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REPRESENTATIONS OF STRANGER AND NON-STRANGER HOMICIDE:

A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN NEWS MEDIA

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The news media play a significant role in shaping public narratives about homicide by the particular incidents that journalists choose to report – or not report – on. Newspapers, in particular, lack the benefit of constant imagery, special effects, and live-action reporting that T.V. news reports have, and, as a result, forces newspapers to construct sensational and newsworthy homicide stories in order to be competitive and gain readership. To achieve this, newspapers often disproportionately report on bizarre and atypical homicide incidents, which most frequently involve a stranger or unknown assailant. While there is substantive literature surrounding the newsworthiness of homicide incidents in the United States and elsewhere, an accurate and comprehensive understanding of how the news media portray incidents of stranger homicide compared to non-stranger homicide in Canadian newspapers is lacking. In this research project, I address this gap by coding 359 Canadian newspaper articles on reported homicide incidents and analyzing this data to identify key themes, which will be used to contextualize larger systemic issues in society, and provide suggestions for future research.

This research project used media constructions of crime to inform its analysis of the three major themes: the demonization of offenders, gendered blame of female victims and offenders, and the intersection between culture, class, and crime. The results of this data collection and my subsequent analysis of the themes revealed three unique findings which contribute to the literature.

First, an analysis of the demonization of offenders revealed the 'devaluing of rehabilitation' as a prominent theme surrounding the construction of stranger offenders. This was an interesting and unique finding that was not previously found in the literature. This suggests that additional research needs to be conducted to reveal the implications of news media's

framing of violent crime and the ensuing punishment and punitive attitudes towards crime from the public.

In addition, many of the articles analyzed in this study used gendered discourse to construct the female victims and offenders in homicide cases. Most research on media constructions of female victims and offenders discuss the imbalance between portrayals of women and men in news media discourse and highlight the obscuring of men's violence towards women while simultaneously blaming females for their own victimization. This research confirms this notion and also introduces the responsibilization of women other than the primary victim or offender as a distinct finding.

Lastly, I present and discuss the intersection between social class and crime in the news media. Analysis of the data collected in this study illustrated that the news media construct crime as emerging from 'deviant' cultures as opposed to rooting crime in the social conditions from which they manifest. This results in further marginalization of particular individuals and groups in society who are already discriminated against (e.g., racial minorities, the lower-class, etc.).

Overall, the present study attempts to expand general knowledge and understanding of news media constructions of stranger homicide compared to non-stranger homicide, and the impact such framing could potentially have on public discourse surrounding certain marginalized individuals and groups in society, particularly visible minorities and victims of domestic violence.

Keywords: newsworthiness, stranger homicide, non-stranger homicide, intimate partner violence, victims, offenders

To Mom and Dad.

For your endless love and support.

It means the world to me.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Media coverage of crime and justice issues has developed into one of the most integral aspects of criminological inquiry (Barak, 1988). As a significant, if not primary, source for information about crime and the criminal justice system, news media, has the potential to exercise a great deal of influence on the public perceptions of crime (Dowler, 2003). News media, in particular, is often used as a social platform in which private issues are selectively gathered up, transformed into broader social problems, and disseminated to the public for interpretation. The process of determining which stories to cover and investing those stories with a meaning made easily accessible for public consumption can have extensive consequences for public understanding of crime (Sacco, 1995). Given the potential media influence on public perceptions of crime, it is important to analyze news media's journalistic framing of crime, in this case homicide, and the subsequent implications of their selection bias. The implications of journalistic framing and selection bias based on newsworthiness in media coverage and reporting of stranger and non-stranger homicide has surfaced as a major problem in recent years (Riedel, 1998).

An Overview of Stranger and Non-Stranger Homicide in News Media

The relationship between victims and offenders is an important, and often overlooked, dynamic when exploring the context of homicide. Crime data consistently show that homicide is an interpersonal crime wherein victims and offenders are more likely to know one another with a variety of social factors at play (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). Domestic violence and intimate partner homicide is an issue that is underreported in the news media. However, when the news

media does report on this issue it is heavily framed by biases or stereotypes which, as a result, can affect who or what the public perceives as the underlying cause of this social problem (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013). The news media construct domestic and intimate partner homicide in gendered terms that fosters historical assumptions that situate women as less than men which downplays men's role in the victimization and responsibilizes women. Instead of reporting on domestic homicide and similar crimes the news media often constructs atypical and sensationalized crimes as social problems. Newspaper portrayals of homicide frequently sensationalize and over-represent stranger cases homicide to increase the salience of the story (e.g., Riedel, 1998). This disproportionate framing of homicide incidents may impact the public's perception of crime. In particular, the sensationalization of stranger homicide may promote an unnecessary societal fear while simultaneously ignoring the broader structural and social factors that contribute to criminality. As a result, society is misinformed about prominent social issues such as domestic violence, child abuse and less serious, but more prevalent, non-violent crimes. Instead, the public is bombarded with newspaper articles on child abduction and murder, serial homicide and school shootings which, although very serious, are rare in occurrence. Thus, more research is needed in this area in order to address these common misconceptions and inform the public on more widespread social and crime problems.

The Present Study

Media portrayals of stranger and non-stranger homicide cases warrant closer scrutiny to better understand how journalistic framing constructs homicide as a social problem. The overarching purpose of this study is to analyze the discourse presented in newspaper coverage surrounding stranger and non-stranger homicide. Although previous research has been conducted on the various factors that define the newsworthiness of homicide cases in the media, the current

literature has failed to examine the specific framing of the role of victim-offender relationship in homicide cases and the larger social problems that are inferred from these frames. In addition, the majority of research studies surrounding the dynamics of news media framing of stranger and non-stranger homicide have been conducted in the United States (e.g., Block, 1973). Although the United States and Canada share similarities across our criminal justice system, our crime rates drastically vary. Furthermore, given Canada's ethnic diversity and reputation as a cultural mosaic, existing literature in this area of criminological inquiry does not necessarily translate to the Canadian experience of crime and victimization. Therefore, there is a significant gap in the literature in relation to the presentation and framing of stranger and non-stranger homicide in Canadian news media.

This study analyzes the status of the victim(s) as a stranger or non-stranger and whether this relationship directly contributed to the newsworthiness of the case. The present study contributes to the literature by analyzing newspaper reports of stranger and non-stranger homicides that took place in Canada between 2009 and 2013. For the purpose of this study, the term 'non-stranger homicide' will refer to homicides committed by acquaintances, friends, relatives or intimate partners. I will fulfill this objective by exploring how stranger and non-stranger homicides are constructed in newspaper reports, and how, in comparison, these reports are framed in order to achieve newsworthiness. This research question allows for a broader understanding of the patterns in newspaper reporting of stranger and non-stranger homicides in Canada over five years. In addition, it allows us to explore the specific ways in which homicide cases are framed in order to make them more newsworthy.

In the following chapter I will present this study's epistemological roots in social constructionism provide a general overview on media construction of crime, discuss the existing

literature within this area of discourse, and situate this research project within the substantive

literature on media construction of crime.

<center>Chapter Two</center>

<center>Literature Review</center>

Theoretical Underpinnings

Social Constructionism and Social Problems

According to a social constructivist perspective, our knowledge and understanding of the world is the result of an ongoing negotiation of meanings in social situations that is influenced by personal experiences and social interactions, which, in turn, allows us to create our own reality (Surette, 2015). Social constructionism "views knowledge as something that is socially created by people" (Surette, 2015, p. 31), and focuses on how social relationships impact how people interpret the world around them. According to Surette (2015) "social constructionism emphasizes the shared meanings that people hold – the ideas, interpretations, and knowledge that groups of people agree to hold in common" (p. 31). Our shared meanings are negotiated through social processes and are collectively imposed on the way people see the world. From this view, reality is subjective and largely based on individual experiences. Through this process, "social constructionism helps to understand the impact of the media on crime and justice" (Surette, 2015, p. 31), which was the theoretical lens used to influence this research project.

According to Surette (1994) "the crimes that dominate the public consciousness and policy debates are not common crimes but the rarest ones" (p. 131). Homicide and, in particular, stranger homicide attract a significant amount of media attention, which, according to the social constructionist perspective, raises questions about how the media's portrayal of stranger homicide constructs social reality.

Surette (2015) claims that the role of the media in the social construction process occurs in four distinct stages: the physical world, competing social constructions, media as social construction competition arena, and winning social construction. In Stage 1, actual events such as homicide occur and subsequently provide the conditions from which individuals and organizations can construct a social problem. In Stage 2, "competing constructions first offer differing descriptions of what the physical world is like" (Surette, 2015, p. 34) for example, "stranger homicide is on the rise" versus "intimate partner homicide is significantly increasing". In order to frame the event as a social problem a social construction will often provide statistical evidence to support its position, offer theories as to why the event happened, and argue for a specific set of public and individual policies that should be pursued. In Stage 3, the media help socially construct the physical world by filtering out competing constructions – usually reporting on the most dramatic and sensational events – and give social problems legitimacy through mainstream coverage. Finally, in Stage 4 the media play a pivotal role in fostering the emergence of the dominant social construction, which promotes a specific social reality to mainstream society. This, in turn, has a direct impact on how the public construct the physical world, and subsequently how policy makers respond to social problems (Surette, 2015).

The Ecole Polytechnique Massacre is illustrative of Surette's (2015) media social construction process. On December 6, 1989, Marc Lepine committed one of the most notorious mass murders in Canadian history when he killed fourteen women at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. The killing of those women was "thought to have had a substantial impact on beliefs and perceptions" (Duwe, 2005, p. 59) about mass murder, stranger homicide, and violence against women. Through the four stages of social constructionism outlined in Surette (2015) the media aided in transforming the physical event of a mass murder into a widespread social

problem encompassing notions of safety in public places, gun control, and violence against women. According to Sheptycki (2009), "the 'Montreal Massacre' transformed the content of Canadian media discourse about guns – due to the misogynistic motivations of the killer women's groups moved to the fore" (pp. 310-311). Although "the massacre did not lead directly to significantly tougher gun control laws" (Scheptycki, 2009, p. 311), media coverage surrounding the massacre in Montreal began to alter the language of Canadians regarding this issue, and served as a symbol of violent crime that could be used to influence debates surrounding crime and crime control in the future. This example illustrates how perceptions of a social condition can change as the media constructions of an event can alter the knowledge about those conditions.

Although it is difficult to define a "social problem" in absolute terms, we can identify components that cultivate the common public definition in an effort to understand the general characteristics of conditions that categorize a social problem. The social constructionist tradition views social problems as "a condition evaluated as wrong, widespread, and changeable... [it] categorizes conditions we believe are troublesome, prevalent, can be changed, and should be changed" (Loseke, 2003, p. 7). Social problems are about identifying an objective condition (something that exists in the physical world) as a problem that requires attention and convincing people through subjective definitions that a certain condition is the source of that problem.

Claims Makers and Claims

Foundational to the social construction process are claims makers. According to Surette (2015), "[c]laims makers are the promoters, activists, professional experts, and spokespersons involved in forwarding specific claims about a social condition" (p. 35). Claims makers identify

a condition as a social problem, what the cause of the problem is, and offer a solution(s) to the problem. In any given social condition there are several groups of claims makers with competing constructions – each group attempting to use the media as an outlet to get an audience to accept their particular claims. According to Duwe (2005), "the news media help construct social problems by either making claims directly (i.e. primary claimsmaking) or, more often, by reporting the claims made by others (i.e. secondary claimsmaking)" (p. 60). Hence, claims makers use the news media to draw attention to a particular social condition and persuade the audience to worry about an issue(s) using frames and typifications.

Aside from drawing attention to a particular social condition, claims makers construct arguments about how the issue(s) should be understood by the audience. According to Best (2015), "this is the problem's frame, the way the condition is presented as problematic" (p. 19). In the social construction of crime and justice, frames are particularly significant because news coverage of crime "is often the primary, and sometimes only, source of information about the problem" (Duwe, 2005, p. 61). Therefore, how a physical event, such as stranger homicide, is framed in the news media has the potential to influence perceptions about the prevalence of this social problem and what can be done to control it (Duwe, 2005). For example, the "faulty criminal justice frame" introduced by Surette (2015) argues that the criminal justice system is weak and places too much emphasis on rehabilitation and offender rights as opposed to punishment. As a result, people commit crimes because they know their punishment will be minimal. Therefore, in order to ensure public safety, crime control efforts must be maximized to deter offenders from committing crime. Framing crime and justice in this way influences how criminality is understood by the general public and attempts to persuade people in a particular direction.

In addition, typifications are often used by claims makers to help construct a social problem. Typifications are simple classifications or categories applied to a social condition or issue as a resource to help reduce complexity so that a claims maker's claim about a particular problem is easily understood by the intended audience. However, typifications can have very negative consequences if they are used to illustrate rare or unusual events as commonplace. The news media often contribute to this distortion of social conditions by reporting on isolated events and labelling them as typifications. That is, "claimsmakers have uncritically and almost exclusively used news coverage (or more specifically, national news coverage) as the main source of information" (Duwe, 2005, p. 60) on homicide. In particular, stranger homicide is frequently overemphasized in the news media, which has significant implications for the social construction of other, more pervasive crimes, such as intimate partner homicide.

Media Constructions of Crime

As previously mentioned, criminological research has increasingly examined the media constructions of crime and justice issue over the last two decades. A common finding that emerges from the research literature is the relationship between media consumption and fear of crime as well as perceptions of the criminal justice system.

In order to understand the relationship between the media and crime and justice, a brief overview of the evolution of media is necessary. According to Surette (2015), each media type maintains a dominant position in history and, as a result, dictates how the public consume news information. Sound media, print media, visual media, and, now, new media are the four types of media that occupy a significant role in the history of information dissemination (Surette, 2015). The arrival of "new media" in the late 1970s initiated the impetus for an entirely new form of

media consumption and, as a result, changed the way the public consumes the news and thus perceives social issues.

The major news media outlets are owned and thus controlled by a handful of major corporations. According to Bagdikian (2004), in 2004 five huge corporations – Time Warner, Disney Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom (formerly CBS) – owned most of the newspapers, magazines, books, radio and TV stations, and movie studios of the United States. As discussed by Noam Chomsky (1997), these dominant corporations are very profitable. Therefore, since the news media are profit-maximizing corporations, efforts to seek profit may interfere with honest and objective journalism that can result in people being misinformed of the reality of social problems. Crime – homicide in particular – is universally considered a serious social problem and thus deemed worthy of significant media attention. Moreover, public policies are created to deal with, fight, solve, and/or prevent it.

In this section I will review the literature on various characteristics that make homicide newsworthy, the relationship that exists between both gender and race in homicide cases, and the news media framing of intimate partner homicide.

What Makes a Homicide Newsworthy?

Despite its relative infrequency, homicide is overrepresented in the news media, and is disproportionately constructed as 'newsworthy' over other more prevalent offences such as theft, property crimes, and white-collar and corporate crimes (see Chermak, 1994; Humphries, 1981; and Duwe, 2005). Public fascination with homicide is illustrated by the volume of popular culture devoted to the subject matter. Journalists and news reporters tend to dramatize incidents of homicide in the news media in order to maintain and increase readership. However, not all

homicides are created equal, so to speak, as evidenced by the fact that certain stories are selected for news coverage over others. Some homicides attract a great deal of media attention and become highly sensationalized news events, while other cases do not garner any media attention, or are only covered by local news media. The impetus for this study is the observed imbalance in media coverage across homicide cases. High profile homicide cases in Canada, such as Robert Pickton, Clifford Olson, Russell Williams, Marc Lepine, and Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka exemplify how the news media overemphasize the most sensational and least representative homicides. Therefore, much of the recent literature (see Buckler & Travis, 2005; Dowler & Fleming, 2006; and Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson, & Ackerley, 2004) developed on news media coverage of homicide has focused on the decision-making process of determining whether or not to report on a homicide case. To date a large body of research has examined the specific characteristics of a homicide case that make it newsworthy.

Previous research has analyzed the newsworthiness of homicide cases based on the presence of certain variables. In general, research (see Gruenewald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009; Chermak, 1998; and Gekoski, Gray, & Adler, 2012) has found that the news media is inclined to disproportionately report on homicides that involve particularly salient characteristics including elderly victims, female victims, white victims, victims of high social status, multiple victims, 'stranger murders,' and homicides involving the use of a firearm (Gekoski, Gray, & Adler, 2012). In particular, a large body of research (see Wilcox, 2005; Paulsen, 2003; and Gruenewald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009) focuses on the gender and race of the victim as well as the victim-offender relationship, and how these factors are constructed in the news media in an effort to increase newsworthiness. While this body of research has focused on what predicts media coverage, it has largely ignored messages about or construction of homicide as a social problem.

Reporting Gender in Homicide Cases

A multitude of research has examined the role of gender and victim-offender relationship in media coverage of crime (see Johnstone, Hawkins, & Michener, 1994; Gruenewald, et al., 2009; Gruenewald, Chermak, & Pizarro, 2013; Sorenson, Peterson Manz, & Berk, 1998; Humphries, 1981; and Lundman, 2003). Overall, these studies found that gender *does* have a significant impact on the newsworthiness of a story. Specifically, gender is oftentimes used in journalism to fit a certain typification, generally involving sexism or some form of the male dominance stereotype. This is why, according to Lundman (2003), "homicides involving male violators and female victims are more likely to be seen as newsworthy because they can be scripted using male sexism emphasizing male aggression and female submission" (p.361). Conversely, homicides that involved female offenders and male victims were perceived as less newsworthy due to traditional conceptions of gender norms and stereotypes, making the presentation and framing of the story difficult for journalists. In one study, Humphries (1981) found that over two-thirds of the offenders in newspaper reported homicides were identified as male. He concluded that, along with race and age, sex is the basic format for representing victims and offenders in the news.

As is typical amongst newspaper writing, coverage of specific events, especially homicide cases, varies in its descriptions of the victims and offenders in a particular case depending on the availability and newsworthiness of their characteristics. The most readily available information in newspaper stories of homicide are often physical characteristics such as the race, age, and gender of the victims and offenders. In one study, Buckler and Travis (2005) wanted to "assess the factors that news organizations use in their judgements concerning the newsworthiness of local homicide occurrences for publication" (p.17). In this regard, their study

focused on commonly reported characteristics of a homicide in order to assess which typifications were deemed more newsworthy and thus provided a more compelling story for the newspapers' intended audience. As previous research has suggested, newspaper organizations tend to focus most of their attention on homicide incidents that are considered "statistically deviant" and educe an emotional response from the public (Buckler & Travis, 2005, p. 18). Thus, as their research suggests, the news media is inclined to focus on homicide occurrences involving female victims due to their perceived newsworthiness. Unfortunately, the process by which journalists decide which stories to cover and which to ignore falls in line with capitalistic notions of what is considered to be 'important' crime news. This process is further facilitated by consumer culture as stories are selected based on what resonates with the audience.

Gender has been found to be a significant factor in shaping the crime news decision-making process. As previously noted, homicides involving female victims are constructed as considerably more newsworthy than homicides involving male victims. As a result, homicides where the victim is female are drastically overrepresented in news media, resulting in increased fear of victimization for women who read crime news. In one study, Gruenewald, Chermak, and Pizarro (2013) examine how the situational components of a homicide story impact the representation of gender in news media. This is important because it helps us understand the impact that targeting female homicide victims may have on society's perception of crime, as well as why the victim's gender is a catalyst in homicide newsworthiness. Although the results of this study confirm that female victims receive more media attention than male victims, "the factors that make a female homicide newsworthy are different than those of male homicides" (p. 778). Overall, this study concludes that newspaper scripts and framing are indeed an important aspect of crime news, and determine which incidents receive coverage, and to what degree.

Gender, in particular, significantly contributes to news media perceptions of which homicide cases are more newsworthy. Schildkraut and Donley (2012) expanded upon Gruenewald et al.'s (2009) research by examining the impact that certain characteristics, such as age, have on the newsworthiness of homicide cases in a homogeneous population. Therefore, their study not only examines the variables that affect a homicide incident's probability of being covered by the news media, but also which factors contribute to more sensationalized and newsworthy stories. The disproportionate nature of homicide coverage, especially in relation to gender, has led to public fear and stereotyping of certain populations. However, contrary to previous findings, while statistically rare victims (e.g., women) are considered to be more "worthy victims," that does not necessary translate to newsworthiness (Schildkraut & Donley, 2012, p. 191). According to their study, "female victims, a group that comprises only 9% of the victim population, received *less* celebrated coverage on average than male victims" (Schildkraut & Donley, 2012, p. 191). This, perhaps, means that it is not necessarily individual characteristics that constitute newsworthiness, but rather the context and content in which the homicide takes place.

Cultural deviance is an important factor when discussing the newsworthiness of a homicide incident. Cultural deviance is related to gender in the sense that "killing a female carries a greater cultural stigma than killing a male" (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997, p. 55). That is to say that, given a woman's stereotypical status as the more 'delicate' and 'gentle' sex, society, in general, is more appalled and disturbed by the killing of a female as opposed to the killing of a male. In an interesting study, Pritchard and Hughes (1997) analyze the "adequacy of deviance-based explanations for crime news decisions" (p. 50). Given that deviance itself is a construct, news media regularly rely on deviance-based explanations for crime to develop a compelling

news story surrounding the most newsworthy details. Therefore, deviance is a prominent avenue of research in order to further understand journalists' decision-making process for selecting newsworthy homicide incidents. The results of Pritchard and Hughes' (1997) study reveals that cultural deviance can, in some respects, successfully explain evaluations of newsworthiness. Specifically, cultural deviance helps to understand and make predictions about the effects of the victims' gender on the salience of a homicide story. Simply put, the murder of certain victims (e.g., women) is considered significantly more culturally deviant and, thus, more newsworthy than the killing of other, less sensational victims (e.g., men).

The representations of crime, especially homicide, found in the news media have been a longstanding public concern. Given the increase in literature in the area it is clear that the presentation of crime though the media has provoked stereotypes and a widespread fear of certain individuals and groups. It is important to assess the frequency and extent to which news media exaggerates the regularity of lethal violence, especially when highlighting gender and race typifcations. Otherwise, we run the risk of perpetuating preconceived notions and concepts regarding a certain population, which, through consensus, can misinform public policy and drive prejudice and injustice.

Reporting Race in Homicide Cases

Previous research on crime newsworthiness has shown us that journalists isolate stories based on certain typifications. These typifications, according Lundman (2003), "reflect existing social structure, appear logical in terms of commonsense understandings of the ways the world operates, sounds, and feels, and mesh easily with existing stereotypes, including those grounded in the belief systems that reflect and nourish race and gender stratification" (p. 360).

Typifications, thus, are a popular method employed by journalists in order to distinguish the newsworthiness of a story and provide a template around which a story can be scripted. Along with gender, race is among the top typifications that contribute to the newsworthiness of a story. Homicides involving Black or other non-white offenders and white victims are, therefore, more newsworthy because they can be scripted using racism or stereotypes involving fear of Black crime. Unfortunately, these journalistic tendencies can create bias in news media stories through the overrepresentation of minorities committing crime. In his study, Lundman (2003) analyzed 640 homicide cases collected from several newspaper sources occurring in Columbus, Ohio between 1984 and 1992. His research confirmed that homicides involving Black law violators received significantly more attention in news media compared to homicides where the offender was white. Indeed Lundman's findings indicate that journalists frequently utilize race typifications when framing homicide incidents in order to increase the salience of a story.

Similarly, Gruenewald et al. (2009) conducted research that assessed the specific characteristics that most contributed to the newsworthiness of a homicide story. Their research, like Lundman's, focused on how the race/ethnicity of those involved in a homicide incidence, either as an offender or as a victim, affected news media selection. However, Gruenewald et al.'s research, unlike previous studies, focused specifically on homicides involving Hispanics as opposed to dichotomizing race into Black and White categories. Therefore, in their study, the author's examined newspaper coverage of homicides occurring in Newark, New Jersey – a midsized city where the majority of the population is Black and the dominant minority is Hispanic – between 1997 and 2005. Given the vast growth of Hispanic minorities across the United States, it is important to understand how Hispanic groups, in comparison to other minorities such as Blacks, are represented, if at all, in homicide incidents. Furthermore,

reflecting on Lundman's (2003) research, this study could be used to better understand the cultural typifications present in homicides involving Hispanic participants (i.e., victims and offenders) in comparison to other minorities that frequent news media and suffer from selection bias, such as Blacks.

In addition, this research can help us better understand existing stereotypes surrounding Hispanics in mass media and aid in the debunking of persistent myths which claim Hispanic populations to be 'violent' or 'aggressive'. Gruenewald et al.'s (2009) findings revealed similar results to Lundman's (2003) study. According to Gruenewald et al.'s analysis of the data, "homicides involving Hispanic males as offenders were more likely to receive media coverage than those involving Black male or female offenders" (p. 269). These findings are consistent with Gruenewald et al.'s original hypothesis which stated that, "cultural typification of victims and offenders will significantly affect news media evaluations of newsworthiness" (p. 265). That is, homicides involving atypical offenders and victims, such as Hispanic minorities, are considered more newsworthy by journalists because they fit a specific cultural typification, which is oftentimes used as a template for news media to script their stories around. This is a problem because it provides journalists with shortcuts to writing a newsworthy story, which generally results in the perpetuation of stereotypes and assumptions surrounding specific race/ethnic groups as criminal or deviant.

Given that journalists necessarily choose which crime stories to report and which to ignore, the importance of understanding news media selection processes is abundantly clear. By actively choosing to report on homicide incidents based on perceived newsworthy characteristics, journalists highlight certain offenders and victims while downplaying or ignoring other individuals and/or groups. This communicates daily stereotypical and negative images of

certain disproportionately marginalized and vulnerable segments of society to the public while reinforcing dominant cultural views and ideologies. Pritchard and Hughes (1997) conducted a study that "gathered information about [various] characteristics of homicides to use as concrete indicators of statistical, status, and cultural deviance" (p. 53). A key characteristic the authors focused on was "whether a White person was involved in the homicide either as a suspect or a victim" (p. 53). By concentrating their research focus exclusively on the White population, Pritchard and Hughes were able to analyze the impact of a White participant as either an offender or a victim on the newsworthiness of a story, which is important because, in Western cultures, White represents the dominant race/ethnicity. Therefore, homicide news stories involving a White victim are more likely to attract public attention and, subsequently, become more newsworthy.

In addition, homicide incidents involving a White victim allow news media outlets to construct a stereotypical offender in order to initiate fear or panic towards a certain social and/ or cultural group and label them as an enemy or 'outsider'. Laws and regulations define situations and outline behaviour that is considered socially acceptable, and, by extension, unacceptable. When a crime is committed, especially homicide, the offender, who is seen to have broken the rules agreed upon by society, is regarded as an outsider (Becker, 1963). This process of 'othering' becomes problematic when certain individuals and groups in society become targeted based on ethnic and/or cultural differences. In their study, Pritchard and Hughes (1997) "coded each of the 560 news items about the homicides published in the morning *Sentinel* and the afternoon *Journal* for every day of publication from January 1, 1994, through March 1, 1995" (p. 57) in order to assess which characteristics of homicide contributed towards statistical, status, and cultural deviance. In addition, the authors conducted semi structured qualitative interviews

with five reporters who covered homicide cases for the *Sentinel* and *Journal* to assess which homicide incidents were deemed more newsworthy than others. Pritchard and Hughes' findings indicate that race undoubtedly contributed to the newsworthiness of a given homicide story. Specifically, the presence of White participants was positively related to the newsworthiness of the story with particular emphasis on the length of the story, the number of news items published, and the proportions of items placed on the front page. However, the authors fail to indicate whether the salience of the story was increased when the White participant was either the violator or the victim.

Typically, the newsworthiness of a homicide incident is directly correlated with the characteristics of the victim as opposed to the suspected murderer. Moreover, the perceived value of the life of the victim positively affects the newsworthiness of the homicide. For example, newsworthiness is enhanced when the victim of a homicide incident is a child due to the professed innocence of children and the fact that their value of life often is placed higher than their adult counterparts amongst other members in society. Therefore, with regards to Pritchard and Hughes' findings, it is important to identify the White participants as either offenders or victims because, depending on geographical location, the newsworthiness can be increased if a higher value of life is ascribed to a White participant in a certain area when they are the victim of a homicide. Interestingly, when Pritchard and Hughes asked all five reporters about the effect of race during the semi structured interviews, "the four White reporters asserted that race played no direct role in newsworthiness [while] the black reporter believed that race did play a role" (p. 61). However, three of the White reporters did agree that the newspaper's homicide stories had to be relevant to their mostly White readership in order to enhance newsworthiness. Thus, Pritchard and Hughes' (1997) study illustrates that certain characteristics, race in particular, are

positively correlated with the newsworthiness of a homicide story, and that journalists utilize these characteristics as a template when deciding whether or not to report on a homicide case.

Given society's fascination with violence and violent crimes, it is not surprising that the news media is more inclined to report on a homicide incident than on other non-lethal, although distinctly more prevalent, crimes. This begs the question, how accurately does newspaper coverage of homicide incidents reflect the true reality of violent crimes? In a study carried out by Paulsen (2003), the author sought to explore the "difference between the reality of homicide in Houston, Texas, between 1986 and 1994 and the socially constructed reality of homicide as portrayed by newspaper coverage of homicide incidents" (p. 289). That is, Paulsen wanted to know if homicide incidents are disproportionately reported on by journalists in order to increase readership as well as what specific characteristics contribute to the salience of a story. Of particular interest is the relationship between the race of the victims and the newsworthiness of the homicide incident. Paulsen's study indicates that White victims were significantly more likely to receive newspaper coverage compared to occurrences where the victim was either Black or Hispanic. This could be attributed to the fact that a homicide involving a White victim is considered to be a rare incident and, thus, is more likely to receive media coverage. On the other hand, homicide occurrences involving minorities are typically associated with drugs and/or gangs, and are thus more commonplace and less likely to be considered newsworthy. Paulsen's (2003) study found similar results and concluded that celebrated articles are more likely to cover homicide incidents involving statistically rare victims. Similarly, homicides involving ethnic and/or cultural minorities such as Black or Hispanic victims in the United States, are less likely to receive newspaper coverage. Therefore, as a victim's social status increases, journalists become more inclined to cover a particular story because of its perceived newsworthiness.

In a similar study by Schildkraut and Donley (2012), the authors build on previous research by examining the predictors of newsworthiness in order to analyze media distortion of homicide coverage. However, this study was conducted in an area with a nearly homogeneous population while focusing on race as a prominent predictor of a story's salience. This is important because, as previously discussed, the presence of minorities in an area dominated by a White majority can have a significant impact on which homicide incidents journalists choose to cover based on their perceived newsworthiness. Schildkraut and Donley's (2012) study analyzed data from *The Baltimore Sun* – Baltimore, Maryland's largest newspaper in 2010 – in order to "identify cases and attributes of the homicides to identify which characteristics increase newsworthiness among the 223 homicide cases known to the Baltimore Police Department" (p. 176). Consistent with previous research, Schildkraut and Donley's (2012) data revealed that, despite the fact that Black victims are six times more common than White victims, White victims occupied the highest amount of coverage (88.95%) compared to minority victims. This, again, illustrates a clear bias in the media selection process when determining which homicide incidents will be the most newsworthy.

Over the years a large body of research has been dedicated to examining how minorities, especially Blacks, have been disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal justice system as well as in the news media. Given the recently examined literature, it is clear that, specifically regarding the influence of race, Blacks are significantly devalued in the media, especially as victims of crime. Weiss and Chermak (1998) conducted a study that looked at the presentation of victims in the news media when race was a known characteristic. Specifically, the authors wanted to examine "whether homicides involving African American victims are given less attention in the news compared to homicides involving white victims" (p. 73). The results of this

study were consistent with previous findings, showing that news media reports treat Black victims of homicide as less important than White victims through their presentation, or lack thereof, in newspaper articles. Again, this indicates that race plays a significant role in the news selection process and, depending on the victim, can be used to construct a particular homicide event as more or less newsworthy. Furthermore, given the frequent nature of homicides involving Blacks, the news media treat these individuals and incidents as less important, opting instead to reserve coverage for what they deem to be 'extraordinary' cases.

The implications of racial bias within news media selection are problematic and extend far beyond an article in a newspaper. Selecting homicide incidents based on the perceived value of a victim in order to increase the salience of a story significantly devalues minorities due to the public's reliance on news for crime and criminal justice. In addition, bias presented in newspaper reporting can, by extension, translate to public perceptions, opinions, and biases on crime. For example, exclusively reporting on homicide incidents where the victim is White can misguidedly suggest to the public that minorities commit the majority of violent crimes, and subsequently initiate misdirected fear and panic. At the same time excluding homicide victims from news media because they are an 'ordinary' occurrence inadvertently diminishes the importance of that individual and further desensitizes the public to similar incidents. Therefore, further research is needed in this area to understand the implications of misrepresenting minorities in news reports of homicide incidents.

Reporting Intimate Partner Homicide in Newspapers

The news media play a substantial role in shaping public perceptions on violent crime, especially homicide. As a result, how journalists choose to report homicide incidents can have

important ramifications, influencing how society perceives the dynamics of this social problem and its range of possible solutions. This is particularly important when reporting on intimate partner homicides in newspapers. Specifically, the presentation of women in mass media has, in general, portrayed them as the weaker sex who are in constant need of protection. Thus, men who domestically abuse their partners are viewed as living up to the aggressive, male-dominated norms that have become deeply entrenched in Western culture. From this view, *if* the news media chooses to report on a particular intimate partner homicide incident, the criminality of intimate partner violence (IPV) is diminished through victim-blaming language, which implies that violence against women (VAW) is not a serious crime (Richards, Gillespie, & Smith, 2011, p. 179). Thus, further research in this area is necessary to reveal the frequency of femicide, defined as the killing of women by male intimate partners, and to what degree media's portrayal of intimate partner homicide accurately reflects the severity of this social problem.

Only in recent years has news media coverage of intimate partner homicides and IPV surfaced and been regarded as a social problem. A study by Richards et al. (2011) analyzed articles drawn from multiple newspapers in North Carolina between 2002 and 2007. Specifically, the authors looked at stories involving all of the known femicides that occurred during that time period. Through this study, the authors sought to understand how incidences of femicide were portrayed in the news media through various sources. In a similar vein to other research on the newsworthiness of homicide cases, the articles that were analyzed frequently used victim-blaming language in an attempt to downplay the severity of the incident. According to Richards et al. (2011), journalists use a variety of tactics such as mentioning the female victim's alleged infidelity, drug and/or alcohol abuse, and mental health issues in order give the illusion that she brought upon her own death. Highlighting these negative characteristics of the victim transforms

the woman into a less sympathetic victim and, as previously discussed, one that is less newsworthy because the public believes her death could have been prevented. Therefore, relying on public sources to obtain information on IPV is problematic because news media outlets are inclined to frame stories in a way that is inherently biased against the victim and, as a result, inaccurately report the frequency and severity of femicide. Similar results were discovered in Taylor's (2009) research study, which examined 292 articles representing 168 separate cases of femicide between 1995 and 2000 in an attempt to demonstrate how the victims and offenders in these cases are portrayed in the news media. Taylor (2009) discovered that, "authors of the articles in the current sample managed to discredit or altogether blame victims using several methods, some with direct and others with more indirect approaches" (p. 33). For example, a direct approach would include using language that attributes the IPV to the victim's unwillingness to leave an abusive relationship. An indirect approach, on the other hand, would include the news media describing IPV in such a way that blame is distributed equally to both the victim and perpetrator. This supports Richards et al.'s (2011) findings, and suggests that journalists use both direct and indirect framing tactics in order to transfer the blame from the perpetrator onto the victim. Consequently, this has serious implications for public perception and social policy towards IPV, which is a serious issue that deserves adequate and unbiased attention.

How the news media portrays incidents of IPV not only has vast implications for public policy, but also has the potential to directly influence normative discourse and public perceptions regarding acceptable behaviour and gender roles within an intimate relationship. Thus, Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff (2008) conducted a research study in order to better understand how media portrayals of IPV impacts public perception and social policy. Carlyle et al. (2008) analyzed a national "representative sample of newspaper coverage of IPV over a 2-year period and

compares this coverage to epidemiological data, examining implications of discrepancies between coverage and social reality" (p. 169). Specifically, the authors wanted to analyze whether or not news media representations of IPV coincides with the actual lived reality experienced by victims of IPV. Consistent with previous research examining IPV cases, this study indicates that "newspaper framing of IPV tends to be heavily skewed toward episodic framing, which focuses on the individual and tends to ignore the larger social context within which IPV occurs" (Carlyle et al., 2008, p. 180). That is, the news media, when reporting on IPV or intimate partner homicide, emphasize the individual, specifically the victim, and disregard the contextual societal factors that help to shape and perpetuate violence against women. This viewpoint sends strong, negative messages to members of the public, who may believe that women are secondary to men and should be treated as such.

Given Western cultures strong patriarchal roots, it should come as no surprise that stories of intimate partner homicide receive little or no attention by the news media. Each year significantly more women are murdered by their current or former intimate partners, yet the majority of newspapers will opt to cover homicide incidents involving strangers because these cases are perceived as more newsworthy. Moreover, cases of intimate partner homicide that *do* receive media attention are oftentimes distorted, and portray the women involved as being responsible for their own victimization. In turn, the media perpetuates gender and power-based issues, and encourages an androcentric, patriarchal culture. Bullock (2010), "examined one year's worth of coverage of domestic violence fatalities in Utah newspapers to identify the primary content-related frames and determine whether the coverage included views that challenged patriarchy" (p. 35). The aim of this study was to understand how media construction of intimate partner homicide aligns with the reality of this social problem or contributes to the

gender and power inequalities that exist between men and women. The results of this study show that almost three-quarters of intimate partner homicides were absent from Utah newspapers during the one-year period (Bullock, 2010). In addition, newspapers that covered intimate partner homicide incidents were criticized for failing to address the broader societal issues and background information that led to the occurrence of intimate partner fatalities. This, of course, can present a skewed and inaccurate version of the incident, and cause readers to believe that IPV or intimate partner homicides only occur to 'certain types of individuals'.

Previously, Bullock and Cubert (2002) conducted a related study in which they looked at "how newspapers portray domestic violence fatalities, how accurately this portrayal reflects the 'victims' experiences and the broader social problem of domestic violence, and the implications of the patterns of portrayal" (p. 476). Similar to Bullock (2010), the aim of the research was to understand how the news media constructs IPV and intimate partner homicide given its ability to bring awareness to this social issue. In general, the results of this study illustrate a failure to portray IPV as an issue, forcing readers to make connections and draw their own conclusions. The authors also found a gross distortion of the victims' experience in the examined articles. Overall, there appears to be a significant disconnect between the construction of domestic fatalities in the news media and IPV as a social problem. Evidently, news media has the power to more accurately represent incidences of domestic homicide and IPV in general, but frequently frames these occurrences in a way that is more newsworthy to the public and will increase readership, rather than promote awareness of this dangerous epidemic.

In a similar study, Gillespie, Richards, Givens, and Smith (2013) conducted a research study that specifically examined "the use of frames in media coverage of femicide stories" (p. 228). Media frames, according to Gillespie et al. (2013), are "prepackaged social constructions

that function as fully developed templates for understanding a given social phenomenon" (p. 225). That is, as suggested by this article, there are five distinct frames employed by the news media when reporting on intimate partner homicide or other criminal justice matters. Gillespie et al. (2013) further reviews the applicability of these five frames to intimate partner homicides in order to assess how femicide is constructed in the media.

The issue of intimate partner homicide is one that transcends geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic divides. Therefore, it is important to analyze the prevalence and impact of news media framings of IPV and intimate partner homicide in various countries. In Canada, "one out of every five homicides involves the killing of an intimate partner" (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013, p. 150). Although Canada is known for its relatively low crime rates, intimate partner homicide and the construction of IPV in the news media proves to be a significant issue that requires further academic and public attention. Thus, Fairbairn and Dawson (2013) conducted a study that specifically explored newspaper coverage of male-perpetrate intimate partner homicide and how it has changed over time. Through the exploration of various research questions and comparing two different time periods (1975-1979 and 1998-2002), the authors sought to understand how the news media has constructed intimate partner homicide and, by extension, IPV as a societal issue over time. Contrary to previous research, Fairbairn and Dawson (2013) discovered that, overall, "news coverage of intimate partner homicide seems to demonstrate some positive change between the late 1970s and the turn of the century" (p. 164). That is, the news media and journalists are acknowledging the prevalence and seriousness of IPV and intimate partner homicide as a societal issue. However, the lack of service providers, advocates and researchers from the news media illustrates the need for more accurate and extensive coverage of IPV in order to eradicate systems of gender inequality.

Summary

After considering this literature it is apparent that the news media disproportionately favour homicide cases involving 'vulnerable' and 'innocent' victims, such as women, children, and the elderly. In addition, racial, ethnic and cultural minorities are continuously underrepresented in newspaper reports of homicide incidents because they are perceived to be less newsworthy in comparison to their dominant White counterparts. Finally, in regards to victim-offender relationship, intimate partner homicide, although statistically recognized as a prevalent social issue, is repeatedly absent from the news media; *if* such incidents are reported, they are often plagued with victim-blaming language, and misrepresent the complex circumstances of these crimes. Thus, the research suggests that the media focuses on homicide cases that cast or construct homicide as less of a social problem and more of an "invading social evil". In other words, the media divorces its construction of homicide from broader social factors such as gender or racial inequity and poverty. In addition, much of the research on media coverage of homicide has been quantitative in nature, looking at what variables determine newsworthiness. Given the relatively small body of literature on news media representations of stranger and non-stranger homicide incidents in Canadian context and the lack of qualitative research, this research project will examine how stranger and non-stranger cases of homicide are framed in six case studies. In the next chapter I will present the research design and methodological approach used throughout this study.

Chapter Three

Methods

In this chapter I will outline the objectives and research questions of the study. Second I will describe the methodological approaches utilized throughout this research study, the data collection, and the epistemological framings used to contextualize the discussion chapters. I will then describe the sample and data collection process. Finally, I will describe the data analysis and coding process that was used to identify key patterns and themes in the headlines and text.

Research Goals and Objectives

The general objective of the present study was to identify reported homicides in Canadian newspapers during a selected time period and analyze the discourse that emerges in the social construction of the homicide in the media. Specifically, the purpose of the present study was to analyze the discourse and potential differences in the framing of stranger and non-stranger homicide cases. As such, analyses focused on how the media constructs homicide as a distinct social problem in cases of stranger and non-stranger homicide and whether differences emerge based on this victim-offender relationship.

The research questions were intended to explore the discourse in news media surrounding constructions of stranger and non-stranger homicide. These questions ask:

- How does the news media construct cases of stranger and non-stranger homicide?
- How does the victim-offender relationship affect the framing of the homicide as a social problem in the news media?

- How are victims portrayed in the news media compared to offenders in stranger and non-stranger homicide cases?

Operationalization of Variables

Several key variables relevant to the study must be operationally defined before discussing how homicide is socially constructed in the news media. For the purposes of this study, it is important to define the following terms and describe the criteria used to identify them in relation to this project: 'homicide', 'stranger homicide', and 'non-stranger homicide'.

For the purposes of the present study, homicide – defined as the deliberate killing of one person by another – included cases of first-degree murder, second-degree murder, and manslaughter. In this study, the term 'non-stranger homicide' referred to homicides committed by acquaintances, friends, relatives or intimate partners. 'Stranger homicide,' on the other hand, referred to homicides committed by persons previously unknown to the victim – this can also be identified as a random act of violence.

Research Method

To examine the discourses found in media constructions of stranger and non-stranger homicide cases the present study adopted an in-depth, qualitative content analysis approach. Qualitative content analysis can be used to reduce large amounts of data and text into cohesive concepts that describe the research phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014). According to Dowler (2006), content analysis can be identified as a "detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purposes of identifying patterns, themes, or biases" (p. 385). In the current study, I focused on qualitative analyses of print news articles, which consisted of identifying and analyzing the discourse surrounding stranger and non-stranger homicide in three

major Canadian newspapers. Specifically, in order to understand how Canadian newspapers construct homicide as a social problem, I conducted an ethnographic content analysis (ECA). According to Altheide and Schneider (2013) ethnographic content analysis is oriented to documenting and understanding the meaning behind communication and the verification of the theoretical relationships that emerge. This is done through the sampling, collecting, coding, analysis, and interpretation of data. ECA aims to be "systematic and analytic but not rigid" by selecting "categories and variables [that] initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study" (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p.26).

The research design of this study was primarily deductive in the sense that a main research question and key categories were identified beforehand. However, there was also an inductive element involved, as certain themes emerged throughout the research process, such as patterns or categories that had not been anticipated based on prior research. Using both deductive and inductive coding and analysis strategies allowed for maximum inclusiveness of journalistic news frames and themes relevant to the research question. Manifest coding is used to code the content in the articles that is explicit and on the surface. In this study, I examine characteristics that are readily apparent, such as gender, and race, as well as whether the alleged offender is a stranger or non-stranger in relation to the victim(s). By contrast, I used a latent coding technique to look for the underlying, implicit meanings to be found in the content of the text. In this study, newspaper articles are analyzed to determine how the given homicide incident is portrayed, and the newsworthiness of the case, as well as examining the journalistic framing of the murder.

Data Source

Data was collected from three major Canadian newspapers: The *Toronto Star,* the *Vancouver Sun,* and the *Montreal Gazette.* Newspapers were chosen based on the size of the market, distribution, and access for the researcher. All three are English-language newspapers published daily in Toronto, Ontario, Vancouver, British Columbia, and Montreal, Quebec respectively. The *Toronto Star* is Canada's largest daily newspaper with a large circulation of approximately one million people (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013, p. 156). The *Vancouver Sun*, although similar in circulation, length, and layout characteristics to the *Toronto Star*, is published six days a week and maintains the largest newsroom in Vancouver. Finally, the *Montreal Gazette* caters primarily to Quebec's English-speaking community and is one of four daily newspapers published in Montreal – the other three being French-language newspapers.

Sampling

A sampling frame of newspaper articles about homicide incidents in Canada published from 2009 to 2013 was identified using the Factiva search engine using a keyword search. The following keywords were used to filter articles: 'Degree murder' and/or 'domestic homicide'. 6,001 articles in total – 2, 598 in the Toronto, 1,954 in the Vancouver Sun, and 1,449 in the Montreal Gazette – were initially identified in the search. Two sampling approaches were then used to identify specific newspaper articles for inclusion in the study. First, stratified random sampling was used to identify and divide relevant newspaper articles from the overall sampling frame into three categories or strata for analysis: the Toronto Star ($n = 150$), the Vancouver Sun ($n = 150$), and the Montreal Gazette ($n = 150$). Second, purposive sampling was then used to narrow down the sample within each of the above strata and include only articles that met certain criteria.

Specifically, in order to be selected for analysis, each newspaper article needed to contain a homicide incident that occurred in Canada, and had to clearly identify whether the alleged perpetrator was a stranger or a non-stranger in relation to the victim. The sample was further filtered, removing articles that were duplicates, as well as any articles that were less than 900 words to ensure that there would be enough detailed information in each article for an in-depth qualitative analysis. A total of ($n = 359$) articles were initially coded for analysis in all three newspapers: the Toronto Star ($n = 143$), the Vancouver Sun ($n = 91$), and the Montreal Gazette ($n = 125$). Of those newspaper articles there were ($n = 97$) individual homicide cases that were reported on multiple times throughout all three newspapers. Of those 97 individual homicide cases ($n = 6$) were selected for an in-depth qualitative content analysis.

The six individual cases that were selected to be analyzed for an in-depth qualitative content analysis were chosen based on the significant news media coverage allocated to these particular homicide cases. Of the six individual cases ($n=3$) were categorized as stranger homicide and ($n=3$) were categorized as non-stranger homicide. The top three stranger and non-stranger homicide cases – in terms of frequency – were selected for analysis as these cases provided the most information and content for examination in order for significant patterns and themes to emerge. Table 1.1 outlines the six homicide cases selected for analysis and provides the number of articles for each case.

Table 1.1 – Stranger and Non-Stranger Homicide Cases Analyzed

Stranger Homicide Cases	Number of Articles	Non-Stranger Homicide Cases	Number of Articles
Victoria Stafford	50	The Shafia Family	78
Stefanie Rengel	16	Jeffrey Baldwin	17
Russell Williams	11	Donna Jones	7

Articles involving stranger and non-stranger homicide cases were the units of analysis used, and a detailed coding protocol sheet accompanied each story. Each homicide story was coded as a separate unit, regardless of whether the story was a follow-up report on a previous news story or a continuation of coverage on a particular news story.

Data Analysis and Coding

In analyzing the sample of newspaper articles for the six selected cases, I examined the headlines and text with a focus on the reported characteristics of the crime, offender, and victim, as well as discourses around potential causal factors. For the purposes of data analysis, I adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2006) describes the grounded theory approach as a form of theory construction where data collection and analysis occur together with no specific hypotheses or pre-determined coding categories. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, data analysis and the identification of coding categories and larger themes were done through a step-by-by process that is described below.

Following the steps outlined by Charmaz (2006), data analysis began with initial coding, which involved a preliminary read-through of the sample of articles collected for all six cases. As part of initial coding, notes were made about headlines, characteristics of the offence, offender, and victim, and references to broader context or potential causal factors. Following the initial coding phase, I engaged in what Charmaz (2006) refers to as focused coding wherein the researcher attempts to "build and clarify a category by examining all the data it covers and variations from it" (Charmaz, 1988, p. 117). For this stage of data analysis, I re-visited articles in the sample, making more detailed notes, and identifying a set of coding categories or "bucket codes" that identified common, related themes emerging from the sample. A total of 11 'bucket codes' were created in the focused coding stage. These bucket codes are listed in Appendix A.

Conclusion

Conducting an in-depth qualitative content analysis of stranger and non-stranger homicide has proven to yield many significant and unique findings that were not previously discussed in existing literature. Based on the analysis of six homicide cases, discussion of the results are organized into three chapters. In chapter four, I focus on how offenders in stranger homicide cases are demonized in the news media and portrayed through a predatory crime frame. In chapter five, I illustrate how gendered discourse surrounding both female victims and offenders in the news media obscures men's role in the victimization and responsiblizes women for deviating from their socially ascribed gender role expectations. Finally, in chapter six, I discuss how the news media construct crime as stemming from deviant cultures and specific social groups (e.g., Muslim culture and lower socio-economic status groups) as opposed to situating crime in terms of the larger social issues in which they exist.

Chapter Four

The Demonization of Offenders: How were they to know they were dealing with monsters?

While a great deal of literature on media representations of homicide focus on identifying factors that predict the extent of media coverage (e.g., Chermack, 1998; Lundman, 2003; Katz, 1987; Gekoski, Gray, & Adler, 2012; Gruenewald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009) the goal of the present study was to analyze the discourse and potential differences in the framing of stranger and non-stranger homicides. In this chapter I will focus on how the media frames stranger homicides as a distinct social problem. First I will briefly discuss media sensationalism and how the structure of the media and its profit orientation influences its focus on predatory crime. Next, I will discuss how offenders in stranger homicide cases were constructed as predatory "others" through a process of demonization that involved dehumanization and medicalizing of deviance.

Sensationalism, Profit-Orientation, and the Predatory Crime Frame

Sensationalism in the news media and, particularly, newspaper reports, has been an ongoing trend in journalism since the *Actua Diurnia* of Ancient Rome (Stevens, 1985). Universally, sensationalized materials typically focus on death, gore, and sex. These topics generally attract public attention in television and newspapers over "sedate alternatives" (Stevens, 2010). This trend has been widely adopted by modern mass media outlets and, as a result, utilized by newspaper reporters and journalists to enhance the newsworthiness of particular news incidents and, subsequently, gain and maintain readership.

The news media, in general, is structured in such a way that it is inextricably informed by and linked to public perceptions of social issues (Altheide, 1997). Crime and, in particular, violent crime is a popular topic for the news media to report on because "it is convenient to discover and it helps to sell newspapers" (Chermak, 1994, p. 97). This profit-driven form of news media coverage tends to focus on atypical crimes, such as stranger homicide, to gain readership as these crimes are inclined to attract more public attention compared to more sedate alternatives.

However, from this newsmaking process, public perceptions of crime are based on the limited information provided in the news. These distorted images of crime misrepresent the reality of crime and victimization and cultivate unnecessary societal fear. Reporters and journalists condense and simplify crime news stories into more entertaining articles that contain only the highlights of the incident. According to Chermak (1994), this simplified "image that is produced has little to do with the realities and complexities of crime" (p. 97).

Given the profit-orientation of media and the focus on sensationalistic material, it is not surprising then that a disproportionate amount of crime media focuses on predatory criminality – that it, "criminals who are animalistic, irrational, and innately evil and who commit violent, sensational, and senseless crimes – as the dominant crime problem in the nation" (Surette, 2015, p.60). This image of the predatory criminal has dominated the contemporary news media in the form of either real people (e.g., Jack the Ripper, John Wayne Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy), fictitious characters (e.g., Freddy Krueger, Hannibal Lecter, Michael Myers), or certain social groups (e.g., minorities, lower-class).

In the news media, predatory crime is typically constructed as an unprovoked and random act of violence. One important aspect of this social construction is the characterization of crime as committed by "others" where criminals are an "invading social evil" rather focusing on social causes of crime. Criminals, then "are portrayed in the media as inherently different from the law-abiding" (Surette, 2015, p. 60). That is, the common image of the criminal found in the news media depict them as "more animalistic, irrational, and predatory and their crimes as more violent, senseless, and sensational" (Surette, 2015, p. 60) than the average citizen. This juxtaposition between good and evil creates a common enemy and, as a result, opens up new avenues for moral panic. As the news media constantly bombard the public with images of crime and violence, people begin to accept an encounter with a predatory stranger as fact (Surette, 2015). This image of a predatory criminal, Surette (2015) argues, is epitomized by the "recent media construction of the ultimate social predator, the serial killer" (p.60).

The social construction of the serial killer was a significant turning point in how the public perceived crime and victimization. While the potential of being victimized was always a possibility, the construction of the modern serial killer in the news media portray these predators as everywhere – transforming the potential of being victimized into a certainty. In reality, however, "although there is evidence of a small increase in the number of active serial killers" (Surette, 2015, p.60), statistically, people are far more likely to be victimized by someone they know, particularly an intimate partner. For example, national percentages of stranger homicide (per capita) are documented frequently by *Statistics Canada*. Overall, research (see Beattie & Cotter, 2010; Mahony, 2011; Perreault, 2012; Boyce & Cotter, 2013; and Cotter, 2014) illustrates that between 2009 and 2013, among solved homicides in Canada, the majority of victims were most likely killed by a non-stranger. On average, 84% of solved homicides in

Canada were committed by someone known to the victim, while the remainder (16%) were committed by a stranger.

The media's focus on violent predatory criminality is, thus, twofold. First, constructing crime as a violent, senseless, and frightening phenomenon provides a source of entertainment for the public and, as a result, increases readership. Therefore, reporting on relatively rare and heinous crimes is motivated by financial means. Second, since predatory criminality is largely presented as caused by individual deficiencies "this individual-level explanation frees mainstream society from any causal responsibility for crime" (Surette, 2015, p.61). This perspective places responsibility solely on the offender and denies the possibility that any social factors may have contributed to criminality. That is, the predatory criminal does not operate within conventional societal rules and values, but rather is driven by animalistic and predatory instincts.

The predatory crime frame in the news media is a process of "othering" or demonization used to distance crime as a social problem. This process of "othering", as outlined by Howard Becker (1963), involves social groups creating deviance "*by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders" (p.9). In this sense, it is not necessarily the individual or group that is deviant, but rather the result of social groups applying deviant labels to marginalized people in order to portray crime as stemming from these particular "offenders".

From this perspective, minorities, for example, "are frequently portrayed as the criminal predators in news reports" (Surette, 2015, p. 60) because it allows the news media to distance their crime from social problems (e.g., racism, poverty, etc.) "even though a much smaller

percentage [of minorities] are involved in the criminal justice system" (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007, p. 62). In addition, while females are less often constructed as predatory criminals than males, the news media regularly portray females who commit serious crimes in gendered terms. The female offender is framed "in typical analogous predatory images woven within narratives of aberrant sexuality and broken gender-based social roles" (Surette, 2015, p. 60). These concepts will be explored further in the subsequent chapter.

The Demonization of Offenders

In this section I will focus on how Canadian media constructions of stranger homicides engaged in an "othering" process wherein the perpetrator was demonized or distinguished from conventional social boundaries. 'Demonize' is a weighty word and can encompass a variety of different terms and phases. There are several bodies of literature that discuss the demonization of offenders (e.g., Baumeister, 1997; Darley, 1992; Ellard, Miller, Baumle, & Olson, 2002; Horwitz, 1981). The demonization of offenders in the media has become a common crime and justice narrative in the media (see Surette, 2015). The term 'demonize' refers to the language that the media uses to construct offenders as an invading evil; it is rooted in the concept of "evil" (Baumeister, 1997). In all three cases of stranger homicide the news media habitually attempts to construct the offenders as "demonic others", whereas this framing was absent from non-stranger homicide cases in the current study. Analysis of the construction of offenders in stranger homicide cases as "demonic others" will be organized into sections based on patterns that emerged from data analysis. First, I examine how one aspect of demonizing offenders in stranger homicide cases involves a process of dehumanizing the offender. I will then focus on how demonizing offenders in stranger homicide cases involves framing the causes of their violence from a medical perspective to further distinguish them as "other". In other words, the media

frames offenders as 'born bad' – their crimes and criminal behaviour does not stem from social factors.

Dehumanizing the Offender

A major component of demonization is the dehumanization of offenders. Dehumanizing places perpetrators into an exceptional category that qualifies them as somehow less than human (van Prooijen & van de Veer, 2010). As such, dehumanizing is often reserved for perpetrators who commit the most severe and atrocious crimes, such as homicide. Although dehumanization is a common response to perpetrators in the news media, very limited research exists on how this media frame is almost exclusively used in stranger homicide cases.

Although contemporary media images often depict offenders as monsters or savages, these perceptions have historical precedent. In 1876, Cesare Lombroso argued that "criminals have multiple physical abnormalities of an atavistic (subhuman or primitive) or degenerative nature" (Williams III & McShane, 2010, pp. 30-31). These physical flaws, Lombroso argues, characterize perpetrators as born criminals (Lombroso, 1976). According to Lombroso (1876), these perpetrators were characterized by a lack of moral sense, including a distinct lack of remorse. Lombroso's positivist approach provided the foundational groundwork for the manifestation of the dehumanization of offenders which was characteristic of late nineteenth-century work.

More recently, Haslam (2006) proposed a theory that identifies two types of dehumanization. The first type is *animalistic dehumanization* which "refers to the denial of attributes that are *uniquely human* (e.g. civility and moral sensibility)" (Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013, p.5). This approach rests on the premise that perpetrators are animal-like and intrinsically

maintain predator-prey instincts. Analyses revealed that media construction of Russell Williams made numerous allusions to Williams as a predator stalking his prey:

> "Col. Russell Williams paints a portrait of a predator who repeatedly broke into
> the homes of neighbours and apparently stalked one of the women he's accused of
> killing." (*Police paint portrait of a chilling stalker; New break-and-enter charges
> against base commander suggest repeat visits*, The Toronto Star)

This media frame personifies the offender as animalistic which communicates a particular savage image to the public regarding stranger homicide. In this case, the perpetrator – unknown to the victim – is presented as having animal-like characteristics that qualify him as subhuman.

Other articles attributed specific non-human words (e.g., creature and animal) to perpetrators in attempt to devalue their status as human. For example, this article refers to the offender, Russell Williams, as a creature:

> "They were useless against a creature like the man who sat it court Tuesday, but
> they were all they had." (*If I die, will you make sure my mom knows I love her?'
> As Russell Williams is formally convicted on 86 charges, court hears how two
> brave women tried – and failed – to prevent their murder,* The Toronto Star)

This perspective constructs the offender as a predatory killer whose lack of humanity has divorced him from the rest of society. In this case, the victim's emotional pleas were considered futile against a guiltless monster.

The second type is *mechanistic dehumanization* which "refers to the denial of *human nature* traits such as interpersonal warmth" (Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013, p. 5). This results in the

perpetrator being perceived as machine-like and lacking human emotions. Michael Rafferty, one of the co-offenders in the Tori Stafford case, was frequently constructed as lacking human emotions:

> "Quite right he doesn't, as he also appears to have no idea what are those strange feelings that seem to so move through others." (*From Tori's brother, words of humanity; from her killer, nothing but crocodile tears,* The Gazette)

The media frame offenders who commit particularly heinous crimes as emotionless serial killers who lack the moral consciousness of 'normal' humans. In this case, the journalist puts into question the offender's humanness by arguing that he lacks the emotional capacity necessary to empathize or feel remorse. Other language typically used to dehumanize these perpetrators includes phrases such as "remorseless" and "depraved":

> "The depths of the depravity shown by Russell Williams have no equal." (*Plea for forgiveness falls on deaf ears; 'Ashamed' Williams surprises court by speaking*, The Gazette)

Dehumanizing the offender alters the public's perception of the perpetrator and places them outside the boundaries of acceptable moral behaviour. This journalistic approach is particularly impactful in reporting stranger homicide cases as it is often used in the news media as the archetypical construction of the dangerous offender. The news media portray the offender as "particularly savage or evil; their characteristics cue the reader about the type of person that should be feared" (Collins, 2013, p. 10). For example, one article highlights:

> "As an object lesson in how close evil comes to good, how thin the line between them may be, this was instructive." (*The thin line between good and evil; Security*

tapes show Terri-Lynne McClintic walking past scenes of innocence at Home

Depot in Guelph, The Vancouver Sun)

This image is consistent with prototypical expectations of evilness which include a variety of innate characteristics such as "lacking uniquely human emotions, being socially isolated, and having a reputation of immoral behaviour that either holds no regard for others' well-being, or is even aimed at intentionally hurting others" (van Prooijen & van de Veer, 2010, p. 260). Dehumanizing the offender assigns a subhuman or demonic label to these criminalized individuals in order to explain or frame their wrongdoing. However, in many reported homicide cases, this journalistic framing tactic misrepresents the reality of the contextual circumstances of the case, and perpetuates unsupported rationalizations of criminality.

Another aspect of the dehumanization of offenders in stranger homicide cases was the focus or persistent recounting of the excessive violence during the commission of the crime. A common pattern in many of these articles was to provide all the horrific details of the murder to illustrate the depravity and psychotic nature of the offender. This recounting of one of Russell William's attacks illustrates the media focus on the "ferocious" aspects of his offending:

"He tore her scalp open, beating her on the head with a red mental flashlight, chased her and tied her to a metal pole, a large bolt piercing her back. When he dragged her upstairs, she struggled ferociously." (*'If I die, will you make sure my mom knows I love her?' Russell Williams is formally convicted on 86 charges, court hears how two brave women tried – and failed – to prevent their murder*, The Toronto Star)

Similar to watching a horror film, journalists often recount every graphic and gory detail when explaining the events of the homicide. These images of violent, sadistic, and deranged sexual predators reinforce society's fear of stranger violence and distorts the public's perception of crime. This journalistic technique is particularly impactful in homicide cases where the victim is a child. For example, in the Victoria Stafford case journalists frequently detailed the horrific nature of her death:

> "[T]he harm the two did the little blond was unimaginable: An autopsy showed Tori died from repeated hammer blows to the head, but that other injuries she suffered – blunt force trauma sufficient to lacerate her liver and fracture many of her ribs – would have been fatal." (*Tori was a dear little girl; Jurors warned about the horrors of evidence to come*, The Vancouver Sun)

While the intentional killing of any one person is widely considered one of the worst crimes a person can commit, there is, perhaps, no crime considered more abhorrent than the killing of an innocent child. Therefore, the detailing of excessive violence in the murder of a child by the news media, as in the case of Victoria Stafford, constructs a particularly dehumanized image of the offender(s).

Excessive violence has been intrinsically linked to instances of stranger homicide as the news media use this method as an effective means of dehumanizing the offender. However, instead of using specific demonizing language the news media recount all of the graphic and violent details of the homicide. This particular narrative technique allows the reader to construct his or her own demonized image of the offender based on details of the article. Specifically, by disproportionately focusing on the heinous details of a violent crime, the news media further

constructs the offender as less than human, which serves to further distance readers from the offender, and reassures them that no 'normal' person would engage in such behaviours—only a monster could be capable of such excessive violence. Moreover, when offenders are dehumanized to this extent, the public are more amenable to the use of increasingly punitive sentences and sanctions against the offender, which may or may not be proportional to the crime committed, and can blur the line between punishment and vengeance.

Medicalizing Deviance

Similar to dehumanization, the medicalization of deviance has a long history, "beginning at least as early as ancient Greece" (Conrad & Schneider, 1981, p. 261). The idea that a disease or mental illness can cause deviant behaviour has since developed and, thousands of years later, contemporary definitions of medicalization have become a conditioned response for deviant behaviour, especially in the news media.

The medicalization of deviance emphasizes the 'born criminal' perspective of criminalization. Specifically, "'[m]edicalization' refers to the tendency to define deviance as a manifestation of an underlying sickness, to find the cause of deviance within the individual rather than in the social structure, and to treat deviance through the intervention of medical personnel" (Horwitz, 1981, p. 750). That is, the news media often portray stranger offenders as mentally ill or diseased and ignore potential external mitigating circumstances, including social factors that may have contributed to criminality.

However, the term "medicalization" can encompass a multitude of meanings and can differ considerably "depending upon the type of deviance under consideration" (Horwitz, 1981, p. 751). For example, while "sickness" can refer to alcoholism and drug addiction, this blanket

medicalizing term is also used in the news media to describe offenders who commit homicide. For example, one article highlighted that, while the offender, Russell Williams, was not found to be clinically insane, he remains a very "sick" individual:

> "'Although not insane, it appears that Mr. Williams was and remains a very sick individual, but a very dangerous man nonetheless,' he said. 'Russell Williams will forever be remembered as a sado-sexual serial killer,' he said." (*'As long as he dies in jail, I'm happy'; 'Despicable' serial killer offers court apology but no explanation for brutal deaths of two women*, The Toronto Star)

In this case, the term "sickness" is used in metaphorical terms to describe the offender and does not necessarily refer to an inherent illness. The lack of precise definition of "medicalization" blurs the relationship between the notion of deviance as a sickness and those in need of treatment.

Other articles also label the offender using similar medicalizing language but are careful to make the distinction between words used to describe the offender that are tangentially related to medicalization and a mental illness:

> "[W]ith prosecution and defence spinning the minutiae of psychiatric evaluations and the shrink in the witness stand applying bloodless behaviour observations to what was a very bloody, very psycho (but not legally insane) crime." (*Doctors paint benign portrait of young killer*, The Toronto Star)

Labelling an offender as 'crazy' or 'unstable' can have a dual marginalization effect – first for committing the homicide and a second time for being mentally ill, which is heavily stigmatized in society (Collins, 2013). Through news media discourse, these negatively valued meanings are

attached to the offender and, as a result, change the scope of the crime which has the potential to alter the public's perception of the circumstances and reality of the situation. That is, the medicalization of deviant behaviour in the news media draws attention away from the victim(s) and focuses on the offender by suggesting an intrinsic, biological deficiency as the motivation behind the crime.

In addition, the "bad seed" is another commonly used theme in the medicalization of deviance. Again, this construction of the offender frames deviance as a manifestation of an underlying biological flaw. This idea is illustrated in some articles that reject the premise that the offender's criminality was caused by external factors:

> "Those looking for an explanation as to why two teenagers with a relatively stable upbringing, loving parents and no significant mental illness would do such a terrible thing won't find any answers in this case's public record." (*Natural born killer*, The Toronto Star)

In this case, while the article points out that the offenders, Melissa Todorovic and David Bagshaw, had no "significant" mental illnesses, it calls into question the possibility that social factors may have contributed to their criminality. This suggests that the offenders' criminality was not a product of their environment, stating that they both had relatively stable upbringings and loving parents, but rather that they were simply 'born bad'. Similar news media frames were used to describe other stranger offenders with no discernible tumultuous childhood. In another article, the journalist arrives at a similar conclusion, noting that nothing in the offenders past could be used to explain his criminality:

"Williams' childhood doesn't fit the pattern of parental abandonment or physical and sexual abuse found in the histories of some mass murderers. And none of the psychologists and criminal profilers interviewed by the Star consider his mother's divorce a potential trigger of a life of crime." (*A killer like no other; He seemed successful and happy, yet at 44 he embarked on a life of crime that escalated from panty fetish to murder. To the experts, Col. Russell Williams is a serial killer like none they've ever seen*, The Toronto Star)

Predatory criminality, particularly serial killers, typically fit a prescribed image which, according to Hickey (2010), oftentimes involves some degree or type of traumatization. Hickey (2010) states that many serial killers experience rejection as a result of "a dysfunctional family, sexual abuse, and so on" (p.221) which has the potential to cause criminality later in life. However, in cases where predatory offenders did not endure childhood trauma, such as the cases above, the default response by the news media was to label them as 'bad seeds'.

Lastly, to further emphasize that offenders in stranger homicide cases are predatory "outsiders" that are created and exist outside of conventional society, media coverage often constructed general models of rehabilitation in negative terms. Several articles in the stranger homicide cases centered largely on the premise that these offenders *cannot* and *should not* be rehabilitated. Many articles portrayed the offender(s) as depraved beyond help. As such, some articles constructed rehabilitation as a conditioned response by mental health professionals that, in reality, is an inadequate response to crime:

"It is the peculiar de facto position of most psychiatrists to take on face value whatever an offender says and then blunt the offence, predictably cleaving to the mantra of rehabilitation-conquers-all." (*Natural born killer*, The Toronto Star)

From this perspective rehabilitation is too often used as a prescribed response in the mental health community and fails to hold the offender responsible for his/her actions. In the case of Melissa Todorovic and David Bagshaw, for example, the news media further demonized them by suggesting that rehabilitation was an unlikely possibility for the duo:

"No one knows if this [rehabilitation] is even possible for Bagshaw and Todorovic." (*Young killers merit some mercy*, The Toronto Star)

While some articles reject the notion that rehabilitation is an effective means of treatment for offenders who are deemed incapable of feelings of remorse or conscience, others furthered their argument by claiming that no one would want to see them reintegrated into society:

"'We don't have a way of treating men who lack any feelings of remorse or conscience, not when they're middle-aged. And who would want to rehabilitate him?' Levin asks. 'Do we really think that anyone in Canada, or the United States, would want to see Williams back on the streets?'" (*Can a monster be cured?; Those who study sex offenders say Russell William's case provides an opportunity to grasp a deeper understanding of what drives someone to become sexually excited by the suffering, humiliation, torture and even death of others*, The Gazette)

In this case, the news media frames the rehabilitation of the offender in terms of public safety. As a result, the argument shifts from *can* these offenders be rehabilitated to who, in fact, would

want to rehabilitate them. From this perspective, the news media advocate that while it can be a good thing to try and salvage a human life, it is not more important than the rights of society to be safe. In this end, this process of demonization is an effective means of portraying perpetrators as monsters who cannot and should not be cured.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of predatory criminality and how stranger homicide has been socially constructed in modern news media, and I have outlined and discussed 'the demonization of offenders' as a major theme that was found while analyzing stranger homicide articles. While a large variety of sub-themes can be identified under the umbrella of demonization, the four most prominent in the data are: dehumanizing the offender, medicalizing deviance, excessive violence, and mental health professionals as left.

'Mental health professionals as left' is a significant finding as this was not found in the literature as a narrative technique for framing homicide cases in the news media. This suggests that the devaluing of rehabilitation and treatment of offenders in the news media is an aspect of the demonization process that has been overlooked in previous research. Within this sample there was a clear link between cases of stranger homicide and the implication that rehabilitation is not an effective means of punishment for those perpetrators who commit violent crimes.

Chapter Five

Gendering the Blame: News Media Construction of Female Victims and Offenders

In Chapter 4, I examined the demonization of offenders as a major theme in news media representations of stranger homicide. The demonization of offenders in stranger cases using a familiar predatory crime frame served to construct homicide as a form of "invading social evil" separate from social factors. While stranger homicide cases were characterized by this overall pattern, there was no consistent pattern or theme that emerged from non-stranger homicide cases. This was due, in part, to the varying types of homicides selected for this research project (honour killing, infanticide, and intimate partner). That being said, another prominent theme that surfaced throughout the analysis of the text was "gendered" narratives surrounding the women in both stranger and non-stranger homicide cases. Both female victims and offenders were constructed in the news media in gendered terms that deviantized them for veering away from societal conceptions of "acceptable" female behaviour.

The framing of domestic and intimate partner violence in the news media has been the focus of much research since the issues surrounding gendered discourse in homicide reporting have become paramount (see Anastasio & Costa, 2004; Berns, 2001; Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Gillespie, Richards, Givens & Smith, 2013; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Wilcox, 2005). A major pattern that emerged across cases of both stranger and non-stranger homicide included in this study was a gendered pattern of victim blaming. Many of the women – either directly or peripherally involved in the crime – were constructed, to varying extents, as 'blameworthy'. Consistent with past research, the way in which the news media ascribed and gendered blame reflected perceived deviations from traditional gender roles (see Collins, 2016; Easteal, Bartels,

Nelson, & Hollkand, 2015). In order to examine how the news media uses gender to construct victims and offenders in homicide cases, first I will discuss how some victims, specifically those of domestic homicide, do not have their "victim status" legitimized by the media. Second, I will examine how the news media construct female offenders as manipulators.

"Gendering" Blame for Female Victims

As previously mentioned, one of the non-stranger homicide cases included in the study involved a domestic homicide. In December, 2009, Donna Jones was tortured and murdered by her husband, Mark Hutt. Hutt was charged and later convicted of first-degree murder in her brutal death. An analysis of the articles included for this case found that the news media "reframe domestic violence in a way that obscures men's violence while placing the burden of responsibility on women" (Berns, 2001, p. 262). Although this issue was most prominent in the case of Donna Jones, the theme of victim-blaming was also evident – to a lesser extent – in other cases analyzed in this study. That being said, I will assess how the news media construct these women as blameworthy through three key narratives: (1) holding female victims responsible for their own victimization, (2) the responsibilization of women and mothers, and (3) constructing the ideal victim.

How Do You Save Someone Who Doesn't Want To Be Saved?

Coverage of domestic fatalities in the news media frequently uses patriarchal narratives and misogynistic language to blame female victims for their own victimization. In this sense, women are constructed in gendered terms that condemn them for deviating from traditional female norms and behaviour. This framing of the victim diverts the public's attention away from the offender – and constructs domestic violence as a social problem – and reframes the homicide

as an isolated incident or a mutually assured occurrence. Moreover, this framing stereotypically focuses on the victims actions and how she contributed to her own victimization as opposed to the perpetrators actions and how society is structured in such a way that fosters systemic violence against women.

The news media often "frame domestic violence [and homicide] in a way that normalizes the victim's responsibility while ignoring the role of the abuser and of society" (Berns, 2001, p. 269). In the case of Donna Jones – the only victim of domestic homicide in the sample – the news media constructed her as responsible for her own victimization. For example, one article wrote:

> "And so Thursday in Ontario Superior Court, before judge and jury, did the late Donna Jones join the ranks of those who carelessly caused or invited their own deaths or who are otherwise to blame." (*Mark Hutt portrays himself as hero; Recounts efforts to 'save' wife, who was badly burned*, The Gazette)

In this article, there are explicit efforts to frame Jones as morally culpable for her own death using language that suggests she "caused" and/or "invited" the violence that transpired. Gendered blame in the news media holds the victim responsible – directly or indirectly – for their own victimization. Examination of these articles revealed that the news media also engendered blame for Jones' failure to leave the situation sooner. Some articles framed Jones as blameworthy because she remained in an abusive relationship despite her friends and family's best efforts to help:

"They could all see it coming, the train that was bearing down on Donna Jones,
and all around her, people were yelling at her to move off the tracks." (*Friends
tried to help victim, trial told; Husband charged with murder*, The Gazette)

In this case, the abuse that Jones suffered at the hands of her domestic partner was trivialized by
the fact that she stayed in the relationship. From this perspective, the victim is constructed as
blameworthy for refusing to acknowledge the abuse and denying such violence to her friends and
family.

In addition, many articles framed Jones in a way that suggested she should be the one
responsible for ending the violence in the relationship:

"Between the scalding and the day she died, the young woman talked to some of
her co-workers and to her mother, the prosecutor said. She 'did not ask for help,'
She was blinded, either by light or darkness." (*Friends tried to help victim, trial
told; Husband charged with murder*, The Gazette)

Domestic violence and homicide, in this case, is framed as a two-way street that requires *both*
individuals involved. While this perspective acknowledges men's responsibility in an obligatory
fashion, it also suggests that the "victims must be held responsible for their role in the abuse"
(Berns, 2001, p. 271). As suggested in the previous article, Jones was an equal party in the
abusive relationship with Hutt. As such, her inability to disengage from the relationship – out of
love or fear – rendered Jones at least partially responsible for the abuse and violence she
endured.

The Bad Mothers, Failed Women Trope

Although the patriarchal perspective of domestic and intimate partner violence in the news media uses victim-blaming language to gender the blame, this narrative extends to cases of familial homicide and stranger homicide as well. In the news media and elsewhere women are constructed within hegemonic narratives of gender relations in which emphasis is placed on traits of femininity and womanhood. Thus, when woman transgress from this prescribed narrative and step outside the boundaries of femininity and womanhood they are cast as deviant or blameworthy.

The emphasis on traits of femininity and womanhood are also prominent in news media discourse of homicide. The news media's construction of females in homicide cases overwhelmingly relies on what Frigon (2006) refers to as the "triangle of womanhood" (p. 17) which is comprised of wifehood, motherhood, and femininity. From this perspective, if a woman is perceived as failing in any or all of these areas they are, in turn, constructed as 'failed women' or 'anti-feminine'. In this context, women, specifically the mothers and/or wives of the victim and/or perpetrators of violent crime, are responsibilized for failing to adhere to their socially prescribed gender expectations. In the case of Victoria Stafford, for example, the victim's mother, Tara McDonald, was portrayed in the news media as partially responsible for the kidnapping and death of her daughter:

> "Yet he managed nonetheless to suggest, slyly and never directly, that she bore some responsibility for what happened, or at the least was a lousy parent."
> (*Defence hints Tori's mom bears some blame; Subtle questions suggest she did not take enough precautions to protect her daughter*, The Vancouver Sun)

Research has identified a good girl-bad girl dichotomy that is commonly used in the news media to portray female victims in gendered terms (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997). This dichotomy can also be applied to mothers who are presented in the news media as blameworthy. This good mother-bad mother dichotomy places emphasis on traits which, under patriarchal narratives, are considered anti-mothering and anti-feminine. This practice of blaming females, particularly mothers, for deviating from prescribed gender norms diverts attention away from the offender while placing the burden of responsibility on the women. This article illustrates how McDonald's abilities as a mother were disparaged in the news media:

> "Their mother, Tara McDonald, was addicted to OxyContin and her boyfriend used it too. Their father, Rodney Safford, was not always a reliable presence. They weren't bad parents, but they were young and a bit feckless, as the young can be." (*From Tori's brother, words of humanity; from her killer, nothing but crocodile tears*, The Gazette)

By highlighting McDonald's substance abuse problem and careless nature, the news media constructed an image of an incompetent mother who did not take enough precautions to protect her daughter.

The victim-blaming language used in the Stafford case is not only reserved for mothers who are deviantized for veering away from their socially prescribed roles related to motherhood. The wives of homicide offenders, particularly serial killers, are often blamed for being either stupid or complicit. For example, the news media questioned how Russell Williams' wife, Mary Elizabeth Harriman, was unaware of her husband's crimes:

"Some wonder how Harriman had no inkling of her husband's crimes..." (*How did the colonel's wife not know?; Research on the wives of serial killers shows most had no idea their spouse was a monster*, The Toronto Star)

This normalization of the woman's responsibility while ignoring the offender's crimes hold women unfairly accountable for the actions of their husbands which can potentially subject them to the same public scrutiny as the offender. One article highlighted that Harriman would be subjected to the same stigmatization as Williams:

"There is sympathy there for Harriman. But where once there would have been greetings or waves, there were averted gazes. Such is the inescapable stigma." (*How did the colonel's wife not know?; Research on the wives of serial killers shows most had no idea their spouse was a monster*, The Toronto Star)

As Harriman is perceived to have deviated from her gendered role of wifehood, she is framed in the news media as blameworthy. As a result, Harriman's status as a victim is delegitimized and she is subsequently constructed in negative, responsiblizing terms. In doing so, the news media undermines women's "victim status" while simultaneously holding them accountable for either their own victimization or for deviating from their socially prescribed gender roles. This gendering of the blame contributes to patriarchal narratives that obscure systemic violence against women and fosters unequal gender and power relations between men and women.

From Villainhood to Victimhood

Similar to the patriarchal narratives used to blame female victims and women, the news media use the same gendered discourse and adherence to traditional gender norms to legitimize other victims. The news media's focus on homicide is highly selective and is very rarely

representative of the vast majority of recorded crime. Instead, news reporting overwhelmingly focuses on the most serious and atypical homicide incidents. As a result, certain types of homicide incidents are disproportionately overrepresented while others receive very little coverage, such as domestic homicide. The news media also apply the same selection bias to homicide victims. An analysis of the articles included in this study highlighted the 'ideal victim' as a prominent theme in the representation of particular victims.

Indeed, not all homicide victims receive equal attention in the news media (Greer, 2007). Thus, critically exploring media constructions of a vulnerable and newsworthy victim is an important aspect of understanding the significance of the victim in media discourse as well as the impact of homicide victims on crime policy. Over the past few decades, the news media has been increasingly selective regarding the coverage of homicide stories, focusing the most intense media coverage on the 'ideal victim', which may be defined as "a person or category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim" (Christie, 1986, p. 18). Further, Greer (2007) states, "[t]his group includes those who are perceived as vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sympathy and compassion" (p. 22). Therefore, women and children typically encompass all the traits that comprise the ideal victim. On the other hand, individuals that exist on the margins of society such as sex workers, those battling addictions, and the homeless, "may find it much more difficult to achieve legitimate victim status" (Greer, 2007, p. 22).

Contemporary social structures and institutions are organized in a hierarchy of privilege; in mass media, the topmost tier consists of 'ideal victims' who attract national and even international media attention. These 'worthy' victims are continually sensationalized through multiple media outlets. Conversely, at the bottom of this hierarchy, are the unworthy victims

who receive very little, if any, media coverage. Although patriarchal narratives have framed women who deviate from their prescribed gender expectations as 'failed women', certain female victims are portrayed in gendered terms that idealize their 'victim status' and construct them as newsworthy. That is, female victims who subscribe to hegemonic gender norms are portrayed in the news media as the archetypal ideal victim. In other words, women whose social identities are consistent with traditional understandings of appropriate gender-role behaviour are more likely than "deviant" women to have their victim status legitimized in the news media. Victoria Stafford and Stefanie Rengel, for example, were presented in the news media under the 'ideal victim' narrative:

> "It was not 'a girl,' but Stefanie Rengel, described by one of her friends...as 'one
>
> of the most beautiful, charitable people' she's ever met." (*What lies beneath good*
>
> *behaviour?; Psychiatrists say Melissa Todorovic has 'a striking lack of empathy'*,
>
> The Vancouver Sun)

> "Tori – bright-eyed beauty, chatterbox, beloved daughter and sister." (*Horror in*
>
> *an ordinary day; Crown opens case with shocking details of Tori Stafford's death*,
>
> The Toronto Star)

The ideal victim "is designed to evoke a passionate response to the crime by creating empathy" (Collins, 2014, p. 3). This notion is reinforced when the victim is viewed as deserving of sympathy. Children, particularly girls, when confronted with crime, educe the greatest public response as they are perceived as innocent and pure. Therefore, homicide cases in which a child is murdered by a stranger attract national and even international attention in the news media.

Even children who are murdered by a non-stranger, as in the case of Jeffrey Baldwin, attract a significant amount of public attention and are sensationalized in the news media:

> "...that he [Jeffrey Baldwin] was a huggy kid; that he loved his dinky cars; that he had blond curly hair; that his favourite superhero was Superman and that he wanted to fly." (*Now killer granny wants to take part in Jeffrey Baldwin inquest*, The Vancouver Sun)

The news media often attempt to connect the reader to the victim though relatable circumstances. Many consumers can relate to being a parent or guardian, which generates additional sympathy for the victim and abhorrence for the offender.

According to Collins (2014), "the archetypal portrayal of the crime victim often depicts personal stories of suffering at the hands of strangers" (p. 3). The news media portrayed the victims of Russell Williams, Marie-France Comeau and Jessica Lloyd, as innocent bystanders who, through no fault of their own, were subjected to torture and death at the hands of a monster. This image of an ideal victim was augmented through discourse surrounding their bravery:

> "The two women were, in profoundly different ways, both brave, and I know their families and friends must take pride in that." (*'If I die, will you make sure my mom knows I love her?' As Russell Williams is formally convicted on 86 charges, court hears how two brave women tried – and failed – prevent their murder*, The Toronto Star)

The ideal/good victim being violated at the hands of a stranger "can elicit fear of our own potential victimization by 'identification through shared experience'" (Collins, 2014, p. 3). The

persistent image of innocent victims falling prey to violent crime generates fear as it symbolically represents the idea that it could happen to anyone.

On the other hand, victims of domestic homicide, such as Donna Jones, are viewed bad or undeserving victims who do not garner a great deal of sympathy. They are perceived as culpable "because they are seen as people who jeopardized their own safety through a series of bad decisions" (Collins, 2014, p.3). This portrayal centers on the victim's character flaws and decision to remain in an abusive relationship. As a result, the news media constructs them as deserving of relatively little sympathy or do not report on them at all. For example, Donna Jones only had 7 articles written about her homicide whereas Victoria Stafford, for instance, had 50 articles written about her. This lack of media attention further silences victims of domestic violence and homicide and undermines the physical, social, and psychological harms done in these cases.

Ultimately, the legitimization of particular homicide victims over others reinforces social divisions and inequalities by deeming one victim more newsworthy – and thus more deserving of sympathy – than another. The selective representation of homicide victims in the news media contributes to prejudices toward specific individuals and groups, and stifles the voices of certain, frequent victims in society.

Just a Teen Succubus

Female violence and aggression, while not a new phenomenon, "have long captured the attention of mass audiences" (Collins, 2014, p.1). Over the past two decades, the news media have dedicated a significant amount of coverage on hyper-violent and dangerous women. Research on the construction around female violence and aggression in the news media has

found that images of female offenders as likely to engage in violent crime is often exaggerated (see Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Schissel, 2006). Although "females are considerably less likely to commit crimes than males" (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009, p.143) the news media portray female criminality as a prevalent social issue. In addition, the news media tend to overstate the level of violence and aggression displayed by female offenders. One article described the crime rate of female offenders as increasing the greatest in comparison to all other segments of the population:

> "...'the rate of [crime] increase is greatest for girls relative to all other segments of the population." (*Rising tide of girl-on-girl violence blamed on many factors, including misguided stereotypes, jealously; Experts say youth violence has risen only marginally, but that the 'lethality' of violence has gone up dramatically*, The Vancouver Sun)

Although the news media, in general, operate under universal biases and stereotypes, portrayals of women, in particular, are often constructed in patriarchal narratives that disproportionately represent the criminalization of women. These gendered narratives and biases are most evident in crime reporting on female offenders.

The images and discourse used in the news media to depict female offenders underscores the gendered stereotypes and gender-role expectations used to construct women (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Gender-role expectations are based on biological sex and define the behavioural norms that dictate how both men and women are supposed to act. Therefore, as discussed in the previous section, when men or women step outside the boundaries of "acceptable" behaviour they are deviantized by society.

There are many stereotypes associated with women and how they should conduct themselves; these gendered stereotypes center around femininity and womanhood. Much of society still maintains the assumption that girls should be ladylike and not at all aggressive. This article supports this stereotype by suggesting that women gravitate toward verbal aggression as opposed to physical violence:

> "That may be because it's ingrained in them [girls] not to be physical, she says, or because social aggression is more covert and 'safe' because nasty deeds often can't be traced back to the source." (*Rising tide of girl-on-girl violence blamed on many factors, including misguided stereotypes, jealously; Experts say youth violence has risen only marginally, but that the 'lethality' of violence has gone up dramatically*, The Vancouver Sun)

Women who fail to adhere to gender-role expectations are "considered abnormal and, as a result, are viewed much more negatively" (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009, p. 144). By extension, women that commit crime, especially homicide, are deviantized twice—once for committing the crime and a second time for failing to conform to traditional gender-role expectations (Lloyd, 1995). The news media foster the notion that "women are increasingly entering the world of male-dominated violence is largely a reaction to the shifting of gendered social boundaries and weakening of the traditional spheres of informal control over women" (Collins, 2014, p. 2). For example, this article points out the transition of girls to as violent, aggressive, and evil as their male counterparts:

> "Several factors could be influencing this, experts say, from misguided sugar and spice stereotypes of girls to an unexpected dark side to greater gender equality."

(*Rising tide of girl-on-girl violence blamed on many factors, including misguided stereotypes, jealously; Experts say youth violence has risen only marginally, but that the 'lethality' of violence has gone up dramatically*, The Vancouver Sun)

This construction of the female offender often results in the news media labelling them as bad girls, monsters, and manipulators (Collins, 2014). With this, the following section will focus specifically on media representations of Melissa Todorovic as news articles focused on her role in the murder of Stefanie Rengel as opposed to David Bagshaw who was the one that stabbed the young girl to death.

Female Offenders as Manipulators

Research has shown that while "serious, violent crimes are very rarely committed by women" (McDiarmid, 1996, p. 5) those females who *do* commit such crimes are judged much more harshly than their male counterparts. Taking note of Ann Lloyd's (1995) theory *'Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned'* she argues that female offenders are deviantized for committing the crime as well as for transgressing from traditional gender norms. Such gender stereotyping in instances of male and female co-offending portrays the female offender as the 'Eve' or 'seductress' who manipulates the male into criminality. These themes around female offenders create unfavourable narratives for women who engage in crime as well as females more generally (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009).

The case involving Melissa Todorovic identified 'female offenders as manipulators' as a theme when depicting female offenders. Todorovic was cast as a 'puppet master' who orchestrated the killing of Stefanie Rengel:

> "...Flumerfelt pointed out, when she [Melissa Todorovic] was simultaneously badgering, bullying and sexually manipulating her boyfriend into killing Rengel." (*What lies beneath good behaviour?; Psychiatrists say Melissa Todorovic has 'a striking lack of empathy'*, The Vancouver Sun)

As the news media places emphasis on Todorovic's role in the murder of Rengel, her deviation from gender-role expectations becomes glaringly obvious and her crimes become particularly terrible in the view of the public. The focus on Todorovic in this case brings attention to the departure of women from historical constructions of acceptable female behaviour.

In contrast, although David Bagshaw was the one who wielded the knife that killed Rengel, he was portrayed as a simple boy that was coerced into murdering her by Todorovic. The news media constructed an image of Bagshaw as a mindless, hulking lad who was seduced by the endlessly manipulative Todorovic:

> "...but he [David Bagshaw] was seduced into murder by his then-girlfriend, the stridently jealous and villainous Todorovic." (*Natural born killer*, The Toronto Star)

> "The man-boy had been led around by his throbbing penis..." (*Young killers merit some mercy*, The Toronto Star)

Moreover, even if Bagshaw *was* manipulated into murdering Rengel, his role in the homicide is diminished relative to hers as Todorovic was the primary focus of the news media. As a result, as female offenders are viewed as moving toward male-dominated violence, they are depicted as "violators of gender norms" (Collins, 2014, p. 3) and, as a result, are punished more harshly than males.

Conclusion

The process by which women are constructed in the news media is complex and varies considerably depending on the individual and the context of the homicide. However, the various aspects of gendering the blame that were found in this data represent some of the ways that the news media foster stereotypical notions of gender-role expectations. The overwhelming majority of articles frame women within patriarchal narratives that undermine men's responsibility and place the blame on the woman. The three major narratives used to construct women as blameworthy described in this study are holding female victims responsible for their own victimization, the responsibilization of women and mothers, and constructing the ideal victim. 'The responsibilization of women and mothers' was a unique narrative that was not found in the literature. In addition to being constructed as 'bad' or 'failed' women, female offenders are portrayed in the news media in gendered terms that depict them as increasingly aggressive and hyper-masculine (Collins, 2014).

Chapter Six

The Intersection between Social Class and Crime

Although the news media frequently sensationalize and over-represent atypical crimes and homicide cases – as illustrated in the two previous findings chapters – there are also prescribed frames that help news media outlets explain crime perpetrated by those considered to be on the margins of society and those who are socially constructed as being predisposed to criminal behaviour. Greer and Jewkes (2005) discuss the idea of a "sliding scale of otherness" that reinforces concepts of deviancy. Specifically, the authors argue that at one end of the spectrum exist those who are *of* society, but not *in* it; this includes those individuals who are framed through social interactions as contributing little or nothing to the economy and are typically of lower-class. On the other end of the spectrum are those who are *in* society but not *of* it. These individuals include serial killers, sexual predators, and those who lack distinctive "human" traits such as empathy or remorse (Greer and Jewkes, 2005). In this chapter I will discuss how the news media constructs homicide – both stranger and non-stranger – as a social problem that emerges from two types of groups: 'deviant' cultures and 'deviant' classes. News media constructions of culture and social class come together to form an overall "deviant outsider" narrative that is used to further separate certain individuals and groups from the rest of society. In addition, this chapter will illustrate how the news media perpetuate fear and intolerance of certain individuals and groups based on stereotypical notions of crime and deviance.

The Commodification of Crime

Cultural criminologists propose that the meaning of crime and crime control is constantly changing and adapting to our contemporary world. As society has entered a digital age where the news and popular culture intersect, our ideas of crime have shifted. The news media blurs with popular culture and, as a result, images of crime are repackaged as entertainment instead of news and vice versa (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008). For consumers, this blurring of the line between the news media and popular culture can make it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction.

Modern mainstream media relies on popular stereotypes to help the public make sense of seemingly senseless and atypical crimes which, in turn, serves to commodify the deviantization of particular groups. This redefined understanding of crime stigmatizes certain segments of the population that diverge from dominant understandings of socially acceptable morals and values. In other words, the news media frames crime – homicide in particular – as a social problem that stems from 'deviant' groups.

The commodification of crime focuses on the symbolic relationship between crime and the news media. It is though this symbolic relationship that the news media frames crime narratives which impacts dominant discourse around crime, crime control, and crime policy. Therefore, the news media directly influence how consumers perceive crime.

Throughout the data collecting process, it became apparent that only the most atypical and sensational homicide cases were reported on in the media. This reinforces the "money-making mantra of '[i]f it bleeds, it leads'" (Ferrell et al., 2008, p.128) that characterizes the news media's perspective on crime reporting. The news media prioritizes rare and unusual crimes over

the more mundane and common, everyday crimes to attract public attention and gain readership. This commodifies crimes as the news media selectively choose which stories to report on that will garner the most attention.

In late-modernity the constant connection to media outlets allows for immediate access to information. From this perspective, "contemporary culture can be conceptualized as a series of *loops*, an ongoing process by which everyday life recreates itself in its own image" (Ferrell et al., 2008, p.130). That is, processes of discourse production and discourse dissemination are interrelated symbiotic. In this sense, meaning is not linear or sequential but is rather constructed from images that bounce endlessly off one another in what Ferrell (1999) refers to as a 'hall of mirrors'. These mediated representations of crime can have widespread, negative implications for particular individuals and groups that are portrayed in the news media as deviant or causing crime.

When it comes to crime, homicide in particular, the news media is intertwined with mediated images of crime and, as a result, fear of stranger homicide and other atypical crimes are amplified. The mass media constructs crime as news and entertainment and, thus, we are only offered selective images and agendas (Ferrell, 1999). The data collected in this study reinforces Ferrell's (1999) 'hall of mirrors' theory by framing homicide as a problem that stems from 'deviant' social groups.

Moreover, cultural criminology argues that the news media construct alternative images and understandings of crime issues (Ferrell, 1999) and, in doing so, shape the way the public perceive such issues. In recent years, this form of "newsmaking criminology" has been most abundant in discussions of honour killings and other culturally-specific violence.

Clash of Cultures

One of the non-stranger homicide cases included in the current sample involved a case labelled by the news media as an 'honour killing.' On June 30, 2009, three Canadian teenagers of Afghanistan origin, along with their father's first wife in a polygamous marriage, were collectively murdered by their father, mother, and eldest brother in a canal in Kingston, Ontario.

Past research has shown that the news media's coverage of Muslims and Islam since 9/11 has been extremely negative and characterized by racism and Islamophobia (see Ahmed & Matthes, 2016; Hayes, Freilich, & Chermak, 2016; Shier & Shor, 2016). Here, non-West countries, namely those that comprise the Muslim Diaspora, are presented in the news media as "the predominant antithesis [and threat] to Western civilization and culture" (Terman, 2010, p.4). An analysis of articles detailing the Shafia family murders was consistent with past research. That is, the news media focused on cultural differences, constructing the Shafia family as 'deviant others':

> "'The apparent reason behind these cold-blooded, shameful murders was that the four completely innocent victims offended your twisted concept of honour, a notion of honour that is founded upon the domination and control of women, a sick notion of honour that has absolutely no place in any civilized society.'" (*'A sick notion of honour'; Accused in Shafia trial handed life sentences after jury finds husband, wife and son guilty of first-degree murder in the 'heinous' slayings of four female family members*, The Toronto Star)

The term "honour killing," in this sense, "is being used to permanently stigmatize Muslim communities and evict them from the political community, especially when these communities

are minorities in the North American and European countries" (Terman, 2010, p.6). Moreover, unlike other homicide cases examined in this study, the news media do not focus on individual pathology but rather they immediately center on cultural differences and emphasize this notion by labelling the crime an 'honour killing.'

In addition, discussions around honour killings are being used to construct a common enemy and create societal fear around an 'invading evil'. The news media convey this notion by reinforcing honour killings as a culture-specific problem that, through immigration, is traversing into Canada:

> "This grisly discovery would eventually lead to first-degree murder charges for each of the defendants and national hand-wringing over the phenomenon of 'honour killings' imported to Canada from abroad." (*'A sick notion of honour'; Accused in Shafia trial handed life sentences after jury finds husband, wife and son guilty of first-degree murder in the 'heinous' slayings of four female family members*, The Toronto Star)

From this perspective, Canada is presented as civilized and having morals and values while the "Muslim world" is demonized for bringing an archaic form of violence to Western nations:

> "Take a stroll through the hospital burn unit in Herat or Peshawar to eyeball the horrific injuries inflicted on daughters and wives, often with their own mothers and mothers-in-law involved in the deed. And that villainy has been exported to the West." (*Hamed, the fourth ruined child; Western-raised son of Shafias embraced the 'honour' dogma*, The Toronto Star)

Beyond the fear-centered narrative that surrounds honour killings, "the way we define 'honour killing' in conjunction with domestic violence" (Terman, 2010, p.6) in the news media reveals additional issues with the way it is framed as a social problem. The news media frame honour killings and female-perpetrated violence as the result of deviant cultures bringing antiquated practices of misogyny and male-domination to Western countries:

> "They left the Stone Age behind 15 years before the bodies of Zainab, Sahar, Geeti and Rona were discovered in a Nissan submerged in the Rideau Canal. But they brought their wretched moral absolutism to Canada with them." (*Lessons from a murder trial. As a society, we need to be alert*, The Toronto Star)

However, the term "honour killing" can be categorized under the broader umbrella of domestic violence which, as discussed in the previous chapter, which we know is a widespread social issue that is not racial or culturally-specific. Therefore, although the news media attempt to construct honour killings as an emerging social problem committed by deviant, non-West cultures, in reality honor killings are inextricably linked to domestic violence and homicide. According to Terman (2010), "by singling out 'honour killing' from domestic violence...we risk not only downplaying domestic violence as something less serious, but singling out immigrant communities for their apparent 'backwards' values" (p.6) and deviant behaviour stigmatizes certain cultures and fosters intolerance and racism.

The news media not only promote xenophobic views of non-West cultures through the construction of honour killings as the danger inherent in Muslim immigration, but also through the ethnocentric rhetoric around such crimes. That is, the news media often portray honour

crimes as a problem that stems from deviant cultures by maintaining the idea that their own country reigns superior:

> "'This verdict sends a very clear message about our Canadian values and the core principles in a free and democratic society that all Canadians enjoy, and even visitors to Canada enjoy,' Laarhuis said." (*There's no honour in 'shameless murders'*, The Gazette)

By claiming that Canadian values and morals are of a higher standard than other countries the news media emphasize the divide between cultures which reinforces an 'us vs. them' dogma:

> "In this clash of vultures writ small, within familial walls, the behavior of the girls and Rona Amir Mohammad, which would be 'trivial and so inoffensive' to most Canadians, directly led to their murders." (*Tragic accident or honour killing? Family's fate will soon rest with jury; Crown honours victims: sisters Zainab, Sahar and Geeti and 'other wife' Mohammad Shafia*, The Vancouver Sun)

Although there is no definite census on what constitutes an honour killing (Terman, 2010, p.7), the term "honour killing" is used globally to describe the killing of an individual, usually a female, to restore honour to one's family. However, such a term, when used in Western news media connotes xenophobia and racist views. The term insinuates that Muslim or "Brown" culture is violent, inhumane, and causes crime (Terman, 2010). In addition, mass media operates under the premise that honour killings are in some way more terrible and horrific, and thus more newsworthy, than domestic violence and homicide.

Social Constructions of Socioeconomic Status

In addition to framing aspects of Muslim culture as a 'social problem', the media also deviantizes and frames lower social classes as a social problem. In particular, this section will be focusing on the cases of Victoria Stafford and Jeffrey Baldwin; in both cases, the news media disproportionately focuses on the perpetrators' socioeconomic status in an attempt to contextualize their criminality. Individuals who occupy the lower-class are frequently constructed in the news media as deviant. The individuals and groups commonly associated with criminality are those who visibly occupy the margins of society and engage in deviantized behaviour (e.g., drug use, dole scrounging, etc.). The news media – when reporting on crime committed by marginalized groups – frame the incident as a by-product of their deviant lifestyle and the cycle of poverty.

For example, Terri-Lynne McClintic was framed in the news media as an avid drug user:

"At every opportunity she references her own addiction and the drug-sodden environment from which she sprang. That fateful day had begun with a wake-up toke, early in the morning, McClintic scrounging in her bedroom for marijuana roaches. 'Cooking' some Oxycontin to 'shoot up' with her mum – a woman known as 'Crazy Carole' to her daughter's friends – then drug top-ups throughout the day, most especially after the crime was actually in process, Tori stuffed in the back seat of Rafferty's car." (*'I would take the fall for everything'*, The Toronto Star)

Here, the news media directly link McClintic's crime, at least in part, to her drug addiction. This media frame constructs crime as stemming from lower-class cultures where drug use and deviant

behaviour is perceived as rampant. This notion is illustrated in one article that portrays crime as cultural deviance where criminality is part of their lifestyle:

"A place where daughters injected drugs with their mothers." (*'I would take the fall for everything'*, The Toronto Star)

From this view, substance abuse and drug addiction are characterized as common traits amongst those who occupy the lower-class. This media frame perpetuates harmful rhetoric that demonizes the proletariat class and cultivates unfair assumptions about the marginalized culture as a whole. By explicitly associating drug use with violent crime and characterizing such behaviour as a lower-class problem, the news media encourage negative public opinions of those individuals and groups in society.

The intersection of crime and class relations was another prominent theme found in news media constructions of deviant sub-cultures. Violent crime, particularly homicide, is accordingly constructed as the result of multi-generational poverty and, in some cases, the failure of social institutions to intervene. In both the Victoria Stafford and the Jeffrey Baldwin cases the offenders were framed in terms of their low socio-economic status:

"Her [McDonald] boyfriend, James Goris, was using, too, she said, and the two of them had actually met McClintic twice, and been to the shack where she then lived with her mother, to buy OxyContin." (*Defence hints Tori's mom bears some blame; Subtle questions suggest she did not take enough precautions to protect her daughter*, The Vancouver Sun)

"She lived in subsidized housing. She was ably represented at trial, where she chose not to testify in her own defence and where the tab was certainly paid by

legal aid. She appealed her conviction and sentence – again undoubtedly through public funds..." (*Now killer granny wants to take part in Jeffrey Baldwin inquest*, The Vancouver Sun)

By framing perpetrators of homicide through a socio-economic lens, the news media deviantizes everyone who occupies that particular group, which is an enormous oversimplification of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape. This sweeping generalization of deviant cultures also extends to the parents of victims of homicide or other violent crimes. These peripheral news subjects are stigmatized by association for being on the margins of society, and are often constructed as blameworthy for not taking adequate measures to protect their children from harm. This framing of lower-class parents was prominent in news reports on the cases of Stafford and Baldwin:

> "The kids were often at their grandmother's house, sometimes for days or weeks at a stretch. Though only in Grade 3, Tori already had attended eight schools, the suggestion clear the family moved a lot. In the mother's house, there wasn't much money, and there were often tensions." (*From Tori's brother, words of humanity; from her killer, nothing but crocodile tears*, The Gazette)

> "In fact to my memory, no one has every suggested the young couple were parents of the year, or anything other than what they transparently were and remain – the products of multi-generational poverty, abuse, unfinished educations, lost chances, bad luck, diminished expectations and social assistance." (*Agency believed murderous grandparents over Jeffrey Baldwin's inept teen parents*, The Vancouver Sun)

By disproportionately focusing on a news subjects' social identity, such as their race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status, news media reports contribute to the further stigmatization of already distinctly marginalized individuals and groups. Moreover, by suggesting these facets of an individual's cultural background may be linked, however tangentially, to their criminalization or victimization, particularly in highly sensationalized cases of violent crime, mass media outlets perpetuate the notion that crime is pervasive social problem, and one that is primarily committed by problematic "other" groups.

While the news media has effectively ascribed blameworthiness to individuals involved in cases of stranger and non-stranger homicide, as demonstrated above, from a more macro-perspective, news outlets have also responsibilized social institutions and governing bodies for their involvement (or lack thereof) in high-profile incidents of violent crime. Although the main focus of this chapter is the deviantization of marginalized subgroups and cultures, news media constructs of social institutions and agencies as blameworthy was a key finding in this study. Mass media accomplish this by highlighting these institutions' shortcomings and the potential for systemic negligence to be carried out by and within these bodies.

The public ascribes a significant amount of trust and faith toward certain social institutions and enforcement agencies that have been assigned to protect society from crime and deviance. For that reason, "[w]hen there is evidence that official agencies and state bodies assigned to protect the 'innocent' have somehow failed in this task, the potential to develop and sustain a compelling narrative is increased considerably" (Greer, 2007, p. 32). Media interest in the death of Jeffrey Baldwin, Jessica Lloyd and Marie-France Comeau, and Zainab, Sahar, and Geeti Shafia along with Rona Amir Mohammad, for example, was maintained by the failure of social institutions and enforcement organizations. Once the news media has identified evidence

of serious institutional failings – implicating child welfare services and/or the police – which were portrayed as negligent in their duties and maintained the conditions that allowed the homicide to occur, the crime extends far beyond the victim and becomes representative of a larger social issue. Thus, as societal reactions toward the homicides shift from sympathy to outrage, the victim becomes a symbol of that particular social problem and, as a result, their homicide is used as a cautionary tale to garner high levels of public support (Greer, 2007).

Consequently, Greer (2007) states that, "[f]aced with collective moral outrage and a sustained barrage of critical media coverage, agencies publicly implicated as part of the problem, or the authorities to which those agencies are answerable, are required to respond" (p. 33). In many of the cases listed above, public outrage and extensive media attention resulted in official inquiries, which, in turn, resulted in "recommendations for change in structures of training and accountability, professional practice and criminal justice and social policy" (p. 33). The death of a child – as in the cases of Jeffrey Baldwin and the Shafia sisters – "who is known to protection agencies is perhaps the gravest critical incident affecting child welfare today" (Longlade, 1999, p. 295). The extensive media coverage that these cases receive is fuelled by public outrage surrounding the institutional failure of child welfare agencies. In response, public investigations have ensued following the murder of a child. However, there is no evidence supporting the actual implementation or effectiveness of the changes or recommendations for change following these cases. In 2002, for example, Jeffrey Baldwin was murdered by his grandparents, Elva Bottineau and Norman Kidman, who retained custody of the 5-year-old boy. At the time Bottineau and Kidman were granted custody of Baldwin and three of their other grandchildren the couple were already convicted child abusers. As a result, the media heavily focused on the failure of the CCAS:

"And the grandparents, who were later convicted of second-degree murder and are in prison, had custody of Jeffrey and his three siblings in significant part because no one at the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, which had been involved with the Bottineau clan since 1950, did a thorough internal records check before agreeing with or supporting Bottineau's several custody applications in family court." (*Information was there, but it wasn't used; Child services would've known Jeffrey Baldwin's grandparents were dangerous – if they'd checked*, The Gazette)

Other articles continued the argument by highlighting the lack of accountability for these agencies:

"At the criminal trial, prosecutors unexpectedly didn't call any witnesses from the CCAS, which meant that the conduct of the agency and its employees went unexamined." (*Children's treatment was 'utter destruction of dignity'*, The Gazette)

The construction of these homicide cases in the news media has emphasized many of the gaps and oversights in various institutions, including enforcement agencies. In the Russell Williams case the police were overtly blamed for their failure to intervene and provide critical police services that the news media suggested could have prevented the murder of at least one of his victims:

"A Belleville police officer did not make note of a licence plate on a suspicious truck she spotted outside the Belleville home of Jessica Lloyd on the night Russell Williams went on to rape and abduct her." (*Fatal flaw; On the night Jan.28, 2010,*

a Belleville police officer noted a suspicious vehicle beside a home, but didn't take down the licence plate number. That key detail could have led police to Russell Williams before he killed Jessica Lloyd. A shocking gap in police protocol means it could happen again, The Toronto Star)

In addition to the contents of the news report itself, the title of the article displayed in italics above further demonstrates the news media's distinct responsibilization of both the individual police officer and the police department as a whole. When reporting on the Williams case other news outlets highlighted the police department's failure to pre-emptively inform and protect the public:

"It is true that Belleville and Ottawa police should have alerted women earlier that there was something evil on the loose, something Jessica Lloyd herself referred to as the 'Tweed creeper.'" (*A few good men vs. a monster; The world doesn't work unless men and women are united, working together for a common good. It happened at this trial. The trial was not about men and women, but about humanity*, The Toronto Star)

The news media was "instrumental in publicly defining the cases, rooting the victims' images in the popular imagination, generating and focusing collective moral outrage and support for change, and, crucially, keeping the stories alive in both political and popular consciousness, in some cases, long after the initial investigation had closed" (Greer, 2007, p. 33).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the news media construct certain cultures as deviant through disproportionately emphasizing characteristics of individual social

identity that perpetuate processes of stigmatization and othering against already vulnerable and marginalizing populations. Specifically, I have highlighted examples of race and class based biases in news media reports of homicide. Lastly, I outlined and discussed instances of institutional failure presented in the news media, namely CCAS and police agencies. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I will discuss some of the more prominent findings of this study and present directions for future research.

Chapter Seven

Discussion/Conclusion

To date, a large body of research has examined media constructions of crime and the criminal justice system. Throughout this thesis, I have examined the construction of particularly 'newsworthy' homicide cases in a wide range of Canadian news articles through a social constructionist lens, and situated findings within the theoretical context of social problems literature where appropriate. Specifically, I analyzed the discourse in the framing of stranger and non-stranger homicide in six Canadian cases: The Shafia Family, Russell Williams, Victoria Stafford, Stefanie Rengel, Jeffrey Baldwin, and Donna Jones. Within these cases, I was most interested in exploring the myriad ways in which the news media constructed and contextualized the identities and actions of both victims and perpetrators in cases of both stranger and non-stranger homicide.

Across the news articles examined, there was a clear pattern of media framing within the stranger homicide cases. On the other hand, the non-stranger homicide cases examined in this study were so disparate (e.g., domestic homicide, honour killing, infanticide) that no clear pattern of media framing emerged. However, we can say that in each homicide case explored in this study – both stranger and non-stranger – the news media take a complex social phenomenon (crime) and root it in a variety of different factors, none of which accurately reflect the broader structural and social context in which crime emerges.

Key Findings

The data I collected throughout this study yielded several significant and unique findings. First, the demonization of offenders emerged as a prominent theme when reporting on incidents of stranger homicide. The news media construct offenders in this way by assigning a sub-human or demonic label to them. As the findings outlined and discussed, this is done through various media frames including dehumanizing the offender, medicalizing deviance, and mental health professionals as left.

From this perspective, crime and deviance is inherent in the individual and a product of biological deficiencies as opposed to their environment. This media frame was maintained through language that demonized the offender and constructed them as evil and thus not deserving of sympathy. The news media used language that constructed the offender as a monster or creature and detailed the excessive violence used to murder his/her victim (dehumanizing the offender), portrayed the offender in psychopathologizing terms (medicalizing deviance), and provided expert testimony that argued that these particular offenders could not be rehabilitated (mental health professionals as left).

'Mental health professionals as left' was a unique finding as this framing of offenders was almost entirely absent from existing literature. The news media used demonizing language to construct the offender as so far removed from society that rehabilitation and reintegration are not an option. This framing of the offender was supplemented by arguments stating that even if these particular offenders *could* be rehabilitated the public would not want to see such violent offenders back on the streets.

The demonization of particular offenders and the sensationalization of stranger homicide perpetuate unrealistic and inaccurate perceptions of crime and victimization. As the news media constantly depict homicide that involves excessive violence and unknown assailants, public fear of being a victim of a violent crime increases. In general, "although everyone fears being the victim of violence, being the victim of stranger violence is more frightening" (Riedel, 1998, p. 206).

One reason that fear of stranger violence is so pervasive is that most people do not expect to be murdered by someone they know, especially by an intimate partner or relative. Therefore, the news media construction of stranger homicide and the demonization of offenders only reinforce the public's fear of being a victim of a violent crime. At the same time, by sensationalizing stranger homicide the news media deemphasize more common forms of violence, particular intimate partner violence, which, as illustrated in the findings, is a much more pervasive and widespread issue in Canada. This, in turn, further victimizes the victims of intimate partner violence by silencing their voices and undermining this issue through underreporting and media selection bias.

In addition, by the news media constantly reporting on atypical crimes, such as stranger homicide, they foster the notion that anyone can be a victim of an indiscriminate attack. As a result, our "concern for strangers governs much of our situation behaviour; how and where we sit in public transportation, airports, restaurants, and bars, and how we comport ourselves in these settings forms a largely unconscious 'interaction ritual' designed to govern our relationships with unknown others" (Riedel, 1998, pp. 206-207). The misrepresentation of stranger homicide in the news media amplifies the public's fear of victimization and can cause unnecessary anxiety and panic in everyday situations.

A second theme that presented itself in the data was gendered discourse surrounding both female victims and offenders in homicide cases. Literature on news media constructions of females (focused either on victims or offenders) typically centre on the deviation of women from their prescribed gender role-expectations. While the data collected in this study confirmed this notion, it also revealed that this dichotomy extended to other females that were peripheral to the crime (e.g., mothers and wives). The news media used the same victim-blaming language used to responsiblize victims of domestic homicide to construct the mothers of victims and the wives of offenders as failed women. Therefore, the responsiblization of women other than the primary victim or offender was an interesting and unique finding in this research project. Similar to the language used in the intimate partner homicide examined in this study, in cases of both stranger and non-stranger the news media constructed females as blameworthy.

Additionally, in the same way the news media used gendered terms to deviantize certain individuals this study illustrated how they used the same approach to construct others as newsworthy, thus legitimizing their 'victim status'. This media framing creates a hierarchy of victimhood where those who adhere to this narrowly defined victim narrative garner more sympathy within news media framings, and thus the general public, while those victims who deviate from this rigid archetype are subsequently responsiblized for their own victimization. As a result, those who are deemed 'unworthy' victims receive less media attention and are vilified in the news media. In other words, the ideal victim is one who adheres to prescribed social norms and values and is murdered by a stranger as this reinforces 'dark figure of crime' narratives and dictates who the public should and should not fear.

These findings are significant as they illustrate how gendered discourse in the news media project misogynistic views on who can and cannot claim a 'legitimate victim status'. On

the one hand, when women (as victims of crime) adhere to traditional understandings of appropriate gender-role behaviour, they are framed as 'ideal victims'. On the other hand, if women deviate, in any way, from their socially prescribed gender-role, their victim status is delegitimized and, at the same time, they are responsiblized for their own victimization. Consequently, by framing females in such gendered terms, the news media obscure men's violence toward women and perpetuate patriarchal and misogynistic views toward women.

In addition, women who commit crime are also framed in gendered terms in the news media. However, apart from being deviantized for diverging from acceptable female behaviour and gender-role expectations, female offenders are also framed as exhibiting 'masculine' traits. As a result, women are deviantized twice: first for committing a crime and a second time for transgressing from normative ideals of womanhood. Since, historically, men have been the norm around understandings of violent crime and aggressive behaviour, women who commit crime are discussed in the news media and by society in gendered terms that reinforces sexist and patriarchal stereotypes. Furthermore, criminal justice and penal policies have been structured around these ideals and, as such, criminalized women are simply added on to this andocentric model. That is, the criminal justice system is structured around men's criminality and is not sufficient to deal with deviant females as men and women have different needs.

Lastly, analysis of the data collected in this study illustrated that the news media construct crime as emerging from 'deviant' cultures. That is, those who live on the margins of society, particularly racial minorities and the lower-class, are framed as the most prominent perpetrators of crime in society. For example, the news media framed the 'honour killing' in the Shafia case as a problem stemming from deviant Muslim cultures as opposed to an extreme form of domestic violence. Honour killings, while a relatively new concept in Westernized cultures,

derive from an andocentric culture of male-dominated violence against women, which is prevalent in Western society and not a product of archaic "other" non-Western cultures. By disproportionately focusing on the cultural aspect of honour killings rather than the gendered violence aspect, the news media obscure the larger issue of intimate partner violence and homicide and limits our understanding (and prevalence) of this widespread issue.

Similarly, the news media blurs the lines between cause and effect in cases where perpetrators or victims of crime are lower socioeconomic status. The news media frames criminality as emerging from lower-class culture but fails to highlight the broader sociopolitical organizational arrangements that make certain populations more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system. In other words, the news media pathologizes poverty in a sense, suggesting that poor people are more likely to commit crime because there is something wrong with *them*, rather than framing their actions as a result of a flawed social structure and systems.

The final unique contribution of this thesis to the literature on news media constructions of crime is discussed in chapter six. The responsiblization of social institutions was a key theme that surfaced while analyzing the data. The news media framed institutions (e.g., CCAS and police services) as blameworthy for failing to protect innocent people from harm or cultivating the environment that allowed for a crime to occur.

In this study, a few homicide cases contributed considerably toward public demand of third party accountability after social institutions – namely CCAS and police agencies – were portrayed as failing in their duties to protect citizens, particularly in the case of Jeffrey Baldwin. Child welfare authorities in Ontario have immense powers and yet, in instances of misconduct, are accountable to no one. Child welfare services are shielded by the Criminal Justice System

and in only a handful of cases has a member of the CCAS or CAS been charged criminally. In all of Canada, "Ontario is the only province that does not grant the provincial ombudsman authority to investigate child welfare agencies such as CAS, the CCAS or the JFCS" (DiManno, 2011). Thus, there is no effective oversight body to investigate and hold these agencies accountable when they have been under motivated or ineffective in determining if a parent or guardian is suitable or fit to care for a child or children. As a result, when a particular homicide case explodes in the news media, public outrage ensues and a demand for accountability monopolizes newspaper headlines.

On the other hand, the news media can inadvertently hyper-responsibilize social institutions by highlighting and sensationalizing particular institutional shortcomings or failures as being more significant in the outcome of a case than they actually were. That is, the news media construct social institutions as blameworthy for things that may be out of their control. This, in turn, increases tensions between the public and social service providers and makes it more difficult to do their job.

Implications

At the culmination of the data collection process there was a distinct pattern of reporting and sensationalizing the most unique and bizarre homicide incidents in the news media. As a result, homicides that were domestic in nature were underreported and framed in gendered and patriarchal terms, including the case of Donna Jones which received the least amount of media coverage out of all the homicides examined in this study. Therefore, current representations of intimate partner violence and homicide are replete with stereotypes and do not accurately illustrate the true nature and harm caused by this social issue.

Change in regards to social perceptions of domestic violence and ingrained gendered beliefs "cannot occur if news coverage fails to consider more recent activist and academic work that has approached intimate partner violence as a social problem rooted in a patriarchal environment and gender inequalities that foster violence against women" (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013, p. 148). Newspaper coverage of intimate partner homicide is important because selection bias and journalistic framing has the potential to promote stereotypical understandings of these crimes and romanticize the incident for added sensationalism and drama. At the same time, this downplays the violence and deviant nature of these crimes which disproportionately impact women.

Biased or stereotypical portrayals of intimate partner violence in the news media can affect public understandings of this social issue (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013). That is, historically, intimate partner violence has occurred devoid of public attention and has not been considered a social problem but rather a private issue. As a result, "the development of appropriate social, legal, and political responses" (p. 148) to intimate partner violence and homicide were hindered. It was not until the late 1970's that gender-based violence was considered a social problem that demanded public attention. Recent efforts surrounding intimate partner violence have shifted the focus away from the private domain and into the public sphere. However, news media still tend to emphasize sensational cases of intimate partner homicide, while misrepresenting or altogether ignoring the everyday plight of victims of domestic violence.

Although there has been increased awareness of intimate partner violence as a serious social issue, news media frames seldom accurately reflect the dynamics of this crime and fail to capture its widespread pervasiveness. As noted, in Canada, intimate partner violence and homicide disproportionately affects women whom are often held responsible in the news media

for their victimization. The news media use prescribed stereotypes to construct a newsworthy story which often inaccurately depicts the nature and circumstances of intimate partner homicide and violence more generally and contains victim-blaming language that further victimizes these women. As Berns (2004) points out, "Even though academic theories have advanced our understanding of domestic violence to include structural and cultural factors, public understanding of domestic violence focuses primarily on the individual or psychological level" (p. 31). Focusing on the individual or psychological factors that may have contributed to the crime effectively ignores the larger social constructs that contribute to intimate partner violence and, as a result, transforms domestic violence into a private issue rather than the product of institutional and societal failure to acknowledge this crime as a public issue and take the steps necessary to protect women in particular, and all members of the public more broadly.

Understanding how non-stranger homicide, particularly intimate partner homicide, is portrayed in the news media is important because it can have a significant impact on how members of the public perceive this crime and the social issues surrounding violence against women. Thus, "portraying intimate partner homicide as part of a larger social problem of violence against women is important because it increases the likelihood that the public (including policy makers) will understand these crimes as typically the final act in a series of violent acts against women, acts that may have been prevented" (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013, pp. 149-150). Unlike stranger homicide, which often occurs during the commission of another crime, intimate partner homicide is frequently the culmination of long-term physical and mental abuse and, thus, is arguably more preventable than other types of homicide. Therefore, it is important for news media to construct intimate partner homicide as a social issue rather than as an individual

problem in order to bring awareness to this crime in an effort to prevent its widespread occurrence.

Since the news media report on homicides and other violent crime on an almost daily basis, newspaper articles are bound to contain their share of biases and subjective opinions. However, there is a significant disconnect between the reality of intimate partner homicide and how victims of domestic homicide "are described, the circumstances of the crime, the information that the journalist chooses to include or omit, how the information is collected, and who is interviewed" (Post, Smith, & Meyer, 2009, p. 60). Journalists use stereotypes and biases rooted in prescribed assumptions surrounding victims of domestic violence that is abstracted from the abusive context and presented as an isolated incident as opposed to a social problem (Post et al., 2009). Furthermore, the public are left to fill in the gaps, draw conclusions, and formulate opinions based only on the information provided in a brief newspaper report. As a result, the representation of intimate partner homicide in this context "perpetuates myths about IPV, blames victims for their own deaths, minimizes or conceals perpetrator responsibility, and conceals the significance of the violence and related forms of coercion and control by isolating incidents from their larger social contexts" (Post et al., 2009, pp. 60-61). In many cases, even when newspaper articles place blame solely on the offender, this journalistic framing tactic is problematic because it ignores the larger societal context in which intimate partner violence is cultivated, such as a patriarchal society that is rooted in the domination and control of women.

Media outlets play a significant role in the social construction of reality. News organizations have the ability to shape public opinion and provide context for important social issues. Therefore, the way news media presents intimate partner homicide can impact the public perceptions and attitudes toward this type of crime. That is, if newspapers frame intimate partner

violence in such a way that blames the victim rather than shows empathy for them, this framing has the potential to impact societal thoughts/feelings toward this issue. In addition, "through the selection by editors and reporters of specific cases deemed 'newsworthy,' the subsequent prioritization of these cases and the selection and organization of such components of news stories as facts, sources, and headlines, journalists can shape the public's view of what IPH is and who is involved" (Post et al., 2009, p. 61). Selective reporting often results in only the most extraordinary and sensationalized incidents, usually involving strangers or an unknown, being reported over a common occurrence, such as intimate partner homicide. Consequently, "this sort of distortion in favour of 'newsworthiness'" (p. 61) downplays the effects of intimate partner homicide and normalizes violence against women. Even worse, framing intimate partner homicide in this way can hold the victim culpable for his or her own death and, in essence, re-victimizes them.

Just as not all homicides are created equal, not all instances of intimate partner homicide are weighted the same in terms of newsworthiness. Demographic and situational variables play a significant role in determining whether a homicide case receives media attention, and to what degree. This prioritization of particular homicide incidents over others misrepresents the reality of intimate partner homicide and helps to sustain a heteronormative patriarchal system that normalizes violence against women. Therefore, as society works towards achieving gender equality in all respects, the news media must change their presentation of intimate partner homicide and violence to express a larger, social issue rather than an individual problem.

Limitations

As in many research projects, there are limitations within the study design that should be highlighted for improvement in the future. Two distinct limitations were identified after conducting the present study, including: the data sample and the source from which the data was collected. These two study shortcomings are briefly explained and discussed below.

Data Sample

The three major newspapers included in the present study's sample were selected for their daily national dissemination and extensive readership base, both numerically and geographically. Rather than capture a broader and more diverse sample, as intended, the news media reports that met the study selection criteria only reported on the most shocking and sensationalized homicide incidents. In fact, out of the 359 articles included in the sample, only 97 unique homicide cases were reported. Lesser known and less newsworthy cases went unreported in these major news media outlets, resulting in a sample replete with repeat stories and fewer distinct homicide incidents to analyze. Future sample parameters should be broadened to include smaller and local news media sources, which may be able to provide a more nuanced look at news media framings of both high- and low-profile stranger and non-stranger homicide incidents in Canada.

Sample Source

In the present study, sample data was collected using the Factiva search engine, which produced articles from each newspaper within the given time frame (2009-2013). Although Factiva proved to be a robust and easy-to-use to source of data, the format in which news articles were generated – a single text file – ultimately detracted from the sample in the sense that certain

visual aspects of the data in its original form (i.e. print media) were lost in this translation of the article. For instance, Powell, Boomgaarden, Swert, and de Vreese (2015) conducted a study on the framing effects of visuals and texts, which found that news media reports that included both text and images were stronger predictors of emotional responses – such as sympathy, anger, and fear – in readers. Thus, by using Factiva, as opposed to an alternate source that preserved the authentic format of the news article (including any images or other non-textual visual effects), potentially significant data was excluded from analysis. Moving beyond a purely text-based analysis would provide researchers with more holistic view of *all* the elements that contribute to the framing of a given news report.

A Few Last Words

The principle goal of this research has been to explore how the news media in three major Canadian newspapers construct incidents of stranger and non-stranger homicide to help us understand what the news media portray as the root causes of crime. Scholars have consistently identified the factors that make homicide newsworthy. This study takes this concept one step further and uses qualitative content analysis to highlight who and what the media portray as causing crime. Upon reviewing my qualitative analysis of six prominent homicide cases, I have gained a greater understanding of how the media frame homicide incidents to gain readership as opposed to reflecting the broader social problem from which crime emerges. Moreover, through this research, I have been able to highlight and problematize how the media make an effort to deviantize certain individuals and groups in society and ignore some of the more prevalent and widespread social issues in society (e.g., domestic violence, poverty, racism, etc.).

Appendix A: Summary of Homicide Cases

Homicide Case	Brief Summary
The Shafia Family	On June 30, 2009, Zainab, Sahar, and Geeti Shafia, along with Rona Amir Mohammad, were found dead in a car that had plunged into the Rideau Canal in Kingston, Ontario. The sisters' father, mother, and eldest brother were each charged and convicted of four counts each of first-degree murder in the death of their family members in what the media labelled an "honour killing".
Victoria Stafford	On April 8, 2009, 8 year-old Victoria Stafford was abducted while walking home from Oliver Stephens Public School in Woodstock, Ontario. Stafford's badly decomposed remains were found by police three months after she was reported missing under a rock pile in Mount Forest, Ontario. Terri-Lynn McClintic pleaded guilty to first-degree murder on April 30, 2010 and was sentenced to automatic life in prison. Michael Rafferty was also found guilty of first-degree murder and other charges in the abduction, rape and killing of Stafford.
Russell Williams	Russell Williams, commander of CFB Trenton, pleaded guilty and was charged with two counts of first-degree murder, two counts of forcible confinement, two counts of breaking and entering and sexual assault, and 82 charges relating to breaking and entering. Williams was subsequently sentenced to life in prison for the murders of Jessica Lloyd and Cpl. Marie-France Comeau. He was later stripped of his military rank.
Stefanie Rengel	On January 1, 2008, David Bagshaw, under the instruction of Melissa Todorovic, went to the home of 14 year-old Stefanie Rengel and stabbed her six times before leaving her to die in the snow. Bagshaw and Todorovic who were 17 and 15 respectively at the time of the murder, were each convicted in separate trials of first-degree murder and sentenced as adults.
Jeffrey Baldwin	On November 30, 2002, 5 year-old Jeffrey Baldwin died of complications from chronic starvation while in the care of his maternal grandparents. Elva Bottineau and Norman

	Kidman were later convicted of second-degree murder in the young boy's death. It later emerged at the inquest of Baldwin's death that the Catholic Children's Aid Society placed him and his three siblings in the care of their grandparents without checking their own files on Bottineau and Kidman, who both had prior convictions for assault on their own children.
Mark Hutt	On December 6, 2009, Donna Jones was reported dead in a 911 call from Mark Hutt, her husband of two years. Hutt was later convicted of first-degree murder in the death of his wife.

Appendix B: Coding Categories

Bucket Code	Definition
Dehumanizing the Offender	Constructions of the offender(s) that depict him or her as 'monstrous', lacking basic human qualities, and/or frame the homicide as a manifestation of 'evil'.
Medicalizing Deviance	Constructions of the offender(s) that depict him or her as 'sick', 'crazy', or 'unstable' in an effort to frame the offender as biologically flawed or deficient.
Excessive Violence	Dialogue, illustrations, or storyline elements that recount all of the graphic and violent details of the crime. This framing of the homicide dehumanizes the offender. This theme also adds to the sensationalism of the homicide incident and increases newsworthiness.
Medical Health Professionals as Left	Dialogue, illustrations, or storyline elements that construct mental health professionals as idealistic, incompetent, naive, or unable to adequately deal with the mentally ill.
Victim-Blaming	Dialogue, illustrations, or storyline elements that blame – in whole or in part – victims (either primary or secondary) for the crimes that have been committed against them.
'Ideal Victim'	Constructions of the victims that are consistent with Nils Christie's of an "ideal victim" – media frames the victim as a "legitimate victim". This includes references to the victim as being a "good person", "not provoking or deserving of his or her victimization", and/or their traits or behaviours are consistent with traditional normative values.
Female Offenders as Manipulators	Constructions of female offenders as the 'Eve' or 'seductress' in homicide cases. This media frame depicts female offenders as manipulators and the mastermind behind the crime (particularly in male and female perpetrated homicide).
Xenophobia	Dialogue, illustrations, or storyline elements that construct stereotypical narratives of a different culture and promote fear of people from other countries.
Misogynistic Culture	Constructions of non-West cultures as misogynistic and promoting violence against

	women.
Institutional Failure	Constructions of social institutions or enforcement agencies as blameworthy for failing in their duty to protect the public. This media frame responsibilizes third party organizations such as CCAS and police agencies.
Class Relations	Constructions of crime as stemming from lower-class cultures.

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