

# Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

## Killers, Abusers, Gangsters, and Fraudsters: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Parole and Paroled Offenders in Canadian News Media

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**B.A. Applied Criminology (Honours) Thesis**



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

KILLERS, ABUSERS, GANGSTERS, AND FRAUDSTERS: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT  
ANALYSIS OF PAROLE AND PAROLED OFFENDERS IN CANADIAN NEWS MEDIA

by

KALYN J. FIELD

B.A. (Honours), Douglas College, 2023

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Faculty and Thesis Supervisor

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# **Killers, Abusers, Gangsters, and Fraudsters: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Parole and Paroled Offenders in Canadian News Media**

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**Kalyn J. Field**

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in Applied Criminology - Honours

in the  
Douglas College Department of Criminology  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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DOUGLAS COLLEGE  
2023

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## **Declaration of Committee**

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## **Abstract**

Offenders and crime, especially those with a violent nature, are rife within the news media. However, little research exists pertaining to these offenders who are going to be, or nearing, their release on parole. This thesis aimed to extend prior literature by conducting two qualitative content analyses. The first included a general selection of Canadian parole-based newspaper articles from 2002 to 2022 in order to create a foundation of how parole is represented in the media. The second was an in-depth analysis that drew upon articles from a male offender (Larry Takahashi) and a female offender (Joanna Larson) to compare representations based on gender. This exploration uncovered four central themes, the types of crimes published, gender of offenders, age of victims, and the usage of certain language. The results of this study revealed several implications related to community attitudes, and public policy.

**Keywords:** parole; paroled offenders; crime newsworthiness; qualitative content analysis; social constructionism; Canada

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents and grandparents. Dad, Mom, Papa, Gramma, and Nana, I couldn't have completed this project without your unconditional support and guidance. Thank you.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Acronyms**

**CSC:** Correctional Service of Canada

**DO:** Dangerous Offender

**LTSO:** Long Term Supervision Order

**UAL:** Unlawfully at Large

# **Chapter 1.**

## **Introduction**

Society in general continues to be fascinated with crime and criminals. This interest tends to be presented in the news media, which provides an excellent opportunity for research. Criminologists and other scholars take advantage of this existing data source and by analysing these news articles, one can see what crimes, offenders, and victims are deemed the most newsworthy. These are typically crime stories that involve violence, vulnerable victims, and rare events. These articles further entice viewers through sensationalism, using carefully picked language and attitudes to elicit feelings of fear (Wong & Lee, 2021). Because most of the public is not directly involved with the criminal justice system, their main source of information is through news media outlets. This can be troubling as much of this information is sensationalised and dramatized to capture viewers' attention and influence their opinions (Berrington & Hankatukia, 2002; Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006; Navarro & Higgins, 2022; Taylor, 2009; Wong & Lee, 2021). This is done by using media frames, which “are constructed from a sum of selected parts to build a story, which structures reality and can be made significant through routine exposure” (Navarro & Higgins, 2022, p. 2). For example, the focus on only certain violent crimes such as murder, gives the public the impression that these rarer crimes occur more frequently. The sway in public opinion can influence the types of public policies implemented such as various sex offender legislation for community monitoring. When looking at public opinion about these offenders and crimes, the social construction of crime, moral panics, and folk devils are important to consider (Calleja, 2010; De Vries, Farrell, Dowler, Bouche, & Wittmer-Wolfe, 2020; Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006; Frei, 2008; Harris & Socia, 2014; Hayes & Carpenter, 2013; Klein & Cooper, 2019; Maguire &

Singer, 2010; Navarro & Higgins, 2022; Rogers & Ferguson, 2011; Shackley, Weiner, Day & Willis, 2014; Taylor, 2009).

Gender and other background characteristics of offenders and victims also contributes to newsworthiness and how they are framed in the media. Typically, male offenders are at the forefront of attention and typically seen as committing the most crime (Consalvo, 2003). However, the way males and female offenders are reported on differs greatly. Female offenders typically have their crimes explained with stereotypical reasons or violating societal standards of femininity. Meanwhile men are almost expected to be violent because of their perceived masculinity (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002). The risk and mitigating factors that male and female offenders experience are much different, and with that they are also treated differently by the news media (Hassan, 2021).

While there is much to consider in these news articles, prior research mainly focuses on articles that feature crimes that just occurred or the apprehension of offenders. Once sentenced and imprisoned, media attention wanes on these offenders as there are newer and more exciting stories to report on. The media may then pick up the offender and their story again once they are nearing release and when they are released on parole. Therefore, analysing and considering how parole and paroled offenders are represented in the news media is a major gap in the literature, that this research aims to address.

While an offender is in prison, news media stories covering them tend to lessen as no new details arise. They are typically not featured until they are nearing the end of their prison term. An offender's involvement with the criminal justice system continues after they have been released from prison, falling under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Depending on their sentences, offenders may be granted a form of community supervision including parole or probation. For the purposes of this research, only parole and

paroled offenders will be considered, as parole is mainly used for federal offenders (Government of Canada, 2021). These offenders have committed more serious crimes that warrant more media attention. On community supervision, offenders are typically on at least one of these release types: day parole, full parole, statutory release, or a long-term supervision order (LTSO) (Government of Canada; 2018). Most offenders will be released from prison, even those who received a life sentence. According to the 2021 Corrections and Conditional Release Annual Report, 42.4% (9113 offenders) of the total offender population was under community supervision (Public Safety Canada, 2023). Depending on the offender and their crime, their release back into the public is covered by various news sources. This includes community notification of an offender being granted or denied parole, an offender relocating, and public reactions to parole hearings to name a few. Sensationalism and criticism are rife within these articles as media coverage often sparks public outcry, making them a deserving and needed place for analysis, especially since offenders in the community make up almost half of the total offender population.

Despite a sizeable population, very little content analysis research has been conducted on paroled offenders. This presents a unique opportunity to analyze how parole and paroled offenders are represented in Canadian news media. This research was guided by two research questions: How are offenders on parole and parole in general represented in Canadian news media? And how does gender influence these representations? I believe that because of their large population and parole's integral part of the criminal justice system, the way offenders are represented in the media will provide insight into how parolees are framed by news sources, what types of crimes and offenders are most newsworthy, and how this can shape public opinion and policy.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism is important to the current study for several reasons. Like with crime in general, the public typically has very little experience with offenders on parole, meaning their construction of paroled offenders is based solely on news media information. It is also important to consider why parole is presented a certain way, and why certain feelings are elicited from the public. The key to understanding how news media influences the representation of parole and paroled offenders and the public reactions to these is social constructionism. Social constructionism posits that social reality is created through the shared interactions, ideas, knowledge between members of society, and especially the media (Lindgren, 2005; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Wong & Lee, 2021). Meaning is first made when news broadcasting companies decide which stories become news. Crimes that are violent, rare, and can evoke an emotional response from viewers are greater represented in the news media. Community and individual reality and meaning is created from the interpretations made after viewing such media (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007). Typically, one's only exposure to crime and criminality is through the media. They then create their own reality of crime through the stories and meanings that news media present. In addition to the types of crimes shown to the public, the language used, the facts presented or omitted, and the frames used to present these articles; all shape the way the public understands and responds to crime (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007).

## 2.2 Crime and Newsworthiness

One of the most influential aspects that decide a crime's newsworthiness is the type of crime committed. The more violent and rare a crime is, the more likely it will be featured in various news sources, especially since there is only limited space to include crime stories in newspapers. Journalists choose to showcase the more violent and graphic cases because that's ultimately what is preferred by audiences (Gruenewald, Pizarro, & Chermak, 2009). This includes homicide, terrorism, mass murders, and various sex crimes (Dowler et al., 2006; Navarro & Higgins, 2022). Because these types of crimes are more likely to be presented, these crimes are then overrepresented in the news media. For example, even though domestic homicides or homicides committed by someone of a familiar relationship made up 25% of all homicides committed in Canada in 2014, news coverage of these crimes was much less than homicides committed by strangers (Wong & Lee, 2021). The public then views stranger homicides as occurring more frequently than they actually do, creating issues with public fear, and evoking public, social, and political action (Dowler et al., 2006; Navarro & Higgins, 2022; Wong & Lee, 2021). In some instances, these media frames may be used to invoke certain feelings about offenders and victims. This is the case with the media representation of offenders who have been given a Dangerous Offender (DO) designation. This influences the public to harbour more punitiveness towards offenders and more empathy towards survivors or victims' families (Mussell & Orsini, 2021), this is particularly problematic because of the ways this distorts public views about homicide incidents, especially the causes of homicide and related violent crimes.

Sex crimes are also among the most newsworthy, typically inciting a negative response from the public. This negative perception of sex offenders has led to more punitive and restrictive methods of dealing with sex offenders such as having a sex offender registry, residency restrictions, internet and social media bans and monitoring, and community

notifications of their release (Frei, 2008; Grossi, 2017; Harris & Socia, 2016; Navarro & Higgins, 2022, Rogers & Ferguson, 2011). Sex offenders are given, in a sense, two forms of stigmatization because of their crimes. First, being the label of convicted offender, and second from being labelled as a sex offender (Harris & Socia, 2016; Navarro & Higgins, 2022).

Like with homicide coverage, the misconception given to sex crimes is that they are more likely to be committed by a stranger, when realistically the offender is most likely already known to the victim. This further adds to the public fear and hatred for sex offenders (Frei, 2008; Harris & Socia, 2016). Also given this overrepresentation of sex offenders in the media, it provides the public the impression that these offenders are more likely to recidivate with more sex crimes, further weakening the belief that they can be rehabilitated and reintegrated (Harris & Socia, 2016, Rogers & Ferguson, 2011). These attitudes are reinforced by the way that the media frames sex offenders. Navarro and Higgins (2022) found that the most common frame of sex offenders was the ‘monstrous sex offender’. This frame presents sex offenders as serial rapists, violent or brutal, and a familiar sex offender that hides in plain sight (Navarro & Higgins, 2022). This representation can also lead to the development of moral panics and folk devils, which will be discussed in the following section. Interestingly, a study done by Shackley, Weiner, Day, and Willis (2014) found that individuals with higher education levels reported fewer negative attitudes towards sex offenders, possibly due to individuals seeking information from more credible sources and not believing in the stereotypical ways in which sex offenders are commonly represented.

One of the most common quotes about newsworthiness and crime is ‘if it bleeds, it leads’; however, as argued by Dowler et al. (2006), it greatly depends on who is bleeding. Consideration of who is a victim and their respective backgrounds are critical to understand who is most represented in the news. An ideal or worthy victim is typically described as



someone who is weak, blameless, innocent, and helpless—someone who is able to successfully claim victim status (Lewis, Hamilton, & Elmore, 2019). One of the main characteristics that impact victim newsworthiness, and their ideal victim status is their gender. For example, female victims of homicide are seen as more newsworthy than male victims because of their perceived femininity, or inability to fend for themselves (Wong & Lee, 2021). However, this changes with sexual assault victims, in which media sources may victim blame because of a victim's attire at the time of their assault (Taylor, 2009). Victim blaming also considers the socio-economic background, age, ethnic and racial background, mental health, drug use, and occupation of the victim. Those who are impoverished, involved with the sex trade, have mental health issues, are from a racial or ethnic minority, and use drugs are deemed as not worthy or even inviting their own victimization, leaving their victimization absent from news sources. Therefore, the most newsworthy victims are those that are female, white, middle-class, mentally stable, and young (Wong & Lee, 2021).

### **2.3 Moral Panics and Folk Devils**

Moral panics and folk devils are key to understanding how paroled offenders, especially sex offenders, are treated once they are released. The concepts of moral panics and folk devils were first created by Stanley Cohen in 1972. Cohen (2002) defined a moral panic as:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often)

resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible (p. 1).

Folk devils are the identified group or person that threaten societal values and interests (Cohen, 2002). In this case, sex offenders or paroled offenders in general are the folk devils (Hindess, 2015). When the news media report on sex offenders, they typically do so in a dramatized and sensationalized way that invokes fear in the public. This then gives the impression that sex offenders prey on strangers, when in actuality, victims are more likely to be related or in a close relationship with the offender (Maguire & Singer, 2011). The sudden and widespread fear that comes with this moral panic has resulted in various legislative changes such as residency and internet restrictions, sex offender registries, and community notification. These enactments, however, are typically based on emotional responses rather than on empirical results, leading to a false sense of security (Barryessa, 2022; Calleja, 2016; Maguire & Singer, 2011).

Sex offender policies also fail to account for the heterogenous nature of sex offenders by assuming each offender should be monitored the same way (Barryessa, 2022). This is detrimental not only to the offender's successful reintegration, but also costly to the community. Even though these policies have shown little impact on recidivism rates, the public still strongly supports them, basing their supports solely on their fears (Barryessa, 2022). Because the public has negative opinions of these offenders, they are more likely to be in favour of more punitive legislation. Punitive legislation has led to increased difficulty in community reintegration, such as having issues finding employment or housing, this may lead an offender to turn to crime to cope. This results in prison overcrowding due to parole violations, costs spent on ineffective policies, and ultimately communities that are less safe because policies and strategies that are more effective are simply ignored (Klein & Cooper, 2019; Maguire & Singer, 2011). This has become a vicious cycle as the media continues to

report on sex offenders and other paroled offenders, resulting in public fear, which perpetuates these policies instead of enacting more effective ones.

## **2.4 Female Offenders**

It is also important to consider how differently female offenders are represented in comparison to their male counterparts. The reactions to and representations of female offenders are typically rooted within hegemonic masculinity and gender roles. As such, mass media uses framing and discourses to reinforce these gender roles and stereotypes (Christensen, 2018). The common discourse around female offenders categorizes them into two categories: 'mad' and 'bad'. 'Mad' female offenders have their crimes explained due to their hormones or mental illness, while 'bad' female offenders have their crimes explained due to them being evil deviations from stereotypical female gender roles (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Estrada, Nilsson & Pettersson, 2019). The criminality of female offenders plays more into social morality than with male offenders, and with this comes a greater need to explain females' crime (Estrada et al., 2019). Even though serious and violent crimes committed by females occur less frequently, the shock and awe factor that female offenders have on the public make them particularly newsworthy, especially since females are not stereotypically expected to commit crime (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Females are stereotypically seen as nurturing, caregiving, harmless, and submissive members of society, so when they commit violent and sexual crimes, they break that mould (Christensen, 2018; Taylor, 2009). For example, while both male and female sex offenders are viewed as evil and monstrous, "male sex offenders are not unnatural in the same way as women" (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013, p. 163). The violation of gendered social morals evokes negative public opinions, that then influences public policies for female offenders (Collins, 2016). This is particularly troubling as there are different pathways that lead females into crime, resulting in different levels of risk when in the community. This

warrants specialized support and rehabilitation which negative public opinion could hinder (Al Hassan, 2021; Christensen, 2018).

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Methods**

To address my first research question: How are offenders on parole and parole in general represented in Canadian news media? I conducted an exploratory qualitative content analysis, which was a general analysis of Canadian newspaper articles referencing parole and paroled offenders from 2002 to 2022. My second research question: How does gender influence these representations? was addressed by another qualitative content analysis that was more in-depth. This analysis compared two specific offenders on parole, a male and a female. This chapter serves to provide an overview of the theoretical approach, methodological framework, sampling, data collection, data coding, and analysis methods of the current project.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

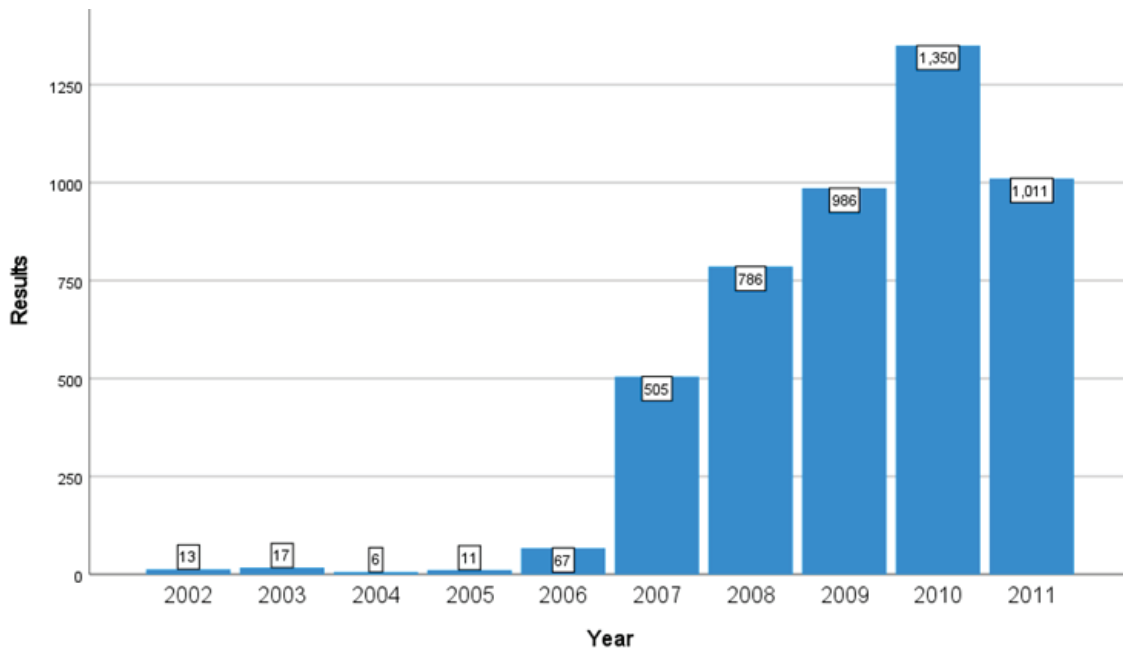
Exploratory qualitative content analysis was chosen because of the lack of research on paroled offenders in the news media. Qualitative content analysis is commonly used to analyze, understand, and summarize contextual meanings present in various sources of text, which best suited this research project. The qualitative nature allows for a better understanding of the constructions of crime and criminals as well as the possible meanings the viewers could make after reading these articles (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Two separate analyses were used to get a better understanding of parole and paroled offenders. The first analysis included a general representation of parole in the media, that set a foundation for the second analysis that looked at two specific cases.

This research used an interpretive paradigmatic approach as this strand seeks knowledge by understanding the interactions between interactions, actions, and objects which

make up social reality (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Social constructionism was key to this project. Social constructionism posits that social reality is created through the shared interactions, ideas, knowledge between members of society, and especially the media (Lindgren, 2005; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Wong & Lee, 2021). Symbolic interactionism was also helpful with analysis. Symbolic interactionism was used because this theory looks at the interactions between individuals, objects, and symbols and the meaning-making individuals make from these. Each of these provided valuable frameworks for understanding how and why parole and paroled offenders are represented in the media, and how the public views and understands parole and paroled offenders based on their interactions with the media.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Samples**

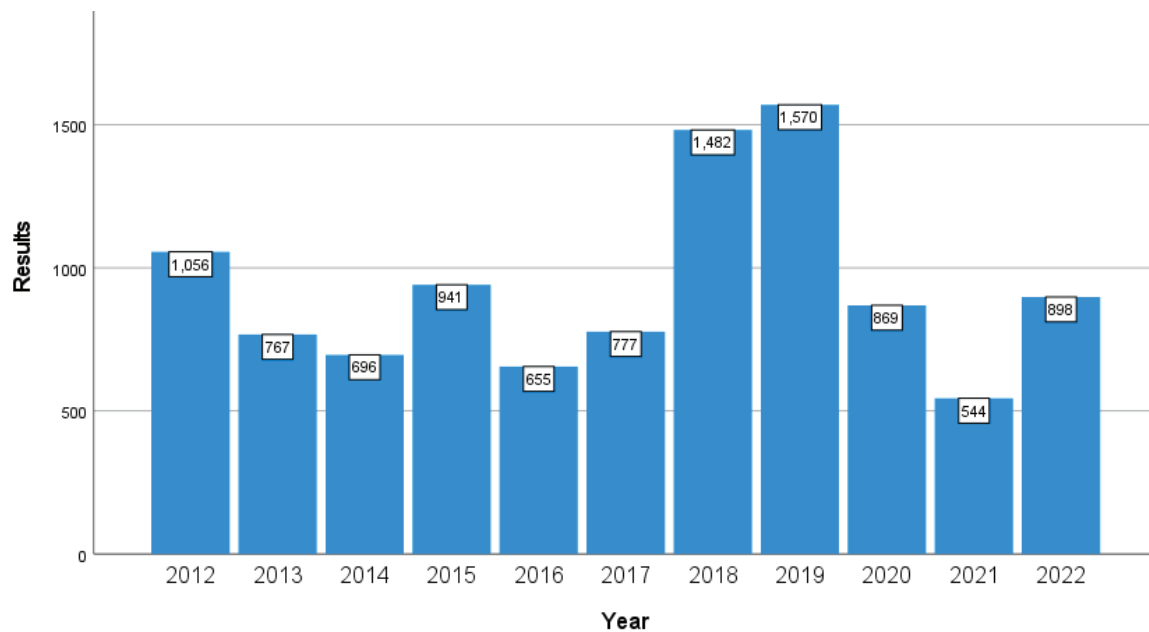
In order to gain a general understanding of how parole and paroled offenders were represented in the media, a broader content analysis was conducted first. The online newspaper article database ProQuest: Canadian Newsstream was used. The first collection of articles had a date range from 2002 to 2011, and the second collection of articles had a date range from 2012 to 2022. The search term used was “parole”, with location limits set to Canada and only articles featured in newspapers. For each 10-year search pool, the first 80 articles were selected, after duplicates were removed. A total of 160 articles spanning the two decades, were selected and used. Only searching by the term “parole” allowed for a broad range of articles that included offender specifics, public reactions, policy changes, and implications. The number of search results per year per decade can be found in Figures 1 and 2. The search was split into two decades in order to have a better representation of articles for each time period and allowing each decade to be compared to each other. This also helped reveal how representations of crime, criminals, and parole have changed over time.



***Figure 1. Number of Search Results by Year, 2002-2011.***

As illustrated by Figure 1, there was a sharp increase in articles starting from 2007 and peaking at 1350 in 2010. There were several potential reasons for this increase in reporting. In 2006-2007, serial killer Clifford Olsen began applying for parole. Because his crimes were gruesome and widely reported on, it is likely that media outlets capitalized on his story because of public interest and reactions. In 2010, Robert Latimer, a father who was convicted of killing his disabled daughter in a mercy killing, was first released on parole. Because of the controversial nature of his crime and the media and public reaction to them, news outlets continuously reported on his background and parole status. Newspapers may have noticed these stories selling better than others, leading them to cover more parole-based stories in the future. This may explain why parole articles were consistently over 500 results per year from 2007 onwards.

In Figure 2, there was a noticeable increase in the number of articles in 2018 and 2019.



***Figure 2. Number of Search Results by Year, 2012-2022.***

In 2018, Paul Bernardo, an infamous serial killer and rapist had his first parole hearing. Even though he was ultimately denied, the possibility of his release caused an uproar among the public making it a hot topic for news reporting. Interestingly, in 2019 there was not one sole case that dominated news headlines like the previous years mentioned. Reporting in general could have increased because of more offenders being released, leading to more one-off type stories. The number of articles dropped significantly after 2019 that may be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. News sources turned their attention to reporting more on the pandemic and health related news rather than parole-based stories, leading to a decline in numbers. Hearings may also not have taken place due to reduced gatherings and occupation restrictions. As the newsworthiness of the pandemic began to subside, one can see the numbers increased again by 2022. It may also be the case that offenders were less likely to be released during the pandemic or the ones that were released did not have newsworthy crimes.

### **3.2.1 Male and Female Comparison**

Once the general analysis of parole representation was completed, a second, in-depth qualitative content analysis was completed. This included selecting one male and one female



offender on parole to analyze. Because violent crime was most commonly reported in the media, two violent offenders were chosen. The term violent crime was operationalised to be defined as “the use or threatened use of violence against a person, including homicide, attempted murder, assault, sexual assault and robbery” (Statistics Canada, 2015 para. 244).

The male offender chosen was Larry Takahashi. Takahashi was a serial rapist that assaulted women in Edmonton from 1979 to 1983. He was convicted of three counts of rape and two counts of aggravated assault among other convictions. Takahashi was eligible for parole in 1991 but was not granted day parole until 2005. His parole was revoked shortly after as he had breached his conditions by meeting with a sex offender. He was released again on day parole in 2013, but again had his parole revoked as he had breached his conditions after receiving a massage from a massage therapy student (Ip, 2016, July 27). Takahashi was granted day parole again in 2016 and remains on parole today (Bernardo, 2021, Aug 16).

The female offender chosen was Joanna Larson. Larson and an accomplice killed a prostitute at a “crack house” in Surrey. Although initially charged with first degree murder, Larson plead guilty to manslaughter (Chu, 2005, Jun 3). Larson was first granted day parole in 2009 but had it revoked in 2012 for breaching her conditions. In 2014, she was released again on day parole; however, she was arrested in early 2015 after going unlawfully at large (UAL) (Bolan, 2016, Sep 13; Nolan, 2016, Sep 27). Larson was granted day parole again in 2016, but again went unlawfully at large again in 2018 and had her parole revoked (Zyktaruk, 2018, July 13). It is unclear whether Larson has remained in prison or been granted day parole again as there have not been any updates on her case. Given that there have been no updates, it is likely that she is still in prison. If she has been released, it is abnormal that it has not been reported on like her prior releases.

A male and female offender were chosen to compare and contrast their representations in the news media based on gender. Takahashi was chosen because his offences are considered violent, his time on parole was widely reported on, and he was on parole at about the same time as Larson. The ProQuest: Canadian Newsstream database was used, with the search term being “Larry Takahashi parole”, location limited to Canada, only newspapers, and with the date range from 2000 onwards. The first 18 articles were selected with duplicates removed.

Larson was chosen because there are very few female offenders with violent crimes that had numerous news articles detailing their time on parole. Again, ProQuest: Canadian Newsstream was used. The search term was “Joanna Larson parole”, with the location limited to Canada, only newspapers, and the date range from 2000 onwards. Because there was less coverage of Larson, only 13 articles were available with duplicates removed. These two offenders were selected due to their violent crimes as well as having more available articles to analyse. They both were also granted parole at about the same time frame, from about 2005 onwards, which also allowed for a smoother comparison over time. Takahashi had an earlier history of temporary releases; however, these articles were excluded from the selection as Larson was not granted parole until 2005. Even though their crimes were different, the violent nature of each also allowed for comparisons.

### **3.3 Data Preparation and Analysis**

For the general analysis, each decade was coded separately, 2002 to 2011 and 2012 to 2022. Each article was reviewed for the following information: wordcount, provincial location of the article, location of article in the newspaper, offender gender, victim age (categorized as minor or adult), primary or index crime/offense, year, and theme. Themes were categorized by the main topic or idea of the article. Once the data was organized into a

spreadsheet, frequencies, and summaries were generated using the statistics software SPSS. Attention was also placed on the language used to describe offenders and their crimes while reading each article. Each article was read through twice to gather this information and then read a final time for analysis.

Crimes included in the analysis consisted of: murder (both first and second degree), manslaughter, conspiracy to commit murder, driving under the influence (DUI) causing death, attempted murder, sexual assault (including all sex crimes such as sexual assault and sexual interference), abduction, white-collar crimes (including various fraud and tax evasion offences), drug offences (including trafficking and possession), assault (including with a weapon, and aggravated), robbery, break and enter, organized crime (including gang-related offences), terrorism, weapon related offences, hate speech, and conditional release offences (including breach of conditions). These categories of crimes were used to better understand the representation and number of each crime committed. For example, for some articles only vague descriptions of crimes were listed, such as only referencing ‘murder’ without specifying which degree of the offence. Organized crime, and white-collar crimes were also grouped together as many articles did not specify the exact crimes. The number of articles that featured each crime type per decade are found in Table 1.

Each article was also categorized into four central themes: parole decisions, court proceedings, reactions, and policy to understand their representation. These themes emerged after reading through the sample and analysing the articles for their base topic. “Parole Decisions” included articles about whether an offender was granted or denied parole, had their parole revoked, or breached their parole conditions. “Court proceedings” included the notification of parole hearings or appeals, or the mention of parole in sentencing.

***Table 1. Number of Crime Type per Queried Article per Decade.***

<b>Crime</b>	<b>2002-2011</b>	<b>2012-2022</b>
Abduction	1	1
Assault	1	0
Attempted Murder	2	1
Breach of Conditions	0	1
Break and Enter	2	1
Drug Offences	2	3
DUI Causing Death	3	2
Hate Speech	0	1
Manslaughter	8	2
Murder	45	49
Murder Conspiracy	2	1
Organized Crime	0	2
Robbery	1	1
Sexual Assault	7	6
Terrorism	1	1
Weapons Offences	0	1
White Collar Crimes	4	2
No Crime Mentioned	2	5

The “reaction” theme contained articles that responded to other articles or news about an offender's parole, such as being granted or denied. This theme included direct feelings and quotes from victims’ families, the community, and other relevant parties. Finally, the “policy theme” included information about implementing new legislation and procedures as well as

criminal justice system members' view on existing policies. Table 2 includes the number of articles categorized by each theme per decade.

***Table 2. Number of Each Theme per Queried Article per Decade.***

<b>Theme</b>	<b>2002-2011</b>	<b>2012-2022</b>
Parole Decisions	33	39
Court Proceedings	7	14
Reactions	38	12
Policy	2	12

### **3.3.1 Male and Female Comparison**

Each article for the male and female comparison was read and reviewed several times for the location of the article in the newspaper, year, wordcount, and theme (as detailed by the general analysis). Once the data was organized into a spreadsheet, frequencies and summaries were generated using the statistics software SPSS. Special attention was paid to the language used to describe the offenders and their crimes. This included the nicknames the offenders were given, and the loaded language used, such as terms that are persuasive and emotive. Differences and similarities based on gender were also noted while reviewing the articles. This included differences in interviewed subjects (victims and offenders) and the overall attitude present in the articles (sympathetic versus unsympathetic). Only three of the four previously described themes were found in these articles (parole decisions, reactions, and policy). Table 3 details the number of articles categorized by each theme per offender.

***Table 3. Number of Articles per Theme per Offender.***

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Larry Takahashi</b>	<b>Joanna Larson</b>
Parole Decisions	10	10
Reactions	7	3
Policy	1	0

## Chapter 4.

### Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 General Analysis

As seen in Table 1, the most reported crime for both decades, was murder, with it occurring 56.3% in 2002 to 2011 and 61.3% in 2012 to 2022. Crimes involving death (murder, manslaughter, and DUI causing death) made up 70% of articles in 2002-2011 and 66% in 2012 to 2022. This aligns with the popular notion that ‘if it bleeds, it leads’. One can also look at the number of non-violent crimes such as drug offences and white-collar crimes. In 2011 to 2022, these crimes made up 7.5% and 6.3% in 2012 to 2022. The next most represented crime in the sample was sexual assault, occurring in 8.8% of articles in 2002-2011 and 7.5% of articles in 2012 to 2022. By looking at these numbers, it is evident that violent crime was and continues to be overrepresented in the media. In 2021, there were a total of 5375 crimes reported to police. Among those, 890 were considered violent crime and 2219 were property crime (Statistics Canada, 2022). Even though property crime reported was almost 2.5 times the amount of violent crime, property crime is simply not newsworthy.

Four central themes were identified during the data preparation process. The number of articles per theme per decade are shown in Table 2. “Parole decisions” was the most popular theme across both decades. This may be because the general information about an offenders’ parole, such as it being granted, denied, or revoked, is a quick and easy story to publish. The “court proceedings” theme increased slightly in the second decade. This may be because there were some notable parole hearings and appeals such as from Paul Bernardo. “Reaction” themed articles were the most popular in the first decade and decreased to the third most popular in the second. This may be due to the notable offenders that were up for parole at this time, including Robert Latimer and Clifford Olsen. Latimer’s crimes sparked a

lot of debate regarding euthanasia and mercy killings. Olsen, who killed young children, faced immense victim family and community backlash when applying for parole. While there were more articles about paroled offenders in the second decade, the decrease in reactionary articles may be because reporting included a more general showcase of multiple offenders, rather than a focus on only a couple like the first decade. There is also an increase in “Policy” themed articles, which may be due to more criticisms of the parole system. This included criticizing life sentences without parole, statutory release, parole for residential school offenders, and even enacting an Alberta Parole Board that was separate from the Parole Board of Canada (Kerr, 2016; Wakefield, 2019; White, 2022).

The number of articles per year for both decades are represented in Tables 4 and 5. The spread of articles is consistent with Figures 1 and 2, with the most articles being from 2010 in the first decade and 2019 in the second decade. Because the number of articles were so low in the years 2002 to 2006, none of the sampled articles were from those years. Since there were more articles for the whole decade of 2012 to 2022, the sample included articles from every year.

***Table 4. Number of Articles per Year 2002-2011.***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
2002-2006	0
2007	9
2008	15
2009	13
2010	29
2011	14



***Table 5. Number of Articles per Year 2012-2022.***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
2012	1
2014	3
2015	6
2016	4
2017	2
2018	10
2019	16
2020	13
2021	10
2022	15

As shown in Table 4, 2012 to 2022 had higher maximum and mean word counts. Lower word count articles typically included a brief community notification or warning of an offender being released on parole. These articles generally included a location of where the offender was residing, their crime, and a physical description. These shorter articles served to provide raw information to viewers rather than to elicit an emotional response. Longer articles generally focused on providing detailed backgrounds about the offender's offences, victim or victim's family reactions, or a combination of both. These articles generally tried to evoke an emotional response from viewers as they were given more dramatized information. The minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of article word counts per decade can be found in Table 6.

**Table 6. Word Count Descriptive Statistics per Decade.**

	<b>2002-2011</b>	<b>2012-2022</b>
<b>Minimum</b>	161	188
<b>Maximum</b>	1960	2143
<b>Mean</b>	552.73	715.81
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	320.253	314.518

Unsurprisingly, for both decades male offenders were most reported with 85% and 87.5% respectively. Female offenders occurred slightly more frequently in the first decade, appearing in 12.5% of articles and appearing in only 2.5% of articles from 2012 to 2022. Mentions of both gendered offenders occurred twice and only in the 2012 to 2022 group. A transgender offender was mentioned once and only in the 2012 to 2022 group as well. This may be because societal acceptance of the transgender population has increased over time. These results are consistent with prior research that males are seen as committing more crime, therefore they are represented in the media more frequently. This over representation may also be attributed to a greater public fear of male offenders when compared to female offenders. Therefore, these women are considered less newsworthy and have less articles about them.

Victim age, sorted by whether the victim was a minor (below 18 years of age or described as a child or related terminology) or an adult (18 or older, or described as an adult or related terminology), is listed per decade in Table 7. The spread of victim age for the first decade was fairly even compared to the second decade, where adult victims were mentioned more than twice the number of minors. Victims were not mentioned in more articles in the

2012 to 2022 group. This may be explained by the increase in the “policy” theme articles in this decade, which described laws and legislation more than crime details.

***Table 7. Age of Victims Per Decade.***

<b>Age of Victim</b>	<b>2002-2011</b>	<b>2012-2022</b>
<b>Adult</b>	32	40
<b>Minor</b>	33	19
<b>Both</b>	6	5
<b>No victim mentioned</b>	9	15

The provincial locations of the news articles are displayed in Table 8. For each article, the province in which the article was published was recorded. Across both decades, Ontario had the highest number of articles. This may be due to the higher population in this province. There is also a higher number of articles in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the first decade compared to the second. This may be due to the offenders that were released on parole in those provinces at that time. This included Robert Latimer who was from and was released to Saskatchewan. The increase in articles from Alberta may be due to the charges and pardons of junior ice hockey coach Graham James, who sexually assaulted players on his teams.

Another aspect that is important to consider when looking at newsworthiness is where the article was placed in a newspaper. The location of the article within the news source was recorded per decade (Table 9). Interestingly, a vast difference in the number of front-page articles was evident, with the 2012 to 2022 decade having the most. To explain this difference, it is important to consider the difference in article search results per decade, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

**Table 8. Number of Articles per Province per Decade.**

<b>Province</b>	<b>2002-2011</b>	<b>2012-2022</b>
Alberta	15	5
British Columbia	0	2
Manitoba	5	1
New Brunswick	1	2
Nova Scotia	0	9
Ontario	39	56
Quebec	1	1
Saskatchewan	19	4

**Table 9. Article Page Data per Decade.**

<b>Page of Newspaper</b>	<b>2002-2011</b>	<b>2012-2022</b>
Front page (page 1)	8	28
Page 2 to 10	51	34
Page 11 or later	20	14
No page number	1	4

There were very few articles from 2002 to 2006, limiting the total number of articles for the 2012 to 2022 comparison. Parole based articles did not gain popularity until 2007, where the total was consistently more than 500 per year. News outlets may have realized an increase in sales and viewership from these articles, leading them to be displayed earlier in the newspaper over time. So, the number of articles that appeared in pages two to 10 may have been bumped up to front page news in the second decade as they have been considered

more newsworthy. Articles with no page number were classified as such because there was no information about pages on the ProQuest database.

Killer, abuser, gangster, and fraudster were just some of the titles or nicknames given to offenders on parole. Some other notable ones include “baby killer”, “cop killer”, “pedophile”, and “mobster”. These terms, their variations, and a variety of others were commonly found in the titles of articles, grabbing the reader’s attention, and evoking an emotional response. While these are typically effective at drawing in readers, they can have negative consequences for the offenders themselves. Instead of acknowledging them as a person, they are almost always referenced by the crimes they have committed. This dehumanization leads to the public to interpret them as an “other”—someone undeserving of rehabilitation and reintegration. Community ostracization can greatly hamper the progress offenders make in the community and potentially lead to recidivism (Shackley et al., 2014). This also poses challenges to enacted legislation, with the public more likely to harbour punitive attitudes. Again, this can be understood by the concept of moral panics, with emotionally based legislation being enacted to please the public rather than policies that are empirically tested.

#### **4.1.1 How are offenders on parole and parole in general represented in Canadian news media?**

Based on the results of the general analysis, several conclusions can be made for the first research question: how are offenders on parole and parole in general represented in Canadian news media? Unsurprisingly, the language used, and the general attitudes of the articles presented offenders negatively. The titles and labels given to offenders tended to refer to them by their crimes rather than them as a person. This dehumanization makes it easier for the public to interpret this information as negative. Parole based articles were also more

likely to include ‘failures’ rather than ‘successes’. This included reporting on offenders who have their parole revoked or breach their release conditions. Throughout this research, not a single article mentioned an offender successfully completing their parole in the community. Because the public does not see this, they interpret success rates as being low, further reinforcing negative attitudes.

The crimes that were most commonly reported on followed the quote “If it bleeds, it leads”, with crimes involving death such as murder and manslaughter, and other violent crime such as sex offences being the most common and newsworthy. This over-representation leads the public to believe that these crimes occur more often than they actually do. This increases public fear of crime, potentially leading to more favour for punitive legislation, tying back to the concepts of moral panics and folk devils. The emotional responses to paroled offenders tend to result from a lack of education and can lead to emotionally backed legislation rather than some that is empirically tested. These representations pose significant implications for successful reintegration because of the potential ostracization and harassment from the community once these offenders are released. This includes the inability to find housing and employment, which are crucial to successful community reintegration.

#### **4.2 Male and Female Comparison**

The male and female comparison articles were organized into the same themes that were generated by the general analysis. The theme that occurred most frequently for both offenders was the “parole decisions” theme (Table 3). This theme evolved from articles about an offender’s parole history, including granting, denying, and revoking parole. Both Takahashi and Larson had an extensive parole history, having day parole granted and revoked several times over 10 years. Takahashi had more “reaction” articles than Larson. These were

typically negative perspectives from victims and the community where he was living. The “reaction” articles about Larson featured interviews that she herself had with news outlets. These articles represented her as someone with a troubled past that was working towards changing herself. The details included in these articles featured personal background information and the goals she had set for herself in the community. These articles tried to get viewers to gain sympathy for her and to prove herself worthy of redemption. The standpoint that Larson took in these articles contradicted her actions in the community, as she had been UAL several times while on parole. Crime explanations in these articles included the poor mental health and substance abuse issues Larson had at the time of the offence. Interestingly, there was a lack of crime explanations for Takahashi. There was only one “policy” article identified, and it was for Takahashi. This article argued that his return to prison negatively impacts the offender himself and the community because ‘one size fits all’ approaches to sex offenders and longer jail terms do not increase public safety. No “court proceeding” articles were identified for either offender. This may be because there were no hearings or appeals held at this time, or if there were, they were not deemed newsworthy enough to be covered.

It is important to look at the placement of articles in a newspaper in order to assess their newsworthiness. Articles that are featured closer to the front of the newspaper are generally more newsworthy. When looking at the articles featured on page 1, Takahashi only had two while Larson had none (Table 10). While both offenders committed serious and violent crimes, the placement of their articles demonstrated the difference in newsworthiness. Takahashi being considered the most newsworthiness as his articles were located towards the front of the newspaper. Both offenders had most of their articles placed from page 2 to page 10. Larson likely did not have any front-page articles because of a lower public reaction to her crimes. This may also be due to the victims from these crimes as being deemed as less newsworthy because of their drug abuse and poverty. Takahashi targeted middle class

women, a victim group that is considered one of the most newsworthy, while Larson killed a drug-addicted prostitute, a victim group that is among the least newsworthy. Takahashi also had more articles that featured victim responses, which were more likely to be placed near the front of the newspaper. Larson had five articles that did not feature any page number data on ProQuest.

***Table 10. Article Page Data per Offender.***

<b>Page of Newspaper</b>	<b>Larry Takahashi</b>	<b>Joanna Larson</b>
Front page (page 1)	2	0
Page 2 to 10	8	6
Page 11 or later	6	2
No page number	1	5

Word count descriptive statistics per offender can be found in Table 11. Word count was important to analyze because more newsworthy articles tend to be longer. The minimum word counts were both similar. Shorter articles typically included general information about the granting or revoking of parole, the location where the offender was to be released, a physical description, and a short criminal history. Interestingly, the highest word count articles were found in Larson's articles. The interviews that she did with news outlets were the longest. It could be that Larson said as much as she could in order to gain the most sympathy from readers. Takahashi did not participate in any interviews, resulting his articles to be information based with some victim perspectives. Even though Takahashi had more victim perspective articles, they were not as long. Overall, the mean word counts per article for Takahashi and Larson were relatively close, with 457.27 and 563.30 respectively.



**Table 11. Word Count Descriptive Statistics per Offender.**

	<b>Larry Takahashi</b>	<b>Joanna Larson</b>
<b>Minimum</b>	139	126
<b>Maximum</b>	877	1477
<b>Mean</b>	457.27	563.30
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	231.599	359.721

Both Takahashi and Larson were given nicknames for the crimes they committed. Takahashi was called the ‘Balaclava Rapist’ because of what he was wearing at the time of the attacks. Article titles and bodies also referred to him as simply ‘rapist’ and ‘attacker’. Larson was given the nicknames ‘Crack Shack Killer’ and ‘House of Horrors Killer’ because of the drug house where the offence took place. Looking at the article titles for both offenders, Takahashi’s and Larson’s was mentioned four times. Like the results of the general analysis, these offenders were more likely to be referenced by their crimes and nicknames before their actual names. Interestingly, Larson’s articles were more likely to mention her gender, especially including the term “woman” in both article titles and contents. Because female offenders are seen as being rarer, news articles make sure to mention Larson’s gender to catch the attention of curious viewers. Clearly, the nicknames of both offenders were used to provoke fear in viewers and ostracize the offenders.

#### **4.2.1 How does gender influence these representations?**

Analysing a male and female offender revealed several answers to the second research question: how does gender influence these representations? There were more personal perspectives for Larson, the female offender, including an interview with the offender herself. This could have been done to pull in public sympathy, causing the public to question why a

woman who has been redeemed continues to be punished for her crime. There was also more public scrutiny for Takahashi, the male offender, including more victim and community response and backlash based on the content and themes identified in the articles selected. Again, this relates back to the concept of moral panics. There was a lack of victim family or community response to the female offender. This may be due to the victim of the crime being a drug addicted prostitute, which are among the least newsworthy. There was also a significant lack of crime explanations for the male offender. This may be because the belief that men commit more crime is normalized. The female offender had her crimes explained by her mental health and addiction, which aligns with the 'mad' classification of female offenders. There was also a significant disparity in the number of articles for male and female offenders. The female offender that was chosen, as well as others that were examined during the selection process had considerably less articles about them when compared to male offenders. This may be attributed to a greater public fear of male offenders compared to female offenders, rendering these women less newsworthy, and therefore having less articles about them.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Conclusion**

This research explored the first research question: How are offenders on parole and parole in general represented in Canadian news media? To best study this area, a general content analysis was conducted, revealing valuable information about how parole and paroled offenders are represented in the media. This allowed for the establishment of a foundation for how parole is framed in Canadian news media. The themes generated allowed for a smoother understanding of these representations. The results showed that offenders who commit deadly and violent crimes are the most newsworthy. As a result, these articles were placed within the first 10 pages of a newspaper. Certain infamous offenders can be attributed to increases in coverage, these typically included serial killers and serial sexual offenders. Articles that featured victim and community reactions were more likely to be against an offender's parole than in favour for their parole. Looking at these representations from a social constructionism perspective allowed for a better understanding of how and why public meaning making occurs. In particular, the dramatized and loaded language that is used to describe offenders and their crimes promotes the dehumanization of offenders, reinforcing negative and punitive attitudes.

The comparison of Takahashi and Larson addressed the second research question: This in-depth analysis displayed gendered differences among offenders. Notably, the lack of articles that female offenders have and more sympathy tactics for female offenders. There was also more public backlash for the male offender. Despite both crimes being of a violent nature, Takahashi was perceived to be more of a community danger. This further reinforced gendered stereotypes of fearing males over females. In both instances, their articles supported negative public attitudes towards them as offenders and against their parole.

While this study was able to shed light on under researched areas, there are several limitations to this study. Because this study was qualitative and limited by time, a small sample size was used. Future research could take a quantitative approach, generating a larger sample and possibly a bigger timeline. There is also a lack of generalizability to other locations, as the sample contained articles only from Canada. Additional studies may consider comparing paroled offender representations between Canada and other countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, or Australia. Further research could also look at more varieties of offenders. This includes comparing offenders with different offences, ones with more available articles, and those who have had a longer history on parole. Part of this research focused on gendered representations, drawing upon a male and female offender for comparison. Gender identity, however, is much broader than just male and female. Future research could examine offenders who are transgender, non-binary, or even based on their sexual orientation. Surveys and interviews that ask communities about their perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of parolees may help with the further understanding of meaning making from the media they consume.

This research has established a foundation for understanding how offenders on parole are represented in the news media. This includes overrepresentation of certain crimes such as murder which reinforces negative and fearful attitudes towards offenders in the public. These results showcase the perpetuation of negative attitudes towards offenders. The results of future research can help to understand how paroled offenders are represented globally. The implications of these attitudes include the implementation of punitive and emotionally based legislation, and the harassment and ostracization of offenders once released. Ineffective legislation, public policy, and an inability to reintegrate once released greatly increases the risk for an offender to recidivate. Providing more public education about the realities of community corrections and conducting additional research is key to understanding these

issues further. By understanding how the public creates meaning from media on parolees, areas which require more public education can be pinpointed. More detailed gender identity investigations will help to understand the diversity of the population. This research was just the first step in understanding news media representations of parole and its impact on offenders and the wider community.

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