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## Femicide in the News: How Newspaper Articles Represent the Killing of Women & Girls in Detroit and Ciudad Juárez

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Femicide in the News: How Newspaper Articles Represent the Killing of Women  
& Girls in Detroit and Ciudad Juárez

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### **Abstract**

In the year 2017 alone, 87,000 women were intentionally murdered across the globe, while 58% of these victims were murdered by someone they knew—family members or intimate partners (Global Study on Homicide: Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls, 2018). The intentional killing of women and girls, typically by men and motivated by gender, is classified as a crime called “femicide.” Broader definitions of femicide simply state that it is the murder of women and girls, by someone of any gender, regardless of their motive. In some regions of the world, this phenomenon is more prevalent than in others. Although women and girls are murdered at an alarming rate both in the United States and in Mexico, research and media attention tends to be concentrated in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, where femicides are considered to be an epidemic. This study examines a total of 102 newspaper articles where a female was murdered in Detroit, Michigan and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The newspaper articles from both cities were analyzed as two separate cases in order to determine characteristics of newsworthiness and their implications for how these locations construct the issue of violence against women with respect to each city. The results of this research demonstrate that, although cases in Ciudad Juárez were more likely to be connected to the city’s epidemic of femicide, the news source used failed to adequately follow up on stories or provide thorough details. Contrary to this, the Detroit news source often provided an overwhelming amount of detail on cases and followed up sufficiently despite the lack of recognition to a larger social problem. Overall, the findings will reveal that the source selected to represent cases in Ciudad Juárez was more likely to relate incidents of femicide within the scope of violence against women, whereas the Detroit news source rarely even made a connection between cases.

## **Introduction**

The intention of the current study is to examine cases of femicide in newspaper articles cross-culturally, in order to determine characteristics of newsworthiness and their implications for how these locations socially construct and respond to violence against women. For the purposes of this study, ‘femicide’ shall be defined as the murder of women and girls. Lin & Phillips (2012) assert that strong public opinion on prominent cases of homicide can result in new criminal justice policies, such as California’s “three strikes” policy after the brutal murder of Polly Klaas. Laws developed out of strong public opinion could not have succeeded unless the crime, victim, and perpetrator possessed newsworthy characteristics which were able to survive through rigorous journalistic selection. Language, sources and context are vastly important in constructing news stories on crime and justice, as these factors demonstrate which subjects are considered to be ‘newsworthy.’ Thus, an examination of femicide and violence against women in the news is vital in the understanding of how news media will report on violence against women, subsequently shaping public opinion and further public policy.

As a whole, scholars have neglected to publish a significant amount of research on the topic of femicide. The word femicide itself has only recently entered into dialogue in the United States. Its first major appearance was at International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women (The history of the term ‘femicide’) where Diana E. H. Russell presented an early definition of the word. There are locations around the world which have earned the attention of researchers due to their high rates of femicide, therefore femicide publications are typically concentrated in particular parts of the world. South Africa, Latin American countries such as Guatemala and Honduras, Ciudad Juárez (commonly called Juárez), and the state of North Carolina are some

examples of these infamous locations. Although it is gravely important to understand the causes of femicide in these locations with unusually high rates of crime, these studies have only provided insight into why the crime occurs in relation to that location's cultural norms, values, ideologies, and law enforcement response. Depending on where the crime occurs, as well as who the victims and perpetrators are, the crime of femicide may be defined in an entirely different way than in another part of the world. For example, dowry-related killings in India are caused by vastly different motives and cultural values than femicides in South Africa, which are most often the results of ongoing domestic violence. For this reason, existing femicide literature proves to be limited in that its focus is on locations with high rates of femicide, which may exclude cases of femicide that do not directly fall in line with such unequivocal occurrences. Authors Gillespie et al. (2013) and Richards et al. (2011) both call for future research which examines femicide in other states besides North Carolina, a state that already has numerous studies that consider its high rates of femicide. A new approach must be taken to this topic, which analyzes femicide in locations that are not consistently exploited by way of media for their seemingly aberrant crimes. By taking on an unusual approach to the study of femicide in an analysis of newspaper articles, the current study aims to reveal how media are able to construct the same type of crime as either a cause for public concern or a private problem which must be left alone.

Publications on femicide fail to take on a comparative criminological approach, where two locations are compared in terms of their crimes rates or other criminological characteristics. These existing publications have more often focused on a single location with a greater volume of news articles and sources rather than a comparison between two locations. While there is not a significant amount of attention given to the topic, the United States especially is an understudied

area for femicide scholars. Studies in South Africa have thoroughly addressed the root causes as to why men kill their female partners, as have studies about why female laborers are heinously murdered in Mexico near the *maquiladoras*. Still, there remains a large gap in knowledge as to why women are at a great risk of being murdered by men in the United States, especially by their male intimate partners. Because certain homicides against women tend to receive much greater attention than others, even though the end goal is the same, a comparative criminological approach can benefit femicide studies greatly to understand why it is that the same crimes are given more or less attention depending on who the victim is or where the crime occurs.

The purpose of my study is to remedy several problems. First, my study will contribute to the body of existing literature on newspaper representations of femicide, furthermore to the amount of content analyses of newspaper articles on the subject. Next, my study will fill a gap in the literature in terms of comparative criminology. Existing femicide studies only reflect the crime as it pertains to one particular location, and lack an approach which addresses similarities and differences in places around the world. My study will be comparing the language used to describe acts of femicide, domestic homicide, and intimate partner homicide in newspapers in both Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico and Detroit, Michigan. Language use is vital in the construction of a social problem, but more importantly how society responds to the problem. Victim, perpetrator, and crime characteristics that are present in newspaper articles will also be recorded, which will provide insight into which types of crimes, victims, and perpetrators are considered to be newsworthy by media. By examining two different types of newspaper representations of violence against women, we can contrast two cultures in terms of women's status, how crime is misconstrued through media, relative beliefs about what causes female

homicide, and possibly ethnocentrism. This study's analysis of newspaper articles aims to bring to light the potential differences and similarities between cultures in terms of media coverage and social perception and reaction to the crime of femicide. A relationship between crime and media exists undeniably, however the facts are rarely communicated accurately. Vincent Sacco (1995) explains this phenomenon in "Media Constructions of Crime":

Variations in the volume of news about crime seem to bear little relationship to variations in the actual volume of crime between places or over time. Whereas crime statistics indicate that most crime is nonviolent, media reports suggest, in the aggregate, that the opposite is true (Sacco, 1995, p. 143).

Sacco's argument that crime and media are not representative of each other incites the purpose of the current study. The ultimate intention of my study is to draw comparisons as well as differences between two distinct locations experiencing the problem of violence against women. My study aims to analyze and expose media strategies on crime reporting which have a powerful influence in determining what is or is not considered a problem of that particular place in the world. Femicide, a crime that predates its recent scholarly and media attention, is a phenomenon that is not well understood across global context. For this reason, my study will expose how media are shaping the world's understanding of femicide on a small scale through comparisons and differentiations between Ciudad Juárez and Detroit.

Lastly, my research will add to the information that exists on female homicides in the United States, more specifically in Detroit, Michigan. Currently, hardly any literature exists on female homicides in Detroit, let alone within the context of femicide. Studies on women in Detroit, Michigan are typically limited to a specific population, which is not necessarily

representative of all females nor all female homicides. I hope that my research will bring light to the fact that female homicides in the United States are often not isolated incidents, contrary to what media might imply through the social construction of this crime.

The following research questions have been based on those previously utilized by scholars such as Chermak (1995), Richards et al. (2011), and Gillespie et al. (2013), who have published some of the most influential studies on this contemporary topic of discussion. Each question has been investigated previously, however for the purposes of the current study some adjustments have been made. Elements for consideration included within the research questions are types of victim-blaming language, ways in which stories are framed by journalists in newspaper articles, and which elements of the story are present in cases that receive the most prominent news coverage. In addressing the research questions concerned with different types of language and framing, both a content analysis and frame analysis are utilized. With respect to characteristics of the crime such as location, incident participants, cause of death, etc., an online spreadsheet as well as a qualitative analysis software called “ATLAS.ti” were used to categorize incident details.

**General Research Question:** How is the killing of women and girls represented in newspapers based in Detroit, Michigan and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico?

**Specific Research Questions:**

- 1) How is direct and indirect victim-blaming language, as well as other harmful types of language such as linguistic avoidance, deployed in newspaper accounts of the killing of women and girls?



- 2) How do the newspaper accounts frame the killing of women and girls with respect to the broader scope of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and femicide?
- 3) Which victim, perpetrator, and crime characteristics are associated with high profile newspaper coverage and newsworthiness of the killing of women and girls?

## **Literature Review**

The killing of women and girls, regardless of intention or relationship, falls under a category of crimes against women called ‘femicide.’ Various forms of femicide exist, such as intimate partner femicide, non-intimate femicide, female infanticide, and dowry or ‘honour’-related killings. A 2012 study conducted by The World Health Organization (WHO) found that, globally, over 35% of murdered women are killed by an intimate partner. Conversely, the same study found that only around 5% of murdered men are killed by an intimate partner (World Health Organization, 2012). The WHO cautions that these numbers are low due to the fact that the murders of women in non-industrialized countries are missing from this data, implying that the problem is much deeper than what studies can show. Although men are most commonly the perpetrators of violence against women in all forms, women are frequently perpetrators of these crimes as well. Due to the complexity of crimes against women, the WHO has defined femicide in a variety of ways because the motive for these killings are commonly fueled by cultural elements specific to a particular part of the world.

**Detroit, Michigan.** A city once flourishing due to the auto industry, the majority of Detroit is now ravaged and economically devastated as a result of deindustrialization. Homes and buildings sit vacant, stripped of their materials and badly vandalized. Since the 1950s, Detroit has seen a great decline in population, especially the wealthy, which has completely rid the city of its tax

base. When industry was forced to leave Detroit, those who could afford to leave the city did so in order to follow employment. The period of the 1960s-1970s is characterized by “white flight,” where wealthy white individuals were the first to flee from a location in droves. The Detroit Riot of 1967, heavily fueled by animosity toward the police because of racial discrimination, heightened a fear of crime in the city and continued to drive residents out of Detroit. The population left behind was destitute, and a majority African American. Detroit, deprived of its tax base, is now unable to provide vital social services to its population that is so desperately in need of them. Hollis (2017) summarizes the decline in population and increase in poverty in “Homicide, Home Vacancies, and Population Change in Detroit,”:

The residents who could afford to leave and follow the jobs did. The ones who were left behind were the marginalized and disadvantaged who could not afford to follow (Sugrue, 2005). With no jobs left in the city, there was no attraction for immigrants or other groups who could have revitalized the economy of the city. With no new population providing financial and other resources and no jobs, unemployment and poverty escalated in the city (Hollis, 2017, p. 5).

Reid (2003) provides data supporting that certain violent crimes in Detroit are correlated with the city’s rates of unemployment, especially in positions of manufacturing. Nonwhites were disproportionately employed in manufacturing jobs (Hollis, 2017), so when these positions were most harshly affected by deindustrialization, African American and other nonwhite populations were hit the hardest by unemployment and poverty.

The objective of the research conducted by Hollis (2017) in “Homicide, Home Vacancies, and Population Change in Detroit” is to examine the relationship between homicide

and patterns of population change. Her findings conclude that areas in the city which have experienced higher numbers of outmigration also experience the highest rates of homicide. Further, locations with a greater number of vacant homes tend to have higher rates of homicide. Hollis (2017) speculates that these locations, marked by more vacant homes and more outmigration, are the areas hit hardest by “white flight” and therefore left the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups behind. “As the rest of the country saw a steady decline in homicide rates, Detroit had a steady high homicide rate” (Hollis, 2017, p. 5). A theoretical approach to this phenomenon may infer that Detroit experiences steady homicide rates because of the enormous social strain placed on its residents due to severe poverty and lack of social services. Reid (2003) discusses Boston, Massachusetts as an example of how a city is able to overcome manufacturing decline. In contrast, Detroit is not exemplified as a city that is able to overcome its downfall. There seems to be a circular effect taking place in Detroit, where outmigration robbed the city of its tax base and poverty flourished, and today no new populations are able to migrate into Detroit because there are no resources, industry, or capital. Hollis (2017) summarizes this effect where she states:

This is indicative of the current concerns in Detroit where populations are leaving the city in masses without any new population influx. Deindustrialization combined with the downfall of the automotive industry led to white flight, and eventually black upper and middle class flight. In other words, there is no immigration that can revitalize the city and contribute to the economy (Hollis, 2017, p. 25).

Detroit once held a seven-year streak of being named the most dangerous city in the United States (Hollis, 2017). This record continued into 2016, when it was said that Detroit had the

highest rate of violent crime compared to any other large city in the United States (MacDonald & Hunter, 2018). More recently, there have been over 26,000 incidents of violent crime across the city of Detroit from January of 2018 to January of 2019, including 860 incidents of sexual assault (City of Detroit). Despite these alarmingly high violent crime rates, and its seemingly incessant cycle of poverty, Detroit remains a neglected topic of discussion for crime and justice scholars.

Intimate partner violence is not a sector of violent crimes unique to Detroit or other major U.S. cities, as it has continuously plagued the United States long before the crime was defined as a public concern. Both men and women are affected by intimate partner violence, however, women are disproportionately affected at the hands of their male intimate partners. Meyer (2008) states that intimate partner homicide, the ultimate consequence of intimate partner violence, is the most common cause of injury for women who are between the ages of 15-44 (Meyer, 2008). Meyer (2008) has estimated that between two to four million women are abused by their partners each year, and that 1,200 women a year are murdered by their current or former partners. The collateral effects of intimate partner violence and intimate partner homicide are shocking as well, as Meyer (2008) found that at least five million children each year witness abuse (Meyer, 2008). A collateral intimate partner homicide is when a friend, family member, new or past intimate partner is killed as a result of intimate partner violence between two people. At the time that Meyer published this dissertation, she stated that her publication was the first to be written on the topic of collateral intimate partner homicides, and that the term “collateral intimate partner homicides” had not yet been coined by any researcher in the field. Meyer remains a pioneer on the topic of collateral intimate partner homicides today. While collateral victims are frequently

acknowledged in intimate partner violence and intimate partner homicide literature, there is still a severe lack of individualized research on this subject.

Scholars on crime and justice media have found that the way in which the media report on domestic violence, intimate partner violence, intimate partner homicide, and violence against women profoundly shape not only the way that society forms an opinion on these issues, but how society forms opinions about women. In “Slain and Slandered: A Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Femicide in Crime News,” Taylor (2009) identifies five main factors present in femicide literature which play a vital role in the social construction of violence against women, which therefore shape the public’s perception on these types of crimes. These five main factors are: the construction of crime news (newsworthiness), victim blame, language, context, and sources. Aside from language, sources, and context, Taylor (2009) explains how victim blame and newsworthiness are prevalent in the news media’s representation of female deaths in the United States especially.

First, Taylor (2009) states that the media are responsible for socially constructing the idea of newsworthiness based on the constraints that exist during the process of reporting a story. The extent of a story’s newsworthiness is dependent upon the peculiarity that the story may possess. The more unusual a story is, the more likely it is to receive greater coverage in the media. A constant depiction of the rarest incidents portrays an idea of crime that is not representative of reality, therefore forming a social construction about which types of crimes most frequently occur. It is also victim and perpetrator characteristics that determine unusualness and therefore newsworthiness, meaning that certain crimes, locations, and individuals are considered to be more newsworthy than others. Yet, Taylor (2009) argues that newsworthiness is further socially

constructed because the decision about which stories are newsworthy goes beyond one individual reporter or journalist, and that the decision is actually influenced by values, beliefs, and bureaucracy as well. Factors that influence which stories receive the most coverage also include; “competition, deadlines, reporters’ ambitions, what sells, journalistic traditions, racism, sexism, class prejudice, bias of sources, reporters’ opinions, manipulation, and hierarchy in the newsroom” (Taylor, 2009, p. 23).

Next, Taylor (2009) states that victim blame is a standard tactic used by news media in framing stories where a woman has been killed. One method of placing responsibility on the female victim is by emphasizing the mental health state of the perpetrator, which diverts sympathy away from the female victim and onto the perpetrator. By shifting this blame away from the perpetrator on account of their (typically ‘his’) pathological state and inability to control their actions, the incident is framed as an isolated event and therefore not as a result of violence against women. From this, the public perception is that acts of violence against women are not the result of ongoing domestic violence, and are committed by mentally ill individuals who cannot control the symptoms of their illness. This deflection of criticism without a doubt has a negative impact on the way violence against women is perceived, because it removes responsibility from the perpetrator and depicts them as someone who is easily identified as pathological; this is not characteristic of all perpetrators of violence against women and disambiguates the identification of perpetrators of these crimes.

To date, there are very few scholarly articles on the topic of homicide in Michigan, and even fewer on the topic of femicide and violence against women. Nevertheless, Meyer’s (2008) dissertation titled, “Newspaper coverage of collateral intimate partner homicides” makes an

impactful contribution not only to literature on violence against women in Michigan, but to an exceptional form of femicide. Using a content analysis of Michigan newspapers, Meyer (2008) employs four generic media frames to develop patterns in the way that media report on the topic of intimate partner homicide. The four media frames utilized in Meyer's dissertation are; problem definition, causal attributions, moral judgements, and potential remedies (Meyer, 2008, p. 78). The frames adopted by Meyer are theory-focused, as they are used to connect the killing(s) reported in newspaper articles to two broader crime theories, coercive control theory or family violence theory. I have chosen not to include these frames for my own research because they would not be effective for answering my research questions. The goal of my research is not to connect femicide and violence against women to broader theories of crime or to explain why they occurred.

While other studies do exist on the topics of intimate partner violence and intimate partner homicide in Michigan and Detroit, and make great advancements in the literature on violence against women overall, they are not necessarily representative of all women. For example, Barkho et al. (2010) published a study titled "Intimate Partner Violence Among Iraqi Immigrant Women in Metro Detroit: A Pilot Study." The findings by Barkho et al. (2010) demonstrate that Iraqi women in the U.S. experience intimate partner violence at a similar rate to women living in Iraq. Further, their study revealed noteworthy beliefs of Iraqi women regarding their social status in relation to their partners, and well as knowledge of their legal rights. While these findings are vastly important, they could prove to be limited to Iraqi women who have moved to the United States, and therefore may not be applicable to the broader population of women experiencing intimate partner violence in the U.S. Moreover, Biroscak et al. (2006)

utilized intimate partner homicide data in Michigan to conduct a study titled, “A Practical Approach to Public Health Surveillance of Violent Deaths Related to Intimate Partner Relationships,” which analyzed the efficiency of the Michigan Intimate Partner Homicide Surveillance System. While this research is important in identifying and categorizing types of crimes in a statewide database, it does not enhance our knowledge of femicide or intimate partner homicide, nor does it provide valuable information regarding media representations of violence against women.

**Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico.** Contrary to Detroit, Ciudad Juárez is abundant with research due to the copious numbers of *feminicidios* that occur in the city. Not only is Juárez infamous because of the brutality present with each body discovered, but because of the corruption that plagues the city’s government and criminal justice system. In “Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border,” Domínguez-Ruvalcaba & Corona (2010) detail accounts where the police in Juárez are often gang members themselves and have been known to kill attorneys in order to maintain a desired version of a case (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba & Corona, 2010). As a result of such corruption and lack of action on the part of the authorities, it is common for the victims’ bodies to permanently remain unidentified. Domínguez-Ruvalcaba & Corona (2010) state that because the criminal justice system has proven the courtroom to be an unsafe space to receive justice, crime victims and their families often turn to news media, television especially, to have their stories told. In Juárez, the public opinion which emerges from victims’ stories carries more weight than traditional justice in the courtroom. To support this contention, authors Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Corona avow that:



Instead of filing complaints in police offices, they use the media to speak out. The local television news programs become the public arena where criminal issues are disputed. Television is taken as the substitute for the courtroom. The public is a massive plaintiff; the anchors refer all complaints to a deaf authority or simply reiterate commonsense principles, a melodramatic morality that is nurtured by the claim of being victims (Dominguez-Ruvalcaba & Corona, 2010, p. 71).

In recent years, Mexico has seen an increase in *maquiladoras*, or foreign-owned factories, as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The femicides that occur in Ciudad Juárez are referred to as the “maquiladora murders” because many of the women who are killed were employees of the maquiladoras, or their mutilated bodies were found in the surrounding empty deserts. In “Gendered Violence: An Analysis of the Maquiladora Murders,” Pantaleo (2010) offers one possible cause for the uptick in violent homicides where she suggests: the increase in the maquiladora industry along the border, fueled by NAFTA, indirectly led to an increase in women working outside the home. This disrupted the patriarchal social fabric of Mexican society and resulted in a backlash against women and the targeting of these women for murder by unknown subjects (Pantaleo, 2010, p. 350).

Pantaleo's theory is just one of many devised to explain why Ciudad Juárez has recently seen an explosion in crimes against women and girls. However, the literature that exists on the city is plentiful, yet the heinous murders of women and girls remain some of the worst in the world. Due to the fact that politics and news media in Ciudad Juárez are heavily co-dependent, and the city openly proclaims femicide to be a social crisis, reports on crime in the city could reveal

novel distinctions or similarities to the way in which the U.S. reports on a familiar crisis of its own.

**Literature.** The term ‘femicide’ has taken on several definitions since its inception, however the crime itself has remained the same. Until the 1970s, violence against women was not a topic of concern in the United States, and the word ‘femicide’ is still rarely used today. The word ‘femicide’ was first used in a book by John Corry in the year 1801, however that brief introduction did not bear much importance until 1976. During the year 1976, Diana E. H. Russell introduced the topic of femicide at the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women (The history of the term ‘femicide’). Russell, a feminist scholar and activist, was the first to provide a modern definition of the word in 1976, which calls femicide: “the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women” (The history of the term ‘femicide’). In 1992 Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell (1992) published “Femicide: The Politics of Woman-Killing.” In this monumental publication, the term femicide is defined as “the misogynistic killing of women by men” (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. xi). Russell later rephrased the definition in 2012 before the United Nations Symposium on Femicide to read as, “the killing of one or more females by one or more males because they are female” (The history of the term ‘femicide’). Russell’s 2012 definition of femicide falls closer to the definition provided by the World Health Organization, which breaks down femicide into several categories with different definitions in order to encompass the many forms that it takes on. Femicide can be defined in different ways in order to cover the many scopes from which the crime can be examined.

Although Russell’s varying definitions of femicide are those most prevalent in the available femicide research, they fail to include important classifications of female deaths

presented by the World Health Organization. After considering Russell's original definition of femicide, Jacquelyn Campbell and Carol W. Runyan offer a broader definition in "Femicide: Guest Editors' Introduction." The authors argue that Russell's initial definition can prove to be problematic as it jumps to conclusions about the motive behind the crime without careful examination. The authors further argue that Radford and Russell's book, "Femicide: The Politics of Woman-Killing," implies that femicide by their definition is limited to female homicide perpetrated solely by men who have previously abused, stalked, and/or assaulted their female victim(s). While this does tend to be a common theme among female homicides, it proves to be exclusionary toward other categories of femicide. In particular, the World Health Organization (2012) has defined female infanticide, 'honour'-related murder, dowry-related murder, and non-intimate femicide as categories of femicide that are not necessarily preceded by ongoing violence and may be perpetrated by women as well as by men. For these reasons, authors Campbell and Runyan (1998) contend that, "we have developed this issue from a more empirical perspective, cautiously avoiding inferences to motive without clear support from available data. Consequently, in this volume, femicide refers to all killings of women regardless of motive or perpetrator status" (Campbell & Runyan, 1998, p. 347).

The battering of women began to be recognized as an issue of public concern after the publication of Erin Pizzey's (1974) book titled "Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear." Pizzey's book was the first ever to be published on the topic of wives who are abused by boyfriends or husbands. Although this book was written about and published in England, and only touches on a portion of female deaths, it brought awareness to violence against women in North America and created a platform for the issue to be heard. In "Femicide: The Politics of

Woman-Killing,” over 20 different authors contributed to the literature on femicide in noteworthy ways, which have proven that the problem comes in many forms and has existed long before it become a public topic.

One country that has received a great deal of scholarly attention for its femicidal activity is South Africa. Mathews et al. (2014) have stated in “‘So Now I’m the Man’: Intimate Partner Femicide and Its Interconnections with Expressions of Masculinities in South Africa” that intimate partner femicide is the leading cause of death for women in the county, and this crime occurs at over twice the global femicide rate. South Africa’s current societal structure has developed out of its extremely violent past of apartheid, which has created a deep divide in the country by race, class, and certainly gender. Out of their interviews with 20 men in South Africa who were incarcerated for killing their partners, Mathews et al. (2014) settled on a variety of factors that heavily influenced men to become violent towards and ultimately kill women. Alcohol abuse, gang involvement, financial hardship, infidelity, little parental involvement growing up, and high expectations to provide for the family were just a few of the reasons given by the interviewees as to what drove them to kill. On the reverse end, women in South Africa are expected to stay home and not work for it is considered to be disrespectful to the man in the relationship, which places a great financial and emotional burden on the man if he is unable to successfully provide. Gendered expectations such as these are embedded throughout an individual’s life, which includes causing both men and women to believe that their self-worth is based upon the quality of their partners. If one of the two partners does not meet society’s expectations, punishments in the name of ‘honour,’ including death, are socially acceptable forms of reparations. Yet, since women are instructed to be submissive, they are almost always

the ones who pay for any sort of real or imagined strains in the relationship. Although the social conflicts that arose due to apartheid are unique to South Africa, the gendered expectations imposed by both men and women are ignited by similar principles that are present in cases of intimate femicide worldwide. Because femicides in South Africa are so prevalent, and are most commonly the results of previous intimate partner violence and gender roles, the literature on this country is highly valuable as it has great potential to be related to crimes in the U.S. and Mexico where the present study is concerned.

One of the more popular methods to analyze femicide and domestic violence is through news articles in either the form of a content analysis or frame analysis. Scholars of femicide have utilized newspaper articles in the United States to code for specific words as well as take note of which type of media frame is used for each article. In the article “Exploring News Coverage of Femicide: Does Reporting the News Add Insult to Injury?,” Richards et al. propose three questions to guide their research, which are:

- 1) Did news coverage tend to blame the victim for her murder through direct or indirect victim-blaming language?;
- 2) Did different sources cited in the news coverage—public, private, and domestic violence experts—vary in terms of their portrayal of the femicide?;
- 3) Did the articles portray the event as isolated or within the context of IPV as a societal issue? (Richards et al. 2011, p. 184)

I’ve chosen to base some of the questions in my own research on these questions. In my own research, I will be coding for direct and indirect victim-blaming language. Richards et al. (2011) state that direct victim-blaming language includes references to the failure to take action on the victim’s part, such as how they did not prosecute their offender, not reporting acts of violence,

and not attending their court dates. Their description of indirect victim-blaming language includes referencing the alcohol and drug use of the victim and perpetrator, as well as their mental health states.

The article titled “Framing Deadly Domestic Violence: Why the Media’s Spin Matters in Newspaper Coverage of Femicide” by Gillespie et al. (2013) utilizes a frame analysis to explore whether or not cases of femicide are framed within the broader context of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. By framing cases within the broader context of intimate partner violence and domestic violence, it aids society in the identification of a potentially deadly problem. When cases are not framed as intimate partner violence and domestic violence, it illustrates that the incident was an isolated event and not associated with past incidents of violence. It is important for society to acknowledge past episodes of violence, because past domestic violence research has shown that a woman is more likely to be killed by her intimate partner when that partner has exhibited violence behavior in the past. Due to the importance of frame analysis concerning femicide research, I have decided to adopt a frame analysis approach for my own research. Gillespie et al. (2013) use several frames for their research that contain elements which attempt to explain away the incident in a passive manner.

Taylor (2009) has published on the importance of media in their ability to determine which stories are important or not, a concept called “newsworthiness.” Essentially, newsworthiness is what makes a story peak society’s interest, thus earning it media attention. Taylor suggests that the news media are immensely important in determining the importance of stories because newspapers in particular are a main source of information for many individuals. Characteristics of the crime itself, the perpetrator(s), and the victim(s) are all vital in determining

newsworthiness. Because newsworthiness is determined by the characteristics of a crime, it is frequently the most unusual stories that receive the most media attention (Taylor, 2009). Some examples of how a news story is constructed that Taylor (2009) provides include, “competition, deadlines, reporters’ ambitions, what sells, journalistic traditions, racism, sexism, class prejudice, bias of sources, reporters’ opinions, manipulation, and hierarchy in the newsroom” (Taylor, 2009, p. 23). Once passing through the competitive and biased atmosphere of newsrooms, it is only the most rare and unusual stories that make it into the newspaper. As a consequence, those reading the news are only exposed to rare stories and therefore may interpret these stories as the most typical occurrence. Newspaper articles are often examples of the social construction of reality because companies are selective in their publishing so to make stories align with common beliefs and stereotypes or to provide a captivating story for readers. This permits uncommon stories to be portrayed as the norm. The relevance of this to my own research, is that I will also be coding for victim and perpetrator characteristics in order to reveal which types of people and crimes are considered to be most newsworthy.

Although comparative criminology is an overlooked approach for femicide scholars, Paulina García-Del Moral (2011) published “Representation as a Technology of Violence: On the Representation of the Murders and Disappearances of Aboriginal Women in Canada and Women in Ciudad Juarez” which provides a fascinating comparison between how deadly crimes against Canadian and Mexican women are portrayed through print media.

## Conceptual Framework

This study employs proven sociological concepts which have been utilized by researchers in prior studies on crime and justice media, especially those pertaining to the representation of crime victims.

Prominence, or newsworthiness, as told by Chermak (1995) in “Victims in the News: Crime and the American News Media” is determined by five main factors. These factors are the seriousness of the crime, incident participants, incident producers, uniqueness and salience. Chermak (1995) asserts that “Crimes of violence are overrepresented in the news, whereas property and white-collar offenses are underrepresented. The crimes least likely to occur (murder, rape) are those most frequently presented” (Chermak, 1995, p. 24). Chermak further describes that the characteristics of both crime victims and perpetrators are telling about the coverage their story will receive. Personal factors which influence this include age, race, social status, and occupation. Yet, victim and perpetrator characteristics do not predict newsworthiness independently of one another. Lin & Phillips (2012) expand upon this in their analysis of media coverage of capital murder cases. They found that, “interracial or interethnic homicides receive more coverage than crimes in which offenders and victims are members of the same group” (Lin & Phillips, 2012, p. 938). These findings coincide with ideas about a victim’s “worthiness” of receiving prominent coverage, where the media may tend to give more attention to cases where a victim possesses attributes which make them most vulnerable or most valuable to society.

More unusual cases receive more coverage because they are more interesting to the public and thus generate more advertising revenue. Causes involving “worthy” victims



and “unworthy” perpetrators are also interesting because they fit with compelling narratives about bad people harming good people (Lin & Phillips, 2012, p. 939).

This discovery made by the authors explains why past research (Chermak, 2015) has found that stories involving very young and very old victims, or victims of high social status have received more prominent coverage. Lin & Phillips (2012) add that perpetrator characteristics have been found to be less predictive of newsworthiness than victim characteristics, and may only be predictive of prominent coverage when there is a noteworthy relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Incident producers are said to be significant in the determination of newsworthiness due to the great deal of autonomy that journalists possess. Which stories they chose to cover, how long they choose to cover them, which court proceedings they attend, and the perspective from which a story is covered are all some of the personal decisions made by producers (Chermak, 1995). Yet, these decisions are also heavily influenced by social factors pertaining to journalists as well. Personal interests, level of education, political party affiliation, demographics, and professional background are just some of the social factors that journalists are influenced by when reporting the news, which easily explains why past researchers proclaim that crime news is socially constructed (Chermak, 1995). A unique element of a crime is critical in determining newsworthiness for reasons that it is able to distinguish that particular crime from others which occur frequently. In an instance provided by Cherkmak (1995), a typical burglary would not likely receive prominent coverage because these crimes happen so often. Yet, when the burglar’s intention was to steal the victim’s underwear, this may earn the crime prominent media coverage because it employs an element of shock, surprise, and even curiosity that is not typically present in this type of offense. Conclusively, salience is able to determine the

newsworthiness of a crime in several ways. First, if media are concerned with appealing to a local population then they may choose to include stories that are relatable to that area, such as community members, businesses, or other known locations. Another way in which salience is key is when other types of crime are continually occurring in a location, then as similar stories occur they gain prominent coverage because they are able to fit with the present theme of crime (Chermak, 1995). For example, the prominent O.J. Simpson case during 1994 allowed for unrelated cases of domestic violence to appear in a prominent way as these stories were salient to the high-profile O.J. Simpson case in which domestic violence was a significant factor (Sacco, 1995).

As mentioned previously through cases provided by Legal Momentum, language used by the media affects how the public interprets the severity of a crime. This understanding, or misunderstanding, of crime then further affects how society is inclined to either remedy or bypass the challenges presented by various types of crime. In the context of intimate partner violence, Richards et al. (2011) believe that language used to describe women or the crimes committed against them maintains the idea that women are participants in their own abuse, especially when they fail to uphold gender roles prescribed by society. The authors expressed that:

when the criminality of intimate partner violence (IPV) is diminished or dismissed through victim-blaming language, the media send a clear message to consumers that violence against women is not a serious crime, that women are responsible (or partly responsible) for their victimization, or both (Richards et al., 2011, p. 179).

Careless language and harmful representations of violence against women are influential in demonstrating to society that violence against women is not an epidemic; this is an inaccurate notion that must be remedied if society is to think differently about these crimes.

The above concepts presented by various researchers on violence against women, as well as media, are evidence to the contention that media are a powerful influence on what society thinks and why. Further, media are a powerful influence on how society will choose to react to issues presented on a prominent platform based on how crime is presented. The above sociological concepts may prove to be successful in gaining insight into women's status in society through an international lens, and furthermore, how the killing of women and girls is represented in entirely different societies with varying perceptions of violence against women.

## **Methods**

The process of conducting a content analysis typically includes reading a piece of literature, assigning 'codes' to important words and phrases, and then later utilizing the frequency of these codes to conduct further analyses. A content analysis is valuable for this type of research because it simplifies the process of sifting through large quantities of news articles, and it is highly useful for a frame analysis. Gillespie et al. (2013) describe the process of conducting a frame analysis as utilizing the language, sources, and context present in the articles to apply them to predetermined media frames that have been used in previous crime and justice studies. The media frames set forth in the study by Gillespie et al. (2013) are ways for the media to give meaning to a crime, and later present this to their readers.

For example, if an incident of domestic homicide is characterized as an isolated event, or one that occurred "out-of-the-blue," then this would not be framed within the broader context of

domestic violence. A consequence of this frame is that readers may see this final act of domestic violence as unrelated to previous incidents of domestic violence in a relationship, overlooking the fact that domestic violence is a common predictor of homicide later on. When the media brush off incidents of domestic homicide as isolated events, domestic violence is not seen as a part of an urgent problem. Media frames are pivotal when it comes to which crimes receive attention and which crimes go unresolved.

By utilizing a content analysis in conjunction with frame analysis, words, quotations, and headlines form patterns which are valuable to determining the way in which a topic was intended to be perceived. A third method to examining media coverage of crime is by determining if a story receives “high-profile” and/or “incremental” media coverage. Determining these two characteristics is a quantitative research technique which is able to prove the “newsworthiness” of either a story, victim, perpetrator, or type of crime.

## **Present Study**

My research includes a content analysis on a total of 102 articles between Detroit and Ciudad Juárez, 51 articles located for each city. In order to locate articles which cover the topic of female homicide, a variety of key terms were used both in English and Spanish. English search terms in “The Detroit News” articles include:

- femicide
- homicide
- murder
- domestic homicide
- intimate partner homicide
- domestic violence
- intimate partner violence

- killing
- slaying

Spanish terms that will be searched in order to locate articles in “El Universal” include:

- feminicidio
- homicidio
- asesinato
- homicidio doméstico
- homicidio de socio íntimo
- violencia intrafamiliar
- violencia de socio íntimo
- matanza
- matar
- desaparecida/s

Articles from both sources were located in chronological order, beginning with January 1st, 2013, to ensure that no articles were missed during the time frame by missing weeks or months. Next, it was determined if the story was written about a femicide, intimate partner homicide or domestic homicide. The practice of eliminating articles that do not fall under the category of femicide is commonly performed by previous scholars on the subject, and for this reason I excluded irrelevant articles as well in order to use the most relevant articles. A female death that did not fall under this category of homicide against a female includes a car accident or another incident where gender, past intimate partner violence, or other domestic matters were not a factor in the death. Articles were excluded when the author presented a motive for the killing that was not consistent with reasons of gender, domestic violence or intimate partner violence (e.g. a woman was killed by her daughter so that she could obtain the woman’s life insurance).

Because the intention behind the crime can be difficult, if not impossible at times to determine, stories about a female death that failed to offer an explanation were included as a crime of femicide. For example, if an article was located about a woman who was found sexually assaulted and stabbed in a field without any further details about who committed the crime or why, that article would fall under the category of a femicide for the purposes of this research. Many of the articles included in this study were oftentimes the very first article to be published about a crime, and therefore lacked a substantial amount of detail. The inclusion of stories about murdered women with no particular explanation behind the homicide could prove to be a limitation to this research, because as time passes, details about the crime may become available which could offer evidence that the crime was in fact *not* a femicide. Researchers who have previously studied this topic have had access to police databases, which allowed them to obtain exclusive details in order to more precisely determine a motive for the crimes. However, the goal of this study is to examine how news articles represent the killing of woman and girls under a broader definition of “femicide.” Although it may not be clear whether the victim was killed as a result of ongoing domestic violence or because of her gender, the common denominator is that a woman was murdered.

The current study made careful considerations when choosing which articles to either include or exclude. By excluding articles that provided a motive for the killing which was inconsistent with a gender-motivated homicide, the current study is able to abide by some of the earliest definitions of femicide stating that it is a crime motivated by gender and perpetrated by men. By including articles that do not explicitly offer a motivation for the killing, and have been perpetrated by either a man or woman, the current study welcomes a more current definition of

the crime of femicide that does not outline as many limitations. There is a benefit to adopting a broader definition of femicide for the purpose of this particular study, because many details are often left out of these articles or are simply unavailable at the time. If cases were excluded simply because a perpetrator had not been identified, many cases of homicide against a woman or girl could have gone unnoticed. If the current study chose to eliminate all articles that did not fit the rigorous definition provided by Diana Russell in 1992, this study could have easily diminished the scope of violence against women, while many studies continue to state that these crimes are not so clear-cut. Although some theoretical decisions had to be made when deciding whether or not an article was relevant to the study, questionable cases appeared to be sparse.

Articles were not excluded for any other reason aside from the fact that they have not been determined to be a femicide, intimate partner homicide or domestic homicide based on the criteria stated above, or if they fell outside of the immediately surroundings of the designated locations for the project.

Richards et al. in their 2011 publication titled, “Exploring News Coverage of Femicide: Does Reporting the News Add Insult to Injury?,” state that direct victim-blaming language includes references to the failure to take action on the victim’s part, such as how they did not prosecute their offender, not report acts of violence, how the victim failed to attend her court dates, or did not make an attempt to leave the abusive situation. Direct victim-blaming also includes allusions to the victim’s real or imagined infidelity. These are all considered examples of direct victim-blame because it places immediate responsibility on the victim of these crimes for failure to take action against the perpetrator, instead of examining why the perpetrator committed the crimes.

The description provided by Richards et al. (2011) of indirect victim-blaming language includes references to the alcohol and drug use by the victim and perpetrator as well as the physical and/or mental health states of victim and perpetrator. These references are considered to be examples of indirect victim-blame because although it does not necessarily place a sense of responsibility on the victim of these crimes, it provides both possible motivations and justifications as to why the crimes occurred, and in many cases deflects responsibility and criticism from the perpetrator.

Newspaper articles in both “The Detroit News” and “El Universal” beginning in 2013 will be read to determine which “frame” is used in the article. Gillespie et al. (2013), the authors of “Framing Deadly Domestic Violence: Why the Media’s Spin Matters in Newspaper Coverage of Femicide” cite five media frames that are most frequently used to talk about cases of domestic violence, which include:

1. “Focusing on the behavior of the victim, including blaming the victim or excusing the perpetrator;
2. Normalizing the event as commonplace;
3. Suggesting the incident was an isolated event;
4. Indicating the victim and/or perpetrator are somehow different from the norm;
5. Asserting that domestic violence perpetrators are “disordered” and should be easily identifiable” (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 227).

Gillespie et al. (2013) indicate that the first frame references the actions, or lack of action, on the part of the victim preceding her death which in turn deflects responsibility from the perpetrator.



The first frame can be located through the use of direct victim-blaming language, as this type of language tends to focus on the victim's actions rather than the perpetrator's.

The second frame can be identified when the crime is included amongst other homicides that have occurred recently, implying that the crime in question is "just another homicide" (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 232). Another way in which this frame can be identified is when vague references are made to the perpetrator's history of violence or past criminal convictions but do not explicitly note this violence as domestic violence (e.g. The perpetrator has previously been convicted on assault charges that may have been related to a domestic dispute).

The third frame does not acknowledge that the victim was killed as a final result of ongoing abuse, but rather an event that occurred at random. The third frame can be identified through the use of neighbors as sources, because neighbors do not typically have a close relationship with each other and therefore may not know the violent history between the victim and perpetrator. To reinforce why neighbors and community members are not credible sources for this nature of coverage, Taylor (2009) states:

reporters also routinely look to neighbors of a couple or other members of the community for information about a couple in femicide coverage. These other community sources may serve to perpetuate harmful myths about domestic violence, including the idea that a domestic violence murder may be an unpredictable, isolated act of violence with no other history of domestic violence, and no reference to domestic violence as a social problem (Taylor, 2009, p. 27).

The third frame may also be identified through the primary use of the police or other criminal justice personnel as sources. Enrique Gracia (2004) reports that 25% of Western society suffers

from domestic violence, yet only 2.5% to 15% of victims report their abuse to police, making domestic and intimate partner violence an underreported crime. Due to this underreporting, the police may provide a perspective indicating that this incident was isolated because the victim had not reported prior incidents of abuse to law enforcement, whereas close family or friends to the victim may be able to offer the victim's version of the story which includes past incidents of violence that were kept confidential.

The fourth frame can be identified when the media places emphasis on the socioeconomic status or ethnic group that either the perpetrator or victim belong to. Additionally, this frame may tend to emphasize criminal activity that the perpetrator or victim may be apart of, indicating that domestic violence only affects a particular part of society (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 227). An example of this frame could include a tendency for the author to focus on the gang involvement of the perpetrator. The explanation provided by Gillespie et al. (2013) suggests that this focus may be indicative of this fourth frame as it associates domestic violence with gang members and may exclude "ordinary" people, those not involved with gang activity, from being subjected to domestic violence.

The fifth frame can be identified through shock at the actions committed by the perpetrator, or reference to some irregular aspect about the perpetrator that presumably makes their potential for violent behavior easy to identify by intimate partners or even the public. Indirect victim-blaming tactics are applicable here because that type of language can make reference to drug use and infidelity on the part of the perpetrator, which could be actions that provide shock to media consumers and are not considered "normal" to most members of society and potentially apart of a "disorder" on the part of the perpetrator.

In addition to these five media frames for reporting on domestic violence, Gillespie et al. (2013) include five more media frames which are commonly used in crime and justice media.

These five frames are:

1. “Blaming a crime event on a faulty criminal justice system;
2. Suggesting the victim or offender has experienced blocked opportunity at a structural level;
3. Noting social and moral breakdown in the recent past;
4. Considering institutional racism;
5. Placing blame on violence portrayed in the media” (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 227).

Due to the content in the articles that were located, as well as the small sample size of the study, two frames will be eliminated from consideration for this study which include the “considering institutional racism” and “placing blame on violence portrayed in the media” frames. Although Gillespie et al. (2013) note the above ten media frames as the most common ways for the media to package crime news, the articles included in their sample were only found to fall within five media frames. For this reason, my own research will only consider the most relevant media frames out of the ten as listed by Gillespie et al. (2013).

The “faulty criminal justice frame” places blame on the criminal justice system for the crimes that occurred instead of on the perpetrator or even the victim. This frame can be identified through a variety of sources, so long as the failure of the criminal justice system is noted as a certain or potential factor in the victim’s death.

The second frame can be identified through reference to the perpetrator’s lack of educational, occupational, or monetary opportunities or access to these opportunities which

created some sort of stressor in their life that was influential in their desire to kill. These blocked opportunities could be used by the authors of an article to describe how the perpetrator was forced to adopt illegitimate pathways to success in order to compensate for blocked opportunity.

Gillespie et al. (2013) state that the third frame can be identified through narratives of the perpetrator's failures, lack of opportunity, or personal breakdowns related to mental health including suicidal thoughts. Examples of this could include the perpetrator being mentally unstable and depressed with no access to medical coverage and therefore unable to treat these issues, or being destitute and unemployed. These personal problems could be cause for extreme frustration and a feeling of failure for the perpetrator, therefore causing them to lash out against the victim.

Due to the detail that Gillespie et al. (2013) provide about each media frame and how to identify them, I will be adopting these eight media frames for my own research as well because they are often identified in news stories on crime and domestic violence. I believe that identifying common media frames associated with domestic violence, as well as with crime overall, will serve to be beneficial to examining newspaper articles from both the United States and Mexico. Limiting this study to only domestic violence media frames or crime and justice media frames may not provide accurate results in terms of the intended message in the articles.

In order to identify a media frame, Gillespie et al. (2013) and Taylor (2009) suggest analyzing three key components present in newspaper articles. These three components include sources, language, and context.

**Sources.** Sources are relevant to determining media frames because the source of the information will determine what type of information is given to the reader. Depending on the quality of the

information provided in the news, as well as the perspective from where that information comes from, an incident of crime can be interpreted by the reader differently. Police are perhaps some of the most frequently called upon sources by media to offer information about crime, yet these “gatekeepers” to information create a potential for misrepresentation of the crime. Gillespie et al. (2013) elaborate on this point by stating “Moreover, research suggests that the frame of reference offered by actors of the criminal justice system in regard to crime problems are rarely questioned, resulting in the marginalization of competing perspectives” (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 225). Authors DeJong et al. in “Police Officer Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence: An Analysis of Observational Data” offer explanations as to why police officers in particular have the potential to contribute to the stigmatization and poor reporting on cases of intimate partner violence. First, DeJong et al. (2008) found that police officers responding to calls about intimate partner violence find these calls more difficult than stranger assaults because there exists a level of uncertainty about who is the victim and who is the perpetrator. Second, the authors state that police officers may not realize the various reasons why a victim of violence would choose not to leave their abusive partner. Some examples of why victims may not leave the abusive relationship immediately include economic dependence, the desire to continue the intimate relationship, fear of retaliation, etc. (DeJong et al. 2008). Thus, if officers are uneducated about the complications surrounding intimate partner violence, their interpretation of the situation may be that the victim is choosing to stay in the relationship of their own accord as opposed to other serious concerns. Next, DeJong et al. (2008) found that police officers who hold misogynistic or patriarchal views tend to blame the victim for the abuse perpetrated against them. These viewpoints are found to have lessened the police officer’s willingness to make arrests in these

cases as well, especially if the victim was intoxicated or allowed the perpetrator onto her property (DeJong et al. 2008). Lastly, police officers can be led to believe that victims of abuse will be uncooperative with the criminal justice system even after an arrest is made. Officers could come to this conclusion if the victim is unwilling to press charges against her abuser or appear at her court dates, yet these decisions go back to the complex reasons (socioeconomic status, economic status, fear, etc.) that may prevent the victim from speaking out and taking action. DeJong et al. summarize how police officers might assume that the victim is unreliable by explaining, “the officers may conclude that she is acting illogically, that she is not serious about getting help, or that she somehow condones the abuse” (DeJong et al., 2008, p. 685).

The most qualified individuals to comment on the dynamics of the relationship are friends and family members of the victim and domestic violence advocates. Unfortunately domestic violence advocates are rarely used, as they are considered to be biased by journalists (Gillespie et al. 2013; Taylor 2009). Expanding upon this contention, Taylor (2009) notes that, “Journalists tend to view advocates as biased sources rather than as experts even though advocates are among the few professionals equipped to offer accurate and valuable information about violence against women” (Taylor, 2009, p. 27). In her book “News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame,” Meyers (1997) provides her findings from interviews with 20 advocates for victims of battering and rape. The results of these interviews yields advice for how journalists can better represent crimes of violence against women so not to perpetuate myths about women or these crimes. One main theme that emerged was “Educate themselves (the journalists) about violence against women” (Meyers, 1997, p. 112). Suggestions from the advocates included that journalists should read books which talk about violence against women,

spend more time interviewing the victims of anti-woman violence, advocates for victims of domestic violence and rape, and become volunteers at women's shelters. Community members and neighbors are likely sources to be utilized, however, Taylor (2009) found that:

These other community members may serve to perpetuate harmful myths about domestic violence, including the idea that a domestic violence murder may be an unpredictable, isolated act of violence with no other history of domestic violence, and no reference to domestic violence as a social problem (Taylor, 2009, p. 27).

Instead of reaching out to experts or close friends and family, the media tend to use convenient sources with a severe lack of valuable information or sources with a one-sided view of the event that occurred.

**Language.** Language use will be analyzed through direct and indirect victim-blaming tactics as defined by Richards et al. (2011) in order to determine how the media portray violent crimes against women, especially how the media contribute to the maintenance of negative stereotypes against women. Language use is fundamental in determining public perceptions on the story depicted by the media. Taylor (2009) states that, "Media coverage of femicide may reinforce patriarchal tendencies and obscure the very important context of domestic violence simultaneously" (Taylor, 2009, p. 26). One way in which media coverage reinforces patriarchal tendencies is by referring to female victims by their relationship to men or to others. Titles such as "wife" and "mother" are often used in place of calling the female victim by her complete name. This finding is supported by Monckton-Smith (2012) in "Murder, Gender and the Media" where she describes how victims are referred to as "Mrs. Jones," for example, instead of by their given names, which deprives them of their identities. Moreover, one method by which the

language used in media coverage negatively impacts perceptions of femicide is the use of the passive voice. Monckton-Smith (2012) uses the example “he beat her” vs. “she was beaten” to illustrate how the latter statement deflects criticism from the perpetrator by removing the wrongdoing entity all together (Monckton-Smith, 2012, p. 68).

Linguistic avoidance is a strategy which sanitizes the language used to describe an event to minimize the impact that it has, or uses language in a way which avoids the severity of what actually occurred. Publichealthwatch posted an article titled, “How Language Used By The Media And Prosecutors Minimizes Sexual Violence And Encourages Victim-Blaming,” where they offer the perspective of a feminist advocacy law group. This group says that the media’s use of linguistic avoidance not only describes the events of the crime inaccurately, but it misrepresents the crime in a way which places responsibility onto the victim as well as onto the perpetrator. In more specific terms, the authors of the article demonstrate that:

when the media uses the language of consensual sex—terms like *recruited* rather than *kidnapped* or *took by force*, and phrases like *performed oral sex* or *engaged in sexual activity* instead of writing that *he forcefully penetrated her vagina with his penis*—they do more than use euphemisms to blur reality; they actually mislead, misdirect, and minimize the violation. What’s more, they imply that both parties were willing players (publichealthwatch, 2014).

Publichealthwatch provides a further way in which the the media are guilty of minimizing the severity of violence against women. The article details how crimes of domestic violence by George Zimmerman, perpetrated against his ex-wife Shellie Zimmerman, were included amongst minor traffic violations although the offense against Shellie was life-threatening.



Publichealthwatch reveals how two different sources leave out all emotion and any type of concern when describing Zimmerman's crimes:

*NBC News* reported that 30-year-old Zimmerman had been "arrested and charged with threatening his girlfriend with a gun." The *Los Angeles Times* noted that he spent the night post-arrest in a 64-square-foot cell. They also reported that he'd had several "scrapes with the law" during the previous six month. These included major and minor offenses: three traffic stops for speeding and having overly dark-tinted car windows, and one domestic abuse complaint. In the latter "scrape," police questioned Zimmerman after his ex-wife, Shellie Zimmerman, told law enforcement that he had threatened her and her father with a gun while they were moving her possessions out of the home that she and George had once shared (publichealthwatch, 2014).

News media are guilty of avoiding the severity of violence against women, whether that may be by reason of person bias, inadequate knowledge on the topic, consideration for their mainstream audience, poor sources or even an unconscious inclination. For this reason, language is an essential component of newspaper articles to examine.

**Context.** Finally, context will be examined by coding for several characteristics regarding the victim, perpetrator, their relationship (if any), and other details about the crime. Context can be analyzed by providing details about the event or events preceding the crime, and even by detailing the relationship between the victim and perpetrator when one exists. As a result of not including information regarding the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, Gillespie et al. (2013) conclude that:

All too often details pertaining to a couple's past are either omitted or relegated to the end of an article (McNeill, 1992). Consequently, domestic violence is often framed as being an isolated incident when in reality this could not be further from the truth (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 226-227).

Taylor (2009) further expresses that the context given for femicide articles can shape readers' perceptions of deadly crimes against women. For example, if the author of the article fails to mention past domestic disputes between the victim and perpetrator, or neglects to mention the victim's various attempts to take legal measures against the perpetrator, this can imply to the reader that femicide is an isolated event. Moreover, this can contribute to victim blame if the reader is not provided with details on the victim's various attempts to take action against her perpetrator. In an abusive relationship, when the victim finally attempts to leave, Taylor (2009) found that this increases the victim's risk of being killed by the perpetrator (p. 26). It is so essential to include details about the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, because victims of domestic violence reading these stories can relate their own experiences to these articles and can potentially see their current situation as a warning sign. By connecting current abuse with the possibility of future homicide, it distinguishes femicides from other homicides which is critical to presenting femicide as an unparalleled social problem. Context, Taylor (2009) argues, relies upon the quality of the sources in order to provide adequate and relevant context for which to detail a crime. For instance, police officers as a source may serve to be problematic for contextualizing a crime as "they base their knowledge on an official record (or lack thereof) of reported incidences of violence" (Taylor, 2009, p. 27). If domestic violence goes unreported, the police officer cannot offer details which place a woman's homicide within the context of

ongoing domestic violence. By contextualizing crimes against women and girls, patterns arise where only certain types of crimes are given media coverage, which broadcasts a biased interpretation of the reality of an escalating social problem. Furthermore, victim and perpetrator characteristics will be examined to see how they relate to high profile coverage of femicide, which will be operationalized as front page placement of the story as well as stories with more than the average number of words. Due to the difference in newspaper format as well as to the availability of perpetrator and victim characteristics, only these characteristics of the articles (when available) will be used in contextualizing “The Detroit News” newspapers:

- age of victim and perpetrator
- race of victim and perpetrator
- sex of the perpetrator
- crime location (urban, suburban or rural)
- what page of the newspaper the article was published on
- number of words in the article
- relationship between the victim and perpetrator (if any)
- method of killing (gun, knife/sharp object, physical force/blunt trauma, drowning, burning, other, whether or not suicide followed the murder)

Similarly, these characteristics will be used in “El Universal” newspapers:

- age of victim and perpetrator
- sex of the perpetrator
- crime location (urban, suburban or rural)
- what section of the newspaper the article was published in
- number of words in the article
- relationship between the victim and perpetrator (if any)
- method of killing (gun, knife/sharp object, physical force/blunt trauma, drowning, burning, other, whether or not suicide followed the murder)

## Results

**Detroit.** 51 articles about a female homicide were examined that took place in the city of Detroit or within its immediate surrounding areas, and they were published between January and September of 2013. Of these 51 articles, 21 instances of indirect-victim blame were located which include any reference to the physical, mental, or emotional health states of the victim and/or perpetrator, and drug or alcohol use by the victim and/or perpetrator. Some direct examples of this type of language from the articles include “Her attorney, Cornelius Pitts, said Thursday there is a “question about her emotional state” and requested a mental evaluation when she was arraigned in 36th District Court” (Hunter & MacDonald, 2013); ““And the key witness “Tonia Watson” is a liar, cheat and a thief,” he said. “... Obsessed with Mr. Wood, extremely jealous of him, and addicted to heroin. This star witness is also addicted to sex”” (Martindale, 2013); “A onetime Christian high school honor student was sentenced Tuesday to 20-60 years in prison for beating and stabbing his mentally ill mother to death” (Martindale, 2013).

Almost all examples of indirect victim-blaming are focused on the perpetrator, with an exception to two articles. One story details the death of Ruth Pyne who was stabbed to death by her son, Jeffrey B. Pyne. The article depicts Jeffrey Pyne as being an average person and a bright student who had become frustrated with dealing with his mother’s bipolar disorder. It is also stated in the article that this sometimes made her act violently. By highlighting the mental health state of the victim and further, her potential to become violent, her bipolar disorder and its effects may be perceived by readers as the cause of or justification for Ruth’s death.

Of these 51 articles, no examples of direct victim-blaming language could be located. Dissimilarly to the findings of Richards et al. (2011) and to that of previous research, direct

victim-blaming tactics were not the most common victim-blaming tactic. In their findings, Richards et al. (2011) found that:

In a similar vein as previous femicide research, the most often used tactic to blame victims was to suggest that they had failed to take appropriate measures to protect themselves from abusive partners by not reporting past domestic violence, not filing charges or pressing charges for previous abuse, failing to show up for court dates, and/or not leaving an abusive situation (Richards et al., 2011, p. 189).

Articles located for the current study actually failed to include details about the history between the victim and the perpetrator. When these details were mentioned, the information was limited and the writer rarely elaborated. Take, for example, an article about Family Dollar Store employee Brenna Machus who was first missing for three days and later found dead by a gunshot wound to the head. Although she was not the only one killed in the incident, the journalists write at the end of this article that: “Ryan Machus said she was fearful of a man who lived close to the store, who she believed was stalking her. She had also received threats from an ex-boyfriend who is a reputed gang member, he said” (Fleming & Brand-Williams, 2013). There is great potential here to elaborate upon whether or not Brenna Machus had reported her stalker to police, what kind of threats Machus received, or even what caused the relationship between Brenna and her ex-boyfriend to end. However, instead of jumping to assumptions, the journalists here chose to simply state the facts.

Other types of language, such as linguistic avoidance and a deflection of criticism were located in “The Detroit News” articles. Six examples of a deflection of criticism were located, and two examples of linguistic avoidance were located. One example of linguistic avoidance was

used in an article which details the killing and dismemberment of Kaitlin Elizabeth Hehir by her boyfriend. Journalist Mike Martindale wrote that, “As part of the investigation, officers checked the home and discovered "bloody plastic," police said. Schulz said officers suspected foul play and after questioning the boyfriend further, he "confessed to having a verbal argument that turned physical"” (Martindale, 2013). The phrase “verbal argument that turned physical” is a euphemism which severely downplays the events that actually occurred. Publichealthwatch (2014) declares that euphemisms like these actually “minimize the violation” (publichealthwatch, 2014) as opposed to using more aggressive, and accurate, vocabulary in order for the reader to legitimately interpret the crime that occurred. Deflection of criticism was used by a former Family Dollar manager, Tina Cable, when describing the outrage that she felt when learning that another Family Dollar employee, Laverne Bryant, was responsible for the shootings of employees Brenna Machus and Joseph Orlando. Cable is quoted in an article, where she says: ““I don't understand how they could hire somebody with a criminal background. I don't understand how he was hired to begin with,”” (Daniels & Williams, 2013). Although outraged by the fact that Laverne Bryant could commit such atrocities, Cable deflects the criticism away from Bryant and then places it on Family Dollar as a company for being able to hire an individual with a criminal background.

**Table 1.** Frames used in “The Detroit News” articles

Frame	n	<u>% of all articles (N=51)</u>
		%
Just the Facts	23	45.1%
Faulty Criminal Justice System	12	23.5%
Suggesting the Incident was an Isolated Event	7	13.7%
Noting Social and Moral Breakdown in the Past	5	9.8%
Normalizing the Event as Commonplace	2	3.9%
Victim or Offender has Experienced Blocked Opportunity	1	2%
Within the Broader Scope of Domestic Violence	1	2%

A total of five frames were identified out of 51 articles. 12 of the articles utilized a “faulty criminal justice” frame, where some reference was made to the failure of the criminal justice system to take adequate measures to protect society from the perpetrator. Articles about the death of eight-year-old Tamera Greene used titles such as “Court referee refused to take girl from mom,” and “Agencies trade blame in death of Detroit girl.” These titles, before even reading the story, tell the reader that the death of Tamera Greene was the result of a poor criminal justice system that failed to take Tamera away from her abusive mother, and not the fault of Tamera’s mother who was her killer. In other words, this frame was utilized to relate the crime in the article to a broader lack of confidence in the criminal justice system overall. In another story, 80-year-old Nancy Dailey had her throat slit and was mercilessly beaten in her home by a couple she had hired to do yard work for her, Alan Wood and Tonia Watson. Articles indicated that Wood and Watson were recently paroled and addicted to drugs, which allowed one

journalist to write, “The killing and arrests renewed criticism over lax policies of the Michigan Department of Corrections concerning supervision of released parolees” (Martindale, 2013). As opposed to assigning personal responsibility to Alan Wood and Tonia Watson for the atrocious murder the two committed against Nancy Dailey, the crime is used to draw attention toward the criminal justice system “lax” policies for offenders.

Seven articles used a “suggesting the incident was an isolated event” frame, where little to no reference was made to the history between the victim and the perpetrator or where the crime seemed to have occurred “out-of -the-blue.” This frame was also identified in both titles and in the main text. One title read “Trial of housemate in couple’s slaying set” which actually proves to be misleading upon reading the full article. Danielle Greenway and Chris Hall allowed Roger Bowling, Danielle’s former boyfriend, to live in their home. After what this journalist calls things growing “contentious,” Greenway and Hall no longer wanted Bowling to reside in their home. The article fails to include much detail about which event ultimately led Roger Bowling to dismember Danielle Greenway and Chris Hall, but one statement shows that Bowling’s desire to kill his former girlfriend Danielle was not an isolated event. At the end of this article, it reads:

Robert Slick, a former friend and roommate of Bowling's, previously testified Bowling had long contemplated killing Greenway. Slick said he and Bowling discussed it at least 10 times while drinking beer and smoking marijuana when they lived together around 2004 (The Detroit News, 2013).

The title itself fails to frame the killing of Danielle Greenway and her fiance Chris Hall within the broader scope of domestic violence although it is more than likely that violence was present.



Upon reading the article, it is clear that Danielle Greenway and Roger Bowling were more than “housemates” and could have had a violent past relationship if Bowling contemplated killing Greenway at least 10 times.

Five articles used a “noting social and moral breakdown in the past” frame, where the explanation for the femicide is “some personal breakdown experienced by the perpetrator” (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 234), usually with respect to suicidal thoughts or personal failure. Again, in the case of Tamera Greene, there was less focus placed on the tragedy of her fatal stabbing and past physical abuse, and more on her mother’s suicidal thoughts and own history of abuse. In the article titled “I ... have so much madness” the journalist briefly alludes to Tamera’s death by stating “Tamera had a tumultuous life” (Hunter & MacDonald, 2013) before immediately divulging Semeria Greene’s childhood of trauma. Among these accounts are letters written by Semeria about her life. This article writes, “The unsigned letters, titled “To Myself,” give a unique view into Greene's life and state she was threatened not to report her assault, depressed because her brother was shot and pained over being held back two grades in school” (Hunter & MacDonald, 2013). Other letters addressed in the article include statements like “I'm not crazy I just wish I would have killed myself when I tried to” (Hunter & MacDonald, 2013) which seriously concerned the courts about Semeria Greene’s mental health state at the time she killed 8-year-old Tamera.

Two articles used a “normalizing the event as commonplace” frame, where the femicide was not considered to be different from other homicides that have occurred recently or do not identify other incidents of violence by the perpetrator as domestic violence. In the article on the discovery of Lizzie Mae Collier-Sweet’s remains in a wooded area, it states that:

Collier-Sweet's husband, Roger Sweet, told police he believed his wife set their house on fire, then went into the woods nearby to kill herself. Sweet, a suspect in her disappearance, hasn't been charged. He is in prison for the 1990 killing of his first wife, Marlene Sweet, and for federal child exploitation and child pornography charges in a separate case (Williams & Daniels, 2013).

Gillespie et al. (2013) state that the strategies used to identify a “normalizing the event as commonplace” frame is to note the incident in question as one of many, or to show that the homicide was preceded by violence but not specifically domestic violence. In the case of Lizzie Mae Collier-Sweet, the discovery of her skull and various other skeletal remains was normalized as commonplace when the journalists passively wrote about her husband’s incarceration for the murder of his previous wife. Through mention of the perpetrator’s criminal past, Gillespie et al. (2013) indicate that this can normalize the event as commonplace because it suggests to the reader that perpetrators of femicide can be easily identified by their past criminal convictions. This excerpt further normalizes the event as commonplace because it fails to make a connection between Roger Sweet’s propensity to kill to Lizzie Mae Collier-Sweet’s death.

One article used a “suggesting the victim or offender has experienced blocked opportunity at a structural level” frame. This frame suggests that the offender committed the crime of femicide due to an inability to achieve legitimate opportunities such as employment, housing, etc. and thus acted out on these frustrations. This frame was located in yet another article about the death of Tameria Greene, where the author quotes a public policy director: ““We don't have an adequate array of services for families that are under a lot of stress," she said. "There's a lot of duress that doesn't get addressed, and unfortunately, kids get victimized”

(Hunter, 2013). This quote refers to the fact that Semeria Greene was an abusive mother who received assistance from the Department of Human Services to address her abusive behavior toward her five children. The “stress” that Semeria Greene was under could include her emotional instability and suicidal thoughts, or the impoverished state that her home was in. It was found that:

"The children were found in soiled diapers," according to a May 19 petition from Child Protective Services. "The home is in complete disarray. The kitchen is filthy. There is nothing in the refrigerator but mayonnaise ... the home is barely furnished. The crib is full of items which means the baby is not sleeping in it." The petition stated Greene's sister “Tanisha” called police and stated she "prostitutes in the area of Six Mile and John R” (Hunter, 2013).

No matter the “stress” that Semeria Greene was under when she was brutally assaulting her children and stabbing Tamera to death, this article is one of several that focuses on Semeria’s personal problems and lack of assistance from social services as opposed to the stolen life of 8-year-old Tamera.

Finally, one article was found to have framed several femicides within the broader scope of domestic violence. The article was published on February 11th of 2013, and focused on an upcoming play titled *The Vagina Monologues* which raises money to end violence against women. Toward the end of this article, the journalist writes “This year's V-Day events come after a woman died after being brutally gang raped in India, sparking a global outcry. Closer to home, two southeast Michigan husbands are charged with killing their wives last month” (Kozlowski, 2013). These two murdered that the article references are named Christina Lazzana-Webster and

Katherine Kellogg Porter. The larger message that *The Vagina Monologues* intends to advertise is that women are at a great risk of being abused or raped at some point in their lifetime and that society must take action to counter violence against women. It was remarkable that this journalist chose to include the stories of Christina Lazzana-Webster and Katherine Kellogg Porter in the discussion of violence against women because both of these women were killed by their husbands, which indicates to the reader that domestic homicides *are* apart of the larger discussion of violence against women, domestic violence is *not* a personal issue and that it can lead to more severe consequences if not addressed sooner.

The remaining 23 articles utilized a “just the facts” or “police” frame, which strictly gives factual details about the crime that occurred and did not necessarily make inferences, assumptions, or conclusions about the crime. These articles were typically the first to be published about that particular crime, therefore details may not have been available.

**Race of Victims**

**n = 25**

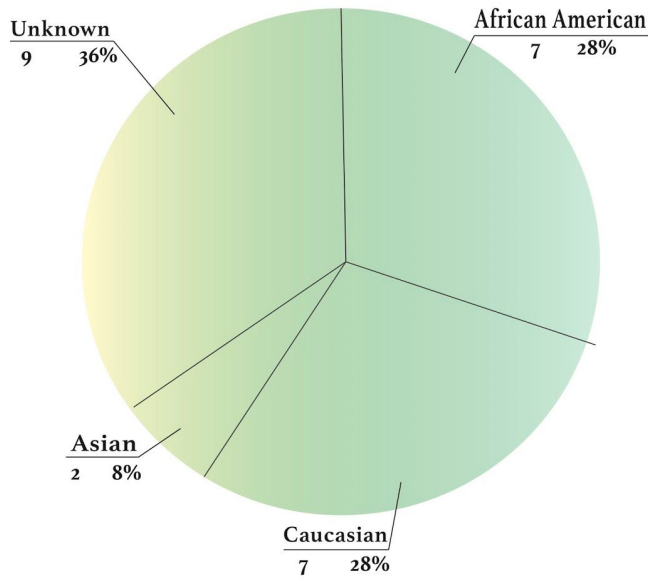


Figure 1

Race, class, gender, and social status of both the victim and the perpetrator of a homicide are key characteristics in determining the newsworthiness of the crime, and more specifically the “worthiness” of the victim (Lin & Phillips, 2012; Meyers, 1997). The above graph shows data pertaining to the race of the victims in “The Detroit News” articles. 25 unique cases were represented throughout the 51 articles. Among these 25 unique cases, victims who were either of an unknown race, Caucasian or African American appeared the most frequently.

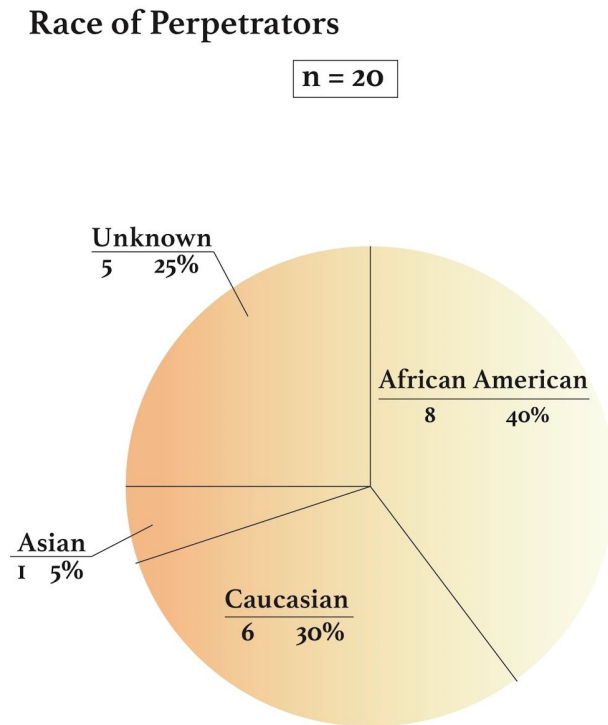


Figure 2

The following chart shows the breakdown of the 20 perpetrators identified from the 51 “The Detroit News” articles. The majority of these perpetrators (40%) were found to be African American.

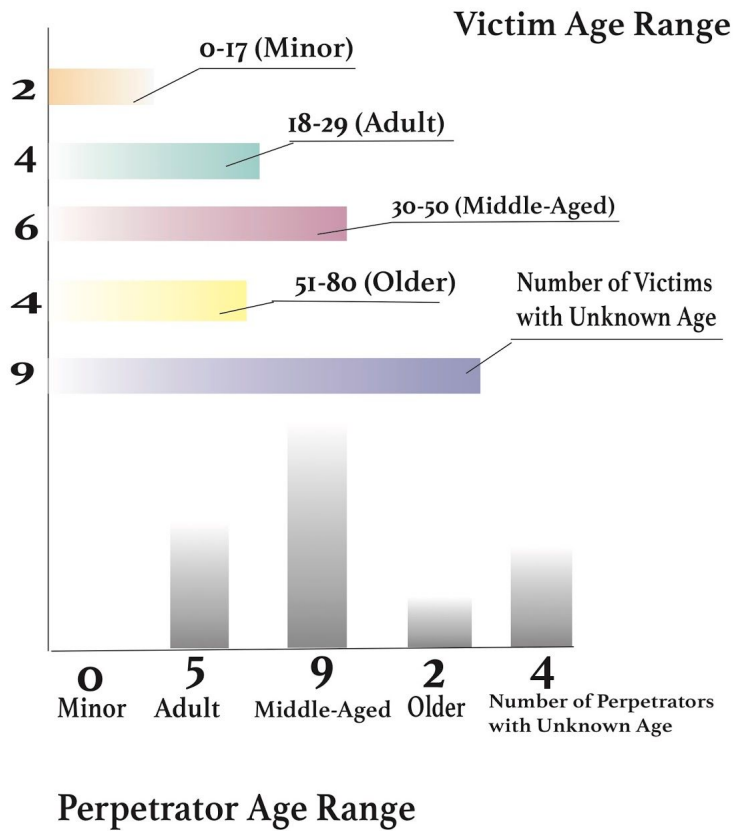


Figure 3

The above graph will show the age ranges for both the victims and the perpetrators in “The Detroit News” articles. Although these results are not particularly significant unless put into context with their respective cases, it can be noted that known victim ages spanned from 8-80 years old while known perpetrator ages spanned from 22-72 years old.

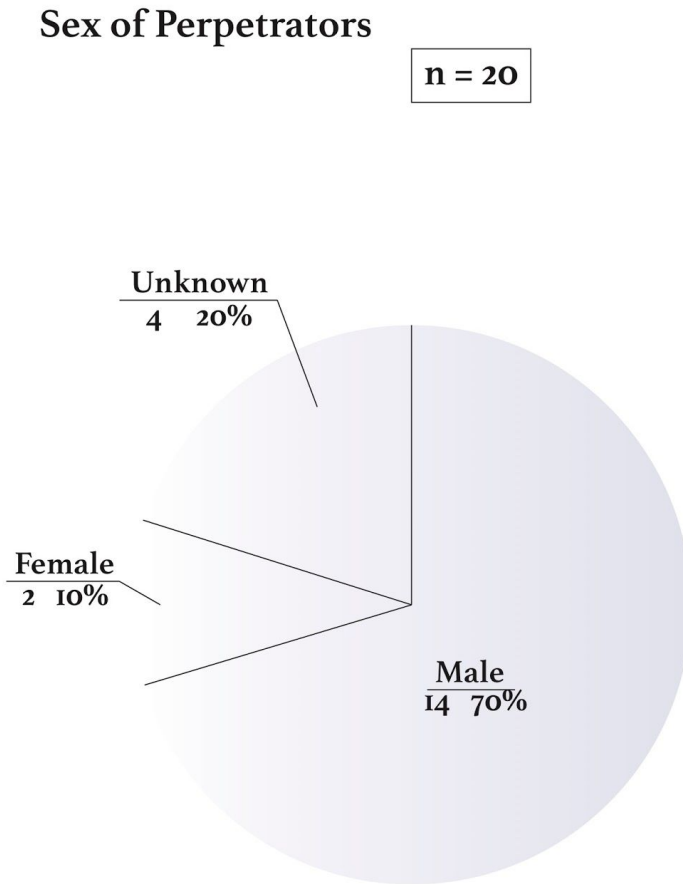


Figure 4

Further, the graph regarding the gender of the perpetrators will show that the majority of the perpetrators of these femicide cases were male which is consistent with past research into violence against women.

High profile coverage was examined in order to gain insight into the newsworthiness of victims, perpetrators, and the crime itself. For “The Detroit News” articles, the average number of words per article was 460.4, while the average page number that a femicide story appeared on was A4. These numbers may not necessarily seem significant until placed into context, which is



why two cases will now be discussed in order to examine why these particular crimes were considered to be newsworthy by news media.

**Table 2.** Crime Characteristics of “The Detroit News” Articles

Crime Characteristic	% of all Unique Cases (N=17)	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Weapon Used, Cause of Death, or Other Violent Element</b>		
Strangulation	4	23.5%
Dismemberment	4	23.5%
Shooting	4	23.5%
Disappearance	2	11.8%
Home Invasion	2	11.8%
Unknown	2	11.8%
Burning	1	5.9%
Gang Activity	1	5.9%
Murder-Suicide	1	5.9%
Physical Force/Beating	1	5.9%
Stabbing/Throat Slit	1	5.9%
Torture	1	5.9%
*Totals do not equal 100% because some crimes included more than one criminal element		
<b>Crime Location</b>		
Urban	9	52.9%
Suburban	8	47.1%
<b>Relationship Between Victim and Perpetrator</b>		
Unknown	5	29.4%
Husband-Wife	4	23.5%
Boyfriend-Girlfriend	1	5.9%
Coworkers	1	5.9%
Employee-Employer	1	5.9%
Father-Daughter	1	5.9%
Former Boyfriend-Girlfriend	1	5.9%
Hitman/Family Acquaintance	1	5.9%
John-Sex Worker	1	5.9%
Mother-Daughter	1	5.9%
Mother-Son	1	5.9%
Neighbors	1	5.9%
*Totals do not equal 100% because some crimes included more than one perpetrator/victim		

Here, Table 2 shows which elements of crime appeared most frequently across 17 unique cases in Detroit newspaper articles. Although an unknown relationship was the most common, it is consistent with prior research that a husband-wife relationship would be the most common

relationship between a victim and perpetrator of a female homicide, especially in the United States. Aside from the top two relationships between victim and perpetrator, it is also unsurprising that the majority of all other relationships identified are between two people who would presumably have a close relationship, or one where the two would know each other.

In an effort to examine newsworthiness in action in “The Detroit News,” two cases receiving the highest number of articles are now dissected here. First, there is the case of 8-year-old Tameria Greene who was murdered by her mother. Tameria’s murder was presented in eight articles out of 51 located for Detroit, which accounts for 15.7% of all Detroit articles. Although Tameria’s cause of death, stabbing, was not the most common cause of death among unique articles presented in “The Detroit News,” there are other unique characteristics about her death that could be responsible for the large number of articles. Age of the victim alone is an indicator of newsworthiness, and Tameria’s extremely young age makes her horrific death captivating to readers. Tameria was the victim of prolonged child abuse perpetrated by her mother, and after her death we learn that Child Protective Services (CPS) had previously been involved. A combination of the fact that a mother stabbed her child to death coupled with the fact that CPS did not adequately address the abuse could be sufficiently unique characteristics to earn repeated coverage. In some of the first articles written about the case, neighbors in the apartment complex where Tameria lived complained that the complex was “overrun by drug dealers and other criminals” (Ferretti, Greenwood & Hunter, 2013). One neighbor even reported that her husband was shot and killed in the complex two years prior. In Detroit, where violent crime rates are some of highest in the country (MacDonald & Hunter, 2018), this case could have received prolonged coverage due to its salience. This violent homicide, committed in an area previously

known for violence fits with existing ideas about the city of Detroit and its propensity for violence, meaning that readers will show interest. As days went on, more details were released about the case which were less focused on Tameria and more focused on her mother Semeria. In these later articles, letters written by Semeria revealed that she has desire to commit suicide and also had a traumatic life of her own. Whether readers were convinced that Tameria was the victim of lethal child abuse, a mentally ill mother, or an environment predisposed to violence, any one of these factors could be utilized as a way to maintain the public's attention.

Next is the case of Jane Bashara, a 56-year-old marketing executive who was found strangled and dumped in a Detroit alley. This case also received a total of 8 articles, but became newsworthy for different reasons than Tameria Greene's death. Jane's prominent position as a marketing executive from Grosse Pointe Park immediately makes her a "worthy" victim. Initially, the family's handyman Joseph Gentz is sentenced for Jane's murder despite information suggesting that her husband, Robert Bashara, hired Gentz to murder his wife. Articles even defended Robert's innocence after disclosing his previous attempt to have Gentz murdered in jail. Despite Jane's average age and common cause of death (in relation to 16 other unique cases), the newsworthiness of her death is most likely determined by something unusual. Lin & Phillips (2012) reveal that newsworthiness is rarely determined by the perpetrator's characteristics. However, as details about the Bashara case continue to emerge, articles became engrossed with Robert Bashara's infidelity and bizarre sex life as told by his mistresses. Articles became so sidetracked from Jane's murder and immersed with Robert's life that one headline read, "Bashara punished over ketchup - Prison privileges suspended over condiments in cell" (Hunter, 2013). A perpetrator's scandalous love life meets the criteria for the shock factor that

media consumers are interested in, yet the relevance of Bashara's prison contraband to the case of an innocent woman's murder is questionable, making the newsworthiness of this case an outlier to a degree.

**Ciudad Juárez.** Out of the 51 articles found in "El Universal," four examples of indirect victim-blaming were located. However, of these examples, three referenced the drug use or mental health state of the perpetrator. Similarly to the findings in "The Detroit News" articles, there was little reference directly made to the victim's behavior in any of the articles. However, one striking example of indirect victim-blaming language is found in an article about two young girls, Deisy and Cynthia, who were brutally murdered by their mother's boyfriend. A statement from this article reads, "Genoveva Salazar, una mujer de condiciones precarias, madre de tres hijas de igual número de matrimonios, es empleada en una maquiladora; sus pocos ingresos no alcanzan a llegar a los mil pesos semanales" [Genoveva Salazar, a woman of precarious conditions, mother of three daughters of equal number of marriages, is employed in a maquiladora; their low income is not enough to reach the thousand pesos a week] (Agencia el Universal, 2015). The statement here talks about the mother of Deisy and Cinthya, Genoveva, and how she is a very poor woman who has had as many children as she has marriages. This example is slightly unusual, as it does not exactly meet the criteria for indirect victim-blaming language as outlined by Richards et al. (2011). Yet, it is reasonable to conclude that this is indirect victim-blaming because by referring to the amount of marriages that the girls' mother has had, the journalist may be insinuating that Genoveva's husbands and boyfriends have not been adequate. The following example of direct victim-blaming will tell how the deviation for this finding is justified.

Only one example of direct victim-blaming was located, which differs from the findings in Detroit articles. This example was found in the same article about the deaths of Deisy and Cinthya. The title of this article reads “Su “amor enfermizo” a un adicto le quitó a sus dos hijas” [Her “sickly love” to an addict took away her two daughters] (Agencia el Universal, 2015). Although this bold introduction does not directly blame the daughters for their own death, it directly blames the mother by stating that her relationship with the killer was the reason why her daughters were killed. This title is supported by the previously stated example of indirect victim-blame, where the mother is described as destitute with a lengthy history of partners.

Among the Spanish articles, five examples were located which either demonstrate a deflection of criticism or the use of the passive voice. Additionally, three examples of linguistic avoidance were located. One example of a deflection of criticism is quoted by a specialist who was interviewed for this particular article, stating ““También deben intervenir las familias y se debe fomentar la denuncia; es decir, las mujeres no deben permitir la violencia física o psicológica, lamentablemente es un patrón que cuesta vida y lo estamos viviendo”” [Families should also intervene and complaints should be encouraged; In other words, women should not allow physical or psychological violence, unfortunately it is a pattern that costs life and we’re living it] (Agencia el Universal, 2017). By stating that women should not permit violence to happen to them, this deflects criticism from perpetrators of violence and places responsibility onto victims to protect themselves from these crimes which is problematic for a variety of reasons. It is the case in Ciudad Juárez that when the families of victims participate in activism or attempt to file charges, they are at great risk of being killed themselves. Instead of placing blame onto the victims of femicide for failing to adequately protect themselves, a closer look

should be taken at offenders for committing these acts and the authorities for allowing so many of them to persist without consequences. Linguistic avoidance can be seen through the following quote, which understates the severity of Laura Flores' death: "Se trata de Laura Flores, empresaria de 35 años que recibió varios tiros" [This is Laura Flores, a 35-year-old businesswoman who received several shots] (Agencia el Universal, 2017). Rather than creating an accurate depiction of what happened to Laura Flores during her violent fight for life amidst a carjacking, where she was horrifically shot to death by two men, this journalist described Laura as having "received several shots." The murder of Laura Flores was not the main focus of this article and it shows, as her death was casually employed to introduce other homicides that recently occurred throughout Mexico. Not only was the murder of Laura Flores described with an absence of care, but her death is unable to be discerned as the result of drug trafficking or femicide.

**Table 3.** Frames used in "El Universal" Articles

Frame	n	<u>% of all articles (N=51)</u>
		<u>%</u>
Just the Facts	29	56.9%
Within the Broader Scope of Violence Against Women	9	17.6%
Faulty Criminal Justice System	9	17.6%
Suggesting the Incident was an Isolated Event	2	3.9%
Victim or Offender has Experienced Blocked Opportunity	2	3.9%

\*Totals may not equal 100% because some articles used more than one frame

Similarly to "The Detroit News" articles, the majority (56.9%) presented the articles with a "just the facts" frame, by simply providing factual information about what occurred. The next

two most frequently utilized frames were “within the broader scope of violence against women” and a “faulty criminal justice system.” Several times, these two frames were presented at the same time in a single article. One way in which these two frames were found in the same article is when multiple unrelated cases of femicide were characterized as femicide and as a social problem, and further, as the result of impunity for the perpetrators. A main story that was followed through the course of searching through “El Universal” was about a group of around thirty mothers who were marching across Mexico in order to draw attention to their grievances, particularly from the government. These mothers retain a heavy blame against the mayor of Ciudad Juárez in particular. One mother named Luz del Carmen Flores, mother to Luz Angélica Mena Flores, spoke out in an article which demonstrates a very explicit anger toward the criminal justice system: “Es por la insensibilidad de las autoridades, para que vean que este problema no se ha resuelto, que las niñas siguen desapareciendo” [It’s because of the insensitivity of the authorities to see that this problem has not been resolved, that girls continue to disappear] (Agencia el Universal, 2015). Luz del Carmen Flores explains in this statement that she believes the authorities are insensitive to the problem of missing women, and had they responded properly to these crimes in the past, women would not continue to go missing today. This statement not only demonstrates a “faulty criminal justice” frame, but because a multitude of cases of missing women are all placed into one context together as well as alongside various social movements aiming to end this type of violence, this statement is also apart of the larger discussion of femicide and violence against women.

Being that Mexico recognizes femicide as a harmful social issue, and the majority of these cases were placed within the broader scope of violence against women, it is logical that a

minority of the articles framed incidents as isolated events. Only representing one case, these two articles detailing the story of a 17-year-old girl and her friends murdering her parents indicated that this crime was out-of-the-blue. In one article, the journalist writes: “No hubo una razón, no hubo peleas o maltrato, simplemente el deseo de hacerlo” [There was no reason, there were no fights or mistreatment, simply the desire to do it] (Agencia el Universal, 2013). Put simply, the author implies that Ana murdered her mother and father solely based on her desire to do so. While this could be the case, the lack of detail prevents the reader from knowing whether this crime truly transpired out of desire or as a result of domestic violence that may have existed in the household.

Marisela Escobedo Ortiz was a mother turned activist after her 16-year-old daughter, Rubí Marisol Frayre Escobedo, was the victim of a femicide in 2008. By 2010, Marisela had been shot in the head while protesting the impunity of Rubí’s perpetrator. Two articles were located which touch on the death of Marisela, but gave more attention to her killer, known as “El Wicked.” The “suggesting the victim or offender has experienced blocked opportunity at a structural level” frame was identified in both articles about the case. This frame was identified in one article by the following statement:

Su adicción a las drogas y alcohol comenzó cuando apenas era un niño en ciudad Juárez, el primer crimen llegó a los 14 cuando vendió marihuana en El Paso, Texas, a donde su madre lo llevó a buscar una mejor vida, la cual nunca encontró, y por el contrario verla prostituirse en cantinas dejó traumas severos en “El Wicked”, quien narró esa experiencia en repetidas ocasiones a los estudiantes [His addiction to drugs and alcohol started when he was barely a child in Ciudad Juárez, the first crime began at 14-years-old when he sold



marijuana in El Paso, Texas, where his mother took him to seek a better life, which he never found, and on the contrary see her prostitute in cantinas left severe traumas in “El Wicked,” who narrated that experience repeatedly to students] (Agencia el Universal, 2015).

In a sympathetic way, this statement demonstrates that the lack of opportunities experienced by “El Wicked” and his mother during his childhood may have prematurely led him down a criminal path — one that eventually turned deadly. Other accounts positively describe “El Wicked” as a father of two children who mentors youth while he is incarcerated on how to never end up like him. These favorable depictions of “El Wicked,” the presumed killer of a mourning mother, may incite a sense of sympathy in the reader on behalf of his difficult childhood and draw attention away from the seriousness of Marisela’s death.

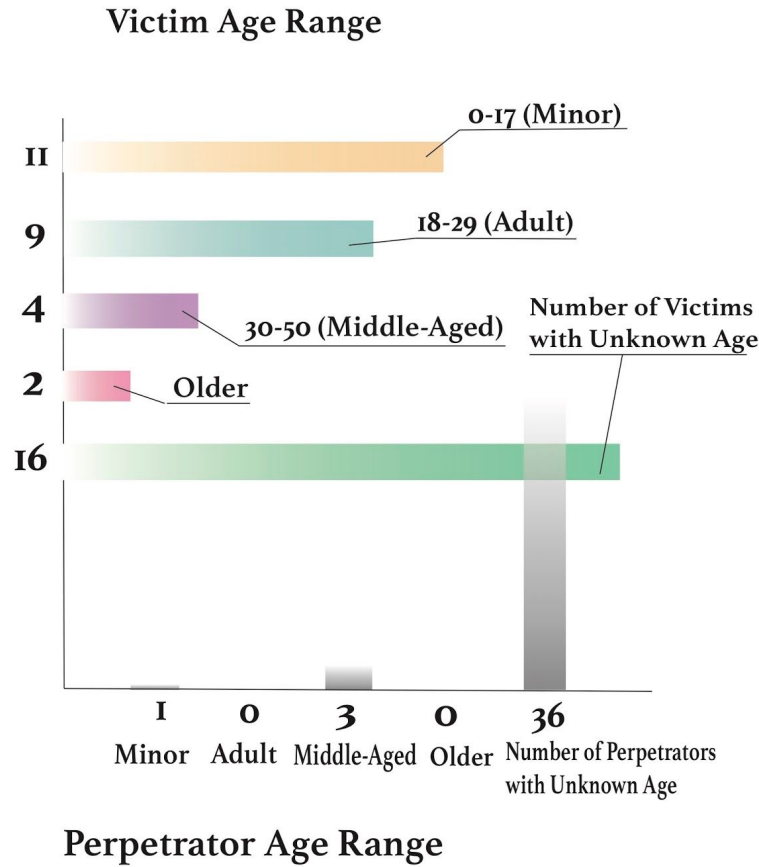


Figure 5

The present graph shows the ages of the victims and perpetrators among unique cases identified throughout 51 “El Universal” articles. These results differ from Detroit articles in that the “unknown” categories are much larger, and there were more unique cases throughout the articles. Unsurprisingly, the perpetrators of femicide remained largely unidentified which is consistent with the issue of impunity so frequently acknowledged by the media.

### Sex of Perpetrators

n = 40

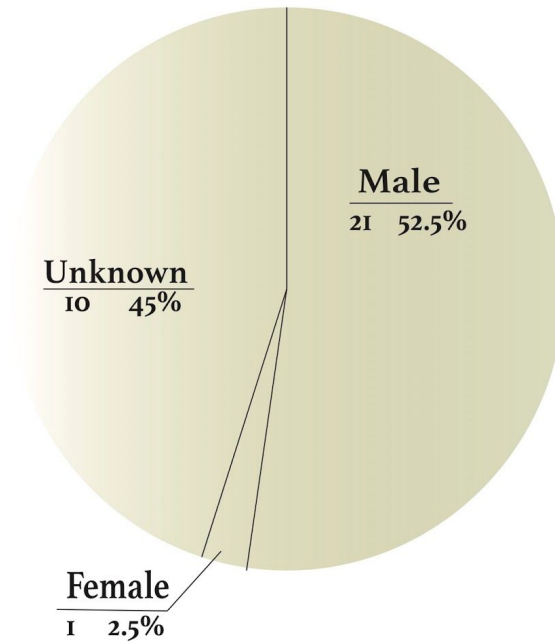


Figure 6

The final graph demonstrates a finding similar in some ways to that of Detroit articles, which is that the majority (52.5%) of known perpetrators in these unique cases were male. Still, a large majority of these perpetrators remain unknown.

In terms of high profile news coverage, “El Universal” articles yielded an average word count of about 585, a number slightly higher than that of Detroit articles. This news source is formatted differently than “The Detroit News,” as the page placement for the article was not indicated. Instead, each article provided the section that it was published in, so to account for this

variation the section placement was a factor used in determining newsworthiness. Femicide articles most frequently appeared in the *Nacionales* [Nationals] section with 31 out of 51 articles being placed there. Next, 13 out of 51 articles were published in the *Política* [Politics] section; Five in *Sociedad* [Society]; One in *Cultura* [Culture]; and finally one in *Justicia* [Justice]. Much like articles from Detroit, it is important to place these high profile findings into context in order to demonstrate which crimes were considered to be the most newsworthy and why.

**Table 4.** Crime Characteristics of “El Universal” Articles

Crime Characteristic	% of all Unique Cases (N=28)	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Weapon Used, Cause of Death, or Other Violent Element</b>		
Disappearance	13	46.4%
Shooting	5	17.9%
Strangulation	5	17.9%
Gang Activity	3	10.7%
Stabbing/Throat Slit	3	10.7%
Unknown/No details provided	2	7.1%
Burning	2	7.1%
Dismemberment	1	3.6%
Forced Drug Trafficking	1	3.6%
Forced Sexual Exploitation	1	3.6%
Injection of Chemicals	1	3.6%
Murder-Suicide	1	3.6%
Rape	1	3.6%
*Totals do not equal 100% because some crimes included more than one criminal element		
<b>Crime Location</b>		
Unknown	17	60.7%
Urban	6	21.4%
Rural	4	14.3%
Suburban	1	3.6%
<b>Relationship Between Victim and Perpetrator</b>		
Unknown/No Relationship	23	82.1%
Stepfather-Stepdaughter	2	7.1%
Friends/Acquaintances	1	3.6%
Husband-Wife	1	3.6%
Mother-Daughter	1	3.6%
*Totals do not equal 100% because some crimes included more than one perpetrator/victim		

Table 4 provides some expected characteristics for crimes in Ciudad Juárez. Of the 28 unique cases identified in the articles, almost half (46.4%) included an element of disappearance—a routine component to many of the femicides that occur in the city. It was easy to uncover details about how the victim was murdered or how her body was found, yet there were rarely details provided about the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Shockingly, 82.1% of the unique cases in Juárez failed to provide details on any sort of relationship, let alone identify a known perpetrator. Again, these findings are consistent with a grievance that many victim families have, which is knowing that the perpetrator has not been convicted or remains unidentified for years after a woman's death.

Marisela Escobedo Ortiz's murder was present in six out of 51 articles. She is a newsworthy victim because her story is emblematic of the many grieving mothers experiencing the loss of their missing and murdered daughters in Juárez. Marisela advocated for her daughter's justice and became a victim herself as a result. Marisela's death is referred to in several articles as something that many mothers fear will happen to them if they choose to protest the death of their daughters. Some articles tell of activist mothers who have had to abandon Juárez after narrowly escaping their own murders. Although her assassin remained unknown for some time, Marisela's presumed killer is now identified as "El Wicked" and he made national headlines after dying in prison in 2015. Much like the Bashara case, the fascination surrounding the perpetrator generated a great deal of media coverage although perpetrators are not said to have a high correlation to newsworthiness.

Being that the design for this research only allowed for articles to be pulled from a national Mexican source instead of a local one, two additional newspaper articles are utilized

from “El Diario de Juárez” about the cases of 17-year-old Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, and 12-year-old Nahomi Calino Torres. To provide further context into how femicides are represented in Ciudad Juárez, a blog post highlighting the mother of Luz Angélica Mena Flores and how her daughter’s murder is representative of the crime as a whole is also included.

Because the 51 articles about crimes in Ciudad Juárez were all published in a national news source, it is likely that these cases were represented in a much different way than they would be represented at a more local level, such as in a Juárez newspaper. Likewise, crimes in newspapers could be reported in a much different context than they are in blog posts. The blog, titled “Ciudad Juárez, en la sombra del narcotráfico” [Ciudad Juárez, in the Shadow of Drug Trafficking], is written by journalist Judith Torrea with the intention of telling a more accurate version of the Juárez story that the mainstream media fails to tell. With tensions over homicide and drug trafficking in Juárez so high, a variety of sources have been implemented to show varying perspectives on femicide.

Unlike Detroit newspaper articles, Juárez articles in “El Universal” rarely gave the name, let alone the last name of the perpetrators of femicide when one could be identified. In “El Diario de Juárez” there was greater detail given regarding both perpetrators and victims, including full names, a more in-depth account of the crime, as well as information about criminal proceedings. 17.6% of “El Universal” articles framed crimes as the result of a “faulty criminal justice system,” yet the “El Diario” article detailing the rape and murder of 12-year-old Nahomi provides substantial details about the status of the case which could prove to be reassuring to Juárez residents, as opposed to perpetuating the fear of impunity. Another side to the story is told through blog posts, which are victim-focused and tell about personal struggles experienced by

the family members of missing girls. In interviews, Judith Torrea has stated that the stories of the families must be told in order to distinguish these crimes from the country's larger concern of drug trafficking. Through interviews with the mothers of missing women and girls, victims' stories have a stronger, more personal impact rather than being seen as a number or "just another homicide."

## **Discussion**

The present study has contributed to the body of literature regarding femicide, including femicide as portrayed through media. Past researchers (Richards et al., 2011) have requested that future research examine news coverage of femicide in other states, which has been done here in the state of Michigan. Aside from the dissertation published by Meyer (2008) on collateral victims of intimate partner violence in Michigan news sources, there are currently very few studies published on femicide news coverage in Michigan. The present study has also taken on a unique approach to the topic which is the comparison of femicide news in two distinct locations in two different countries.

A comparative method could prove to be valuable in understanding how two different cultures represent a crime that occurs globally—the killing of women and girls. Both Detroit and Ciudad Juárez exhibit unique elements to the crime that tend to be characteristic of femicide in those cities. For example, women in Juárez often go missing for long periods of time before their bodies are uncovered. In Detroit, murdered women typically know who their killer is, and he is often a current or ex intimate partner. A comparative method in this context would prove to be even more valuable if this study could have investigated the history of violence against women with respect to each account. Data on violence against women suggests that female homicides,

especially those perpetrated by a family member or intimate partner, are increasing globally (Global Study on Homicide: Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls, 2018). Without understanding the prevalence of femicide over time, the evolution of legislation against violence against women, or how women's status in society has evolved from past until present, a comparative criminological approach cannot adequately examine how women's status in society has changed over time. More specifically, a comparative criminological approach here fails to appropriately explain how women's status in society is represented through newspaper articles today without an understanding of women's status in the past. Although this approach has not shown much practicality for drawing comparisons between two unique locations, it has yielded similar results to past research in addition to some contradictory findings.

Initially, the intention for this research was to make comparisons between Detroit and Juárez in their representations of femicide in newspaper articles. Upon further research, the cases have proven to be far too dissimilar to focus on similarities between these two locations. Instead, I have chosen to treat Detroit and Juárez as two separate cases and demonstrate how they differ. Still, amongst the differences, several noteworthy similarities were noticed and may denote a tendency for media to report on the stories of murdered women and girls in a selective way.

In a sample of 102 articles, both news sources were found to have used direct and indirect victim-blaming language far less than past research has uncovered. Further, the majority of articles in both cases stuck to presenting strictly factual information, as opposed to framing the case in any particular context. Only rarely were journalists guilty of placing responsibility on the victim, and very few insinuated that the violence experienced by a woman was a private concern. Nearly every account of indirect victim-blaming language in both sources made reference to the



behavior of the perpetrator. While this may appear to benefit the victim's representation, some accounts used the perpetrator's behavior as a mitigating factor for their actions. Furthermore, there were fewer examples of linguistic avoidance and deflection of criticism used than expected in both accounts. "El Universal" articles tended to use less harmful language overall than "The Detroit News" articles. It is plausible that "El Universal" used less harmful language because both the citizens and authorities of Mexico recognize femicide as a national concern, whereas in the United States violence against women is perhaps not as publicized.

Very few articles actually did frame the crime with the broader scope of any time of violence against women and girls. One article in "The Detroit News" chose to frame a case in this manner, while nine "El Universal" articles chose to frame cases this way, a meager 9.8% of 102 articles. "El Universal" articles presented a theme where the names of victims would be listed somewhere in an article about an unrelated case, demonstrating to readers that although these women were murdered on separate occasions, their deaths were fueled by the same underlying motive. By connecting cases together, "El Universal" articles prevented many deaths from being seen as isolated incidents, and often acted upon the opportunity to talk about femicide as a national problem. Relating individual cases to one another as well as bringing them up for national debate allowed newspapers to relate femicides to broader political discussions, such as how government officials are planning to respond to unsolved cases and what it means for families of victims. These findings seem both unsurprising as well as consistent with past research on the topic of femicide. Contrary to this, "The Detroit News" was only able to relate two femicides to the larger issue of violence against women. It proves to be damaging to isolate cases of female homicide because it makes the the threat of this occurring to others seem absurd,

like something that only happens on TV. Women may not connect cases of homicide to their own experiences if they are unaware that these cases were preceded by violence and abuse, and were in fact not random at all.

In this particularly small sample, it was difficult to identify which perpetrator and victim characteristics earned a story high profile coverage independently of other crime characteristics. Thus, stories in this sample typically received high profile coverage based on the uniqueness or severity of the crime. Among these extraordinary events, victims were identified as being very young or very old. In Detroit, the death of Tameria Greene received a total of eight articles and she was only eight-years-old when she was murdered. Similarly, the killing of 80-year-old Nancy Dailey received five articles out of the total sample. With the exception of Tameria Greene, due to her extremely young age and the contention surrounding the circumstances of her murder, Caucasian victims in Detroit received the highest number of articles per story versus other races or ethnicities. For example, 33-year-old Christina Lazzana was a successful businesswoman who was murdered by her husband. She was African American, and her case only received a total of three articles. Her case could have received less coverage because she was African American, as past studies have proven that African American victims of crime are less newsworthy than Caucasian victims (Lin & Phillips, 2012; Stillman, 2007). Or, her case could have received less coverage because at the time, there were other cases to be written about containing more unique and unusual details. Take, for instance, the case of Jane Bashara. The alleged motive behind her death was so that her husband could pursue a life with his several mistresses in his “sex dungeon” below his bar in Detroit. With hardly any detail provided about why Anthony Webster chose to shoot Christina in the chest, it is no wonder that readers may be

more interested in following up on the Bashara story. The results from this study demonstrate that the crime characteristics are most often what determines high profile coverage for a story in newspaper articles, as opposed to the victim and perpetrator race, age or gender. Some cases showed that a victim's age may have been influential in their newsworthiness, but the uniqueness of the case or its salience to current events could have played a larger role. No matter which feature was highlighted most frequently in any particular story, there were often several unusual crime or incident participant characteristics present in each high profile case. Thus, these characteristics seemed to influence each other. Cases that appeared in this sample of "The Detroit News" articles did not yield any significant patterns with regard to newsworthiness of violence against women, as cases seemed either newsworthy or not for a multitude of reasons. However, the newsworthiness of certain cases did support the research conducted by Chermak (1995) and the five factors that determine newsworthiness.

In Juárez, the rape and murder of 12-year-old Nahomi received a total of nine articles. This case in particular, much like that of Tamera Greene, most likely received a great deal of articles because Nahomi was so young when she was murdered. Furthermore, Nahomi was raped and murdered, while her two sisters were raped and survived to tell their stories. More than one victim makes this scenario especially newsworthy. A good portion of cases in Juárez included a victim under the age of 18. This finding is interesting because a younger female is the quintessential victim represented in cases of femicide in Juárez. Is it so that victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez are most often younger women and girls under the age of 18? This is possible, however it is possible that these victims most often represented in the media because their age makes the crimes against them especially horrendous. Younger victims in Juárez received more

high profile coverage because they were easier to relate to the city and country's epidemic of femicide, and precisely because "El Universal" is a national news source concerned with issues that the entire country of Mexico has interest in. A visible patterns amongst Juárez stories were the overwhelming amount of unknown information. One might wonder whether an unknown perpetrator or unknown victim makes a case more mysterious and therefore fascinating to readers. Yet, based on the various accounts stating that the Mexican authorities have a history of negligence in response to cases of missing and murdered women, an unknown perpetrator or victim may be common for cases both in and out of the limelight. With this being said, patterns were difficult to identify in the sample of articles from "El Universal," much like "The Detroit News." What information that can be gathered from this sample is that many cases involved some element of disappearance, many victims were under the age of 18, and there was a great deal of information on incident participants that is unknown. These faint patterns do seem to bear some resemblance on femicides in Ciudad Juárez.

Violence against women is typically not seen as a social problem in the United States, although it is viewed this way in Mexico and many other countries. Domestic violence may not necessarily be viewed as the main precursor to murder in a city like Ciudad Juárez, for example, but the murders and disappearances of women across the country continue to be linked to a nationally-recognized epidemic fueled by gender. Domestic violence in the United States remains a crime that is underreported and not considered suitable for public discussion. While women across the globe continue to be murdered by a variety of perpetrators with various social or political motivations, it is my hope that femicide will be seen as cause for public concern and policy change no matter the context for the crime.

## Limits and Delimits

Due to the time-sensitive and intensive nature of this research, this study did not conduct an exhaustive analysis of every newspaper in either Detroit nor Ciudad Juárez. This can be a shortcoming of this research because other newspapers may include articles on cases which were not published in “The Detroit News” or “El Universal,” the two most appropriate sources available through the newspaper database “Access World News.” Unfortunately, “Access World News” does not provide a news source published in Ciudad Juárez, which is why “El Universal” out of Mexico City is used as the Spanish news source. In order to ensure that the newspaper articles in “El Universal” are on the topic of crimes that occurred in Ciudad Juárez and not in Mexico City, the search terms used to locate relevant articles were always accompanied by the term “Ciudad Juárez” to filter through unrelated stories. Additionally, another limit to using “Access World News” is that while searching for articles in “El Universal,” I found that there were several days, sometimes even weeks, where there were no articles published from those days. This could prove to be a limit to my research because I could be missing important articles on femicides that were originally published in print, but never made it to the online database. Furthermore, because “El Universal” is published out of Mexico City, the articles included in this newspaper may have been subjected to a more strict journalistic selection and therefore may only include stories that interest readers at a national level. In other words, the more “typical” stories could have been excluded in order to make space for only the most intriguing and compelling stories. I expect that a benefit to using a Ciudad Juárez news sources may have been that more femicide stories would be published because they are more relevant to the readers in

that city and state, and may not have been excluded for purposes of space and lack of importance or prevalence.

An analysis of high-profile news coverage consistent with that outlined by Lin & Phillips (2012) would note whether or not the newspaper chose to include a photo, whether or not the story made the front page, and overall placement on the page. Unfortunately for my research, “Access World News” only provides the text that was originally published in the newspaper, and does not provide a way for the reader to determine where the story was published on the page or if a photo was included. For some newspapers, such as “El Universal,” it is not even possible to see which page the story was placed on. Due to these unexpected challenges, my analysis of high-profile coverage will examine the number of words contained in each story as well as their page placement (for Detroit news articles) and category/section placement (for Ciudad Juárez articles). This is a limit to my research because not only is a photo a telling indicator of a story’s prominence in the news, but the photo is also telling in terms of the victim and/or perpetrator’s physical characteristics.

Lastly, any findings of this research may not be comparable to any other two locations throughout the world and merely aim to represent how newspapers in Detroit and Juárez, two cities with high crime rates in relation to their respective countries, depict the killing of women and girls.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Upon completion of this study, it will be beneficial for future research in this area to speak with journalists and examine their reasoning behind word choice, their personal beliefs, gender, and level of education on domestic violence. Past research (Taylor, 2009; Richards et al.,

2011; Gillespie, 2013) contends that it would be helpful to spend time with journalists in order to uncover how they choose which aspects of a story to cover and why, in addition to how they choose to gather their information. A closer examination of journalists may be able to provide insight into whether journalists' reporting tendencies are influenced by their own biases or by journalistic processes (Gillespie et al., 2013).

In line with this concept, future research should examine how a journalist's exposure to domestic violence education impacts their reporting on stories of violence against women and girls. Due to the strong impact that media have on society, increased domestic violence education for journalists could prove to be advantageous toward instilling the idea that domestic violence and intimate partner violence are social problems, not personal issues. Moreover, domestic violence education could help eliminate harmful language used to talk about women and the crimes against them such as sexualized language, sanitized language, euphemisms, and more (Meyers, 1997). While Taylor (2009), Richards (2011), and Gillespie (2013) allude to this domestic violence-centered research taking place in other states around the U.S., it could be that journalists in other countries (such as Mexico) could also benefit from this type of exposure. Furthermore, journalist attitudes and decisions should be analyzed in other countries as well which may be telling as to why so many cases reported in "El Universal" provided scant information regarding each crime.

Due to varying motivations and vastly different details contained in each story, future studies choosing to analyze media representations of violence against women should investigate how a single story evolves in the news with respect to the language used and the framing of the article. Moreover, a mixed-media method would be beneficial to future research as well.

Newspapers, although convenient for analysis, may not be the best indicator of how messages about crime are transmitted. The consumption of media through television and online sources is most popular today, and these differences in reporting could prove to have a drastically different effect on how crime is perceived by the public. With this being said, future studies could benefit from a comprehensive examination of one or more stories across different types of media (television, newspaper, radio, blogs, etc.).

## **Conclusion**

On the basis that femicide is both a recent and understudied topic in sociology, the current study has aided in the representation of this crime as well as to the body of literature that exists on violence against women. Although violence against women is not dated, its appearance in literature and public conversation did not gain traction in the United States until the mid to late 1970s. Vincent Sacco's (1995) contention in "Media Constructions of Crime" offers an explanation as to why the public has seen a great deal of landmark cases of violence against women in the media during the past three to four decades:

The discovery of new problems provides a journalistic opportunity to tell a story that has not been told before, but such stories are told most effectively when they resonate with existing cultural themes. In the 1970s, the problem of crime against the elderly brought together in one pack an already familiar concern about crime in the streets and victims' rights with an emerging concern about the aging population (Sacco, 1995, p. 150).

The misrepresentation of crime per the media is not limited to a particular crime nor to the prevalence of criminal activity. Each element of crime has the potential to be misrepresented, most often including victims of crime, perpetrators of crime, the public's risk factor of being



victimized, even what is being done to remedy crime. The present study has made a contribution to the topic of news coverage of femicide by exploring how the news media take advantage of another “current” crime problem.

Research on two geographically different regions has yielded findings that are thought-provoking. Detroit and Ciudad Juárez both have some of the highest homicide rates in their respective countries; however, each culture’s perception of violence against women and girls varies greatly due to varying political and legal responses. Recently in Mexico, there has been legal action taken against gender crimes which forces its citizens to recognize the issue of violence against women and girls as a public concern rather than a private problem. In the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, those convicted of committing the crime of femicide are now punished by life in prison and even monetary reparations to the victim’s family (Diaz & Yukhananov, 2015). While some Mexican states are more conversant with this public issue than others, Mexico as a country is well-versed on the issue of femicide while this word rarely enters into American dialogue about violence against women and girls. In the United States, where female homicides are largely talked about as isolated incidents and private troubles amongst the individuals, language use may differ greatly from that in Mexico where its citizens are gradually beginning to recognize violence against women and girls as a phenomenon of their country. There exists great hypocrisy on the part of the United States, which is quick to pin cases of femicide in Latin American countries under the concept of *machismo*. However, the United States has higher rates of female homicide than some Latin American countries and shares in common with those countries one of the leading causes of death for women under the age of fifty: homicide. The United States is currently enveloped in an epidemic where sexual assault

occurs excessively on college campuses, where perpetrators are rarely prosecuted, and where female homicide is swept under the rug as a private matter. At the same time that #MeToo circulates the internet in the U.S., #NiUnaMenos [Not One Less] is happening in Mexico and other Latin American countries where femicide is apart of public dialogue. My research has explored how newspaper articles represent identical crises of female homicide through both the lens of ‘femicide’ and of ‘domestic violence.’ The intended implications for this study are to bring awareness to the importance of media in shaping a social problem. Moreover, this research sheds light on how language use can drastically affect the way in which society identifies a social problem as cause for national (or international) concern and how the problem is addressed.

The public discussion on femicide and violence against women can improve by refusing to isolate incidents of domestic violence as though they are private matters. Informed reporting on incidents of violence against women are necessary to ensure that the public interprets violence against women as a serious crime, and as a cause for public concern. I hope that media outlets begin to use their platform to accurately demonstrate the lethal risk that women and girls are facing, in order to change the stance on violence against women and impact legislation.

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