

Invisibility cloaks, prisons, and a pandemic: Did COVID-19 render the prison invisibility cloak ineffective?

by

Jennifer Weger

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Criminal Justice degree.

Department of Criminal Justice  
Master of Arts in Criminal Justice  
The University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
July 2022

Copyright © 2022 Jennifer Weger

## **Acknowledgements**

Words cannot express my gratitude to my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Steven Kohm, and Dr. Michael Weinrath, a member of my Thesis Supervisory Committee. Your guidance and expertise made this research attainable. Thank you for all the kindness, support, and encouragement you provided me throughout this project.

To the Criminal Justice Department Faculty, thank you for making my undergraduate and graduate experience so enjoyable. I am very grateful and proud to be a student of such a great department.

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and family for the endless amount of support, love, and encouragement while completing my academic journey. I am so fortunate and grateful to have such an amazing support system.

## **Abstract**

This thesis acknowledges the importance of examining news media representation of prisons, and more specifically, news media representation of Canadian prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic. A thematic qualitative and quantitative content analysis of news coverage of prison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic was undertaken to analyze how news media organizations communicate meanings and messages about punishment and prison to the general public. Utilizing a social constructionist approach, I examined how the news media frames coverage of correctional institutions, consequently shaping public understanding of punishment and prison which may impact correctional policy. This thesis addressed the following questions: 1) Was there an increase in news media coverage of prison during the COVID-19 pandemic? Has coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic made the prison more visible? 2) Does the news media coverage of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforce traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding punishment and prison? Or challenge them? 3) Is the news media representation of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic consistent with coverage of traditional prison newsworthy items which focus on discrete incidents? Or does the coverage reflect newer, broader systemic newsworthy issues, namely, reform? The findings demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic did not quantitatively bring more visibility to prisons as assessed by the amount of news items, however, qualitatively it appears COVID-19 brought more visibility to prison issues. While some traditional prison stereotypes are still present in the news media and were reinforced during the pandemic, other myths and stereotypes were challenged, or were rare. Lastly, the results demonstrate that although traditional prison newsworthy items were still often reported in the news, discussions of prison reform were prevalent in the sample.

# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theory .....	13
2.1 Correctional Institutions, Prison Populations and the COVID-19 Pandemic .....	18
2.2 Theorizing Media Representation of Corrections.....	21
2.3 Myths and Misconceptions of Prison .....	28
2.4 Public Opinion about Punishment and Correctional Institutions .....	34
2.5 COVID-19 and its Potential Impact on Attitudes Toward Punishment and Prison.....	40
Chapter 3: Methods .....	45
Chapter 4: Quantitative Findings.....	56
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings .....	79
5.1 Law Reform and Segregation .....	80
5.11 <i>Pre-COVID Coverage of Segregation</i> .....	82
5.12 <i>Claims Makers in the Pre-COVID Period Local News</i> .....	83
5.13 <i>Claims Makers in the Pre-COVID Period National News</i> .....	87
5.14 <i>COVID-19 and Segregation</i> .....	90
5.15 <i>Claims Makers in the Post-COVID Period Local News Items</i> .....	91
5.16 <i>Claims Makers in the Post-COVID Period National News</i> .....	94
5.17 <i>The Social Construction of Segregation</i> .....	98
5.2 Dauphin Correctional Centre Closure.....	101
5.21 <i>Claims Makers in the Pre-COVID Period</i> .....	102
5.22 <i>COVID-19 and the Dauphin Correctional Centre Closure</i> .....	108
5.23 <i>The Social Construction of the Dauphin Correctional Centre Closure</i> .....	111
5.3 COVID-19's Impact on Prisons .....	112
5.31 <i>Claims Makers and COVID-19's Impact on Prisons in the Local News</i> .....	113
5.32 <i>Claims Makers and COVID-19's Impact on Prisons in the National News</i> .....	117
5.33 <i>The Social Construction of COVID-19 in Prisons</i> .....	120
5.4 The Racist System .....	123
5.41 <i>Claims makers and the Racist System Frame</i> .....	124
5.42 <i>Social Construction of the Racist System</i> .....	129
Chapter 6: Discussion .....	132
6.1 Social Constructionism and Canadian Prison News.....	146
6.2 Direction for Future Research .....	153
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	157
References.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

## Tables

<u>Table 4.1 Prison Media Indicators</u> .....	56-57
<u>Table 4.2. Prison Reform/Critical, Racist System and Correctional Officer, Healthcare and, Prison Stereotype Frames/Themes and Subthemes</u> .....	63-64
<u>Table 4.3 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</u> .....	68
<u>Table 4.4 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</u> .....	70-71
<u>Table 4.5 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</u> .....	72-73
<u>Table 4.6 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</u> .....	74
<u>Table 4.7 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</u> .....	76

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*We are talking about a cloak that really and truly renders the wearer completely invisible, and endures eternally, giving constant and impenetrable concealment, no matter what spells are cast at it. – J.K Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Invisibility cloaks are magical garments found in folklore and mythology. They are valuable devices because they render whomever or whatever they cover invisible. While invisibility cloaks may be useful for wizards, they also may be useful for institutions who do not want scrutiny over their affairs. This study examines one institution that has been shrouded in secrecy for many years: the prison. This research aims to uncover whether COVID-19's "spell" has been able to penetrate the hypothetical prison invisibility cloak that has shielded correctional institutions from a high degree of scrutiny, thus, making it less effective. More specifically, this study aims to uncover whether COVID-19 rendered the prison invisibility cloak ineffective in Canadian news media representations of correctional institutions.

News media representation of the criminal justice system is an important area of research because most individuals in society do not have direct experience with various parts of the justice system; much of the general public's knowledge about the system is acquired through the news media and popular culture (Surette, 2007). While there is an abundance of literature on news media representation of crime and its effects on society, there appears to be a gap in the literature on news media representation of prison, especially compared to other aspects of the criminal justice system such as criminal courts and policing (Ross, 2012). These representations are important because they contribute to the general public's views and understanding of prison in general and correctional issues more broadly. The news media presents representations of correctional and criminal justice issues such as the purpose of punishment, fairness, severity, and the need for potential reform in the area of punishment. In turn, this contributes to the general

public's knowledge and opinion on these issues and can have real impacts on policy affecting correctional institutions and the criminal justice system. Utilizing a social constructionist approach, I examine how the news media frames coverage of correctional institutions, and consequently shapes our understanding of punishment and prison. Due to limited news media coverage of prisons and the general public's lack of direct experience with the justice system, many myths and stereotypes surrounding punishment and prison have been able to flourish. Therefore, it is important to examine these socially constructed myths and the role of news media in furthering these stereotypes as they can have real effects on public attitudes toward punishment and correctional issues more broadly.

This thesis explores why correctional institutions are a comparatively invisible part of the justice system in the news media in contrast to the police and criminal court system. The title of this thesis and the above Harry Potter quote references this idea of the prison being invisible to the general public compared to other parts of the justice system due to a hypothetical "prison invisibility cloak". COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on day-to-day life in Canada and other parts of the world. News media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic has focused significant attention on aspects of the criminal justice system such as policing (Schneider, 2021). This study examines news media coverage of correctional institutions to assess if it has been impacted by COVID-19 and related public health measures in a manner similar to police coverage during the pandemic. Further, this study examines whether COVID-19 has made prisons more visible in the media due to the threat the virus presents in congregate living settings, which in turn may lead to shifts in the way the public views prisons and prisoners. I explore whether the pandemic rendered the prison invisibility cloak ineffective, thus, making

prisons more visible and hypothetically “remove the prison invisibility cloak” that has shielded prisons from the general public and potential scrutiny.

This research addresses three general areas. The first set of research questions concerns the amount of news media coverage of prison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the lack of news media coverage of prison in general compared to other parts of the criminal justice system, I ask, was there an increase in news media coverage of prison during the COVID-19 pandemic? Research by Ross (2011) has demonstrated that prisons are the most invisible part of the justice system due to many factors discussed later in this thesis, therefore, it is important to ask, has coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic made the prison more visible?

The second set of questions explores traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding prison and punishment, many of which are perpetuated in the news media and popular culture. This thesis analyzes news media representations of prison before and during the COVID-19 health crisis to assess if these traditional myths and stereotypes have changed under pandemic conditions. Since most individuals in society do not have personal experiences with prison and correctional institutions, much of their knowledge and perceptions about prison are influenced by these mediated myths and stereotypes. Therefore, I ask, does the news media coverage of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforce traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding punishment and prison? Or conversely, does news media coverage of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic challenge traditional myths and stereotypes about punishment and prison?

The third set of questions involves examining traditional prison issues and events long considered newsworthy by the press. This includes a focus on more discrete incidents, such as violence, riots, escapes, and deaths. In addition, newer and more critical prison issues which



focus on broader system-wide concerns related to reform are examined. I ask, is the news media representation of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic consistent with coverage of traditional prison newsworthy items which focus on discrete incidents? Or does the coverage reflect greater emphasis on broader systemic prison newsworthy issues, namely, reform?

It is important to position myself in this research and acknowledge my past employment at the Winnipeg Remand Centre, and my current employment with the Manitoba Justice, Corrections Division. My career with Manitoba Justice has drawn me to this area of research; I was employed as a correctional officer and a counsellor at the Winnipeg Remand Centre. As a correctional officer I worked with a variety of inmate populations, both male and female, and in a variety of different types of units, such as general population, special needs, and segregation. As a counsellor, I managed inmate case loads, conducted suicide risk assessments, and delivered cognitive behaviour therapy programs to male and female inmates in both group and individual settings. I worked at the Winnipeg Remand Centre for roughly seven and a half years, including the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic began, I was surprised by the lack of news media coverage of the potential threat the virus posed to correctional institutions considering they are congregate living settings. Much of the news media coverage focused on the devastating impact the virus posed to other congregate living settings, such as personal care homes. When the pandemic began, the Winnipeg Remand Centre became the isolation centre for all adult inmates who were incarcerated in the province of Manitoba. The potential for the COVID-19 virus to spread throughout the institution caused stress for both correctional staff and inmates, and the lack of news media coverage drawing attention to this threat inspired my research.

Roughly one year after the pandemic was declared, I accepted a position with Manitoba Justice as an investigator with the Professional Standards Unit, Corrections Division. As an investigator, I lead external workplace investigations in the seven correctional institutions and several community corrections offices throughout the province. The investigations I lead range from respectful workplace investigations to death in custody reviews. As an investigator it is vital that I remain objective throughout the investigations, and I utilized this skill while conducting my analysis. Due to my past and current employment, I am attentive to inherent or unconscious biases in this research. However, I believe my experience has provided me with a greater understanding of the inner workings of correctional institutions and correctional issues which was beneficial while conducting the qualitative analysis of news media representations of prisons. I have direct experience working with a variety of positions and parties within corrections. I interview inmates, correctional officers and correctional staff, as well as members of the community while working in my current and past positions. Throughout my various roles and responsibilities, I have gained a well-rounded perspective of prison and prison issues. Therefore, I have a balanced viewpoint compared to a researcher who may not have the institutional knowledge and perspective that I have gained. Thus, my understanding of Canadian prison issues, such as issues with segregation and the race issues in the justice system, allowed me to contextualize the results from the quantitative analysis, as well as issues brought forth by various claims makers in the news media.

The overall goal of this thesis is to shed light on an under researched area- news media representation of prison, by examining the myths surrounding prison that have been socially constructed and framed through news media representations. I examine the potential impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on news media representations of correctional institutions and the

traditional myths surrounding punishment, and the potential increase in presentations that impact reform.

In the following chapter, I examine the literature surrounding news media coverage of prisons, and explore why correctional institutions are a relatively invisible part of the criminal justice system in the news media. I review the recent literature surrounding the challenges COVID-19 presents to correctional institutions, followed by an overview of the theoretical approach that I undertake—social constructionism and framing theory. Following discussion of the theoretical approach, I describe how I conducted a qualitative, thematic method of analysis of news media. Additional to the qualitative analysis, I describe how the news items were counted, compared, and analyzed quantitatively to assess changes between the pre- and post-pandemic periods. I present and describe the results of the quantitative analysis, highlighting the changes in how the news media represented corrections before and during the pandemic. I hypothesized there would be more prison news items published after the pandemic was declared, bringing more visibility to correctional institutions, thus, removing the hypothetical invisibility cloak. However, this was not the case. The prison did not remain completely invisible, therefore, it appears the cloak was not completely effective. There was a focus on prison issues, such as issues with segregation and overcrowding, before the pandemic was declared as well as during the pandemic. However, it does not appear the pandemic brought more visibility to prison in the news media. I then discuss the results from the qualitative analysis and provide an overview and the social construction of four major events and issues from my sample: law reform and segregation, the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure, COVID-19's Impact on Prisons, and race and racism in the criminal justice system. The results from this study show that while some traditional prison stereotypes are still present in the news media representation of correctional

institutions and were reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, other myths and stereotypes were challenged, or were rare. Additionally, while traditional prison newsworthy items and stereotypes were often present in the news items, it appears systemic prison issues have become increasingly newsworthy topics for news organizations. As hypothesized, there was less reporting of traditional prison newsworthy events after the pandemic was declared as well as more reporting of systemic issues and prison reform in the news items post-pandemic. Upon examining the social construction of Canadian prison news media, it was evident that the news items were framed with prison reform and critical tones by the authors. As well, there were many claims makers that were pro-prison reform oriented and were critical of the correctional system, bringing awareness to prison issues that have been plaguing the system for decades. However, it was found that although more attention was brought to these issues, correctional policy appears resistant to change. I end with a discussion on the limitations of this study, as well as direction for future research that is needed in this under researched area.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theory

The news media is comprised of elements of the mass media which focus on delivering news to the general public through various forms: newspapers, radio and televised news broadcasts, and the internet (Jewkes, 2011). Jewkes (2011) claimed that although the media is often described as a 'window on the world' or a mirror reflecting 'real life', the media may be more accurately thought of a prism, subtly bending and distorting the view of the world it projects (p. 41). Therefore, media representations are not reality, they are a version of reality that is culturally determined and depending on both production processes of news organizations, and the assumptions media professional make about their audience (Jewkes, 2011). Media organizations and journalists select, produce, and present news items dependent on what they consider newsworthy and of public interest (Jewkes, 2011). Since the production of news is far from a random process, it is important to examine how the news media represents certain institutions because these representations contribute to the socially constructed reality of consumers. News media coverage of correctional institutions is an under researched area, especially in the Canadian context (Doyle & Ericson, 1996). Doyle and Ericson (1996) cite statistical evidence suggesting that correctional institutions receive very little news media coverage compared to the court system and, especially, compared to the police. Chermak (1998) examined news media representations of prison and noted that it is rare to see news stories that discuss the daily operations of correctional facilities, how inmates adapt to the conditions of incarceration, or the violence that routinely occurs inside the institutions. News stories tend to focus on less routine and more sensational forms of violence, such as riots and deaths that occur in custody. The limited news media coverage on correctional institutions has led some researchers to claim that prisons are largely invisible.

Ground breaking work by Doyle and Ericson (1996) investigated why correctional institutions are a relatively hidden part of the criminal justice system, who the official sources of information on prisons are, and how this works to reproduce official ideology about crime and punishment. Doyle and Ericson (1996) asserted, “Dominant ideology theorists have argued that journalists are very subordinate to official sources in covering crime and punishment, they place a heavy reliance on regular sources, such as police, who are voices of the hegemonic order” (p.160). Doyle (2006, p. 870) asserted that this reliance is largely pragmatic: “Crime news tends to rely heavily on the police as news sources...due to their routine availability, authority, and control of information.” Therefore, since the police are most visible and accessible compared to other parts of the criminal justice system, they become the official sources of information, leading to a reproduction of official ideology (Doyle & Ericson, 1996). The police are seen as highly credible sources and have ownership over the crime issue so they are able to shape representations through the news media as they provide official statistics and are able to exert control over their message through dedicated media spokespersons and scheduled media events (Surette, 2007). Since the police are most frequently represented in the news media compared to other parts of the criminal justice system, it makes sense that they become regarded as authoritative sources of information regarding crime. Prison managers do not typically schedule media events nor do they typically have highly visible media spokespersons who communicate messages; therefore, little official information is provided to the public on a regular basis. Doyle and Ericson (1996) examined how prison news was produced and their data indicated penal authorities cannot exert strict control over correctional news. Instead, penal authorities were only intermittently successful in managing news coverage of prisons; journalists accessed a variety of alternative information sources when representing correctional institutions in the news media

(Doyle & Ericson, 1996). It has also been argued that difficulties with access to correctional facilities has contributed to the lack of news media representation of prison. Doyle and Ericson (1996) found that prison administrators presented numerous arguments justifying limited media access such as threats to institutional security, fear of jeopardizing incidents that are under investigation, confidentiality and privacy concerns for inmates' personal information, correctional policies and legislation that give authorities the right to limit visitors, monitor and intercept letters and telephone calls. Finally, the often-geographical isolation of prisons from main media markets make access for journalists more difficult.

Chermak (1998) built on work by Doyle & Ericson (1996) and provided additional reasons as to why there is a lack of news media representation of correctional institutions, including: news personnel do not think an inmate's correctional behaviour is interesting to the general public, the media has limited access to official prison sources, news organizations often do not have a prison "beat" or assignment that fulfills the same function as a police or court beat, reporters do not have close relationships with officials from correctional organizations compared to the police, and correctional officials do not make an effort to legitimize their activities through the media because public interest is limited. When correctional institutions are presented in the news, the stories typically focus on significant and discrete incidents such as prison escapes or prison riots, or less commonly, a focus on significant policy issues, such as the use and harms of administrative segregation (Chermak, 1998). Chermak (1998) asserted, "The presentation of the components of the criminal justice system in the news varies because of differences in criminal justice source involvement in the news production process" (p.98). Much like Doyle and Ericson, Chermak argued police organizations expend significant resources on media relations, and the media are complicit in allowing the police to have a significant amount of control over the

messages they disseminate to the general public. The news media also has greater access to courtrooms and court sources, which allows for greater access for journalists and contributes to more news media representations of the court system and process (Chermak, 1998). Since correctional organizations are closed to the public and lack media relations representatives, it is difficult for media organizations to gain access to sources that provide varying perspectives on correctional topics, which results in little news media coverage of prison in general.

Ross (2011) reviewed scholarly research on the news media's portrayal of correctional institutions and the challenges reporters face when covering this largely invisible part of the criminal justice system. Writing from an American vantage point, he highlighted various problems with the news media's coverage of prisons, and acknowledged that accurate and abundant news coverage of prison is difficult for several reasons. Much like the previous literature on this topic, Ross (2011) asserted crime and criminal justice is a low-status news beat, therefore, few reporters specialize in covering jails and prisons; editors believe that the public is not interested in prison-related issues and may think that the costs of reporting on jails will not be worth the expense; it is difficult for reporters to gain access to correctional facilities; and the subject is often not emphasized as part of the curriculum in journalism schools. Ross (2011) noted correctional officials are very restrictive with news media interviews between inmates and journalists, therefore, "much of what is reported on often comes from limited or biased sources" (p.9). Consistent with prior research, Ross noted that the news media have often been denied complete access to facilities due to institutional policies and procedures, and correctional officials rarely issue press releases or conduct press conferences. Ross (2011) concluded by asserting that due to prisons being a hidden part of the criminal justice system, the correctional institutions are embedded with numerous myths, and cultural industries such as the news media



socially construct and perpetuate many of the myths and misconceptions.

It is evident that correctional institutions are the most invisible part of the criminal justice system in general, and especially in the news media. “Prisons are surrounded by high walls - walls of concrete and razor wire, of course, but also walls of secrecy and stereotype” (Sussman, 2002, p.258). This secretiveness that has characterized our correctional system enables the news media to construct and disseminate myths and stereotypes about prison in general and correctional issues. This can have real effects on our justice system and contribute to distorted public views about prison and punishment, which can impact changes to correctional policy and procedures (Sussman, 2002).

The global pandemic brought on by COVID-19 has generated significant and ongoing news media coverage around the world. The pandemic has also led to increased coverage of certain aspects of the justice system, such as policing, as it relates to enforcing public health orders (Schneider, 2021). Therefore, the pandemic could also contribute to an increase in news media coverage of prison due to the potential impact of COVID-19 on correctional populations. For example, a COVID-19 outbreak in a correctional institution may cross the threshold necessary to be seen as a newsworthy item, resulting in news media coverage of the issue. The COVID-19 pandemic may bring new visibility to correctional institutions in general, more visibility to prison officials in the news media, as well as an increase in visibility on correctional issues and myths that have plagued our criminal justice system for decades. Some scholars have even argued that the pandemic could also lead to greater public empathy for prisoners after many jurisdictions imposed strict lockdowns during outbreaks of COVID-19 (Tschanz and Hernandez, 2021).

## **2.1 Correctional Institutions, Prison Populations and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has presented challenges in all countries and contexts. Correctional facilities present unique challenges as they are congregate living settings where numerous individuals reside and use shared spaces. The main mechanism of contagion and transmission of COVID-19 is droplet spread and close physical proximity; therefore, correctional settings are particularly sensitive to the impact of this pandemic because of overcrowding, lack of ability to socially distance between inmates, and poor ventilation (Redondo et al., 2020; WHO, 2020a). As argued above, correctional institutions have not historically been represented in the news media as often as other parts of the criminal justice system. Therefore, the onset of the COVID pandemic provides a great opportunity to assess the amount of news media coverage of prison immediately before the pandemic, as well as examine the way the media represents correctional institutions and correctional issues during the first year of the pandemic. There are many critical correctional issues which have been mostly ignored that the news media may focus on during the pandemic because these issues may be seen as more relevant during the COVID-19 health crisis. These issues include: overcrowding, the use of isolation or solitary confinement and mentally ill inmates, the high prevalence and spreading of communicable and infectious disease among correctional populations, a high prevalence of disadvantaged social groups, and systemic racism (Redondo et al., 2020; Weinrath & Winterdyk, 2019). Typically, correctional institutions are overcrowded and due to high inmate populations, it is difficult to properly isolate inmates, which increases the risk of contracting COVID-19 (Redondo et al., 2020). The close quarter living conditions, lack of social distancing, shared spaces, and inadequate ventilation systems, make infection and disease control in correctional institutions very difficult (Nowonty & Piquero, 2020).

Correctional institutions are designed for security, not public health and health care delivery. Recently this tension between security and health has come to the forefront as correctional facilities have been referenced as the largest mental health care providers in the U.S. (Nowonty & Piquero, 2020). Isolation can have negative effects on inmates' mental health, and isolation may be more deleterious for inmates who have major mental health issues (Nowonty & Piquero, 2020). Many advocates fear that the use of isolation to curb the transmission of COVID-19 in correctional institutions will cause further difficulties for inmates. Prisoners may become reluctant to report COVID-19 symptoms due to fear of being moved to isolation which is similar to solitary confinement. Such a move would force them to endure a segregation experience that has been known to cause psychological harm (Cloud et al., 2020). This situation is a dilemma for correctional administrators, however, because quarantine and physical isolation in response to COVID-19 prevention is necessary to halt the spread of the infection (Cloud et al., 2020).

The prison population in general is composed mainly of individuals from disadvantaged social groups, lower socio-economic and educational levels, ethnic and racialized minorities; and as a result, their health is generally poorer than the general population in the community (Lyons, 2020). Therefore, prisoners are at a greater risk of getting infections and developing serious health issues, and are consequently more vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 (Lyons, 2020; Redondo et al., 2020). Ultimately, the coronavirus has exacerbated the many social, racialized/ethnic, and health inequalities and injustices experienced by the individuals who are incarcerated in correctional institutions, as well as the many disadvantaged communities from which the individuals come from and will return to upon their release from custody (Nowonty & Piquero, 2020). Yet, preliminary research from Australia (Whittaker, 2021) suggests that greater

media coverage and visibility of prisons has not resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whittaker (2021) examined news media reporting of prison conditions in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic, and explored communications and media coming from inside correctional facilities to families, community, and media outlets during COVID-19, and in the years preceding it. Whittaker (2021) argued even before the pandemic, it was difficult to generate public interest in the terrible conditions that inmates face inside Australian prisons. Inmates had difficulty conveying information on the deplorable conditions to community members, who in turn had difficulty drawing the attention of the community, non-government organizations, and government officials (Whittaker, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic when prison conditions posed a greater danger to the wellbeing of inmates in the institutions, Whittaker (2021) noted the news media reporting on the conditions has remained very sparse, and his research examined why this was the case. Whittaker (2021) analyzed numerous reports, inquiries, policies, and procedures from New South Wales Corrective Services. The author observed that once the pandemic began, institutions tightened the already small scope for outside contact that existed. For example, visits from family and friends were banned, visits from community support services were limited, and inmates reported fears of using the shared phones to contact family and friends (Whittaker, 2021). While it was difficult for the media and advocacy groups to gain access to prisons to meet and discuss conditions with inmates prior to the pandemic, the media had a larger pool of other sources of information such as family and friends of inmates since inmates had more opportunities for communication with loved ones before the pandemic. Once the pandemic began, this pool was depleted due to the tightened scope for outside contact. During the pandemic, the constriction of communication with the outside world as well as long periods of isolation made it more difficult for inmates to

communicate their fears and frustrations to their supports. Even when friends and family members would reach out to media organizations, editors were hesitant to trust the accounts of loved ones who had someone in custody, as editors often rely on source corroboration before publishing articles. Therefore, the accounts of anguished family and friends were often not heard by the media during the pandemic (Whittaker, 2021).

Due to the above noted correctional issues that have been intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the sparse news coverage of prison in general, it is important to investigate how the news media constructs and frames these issues during this health crisis. This thesis asserts that the media constructions and framing of these issues will have an effect on the general public and how they view correctional institutions, as well as their confidence in the criminal justice system. This study fills the gap in the literature on how the news media represents, frames, and socially constructs prison during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2.2 Theorizing Media Representation of Corrections**

A social constructionist approach is utilized to examine how the news media represents prison, and more specifically, how the news media represents prison during a pandemic. Surette (2007) asserted, “The traditional Western viewpoint is that reality and knowledge of the world are independent of human processes and grounded totally in autonomous, freestanding events. Social constructionism sees reality in a very different light” (p. 39). Social constructionism views knowledge as socially created by people through social interactions and social institutions, therefore, people create reality—the world they believe exists—based on a combination of personal experience and knowledge gained through social interactions and through social institutions such as the media (Surette, 2007). Therefore, according to this paradigm, the degree to which a constructed reality prevails is not solely dependent on its objective empirical validity,

rather, it is subjective and strongly influenced by shifting cultural trends and social forces (Best, 1990; Surette, 2007). Individuals acquire social knowledge from various sources: personal experiences, peers, friends, family, other social groups and institutions, and the media (Surette, 2007). If one considers how most people have never been incarcerated in a correctional institution, and if their peers, friends, and family members have never been incarcerated, much of their knowledge about prison will depend on secondary sources of information, such as the news media (Ross, 2003). Since the media is now an essential part of our reality more than ever before, it is important to examine the messages they convey, as well as examine the social effects that result from media representations (Valverde, 2004). In order to better understand social constructionism and the social effects of media representations, it is important to understand how social problems are constructed in the media through a process of claims making where individuals and authorities assert competing constructions of the social world.

Rather than taking the existence of a social problems at face value, the social constructionist approach directs researchers to examine the way issues are constructed by claims makers through the claims making process itself (Kohm, 2020). “Claims makers are the promoters, activists, professional experts, and spokespersons involved in forwarding specific claims about a social condition” (Surette, 2007, p.36). Claims makers not only draw attention to certain social conditions, they shape our sense of what the conditions mean, what the problem actually is, and are capable of constructing the social conditions in various ways (Surette, 2007). Therefore, the process of claims making turns conditions which may have previously gone unnoticed, taken for granted, or willfully ignored, into objects of societal concern (Best, 1990). It is important to examine how certain correctional issues gain media attention while others do not. This involves examining the claims makers who bring attention to correctional issues in the news

media; whether they are the family or friends of offenders, the offenders themselves, or if they are organizations and activists who may have influence in the community or a stake the operation of corrections itself.

As noted above, correctional institutions do not typically hold press conferences or have dedicated media representatives acting as claims makers and official sources of information. Due to the lack of prison officials in the news media, it is important to examine who the claims makers are as they can be seen as ‘experts’ to the general public, however, they may be simply making claims that are not entirely true, falsely shaping our view of social issues. Claims makers may make assertions in the news media according to their own interests, and these claims may not be accurate. According to Surette (2007), there are two different types of claims: factual claims which are statements that attempt to describe the world and are promoted as ‘objective facts’, and interpretative claims which are statements that focus on the meanings of events. An example of a factual claim may be that correctional institutions are sites of infection and disease transmission. An interpretive claim may be that due to the overcrowding, poor air quality, and fluid movement of correctional officers coming in and out of the institutions, inmates are at greater risk for COVID-19. Interpretative claims do two things, they either offer an explanation of why a factual claim is as described, or they offer a course of action that needs to be taken in order to address the issues described in the factual claim (Surette, 2007). Together, factual and interpretative claims target the beliefs and attitudes that people hold about the world: their beliefs of the conditions of the world and the causes of these conditions, and what the available solutions are (Surette, 2007). In order for a social construction of a putative social problem or issue to become accepted by the public, claims makers often employ linkages. Linkage involves associating the putative social problem with other accepted social issues and wider cultural

anxieties. Therefore, it is important to examine the larger cultural, social, and political context in which claims are made and received via news media (Kohm, 2020). By linking one concerning social condition with an accepted social issue, there is a rise in the importance of the linked issue, thus, increasing the chance of the social construction to be successful and accepted which is the ultimate goal of claims makers and moral entrepreneurs. For example, by linking COVID-19 to the poor conditions of incarceration, this could be an effective claims making strategy to bring attention to the cause of penal reform. To increase the likelihood of the social construction's success, claims makers often use pre-established social constructions, or frames, as a way of advancing their claims (Scheufele, 1999).

Related to social constructionism, framing theory can also be utilized to examine how the media presents information about prisons to the public. "The sociological foundations of framing were laid by Goffman (1974) and others who assumed that individuals cannot understand the world fully and constantly struggle to interpret their life experiences and to make sense of the world around them" (Goffman, 1974; Scheufele & Tweeksbury, 2007, p.11). Therefore, one engages in the process of framing as a way to develop a particular conceptualization of events or issues, or reorient their thinking about an issue (Goffman, 1974; Chong & Druckman, 2007). A frame is a fully developed social construction template; it helps individuals to simplify experiences by allowing for easier categorization, organization, and labelling of events (Surette, 2007). By having pre-existing frames, we are able to quickly place representations of criminal justice issues into the established frames with ease. Surette (2007) identified two pre-existing criminal justice frames that are useful for examining news media representation of prison during a pandemic: The 'faulty system frame' and the 'racist system frame'. The faulty system frame can be applied in several ways. First, the faulty system frame portrays the justice system in terms



of ‘leniency’ and ‘inefficiency’, and may be utilized in the news media to present correctional institutions as simply a ‘revolving door of justice’, and one that is too soft on inmates and fails to rehabilitate (Fox, 2012). The faulty system frame may also take a different form, such as portraying correctional institutions as faulty because they are too harsh on inmates, presenting prisoners as victims of a faulty system (Surette, 2007). The racist system frame depicts criminal justice institutions as racist agents of oppression (Surette, 2007). This frame was also considered in my analysis of news media representation of prison during the pandemic. Due to Canada’s colonial history, the overrepresentation of Indigenous offenders in correctional institutions is an ongoing issue. The racist system frame may gain new salience in the news media through linkage between the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in custody with the COVID-19 pandemic as it is argued that Indigenous peoples are at a higher risk for having more severe outcomes from COVID-19 (Whittaker, 2021).

Frames are important to examine because they can influence criminal justice policy. Claims makers may be more successful in advancing constructions for social issues if they are able to fit their claims into a pre-existing frame. Moreover, frames are not mutually exclusive, people often support more than one frame, often applying one frame to the criminal, and one set to events or criminal justice issues (Surette, 2007). Therefore, framing effects contribute to the formation of attitudes and opinions, because individuals will either accept or reject competing frames depending on beliefs of pre-existing frames. Chong and Druckman (2007) discussed how framing can be viewed in both positive and negative terms. “It can be viewed as a strategy to manipulate and deceive individuals, or it can refer more neutrally to a learning process in which people acquire common beliefs, as in the coordination of people around a social norm” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 120). When framing is examined in the public opinion field, it usually has

a negative association because framing can often suggest that information provided to the public may be arbitrary and may be used to support specific political agendas (Goffman, 1974; Chong & Druckman, 2007). By analyzing how frames are used in news media representations of prison, one can examine if the construction of the messages is framed in a way that may reflect hidden political interests of government officials, such as reform efforts that may result in cost savings for the government during times of economic uncertainty (Goffman, 1974; Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Work by Scheufele and Tweeksbury (2007) discussed how framing is used as a communication tool for political campaigns. They discussed how framing and agenda setting are different and asserted it is important to examine these two concepts as they can tell us a lot about the social effects of news media. “Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that media place on certain issues (e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences” (Scheufele & Tweeksbury, 2007, p.11). Unlike framing theory which argues the way an issue is characterized in the news will influence the audience’s understanding of the issue, the effects of agenda setting are due to memory-based information processing and the overall amount of coverage of an issue (Goffman, 1974; Scheufele & Tweeksbury, 2007). Therefore, if the news media are consistently publishing stories about how a certain social issue relates to others issues within the criminal justice system, or specifically, correctional institutions, the mass audience is likely to attribute more importance to these issues than if they were not reported in the media as often. “Thus, it is not information about the issue that has the effect; it is the fact that the issue has received a certain amount of processing time and attention that carries the effect” (Scheufele & Tweeksbury, 2007, p.14). It is important to examine framing and agenda

setting together because they have different psychological effects, but work together to create social effects. My analysis is attentive to agenda setting in the media as well as applying aspects of framing theory to examine the way news media represents prison during a pandemic. In addition to investigating the construction of frames and agenda setting in the news media, narratives are another important tool used by claims makers and are worth examining as they were identified in the analysis.

Another concept that is useful in an analysis of the social construction of crime and justice in the media is narrative (Surette, 2007). While frames often include wide-scale public policy directives, narratives are less encompassing, mini portraits or pre-established social constructions that the public already recognize (Surette, 2007). Narratives outline the recurring situations involving crime and justice that regularly appear in the media and can be utilized to quickly establish and understand the characteristics of a criminal, victim, or criminal justice agent and institution (Surette, 2007; Ciasullo, 2008). Surette (2007) argued narratives are frequently linked to the faulty system frame by inferring a simplified single-cause explanation, allowing the general public to absorb the issues presented to fit into a pre-existing frame with ease. Surette (2007) outlined common crime-and-justice narratives, such as the ‘sadistic prison guard’, who has characteristics such as: low intelligence, violent, racist, sexist, perverted, and one who enjoys cruelty and inflicting pain and humiliation. Because prison work does not occur in public, the closed nature of correctional environments shields correctional officers from public view. If media depictions both in fictional stories and in the news morally taint correctional officers by depicting them in negative lights, these constructions may be exacerbated by assumptions some members of the public hold that many inmates are incarcerated because they are victims of unfortunate circumstances, and are now subject to the

control of correctional officers who wish to make their lives miserable (Vickovic et al., 2013). I examine the ‘sadistic guard’ narrative in news media items about prisons before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This narrative was present in the analysis, and may contribute to larger social constructions of criminal justice institutions, such as the faulty system frame, or the racist system frame as these frames were present in the sample. Framing, agenda setting, and narratives were utilized during the qualitative analysis to study news media representation of prison during a pandemic, and the social effects that are created.

### **2.3 Myths and Misconceptions of Prison**

Most people have never been incarcerated in a correctional institution, they have never been a correctional officer, correctional support staff, a correctional administrator, or a visitor in a correctional institution, thus, the general public depends on secondary sources of information and their own preconceived ideas about correctional institutions (Ross, 2003). Since most people do not come into direct contact with the criminal justice system, much of their knowledge of and opinions about the correctional system are based on the information and images they receive from the media and popular culture (Cecil, 2007; Levan et al., 2011). Prison films and television shows have been increasingly discussed in scholarly literature, and it has been argued that representations of prison in TV and film shape public perceptions and are a major source of public knowledge of correctional institutions due to their lack of experience with the correctional system (Bennett, 2008). Prison stories first became popular through Hollywood films in the 1930s, and at that time, movies were one of the only sources available to the general public, giving individuals a glimpse into life behind prison walls (Cecil, 2019). Prisons can now be found in all facets of the media: through film, television, documentaries, and the news media, with each representation sending their own message about the hidden institutions and their role

in society (Cecil, 2019). Due to the abundance of prison representation in popular culture, many scholars have examined the impact of these images on audiences. However, according to Prior (2005), not all media has the same impact on individuals. For instance, the news is viewed as more accurate and trustworthy compared to other media, especially in present times where there is instantaneous access to a plethora of options (Prior, 2005). The new social media landscape allows individuals to be selective, while some may choose to watch prison films to be entertained, others may choose to read about correctional institutions in the news media in order to be informed (Prior, 2005). Therefore, individuals may be reliant on the news media as their main source of information regarding correctional issues due to the perception that the news is real and factual compared to popular culture.

When correctional institutions are in the news media, the depictions are often of extreme and unusual discrete events, such as riots, escapes, violence, and suicides which are deemed newsworthy by journalists and news organizations. These stories may be sensationalized or grossly inaccurate, and in the absence of alternative sources or factual information provided by prison officials, this can lead the public to hold distorted and limited views of correctional institutions (Levenson, 2001; Vickovic et al., 2013). As previously noted, the correctional system is the component of the criminal justice system that is least likely to be depicted in the news media compared to the others. If the news media is only informing the public about specific issues and discrete events, and in the absence of personal experience or other sources of information, the media directs the public about what issues are important and how to think or feel about the issues presented (Vickovic et al., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the content of messages in the media as they contribute to individual knowledge of prison, as well as the construction of myths, misconceptions, and stereotypes, many of which go unchallenged.

“Myths are statements or stories that embellish the truth. They are passed on from person to person, organizations to their members, and sometimes from generation to generation” (Ross, 2012, p. 409). Myths are not always arbitrary or false, but they may exaggerate or simplify particular aspects of reality, and are powerful windows into the beliefs of a society (Ross, 2003). “In all myths, there resides a kernel of truth. How that kernel germinates and proliferates and the intended and unintended consequences attached to proposed solutions determine its potency” (Kappeler & Potter 2005, p.359). Ross (2003) identified several components that he argued must be present for myths to be developed, particularly for criminal justice myths: persuasive presentation, following certain well-known themes, targeting unpopular groups in society, making victims appear helpless and innocent, and a means of disseminating the information. Myths need to be persuasively packaged and marketed, must exaggerate the magnitude of the problem so public attention can be sustained for prolonged periods, fear can be instilled, calls for institutional control can be made, and public support for institutional changes can be made: all are ingredients required for a myth to reach its full potential (Kappeler et al. 1996; Ross, 2003). Myths are often accepted by individuals in society without much concern or knowledge about the evidence that challenges them. Myths typically have roots in folklore and culture, and are often timeless (Ross, 2012). Myths serve numerous purposes in society: disguising the original intent of the person or organization who made the original communication, filling gaps in our knowledge of the world, and convincing the public of the virtues of the mythmaker (Kappeler & Potter 2005; Ross 2012).

The mass media, government officials, advocacy groups, and other organizations with sufficient means to lobby for their interests select criminal justice problems and focus attention on social issues, however, the largest and most powerful mythmakers in present society are the

mass media (Kappeler & Potter, 2005). “Mass communication is a formalized and institutionalized system of conveying messages to large groups of people. Rapid, electronic-based communication has replaced the much more slowly paced word of mouth and written communication” (Kappeler & Potter, 2005, p.5). The contemporary mass media has enabled unprecedented amounts of myths to spread with high speed; stories that were once restricted to small social groups can now be instantly disseminated to billions of people around the world, thus, technology has enhanced our ability to generate, refine, distribute, and reinforce myths (Kappeler & Potter, 2005). Kappeler and Potter (2005) discussed techniques of myth construction that are utilized by the media, government officials, and interest groups, and are worth examining in the context of news media representation of correctional institutions during a pandemic. Selective presentation of fact is a technique of myth construction that is often utilized in the news media. This involves presenting certain facts while excluding others, which helps strengthen a biased argument or angle that journalists wish to present (Kappeler & Potter, 2005). Selective interviewing is often used by journalists which involves interviewing one or two authorities on an issue or topic and presenting their opinions and statements as the generalized expert opinion on a given topic or area (Kappeler & Potter, 2005). While analyzing news media representation of prison, it is important to be mindful of the techniques of myth construction that may be utilized by the media, government officials, and interest groups.

Criminal justice myths and framing theory go hand in hand, working to construct our reality and influence opinions on crime and justice issues. After the initial panic or uproar surrounding a crime and justice myth subsides, we are left with a conceptual residue that becomes a frame of reference for determining our thoughts about a social issue, therefore, crime and justice myths become like mental filters through which social problems are sifted and sorted

(Kappeler & Potter, 2005). “Once a myth becomes entrenched in thought, it takes only an occasional incident to fan the smoldering embers of the latent myth into another flame of public attention” (Kappeler & Potter, 2005, p.358). Individuals are better able to interpret problems and myths of crime and justice if the mythmaker constructs new problems or events within the framework of previously constructed myths. Our historical frames of reference ensure that mythical conceptions of crime and justice issues live on even after the media storm on specific criminal justice issues has passed (Kappeler & Potter, 2005). It is evident that in our present world, the mass media is the main culprit for constructing myths as well as disseminating them globally, therefore, it is crucial that myths of crime and justice are examined and analyzed as they can cause real social effects.

There are many myths surrounding the criminal justice system, and although some myths are challenged occasionally, myths about prison are rarely challenged and analyzed as the average person is not likely to be overly concerned with issues in this field (Ross, 2012). When correctional myths are challenged, analyzing the myths are not easy; one may not have the suitable evidence to confront or debunk the myths due to correctional institutions being an invisible part of the criminal justice system, or the empirical information to counter-balance the myth is contradictory (Ross, 2012).

Ross (2012) examined numerous correctional myths and called them into question. Ross identified sixteen prominent and interrelated myths about prison, convicts, and correctional officers, and organized the myths into four categories. The categories included: A) quality of living conditions (cleanliness of correctional institutions, food quality, the appropriateness of health care, the presence and cost of certain amenities, access to educational programs and recreational opportunities, the frequency of sex and/or male rape), B) convicts (convicts’



physical appearance, prisoners' violent tendencies, inmates' guilt), C) correctional officers (correctional officers' lack of concern for inmates), and D) the effectiveness of the correctional sanction (the effectiveness of community corrections, the relationship between incarceration and crime rates, the cost of jails and prisons, the types and length of punishment for convicted criminals, prisoners' inability to be rehabilitated, the utility of jails and prisons as a deterrent to crime) (Ross, 2012, p.412).

The myths surrounding the quality of living conditions in correctional institutions are of particular relevance to this study of news media representation of prison during a pandemic. The general public tends to believe that prisons, as well as the living conditions within, are either too harsh or too lavish for incarcerated offenders. Ross (2012) asserted that although administrative areas within prisons are likely very clean, the cells and interior of the correctional institutions are often filthy, the lightening and ventilation may also be poor. Regarding the quality of healthcare, inmates are often thought to be given above average and completely free medical and dental care, however, Ross (2012) asserted prisoners are often denied much-needed medical attention, are often not permitted access to medications prescribed prior to their incarceration, there is a lack of psychologists and counsellors, and there is reason for inmates to worry about catching serious and possibly fatal diseases as correctional institutions are notoriously unhealthy places. Ross claimed that while many people believe that correctional institutions coddle inmates, especially because taxpayer dollars are spent on the institutions and amenities (free cable television, exercise equipment, quality education, medical, dental, and psychological services), this is not the case. When examining the myth of the uncaring disposition of correctional officers, or the 'sadistic prison guard' narrative, it is noted that many people believe that all officers are uncaring, they are characterized as being known for brutality, incompetence, low

intelligence, and indifference to human suffering (Ross, 2012). But while some correctional officers do resort to violence during incidents with inmates, most correctional officers use violence as a last resort and are interested in rehabilitating offenders (Ross, 2012; Weinrath, 2016). The belief among the general public that correctional institutions do not punish inmates severely enough is pertinent for this study (Ross, 2012). Ross argued that this is not necessarily the case, inmates often suffer serving their sentences, knowing their families are left in the community without them. Ross (2012) concluded by asserting that understanding correctional myths is important because it will help pave the way to meaningful attempts at correctional reform. Ultimately, work by Ross and others demonstrated that while there is some truth to the myths surrounding correctional institutions, there are also exaggerations and false information that is disseminated to the general public through news and popular cultural representations of the prison. It is crucial to examine the myths surrounding correctional institutions in the news media because these myths and misconceptions about this hidden part of the criminal justice system impacts public opinion surrounding prison and correctional issues. By understanding the representations in the news media, we can better understand public attitudes and opinions toward punishment (Bennett, 2006). In the section that follows, I examine literature on public opinion about punishment and correctional institutions, and the news media's role in socially constructing our views and understandings of punishment and prison.

## **2.4 Public Opinion about Punishment and Correctional Institutions**

Media outlets expose individuals around the globe to news, not only informing the public about key events but also impacting the public's attitudes and perceptions about the events that are covered, especially in the absence of personal experience or other sources of information (Vickovic et al., 2013). The general public rely on the media for much of their information, and

since the public is unacquainted with numerous aspects of the criminal justice system, the media is a main source of criminal justice related information (Mason, 2007). “This is particularly pertinent to prisons, where punishment remains hidden from public view and scrutiny. In this space between the reality of prison and public ignorance about it, lie the journalist and the media” (Mason, 2007, p.491). A survey conducted by Levenson (2001) revealed that the British general public are unacquainted with numerous aspects of the criminal justice system, and rely on the media for their information. Levenson’s study revealed only six percent of the general public considered their principal source of information to be inaccurate, therefore, examining media representations of prison, which ultimately contribute to public attitudes and opinions are particularly important considering they are the most hidden and invisible part of the criminal justice system. The literature on the media’s influence on the public’s attitude toward punishment and prison reveals that the media often portrays two contrasting representations of correctional institutions- as easy going ‘holiday camps’, or on the contrary, as dangerous and violent places, where there is a constant threat of violence and brutality (Marsh, 2009 p.370). Therefore, on the one hand, media representations often portray prisons as too soft and increase punitive attitudes toward inmates by representing them as inhumane and deserving of punishment. On the other hand, the representations can elicit empathy for inmates and view the criminal justice system as too harsh and dangerous (Vickovic et al., 2013). Since the news media socially constructs our reality through framing and agenda setting, they tell the public what issues are important and how to think and feel about these issues, therefore, this powerful process has a significant influence on the public’s opinions about the correctional system and criminal justice system in general (Vickovic et al., 2013).

Vasiljevic and Viki (2013) asserted the importance of public attitudes towards inmates

and the criminal justice system in general cannot be denied. The legitimacy of the criminal justice system depends on the willing participation of members in society, and their willingness to participate and support the criminal justice system depends heavily on their attitudes toward the criminal justice process (Wood & Viki, 2004; Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013). “Media images often conjure monstrous images of criminal savages that do not deserve public compassion. This perception of criminal offenders is not just a contemporary phenomenon; it has historical precedent” (Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013, p.3). The dehumanization of offenders started as early as 1876 with Cesare Lombroso arguing that criminals had physical and psychological anomalies and often referred to them as savages. This dehumanization process was characteristic of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013). If criminals are viewed as subhuman, non-reforming savages, public attitudes are likely to be negative towards offenders and result in highly punitive approaches to punishment; this can form a basis for justifying social and moral exclusion (Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013). Vasiljevic & Viki (2013) reviewed the literature and empirical research to date on dehumanization and moral exclusion, and argued that dehumanization can be related to public attitudes toward offenders. The authors asserted that to the extent that offenders are dehumanized, the general public are likely to support their punitive treatment. Therefore, this supports the notion that the news media representations of offenders have real effects on the public’s view of offenders, as well as punishment. Depending on how the media represents and constructs offenders, this can lead to increased punitive attitudes in the general public and can result in changes in policy, such as “tough on crime” approaches. On the other hand, if the media representations “humanize” offenders, this may lead to decreased punitive attitudes in the general public and may contribute to reform-oriented changes in policy.

Mason (2007) explored how prison and prisoners were constructed by the news media

and illustrated the process of misinformation and distortion that existed in the British press during October of 2005. Mason's work examined how news media stories constructed prisoners as high risk and dangerous to society, but at the same time represented prison as an easy form of punishment. Mason (2007) argued, "The mainstream press does not simply normalise prison, glossing over its underlying function as an instrument of pain delivery, but promote its use and expansion through misinformation and distortion about those in prison and the conditions to which they are subjected" (p. 482). Mason's (2007) analysis showed that the media described prisons as a "hotel" with soft conditions for the inmates who were incarcerated, and constructed dangerous prisoners as being given privileges justified by a soft criminal justice system. Mason concluded by asserting that the prison stories in the press are often misleading and frequently inaccurate, and that representations play a crucial role in public comprehension of prisons and punishment, as well as government policy.

Recent work by Cecil (2019) examined how after decades of 'get tough on crime policies' being enacted, many states were looking to reform prison policies that helped fuel mass incarceration in the United States, given that much research had demonstrated the devastating effects of mass incarceration on offenders, communities, and societies. Cecil (2019) examined news coverage of prisons in the *New York Times* between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2015 to determine whether correctional reform was being covered and how it was being addressed, and considered whether or not old concepts of prison newsworthiness were still most prominent. Cecil (2019) asserted public opinion research showed that the general population had become more accepting of prison reform ideas due to the shifting political climate in the United States. The public was more supportive of rehabilitation she argued, and less supportive of

mandatory minimum sentences and the war on drugs, and believed too many people were incarcerated for the wrong reasons.

Research had established that traditionally, media coverage of prison had been supportive of the tough on crime approach to policies that contributed to mass incarceration. Cecil's study examined if and how prison reform efforts were being covered by the news media, which ultimately, may contribute to the general public being more supportive of the reform efforts. As noted earlier, much of the news media coverage on prisons has focused on newsworthy, sensationalized, rare, discrete events. The news media focuses on single events that thrill readers such as riots, escapes, and cruel correctional officers, thus, the daily reality of prison is often left out which limits the public's understanding of the need for reform (Cecil, 2019). However, Cecil asserted a more recent literature review of prisons in the news has detected more frequent discussions of correctional reform. The Opportunity Agenda (2014) analyzed 89 news items from the first six months of 2013 and found that the public discourse on prison was moving more toward favoring reform, as the pro-reform stories outnumbered those against. Thus, it appeared that the conversation about prison in the United States news media was changing (Cecil, 2019).

The news media plays a powerful role in shaping the public's perceptions of prison and policy matters, and sets the public agenda by defining what issues are important and how we should think or feel about them. If the news media continues to frame the criminal justice system as being too lenient and utilize tough on crime frames, readers may be hesitant to consider prison reform. However, if reform discourse is common in the news media and potentially more common than tough on crime frames, the public will have a better understanding of prison issues and may be more supportive of prison reform (Cecil, 2019). Cecil (2019) asserted the most common type of reform was sentencing related, and many articles she reviewed also addressed

solitary confinement, court-related, and parole related reforms, rehabilitation and treatment, improvement of prison conditions, alternatives to prison, and reforms directed at special populations (Cecil, 2019). While reform efforts (systemic, or societal level issues) were in the news media, readers were still exposed to more articles reporting on traditional prison newsworthy items (discrete incidents), such as escapes, abuse, riots, and cruel guards, demonstrating the dangers of prison and the violence that occurs behind the walls, and contributing to the preservation of common correctional myths and stereotypes (Cecil, 2019). Cecil asserted that the news media coverage of prisons has shifted, and prison reform is now newsworthy for a few reasons: people in general have changed their views on the correctional system, they are more open to reform, therefore, articles covering reform will pique their interest more than before, and it reflects the changing political climate. Cecil noted President Obama was heavily involved in criminal justice reform, he was the first president to visit a prison and released 6,000 drug-offenders from federal prison under his administration, and when combined with the bipartisan nature of a reform movement that has been taking place at the federal level in many states, headlines are created (Cecil, 2019). Cecil's analysis demonstrated that while prison stories containing traditional newsworthy components are still being covered, reform discourse is being incorporated into the news media, therefore, altering the general public's opinion on prison and punishment. The results from Cecil's recent study justifies and validates the importance of examining news media representation of prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. If prison news has shifted toward more reform-oriented discourse, the pandemic may bring more awareness to correctional reform and issues such as problems with overcrowding, which may have been previously ignored. Like the shifting political context in the U.S. during the Obama

administration, the COVID-19 pandemic provides a new social context for understanding the conditions of incarceration that might lead to greater public sympathy for prisoners.

## **2.5 COVID-19 and its Potential Impact on Attitudes Toward Punishment and Prison**

The literature thus far has shown that in the past, the public has viewed correctional institutions and the criminal justice system as an inefficient system, one that is too lenient and soft on offenders while at the same time, popular culture has depicted prisons as harsh, dangerous, and violent places. News media representation of offenders and correctional institutions construct the general public's attitude toward prisons and the justice system, and if the media frames and represents offenders as less than human and prison as a faulty system, this can cause the public to be supportive of more punitive measures toward offenders, as well as create an overall unfavorable attitude toward correctional institutions (Vickovic et al., 2013). Cecil's (2019) recent work showed how within the last decade, there appears to be a shift in how the news media in the United States represents prisons and correctional issues due to changes in attitudes toward prisons and changes in the political climate in that nation. Cecil found that there is more coverage on prison reform, thus altering the general public's view of offenders and the correctional system.

If one considers the recent literature on the negative impacts of COVID-19 in prisons, the literature on social constructionism, framing theory, and how powerful the news media is when it comes to constructing our reality and understanding of correctional institutions and correctional issues, it is crucial to examine news media representations of prisons. My study examined if the news stories before and during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to and reinforced traditional myths surrounding correctional institutions and views on punishment, as well as uncovered whether the news media representations of inmates and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic



included prison reform frames. If now there is more of a focus on reform efforts and systemic/societal issues in the news media coverage compared to traditional prison newsworthy items focusing on discrete incidents, this may influence and alter the general public's opinion on correctional institutions and correctional issues, and ultimately, may lead to correctional reform.

Given the unique and serious threat of illness outbreaks in prisons, the COVID-19 pandemic has ignited the proposal and implementation of new, radical changes to criminal justice practices in order to reduce correctional admissions, such as: prosecutors using their discretion to decline to prosecute many low-level crimes, measures to decrease the number of people who are currently incarcerated, such as proposals to temporarily release inmates who were convicted of low-level offences, as well as radical voices calling for correctional institutions to be shut down altogether (Lyons, 2020). Lyons (2020) asserted, "The moral impetus to change justice system practices because of the threat of the pandemic is felt worldwide" (p. 3). Lyons (2020) discussed how prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were roughly 2.3 million people in jails and prisons in the United States; many of these people, roughly 470,000 were awaiting trial and thus not yet convicted of a crime. Lyons (2020) asserted that due to the poor conditions of correctional institutions (overcrowding, lack of social distancing, socio-economic disadvantaged inmates who may have pre-existing health conditions, poor health care), prisons in the United States and elsewhere have become hotspots for the virus. Lyons (2020) questioned whether punishment endured by inmates who are incarcerated under the present, non-ideal circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic can be morally justified due to the additional threat the virus presents to inmates' health and well being.

According to Lyons, there are two approaches to justifying legal punishment: retributivism and consequentialism. Retributive justifications of punishment draw on the notion

of desert, requiring that the state be justified in inflicting punishment on a person, as punishment is a deserved response to wrongdoing (Lyons, 2020). However, retributivists must also consider how much punishment the state is justified in inflicting and thus draw on principles of proportionality which require that the severity of a punishment be a function of the seriousness of the crime (Lyons, 2020). Consequentialists believe that punishment is not a deserved response to wrongdoing, but rather, we are justified in punishing people because it yields positive consequences: punishment can rehabilitate and incapacitate people, and deter them (both the individuals who are being punished but also the general public from committing crime). Thus, punishment is justified because although it imposes harm, it curbs crime and produces an overall good (Lyons, 2020). Much like retributivists, consequentialist theories of punishment must also account for proportionality and the severity of the punishment: they believe punishment is only justified to the extent that it achieves the greater good (Lyons, 2020). Lyons (2020) argued that when one draws on the standard conceptions of punishment justification and metrics of punishment severity, it is unjustifiable to incarcerate people during the present pandemic due to the increase in punishment severity in circumstances related to COVID-19.

Skolnik (2020) discussed the potential impacts of COVID-19 on three areas of criminal law: the scope of certain crimes, bail, and punishment. He argued the pandemic exposed the severity of problems such as overcriminalization, pre-trial detention, and disproportionate punishments that have plagued the criminal justice system for decades. “Due to COVID-19 outbreaks in detention centres, courts are rethinking whether pre-trial custody is necessary to maintain public confidence in the criminal justice system” (Skolnik, 2020, p.145). Skolnik (2020) also noted the pandemic is impacting sentences due to judges moving away from custodial punishment when possible, raising concerns for proportionality and retributive

justifications for punishment during the pandemic, but also beyond the pandemic. It has been noted that in general, pre-trial detention has many negative consequences: it incentivizes individuals to plead guilty, individuals who are remanded are more likely to be convicted at trial than those who were granted bail, they are subject to overcrowding and lack of rehabilitative programs, they risk losing their jobs, housing, and the ability to provide for their families, and many scholars argue pre-trial punishment flouts the presumption of innocence (Skolnik, 2020). COVID-19 compounds many of these problems, and adds more issues such as isolation and quarantine periods that bar access to amenities, overcrowding, and more adverse physical and mental health effects.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced courts to place greater emphasis on offenders' fundamental interests when interpreting the notion of "public confidence", which signals a shift towards a more "liberal and enlightened system of pre-trial release", and more liberal views on punishment (Skolnik, 2020, p. 171). It is noted that some courts have granted a "COVID credit" which results in an enhanced credit for pre-trial custody due to the harsher conditions presented as well as an increased risk of harm from contracting COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on prisons has resulted in courts rethinking how pandemic prison conditions fit within retributive theory and how it affects the proportionality of punishment (Skolnik, 2020). Skolnik (2020) argued the emergence of COVID-19 has forced courts to increasingly consider qualitative proportionality (the harshness of prison conditions) rather than focusing more on quantitative proportionality (the length of imprisonment) when justifying punishments in terms of retribution. Skolnik provides a useful conceptual framework for analysis of news media articles about prison during the pandemic. Using this framework, I assessed if news stories utilized retributive or proportionality frames which can provide insight into whether or not COVID-19 has changed the

way correctional myths and issues are taken up by the news media. Consequently, this may spur changes in public opinion about correctional institutions, punishment and the criminal justice system, which may in turn lead to changes in policy and prison reform efforts. I found there was a shift in news media coverage of prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a change in focus from traditional newsworthy events to prison reform.

In the following chapter, I explain the research methods used to investigate news representations of prison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic through a qualitative analysis and quantitative assessment of news coverage of correctional institutions during the two time periods.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

In order to examine news media construction and framing of prison during the COVID-19 pandemic, a qualitative content analysis was undertaken to answer the above noted research questions. A content analysis is a research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication (Lombard et al., 2002). As noted above, news media representations contribute to the social construction of crime, punishment, and broader criminal justice issues, constructing people's beliefs and attitudes (Surette, 2007). Media and popular culture sources are viewed as repositories of cultural knowledge which present ideas about crime and justice and create and reinforce a culture's shared understanding, therefore, a content analysis can be used to reveal a culture's stories about punishment and justice, appraising the meaning and messages contained within the media sources (Kort-Butler, 2003). The goal of a qualitative content analysis is to discover how materials communicate meaning. Qualitative content analysis not only tells how the story is presented but also reveals the manifest and latent meaning of stories by grounding them in the social world and the broader social processes by which meaning is produced (Kort-Butler, 2003). The manifest content of a story is directly seen by the consumer, such as the words used in a news item to describe prison. The latent content of a story refers to the underlying meaning, such as how the consumer understands and interprets the news item about prison. If one considers the questions this thesis seeks to answer, a qualitative content analysis is the most suitable method to better understand how the news media socially constructs prison.

In addition to the thematic method of analysis, the manifest content (or first order content) of news media articles was quantitatively assessed. News items published before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic were counted, compared, and analyzed

quantitatively to assess the magnitude and statistical significance of changes between news coverage during the two time periods. Latent content of the news items was analyzed thematically drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative model which they describe as a "method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). Holloway and Tordes (2003) acknowledged the importance of thematic analysis while conducting qualitative forms of analysis as it provides generic, core skills that are useful for conducting many forms of qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that since qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex, nuanced, and flexible, thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) further asserted that thematic analysis can be a social constructionist method which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences, and so on are effects of a range of discourses occurring within society. A thematic approach to the analysis allows the researcher to uncover how news media communicates meanings and messages about punishment and correctional institutions to the general public. Moreover, the analysis examines whether or not the coverage contributes to or challenges traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding punishment and prison, and whether the news media representation of prison has changed in other ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, news media coverage of prison during the COVID-19 pandemic may contain more critical coverage about prison reform issues rather than violence, riots or other disturbances in carceral contexts and focus less on discrete events, and more on systemic or societal issues impacting prisons.

Because this thesis focuses on Canadian news media coverage of COVID-19, it is important to establish a timeframe of the coronavirus in Canada. Before it received its name, COVID-19 was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) China office on December

31, 2019 as a “pneumonia of an unknown cause”, and roughly a week and a half later, WHO replaced pneumonia with “novel coronavirus” (Schneider, 2021, p.68). By the end of January 2020, the WHO issued an international public health emergency and on February 11, 2020, the new coronavirus was given its name: COVID-19 (Schneider, 2021). After roughly three months of intense epidemiological monitoring of COVID-19, on March 11, 2020, the WHO officially declared the global COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic (Redondo et al., 2020, Schneider, 2021, WHO, 2020a). Consequently, I utilized a sample consisting of news media articles from a two-year timeframe, March 1, 2019 to March 31, 2021, which included a year prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. I performed keyword searches in ProQuest Canadian Newsstream which provides access to all major Canadian newspapers. I limited the search to one national and one local newspaper. I selected Canada’s largest national newspaper: *The Globe and Mail*, because it has the largest circulation of any English language newspaper in Canada. It had an average daily circulation (print and digital) of 336,487 in 2015 (News Media Canada, n.d.). I selected one local newspaper as a comparison: the *Winnipeg Free Press*. I chose it because it is one of the largest independent newspapers in Canada and due to its large circulation, it has significant reach in Manitoba (Winnipeg Free Press, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. The *Winnipeg Free Press* had an average daily circulation (print and digital) of 106,473 in 2015, therefore, it has significant per capita coverage compared to other major daily newspapers in other Canadian cities (News Media Canada, n.d.). Due to my past employment at the Winnipeg Remand Centre, and my current employment with the Manitoba Justice Corrections Division, a local newspaper in Manitoba was selected as I am more familiar with the institutions and correctional issues in the province, and

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Winnipeg Free Press* describes itself as being an independent newspaper (<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/>). This is in contrast to other newspapers, such as the *Winnipeg Sun*, which is a chain newspaper owned by a Postmedia, headquartered in Toronto.

was therefore better able to perform more targeted searches. Using the online database, keyword searches were conducted for both the *Winnipeg Free Press* and *The Globe and Mail* with the following terms: “prison”, “jail”, “remand”, and “correctional institution”. More targeted keyword searches of specific correctional institutions were carried out to ensure more complete coverage. For example, I performed targeted searches for “Headingley Correctional Centre”, and “Stony Mountain Institution”. Headingley Correctional Centre and Stony Mountain Institution had major COVID-19 outbreaks compared to other Manitoba correctional institutions.

For the *Winnipeg Free Press* sample, I filtered the document type to only include news articles, editorials, commentary (coded as opinion), and news briefs. It is important to note there were opposite editorials (op-ed) in the sample that were coded as editorials. Editorials are opinion pieces submitted by the newspaper editorial board, while opposite editorials are generally produced by an author who is not affiliated with the newspaper and are often utilized to create thought and discussion among readers (Tapia, 2020). Several articles that were titled “Derived Headlines” or “In Brief” were classified as “news briefs”. The location was filtered to only include Canadian locations; all others were excluded. The resulting *Winnipeg Free Press* sample consisted of 548 news items. For *The Globe and Mail* article sample, the document type was filtered to only include news articles, editorials, commentary (coded as opinion), correspondence, interviews, and features. The location was filtered to only include Canadian locations; all others were excluded. The resulting sample consisted of 853 news items. The resulting samples were further scrutinized and extraneous and irrelevant news items were removed from further analysis. For example, news items about individual court cases were removed unless they discussed details about prison. News items involving wrongful conviction cases and trials were also excluded as they focused on the courts and trial system failures rather



than prison. In addition, news items that examined court and bail issues were excluded. News items selected for analysis were further limited to stories that focused on Canadian correctional issues as these items are most likely to contribute to the Canadian general public's socially constructed views and attitudes surrounding prison and punishment in Canada. Jewkes (2011) discussed how the news value proximity has both spatial and cultural dynamics, and asserted these factors often intertwine. "Spatial proximity refers to the geographical 'nearness' of an event, while cultural proximity refers to the relevance of an event to an audience" (Jewkes, 2011, p. 54). Therefore, news stories that are perceived to reflect the public's existing framework of values, beliefs, and interests as well as occur within the geographic proximity to them are most likely to be reported on and have the potential to be more impactful (Jewkes, 2011). It is for this reason that I restricted my analysis to Canadian news stories only. News items that only mentioned prison briefly were also excluded from the sample. For example, if an item was discussing COVID-19 outbreaks and there was a sentence in the article that mentioned a COVID-19 outbreak in a correctional institution, it was excluded as the main focus of the item was not on prison. News items that focused on Indigenous issues in general but only briefly mentioned prison were also excluded. For example, there were several news stories generally about Indigenous overrepresentation in the justice system that were excluded because these items did not focus primarily or significantly on prison or prison issues. In general, news items were considered to be primarily and significantly about prison issues if they contained "prison", "jail", or "corrections" in the title and/or they contained information about prison within the first two paragraphs of the article. All others were excluded as prison was deemed a secondary focus of the item, not the primary focus. All news media items were ordered chronologically to determine

if there were more stories during the COVID-19 pandemic or throughout specific periods during the pandemic, for example during the initial period of widespread lockdowns.

Once data were collected, cleaned and sorted, the total sample size was reduced to 104 *Winnipeg Free Press* news items, and 78 *Globe and Mail* news items that were primarily and significantly about prison issues. Next, a thematic qualitative content analysis of the 182 news media items commenced. Braun and Clarke (2006) laid out a template for thematic analysis consisting of six phases. Here, I describe those phases that were more pertinent to my analysis. Phase one involves familiarizing yourself with the data which consists of reading and re-reading the data, and making notes of initial ideas. While reading through and sorting the data, I made notes on various themes that were present in the news items. For example, news items discussing issues with segregation were prevalent in the sample. As I read through the news items, I identified recurrent themes that were consistent with the literature as well as new themes that were emerging from a careful reading of the data specific to my sample. Phase two consists of generating initial codes, such as coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the whole data set, and organizing data relevant to each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to define the rules set out for coding (how the words fit into the defined categories and why certain words do not) to ensure that all texts are coded consistently, allowing for more reliability. However, it is also important to be open to potential new categories and themes that emerge during the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While developing my coding system, I identified key words that would be coded in the themes that emerged through the initial reading of the data. As Corbin and Strauss (1990) point out, analysis and coding take place simultaneously. This phase involved coding for traditional prison newsworthy events and discrete events, such as deaths and escapes, as well as coding for discussions about prison reform

involving systemic/societal issues (whether reform was mentioned, types of reform mentioned). I took note of which Canadian regions were present in the news stories as well as any specific correctional institution that was mentioned. In addition, based on my review of the literature on crime and media, I took detailed notes about the news sources and claims makers that were cited in the news items. For example, Doyle (2006) noted that official sources like the police are relied upon heavily in the news. Consequently, I was attentive to how official sources figured into news coverage of prison. Following the literature on the social construction of crime in the media (e.g., Surette, 2007), I also took careful note of the content and rhetorical style of the claims made by sources cited in news stories, including whether linkages were used by claims makers to link issues within prisons to other established social problems. Phase three involves searching for themes, “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the dataset” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). This phase consisted of organizing codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme, and identifying which themes from the literature were absent. For example, as identified in the literature review, themes involving overcrowding, poor health care, isolation/segregation and the fluid movement of correctional officers were present in the articles during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, themes involving retribution as identified in the literature review were not present. Phase four consists of reviewing themes and checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reviewed the coding system I created with my supervisor before I began the analysis. For example, words such as “isolation”, “administrative segregation”, and “solitary confinement” were coded under the “issues with segregation” theme. As I read through the articles, I noticed new themes appearing which were then added, such as: deficiencies in the prison system,

inmates are violent, and the criminal justice system discriminates. During this stage, I also began the process of refining and reorganized themes and subcategories to better fit with the entire dataset. During phase five a thematic map is generated. This phase involves defining and naming themes, as well as refining the specifics of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The work during this phase continued the work of phase four and themes became better defined and more clearly named to reflect my evolving understanding of the entire data set. For example, I changed the name of the “faulty system frame” to the “prison reform/critical frame” as it was evident the news items coded for this frame were reform oriented. I referred back to the notes I took when I initially read through and sorted the sample and identified all the themes and frames that were present in my notes. There were various themes present in the articles that were identified in the literature review, such as themes involving prison reform, poor healthcare in prisons, correctional officers presented in a bad light (the ‘sadistic guard’ narrative), and the prison is dangerous theme. These themes from the literature were then merged and combined with themes I identified through my thematic analysis. The results were then named and grouped into a set of broad overarching themes/frames that each contained several smaller and more specific subthemes. The five overarching themes/frames created were: 1) prison reform/critical frame, 2) the racist system frame, 3) correctional officer (CO) related, 4) healthcare and COVID-19, and 5) traditional prison stereotypes. The number of subthemes within each theme/frame varied and were assigned a code (refer to the table below).

<b>Theme/Frame and Subthemes</b>	<b>Code</b>
<u>1) Prison Reform/Critical Frame</u>	
Issues with Segregation	1
Prison is too Harsh	2
Prison is Overcrowded/Overincarceration	3
Inmates are Suffering	4
Government is not Accountable	5
Humanize Inmates	6

Need for more Rehabilitation/Programs	7
Need for more Restorative Justice	8
Calls for Socio-Economic/Societal Change	9
Prison is Costly	10
Deficiencies in Prison System	11
<u>2) Racist System Frame</u>	
Overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples	1
Overrepresentation of Black People	2
Colonization/Systemic Issues	3
Need for more Culturally Appropriate Programs	4
Criminal Justice System Discriminates	5
<u>3) Correctional Officer (CO) Related Theme</u>	
CO in Bad Light	1
CO in Danger	2
CO in Good Light	3
COs are Suffering	4
<u>4) Healthcare and COVID Theme</u>	
Poor Healthcare in Prison (Including MH)	1
Prison is Dirty	2
Lack of PPE (Includes Sanitizer/Hygiene)	3
No Social Distancing	4
Poor Ventilation	5
Poor Nutrition	6
Changes in Prison System due to COVID-19	7
<u>5) Traditional Prison Stereotypes</u>	
Prison is Dangerous	1
Criminal Justice System is too Lenient	2
Prison is Invisible	3
Inmates are Violent	4

Following this step, I returned to the data and analyzed the news items utilizing the refined coding system I created. I assigned each theme/frame a different colour and highlighted the words in the news items while coding for the relevant themes/frames and subthemes. For example, the prison reform/critical frame was assigned as yellow, so when I identified words or phrases that reflected that frame, such as, “administrative segregation is cruel and unusual punishment”, I highlighted the words I assigned to code for that specific frame in yellow and

wrote the appropriate number code by the highlighted word, such as “1” – reflecting a specific focus on issues of segregation. If there were multiple themes and subthemes present in the news items, they were all coded and tabulated. For example, the statement, “administrative segregation is cruel and unusual punishment”, reflected two subthemes in the coding system: “1” – “issues with segregation” and “2” -- “prison is too harsh”. After each news item was coded, I entered the identified themes/frames and subthemes into a spreadsheet. Phase six of thematic analysis consists of writing up the results and is the final opportunity for analysis. This final phase involves selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, and the final analysis of the selected extracts while relating back to the research questions and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I selected various vivid and compelling extracts that exemplified each of the five broad categories/themes and illustrated the way the various subthemes played out in the data.

In addition to the qualitative content analysis, a quantitative content analysis was undertaken. A quantitative analysis is beneficial for examining mass print and media items, it provides a systematic process to categorize and organize data to find significant trends by the use of counts (Champion et al., 2016). Combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses can assist in mitigating the limitations of each approach, offering a more complete understanding and more confidence in the findings. For example, quantitative approaches offer more objectivity compared to qualitative approaches, while qualitative approaches allow the researcher to understand the symbolic content and meaning within the data. Additionally, my study not only assessed the meanings and messages within the news items, it also assessed the amount of prison news coverage before and during the pandemic. Thus, a quantitative analysis was undertaken to assess the degree of change pre- and post-COVID across the various themes/frames and subthemes. A chi-square analysis was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS). The themes/frames and subthemes were counted and compared between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe in order to see if there were substantive increases or decreases between the two time periods, and if any changes were statistically significant.

In this chapter I laid out my approach to the qualitative, thematic method of analysis of news media, and explained the steps I followed while conducting the analysis. In addition, I described how a thematic analysis can be a social constructionist method that allows me to uncover how news media communicate meanings and messages about punishment and correctional institutions to the general public. In the next chapter, I present the quantitative findings and examine the magnitude and direction of change between the overarching themes/frames and various subthemes that were present in the news items during the pre- and post-COVID timeframes, and provide analysis about why these changes occurred and how my results compare to the findings of prior research on the representation of the prison in news media.

## Chapter 4: Quantitative Findings

This chapter examines the quantitative findings from the thematic content analysis. The quantitative findings were organized and presented in tabular form. The first table summarizes various aspects of my sample (Table 4.1).

<i>Table 4.1 Prison Media Indicators</i>			
Variable	N	Valid %	
<b>Prison News Items</b>			
Pre-COVID	97	53.3	
Post-COVID	85	46.7	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>News Source</b>			
Winnipeg Free Press	104	57.1	
Globe and Mail	78	42.9	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>Number of Stories by Author</b>			
13-17 News Stories	46	25.3	
4-7 News Stories	19	10.4	
2-3 News Stories	32	17.6	
1 News Story	49	26.9	
None Specified	36	19.8	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>News Item Type</b>			
Editorial	14	7.7	
News Article	121	66.5	
News Brief	17	9.3	
Opinion	30	16.5	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>Region</b>			
Manitoba	96	52.7	
Other Prairie Region	3	1.6	
Central Canada	10	5.5	
West Coast	6	3.3	
Atlantic Provinces	3	1.6	
Multiple Regions	64	35.2	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>Institution</b>			
Manitoba Adult and Youth Prisons	83	45.6	
Prisons in Other Jurisdictions	35	19.2	
None Specified	64	35.2	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>COVID Related Story</b>			
Yes	53	29.1	
No	129	70.9	
Total	182	100.0	
<b>Traditional Newsworthy Event</b>			
Yes	106	58.2	
No	76	41.8	
Total	182	100.0	



<b>Systemic Issues</b>			
	Yes	120	65.9
	No	62	34.1
	Total	182	100.0
<b>Claims Makers</b>			
	Prison Officials/Spokesperson	53	29.1
	Government Officials/Politicians	73	40.1
	Lawyers/Legal Professionals	54	29.7
	Social Justice Advocates	42	23.1
	Prisoners/Families and Friends of Prisoners	22	12.1
	Other	84	46.2
Note: percentages of claims makers refer to the proportion of news items with claims makers of the various types			

News items published before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic were counted and compared. I hypothesized there would be more news items published after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the threat the virus presented in congregate living settings, however, this was not the case as just over fifty percent of the prison news stories were published before the official onset of the pandemic. There was a total of 97 news stories (55.3%) published before the COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the WHO, and a total of 85 news stories (46.7%) after. For the *Winnipeg Free Press* sample, there were 57 news items published during the pre COVID-19 timeframe, and 47 news items published after the pandemic was declared. For *The Globe and Mail* sample, there were 40 news items published during the pre COVID-19 timeframe, and 38 news items published after the pandemic was declared. This is consistent with preliminary research from Australia that was conducted by Whittaker (2021), which suggested that greater media coverage and visibility of prisons will not result from the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering this was the only study that I found while reviewing the literature on media coverage of prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic, I predicted that Canadian coverage may be different. The lack of media attention may be attributed to the general level of importance placed on prisons news by journalists. As previously noted, there is a lack of news media coverage of prisons in general (Doyle & Ericson, 1996; Chermak 1998; Ross, 2011). Once

the pandemic was declared, news media outlets may have deemed prison stories to be less newsworthy than before, focusing more on the COVID-19 pandemic in general and its impacts. After reviewing the literature, I speculate news media outlets may have felt the pandemic's impact on nursing homes and long-term care facilities was more newsworthy than the potential impact on prisons.

There were noteworthy differences between local and national news coverage of prison issues over the two-year sample timeframe. In total, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published 104 prison news items (57.1%), while *The Globe and Mail* published 78 news items (42.9%). Therefore, there were more local prison news items published than national news items. One reason for the preponderance of local coverage of prison issues can be attributed to the closing of the Dauphin Correctional Centre, a provincial jail located in Dauphin, Manitoba, a small city northwest of Winnipeg. There were 14 local news items published within the months leading up to the closure. Local news coverage of this issue focused mostly on economic and employment impacts to Dauphin. News reports about the closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre focused on eliminated employment opportunities, displaced families, and general adverse effects on the Dauphin economy. Additionally, the local news outlet published 17 prison stories involving traditional newsworthy events. For example, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published short news briefs when a death in custody or major assault occurred at a Manitoba provincial or federal prison. Since these events occur fairly frequently, this led to an overall larger number of stories in the local media. Conversely, *The Globe and Mail* did not publish short news briefs containing traditional prison newsworthy items such as deaths in custody, and instead focused on broader, systemic issues of national importance, such as issues with segregation in the correctional system.

The analysis revealed a distinct pattern of authorship of prison news stories in the local and national press. Roughly a quarter of the authors/journalists published 13-17 prison news stories (25.3%). According to Chermak (1998) and Ross (2011), news organizations often do not have a “prison beat”, however, this analysis suggests that some reporters may be assigned a “prison beat” as part of an overall crime and justice “beat”. Just over a quarter of authors in the sample published only one prison news story (26.9%). A little less than twenty percent of authors published 2-3 prison news stories (17.6%), and a little more than ten percent published 4-7 prison news stories (10.4%). Just under twenty percent of the news stories did not have an author specified (19.8%), such as editorials or anonymous opinion items. The concentration of authorship of prison news stories is important because as discussed by Kappeler and Potter (2005), reporters may utilize techniques of myth construction. For example, reporters may use selective interviewing and selective presentation by purposely choosing individuals to interview for a story on the basis of how well their opinions match the theme or angle that the reporter uses when presenting the story.

Differences in the type of news items published were discovered during the analysis. News articles were the most prevalent in the sample, accounting for roughly two-thirds of the news items (66.5%). Opinion items were the second most prevalent but accounted for just under twenty percent of the items (16.5%), followed by news briefs (9.3%) and editorials (7.7%), both accounting for just under ten percent of the sample.

The location of the story was coded according to regions in Canada. Where news items discussed more than one region, a multiple regions category was coded. Since the *Winnipeg Free Press* is a local newspaper, a category was created to code for news stories that focused specifically on Manitoba. Predictably, just over half of the news items in the entire sample

focused specifically on Manitoba (52.7%), while less than two percent (1.6%) of the news stories were from the other prairie regions (Saskatchewan and Alberta). Just over one third of the news items discussed multiple regions (35.2%). The other regions were identified in less than ten percent of the sample, Central Canada was identified in roughly five percent (5.5%), the West Coast (British Columbia) was identified in roughly three percent (3.3%), and the Atlantic Provinces in under two percent (1.6%). The Northern Territories region was not identified in any news items in the sample.

The analysis revealed noteworthy differences in prison institutions that were identified in the news items. Unsurprisingly, news items containing Manitoba adult and youth correctional facilities accounted for just under half of the sample (45.6%) due to the local newspaper sample. Almost twenty percent of the news items identified a prison in other jurisdictions across Canada (19.2%). A little over one third of the news items did not identify a specific correctional institution (35.2%). When news items discussed Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in general they were coded as “none specified”. News items that addressed issues with CSC as a whole rather than identifying specific institutions were common in *The Globe and Mail* sample.

The analysis identified news items that were related to COVID-19 in order to answer whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic would bring more attention to prison. If the news item mentioned COVID-19 in a sentence but was not a central part of the primary focus of the item, it was not coded as COVID-19 related. Roughly seventy percent of the news items were not COVID-19 related (70.9%), with just under thirty percent (29.1%) of COVID-19 related news items. Considering the sample of news items was over a two-year period with just over one-year pre-COVID and a little less than one-year post-COVID, it is notable that just under a third of the news items post-COVID were about the pandemic. The COVID related prison news items often

discussed correctional issues involving COVID-19, therefore, a large majority of these news items may have contributed to more awareness of prison issues. I hypothesized that the COVID-19 pandemic would bring more awareness and attention to prison and prison issues. It appears that many of the prison news items published after the pandemic did not directly focus on COVID-19. However, although COVID-19 was not the primary focus in the prison news items in the post-COVID sample, it may not necessarily mean that COVID-19 did not contribute to the awareness of the prison issues that were discussed in the news items. For example, a news item that did not mention COVID and focused on overincarceration may have not been deemed newsworthy before the pandemic, but was deemed newsworthy after the pandemic was declared. It may be beneficial for future research to explore this through interviews with journalists and media organizations.

News items were coded for traditional newsworthy events, such as deaths in custody, riots, escapes, and unique individual cases and events. As noted by Chermak (1998) and Cecil (2019), when correctional institutions are in the news media, the depictions are often of extreme and unusual discrete events, which are deemed newsworthy by journalists and news organizations. This was the case in my sample as well. More than half of the news items contained traditional newsworthy events (58.2%). The news items were also coded for systemic issues, such as the need for prison reform and issues with the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. Almost two thirds of the news items discussed systemic issues (65.9%). This was surprising because this was not identified in the prior literature. It is important to note 43 (23.6%) news items contained both traditional newsworthy events as well as systemic issues. For example, some news items discussed deaths in custody that occurred and also spoke to issues

with segregation and the need for reform in this area as the individuals who passed away in custody were in administrative segregation for long periods of time.

The analysis uncovered noteworthy differences in the types of claims makers that were quoted in the news items. As previously discussed, claims makers are sources quoted in news items that make assertions about the nature of social problems. Claims makers draw attention to certain conditions and can help shape our understanding of what the conditions mean by offering an explanation or analysis (Surette, 2007). There were numerous different types of claims makers quoted in the sample. Six broad categories were created to reflect the most common types. Government officials/politicians were the most common claims makers in the news, appearing in just over forty percent (40.1%) of news items. Lawyers/legal professionals (29.7%) and prison officials/spokespersons (29.1%) both appeared in just under a third of news items, followed by social justice advocates who appeared in just under a quarter (23.1%) of news items. Prisoners and families and friends of prisoners were cited in just over twelve percent (12.1%) of the news items in the sample. The 'other' category consisted of a range of sources including professors, correctional officers, members of the public, unions, prison volunteers, students, and was coded for unsigned editorials where the newspaper itself was making the claim. Just under half of the news items (46.2%) were included in the 'other' category. It is noted in the literature that there is a lack of correctional representatives who offer official sources of information to the news media compared to other areas of the justice system, such as the police (Doyle & Ericson 1996). This brief overview highlights the lack of claims making by prison officials and spokespersons. A more detailed analysis of claims makers and their claims making will be presented in the following chapter.

Table 4.2 shows the frequency of the overarching themes, frames and subthemes that were identified in the sample of news items.

<i>Table 4.2. Prison Reform/Critical, Racist System and Correctional Officer, Healthcare and, Prison Stereotype Frames/Themes and Subthemes</i>					
Variable	N	Valid %	Variable	N	Valid %
<b>Prison Reform/Critical Frame</b>			<b>Correctional Officer (CO) Related Theme</b>		
<b>Stories of Prison Reform/Critical of Prison</b>			<b>CO Related Stories</b>		
Yes	142	78.0	Yes	64	35.2
No	40	22.0	No	118	64.8
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Subthemes of Prison Reform/Critical Frame</b>			<b>Subthemes of CO Related</b>		
<b>Issues with Segregation</b>			<b>CO in Bad Light</b>		
Yes	42	23.1	Yes	14	7.7
No	140	76.9	No	168	92.3
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Prison is Too Harsh</b>			<b>CO in Danger</b>		
Yes	54	29.7	Yes	38	20.9
No	128	70.3	No	144	79.1
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Prison is Over-Crowded</b>			<b>CO in Good Light</b>		
Yes	30	16.5	Yes	6	3.3
No	152	83.5	No	176	96.7
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Inmates are Suffering</b>			<b>COs are Suffering</b>		
Yes	79	43.4	Yes	22	12.1
No	103	56.6	No	160	87.9
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Government is not Accountable</b>			<b>Healthcare and COVID Theme</b>		
Yes	61	33.5	<b>Stories of Healthcare and COVID</b>		
No	121	66.5	Yes	69	37.9
Total	182	100.0	No	113	62.1
<b>Humanize Inmates</b>			Total		
Yes	16	8.8	182		
No	166	91.2	<b>Subthemes of Healthcare and COVID</b>		
Total	182	100.0	<b>Poor Healthcare in Prison (Includes MH)</b>		
<b>Need for more Rehabilitation/Programs</b>			Yes		
Yes	39	21.4	34		
No	143	78.6	18.7		
Total	182	100.0	No		
<b>Need for more Restorative Justice</b>			148		
Yes	21	11.5	81.3		
No	161	88.5	Total		
Total	182	100.0	182		
<b>Calls for Socio-Economic/Societal Change</b>			<b>Prison is Dirty</b>		
Yes	11	6.0	Yes	10	5.5
No	171	94.0	No	172	94.5
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Prison is Costly</b>			<b>Lack of PPE (Includes Sanitizer/Hygiene)</b>		
Yes	29	15.9	Yes	11	6.0
No	153	84.1	No	171	94.0
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Deficiencies in Prison System</b>			<b>No Social Distancing</b>		
Yes	76	41.8	Yes	18	9.9
No	106	58.2	No	164	90.1
Total	182	100.0	Total	182	100.0
<b>Racist System Frame</b>			<b>Poor Ventilation</b>		
<b>Stories of Racist System</b>			Yes		
Yes	36	19.8	3		
No	146	80.2	1.6		
Total	182	100.0	No		
<b>Subthemes of Racist System Frame</b>			179		
<b>Overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples</b>			Total		
Yes	25	13.7	182		
No	157	86.3	<b>Poor Nutrition</b>		
Total	182	100.0	Yes		
<b>Overrepresentation of Black Peoples</b>			3		
Yes	9	4.9	1.6		
No	173	95.1	No		
Total	182	100.0	179		
<b>Colonization/Systemic Issues</b>			Total		
Yes	12	6.6	182		
No	170	93.4	<b>Changes in Prison System due to COVID</b>		
Total	182	100.0	Yes		
<b>Traditional Prison Stereotypes Theme</b>			37		
<b>Stories of Traditional Prison Stereotypes</b>			30.3		
Yes	87	47.8	No		
No	95	52.2	145		
Total	182	100.0	Total		
<b>Subthemes of Traditional Prison Stereotypes</b>			182		
<b>Prison is Dangerous</b>			<b>Traditional Prison Stereotypes Theme</b>		
Yes	73	40.1	<b>Stories of Traditional Prison Stereotypes</b>		
No	109	59.9	Yes		
Total	182	100.0	87		
<b>Criminal Justice System is too Lenient</b>			No		
Yes	9	4.9	95		
No	173	95.1	Total		
Total	182	100.0	182		

<b>Need for more Culturally Appropriate Programs</b>			No	173	95.1
Yes	13	7.1	Total	182	100.0
No	169	92.9	<b>Prison is Invisible</b>		
Total	182	100.0	Yes	2	1.1
<b>Criminal Justice System Discriminates</b>			No	180	98.1
Yes	19	10.4	Total	182	100.0
No	163	89.6	<b>Inmates are Violent</b>		
Total	182	100.0	Yes	37	20.3
			No	145	79.7
			Total	182	100.0

The prison reform/critical frame was present in just under eighty percent of the news items (78.0%). This frame had the largest number of subthemes compared to any other overarching theme or frame; there were eleven subthemes in total. The most prevalent subthemes were “inmates are suffering” (43.4%) and “deficiencies in prison system” (41.8%), identified in over forty percent of the news items. The “government is not accountable” subtheme was present in roughly one third of the news items (33.5%), followed by “prison is too harsh”, which was identified in a little less than one third of the news items (29.7%). The “issues with segregation” subtheme (23.1%) and the “need for more rehabilitation/programming” subtheme (21.4%) were both present in more than one fifth of the news items. The remaining subthemes: “prison is overcrowded”, “humanize inmates”, “need for more restorative justice”, “calls for socio-economic/societal change”, and “prison is costly”, were identified in less than twenty percent of the news items.

The racist system frame (e.g., Surette 2007) was present in a little less than twenty percent (19.8%) of the news items, which was surprising as it was identified in the literature as a common frame, particularly in the United States. The racist system frame contained five subthemes, the most prevalent being the “overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples” which was present in 13.7% of the news items. “Criminal justice system discriminates” followed with just over ten percent (10.4%), and all the remaining subthemes: “overrepresentation of Black



peoples”, “colonization/systemic issues”, and “need for more culturally appropriate programs”, were identified in less than ten percent of the news items.

The correctional officer (CO) related theme was identified in just over a third of the news items (35.2%). Out of the four subthemes, the “CO in danger” subtheme was the most prevalent; it was identified in just over one fifth of the news items (20.9%), followed by the “COs are suffering” subtheme (12.1%). The remaining subthemes, “CO in bad light” and “CO in good light”, were present in less than ten percent of the sample. The results ran counter to what was expected based on the review of previous research. The “CO in bad light” subtheme was identified in the literature as being a common theme in prison related news stories and popular culture, however, it was only present in 7.7% of the news items.

The healthcare and COVID theme was identified in just over one third of the news items (37.9%). Of the seven subthemes, “changes in prison system due to COVID” was the most prevalent and was identified in just more than thirty percent of the news items (30.3%), followed by the “poor healthcare in prison” subtheme which was present in less than twenty percent of the news items (18.7%). The “no social distancing” subtheme was identified in just under ten percent (9.9%) of the sample. The rest of the healthcare and COVID subthemes: “prison is dirty”, “lack of PPE”, “poor ventilation”, and “poor nutrition”, were infrequent and accounted for six percent or less of the sample. This was unexpected as the “prison is dirty” subtheme was identified in the literature as a common theme (Ross, 2012).

Lastly, the traditional prison stereotypes theme was identified in just under half of the news items. The “prison is dangerous” subtheme was the most prevalent out of the four subthemes, and it was present in slightly more than forty percent (40.1%) of the news items. The “inmates are violent” subtheme was the next most prevalent subtheme; it was identified in

approximately twenty percent (20.3%) of the news items. Both of these two subthemes were expected to be prevalent as it was identified in the literature that traditional prison newsworthy items tend to focus on discrete events such as deaths in custody, riots, or incidents of violence. The remaining two subthemes, “prison is invisible” and “criminal justice system is too lenient”, were identified in less than five percent of the sample. The “criminal justice system is too lenient” subtheme was identified in the literature as being a common theme in the news media, however, this was not the case in the sample. A reason for this may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. News media outlets may not have framed the justice system as too lenient due to the additional health risks associated for inmates living in congregate living settings during the pandemic.

A contingency table and chi-square analysis was undertaken to determine if there was an increase or decrease in overarching themes, frames, and subthemes in the pre-COVID and post-COVID samples, determine the magnitude of the difference and assess if the variation was statistically significant. Tables 4.3-4.7 outline cross-tabulations of the news items and the results will be examined in detail below.

The prison reform/critical frame (Table 4.3) showed a modest increase of 10.3% in news items containing this frame after the pandemic was declared. It was significant at  $p < .09$ , slightly lower than the usual  $p < .05$  standard but this estimate is limited by sample size ( $\chi^2 = 2.82, 1 df$ ). This change was in the predicted direction as I hypothesized the COVID-19 pandemic may bring more awareness and attention to prison issues that have plagued the corrections system for decades, resulting in more calls for prison reform. When examining the subthemes, there are some very pronounced differences between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. In particular, there is a moderate difference in the “prison is costly” subtheme, as there was a 25.4%

decrease in news items which reflected the high cost of prison once the pandemic was declared ( $\chi^2=21.96, 1 df, p<.001$ ). It appears the issue with the high cost of prisons was more newsworthy before the pandemic was declared, and that the pandemic may have shifted topics that are considered newsworthy. Consistent with this, there was a significant increase in the “prison is overcrowded” subtheme, as the presence of this subtheme increased by a moderate 17.7% after the pandemic was declared ( $\chi^2=21.96, 1 df, p<.001$ ). This was to be expected due to the way the COVID-19 virus is transmitted, because overcrowded prisons would increase the likelihood of the transmission and spreading of COVID-19. Additionally, there was a significant increase in the “inmates are suffering” subtheme, as there was a moderate 15.7% increase in the reporting of this subtheme after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared ( $\chi^2=4.54, 1 df, p<.05$ ). This was anticipated given concerns from prisoners and the family and friends of prisoners once there were COVID-19 outbreaks in correctional institutions.

There were several other subthemes that showed moderate effects that were statistically significant. However, these effects were opposite to the predicted direction. There was a moderate 13.7% decrease in the “need for more rehabilitation/programs” subtheme between the pre- and post-COVID timeframe ( $\chi^2=5.06, 1 df, p<.05$ ). This may have been due to the suspension of certain programs due to COVID-19. The “issues with segregation” subtheme was significantly less likely to be reported after the pandemic was declared as there was a moderate 12.4% decrease post-COVID ( $\chi^2=3.92, 1 df, p<.05$ ). This may be due to the fact that inmates were placed in isolation for their own protection from COVID-19, and some inmates may have requested to be placed in segregation rather than reside in general population units where there is an increased likelihood of COVID-19 transmission.

The prevalence of the “prison is too harsh” subtheme increased by 6.1% after the pandemic was declared, however, this minimal difference was not statistically significant. The slight increase might be attributed to the added risk of contracting COVID-19 while in custody. The “government is not accountable” subtheme saw a slight increase of 5.6% in the post-COVID period, but this was not statistically significant. This negligible increase may be attributed to the COVID-19 outbreaks that were declared in prisons and the outcries from prisoners and their families for the government to do more to reduce the risk of transmission. There was a non significant 4.7% decrease in the “calls for socio-economic/societal change” subtheme, as well as a non significant 4% decrease in the “need for more restorative justice” subtheme in the post-pandemic time period. The “humanize inmates” subtheme saw a 1.2% increase, the “deficiencies in prison system” subtheme saw a slight 1.1% decrease post-COVID, both minimal differences were non significant.

*Table 4.3 Pre and Post COVID and Themes*

Variable		<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
<b><u>Prison Reform/Critical Frame</u></b>					
<b>Stories of Prison Reform/Critical Frame</b>					
	No	26	14	40	
		26.8	16.5	22.0	
	Yes	71	71	142	
		73.2	83.5	78.0	
	Total	97	85	182	2.82 <sup>a</sup>
<b><u>Subthemes of Prison Reform/Critical Frame</u></b>					
<b>Issues with Segregation</b>					
	No	69	71	140	
		71.1	83.5	76.9	
	Yes	28	14	42	
		28.9	16.5	23.1	
	Total	97	85	182	3.92*
<b>Prison is Too Harsh</b>					
	No	71	57	128	
		73.2	67.1	70.3	
	Yes	26	28	54	
		26.8	32.9	29.7	
	Total	97	85	182	.82
<b>Prison is Over-Crowded</b>					
	No	89	63	152	
		91.8	74.1	83.5	
	Yes	8	22	30	

Table 4.3 Pre and Post COVID and Themes

Variable		Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	All	$\chi^2$
<b>Inmates are Suffering</b>	Total	8.2 97	25.9 85	16.5 182	10.23***
	No	62 63.9	41 44.2	103 56.6	
	Yes	35 36.1	44 51.8	79 43.4	
<b>Government Is Not Accountable</b>	Total	97	85	182	4.54*
	No	67 69.1	54 63.5	121 66.5	
	Yes	30 30.9	31 36.5	61 33.5	
<b>Humanize Inmates</b>	Total	97	85	182	.63
	No	89 91.8	77 90.6	166 91.2	
	Yes	8 8.2	8 9.4	16 8.8	
<b>Need for more Rehabilitation/Programs</b>	Total	97	85	182	.08
	No	70 72.2	73 85.9	143 78.6	
	Yes	27 27.8	12 14.1	39 21.4	
<b>Need for more Restorative Justice</b>	Total	97	85	182	5.06*
	No	84 86.6	77 90.6	161 88.5	
	Yes	13 13.4	8 9.4	21 11.5	
<b>Calls for Socio-Economic/Societal Change</b>	Total	97	85	182	.707
	No	89 91.8	82 96.5	171 94.0	
	Yes	8 8.2	3 3.5	11 6.0	
<b>Prison is Costly</b>	Total	97	85	182	1.78
	No	70 72.2	83 97.6	153 84.1	
	Yes	27 27.8	2 2.4	29 15.9	
<b>Deficiencies in Prison System</b>	Total	97	85	182	21.96***
	No	56 57.7	50 58.8	106 58.2	
	Yes	41 42.3	35 41.2	76 41.8	
Total	97	85	182	.02	

Note: <sup>a</sup>p<.09 \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

Reported p values are the Pearson's Chi Square test asymptotic 2-sided significance.

The racist system frame showed a very minimal increase of 0.4% during the period after the pandemic was declared, and the change was not statistically significant (Table 4.4). The only subtheme that showed a statistically significant change between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe was the “need for more culturally appropriate programming” subtheme, and even this difference was small, an 8.9% decrease ( $\chi^2 = 5.52, 2 df, p < .05$ ). Much like the “need for more rehabilitation/programming” subtheme, this decrease may be due to the precautionary suspension of certain programs due to COVID-19 and attempts to reduce the spread of the virus. Inmates’ health and well being may have been viewed by news outlets as more important to focus on rather than their access to programs during the pandemic.

The rest of the subthemes: “overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples”, “overrepresentation of Black peoples”, “criminal justice system discriminates”, and “colonization/systemic issues” showed minor differences that were not statistically significant. Overall, the racist system frame and its subthemes did not show much difference between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframes. This was unexpected as the racist system frame was identified in the literature as being a common frame utilized by the news media, especially considering the high rates of incarceration of Indigenous peoples, especially in the prairie region of Canada.

Variable		Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	All	$\chi^2$
<b><u>Racist System Frame</u></b>					
<b>Stories of Racist System Frame</b>					
	No	78	68	146	
		80.4	80.0	80.2	
	Yes	19	17	36	
		19.6	20.0	19.8	
	Total	97	85	182	.01
<b><u>Subthemes of Racist System Frame</u></b>					
<b>Overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples</b>					
	No	86	71	157	
		88.7	83.5	86.3	

*Table 4.4 Pre and Post COVID and Themes*

Variable		<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
<b>Overrepresentation of Black Peoples</b>	Yes	11	14	25	1.01
		<i>11.3</i>	<i>16.5</i>	<i>13.7</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	
	No	94	79	173	
<b>Colonization/Systemic Issues</b>		<i>96.9</i>	<i>92.9</i>	<i>95.1</i>	1.52
	Yes	3	6	9	
		<i>3.1</i>	<i>7.1</i>	<i>4.9</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	
<b>Need for more Culturally Appropriate Programs</b>	No	91	79	170	5.52*
		<i>93.8</i>	<i>92.9</i>	<i>93.4</i>	
	Yes	6	6	12	
		<i>6.2</i>	<i>7.1</i>	<i>6.6</i>	
<b>Criminal Justice System Discriminates</b>	No	86	83	169	.18
		<i>88.7</i>	<i>97.6</i>	<i>92.9</i>	
	Yes	11	2	13	
		<i>11.3</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>7.1</i>	
<b>Criminal Justice System Discriminates</b>	Total	97	85	182	5.52*
	No	86	77	163	
		<i>88.7</i>	<i>90.6</i>	<i>89.6</i>	
	Yes	11	8	19	
<b>Criminal Justice System Discriminates</b>		<i>11.3</i>	<i>9.4</i>	<i>10.4</i>	.18
	Total	97	85	182	

The correctional officer (CO) related theme (Table 4.5) showed a moderate increase of 13.5% and was significant at  $p < .09$ , slightly lower than the usual  $p < .05$  standard ( $\chi^2 = 3.61, 1 df$ ). As noted earlier, this estimate is limited by sample size, but the size of the difference and the fact it is in the predicted direction merits attention. When looking at certain subthemes, there are several substantive and statistically significant differences. The “CO in danger” subtheme showed a moderate significant increase of 13.8% ( $\chi^2 = 5.22, 1 df, p < .05$ ) along with the “CO in bad light” subtheme ( $\chi^2 = 6.19, 1 df, p < .05$ ), which displayed a modest increase of 9.8% between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. The “CO in danger” subtheme difference might be attributed to the added threat of contracting the COVID-19 virus while performing their duties in prison, as well as news items reporting on outbreaks that occurred in prisons and the statistics

regarding COVID-19 positive correctional officers. The “CO in bad light” subtheme increase might be attributed to prisoners in the news media making negative claims about correctional officers, such as that they are not wearing their appropriate PPE, that they are not taking their COVID-19 symptoms seriously, and that they are potentially going to bring the COVID-19 virus into the prison. However, the “CO in good light” subtheme and the “COs are suffering” subtheme did not show a significant difference when comparing the pre- and post-pandemic news items. This was not surprising for the “CO in good light” subtheme; it was noted in the literature that correctional officers are generally portrayed in news items in a negative light.

Variable		<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
<b><u>Correctional Officer (CO) Related Theme</u></b>					
<b>Stories of CO Related Theme</b>					
	No	69	49	118	
		<i>71.1</i>	<i>57.6</i>	<i>64.8</i>	
	Yes	28	36	64	
		<i>28.9</i>	<i>42.4</i>	<i>35.2</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	3.61 <sup>a</sup>
<b><u>Subthemes of CO Related Theme</u></b>					
<b>CO in Bad Light</b>					
	No	94	74	168	
		<i>96.9</i>	<i>87.1</i>	<i>92.3</i>	
	Yes	3	11	14	
		<i>3.1</i>	<i>12.9</i>	<i>7.7</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	6.19*
<b>CO in Danger</b>					
	No	83	61	144	
		<i>85.6</i>	<i>71.8</i>	<i>79.1</i>	
	Yes	14	24	38	
		<i>14.4</i>	<i>28.2</i>	<i>20.9</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	5.22*
<b>CO in Good Light</b>					
	No	94	82	176	
		<i>96.9</i>	<i>96.5</i>	<i>96.7</i>	
	Yes	3	3	6	
		<i>3.1</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>3.3</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	.03
<b>COs are Suffering</b>					
	No	85	75	160	
		<i>87.6</i>	<i>88.2</i>	<i>87.9</i>	
	Yes	12	10	22	
		<i>12.4</i>	<i>11.8</i>	<i>12.1</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	.02



<i>Table 4.5 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</i>				
<b>Variable</b>	<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
Note: <sup>a</sup> p<.09 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Reported p values are the Pearson's Chi Square test asymptotic 2-sided significance values.				

The healthcare and COVID theme saw a large 43.7% increase in healthcare and COVID related stories after the pandemic was declared, and this was a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 36.67, 1 df, p < .001$ ) in reporting during the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe (Table 4.6). This was to be expected as there would only be COVID-19 related stories after the pandemic was declared, and the pandemic was expected to place more of a focus on the quality of healthcare in prisons. Several subthemes showed significant differences between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. The “changes in prison system due to COVID” subtheme showed a large change from 0% to 43.5% between the two timeframes ( $\chi^2 = 53.00, 1 df, p < .001$ ). This was expected considering it was specifically measuring COVID-19 related changes, there were no news items in the pre-COVID timeframe as the pandemic had yet to be declared. Additionally, the “no social distancing” subtheme was not present in any pre-COVID articles which was also expected. There was a moderate change from 0% to 21.2% in the post-COVID timeframe which was significant ( $\chi^2 = 22.80, 1 df, p < .001$ ). This change was expected as there was no need for social distancing in prisons prior to the pandemic. For the “lack of PPE” subtheme, it was only reported in 1% of the news items pre-COVID, and after the pandemic was declared this subtheme increased to 11.8% of news items, which was an expected small increase that was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 9.19, 1 df, p < .01$ ) as PPE is crucial to lessen the spread of COVID-19.

While the remaining subthemes did not display any statistically significant differences, some of the differences reported were of note. The “poor healthcare in prison” subtheme showed

a modest 6.9% increase between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. This may be linked to the “issues with segregation” and “prison is too harsh” subthemes as there was discussion in the news items about the poor healthcare and mental health resources in prison and more specifically, administrative segregation. Therefore, there was already attention brought to this subtheme in the news items in the pre-COVID period for reasons other than COVID-19. The “prison is dirty” subtheme showed a small 5.1% increase after the pandemic was declared; however, this small difference was not statistically significant. This subtheme was identified in the literature as being present in news items before the pandemic occurred, so it was somewhat surprising that there wasn’t a larger increase after the pandemic was declared as public health recommended an increase in sanitizing and cleaning communal spaces to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The most surprising out of the subthemes that showed no statistically significant difference was the “poor ventilation” subtheme. This subtheme was not significantly different pre- and post- pandemic, showing only a modest 1.4% increase. It is also important to note that this subtheme was only present in a total of three news items, and considering the airborne transmission of COVID-19, the low prevalence was unexpected. The “poor nutrition” subtheme showed the least difference, with a 0.9% decrease. However, only three news items contained this subtheme, I predicted this subtheme would be more prevalent considering it was identified in the literature.

*Table 4.6 Pre and Post COVID and Themes*

Variable	<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
<b>Healthcare and COVID Theme</b>				
<b>Stories of Healthcare and COVID</b>				
No	80	33	113	
	82.5	38.8	62.1	
Yes	17	52	69	
	17.5	61.2	37.9	

Variable		Pre-Covid	Post-Covid	All	$\chi^2$
	Total	97	85	182	36.67***
<b>Subthemes of Healthcare and COVID Theme</b>					
<b>Poor Healthcare in Prison (Includes MH)</b>					
	No	82 84.5	66 77.6	148 81.3	
	Yes	15 15.5	19 22.4	34 18.7	
	Total	97	85	182	1.42
<b>Prison is Dirty</b>					
	No	94 96.9	78 91.8	172 94.5	
	Yes	3 3.1	7 8.2	10 5.5	
	Total	97	85	182	2.31
<b>Lack of PPE</b>					
	No	96 99.0	75 88.2	171 94.0	
	Yes	1 1.0	10 11.8	11 6.0	
	Total	97	85	182	9.19**
<b>No Social Distancing</b>					
	No	97 100.0	67 78.8	164 90.1	
	Yes	0 0.0	18 21.2	18 9.9	
	Total	97	85	182	22.80***
<b>Poor Ventilation</b>					
	No	96 99.0	83 97.6	179 98.4	
	Yes	1 1.0	2 2.4	3 1.6	
	Total	97	85	182	.49
<b>Poor Nutrition</b>					
	No	95 97.9	84 98.8	179 98.4	
	Yes	2 2.1	1 1.2	3 1.6	
	Total	97	85	182	.22
<b>Changes in Prison System due to COVID</b>					
	No	97 100.0	48 56.5	145 79.7	
	Yes	0 0.0	37 43.5	37 20.3	
	Total	97	85	182	52.00***

Note: <sup>a</sup>p<.09 \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.  
Reported p values are the Pearson's Chi Square test asymptotic 2-sided significance.

Lastly, the traditional prison stereotypes theme showed a moderate significant increase of 20.7% ( $\chi^2=7.76$ , 1 *df*,  $p<.01$ ) between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe (Table 4.7).

This increase may be attributed in particular to the “prison is dangerous” subtheme, which saw a moderate increase in news items in the post pandemic period of 21.9% over the pre pandemic proportions ( $\chi^2=9.02$ , 1 *df*,  $p<.01$ ). The increase is not surprising as the COVID-19 pandemic created more dangers to inmates and staff in relation to contracting COVID-19. News items that discussed COVID outbreaks in prison were coded for this subtheme as the virus is considered a threat to one’s health and wellbeing. The “inmates are violent” subtheme showed a moderate 11.7% decrease in news coverage in the post pandemic period, but it did not reach statistical significance. The “criminal justice system is too lenient” subtheme and the “prison is invisible” subtheme did not show a significant difference in reporting during the timeframe.

*Table 4.7 Pre and Post COVID and Themes*

Variable		<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
<b>Traditional Prison Stereotypes Theme</b>					
<b>Stories of Traditional Prison Stereotypes</b>					
	No	60	35	95	
		<i>61.9</i>	<i>41.2</i>	<i>52.2</i>	
	Yes	37	50	87	
		<i>38.1</i>	<i>58.8</i>	<i>47.8</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	7.76**
<b>Prison is Dangerous</b>					
	No	68	41	109	
		<i>70.1</i>	<i>48.2</i>	<i>59.9</i>	
	Yes	29	44	73	
		<i>29.9</i>	<i>51.8</i>	<i>40.1</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	9.02**
<b>Criminal Justice System is too Lenient</b>					
	No	92	81	173	
		<i>94.8</i>	<i>95.3</i>	<i>95.1</i>	
	Yes	5	4	9	
		<i>5.2</i>	<i>4.7</i>	<i>4.9</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	.02
<b>Prison is Invisible</b>					
	No	96	84	180	
		<i>99.0</i>	<i>98.8</i>	<i>98.9</i>	
	Yes	1	1	2	
		<i>1.0</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>1.1</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	.009
<b>Inmates are Violent</b>					
	No	72	73	145	
		<i>74.2</i>	<i>85.9</i>	<i>79.7</i>	
	Yes	25	12	37	
		<i>25.8</i>	<i>14.1</i>	<i>20.3</i>	
	Total	97	85	182	3.800 <sup>a</sup>

<i>Table 4.7 Pre and Post COVID and Themes</i>				
<b>Variable</b>	<i>Pre-Covid</i>	<i>Post-Covid</i>	<i>All</i>	$\chi^2$
Note: <sup>a</sup> p<.09 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Reported p values are the Pearson's Chi Square test asymptotic 2-sided significance values from SPSS.				

This chapter began by discussing the quantitative findings from the thematic content analysis as well as speculations as to why some of these results/changes occurred. The results were mixed, some findings were expected and some were not. There were less news items published after the pandemic was declared. This was not expected as I hypothesized the pandemic would bring more awareness to prison issues due to the threat the virus presents to inmates and correctional staff. It was surprising that the majority of news items published during the pandemic did not focus on COVID-19. It was identified in the literature that news outlets tend to focus on traditional newsworthy events, however, there were more news items coded for systemic issues than traditionally newsworthy events. The prison reform/critical frame was present in just under eighty percent of the news items and showed a modest increase after the pandemic was declared as expected. The racist system frame and the “CO in bad light” subtheme were not as common in the news items as anticipated according to the literature. The healthcare and COVID theme provided results as expected, except for the “prison is dirty” subtheme. The subtheme was identified in the literature as a common stereotype but it was not prevalent in my sample. The traditional prison stereotypes theme was identified in just under half of the news items which was expected due to the literature. Additionally, this theme saw a moderately significant increase which may be attributed to the dangers the virus presents in prisons. In the following chapter, I report on the qualitative findings which were thematically derived. I will examine the five overarching frames/themes, as well as the subthemes and draw on

examples/quotes from the news items that were analyzed.

## Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis of news coverage of prison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. I undertook a thematic content analysis to uncover how news media organizations communicate meanings and messages about punishment and correctional institutions to the general public. Moreover, I examined whether or not the coverage contributes to or challenges traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding punishment and prison, and whether the news media representation of prison has changed in other ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis revealed significant issues and events that generated many news items and encompassed many of the overarching themes and subthemes. The first issue was prevalent in the news media before the timeframe of my sample and spawned a series of news items, predominantly in the national press, focusing on law reform aimed at segregation in Canada during the pre- and post-COVID time period. The news items focused on the recent challenges in the Canadian court system surrounding the constitutionality of administrative segregation, and the controversy surrounding the proposed changes as a result of Bill C-83. The second significant event was the closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre in Manitoba, which led to a series of local news items in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. The government previously announced its intent to replace the century- old jail, however, during the timeframe of my sample the government announced the jail would instead be closed. The controversy over the correctional centre closure produced a number of news items that focused on prison issues and the impact of the closure on correctional officers and the economy. Third, local and national news items focusing on COVID's impact on prisons were common in the post-COVID time period. The news items focused on critical correctional issues, such as: overcrowding, harsh prison conditions, poor healthcare in prisons, the high prevalence and spreading of

communicable and infectious disease among correctional populations, and systemic racism. Lastly, I examine the prevalence of the racist system frame in my sample. The racist system frame was identified in the literature review as a common frame utilized by the news media. However, I discuss how there were fewer news items containing the racist system frame than originally suspected, and discuss how COVID-19 did not appear to be a rhetoric utilized in claims making to bring awareness to systemic racism in prisons in the post-COVID period. In what follows, I examine how these significant events and issues generated a variety of claims that were predominantly critical of the correctional system.

### **5.1 Law Reform and Segregation**

Traditionally, news media coverage of prisons has focused on newsworthy, sensational, discrete incidents, concentrating on events that are believed to appeal to readers. Thus, the daily reality of prison life is often left out of the news which limits the public's understanding of critical issues in corrections or the need for reform (Cecil, 2019). However, Cecil (2019) asserted that a more recent literature review of prisons in the news has detected more frequent discussions of correctional reform. The Opportunity Agenda (2014) found that the public discourse on prison in the United States was moving more toward favoring reform, and Cecil's (2019) study found that while traditional newsworthy items about the prison were still commonly reported (discrete events, deaths, riots), news media coverage of correctional institutions has shifted, and prison reform is now newsworthy. While conducting the thematic content analysis, it was evident that the reform/critical frame was prevalent in both the local and national news in Canada, and more specifically, issues surrounding segregation practices in Canadian prisons generated considerable attention in the news media.



In the last few years there has been more awareness of the negative effects of isolation, which is also termed “administrative segregation” and “solitary confinement”. Isolation can have negative effects on inmates’ mental health, and isolation may be more deleterious for inmates who have major mental health issues (Nowonty & Piquero, 2020). There have been recent changes in Canadian federal correctional policy regarding the use of administrative segregation with inmates who have a mental illness, as well as changes in the maximum length one can stay in administrative segregation (Walters, 2018). In December of 2017, Ontario Superior Court Justice Frank Marrocco ruled that isolating a prisoner for more than five days in administrative segregation is unconstitutional because the system lacked proper safeguards (“Ontario Judge Rules”, 2018). Roughly 15 months after striking down a portion of the law governing solitary confinement on the grounds it violated Section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Ontario’s top court ruled that placing inmates in solitary confinement for more than 15 days constitutes cruel and unusual punishment (White, 2019). The Canadian Civil Liberties Assn v Canada (Attorney General) 2019 decision has been described as a significant win for the many social justice advocates and was supposed to be in full effect as of April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (White, 2019). However, a motion was brought forth by the Attorney General to extend the period of suspension of invalidity of certain sections of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*. This was the second time the Attorney General had sought an extension, and the reasoning was the same as the first: the significant legal, policy, operational, infrastructure and resource considerations involved in the anticipated implementation of Bill C-83 (Freeze, 2020). Bill C-83 sought to eliminate administrative segregation and replace it with structured intervention units (SIU) which emphasize opportunities for meaningful human contact, participation in programs, and access to services (Freeze, 2020). Bill C-83 was eventually passed, the extension was

granted and further expended until Nov. 30, 2019, marking the end of administrative segregation in Canada.

### ***5.11 Pre-COVID Coverage of Segregation***

Given the timeframe of the pre-COVID sample of news items (March 2019-March 2020) and the controversy over administrative segregation in Canada, it is logical that the law reform and segregation was prominent in the news items before the onset of the pandemic. However, the *Winnipeg Free Press* produced fewer news items focusing on segregation reform compared to *The Globe and Mail* in the pre-COVID period; there were only six *Winnipeg Free Press* news items coded for the “issues with segregation” subtheme, as opposed to twenty-two news items coded from *The Globe and Mail* sample. This reflects a difference in the type of coverage between local and national news. The local news items in my sample contained far less coverage on segregation; two of the news items focused on concerns surrounding the use of segregation in Manitoba youth prisons, and one article discussed new body scanners that were installed in Manitoba prisons which contributed to inmates spending less time in segregation when they were suspected of bringing illicit drugs into the correctional institutions. Only three local news items in my sample focused on broader issues surrounding segregation, and discussed Bill C-83, the proposed law surrounding segregation reform in Canadian prisons. Conversely, *The Globe and Mail* coverage of segregation in the pre-COVID period was typically broader and focused on the recent challenges in the Canadian court system surrounding the constitutionality of administrative segregation, and the proposed changes as a result of Bill C-83. While conducting the thematic content analysis, law reform and segregation emerged as a key theme in the sample—particularly within the national press—and the news items that were coded for this issue often included many other reform and critical subthemes, as well as other subthemes.

### ***5.12 Claims Makers in the Pre-COVID Period Local News***

During the pre-COVID period, a variety of claims makers drew attention to segregation and the need for law reform in the local news. In the few pre-COVID local news items that discussed segregation and law reform, claims makers included the Manitoba Ombudsman, Justice Minister Cliff Cullen, Manitoba Justice spokespersons, University of Toronto Criminology Professor Anthony Doob, James Bloomfield, president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, and Carleton University Law and Legal Studies PhD candidate Anita Grace. As noted above, there were only six news items in the pre-COVID period that discussed segregation, and most focused on issues with youth segregation and government accountability. The Manitoba Ombudsman, for example, raised concerns of high rates of segregation in the province's youth jails, and argued youth who were detained for being intoxicated were being treated the same as youth who were placed in segregation. The Manitoba Ombudsman asserted specific checks need to be completed while youth are in de facto segregation conditions, and stated, "So it's unclear how they were handled during that one-year timeframe, and what their rights were" (May, 2019, p.1). Government spokespersons, in turn, responded to these claims stating that staff take reasonable steps to ensure youth are not kept in segregation for longer than they are supposed to, but acknowledged there were occasions where youth were in segregation for longer than 24 hours. Another local news item discussed body scanners that were recently installed in provincial prisons and contained claims by Justice Minister Cliff Cullen and Executive Director of Custodial Corrections Greg Skelly, about the benefits of the new scanners. The government officials claimed the body scanners help keep inmates out of segregation who are suspected of bringing contraband into prisons, they will protect inmates and staff from contraband and "...the scanners are expected to pay for themselves—through savings in labour

and costs—within three years” (Kusch, 2019, p.1). This reflects how the “issues with segregation”, “prison is dangerous” and “prison is costly” subthemes were all implicated in the news item about segregation. Half of the local news items (three) that discussed segregation in the pre-COVID timeframe focused on broader issues related to segregation and changes due to Bill C-83. Two out of the three news items focused on recent changes to administrative segregation and the creation of the new structured intervention units (SIUs), and discussed the potential dangers this may cause for correctional officers. Consequently, these news items did not focus on issues with segregation for inmates, rather, they focused on the impact of law reform surrounding segregation on correctional officers, highlighting how the “issues with segregation” subtheme became connected in the local news media to the correctional officer related theme, and the traditional prison stereotypes theme. For example, one news item quoted James Bloomfield, Prairies Regional President for Federal Correctional Officers’ Union, who stated the legal changes won’t help correctional officers manage behavioural issues among inmates, and stated, “We are now more susceptible to assault than we have ever been before” (Solomon, 2019, p.1). Conversely, a letter to the editor by former correctional officer Jackie Pearse, spoke in favour of the SIUs and refuted Bloomfield’s claim, arguing, “If implemented correctly, you do not have to give up one thing (safety) for the other (meaningful human contact)” (Pearse, 2019, p.1).

One of the pre-COVID examples from the sample of local media coverage of segregation that was unique and significant was the *Winnipeg Free Press* op-ed published on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019, titled, “Ending solitary confinement in federal prisons only a start”.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The item was first published in The Conversation Canada, an organization that helps academics translate their work for the general public (<https://theconversation.com/ca/who-we-are>).

This editorial was unique because it was a local news item that focused on issues with segregation at the national level. It discussed the recent court decisions noted above which resulted in changes to administrative segregation—the changes that will occur as a result of Bill C-83—and whether or not the new SIUs will be enough to address the harms associated with solitary confinement. The author set the tone of the editorial in the first sentence by claiming, “As of Dec.1, inmates in Canada’s federal prisons can no longer be legally held in solitary confinement. Sort of” (Grace, 2019, p.1). Grace (2019) provided a critical take on Bill C-83 and stated:

The act eliminates administrative and disciplinary segregation, also known as solitary confinement. According to Ralph Goodale, the former public safety minister who lost his seat in the recent election, this amounts to a “fundamental” change in the way prisons deal with inmates who are considered a risk to others or themselves. According to Independent Sen. Kim Pate, however, it’s simply an exercise in “rebranding” (p.1).

Grace (2019) stated that critics question the value of the proposed changes in Bill C-83, and quoted Correctional Investigator of Canada, Ivan Zinger, who called segregation “the most onerous and depriving experience that the state can legitimately administer in Canada”. Grace (2019) then listed recent deaths in custody that occurred while inmates spent long periods of time in administrative segregation, explained that segregation is used by the Correctional Service of Canada for safety and security which highlighted the prison is dangerous subtheme, and reminded readers that while inmates lose certain rights, they do not lose all their rights. Grace (2019) ended the commentary by stating the constitutionality of the SIU model will be the subject of future debates, and asserted if the new SIUs are inadequate and do not have rehabilitative programming in place then the new SIUs will be the rebranding of a harmful,

unconstitutional practice. While the main focus of this editorial was on segregation reform in Canadian prisons, it also reflected seven prison reform and critical subthemes, demonstrating again how the issue of segregation implicates many areas of critique and potential reform of Canada's correctional system. While discussing the issues with segregation in Canadian prisons, Grace (2019) also noted the harsh conditions that inmates endure while in solitary confinement, describing it as causing "severe mental distress, including paranoia and psychosis" which implicates the "prison is too harsh" and "inmates are suffering" subthemes (p.1). Grace also highlighted how in 2018, the Supreme Court ruled segregation was unconstitutional because it discriminated against Indigenous prisoners, drawing on the racist system frame and the "criminal justice system discriminates" subthemes in her arguments. While the author acknowledged the benefits of the new SUI model, such as more programming ("need for more rehabilitation/programs" subtheme) and more health care interventions ("poor healthcare in prison" subtheme), she also acknowledged the proposed changes will have an annual operating cost of \$58 million ("prison is costly" subtheme), and cautioned that the changes may only be a rebranding of a harmful, unconstitutional practice ("deficiencies in the prison system" subtheme). While the author quoted statements made by claims makers on opposite ends of the argument, the overall critical framing of the issue was clearly reflected in the headline as well as the first sentence, and her overall stance was clearly skeptical of the new SIUs as reflected in the last sentence of the editorial noted above. This example was typical of news reports in the pre-COVID time period that were critical of Canada's practice of administrative segregation, and demonstrates how the news media frames and constructs administrative segregation from a practice that was once willfully ignored and unnoticed, to a critical issue that needs to be immediately addressed by the Canadian government. Additionally, this example reflects how

court decisions surrounding administrative segregation are being discussed and framed in the news media by lawyers, politicians, and social justice advocates who are critical of correctional policy.

### ***5.13 Claims Makers in the Pre-COVID Period National News***

As noted above, there were far more national news items in the pre-COVID period discussing segregation than in the local news items. The majority of pre-COVID national news items that discussed segregation and law reform focused on the recent court cases discussed above in which Ontario Superior Court judges deemed administrative segregation unconstitutional because it was found to be in violation of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The pre-COVID national news items also focused on the implementation of Bill C-83 and the controversy surrounding its constitutionality. The key claims makers that were defending the changes implemented by Bill C-83 were several CSC spokespersons, and a spokesperson for the former Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale. The key claims makers that were arguing for the elimination of segregation and questioning the constitutionality of Bill C-83 were Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger, several lawyers, judges, members of the Prisoner Legal Services, members of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and professors. News items often presented claims from both sides of the argument. However, claims made by those advocating for the elimination of segregation and the rights of prisoners outnumbered the claims made by government and prison officials. There were also important differences in the style and rhetoric of critical claims about segregation. Best (1990) discussed how not all claims are effective, so claims makers must ensure their claims about social problems are compelling if they are to be successful. The claims made by those critical of segregation utilized statistics and evidence to reinforce their claims which made them appear more compelling compared to the written

statements provided by government and prison officials which were less effective in refuting the critical claims about Bill C-83.

*The Globe and Mail* published an article on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 titled, “Lawyers, scholars tell Ottawa solitary confinement bill is unconstitutional” that neatly encapsulated many of the key concerns about the new segregation legislation, and demonstrated the claims making competition in the news media. The article began by stating that a group of nearly 100 lawyers and law professors wrote a letter warning the federal government that Bill C-83 would create solitary confinement under a different name rather than abolishing the practice as the government intended. The statement was coded for both the “issues with segregation” and “deficiencies in the prison system” subthemes. Several law professors and lawyers were quoted from the letter and claimed that the proposed law is unconstitutional, setting the tone that Bill C-83 will not eliminate administrative segregation. The article described the purpose of Bill C-83 which is to eliminate segregation and the “irreparable mental health problems” among prisoners which amounted to “torture” under international law, which reflected the “prison is too harsh”, and “inmates are suffering” critical subthemes (White, 2019, p.1). These two subthemes were common in the national news items that discussed law reform and segregation as many prisoner advocates made claims about the negative effects of segregation on inmates. The journalist then discussed recent constitutional challenges regarding administrative segregation. According to this news report: “In March, Ontario’s appeal court ruled that placing inmates in solitary confinement for more than 15 days constitutes cruel and unusual punishment, echoing the United Nations’ Nelson Mandela rules on the use of solitary confinement” (White, 2019, p.1). Lawyers and law professors critiqued the proposed law and asserted, “With respect, we submit that passing a bill while knowing full well that it is unconstitutional is not only a waste of taxpayers’



money [“prison is costly” subtheme], but it also raises questions regarding Canada's commitment to the rule of law [“government is not accountable” subtheme]” (White, 2019, p.1). *The Globe and Mail* report also contained a written statement from Scott Bradley, a spokesperson for Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale refuting these claims. Scott Bradley stated via email, “To fit [the U.N.'s] definition, the person must be both confined and denied meaningful human contact for 22 hours. Under C-83, prisoners will be confined for a maximum of 20 hours a day” (White, 2019, p.1). This was followed by a quote from the letter submitted by lawyers and law professors suggesting amendments could be made to save Bill C-83 which involve judicial oversight of segregation. This claim was also rebutted by Scott Bradley who argued this would cause an unnecessary burden on the court system. The article ended with a claim made by Senator Kim Pate, a long-time advocate for prisoners, who argued the burden would be minuscule, and asserted, “Nothing less than judicial oversight is likely to change the culture within corrections” (White, 2019, p.2). This article was a typical example of the claims making competition in the national news items focusing on law reform and segregation. This article demonstrates how competing claims by experts and government officials attempt to establish the meaning of legal reforms aimed at addressing the problem of segregation.

In summary, there were more articles about segregation in the pre-COVID period compared to the post-COVID period. The local news items in the pre-COVID period focused less on segregation and law reform compared to the national coverage. The coverage in the *Winnipeg Free Press* was mostly focused on local issues related to segregation but occasionally reported on national debates about administrative segregation. Conversely, national news items in the pre-COVID period had a broader focus, and examined the recent challenges in the Canadian court system surrounding the constitutionality of administrative segregation, and the

proposed changes as a result of Bill C-83. The overall tone of the news items about segregation in this period communicated skepticism to the readers. In the local news items, there was concern that Manitoba youth jails were not following policy which resulted in a high number of youths being kept in segregation, as well as skepticism about the new SIUs as a result of Bill C-83. In the national news items, there was concern about the constitutionality of Bill C-83, and skepticism about government officials' claims that the new proposed law will resolve issues involving segregation, an issue that has been plaguing the system for decades. Overall, this seems to suggest that the Canadian news prior to the pandemic was already largely critical of prisons. The following section examines COVID-19's impact on segregation in Canadian prisons.

#### **5.14 COVID-19 and Segregation**

After the pandemic was declared, inmates in Manitoba prisons were placed in isolation once admitted into custody in order to prevent outbreaks and help curb the spread of COVID-19 in correctional institutions. In the post pandemic period, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published fewer news items (five in total) on segregation compared to *The Globe and Mail* (nine in total). However, out of the five news items from the local coverage, four of the news items discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on segregation, whereas only two out of the nine *Globe and Mail* news items discussed COVID-19 and its impact on segregation in the post-COVID period. Therefore, there were more local news items in the *Winnipeg Free Press* focusing on issues with segregation that were linked to COVID-19 compared to *The Globe and Mail* in the post-COVID period, reflecting a difference in the type of coverage between local and national news. The local news items focused on the negative impacts inmates faced in Manitoba prisons by being placed in isolation due to COVID-19, while *The Globe and Mail* coverage of segregation in the post-

COVID period was broader and continued its pre-pandemic focus on the recent challenges in the Canadian court system surrounding the constitutionality of administrative segregation, and how the Canadian prison system continued to use the practice even though it was banned. Therefore, *The Globe and Mail* continued to cover segregation in the same way it did in the pre-COVID period while local coverage shifted focus during the pandemic. Much like the pre-COVID period, news items about segregation often touched on many other reform and critical subthemes, as well as other subthemes, including COVID and healthcare. The following section analyzes how the pandemic led to a new focus surrounding issues with segregation in the local news media, by linking segregation with COVID-19 isolation measures.

### ***5.15 Claims Makers in the Post-COVID Period Local News Items***

In the post-COVID timeframe, claims making shifted in the local news surrounding issues with segregation. The key claims makers cited in the local news items in the post-COVID period who defended the provincial prison responses to COVID-19 were Justice Minister Cliff Cullen, an unnamed spokesperson from Manitoba Justice, and Manitoba's Deputy Chief Provincial Public Health Officer Dr. Jazz Atwal. The key claim makers cited in the news who were critical of the federal and provincial prison responses to COVID-19 were lawyers, inmates and their family members, a prison chaplain, Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger, NDP justice critic Nahanni Fontaine, and an anonymous prison source. Those critical of the government's response to COVID-19 and the changes in protocols to help curb the spread of the virus often claimed that the government was not taking appropriate measures, and often spoke of the poor conditions that the inmates faced in custody during the pandemic.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* published a news article on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, "COVID-19 issues fuel tension at The Pas jail". This article was a typical example of the local news items

in the post-COVID period that discussed issues with segregation. Many of the local post-COVID articles involving issues with segregation focused on inmates being isolated in conditions similar to solitary confinement when they exhibited COVID-19 symptoms, or when they tested positive for the virus. The article began by citing a claim by the province that they have done “everything they can” to deal with COVID-19 in Manitoba jails. However, this was followed by an anonymous source who claimed an alleged “standoff” erupted between inmates and staff at The Pas Correctional Centre, a Manitoba provincial prison, due to concerns about COVID-19. The “stand off” was a result of inmates temporarily barricading staff from accessing part of the jail (Sanders, 2020). This incident, coded “prison is dangerous”, exemplified the sorts of traditional newsworthy items that were noted in the literature review to be common in news about prison. The “standoff” occurred after inmates learned of a plan to create a COVID-19 isolation range in the general population area at the prison, resulting in the potential for inmates to be “double bunked” (Sanders, 2020). When inmates are “double bunked”, two inmates are placed in a cell together and there is no opportunity to socially distance (“no social distancing” subtheme). The journalist highlighted how earlier in the week, The Pas Correctional Centre was already over capacity, indicating that the prison is already facing issues with overcrowding, another prison reform/critical frame subtheme, thus, linking COVID-19 to a number of other correctional issues. The journalist followed by stating a government spokesperson did not reply to a request for comment about the “standoff”, and discussed how earlier in the week, Justice Minister Cliff Cullen held a press conference along with Executive Director of Custodial Corrections Greg Skelly, where Cullen claimed, “We’ve done everything we can across the justice system to prevent the spread of the virus” (Sanders, 2020, p.1). The journalist then moved to a discussion of COVID-19 cases in Manitoba prisons, and explained how an outbreak at Headingley

Correctional Centre occurred. The overall framing of this story, drawing on claims and counter claims, suggested that while the government is claiming they have done everything, outbreaks are still occurring which insinuated to readers they should be skeptical of the government's claims. The article concluded with a quote from NDP critic Nahanni Fontaine who challenged the government's statements, claiming:

I have spent the last eight days on the phone with families and with staff who are very concerned at what's going on in our correctional facilities, Fontaine told reporters.

When people are being isolated, they're being held in what's been called the 'hole' — isolation units near the exterior of the building that are cold and not conducive for folks who are sick (Sanders, 2020, p.1).

Nahanni Fontaine's claim highlights the way issues with segregation in the post-COVID period intersected with other critical prison themes, demonstrating how these issues cause inmates to suffer in harsh conditions due to the prison's response to managing the virus. As noted in the literature review, many advocates fear that the use of isolation to curb the transmission of COVID-19 in correctional institutions will cause further difficulties for inmates (Cloud et al., 2020). Prisoners may be reluctant to report COVID-19 symptoms due to fear of being moved to isolation which is similar to solitary confinement, forcing them to endure a segregation experience that has been known to cause psychological harm (Cloud et al., 2020). Fontaine's claim demonstrates how this fear is a reality in Manitoba prisons in order to curb the spread of COVID-19. Fontaine further claimed that symptomatic inmates who were tested for COVID-19 were sent back to general population before receiving their positive test results, only then to be placed into isolation, insinuating poor healthcare is provided to inmates in prison. Much like the previous examples, while the journalist cited claims makers with opposing views, the balance of

claims by individuals who are advocating for prisoners (or who are critical of government) vastly outweigh the claims made by the government spokespersons resulting in an overall critical framing of the issue.

### ***5.16 Claims Makers in the Post-COVID Period National News:***

Claims making about segregation did not appear to shift in the national news in the post-COVID period. Much like the pre-COVID period, the key claims makers quoted in the national press included CSC spokespersons, the spokesperson for Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale, Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger, lawyers, judges, members of the Prisoner Legal Services, members of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and academics. As noted above, there were only nine national news items about law reform and segregation after the pandemic was declared, and only two of those news items discussed the impact of COVID-19 on segregation. This was surprising considering the impact the pandemic has had on isolation protocols in prisons. Inmates were placed in isolation for their own protection from COVID-19, resulting in more inmates being placed in segregation type conditions than before the pandemic was declared (Murdoch, 2020). However, some inmates may have requested to be placed in segregation rather than reside in general population units where there is an increased likelihood of COVID-19 transmission.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there may have been less of a focus on segregation after the pandemic was declared because segregation conditions offer more protection from COVID-19 compared to other placement options in prisons.

In one of the two national news items that discussed law reform and segregation with reference to COVID-19, the majority of the article was focused on the implementation of Bill C-

---

<sup>3</sup> This was an observation I made while working at the Winnipeg Remand Centre during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

83 and the introduction of the new SIUs. The journalist highlighted reports written by the Prisoners' Legal Services which claimed segregation still persists despite the new SIUs. The report claimed that despite the new law, inmates who are residing in SIUs were reporting a variety of deprivations, and showed nearly fifty percent of structured intervention placements lasted beyond the 15-day threshold (White, 2020). Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said the findings raised "serious concerns" and vowed to address them, and Corrections Commissioner Anne Kelly claimed she wouldn't draw any conclusions about the SIUs until a larger internal evaluation was complete and cited COVID-19 as a possible reason the SIU operation was disrupted (White, 2020, p.2). This claim was rebutted by two criminologists who cited the report and pointed out, "They found no period in the operation of the SIUs-before or after the onset of the COVID pandemic- when the SIUs were operating in a fashion contemplated by the law or the Commissioner's directive on SIUs" (White, 2020, p.2). The article ended on a critical tone by citing the Prisoners' Legal Services report that claimed only the Correctional Service of Canada has the means to diagnose and fix any problems with the new regime, and added how authors of the report have seen little urgency to do so from the agency. While COVID-19 and its impact on segregation was mentioned in this news item, it was not the primary focus; the primary focus was how the government has not been accountable and the negative impact this had on inmates. This example reflects how various prison reform and critical subthemes, such as: "government is not accountable, "prison is too harsh", and the "inmates are suffering" were utilized in the news item and contributed to the primary focus of the story, rather than COVID's impact on prisons. However, in another national news item that discussed issues with law reform and segregation, COVID-19 was the primary focus of the article, and it was written almost a year to the date after the pandemic was declared.

*The Globe and Mail* published an article on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 titled, “Prisoners sue over COVID-19 lockdowns”. Much like *The Globe and Mail* article discussed above in the pre-COVID timeframe (White, 2019), this article examined the recent changes to administrative segregation and Bill C-83. The journalist asserted that according to a new federal lawsuit, federal penitentiaries have violated the Charter rights of prisoners by imposing stringent COVID-19 measures that are tantamount to administrative segregation (Woo, 2021). The reporter indicated a lawsuit was filed by the John Howard Society of Canada, a social justice advocacy group, as well as seven people incarcerated in federal prisons in British Columbia during the pandemic. The reporter quoted the John Howard Society of Canada Executive Director who argued that inmates are suffering physically, and mentally due to COVID-19 and stringent measures taken by prison officials, linking issues with segregation to changes in the prisons system due to COVID-19, a health and COVID subtheme (Woo, 2021). Catherine Latimer, Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Canada was quoted saying, “It’s probably, in my view, the worst crisis in corrections that we’ve seen in more than half a century” (Woo, 2021, p.1). The article described additional issues highlighted in the lawsuit due to COVID-19, such as its adverse effects on parole eligibility, pointing out deficiencies in the prison system- another prison reform/critical subtheme. The report also highlighted the recent changes in administrative segregation due to Bill C-83, which set the maximum length a prisoner can spend in solitary confinement. The journalist pointed out that according to the new segregation legislation, anything more than 15 days in solitary confinement is deemed to be cruel and unusual punishment. However, COVID-19 lockdowns have exceeded 15 consecutive days, linking this issue to the “prison is too harsh” and “inmates are suffering” subthemes. Catherine Latimer is quoted throughout the article and advocated for prisoners who are not receiving programming (“need for more



rehabilitation/programs” subtheme) or parole due to the institutional changes in response to COVID-19. Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger is also quoted making a claim that more than ten percent of the total inmate population has tested positive for COVID-19, which was significantly higher than the rate of infection for the general population at that time, and it was noted that Indigenous offenders accounted for close to sixty percent of all cases in Canadian prisons since November 2020 (“overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples” subtheme). Statistics are a standard element in modern claims making rhetoric, however, statistics do not exist entirely as objective facts; they are subject to claims making and are often framed in specific ways (Best, 1990; Kohm, 2020). In this case, the journalist may have included this statistic as a way to reinforce the claims made by the advocacy group, and provoke concern from the readers by demonstrating how prisons are racist, dangerous places due to COVID-19 (“prison is dangerous” subtheme). The journalist noted that the lawsuit alleges there has been inadequate PPE for prisoners (“lack of PPE” subtheme), a failure to facilitate physical distancing (“no social distancing” subtheme), and a failure to enforce compliance with public-health directions by staff (“poor healthcare in prison” subtheme). The article concluded with a quote from a written statement by Correctional Service of Canada, asserting that they continue to implement “rigorous health measures” to mitigate the spread of the virus, which includes adjustments to institutional routines, and further claimed they will adapt their approach to take additional measures as needed (Woo, 2021, p.2). Unlike the *Winnipeg Free Press* post-COVID article discussed above (Sanders, 2020), this article discussed COVID-19 on a national level, rather than focusing on issues that occurred in a specific prison. This reflects an important difference between national and local news reporting on this issue. National reporting focused on larger policy issues impacting Correctional Service of Canada, such as how administrative segregation is being used

as a response to COVID-19, and its overall negative effects on parole eligibility across the country. Both local and national coverage of segregation in the post-COVID time period took up many critical and reform-oriented themes suggesting that COVID-19 brought awareness to prison issues and the need for reform in Canadian prisons.

### ***5.17 The Social Construction of Segregation***

The news items that discussed law reform and segregation often published competing claims. However, the claims made by social justice activists and prisoner welfare advocates far outnumbered claims made by government spokespersons, politicians, and prison officials. The relative invisibility of prison officials in the media, in contrast to the high visibility of police officials (e.g., Doyle 2006), appears to have resulted in a more critical framing of the issue of segregation in the national and local press. The examples above reflect a pattern of news media framing of prison issues: the journalists typically opened the news items with critical claims made by social justice/prisoner advocates followed by often defensive claims from government spokespersons and prison officials, resulting in an overall critical tone. This was consistent across the news items that were coded for issues with segregation in both the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. Moreover, when authors presented the perspective of government spokespersons and prison officials, it was usually placed at the end of the news item, and took the form of a written statement which appeared less compelling than the numerous direct quotes of the prisoner advocates throughout the news items. This was a similar pattern seen in many news items in my sample, where official sources were seldom quoted directly in the news, and often only appeared only via written statements. This suggests that while this prison issue gained attention in the news media, there is still a level of invisibility of the institution, as prison officials are the most invisible claims makers in news items about prison issues. This is in

contrast to the police, who hold regular planned media events and tend to “own” the crime issue in the media.

As discussed earlier, Kappeler & Potter (2005) argued that reporters may use techniques of myth construction in the news media, such as selective presentation (only certain facts) and selective interviewing (one or two authorities as collective experts). These techniques appear to be applied in the news items noted. However, the fact that the authors of the news items presented opposing views from various claims makers makes them appear neutral, or in other words, objective. Valverde (2006) examined the creation of objectivity by journalists who are taught to seek comments from two sources whenever possible (‘two-sides’ of a story). The two-source rule demonstrates characteristics of liberal democracies, and demonstrates the liberal myth that truth is somewhere in the middle (Valverde, 2006). If they are presented with two sides of the story this may also allow the readers to interpret the issue presented in a way that aligns with their preconceived, social constructions of prison reform and segregation, furthering their socially constructed views on the topic. However, Valverde (2006) also noted that journalists tend to write news stories from a certain ‘angle’, emphasizing certain features of an issue over other features. Considering that critical social justice advocate claims in this example tended to far outnumber claims by official government spokespersons and prison officials, it appears news items about segregation in Canada were framed predominantly with a pro-prison reform tone and angle. The overall framing of the issue surrounding law reform and segregation in the news items in both the pre- and post-COVID timeframe frames segregation as a harsh and inhumane practice. Additionally, these news items were framed to reflect general skepticism toward the government with their proposed changes to administrative segregation, insinuating that they are not doing enough to protect the rights and well-being of inmates in prison. The framing is

reflected in various prison reform subthemes, such as “prison is too harsh”, “inmates are suffering”, “government is not accountable”, and “deficiencies in prison system”. As noted in the literature review, there are common myths surrounding the quality of living conditions in correctional institutions, which are presented as being too soft or conversely harsh and dehumanizing (Ross, 2012). Additionally, Surette (2007) indicated the news media often presents stories involving prison as part of a “faulty system”. The faulty system frame can be applied in a few ways: in terms of ‘leniency’ and ‘inefficiency’, or it is presented as faulty because prisons are too harsh on inmates, presenting inmates as victims of a faulty system (Surette, 2007; Fox, 2012). Work by Vickovic et al., (2013) discussed how news media representations of prisons can elicit empathy for inmates who are suffering, and depict the criminal justice system as too harsh. Therefore, it is not surprising that these prison reform and critical subthemes were linked to issues with law reform and segregation in the sample of news items in both the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe, insinuating to readers that government and prison officials are not accountable with their commitments to eliminate segregation, thus, allowing inmates to continue suffer and experience harsh prison conditions in Canada.

Overall, the focus on law reform surrounding segregation in Canada was a newsworthy topic in my sample due to the recent changes brought on by Bill C-83. While there were numerous claims makers who were critical of the new SIUs and the constitutionality of Bill C-83, the new law remains. While those critical of the new law did not necessarily ‘win’ the social construction contest by steering public policy (e.g., Surette, 2007), the claims makers who were reform oriented and critical of Bill C-83 utilized the media to bring awareness to many prison issues, such as issues surrounding the constitutionality of the new segregation policy, harsh

prison conditions and the suffering of inmates, the need for more programming, systemic racism, the lack of government accountability, and the overall deficiencies in the prison system. Thus, the focus on issues surrounding segregation and law reform made visible many prison reform and critical issues that have existed within the Canadian correctional system for decades. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic did not appear to accelerate or intensify the level of interest in critical prison issues in Canada. In the following section I examine the closure of the Dauphin Correction Centre, an event that generated much local news media coverage.

## **5.2 Dauphin Correctional Centre Closure**

It was noted in the quantitative findings that there were more local prison news items published than national, and one reason for the preponderance of local coverage of prison issues can be attributed to the closing of the Dauphin Correctional Centre, a provincial prison located in Dauphin, a small city in western Manitoba. There were 14 local news items (13.5% of the local news sample) published from when the closure was announced on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (shortly before the pandemic was declared) and within the months leading up to the scheduled closure, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Dauphin Correctional Centre was built in 1917 and it was deemed by the government to not meet present day standards (Kusch, 2020). In 2013, the previous NDP government announced its intention to replace the century-old jail and triple its capacity in order to ease pressure on other Manitoba jails (Kusch, 2020). However, the new jail was never built, and the subsequent Progressive Conservative government instead invested heavily in the Dauphin court house, which was also built in 1917 and is located next to Dauphin Correctional Centre. A December 2019 inquest report on the 2016 hanging death of a Dauphin Correctional Centre inmate described how the jail was outdated, which prevented correctional officers from being able to adequately monitor all inmates (Kusch, 2020). Local news coverage of this issue focused

mostly on economic and employment impacts to Dauphin. The closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre eliminated employment opportunities, displaced families, and adversely affected the Dauphin economy. The news coverage of the prison closure linked prison reform issues with correctional officer related concerns. Despite containing various subthemes and claims makers with competing interests, a unified and critical framing of the jail closure emerged through the claims making process.

### ***5.21 Claims Makers in the Pre-COVID Period***

In the news media coverage of the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure, there were numerous claims made by a variety of claims makers. Claims critical of the closure cited in the media including those by Manitoba Government and General Employees Union (MGEU) President Michelle Gawronsky, several social justice advocates, and members of the public. The only claims that were not critical of the prison closure were made by Justice Minister Cliff Cullen and a Manitoba Justice spokesperson. Consequently, claims made by those critical of the government vastly outnumbered the claims made by government officials. Similar to the news media framing of segregation, most news items set the tone of the article within the first paragraph of the news items by utilizing claims that were critical of the government's decision to close the jail. Statistics were often provided by journalists to point out discrepancies between claims made by Justice Minister Cliff Cullen and the Manitoba Justice spokesperson and what was reported in the provincial system, creating skepticism of the government's claims. For example, Cliff Cullen and a government spokesperson provided statistics on the inmate population in the province and argued that they can accommodate the Dauphin inmates in other provincial prisons. The statistics provided by Cliff Cullen and the government spokesperson showed the correctional institutions were under capacity, while the statistics gleaned by the

reporter from the provincial system showed prisons were operating above bed capacity. For example, Cliff Cullen stated the provincial prison population was roughly 2,100 -- 250 less than it was at its peak a few years ago -- attributing the decrease to restorative justice measures, which Cullen claimed he would like to enhance ("need for more restorative justice" subtheme). Justice Minister Cliff Cullen was quoted often in news stories about that jail closure, claiming his department will do what they can to find jobs for the affected employees at other prisons, and noting there are currently a number of employment vacancies in the provincial correctional system. It is important to note that this major event demonstrated how claims makers who have competing interests came together to be critical of the government's decision to close the prison. Claims making in the news media about this issue saw social justice activists and the president of the MGEU making similar claims about overcrowding in the provincial prison system, for example. MGEU President Michelle Gawronsky made claims about inmates being held in small overcrowded cells, "sleeping on mats on the floor with their heads against metal toilets" (Kusch, 2020. P.2), bringing awareness not only to overcrowding but the suffering of inmates, both prison reform and critical subthemes. While both the MGEU and social justice/prisoner advocates were focusing their claims on issues of overcrowding in the prisons and the suffering of inmates due to the closure, their motivation and the nature of their critiques of the government were quite different. The MGEU was not reform oriented in their claims; they were critical of the government for closing the prison. The MGEU focused mainly on the negative consequences the closure would have on correctional staff and their families. It could be argued that the MGEU would be in favor of building more prisons, as this would offer more jobs for correctional staff and employees, rather than closing prisons as an effort to reform the correctional system. For example, the MGEU argued that the closure of the jail would force its 80 employees to either

relocate or find new work (“COs are suffering” subtheme), demonstrating how the CO related theme was highlighted in the news items about the jail closure and was a point of interest for the MGEU. For example, MGEU President Michelle Gawronsky called on Premier Brian Pallister and Dauphin Conservative MLA Brad Michaleski, and stated:

Listen to the people of this community, listen to the inmates, their families, listen to the correctional officers...Let’s move on with life in a productive way that’s going to keep the economy of Dauphin going. They need to be listening to the people, just once (May, 2020, p.1).

This quote shows Gawronsky’s interests in bringing awareness to the negative impacts the closure has on correctional officers and the Dauphin economy while linking how the closure negatively impacts inmates, and critically states the government is not listening to those most impacted by the closure. As noted earlier, linkage is an effective claims making strategy; by linking one concerning social condition with another previously constructed social issue, there is a rise in the importance of the linked issue (Surette, 2007). This is a significant finding because the Dauphin jail closure enjoined prison reform/critical themes with claims from the union, whom are not critical of prisons as they provide union members with employment. This finding is consistent with the literature on prison unions and prison reform. The literature indicates that prison union’s interests are focused mainly on protecting jobs, and in some instances, this has led prison unions to take positions that align with those in favor of prison reform as both have shared concerns about overcrowding (Ridgeway & Casella, 2013). Additionally, journalists quoted statements made by officials with the City of Dauphin who claimed the news came without notice or consultation, and called the news “devastating”, as the closure would result in a loss of at least 80 jobs and have a ripple effect throughout the Parkland region (Kusch, 2020). On the



other hand, the social justice and prisoner advocates took a reform-oriented approach and focused on the negative impacts the closure would have on inmates and their well being, such as overcrowding in the prison system, and the displacement of inmates from their communities and supports. For example, Christopher Schneider, a board member of the John Howard Society of Brandon, said the impending closure would have a big impact on the inmates and their families. Schneider claimed:

In some ways, they become hidden victims. The five-year old son of somebody who's incarcerated who can no longer see his father on the weekends. ...He didn't do anything wrong and it's difficult to explain to the children and the families of some of these individuals what it is that's happening (May, 2020, p1).

NDP justice critic Nahanni Fontaine was quoted saying she was concerned the prison closure would have a negative domino effect on the rest of the prison system ("deficiencies in prison system" subtheme), and more specifically in regard to issues surrounding overcrowding in prisons and claimed: "At any given time, a lot of our facilities are busting at the seams" (Kusch, 2020, p.2). Additionally, Fontaine claimed that many inmates housed in the prison are from rural communities and northern Manitoba, and questioned where they would be transferred, as they would most likely be relocated further away from their supports. While Fontaine did not specifically reference Indigenous peoples in her statement, her claims may insinuate to readers that the prison closure would have a negative impact on Indigenous peoples from remote northern First Nation communities. Social justice and prisoner advocates would most likely be in favour of fewer prisons, which demonstrates how various claims makers with different motivation and critiques were presented by journalists as being on the same, critical side of the claims making contest which opposed the government's decision to close the prison. Journalists

pointed out that in 2013, the NDP government announced its intent to replace the prison but it was never built (“government is not accountable” subtheme), and this was often followed by claims made by members of the general public, and social justice/prisoner advocates, who reinforced the request to build a new rehabilitation facility centered on concepts of restorative justice. For example, there was a letter to the editor published on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, “Build better facility in Dauphin”. The author, Brian Spencler from Winnipeg, asserted the need to build a new facility while incorporating more rehabilitation programming (“need for more rehabilitation/programs” subtheme) to reduce the risk of reoffending, and claimed:

This would not only keep the existing 80 jobs in Dauphin, but create more jobs for the community and reduce the use of the far more expensive [“prison is costly” subtheme] revolving doors our legal system is currently experiencing with the release, re-arrest, re-incarcerate, repeat cycle [“deficiencies in the prison system” subtheme] that too many people find themselves trapped in” (p.1).

Spencler (2020) continued by discussing the negative impact the closure has on correctional officers and their families (“COs are suffering” subtheme), as well as inmates:

If you tell inmates they aren’t worth more than a few square metres of concrete floor and a mat squished up against a toilet [“prison is too harsh” subtheme, “inmates are suffering” subtheme] how do you expect them to feel like our society cares about rehabilitating them [“need for more rehabilitation/programs” subtheme]? If you treat people like people, and not just offenders [“humanize inmates” subtheme], they may stop offending (p.1).

This letter from a member of the general public about the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure demonstrates how numerous prison reform and critical subthemes and the correctional officer related themes were intertwined in this major event that occurred in the local news coverage. This example shows how linkage was used by claims makers as a rhetorical strategy in the social construction of this issue. The negative impact the closure would have on correctional officers and the overall economy in Dauphin was linked with calls for prison reform and calls for more restorative justice. This letter also highlights the request for the development of a new rehabilitation facility in the area, which was commonly referenced in the news items surrounding the prison closure, demonstrating calls for correctional reform from the public.

Overall, the news items focusing on the closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre in the pre-COVID period contained all but one of the prison reform/critical subthemes. The only subtheme that was not present in the news items was the “calls for socio-economic/societal change” subtheme, which was not a common subtheme as it was only present in six percent of the entire sample. Jewkes (2011) discussed how journalists present news according to a range of criteria that are used to determine a story’s newsworthiness. News values are the judgements that journalists make about the public appeal of a story (Jewkes, 2011). Two news values that may explain why this subtheme was not common in this sample are simplification and individualism. Simple explanations, and rationalizations which highlight individual responses are preferred in the news over complex cultural and political explanations (Jewkes, 2011, p.40). In the news items about the Dauphin jail closure, journalists and claims makers highlighted how the closure was a decision made by the government officials. The claims makers called on the government to reconsider the decision to close the jail and highlighted how the closure impacts inmates as well as correctional officers. News items about the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure demonstrate

how the multiple prison reform/critical subthemes intersected with the correctional officer related themes in the reporting of this local event. The main prison reform/critical subtheme that was present in the majority of the news items focused on the impact the closure would have on issues surrounding overcrowding in the overall provincial correctional system. The main CO related subtheme that was present in this event was the “COs are suffering” subtheme, which is a particular type of suffering compared to suffering from violence in prisons or the potential exposure to COVID-19. Although the journalists presented claims from both sides of the argument, the claims made by the opposing side of the issue outnumbered the government’s claims. While it may appear the journalists utilized selective presentation and selective interviewing while presenting the articles with a pro-prison reform tone and angle, the journalists may have utilized claims made by claims makers who were readily available and eager to have their voice heard. It may have been more difficult to obtain statements and claims from government and prison officials as they are often not in a position to release information and opinions to the news media.

### ***5.22 COVID-19 and the Dauphin Correctional Centre Closure***

The majority of news items regarding the Dauphin prison closure were published before the pandemic; only one news item was published after the pandemic was declared. As noted in the literature review, Redondo et al., (2020) stated that typically, correctional institutions are overcrowded and due to high inmate populations, it is difficult to properly isolate inmates, which increases the risk of contracting COVID-19. Due to overcrowding and other poor conditions of correctional institutions (lack of social distancing, socio-economic disadvantaged inmates who may have pre-existing health conditions, poor health care), prisons in the U.S. and elsewhere have become hotspots for the virus (Lyons, 2020). Therefore, it would be expected that prison

reform/critical subthemes would be present in news items about the closure of Dauphin Correctional Centre in the post-COVID timeframe as the inmates would need to be dispersed to other Manitoba prisons. In the post-COVID period, it was noted above that there was only one news item published that focused on the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure. This was surprising as one could expect social justice advocates and others like the MGEU who were opposing the closure of the jail to utilize COVID-19 as a rhetorical device to bolster their claims as to why the government should reconsider the closure. The *Winnipeg Free Press* published an article on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, “Union calls on province to delay jail’s closure”. This article discussed how the MGEU was urging the province to reconsider its plan to close Dauphin Correctional Centre as concerns of COVID-19 spreading to the inmate population increased. Much like claims made in the pre-COVID period, a claim was made by MGEU President Michelle Gawronsky who stated, “Adding 60 inmates to other correctional facilities around Manitoba, some of which are already forcing inmates to sleep on the floor, would only exacerbate the risks posed by COVID-19 to inmates and correctional officers” (Pritchard, 2020, p.1). This claim reflects how COVID-19 was used by a pro-prison claims maker as a reason not to close the prison, while highlighting the “prison is overcrowded” prison reform/critical subtheme. Within the same article, Gawronsky made other critical claims about the government, and stated it was “unacceptable to place these families in such an untenable position” (Pritchard, 2020, p.1). Gawronsky’s claims referenced various prison reform/critical subthemes, such as “prison is too harsh” subtheme, “inmates are suffering” subtheme, and the “prison is overcrowded” subtheme, as well as the “CO in danger” and “COs are suffering” correctional officer related subthemes. The journalist noted Justice Minister Cliff Cullen was not available for an interview on the topic, and then followed with quote by Larry Budzinski of the Dauphin

Correctional Centre Coalition, which is a group of citizens who were rallying against the jail's closure. Budzinski claimed that adding 60 more inmates to an already overcrowded jail system "is just putting gasoline on a fire" (Pritchard, 2020, p.1). Budzinski continued and stated:

It doesn't take an immunologist to figure out that's pretty dangerous. I'd hate to see someone fall ill, and maybe even a death. Those are close, confining situations. Once it gets in the jails it could be devastating...It's just ripe for explosion in an incarceratory setting (Pritchard, 2020, p.1).

The claims made by Budzinski focus on issues with overcrowding in prisons, as well as issues with no social distancing in prisons, a subtheme from the health and COVID theme. Budzinski's claims also focus on the dangers that the virus poses to staff and inmates. This is a new form of danger, adding to traditional prison stereotypes noted in the literature to be staples of news media coverage of prisons. This demonstrates how COVID-19 was referenced by claims makers with varying interests, including those who are critical of prisons and those who are not. The journalist concluded the article with the statistics on overcrowded prison conditions, and a statement made by a Manitoba Justice spokesperson in which there was no direct answer provided on whether the prison closure would be delayed. The spokesperson provided a written statement that was not very compelling, indicating they plan to continue to adjust their operations and response as situations change, and continue to take direction from public health experts (Pritchard, 2020). Overall, the claims making did not shift during this event due to the COVID-19 pandemic which was surprising. However, this article was coded for four out of the five overarching themes, and contained numerous subthemes which demonstrates how the news items that focused on the Dauphin jail closure contained prison reform/critical issues as well as other themes and their respective subthemes.

### ***5.23 The Social Construction of the Dauphin Correctional Centre Closure***

The Dauphin Correctional Centre closure was an event covered by the news media over a period of roughly three months. During these months, news stories featured claims made by those who were justifying the jail closure, as well as those who opposed the closure. As noted above, journalists presented an unbalanced claims making competition by giving voice to more claims from those who opposed the closure of the prison and those who presented prison reform and critical oriented claims. The cumulative construction of the event by journalists and claims makers can be explained by analyzing the overall framing of the event. The news items about the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure in both the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe were framed to reflect how the closure of the Manitoba prison would have negative impacts on the region, correctional staff and their families, and inmates. The overall economy in Dauphin would suffer, correctional officers would lose their jobs and may have to relocate their families, and Manitoba prisons are already overcrowded, thus the closure of a prison would make matters worse for inmates whom would also have to be relocated farther from their communities. Therefore, the overall media framing and deeper subtext of this event is that money matters more than people. Dauphin Correctional Centre was closed as a cost cutting initiative, regardless of the impact the closure had on the correctional staff and inmates. There were correctional officers, Dauphin residents, and the MGEU president who made claims in the media that the closure would negatively impact correctional staff and their families, as well as social justice advocates who argued the closure would negatively impact inmates. The government officials claimed that the Dauphin Correctional Centre was too old and it was more cost effective to invest into the Dauphin court house. Thus, the overall framing of this event in the news media reflected that the government cared more about money and cost saving initiatives than human welfare.

In the end, the Dauphin Correctional Centre was closed as planned. While there were numerous claims makers who opposed the closure in the news media, both pro-prison and those critical of prisons, they were not successful in changing the course of the closure. Although the claims makers did not necessarily ‘win’ the social construction contest due to the prison being closed, both the pro-prison claims makers in this event and the claims makers who were reform oriented or critical of prisons utilized the media to bring awareness to prison issues, such as issues with overcrowding in the provincial prison system, harsh prison conditions and the suffering of inmates, the economic suffering of correctional officers, and the dangers faced by both inmates and correctional officers in prison. Thus, this short cycle of news stories about the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure made visible many prisons reform and critical issues that exist within the prison system, correctional officer related concerns, and traditional prison stereotypes which reinforce to readers how prison is a dangerous place. Overall, it does not appear that the COVID-19 pandemic was an effective rhetorical strategy of claims making by the MGEU. Much like this event, the next section examines COVID-19’s impact on prisons and how COVID-19 was utilized as a rhetorical strategy to bring awareness to prison reform and prison issues.

### **5.3 COVID-19’s Impact on Prisons**

I hypothesized that COVID-19 would change the nature of the news media coverage of prisons during the pandemic. I argued that there are many critical correctional issues which have been mostly ignored in the past that the news media may focus more attention on during the pandemic. For example: overcrowding, the use of isolation or solitary confinement and mentally ill inmates, the high prevalence and spreading of communicable and infectious disease among correctional populations, a high prevalence of disadvantaged social groups, and systemic racism



(Redondo et al., 2020; Weinrath & Winterdyk, 2019). Typically, correctional institutions are overcrowded and due to high inmate populations, it is difficult to properly isolate inmates, which increases the risk of contracting COVID-19, making infection and disease control in correctional institutions difficult (Nowonty & Piquero, 2020; Redondo et al., 2020). Due to the noted correctional issues that have been intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not surprising that local and national news items focusing on COVID-19's impacts and outbreaks in correctional centres were common in the post-COVID time period. In total, there were 85 news items in the post-COVID period, and 53 of the news items (62%) discussed COVID-19. It is important to note that 35 (66%) of the 53 news items were published by the *Winnipeg Free Press*, while only 18 (34%) of the 53 news items were published by *The Globe and Mail*, reflecting more local coverage that focused on COVID-19 and its impact on prisons.

### ***5.31 Claims Makers and COVID-19's Impact on Prisons in the Local News***

There were a variety of claims makers in the local news items discussing COVID-19 in relation to prisons, therefore, they were broken down by category. Out of all the local news items about COVID-19 and prisons, 48% contained claims by prison officials, 31% featured lawyers and legal professionals as claims makers, 34% had government officials and politicians as claims makers, 20% cited claims by social justice advocates, 17% contained claims by prisoners or the family and friends of prisoners, and 34% of news items cited claims by others (professors, correctional officers, members of the public, unions, prison volunteers, students). It is noteworthy that 48% of local news items about COVID-19 and prisons featured prison officials as claims makers as they are often invisible in most news media accounts of corrections. It appears prison officials in Manitoba may have felt more of a need to respond to and then counter claims made about the pandemic by those outside of the institution compared to other prison issues, such as law

reform and segregation. However, much like the previous events discussed above, many of the claims made by prison officials were generic written statements, less compelling, and were far less prevalent than the verbal quotes provided by those who were critical of prisons and the government. In contrast to the police, prison officials rarely held news conferences or media events. Additionally, news items that discussed COVID-19 and prison outbreaks often highlighted prison reform issues that have not been addressed for years, and the potential impact these issues may have on prison outbreaks.

For example, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published an editorial on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, “Corrections must act to reduce virus risk”. This editorial was published shortly after the pandemic was declared and highlighted prison conditions that create a risk for the virus to proliferate in congregate living settings. The editorial began by highlighting how overcrowding makes physical distancing often impossible, hygiene supplies are meagre so inmates do not have routine access to anti-viral masks, gloves, and sanitizer, and claimed a disproportionately large percentage of inmates already have health problems due to poor nutrition and substance use (“Corrections must act”, 2020). The beginning of the editorial reflected a critical tone and included the “issues with overcrowding” subtheme from the prison reform/critical theme, and numerous subthemes from the health and COVID theme, such as the “no social distancing”, “lack of PPE”, and “poor nutrition”. The editorial stated, “Officials are aware such factors combine to make prisons fertile breeding grounds for the novel coronavirus, but Manitoba has fallen short of changes needed to keep COVID-19 from endangering the 2,000 inmates in provincial institutions. Strong action is needed” (“Corrections must act”, 2020, p.1). This statement highlights the “government is not accountable” and “deficiencies in the prison system” prison reform/critical subthemes, as well as the “prison is dangerous” subtheme from the traditional prison stereotypes

theme. The editorial also discussed the dangers posed to correctional officers, demonstrating the “CO in danger” subtheme by indicating, “The danger is to prisoners, certainly, but it’s also to institution staff and their families, as the workers can carry the virus to and from their workplaces” (“Corrections must act”, 2020, p.1). The editorial made claims about changes that need to occur in prisons to help curb the spread of COVID-19, such as depopulating federal and provincial penal institutions by releasing low-risk and non-violent inmates, and discussed changes that were already occurring (“changes in prison system due to COVID” subtheme), such as transforming the Winnipeg Remand Centre into a quarantine station, increased access to bail hearings on evenings and weekends, a ban on in-person visits, and increased communication via phone or video link. The editorial concluded by claiming the pandemic is an opportune moment for Manitoba to engage in a “bigger-picture review of its history of over-incarceration” and stated, “extreme threats call for innovative solutions”. This editorial was presented with a reform-oriented angle, and demonstrates how the COVID-19 virus brought awareness to prison issues and reform that is needed to help curb the spread of the virus before the virus entered the correctional institutions in Manitoba. The following article demonstrates how the news media framed issues involving the largest COVID-19 outbreak at a Manitoba prison.

Headingley Correctional Centre had the largest COVID-19 outbreak in a Manitoba prison during the second wave of the pandemic (May, 2020). The *Winnipeg Free Press* published an article on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, “Infected inmate alleges poor treatment in jail”. The article began by stating amid the outbreak of roughly 100 COVID-19 cases at Headingley Correctional Centre, an inmate who tested positive for the virus is alleging infected inmates are being treated like animals (May, 2020). The journalist then quoted the inmate, who stated, “They’re treating us like we’re sick animals...They’re just throwing us in a cell with nothing and not even trying to

help us at all” (May, 2020, p.1). This quote highlights how the “prison is too harsh” and “inmates are suffering” prison reform/critical subthemes were linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to this inmate, correctional officers were not taking the inmates’ symptoms seriously (“CO in bad light” subtheme) when they were reported, and there were delays in testing (“poor healthcare in prison” subtheme) which contributed to the entire cell block contracting the virus (“CO in danger” subtheme). The journalist indicated inmate James Pottinger spoke to the *Winnipeg Free Press* over the phone during one of his 30 minute breaks, and claimed the rest of the time he is in isolation in his cell without any personal items or reading material, reflecting how there are “issues with segregation” due to the prison response to the virus. Statistics were provided on the number of COVID-19 cases at Headingley Correctional Centre, calling it the largest outbreak in a Manitoba jail, reflecting the “prison is dangerous” subtheme. The journalist then stated the province responded to a *Winnipeg Free Press* inquiry about the number of correctional staff and inmates who have tested positive and claimed they did not have testing data. The inmate’s wife made a claim that she could hear the inmate struggling to breathe over the phone two weeks ago and repeatedly called the jail to ask why he had not been tested. The journalist stated that according to the province, the inmates who were asymptomatic were given cloth masks that were washed daily, and those with symptoms were given surgical masks. However, the inmate claimed he was given masks made out of bedsheets and elastic bands, and claimed he had been wearing the same mask for more than four days, reinforcing the “lack of PPE” subtheme in the prison. The inmate also claimed a nurse walked by the door of his isolation cell every day and he was expected to “give a thumbs-up” to indicate he was okay, highlighting the “poor healthcare in prison” subtheme. The journalist stated that although Manitoba Justice said in a statement that inmates are being provided games, magazines, and art supplies, the inmate said he has not been

provided any such items, insinuating the “government is not accountable” in their efforts to help inmates cope with protocols in place due to the novel coronavirus. Another inmate who wished to remain anonymous claimed the inability of inmates to physically distance (“no social distancing” subtheme), visit with family or friends, attend programming (“need for more rehabilitation/programs” subtheme), or use the exercise yard “is wreaking havoc on our physical and mental health” (“prison is too harsh”, “inmates are suffering” subthemes) (May, 2020, p.1). The article concluded with a statement from Manitoba Justice that acknowledged the strain that COVID-19 is putting on inmates and their families. Correctional authorities indicated that in response they had reinstated they have purchased games, movies, magazines, art supplies, handheld gaming devices, and reduced the rate for phone calls. The article contained claims from opposing sides of the issue surrounding the alleged poor treatment of inmates, but focused more attention on claims made by the inmates and their family compared to those by Manitoba Justice. Whenever a statement was provided by Manitoba Justice, the journalist would provide a rebuttal from the inmates, calling into question the accuracy of statements made by provincial officials. The journalist appeared to have a sympathetic tone throughout the article for the inmates who were incarcerated during the COVID-19 outbreak at the prison. As noted by Vickovic et al., (2013), this sympathetic tone and angle presented by the journalist may suggest to members of the public that the inmates are victims of unfortunate circumstances, and are now subject to the control of correctional officers who are not taking their symptoms seriously.

### ***5.32 Claims Makers and COVID-19’s Impact on Prisons in the National News***

There were fewer national news items published that discussed COVID-19’s impact on prisons compared to the local coverage. However, much like the local coverage, there were a variety of claims makers in the national news coverage. Out of all the national news items about

COVID-19 and prisons, 37% of news items featured claims from government officials and politicians, 31% cited claims from lawyers and legal professionals, 31% had claims from social justice advocates, 20% featured prison officials, 14% had claims from prisoners or the family and friends of prisoners, and 14% of news items cited claims from others. Therefore, there were some claims making similarities in the local and national coverage, such as the number of claims made by government officials and politicians, lawyers and legal professionals, and claims made by prisoners or the family and friends of prisoners. There were far fewer claims made by prison officials in the national news items compared to the local, which was not anticipated as throughout the analysis, statements from CSC appeared more frequently than statements made by Manitoba Justice. However, it appears the pandemic contributed to an increase in claims made by the provincial correctional system in response to the prison outbreaks. Additionally, there was a notable difference in frequency of social justice advocates in the national coverage compared to the local coverage, which may have been due to claims made by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association as they were noted to be a key claims maker during the analysis. The ‘other’ category had fewer claims compared to the local coverage. However, the category was comprised of various disparate claims makers so it is difficult to determine why that is the case. Much like the previous events discussed above, many of the claims made by prison officials were generic written statements, less compelling, and were far less prevalent than verbal quotes provided by those who were critical of prisons and the government. Similar to the local coverage of COVID-19 and prison, the national coverage also highlighted similar correctional reform issues while speaking to the threat the virus has on prisons.

*The Globe and Mail* published an article on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, “Saskatchewan’s Minister of Corrections under fire”. This national article was unique because it focused on an

outbreak at a specific institution rather than generally speaking about impact the virus had on the system as a whole. It is also important to note that this article demonstrates how the racist system frame was integrated with COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons. This article reported that the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) was calling for the resignation of Saskatchewan's Minister of Corrections, Christine Tell, after more than 100 inmates at Saskatoon Correctional Centre tested positive for COVID-19 (Joy, 2020). The journalist quoted National Vice Chief Kim Beaudin, who claimed, "This requires leadership with a level of foresight and compassion that is lacking here in public response to COVID-19...our people are now facing a death sentence in Saskatoon Correctional Centre due to COVID-19" (Joy, 2020, p.1). This article touched on numerous prison reform and critical subthemes such as issues with overcrowding and vulnerable people, claims that the prison is too harsh and inmates are suffering due to contracting COVID-19, and pointed out how the government has not been accountable with their response as well as deficiencies in the prison system which were claimed to have caused the outbreak. The article highlighted changes that have occurred in the prison system due to COVID-19, such as providing PPE to officers and inmates, utilizing program space to create more social distancing between inmates and staff, and restricting movement throughout the facility, and stated CAP was calling for the release of all non-violent inmates immediately. Kim Beaudin highlighted colonial issues that plague the prison system ("colonization/systemic issues" subtheme) claiming, "These are lives being intentionally put at risk, and is nothing short of a genocidal, colonist policy" (Joy, 2020, p.1).

President Julia Quigley of CUPE 1949, the union that represents 130 lawyers and legal staff at Legal Aid Saskatchewan, asserted the majority of inmates in Saskatchewan prisons are Indigenous and are on remand status and therefore have not been convicted of a crime. Quigley

asserted, “The virus doesn’t discriminate, but the criminal justice system does. Our Indigenous clients will bear the brunt of the Saskatoon outbreak, and any other outbreaks if we don’t contain it” (Joy, 2020, p.1). This claim reflects how the racist system frame was interwoven with COVID-19 within the article, and highlighted the “overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples” and “criminal justice system discriminates” subthemes. The journalist stated Saskatchewan’s Minister of Corrections department was contacted for a comment on the situation but did not respond. Similar to other news items critical of prisons discussed in the previous two sections, this article began with critical claims made against Saskatchewan’s Minister of Corrections setting up a pro-prison reform angle to the story. The claims making competition was unbalanced as the majority of claims presented in the article were those of social justice advocates or those critical of the government. The journalist attempted to provide a statement from the government but noted they did not respond, and provided one outdated statement made by the government in July 2020 near the end of the article that indicated no prisoners had been released early from Saskatchewan prisons during the pandemic at that time. However, it must be emphasized that this article was atypical because national news items often focused on issues surrounding COVID and correctional institutions on a broad level, rather than focusing on a specific outbreak at a federal or provincial prison. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight this article because it demonstrates how the racist system frame was integrated with COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons.

### ***5.33 The Social Construction of COVID-19 in Prisons***

Much like the first two major issues and events discussed, in the majority of the news items surrounding the impact of COVID-19 in prisons and COVID-19 outbreaks, the journalists presented ‘two sides of the story’. However, the claims and quoted statements from the social justice advocates, unions, and prisoners appeared more frequently and prominently in each news



item and were much more persuasive than the written statements provided by government and prison officials often placed in a secondary or defensive position within news items. As noted by Best (1990), the construction of social problems tends to be a continuing process with one claim following and building upon another. This was evident in the social construction of COVID-19's impact on prisons regarding the claims made by social justice advocates and those critical of the government as their claims appeared more frequent, provided statistics, and direct quotes from prisoners who experienced the impact the virus within prisons. However, as noted earlier, the imbalance of claims made by various claims makers could be attributed to journalists utilizing selective interviewing and presentation, or the lack of availability of government and prison officials. Overall, the news items about COVID-19 and its impact on correctional institutions were framed and constructed to reflect prisons as dangerous places for staff and inmates due to the increased risk of contracting the virus. Calls for action from various claims makers often focused on prison reform/critical issues that have plagued the system for decades, such as addressing issues with segregation and the isolation of inmates, issues with overcrowding and overincarceration, harsh prison conditions which contribute to inmates suffering, calls for more government accountability, and deficiencies in the prison system. Additionally, journalists framed their stories to highlight that while the government is attempting to take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19, they are not doing enough to look after staff and inmates' physical and mental health, and are also not addressing or fixing the systemic issues in the prison system. This demonstrates how COVID-19 brought awareness to the need for prison reform. As noted earlier, Skolnik (2020) argued the emergence of COVID-19 has forced courts to increasingly consider qualitative proportionality (the harshness of prison conditions) rather than focusing more on quantitative proportionality (the length of imprisonment) when justifying punishments in terms of

retribution. The news items were framed with critical tones, and focused on the harsh prison conditions faced by suffering inmates. It appears the news items utilized proportionality frames rather than retributive frames during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is reflected in *The Globe and Mail* article discussed above, the journalist quoted National Vice Chief Kim Beaudin, who claimed, "...our people are now facing a death sentence in Saskatoon Correctional Centre due to COVID-19" (Joy, 2020, p.1). Consequently, this may impact public opinion about corrections, which may in turn lead to changes in policy and prison reform efforts once the pandemic is over.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and the virus continues to present challenges for the prison system due to the congregate living setting. Both the national and local news items about COVID-19 that were analyzed in this sample suggest that the news media focused on critical correctional issues, such as: overcrowding, the use of isolation or solitary, poor healthcare in prisons, the high prevalence and spreading of communicable and infectious disease among correctional populations, and systemic racism. It is important to note the news items about COVID-19 and its impact on the correctional system contained many of the subthemes from all the overarching themes, which demonstrates how COVID-19 was linked to numerous prison issues that have plagued our system for decades, bringing more awareness to issues that may have been ignored in the past. Additionally, the news items involving COVID-19's impact on the prison system often highlighted the dangers this virus presents to both inmates and correctional staff. As noted in the literature review, news media often presents prison as a dangerous place as it is a newsworthy topic. While in the past these dangers have focused on the violence that occurs in the correctional system, COVID-19 presents a unique danger which draws from and helps to perpetuate the common stereotype that prison is a dangerous place.

Overall, these three important issues/events generated many news items in the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe, encompassed many of the various critical and reform-oriented subthemes identified in the first part of the study, and also brought to light several other subthemes related to traditional news themes about the prison. The claims making competitions for these three events/issues were very similar as was the framing of news items. The competition was unbalanced as the majority of news items contained more claims by social justice and prisoner advocates than government and prison officials, and the critical claims were far more prominently featured in most news reports. Moreover, critical claims were rhetorically more effective as they often were verbal quotes rather than general statements from government and prison officials. Overall, the majority of the articles were framed in a critical tone, and were presented from a pro-prison reform angle. This finding is consistent with Cecil's (2019) study which detected more frequent discussions of prison reform in the news media, reinforcing the idea that prison reform is now a newsworthy topic. In the following section I examine how the racist system frame was presented in the news media during the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. Unlike the finding noted above, the racist system frame was not as newsworthy as anticipated in the sample.

#### **5.4 The Racist System**

As noted in the literature review, Surette (2007) discussed pre-existing criminal justice frames that are utilized by the news media, one being the 'racist system frame'. The racist system frame focuses on the criminal justice system rather than on the particular crime itself, and depicts criminal justice institutions as racist agents of oppression (Surette, 2007). Due to Canada's colonial foundation, the overrepresentation of Indigenous offenders in correctional institutions is a pressing issue. Therefore, it was expected that this frame would be present in the news items in

both the pre-COVID and post-COVID period. The data was examined to see if this frame was present in the way news about prisons was reported to see if the news media linked the overrepresentation of Indigenous offenders in custody during the COVID-19 pandemic as it is argued that Indigenous peoples are at a higher risk for having more severe reactions to COVID-19 (Whittaker, 2021). In total, there were only 36 news items that contained the racist system frame which was surprising as it was identified in the literature review as being a common frame utilized by the news media. Additionally, there were more news items coded for this frame in the pre-COVID period (19 news items) than in the post-COVID period (17 news items), and only six news items in the post-COVID period were COVID related which was not expected. There was more national news coverage (21 news items) of this frame compared to local news coverage (15 news items), however, both the local and national news focused on broad systemic racism occurring in Manitoba and Canadian prisons.

#### ***5.41 Claims makers and the Racist System Frame***

There were only four news items that were coded exclusively for the racist system frame. These four news items were published in the pre-COVID period, and consisted of two letters to the editor, an opinion piece, and an article. There was only one local news item present out of the four noted news items, and it was a letter to the editor. In both letters to the editor, the members of the public discussed the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Manitoba prisons, and called on the government to address this issue. The article published by *The Globe and Mail* focused on the overincarceration of Black offenders in Canadian federal prisons, and briefly acknowledged the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples by comparing the statistics on the number of Black and Indigenous prisoners. The journalist quoted a briefing note prepared by Correctional Service of Canada for former Public Safety Minister Bill Blair which indicated that

Correctional Service of Canada has begun to study the Black inmate population more closely and track the associated data. The articles also highlighted how the briefing note claimed the overrepresentation of specific groups in federal custody is a complex issue, and that sentencing decisions are not made by the Correctional Service of Canada; therefore, they do not control the incoming inmate population. *The Globe and Mail* published an opinion piece written by Lisa Kerr, an assistant professor in the faculty of law at Queen's University, titled, "Why does the Indigenous rate of incarceration only grow?" Kerr (2020) set a critical tone by discussing a recent report from the Office of the Correctional Investigator which indicated the number of Indigenous people in federal prison has continued to increase in the last four years, while the non-Indigenous incarcerated population has decreased. Kerr (2020) stated while there is no single factor that explains the incarceration rates, she claimed sentencing policy is partially to blame. The author provided an overview of the Gladue framework and its intent to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prison, and identified the variation in how the framework is implemented across Canada as an issue along with mandatory minimum sentences. Kerr ended her opinion piece by claiming the justice system has not learned enough from community-based and Indigenous legal traditions that offer more promising methods of responding to wrongdoing. While there were a few news items that focused specifically on race issues in prison, the majority of news items that were coded for the racist system frame either briefly mentioned statistics on race and the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples while addressing other specific correctional issues, or the frame was common in news items focusing on broader prison reform and long-standing prison issues. News items that were coded for the racist system frame were often also coded for the "government is not accountable", "deficiencies in the prison system", "inmates are suffering", "prison is too harsh",

“overcrowding/overincarceration”, and “need for more restorative justice” prison reform subthemes. The following examples reflect how the racist system frame was linked to various prison reform subthemes and subthemes from the other overarching themes.

In the pre-COVID period, *The Globe and Mail* published an opinion piece on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 titled, “Prison breaking point”. This opinion piece was published by Justin Ling, a Toronto based freelance journalist who examined the deplorable prison conditions and systemic issues in the Canadian prison system. Ling asserted that the conditions of our system “reflect a humanitarian crisis lying in wait, laden with systemic rot”, displaying a prison reform and critical attitude toward the Canadian prison system (Ling, 2019, p.1). This opinion piece was typical of news items coded for the racist system frame, as many of the items contained numerous prison reform/critical subthemes, as well as other themes. Ling quoted a report submitted in 2018 by Ivan Zinger, Canada’s Correctional Investigator, who claimed, “The Service continues to assume the risk of running prisons without 24/7 health coverage [“poor healthcare in prison” subtheme]...I witnessed outdoor segregation ‘yards’ [“issues with segregation” subtheme] that were actually cages, easily mistaken for a dog run or kennel” [“prison is too harsh” subtheme, “inmates are suffering” subtheme]” (Ling, 2019, p.1). Ling referenced another report submitted by former Correctional Investigator, Howard Sapers, who indicated correctional officers were increasingly using force while dealing with inmates who had attempted self-harm or suicide (“CO in bad light” subtheme). Ling (2019) stated:

Going back through years of these reports is like reading a meticulous and galling laundry list of concerns: poor food quality; wild abuses of solitary confinement; low prison pay and the rising cost of basic essentials; systemic racism; a failure to help

inmates with serious mental-health issues; slashed programming due to a lack of funding (p.1).

The above assertions made by Ling highlights how three of the overarching themes (prison reform/critical, CO related, healthcare and COVID) were brought together while discussing failures in the prison system. Ling spoke to what he referred to as a “race problem”, asserting that nearly a quarter of the prison population is Indigenous, despite Indigenous people accounting for less than five percent of the national population, and claimed the problem is more acute in the Prairies where recidivism rates are staggering (Ling, 2019). Ivan Zinger was quoted again on the race issue, claiming, “It is at a crisis point right now”, and indicated an overall lack of culturally informed programming has made reintegration hard and the problem worse (Ling, 2019, p.1). Overall, this opinion piece contained eight out of the eleven prison reform/critical frames, four out of the five racist system subthemes, and contained one to two subthemes from the CO related and healthcare and COVID themes. This example shows how the racist system frame was linked in the news media to other prison reform/critical issues, communicating to readers that these issues are important and need to be addressed. The author quoted Ivan Zinger numerous times, a criminal-defence lawyer, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and Senator Kim Pate, all who were critical of the prison system and government.

In the post-COVID period, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published an op-ed on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 titled, “Corrections issues decades in the making”. It is important to note that the author of this article is Kate Kehler, chair of the Restorative Justice Association of Manitoba and Executive Director of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. This op-ed was similar to the opinion piece discussed above as it contained numerous prison reform and critical subthemes (six in total), as well as the racist system frame and the healthcare and COVID theme. Kehler

began by acknowledging the current COVID-19 pandemic and quoted a prosecutor who stated, “If they are supposed to be in, we are still saying they should be, but if we can release them, we are” (Kehler, 2020, p.1). Kehler (2020) followed by asking the readers, “Shouldn’t we have made sure in the first place that they should be in?” (p.1). The author discussed the need for more restorative justice (“need for more restorative justice” subtheme) and treatment-focused solutions (“need for more rehabilitations/programs” subtheme), provided statistics on the overpopulated prison system (“prison is overcrowded” subtheme), the high cost of incarceration (“prison is costly” subtheme), and indicated that regardless of the numerous issues, incarceration continued to be the default when dealing with crime (“deficiencies in the prison system” subtheme). The author described how seventy five percent of inmates in federal, provincial, and community-based programs in Manitoba are Indigenous, describing this statistic as the most troubling of all the issues (Kehler, 2020). Kehler (2020) quoted former MP Jane Philpott and Senator Kim Pate whom she claimed accurately outlined Manitoba’s current situation:

If you’re poor, homeless, racialized, living in violence or with the ravages of the intergenerational trauma of residential school and colonial inequality, and anesthetizing yourself to such pain with drugs and alcohol, you are more likely to get prison than you are to get treatment, housing, retraining, or employment (p.1-2).

This quote reinforces how prison reform and critical themes (“calls for socio-economic/societal change” subtheme) and the racist system themes (“colonization/systemic issues” subtheme) are interwoven in the news media to bring awareness to race issues. Kehler (2020) claimed that restorative justice programs that are culturally appropriate routinely report recidivism rates that are half of what corrections reports. Kehler (2020) ended the article by stating:



Once the COVID-19 crisis has passed, it will be up to us to resolve the crisis we have allowed poverty to create and perpetuate. Transforming our justice system into one that is both just and effective would be a good place to start (p.2).

Due to the author's employment and position, it is not surprising that the op-ed was framed with a prison reform and critical angle. The author highlighted claims from a prosecutor, a former MP and Senator Kim Pate whom are social justice advocates. The author critically questioned the statement made by the prosecutor regarding the release of inmates due to the pandemic, insinuating to readers that they should be skeptical of the government's response to COVID-19 in prisons, and described the statement made by the former MP and Pate as "accurate". Kehler (2020) presented the story with a very critical, reform-oriented approach to addressing prison and race issues in Manitoba.

#### ***5.42 Social Construction of the Racist System***

Unlike the three major issues and events discussed above, the news items that were coded exclusively for the racist system frame did not present 'two sides of the story', but this is not expected since three out of the four news items were either letters to the editor or an opinion piece. However, the news items that were coded for the racist system frame along with other overarching themes and subthemes often did not present 'two sides of the story'. When the journalists did, the claims and quoted statements from the social justice advocates and those critical of the Canadian prison system appeared much more frequently and appeared to be more rhetorically persuasive than the statements provided by government and prison officials. Journalists may not have presented a counter argument from government and prison officials due to the nature of this frame; it may be hard for the government and prison officials to justify the high rates of Black and Indigenous peoples in custody. The overall framing and construction of

the news items coded for the racist system frame was that the statistics clearly show there is a race issue in the Canadian justice system, and more specifically the Canadian prison system, and the government needs to act and address the systemic racism. Calls for action from various claims makers often linked prison reform/critical issues with race issues, such as issues with overcrowding and overincarceration, harsh prison conditions which contribute to inmates suffering, calls for more government accountability, and deficiencies in the prison system that contribute to systemic racism. Additionally, the news items were framed to reflect that while the government is acknowledging there is an overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous peoples in custody, their current responses are not addressing or fixing the systemic race issues in the prison system.

Overall, there were fewer news items containing the racist system frame than originally suspected after completing the review of the literature. Even more surprising, COVID-19 did not appear to be a rhetoric utilized often by claims makers to bring awareness to systemic racism in prisons in the post-COVID period. Race was most often presented as part of a broader discussion of critical issues, rather than as a singular issue that demands attention. A reason for this may be due to the criteria set out in the sampling process. As noted in the methods chapter, articles that only mentioned prison briefly were excluded from the sample. There were news media articles that focused on Indigenous issues in general but only contained a sentence or two on prison and were therefore excluded. For example, stories more generally about Indigenous overrepresentation in the justice system were excluded if these items did not focus primarily or significantly on prison or prison issues. In general, news items were considered to be primarily and significantly about prison issues if they contained “prison”, “jail”, or “corrections” in the title and/or if they contained information about prison within the first two paragraphs of the

article. Therefore, there were articles that gave attention to race issues in the justice system and reconciliation, however, they were excluded as prison was briefly mentioned, or it was a secondary focus of the article, not the primary focus. In the following chapter, I return to the questions I posed and discuss the significant findings, as well as reflect on the limitations of my study and direction for future research.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative findings from the thematic content analysis produced mixed support for the study hypotheses: some of the results were anticipated while others were unexpected. As noted above, this research addressed three general areas. The first set of research questions involved the amount of news media coverage of prison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The review of literature found a consistent lack of news media coverage of prison in general compared to other parts of the criminal justice system. Therefore, I posed the question: was there an increase in news media coverage of prison during the COVID-19 pandemic? I hypothesized there would be more news items published after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic due to prisons being congregate living settings and the potential impact the virus can have in these types of environments. However, this was not the case as just over fifty percent of the prison news stories were published before the pandemic. There was a total of 97 news stories (55.3%) published before the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, and a total of 85 news stories (46.7%) after. As previously noted, once the pandemic was declared, news media outlets may have deemed prison stories to be less newsworthy than before, focusing more on the COVID-19 pandemic in general and its impacts. For example, news media outlets may have felt the pandemic's impact on nursing homes and long-term care facilities was more newsworthy than the potential impact on prisons. Furthermore, the majority of the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure coverage which accounted for 13.5% of the local news sample was published before the pandemic was declared. I also questioned if coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic worked to make the prison more visible. Research by Ross (2011) has demonstrated that prisons are the most invisible part of the justice system due to many factors, such as difficulties with access to correctional facilities, the often-geographical isolation of prisons, few reporters specializing in

covering prisons, and the belief that the public is not interested in prison-related issues. If one were to measure the level of visibility by the total amount of news items produced after the pandemic was declared, it is clear that the pandemic did not bring increased visibility to prison. Since correctional institutions were already a largely invisible part of the justice system in the news media, COVID-19 did not make the prison a more newsworthy topic to media outlets once the pandemic began. Preliminary research from Australia (Whittaker, 2021) suggested that greater media coverage and visibility of prisons did not result from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is consistent with my findings. Whittaker (2021) observed that once the pandemic began, Australian institutions tightened the already small scope for outside contact that existed. Visits from family and friends were banned, visits from community support services were limited, and inmates reported fears of using the shared phones to contact family and friends (Whittaker, 2021). Thus, the constriction of communication with the outside world as well as long periods of isolation made it more difficult for inmates to communicate their fears and frustrations to their supports. It was reported in the news items in my study that inmates were complaining of long periods of isolation, as well as frustrations with bans on visiting and community support services. Therefore, these factors may have contributed to a lack of media coverage of prisons during the pandemic. Additionally, while sifting through the initial sample of news items that were generated from the searches of both local and national news items, there were numerous articles that focused on the pandemic's impact on the court system. Since the primary focus of these articles were on the court system and not prison, they were excluded from the sample. It is therefore possible that other aspects of the justice system may have received more attention by the news media than prisons. Furthermore, the timeframe of the sample may have impacted the results. For example, the post pandemic sample consisted of news items up to March 2021,

roughly one year after the pandemic was declared. There have been numerous “waves” of COVID-19 since the pandemic was declared, and this sample only consisted of the first three of the waves. There have been numerous outbreaks in various provincial and federal institutions since the sample timeframe ended, as well as a highly contagious Omicron variant which most likely had an impact on the prison system and may have caused an increase in reporting on this issue in the year following my sample timeframe.

The second set of questions explored traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding prison and punishment, many of which are perpetuated in the news media and popular culture. I posed the following research question: Does the news media coverage of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforce traditional myths and stereotypes about punishment and prison? Or conversely, does news media coverage of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic challenge traditional myths and stereotypes about punishment and prison? Traditional myths and stereotypes about the prison included how it is either a harsh, dangerous place or a lenient ‘holiday camp’, stereotypes that correctional officers are uncaring to inmates, and myths surrounding inmates receiving above average health care and amenities while in prison. News media representations of prison were analyzed before and during the COVID-19 health crisis in order to see if these traditional myths and stereotypes changed under pandemic conditions. As noted in chapter 4, the traditional prison stereotypes theme was identified in just under half of the news items (47.8%) across the whole two-year time period. When comparing the local to national coverage of the overarching traditional prison stereotypes theme, there were similar findings as traditional myths and stereotypes were present in half (50%) of *The Globe and Mail* sample, as opposed to being present in just under half (46%) of the *Winnipeg Free Press* sample. When examining the sample as a whole, the “prison is dangerous” subtheme was

the most prevalent out of the prison myths and stereotypes, and it was present in slightly more than forty percent (40.1%) of all news items. The “inmates are violent” subtheme was the next most prevalent subtheme; it was identified in twenty percent (20.3%) of all news items. Both of these two subthemes were expected to be prevalent as it was identified in the literature that traditional prison newsworthy items tend to focus on discrete events such as deaths in custody, riots, or incidents of violence. The remaining two subthemes, “prison is invisible” and “criminal justice system is too lenient”, were identified in less than five percent of the sample. The “criminal justice system is too lenient” subtheme was identified in the literature as being a common theme in the news media. The literature on the media’s influence on the public’s attitude toward punishment and prison reveals that the media often portrays two contrasting representations of prisons- as easy going ‘holiday camps’, or on the contrary, as dangerous and violent places, where there is a constant threat of violence and brutality (Marsh, 2009 p. 370). The results of this study show the news media reinforced the representation of prison as a dangerous, violent place, rather than a ‘holiday camp’. Furthermore, the “prison is too harsh” subtheme which was part of the overarching prison reform/critical frame was identified in just under a third of the news items (29.7%).

All together, traditional prison stereotypes showed a moderately significant increase of 20.7% between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe across all news items (Table 4.7). This increase can be attributed in particular to news items discussing the dangers of prison, which saw a moderate increase in news items in the post-pandemic period of 21.9% over the pre-pandemic proportions. The increase is not surprising as the COVID-19 pandemic created more dangers to inmates and staff in relation to contracting COVID-19, a “new” kind of prison danger compared to the more traditional or stereotypical dangers of prison such as deaths, violence, and

riots. News items that discussed COVID outbreaks in prison were coded for this subtheme as the virus is considered a threat to one's health and wellbeing. Thus, the stereotype that prison is a dangerous place was reinforced once the pandemic was declared, however, this was most likely due to the additional danger the virus presented to both inmates and staff. News items containing inmate violence showed a moderate 11.7% decrease in news coverage in the post pandemic period, but it did not reach statistical significance. This may be due to the strict measures that were put in place once the pandemic was declared which may have contributed to more inmates being safe from violence that occurs in the prison system. It was noted that inmates were placed in isolation once they were admitted into custody in the Manitoba prisons, and federal prisons also utilized isolation measures in order to help curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Murdoch, 2020; Pritchard, 2020). Because inmates were separated from each other more often, this likely decreased prison violence and death, which may in turn explain the decrease in news briefs and news items that were coded for the traditional prison stereotypes theme.

Additionally, Ross (2012) examined numerous correctional myths and called them into question. Myths identified by Ross that overlapped with myths and themes from my sample included quality of living conditions ("prison is too harsh", "prison is dirty", and "poor ventilation" subtheme), food quality ("poor nutrition" subtheme), appropriateness of healthcare ("poor healthcare in prison" subtheme), correctional officers lack of concern for inmates ("CO in bad light" subtheme), and myths surrounding the effectiveness and duration of the correctional sanction ("deficiencies in prison system" subtheme, "criminal justice system is too lenient" subtheme). Ross (2012) noted that the general public tends to believe prisons, as well as the living conditions within, are either too harsh or too lavish for incarcerated offenders. Ross (2012) asserted that although administrative areas within prisons are likely very clean, the cells and



interior of the correctional institutions are often filthy, the lighting and ventilation may also be poor. Out of the above noted quality of living condition subthemes, the “prison is too harsh” subtheme was the only one that was common in news coverage (29.7%); the other subthemes were present in under 6% of the sample. Similarly, the myth surrounding the quality of food in prison was not common and was only present in 1.6% of the sample. When examining the pre- and post-COVID prevalence of the “prison is too harsh” subtheme, the results demonstrate the subtheme was slightly more common during the post-COVID period but it was not statistically significant. Therefore, it does not appear that COVID-19 reinforced or challenged this correctional myth.

Regarding the quality of healthcare, inmates are often erroneously thought to be given above average and completely free medical and dental care. However, Ross (2012) asserted prisoners in the United States are often denied much-needed medical attention and are often not permitted access to medications prescribed prior to their incarceration. Moreover, there is a lack of psychologists and counsellors and there is reason for inmates to worry about catching serious and possibly fatal diseases as correctional institutions are notoriously unhealthy places (Ross, 2012). The myth that inmates receive above average health care was not bourn out in this sample. However, the findings were consistent with Ross’s (2012) assertions as the “poor healthcare in prison (includes mental health)” subtheme was present in 18.7% of the news items. While there was a slight increase in the reporting of this subtheme after the pandemic was declared, the increase was not statistically significant. However, the fact that there was media attention given to poor healthcare in prison in my sample, along with the absence of a theme surrounding inmates being given above average healthcare suggests that the news items in my sample challenged this correctional myth. It is important to note that Ross’s (2012) study reflects

correctional myths in the United States, while my sample reflects Canadian prisons and there are great differences in the healthcare system between the two countries.

When examining the myth of the uncaring disposition of correctional officers, or the ‘sadistic guard’ narrative, research shows that many people believe that all officers are uncaring, they are characterized as being known for brutality, incompetence, low intelligence, and indifference to human suffering (Ross, 2012). While the “CO in bad light” subtheme was present in the news items, it was only present in 7.7% of the sample, and there was a statistically significant but small increase between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. It was evident in news items from the sample that correctional officers were being blamed for bringing the virus into prisons. Additionally, the news items noted a lack of care and concern for inmates who reported COVID-19 symptoms to correctional officers, and inmates complained they were not taken seriously. These factors may have contributed to this myth and narrative being reinforced in the post-COVID period. Additionally, the news items that framed correctional officers in a good light were only present in 3% of the sample, and were evident in the same amount of news items in the pre- and post-COVID periods, therefore, the media did not portray correctional officers in a more sympathetic way, nor did the pandemic challenge the myth and narrative.

Deficiencies in the prison system were identified in just under half of the news items (41.8%), which is consistent with Ross’s (2012) findings that media outlets frequently question the efficacy of correctional sanctions. There was no real change for this subtheme during the post-COVID period. Therefore, it appears this myth was consistently present in media accounts before and after the pandemic was declared, thus, supporting the existence of this type of correctional myth that was reported in the literature.

Ultimately, work by Ross and others demonstrated that while there is some truth to the myths surrounding correctional institutions, there are also exaggerations and false information that is often disseminated by news media to the general public. Drawing on this prior literature, I examined common myths about correctional institutions in the news media because these myths and misconceptions about this hidden part of the criminal justice system can impact public opinion surrounding prison and correctional issues. By understanding representations in the news media, we can understand how prison and prison issues are socially constructed in the news media which shape public attitudes and opinions toward punishment. This is important because public opinion helps pave the way to meaningful correctional reform (Bennett, 2006; Ross, 2012). As noted by Vickovic et al. (2013), media representations that portray prisons as too soft can increase punitive attitudes toward inmates by representing them as inhuman and deserving of punishment. On the other hand, media representations of prisons as harsh, violent places may elicit empathy for inmates, causing readers to view the criminal justice system as too harsh and dangerous. The results from this study show that while some traditional prison stereotypes are still present in the news media representation of prison and were reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, other myths and stereotypes were challenged, or were rare. Overall, the results from the study are consistent with prior research findings that assert prison is often depicted as a harsh and dangerous place, where inmates are suffering due to a deficient system. Thus, these media depictions often resulted in calls for correctional reform by claims makers in the news media, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

The third set of questions addressed traditional prison issues/events long considered newsworthy by the press. This includes a focus on discrete incidents, such as violence, riots, escapes, and deaths. In addition, newer and more critical prison issues which focus on broader

system-wide issues related to reform were examined. I posed the following questions: Is the news media representation of correctional institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic consistent with coverage of traditional prison newsworthy items which focus on discrete incidents? Or does the coverage reflect newer, broader systemic prison newsworthy issues, namely, reform? News items were coded for traditional newsworthy events, such as deaths in custody, riots, escapes, and unique individual cases/events. Chermak (1998), Jewkes (2011), and Cecil (2019) asserted when correctional institutions are in the news media, the depictions are often of extreme and unusual discrete events, which are deemed newsworthy by journalists and news organizations. As noted above, more than half of the news items contained traditional newsworthy events (58.2%). The news items were also coded for systemic issues, such as the need for prison reform surrounding administrative segregation policy, overincarceration, and systemic racism. Almost two thirds of the news items discussed systemic issues (65.9%). It is important to note 43 (23.6%) news items contained both traditional newsworthy events as well as systemic issues. For example, some news items discussed individuals who passed away in custody who were in administrative segregation for long periods of time.

Of the news items that contained traditional newsworthy events, 66% were local news items, while 34% were national news items. It was noted in the Methods chapter for the local *Winnipeg Free Press* sample, the documents were filtered in the Proquest Canadian Newsstream database to include short articles that were titled “Derived Headlines” or “In Brief”, and were classified as “news briefs”. These items were short news briefs that contained traditional newsworthy prison events, such as a report of a death in custody, major assault, or escape that occurred at a Manitoba provincial prison, or Stony Mountain Institution, the only federal institution in Manitoba. The news briefs consisted of only a few sentences that very briefly

described the situation, and did not offer much detail about the event. As Levenson (2001) and Vickovic et al., (2013) discuss, when correctional institutions are in the news media, the depictions are often of extreme and unusual discrete events, such as riots, escapes, violence, and suicides which are deemed newsworthy by journalists and news organizations. These stories can be sensationalized or are grossly inaccurate, and in the absence of alternative sources or factual information, this can lead the public to hold distorted views of correctional institutions (Levenson, 2001; Vickovic et al., 2013). In contrast, the *Winnipeg Free Press* news briefs were not sensationalized and did not contain grossly inaccurate details. Rather, the briefs were short and offered minimal information. The local news outlet published 17 news briefs focusing specifically on traditional newsworthy events. Out of the 17 news briefs, 10 were about a death in custody, three were about major assaults, two were about escapes, one was about a major drug bust, one was about a correctional officer who was charged with sexual assault, and one provided statistics on how many COVID-19 positive cases there were in prison. There was one news brief that included both a death in custody and an escape in the same news brief. The news briefs contributed to the higher number of traditional newsworthy events in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Conversely, *The Globe and Mail* did not publish news briefs and therefore reported fewer of these traditionally newsworthy events. There were more news items coded for the traditional newsworthy events (e.g., deaths, escapes) than news items coded for the overarching traditional prison stereotypes theme (e.g., prison is dangerous). This was due to the prevalence of news briefs in local media as they often contained traditional newsworthy events but were not coded for any additional themes. For example, there were news briefs which indicated an inmate passed away in custody without any further information. These news briefs were coded solely as a traditional newsworthy event as the inmate most likely passed away from natural causes and no

additional themes were present. A few news briefs indicated an inmate passed away in custody due to violence at the hands of other inmates, therefore, they were coded as being a traditional newsworthy event, and coded for the “prison is dangerous” and “inmates are violent” subthemes. Additionally, if news items described individual cases, or celebrities in prison (e.g., Peter Nygard<sup>4</sup>) they were coded for traditional prison newsworthy items.

Of the 17 news briefs, 12 (71%) were published before the pandemic was declared, and five (29%) after. As noted above, news items involving inmate violence decreased after the pandemic was declared. This may be attributed to measures limiting contact put in place in jails and prisons during the pandemic, and may have contributed to less inmate violence. Thus, there were fewer local news briefs about inmate deaths and assaults. There was a difference in the reporting of traditional newsworthy events in the overall sample (both local and national) between the pre-COVID and post-COVID timeframe. In the pre-COVID period, 57% of all the news items contained traditional prison newsworthy events, in comparison to 43% of the news items in the post-COVID period. These findings are consistent with my hypothesis that there would be more traditional newsworthy items published before the pandemic was declared. However, as I mentioned this may have been due to the measures put in place to help curb the spread of COVID-19, and there may have simply been fewer incidents for the media to report.

When examining whether the coverage reflects critical, systemic issues, it was noted above that two thirds of the news items discussed systemic issues (65.9%). Therefore, although traditional prison newsworthy items and stereotypes were often present in the news items, it appears systemic prison issues have become increasingly newsworthy topics for news

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter Nygard is a Canadian fashion mogul who was arrested in Manitoba in December 2020 for sexual assault and racketeering. His case gained publicity in the news media and his case was present in news items in the sample.

organizations. Of the news items that discussed systemic issues, 40% were local news items, and 60% were national news items. It was a consistent finding throughout the analysis that national coverage of Canadian prisons typically focused on broad, systemic issues that exist in the Canadian prison system as a whole, compared to the local news reports which tended to focus on issues specific to the provincial prisons. For example, local coverage focused on systemic issues such as high rates of inmates who are in custody on remand status in Manitoba which result in overcrowding in provincial prison. National news items focused more on issues with administrative segregation in the Canadian prison system. For both the local and national coverage, it is evident that prison reform was a prominent newsworthy issue before, during, and after the pandemic, which gained a lot of attention. As reflected in the Findings chapter, the prison reform/critical frame was present in just under eighty percent of the total news items (78.0%). However, there were certain prison reform subthemes that were more prevalent than others. News items that discussed the suffering of inmates (43.4%) and deficiencies in prison system (41.8%) were identified in over forty percent of the news items. News items that mentioned a lack of government accountability accounted for one third of the news items (33.5%), followed by news items that depicted prison as a harsh place, which was identified in a little less than one third of the news items (29.7%). News items that focused on issues with segregation (23.1%) and the need for more rehabilitation/programming (21.4%) were present in a little less than a quarter of the news items. The remaining subthemes were identified in less than twenty percent of the news items. These findings are consistent with Cecil's (2019) study in which she asserted that a more recent literature review of prisons in the news has detected more frequent discussions of prison reform. It was noted that The Opportunity Agenda (2014) found that the public discourse on prison in the United States was moving more toward favoring

reform, and Cecil's (2019) study found that while traditional prison newsworthy items were still commonly reported (discrete events, deaths, riots), news media coverage of prisons has largely shifted, and prison reform is now newsworthy. The results of this thematic content analysis show that although traditional prison newsworthy items were still often reported in both the local and national news items, the reform/critical frame was also prevalent in the both local and national news in Canada. More specifically, issues surrounding segregation practices and law reform in Canadian prisons generated a lot of attention in the news media.

There was a slight increase in the amount of overall news items that discussed systemic issues. In the pre-COVID period, systemic issues were present in 48% of the news items, in comparison to 52% of news items in the post-COVID period. When examining the increase in newsworthiness of prison reform after the pandemic was declared, the overarching prison reform/critical frame (Table 4.3) was significant at  $p < .09$ , and there was a modest 10.3% increase in news items containing this frame after the pandemic was declared. There was a significant increase in news items that discussed prison overcrowding; the presence of this theme increased by a moderate 17.7% after the pandemic was declared. This was to be expected due to the way the COVID-19 virus is transmitted, because overcrowded prisons would increase the likelihood of the transmission and spreading of COVID-19. Furthermore, there was a significant 15.7% increase in the amount of news items that asserted inmates were suffering after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. This was also not surprising given concerns from prisoners and the family and friends of prisoners once there were COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons. Thus, although there were no large differences in the reporting of systemic issues and prison reform in the news items before and after the pandemic was declared, there were increases as hypothesized.



Overall, the findings of this study were mixed. Some results were consistent with what I hypothesized, while some results were not. I hypothesized that there would be more news items published after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, this was not the case as just over fifty percent of the prison news stories were published before the pandemic. Conversely my second hypothesis was confirmed by the results of the study—that there would be more coverage of traditional prison newsworthy events such as deaths or escapes prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirdly, I hypothesized that the pandemic will have an impact and change both the volume and content of news media coverage of correctional institutions. I hypothesized there would be more discussion of criminal justice reform efforts rather than traditional myths and stereotypes that have historically been the focus in news media coverage of prison. The results show that while the news organizations continued to publish stories involving traditional myths and stereotypes, some of these stereotypes were reinforced, challenged, or altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., the new danger the virus presents in prison). While there was consistent reporting of traditional prison events in both the pre- and post-pandemic timeframe, there was a decrease (14%) of the reporting of traditional events in the overall sample of news items, and an increase in reporting on systemic issues (4%). As noted above, the COVID-19 pandemic may have offered new opportunities for claims makers, activists, and moral entrepreneurs to utilize the news media to draw attention to correctional issues that have plagued our criminal justice system for decades and generate awareness and discussion on reform efforts. I hypothesized that the COVID-19 pandemic would bring more awareness and attention to prison and prison issues, and may decrease the threshold necessary for these types of stories to be seen as newsworthy, resulting in increased coverage of a range of correctional issues. It appears that many of the prison news items published after the pandemic did not directly focus on COVID-

19. However, there was still a slight increase in the reporting of systemic issues in the post-COVID period, as well as a modest increase in discussion of prison reform. While the COVID-19 pandemic did not bring more visibility as I anticipated, COVID-19 reinforced and challenged myths, brought visibility to a new type of danger in correctional institutions, as well as an increase in visibility of correctional issues (e.g., overcrowding, segregation) that have plagued our criminal justice system for decades.

### **6.1 Social Constructionism and Canadian Prison News**

A social constructionist approach was utilized in a qualitative analysis of news media coverage of the prison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. As previously noted, social constructionism views knowledge as socially created by people through social interactions and social institutions. Therefore, people create reality—the world they believe exists—based on a combination of personal experience and knowledge gained through social interactions (Surette, 2007). Since most people in society have never been incarcerated in a correctional institution, and if their peers, friends, and family members have never been incarcerated, much of their knowledge on prison depends on secondary sources of information, such as the news media (Ross, 2003). It was noted that there is limited news media coverage on correctional institutions, which has led some researchers to claim that prisons are largely invisible (Doyle & Ericson 1996; Chermak 1998; Sussman, 2002; Ross, 2011). Due to the limited news media coverage of prisons, it is vital to examine the content in the little coverage that correctional institutions receive. These representations are important because they contribute to and shape the general public's views and understanding of prison in general and correctional issues more broadly. In turn, this contributes to the general public's knowledge and opinion on these issues and can have real effects on policy affecting correctional institutions and the criminal justice system.

In addition to social constructionism, framing theory was utilized to examine how the media presents information to the public. A frame is a fully developed social construction template, it helps individuals to simplify experiences by allowing for easier categorization, organization, and labelling of events (Surette, 2007). I adapted the ‘faulty system’ and ‘racist system’ frames identified by Surette (2007). Rather than using the title of the faulty system frame, I labelled the frame the prison reform/critical frame as it was evident that there were numerous prison reform/critical themes in the news items which focused on the faulty prison system. It was apparent the prison reform/critical frame was the most prominent frame/overarching theme in the news items. This frame was utilized in a variety of ways by claims makers and journalists throughout the sample. For example, law reform around segregation was framed as a practice that was once willfully ignored into a practice that needed to be eliminated immediately. Additionally, news items about the COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons utilized the prison reform/critical frame to bring awareness to prison issues that have been plaguing the system for decades. As noted in the qualitative findings, the racist system frame was not as prevalent as anticipated. However, this frame was often utilized in news items focusing on broader prison reform and long-standing prison issues, and when focusing on the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in custody. Frames were important to examine because they can influence criminal justice policy. Claims makers have a better chance at success if their claims or social constructions fit into a pre-existing frame. Frames are not mutually exclusive, people often support more than one frame (Surette, 2007), and this was evident in the sample of news items as noted above. Work by Scheufele and Tweeksbury (2007) discussed how framing is used as a communication tool for political campaigns, and examined how framing and agenda setting are related. “Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between

the emphasis that media place on certain issues (e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences” (Scheufele & Twombsbury, 2007, p.11). If the media is consistently publishing stories about how a certain issue relates to others issues within the criminal justice system, or specifically, correctional institutions, the mass audience is likely to attribute more importance to these issues than if they were not displayed in the media as often (Goffman, 1974). In my sample of news items, agenda setting was apparent in the amount of coverage the three significant events/issues gained. Framing and agenda setting was present in the way the news items focused on law reform and segregation. The news items surrounding these events were framed with pro-prison reform and critical tones toward the use of administrative segregation in Canada, and much coverage was brought to this practice that was once willfully ignored. Thus, the frequent and critical media coverage attributed a high degree of importance to this issue, potentially shaping public opinion about the practice, and may have contributed to a change in policy and the introduction of Bill C-83. Framing and agenda setting were also present in news stories about the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure. These news items were generally critical of the government’s decision to close the jail. There were numerous news items in the sample that discussed the negative impacts the Dauphin jail closure had on the small city, which made the general public aware that this was a major issue, and led to many individuals protesting the closure. News items surrounding COVID-19’s impact on the prison systems were framed as pro-prison reform, and considerable coverage was brought to the impact COVID-19 had on the prison system. Many of these news items contained the prison reform/critical frame, resulting in COVID-19 bringing more awareness to prison issues and government accountability.

This thesis examined claims makers in the news media; claims makers not only draw attention to certain social conditions, they shape our sense of what the conditions mean, what the problem actually is, and are capable of constructing the social conditions in various ways (Surette, 2007). Claims makers were examined to see how certain correctional issues gained media attention while others did not. Unlike the police, correctional institutions do not typically hold press conferences and have media representatives acting as claims makers and official sources of information (Doyle & Ericson, 1996). Therefore, it was important to examine who the claims makers were as they can be seen as ‘experts’ to the general public, and shape our views of social issues. There were a variety of claims makers in the news items in this sample, however, there were a few important observations to note. As noted in the qualitative findings, the claims making competitions surrounding the three events/issues: law reform and segregation, the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure, COVID-19’s impact on the prison, and the items coded exclusively for the racist system frame were similar in terms of the way the news items were framed and constructed. The claims making competition was unbalanced as the majority of news items contained more claims by social justice and prisoner advocates than government and prison officials. This study found that prison officials did not regularly make claims in the news items, which is consistent with the literature. When prison officials made claims, they were often made as a response to criticism brought forth by other claims makers and were positioned as secondary claims within many news items. Additionally, when prison officials would provide a statement to the news outlet, they were general written statements that offered little detail. This is in contrast to social justice and prisoner advocates, whom made numerous direct, verbal statements to the media and asserted more powerful claims due to their more persuasive

rhetorical style. It was evident that journalists presented the news items with a critical tone and angle, and the majority of claims makers in the news items were critical of the prison system.

Surette (2007) asserted that the media plays a vital role in the third and final stage of social construction. The media acts as a social construction competition arena and filters the claims made by claims makers, and the media plays a vital role in deciding the outcome of the social construction contest—the rise of a dominant social construction of a social problem or some aspect of society. The final stage is most important because the dominant construction directs public policy. Claims about the nature, causes and remedies to social problems make specific public policy interventions seem possible and desirable. This study presented important findings in regard to competing claims made by claims makers in the news items about prison and changes in public policy. It was noted that in the last few years, there has been a lot of controversy in the news media regarding the use of administrative segregation and solitary confinement in Canada. Some of the Superior Court challenges regarding the use of administrative segregation were in the news media for a number of years before the timeframe of my sample, therefore, the social construction competition arena for law reform surrounding administrative segregation has been occurring for years, and was still apparent in the 2019 news items. It is evident given the recent elimination of administrative segregation in Canadian federal prisons, as well as the implementation of Bill C-83, that the dominant construction was that administrative segregation and solitary confinement violated individuals' Charter Rights, and is cruel and unusual punishment. Thus, policy was changed, and Bill C-83 was implemented along with the Structured Intervention Units (SIU). However, it was evident in my sample that there was another social construction competition occurring between social justice and prisoner advocates who were critical of Bill C-83 and its constitutionality, and Correctional Service of

Canada who defended the new law. While there were numerous claims makers who were critical of the new SIUs and the constitutionality of Bill C-83, the new law remains. As previously noted, those critical of the new law did not necessarily ‘win’ the social construction contest by steering public policy. The claims makers who were reform oriented and critical of Bill C-83 utilized the media to bring awareness to many prison issues which may result in readers attributing more importance to these issues. This in turn may result in more public support for future debates surrounding reform-oriented changes in prison policy.

The closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre revealed another significant social construction contest between various claims makers about the meaning of the jail closure. The event was covered by the news media over a period of roughly three months and contained news stories with claims made by those who were justifying the jail closure, as well as those who opposed the closure. As previously noted, journalists presented an unbalanced claims making competition by highlighting more claims from those who opposed the closure of the prison than those who supported the closure. The majority of sources quoted in the news stories engaged in claims making about the consequences of closing the jail using critical reform-oriented rhetoric in attempts to keep the jail open. In the end, the Dauphin Correctional Centre was closed as planned. The MGEU had an agenda, which was to keep the jail open and protect the jobs of its members, and the social justice and prisoner advocates had their own agenda which involved preventing higher rates of overcrowding and the suffering of inmates. While there were numerous claims makers who opposed the closure in the news media, both pro-prison and those critical of prisons, they were not successful in changing the course of the closure. Much like those opposed to the implementation of Bill C-83, the claims makers did not necessarily ‘win’ the social construction contest because the prison was closed. However, both the pro-prison

claim makers (MGEU) in this event and the claims makers who were reform oriented and critical of prisons utilized the media to bring awareness to correctional issues.

The claims making competition around Bill C-83 and the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure can be used to reflect on the relationship between public policy and the social construction of social problems. According to Surette (2007), since success is measured by being able to influence or direct public policy, this calls into question the value of merely “raising awareness” of issues, and influencing public opinions of the issues. As noted in the literature, media outlets expose individuals around the globe to news, not only informing the public about key events but also potentially impacting the public’s attitudes and perceptions about the events that are covered, especially in the absence of personal experience or other sources of information (Vickovic et al., 2013). The general public rely on the media for their information, and since the public is unacquainted with numerous aspects of the criminal justice system, especially correctional institutions which are the most invisible part of the system, the media is a main source of prison related information (Mason, 2007). It is noteworthy that in general, this study shows how the media is fairly critical in how it frames correctional issues. The majority of journalists and authors of the news items highlighted critical claims, yet correctional policy seemed resistant to change. Therefore, one could ponder, is prison an area of public policy that is resistant to change? While there was considerable awareness brought to issues surrounding the constitutionality of Bill C-83, as well as issues with overcrowding and the closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre, Bill C-83 remains, and the Dauphin Correctional Centre was closed. This also raises questions surrounding the lack of corrections officials in the news media when prison issues are critically examined. In comparison to the police, who are very adept with controlling media narratives and have become the primary definers of information (Doyle & Ericson, 1996),



my analysis demonstrates that prison officials are the secondary definers of information. Therefore, one may ask, is there a general lack of prison officials in the news media not addressing issues because historically, policy has not changed due to public opinion and public outcry? While prisons may receive a lot of “bad press”, prison reform remains elusive. The results from this study raise questions about the social construction competition arena involving prisons and the relationship between public policy and the social construction of social problems. Considering news media representation of prison is an under researched area, future research would be beneficial to address some of the questions surrounding whether prison is an area of public policy that is resistant to change compared to other parts of the criminal justice system.

## **6.2 Direction for Future Research**

As noted above, this thesis employed a qualitative, thematic method of analysis of news media. News items published before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic were counted, compared, and analyzed quantitatively to assess changes between the two time periods. Next, the latent content (or second order meaning) of the news items were analyzed thematically drawing on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) qualitative model which they describe as a “method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.79). A content analysis is a research method that offers advantages to researchers but also has limitations. A content analysis was beneficial because it is considered both a quantitative and a qualitative research method. Therefore, the analysis provided the ability to qualitatively evaluate the symbolic content of the news items, and quantitatively categorize and organize the data to find significant trends by the use of counts (Lombard et al., 2002; Champion et al., 2016). However, a content analysis has limitations as it purely relies on analyzing texts and images. In addition to content analyses, it may be beneficial for future researchers in this area to conduct interviews with prison

officials to better understand their media strategies, and why there is a lack of prison officials in the news media. This may provide more insight into why prison is an invisible part of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, an analysis of audiences could be helpful to understand how critical representations of the prison in news coverage may or may not change public opinion.

The sample consisted of news media articles from a two-year timeframe, March 1, 2019 to March 31, 2021, which included a year prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. There were limitations with the timeframe because it only included three of the COVID-19 “waves”, and the highly contagious Omicron COVID-19 variant was not detected during this timeframe. As the pandemic continued past the timeframe of this study, there were more COVID-19 outbreaks in federal and provincial institutions. This may have resulted in more reporting on prisons and the COVID-19 outbreaks in the news media. Or on the contrary, since the Omicron variant was so widespread, this may have resulted in a lessening of concern about COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons. Additionally, the recent news cycle has been dominated with various protests against COVID-19 restrictions, taking the focus off what is occurring in prisons and may result in less prison news coverage. Therefore, a larger sample of news items from a longer timeframe, such as two years pre-pandemic and two years post-pandemic, may offer a better comparison and more information as to how COVID-19 impacted prison news media coverage.

The sample was restricted to one national and one local newspaper which creates limitations. The *Winnipeg Free Press* was chosen because it is one of the largest independent newspapers in Canada and due to its large circulation, it has significant reach in Manitoba. However, a different news outlet such as the *Winnipeg Sun*, a tabloid newspaper, may have

offered a different editorial tone and revealed other themes that were not present in the sample. A different national newspaper, such as the *National Post*, may have also offered a more conservative editorial tone than *The Globe and Mail*, and may have influenced the findings as well. It was noted that news items that only mentioned prison briefly were also excluded from the sample. In general, news items were considered to be primarily and significantly about prison issues if they contained “prison”, “jail”, or “corrections” in the title and/or they contained information about prison within the first two paragraphs of the article. All others were excluded as prison was a secondary focus of the article, not the primary focus. There were many news items that focused on sentencing that were excluded. If these news items were included, they may have impacted the results. As well, news items that focused on Indigenous issues in general but contained a sentence or two on prison were also excluded. If the news items that focused on Indigenous issues were included, this would most likely have impacted the prevalence of the racist system frame in the sample. Moreover, there has been a lot of news media coverage of the discovery of residential school mass gravesites that occurred after the timeframe of this sample. The news items contained discussions on colonialism and there may have been coverage linking colonialism to the high rates of the Indigenous prison population, resulting in more prison news items. Furthermore, this sample did not include reader responses. The *Winnipeg Free Press* no longer publishes reader comments; therefore, readers may access online forums or social media forums such as Reddit and Twitter, and comment on news items. It was reported in the news items that during the pandemic, inmates were complaining of long periods of isolation, as well as frustrations with bans on visiting and community support services. The inmate concerns may have been shared with the general public during periods of lockdowns. If reader responses were included, the general public’s reaction to the news items could have been analyzed, offering

more of a diverse sample and more insight into how the news items impact public opinion and attitudes. Future research could explore if the concerns shared by the inmates produced more sympathy for inmates, and if so, why this did not result in more coverage by news outlets.

Although this study provided answers and insight into the questions I posed, there are still some unresolved questions. Future research will help offer more information on how the news media represents prison, and can contribute to an under researched area of the criminal justice system.

Notwithstanding the above, this study provides a rich case study of prison news coverage in Canada, a much-neglected area of research.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

News media representation of the criminal justice system is an important area of research, and there is a gap in the literature on news media representation of prison- the most invisible part of the criminal justice system. These representations are important because they contribute to the public's understanding of prison and correctional issues, such as the need for potential reform. It is important to examine how the news media represents prison because this can contribute to public opinion about the justice system, and can have real effects on policy. While conducting this study, I examined the literature surrounding news media coverage of corrections, and explored why correctional institutions are a comparatively invisible part of the justice system in the news media in contrast to the police and criminal court system. I quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed local and national news media coverage of prison one year before and during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting a thematic content analysis. The results showed that there were less prison news stories published after the pandemic was declared, which was not expected. I predicted the pandemic would make prisons more visible, and hypothetically "remove the prison invisibility cloak" that has shielded prisons from the news media and general public. Although the COVID-19 pandemic did not bring more visibility to prisons in the news media, or hypothetically "remove the prison invisibility cloak", the pandemic brought awareness to prison issues that have been plaguing our system for decades. The Harry Potter quote at the beginning of this thesis describes the invisibility cloak as, "...a cloak that really and truly renders the wearer completely invisible, and endures eternally, giving constant and impenetrable concealment, no matter what spells are cast at it (Rowling, 2007, p.333)", it appears the COVID-19 "spell" did not render the prison completely visible. However, it seems the invisibility cloak was partially vulnerable to COVID-19's "spell" as it was able to

damage and penetrate the invisibility cloak, bringing increased visibility to prison issues, thus, rendering it less effective than before. Although the COVID-19 pandemic did not bring more visibility to prisons as measured by the total amount of news media coverage, it provided a glimpse of the secret world that was hidden behind the cloak, and brought awareness to prison issues that have often been ignored in the past.

The qualitative analysis identified four major events and issues from my sample: law reform and segregation, the Dauphin Correctional Centre closure, COVID-19's impact on prisons, and the racist system. I examined these events through a social constructionist lens and discussed how the news media framed these events and issues with a pro-reform-oriented angle, which can have an impact on public opinion about prisons and prison issues. While traditional prison newsworthy items and stereotypes remained common in the news items, it appears systemic prison issues have become increasingly newsworthy topics for news organizations. As hypothesized, there was less reporting of traditional prison newsworthy events after the pandemic was declared as well as more reporting of systemic issues and correctional reform in the news items post-pandemic. I explored traditional myths and stereotypes surrounding prison and punishment in the news media before and during the pandemic, examined the prevalence of traditional prison issues/events long considered newsworthy by the press, and identified a shift in what is now considered newsworthy prison topics. The results from this study show that while some traditional prison stereotypes are still present in the news media representation of prison and were reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, other myths and stereotypes were challenged, or were rare. Although traditional prison newsworthy items and stereotypes were still present in the news items, it appears prison reform and a focus on systemic correctional issues has shifted to become more newsworthy for news organizations than in the past, as noted in prior

research (e.g., Cecil, 2019). The analysis revealed there was less reporting on traditional prison newsworthy events after the pandemic was declared, and more reporting of systemic issues and correctional reform in the news items.

The thematic content analysis provided insight into how the news media frames and socially constructs prison and correctional issues, which has an impact on public opinion about prison. News items were presented with prison reform and critical tones by the authors. There were many claims makers that were pro-prison reform oriented and were critical of the prison system, bringing awareness to correctional issues that have been plaguing the system for decades –although sometimes for reasons of self interest, such as in the case of the MGEU and the Dauphin Correctional Centre. The social constructionist approach provided important findings regarding the social constructionist competition arena in regard to prison and prison issues. This analysis demonstrated that correctional institutions may be more resistant to changes in policy than other areas of the justice system, making it more difficult for claims makers to ‘win’ their competitions to socially construct the prison. While I was able to bring awareness and contribute to this important area of research that is lacking, more research in this area is needed to better understand how the news media represents prison, and its impact on public attitudes and changes in correctional policy.

## References

- Bennett, J. (2006). The good, the bad and the ugly: The media in prison films. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45, 97-115.
- Best, J. (1990). *Threatened children: Rhetoric and concern about child-victims*. University of Chicago Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Cecil, D.K. (2007). Doing time in “Camp Cupcake”: Lessons learned from newspaper accounts of Martha Stewart’s incarceration. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 14(2), 142-160.
- Cecil, D.K. (2019). Newsworthiness of reform: Prison news stories in an era of change. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 42(2), 221-235.
- Champion, C.C., Berry, T.R., Kingsley, B.C., & Spence, J.C. (2016). Pink ribbons and red dresses: A mixed methods content analysis of media coverage of breast cancer and heart disease. *Health communication*, 31(10), 1242-1249.
- Chermak, S. M. (1998). Police, courts, and corrections in the media. In F. Bailey & D. Hale (Eds.), *Popular culture, crime & justice* (pp. 87–99). Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 103–126.
- Ciasullo, A. (2008). Containing “deviant” desire: Lesbianism, heterosexuality, and the women-in-prison narrative. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 41(2), 195-223.



- Cloud, D. H., Ahalt, C., Augustine, D., Sears, D., & Williams, B. (2020). Medical isolation and solitary confinement: Balancing health and humanity in US jails and prisons during COVID-19. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *35*, 2738–2742.
- Corbin, J.M., & Strauss, A. (1990) Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, *13*, 3–21.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Doyle, A., & Ericson, R.V. (1996). Breaking into prison: News sources and correctional institutions. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, *38*(2), 155-190.
- Doyle, A. (2006). How not to think about crime in the media. *Canadian Journal of Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *48*(6), 867-885.
- Fox, K. (2012). Incurable sex offenders, lousy judges the media: Moral panic sustenance in the age of new media. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *38*, 160-181.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Grace, A. (2019, November 6). Ending solitary confinement in federal prisons only a start. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A7.
- Holloway, I. & Todres, L. (2003). The status of method: Flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative Research*, *3*, 345-357.
- Jewkes, Y. (2011). *Media & crime*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Joy, L. (2020, December 5). Saskatchewan's Minister of Corrections under fire. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A19.
- Kappeler, V. E., Blumberg, M., & Potter, G. W. (1996). *The mythology of crime and criminal justice*. Waveland Press, Inc.
- Kappeler, V. E., & Potter, G. W. (2005). *The mythology of crime and criminal justice*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Waveland Press, Inc.
- Kehler, K. (2020, April 30). Corrections issues decades in the making. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A7.
- Kerr, L. (2020, January 25). Why does the Indigenous rate of incarceration only grow? *The Globe and Mail*, O3.
- Kohm, S. A. (2020). Claims-making, child saving, and the news media. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 16(1), 115–137.
- Kusch, L. (2019, May 17). Province installs body scanners in three jails to thwart smugglers. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A5.
- Kusch, L. (2020, January 25). Dauphin jail closure 'devastating'. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A3.
- Levan, K., Polzer, K., & Downing, S. (2011). Media and prison sexual assault: How we got to the "don't drop the soap" culture. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 4(2), 674-682.
- Levenson, J. (2001). Inside information: Prisons and the media. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 43, 14-15.
- Ling, J. (2019). Prison Breaking Point. *The Globe and Mail*, O3.

- Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research, 28*(4), 587–604.
- Lyons, L. (2020). Incarceration, COVID-19, and emergency release: Reimagining how and when to punish. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal, 30*, 291-317.
- Marsh, I. (2009). Representations of prisons in the British media – Or are we being fair to holiday camps? *Criminal Justice Studies, 22*(3), 367-374.
- Mason, P. (2007). Misinformation, myth, and distortion. *Journalism Studies, 8*(3), 481-496.
- May, D. (2020, February 5). Corrections officer joins march, worries about future. *Winnipeg Free Press, A3*.
- May, K. (2019, March 11). Youth jail segregation a concern. *Winnipeg Free Press, A0*.
- May, K. (2020, November 4). Infected inmate alleges poor treatment in jail. *Winnipeg Free Press, A5*.
- Murdoch, D. (2020). British Columbia provincial corrections’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of correctional policy and practice, *Victims & Offenders, 15*(7-8), 1317-1336.
- News Media Canada (n.d.) Daily newspaper circulation data. Retrieved March 18, 2021, from <https://nmc-mic.ca/about-newspapers/circulation/daily-newspapers>

- Nowonty, K. & Piquero, A. (2020). The global impact of the pandemic on institutional and community corrections: Assessing short-term crisis management and long-term change strategies. *Victims & Offenders, 15*, 1-9.
- The Opportunity Agenda. (2014). *An overview of public opinion and discourse on criminal justice issues*. Retrieved May 11, 2021, from [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/2014.08.23-CriminalJusticeReport-FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/2014.08.23-CriminalJusticeReport-FINAL_0.pdf)
- Pearse, J. (2019, September 18). Make officers' safety a priority [Letter to the editor]. *Winnipeg Free Press, A6*.
- Prior, M. (2005). News vs. entertainment: How increasing media choice widens gaps in political knowledge and turnout. *American Journal of Political Science, 49*, 577–592.
- Pritchard, D. (2020, March 25). Union calls on province to delay jail's closure. *Winnipeg Free Press, A8*.
- Redondo, S., Gonçalves, R., Nistal, J., Soler, C., Moreira, J.S., Andrade, J., & Andrés-Pueyo, A. (2020). Corrections and crime in Spain and Portugal during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impact, prevention and lessons for the future. *Victims & Offenders, 15*, 1156-1185.
- Reiner, R. (2007). Media made criminality: The representation of crime in mass media. In M. Maguire, R. Morgan & R. Reiner (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of criminology* (pp. 376-416). Oxford University Press.
- Ridgeway, J., & Casella, J. (2013). Solidarity and Solitary: When Unions Clash with Prison Reform. *Prison Legal News, 24*(6), 12–14.
- Roberts, J.V. & Hough, M. (2005), The state of the prisons: Exploring public knowledge and opinion. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 44*, 286-306.

- Ross, J.I. (2003) (Mis)representing corrections: The role of our cultural industries. In J.I. Ross and S.C. Richards (Eds.), *Convict criminology* (pp. 37-58). Wadsworth Publishing.
- Ross, J. (2011). Challenges of reporting on corrections: An exploratory study derived from interviews with American reporters who cover jails and prisons. *Corrections Compendium*. Spring 2011, 7-13.
- Ross, J. (2012). Debunking the myths of American corrections: An exploratory analysis. *Critical Criminology*. 20, 409-427.
- Rowling, J. K. (2007). *Harry Potter and the deathly hallows*. Bloomsbury.
- Sanders, C. (2020). COVID-19 issues fuel tension at The Pas jail. *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2.
- Scheufele, D. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49, 103-122.
- Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda-setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 9–20.
- Schneider, C. (2021). Assholes in the news: Policing in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research*, 10, 59-91.
- Skolnik, T. (2020). Criminal law during (and after) COVID-19. *Manitoba Law Journal*, 43(4), 146-180.
- Solomon, I. (2019, September 17). Prison guards highlight issues ahead of election. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A3.
- Spencer, B. (2020, February 6). Build a better facility in Dauphin [Letter to the Editor]. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A6.

- Surette, R. (2007). *Media, crime and criminal justice: Images, realities, and policies*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Sussman, P. Y. (2002). Media on prisons: Censorship and stereotypes. In M. Mauer & M. Chesney-Lind (Eds.), *Invisible punishment: The collateral consequences of mass imprisonment* (pp. 258-278). The New York Press.
- Tapia, A. (2020, December 12). *What is an op-ed article?* The Balance Small Business. Retrieved November 10, 2021, from <https://www.thebalancesmb.com/oped-what-is-it-and-how-to-write-it-1360714>.
- Tschanz, A., & Hernandez, L. (2021). Understanding the carceral experience and the “carceral imaginary” in a lockdown situation: An exploratory study of social representations of prison during a health crisis. *Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research, 10*, 1-143.
- The Editorial Board. (2020, April 8). Corrections must act to reduce virus risk [Editorial]. *Winnipeg Free Press*, A6.
- Valverde, M. (2006). Representations and their social effects: A template. In *Law and Order: Images, meanings, myths* (pp.31-57). News Brunswick, N.J: Routledge Cavendish.
- Vasiljevic, M., & Viki, G.T. (2013) Dehumanization, moral disengagement, and public attitudes to crime and punishment. In: Bain, Paul G. and Vaes, Jeroen and Leyens, Jacques-Philippe, (Eds.), *Humanness and dehumanization* (pp. 1-29). Psychology Press.

- Vickovic, S.G., Griffin, M.L., & Fradella, H.F. (2013) Depictions of correctional officers in newspaper media: An Ethnographic content analysis. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 26(4), 455–477.
- Weinrath, M. (2016). *Behind the walls: Inmates and correctional officers on the state of Canadian prisons*. UBC Press, Law & Society Series.
- Weinrath, M., & Winterdyk, J. (2019). *Adult corrections in Canada*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). de Sitter Publications.
- White, P. (2019). Lawyers, scholars tell Ottawa solitary confinement bill is unconstitutional. *The Globe and Mail*, A3.
- White, P. (2020). Solitary confinement persists in prisons, new reports say. *The Globe and Mail*, A1.
- Whittaker, A. (2021) No news is no news: COVID-19 and the opacity of Australian prisons. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 33(1), 1-10.
- Winnipeg Free Press. (2015, May 10). Retrieved September 15, 2021, from <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/about-us/>.
- Woo, A. (2021, March 8). Prisoners sue over COVID-19 lockdowns. *The Globe and Mail*, A4.
- Wood, J., & Viki, G.T. (2004). Public attitudes towards crime and punishment. In J. Adler (Ed.), *Forensic Psychology: Debates, Concepts and Practice* (pp. 16–36). Willan Publishing.
- WHO. (2020a). Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places in detention. Retrieved May 11, 2021, from

[http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/434026/Preparedness-prevention-and-control-of-COVID-19-in-prisons.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/434026/Preparedness-prevention-and-control-of-COVID-19-in-prisons.pdf?ua=1)