

# **The Framing of Terrorism:**

*A comparative Analysis of News Media Framing of Terrorism*

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## **Abstract:**

### **The Framing of Terrorism:**

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Terrorism as a social phenomenon has existed in society since the beginning of recorded history. However there remain many areas related to terrorism that are underdeveloped. This thesis focuses on how domestic news media frames acts of violence as terrorism. This thesis teases out the main themes of framing of terrorism and the processes of establishing an 'other' in the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News with regard to two violent events. The first, the Ottawa shootings, has been framed as terrorism whereas the second event, the Moncton shootings, is not framed as terrorism. This thesis therefore identifies the criteria by which the label of terrorism is applied by framing risk levels and fear, through the use of language, and through the construction of the 'Other' or 'Othering'.

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## **Section 1:**

### **Introduction**

## A. Introduction

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon solely tied to society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The term terrorism has changed vastly since its original definition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. “[Terrorism] meant violent actions from above, by the state, such as those during the Reign of Terror in the wake of the French Revolution, when terrorism meant the mass guillotining of the aristocracy and other real or perceived enemies of the state” (Nacos, 2002, p.17). From that specific period forward, the meaning of terrorism has changed greatly and has come to encompass different acts of violence, and can mean different things depending on the actors who are applying the term. In both the academic and non-academic world there is no agreed upon definition of the term terrorism. Thus, this research will make no attempt to define the term of terrorism. The following research is meant to accomplish one main goal. The goal that this research project aims to accomplish is to add to the body of literature that is already in existence.

Since the end of the Second World War, Canada on the international level is seen as a nation of peacekeepers. A nation that can be called upon to stand in the middle of a conflict zone and mediate a peace. Inside of Canada, the colloquial term used to describe ourselves is that we are a mosaic of different cultures and religions that live together and make up this great nation. This has been the popular image as framed by Canadian news media. Unfortunately, this image that we as a nation carry of ourselves may slowly be changing. As a Western nation, we are similar in many ways to the United States of America. This includes the ways in which news media organizations frame events in our society. A troubling trend in the United States news media has been spotted. “Notwithstanding the long relationship in the United States between fear and crime, the role of the mass media in promoting fear has become more pronounced since the

United States ‘discovered’ international terrorism on 11 September 2001” (Altheide, 2007, p. 292). What is still unknown about Canadian mass media is how they frame terrorism events.

A gap in this body of research is the lack of studies that examine how terrorism is operationalised by Canadian news media sources. Research that pertains to Canadian news media sources and its framing of terrorism is important for a few reasons. Firstly by examining Canadian news media sources, researchers will be able to form a picture of what framing of terrorism looks like in Canada by the news media. It will also give a preliminary insight into what violent events are regarded as terrorism events by the Canadian news media. Another reason why it is important to examine the framing of terrorism by Canadian news media is that it will add to the body of existing research that examines framing of terrorism by media in the western world. This work will examine two violent events that recently took place in Canada. The first, known as the Moncton shootings was framed as a violent act by Canadian news media. The second event that will be examined is the shooting that took place at Parliament Hill and the Canadian War memorial. The second shooting was framed as terrorism by Canadian news media.

This research focuses on the objective of gaining insight into how certain Canadian news media organizations frame violent acts that have been deemed terrorism. This research project is necessarily small in its size and scope. Two violent events, the shootings on Parliament Hill and the War Memorial along with the Moncton shootings, will be the two events examined and compared. I have chosen three news media sources that reported on these two violent events (the CBC News, The Globe and Mail, and the National Post) to provide the essential data required for this study. For the purposes of this study, it would be impossible to analyse all Canadian news

media sources. Consequently this research is not meant to create conclusions that can be applied to all Canadian news media.



## **Section 2:**

### **Purpose**

## **A. Reason for Research**

The desire to perform research specifically on the framing of terrorism in Canadian news media comes from the desire to know more about the topic of terrorism based on previous studies in the field of terrorism studies. These experiences come from courses that I have taken throughout my undergraduate degree. I have come to find the general topic of terrorism studies to be a fascinating field of research for the most part because of the perceived notion by most that the threat of terrorism is new to society. I also find the field of terrorism studies interesting because of the fact that the terms of terrorism and terrorist are highly debated and that there is no one true or correct definition. Most of the debate that is performed around the topic of terrorism sets aside the voices of academics and uses the topic to push for certain policies (Altheide, 2006; 2007.) This is one reason (amongst others) of why it is important to research and analyse how the Canadian news media frames terrorism.

**Section 3:**  
**Literature Review**

## A. Introduction

In the time since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the amount of people who have become interested in pursuing research on the topic of terrorism has greatly expanded. Below is a discussion of the predominant themes that are found in the literature in field of terrorism studies. Included in these themes are; (1) the framing of risk levels and fear, (2) the framing of terrorism by use of language, and (3) the construction of the ‘Other’.

The word terrorism can provoke a wide variety of emotion in many people. One aspect of the western world plays a large role in perpetuating a common understand of terrorism. The news media is one of the primary means that people use to obtain information about events that take place in society and the world in general. News media stories about terrorism threats and acts pertaining to terrorism, such as foiled terrorism plots, have also become more prevalent in the past decade. The prevalence of terrorism in the media may have an impact on society but its impact would be very difficult and complicated to measure. As Nellis & Savage (2012) state; “Fear of terrorism has not been studied extensively” (p.751). One thing that can be speculated about is that even with the uptick of news stories covering terrorism, most people will not take the time to examine terrorism narratives with a critical eye.

In turn, the news media has not been the focus of any notable studies in the field of terrorism, even though this form of communication is present in society and it is one of the dominant means in how people gain knowledge of their surroundings. This literature review will focus specifically on three key themes that are found in current literature that examines terrorism in the media. First it will begin with a discussion of the framing of risk levels and fear. The literature review will then move onto the second theme. In this subsection, the theme of framing

of terrorism by the use of language will be discussed. Finally, the construction of ‘Other’ or ‘Othering’ will be discussed.

## **B. Framing Risk Levels and Fear**

The first key theme is that of the framing of risk levels and fear in the news media. The theme of the framing of risk levels and fear as found in the literature explores how media organizations create and or employ terms of risk and fear. Throughout the body of literature a critical perspective is taken by most researchers. This is because the majority of the literature that addresses risk levels and fear use the methodology of framing analysis.

When Boydston & Glazier (2013) explored methods for identifying trends in media framing they cited; Camerer (2005) and Mercer (2005), in stating that “Specifically, when loss-based and self-referential frames are used together, the message is generally one of fear...” (p.716). The authors further discuss this finding when drawing their conclusions. When both of these specific frames are used in conjunction with each other, individuals in society are more accepting of risk, thus they are more willing to publicly support risky foreign policy such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Boydston et al., 2013). Furthering the discussion of fear in the media Altheide (2007) states that the media played a large part in promoting the war on terrorism by stressing the factors of fear and uncertainty while at the same time underreporting the major shift in foreign and domestic policy that occurred during this period (p.7). If the media lends larger emphasis to stories based in fear and other stories that promote a pattern that shifts away from stories on policy, the general public may be more apt to support government action. Then perhaps if frames of risk and fear are employed and effectively communicated to the general

public, it is possible for certain actors (such as government) to gain from the employment of these frames.

Woods (2007) when speaking of risk levels, furthers this point in conducting his study of framing of terrorism in elite newspapers. Woods found that the level of terrorism risk spiked in newspaper articles after 9/11 but then leveled and declined after a period of time (p.16). The noticeable spike in the terrorism risk level was done through a careful selection of sources by the media in order to pick and choose what they wished to project to the public. This can be seen as a very one sided approach and hints at underlying biases or motives. Ulrich Beck (2002) in his article *The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited* discusses in depth the present age of modernity as a risk society where as frames of risk are more common place. “The perception of terrorist threats replaces active trust with active mistrust. It therefore undermines the trust in fellow citizens, foreigners and governments all over the world” (Beck, 2002, p. 44). One conclusion that Beck (2002) draws in relation to the media is that because communication is global, terrorist threats (risk) is of course reproduced by the global media and perpetuated through themes of risk and fear (p.45). It appears as though risk and fear in media framing of terrorism are a symbiotic pair that can work together in order to accomplish a larger goal if desired.

### **C. Framing of Terrorism by Discourse Analysis**

In advancing and expanding further the body of literature that addresses the topic of news media framing of terrorism this study now shifts its focus to a second predominant theme. When researching the topic of media framing in relation to terrorism, another theme that is focused on in the body of literature is how the media frames terrorism or acts of terror through specific

language. This is a prevalent theme that is researched in media news framing of terrorism.

Katherine Brown (2011) in her study of a female suicide terrorist notes that the use of specific words around her subject were emphasized or used more frequently in different and various news articles. Brown found that the news media constantly prioritized the suicide terrorist's Muslim identity over all other factors, such as the fact she was a European citizen or that she was a widow (the second factor being a major contributor to the reason why she chose to become a suicide terrorist) (p.716).

Dunn, Moore & Nosek (2005) add further to the issue of the use and framing of language in their research consisted of a collection of four separate studies. The authors' research looks at how linguistic difference can and does shape perceptions of an event of terrorism versus an event that could be described as an act of patriotism. Dunn et al. (2005) found that even minor changes in the language used in reporting an event that was violent can influence whether an audience believed an act of terrorism or an act of patriotism had taken place. "Thus, simple linguistic differences in news reporting may influence that public's support for international policies; if news stories use words that activate the terrorism schema, [common beliefs about terrorism], then the action is more likely to receive moral condemnation, and moderate responses such as engaging in negotiation with the perpetrators may be seen as less acceptable" (Crenshaw, 1995 as cited in Dunn et al., 2005). The use of language in news media framing is key to the process of shaping the perceptions of the general public who consume news stories. In turn the outcome of these linguistic changes can often be found in the public's support, or lack of support, for government policies.

In a study that compared Indonesian and Australian media and their framing of terrorism, Mahony (2010) found that "...in the Australian sample articles and some crucial contextual

information [were] omitted that substantially contributed to a misleading, stereotypical and orientalist representation” (p.744). This was done through the use of words that have a negative connotation. In comparison, the news articles that were pulled from Indonesian media reflected Islam and Muslims in a more positive light. Altheide (2007) also reinforces this point about selective language in a study about the media, terrorism and propaganda. Part of the study discussed Iraqi fighters and their different portrayals by Western media. He explains that they were ‘gunman’ or ‘insurgents’ rather than an army, soldiers or guerillas because the later are terms that have a connotation of being a legitimate fighting force (p.5).

In addition to these findings, Vultee (2006) explored the use of a single word in news media articles. He found that the meaning and connotation behind this term had significantly shifted over time. The balance of his research was exploring how this term went from something of religious term to being transformed into a word that came to exclusively mean violence. This newly created meaning adds to the trouble of news framing of terrorism. The transformation of words in the media leads us to our next key theme that is explored in news media framing of terrorism. The construction of the ‘Other’ is facilitated through framing and the ways in which the media employs certain language.

#### **D. The Construction of the ‘Other’**

If there was one theme that stuck out when researching the body of literature pertaining to news media framing in relation to terrorism, it would be the construction of the ‘Other’. Most articles and books that are focused on analysing news framing in terrorism have sections of their study devoted to the construction of the ‘Other’. The construction of the ‘Other’ is one of the most frequent and recurrent explored themes. Mahony (2010) cites Galtung and Rung (1970)



when saying that in construction of the 'Other', in news articles have a trend that the more distant the nation is from 'ours' in terms of culture and economy, the more negative the news [or news focus] is likely to be.

An example of this is the study performed by Kabir & Bourk (2012). In the study, the authors aim is to show how through media news frames an 'Othering' process occurs. Many stories are reprinted from international newsfeeds and agencies supplying pre-packaged media products that construct Muslims as the "dangerous Other" (p.12) and thus local Muslim culture found in New Zealand was muted by exclusion in the media. This find, if it can be replicated, is terrible news for the Muslim community. As per usual, a large population of people are forcefully marginalized because of a more captivating construction that only damages people's perceptions.

Ambrosio De Nelson (2008) talks specifically about stereotyping in their article and how it contributes to understanding the world. Unfortunately this stereotyping just reinforces (if not recreates) the 'other'. Brown (2011) gives specific context to this; the news media constantly portrayed her identity as Muslim (as other). "This racial Othering of a 'white' suicide bomber shows not only the ways in which inherited accounts of gender (femininity) and race are disrupted by her actions, but also how prevailing narratives stabilize dominant characterizations of 'women' and 'Europeans'" (p.13). Stereotyping through an orientalist lens seems to be one way that the media actively and intentionally constructs the 'other'.

Interlocking with news framing of fear in the media and 'Othering' in framing as key themes in the literature, Altheide (2006) states; "What they all have in common is pointing to the "Other," the outsider, the non-member, the alien. However, Schwalbe et al. (2000) has shown that "Othering" is part of a social process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an

inferior group (p.6). This fear created is then used to leverage certain policies into place. The majority of the themes discussed in news framing in relation to media are all somewhat interconnected.

### **E. Summary**

As citizens in the modern age, people that live in western countries have for the most part adopted and use a large array of technology that allows for the expedient sharing of information, ideas and events on a global scale. A review of the body of literature has brought forth several major themes that are prevalent in news framing of terrorism. The framing of risk and fear levels in the media lends exaggeration to threats of terror. This can be used to constructed narratives that help to push policy which in turn can re-enforce social norms (Woods, 2007; &Altheide, 2007). This idea of fear and risk portrayed by the media is not a new concept. David Altheide is a well-known researcher who discusses the politics of fear in many of his essays and books (2006; 2007; & 2009).

The use of language is also widely looked at in new framing of terrorism (Altheide, 2007; Brown, 2011; Dunn et al., 2005; Mahony, 2010; Vultee, 2006). The findings of these studies conclude that linguistics and the selection of words play a large part in how violence is portrayed by western media. Thus having an impact on how people perceive violent events, even if the representation of the event in the media has been distorted by the use of specific language (Mahony, 2010). Adding to this, the use of language has been used in order to reinforce stereotypes and norms that have existed in the western world for decades. The process of ‘Othering’ has also been exposed in a collection of studies in the body of literature (Altheide,

2006; Ambrosio de Nelson, 2008; Brown, 2011; Mahony, 2010; Kabir et al., 2012; & Schwalbe et al., 2000).

Much of the research done in this field takes a critical approach that has the purpose of questioning and exposing the norms and stereotypes that are built into the frames that media organizations choose to employ. This research helps to show that media organizations can have underlying biases or motives when they report on an event. Research on media framing is important because it forms a basis in which people can develop their own opinion on events that have occurred instead of relying solely on media organizations. There has been a lot of development in regards to research in this field since 11 September 2001 but there are still gaps in research that can be filled in this field. When examining the body of literature a pattern emerges. The majority of these studies focus on news media sources found in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia. One of the major gaps that remains is the lack of research that focuses on Canadian news media. In addressing this specific gap, this research aims to explore a few Canadian news media sources and examine how they frame acts of terrorism.

**Section 4:**  
**Research Design and Methodology**

## A. Research Questions

Why are some violent events that occur in Canada framed as terror attacks by the news media while other similar and equally violent events are not framed in this way? This proposed study seeks to examine terrorism as it is framed in the Canadian news media. Specifically it will ask:

- How is the perpetrator of the event depicted in the news articles?
  - What is the language used in the news articles to construct the individual?
- How was the victim (or victims) depicted in the news articles?
  - What is the language used in the news articles to construct them?
- Is stereotyping present in the news articles that discuss the events?

## B. Objectives

This study will explore how events are framed as terrorism by the CBC News Online (CBC), The Globe and Mail, and the National Post. In examining the news articles from the CBC, The Globe and Mail, and the National Post, this paper will explore and highlight themes that are found in the process of analysis. Furthermore, this paper will evaluate themes such as risk, fear and the construction of the 'Other' if they are found to be present in these Canadian news media sources. In accessing these articles, specific questions will be asked to help facilitate in the identification of themes that were found in the body of literature.

Specifically the questions will: (1) uncover if there is noticeable stereotyping present in the articles that cover the event in question and (2) explore the language used by the news media to construct the perpetrator of the event and this person was depicted. Does the language suggest in one way that the perpetrator was a normal, but misguided person or do the articles frame the person as pure evil?; (3) explore how the victim(s) of the event were constructed through

language used by the news media. Does the language construct the victim(s) as brave, heroic, helpless or other in the news articles? Do the news articles give background stories about the victims and what is the language used? In answering these key questions it will help to answer how some events are framed as terrorism by the Canadian news media while other events that are similar are not framed as terrorism.

### **C. Methods**

For the purpose of this project, the study will be approaching the research question using qualitative research methodologies. This project is for an Honours level seminar course, so its scope will be small in comparison to a master or doctorate program. The perspective that was taken is a critical perspective of how terrorism is framed in Canadian news media. So, in using qualitative methods this study will be able to explore in depth and in great detail the dataset that has been collected. This will be done in order to give meaning to the construction of the framing of the events that is the focus of the research project. The research will be a case study of two events that the Canadian news media have covered. The first event that has been chosen to be analysed is the Moncton shootings of multiple RCMP officers. The second event that was chosen to be analysed is the recent event of the shooting at the National War Memorial and Parliament Hill. In particular, these two events were chosen to be examined because these two events offer widespread Canadian news media coverage. A qualitative methodology has been chosen because the scope of this project is small. Therefore it will afford the opportunity to use analysis techniques that allow for an in-depth look in order to understand why the shooting in Ottawa has been constructed as terrorism while the Moncton shooting has not been constructed as a terrorist act.

The method of analysis that is employed in this study is framing analysis. This method of analysis has been chosen because the body of literature that has been reviewed discusses the notion the news media organizations employ specific structures called ‘frames’ in order to perpetuate notions of terrorism that are common in Canadian society. “News Frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. The essence of framing is selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events” (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003, p.10-11). ). Framing analysis is the process of examining the frames that are used in the construction of the news’ image of an event. Yet, this is just a basic understanding of news framing as Vultee (2006) states that frames are used to activate processes of attribution (heuristic cues) of social issues to generalized explanations that match what is seen as the dominant view (in society) of the issue. An example of the employment of heuristic cues is that “when [news] media language paints the Arab and Muslim worlds as uniquely prone to political violence, then, it is not merely choosing one facet of a narrative to highlight; it also helps ensure that facet is the most readily available to the audience” (Vultee, 2006, p.322). In making certain that particular narratives are made easily available for an audience, a dominant discourse that is already present in a society can be perpetuated.

Another layer of framing analysis is that the frames themselves be it a word or a sentence may seem not as significant at first glance but one must take into account the large overall picture. In the public’s eye a certain word, key concept, or stock phrase may trigger memories of past events in the news media that were overwhelmingly accepted as a terrorism event. “Within the realm of political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized on the basis of...social constructivism. Mass media actively sets the frames of reference that readers or

viewers use to interpret and discuss public events” (Tuchman, 1978 as cited in Scheufele, 1999, p.105). The news media relies partially on what their audience has learned, constructed or has learned about terrorism from previous knowledge on the subject. In relying on the previously constructed knowledge, the news media often aims to perpetuate familiar preconceived notions of terrorism. Thus perpetuating the dominant discourse that surrounds the topic of terrorism found in a society.

#### **D. Data**

The data has been drawn from three Canadian news media sources. I have chosen three sources because this will give the possibility for a variety of perspectives that would not be found if a researcher were to analyse one or two Canadian news media sources. The study will examine all of the news articles (electronic) that pertain to the two events that are produced by the Canadian news media sources that have been previously selected. I will limit the scope of my data collection to the time span of one week after the two events have taken place. This is seen as one news cycle. I have chosen the time-span of one week because in the span of one week after the events have taken place the coverage of these events will have declined to some extent. Also from the aspect of being manageable, limiting the data collection from the Canadian news media sources so that a qualitative analysis is feasible.

The three Canadian news media outlets that data will be collected from will be; the National Post, the Globe and Mail and CBC News. I have chosen these three Canadian news media sources because they are seen as Canada-wide news media outlets. These news media outlets are also widely available through the internet and are typically found in archives that store news media. I have chosen these three specific Canadian news media outlets because they



are national news outlets as opposed to local news sources. The dataset will consist of editorials and lead articles. The data set does not include letters to the editor. I have chosen to exclude letters to the editor because unlike editorials and the main articles found in newspapers (electronic or print), letters to the editor are typically from citizens and they do not necessarily represent or frame an event in ways which the news outlet wishes to frame that particular event.

In the process of collecting the 199 news articles, two different databases were used. The first database used in the collection of articles was the National Post news archives. This database was used to access all of the National Post news articles. The second database used in the collection of the remaining articles was a research database. The Lexis-Nexis research database is a database that contains libraries of information on subjects ranging from law and business to news media. One reason why the Lexis-Nexis database was chosen is because it contains a comprehensive archive of news articles from hundreds of different news media outlets. This includes the news outlets that were the focus of this study. A secondary reason why the Lexis-Nexis database was chosen is because it holds a reputation of quality. Many of the studies that are media framing analysis in the body of literature use the Lexis-Nexis database. In the use of both databases, specific search terms were input to action the collection of data.

When searching for the news articles that pertained to the Ottawa and War Memorial shootings, the following terms were used; *Ottawa shooting*, *Ottawa*, *Shooting*, *Zehaf-Bibeau*, and *Parliament*. When searching for news articles that pertained to the Moncton shootings the following terms were used; *Moncton Shooting*, *Moncton*, *Shooting*, and *Justin Bourque*. In using the National Post database, I manually had to sort through all of the content to ensure that there were no duplicates of the news articles. At the same time as sorting the content for the issue of duplicate news stories, I ensured that each of the articles collected were primarily concerned with

the topic of this research project. The total number of news articles collected from the National Post was 61. Due to the fact that a manual search of the database was performed, all of the articles collected were relevant to the topics of the Ottawa shooting and the Moncton shooting. The Lexis-Nexis database was used to collect the news articles for The Globe and Mail and the CBC News. One of the search features of this data base is to automatically discard any news articles that are doubles. The search for The Globe and Mail generated 54 news articles in total and the search for the CBC News generated 114 news articles. After reviewing the news articles for The Globe and mail, an additional four news articles were discarded because they were not relevant to either shooting. This left a remaining 50 news articles to analyse for The Globe and Mail. In reviewing the CBC News articles, it was found that 26 news articles were either similar to another article or they were not primarily concerned with the Ottawa or Moncton shootings. This left a remaining 88 articles to analyse for the CBC News.

The use of the two different databases, one being a news media archive and the second a research database helped facilitate the collection of the many Canadian news media articles. Originally the news articles were to be collected off of each news media's respective archive. Unfortunately complications with gaining access to each of the news article archives made it necessary to use the Lexis-Nexis research database to collect the outstanding balance of the Canadian news media articles. One thing to note is that the Lexis-Nexis database, with its many features made the collection of the remaining data smooth because of its advanced research options, such as searching in specific time spans and the exclusion of duplicate news articles.

## **E. Ethical Implications**

Although this project is based on analysis of secondary data, this does not preclude a discussion on ethics of the project. The news articles that will be collected will detail what occurred or events surrounding the Moncton and Ottawa shootings. In both events there was loss of life through very violent means. By the circumstances of how these events unfolded they are sensitive in nature. This leads to the possibility that some people could become offended or upset because this project aims to examine in detail how the media has framed both events and will, in that process, have to examine aspects of language that frame the deceased. By examining and critiquing the language used to portray either the perpetrator or victim (s) in both events it could easily upset the families or people who know the actors involved in both events. The sensitivity and extent of the analysis that will be performed will have some ethical implications.

## **F. Limitations**

Due to the size of this project and the timeframe that has been given in order to complete the thesis, the best way that this project can contribute to the analysis of Canadian news media is to limit the scope. This project looks at three national news media outlets from a critical qualitative research strategy. This means that the study is not meant to generalize about news framing of terrorism as constructed by all Canadian news media organizations. Instead it will provide an in depth exploration of a small section of the Canadian news media. This research can be then used in the future by other projects that have objective of generalizing about news framing in Canada.

A secondary limitation is that; in coming from a critical perspective the researcher must recognize that framing and analysis is subjective to the extent of the researcher's background and beliefs. This means that the research outcomes are influenced by the position of the researcher.

This in turn can end up altering or skewing the results. Thus, this entails the need to be reflexive of the researcher's position and the values that the researcher holds when analysing the news media articles. In taking a critical perspective while performing research, the method of framing analysis does not offer quick and simple solutions to the issues of the frames it explores. It is simply a tool used to question the ways in which knowledge and understanding is produced by the news media.

A third limitation of this research project is found in the collection of this study's data. Due to the constraints on the scope and size of the project a choice was made to only use the news article archives of the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News in order to collect the necessary news articles. Unfortunately, when it came time to perform the data collection, only one of the news article archives was readily accessible. Thus the news articles from the National Post were collected from their own organization's news archive. For The Globe and Mail and the CBC News, the Lexis-Nexis database was used in the collection of all articles primarily concerned with both shootings. Thus the collection of news articles has been limited to two sources. This creates the possibility for a reduction of content found. This is because the collection of news articles is subject to the processes found in the search terms of the Lexis-Nexis database or the National Post news archives.

**Section 5:**  
**Results**

## **A. Introduction**

The following section will discuss the results from the analysis of news articles from the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News. In total 221 news articles were sourced from the data collection. All articles that were found to be duplicates of a news story or articles that were not primarily concerned with the topic of the Ottawa and Moncton shootings were discarded. A total of 199 articles made up the body of the data. In order to accomplish a discussion of the findings the results are broken into the themes that are found in the literature review. Each theme is further organized with subheadings for the Ottawa shootings and the Moncton shootings. The first theme that is discussed is the framing of risk levels and fear, followed by the framing of terrorism by use of language and then the construction of the ‘Other’.

## **B. Framing of Risk Levels and Fear**

### *Ottawa shooting*

From the insight gained in the literature review, the framing of risk levels and fear in news media from the United States have dominated the portrayals of terrorism since 11 September, 2001 (Altheide, 2006). The use of fear and framing of risk is also used by other Western news media sources. One thing to note is the lack of a focus on Canadian news sources and their framing of terrorism. In the process of analysing the Canadian news articles that covered the Ottawa shootings, the articles were examined for the framing of risk levels and fear.

In regards to the National Post, the use of frames that involved risk and fear were quite pronounced in comparison to the other two news media organizations. A noticeably large portion, 49 percent, of the National Post’s articles were devoted to a discourse on the topic of security, and more importantly, the lack of security that was in place in Ottawa prior to the

shooting. One example of the headlines they used to project threat levels is from 28 October. “Threat assessment agency warned last year Ottawa was a ‘rich environment’ for a possible terror attack” (Bell, 2014). In regard to the framing of fear, news articles in the National Post used eyewitness accounts from the two separate shooting sites. The National Post made use of their press connections and were quick to use the accounts of terrified Members of Parliament in order to exploit the fear felt on that day in Ottawa.

The Globe and Mail also used the framing of risk levels and fear in their news articles. Although not as frequent as the National Post, 42 percent of The Globe and Mail articles focused their attention on the security (and lack thereof) found in Ottawa. The news articles were similar to the National Post, as most detailed the movements of Zehaf-Bibeau and relied on various government and non-government security experts. When it comes to the framing of fear, the Globe and Mail also used eyewitness accounts in the framing of fear. The Globe and Mail used the firsthand account of their reported Josh Wingrove, who was in the Parliament and filmed the last moments of the attack on his cellphone.

The CBC News was the third news organizations that was analysed in this study. The CBC News was different than the other two news organizations. Although they did include stories that covered the topic of security, they were not as emphasized. After analysing the news articles, the CBC News was found to focus more on the aspect of fear and loss. They accomplished this the same way as the other two news organizations, through eyewitness accounts. One thing that is noteworthy is that the CBC News gathered reactions to the shooting from Ottawa residents. Drawing on the fear that was felt from regular citizens.

*Moncton shooting*

In examining news articles from the Moncton shootings, it is somewhat expected that the framing of risk levels and fear would be present. It is expected to be present to a certain degree because even though this shooting was not labeled as terrorism, it is none-the-less a violent event targeting police officers as representatives of the state. After analysing the National Post's Moncton shootings articles one pattern emerged in relation to the framing of threat levels. When threat levels were framed in the National Post, the threat of attack was not directed towards the targeting of the general population. The framing of threat was directed solely towards the members of the RCMP. The National Post, along with the other two news organizations, had articles that retold the interactions that members of the general population had with Justin Bourque. These articles downplayed the threat to the general population and reaffirmed that the shooter was targeting police. For the National Post, the framing of fear was present in the majority of their news articles. Similar to the Ottawa shootings fear was framed through the eyewitness and personal accounts of the shootings in Moncton.

The Globe and Mail also used the framing of threat levels and fear in their coverage of the Moncton shootings. When articles in the Globe and Mail discussed threat levels and fear, they were also accompanied by eyewitness statements from the community detailing the lockdown that was imposed on the community of Moncton. Most of the news articles that had a framework of threat levels and fear were accompanied by stories of loss and information about the three police officers that lost their lives in the process of trying to stop Justin Bourque. The CBC News articles were similar to The Globe and Mail in terms of using frames of threat levels and fear. Most of the articles that used fear as a main way in framing the article drew on the loss of life, the deaths of the RCMP officers.

### *Discussion*



In comparing the Ottawa and Moncton shootings in regards to the framing of threat levels and fear some conclusions about similarities and differences can be drawn. In considering the discussions found in the news articles that pertained to the threat levels in Ottawa versus the city of Moncton there was a difference that can be seen. As Ottawa is the capital region of Canada there were more news articles that focused on the threat of violence and attacks. Many articles discussed prior assessments from organizations that spoke of the possibility of an attack because Ottawa is supposed to be a city that is representative of Canada as a nation. It is a city where leaders who represent all areas of Canada come together to discuss pressing issues. The city of Ottawa is very symbolic of Canada and its people. In the wake of the Moncton shooting, the employment of frames of fear and shock were employed in greater frequency than the framing of risk. It was not the city of Moncton itself that was the intended target of a gunman on the loose. It was the members of the RCMP. The Moncton shooting was an attack that was framed as a violent event that blindsided the community of Moncton. There were no prior warning signs that an attack was about to occur and no organizations believed that Moncton would be the target of an attack that was motivated by ideology.

As Woods (2007) noted in his work, the selection of specific sources by the media can be used to manipulate the overall perceived risk or threat levels. With articles that discussed risk levels in both the Ottawa and Moncton shootings, various expert opinions were not canvassed. The three news organizations generally stuck to what was given to them by the RCMP or the Prime Minister's office. In regards to the coverage of the Ottawa shooting a dissenting opinion of the events that had taken place was kept to a minimum. Susan Bibeau (Michael Zehaf-Bibeau's mother) and the NDP opposition party in parliament were the only two voices that raised the question of mental health in relation to the gunman. There was a noticeable lack of academic

interpretation of the shooting in Ottawa. As for academic views on the Moncton shooting, the National Post had two articles that included academics. The first article on 5 June gave insight into the mind and motives of Justin Bourque from a professor teaching at Western University (Ontario). Michael Arntfield stated that the shooting perpetrated by Justin Bourque was an act of domestic terrorism (Brean, 2014 June 5). The second article included discussion from Jack Levin (a professor at Northeastern University in Boston), Kim MacInnis (who teaches at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts) and James Alan Fox (a criminologist at Northeastern University in Boston). These three academics did not deem that Justin Bourque's actions were an act of terrorism but instead classified him as a mass murder (Brean, 2014 June 6).

The framing of fear was one common thread that was shared between the news articles that focused on the Ottawa and Moncton shootings. As in both groups of articles, the news organizations relied heavily on eyewitness accounts in order to create a discourse of fear around both of these shootings. In the articles that focused on the Ottawa shootings, more individual narratives of fear were shared whereas in the case of Moncton, the narrative of fear was placed at the community level. When it comes to the framing of risk levels and fear in these three Canadian news organizations based on this framework alone, it would be difficult to tell if an event was classified as an act of terrorism (as Ottawa is classified) or as a mass shooting like Moncton.

### **C. Framing of Terrorism by Discourse Analysis**

#### *Ottawa shooting*

In the analysis of news articles that focused on the Ottawa shootings, there was special attention paid to the words and phrases used in order to frame this event as an act of terrorism.

Within the news articles from the National Post it was found that specific words and phrasing was used in order to reinforce the idea that the shooting in Ottawa was in fact a calculated terrorist attack. In many news articles that debated the reasoning behind the attacks, experts such as the RCMP were quoted repeatedly as saying that the attacks were politically and ideologically motivated, thus reinforcing the applied label of terrorism. The Ottawa shooting occurred only a few days after another alleged ISIS inspired person had run down a military member in Quebec. In keeping that event in mind, the National Post often framed, in the form of questions, the motives of Zehaf-Bibeau. Many articles focused on his conversion to Islam and his speculated radicalization. These articles used words such as “radicalized”, “jihadist”, “lone-wolf”, “extremist” and “violent zealots”. Beyond this, the Prime Minister’s office played a key role in framing this as an act of terrorism. Statements from the Prime Minister, or his office would use the term terrorism or terrorist when referring to the shooting or when the referred to Michael Zehaf-Bibeau.

The Globe and Mail was similar to the National Post in their use of specific terms to frame the Ottawa shootings as an act of terrorism. The Globe and Mail relied on government based agencies to determine whether or not the Ottawa shooting was an act portrayed by a terrorist, or by a person who had mental health issues. In the days following the shooting, many of the descriptions used to identify Zehaf-Bibeau were similar. “... [Zehaf-Bibeau] described as a 32-year-old drifter with ‘extremist beliefs’ who was seeking to travel to Syria” (Freeze & Carlson, 2014 October 24). In considering the context of the timeframe, there were a lot of concerns in the news media about Canadians responding to the call of jihad that was put out by the Islamic State. For this reason it may have been of use to the RCMP to include the idea that Zehaf-Bibeau wished to travel to Syria, linking him to the act of jihad and terrorism. Examples

of other language used by the Globe and Mail to frame this event as a terrorism act were:

“Canadian extremist”, “terrorism”, “terrorist”, “domestic radicalism” and “radicalized terrorist”.

The CBC News did not differ much in terms of the use of language to construct the Ottawa shootings as an act of terrorism. Similar to the previous two news organizations, the CBC News relied on the word of the government or the RCMP to obtain much information about what possibly unfolded in Ottawa. Some terms used to describe the Ottawa shootings or the gunman were; “radicalized”, “extremist”, “ISIL-inspired terrorist” (ISIL refers to the Islamic State, an organization labeled as a terrorist group by most Western countries), “terrorist attack”, and “high-risk”. In the framing of this event, the CBC news along with the two other news organizations used similar language and relied on the same sources in order to obtain information about the Ottawa shootings.

### *Moncton shooting*

Unlike the shootings in Ottawa, the shootings in Moncton were not framed by the news media as a terrorism act. The National Post down-played the idea that Justin Bourque was connected to any larger organizations who’s motives would be to terrorize a population (Brean, 2014 June 6). The National Post included descriptions of Bourque that called him militant but stopped short of calling him an extremist. Some of the words that were used to describe Justin Bourque or his actions were; “criminal”, “calm”, “gun-nut”, and “anti-establishment”. The only mentioning of the word terror was used in a description of what one citizen of Moncton felt when they were under a city-wide lockdown.

The globe and mail, similar to the National Post avoided using language that would frame the Moncton shootings as an act of terrorism. The globe and Mail did mention Bourque’s

ideological beliefs that he held in regards to government and describe him dressed in military camouflage but came no-where close to concluding that it was terrorism. They looked to the RCMP and the Prime Minister once again to frame the shooting. The RCMP would refer to the event as “criminal”, “a mass shooting”, “a worst nightmare” and the Prime Minister called it a “tragedy” but no language common to the framing of terrorism was employed.

The CBC News in their coverage of the Moncton shootings did not differ from the previous two news organizations. The CBC News employed terms such as “shooting spree”, “shootings”, and an “attack on police officers”. From the standpoint of all government agencies, this shooting spree was not a terrorist attack. The Moncton shooting, was framed by the CBC News as an event that terrorized the Moncton area for multiple days. Instead of questioning or asking other experts that were not linked to a government, the CBC News had decided that this event was just some gun-nut that had finally snapped and decided to start shooting police officers.

### *Discussion*

In analysing both the Ottawa and Moncton shootings for the second dominant theme found in the literature review, the framing of terrorism by use of language, differences in the terminology used to describe the two events were found to be present. In regards to the Ottawa shootings terminology that is now often associated with terrorism, such as “jihad” and “Islamist extremist” were a constant when describing Michael Zehaf-Bibeau or the actions he took on that day. In contrast to this, the main terms applied to Justin Bourque or his actions were “gunman”, “shooter” and “shooting”. The language used in articles to describe the Ottawa shootings were terms that are strongly connected to a religion whereas the terms in the Moncton shootings are not centred on a religion. In the case of the Ottawa shooting it can only be speculated if religion

played a major factor in motivating Zehaf-Bibeau (as he is deceased and cannot be questioned) but the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News appear to be following patterns that were found in the literature review. Those patterns are that terms that are connected to the religion of Islam and Muslim peoples as a group are continuously being connected back to basic understandings of terrorism (Kabir et al., 2012; Vultee, 2006). The framing of terrorism through the use of specific language in Canadian news as found through these three individual news organizations appears to match the general tendencies found by studies of other Western news sources, in that the language of terrorism has become strongly connected to Islam (Altheide, 2007; Brown, 2011; Kabir et al., 2012 & Vultee, 2006).

#### **D. Construction of the ‘Other’**

##### *Ottawa shooting*

The framing of terrorism by news organizations is a relatively new area of study. One important aspect that is examined in these studies is that they often look into the construction of terrorism. These studies look at how terrorism in the western media is constructed through an orientalist lens (Altheide, 2006 & 2007; Brown, 2011; De Nelson, 2008; Mahony, 2011 & Vultee, 2006). The theme of construction of the ‘other’ was the last theme that was looked at when examining the Ottawa and Moncton shootings. When analysing the National Post articles that reported on the Ottawa shooting just under half of the articles made note that Zehaf-Bibeau was a convert to Islam, or related the shooting in some way to Islam. “On Monday, authorities say a recent convert to Islam killed one Canadian soldier before being shot to death by police” (Obama condemns Canada shootings, 2014 October 22). The quote is in reference to the attack that took place in Quebec, as a man ran over a soldier, killing him with his car but this quote at

the end of the article can be seen as unnecessary as it has nothing to do with the shooting that took place in Ottawa and misleads the reader to think that this quote is in reference to Michael Zehaf-Bibeau.

In just under half of the articles that gave coverage to the Ottawa shootings The Globe and Mail made mention of the religion of Islam or connected terrorism, Muslims and Zehaf-Bibeau together. In terms of constructing the ‘Other’, The Globe and Mail went farther than the National Post. In one of his press releases after the Ottawa shooting, Stephen Harper vowed that there would be “...no safe haven for those who would bring ‘savagery to our shores’” (Chase, 2014 October 23). What is not mentioned in this article along with other articles that insinuate that these attacks (referencing the Martin Couture-Rouleau hit and run attack) originate from outside of Canada is that the people who have perpetrated these attacks were born and raised in Canada and have lived in Canada their whole lives. The term, domestic terrorism, is noticeably absent from the majority of the news articles linking the Ottawa shootings to the Islamic faith.

In not differentiating from the framing of terrorism that the other two news organizations constructed, the CBC News does not take their framing in a different direction than the National Post or The Globe and Mail. The CBC News often links Islam to radicals, extremists or terrorism. Furthermore, many of the news articles that focus on Zehaf-Bibeau’s past bring up his conversion to Islam, and the time he spent in western Canada, homeless and often sleeping in mosques. One narrative that is different from the National Post and The Globe and Mail is that the CBC News data contains many interviews and statements from prominent members of the Canadian Muslim community. These interviews often involve members of various Canadian Muslim communities rejecting the actions of Michael Zehaf-Bibeau.

*Moncton shooting*

After analysing the news articles from all three news organizations, it is clear that the Moncton shootings have not even the slightest hint of stereotyping in relation to the construction of the ‘other. Between the National Post, The Globe and Mail, and the CBC News only two news article briefly mention religion. When religion is mentioned, it is as a passing thought that constructs Justin Bourque’s past life as a child and is not considered a main factor in motives of the attack. This is completely different than the consideration given to religious factors in the Ottawa shootings. The main discussion around the Moncton shootings seem to revolve around questions of mental health with a secondary and much smaller discussion about ideology and motives behind the shooting spree.

### *Discussion*

In the news articles that focused on the Moncton shootings, the religious affiliation of Justin Bourque was only mentioned twice. The first instance was in reference to his family’s church and the second instance was when an article discussed Justin Bourque’s upbringing. In the context of these two articles, the brief mentioning of his past religious affiliation was used in order to humanize Bourque. To give the impression that he was a regular Maritime native who had seemed to have lost his way somewhere later in life. The talk of his religious background was meant to help cement his Caucasian, Canadian identity. This is in complete contrast to the construction of Michael Zehaf-Bibeau where religious affiliation was mentioned repeatedly.

In the literature review, the construction of the ‘Other’ played a key role in how Western countries; (1) understand Muslims and the Middle East through acts of terrorism (Mahony, 2010), (2) proceeds to define groups ‘other’ than themselves (Altheide, 2006) and thus defining what it means to be Canadian, and (3) over represent one group with a particular kind of activity (Brown, 2011; De Nelson, 2008) all while constructing all Muslims as the dangerous ‘Other’



(Kabir et al., 2012). In a large proportion of articles from all three news organizations, there was an ongoing reoccurrence that in that Michael Zehaf-Bibeau's religion often ended up being a characteristic that defined him and was framed as a major motivating force in his life. It was reported by all three news sources that Zehaf-Bibeau was trying to reacquire a passport so that he could leave Canada to travel to the Middle East. The failure to obtain this passport was framed as a secondary reason why Zehaf-Bibeau decided to carry out a shooting on Canadian soil. This kind of reaction to not being able to obtain a passport would seem unnecessary to a reasonable person. The acknowledgement of his desired destination (the Middle East) coupled with the repeated highlighting of Zehaf-Bibeau's faith combine with an already present discourse in Western media to reinforce the frame that people who are Muslims are dangerous and can be violent. It is not what is often stated bluntly in news articles that creates the frame of a dangerous 'Other', but instead what is implied leads to a heuristic process.

Some acknowledgment for what the CBC News did in their articles must be made in this study. In analysing the three different news organizations, CBC News by far did the most to counteract the framing of construction of the 'Other'. CBC News in the coverage of the Ottawa shootings and the after impact of the shooting that was felt across the country had numerous articles to counter the main narrative of Islam as a source of violence. The CBC News accomplished this by interviewing leaders in Muslim communities from across Canada. Their message to the Canadian public was that the stereotyping that occurred in the news media after the Ottawa shootings is not an accurate portrayal of the Muslim community as a whole. These people dissuaded the idea that all Muslims resort to violence to solve their issues and that people who identify as Muslim should not be seen as an outsider population within the borders of Canada.

## **E. Limitations of Results**

This section is a brief description to acknowledge the limitations of the findings in this research. The main objective of this research was to compare an instance of violence framed as terrorism in contrast with an event that was not framed as terrorism. The nature of the study is descriptive in that it aimed to provide a detailed analysis of events. In order to accomplish this a qualitative approach was chosen. Any time that a qualitative approach is utilised a researcher sacrifices the ability to generalize. This research examined only three mainstream news organizations that are based in Canada. It is imperative to note that this means the results of this research can in no way speak to the framing of terrorism in any other news organizations than the ones examined within.

**Section 6:**  
**Conclusion**

## A. Conclusion

Since the time of the terror attacks on 11 September 2001, there has been a considerable amount of research done in the field of terrorism studies. By examining the body of literature that makes up this field, the observation that most of the prominent literature in the field has been written in the time after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In the body of literature that examines the subtopic of media framing and terrorism there is still many areas that need exploration. One gap that was discovered in a review of the literature was that there were no studies that examined how the Canadian news media frames terrorism. So, this research was mainly focused on beginning to fill the gap.

Ultimately because of the lack of research that examines Canadian news organizations and the framing of terrorism, a comparative analysis of media framing of terrorism was the route chosen. This research analysed in depth the framing of terrorism by three Canadian news organizations through three major themes that were discovered in the literature review. The three news organizations that were examined were the National Post, The Globe and Mail, and the CBC News. Using the themes, the research analysed two events that occurred in recent memory. The first event, the Ottawa shootings was framed as terrorism by the three Canadian news organizations. In contrast to this, the second events, the Moncton shootings were not framed as terrorism.

One of the compelling findings that was made in the process of analysing and comparing the two events were the employment of the same key themes that were found in the literature review. The theme that was relied upon the most by the three news organizations in order to construct the Ottawa shooting as terrorism was the use of (specific) language. The three news

organizations relied on key government agencies to feed them the appropriate narrative that was to be employed in both the Ottawa and the Moncton shootings. This was done with minimal questioning of government political agendas. At one point in time in Canada, the press often acted as a critical body of thought that was used to question the motives of government and non-government organizations. In the case of the Ottawa and Moncton shootings, a critical or academic voice to discuss opinions on the events were barely present. Although this study cannot be used to generalize about other Canadian news organizations, the research performed in this study has led to further intrigue and the desire to perform further research in a quest to seek out if more news organizations are employing the same frames of terrorism as the National Post, The Globe and Mail and the CBC News.

**Section 7:**  
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