

## **News Media Representation Among Female Offenders in Canada**

Ricardo Miguel Mijares-de Leon

Bachelor of Law Enforcement Studies, Justice Institute of British Columbia

### **Author Note**

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### **Abstract**

Previous research has primarily examined the relationship between male offenders and media representation, with limited studies on female offenders, most of which date back to the early 2000s. This raises the question: How do news media represent female offenders in Canada? This research aims to determine whether female offenders are inaccurately portrayed due to the power and influence of news media in shaping public perception. Based on this statement, the scope of this primary research specifically analyzes Canadian news media outlets through a qualitative content analysis that was conducted on six newspapers between 2024 to 2025, all of which are from *CTV*, *CBC*, *National Post*, and *Vancouver Sun*. Several keywords and patterns of themes through an initial and focused coding sequence arose. The findings revealed that female offenders are misrepresented through image framing, language use, gender framing, and race and ethnicity – all of which suggest that news media significantly shape societal attitudes, reinforce gender stereotypes, and instill moral panic.

*Keywords:* Canada, news media, female offenders, representation, gender framing

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### **News Media Representation Among Female Offenders in Canada**

*Orange Is the New Black* is a 7-season TV series, aired between 2013 and 2019, that showcases the life of many women behind bars who have committed different types of crime. The storyline portrays a convicted woman named Piper Chapman, the protagonist, who was charged for drug trafficking and was given a fifteen-month sentence. Chapman's character illustrates the transition of civilian life to prison life and the unexpected people she meets, eventually becoming best friends throughout the series. Although the show may be intriguing to watch as the characters of the series are depicted as funny, intelligent, and quirky, it is far from reality as to how female offenders are represented in Canada. More specifically, news media play an important role as they have the power to dictate what is written and published (Zimo, 2019). The slogan 'if it bleeds, it leads' is a perfect example of how news media apply attraction and overemphasize the representation of female offenders, which increases viewership and streaming from frequent publications (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; D'Angelo, 2017).

Furthermore, the problem that has been raised from my research project focuses on the representation of female offenders in Canada. Many of these female offenders in Canada are often misunderstood and perceived based on societal attitudes through the representation of news media (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Dowler et al., 2006). These issues ultimately correspond to the idea of labelling theory in which a person is labelled as deviant, which leads to problems that can arise from self-identity of being an offender or negative stereotypes that society portrays them as in which they are attached to that label (Becker, 1963, as cited in Brenburg, 2019; Lemert, 1967). News media plays a role in its application of theoretical frameworks, as mentioned above, to understand crime, news media, and labelling (Greer & Reiner, 2013).

News media can influence these types of representations among female offenders based on biases and stereotypes and instill moral panic (Szczepan, 2024; Zimo, 2019; Greer & Reiner, 2013). If these issues are not addressed, this can lead to stigmatisation, harmful stereotyping, and lack of support when reintegrating back into society. Many female offenders will serve their sentencing and eventually be released back into society. Reintegration into communities is difficult alone, but when these communities have a biased, stereotype-driven perception of female offenders, it becomes next to impossible. It has been said that many job applications have restrictions on hiring people who have a criminal record, and employers are less likely to hire these applicants for future hiring (Brenburg, 2019). Furthermore, those who will be affected by these issues are not just Canadian female offenders but also people in our society who rely on the news media to gather information. Such representation of women offenders can create a divide between societal attitudes of female offenders in Canada.

The rationale of my research question focuses on an issue that is not discussed as much compared to their counterpart of male offenders where many researchers and academic scholars have invested and put forth questions and answers solving the issues around this topic of Canadian news media research. Past research has suggested that news media have represented female offenders in the media as ‘nasty girls’, ‘bad girls’, ‘manipulators’, or ‘monsters’ (Collins, 2016; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Building on evidence from previous academic research, this study examines how Canadian news media portray female offenders, identifying recurring themes and patterns in their representations.

The Purpose of my research paper is to examine how Canadian news media uses power and control to shape attitudes and agendas through its representation of female offenders. In addition, it is important to understand how news media can twist certain narratives among female

offenders. By analyzing common themes, framing techniques, and their implication, this study explores whether such portrayals promote biases and stereotypes and instill moral panic. Given this, the primary research paper that I have will explore the question: How do news media represent the images of female offenders through a qualitative content analysis of Canadian news articles from 2024 to 2025?

### **Literature Review**

Several themes, gaps, and debates emerged from the analysis of the literature, which provided an understanding of how news media represent female offenders in Canada. These findings include the application of news media framing, labelling of female offenders, marginalization of women offenders through race and ethnicity, and lack of focus on reintegration of female offenders.

**News Media Framing:** According to the literature discussed by Dowler et al. (2006) and Doyle (2006), media framing plays a crucial factor in the representation of current events. Within Canada, the topic of crime is the center of news media production that is newsworthy and informative (Dowler et al., 2006; Doyle, 2006). In addition, many researchers suggest that the representation of crime in the news media is completely different from what is portrayed by official stats from the government (Shehata et al., 2023; Shor et al., 2022; Szczepan, 2024). A comparison between both literatures explained the use of pop culture, more specifically, crime shows, and true-crime books that tend to be the basis of how news media frame certain events. Szczepan (2024) contradicts this by saying the opposite and adds that there is a potential risk of the use of entertainment when stories are inspired by real events and people — which takes exploitation to a whole new level and eventually turns them into victims of news media framing.

The application of news media framing from a societal perspective creates pre-existing beliefs that shape worldviews that derive from media messages and their influence on certain agendas (Shehata et al., 2023).

Furthermore, supporting this argument, the effects of the news media framing are perceived as ‘fast pace’ in the sense that a news story about a specific crime, like theft, will create immediate perceptions of this story (Szczepan, 2024). Greer and Reiner (2013) suggest that for an action to be considered criminal, that action has to be labelled as such based-on society's standards through news media – ultimately resulting in a ripple effect of being put into a labelling category of deviance as mentioned by Shehata et al. (2023), Shor et al. (2022), and Szczepan (2024). It has also been said that negative coverage of news media is more likely to outweigh positive coverage, in which sensationalism is applied to the topic of female offenders (Shehata et al., 2021; Collins, 2016).

In support of this argument, Szczepan (2024) and Shor et al. (2022) explained how media framing is also due to the practice of sensationalism, which is the idea of exaggerating certain events to gain viewership and attention. News media also has the power to remove certain details from the story to tailor to its consumers, which then, in turn, increases mainstream popularity (Szczepan, 2024). Exposure to this type of method of programming can result in biases. Furthermore, the authors’ perspective on the influence of news framing can lead to inaccurate public beliefs and negative perspectives on crime and control – all connecting to the next theme, labelling female offenders (Dowler et al., 2006; Doyle, 2006; Szczepan, 2024).

**Labelling of Female Offenders:** News media framing has increasingly led to negative consequences over time, particularly in Western societies (Zimo, 2019). This framing creates a

framework for labelling female offenders (Collins, 2014). Gartner (2011) explains that those women who were within the norms of being a ‘mother’, ‘caring’, and ‘nurturing’ were looked upon positively, while those who commit crimes were viewed as abnormal (Brennan and Vandenberg, 2009). In comparison, several pieces of literature argue how women offenders tend to be dehumanized as ‘nasty girls’, ‘bad girls’, ‘manipulators’, and ‘monsters’ (Collins, 2016; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Although labelling theory emphasizes labels that account for the framework that people use to categorize a group of people, deviant labels, as mentioned by Collins (2016) and Brenburg (2019), are considered special in a way that specifically stigmatizes female offenders.

Consistent with this statement, Estrada et al. (2019) mention how ‘bad girls’ create a breach of the norms of femininity. The breach of norms aligns with the author's argument that implies that women’s crimes are considered immoral and not as common as compared to their male counterparts (Estrada et al., 2019). The authors add to their argument that women were set to an expectation of a high standard of feminism where the crimes they committed were seen as an implication of double deviance (Zedner, 1991, as cited in Estrada et al., 2019). Furthermore, the form of labelling is also based on the relationship between gender norms of men and women (Gartner, 2011). Female offenders are at a disadvantage when being covered by the news media as it also creates a perception of masculinized violent women (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Gender stereotypes influence the expectation of what is normal for femininity (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). The labelling of masculinized women creates a violation of gender norms where women are supposed to be traditionally nurturing or submissive (Collins, 2014; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Estrada et al., 2019). Violation of gender norms, as highlighted in the



literature, shows how gender expectations and labelling contribute to harsher punishment for female offenders (Collins, 2014; Gartner, 2011).

**Marginalization of Female Offenders Through Race/Ethnicity:** While punishment of females is evident throughout the authors' research, in comparison, literature articles have argued the consequences of labelling can lead to marginalization of female offenders. Although few literature articles have studied media representation of female offenders, a few have discussed the issue that race, and ethnicity play a role in media representation (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). This statement made by these authors is significantly supported by an aspect of labelling theory which argues that marginalized groups (minority offenders) are more likely to experience a form of labelling (Greer & Reiner, 2013; Bernburg, 2009). Racial characteristics such as a person's skin are the first thing a consumer sees, which leads to its impression on female offenders (Haley, 1997, as cited in Brennan and Vandenberg, 2009).

Literature has stated a difference between how white offenders and offenders of colour are represented based on race (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Brennan and Vandenberg (2009) and Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) argued that race plays an important role in shaping society's perception of offenders. With the application of labelling theory, several pieces of literature state that white female offenders are often marginalized and portrayed as outcasts from their normal white community (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). However, Gartner (2011) counters Eliason's (2006) and Brennan and Vandenberg's (2009) argument mentioning how the definition of women-like qualities is based on white women who are from middle and upper-class society, arguing that white women are not as marginalized compared to their counterparts. In contrast, both authors agree that visible minority offenders are frequently linked to poverty and framed as victims of their circumstances (Chesney-Lind

Eliason, 2006; Gartner, 2011). The race-based perception of marginalized female offenders may contribute to broader stereotypes and media narratives about crime and poverty concerning systemic bias within social structures (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Gartner, 2011).

**Lack of Focus on Reintegration of Female Offenders:** While there is strong evidence and supporting arguments that discuss several themes throughout the literature, there is still an unsettled question regarding what happens after a female offender is released from prison. While Gartner (2011) and Collins (2014) do mention the word ‘reintegration’, most of the literature articles used still lack the discussion of reintegration as they mainly talk about the relationship between news media and female offenders. Many female offenders face challenges that arise from news media framing, labelling and marginalization through race and ethnicity, and creates a barrier in applying for a job or getting housing.

Discussion of male offenders integration tends to be talked about more compared to their counterpart of female offenders – this results in increase of gender stigma, stereotype, and biases. Such labelling and framing can often lead to a domino effect of mental health issues that self-absorbs the self-identity of being a female offender and being an outcast to society, which results in a higher risk of reoffending. The lack of discussion on rehabilitation creates gaps within the literature, which allows for further research on the topic, as there is little guidance or research on rehabilitation for female offenders.

Within the literature, several findings go back to the question: How do news media represent female offenders in Canada? News media do have the power and control to dictate what is being released through journalists who emphasize sensationalism as well as the use of images, which creates an immediate perception of female offenders (Doyle, 2006; Dowler et al.,

2006; Szczepan, 2024). The labelling of female offenders results in gender stereotypes that lead to societal attitudes towards gender norms of women, implying a high expectation in the characterization of femininity (Estrada et al., 2019; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006).

Furthermore, marginalization of female offenders through race and ethnicity illustrates a difference between how white female offenders and female-coloured offenders are represented, which leads to systemic biases within social structures (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Gartner, 2011; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2011). While there is strong evidence supporting these claims, the lack of focus on the reintegration of female offenders remains an unsettled question that requires further discussion.

### **Methodology**

With this research question, the main objective of this worldview is to focus on my view of the situation that is being studied between news media and Canadian female offenders. This research paper adopts a constructivist worldview and is the most feasible option as to an approach that leans towards qualitative content analysis research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The constructivist worldview argues that reality is based on societal and cultural media representation of female offenders in Canada (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, this worldview is applied to seek further understanding of the languages used, the illustration of images, and demographic characteristics to conclude how female offenders are represented in the news media.

The search methodology for this study focuses on searching for secondary data of literature that will help as a supporting argument when I gather and conduct my analysis of seven news articles through a primary research approach. A comprehensive search was conducted using strategies such as keywords (see Table A1) and inclusion and exclusion criteria to enhance

relevant literature. Although the JIBC EBSCO library was encouraged to be used, I came across roadblocks of not finding any results relevant to my research topic, as well as many of the articles had restricted access that required me to send a request to be able to use them. Instead, the following databases were utilized for the search: Sage Journals and JSTOR. To gather relevant information for this research, I applied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine my search. The first step was that all sources be scholarly peer reviewed. I then restricted my results to article journals published between 2002 and 2025 to ensure reliability, validity and accuracy, as many key studies on this topic emerged in the early 2000s.

Furthermore, I used advanced filters, selected articles available for direct download as PDFs and set the language requirement to English. The initial and revised searches (see Tables A2, A3, A4, A5) illustrated several credible pieces of literature that can be applied to my research project. The sources that were identified are not limited to the topic of women offenders and news media. Any literature that discusses female youth offenders and gender differences between male and female crime will be included. Research articles that focus on the topics of framing, media representation of crime, and sensationalism will be included as a supporting argument on how news media represent female offenders in Canada. Initially, the exclusion criteria were to exclude international articles and limit them to Canadian literature. However, due to the limited number of Canadian literature available, some articles from the United States, England, Sweden, Finland, China, and Ireland are allowed. Therefore, the research findings from these countries, as mentioned, may be applicable and transferable to this research project.

A review of fifteen abstracts was applied throughout the literature search. Based on the fifteen articles, I chose the ones that represented the three important factors in research: reliability, accuracy, and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The literature articles were

reliable as the information regarding Canadian women offenders and news media representation were consistent and came from reputable sources and academic scholars who are professionals in that field of research. Furthermore, the validity of each literature article provided information relevant to the research question and precisely illustrates news media representation of Canadian female offenders. Lastly, the accuracy of each literature abstract ensured data that were specifically measured to provide accurate research outcomes that are useful and meaningful.

Narrowing my literature articles from fifteen, a full review of eight articles was selected. Using reliability, validity, and accuracy, the same application was applied when selecting my eight articles. While reading the abstract did help, I investigated further details of their methodology, sample size, and the patterns that I saw in their literature. As a student researcher focusing on women offenders in Canada, several authors have applied a methodology of qualitative content analysis that focuses on news media representation and women offenders between a specific timeline (Collins, 2014; Zimo, 2019). The significance of these findings is that not only can they help as a guideline for my research findings, but being able to back up my arguments can be supported by these literature articles. Furthermore, the sample data of each article relies on secondary sources such as media analysis and case studies that discuss the significance of each case and findings which help support their arguments (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Estrada et al., 2019).

In addition to gathering secondary data of literature articles to support my research question, I have also gathered news articles as my primary data with a sample size of seven news articles. Given the broad term 'News Media', the study will specifically examine mainstream news outlets that are publicly available on the internet. The analysis will include news articles published no later than 2024 to ensure relevance and reliability. These news articles will come

from the National Post, CBC, CTV, and Vancouver Sun. Google was the search engine that I used by using a comprehensive search strategy applying key phrases such as ‘women committing crime in Canada’ and ‘women offenders in Canada’. From there, I used the search bar to click through my searches. After having difficulty finding articles, I decided to add the news company in front of the key phrase that was used. For instance, ‘women committing crime in Canada CBC’ or ‘women offenders in Canada National Post’. This is where I was able to narrow my searches and gather the news articles that I needed for my data collection.

With a content analysis approach, coding was applied by “Naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of the data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 245). During my initial coding, which is my first round of coding, I collected any data that was relevant to my research project by highlighting them and labelling them based on certain categories such as gender framing, key phrases, age representation, image framing, race and ethnicity, and demographic area. From the initial coding, a focused coding was conducted (see Table A6) where I narrowed my data by grouping them to specific codes that are relevant and accurate to my research project. From there, each category had its specific code that was backed up by a description and example to support each code that was chosen. The collected data from the second round of focused coding provided me with the results and findings to answer my research questions regarding news media representation of female offenders in Canada.

## **Results**

It is evident that news media tend to push certain agendas or motives based on what is being published throughout the news (Shehata et al., 2021, 2023; Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007). With a qualitative content analysis approach, this methodology was used to observe a sample

size of seven news articles spanning across five different news companies within Canada. With the application of initial and focused coding, a series of different types of data were categorized to specific codes.

I have noticed a pattern in the demographic area of crimes being committed. The majority of these crimes are committed in areas where there are many people, more specifically in places such as Toronto, Brampton, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, and Guelph, Ontario. In contrast, I have only found one article where the crime was committed in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Furthermore, age representation was between as young as 18 years old to 30 years old, where many of the female offenders committing crimes were between their 20s to early 30s. While demographic area and age representation were some of the things that stood out, based on the data that was found, several deeper themes arise. Image framing, use of language, gender framing, and race and ethnicity were the categories that will be discussed for my results and findings.

### **Image Framing**

Image framing plays a crucial role in how female offenders are represented based on the images that have been used. Six out of the seven articles that were coded only showed the perpetrator's face, whereas one article showed the victim instead. My findings correspond to my literature articles describing how crime is the 'holy grail' of news media that is worthy and informative (Champagne-Buckley, 2019; Szczepan, 2024). The *National Post* showcased Sarah Bradshaw, 18, who was charged with car theft and several other crimes that she had committed (Lewis, 2024). In the article, a mugshot was used to emphasise the criminality of women offenders. This analysis revealed patterns in how female offenders were visually represented, reinforcing gendered and class-based narratives (Sandman, 2021).

In addition, CCTV photos tailored to the offender committing the crime were also shown as a comparison between their mugshots. A CCTV photo shows Sarah as a potential buyer dressed in business attire while wearing makeup. The mugshots provided by the police presented a neutral colour tone with a poker face expression that illustrated a sense of 'guilt'. Whereas CCTV photos captured by surveillance cameras showcased the expressed 'lack of remorse' with intent of committing the crime (Lewis, 2024). Sandman (2021) supports this statement by expressing the various studies that have suggested image framing in news media plays an important role in societal attitudes and beliefs of female offenders as it is the first thing that grabs a person's attention.

Furthermore, the application of sensationalism in the theme of image framing was applied where the *Vancouver Sun* used the photo of the victim, Sidney Mantee, 32, of Nanaimo, British Columbia, instead of the murderer, Paris Laroche, 29, which emphasises a dramatic expression of sympathy for the victim rather than the woman who committed the crime (Egan-Elliott, 2025). In comparison, *CBC News* talked about Sabrina Kauldhar, 30, who was charged with murder in the deaths of three people in Toronto, Niagara Falls, and Hamilton. In this news article, both the offender and the victim photos were released where Sabrina's photo was a mug shot that was dark and grainy with an 'evil grin' on her face and the victims were represented with bright coloured tone which can be metaphorically translated with the sense of 'joyfulness' and 'innocence' (Draaisma, 2024).

It is interesting to see why the *Vancouver Sun* intended to use only the victim's photo, whereas *CBC News* had used both, and the *National Post* only showcased the female offender. This relates to Parveen and Showkat (2020) and Zimo's (2019) findings, where visual images create a story and sense of emotions that are created for a person to interpret. The relevant theme



of image framing illustrates how news media have the power to represent female offenders as either worthy of our sympathy of the crime that they have committed or being unworthy and getting what they have deserved, depending on how they are represented based on the images that have been used in the news media; which influences a person beliefs and opinions that shape biases and stereotypes (Andersen et al., 2019; Doyle, 2006; Dowler et al., 2006; Sandman, 2021).

### **Use of Language**

Although image framing plays a huge factor in how we perceive female offenders in Canada, the use of language plays a significant role. The *National Post* article on Sarah Bradshaw, charged with car theft, used the nickname ‘Porsche Girl’ in its headline. The use of infantilization by framing her as a ‘Porsche Girl’ downplayed the seriousness of the crimes she had committed and contributed to her gaining attention across the world, even reaching India (Lewis, 2024). In contrast, it is clear in Paris Laroche’s situation, she was framed in a way that represented demonization, which uses harsh language to frame these women as dangerous. Paris Laroche murdered her boyfriend and then later sliced his body into pieces and deposited his body parts into zip lock bags and scattered them across the city of Nanaimo, BC (Egan-Elliott, 2025). The *Vancouver Sun*’s description of how she murdered and disposed of his body shows a clear correlation to being demonized as a killer out for revenge, and the judge of the case gave a clear statement regarding the murder of her ex-boyfriend as ‘extreme’ and ‘unmistakably punitive’ (Egan-Elliott, 2025).

In comparison, a *CTV News* article illustrated a Toronto woman named Karima Manji, who was sentenced to 3 years for Inuit identity fraud, and the headline frames the incident as ‘egregious exploitation’ (The Canadian Press, 2024). It is clear in her mugshot that she was not

of Inuit descent, and for the news article to apply that type of language to describe her is unreasonable. Furthermore, the article also explains how Karima had used Inuit status to reap benefits for her two daughters, whom at that time did not know about (The Canadian Press, 2024). When Karima was finally caught, her two daughters were originally charged because Karima used their credit cards to apply for the benefits, but the case was dropped (The Canadian Press, 2024). After the case, Karima's daughters expressed emotions of being victimized by their mother, who was described as 'deceitful,' which ultimately led to their lives and careers being compromised (The Canadian Press, 2024).

The words 'extreme,' 'unmistakably punitive' 'egregious exploitation, and 'deceitful' are clear indications of the way news articles use language framing to infantilize and demonize female offenders. My findings, particularly for language framing, connect back to the literature review that described the labelling of offenders. Although Collins' (2016) and Zimo's (2019) literature article suggest different use of language towards women offenders such as 'bad girls', 'monsters', or 'manipulators', nonetheless, the use of words infantilizing and demonizing them is an issue that can be seen in news companies across Canada. The connection between my result findings and the literature review goes to one of the two extremes – Masculinized violent women like Paris Laroche and Sabrina Kauldhar or the poor infantilized women like Sarah Bradshaw who needs help with her life choices as an 18-year-old.

### **Gender Framing**

While the use of image and language framing are shown within the data that I have coded, there is a pattern that can be seen that emphasizes gender framing. Female offenders are often represented through sexualization and being domineering (Zimo, 2019; Shor et al., 2022; Sandman, 2021). This can be seen in Melissa Todorovic's case, where *CBC News* described her

actions of threatening to end the relationship with her boyfriend by ‘withholding sex’ unless he killed his ex-girlfriend (Loriggio, 2024). By withholding sex, Melissa is seen applying her sexual power and control of the relationship between herself and her boyfriend. This also creates a tone of jealousy and manipulation with Melissa for pressuring her boyfriend into killing his ex-just so they can salvage their relationship with one another (Loriggio, 2024).

While sexualization is one thing, appearance is another that stood out where a *CBC News* article mentioned a woman named Jodi-Ann Bonnick, 33, who was charged with fraud. Alissa Douglas, who had worked for her business, mentioned that Bonnick seemed to be a young entrepreneur owner who operated many businesses in Toronto, and many had admired her within the community (Bilhete, 2024). The emphasis on the word ‘seemed’ indicated that looks can be deceiving and implied that women are not what they truly seemed to be labelled as in society (Dowler et al., 2006; Doyle, 2006). In connection to my first theme of image framing, the image that was used shows her as a successful business owner who had inspired others within her community, posing right in front of her business, Bonnick’s West Indian Grocery (Bilhete, 2024).

However, the second photo, which was a mugshot, revealed her true criminal identity. The idea that women are supposedly ambitious, persuasive, and can empower others is portrayed in this article, but Bonnick is rather portrayed as a liar and a con artist for her behaviour in engaging in fraud (Estrada et al., 2019; Trist et al., 2023). In comparison, the whole notion of ‘looks can be deceiving’ based on appearance can be supported by another news article from *CTV News*, where police believed a woman may have been wearing a fake pregnant belly to hide stolen products from the Guelph store in Guelph, Ontario (Knox, 2024). This emphasizes reinforced gender stereotypes of women being deceptive and manipulative while also expressing

femininity through the women's outfits. Focusing on the women's outfits and appearance shifts the attention to her femininity rather than just her crime.

Another code was revealed during my results which focuses on victimization. In addition to being labelled as the perpetrator of the crime that was committed, Paris Laroche was also labelled as a victim. Paris Laroche and Sidney Mantee's relationship had its ups and downs but eventually deteriorated when it became severely toxic, which led to verbal and physical abuse (Egan-Elliott, 2025). It was stated that Laroche requested fifteen years before parole eligibility due to displaying symptoms of 'battered spouse syndrome' and having 'feared' for future violence and threats from him (Egan-Elliott, 2025). Framing Laroche as a victim can shape public perception of crime, making female offenders less responsible for their crimes or be sympathised due to her toxic, abusive relationship. (Szczepan, 2024; Estrada et al., 2019; Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006).

### **Race and Ethnicity**

Connecting with the literature articles, race is a crucial factor in shaping public perception of female offenders (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Brennan and Vandenberg, 2009). Gartner (2011) argued that white women were not as marginalized compared to their counterparts, while Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) and Brennan and Vandenberg (2009) claimed that white women were, in fact, often marginalized from their community. My results revealed that four of the female offenders were women of colour: Sarah Bradshaw, Sabrina Kauldhar, Jodi-Ann Bonnick, and Karima Manji. Two offenders were white: Melissa Todorovic and an unnamed woman whose identity was not disclosed but was visible in a CCTV photo. The racial background of Paris Laroche remains unknown, as no photo of her was included in the article. These findings suggest that both white women and women of colour were marginalized

in new media, challenging the idea that white women benefit from racial privilege. For example, Sarah Bradshaw was framed as ‘Porsche Girl’, Karima Manji and Jodi-Ann Bonnick were framed as ‘deceitful’, and Melissa Todorovic was framed as ‘manipulative’ and ‘controlling’. This indicates that, regardless of race or ethnicity, news articles used strategies such as image selection, use of language, and gender framing – all of which align with the majority of the themes in my research.

### **Discussion**

With the literature review of academic articles and the data found in my results, this research project had a clear focus on the topic that was being discussed regarding how news media represent female offenders in Canada. This research is relevant to current debates about the gender of men and women, race, news media and crime within a Canadian perspective.

The strengths of my research were provided by seven reliable, relevant, and accurate Canadian news articles that discussed the different types of crime and how they were committed. The media does have a way of framing news articles with the help of sensationalism to push a certain narrative. Furthermore, labelling theory has been the backbone of this research, which showcases that news media and technology have been expanding quickly compared to before, which creates newsworthy headlines on news – ultimately resulting in significant labelling of deviance towards female offenders (Greer & Reiner, 2013).

As previously mentioned, the emphasis on the slogan ‘if it bleeds, it leads’ clearly creates a shocking or exciting story regardless of whether what is being published is accurate or not (D’Angelo, 2017; Szczepan, 2024). This pushes the idea of the news article as worthy and trendy, ultimately reaching a global sensation which is talked about among people in society (Parveen and Showkat, 2020). Furthermore, people’s opinions and perspectives are focused on

the use of language which describes the female offender and the crime that was committed, which creates certain biases and stereotypes against female offenders. In addition, the application of qualitative content analysis provided a foundation of what will be discussed and experimented with based on my research topic. This methodology provided flexibility in analyzing Canadian news articles, which allowed me to explore themes and similar or different patterns, thus leading me to an outcome based on the data that was found.

Although my research project had several strengths, it also had limitations. While the seven articles provided insight into the issue, the small sample size may not accurately represent the broader population of female offenders. Additionally, most of the articles that I chose focused on crimes committed by female offenders in Ontario, while only one article was from British Columbia. This limited demographic scope may not fully capture how female offenders are presented in the media across different provinces in Canada. Also, reflecting on the news articles that were chosen, many of my articles were from national news companies, like the *National Post*, *CBC*, and *CTV*, where only one was from British Columbia, the *Vancouver Sun*. Many of these news companies may be politically left or right-leaning, which can influence the representation of female offenders. While using national news articles still provided answers to my question, it would have been better if I had also used different news articles in addition to the *Vancouver Sun*. This would leave less room for bias in media selection and open more room for results and findings about new connections or themes that may have arisen within my research project.

Lastly, the 14-week semester was a constraint that was beyond my control, limiting the depth of my research. With more time, I could have conducted a more extensive analysis, gathered additional findings, and compared them thoroughly with literature to strengthen my

arguments. Additionally, balancing this capstone Project with other coursework further restricted the time and resources available, presenting another challenge in creating a more detailed research project.

While this research project has several strengths, such as contributing to research regarding news media and female offenders, critically applying qualitative content analysis and using previous literature articles to support my arguments, there are still some limitations that highlight areas for future research within my project. By increasing the sample size and including additional news articles, primarily municipal news articles, and having more time to conduct this project, this would have developed more understanding of this issue and may have had a different outcome than expected.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the research conducted on news media and female offenders in Canada and how they are represented, several gaps and future research areas have been identified. Policymakers, academic scholars, and people of Canadian society need to take the following actions to fully understand the severe consequences of news media framing, particularly towards female offenders.

Academic research must address the significant influence of media on sensationalism, which fuels fear and shapes public perception of crime, all relating to labelling theory (Brenburg, 2019). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, news media has become more accessible than ever, available at the touch of a button. However, a key knowledge gap in the literature is the underexplored role of crime shows and pop culture in reinforcing sensationalism in news reporting. News media often rely on sensationalism to attract attention, which in turn drives trends that can reinforce biases, stereotypes, and moral panic surrounding female offenders. Much of the existing research on this

topic was conducted in the early 2000s, with only a few recent studies available. While this research project primarily focuses on news media, future studies should explore the role of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, and TikTok in shaping public perceptions of female offenders. As technology evolves, so do its influences on societal attitudes and the framing of crime narratives.

In addition, further research should also be done primarily in the Canadian context as there tends to be a limitation of research, so I had to rely on research conducted in the United States, England, Sweden, Finland, China, and Ireland. Additionally, while several studies mention reintegration, there is little discussion on how news media influence the self-perception and rehabilitation of female offenders. Given Canada's diversity, future research should also examine how Black, Indigenous, and immigrant women offenders are represented in the media. The consistent negative labelling of female offenders in Canada remains largely unexamined in terms of its long-term impact on their self-identity and reintegration into society.

As media consumers, it is important to be aware of how the content we engage with shapes our perception, particularly regarding female offenders. Sensationalized reporting can reinforce negative misconceptions, making media literacy and awareness essential. Society, including journalists, must recognize the importance of addressing gender biases in crime reporting. Creating a sense of empowerment in being an alternative voice to those female offenders should help foster the issue in challenging news media representation. It is crucial to emphasize ethical practices in news media and how they represent female offenders. Lastly, policy advocacy is important to push stronger reintegration within society by educating and training people within society, such as people who work in the criminal justice system, law enforcement, and civilians employed in the government industry.



### Conclusion

Although the TV series, *Orange is the New Black*, creates a sense of entertainment for women behind bars, it is clear that this is not how they are portrayed in reality. The way Canadian news media represent female offenders clearly emphasizes the slogan ‘if it bleeds, it leads’ – implying the use of sensationalism as way to enhance the appeal of a story that leaves consumers filled with feelings of fear, sadness, and other emotions to gain their attention (Andersen et al., 2019; Sandman, 2021; Champagne-Buckley, 2019). The seven news articles that were used in the research project shows a clear application of image framing and use of language to portray female offenders – influencing societal attitudes and beliefs that further promotes biases, stereotypes, and misunderstanding (Collins, 2016, 2014; Estrada et al., 2019; Trist et al., 2023).

This also leads to a domino effect of negative consequences that instils gender framing in a way that female offenders who commit crime are going against the norm of femininity by being deceitful, manipulative, controlling, and domineering (Estrada et al., 2019; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Furthermore, the race and ethnicity of female offenders showed no differences, which disproves that white women benefit from racial privileges when being represented in the news media. This research paper is hopeful that suggestions and further research to news organisations, scholars and policymakers promote balanced and accurate journalism that does not reinforce harmful stereotypes or misrepresentations of female offenders.

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## Appendix

### Searches & Results

**Table A1**

*Key Search Terms*

“News Media” “News Coverage” “News Framing” “Media Representation”	AND	“Women Offenders” “Gender”	AND	“Canada”
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*Note:* This Table represents the keywords that were used to gather literature that is relevant for the article selection.

**Table A2**

*Results from the initial search*

Database 1	Search Term(s)	Search Results
SageJournals	women offenders AND news media	19,929

*Note:* This Table represents the search database used, search terms, and number of hits returned from the initial search.

**Table A3**

*Results from the revised search*

Database 1	Search Term(s)	Search Results	Reason for Revision
Sage Journals	women offenders AND (news media OR news coverage)	17,253	Added synonym for news media
Sage Journals	women offenders AND (Canada) AND (news media OR news coverage)	4,915	Added keyword ‘Canada’
Sage Journals	women offenders AND (Canada) AND (news framing OR news coverage)	2,598	Removed ‘news media’ AND replaced with ‘news framing’

Sage Journals	women offenders AND (Canada) AND (news framing OR news coverage) AND (gender)	132	Added keyword 'gender'
Sage Journals	News framing and Media representation	83,585	Removed 'women offenders' AND 'Canada' AND 'news media' AND 'news coverage'

*Note:* This table represents the search database used, search terms, and the number of hits returned with revisions applied to the search.

**Table A4**

*Results from initial search*

Database 2	Search Term(s)	Search Results
JSTOR	women offenders AND news media	20,204

*Note:* This Table represents the search database used, search terms, and number of hits returned from the initial search.

**Table A5**

*Results from revised search*

Database 2	Search Term(s)	Search Results	Reason for Revision
JSTOR	women offenders AND (news media OR news coverage)	11,972	Added synonym for news media
JSTOR	women offenders AND (Canada) AND (news media OR news coverage)	4,211	Added keyword 'Canada'
JSTOR	women offenders AND (Canada) AND (news framing OR news coverage)	866	Removed 'news media' AND replaced with 'news framing'
JSTOR	women offenders AND (Canada) AND (news framing OR news coverage) AND (gender)	431	Added keyword 'gender'



JSTOR	News framing and Media representation	22,621	Removed 'women offenders' AND 'Canada' AND 'news media' AND 'news coverage'
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*Note:* This table represents the search database used, search terms, and the number of hits returned with revisions applied to the search.

**Table A6**

*Results from focused coding*

Category	Code	Description	Example
<b>Gender Framing</b>	<i>Appearance</i>	<p>Focus on appearance to commit a crime</p> <p>Portrayal of a woman's appearance based on how they look</p> <p>Women are cunning and deceiving based on their appearance</p>	<p>Her alleged participation in a car theft scam when she posed as a buyer (Lewis, 2024)</p> <p>By posing as a presentable, well-dressed woman (Lewis, 2024)</p> <p>Bonnick has a history of fraud charges in Florida and reportedly in Jamaica, as well as Toronto (Bilhete, 2024)</p> <p>A white woman was seen using a fake belly which resemble her benign pregnant to steal items (Knox, 2024)</p>
	<i>Domineering</i>	Instill the perceived notion of women being manipulative and controlling	Melissa pressured her boyfriend into killing his teenage ex more than a decade ago (Loriggio, 2024)
	<i>Sexualization</i>	Implying a stereotype of sexual power and control. Very promiscuous.	Melissa repeatedly threatened to end her relationship with Bagshaw or withhold sex unless he killed Rengel (Loriggio, 2024)

	<i>Victimization</i>	Women are given a sense of sympathy based on the incident that occurred	Paris displayed many symptoms of legal definition of battered spouse syndrome, including chronic anxiety, avoidance, fear, and heightened startle response (Egan-Elliot, 2025)
<b>Language Framing</b>	<i>Demonization</i>	Uses harsh language to frame these women as dangerous	<p>The violence of Laroche's attack was extreme and unmistakably punitive (Egan-Elliot, 2025).</p> <p>Gill sisters were also victimized by Manji's deceptions (The Canadian Press, 2024)</p> <p>Paris sliced Manatee's body into pieces where she disposed it in various places around Nanaimo in a painstaking and grimly macabre process (Egan-Elliot, 2025)</p>
	<i>Infantilization</i>	Labelling them with certain nicknames instils in them as less threatening	18-year-old 'Porsche Girl' was arrested in connection with the captured video (Lewis, 2024)
<b>Image Framing</b>	<i>Mugshot Use</i>	Police mugshot was used to emphasise criminality	<p>Following female offenders:</p> <p>Sarah Bradshaw Sabrina Kauldhar Melissa Todorovic Jodi-Ann Bonnick Karima Manji</p>
	<i>Sensationalism</i>	A photo of the victim was used instead of the female offender, which emphasises a dramatic expression of sympathy for the victim	Vancouver Sun news article shows Sidney Manatee, 32 years old, instead of 29-year-old, Paris Laroche (Egan-Elliot, 2025)

	<i>Comparison Framing</i>	<p>Other photos were taken from CCTV cameras</p> <p>Uses a normal photo and a mugshot to emphasize the before and after outcome of the female offender</p>	<p>CBC actively shows the incident of the crime of the female offenders stealing from the Guelph store and variety store (Knox, 2024)</p> <p>CBC shows Jodi-Ann Bonnick with her successful food business, Bonnick's West Indian Grocery, but in the second photo was her caught by the police (Bilhete, 2024)</p>
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>	<i>Minorities vs non-minorities</i>	Mostly, people of colour are committing a variety of crimes compared to non-minorities of white people	<p>Minority female offenders: Sarah Bradshaw Sabrina Kauldhar Jodi-Ann Bonnick Karima Manji</p> <p>Non-Minority: Paris Laroche</p>

*Note:* This table represents the focused coding used, category, code, description, and examples applied to this research paper.