From Man to Monster:

A case study of *The Mercury*'s news framing of Martin Bryant and the Port Arthur massacre

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore a framing analysis of the 1996 Port Arthur massacre with specific emphasis on the identity constructions of its perpetrator, Martin Bryant. It will do this with a framing analysis in order to examine how the local Tasmanian newspaper, *The Mercury*, framed Martin Bryant from the moment reporting of the massacre began on 29 April, up until Martin Bryant's conviction on 23 November, 1996. This thesis demonstrates that Martin Bryant was subjectively framed in *The Mercury*'s news reports as a consequence of being labelled as a violent, mentally ill mass murderer, which may have had potential 'framing effects' on public perceptions of the Port Arthur massacre, its perpetrator and the concepts of 'mental illness' and 'criminality'.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, 28 April 1996, the Australian state of Tasmania was at the centre of the world's attention when the worst shooting incident carried out by a lone gunman in Australia took place at Port Arthur – a penal colony just one and a half hours from the island state's capital city of Hobart. The question of who had committed such an act remained unanswered, until two days later when the offender was identified. On 30 April 1996, the local Tasmanian newspaper, *The Mercury*, revealed on its front page the face behind the shootings – a moment in which Martin Bryant became more than a lone gunman, and more than a killer on a rampage of death and destruction. Finally, there were more than theories and speculation as to the identity of the gunman – there was a face to connect to what conventionally became known as 'the Port Arthur massacre'.

News reports detailing the massacre did not emerge until 29 April 1996, the day after the massacre. Being an era not yet in the digital age, in which news media has the ability to reach the broader public in a matter of seconds through social media and the 24-hour news cycle, instantaneous reporting was not as significant an imperative. Similarly, Bryant was convicted on 22 November 1996, but news reports detailing his conviction and final court appearance were not published in *The Mercury* until 23 November 1996. This timeframe forms the basis of newspaper analysis in this thesis to enable an examination of the framing of Martin Bryant from the moment of the impact of the massacre through to Bryant's conviction.

Being quite young at the time, but starting to develop an interest in news and current affairs, I was drawn to the photograph on the front of *The Mercury* two days after the massacre. Perhaps, to most, this image of Martin Bryant reflected a man who was currently the talk of the state, the country and the world because of the crime he had committed. But, to me, this

man was the face of something more – a victim himself, perhaps. His long, unkempt blonde hair, hooded jumper and expressionless stare intrigued me – furthermore, at the time, he had lived only a short distance from me. Today, the aforementioned photograph is iconic in its portrayal of the perpetrator of the shootings at Port Arthur. Martin Bryant became the name linked to tragedy at Port Arthur, adding to the already haunting history of the convict site. These personal experiences have inspired me to undertake this study and its critical analysis of how Bryant was presented through local news media, specifically *The Mercury* newspaper – not only to me, as one news consumer, but to the wider audience of news consumers.

Following the Port Arthur massacre, local and national media turned its attention to the story *behind* the massacre – a narrative about the perpetrator of the shootings. Martin Bryant therefore became one of the most prominent figures in news reports of the massacre from 29 April to 23 November 1996. Once Bryant was identified as the perpetrator, a pattern of news framing (built largely around stereotypical representations) became evident.

This thesis has adopted a news framing analysis of the Port Arthur massacre, with specific emphasis on the constructions of the identity of Martin Bryant in *The Mercury's* news reports, in an attempt to address the following research questions:

1. How was the Port Arthur massacre represented in the local newspaper, *The Mercury*, immediately after the event until the conviction of its perpetrator Martin Bryant?

2. Which news frames were most dominant over this period? Did these news frames remain dominant or did they evolve over time?

3. How was Martin Bryant's subjectivity framed as a consequence?

4. What potential 'framing effects' might this news media coverage have had on public perceptions of the Port Arthur massacre and Martin Bryant, in particular?

5. What can these critical observations contribute to broader discussions of the mediated representation of crime and criminality?

The thesis aims to address these questions via a comprehensive study of the news framing of Martin Bryant as the perpetrator of the Port Arthur massacre. Discussion of the findings of this analysis is based on three key themes to emerge from the news framing: 'criminal profile', 'physical descriptions' and 'deviance and mental illness'.

The study offers a contribution to the field of media and crime research in that, to the best of my knowledge, a news framing analysis of the constructions of Martin Bryant's subjectivity in the press at the time and following the Port Arthur massacre has not been previously conducted.

To analyse the constructions of the identity of Martin Bryant, this thesis is structured around a Literature Review chapter, which examines the literature relating to media representations of crime, criminality and mass shootings, (including the recurrent connection between violence and mental illness) as well as the Port Arthur massacre and Martin Bryant. This is followed by a Methodology chapter, which discusses the research methods used for this study. The findings of the research are then discussed in a Data Analysis chapter, which is followed by a concluding chapter that summarises the study and the significance of its findings in relation to each of the key research questions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature relating to this research crosses a number of different fields and disciplines, not least of all the broad topic areas of media and crime, 'media effects' and the link between violence and mental illness. Little study has been conducted concerning the 1996 Port Arthur massacre (as it is conventionally known) and its perpetrator Martin Bryant from a media analysis or news framing perspective. Those studies which have been undertaken have mostly emerged from a criminological or psychological perspective – or are otherwise perhaps best described as reflective pieces written by journalists about Port Arthur and the topic of trauma reporting (for example, see 'The Mass Murder as Quasi-Experiment: The Impact of the 1996 Port Arthur Massacre' by Carcach et al. (2002); and *Suddenly One Sunday* by reporter Mike Bingham (2000)). This chapter examines the existing literature and identifies what is already known about the relationship between mediated representation and crime, deviancy, and mental illness – as a context to this study's news framing analysis of the representation of Martin Bryant in *The Mercury* following the Port Arthur massacre.

MEDIA AND CRIME

From the existing literature, it is evident that much research has been undertaken on the relationship between media and crime. It is crucial to study this relationship, because not only does the news media deliver stories of crime and deviance, but also has the potential to assist in the construction of audiences' *understandings* of crime and criminality. The media has often been "credited with considerable power to shape opinion and belief, to change habits of life and to mould behaviour actively more or less" (Bauer and Bauer 1960 cited McQuail 1994: 328). Many studies refer to the potential power of news media to influence public

perceptions of crime (see Greer and Reiner, 2012; Carrabine, 2008). It is therefore important to explore how the two interact with each other, and to study the construction of news frames in the coverage of criminality, and the potential for particular news frames to influence public and societal perceptions of crime events – to the extent that the latter is possible to undertake. Previous studies of media and crime have largely been derived from criminological, legal and psychological perspectives, often not taking into account the nuances of journalistic practice and the political economy of media which are embedded in the way issues of criminality are presented in the news. There have been some exceptions of authors who have adopted a journalism studies perspective in their work on media and crime, such as Grabosky and Wilson (1989) and Schlesinger and Tumber (1994), whose work seeks to explain how the media and crime interact with one another. In a comprehensive review of the literature, Jewkes (2004) found that the relationship between the media and crime develops our understanding of how the two fields work together. In terms of journalistic practice, Jewkes' (2004) work illustrates how the interaction between the media and crime has the potential to create new meaning for news consumers. This is significant in that it exemplifies the media's potential to create, for media audiences, particular understandings of the world around them, which is a central aspect of this thesis and its own research questions, which seek to understand the news framing of the identity of Martin Bryant in the press after the Port Arthur massacre.

Much of what we already know about crime and the media is that the general public has developed a significant interest in crime stories (Jewkes 2004). Part of the reason for this, as Jewkes (2004) proposes, could be due to the popularity of fictional accounts of crime, which are produced in the entertainment industries and exemplified by television series, such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. As Greer and Reiner (2012: 248) explain: "Crime and criminal justice have long been sources of popular spectacle and entertainment, even before

the rise of the mass media". However, more recent debate has focused on whether these fictional accounts have the potential to mislead the public's understanding of crime events in that they can often present unrealistic portrayals of crime. Dowler et al. (2006: 839) argue that:

> The selective nature of crime news . . . with its emphasis on violence and sensationalism – essentially crime as a product, playing to the fears, both imagined and real, of viewers and readers – has produced a distorted picture of crime and criminality.

Marsh (2009) suggests that the knowledge the public has of crime is largely derived from what they have seen or heard through different media forms, and found evidence to suggest that most people form their opinions about crime from what they see or read in the news. These opinions can be a product of the news media's constructions of criminality. What is transmitted and understood through different media forms can be a result of the ways the media has presented information to news consumers. Consequently, the media has the power to influence and shape public opinions. As Jewkes (2004) explains, media professionals have the power to make assumptions about news audiences, resulting in a process known as 'agenda-setting'. She argues: "They sift and select news items, prioritize some stories over others, edit words, choose the tone . . . and decide on the visual images that will accompany the story" (Jewkes 2004: 37). This selection and processing of news items can ultimately affect the outcome of how news is understood by its audiences. Entman (2010: 336) also found reason to suggest that this process of agenda setting can be "seen as . . . performing the first function of framing: defining . . . problems worthy of public and government attention". Similarly, Brewer and Gross (2010) argue that news frames tell audiences how to understand particular matters. Martin Bryant, for example, and the way he was framed in the local newspaper may have affected many people's opinions of him – particularly given that many

articles foregrounded comments about his mental state, often on the basis of speculation (the mediated connection between Martin Bryant, violence and mental illness will be discussed further in this chapter as well as in the Data Analysis chapter).

In this context, it is important to mention 'media effects' theory. A large body of work concerning media effects has been produced. This work questions the potential impacts of media representations on audiences. Indeed, the news media has some potential to create effects on audiences and influence its consumers to some degree; however it is not easy to truly *define* media effects as one concrete concept. It is, perhaps *not possible* to define media effects, given that much debate has been undertaken to determine what constitutes 'effects'. What literature *has* suggested, is that the media does, to some degree although not one that is absolute, have the potential to influence audiences. Much debate has occurred over whether or not certain behaviours are solely the result of the news media, and an individual's exposure to particular media representations. Violence in society, for instance, has often been attributed to violence in the media, which some argue has *too much* power to persuade and is directly responsible for copycat acts of violent behaviour (see Kaplan 2012). As Carrabine (2008: 20-21) explains, the debate around media effects is often "polarized, simplified and displaced . . . All too often the debate polarizes into either accepting a powerful media effects model or arguing that the media have little or no influence over audiences". Carrabine (2008: 23) reviewed the literature on mass communications approaches to the study of media effects, finding that "the question of whether media representations of violence have damaging effects upon audiences . . . remains one of the most influential forms of explanation in public opinion". This debate has been particularly evident in the public and news discourse about mass shootings and gun violence, particularly school shootings in the United States (see Ferguson 2008). Carrabine also found evidence to suggest that, although there have been more than 10, 000 research studies which have analysed the relationship between viewing

violence and subsequent aggressive tendencies, there has not yet been any distinct "evidence for or against such behavioural claims" (2008: 23).

As mentioned above, mass shootings (of which school shootings are a common example) are often linked to the discourse of 'moral panics' about violence and the media. There are parallels between these debates and the news reporting of the Port Arthur massacre in that the reporting strongly identified public debate about similar issues in relation to Bryant's actions. Many studies have been conducted into mass shootings (of which school shootings are a common example) and the implications of gun violence (see Howells 2012). Leary et al. (2003), for example, examined the relationship between school shootings and teasing, rejection and violence. They argue that:

> School violence has led to much discussion of the causes of such episodes, which have variously been attributed to lax gun control laws, society-wide moral decline, the influence of aspects of popular culture that glamorize death . . . violent video games, and even the failure to display the ten commandments in school buildings (Leary et al. 2003: 202).

The strength of Leary et al.'s (2003) study is that it identifies with the relationship between shootings and the discourse and "precedents" or 'media templates' (Kitzinger 2000) around gun violence, politics and the media. This is significant to my study in that it too draws upon the idea of 'media templates' in that there are frames, which have been identified as part of the news framing analysis, which are commonly applied within other news stories of mass shootings. Kitzinger's theory of media templates will be defined and discussed further in the Methodology chapter.

One of the key issues is whether or not *The Mercury*'s reports and images had the power and potential to shape public opinion. This discussion, while relevant to consider within the thesis, lies outside the principal scope and aims of this study, which focuses on identifying

the predominant media constructions of Martin Bryant in *The Mercury*'s news reportage of the Port Arthur massacre. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the possibility of 'media effects' in terms of the shaping of public opinion about Martin Bryant in the immediate aftermath and collective memory of the event. Hall et al.'s (1978: 63) much cited work on the social production of news comprehensively reviewed the literature around the media and public opinion, suggesting that:

> The press can legitimate and reinforce the actions of the controllers by bringing their own independent arguments to bear on the public in support of the actions proposed . . . or it can bring pressure to bear on the controllers by summoning up 'public opinion' in support of its own views.

There are, however, as previously stated, certain limitations to the 'media effects' hypothesis, such as the difficultly to determine the impacts the media can have in light of other possible contributing factors, such as the pre-existing ideas and personal experiences of news consumers. As Scheufele (1999: 105) explains, "people's information processing and interpretation are influenced by preexisting meaning structures". In a study of mass communication theories, McQuail (1994) found evidence to suggest that media effects are occurring all the time without the ability to predict the outcome or understand how much of the effects are a direct result of the media. In a similar study, Jewkes (2004: 36) extended this idea by suggesting that the ways in which the media assists in shaping our ideas can be regarded as both positive and negative "depending on the perspective adopted". As Jewkes (2004) further explains, media professionals have the power to make assumptions about their audiences. As a result, the media *might* play a role in potentially influencing the public's understanding of news and events. The limitation of Jewkes' (2004) study is that it does not recognise that there are limitations of media effects. These limitations of media effects, however, do not limit the making of observations about news frames.

Much of the research that has been conducted in relation to media and crime, and its power to influence audiences has resulted in a discourse around a 'fear of crime' (Lee 2007). The fear of crime discourse relates to the idea that representations of the prevalence of crime, especially serious crime, are not often borne out by crime statistics. This feeds into the work on 'moral panics' (see Young, 2011; Cohen, 2011; Altheide, 2009). In his study, Altheide (2009) suggests that moral panic is more compatible with print media in contrast to other media formats like television news reports. He goes on to argue that, "MP [moral panic] is part of the social control and fear narrative" (Altheide 2009: 86). In the case of the reporting of the Port Arthur massacre and Martin Bryant, many headlines and subheads had the potential to spark moral panic, given that they were often provoking.

The media and its centralisation of crime can confirm and increase anxieties and fears. Pratt (1997 cited in Lee 2007) suggests that the public's assessments of crime are likely to be based on the information delivered by the mass media. This accounts for the possibility that the news media can influence news consumers' interpretations of crime issues and events. Some authors have suggested that crime and its representations in the media have become "worse than ever" (Hogg and Brown 1983 cited in Lee 2007: 189). Lee (2007: 188) is well published in the criminology discipline, and suggests that news stories that involve violence are often good news stories while being "bad news stories". Murder, for example, can gain much media attention for weeks, especially when a "stranger" commits the murder and the victim is deemed an "innocent victim" (Carrington 1998 cited in Lee 2007). The shaping of such issues is central to my own analysis of the media's constructions of Martin Bryant, and will be discussed further in the Data Analysis chapter of this thesis.

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF DEVIANCE

Much analysis of media representations of deviance has reinforced the conception that journalists play an important role in the construction of deviance in the news media. As Ericson et al. (1987: 356) explain, journalists are "control agents" in that they have the power "to police what is being done in the microcultures of bureaucratic life". News, Ericson et al. (1987) argue, focuses on the information which is disseminated about deviance. Discussion around "wrongs, errors, faults and cracks in every nook and cranny of organized life gives a sense of how organization can be improved to makes things better, to progress" (Ericson et al. 1987: 356). In a world where "modern bureaucracies" look for "control over problem definition and solution", bad news is inevitably produced (Ericson et al., 1987: 357). Similarly, with deviance in the media, the news media has the power to control how this deviance is represented. Ericson et al. (1987) calls this power 'social control' with journalists the agents of this control. In their study, Ericson et al. (1987: 357) concluded that the result of the production of "bad news" is "a rhetoric of failure" which:

> Offers the citizen a sense of the knowledge-power arrangements in society and where [the citizen] might fit in … The citizen is given his sense of place in the administered society. As a result, the journalist acting as the "control agent" becomes a part of the "deviance-defining élite".

This power to influence news consumers' understanding of representations of deviance in the news becomes further problematic when representations of mental illness are derived from news-making authorities. This is because what these news-making authorities, identify as characteristics of mental illness may be incorrect and misleading. As a result, mental illness is often interpreted as criminal, because it is reported on the basis of being different or unusual to 'normal' society. More often than not, mental illness is blamed for the triggering violent

acts. This attempt to attribute blame is discussed by Camaj (2010) who identifies this as an 'attribution of responsibility' news frame. This need for blame was evident in the early stages of the reporting of the Port Arthur massacre once Martin Bryant had been identified as the perpetrator. Reiner (2007: 394) suggests that there are many studies which "have illustrated the crucial role of the media in shaping the boundaries of deviance and criminality". The news framing of Martin Bryant implied a causal relationship between mental illness and violence, which has been shown to be a problematic and unfounded assumption in the research on mental illness and the literature about media representations of mental illness more broadly.

MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE MEDIA

Many studies have been conducted into media representations of mental illness (see Gove, 1982; Cross, 2004). Much of this literature has problematised the assumptions of a causal link between mental illness and violence, which have historically been evident in news media coverage (see Marzuk 1996). Studies conducted by the *Mindframe* National Media Initiative (2012), for example, reveal that:

> There appears to be a week statistical association between mental illness and violence . . . Research indicates that people receiving treatment for a mental illness are no more violent or dangerous than the general population.

Therefore, the idea that there is a link between mental illness and violence is in fact a misconception, given that statistics show that people suffering from a mental illness are no more prone to violence than the rest of society (Winick 1982). Media professionals "can influence attitudes towards mental illness by their decisions on whether to run stories on the

subject and the prominence of such stories" (Winick 1982: 226). In his research, Winick (1982) studied the presentation of mental illness in various forms of media, including newspapers. Ordinary murder, he argues, does not receive as much media attention when compared to murders which have mentally unstable perpetrators involved (Winick 1982: 226). Winick suggests that the frequency of reporting murders involving "insane killers . . . may create an erroneous impression about the link to murder and insanity" (Winick 1982: 226). Winick (1982: 243) also found evidence to suggest that many newspapers around the world still promote headlines about "crazed killers" or "psychopathic rapists", ultimately providing a motive for the expression and judgement of stereotypes. This strengthens the misconceptions made between violence and mental illness, and Winick's (1982) proposes that mental illness has become so common in the media that it may have become an important *need* for news consumers and, as a result, enforces the idea that news consumers thrive on such representations of news. This is significant in that it shows that these kinds of problematic representations of mental illness and violence may be something with which news consumers have become familiar, and may therefore be immune to questioning. Hayward and Young (2012) note that crime has similarly become a news commodity, and that the vast availability of various media platforms have enabled representations of crime to become more conventional.

The proliferation of mental illness in the news media has prompted much debate around perpetrators of crime who are victimised for being mentally ill. Peay (2012: 427) claims that offenders and perpetrators who have mental disorders are especially at a risk of "being perceived as posing an unquantifiable danger". A study by Cross (2004) on the public representations of mental illness suggested that over the years "psychiatry has failed to distance itself from traditional notions of possession, violence, and creativity" (2004: 198). Gove's study (1982: 288) of the literature relating to 'labelling theory', and the consequences

of being labelled mentally ill, suggesting that "labelling theorists believe that once a person has been labelled mentally ill . . . it is extremely difficult for the person to break out of the deviant status". The labelling theory is a persistent issue within the news media, as seen in the case of the news reports about Bryant, which are further discussed in the Data Analysis chapter of this thesis.

THE PORT ARTHUR MASSACRE AND MARTIN BRYANT

The current literature concerning the 1996 Port Arthur massacre is abundant in terms of accounts of the day of the massacre and personal stories (see Scott's *Port Arthur: A Story of Strength and Courage* (1997)). However, there exists little literature that analyses in detail the media's representations of the event, and Martin Bryant. The literature concerning Bryant is generally limited to studies, which discuss his personal life with little examination of his representations in the media and the recurrent link between violence and mental illness. Wainwright and Totaro's (2009) *Born or Bred? Martin Bryant: the making of a mass murderer*, for example, looks at Bryant's social problems in the years before the Port Arthur massacre. However, the account of Bryant's life from childhood to adulthood does not identify the ways in which he and his upbringing were represented in the media following the Port Arthur massacre. This is where my own research attempts to build on the literature.

Rapley et al.'s (2003) study of the *social psychology* of Martin Bryant, in terms of how he was constructed in newspapers around Australia as a result of his mental illness, is a rare exception to the above. This study represents the most comprehensive attempt to analyse Bryant in the media. However, it deviates from the current study in that it adopts a psychological approach, rather than a journalistic one. Rapley et al.'s (2003) study concluded that Bryant was portrayed as a "monster", a "psychiatric case" and a "child" in the media.

According to Rapley and colleagues (2003: 435), initial reporting following the Port Arthur massacre varied in terms of the categorisation of Martin Bryant, but "all converged on common-sense understandings of deviance". The authors found evidence to suggest that various reports categorised Bryant as "a Jekyll and Hyde", "a man who sleeps with his pet piglet", and as an "eight year old" (Rapley et al. 2003: 435). Further studies conducted by Rapley et al. (2003) revealed that media characterisations of Martin Bryant merged into three main categories: "monster", "madman" and "child". These categorisations assisted in the construction of the mediated identity of Bryant, as well as with accomplishing "the all-but-impossible task of producing an account of Bryant" (Rapley et al 2003: 440). Although the study adopted a different disciplinary approach and methodology from my own, Rapley et al.'s (2003) categorisations are informative to this study in that the categories they identified parallel my own findings in terms of the news framing of Bryant; most notably, in terms of the 'monster' ('criminal profile') and 'madman' (physical descriptions') identities. These frames, and their significance, are discussed further in the next chapter of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, no analysis of the constructions of the identity of Martin Bryant in the news media has been conducted over time. The majority of existing studies which *do* address the Port Arthur massacre are largely derived from criminology or sociological perspectives. Little research has been conducted in terms of a framing analysis of Martin Bryant and his representation in print media. While there have been some reflective pieces and reports on trauma written, to date, a framing analysis of the Port Arthur massacre with specific emphasis on Martin Bryant and the constructions of his identity in the news media, from a journalistic perspective, has not been carried out. Therefore, the significance of this

research is that it attempts to address this gap. In order to do this, it is crucial to discuss the existing literature concerning media representations of deviance, and mental illness in the media, as these are two topics which are central to this thesis. The Methodology will discuss how this thesis will conduct an analysis of the representation of Martin Bryant in *The Mercury*, and which theories it will address in order to determine how his identity was constructed.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, this study sought to identify a number of conclusions about the ways in which the Port Arthur massacre and its perpetrator, Martin Bryant, were represented in the local print media. To do this, a framing analysis of the news media coverage was conducted, with a focus on the news events reported in the local Tasmanian newspaper, *The Mercury*, from the period of 29 April to 23 November, 1996. *The Mercury* was selected for the purposes of this analysis because, firstly, it is one of the more prominent newspapers in the state of Tasmania, and secondly, because of its proximity value to the event (i.e. *The Mercury* is a southern publication and Port Arthur is located in the south of Tasmania). The timeframe of 29 April to 23 November 1996 was selected to enable analysis of the news reportage from the point of impact (i.e. the immediate reporting of the incident) to aftermath (i.e. the trial and conviction of Martin Bryant). This timeframe was also selected with the view that it would provide an opportunity to trace any potential evolution in the news framing of the Port Arthur massacre and, more specifically, Martin Bryant. This is where Iyengar's (1991) definitions of 'episodic' and 'thematic' frames have been useful to the study (as will be discussed later in this chapter).

To conduct the framing analysis, a search was conducted on the Newstext database using the keywords "Port Arthur", and the specified timeframe of 29 April to 23 November, 1996 and the specified publication of *The Mercury*. The search resulted in a return of over 3, 543 articles. An additional search was undertaken with the keywords "Martin Bryant" to ensure that the initial search term had included any mentions of Martin Bryant in reports of the massacre across the selected time period. Editorials, opinion pieces and letters to the editor were then excluded from the sample. This was done with the intent of conducting a framing analysis of hard news only from the selected time frame. Only hard news items were

analysed, because I wanted to examine how *The Mercury* had framed its factual reporting of the Port Arthur massacre and Martin Bryant. For this reason, I did not want any personal opinions, which may have been deliberately subjective. Unnecessary news reports, such as articles which only mentioned the Port Arthur massacre in passing, were also excluded from the final sample of news texts. The final collection of news articles consisted of 220 articles. News reports were carefully read with the recording of headlines, subheads and the dates on which the articles were written. The news reports were then categorised in terms of their main frame (see Table 1) following the lead of Stephanie Howells' (2012) 'Framing Categories and Their Description' model from her study of the framing of Canadian school shootings. In relation to my own study, Howells' framing definitions are significant in that her study sought to achieve similar aims to my own, albeit with frame analysis of Canadian school shootings over a 25-year period. Her study also examined the potential the reporting of school shootings in the Canadian press had in terms of the power to influence public opinion and public discourse (see Howells 2012). The newspaper reports from *The Mercury* were categorised into eight different news frames. The category 'perpetrator' was characterised by those news articles which featured Bryant as the primary focus or news subject. As demonstrated by Table 1, it is evident that the category of 'perpetrator' was the predominant frame throughout *The Mercury*'s reporting of the Port Arthur massacre, with a total of 91 news items focusing on Bryant as the primary subject. It was noted that the predominance of the frames of 'guns/politics' and 'media' identified with Kitzinger's (2000) concept of media templates in that these news frames are frequently associated with the news reporting of mass shootings – particularly school shootings (see Howells 2012). The predominance of such frames is consistent with the literature, which suggests that these frames come from media templates, or what the public has "seen" before from the media to assist in new interpretation (see Kitzinger 2000). The identification of these eight dominant news frames assisted in

interpreting the overall news framing of the Port Arthur massacre. A further more specific

frame analysis of the 'perpetrator' news frame assisted in identifying several key

characterisations or constructions of Martin Bryant throughout the news reportage.

Table 1. Framing Analysis of *The Mercury*'s Reporting of the Port Arthur Massacre: News Frames, Description and Number of Articles

Category	Description	No. of articles
Perpetrator	Article discusses the perpetrator of the massacre, his family life, background, mental health, motives, actions, physical descriptions, personality, interests, court appearances, court case, conviction	91
Victims	Article discusses the victims (those fatally wounded and those not), victims' families and friends, witnesses of the massacre, personal stories	39
Guns/Politics	Article discusses political discourse around gun control, gun types, gun businesses, gun rallies, responses from the government	23
Memorial/Religion	Article discusses memorial services, religious ceremonies, religious and spiritual discussion	20
Community	Article discusses the community of Port Arthur and neighbouring towns, redevelopments, tourism, volunteers, school contributions, staff members	15
Health	Article discusses both mental and physical health of victims, trauma, medical services, grief and trauma counselling	14
Media	Article discusses the media's coverage of the event, media behaviour, media violence (including video games and film), media violence debates, former crimes presented in the media, books on the event	11
Finance	Article discusses appeals, donations and other financial issues	7

Table adapted from Howells, Stephanie 2012, 'Making Headlines: A Quarter Century of the Media's Characterization of Canadian School Shootings', *School Shootings: Mediated Violence in a Global Age*, vol.7, pp. 91–114.

NEWS FRAMING ANALYSIS

News framing is a study of how news is presented for interpretation, and is used to explain how the media constructs meaning and presents this meaning to its audiences. Entman (2010: 336) defines framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation". Framing, Entman (2010: 336) argues, has the potential to shape audience interpretations through a process known as "priming", in which particular aspects of news issues and events are made salient for media audiences through their news reportage. Building on this, De Vreese (2005: 51) argues that news framing reflects "a dynamic process" of communications, which rather than being static, involves "frame building (how frames emerge) and frame setting (the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions)". This points to the way in which news frames are able to evolve over time.

News framing analysis was selected as the primary research method for this study as it allows for the examination of how concepts and identities are constructed within news media and made salient to consumers of news. News framing analysis is but one method by which to interrogate how crime events are presented in the news media, and the potential these representations can have on shaping news consumers' interpretations of associated issues, such as responses to crime and definitions of criminality. In this respect, news framing provides an insight into news construction, but not actual media effects. We can, however, speculate on how particular patterns of news framing may contribute to public understanding. As De Vreese (2005: 52) states:

> The *consequences* of framing can be conceived on the individual and the societal level. And individual level consequence may be altered attitudes about an issue based on exposure to certain frames. On the societal level, frames may contribute to shaping

social level processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions.

In his own framing analysis, Iyengar (1991: 14) found that there were two types of time-based news frames in relation to the television coverage of political issues: *episodic* and *thematic* news frames. The concept of 'episodic' news framing is defined as the illustration of events and issues, whereas 'thematic' news framing "presents collective or general evidence" (Iyengar 1991: 14) over time. As Iyengar (1991: 14) explains:

> The episodic news frame takes the form of a case study or event-orientated reports and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances . . . The thematic frame, by contrast, places public issues in some more general or abstract context and takes the form of a "takeout," or "backgrounder," report.

Although Iyengar (1991) addresses televisual media in his study, the concept of 'episodic' and 'thematic' news frames also has relevance within print news media coverage. The distinction between 'episodic' and 'thematic' news frames also supports the view that news frames are not static, but can evolve over time. Iyengar's concept of 'episodic' and 'thematic' news frames was therefore applied in this study to assist in the evaluation of whether *The Mercury*'s news framing of the Port Arthur massacre and Martin Bryant changed or remained consistent throughout the reporting period analysed. Frame analysis of news reports can also determine whether there are predominant patterns of news reporting, and whether or not there are any changes in news narratives, which offer a 'counter-frame' to predominant news frames. In this way, news framing analysis served as a useful research method, which aligned with the aims of the study and the research questions it sought to answer.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, Rapley et al. (2003) used a social psychology approach to analyse the representation of Martin Bryant in newspapers around Australia, with

specific reference to his perceived mental illness. Rapley et al.'s (2003) study concluded that

Bryant was portrayed as a "monster", a "psychiatric case" and a "child", and that these

frames were particularly present during the course of his trial. The frames identified were

restricted "to an examination of the delicate discursive production of Bryant's membership in

the category 'madman'/'psychiatric case'" (Rapley et al. 2003: 435). Despite the different

methodologies, there are parallels between Rapley et al.'s social psychology categories and

the characterisations of Bryant that were identified through my own analysis of the news texts

within the 'perpetrator' frame (see Table 1). Rapley et al.'s (2003) 'psychiatric case' had

parallels with the 'physical descriptions' frame identified in this study. So too, Rapley et al.'s

(2003) 'monster' frame had parallels with the 'deviance and mental illness' frame, which was

also identifiable in the sample of *The Mercury*'s news reports. An additional frame of

'criminal profile', rather than Rapley et al.'s 'child' frame, was also identified. These are

discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

To identify news frames, Tankard (2001 cited in de Vreese 2005: 54) suggests that the

following 11 "framing mechanisms" be applied: the identification and measurement of

headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull

quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and concluding statements. All of Tankard's framing

mechanisms – excluding photo captions and logos – were applied within this study. However,

the framing device of 'source selection' was not limited to an identification of *who* gets to

speak, but also *what it is that they say*, so as to draw conclusions about who sets the agenda

for the news report and how it is that they serve to define the problem identified within it.

For the purposes of this thesis, and relative to the above, it is important to mention Hall et

al.'s (1978: 58) theory of 'primary definers', which characterise the "structured preference"

which is "given in the media to the opinions of the powerful". What this concept points to is

the way in which the news media has the power to establish the "initial definition or primary

interpretation of the topic in question" (Hall et al. 1978: 58). This primary interpretation then sets a precedent, which allows for the "'command[ing] of the field' in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage or debate takes place" (Hall et al. 1978: 58). Hall et al. (1978: 59) explain:

> The primary definition sets the limit for all subsequent discussion by framing what the problem is. This initial framework then provides the criteria by which all subsequent contributions are labelled as 'relevant' to the debate, or 'irrelevant'.

Hall et al.'s primary definers play an important role in this study in determining how *The Mercury* had the power to frame the "problem", ultimately creating a 'media template' (Kitzinger 2000) for future interpretations.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In a framing analysis, the study of images is an important aspect in determining which news frames are present and which are absent (see, for example, Coleman 2010). Given that this study examines a historical event, the original news articles with accompanying photographs were difficult to obtain in hard copy. A search was conducted of the microfilm copies archived at the State Library of Tasmania. However, their clarity was diminished by the form of media, and their availability as black and white copies only, which presented some difficulties for news framing analysis. This limited my study of the iconic photographs of Martin Bryant in that they were not available for analysis in their original news context. However, published photographs of Bryant are generally available and accessible for the public via the Internet. While this study therefore focuses its news framing analysis on the printed text from the news reports in *The Mercury*, it is difficult not to include some critical

discussion of the visual images of Martin Bryant – particularly the more iconic images – which served to *define* him within some of these newspaper reports (for example, see http://www.heraldsun.com.au/ipad/bryant-victims-outraged-by-tv-show/story-fn6bfkm6-1226013135057#content). These are discussed within the context of the data analysis in the next chapter. Another potential limitation of the study includes the designation of news frames, in that these are researcher designations, which are therefore open to interpretation and contestation.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has explained, to address the research questions outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, a news framing analysis was conducted of the media coverage in the local Tasmanian newspaper, *The Mercury*, from the period of 29 April to 23 November 1996. A study of the news reports indicated that the 'perpetrator' frame was the most predominant frame within the reporting over this period. This provided the catalyst for a more detailed framing analysis of the identity constructions of Martin Bryant within the news reports that were characterised by the broader 'perpetrator' news frame. The findings of this data analysis will now be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter seeks to address the findings of the framing analysis, with particular attention on the analysis of the news frames constructed in relation to news reports where Martin Bryant was the primary news subject. Following the event, the Port Arthur massacre was the most predominantly featured news story in *The Mercury*, with consecutive front page stories from April through to May 1996, with an increase again in front page stories around the time of Martin Bryant's conviction in November 1996. Being a small state, the incident remained at the centre of local Tasmanian news as details of the event emerged. A framing analysis of the reporting revealed that reports of the incident in *The Mercury* were primarily definable by eight main news frames: 'perpetrator', 'victims', 'guns/politics', 'memorial/religion', 'community', 'health', 'media' and 'finance' (see Table 1 in the Methodology chapter). Of these, the news frame characterised as 'perpetrator' was the predominant news frame, with a total of 91 news articles focusing on Martin Bryant as the primary news subject. On closer examination, it was discovered that the news articles in which Bryant was a primary focus could be categorised into three separate categories based on the prevalence of particular key themes within the news reports. These categories were defined as 'criminal profile', 'physical descriptions', and 'deviance and mental illness'. This was determined by both the flow of events and the news narrative over the period of 29 April to 23 November 1996. The following discussion of the data analysis is structured around these three themes, which as previously discussed, bear parallels to the findings of Rapley et al.'s (2003) social psychology analysis of the representation of Bryant in a broader sample of Australian newspapers. Rapley et al.'s (2003) data analysis concluded that Bryant had been portrayed as three different types: as a 'monster', a 'psychiatric case' and a 'child'. My own analysis broadly concurs with these findings, but includes the identification of the additional frame: 'deviance and mental illness'.

CRIMINAL PROFILE

From the analysis of news reports from 29 April to 23 November 1996, it was noted that initial reporting of the event attempted to establish a 'criminal profile' of Martin Bryant. This was done by trying to construct the identity of the gunman – how old he was, what he looked like, and facts detailing his mental state. However, in doing so, this construction contributed to an immediate labelling of the perpetrator, which ultimately linked the violence of the Port Arthur massacre with someone who was allegedly mentally ill. For example, the first report of the massacre in *The Mercury* on 29 April 1996, '33 DEAD', immediately identified Bryant as a "29-year-old schizophrenic" (*The Mercury* 1996a: 1). Despite the label, at this stage in the reporting of the event there was no evidence of a clinical diagnosis for Bryant's alleged schizophrenia. As a result, Bryant was immediately labelled as a criminal with a mental disorder. The significance of this is that, as Gove (1982: 288) explains, "labelling theorists believe that once a person has been labelled mentally ill…it is extremely difficult for the person to break out of the deviant status". This was also the case for Bryant in that, once he had been defined as mentally ill within *The Mercury*'s news reportage, this connection between the violence of the Port Arthur massacre and mental illness may have had the potential to set a precedent for the newspaper's subsequent framing of Bryant.

As soon as news reports of the massacre began to circulate, many speculations did also. Bryant became "intellectually disabled" (with no significant confirmation), of "about 18 years of age" (when he was actually 29 years old), a "surfie-type" with a mood "fluctuating between "angry and rational"" (see '33 DEAD' (*The Mercury* 1996a: 1); 'Our bloody Sunday' (Bailey 1996a: 1)). These speculations about the unidentified gunman were compounded by the identification of stereotypes, with reports suggesting that Bryant was a "surfie type" due to his long blonde hair and athletic build (Bailey 1996a: 1). As Bryant had not yet been officially named, it is important to note that he was labelled before any

information was confirmed. This set up the character of Bryant without any real evidence, ultimately *telling* readers who he was and how they should *interpret him to be*. Being the first day of the reporting of the massacre, much information surrounding the shootings and the perpetrator remained unclear and unconfirmed, which was to be expected. However, what *was* known resulted in the attempt to identify the gunman without any concrete evidence. These early reports stated that the gunman was "recently diagnosed as schizophrenic", and that he was known simply as "Martin" (Bailey 1996b: 3). *The Mercury* also presented the public with reports, which gave the first glimpse and insight into the life of the gunman, discussing his father's suicide – possibly insinuating that this might warrant reason for the shootings and provide a motive. Other reports used words like "insanity", "evil", "viciousness", "wickedness" and phrases like "normal people", and references to the murders as "the worst mass shooting by a lone gunman in history" became a significant and repetitive refrain (for example see '33 DEAD' (*The Mercury* 1996a: 1); 'Our bloody Sunday'; (Bailey 1996a: 2); 'Highest toll by a lone gunman' (Tremayne 1996: 42). The inclusion of such words and statements (i.e. the language choice within these reports) bore the potential to reinforce to readers the idea that, to be the worst mass shooting by a lone gunman, the perpetrator must be an inherently evil, insane person.

Once news of the Port Arthur massacre broke, it was fair to say that very little was reasonably known about the gunman. However, much of the initial reporting attempted to establish a 'criminal profile' of Martin Bryant, based on what *was* known about him, or at least assumed. The page 3 story from *The Mercury* on 30 April 1996 is representative of this:

> The man owned a small farming property . . . His father had committed suicide three
> years ago . . . The man's mother early today was still at police headquarters . . . The
> man's uncle was also helping police, as was the gunman's young girlfriend. The girl's

father said he only knew the gunman as "Martin" and said he had been a "nice bloke".

He had Sunday night dinner with the family only a week ago (Bailey 1996b: 3).

The fact that the report states that the gunman's father had committed suicide three years earlier and had known two of the gunman's hostages, provides an insight into the possible motives for the shootings (or at least implies to readers that this may be the reason behind them). This indicates a blurring of the distinctions between 'episodic' and 'thematic' news frames, as identified by Iyengar (1991). When news reports of the Port Arthur massacre began to circulate, news consumers were first exposed to not only the 'episodic' details of the incident – *who* had committed the shootings, *what* had happened, *when* it happened, and *how* it happened – but also, quite quickly, 'thematic' news frames (*why* it happened, the *context*). As discussed in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, Iyengar defines 'episodic' news frames as taking "the form of a case study or event-orientated reports and depict[ing] public issues in terms of concrete instances" (1991: 14). Lawrence (2000) builds on this by arguing that, "thematic reporting examines broader social phenomena and places events into the context of some rising trend or troubling social condition" (2000: 94).

The early 'episodic' reporting of the event included what information was known about the incident at the moment of impact, how many fatalities there were, how many people were injured and the sequence of events according to witnesses. However, it was not long before speculation arose with regards to the gunman's motives, leading to a more 'thematic' style of reporting. 'Thematic' news frames, as Lawrence (2000: 94) explains, examine the "broader social phenomena" of events. This was particularly evident in this study's framing analysis in that many of the news reports from *The Mercury* in the more immediate aftermath of the Port Arthur massacre focused on the identification of "social conditions", beginning with Bryant's motives and leading to his troubled, deviant life.

On 30 April 1996, the alleged gunman of the Port Arthur massacre was identified by name –

Martin Bryant – a 28 year old "man of mystery" (*The Mercury* 1996b: 1) from the Hobart

suburb of New Town (this had been reported incorrectly; he was in fact 29 years old at the

time as news reports later confirmed). The front page of the newspaper was devoted entirely

to the identification of the gunman, with a headline that informed readers: "THIS IS THE

MAN" (*The Mercury* 1996b: 1). The page featured the first published photograph of Bryant,

in which he wore a blue hooded jumper, white trousers, and held a vacant expression. "This

is the man," read the beginning of each sentence of the article: "This is the man . . . This is

the man . . . This is the man . . ." (*The Mercury* 1996b: 1). The repetition of this phrase

reinforced to readers of *The Mercury* the idea that not only was Bryant the perpetrator of the

Port Arthur shootings, but the man to blame. Camaj (2010: 643) calls this an 'attribution of

responsibility' – "a frame that emphasizes the attribution of responsibility for the problem to

a person, institution or government", which is common in trauma reporting. The front page

photograph became one of the most iconic images of Bryant to circulate in association with

the Port Arthur massacre, and was the subject of debate and scrutiny when it was revealed

that the photograph had been supposedly digitally altered by *The Australian* newspaper to

make Bryant's eyes appear more wild and disturbing, giving him an overtly deranged look

(McGregor 2007). Whether true or not, the photograph and its framing invited readers to

interpret Bryant as a man with no expression, and therefore, no remorse for his actions;

visually illustrating the notion that he was a killer with no emotion for what he had done.

On 30 April 1996, *The Mercury* began to use more emotive language to describe Bryant.

Some of this language choice was attributable to comments from friends and neighbours.

Many of the words used to describe Bryant were contradictory. The opinions of others

assisted in building on Bryant's character, and the process of understanding what kind of

person had carried out the shootings. The use of sources in these reports is important, because

on one hand, the comments incorporated into news reports effectively humanised Bryant while, at the same time, other comments sought to dehumanise him.

For example, in some of the news reports analysed, Bryant was described by associates as "happy and friendly" with a "cheeky grin"; with "blonde hair, bright blue eyes and flushed red cheeks" and "albino-like in appearance" with a "trim, athletic body"; as someone who "would not hurt a fly", and as being "like a puppy", "nice and friendly" and "pleasant"; while at the same time, he also had eyes which were "cold and piercing"; and was someone who was "a bit scary", "immature", "eccentric, weird and lonely" with a "certain strange side to him" (Bailey 1996c: 4). These evaluations all add to the character of Bryant, giving balance through various opinions, while also serving to build upon establishing a 'criminal profile' of him. As discussed by Hall et al. (1978), the use of sources in news reports (and their dominance within the news story) places people in positions of power – they serve as 'primary definers' of the news agenda. Who gets to speak is important, and this is significant because it can be argued that it adheres to "the requirement of balance" in which "each 'side' is allowed to present its case" (Hall et al. 1978: 58). Nonetheless, those in positions of power who have their voices heard in the news also have the power to reinforce certain ideas and have the potential to impact on the way in which readers are invited to engage with the mediated representation of Martin Bryant. For example, on 23 November 1996, and, at the time of Bryant's conviction, *The Mercury* quoted Tasmania's then-Chief Justice William Cox, as having remarked after sentencing that:

> He [Bryant] killed and injured men, women and even children. He killed, or attempted to kill, local residents, visitors from other parts of this state, from other parts of Australia and visitors from a number of overseas countries. He killed individual family members, married couples and, in one case, all the members of one family save the bereaved father . . . (Cox cited in Walsh 1996a: 6).

Once reports had confirmed that a "strange" man had committed the shootings at Port Arthur, a connection was made between the crime and the strangeness of Bryant, and this was used as a pattern of reporting on the incident. This was especially evident in the news reports concerning his home life, such as the article, 'A quiet house on Clare St hides clues to a strange life', which included a detailed list of the disorganised contents of Bryant's house, as though this provided a forewarning of his inherent criminality (see Potter and Bailey 1996: 4).

This focus on the *disorganisation* of Bryant was ultimately framed as being in contrast to that of an *organised society*. It is interesting that so much of the information concerning Bryant's home received as much media attention as it did. As evidenced by the above newspaper report, *The Mercury* suggested to readers that it was necessary to know which movies Bryant had on video, and that he owned a book about caring for pets (Potter and Bailey 1996: 4) when the fact that Bryant lived in a house, which had paint flaking off the walls and dust on chandeliers, did not inherently make him anymore of a mass murderer than anyone else. The report consequently made his house and its contents seem "strange", further adding to the strangeness which had already been constructed in relation to Bryant's character. The descriptions of Bryant's home contributed to the framing of him as a whole, portraying him as a careless housekeeper. This framing is consistent with the reporting of other incidents of serious gun violence, such as school shootings, which often frame the perpetrators as strange, different and 'social rejects'. Therefore, it may be argued that patterns in the framing of Bryant followed Kitzinger's (2000) theory of 'media templates' in that the reporting of Port Arthur could be considered a media template, since incidents following Port Arthur have been similarly framed. The framing of perpetrators of gun violence has also created media templates with cases such as the Columbine High School, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings.

Bryant's strangeness was reinforced through a news story in *The Mercury* on 30 April 1996, which stated that a 23-year old woman had been disturbed by a marriage proposal from Martin Bryant after they had been sitting together on a flight from London. The report read: "Miss Lee said the man sitting across the aisle from them on the plane thought Bryant was weird" (Gillard 1996: 5). The repeated inclusion of this kind of information on Bryant's relationships and interactions with others in news reports after the Port Arthur massacre further exemplified the emphasis *The Mercury* placed on Bryant's strange and extraordinary behaviour. In a similar way, Bryant's strangeness was exemplified following his first court appearance. What a perpetrator of crime – and especially murder – says in court, is often greatly anticipated for news reporting, and in late May, Bryant spoke in court for the first time, and *The Mercury* reported this moment in 'Murder-charge man speaks just seven words': "Martin Bryant, sitting in a wheelchair in a room in Risdon Prison answered: "Yes I am." Mr Hill then…asked Bryant if he understood. Bryant answered "Yes I do, uhuh"" (Lamb 1996: 1). The fact that Bryant had finally spoken was framed as an important and long-awaited event for Tasmanians, who were informed exactly of which words he had said, and how many words he had spoken. It could be (given the knowledge that Bryant was supposedly unintelligent and suffering from a mental condition) that *The Mercury* was suggesting that he was not *able* to comprehensively speak any other words. The inclusion of the "uhuh" in the article implied that Bryant was immaturely casual, and served to frame him as being unaware of the graveness of not only the crimes which he had committed, but of the charges laid against him, which further suggested that Bryant could not comprehend the seriousness of his crimes.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS

Many of the news reports which featured in *The Mercury* – particularly during Martin

Bryant's trial – maintained a focus on the way Bryant looked, and how he reacted in court.

The way in which *The Mercury* reported Bryant's trial and how it referred to his physical

characteristics may have had potential 'framing effects' on public perceptions of the Port

Arthur massacre and its perpetrator. The justification for this argument lies in the words that

were chosen to describe Bryant in *The Mercury*'s news reportage. Much of the time,

emphasis was placed specifically on his eyes, particularly the movement of them and who he

stared at and at which moments. The news framing analysis for this study revealed that there

were also many references to *looking* in general – the way Bryant physically looked in terms

of attire and body language; the action of looking with his eyes; and witnesses and victims

having the opportunity to look at him. Such discussion centralises the idea that "madness is as

madness looks" (Cross 2004) – that because Bryant looked strange in every way, he was

therefore identifiably "mad", and visually so. The attention given to Bryant's eyes, in

particular, encompasses the idea that he was portrayed as a psychotic mass murderer with a

wild-eyed stare; ultimately depicting him as a criminal who had not only committed a terrible

crime, but who also *appeared deranged*. Framing analysis identified that the physical

descriptions of Bryant formed the basis of a pattern of news framing in *The Mercury*'s

reportage of Bryant's court appearances. These descriptions of Bryant's appearance

supported both the textual and visual framing of him in news reports given that the reports

portrayed him as someone who was not 'normal'. As Cross (2004: 199) explains in his study

on madness and representation:

> One key icon is dishevelment. Wild, unkempt hair and tattered clothing have long
>
> provided influential visual signs of madness . . . They enable the intended audience to
>
> recognize that it is madness that is being portrayed. Consider, for a moment, images

we conventionally associate with madness: wild, unkempt hair; tattered clothing; red-veined, staring eyes; muttered imprecations; fists shaken at "things" that are not there; outspoken dialogues to the different parts of oneself. These are stereotypical conceptions that make it clear how madness is seen: as visible differences of appearance and behaviour that demarcate a symbolic boundary between "us" and "them".

This is especially applicable with regards to how Bryant was framed in news reports in terms of his physical appearance and demeanour. Drawing on Cross' (2004) own evaluations of the representations of 'madness', the contrast between 'normality' and Bryant was repeatedly referenced in *The Mercury*'s reportage in terms of Bryant's dishevelment (his hair), clothing (his repeated wearing of the same suit), and his sudden outbursts during court proceedings. News reports from 1 October 1996 (after Bryant had pleaded not guilty) provided readers with first-hand descriptions of Bryant's courtroom demeanour, based on the observations of *The Mercury*'s reporters:

> Bryant started to rock on his feet and he glanced towards the ceiling . . . When he was asked to plead to the 21st charge of attempting to murder Graham Collyer Bryant tilted his head to one side as he said "not guilty". On the 30th charge of wounding Peter Crosswell Bryant turned and looked at the victims' relatives and friends . . . When Ms McLagan read out count 52, the murder of six-year-old Alanna Louise Mikac, Bryant looked at members of the media . . . He was moving from foot to foot again looking towards the ceiling (Walsh 1996b: 1).

These detailed descriptions of Bryant also informed readers of when he smiled and to whom, and included information about his body language: "Standing with his hands clasped in front of him Bryant bent forwards towards the microphone and said "Not guilty" to four murder

counts..." (Walsh 1996b: 1). Much attention was also paid to what Bryant was wearing for his appearance in court: "Bryant, wearing a double-breasted, silver grey silk suit and a cream collarless shirt was led into court…" (1996a: 1). In the news report, 'How say you…', readers were told of Bryant's "half murmer[s]" and "half-whisper[s]", how his "blond hair, parted on the right, cascaded down on to his shoulders", how "he had to put his hands in his pockets and fingers through the belt loops of his sharp silver-grey pants to keep them from falling down", and how his answers of "Not guilty" remained in the same monotone throughout the 72 charges put to him (Hamilton 1996a: 3). These accounts of Bryant's stance, body language, speaking manner and attire bear resonance to Cross' (2004) idea that the ways in which madness is represented often creates a boundary between "us" and "them". So too, this was the case in *The Mercury*'s visual and textual news framing of Martin Bryant. A significant moment in the newspaper's reporting came in the form of 'Bryant's words echo worldwide', which detailed the accused's attire and body language:

> Dressed in a powder-blue, two-piece suit and a collarless shirt, Bryant repeated his guilty plea 71 more times. He did so with smiles and glances at the relatives of people killed at Port Arthur (Walsh 1996c: 2).

From this moment on, Bryant was framed as a maliciously laughing, *smiling* murderer, adding to previously suggested reports that he was odd; and effectively portraying him as the quintessential "madman" – as "the gunman who giggled" who "smiled…smirked… snickered… [and] giggled", who laughed uncontrollably with his "hands in pockets, long tendrils of blond matted hair hanging down on each side of his flushed face, hanging like some rough-woven hemp plaits around the face of a painted sailor doll" (Hamilton 1996b: 2). Readers were also told that his hair was more unkempt than it had been at his last appearance, that he stood licking his lips with his head "lolling from left to right", and how "he looked

almost like a pale blue marionette being pulled by invisible strings" (see 'The gunman who giggled' 1996).

On 8 November 1996, *The Mercury* featured a news story that reported on the witnesses who were at Port Arthur and their chance to look at Bryant. On 20 November 1996, the report, 'The quiet man weeps as he hears how his family was gunned down', again relayed Bryant's "trademark blond curly hair cropped off to short back and sides" and how he was wearing the same suit he had worn to court last time (see Whinnett 1996a: 3). From this moment, reports no longer referred to Bryant as an alleged gunman, but as a "mass murderer" (Whinnett 1996b: 2). This reflected a subtle shift in the news framing of Bryant, which reinforced the notion that, not only had he shot people, but he had *murdered* them.

DEVIANCE AND MENTAL ILLNESS

The analysis of news reports from the 'perpetrator' frame – particularly during the time of Martin Bryant's trial – also revealed that there was often a focus on Bryant as deviant. This framing category of 'deviance and mental illness' was determined by the articles which focussed on Bryant's abnormal behaviour, attitudes and mental state, and was distinguished from the 'criminal profile' category through its considerably drastic focus on Bryant as a deviant, "abnormal" figure due to his supposed mental illness. As Gove (1982: 276) explains, a person is often labelled as deviant "primarily because they either act in a deviant manner or have characteristics that mark them deviant". This was particularly the case in regards to *The Mercury*'s news framing of Bryant around the time of his conviction, in which the characteristics that marked him as 'deviant' were over-emphasised and frequently the subject of attention in *The Mercury*'s news reportage. News of deviance, as Ericson et al. (1987: 356) argue, "helps to create a factual basis for commitments, giving values the appearance of

objectivity… The feeling of certainty it offers serves in turn as an impetus to organizing…"
This attempt to organise enables a distinction to be made between what is perceived as normal and what is not. According to Ericson et al. (1987: 47), the news media often emphasises "organized life" and focuses "on aspects which violate expectations about organized life or which suggest tendencies towards disorganization". The motif of Martin Bryant's 'disorganised' life was particularly evident at the end of November 1996 and at the end of his trial when news reports focused on the rejection that Bryant had faced throughout his life. On 21 November 1996, the news report, 'Stark words end grim day', stated that the Director of Public Prosecutions, Damian Bugg, QC, had told of how Bryant used to keep a piglet in his bedroom (Whinnett 1996b: 2). That same day, *The Mercury* attempted to give an insight into the senseless character of Bryant in a news article, which discussed Bryant's mindless squandering of money on overseas travel (Walsh 1996d: 2). This news report exemplified the framing of Bryant as a person who was out of control, who had no self-discipline, and who was without sense and reason.

Indeed, many of the new reports analysed as part of this study focused on stereotypical representations of Bryant's 'abnormalities'. His vulnerability as a person with a low IQ, his apparent personality disorder, and his tendency to inflict trouble, resulted in patterns of news framing that played on the ways in which Bryant was recognisably 'abnormal' in society. Towards the end of the trial on 21 November 1996, it was revealed that Bryant was, in fact, "not mentally ill and did not have schizophrenia" (Walsh 1996e: 3). This contradicted initial reports in *The Mercury*, which had labelled Bryant as mentally ill and recently *diagnosed with schizophrenia*. The article, 'Bryant not mentally ill: doctor', suggested that Bryant:

> Was not mentally ill and did not have schizophrenia . . . Hobart psychologist Ian Sale said it was likely he was suffering from Aspberger's Disorder, a developmental condition bearing some similarities to autism (Walsh 1996e: 3).

The admission that Bryant was aggressive in character, but not mentally ill, not only contradicted initial reports, but also highlighted the potential for the newspaper's early reportage to mislead news consumers. Within the courtroom, the revelation that Bryant was not mentally ill provoked an examination of his intellect, which was subsequently reported by the newspaper. One news article, 'Bryant resigned to life sentence, says lawyer', indicated that Bryant's lawyer had said that: "He was not suffering from any mental illness, he wasn't suffering from schizophrenia or anything of that nature and he is obviously a person of very limited intellectual capacity (Whinnett 1996c: 8). The article, 'Abnormalities from early childhood', reported that Bryant had been examined by two psychiatrists and a psychologist, whose assessments had concluded that Bryant had simply become aggressive due to his loneliness:

> Bryant had become increasingly unhappy and angry because he had no real friend. "He said: "All I wanted was for people to like me". And their failure to respond to his overtures led him to feel that "I'd had a gut-full" (Walsh 1996f: 3).

As discussed by Gove (1982), "once a person has been labelled mentally ill . . . it is extremely difficult for the person to break out of the deviant status" (1982: 288). The same may be said for Martin Bryant, although there was an identifiable shift in the language choice and *The Mercury*'s news framing after the revelation that Bryant was not mentally ill.

On 23 November 1996, *The Mercury* printed six articles detailing the end of Bryant's criminal trial. Page 2 revealed that the "pathetic social misfit" who was "guilty of the world's worst massacre by a lone gunman" would spend the rest of his life in prison (McCausland 1996: 2). No longer was Bryant represented as a schizophrenic gunman. Rather, he was reduced to a "pathetic", albeit deviant figure. As a result, this modification provoked the notion that if Bryant was not mentally ill or criminally insane, then he could only be further

devalued to someone of a deviant, impossible nature – still rejecting the possibility that Bryant could, in any way, fit into 'normal' society.

CONCLUSION

 The findings of the framing analysis of *The Mercury*'s news reporting of the Port Arthur massacre and Martin Bryant demonstrate that Bryant was portrayed not only in subjective terms, but also stereotypically, throughout the seven months after the shootings. This was especially evident during the court proceedings of November 1996, in which Bryant's 'strangeness' (both in behaviour and appearance) was often over-emphasised and invoked as a marker of his inherent criminality and capacity for violence. Initial 'episodic' framing of the Port Arthur massacre evolved into more 'thematic' news frames as *The Mercury*'s reporting moved from details of the incident, and the need to attribute blame, to the identification of the perpetrator and the search for an explanation of motive.

These critical observations of *The Mercury*'s reporting of the Port Arthur massacre and its subsequent constructions of Martin Bryant's subjectivity can contribute to broader discussions of the mediated representation of crime and criminality in that they serve as a caution that violent criminals who are labelled as mentally ill run the risk of being stereotypically portrayed in the news media. This has broader implications for mediated representations of violence and mental illness, and is particularly pertinent to more contemporary reporting of extreme gun violence, such as school and other mass shootings – as is discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

 From the framing analysis of *The Mercury*'s news reports from 29 April to 23 November 1996, it is evident that the most predominant news frame was one that featured Martin Bryant as the primary news subject. Further analysis of the news reports within this framing designation revealed that, more often than not, Martin Bryant was portrayed stereotypically as well as problematically in relation to his deviant behaviour and violence. In addressing the research questions outlined in the Introduction to the thesis, the study demonstrated that *The Mercury*'s news framing evolved from the period immediately after the Port Arthur massacre to Bryant's conviction for the shootings. Over this period, a number of patterns of news framing were identifiable in relation to the characterisation of Martin Bryant. These included the construction of a criminal profile, a focus on Bryant's physical attributions, and stereotypical representations of 'madness' and 'abnormality'.

As a consequence, it could be argued that Bryant was subjectively framed and problematically labelled as a violent criminal suffering a mental illness in the majority of *The Mercury*'s news reports of the Port Arthur massacre. Consequently, the news framing of Bryant may have had potential 'framing effects' on public perceptions of the Port Arthur massacre, its perpetrator and the concepts of 'mental illness' and 'criminality' more broadly – resulting, in the case of the latter, in the potential for public perceptions of mental illness to be associated with inevitable acts of violence.

FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Analysing the critical observations derived from this research contributes to broader discussions about the mediated representations of crime and criminality – particularly in

terms of the relationship between mental illness and violence. Although some argue that the reporting of mental illness and violence has improved, there are still many links made in the news media between mental illness and mass shootings (which provides avenue for further research, such as whether news frames of more contemporary mass shootings can be compared to those of the Port Arthur massacre to identify whether there have been changes in the reporting of these events). This study has therefore raised additional questions, such as whether or not this study could be linked to other studies of mass shootings and the framing of perpetrators in the news media. Further research of Martin Bryant's framing in the news media – such as analysis of current affairs reports and interviews on television, or further analysis of his representation in a variety of newspapers – might similarly reveal additional insights into the way in which he was represented in the media. This could potentially build upon the framing of Bryant as a perpetrator and add to evidence of the potential 'framing effects' of particular patterns of news reportage.

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