

Madness in the Media:

News Coverage of Police Lethal Force on Persons with Mental Illness

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Abstract

Police encounters with persons with mental illness have been increasing since the deinstitutionalization of the 1960s. As a result, persons with mental illness are the most vulnerable demographic to police use of lethal force. Due to the public reliance on the news media to relay information on these incidences, this project aims to answer the question: How has the Canadian print news media presented prominent cases of police lethal force on persons with mental illness to its respective audiences? To answer this question a qualitative content analysis was used to examine three cases across four daily newspapers within six months of the incident. This paper argues that the way in which the media depicts persons with mental illness for the interpretation of its audience perpetuates the discriminatory stereotypes that the media is suggesting to be exclusive to the police and the cause of their ignorance. In this way, the media's condemnation of the police seems to be paradoxical when it is presented alongside its reinforcement of stigmatization.

Keywords: *persons with mental illness, police lethal force, agenda-setting, media framing*

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Introduction

Since the deinstitutionalization of the 1960s, the police have been experiencing an increase in encounters with persons with mental illness (PMI)¹, as such, they are becoming the informal first responders of the mental health system (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2003). Unfortunately, PMI are now the most likely demographic to die by police lethal force in Canada (Marcoux & Nicholson, 2018). The Canadian Mental Health Association (2003) is hoping that by increasing mental health resources and offering police more extensive knowledge of mental illness these rates will significantly decrease. Their research indicates that police officers have strong misconceptions about what mental illness is, which can affect how they respond to situations involving PMI (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2003). Interestingly, the Canadian Mental Health Association (2003) also reported that a police officer's understandings of PMI are no greater than that of the general population.

Nonetheless, despite recommendations, improvements to police training and education have been stagnant. It is not unreasonable at this point for the public to be curious as to why PMI deaths keep occurring, but these incidents are rarely seen first-hand. It is the news media that is responsible for relaying information to the public. Due to the public reliance on the news media to provide information, and the Canadian Mental Health Association's (2003) research suggesting the general population holds misconceptions of PMI, I was curious to know how cases of police lethal force on PMI were shared.

With that in mind, the research question guiding this project was: How has the Canadian print news media presented prominent cases of police lethal force on PMI to its respective

¹ PMI refers to "Person with mental illness" or "Persons with mental illness".

audiences? The goal of this project was to not only understand how the media represented the actors of these incidents but to reveal the extent to which the media used agenda-setting theory and framing techniques to create media narratives involving PMI and policing. Therefore, I relied on Mad studies, Othering, agenda-setting theory, and framing theory for this analysis.

Literature Review

Mad Studies

The study of mental distress is commonly framed in the expanding domain of biomedical terminology (Beresford, 2019; Borinstein, 1992; Corrigan et al., 2003; LeFrançois, Berresford, & Russo, 2016). Terms such as “mental illness”, “mental disorder”, “mental health”, and “mental health problems” are derived from a mental health paradigm that is largely representative of “sane” professionals (Beresford, 2019; Castrodale, 2017). This form of labelling triggers social rejection, stigmatization, and deeply discredits individuals facing mental conditions (Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 1966; Corrigan et al., 2003). Historically, this has justified the ill-treatment and disenfranchisement of PMI (Aho, Ben-Moshe, & Hilton, 2017; Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 1966; Corrigan et al., 2003). Damaging forms of treatment in the search of a “cure”, such as electroshock therapy, have been justified on the basis that PMI need to be fixed; they are seen as a flaw in human variation (Aho et al., 2017; Borinstein, 1992; Castrodale, 2017).

Mad studies is an emerging field of scholarship and theory created by a “meld of activism and intellectual activity” (Beresford, 2019, p. 2). The emerging field is meant to challenge oppression stemming from sanism by rejecting biomedical understandings of PMI in favour of knowledge that has been developed by the Mad community (Castrodale, 2017). It introduces the framework of “madness” as a substitute for the biomedical approach; an approach that is deeply

connected to systematic violence, abuse, neglect, and intersectional forms of oppression (Aho et al., 2017; Beresford, 2019; Castrodale, 2017).

The use of the terms “mad” and “madness” are intended to reflect the lived experiences of people who identify as having a mental illness within the Mad community (Beresford, 2019; Castrodale, 2017). However, other members in the community-led movement still view the word as a discriminatory stereotype (Beresford, 2019; Corrigan et al., 2003). Stereotypes are meant to categorize information that allows people to intrinsically generate impressions and expectations of individuals (Corrigan et al., 2001; Corrigan et al., 2003; Goffman, 1963; Mann & Himelein, 2004; Scheff, 1996). A common stereotype about PMI is the belief that they are dangerous, violent, and unpredictable (Corrigan et al., 2003; Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 1996; Wahl, 1995). If the term “mad” is seen as another negative stereotype, it becomes harder to obtain positive cultural recognition of mental difference as an intrinsic aspect of human variation (Aho et al., 2017; Beresford, 2019; Corrigan et al., 2003).

Mad studies pay critical attention to systematic violence, abuse, and neglect that derive from discriminatory power relations of sanism (Aho et al., 2017; Castrodale, 2017). There is a large focus on the role that biomedical systems of oppression have on shaping public attitudes towards PMI (Beresford, 2019; Borinstein, 1992; Castrodale, 2017; Corrigan et al., 2003; LeFrançois, 2016). A majority of the articles I reviewed for my research were dedicated to examining how mental illness can be understood outside of the biomedical domain (Beresford, 2019; Borinstein, 1992; Corrigan et al., 2003; LeFrançois, 2016). Other contributors to Mad studies focused on the historical formation of sanism versus madness to explain contemporary forms of stigmatization and discrimination (Aho et al., 2017; Castrodale, 2017). I hope to contribute to this community-led discussion through my research by focusing on how the print

news media discusses PMI victims of police violence. Mad studies reveal the importance terminology has on defining attitudes toward PMI which is why I believe it to be important for my analysis.

Othering

Othering is proposed as a theoretical framework to analyze how we engage with those who are perceived to be different from the Self (Canales, 2000; Jenson, 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). It is described as a process of attaching moral codes of inferiority to a difference (Jenson, 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Evidently, power structures are central to the study of Othering. The process of Othering is an exclusionary act that produces power for the Same and subordination for the Other (Canales, 2000). Those who are Othered are no longer seen as active subjects in the formation of their identity (Jenson, 2011). The identity of the Other is fundamentally constructed in the gaze of power (Jenson; 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). This, in turn, means the Othered are only conscious of themselves in ways that the Same have shaped them to be (Jenson, 2011).

The marking and the naming of those who are different from oneself are thought of as a process of identity formation for the Same (Canales, 2000; MacCallum, 2002). It is through Others that the Same come to see themselves as a legitimate identity (Canales, 2000; Jenson, 2011). The Same project upon the Other that which is undesirable in themselves, this is why Othering can be an intersectional process of oppression; it is not exclusive to those who are psychologically different (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Identity, in this sense, is formed by understanding oneself in relation to what you are not (MacCallum, 2002).

The theoretical framework of Othering is defined in three dimensions: value judgement, social distance, and knowledge (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). For the purpose of my research, I

will use the dimensions of value judgement and social distance to understand how PMI are discussed in the media. A value judgement is a process in which the Other is perceived as morally good or morally bad and social distance is how the Other is perceived as psychologically distant from the Same (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). These two dimensions are relevant to my research because they both provide insight into how Othering supports stereotypes that shape PMI as bad individuals who are fundamentally different from the Same. Existing studies that incorporate mental health and Othering as a theoretical framework often focus on its function in psychiatric nursing (Canales, 2000; MacCallum, 2002). I would like to add to studies on Othering by looking at its practice beyond the biomedical domain and situating it within a media domain.

Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting can be best understood as a media process for shaping public opinion, it is the flow of salient issues from the media to the public agenda (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2014; Neuman, 1990). In other words, the media indirectly shows its audience how much importance to attach to a topic through its emphasis in the news (McCombs, 2002). Agenda-setting theorists are not suggesting that the media has the power to tell its audience what to think, rather, the media has the power of influence to tell its audience what to think about (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). For instance, an article on the front page of a newspaper is considered far more important than an article found in the back (McCombs, 2002). The amount of space an article is given also represents its salience, articles that are afforded a page rather than a corner are presented as being of higher significance (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Repeated exposure to an issue, through these cues, sets the agenda for the public to form their opinion around (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 2002).

The agenda-setting process is often broken down into an agenda's objects and attributes. An object is a media item, such as a public issue, and each object has numerous attributes which are the characteristics and traits that describe the object (McCombs, 2002; McCombs et al., 2017). When the media talks about an object they will emphasize some attributes while directing less attention to its other attributes, or they can completely omit certain attributes (McCombs, 2002). This, in turn, cultivates how the public comes to envision the object. McCombs (2002) describes this as the epitome of power. However, people who have more knowledge about an issue or more interest in it are less likely to change their opinions if the issue is in opposition to their predispositions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). McCombs & Shaw (1972) clarify that regardless of strongly held beliefs the mass media still forces attention to certain issues (p. 177).

Agenda-setting's traditional focus has been on political agendas and politicians (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2002; McCombs et al., 2014; Neuman, 1990; Neuman, Guggenheim, Jang, & Bae, 2014; Shaw, 1979). As such, its application to violence against PMI is not common. However, I believe the agenda-setting process will lend itself to be suitable for my research. What attributes the news media finds important to share to their respective audiences and what is left out can determine how the public will envision incidents of police use of lethal force on PMI. Agenda-setting also outlines the cues used by the media to set an agenda for which the public will form their opinion around which will aid my analysis of the articles.

Media Framing

Framing theory is important for understanding how the media wants information to be interpreted by its audience. Much like agenda-setting, framing theory is not "what to think", rather it is *how* to think about something. Elaine M. Sieff (2009) stated that a frame is "the way information is presented and organized in the media" (p. 260) to be interpreted by an individual.

At a deeper level, framing theory represents the news media's power to influence how people come to think about certain issues (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Fridkin, Wintersieck, Courey, & Thompson, 2017). This is most successful when audiences receive repeated exposure to a specific frame because its accessibility to the public makes it more likely to be used when processing information (Fidkin et al., 2017; Paterson, 2006). For example, if an audience's exposure to PMI is repeatedly linked to news stories about violence and crime then they are more likely to process new information about PMI with these issues in mind (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Sieff, 2009). It is not uncommon for newspapers to overemphasize violent behaviour amongst PMI, this is why the media is often critiqued for perpetuating negative stereotypes against PMI (Dickens, 2008; Sieff, 2009).

The media uses several framing elements during a framing process: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (Sieff, 2009). Studies surrounding mental illness in the media often focus on the film and television industry because of the visual imagery used to define a character as a PMI (Sieff, 2009; Wahl, 1995). PMI are often presented as psychotic, dangerous, wild, and unpredictable (Sieff, 2009; Wahl, 1995). Despite the inaccuracy, the representations can still influence their audiences to process new information about PMI through this stereotypical caricature (Dickens, 2008; Sieff, 2009). On the other hand, the metaphor is described to be used frequently in print news media (Sieff, 2009). News articles are designed using a syntactical structure, or an "inverted pyramid style", to draw attention to the article (Sieff, 2009). A metaphor such as "ticking time bomb" can be used in a headline to captivate audiences (Sieff, 2009, p. 264). The use of an "inverted pyramid style" outlines what information is deemed to be important and what information is of less relevance to the greater story being framed.

That being said, authors outlining the consequences of news framing are not suggesting that audiences mindlessly follow what the media produces. The effects of media framing are less significant when audience members hold strong pre-existing opinions that are in opposition to the messages being conveyed (Fridkin et al., 2017). Therefore, the consequences of media framing will vary in effectiveness. When audiences lack strong predispositions, their opinions are more likely to be influenced. If PMI are regularly framed in terms of violence and crime, hostile considerations will be more salient amongst these audiences (Fridkin et al., 2017) This, in turn, leads people to develop negative opinions of PMI. Media framing's ability to shape *how* audiences think about something is important to my research because it demonstrates what conversations the media want its audiences to have about PMI.

As my research question focuses on exploring how the media discusses prominent cases of police lethal force on PMI, agenda-setting theory and framing theory will be significant in my analysis. The media's processes for what to think about and how to think about it will be coupled with Mad studies and Othering for further evaluation. Mad studies outline the importance of terminology and Othering discusses how terminology creates hierarchies of power that situate PMI on the bottom and leave them susceptible to abuse. By incorporating all these theories into my analysis, this research project should be able to shed light on how the issue of police use of lethal force on PMI is presented in the media for audience interpretation.

Methods

Source Collection

The focus of my research was a qualitative content analysis of print news media exploring how the deaths of Robert Dziekański, Michael Eligon, and Sammy Yatim were discussed. These incidents were selected for my research based on their prominence in the

media. All three incidents continue to be referenced in discussions surrounding police lethal force involving mentally ill individuals and were heavily publicized following their occurrence (Harper & Mukherjee, 2018). However, I did not solely focus on the actors involved in the incidents. I analyzed the articles for larger themes, more specifically, how the media discussed mental illness and how they discussed policing. In the discussions, I specifically looked at the extent to which these themes were characterized by exclusionary, inclusionary, and bias practices to encourage certain interpretations of mental illness and policing.

I narrowed down my search by focusing on articles that were published in four popular daily Canadian newspapers. I chose articles from: *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *The Toronto Star*, and *The Vancouver Sun*. These publications were chosen based on their daily circulation. *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, and *The Toronto Star* are amongst the top ten most circulated daily Canadian newspapers (Chepkemai, 2019). *The Vancouver Sun* was included because the Robert Dziekański incident took place in the Vancouver International Airport. Consequently, I included *The Vancouver Sun* because it is the most circulated daily newspaper on the west coast of Canada (Chepkemai, 2019). I anticipated that the incident would have a higher salience in the media based on the region in which it took place. Using this rationale I included *The Toronto Star* because the Michael Eligon and Sammy Yatim incidents both took place in Toronto.

I found the news articles used for my research through the online newspaper database *Factiva*. I focused my search on articles that were published within six months of the incident. I selected this range because incidents are covered more frequently and prominently shortly after its occurrence (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006). To further account for media salience, I sorted the articles from oldest to newest. I selected ten articles per incident which gave

me a total of 30 articles to analyze. I found ten articles per incident to be a manageable sample size that still allowed me to identify themes that could be supported by numerous other articles. The time range and the sample size provided me with articles that were, at most, published within three months of the incident. In the case of Sammy Yatim, all ten articles were published within one month of the incident.

During my search, I established two terms that had to be included in each article: the victim's last name and the word "mental". The terms ensured that my search captured a discussion of the victim as well as a discussion of mental illness or mental health. I excluded articles that were less than 550 words as I found them too short to introduce themes and I removed articles that were duplicates. Additionally, I excluded op-eds in an attempt to capture how the publications frame mental illness and policing through their perceived facts rather than how an individual frames their opinions. If an article mentioned the incident or mental illness in passing I proceeded to the next article in the queue. This resulted in ten articles from *The Globe and Mail*, eight articles from *The National Post*, two articles from *The Vancouver Sun*, and ten articles from *The Toronto Star*.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Once I completed my source collection, I began my coding. There are two types of content analysis coding methods I employed for my research. The first method is directed content analysis wherein analysis starts with a theory or research findings as guidance for initial codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This method was beneficial for predicting areas of interest (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For my analysis, I identified five categories that I expected to find within the articles: the victim, PMI, the subject officer(s), policing, and media. The categories for the victim and PMI were derived from a theory of "othering" (Canales, 2000; Corfee, Cox, &

Windsor, 2020; Jenson, 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), while the subject officer(s), police, and media categories were derived from media framing theory (Fridkin et al., 2017). These became my “pre-coded” categories to organize my analysis. I then read through several articles to identify subcategories for my coding instruments (Appendix A). At the end of each coding instrument, I included a “miscellaneous” box to account for new themes or terms that might appear in an article.

The second method is the traditional content analysis which is divided into a manifest and latent content analysis (Ahuvia, 2001). Manifest content refers to the straightforward meanings of a text, whereas latent content refers to the underlying context of a text (Ahuvia, 2001). The manifest content analysis was beneficial for identifying the ways in which the media superficially described my pre-coded categories. During my latent content analysis, I searched for the underlying context of the content found during the manifest content analysis. As such, my first round of coding was used to identify the surface descriptions of my pre-coded categories and my second round of coding was used to identify how the media used these descriptions to frame the victim, PMI, and policing. My pre-coded category for the subject officer(s) did not produce enough information in the first round to conduct an in-depth analysis in the second round.

My third round of coding was focused on content identified in the first and second rounds. In my initial readings, the media discussed a pre-existing debate over police training for situations that involve PMI in the cities where the incident took place. Different media stories outlined how the police view their specialized training programs and how the general public views their training. The “general public” includes several defined groups of people: witnesses, friends or family of the victim, friends or family of a different victim, advocates for the mental

health community, and civilians that view police violence against PMI as an epidemic. I took note of how police training was discussed in the media as well as police practices in general. By the end of my coding process, I had identified two recurring themes: the stigmatization of those who appear to be different and the framing of the police as at odds with their communities.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Limitations

I was confident in my source collection method because of the detailed steps I took to ensure the process was rational and capable of being replicated. I maintained a focus on the purpose of the research to guide my rationales and my coding. The coding instrument for my qualitative content analysis allowed me to analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of keywords and themes that emerged from the articles. I found these methods to be strengths in my research process.

After my first round of coding, I identified a potential problem in my coding instrument. My pre-coded category for the subject officer(s) was producing a significant amount of “non-applicable” codes. Initially, I considered editing out the category in order to solve the problem. After rereading the articles I felt that the lack of information for the category spoke volumes. I explore this further in my analysis.

I identified several limitations in my research that could be addressed in future research. The media articles in my sample did not address intersectional systems of oppression, more specifically, it overlooked the topic of race. Not a single article in Eligon’s sample mentioned his status as a black man. Racialized violence in Toronto appears to be prevalent in the news but it was not captured in my sample. Perhaps this suggests that PMI victims are higher on the media agenda, but further analysis would be necessary to back such a claim. In future research a keyword could be introduced in order to ensure intersectionality is taken into consideration. This

could also be addressed by obtaining a larger sample as they can lead to more representative results. While both intersectionality and sample sizes are important considerations I am still confident that this project will be useful to the pieces of literature previously discussed.

Results and Discussion

The results of my coding process revealed two clear themes. While both of the themes are distinct in and of themselves, they are inherently related to one another. The two themes I identified are the stigmatization of those who appear to be different and the framing of the police as at odds with their communities. Throughout the articles, these two themes were tied together through discussions that frame both PMI and the police as a separate “them” against a non-PMI and civilian “us”. For example, within the first theme, stigmatization of those who are different, the media draws a clear line to separate PMI from non-PMI through their use of discriminatory terminology. While in the second theme, the media intentionally distances the police from civilians to attribute blame to a “them”. The way the media presents what to think about and how to think about it through an “us versus them” lens has generated questionable consequences that extend beyond the articles. To interpret these larger themes I draw upon Mad studies, Othering, agenda-setting, and framing theory.

The Stigmatization of Difference in the Media

The first theme I identified was the stigmatization of those who appear to be different. The term PMI is intentionally replaced by “those who appear to be different” because only one of the three cases has a justification for its depiction of the victim as a PMI. On February 3rd, 2012 29-year-old Michael Eligon was shot dead by the Toronto police while wearing a hospital gown. The basis of his hospitalization was unclear until an article dated March 20, 2012, stated it

was “an involuntary admission under the Mental Health Act” (Rush, 2012). A mental illness could not be disclosed due to privacy laws but the admission provides the justification for his status as a PMI in the articles. Interestingly, despite this being the only case with potential evidence of mental illness, Eligon’s sample had the least amount of stigmatizing words and statements. This is not to say that stigmatizing language was not used, PMI were still described as unstable, emotionally disturbed, disordered, mentally disabled, and so on. Instead, the articles were centred around community frustration with the police and activist groups, such as the citizen coalition called “Never Again”, calling for improved police procedures in situations involving PMI. Considering framing theory, the media may have intentionally used less offensive language towards PMI because it was aware the audience for this case held strong predispositions about this topic. The media’s ability to shape *how* audiences think about something is less effective when this is the case (Fridkin et al., 2017). Instead of framing Eligon and PMI, the media presents the salience of Eligon’s case through its coverage of protests and community meetings.

Returning again to the justifications of PMI labels is the case of Robert Dziekański, a 40-year-old Polish man arriving at the Vancouver International Airport, who was labelled a PMI by the RCMP after they tased him. Dziekański was described as having no history of mental illness until his death. The media heavily criticizes the RCMP for identifying Dziekański as a victim of a mental illness titled “excited delirium”. The media discusses the illness in a skeptical way, calling it a bogus label that is not recognized by the World Health Organization or the American Medical Association as an actual psychological or medical condition (Mulgrew, 2007; Leeder & Alphonso, 2007). Nonetheless, the media entertains the idea of Dziekański being mentally ill

throughout every article in the sample. While Dziekański's classification as a PMI is odd, the most unusual of the three cases is that of Sammy Yatim.

What is noteworthy about the case of Yatim, an 18-year-old Syrian immigrant in Toronto, who was shot on a public transit bus after behaving in a "troubled" manner was that it seems as though the media started the dialogue of Yatim being a PMI. The articles in Yatim's sample clarify that he had "not been identified as suffering from mental illness" (Andreatta & Alphonso, 2013), "never [showed] signs of mental illness" (Kane, 2013), and "did not have a history of mental illness" (Andreatta, Mahoney, & White, 2013). In spite of this, the media framed Yatim as crazed, disturbed, erratic, and mentally ill. Their use of stereotypical PMI descriptors cultivates how their audiences not only come to envision Yatim but PMI in general (Corrigan et al., 2001; McCombs, 2002). It appears that Yatim's inexplicable behaviour was linked to mental illness on the basis that it was abnormal behaviour, almost as if the media is suggesting PMI have a monopoly on this form of behaviour. This is significant because the media is presenting abnormal behaviour as a defining characteristic of PMI which, in turn, perpetuates the idea that PMI are not normal.

Explanations as to why the media may have approached Dziekański's and Yatim's incident in this way could be because the conflictual nature of a police officer killing a PMI makes it more newsworthy (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The susceptibility of PMI to forms of abuse frames them as a vulnerable population who are being targeted by the police (Aho et al., 2017; Castrodale, 2017). The media appears to present this as a valence issue, an issue with only one legitimate side, but they still describe PMI as crazy self-destructive citizens which is perplexing (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). This could suggest that the media is introducing a moral hierarchy, which is a process tied to Othering (Jenson, 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). By

taking Othering into consideration it seems as though the media is situating itself on the top of a moral hierarchy through its arguments in defence of PMI and their susceptibility to abuse.

However, the media clarifies that PMI are morally inferior by distinguishing them in opposition to itself; PMI are irrational but the media is a source of reason. In this instance, the media is focusing on its own framing to its audiences. By framing PMI as vulnerable, the media takes on the presence of a charitable power because it uses its platform to discuss the challenges PMI face. Whether or not media audiences appreciate this hierarchy is debatable. As Fridkin et al. (2017) wrote, media audiences do not mindlessly follow what the media produces.

That being said, the media's stigmatizing defence of PMI from police lethal force is present across all three cases. For example, Eligon's death was associated with the police's general lack of understanding of "the plight of those with mental disabilities" (Moloney, 2012). This comment stood out because the Mad community is actively arguing against the assumption that PMI are disabled (Castrodale, 2017; Rashed, 2019). The term "disabled" is inherently exclusionary which is counterproductive to their goal of positive cultural recognition (Aho et al., 2017). A reporter for the Dziekański incident had a more graphic comment:

There was a time when the mentally ill were placed in horrific mental institutions and, if they could not be controlled, they were electroshocked into drooling submission. Today, we have shut down the asylum, releasing the mentally ill onto the streets without support and, when they act bizarrely, police are dispatched to subdue them with 50,000 volts from a taser. This is progress? (Picard, 2007)

This comment would be reflective of the Mad community's frustration with biomedical terminology, being referred to as mentally ill has historically justified their mistreatment and perpetuates the idea that they need to be cured (Aho et al., 2017; Borinstein, 1992; Castrodale,

2017). Lastly, in reference to Yatim's death, a reporter wrote, "we don't kill crazy people, do we? Well, I guess we do, or cops do"(DiManno, 2013). It is clear that there is an increasing outrage in the media due to the ongoing mistreatment of PMI by the police, but their terminology increased in aggression almost in unison. The media's use of terminology to describe PMI has an influence on how its audience shapes their opinions about PMI (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Fridkin et al., 2017), unfortunately, media depictions are disproportionately negative.

An audience's repeated exposure to news stories about PMI that are consistently describing them using negative and stereotypical terminology increases the likelihood of new information about PMI to be processed with that frame in mind (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Sieff, 2009). Throughout the articles in the sample, words such as menaces, psychotic, threats, deranged, unruly, and mentally compromised were used in reference to PMI. Additionally, the media used phrases such as "how do you distinguish... the criminal from the kook" (Picard, 2007). Within the same article, the author compared PMI to drug users in his discussion of Dziekański's behaviour:

They are the severely mentally ill and the intravenous drug users who have become part of the urban landscape. They are rarely violent, but often off-putting with antics that include public urination, persistent begging or loud declarations that they are the Messiah. (Picard, 2007)

What these examples demonstrate is how the media has used stigmatizing exemplars of otherness and discriminatory terminology to push a biased ideology onto its audiences. Media audiences that are unfamiliar with PMI come to relate these stereotypes as the characteristics of PMI. These are the misconceptions about PMI that media audiences blame the police for having,

but the media's role in repeatedly presenting and organizing these misconceptions is less noticeable than lethal force.

The stigmatization of PMI is deeply rooted in a history of systemic violence stemming from biomedical understandings of difference; unfortunately, PMI are still seen as a flaw in human variation to this day (Aho et al., 2017; Corrigan et al., 2003). Understandings of PMI have been constructed by medical professionals and are now perpetuated in the media for audience interpretation. The articles used for this research suggest that PMI identities are still malleable. This can be seen in the media's construction of Dziekański's and Yatim's PMI status. They were both considered to be PMI due to their inexplicable behaviour prior to their deaths. Abnormal behaviour was treated as synonymous with PMI behaviour. As such, PMI identity is bound to abnormality. When this is situated within agenda-setting theory it appears as though the media did this intentionally due to the conflictual nature of a PMI being murdered by a police officer; it becomes more newsworthy. The media describes police violence against PMI as a valence issue but it simultaneously relies on discriminatory terminology to discuss the victims and PMI in general. By repeatedly Othering PMI, the media exposes a negative image to its audiences for their interpretation. The articles within the sample suggest that the media's role in perpetuating these negative ideologies is overshadowed by the blame being placed on the police for targeting and stigmatizing PMI. The anger being directed at police was more apparent within the second theme that appeared during coding.

The Framing of Police in Opposition to their Communities

As demonstrated in the analysis of the first theme, the police organizations involved are heavily critiqued in the media for their use of lethal force on a vulnerable population. The

articles in my sample present this as a salient issue by emphasizing certain attributes and paying little attention to others (McCombs, 2002). Interestingly, the media does not seem to acknowledge the systematic discrimination of PMI beyond that of police violence; stigmatization is presented as exclusive to the police organizations. This, in turn, frames the police as solely responsible for the injustices PMI face and omits the role the public may play in perpetuating the stigmatization of PMI. In other words, the media and its audiences target the police for targeting PMI. As such, this has cultivated how the media's audiences have come to envision this issue. With agenda-setting in mind, the "general public's" concern for the safety of PMI appeared to be grounded in deeply felt criticism of the police. The media's concentration on the deaths of PMI sets this issue as not only salient but as an epidemic. As a result, the police are understood to be at odds with their communities.

Initially, it appeared as though the police were only being positioned against PMI but as the reports progressed so did the idea that the police will protect the police above all else; even if that means lying to the public. As one reporter covering the Dziekański case stated:

While [Sgt.] Lemaitre says the officers only fired two bursts of the Taser, [Sima Ashrafina] says she heard four blasts. Since she's not facing lawsuits or potential charges for causing a death, I [cannot] see why she would lie. She was there -- I believe her, a disinterested observer. The force's need to stand behind its officers appears clearly at odds with its duty to the public in these incidents and breeds suspicion. (Mulgrew, 2007)

Contrary to assumptions that trust is given to dominant people of power, the articles in my sample favoured statements made by the witnesses over those made by police officers (Wille, 2000). This signifies an explicit mistrust in the authenticity of police officers. When the media referred to police accounts of an incident it often started the statement with "allegedly" or

emphasized the source of the information. The media used this as a way to warn its audience that the following information should be viewed with skepticism. The media's suspicion of police authenticity is further represented by how it presents witness accounts against departmental accounts. For example, in the first article of Eligon's sample, the reporter quoted a witness explaining that the police officers involved "were kicking him" and "stomping on him" even after shooting at him three times (Rush, 2012). The witness was given the entire article to recount the events that occurred. Over a month later, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) for Ontario stated that the officers were kicking the scissors out of Eligon's hands (Rush, 2012). The SIU was given a brief section towards the end of an article that was specifically sectioned off and labelled as the SIU's confirmation of events. This is significant in agenda-setting theory as it represents how the media gives cues of importance to its audiences for them to form their opinion around. The amount of space an issue is given and its placement within the article represents its salience, it is the media's way of influencing its audience to think about what deserves their attention (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In this instance, the media drew more attention to the witness than to the SIU. When the media does draw attention to the SIU it is usually done to further an argument that the police will protect their own first and foremost.

The SIU is described to be a civilian agency despite having former police officers as investigators. What is unusual is that the articles in my sample did not strain this conflict of interest. The SIU is mentioned as the organization responsible for clearing the officers of any criminal wrongdoing, however, it is the police departments who are argued to put the well-being of their officers before the well-being of their communities. As mentioned in the methods section, I came across the issue of the coding section "Representation of the Police Officer Accused" repeatedly producing "not applicable" responses. In my sample, only one article

identified and discussed a subject officer. What became apparent was that the police departments are adamant about protecting the identities of the officers involved from the public. This is largely in part to prevent harassment but it is interpreted as a lack of transparency. When the name of the officer responsible for Yatim's death had not been shared, the media argued that "death by cop... is not a private matter" (DiManno, 2013). Despite a public outcry for answers, the Toronto Police Association would not reveal the officer's "name and rank" (Andreatta, et al., 2013). The media repeatedly accused the police of withholding information from the public and framed them as being disingenuous. In the Dziekański incident, a reporter argued that when the RCMP quickly "jump[ed] to the defence of their members" they "treated the Dziekański family like dirt" (Mulgrew, 2007). The reporter went on to include "can these guys even spell c-o-m-p-a-s-s-i-o-n?" (Mulgrew, 2007). What these examples demonstrate is that when the police departments try to defend their officers, it is seen as a conflict of interest in their duty to protect their respective communities. As such, the media positions its audiences to be overly critical of the police in their communities.

The narrative that the police cannot be trusted and they have a habit of withholding information was dominant in my sample. Media arguments made against the police often overshadowed any mention of the victim or of PMI. What was most noticeable after coding, however, was that regardless of what the police did or did not do the media would critique them. This is exemplified in one reporter's comment explicitly:

Police have become accustomed to withholding information, as they choose, ducking behind the curtain of privacy laws selectively wielded. Similarly, if we were to depend on cops for a forthright account of what transpired in and around [the scene], the truth might never come out. Are there witness officers, those who can be compelled to answer

questions from the SIU? Or are they all subject officers, who by law have the right to lawyer up and decline interviews? (DiManno, 2013)

The police are accused of withholding information while simultaneously being accused that even if they were to present the information, it would not be reliable. The media has argued that PMI always come out as losers in situations with the police (Picard, 2007), but so do the police when it comes to their representation in the media. Likewise, this can be seen when the media discusses the weapons used by police officers in situations that involve PMI. Within my sample, both Yatim and Eligon suffered gun-related deaths and Dziekański suffered a taser-related death. In Yatim's and Eligon's articles the media argued that in addition to de-escalation tactics front-line officers should be equipped with tasers in order for there to be less reliance on guns. In the articles on Dziekański's death, however, the media urged police forces to stop relying on tasers and focus on improving their de-escalation tactics. The media appears to criticize the police regardless of how they respond in situations involving PMI; de-escalation is presented as the only acceptable method. Within the entire sample, it was rare to come across a comment in favour of the police. Much like the negative exposure given to PMI, the police are repeatedly being framed by the media in opposition to their communities. This encourages media audiences to process new information related to the police through the media's depictions of them as dishonest, disingenuous, and detached to their communities (Fidkin et al., 2017; Paterson, 2006). The media further represents the police in opposition to their communities through the debate over their training for situations involving PMI.

Police officers are required to partake in specialized training programs for how to respond to incidents that involve PMI. The police departments' discretion to determine the amount of time reserved for the training and its frequency results in varying degrees of

competency in de-escalation tactics. In all three cases, the media supports the “general public’s” claims that the police need more extensive and effective training: this includes witnesses, friends and family of the victim, families of earlier victims, advocates for the mental health community, and civilians who fear the police shoot to kill PMI. Activist groups such as “Never Again” were vocal about the need to improve police procedures. The debate over police training is revisited in the media after every incident that involves a PMI death and is commonly presented as the following:

The suitability of training given to front-line officers warrants particular scrutiny. [It is] not at all clear that enough has been done to instruct police on how to de-escalate confrontations with a mentally ill or disturbed person, or if that message is actually sinking in. (The Toronto Star, 2013)

Explicit statements that the police need better training were seen across nearly all articles in the sample. The media often pointed out that police training cannot be effective if every subject officer has been cleared of wrongdoing by arguing they had imminent fear for their life in front of a “scrawny teenager” (Kane, 2013), an “unarmed man” (Mason, 2007), and a man who “had fear in his eyes” (Rush, 2012). The “general public” argues that the stigmatization of PMI has made the police believe all PMI are violent. One of the few defences made for the police was in reference to how it would, in many cases, be unfair to criminally accuse an officer after training them “to resort to lethal force” (The Globe and Mail, 2013). The media further suggests that the police are influenced by bias, not by reason. Police training is seen as deeply problematic well beyond its representation in the media. The “general public” claims that police ratchet up the tension, are trained to kill, and have been granted a monopoly on deadly force. The police involved in the Eligon incident argued that statements such as those are misconceptions of police

training and went so far as to invite the media to examine one of their training sessions (Poisson, 2012). Observing the training session did not appear to affect the media's stance on the matter as they continued to argue that police training is insufficient. When police argued that their officers receive adequate training the media would name other PMI victims in response, often posing the rhetorical question "how many more deaths will it take to stop needless shootings" (The Toronto Star, 2013). The media presents the debate between the police and the "general public" as an on-going battle with no real resolution in sight. The police are framed in a way to suggest they routinely ignore the "general public's" concerns due to their own "self-righteous[ness]"; the police "believe [they are] right" so they "continue to resist training" (Boseveld, 2013). It is their ignorance that is fundamentally to blame for PMI deaths. After every incident, questions are raised but never answered. This further suggests that the media wants its audiences to process other incidents of PMI violence with an on-going sense of frustration in the police's inability to adopt new methods of training. As such, the blame is reserved for the police.

What these arguments make clear is why there is a deeply felt criticism of the police amongst the "general public". The media expresses an explicit mistrust of police officers by framing them in opposition to their communities. This narrative breeds suspicion in the authenticity of police incident reports and is further pushed by the media through its emphasis on representing witness accounts over departmental accounts. The media suggests that the police's need to protect their own, whether that be through falsified accounts or withholding information, is a conflict of interest with their duty to the public. As such, media audiences should interpret police information with skepticism. Regardless of what police officers do during situations with PMI, the media frames them as disingenuous and ignorant of public concerns. As such, this has cultivated how the media's audiences have come to envision this issue. It appears, then, that the

media's consistent framing of police as the sole contributor to the systematic discrimination of PMI dilutes the realities PMI are actually facing. The way in which the media depicts PMI for the interpretation of its audience perpetuates the discriminatory stereotypes that the media is suggesting to be exclusive to the police. In this way, the media's condemnation of the police seems to be paradoxical when it is presented alongside its reinforcement of stigmatization.

Conclusion

To situate my findings at the end of this project I once again return to my research question: How has the Canadian print news media presented prominent cases of police lethal force on persons with mental illness to its audiences? The critical finding in answering my research question is that the way in which the media depicts PMI for the interpretation of its audience perpetuates the discriminatory stereotypes that the media is suggesting to be exclusive to the police and the cause of their ignorance. In this way, the media's condemnation of the police seems to be paradoxical when it is presented alongside its reinforcement of stigmatization.

My findings are situated in Mad studies for its history on the influence terminology has had on the lives of PMI as well as agenda-setting and framing theory for its insight on how the media uses certain devices to influence what its audiences think about and how they think about it. The process of Othering was used more significantly throughout the theme analysis however it emphasizes how power is exercised by the media to exclude both PMI and police from media discussions. As mentioned in the limitations section I believe that this research could be furthered by taking an intersectional approach to analyzing mental health in the news media. Intersectional systems of oppression is a dominant aspect of Mad studies and would make a contribution to the emerging field of study.

In summary, my analysis demonstrated that the media is guilty of simultaneously arguing for and against PMI. The media's role in addressing the issue of police lethal force on PMI is done with high salience. However, using stigmatizing terminology in the defence of PMI suggests that the use of such language causes no repercussions. This is reinforced by the media's consistent framing of police as the sole contributor to the systematic discrimination of PMI. Ultimately, the media's role in perpetuating negative stereotypes is overshadowed by the blame being placed on the police for targeting and stigmatizing PMI.

Appendix One: Coding Sheet for Media Reports

A coding instrument was filled out for every article coded, resulting in one coding sheet per article.

Case:

Article Title:

Article Publisher:

Article Author:

Article Date:

Word Count:

Representations of the Victim:

Race:

Gender:

Age:

1. How is the victim described?

examples: a threat, innocent, a student, young, etc.

<i>Description</i>

2. How is the victim's mental capacity described?

examples: irrational, agitated, confused, deranged, etc.

<i>Description</i>

3. Is a mental illness discussed? Yes No

<i>Description</i>

Representation of Persons with Mental Illness:

4. Are people with mental illness discussed generally? Yes No

Description

5. Is irrationality mentioned? Yes No

Description

6. If number 5 is yes, is irrationality tied to violence? Yes No

7. Does the article mention perceptions of persons with mental illness? Yes No

Description

8. Are any other cases mentioned in the article? Yes No

Description

Representation of the Police Officer Accused:

Race:

Gender:

Age:

9. How is the officer described?

examples: a new officer, a good person, a bad apple, etc.

Description

10. How is the officer's mental capacity described?

examples: impulsive, calm, responsive, etc.

Description

11. Is a justification for the police officer's use of lethal force mentioned?

examples: protection, believed there was a weapon, etc.

Description

Representation of Policing:

12. How is policing discussed?

Description

13. Does the article discuss police training for encounters with persons with mental illness?

Yes No

Description

The Media:

14. What problems are identified?

examples: lethal force, mental illness, hospitalization, policing, civilian was a threat, etc.

Description

15. Are critiques being made about the case? (ie. inconsistent story to crime scene)

Description

16. Are any other actors critiqued?

examples: paramedics, mental health responders, etc.

<i>Description</i>

17. Overall, is the article supportive of policing or critical?

- a) supportive b) critical c) neither

18. Other / Miscellaneous findings

<i>Description</i>

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