *Toronto Star* article informs the reader that the girl is thought to be about nine years old.<sup>43</sup> The colour of her hair is also provided, as the media frequently refers to the missing victim as “the little girl with the long blonde hair.”<sup>44</sup> As to the activity captured by the photographs, the media informs the reader that “the raw pictures once showed a brutal assault.”<sup>45</sup> The images are described as “certainly among the worst” by one child-pornography expert

---

42. J.R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 102.

43. J. Sher, “Child porn strategy,” *The Toronto Star*, February 12, 2005, p. A26.

44. T. Huffman, “CSI Gimmicks,” *The Toronto Star*, February 4, 2005, p. A01.

45. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

(left unnamed by the media).<sup>46</sup> Detective Sergeant Gillespie emphasizes the authenticity of the released child pornography images: “[t]he reality is that you’re looking at images of abuse, and modern technology has allowed us to remove the victim.”<sup>47</sup> The detective then goes on to provide specific details of that abuse: “she has been very violently penetrated ... This isn’t warm and fuzzy stuff. This is horrific sexual abuse.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, despite the assurance that the pornographic aspects of the child pornography image were withheld, the narrative that surrounds the photos evokes graphic images of child sexual abuse.

The commentary conjures up visions of a young, feminine, blonde, and (most likely) Caucasian girl, exposed and molested. Because the police soon reveal that the locale is a Walt Disney resort, the audience can also glean that she is middle-class. As a child situated within the context of sexual abuse, she represents an “ideal” newsworthy victim who has suffered from the most sensational crime, rape.<sup>49</sup> Though the audience does not have an exact image of the victim girl, they are invited to partake in a pedophilic gaze. The descriptions outline the contours of a pedophilic fantasy: western culture’s quintessential construct of innocence and beauty – white, young, and middle-class femininity – sexualized, defiled and penetrated.

The descriptions also employ the vivid language of outrage and disgust. The original photographs are described by the media as “sickening, graphic sexual images.”<sup>50</sup> Another media account explains that the “little girl with the long blond hair has endured horrific sexual abuse in photographs circulated among perverts around the world.”<sup>51</sup> Julian Sher, an oft-quoted investigative journalist writing a book on child pornography, remarks, “Think of it [the doctored child pornography images] as CSI Porn.”<sup>52</sup> He encourages the viewer to construe the released photographs, despite the expurgation of the abuse imagery, within an obscenity context. These descriptions expect and demand that the reader will both imagine the abuse with stark details and be gripped by the same disgust emotions. The images should make you sick, as should the “perverts” who covet them.

In his treatise on disgust, William Miller observes that disgust “is especially useful and necessary as a builder of moral and social community.”<sup>53</sup> He observes that, “one can readily experience disgust on someone’s behalf for their having been defiled.”<sup>54</sup> There is something to the quality of disgust

46. O. Moore, “Child-porn victim; Investigators locate girl,” *Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2005, p. A1.

47. S. Agrell, “Police desperate,” *CamWest News*, February 4, 2005, p. 1.

48. S. Agrell, “Frantic Search,” *National Post*, February 4, 2005, p. A5.

49. See, Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, pp. 40–61, for a discussion on the news values that propel a crime to be newsworthy.

50. T. Huffman, “CSI Gimmicks,” *The Toronto Star*, February 4, 2005, p. A01.

51. T. Huffman, “Child porn tracked to Florida; Public recognizes hotel room after police release photos; Girl’s image digitally removed before pictures distributed; Child porn pictures traced to Orlando, Fla.” *Toronto Star* (February 5, 2005) p. B01.

52. T. Huffman, “CSI Gimmicks,” *The Toronto Star*, February 4, 2005, p. A01.

53. W.I. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 194.

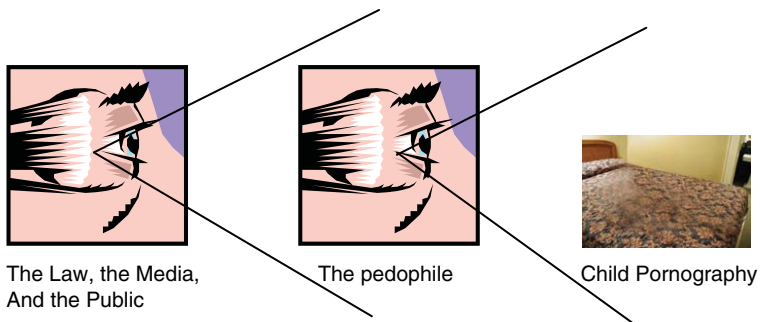
54. Miller, *Disgust*, p. 195.



that engenders empathy. The cops, the experts, the media, and the media consumers became united in a shared moral and social community by the disgust language that surrounded the investigation. Those who seek out such disgusting images were relegated as “perverts” – a descriptor that not only condemns the crime, but comes to define the entire person.<sup>55</sup> The disgust emotion is thus called upon to erect the boundaries between the pure community and the impure Other.

This boundary-making activity, I posit, where the human and the pervert are distinguished from one another by idioms of disgust, involves a multi-valent satisfaction. One key satisfaction of disgust utterances derives from the pleasure of strengthening one’s own identity as human and as belonging. In their paper on disgust, cultural psychologist Paul Rozin et al. suggests that disgust is at “the very heart of what it means to be human.”<sup>56</sup> Rozin explains that not only does disgust seem to be a unique emotion to the human animal, but that when engaged within a moral context, it draws the line between who counts as human (those who feel disgust) and who is relegated as inhuman (those who inspire disgust). The reader can feel her identity as human strengthened as she joins the moral community with her shared disgust towards the inhuman perverts who create and consume child pornography images.

Another satisfaction that piggybacks on disgust involves the lurid peeks at the pervert and his activities. As stated earlier, the photographs and their descriptions allow for voyeuristic glimpses into the backstage world of child pornography. In conjunction with this, the context of disgust towards the criminal and the crime affords an imaginary peek at the pervert peering at the child porn. There is a kind of voyeurism of voyeurism that is engaged when the media expounds on how sickening the images are that the perverts consume.



[Voyeurism of voyeurism allows for an imaginary peek at the pedophile consuming his child pornography]

55. M. Lynch, *supra* note 24 at 533–534.

56. P. Rozin, J. Haidt & C.R. McCauley, “Disgust” in M. Lewis & J.M. Haviland-Jones, eds., *Handbook of Emotions* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), p. 650.

In their study on the symbolic polarities of high and low culture, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have observed, “Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing ‘low’ conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other.”<sup>57</sup> In this case, the desire for the Other translated into the desire to see the Other/pervert seeing the victim. Though the media consumer can assure herself that she is simply performing the role of concerned citizen as she reads the descriptions and scrutinizes the images, she also becomes implicated in a pornographic logic. As Miller suggests, there is something paradoxical to disgust. Though it repulses, it inescapably attracts and entertains.<sup>58</sup> The reader reaps the satisfaction of visually consuming the erotically edited child pornography pictures, while simultaneously imagining the sickening pervert who placed the victim in that horrendous position. In this way, as Miller contends, newspapers, like the entertainment industry, literally “bank on the allure” of disgust-provoking stories when selling their products.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4. *A Proxy-Face to fill in the Gaps*



#### The “Material Witness”<sup>60</sup>

A few months after Toronto police released the doctored child pornography pictures, Orange County law enforcement decided to up the ante. As I stated in Part I, they released an *unmodified* picture of a young dark-haired girl whom they believed might be a material witness to the case of the missing child pornography victim. Toronto police had discovered this girl’s image among a collage of pornographic thumbnail images of Allen. The image that Orange County released features a girl sitting on a couch that the police alleged was the same locale where pornographic images had been taken of their missing child pornography victim. They had surmised that this dark-haired girl was a family friend, or that the child pornographer had also

57. P. Stallybrass & A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 4–5.

58. Miller, *Disgust*, p. x.

59. Miller, *Disgust*, p. x.

60. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7657735/> (accessed August 8, 2007).

taken the picture of her. Orange County Sheriff Kevin Beary explained, “We are releasing the photograph of the material witness in hopes that if a citizen can identify her, it will greatly increase the chances of successfully identifying the perpetrator and recovering the victim.”<sup>61</sup>



The Toronto Sun, April 28, 2005<sup>2</sup>

The Toronto Sun, April 28, 2005<sup>62</sup>

Although the police attempted to evacuate any suggestiveness in the photograph by labelling the girl in the released photo as a “material witness,” this stance was undermined by some of the media coverage of the case. A telling example is provided by The Toronto Sun’s media headlines surrounding the image, which were drenched in perverse sexual insinuations. On the cover of the tabloid paper is the dramatic question, “Is This Innocent Face Key To Porn Case?” Again, the headline exploits an oxymoronic juxtaposition of opposing semantic fields in order to seduce the reader. Framing the girl’s face are the two terms “Innocent” and “Porn Case” in bright bold red thereby linking the two concepts, and compelling an ambivalent reading of her image. Her photograph becomes the semantic bearer of both childhood innocence and adult perversion; the illicitness of the image becomes magnified by the assertion of her purity. The photo also builds up the dramatic tension generated by the first set of released doctored photos. And this time, the image provides a flesh and blood figure positioned within the context of pornographic sexual abuse.

Aware perhaps that there might be objections to releasing the image of the girl, the police anxiously disavowed any sexual connotations related to the image. In addition, Toronto police attempted to deny any possible indications that their “material witness” could be a victim of sexual abuse. “We have no information at all that the girl in this picture has been a victim of anything. We simply believe she might have knowledge about

61. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

62. “Is This Innocent Face Key to Porn Case,” *The Toronto Sun*, April 28, 2005, front cover, and K. Bradley, “Do you know this girl?: May be witness in abuse case,” *The Toronto Sun*, April 28, 2005, p. 10.

the victim ...”<sup>63</sup> Sergeant Matt Irwin of the Orange County Sheriff’s Office assures the public, “There’s no evidence at this point that says that this girl is a victim in any way.”<sup>64</sup> He follows this up with the assertion, “There’s nothing sexual about it [the photograph].”<sup>65</sup>

Despite these assurances of the asexual nature of the “material witness” photograph, the police also informed the public that this “material witness’s” image was part of a pornographic series traded by pedophiles. Detective Sergeant Gillespie states, “this is one of those ‘must-have’ series for child porn collectors ... who are trying to get their hands on as many related images as possible. These include non-sexual images related to the fantasy, such as the photography of the second girl.”<sup>66</sup> Here again, Detective Sergeant Gillespie attempts to pre-empt any interpretation that the image might be construed as sexual by labelling the released photo of the “material witness” “non-sexual.” The reader, however, becomes aware that this girl’s image has been highly coveted by pedophiles, and been fodder for pedophilic fantasy. This belies the authorities’ ostensible position of the inherent non-sexual nature of the image. Further, the reader is given license to take on the pedophilic gaze and to resignify the girl’s idealized innocence as an erogenous trait, always under the cloak of condemnation.

Compounding the underlying sexualization of the photograph is the knowledge that the backdrop of the image has doubled as a pornographic scene. The media informs the reader that the police “believe she is sitting on the same couch in the same room where this highly sought after girl [Allen] was photographed being sexually abused.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, while the face of their missing child pornography victim remains a secret, the photograph delivers a proxy-victim, lounging in the exact location where sexual abuse was carried out. Her face becomes contextually bound to the description of abuse, and the public is delivered a sexualized image of a young girl and urged to see her as an object of pedophilic desire.

This adoption of the pedophilic perspective became part of a controversy that was sparked after the photograph was publicly released. In an article that focussed on the high-risk nature of the strategy, The Toronto Star interviewed Elizabeth Trott, a philosophy professor at Ryerson University.<sup>68</sup> According to the article, Trott was concerned that the photo might have the effect of fuelling the child pornography industry. Trott stated, “I was

63. M. Ien, “Child porn investigators,” April 28, 2005, Canada AM English, © Copyright 2005 CTV Television Inc.

64. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

65. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

66. E. Chung, “Wanted: A young witness; Police hope photo leads to victim of child sex abuse,” *Toronto Star*, April 28, 2005, p. A1.

67. D. Mattingly, CNN Correspondent, “An Unusual Move by Authorities in Orlando Trying to Crack Internet Child Porn Case,” *CNN: American Morning*, April 28, 2005.

68. I. Teotonio & T. Huffman, “Photo release called a ‘high-risk’ strategy; Girl could be friend of abused child; Publicity spurs about 100 calls to police,” *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, p. A24.

stunned because I thought it was a very suggestive photo.”<sup>69</sup> The article then indicates that the professor “point[ed] out the reclined posture of the girl and the low camera angle that draws the viewer’s attention up the girl’s legs.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, Trott and the newspaper article are encouraging the reader to view the image pornographically.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger makes the simple and astute assertion that “[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.”<sup>71</sup> Trott and the reader are keenly aware that this “material witness” is indelibly linked to a child pornography victim. This knowledge or belief corroborates Trott’s presumption that there is something inherently sexual about the girl’s “reclined” posture. Furthermore, a close examination of the photo reveals the invalidity of Trott’s contention that the camera angle is low.<sup>72</sup> If anything, it is a slightly high camera angle such that the viewer can see the top of the girl’s head. How is it then that Trott assumes a low camera angle despite the clear visual evidence that the photographer must have been standing above the girl when the picture was taken? Amy Adler has argued that the discourse on child pornography law “requires us to study the pictures of children to uncover their potential sexual meanings, and in doing so, it explicitly exhorts us to take on the perspective of the pedophile.”<sup>73</sup> Contrary to Trott’s insistence that it is the camera angle that induces her, the viewer, to look up the girl’s legs, it is actually the context of a child pornography case that sexualizes the image. It compels a fetishistic reading practice such that an ordinary picture of a fully-clothed girl playing with an everyday toy metamorphosizes into a “very suggestive photo.”

Discussions of the risks involved in releasing the unconcealed image of a girl connected to the child pornography case generated further opportunities to increase the tension of the narrative. Rita Karakas of Save the Children Canada described the tactic as “very, very high-risk.”<sup>74</sup> The risk she names is extreme. She warns, “I’m quite concerned about (the publicity) because sexual abusers kill children to eliminate witnesses.”<sup>75</sup> Julian Sher, the investigative journalist, defends the unprecedented police strategy. He states, “Posting a picture of a kid is a gamble because you can’t predict how people are going to react, but it’s a gamble you have to take because somebody’s life is at stake.”<sup>76</sup> Sher attempts to sway the concerns away from the safety of the material witness towards that of the missing child pornography victim.

---

69. I. Teotonio & T. Huffman, “High-risk’ Strategy,” *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, p. A24.

70. I. Teotonio & T. Huffman, “High-risk’ Strategy,” *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, p. A24.

71. J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books Limited, 1981), p. 8.

72. It should be remembered, however, that the newspaper article did not quote Trott directly in this regard, but simply asserted that Trott had pointed out the low camera angle and reclined posture.

73. A. Adler, “Perverse Law,” p. 256.

74. I. Teotonio & T. Huffman, “High-risk’ Strategy,” *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, p. A24.

75. I. Teotonio & T. Huffman, “High-risk’ Strategy,” *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, p. A24.

76. I. Teotonio & T. Huffman, “High-risk’ Strategy,” *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, p. A24.

The authorities were quick to agree that there is some risk involved in releasing pictures connected to a child pornography case. As Orange County's Sheriff Irwin stated, "release of the witness photograph may spook the pornographer and put the victim at risk, but they have no other choice."<sup>77</sup> Detective Sergeant Gillespie justified the action by attempting to personalize the issue. The media reported that at a conference on commercial sexual exploitation, Detective Sergeant Gillespie said police weighed the risks, including endangering the subject's safety and privacy, but believed it was the appropriate step to move a long-stalled investigation forward. "There may be a risk of harm but, at the end of the day, would you risk it to rescue your daughter?"<sup>78</sup>

In general, risk discourse in the media tends to revolve around condemning the designated high-risk activity.<sup>79</sup> As Mary Douglas has argued, "Naming a risk amounts to an accusation."<sup>80</sup> In this case, the accusation of risk with regards to the police tactics pointed not to a behavior that was condemned, but rather towards behavior that was seen as daring and valiant. The police were constructed as being "bold" trailblazers, willing to try any tactic to rescue a helpless victim of child pornography. The risk discourse heightened the excitement in the narrative, creating more dramatic tension. It recalled rogue Hollywood police officers portrayed as rule breakers who would risk anything to save the victim and catch the "bad guy." As Surette has argued, in the entertainment media, the main message about fighting crime is that traditional criminal justice tactics fail to produce results.<sup>81</sup> To solve devious crimes, you need either a rebellious law enforcement insider who is willing to bend the rules, or a civilian outsider.<sup>82</sup> In the case at hand, the Toronto and Orange County police officers self-constructed themselves, with the help of the media, as rebels with a heroic cause.

#### IV. The Climactic Anti-climax

Up until this point in the media story of the "Disney World Girl" case, all the events were proceeding in a classic linear narrative fashion. Using the diagram below as a guide, in the sequence of the narrative, the plot was probably at around 2.5, with the action still rising.

Let's recapitulate the major plot points in the story. It began with exposition. Since 2002, the "Disney World Girl" has been at the mercy of the "bad guy" who is using her to produce "kiddie porn" pictures. The action slowly rises with the arrival of the "good guys" (the law, the police),

---

77. W. Mariano, "Photo," *The Orlando Sentinel*, April 28, 2005.

78. "Police back use of porn case photo," *National Post*, May 6, 2005, p. A4.

79. See generally P. Caplan, ed., *Risk Revisited* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), and in the crime news context see Jewkes, *Media and Crime*, pp. 47–48.

80. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. xix.

81. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 42.

82. Surette, *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice*, p. 42.

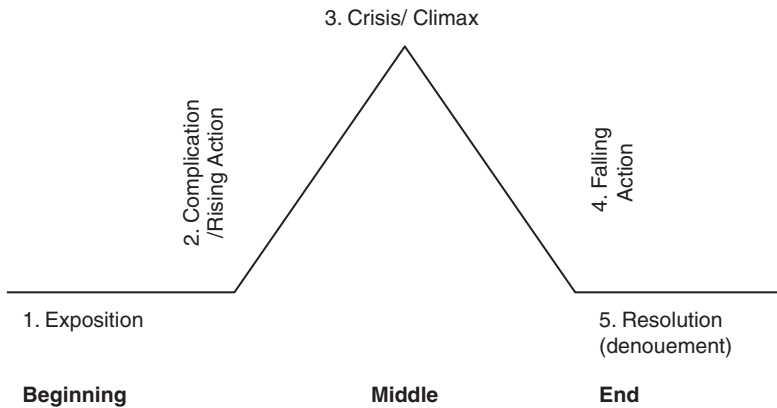


Diagram of a classic narrative<sup>83</sup>

who discover that this girl’s image repeatedly shows up in connection with child pornography possession arrests. The police begin to investigate who this girl is and how they might rescue her. In early 2005, the Toronto police employ the unprecedented strategy of releasing doctored child pornography photographs via the media. They learn through a tip-line that the abuse depicted in the photos took place at a Walt Disney resort in Florida. A few months later, Orange County officers initiate an even more daring and risky tactic: they release an untouched photograph of a young girl, presumed to be a material witness, found among the pornographic photos of the missing “Disney World Girl.” More tips arrive from the public, but nothing that concretely identifies the material witness. The police now openly suggest that their next move will be to release pictures of the “Disney World Girl” herself. As Detective Krawczyk of the Toronto police child exploitation unit grimly states, “If you do nothing, she’ll continue to be victimized.”<sup>84</sup>

And then ... and then ... according to the imperatives of the narrative plot, this *should* take us to the climax of the story, anticipated by Detective Sergeant Gillespie as the day, “the police ... run in, kick the door down and save that child ...”<sup>85</sup>

But that’s not how it happened.

About two weeks after the release of the “material witness” photo, both the missing child pornography victim and her abuser were located. However, this “break-through” had nothing to do with any of the recent efforts of the Toronto Police or the Orange County Sheriff’s office. It had nothing to do with publicizing the doctored pornographic pictures or the “material witness” picture. Citizen tips also could not take credit for the

83. This diagram is modelled off of the one provided in J.H. Pickering & J.D. Hooper, *Literature* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1982), p. 13.

84. N. Kohler, “Girl’s photo,” *National Post*, May 3, 2005, p. A12.

85. N. Kohler, “Extraordinary move,” *National Post*, April 28, 2005, p. A2.

discovery. Instead, the FBI simply figured out that the missing victim in the pornographic pictures released to the public were of Masha Allen, a girl whose photograph was already in their own database of known victims of child pornography. The FBI apparently could have made that match two years prior. Why it took the FBI so long to make the match is unclear. According to a representative of the FBI, the blame lies with the Toronto authorities who initially provided only a small sample of the child pornography pictures of the missing victim in their possession. The FBI also claimed that they had difficulty making the match because the photograph in their own database featured the girl at a different age. In any case, it turned out that Masha Allen had already been rescued two years ago, and the perpetrator, her adoptive father Matthew Mancuso, was already in jail. Accordingly, the police investigations in both Toronto and Orange County and their “high-risk” tactics had contributed nothing to the safety of Allen, or the apprehension of Mancuso.

Despite this, the police and the media contrived to make it appear that their decisions to release the doctored child pornography and the picture of the “material witness” had somehow played a crucial role in the happy ending. “Unbelievable’ Rescue: Police release of child porn photos led to locating both Victim and Abuser” extols one headline.<sup>86</sup> Julian Sher, the investigative journalist writing a book on child pornography, applauded and even glamorized the police tactics. He stated “This case has been stalled for many many months and taking that sort of high risk gamble [releasing the photographs] seems to have helped ... All their CSI-type sleuthing was working.”<sup>87</sup> A sheriff’s statement from Orange County proudly stated that “everything that transpired since Orange County began its investigation of the incident clearly demonstrates that the system works ... What started out as virtually looking for a needle in a haystack has resulted in a probable suspect being located and knowledge that the young victim is safe.”<sup>88</sup> And in a televised news report, Lisa LaFlamme stated, “She was a mystery girl. The victim in a shocking online child pornography case that made headlines across the continent. Tonight law enforcement officials say the 12 year old girl has been found in the US safe. Her alleged abuser behind bars, the culmination of an extensive cross-border investigation. *Some of the credit is going to Toronto police who decided to go public with some revealing photographs.* [my emphasis]”<sup>89</sup>

The above statements completely ignore the fact that the “high-risk gamble” had nothing to do with the rescue of Masha Allen or the arrest of her abuser. She was already safe, and her abuser was already in jail. In

---

86. E. Chung & T. Huffman, “Unbelievable’ rescue; Police release of child porn photos led to locating both victim and abuser,” *The Toronto Star*, May 14, 2005, p. A16.

87. E. Chung & T. Huffman, “Mystery girl found safe; Altered crime-scene photos used in search for child-porn victim,” *The Toronto Star*, May 14, 2005, p. A1.

88. E. Chung & T. Huffman, “Mystery girl,” *Toronto Star*, May 14, 2005, p. A1.

89. L. Laflamme, host, “The Mystery Girl in a Child Porn Case has been Identified,” *CTV News* – PM, May 13, 2005.



addition, the tactics of going public with the child pornography and material witness photographs, and all of the subsequent tips that came pouring in from the public, gave no assistance in the successful identification of the girl or the abuser. What the publicity apparently did do was compel the FBI to more closely scrutinize their own databases – something they should presumably be doing in every case, not just in high-profile media cases.

Another component of the resolution of the story that was ignored was the failure and inadequacy of technology. Throughout the investigation, the role of technology was glamorized as a cutting-edge crime-fighting tool. In the American television news show “TV World News,” the broadcast began with, “A technological breakthrough is helping to make significant inroads into the child pornography industry.”<sup>90</sup> Later in the program, the Toronto police tactics are described as “really out of the box” and “ingenious.” Julian Sher continually likened the process of digitally removing the victim from the child pornography photographs to strategies dramatized in the fictional television series CSI (Crime Scene Investigations). In one article he is quoted as saying, “It’s bringing some of the CSI gimmicks that we see on TV home to us.” Yet, when it was discovered that the FBI already had photos of Masha Allen in its database, but had failed to make a match between two photographs of the same girl at slightly different ages, the media refused to criticize the absence of technological savvy. Instead, a defensive stance was taken, in which the public was lectured that real life crime fighting is much more arduous than what the entertainment media portrays. In an article that Julian Sher wrote himself, he states, “It’s not as easy as the gimmickry you see on CSI, where faces are instantly matched.”<sup>91</sup> Notice that in this instance, he is no longer likening the police work to CSI, but rather blaming CSI for misleading the public on the capacities and incapacities of modern technology. All the hype that the media and the police had previously revved up around the manipulation of forensic evidence amounted to a pathetic letdown. Technology had let the police and the public down.

But perhaps the most glaring omission of the media coverage at the conclusion of the “Disney World Girl” case regarded the grave costs of releasing the photos. The police and the media now refused to acknowledge what had previously been admitted: their “CSI” gimmicks had incited further interest in the child pornography. All of the media attention had created what Detective Sergeant Gillespie referred to as a “feeding frenzy” on-line, where both Masha Allen and the “witness girl” had become hot commodities for pedophilic collections.<sup>92</sup> Since the investigations had gone

---

90. “Digital Technology Used to Tackle Child Porn,” TV World News Transcripts, February 6, 2005, SBS 6.30 pm, Special Broadcasting Service.

91. J. Sher, “Needed: One database of abused kids; Child pornographers expertly exploit Internet Police need to work in ‘co-ordinated fashion’,” *The Toronto Star*, May 16, 2005, p. A12.

92. M. Ien, “Child porn investigators,” April 28, 2005, Canada AM English, © Copyright 2005 CTV Television Inc.

public with the photos, trading activity of the porn collection featuring the two girls had noticeably increased. And, as one Detective had earlier pointed out, “this person’s being victimized every time her photo is being viewed by somebody on the Internet.”<sup>93</sup> Ultimately, by releasing the photos, the authorities drummed up more interest in the “Disney World Girl” and the “material witness,” arguably causing their images to be further circulated to more prying eyes (both to the pedophiles on the Internet, and to the public on newspaper covers) than they would otherwise have been.

Yet nowhere did I find this observation articulated in the media reports that I read. This struck me as unusual because the media generally relishes criticizing the authorities for their handling of any issue. Headlines could read something like: *Were Police too Hasty in Releasing Child Porn Pics?* Instead, the harshest criticism launched at the authorities was that they had wasted valuable resources and time searching for a girl who had already been found.<sup>94</sup> And even this viewpoint was expressed tentatively and tangentially. The vast majority of coverage that I studied somehow tweaked the facts, such that it appeared the police from Toronto and Orange County had contributed to the successful “rescue” because of their unprecedented tactics. As Julian Sher claimed, the releasing of the photos had assisted the investigation, “so that might prompt police services to be a little bolder on the next case, as well.”<sup>95</sup>

This declaration appears to completely disavow the high costs of releasing the photographs and the absence of any tangible benefits. Putting all the facts together – the fact that the girl had already been removed from her abusive father two years earlier, the fact that the FBI had already had photos of both the girl and her abuser in their databases for two years, the fact that four separate law enforcement agencies had been draining precious resources on this high-profile case, the fact that releasing the photos created more interest in downloading the actual pornographic images – one might suggest that police services should actually be a little *less* “bold” on the next case and a little *more* meticulous in their research. For example, one might suggest that police services need to truly exhaust all other avenues of investigation, and implement more coordinated procedures, before even considering the dramatic move of releasing doctored or related child pornography pictures to the public.

Why didn’t the media express this angle at the conclusion to the “Disney World Girl” case? I suggest that their reticence in criticizing the police services would have drawn attention to their own complicity in the trafficking of these pseudo-sanitized child pornographic pictures. But, perhaps more importantly, it would also have created an anti-climactic ending. After the media had continually reported the extreme urgency of the case, and after

---

93. N. Kohler, “Girl’s photo,” *National Post*, May 3, 2005, p. A12.

94. See J. Mann & D. Mattingly, “Child Pornography and Child Abuse of Adopted Russian-Born Children,” *CNN International: Insight*, June 8, 2005 and J. Sher, “One database,” *The Toronto Star*, May 16, 2005, p. A12.

95. E. Chung & T. Huffman, “Mystery girl,” *The Toronto Star*, May 14, 2005, p. A1.

all the hubbub surrounding the “breakthrough” technology, it would have been a narrative let down if the media had then admitted that the climactic rescue had occurred long before the Toronto police had initiated their “high-risk” tactics. The narrative rhythm would look more like:

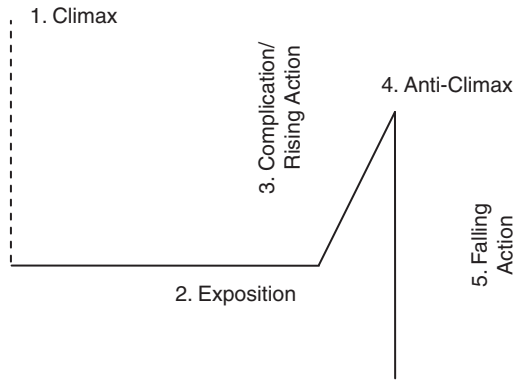


Diagram of the Narrative Rhythm of the “Disney World Girl” Case

The above diagram represents the plot points in the “Disney World Girl” case. Unbeknownst to the audience, the “climax” – where the good guys rescue the damsel in distress – had already taken place before the beginning of the story. The exposition, where the plight of the victim was explained to the public, gave a false impression that a crime was continually being perpetrated. Although the tension did rise with the release of the photographs and the discourse of urgency and “high-risk” gambles, this did not lead to the expected climax. Rather, knowledge that the girl was already safe, and that the abuser was already in jail, amounted to an anticlimax.

Criticizing the manner in which the police had handled the investigation would have drawn attention to the anticlimactic ending of the story and thwarted the public’s desire for a hermeneutic ending. As Peter Brooks has argued, the desire to reach the conclusion of a story is determined, in part, by a desire for retrospective meaning. As he states, “the end writes the beginning and shapes the middle.”<sup>96</sup> The end of the “Disney World Girl” story should have made sense of the previous police tactics of circulating the child pornography evidence. The anticipated climax, promulgated by the media and the police, was supposed to be the detectives locating the crime scene in order to “kick down the door” and save the victim. But, since this had already happened two years previously, the temporal sequence of the story had to be distorted in order to create a linear logic that linked the Toronto and Orange County police investigation to the antecedent rescue.

96. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 22.

Besides compromising the desire for a climactic ending, if the media had drawn attention to the costs of the moot investigation, this might have compromised the parasitic pleasures thus far derived from the “Disney World Girl” story. Though the media and the concerned citizens were given unprecedented access to child pornography and related imagery, this was justified by the greater good. It was situated within the context of self-righteousness and disgust. In his chapter on “The Moral Life of Disgust,” Miller argues that feelings of moral disgust come at a cost; one is often left “feeling polluted” by the object of disgust. He explains, “Disgust signals the need to undertake further labors of purification.”<sup>97</sup> In the case at hand, this purification could have been delivered with the anxiously anticipated cathartic ending: the police apprehending the “bad guy” and rescuing the victim. The word catharsis itself signifies purgation or purification in Greek. In classic literary theory, the catharsis allowed for a purgation of the emotions of fear or pity. In the “Disney World Girl” case, the anticipated catharsis would have allowed for a purgation of the disgust towards the child pornography and the perverts, but more importantly, it would have absolved the media consumer of the ambivalent voyeuristic pleasures that it licensed. Without this piece of the narrative, the disgust would have become self-contaminating. Hence, the media was compelled to perform narrative acrobatics in order to have the “Disney World Girl” story culminate with a justificatory climax that purged the earlier feelings of disgust.<sup>98</sup>

## V. The Never-Ending Story

After law enforcement discovered that Allen had already been removed years ago from the abusive situation, the media continued to harvest her traumatic story to generate derivative accounts of child pornography and sexual exploitation. In Foucault’s terms, the case incited further discourse on sex. Thanks to the publicized “Disney World Girl” investigation, child pornography has become even more speakable and visible in our culture. The media continues to excavate the scandal, capitalizing on the thrill of

---

97. Miller, *Disgust*, p. 204.

98. One referee of this article suggested that by not disclosing the anti-climactic culmination of the Toronto investigation when I summarized the facts of the case in Part I, I was potentially embracing the chosen narrative form of the police and the media. But, my hope is that by not divulging this information, I have demonstrated how the media and the police shaped our expectations of the outcome of their investigation. If the reader knew all along what happened, I was not sure the reader would fully recognize just how much we are all caught up in the narrative of the climactic rescue. I wanted the reader to experience the anticlimax, because this distances us from the expected story-line so that we are better able to trace our own emotions and investments in the narrative pleasures of the text. Whether my use of the anti-climax in this article provided any insights on the “Disney World Girl” narrative, of course, is up to the reader to decide.

examining, exposing and dissecting Allen’s abuse photographs and her story in “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.”<sup>99</sup>

In this section, I will look at two media stories that recycled Allen’s story to spin further accounts that fed off of the taboo of child pornography. First, an article in *The Dose* on child pornography underscores an argument I have advanced throughout my analysis: that articulations of disgust and condemnation of child pornography are productive of pedophilic pleasure. The second media example revisits the point made earlier on the individualization of the “bad guy.” An episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* that featured an interview of Masha Allen demonstrates that the dominant articulation of concern for the welfare and safety of children produces a disavowal of societal responsibility and the familial context in which most instances of child sexual abuse occur. Both of these examples point to the self-contradictory nature of media stories of child pornography crimes. Despite surface intentions, the accounts tend to titillate the reader, while misleading her on the most prevalent dangers that children face.

In *The Dose* article, both titillation and misinformation are present. A few months after the authorities had discovered Masha Allen’s whereabouts, this free Toronto daily newspaper republished the sanitized porn pictures. In an article entitled “Lifting the veil of Child Porn,” *The Dose* recirculated the shots of the hot tub, the bedroom and the elevator.<sup>100</sup> The pictures occupied half the page – more space than the words of the article. Above the pictures it reads in small print, “photos from an internet porn site, with images of a child digitally removed, released by police in hopes someone would recognize the location where a young girl was assaulted.”<sup>101</sup> The text of the article was mostly comprised of quotes by Detective Sergeant Gillespie who describes the valiant efforts made by police to identify victims of child pornography. In particular, technology is credited for assisting Toronto cops in improving their chances of locating victims. Nowhere does the article hint that the accompanying photographs to the article were part of a futile investigation where the girl was already safe. Indeed, the description of the photos leaves the impression that police are still searching for the missing victim.

In this instance, the reproduction of the child pornography pictures serves no law enforcement purpose (despite the misleading caption above them). Indeed, instead of assisting Masha Allen, the victim of the child pornography, the recirculation of the image will again likely incite interest and curiosity about what monstrous taboo activity was smudged out in the photographs. If the detectives were correct that the previous police tactics of publicizing the sanitized child pornography pictures spurred

---

99. M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 45.

100. J. Huber, “Lifting the Veil of Child Porn,” *The Dose*, October 26, 2005, p. 5.

101. J. Huber, “The Veil,” *The Dose*, October 26, 2005, p. 5.

increased downloading of the real thing, this tabloid story will likely have a comparable impact. While Masha Allen gets literally and figuratively erased from the picture in the media story, interest in viewing the images of the abuse will again be piqued by the article.

The child pornography photos embody the performative contradiction of the text. Despite the article's ostensible surface message of condemnation, the economy of the story is invested in the shock and titillation of peeking at real child pornography. Recall that the headline of the story is "Lifting the veil of child porn." This phrase is saturated with sexual connotations. The notion that a veil is being lifted implies a sexual undressing of a feminized object of desire. Again, the descriptions that accompany the photographs offer vivid images of abuse. In his usual candor, Detective Sergeant Gillespie provides some shocking details of the kinds of activities found in child pornography. He states, "I've seen 30-minute movies of little babies in diapers being raped ..."<sup>102</sup> The reader/viewer is licensed then to adopt a pedophilic curiosity and see or imagine what lies beneath this veil. The dissemination of sanitized photographs of Masha Allen's abuse has thus become completely detached from the police's original purpose in publicizing them. They have now become part of an on-going public discourse that has brought child pornography on/scene, marking the paradox that the taboo of "kiddie porn" has been made to speak through an increasing re/presentation in the public sphere.

On January 17, 2006, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* brought Masha Allen herself into the public sphere for an interview. During the show, the audience learns that Allen was a Russian-born girl who "survived the unthinkable."<sup>103</sup> Her father had abandoned her mother before Allen had ever met him. Her mother had tried to kill her by stabbing her in the back of the neck with a knife. She was sent to live in an orphanage until, at the age of 5 or 6, was adopted by Mancuso and brought back to the United States. For the next five years, she endured on-going sexual abuse, some of which was captured on video and photographs. Her ordeal ended when police officer Mike Zaglifa tracked illegal child pornography to Mancuso's home computer where the authorities discovered Masha Allen living with the suspect. In the show, Winfrey also interviews Mancuso's biological daughter from a previous marriage, Rachelle, who, Winfrey explains, "shares a painful bond with Masha."<sup>104</sup> In the show, Rachelle explains that she too was the victim of extreme sexual abuse at the hands of her father, Mancuso, that lasted until she reached puberty.

Although much could be said about the sensational rhetoric of the interview<sup>105</sup> that reflected and expanded on the earlier media coverage, for

---

102. J. Huber, "The Veil," *The Dose*, October 26, 2005, p. 5.

103. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* transcript, Harpo Productions Inc., January 17, 2006, p. 9.

104. *The Oprah* transcript, p. 13.

105. Winfrey's introduction to the interview begins: "Five years old, bound, starved, raped; adopted by a pedophile and made his sex slave; a dark twist; a sick secret," *The Oprah* transcript, p. 1.

the purposes of this section I wish to focus on the conclusion of the television episode. After broadcasting Allen and Rachele’s horrific accounts of child abuse, Winfrey brings Zaglifa on stage to discuss his investigation of Mancuso. She culminates this interview with the question, “Now what have you learned, Mike, while tracking pedophiles online, that parents need to know?”<sup>106</sup> His response is decisive, “the number one thing is no chat rooms.”<sup>107</sup> He explains that even if a chat room appears innocuous, there are always “predators” who will attempt to lure the child into some form of sexual dialogue.

Considering the topic of the show, there appears to be a disconnect between this piece of advice and the accounts of abuse that were relayed in the episode. Although this information might make sense if Winfrey had done a show where she interviewed children lured by strangers on the internet, in this context the information misdirects the focus of the recounted abuse. Consider who was behind the abuse that Allen and Rachele suffered. Allen’s biological father abandoned her, her biological mother attempted to murder her and her adoptive father, Mancuso, sexually abused her until he was arrested. Rachele’s biological father, Mancuso, sexually abused her until she reached puberty. Mancuso was never charged with abusing anyone other than his biological and his adopted daughter. In every instance of abuse chronicled in the show, it was a *parent* who was the perpetrator. Yet, Winfrey rounds off her show by focussing on stranger danger.

In the news media’s coverage of the investigation, the police detectives also gave ambivalent accounts of the victim’s relationship to family and strangers. On the one hand, the media reports that “Gillespie told reporters that sex crimes investigators believe the girl’s abuser is a close family member, possibly her father or an uncle.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, on the other hand, the police’s commitment to finding the pornography victim is partly explained because she is part of a familial unit. When defending the police tactic of releasing the “material witness” photograph, Detective Sergeant Gillespie stated, “There may be a risk of harm but, at the end of the day, would you risk it to rescue your daughter?”<sup>109</sup> In another article, Detective Sergeant Gillespie explains why his officers are so invested in locating the missing victim: “It has become personal for the officers ... she’s somebody’s little girl.”<sup>110</sup> The message is that the real tragedy of the situation is not the abuse of this individual girl, but the fact that somebody’s child is being abused. In her discussion on the construction of the crime victim on the show *Crimewatch*, Jermyn argues that a crime victim is primarily identified as being part of a family unit such that: “to not be in a family would be to not be a proper victim.”<sup>111</sup> Ironically, Detective Sergeant Gillespie’s statements

---

106. *The Oprah* transcript, p.15.

107. *The Oprah* transcript, p.16.

108. S. Agrell, “Frantic Search,” *National Post*, February 4, 2005, p. A5.

109. “Porn case photo,” *National Post*, May 6, 2005, p. A4.

110. T. Huffman, “CSI Gimmicks,” *The Toronto Star*, February 4, 2005, p. A01.

111. D. Jermyn, “Photo stories and family albums: imaging criminals and victims on *Crimewatch UK*” in P. Mason, ed., *Criminal Visions*, p. 185.

that the missing child pornography victim is “somebody’s little girl,” and the assessment that her abuser is likely a close family member, were both true. It was because she was “somebody’s little girl” that she wound up getting victimized, first by her biological parents, and then by her adoptive father.

Detective Sergeant Gillespie’s statements on Allen’s familial ties, and Winfrey’s final warning to parents to monitor their children’s internet use, both point to a refusal to acknowledge what they both know: that the family posed the greatest danger to Allen. The story of Allen’s abuse exposes the myth of the sacred and safe nuclear family. Mancuso must be Otherized as a predator, a pedophile and a “bad guy”; his status as parent and father becomes submerged in the rhetoric. Nowhere in the media could I find suggestions for parents to watch for signs that pointed to their own spouses abusing their children. Nowhere in the media analysis of this case was the suggestion that society needs to consider the monopolizing power that parents can wield over their children. It is possible that both Allen and Rachelle could have escaped much of the abuse if a social structure existed that was attuned to the dangers of the nuclear family. For example, Allen went to school throughout the time she was being sexually abused by Mancuso. Rachelle also went to school and had a mother at home throughout the time she was being sexually abused by Mancuso. There were, in theory, adults who could have intervened if they had been educated about the warning signs. Both Rachelle and Allen *could* have told someone, if they had been educated about appropriate contact with adults and given a safe place to report what was happening to them. The paradox of the discourse is that despite and through a plethora of stories about child pornography and its attendant abuses, the focus shifts away from societal responsibility towards a moral panic about stranger danger. The abusers become constructed as monsters with no ties to the hallowed family.

## VI. Conclusion

This paper has tracked how pedophilic pleasures were harnessed and expressed with regards to one victim of child pornography whose media story became an epicenter of re/placed desire and satisfaction. Put the parts together – the infantilized language to describe the child pornography case; the re-constructed pictures and descriptive text that were released to the public; the distortion of the timing of the climactic ending; and the media’s continual re/presenting Allen’s abuse in and out of context – and we get an understanding of what gets turned on in stories about child pornography. The economy of such stories feeds off of the scandal of the original pornographic text, bringing on/scene the most obscene material in our culture. Disgust licenses the reader to, if not completely violate, then at least relish the taboo of child pornography.

However, the narrative requires a distancing moment of catharsis at the end of the tale where order is restored – the bad guy punished, the good guys victorious, and the damsel in distress rescued. In other words, it is not simply that the “Disney World Girl” story allowed the reader legitimate access to



the taboo of child pornography through its condemnatory discourse, but also that the narrative was invested in the discursive pleasure of catharsis and resolution. Without such a climax, the pleasures of voyeurism and disgust – where the media consumer snatches glimpses of the seedy backstage of child pornography production – would self-contaminate the “good guy.”

After the contrived climax that the media tacked on to their coverage of the “Disney World Girl” case, there were sequels to this story. In *The Dose*, Allen’s identity gets completely expunged, while the photographs of her abuse are exploited in order to “lift the veil” off of child pornography. In *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Allen’s history of severe emotional, physical and sexual abuse in the family gets converted into a tale about stranger danger. The moral of that story becomes: parents, beware of the internet. Perhaps more appropriately, it should have been: parents (and other concerned adults), here are some signs that your child is being abused by a parent (or other family member). Instead of giving this warning, Winfrey’s show re/commodifies the horrific abuse that Allen suffered while managing any cultural anxiety about parent danger. Mancuso gets cast as a sick pedophile and his status as father becomes disavowed.

I want to suggest that instead of objectifying Mancuso, the media narrative could have attempted to contextualize child pornography within the broader problem of child abuse in the family. Child pornography, after all, represents a small fraction of the number of children suffering sexual abuse and an even smaller fraction of children suffering non-sexual abuse. Articles could have provided statistics of the number of children in abuse situations and evaluated the current societal responses to this crime. When police enforcement acknowledge that they have only identified 500 of the estimated 50,000 victims in child pornography,<sup>112</sup> perhaps the media might consider interviewing social-welfare experts on alternative strategies of facilitating victims’ ability to disclose the abuse to a trusted authority. In other words, it might be time to admit that solely relying on the police to “save” victims of child sexual abuse, whether they have been photographed or not, does not in fact, save children at all. Abused children in our society are rarely locked up 24 hours a day and thus are theoretically in the best position to save themselves. But, in order for children to be empowered in this way, we have to expand our understanding of them as not only potential victims but also potential allies. By arming them with relevant information on abuse, sexual or otherwise, they are more likely to recognize their own (or their peers’) exploitation. A big picture analysis of child pornography would then both position the problem within the larger context of child abuse and identify multiple partners in the struggle to address these crimes which would include children, family members, teachers, neighbors, social-welfare workers as well as police officers.

The “Disney World Girl” case exposes the extent to which media production is invested in maintaining entertainment conventions at the expense of showing this bigger picture. The binary oppositions of victim/bad

---

112. E. Chung, “A young witness,” *The Toronto Star*, April 28, 2005, p. A1.

guy and good guy/bad guy obscured the high costs of the police tactics in releasing the doctored and related child pornography pictures. One could argue that the police were also “bad guys” to the extent that they increased Allen’s victimization by publicizing the abuse images when she was already out of harm’s way. The “material witness,” who remained anonymous, has now nonetheless had her fifteen minutes of fame as a child contextually bound to sexual abuse and pornography. One could also argue that the media embody the role of “bad guy” as they repackage Allen’s story over and over in their effort to increase readership/viewership by inciting and gratifying the public’s desire to bring child pornography on/scene. One could further argue that parents need to be recast as the “bad guys” in order for society to come to grips with the biggest risks that children face. One could finally argue that I am a “bad guy” for further publicizing the Allen case, recirculating the released photographs, and recommodifying her story in the interest of academic analysis.<sup>113</sup>

The point of this article, however, has not been to reverse the roles of “good guy” and “bad guy.” Instead, what hopefully has become evident is that such binaries undermine the goal of protecting children from exploitation and distract from the context in which most child sexual abuse takes place. Good/bad dichotomies prevent us from seeing the ways that our own well-intentioned discourse has incited a pedophilic logic. As Kincaid has argued, “The eroticising of children is blamed on somebody else, as if it were an accidental and freakish thing we could wipe out by being sufficiently sanctimonious.”<sup>114</sup> Yet, wrapped in the cocoon of self-righteousness and disgust, the police, the media, and the media consumers gorge themselves on sexualized children and corrupted childhood. And, what subsequently becomes *unspeakable* are the ways that major social institutions – such as the justice system, the news media, and the nuclear family – are implicated in increasing the vulnerability of children to sexualization and abuse.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Brenda Cossman, Virna Jamshed, and Brian Smith for their detailed comments and suggestions on multiple drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to the participants at “The Power Of Stories: Intersections of Law, Culture & Literature” conference in Gloucester, UK who provided excellent feedback and challenging critiques of a conference paper I presented based on an earlier draft. The three anonymous referees and the editorial board at *Law, Culture and the Humanities* offered excellent suggestions on ways to improve and tighten the piece and I thank them heartily. Any blunders, of course, are mine alone.

---

113. Indeed, this dilemma – that to critique the discourse of the “Disney World Girl” is still to perpetuate the discourse – was brought to my attention when I presented an earlier version of this paper at “The Power Of Stories: Intersections of Law, Culture & Literature” conference in Gloucester, UK, 2005.

114. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 281.