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A DECADE OF MATERNAL FILICIDE IN CANADIAN NEWS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC
CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Approval of Thesis

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all mothers who have been, or currently are struggling with mental illness. You are not alone.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their support throughout my academic journey. None of it would have been possible without their help and support . . . especially in relation to child care! I would also like to thank my daughter for constantly providing me with a reason to smile, even on the days that the research weighed heavily on my heart.

Secondly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Gina Wong for sticking with me throughout the duration of this research study. Your continued support, guidance, and motivation kept me afloat when I started feeling overwhelmed with the magnitude of the project. Additionally, I will carry your mentorship in improving my writing, critical thinking, and research skills through my future academic endeavours. I am also grateful for Dr. Jeff Vallance, and Dr. Lynn Corcoran, who were willing to be part of my thesis committee and provided excellent feedback to help further improve this manuscript.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the other members of the research team, Amy Corkett and Nancy Shekarak. This project was a massive undertaking and having both of you be a part of this research added invaluable insights and depth to the findings.

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Abstract

No research to date explores how Canadian journalists disseminate information to the public regarding maternal filicide. Using ethnographic content analysis (ECA), our research team analyzed 10 years of newsprint articles from three major Canadian newspapers including: The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, and National Post on the topic of maternal filicide. The aim of this study was to understand what journalists were publishing about maternal filicide which has implications for how the public may form opinions and attitudes about these mothers and this crime. In this thesis, I present findings from our research which highlight that Canadian reporters use neutral, fact-based language in 81% of articles (n=77) and 179 different instances. Two overarching frames of *Criminal Justice* and *Descriptive Narrative* were revealed. Each frame consists of three themes further elucidating the narratives and discourse presented to the Canadian public via news articles. Our research also highlights a lack of contextual reporting on mental health issues related to the perpetuation of maternal filicide.

Keywords: Ethnographic Content Analysis, Maternal Filicide, Media, Journalists, Mental Health

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PROLOGUE

The first question everyone asks when they discover my research topic is, “why did you choose *that?*” To honor the feminist roots that my research is predicated upon, which involves being willing to share pieces of myself, I offer the following response.

How I Came to this Research

Prior to becoming a student in the Athabasca University’s Master of Counselling program, I spent a decade working in federal corrections with the Correctional Service of Canada. During this time, I worked in both male and female institutions with varying security levels from Special Handling Units to minimum security. I was exposed to a variety of individuals from diverse backgrounds who were incarcerated for crimes ranging from petty theft to first-degree murder.

For seven of the ten years I spent working in the field of corrections, I was at the Edmonton Institution for Women as a Social Programs Officer. This position allowed me to develop a unique rapport with the female inmates as I was a shift worker; I interacted with them during the day when management was present, and also in the evening when management was away. The day-time hours were spent facilitating programs to the women focused on establishing personal or emotional boundaries, and how to maintain or regain connections with friends and family members that would provide positive influences in their lives. Furthermore, I was responsible in assisting inmates to bolster their skills for possible entrance into the workforce upon their release. In the evenings, time was spent interacting with the women in a less formal manner: I planned workouts in the gym or offered unstructured leisure activities such as arts and crafts.

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During the evenings the women were more open and willing to share their life stories with me. They lowered their emotional barriers that had been long ago erected as a necessary defense and/or coping mechanism against the inequalities, oppression, and abuse they had endured, often since birth. Over the course of my career in corrections, I worked directly with hundreds of women who spent time among the transient population of the prison. So many of their stories carried significant impact as I found myself comparing my comfortable life experiences to theirs.

I often felt guilty at the privileges I unknowingly obtained throughout my life as a Caucasian, cis-gendered, heterosexual, married woman. That is, I did not have family members forcibly shooting me up with heroin to jumpstart a drug addiction. My father did not sell me, regularly, for a couple of dollars to his friends for their sexual pleasure. My mother never dropped me off on a street corner when I was ten years old, telling me I was on my own. I did not have to live with the trauma of murdering someone in a drug and alcohol induced haze. Although these statements may seem overwrought, they still fail to convey the weight of the shared lived experiences, extraordinary in their marginalization and victimization, that I was exposed to over this time period.

Over time, I recognized commonalities in their stories such as humiliation, trauma, and helplessness prior to, and often even during their involvement in criminal activity. After hearing the life story of a woman, I often reflected that based on the horrendous traumas they had endured coupled with lack of opportunity, that prison was their inevitable future. This reflection was not immediate, it arose after hearing countless heart wrenching stories from a multitude of incarcerated women. Many of them were just thankful to be alive, although that was not universal. Many others wished they were dead.

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A few of the women had taken the life of their children. Initially, my instinctual reaction was harsh condemnation for what seemed an absolute failure on their part to love and protect their children. However, I saw that no one judged them more harshly than themselves. The pain and heartache they experienced was palpable. As I listened to their stories, I heard about horrific childhood abuse, abandonment, alienation from family members, and recognized severe mental illness often left undiagnosed and untreated. Their stories were similar to those of the other women I worked with in the facility which was the underlying commonality of marginalization. As such, my initial reaction to spurn them shifted to compassion after recognizing the rawness of their pain, the history they lived, the depth of their regret, and the contempt they felt toward themselves. It was at about this point in time, I decided I wanted to be able to increase my professional ability to help women suffering from such complex needs and decided to pursue my graduate degree in counselling psychology.

After my emotional shift to compassion and understanding, I encouraged other staff to consider the mitigating factors in their histories, and to connect with the women from a lens of compassion rather than hatred or disgust. I did not realize it at the time, but this compassion became the root of my research interest. This interest grew into a desire to understand perceptions of the general public in relation to women who have committed maternal filicide. As will be described in my thesis, the media promulgates information to the public and understanding the nuances in discourse surrounding maternal filicide became the focal point of the research.

My desire to enact change developed into action under the guidance of Dr. Gina Wong, my thesis supervisor who formed the Athabasca University Research and Advocacy working group for Maternal Mental Health Progress in Canada in January 2018. This group joins

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approximately 15 Masters and PhD students and mental health professionals across Canada who are interested in advancing maternal mental health. The research contained in my thesis was conducted by a team of four individuals who are a part of this group including Dr. Gina Wong as Principal Investigator, Nancy Shekarak, a Master of Clinical Psychology student at York University, Amy Corkett, a Master of Counselling student also from the Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology at Athabasca University, and myself.

Our research will be published in a book with the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that is titled: *Infanticide and Filicide: Foundations in Maternal Mental Health Forensics*. Amy Corkett assisted in conducting the research and was integral in the conceptual development of the findings our research. As such, she has been accorded second authorship. Nancy Shekarak who also helped with conceptual design and all stages of the research as well as provided essential feedback on the clarity of our findings is recognized as third author. Lastly, Dr. Gina Wong as Principal Investigator, who guided our team in the research process, and contributed immensely with her expertise in maternal mental health, is acknowledged as our final author as is customary in social sciences.

This thesis has been written to support the publication of our APA chapter as referenced above. The chapter highlights the two overarching frames, *Criminal Justice* and *Descriptive Narrative*, that were identified in the analysis of the newsprint articles. Each frame was further elucidated by three themes that emerged from the data. Rather than place figures at the end of the thesis manuscript, they will be left within the body of Chapter 2, the APA chapter, to provide reference and context to better understand the information as it is presented. Chapter 2 also includes a didactic section after the conclusion with key terms on page 55 and key clinical/legal and cultural points arising from our research are highlighted on page 56. Key terms have been

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bolded throughout Chapter 2 as was required by APA. Our findings have been presented at different phases of the research to the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association/International Association for Counselling conference in Moncton, Canada (May, 2019), as well as the 4th annual Addressing Filicide Conference in Melbourne, Australia (November, 2019).

Defining Terms

Various definitions of *filicide* are found in the scholarly literature. The three most common terms used: *filicide*, *infanticide*, and *neonaticide* are often used interchangeably in both academic and non-academic circles and has the effect of stymying comparative data in this area (Bourget, Grace, & Whitehurst, 2007; Dixon, Krienert, & Walsh, 2014). Unless otherwise stated, within this thesis document, *filicide* has been defined as a child's life being taken by a biological parent or stepparent (Bourget et al., 2007; Sideobotham & Retzer, 2018) and is often used as an overarching term that includes infanticide and neonaticide. *Neonaticide* refers to a parent (almost always the mother) taking the life of an infant after birth, but prior to 24 hours; and *infanticide* refers to taking the life of an infant by a parent when the offspring is between 24 hours and 1 year old (Spinelli, 2001).

Our research study has been rooted in a feminist constructivist framework. From a feminist lens, we have chosen to use language that is in keeping with positioning the mothers in a respectful fashion. The history of marginalization of mothers who commit filicide has been a barrier to timely and effective treatment. Given this, we are mindful of not perpetuating the harmful narratives that have contributed to this problem. Instead of using words such as “murderer,” or “killer,” we instead use terms such as “taking the life,” or “perpetuation” as much as we can. When they are not used, we are citing others and/or may be showcasing how

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destructive such language can be. Terms such as this help to avoid the continuation of sensationalism that identified in the language of news articles. In Chapter 1 of my thesis, I share an excerpt from a news article written about a mother who committed maternal filicide that showcases the need for this study and conveys the rationale.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter 1 of this manuscript-based thesis provides the underpinning for our research. I explain how and why we chose our conceptual framework and methodology. Chapter 2 contains our manuscript that will be peer-reviewed by the American Psychiatric Association publishers for inclusion in a forthcoming book *Maternal Infanticide and Filicide: Foundations in Maternal Mental Health Forensics* co-edited by Gina Wong and George Parnham. Permission has been granted from the APA to reprint this chapter. This book consists of four foundations including: (1) Understanding Legal Aspects Surrounding Infanticide and Filicide; (2) Understanding the Impact of Perinatal Psychiatric Complications in Infanticide and Filicide; (3) Understanding the Role of the Expert Witness in Maternal Infanticide and Filicide Cases and; (4) Socio-Cultural Considerations and Feminist Approaches to Prevention and Treatment which is where our chapter fits most appropriately. As noted above, our study is predicated from a conceptual framework that incorporates consideration of various cultural contexts and has implications in relation to the formation of public opinion and bias of mothers who perpetuate filicide.

Other chapter authors are internationally based and include world-renowned professionals such as Diana Barnes, an expert in women's mental and perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, Phillip Resnick, an expert in forensic psychiatry, and Susan Hatters-Friedman who is also an expert in forensic psychiatry. The readership is geared towards lawyers, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, doctors, and other interested professionals or

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lay audiences. Chapter 3 is the conclusion and is a discussion about the limitations of our research as well as future research directions, including future publications. A personal epilogue concludes this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The jury was gone. The judge was gone. And Elaine Campione, convicted murderess, finally showed her true face... But here was the Campione so hideously familiar from the videotaped screed that had been repeatedly viewed by jurors during a seven-week trial: Her fury and her snarl, the lashing out at perceived enemies, the utter self-pity. The mask had slipped off. (DiManno, 2010, p. A2)

This excerpt from the Toronto Star, is an example of information the public read about a mother who took the life of her two young daughters who were three years and 19 months old. Other pertinent information about Elaine Campione, such as her suicide attempts and institutionalizations (three times for psychiatric related illnesses) and that she experienced delusions about her children being abducted and of people trying to kill her, were not so widely publicized. Elaine was going through an acrimonious divorce and alleged her husband abused her and their oldest daughter during their marriage. Rosie DiManno, the journalist who wrote this article briefly touched on these details, however she wrote divisive statements such as: “a skeptic might have sensed that Campione was playing to the jury, window-dressing her plea of mental illness” (p. A2). DiManno’s choice of words vilified Campione thereby making compassion and understanding for Campione more difficult.

Research Purpose

Reporting with flagrant disdain can be found in media reports as our search indicated. We wondered if such reporting was representative of the information reporters were including in their articles, or if this article was an anomaly? To address this question, we conducted a comprehensive media analysis study in relation to maternal filicide to understand what

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information was being presented to the Canadian public about these mothers. While many forms of media exist such as television, radio, or social networking, we focused on news articles, as we were able to perform a rigorous analysis (as will be discussed below) over a ten-year period of time. Examining a form of written media also ensured that all team members were analyzing the same information and we were all equally able to access the data through an online database.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how incidents of maternal filicide were portrayed in Canadian print newspapers within a ten-year span of time. Our research team sought to discover: 1) how mothers who have committed maternal filicide are depicted by journalists in Canadian print newspapers; and 2) how the crime (infanticide/filicide/neonaticide) is described in Canadian newspapers. Thus, our aim was to answer the following question: *What did Canadian journalists publish in newspapers about maternal filicide between January 2008 and August 2018?* To this aim, we utilized the qualitative method known as ethnographic content analysis (ECA) informed by Altheide and Schneider (2013).

Maternal Filicide Background

Taking the life of a child is an act of violence that is abhorred in society, perhaps only surpassed in contempt when that act is committed by the child's mother. Mothers are expected to be the one person who will always love and protect her children from harm. When this archetype is shattered and a mother is responsible for the death of her child, the public often reacts with anger, disgust, and revulsion—the same sort of moral outrage I had initially felt toward the women incarcerated for this crime. Maternal filicide rarely evokes awareness, compassion, and understanding (Cunliffe, 2009; Eastal, Bartels, Nelson, & Holland, 2015; Grant, 2010; Kramar, 2005; Little & Tyson, 2017; Middleweek, 2017). Yet the crime does in fact deserve awareness, compassion, and understanding as many mothers who take the lives of their children are

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struggling with extreme mental health disorders (Brockington, 2017; Friedman, Hrouda, Holden, Noffsinger, & Resnick, 2005). Perceptions of maternal filicide can be multi-varied and for the most part negative because those perceptions come from our own sense of morals (as in my experience), cultural or societal discourse, which is largely promulgated through news media.

Journalists and the messages they convey through media are particularly influential in the creation of narratives within culture and society (Bandes, 2004; Baun, 2009; Little & Tyson; 2017; McCombs, 2014; Rajiva & Khoday, 2014), and in shaping criminal justice policy (Beale, 2006; Little & Tyson, 2017). Based on the understanding that public perception can be shaped and even created through the creation of narrative, it is important to understand as a whole what information journalists are conveying to the public. Our research team examined themes and language used to describe the crime, the mother, and mental illness in the news articles to determine how cases of maternal filicide are portrayed.

Prevalence and Characteristics of Maternal Filicide Worldwide

Ellonen, Kääriäinen, Lehti, and Aaltonen (2015) compiled data on infanticide trends from 28 industrialized countries including Canada, the United States, Australia, Scotland, and Hong Kong among others between 1960-2009. In Canada, the rate of infanticide per 100,000 births between 1960-1969 was 2.87 and this number slightly decreased to 2.29 between 2000-2009 (Ellonen et al., 2015). Ireland had the largest downward trend with the rate of infanticide falling from 2.53 between 1960-1969 to .16 in 2000-2009 whereas Hong Kong had the highest trending increase with rates of infanticide growing from .92 1960-1969 to 4.17 in 2000-2009. Ellonen and colleagues did not offer any hypothesis for the trends but cautioned readers about a limitation to their study regarding the reliability of statistical data in relation to infant deaths. Filicide is a crime perpetually underreported or misreported due to the possibility of the crime

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not reported or discovered; or the cause of death was wrongfully attributed to things such as sudden infant death syndrome (Ellonen et al., 2015; Friedman & Resnick, 2007; Mariano, Chan, & Myers, 2014). As such, the true rate of filicide is likely higher than the numbers reported.

Why Would Mothers Perpetuate Filicide?

Evolutionary theory. Understanding the motivations behind a mother taking the life of her child is difficult. In the animal kingdom, infanticide is observed in several species including squirrels, mice, and chimpanzees (Hrды, 1979). Daly and Wilson (1988) put forth an evolutionary theory proposing that human mothers take the lives of their children for reasons such as congenital defects or disabilities, scarcity of resources including food and social support, and if reproductive potential after the death of the children remains high. However, in situations where resources are scarce due to poverty or famine, cases of infanticide may not be purposeful and should be considered a devastating fact of life (Scrimshaw, 2008). Italian researchers examined 110 cases where mothers had taken the lives of approximately 123 of their children between the years of 1976-2010. They found evidence to support the evolutionary theory that mothers who killed their babies in the first 24 hours of life (neonaticide), were driven to do so to rid themselves of an unwanted child. Furthermore, these women fit a general profile: they were under the age of 25, poor, and attempted to hide the body of the newborn (Ciani & Fontanesi, 2012).

Minocher and Sommer (2016) lend support to an evolutionary perspective. They argued that maternal reproductive success is impacted by a mothers' ability to conceive and carry a pregnancy to term. The amount of energy and care required to care for a human child is significant. In comparison to other mammals such as chimpanzees, human infants and children have a much longer period of dependency on parents (Kaplan, Hill, Lancaster, & Hurtado, 2000)

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resulting in a high need for a strong social support system (Minocher & Sommer, 2016). Mothers who do not develop a strong attachment to their baby, or mothers who believe that reducing the number of children would lead to a higher quality of life for the remaining children, may also make the decision to take the lives of their children (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

Resnick's typologies. Resnick, a renowned United States forensic psychiatrist suggested five typologies to categorize the motives of women and men who had committed filicide based on 131 file reviews from 1751 to 1968 (Resnick, 1970). These included: a) altruistic filicide where the mother takes the life of her child under the belief that she is doing what is best for her child; b) acutely psychotic filicide where the mother is experiencing psychosis and perpetuates filicide during a disturbed state of mind; c) unwanted child filicide where the child was never wanted and is viewed as a burden or impediment to her life; d) accidental filicide where the child unintentionally dies from abuse and; e) spousal revenge filicide where the mother takes the life of the child to 'get back' at her partner (Resnick, 1970).

Conceptual Framework

This research was rooted in a feminist constructivist framework. Such a framework aligned with our worldviews and underscored principles such as the vulnerability that marginalized groups (women who perpetrated filicide) and facilitated examination of news media and their role in potentially disempowering and/or shifting their narratives in the public discourse.

Feminist Principles

Feminist theorists are interested in empowering women and emboldening women to destabilize existing patriarchal power structures, thus encouraging positive changes in their lives (Turner & Maschi, 2015). The oppression, marginalization, and structural inequalities that

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women face must be acknowledged (Campbell & Wasco, 2000) so that women empowering themselves is not seen as the solution to the problem. A feminist framework engenders a focus on power dynamics (Harvey et al., 2016) and structural inequalities that many marginalized individuals are confronted with (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Harvey et al., 2016).

Constructivist Principles

The central ontological tenet of constructivism is relativism (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2015). As this study focused on themes embedded within newsprint media, a constructivist perspective allowed us to consider the larger historical and sociocultural contexts (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Within constructivism, the researcher is fully engaged with their data in an interactive process constantly exercising reflexivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2015). This tenet highlights the construction of meaning from newsprint themes as we were highly involved in data collection and analysis, comparing and interpreting themes as they emerged (Altheide, 1987).

In relation to this proposed study, constructivism through a feminist lens allowed us to examine how the themes and discourses of women convicted of filicide were portrayed in conjunction with the systemic barriers that some women faced. Axiological values within constructivism align well with feminism as they center on the researcher explicitly stating their biases, assumptions, and values in which they position themselves, and the themes within the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016).

Research Method

This section of the thesis is intended to supplement the methodology section which is further explained within Chapter 2, the APA chapter. Our study utilized ethnographic content

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analysis (ECA) informed by Altheide and Schneider (2013) to explore how mothers who commit filicide are described in Canadian print newspapers.

Ethnographic Content Analysis

Ethnography refers to the detailed study of culture and people (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979) and can stem from a postpositivist or constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm depending on the chosen methodology (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005). Researchers utilizing an ethnographic form of research place a heavy focus on participant observation and prolonged engagement within their data in order to understand the themes within social experiences and human behaviors. (Suzuki et al., 2005). Rather than focusing specifically on human interactions, ECA allows for the intersection of social interaction with methods of communication (i.e., newsprint media documents) to be the focal point of qualitative research (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Ethnographic content analysis evolved from qualitative media analysis supporting researchers in more aptly reflecting the underlying meaning and messages that are conveyed through media. As such, ECA has emerged as a form of qualitative data inquiry where the researcher is highly engaged, fully immersed in the data, and is focused on eliciting the meaning within the data (Altheide, 1987; Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Researchers utilizing ECA are primarily focused on analyzing documents and gaining an understanding of the meaning(s) that are conveyed within the documents. Discovering meaning within the content is achieved through ongoing comparison of the articles to discern nuanced patterns and styles that may be present within the articles (Altheide, 1987; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Analysis consists of a “recursive and reflexive movement” between the different stages of data analysis and creation of themes (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 26). Reflexivity is a key component of ECA and researchers are encouraged to maintain an open mind to new

considerations or discernments they may construct through data analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Why Choose ECA?

We chose Altheide and Schneider's (2013) ECA research methodology for two reasons. First, we believed it was necessary to incorporate a high level of reflexivity into this research. Reflexivity is a cornerstone of ECA, and also factors heavily into both feminist and constructivist paradigms. Constantly reflecting on the data we were interpreting, along with thoughts, biases, and emotions as we progressed through our research yielded many in-depth conversations between team members allowing for thorough evaluation of the different meanings conveyed via the articles. Secondly, Altheide and Schneider's version of ECA allows for the development of themes and concepts. For this study, we sought a method that would support a comprehensive analysis of news articles to determine if there were patterns or trends apparent in the discourse surrounding mothers who commit filicide.

Paradigmatic and theoretical assumptions. A paradigm is a way of viewing the world, a set of basic beliefs including ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that direct and categorize research traditions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2015). Ethnographic content analysis is rooted in a symbolic interactionist research paradigm born from sociology (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Glesne, 2016). Symbolic interactionist approaches focus on three basic premises including meaning, socialization, and cultural symbolism (Vejar, 2017). Within the term *symbolic interactionism*, symbolic refers to the concept of the essential linguistic underpinning of human communication. Interaction refers to the ideal that individuals connect and interact with each other (Denzin, 2004).

Symbolic interactionism rests on three core tenets (Vejar, 2017). The first tenet, *meaning*,

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embraces the assumption that people need to construct and assign value to the different social interactions they have (Denzin, 2004; Vejar, 2017). The second tenet, *socialization*, involves the assertion that people evolve to behave dependent upon positive and negative feedback in their daily interactions (Vejar, 2017). The third tenet, *cultural symbolism*, encompasses when people develop accepted cultural norms such as acceptable amount of personal space through their interactions with others (Rothbaum, Morelli, Pott, & Liu-Constant, 2000; Vejar, 2017). These tenets of symbolic interactionism have been incorporated into ECA through the assertion that themes within the media are analogous to social environments that inform individual and societal beliefs, values, and attitudes (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Research Cohesion

Symbolic interactionism has been utilized within the feminist and constructivist theories and methodologies (Denzin, 2004). Core assumptions within a feminist constructivist framework that are congruent with symbolic interactionism include the belief that multiple social realities exist, that cultural values exist and are never wrong but simply unique to each cultural group, that truth and/or knowledge are based on fluid, contextual factors, (Denzin, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2015) and that oppressive and marginalizing forces cannot be ignored (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Altheide and Schneider (2013) noted that the symbolic interactionism paradigm supporting ECA incorporates “a focus on the meaning of activity, the situation in which it emerges, and the importance of interaction for the communication process” (p. 14). The creation of narratives surrounding cases of maternal filicide has concrete consequences for the marginalized women. Understanding the scope and intent of these narratives is required to inform change, impacting both the precursory risk factors as well as potential for treatment, prevention, and possibly policy development. Our team sought to

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understand what information was being published by newspapers in relation to cases of maternal filicide. The assertions that media messages are based on important contextual and process factors intersects with core assumptions associated with feminist constructivism earlier. This ensures that our research methodology and conceptual framework were appropriate to use for this study.

Data Analysis

This portion of the thesis document is intended to supplement the information under the heading, *Our Research*, provided within Chapter 2. Our rationale for determining which newspapers to analyze, time period and search terms applied, as well as an overview of how we selected our final data set of 95 articles is included in that section. For now, a brief review of the 12 steps required to conduct ECA according to Altheide and Schneider (2013), is provided.

Step 1. The first step within our ECA study was to choose a research problem that warranted investigation. Understanding the exact problem guides researchers towards documents they should be focusing upon for their research (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Our research team identified that a gap in literature existed as to what information was published in newsprint media in Canada about mothers who have committed filicide. No systematic investigation had previously explored this content. Therefore, our research question was: *What did Canadian newspapers publish about maternal filicide between January 2008 and August 2018?*

Step 2. Step two involved understanding how the news articles were produced, including how the content that appears is selected (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). We were able to connect with an editor of a major Canadian newspaper. This individual relayed that each newsroom has its own system in place for determining what content is relayed to the public. Considerations involved included societal trends, public interest, legal issues, and journalistic standards.

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Step 3. In the third step of ECA, Altheide and Schneider (2013) recommended reviewing approximately six to ten articles to familiarize oneself with the data and determine exactly what the unit of analysis would be (portion of article, etc.). Upon reviewing some news articles, our research team determined that articles needed to be analyzed in their entirety. This was necessary to gain a complete picture of what journalists were choosing to report upon in relation to maternal filicide. In our initial review, it became apparent that journalists had different writing styles and often chose to include relevant information at any point within the news article thus guiding our decision to fully review the selected articles.

Step 4. The fourth step involved creating a draft protocol sheet, or data collection instrument, with various relevant items listed in order to guide data collection. The chief function of the protocol sheet was to allow researchers to collect information in a format that would allow them to elucidate meanings that emerged from news articles (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). The document sheet, derived first by the principle investigator, was then revised several times by the team in a recursive process of reviewing articles and completing the sheet, revising the protocol to better reflect the findings, and so forth (see Appendix A).

Step 5/Step 6. Altheide and Schneider (2013) recommended completing a test run through of the protocol and then making any necessary revisions. The research team did this by completing a test protocol on the same article independently. After completing the test protocol, we made revisions based on our discussion. Due to the enormity of data, we recognized the need to employ a data management software. NVivo 12 was tested and deemed appropriate to more effectively facilitate the coding our data. This is discussed more in depth in Chapter 2.

Step 7. Step seven required the research team to determine a sampling strategy (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Our data search was delimited to only include biological mothers, children

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whose lives were taken under the age of six, cases where the death was not resultant from ongoing neglect or abuse, and cases that occurred within Canada. This search was also constrained to three newspapers written in English (as that is the primary language of the research team), owned by different parent companies in Canada that had the highest readership according to the Newspapers Canada 2015 Circulation report. Based on this report, the newspapers selected for review were: 1) The Globe and Mail—daily average readership rate, 336,487; 2) Toronto Star— daily average readership rate, 318,763; and 3) National Post—daily average readership rate of 186,108.

Step 8. Altheide and Schneider (2013) recommended stopping data collection partway through the total analysis to ensure the data being generated was useful to answering the research problem. If necessary, make further revisions to the protocol and then complete data collection. Our team determined we did not need to revise our protocol document; however, it was useful to discuss specific cases of maternal filicide and whether to include them in our data set based on delimitations we set. This helped to ensure all researchers were examining the news articles with the same aim and were not needlessly reviewing cases that would be excluded later.

Each of us completed our data search through the Canadian Newsstream database available through the AU library. This database allowed each researcher to only search their assigned newspaper, with a specific date range, and specific word search terms. Search terms used included “child murder by mother,” “neonaticide,” “filicide,” and “infanticide” with a date range of January 1, 2008 to August 1, 2018.

Step 9. Altheide and Schneider (2013) noted data analysis as being the most misunderstood step. They asserted the process of data analysis was where the researcher needed to become deeply engrossed in their protocols to interpret meanings and connect them to

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underlying theories. Researchers should incorporate reflexive thoughts from steps one through eight within their analysis, but at this stage primary attention needed to be given to data collected through the protocols. Altheide and Schneider recommended reviewing the protocols, researcher journals, and any other notes or documentations several times to begin teasing out meaning present within the data. The research team generated preliminary findings which were presented at the AU Graduate Student Conference in October, 2018. Preliminary findings were generated through collaborative insights and suggestions from the team.

Step 10. In this step, researchers sort and categorize the data analysis. Careful notes were made with the researcher adding codes and clearly summarizing the findings from each category (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). In this stage, I developed codes which I was able to formulate into a codebook through NVivo. I then sent this codebook to all members of the research team for discussion and review.

Once our codebook was finalized, I randomly selected 10 articles for the other research team members, Amy and Nancy, to review independently using the codebook. They were encouraged to add as many codes as they deemed necessary to complete the review of their data. Both researchers coded their articles using the existing codes with minor variations. Variations of existing codes are to be expected in ECA as “constant discovery” (Altheide & Schneider, p. 26) is considered part of the research process. These variations included a more nuanced breakdown of our codes (i.e., differentiating between a compassionate or condemning quote in relation to a mother rather than noting a family member provided a quote). Our principle investigator also applied the codes to a random sample of three news articles from each newspaper and codes were further tweaked. This resulted in over 30% of our sample being reviewed by multiple individuals.

Step 11. At this step, comparisons were completed at every level including both within and between categories. Summaries of the data were concise consisting of a roll up of the scope, any extremes, and the researchers' interpretation of meaning. This information was completed by grouping information into different themes and frames (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Our team continued discussion until agreement was reached by all team members of the interpretation of our data.

Step 12. This was the final step of the research process in ECA where the researcher integrated examples from the data to showcase findings. Primary focus in this step was on creating and verifying the different themes that emerged from the analysis and then linking these themes to relevant literature surrounding the research problem (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Rigour of Data Analysis

Four concepts common in qualitative researching including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Mertens 2015) are described below.

Credibility. Within ECA, validity is emphasized over reliability (Altheide, 1987) and in qualitative research, credibility is the parallel to internal validity found in quantitative studies (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Beck, 2009). Credibility is akin to believability and value of the findings (Beck, 2009; Mertens, 2015). An essential consideration in relation to credibility is ensuring there is an adequate scope of data collection to answer the research question fully (Roller, 2019).

In our study, we selected the three newspapers with the highest rates of readership and reviewed a 10-year period of time to ensure we gathered a sufficient number of articles to answer our research question. Additional strategies our team used to demonstrate credibility included prolonged engagement and peer debriefing (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Mertens, 2015). All

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members of the research team spent several months analyzing and interpreting the data via videoconference (on a biweekly basis) and email (continuous involvement). Continued involvement with data is customary in ECA as the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation is circular rather than linear (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) further bolstering our credibility. Through this process, we also engaged in peer debriefing as we sought to understand the themes that were emerging from our data. Reviewing our codes collectively and discussing as a group what themes emerged allowed an organic unfolding of results that organized into two distinct frames and six themes. These frames and themes will be discussed in detail in the APA chapter.

Transferability. This aspect of qualitative research rigour pertains to whether the findings can be utilized in a different situation, whether the reader can relate to the data (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Mertens, 2015). Our team endeavored to provide detailed descriptors through the use of extensive quotes to showcase our findings. Mertens (2015) noted that readers must make the determination of whether or not findings from research can be applied to their unique circumstances.

Dependability and confirmability. These factors are synonymous with reliability and objectivity and can be ascertained through the use of audit trails (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Mertens, 2015). Providing a chain of evidence along with the methods utilized to obtain the data contribute to confirmability (Mertens, 2015). NVivo 12 allowed researchers to maintain audit trails through the use of memos where I was able to record my decision-making processes as well as maintain a reflexive journal. I supplemented this with a hardcopy researcher journal to track meeting dates and when key decisions were made by the team especially in relation to formulating our frames and themes. The other team members, Amy and Nancy, maintained

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individual research journals to track decisions made as they progressed through the research process as well. To demonstrate confirmability of our data, we provided direct quotes from the news articles throughout the discussion of our research findings .

Summary

The team was unable to locate research conducted on how reporters are disseminating information about maternal filicide in Canada until our study was completed. Ethnographic content analysis, rooted in a feminist constructivist framework, was an appropriate qualitative research methodology to analyze the messages that were being delivered to the public from three major Canadian newspapers. As noted in the prologue, Chapter 2 consists of our APA chapter which provides further details of our methodology as well as a discussion of our findings.

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CHAPTER 2

REVIEWING A DECADE OF MATERNAL FILICIDE IN CANADIAN NEWS

On March 15, 2019, a Spanish mother was accused of killing her three-and-a-half-year-old son and five-month-old daughter. Several Spanish articles were published in national and local newspapers in response with varying descriptions of what happened. There were two striking similarities in reporting that was: (1) the slanderous tone of the articles as well as (2) the absence of discussion about maternal mental illness and how it may have played a role in the perpetuation of **maternal filicide**. All media reports in Spain (five in our search), portrayed the mother with crucifying intent. One article, seething with vitriol, was headlined *Deranged Mother Arrested After Killing her Infant Children in Valencia* (“Deranged Mother,” 2019), another *The Parricide of Godella Confessed that [s]he had Killed h[er] Children ‘because they had Lost their Soul’* (“The Parricide,” 2019)¹, and another: *Mother Who Killed her Own Children was Found in A Jar* (“Mother Who,” 2019).

In the opening paragraph of the *Deranged Mother* (2019) news article, reporters detailed the ‘ruined house’ in which the family lived, closely followed by information that social services visited the family only a few days before the event. Statements such as: *the parents lived a ‘hippy-like’ existence and were obsessed with paranormal phenomena and alien abductions*, and that the mother was found *naked and incoherent inside a plastic container* were woven in the article. In *Parricide* (2019), reporters noted the mother’s *creepy* confession in relation to how her *children had lost their soul* and the *macabre crime*, with no mention about the mental health status of the mother. Instances of the mother’s paranoia, nudity, and memory loss were noted. Recognizable to professionals trained in mental health was that descriptions of the mother were consistent with a disturbed state of mind: possibly psychosis. Resnick’s (1969) original typologies of motives behind why mothers perpetrate filicide included acute psychosis.

¹Due to translation of the articles from Spanish to English, errors in pronouns were present in headlines, as well as the use of the term “parricide” (killing of parent or close relative).

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Negative media portrayals of the filicidal mother coupled with cultural and religious beliefs, may reify stigma and falsehoods about **maternal filicide**, and close people down to understanding or to examining the incident further. Without accurate knowledge of facts, nor understanding of psychiatric underpinnings of **maternal filicide**, incensed media reports act as judge and jury, and incite public revulsion against these mothers. Mothers are particularly denigrated in media as viewpoints amass portraying them as failures in upholding the coveted maternal role the public holds dear. In response to the news articles in relation to the Spanish mother, the European Institute of Perinatal Mental Health (2019) published a manifesto decrying sensationalist media reports. Their goal was to reduce the spread of misinformation and vilification of mothers who may be suffering from severe mental illness and perpetrate **filicide**. They underscored the need for balanced and responsible media reporting. An excerpt from the manifesto is as follows:

We, the undersigned, vehemently oppose misrepresentation and sensationalizing of **maternal filicide** in media reports and take this opportunity to invite greater awareness and prevention by working with the Spanish media to restore the human rights of this mother in demonstrating responsible media reporting. The wellbeing and lives of children, families, communities, and our nations will thrive as a result. (European Institute of Perinatal Mental Health, 2019, para. 7)

By June 2019, over 350 mental health professionals and nine mental health entities from across the globe signed the manifesto in support of responsible media reporting of **maternal filicide** in Spain.

Media shapes how the general public as well as potential jurors, lawyers, judges, and those involved in the care of these mothers, understand and perceive the ‘crime’. In turn,

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judicious sentencing and access to timely psychiatric treatment is advanced. Indeed, a powerful source of information for lay audiences is representations of maternal filicide in news media.

This research is the first within a series in which we will investigate media reports of **maternal filicide** in various countries over the next five years. Such research serves to generate comparative data and possibly to compel a global manifesto on responsible media reporting.

In this chapter, we share results of the first analysis of maternal filicide coverage in Canadian news streams over a decade (January 1, 2008 to August 1, 2018) from three prominent Canadian newspapers: Globe and Mail, National Post, and Toronto Star. Ethnographic content analysis (ECA; Altheide & Schneider, 2013) was applied to 95 news articles utilizing NVivo 12 software. This Canadian research team included Dr. Gina Wong, a psychologist, professor, and a perinatal expert witness in Canada; Kim Rock, a Master of Counselling student at Athabasca University; Amy Corkett, a graduate of the Master of Counselling at Athabasca University; and Nancy Shekarak, a Master of Arts student in Clinical Psychology at York University in Toronto.

Maternal Filicide Background

In 2015, Dawson published the most comprehensive facts about the prevalence of maternal filicide in Canada. Between the years 1961-2011, data from Statistics Canada annual Homicide Survey which had been collected yearly from police departments across Canada, revealed that 693 women were accused of filicide in the 50 year time span. This included 136 first degree murder charges, 265 second degree murder charges, 51 manslaughter charges, and 83 infanticide charges. The remaining 158 cases were cleared either by suicide (136 women) or other reasons (22 mothers) such as mental illness or police discretion. Dawson estimated these numbers to be higher given underreporting of filicide crimes. Since Dawson's article, no

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comprehensive data on maternal filicide in Canada has been published, leaving a near decade of missing data.

General characteristics of those who commit **maternal filicide** have been elucidated in studies. Mothers who perpetrate filicide were more likely to be under the age of 30 (Kauppi et al., 2010; Mariano et al., 2014; McKee & Egan, 2013; Sidebotham & Retzer, 2018); to have suffered from mental health disorders (Flynn et al., 2013; Gowda et al., 2018; Kauppi et al., 2010; McKee & Egan, 2013; Sidebotham & Retzer, 2018); and lacked social support systems (Gowda et al., 2018; Kauppi et al., 2010; McKee & Egan, 2013). Additional factors identified included: marital/intimate partner discord (Gowda et al., 2018; McKee & Egan, 2013), high levels of stress (Kauppi et al., 2010), and domestic violence (Sidebotham & Retzer 2018). Several theories have been proposed to substantiate why mothers kill their young (Ciani & Fontanesi, 2012; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Minocher & Sommer, 2016), and classification systems for mothers who commit **filicide** have been proposed (Friedman & Resnick, 2007; West, 2007).

Maternal Filicide in the Media

However, an understanding of public perceptions of **maternal filicide** is less explored. Little and Tyson (2017) researched how parents who commit **filicide** are portrayed in the Australian media. They advanced that media promulgated mothers' and fathers' failure to uphold commonly accepted parental roles that are ubiquitous in our culture. Women who have killed are disadvantaged in the media as they face unrelenting stereotyping for two reasons: 1) for becoming a criminal; and 2) violating the accepted gender role of passive femininity (Collins, 2016; Whiteley, 2012). When women kill or are otherwise violent, it destroys the widely held fixed beliefs that women are gentle, nurturing individuals incapable of dominance and aggression (Whiteley, 2012).

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Such negativity toward women is magnified in media when a mother is accused of taking the life of her child as reverberations from American media tend to be strong, far reaching, and long lasting (Easteal et al., 2015). Behavior viewed as opposite to gentle and nurturing was exemplified in the press through unflattering pictures, descriptive language of the mothers, and critical narratives. Psychosocial, cultural, and mental health factors were often glossed over in news reports. Further, Easteal and associates asserted that media is stunting the public's ability to understand underlying motivations behind filicide, as well as possibly reducing prevention efforts by reporting on mothers in this manner.

From an international perspective, Cavaglione (2008) examined 19 articles about six high profile cases of maternal filicide in Israel between 1992 and 2001. Within Israeli culture, a dominant assumption is that a mother who kills her child "must be insane" (Cavaglione, 2008, p. 272). Cavaglione found reporters biased their representation of the Israeli mothers based on their marital status, socioeconomic position, and ethnicity. For instance, poor, young, uneducated and otherwise marginalized mothers were more likely to be labelled with negative characteristics than more affluent mothers. Mothers who were married and perpetrated filicide were treated with more compassion in that reporters more likely inferred mental illness as the underlying culprit. Cavaglione also revealed that the ethnic background of the mother impacted how reporters portrayed them. For instance, Arab immigrant mothers were described with negative attributes. Lastly, reporters humanized the mother if she articulated any remorse or regret related to the filicide (Cavaglione, 2008). Data regarding media reports of **maternal filicide** in Israel underscored the value in such investigations. A dearth of research regarding Canadian reporters' portrayal of mothers who commit **filicide** substantiated our research.

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News media in Canada. Reporters have an ethical responsibility to accurately represent and objectively convey news that is free of sensationalism (Crawford, 2008). They play a pivotal role in shaping both positive and negative perceptions (Baun, 2009), forming values and attitudes that sway public opinion (Baun, 2009; McCombs, 2014; Rajiva & Khoday, 2014; Zollmann 2019), and creating discourses within the socio-cultural landscape (Bandes, 2004; Baun, 2009; Little & Tyson; 2017; McCombs, 2014; Rajiva & Khoday, 2014). Media has been used to demonize groups or individuals through actions such as name-calling and sensationalizing atrocities without a balanced focus on possible mitigating factors (Zollmann, 2019) as was noted in the case of the Spanish mother described earlier.

When examining impact of media, Statistics Canada indicated 60% of Canadians followed the daily news in 2013 (Statistics Canada, 2016) and 80% in 2015, followed digital or print newspaper on a weekly basis (Vividata, 2015). We forecasted increased percentages with the explosion of social media platforms and other electronic news outlets in recent years. News media, most certainly, is a primary source of information for many Canadians and has influence in shaping criminal justice policy (Beale, 2006).

Studies have affirmed that trial by media (Chagnon & Chesney-Lind, 2015; Greer & McLaughlin, 2011; Middleweek, 2017) exists whereby sensationalistic reporting practices unduly bias the public against the accused. Rajiva and Khoday (2014) argued that media is an integral piece of the framework in the “governing and disciplining of populations in advanced liberal democracies” (p. 179). In this vein, researching media portrayals is integral to understanding narratives that abound. For instance, local and national press flagrantly (and inaccurately) portrayed Andrea Yates, the Texan mother who drowned her five children in 2001 as a “traitor” (p. 15), a woman who not only betrayed her family role(s), but also her female

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gender (Barnett, 2005). The second narrative was “the quest” (p. 19), which was the drive to hold her accountable and sentenced to the fullest extent of the law.

The Yates’ case exemplified how mothers are admonished and rebuked in the media, and how mental health can be used against them. Singh (2017) discussed “tropes” (p. 515) such as the failure to uphold the beloved mother archetype, despite the fact that mothers were victims of domestic violence. Similarly, Easteal and colleagues (2015) suggested that media reporters constructed a “flawed mother narrative” to denounce **maternal filicide** (p. 34). They portrayed the mothers as being “mad, bad, and sad” (p. 39) and framed the mothers as deviant. Additionally, they indicated that news media reporters intentionally excluded relevant facts that could provide compassionate insight into the crime and the mother.

Freedom of the press. Freedom of the press is ingrained in the Canadian Constitution. However, freedom of the press does not permit every act of **maternal filicide** into media clutches. Publication bans are ordered in certain cases (Crawford, 2008). Judges may order a publication ban to maintain privacy of the accused, uphold the right to a fair trial, and/or alleviate fears of witnesses required to testify (Government of Canada, 2015). More specifically, under section 672.5(6) of the Criminal Code (1985), a publication ban may be issued if it is “in the best interests of the accused and not contrary to the public issue” (p. 811). Furthermore, under section 486.5(1), a judge can order a publication ban to protect the identity of the victim or witness of a crime (Criminal Code, 1985). These conditions can be met in cases of **maternal filicide** as mothers’ privacy rights are important to uphold and there can be surviving children whose identities need protection. As such, many cases of maternal filicide are not exposed to the media. Nevertheless, an examination of maternal **filicide** in Canadian media is vital given that cultural understanding and representations are impactful.

Infanticide in the Canadian Criminal Code

The British Infanticide Act of 1922 reduced the punishment for mothers who took the lives of their mother, which was death by hanging (Friedman, Cavney, & Resnick, 2012). The Infanticide Act (discussed in-depth in Chapter 4), was amended in 1938, and served as a model for which Canada and many other Commonwealth countries translated to their law (Friedman & Resnick, 2007). Currently, 50 countries in the world possess some extent of the infanticide provisions within their respective criminal codes including Austria, Israel, New Zealand, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland and Canada (Malmquist, 2013).

Our Research

We reviewed the Canadian Newsstream database for articles between January 2008 and August 2018 from three major newspapers with the greatest readership according to the Newspapers Canada 2015 Circulation report. They included: 1) Globe and Mail, with a daily average readership rate of 336,487; 2) Toronto Star, with a daily average readership rate of 318,763; and 3) National Post, with a daily average readership rate of 186,108. The Canadian Newsstream database was used to search articles given its accessibility to full-text versions. Researchers were able to set detailed search parameters to include a specific date range and precise word search terms.

Initial search terms applied were “**neonaticide**,” “**filicide**,” and “**infanticide**” and yielded 336 articles. However, the search terms did not capture our target subject of mothers who kill their children. The search was expanded to include “child murder by mother” which yielded an additional 3747 articles. Overall, our initial data set included 4,083 articles. Given the focus on cases of **maternal filicide** and the need to further sort the data, we narrowed the search to include only cases involving biological mothers, children whose lives were taken under the age

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of six, cases where the death was not resultant from ongoing neglect or abuse, and cases that occurred in Canada. This yielded a total of 95 articles for detailed review (see Table 1 for a summary).

Newspaper	Articles
National Post	37
Toronto Star	32
The Globe and Mail	26
Total	95

Table 1. Breakdown of analyzed articles according to newspaper

Analysis and Interpretations

Altheide and Schneider's (2013) methodology of **ethnographic content analysis (ECA)** involves systematic analysis of documents focused on the "process, meanings, and emphases reflected in the content" (p. 2). Discovering meaning in content is achieved through ongoing comparison of the news articles to discern nuanced patterns and styles (Altheide, 1987; Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

We analyzed the data set utilizing NVivo 12, a qualitative research software, to facilitate coding of data into nodes, which were then refined into **frames** and **themes**. According to Altheide and Schneider (2013) *frames* have a broad focus on the 'how' and 'why' an issue is presented, while *themes* are ideas continually presented within the body of work. Coding occurred between and within articles which meant that a single article could yield numerous frames and themes. Altheide (1987) noted that information could be coded "conceptually" (p. 69) meaning the same sentence could be coded in different ways allowing for both overarching categorical data and as well as specific thematic data.

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Through this process Criminal Justice and Descriptive Narrative were identified as two dominant frames. Three themes were elucidated within each frame identifying narratives and discourses presented to the Canadian public via the news articles. The Criminal Justice frame involved themes of (1) *Criminal Proceedings*, (2) *Infanticide Law*, and (2) *Mental Health Considerations*. The **Descriptive Narrative** frame encompassed themes which involved: (1) *Details of Filicide Incident*, (2) *Details of The Accused Mother*, and (3) *Details of Mental Illness*. These findings are presented below.

Criminal Justice Frame. It was clear that news reporters focused on law enforcement and the **maternal filicide** case as it proceeded through the court system. Segments of news articles reflecting this frame focused on cases in relation to criminal prosecution and factors relevant to the court case as put forth by defense and prosecution such as the **Infanticide Law (Canada)** and mental health. Reporters commonly quoted judges, recounted submissions to the court, and provided in-depth coverage of the debate surrounding Canada's **Infanticide Law** (see Figure 1).

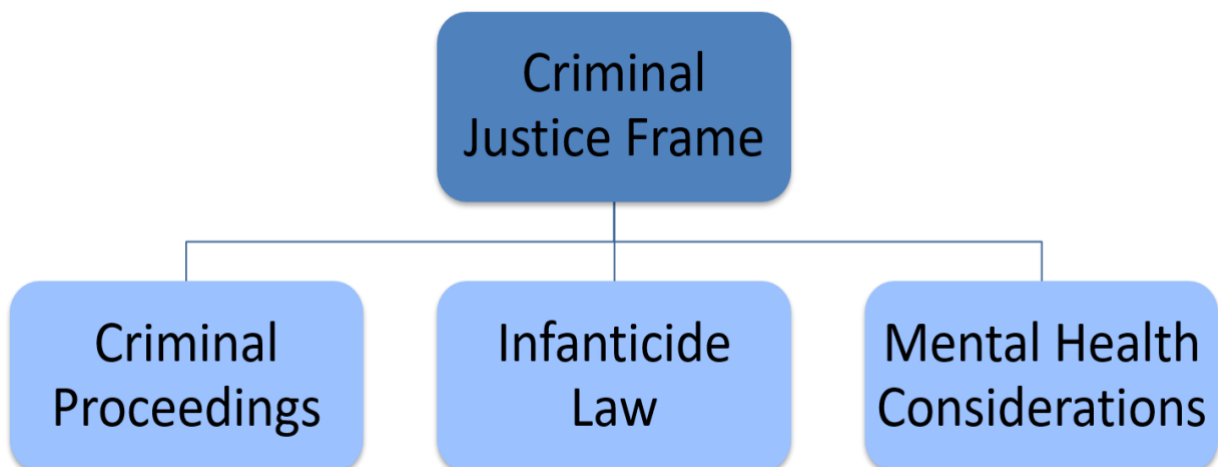


Figure 1. Themes within Criminal Justice Frame

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Criminal proceedings theme. This theme within the Criminal Justice frame reflected statements made by judges, as well as comments about various court rulings such as verdicts, sentencing decisions or conditions imposed, and proceedings of the active trial. With regards to criminal proceedings, 94% (n=89) of articles were identified that included 331 segments referring to various criminal proceedings. Within the 89 articles, 32 articles included 75 direct quotes stated by judges. These quotes were most often in relation to conditions imposed on the mother such as being detained, attending counselling, or no-contact orders. A legal condition levied to monitor and/or inhibit future reproduction was apparent in seven articles, as well as an edict to limit sexual activity in one instance. For example, in a news article written by Fraser (2010) and published in the National Post shared how a judge declared a mother who committed filicide could not have sexual intercourse until the court removed the condition. In fact, four mothers had conditions placed on their sexual activity and reproductive rights.

In addition to judges' statements and rulings, news coverage often followed the proceedings of the active court trial. Attention to prosecution and defense lawyer court submissions were prevalent within 44% (n=42) of Canadian news articles reviewed. There were 75 instances where reporters closely followed submissions to the court during trials and reported much detail about lawyers' arguments. The defense position involved generally positive and compassionate attitudes as evidenced in this excerpt published in the Globe and Mail,

[I]n his closing statement Friday, defence lawyer Richard Fowler urged the jury to convict his client, 28-year-old Sarah Leung, of infanticide rather than of two charges of second-degree murder. (Burgmann, 2014, p. S4)

Conversely, the prosecution's position involved mostly negative or condemning attitudes:

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At a trial that began in Wetaskiwin Court of Queen's Bench on Monday, Crown prosecutor Gordon Hatch said there is no question that Ms. McConnell killed her children. The only questions, Mr. Hatch said, are why, and whether she had the intent required to be convicted of murder in her sons' deaths. (Pruden, 2012b, p. A7)

Submissions to the court also encompassed victim impact statements. Victim impact statements were noted in 4% (n=4) of the articles for a total of eight mentions. Two of the references noted were in relation to a judge allowing individuals to present victim impact statements in court, while six instances included direct quotes from victim impact statements. The poignancy of victim impact statements was highly emotional. For example, a father conveyed the following about the loss of his son:

What God allows this evil to be perpetrated on our children?. . . Which God heard his silent cry for help while this monstrosity was set on him and didn't allow him to be saved? What God allows such an angel to be surrounded by so much hate and evil until it suffocates him? It breaks my heart to know that after four months of being denied access to my son by his mother, it was at a funeral home that I gave him his last hug. (Williams as cited in Mitchell, 2011, p. GT.1)

Victim impact statements are an integral part of the Canadian criminal justice system, though they can also serve to promote condemning biases against mothers. This is not to say that every victim impact statement recorded is reproachful of the mother; however, our search yielded no victim impact statements describing the mother compassionately nor through the lens of mental illness.

Infanticide law theme. The **Infanticide Law** in the Criminal Code is a source of contention in Canada in the criminal justice system. A significant number of articles, 23% (n=22)

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had 63 sections that discussed and/or debated whether the **Infanticide Law** was relevant in the Criminal Code as our social norms have shifted since its inception in 1948. Canadian newspaper reporters predominantly discussed three high-profile cases in Canada over the last decade. These cases were:

1. In 2011, the Ontario Court of Appeal challenged the interpretation of the infanticide law in the Canadian Criminal Code in relation to a mother known as L.B. She had been initially charged with two counts of first-degree murder and was subsequently convicted of two counts of infanticide for smothering her two children; one in 1998 and another in 2002. The decision rendered continued to support the application of an infanticide conviction when a charge of murder is laid.
2. In 2011, the Alberta Court of Appeal overturned a murder conviction (replacing it with a charge of **infanticide**) for Katrina Effert who strangled her newborn son shortly after his birth.
3. In 2016, the Alberta Crown appealed a conviction of **infanticide** in favor of a second-degree murder charge. The Supreme Court of Canada dismissed the appeal by a 7-0 margin. The mother, Meredith Borowiec, had been charged with **infanticide** in 2013 after she confessed to putting her two newborn babies in a dumpster after her third newborn was found alive by the father.

Further, other mothers captured in the 22 articles in relation to the **Infanticide Law** debate included four mothers: one mother from Ontario, another known as L.G., and Jennifer Sinn and Elaine Campione. Three additional news articles discussed the **Infanticide Law** in general and how it factored into the Criminal Code.

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In 2011 the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the necessity and use for the infanticide law in the Criminal Code as was intended by Parliament when it was enacted. The arguments for or against the **Infanticide Law** were staunchly rooted in the culpability and criminal intent of the mothers. Prosecuting lawyers framed the arguments against the **Infanticide Law** as an unacceptable and obsolete defense against a higher-level charge of murder. Brean (2016), a reporter for the National Post wrote that the Alberta government claimed that the **Infanticide Law** was “vague, outdated and rife with problems” (p. A3). In contrast, the defense argued in favor of the **Infanticide Law** providing the rationale that a mother can be in a disturbed state of mind given the complex myriad of social, economic, biological, and psychological stressors in early motherhood. Legal counsel representing Meredith Borowiec argued that the biological imperatives influencing a woman’s state of mind after childbirth have not changed. Thus, the law did not require modernization. Our media analysis shows that the **Infanticide Law** debate was an important theme in Canadian newspapers during our period of review, and provided insight that mothers who commit **infanticide** may be viewed in the Canadian court system with compassion.

Mental health considerations theme. The Criminal Justice frame included mental health concerns as referenced by both crown and defense during trials, however for opposing reasons. Thirteen percent (n=12) of articles had 16 segments that discussed mental health from a condemning stance, asserting mental illness as either irrelevant to the crime or an excuse to avoid culpability. Conversely, 12% (n=11) of articles captured 14 instances where a mental illness was provided as a reasonable rationale underlying **maternal filicide**. Condemning and supportive arguments diverged regarding how much, if at all, mental health was attributable to the crime.

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For instance, the Globe and Mail ran an article about L.B. where prosecuting lawyer, Jennifer Woollcoombe stated the following about mental health as a mitigating factor:

... it is a mockery of a child's death for his or her killer to be spared a life sentence for murder. She argued that an out-and-out psychopath could murder her infant and get off with a relative slap on the wrist simply by exaggerating her "baby blues." (Makin, 2010, p. A7)

Alternatively, the National Post published an article "Saving women and children from postpartum psychosis" written by Hajara Kutty (2010), a Postpartum Support International coordinator in Toronto, Canada. Kutty wrote from a compassionate lens focused on the realities of postpartum psychosis, including the possibility of filicidal behaviour:

A smaller percentage of women who give birth, 1 in 500, can expect to suffer from postpartum psychosis, a serious illness considered a life-threatening medical emergency. Afflicted women with this condition fall prey to delusions, hallucinations and severe paranoia, all of which cause these mothers to lose touch with reality. Women afflicted with this illness function in a reality of their own, which bears no relation to their ordinary personalities. This is why women who have committed infanticide in the postpartum period typically have no prior run-ins with the law, and why they are frequently supported in the aftermath by spouses and family who depict them as the epitome of gentleness. (Kutty, 2010, p. A16)

This news article was among very few that published factual information about postpartum mental illness and psychosis. Of those few, this article was the most educative and descriptive. More frequently, articles referenced mental illness as something the mother suffered from, with no other information provided. For example, *Peng suffered depression after her*

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daughter's birth and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2002. The defence is considering an appeal (Powell, 2008, p. A12).

Descriptive Narrative Frame. This frame encompassed news articles, or sections in articles, that offered narrative details about the incident, mother, or mental illness. These accounts were typically described via quotes from individuals such as law enforcement officials or family and friends of the mothers shortly after the incident occurred. Descriptive narratives were also pervasive in news articles with reporters sharing detailed information in relation to an active trial. Mental illness was referenced as a diagnosis the mother had been labelled with, or as a rationale for previous suicide attempts. Three key themes of descriptive narrative were noted in these articles: (1) details of **filicide** incident, (2) details of accused mother, and (3) details of mental illness (see Figure 2).

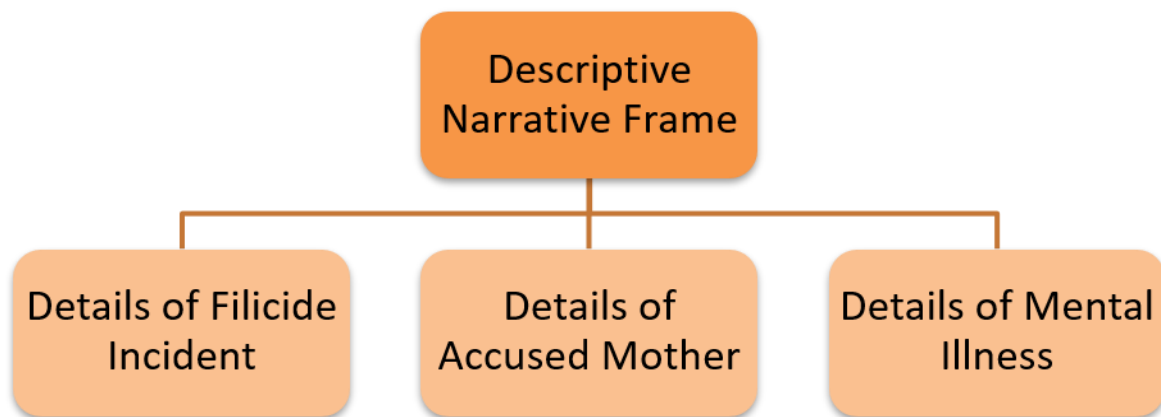


Figure 2. Themes within Descriptive Narrative frame

Details of filicide incident theme. Reporters often included descriptive narrative that captured the *what* and *how* the filicide incident transpired, which was presented in 95% (n=90) of our articles and 459 instances. Overwhelmingly, Canadian reporters relayed information in a neutral tone, conveying facts objectively within 81% of articles (n=77) and 179 instances.

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Unbiased reporting was frequently noted when the incident had just occurred, and police were providing the public factual information through a press release. For example, the following excerpt was written the day after Nadine Bernard was charged with first-degree murder after the death of her infant son:

Peel Regional Police were called at about 8 a. m. to the Mississauga Executive Centre's underground lot, about a block from the Square One shopping mall in the city's core.

They discovered the infant's body with his mother, Ms. Bernard, nearby. (McDonald & Jowett, 2009, p. A14)

Canadian reporters also wrote about **maternal filicide** in a fact-based manner when providing specific court details to the reader. For example, *Court was told that the two met in high school in their native China where Peng trained to be a civil engineer. When Peng moved to Canada, Scarlett remained with her grandmother before coming to Canada* (Powell, 2008, p. A12).

Conversely, there was 13% (n=12) of articles where provocative language was used in 32 different occasions to describe the filicide event. Examples included: *providing baby killers with an easy out* (Makin, 2010, p. A7), *she killed them, held their heads under water until those beautiful little girls were dead* (DiManno, 2010a, p. A2), or the National Post headline, *killer mom wants more children after prison* (Rook, 2008, p. A8). Such descriptions were intended to incite judgement, negative emotion, and/or anger. Also noted was a journalistic technique of providing visual or auditory details to depict a macabre crime which served to sensationalize the **filicide** event. For instance, featured in the Toronto Star on September 29, 2010, Rosie DiManno wrote how the accused mother presented her deceased daughters after drowning them in the bathtub:

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Tinker Bell pyjamas for 19-month-old Sophia, a pretty violet nightgown for 3-year-old Serena - and arrange the girls in a poignant tableau on her own big bed, dry and comb their silky hair, adorn them with necklaces of gold, force their cold fingers together in a sibling clasp, assemble separate piles of clothing and toys for their burial, even place a fan nearby to dispel the odour of decomposition. (DiManno, 2010b, p. A2)

Or this short excerpt from the National Post detailing how Allyson McConnell's husband found their two boys drowned in the bathtub by his wife, *he was the one who dropped to his knees and pulled his 'cold and stiff' children from the bathtub after breaking through the locked bathroom door* (Pruden, 2012b, p. A3). The inclusion of such evocative details (childhood innocence and sweetness amid evil) casts mothers as demons which contributes to negative bias.

Details of the accused mother theme. Articles in which journalists included descriptions of the accused mother's behaviour or appearance comprised this theme. Reporters remarked on how the accused mother appeared in court, or reported on her behaviour leading up to the filicide event, or in the aftermath of the event. For example, *Now 35, Ms. Campione, slender and pale, is a wraith in the prisoner's box, frequently pulling tissues from a box and weeping* (Blatchford, 2010, p. A8). Most articles in the data set focused solely on the details of the accused mother in the context of the filicide event. However, six reporters relayed comparison to other mothers who had perpetrated filicide:

Ms. Yates was originally convicted of capital murder and sentenced to life in prison, but a jury overturned the verdict on appeal in 2006, ruling she was not guilty by reason of insanity. In 2008, an Ontario Superior Court jury found Xuan Linda Peng guilty of second-degree murder for drowning her four-year-old daughter Scarlett in the bathtub of her

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family's Toronto home four years earlier. She had originally been charged with first-degree murder. (Kenyon & Lodge, 2010, p. A6)

More prominent in this theme were description from family and friends, and contextual information about the accused mother's life challenges. The frequency with which family and friends portrayed the mother with a positive or compassionate lens or a negative or condemning lens was about the same. That is, 16 articles published 26 compassionate phrases while 17 articles published 24 negative phrases. An article from the Globe and Mail published a compassionate quote from a neighbor of accused mother Nadine Bernard: *She was an amazing mother, I'm in shock. They're a part of a close-knit neighbourhood. This is inconceivable* (Alphonso, 2009, p. A15). Conversely, the Globe and Mail published a condemning outburst made in court by the father of one of L.B.'s deceased children: *The father of the seven-week-old stared coldly at the accused before he read a victim impact statement. After the woman was sentenced, he cried out: "You'll always be a baby killer. Baby killer!"* (Oliveira, 2008, p. A7).

Lastly, reporters relayed information to the Canadian public about life challenges the mothers faced. Specific occurrences were noted in 25% (n=24) of articles with 31 different instances. Quotes included Sarah Leung being *raised by an abusive and controlling father* (Burgmann, 2014, p. S4), Allyson McConnell being *sexually abused by her father and first attempting suicide as a teenager while pregnant with her father's baby* (Pruden, 2012a, p. A7), or details about Sivananthi Elango including, *a sad childhood in Sri Lanka, where she was sickly and lived in poverty, before [moving] to Canada at age 14. As an adult, she felt ugly, clumsy and stupid, . . . telling psychiatrists she tried to kill herself earlier* (Edwards, 2008, p. A7). No descriptions of mothers by reporters were found to admonish the mother due to her past history.

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Our analysis indicated several Canadian journalists showcased the hardships mothers endured in their lives which humanized them to the public.

Details of mental illness theme. The **Descriptive Narrative** frame involved discussion of mental illness in relation mothers and filicide. Specific maternal mental illnesses were referenced in these articles and included: postpartum depression and generalized depression; postpartum psychosis; and baby blues. Additional mental illness coverage included bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Multiple articles referenced more than one mental illness, however the most frequently discussed was postpartum depression and generalized depression in 37% (n=35) of the articles. Of the 35 articles, 57 instances were found that noted postpartum depression and generalized depression. Canadian reporters predominantly wrote about mental illness without offering contextual or educational information to the public. For example, one quote from the Globe and Mail discussed Allyson McConnell's mental health: *Ms. McConnell, who is originally from Australia, drowned the boys in the family home in Millet, Alta. just south of Edmonton, two years ago when she was severely depressed, suicidal and possibly affected by alcohol and prescription drugs* (Purdy, 2012, p. A10). This statement lacked further description of mental illness' potential role in filicide. Overall, 72 statements within 39 articles written in a ten-year period spoke to mental illness in relation to **filicide** within the above parameters.

Overall, **maternal filicide** in Canadian news articles in the last decade was discussed in a neutral and fact-based manner. Reporters generally relayed information about the mothers and the **filicide** event in a non-biased fashion allowing members of the public to reach their own conclusions in relation to moral blame and culpability. However, two specific reporters, Christie Blatchford who wrote for the Globe and Mail, and Rosie DiManno who wrote for the Toronto

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Star, were outliers. That is, Blatchford and DiManno wrote nine articles altogether that attacked Elaine Campione, an Ontario mother who drowned her two young daughters in the family bathtub in 2006. Other articles by these reporters as well as others were found to represent balanced perspectives. In Ms. Campione's trial, two forensic psychiatrists agreed that she suffered from borderline personality disorder, depression, psychosis, and paranoia. However, one believed these mental disturbances had no bearing on her ability to know right from wrong, while the other report stated she was in a delusional state. Spousal revenge was the alleged motive.

Furthermore, The National Post also covered the Elaine Campione case, but with much less emotionally charged language, although not devoid of sensationalism. Perhaps the shocking facts overshadowed peoples' ability for compassion. These included Ms. Campione's recording of vengeful statements to her estranged husband following the drownings. The defense presented evidence for **Not Criminally Responsible (NCR)**; however, the jury found her guilty of two counts of first-degree murder. Campione currently remains in federal prison (as of October 2019).

A deficit noted in relation to Canadian reporting on **maternal filicide** was the minimal contextual information presented about maternal mental health issues. Mental illness was referenced only in relation to what lawyers raised in their arguments or occasionally if mental health experts were called to testify. Given the significant role mental illness can play in maternal filicide, it is essential to provide education and awareness to the public whenever possible.

Barnett (2005) highlighted the importance of challenging and advocating against dominant narratives of motherhood in her analysis of news reports about the Yates case. Rather

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than crucifying mothers, media reporters could inform the public about risk factors for **filicide** such as maternal mental illness, create space for dialogue about the many burdens of motherhood, and deconstruct the ideology of the perfect mother (Barnett, 2005). Cavanagh (2018) also conveyed a need for advocacy in relation to **maternal filicide** to “progress rapidly from knowledge to social action” (p. 203). Such advocacy would support prevention and awareness efforts and encourage mothers experiencing mental illness to seek help. Encouraging reporters to include information about mental illness to reduce stigma as well as promoting awareness to mothers suffering from mental illnesses would facilitate meaningful discussion, reduce stigma and negative bias, and advance advocacy work.

Future Research Directions

Our research findings build upon existing knowledge in relation to maternal narratives that have been revealed in media analysis completed in other countries, such as Australia and the United States (see Barnett, 2005; Little & Tyson, 2017). Researchers revealed in both countries that mothers who committed maternal filicide were portrayed in a variety of negative ways. As noted in our manuscript, the 2019 case of maternal filicide in Spain, a country that has no research to date on how maternal filicide is portrayed, highlighted the need for further country specific research to be completed. Gathering this data will allow us to compare and contrast findings and elucidate trends as well as differences that may translate to legal outcomes. Furthermore, our research may compel further studies investigating other forms of media such as books, television, radio, or social networking sites and their impact in the shaping of public perception of **maternal filicide**.

Conclusion

Ethnographic content analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) revealed that Canadian

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news streams reports over a decade (January 1, 2008 to August 1, 2018) from the three most prominent newspapers (Globe and Mail, National Post, and Toronto Star) overwhelmingly represented two dominant frames: (1) Criminal Justice and (2) Descriptive Narrative. The majority of articles, 81% (n=77) portrayed sections where maternal filicide was reported in a neutral and fact-based manner, while 13% (n=12) of articles had pieces that conveyed sensationalizing and condemning language and were written predominantly by two female reporters. Twenty-three percent (n=22) of news articles addressed the **Infanticide Law** in Canada. The findings of this research highlight the relative neutrality as well as an overall lack of nuance pertaining to psychiatric and mental health considerations within Canadian news articles.

Media representation of **maternal filicide** is essential to monitor when considering dominant narratives of mothers and filicide, and how members of the public form biases. Media is a platform that shapes public opinion, which may directly influence legal outcomes in juried trials, as well as influence policy. Canadian publication standards which limit editorializing and sensationalism have been effective. Newsprint media can be an opportunity to provide the public with credible education and awareness about maternal mental health including perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. And, focusing on awareness and education in the media on perinatal mental illness would decrease stigma, increase utilization of resources, and enhance compassion and prevention of **maternal filicide**.

DIDACTIC SECTION

Key Terms and Concepts

Ethnographic Content Analysis is a method of qualitative data analysis where the research goal is centered around the discovery and verification of information. Data collection and analysis is reflective and circular with research rigor focused on validity and generating an understanding of the narrative data (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Filicide is the killing of a child at any age by a parent, step-parent, or established parental figure.

Frames as defined within ethnographic content analysis (ECA) are a broad, overarching category in which to organize meaning units of data; connected with themes (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Infanticide is the killing of infants less than one year of age

Infanticide Law (Canada) The Criminal Code of Canada (1985) defines infanticide as follows:

A female person commits infanticide when by a wilful act or omission she causes the death of her newly-born child, if at the time of the act or omission she is not fully recovered from the effects of giving birth to the child and by reason thereof or of the effect of lactation consequent on the birth of the child her mind is then disturbed (RSC 1985, C-34, s. 216).

Infanticide is an indictable offence in Canada, and carries a maximum sentence of five years (Criminal Code, RSC 1985, C-34, s. 220). The Supreme Court of Canada heard a challenge to the infanticide provision in 2016 during the trial of Meredith Boroweic; and the Court affirmed the interpretation of the provision for infanticide in the Criminal Code.

Maternal Filicide is when a mother kills her child(ren) and can be used as an umbrella term that encompasses neonaticide, infanticide, and a mother killing her child who is of any age.

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Neonaticide is the killing of newborn infants less than 24 hours old.

Not Criminally Responsible (NCR) is codified in section 16 of the Canadian Criminal Code.

This provision only applies when the individual has a guilty verdict entered. The provision is as follows:

No person is criminally responsible for an act committed or an omission made while suffering from a mental disorder that rendered the person incapable of appreciating the nature and quality of the act or omission or of knowing that it was wrong. (R.S., 1985, c. C-46, s. 16)

Themes as defined within ethnographic content analysis (ECA), are a reoccurring idea that is presented within data; connected with frames. Several themes can comprise a single frame (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Key Clinical/ Legal and Cultural Points

- The Canadian media has implications in forming public opinion and biases.
- Overwhelmingly, reporters from National Post, The Globe and Mail, and Toronto Star tended to write in a neutral, unbiased, and fact-informed approach; however, some admonishing portrayals were published, particularly in relation to Elaine Campione, and were predominantly written by two female reporters.
- **Infanticide Law** application and interpretation has been challenged and upheld in Canada's highest court, the Supreme Court of Canada, affirming its importance and relevance with the Canadian Criminal Code.
- Canadian news articles did not provide association between mental health and **maternal filicide** which would educate readers.

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- While there were several relevant mental illnesses mentioned, depression and postpartum depression were the most widely raised. Postpartum psychosis also serves as an important factor to consider in **maternal filicide** and should be taken into careful consideration when reporting about mothers who have committed **filicide**.
- Further research involving other media formats (social media, other newspapers, television shows, books) is necessary, as well as research examining maternal filicide within media in other countries.

Practice or Discussion Question Prompts

- 1) Reflect on your thoughts towards mothers who have taken the lives of their children. What sort of biases do you possess? How were these biases formed?
- 2) Discuss the case involving Elaine Campione and your thoughts about the verdict and sentencing when mental illness was confirmed, as well as her vindictiveness to her husband with whom she was involved in an acrimonious divorce (including alleged domestic violence against her husband) and embroiled in a custody battle. Describe the impact to the verdict, if any, of no news reports offering the counter perspective of mental health issues involvement and/or culpability in the crime.
- 3) When you read newsprint articles, do you question the language used by the reporter in the article who convey the accounts? Or do you consider the biases that reporters may hold?
- 4) Similar to discussion question 2, when reporters choose to provide accounts of **maternal filicide** with sensationalism, how could this impact criminal justice proceedings more generally in your view?

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5) Discuss a global manifesto on responsible media reporting in maternal filicide cases.

What are barriers and facilitators to this reality? What countries would be next to investigate media reports, and why?

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Our team utilized Altheide and Schneider's (2013) ethnographic content analysis predicated from a feminist constructivist lens to answer the research question: *What did Canadian newspapers report on about maternal filicide between January 2008 and August 2018?* I focused on exploring this question throughout the manuscript and now in this conclusion of the thesis, I provide my thoughts and discuss the limitations and future research directions.

Summary

Although DiManno wrote in the Toronto Star that the judge and jury were finished in the case of Elaine Campione, I would argue there still exists a judge and jury in her case: the public. Information published by journalists is disseminated through hardcopy newspapers and online in cyberspace where the information is transmitted across the world in seconds. DiManno's portrayal of this mother has a lingering impact in the minds of the public and will forever follow Campione when she re-joins society upon her eventual release from federal prison.

Reporters have the ability to shape perceptions, impact opinions, and provide educational information to the public. Overall, our research demonstrated that Canadian journalists have been reporting in a neutral manner in relation to maternal filicide. While mental health was referenced in many of the articles, there has been a lack of contextual information about mental illness being provided to the public. Regardless of the neutrality of the news articles, the elision of information surrounding mental illness reduces the compassion or empathy that members of the public may experience in relation to the personal experiences of the mothers.

By shedding light on what information has been lacking in Canadian news articles from our ten-year sample, our study began to answer the call to "social action" as noted by Cavanagh

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(2018) toward advocacy work surrounding mothers accused and/or found guilty of filicide through our recommendations. Armed with our findings and the knowledge about lack of mental health education in reporting, I wish to advocate for increased reporting on the contextualization of mental illness to the public and provide recommendations as outlined below.

Recommendations for Community Wide Initiatives

Our first recommendation is for Canadian reporters to be appropriately and adequately informed about maternal filicide. Providing reporters with additional insights into the mental health struggles of mothers who commit filicide may further reduce the sensationalistic language or vilifying comments noted in some news articles. As the death of a child through filicide is always horrific just by nature of the crime, the public does not need any assistance in developing a condemning view of mothers who have taken the life of their child. Secondly, reporters are asked/recommended to include a link to the Postpartum Support International webpage along with the toll-free number for individuals to access immediate help.

By including such information, reporters would begin to close the gap surrounding the lack of education around mental illness included in news articles in addition to providing a resource to individuals who may be in dire need. Lastly, mental health professionals in Canada would greatly benefit from developing a manifesto directed toward all professionals who may be involved in the care and treatment of a mother at risk of taking the life of her child. This manifesto could be used to inform service providers of a minimum standard of care when responding to a mother who is suffering with a perinatal mood and anxiety disorder.

Limitations and Strengths

A limitation of our study was that we only examined newsprint articles. As such, other representations or portrayals of mothers who commit filicide in media, such as television, radio,

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or social media were not investigated. It is possible that the messages conveyed by these mediums impact the public in different ways due to the additional visual and/or auditory cues being presented to the viewer.

A second limitation is our research only reviewed newsprint articles from three newspapers. Other newspapers may report on mothers who have taken the life of a child in a different manner, and the views of the larger newspapers we utilized may not be representative of smaller regional newspapers. Third, as we obtained our newsprint articles through the Canadian Newsstream database, we were unable to code for some visual aspects of data such as how prominently placed the article was in the newspaper. We were able to determine where in the paper the article was located; however, it was not possible to see what other articles, advertisements, or pictures were in close proximity to the reviewed articles. This information may have provided additional insights into how newsprint media conveyed messages about mothers who have taken the lives of their children to the Canadian public.

Our study was predicated from a feminist, constructivist worldview which values the personal viewpoints and biases of researchers while recognizing that reality is socially constructed. It is our stance that the analysis of our data are reflective of our collective experiences and as such offer value to the growing body of literature in this subject area. The findings of this study are novel in that no other studies have examined maternal filicide in Canadian news articles. Understanding the messages that reporters are sending to the public provides insight into the lack of knowledge surrounding maternal mental health; and provides a jumping off point to address this deficiency.

Future Research Directions

This study adds to the breadth of understanding that exist in relation to maternal narratives that

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have been revealed in media analysis completed in other countries, such as Australia and the United States (Barnett, 2005; Little & Tyson, 2017). Researchers revealed in both countries that mothers who committed maternal filicide were portrayed in a variety of negative ways. As noted in our manuscript, the recent case of maternal filicide in Spain, a country that has no research to date on how maternal filicide is portrayed, highlights the need for further country specific research to be completed. This research is the first within a series in which we hope to investigate media reports of maternal filicide in various countries over the next five years to generate comparative data and to compel a global manifesto on responsible media reporting, which has been initiated by the European Institute of Perinatal Mental Health in 2019. Completing a similar study examining television reports, media broadcasting, or social media sites in Canada, as well as other countries, would further contribute to the scope of information in relation to how members of the public form opinions about the topic of maternal filicide.

When conducting research in other countries, it is essential to consider cultural practices as well as the larger sociocultural systems that coalesce in potentially hidden assumptions regarding maternal filicide. In societies that have a predominantly patriarchal system for example, factors such as oppression, marginalization, and religious expectations may contribute to further vilification of women who take the life of their child as well prompt increased perpetuation of filicide itself. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of maternal mental health resources (if any), stigma around mental illness, and country-specific rates of maternal filicide would add breadth to the findings. Cultural nuances that are unique to each country would inform results given that a large majority of the existing research on maternal filicide is drawn from industrialized countries.

An additional research direction that may yield further insights into biases and assumptions

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against mothers who have perpetuated filicide, would be to interview professionals who have worked with them. This could include mental health professionals, physicians, nurses, correctional staff, and members of police or RCMP units. Completing a qualitative study using a research method such as narrative inquiry may provide thick descriptions from these individuals about their thoughts and feelings toward these mothers. Investigating the origins of their opinions, and understanding if media representations have impacted how they view perpetrators of maternal filicide could provide additional information into how the opinions are reified.

Our research also has implications for members of the public and mental health professionals, particularly in relation to how they interpret news article information around mothers who have taken the life of their child. Disseminating our research in a journal geared toward counsellors will help stimulate discussion and awareness around the unique mental health needs mothers have as well as describe preventative care geared toward understanding risk factors. Increasing educational opportunities for health professionals in how to best help mothers manage and recover from mental illness would begin to improve the mental health supports available to mothers struggling with mental illness. Lastly, there is tremendous value in the current study for mental health professionals to gain insight into one key way in which opinions and biases about these mothers are formed, and how counsellors can begin to question assumptions they might hold about these women.

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Personal Epilogue

Reflections on my Research Journey

When we began analyzing the data for my thesis, I believed we would find that Canadian reporters were contributing to the negative bias and negative opinions that the public has surrounding mothers who commit filicide. I thought reporters would sensationalize, vilify, and condemn mothers in the press. Contrary to what I expected, our media analysis team found that Canadian reporters are generally reporting in a balanced fashion. Initially, I struggled to reconcile the findings with my preconceived notions but as I continued to read the articles, I began to appreciate how much of the data was neutral and fact-based. Due to the rise in global media exposure, my bias may be resultant from reading international publications (articles such as the ones recently published in Spain) that do not treat mothers with the same levels of respect as Canadian journalists. The deconstruction of false narratives is a primary motivation for me to explore topics such as maternal filicide.

Completing research with a team presents unique logistical challenges in relation to planning meetings, assigning responsibilities, and reconciling differences in opinions. However, the richness of deconstructing and reconstructing the discourses presented in the news articles could not be replicated by a lone perspective. Reflecting on the entirety of the research process, I am able to confidently state that we arrived at our research findings through a reflexive and circular research method, as is facilitated by researchers who utilize ECA. There are still gains in reporting to be made in promoting education surrounding maternal mental health which invigorates me. I am excited to complete further research in this area, perhaps angling to focus on social media and how public comments are impacting the dissemination of news. Or perhaps being able to complete another ECA study in a different country. Or perhaps both!

Appendix A: Protocol Form

**CANADIAN NEWS ARTICLES FOCUSED ON MATERNAL FILICIDE
(January 2008- August 2018)**

		PROTOCOL FORM	
1.	Researcher Name		
2.	Newspaper		
3.	Article Title Has this filicide case been previously reported (title of that article(s) and reference the protocol form(s) (e.g., Globe_Jan_5_2011_Shepa_Jar_Alberta)		
4.	Author(s)		
5.	Date Appears		
6.	Page/Section		
7.	Sources Cited		
8.	Professionals Identified		
9.	Name of Accused Mother(s) Age (highlight primary)	1. Name and Age 2. Name and Age 3. Name and Age	
10.	Name of Victim(s) Age (highlight deceased)	1. Name and Age	
11.	Date Offense Occurred		
12.	Crime (stabbing, shooting, hanging)		
13.	Location of Filicide (City)		
14.	Location of Filicide (e.g., home, bathtub)		
15.	Original Charge(s)		
16.	Outcome (e.g., Pled guilty to manslaughter)		

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17.	Court Decision		
18.	Sentence		
19.	Mention of Mental Illness (yes/no)		
20.	Type of Mental Illness		
21.	Adjectives Describing Mental Illness Highlight if in Title Positive/Negative/Neutral		
22.	Adjectives Describing Crime Highlight if in Title Positive/Negative/Neutral		
23.	Adjectives Describing Mother Highlight if in Title Positive/Negative/Neutral		
24.	Race/ethnicity of Mother and Children		
25.	Immigrant or Refugee, or N/A		
26.	Miscellaneous		
27.	Article Summary		
28.	Researcher Reflection of Article		
a.	Compared to other Articles		
b.	Author compassionate or condemning mothers		
c.	Trends		

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d.	Noting any race or ethnicity slant to article		
e.	Length of Article		
f.	Photos in Article (depicting what)		
g.	Themes		
h.	Frames (the focus, parameter, or boundary for discussing filicide)		
i.	Your Insights		
j.	Second Stage Analysis (categorize by cases and note depth and frequency of coverage to compare which cases covered the most vs. covered the least) (e.g., Caucasian mothers described more harshly)		
