

HEARING WOMEN'S VOICES?  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE INITIAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE  
OF THE MONTRÉAL MASSACRE

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in Sociology

by  
Merrie Jane Kitchen  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

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HEARING WOMEN'S VOICES? AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
INITIAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE MONTRÉAL MASSACRE

BY

MERRIE JANE KITCHEN

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

On December 6, 1989, 14 women were murdered by a gunman at L'École Polytechnique at the Université de Montréal in Montréal, Canada. This study establishes that a "crime" discourse (which defined the gunman in individualized terms) was more frequent in the news coverage than a "feminist" discourse (which interpreted the massacre as representative of other male violent behaviour). The study also establishes that the non-news coverage (editorials, columns, features, and letters) contained a more developed analysis of violence against women than any feminist content which was present in the news stories. It is suggested that the feminist analysis in the non-news coverage is indicative of a growing impact of feminism on the dominant hegemony.

The media is situated as a site within civil society which reproduces patriarchal capitalist hegemony. Special attention is paid to the structure and operations of newswork, and how crime coverage reproduces hegemony.

Five Canadian newspapers were analyzed using content analysis: The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, the Montreal Gazette, the Winnipeg Free Press, and the Calgary Herald. The newspapers were analyzed from December 7th until December 21st, 1989.

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**This thesis is dedicated to Marley Jordanna and Jennifer Marie.**

**May they know a world which is safe for women.**



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## INTRODUCTION

On December 6th, 1989, 14 women were murdered at L'École Polytechnique at the Université de Montréal in Montréal, Canada. The "Montréal Massacre," as it came to be known, shocked Canadians. Many tried to make sense of the gunman's behaviour. Some blamed access to guns, others insanity, still others saw the massacre as an extension of a violent society. Some people were alarmed at the gunman's violent message against the women whom he saw as "feminists," and whom he had systematically killed while sparing the men.

The media covered the massacre and its effects extensively. Since the media in our society are seen as "objective" and "fair," one might expect all of these different interpretations to be presented in a balanced way. However, some feminist women have claimed that their voices and, in particular, their interpretations of the massacre as yet another example of violence against women, were not heard in the media. It is this claim which provides the starting point for this investigation. While there have been several commentaries and at least one collection of letters and articles (Malette and Chalouh, 1991) published since the massacre, to date there has been little in the way of a systematic analysis of the nature of the media coverage across Canada. How were competing interpretations of the massacre presented in the media? Whose voices were being heard? Which versions of the "truth" were being authorized?

In Chapter One, I will offer some theoretical considerations with which to frame the interpretations which were heard in the media. Several theoretical concepts will be introduced, such as hegemony, discourse, the manufacturing of consent, and the labelling of deviance. Elaboration on the role of the news narrative in reproducing consent will provide

a theoretical framework for my analysis.

In Chapter Two, I will explain the method of sample collection, as well as the method of analysis for examining both news stories and editorials, features, columns and letters.

In Chapter Three, I will detail what occurred the night of the massacre. This will provide a basic understanding of the events and the responses which ensued. At the end of this chapter, I will introduce notions of a crime discourse and a feminist discourse and present my hypotheses which emerge from the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One.

The analysis of the data will be presented in two parts. In Chapter Four, I will present my analysis of the news story coverage of the massacre. I will discuss which interpretations of the massacre were most dominant in the news narrative. More specifically, I will make the case that the crime discourse was most dominant in news stories of the massacre.

In Chapter Five, I will present the analysis of editorials, features, columns and letters in order to determine whether a feminist discourse emerges in a non-news narrative. More specifically, I will show that, in features and columns, a feminist discourse was most dominant.

In Chapter Six, I will discuss the structural constraints present in newspaper coverage (both in news stories and in features, columns, editorials, and letters) and the limits these constraints place on feminist expression. The role each type of coverage plays in reproducing (or challenging) hegemony will also be discussed.

Finally, in my concluding chapter, I will outline questions raised by the research. Limits to the sample will also be addressed.

## CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before a systematic analysis of the media coverage of the Montréal massacre can be undertaken, the groundwork for such an analysis must be laid. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to clarify the theoretical perspective which will be used to understand the structure of society, the role of ideas in reproducing a particular social order and, in particular, the manner in which the media operates in society.

### THE MANUFACTURE OF CONSENT

The Montréal massacre occurred in a society which is both capitalist and patriarchal.<sup>1</sup> Following the basic premises of Marxist thought, our society can be characterized as capitalist since one class - by virtue of its ownership and control over the means of production - is in a position of dominance over the other (subordinate) classes. Feminist theorists have argued that - in addition to characterizing our society as capitalist - there is also a need to attend to the fact that it is patriarchal. According to Zillah Eisenstein, patriarchy is the "process of differentiating men from women while privileging men"; it also "connotes the social, historical, and economic relations of power in society that create and reflect gendered inequality" (1988:20-21).

While capitalism and patriarchy are reproduced materially through people's lived experiences, they are also reproduced at the level of ideas. In order for these inequalities to

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<sup>1</sup> See: Hester, 1992; Tong, 1989; Jaggar, 1983; Donovan, 1985; Walby, 1990; Radford and Russell, 1992; Burstyn, 1985:70; Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989; Eisenstein, 1988:20-21; Hartmann, 1981; Carnoy, 1984:46-47.

be maintained, consensus must somehow be realized. One way to understand how this consensus is achieved is by means of the related concepts of ideology, hegemony and discourse.

Marx's now famous dictum - "The ideas of the ruling class are in every age the ruling ideas" (cited in McLellan, 1986:13) - illustrates the basic premise of his theory of ideology; that in all class societies the dominant class develops or takes over the ideological forms which legitimate its position of dominance. According to Marx, not all ideas produced constitute ideology. While any class in society may produce ideas, they are considered ideological only to the extent that they serve to further the interests of the ruling class by making the unequal distribution of resources in society appear as natural. In this way, ideology serves to conceal the real relationships between people (McLellan, 1986:13-15). If ideology is at work, social relations themselves will not be called into question. Thus, the power of ideology is in "its capacity to represent cultural reality as natural" (Silberstein, 1988:125).

Yet, Marx's theory of ideology did not go far enough in terms of explaining **how** consensus is maintained. One theorist, Antonio Gramsci, has addressed this issue with his concept of hegemony. Hegemony refers to

... an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, customs, religious and moral connotation. (Williams, 1960:587)

Gramsci used the concept in a number of different contexts, one of which saw hegemony as the "mechanism of bourgeois rule over the working class in a stabilized capitalist society" (Anderson, 1977:19). Further to this, he made the point of stressing that hegemony was not an automatic condition, but the result of a pervasive effort made by two

spheres in the superstructure: civil society (which includes the church, schools and the media) and the state (Gramsci,1971:12).

The exercise of hegemony entails, simultaneously, a two-sided process. On the one hand, it involves the efforts of the dominant class to maintain its position of dominance. Gramsci recognized that there was no such simple formula as **the** ruling class. Under different historical conditions, the objective interests of a fundamental class in production could only be realized through the political and ideological leadership of a fraction of that class or an alliance of class fractions. In short, while private ownership of the means of production is a **necessary** condition for capitalist domination, it is not a **sufficient** condition. The capitalist class is continually confronted with the need to organize at the political and cultural levels. On the other hand, hegemony involves the "acceptance" of domination on the part of the subordinate classes. It requires the active consent of those who are being ruled. That is, if the ruling group can convince the subjugated group(s) that the state of society is natural without having to resort to force or violence, hegemony will be more easily achieved. As such, hegemony is a **process**. It must always be in flux to recuperate alternate ideologies; its manifestations must be flexible so it may find "expression in new forms in order to maintain dominance" (Silberstein,1988:131).

Because hegemony is a process "wherein cultural authority is negotiated and contested, (i)t presupposes that societies contain a plurality of discourses and discursive sites, a plurality of positions and perspectives from which to speak" (Fraser,1992:179).<sup>2</sup> These discourses-

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<sup>2</sup> This notion of "discourse" has evolved from three separate areas: 1)post- modern writings, which criticize broad metanarratives or "one truth" theorizing; 2)Deconstructionism- the reading of texts to examine the construction and plurality of meanings; and 3) various feminist works on language as well as feminist writers which incorporate elements of #1 or #2, such as Chris Weedon's feminist poststructuralism (see Walby,1990; Hester,1992).

or ways of thinking - do not have equal authority; conflict and contestation operate among them (Fraser,1992:179). The number of interpretations of an event or occurrence is limited by the discourse in which they occur. If one discourse becomes dominant in society, therefore, interpretations of events will be likely to fall within the parameters of that discourse.

Since hegemony is an ongoing process in the manufacture of consent in society, and since there exists a plurality of meanings or discourses with which to interpret the "truth" about the social world, the possibilities of alternate discourses (or what Gramsci (1971) termed a "counter-hegemony") emerging to challenge the hegemonic control of the dominant group(s) in society are ever-present. Indeed, it is here where an analysis of the media in patriarchal capitalist society can be introduced.

The media provide an important avenue for the articulation of discourse(s). As a site within civil society, the media operates as an agency for the maintenance of patriarchal capitalist hegemony. It is a site where the dominant discourse is constructed and heard. In the process, however, the media provides a discursive terrain where alternate discourses - ones which potentially challenge the dominant meanings and "common sense" views - are also recognized. Yet, the manner in which these alternate discourses are recognized in the media will, for the most part, act to limit and constrain the degree to which any challenges to hegemony will be successful. One way of understanding how this works is to examine the process by which news is made.



## THE PROCESS OF "MAKING NEWS"

### Reproducing Order

Given the capitalist structure in which the media is located, the process of making news is, like other capitalist enterprises, governed by the profit motive. This helps to account for the structure in which newswork takes place, and also to reveal some of the more specific features of newswork. For instance, in order to be profitable, stories must get out quickly (preferably before the competition) and must attract readers. To get a story together quickly depends on being able to decide on a story and find sources; selling a paper depends on being able to grab a reader's attention. Profits then come to the newspaper as the reading audience attracts advertising dollars.

To be newsworthy, and hence profitable, an occurrence must be new and unusual. This leads journalists to overlook "common" cases and look at the unusual, changing the common perception of an occurrence.<sup>3</sup> Failing a new and unusual occurrence, journalistic traditions also dictate that events which are worthy of reporting must "tie into a current event or preoccupation in the news" (Benedict, 1992:8). Thus, in order to be considered news, an event must match a newspaper's recent themes.

Once a journalist decides on a story, it is important to have quick access to sources seen as trustworthy by the public. Consequently, journalists tend to rely heavily on bureaucratic or government sources and social control agencies for their primary sources (Hall et al., 1978; Chibnall, 1977; Fishman, 1980). Since the media must appear legitimate in order to remain profitable, using bureaucratic sources such as legal authorities helps to

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<sup>3</sup> See: Benedict, 1992:8; for example, coverage of rape cases focuses on the exciting or titillating cases and not the usual occurrences, painting rape as occurring only in a dark alley rather than focusing on the more common occurrences of acquaintance rape.

convince readers that the interpretation in the media is an "objective, impartial, universal, and general voice of the people" (Ericson et al.,1987:53). The use of such "authorized knowers" protects the media against charges of bias (Winter,1992:43). It also guarantees that the story itself will be considered trustworthy, as journalists operate on the assumption that those in "powerful positions of authority" are seen as reliable by the rest of society (Chibnall,1977:39).

From a historical perspective, the focus on "objectivity" as a selling point for newspapers is a relatively recent development (Schudson,1980). Newspapers at the turn of the century were mostly partisan papers, reflecting the position of a certain political party or group (Rutherford,1978; Clow,1993). Readers thus expected a partisan interpretation of the events. This changed as the rising costs of publishing forced papers to both amalgamate with other papers and rely on advertising to attract large numbers of readers.<sup>4</sup> Both journalists and readers were dissatisfied with strongly stated partisan views which did not reflect their own, so news stories came to be covered in an ostensibly "unbiased" way (Clow,1993:16). The goal of this type of newspaper reporting was to appease readers and journalists by coming into the middle ground and reporting "both" sides of the events that had occurred.

Yet, this claim to "objectivity" is spurious at best (Clow,1993). For instance, while the media endeavour to present their stories as "objective" interpretations of an event, their sources have their own politically interested views (Ericson in Winter,1992:44). In relying on bureaucratic sources (such as government, police) to construct a story, there is a tendency for the reporter to accept or support the perspective of that bureaucracy (Fishman,1980).

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<sup>4</sup> Advertising plays an integral role in the format of the paper. Since the economic survival of a newspaper depends on money from advertisers, it is necessary to achieve a large audience which will draw advertisers in, and as quickly as possible (Williams,1962:24).

Consequently, media come to "reproduce the definitions of the powerful, without being, in a simple sense, in their pay" (Hall et al,1978:57). That is, the media may reproduce these definitions, but it is not propaganda *per se*. Nevertheless, it is a mutually beneficial arrangement; journalists get their sources and the sources get publicity and legitimation.

The integral presence of advertising in newspapers<sup>5</sup> (Vipond,1989:93) also guarantees that a reader will not react "objectively" to the presentation of the news in the paper. This is because newspapers have come to reflect advertising in "typography, layout, and photographic style" (Williams,1962:100). Williams continues:

The direction of emotional interest and response by advertising slogans is now directly paralleled in popular newspapers and headlines ... whole pages ... seem to be aiming to make a single overall emotional effect. Thus a style of communication, developed for the selling of products, has to a considerable extent taken over the presentation of news and opinion. (Williams,1962:101)

The pressure to sell and the competition among journalists mean that journalists will be encouraged to simplify stories. For example, writers may appeal to emotion, rely on stereotypes, and/or engage in dramatization (Chibnall,1977) in their quest for simplicity. Consequently, news stories become more concerned with "events rather than long term processes"; stories are removed from their "historical context" (Chibnall,1977:23-24). Issues and their causes "are relegated to effects and consequences" (Puette,1992:61). The simplification of news stories so that "social situations are reduced to binary oppositions" is thus a basic procedure in newswork (Chibnall,1972).

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<sup>5</sup> Advertising dominates the newspaper. For instance, one examination of the Winnipeg Free Press revealed that only 25 to 30 percent of the content was "news," the rest was advertising (Campbell and Holmes,1980:6). In Canada, 73 percent of newspaper industry revenue comes from advertisements; and 70 percent of this advertising revenue comes from 100 major companies, half of whom are U.S. controlled (MacLean,1981:126).

One type of simplification occurs when the individual is taken out of social context through such procedures as individualization and personalization (Ericson et al.,1991:8). For instance, news stories which consist of "moral-character portraits" provide a way of allocating responsibility and attributing accountability in such a way as to protect those with political power who would otherwise be assigned responsibility (Ericson et al.,1991:8). In so doing, blame is shifted away from social structural causes and onto the "defective" individual.

News stories constructed in this way benefit the media, their sources, and their advertisers. By avoiding analyses which blame the social order itself, there is less chance of offending advertisers, readers, and sources. In other words, by relying on "common-sense"<sup>6</sup> analyses, stories are more accessible to a wider readership, which pleases advertisers, the sources mentioned in such stories, and the media management.

It is in this sense that it is possible to claim that news work is socially constructed and thus ideological (Fishman,1980). By delimiting what is important to report as well as relying on bureaucratic sources, a certain way of looking at the world is reinforced. Thus, journalists are "central agents in the reproduction of order" (Ericson et al.,1987:3) as the media rank and order different types of "social knowledge" (Hall,1977:341). In this way, the media acts to produce and delimit discourse (Ericson et al.,1987:14) by framing events for the reader, and thereby making alternate interpretations difficult. In the process, hegemony is also maintained.

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<sup>6</sup> Gitlin (1980) has shown that the notion of "common-sense" is ideological in itself.

## Crime as News

The ways in which stories pertaining to crime and deviance are constructed and presented by the media offer a prime example of the kinds of processes sketched out above. In addition, crime stories (especially concerning violent crime) occur frequently, as they sell more papers than any other type of news (Benedict,1992:7).

Criminal activity is considered to be a type of deviant behaviour. Deviance is commonly defined as "the behaviour of a thing or **person** that strays from the normal" (Ericson et al.,1987; Cohen,1972:17; emphasis added). This stress on the individual is common within the dominant discourses on crime, since its root causes are typically traced to sources pertaining to the individual and his/her immediate environment, be they physiological, psychological, medical and/or cultural (cf. Ericson et al.,1991). Such explanations fit with the emphasis on individualism and personal success and/or failure which dominate in the public discourse. Hence, by individualizing the issue, crime comes to be seen as a problem which arises from a social structure which is "otherwise sound" (Hall et al.,1978). The causes of the "crime problem" and their corresponding solutions are normally found, not in the underlying structure of society, but within the individual and his/her immediate environment.

Social control agencies (such as the police) provide ready sources for such definitions of crime. Indeed, according to Hall and his colleagues (1978), crime stories presented in the news are rarely first hand accounts, but are produced from the definitions of "institutional primary definers." The individual thus comes to be defined only in relation to the criminal justice system; he or she becomes what the institution has labelled him or her.

Hall and his colleagues (1978) go on to suggest that this process of labelling and controlling deviance is increased by social control agencies during times of crises in political

hegemony. Challenges to the social order become translated onto the "non-threatening terrains of moral, social and criminal issues" (Comack,1990:73). The social anxiety which such upheaval generates among the public is thereby redirected toward an easily identifiable target or scapegoat. The threat to hegemony is therefore diffused, and consent is again realized. In this way, social control agencies support the status quo in two ways: first, they deny counter-hegemonic interpretations of the roots of a criminal problem as structural and, second, due to the increased "deviancy" of the population, the agencies may "legitimately" call for greater force to "fight crime."

Given its relationship with - and reliance upon - social control sources, the media plays an important role in this redefinition of social problems. In reproducing the sources' definitions of crime and deviance, the media legitimate and reinforce the particular definition of the situation which is offered. In presenting an event as a crime story, therefore, the issue will be individualized, and alternate interpretations which endeavour to call attention to more structural forces will be silenced, disqualified, or subordinated.

## **Violence Against Women**

Violence against women, as a type of criminal behaviour, is rarely covered in an indepth manner in the news.<sup>7</sup> When it is covered, however, the same individualizing treatment found in other crime stories becomes the norm. This can take two different forms, which can appear alone or together.

In one form, crime stories about violent men typically treat the offender as an exception, as insane or, generally, as "abnormal" and therefore not like other men (Radford,1992A).

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, both Soothill & Walby (1991) and Benedict (1992) describe the portrayal of sexual assault cases as superficial and titilating.

In the other form, it is sometimes the case that the women who are victimized by the violence are themselves "scrutinized and often pathologized." A kind of victim-blaming occurs, whereby the women victims "are ultimately held responsible for the violence and abuse" (Radford,1992A:5). If women are to blame for male violence, it follows that men are absolved from accepting responsibility for their actions (Bland,1992). Women victims are especially vulnerable to blame if they deviate in any way from the traditional sex role of being at home with the family (Benedict,1992:19).

However, while the media is an agency for the maintenance of hegemony, it is also a site where alternate discourses compete for attention. In the case of crime coverage, where would a feminist interpretation of male violent behaviour fit in? As outlined above, definitions of reality which challenge the dominant order also may be covered in the media, since the media is a place where differing discourses are heard, and hegemony is stronger if alternate voices are allowed. However, the way that the challenge is positioned is still within a certain "ideological field" (Hall,1977:346). For instance, when women's voices and feminist challenges to the social order occur in newspaper reporting, they may be subsumed within the "objective narrative" of the story. This narrative encourages a superficial text and reading, yet adopts a stance of "truth" and "basicness", of reporting the "facts." Stories are presented as if the event came first, then the text, then the reader's interpretation of the text (Young,1990:120). Women's stories are therefore always "couched within the larger 'reality' of the newspaper world" (Young,1990:113). Thus, their voices and interpretations will not be given the same stress as the objective narrative's interpretation of the "facts."

When women's concerns are covered in the paper, they typically receive peripheral status (Tuchman,1978:138). If an event, such as a demonstration, is organized to express

these concerns, the event will likely be covered as news. However, the news narrative (or discourse) will tend not to connect the event to a larger issue, but will cover it simply as a single event. Concerns about the societal condition of women do not lend themselves easily to a news story.

The coverage of women who are challenging the social order takes on a form of social control much like coverage of deviant behaviour. In covering an event which indicates ongoing discontent with the social order, the coverage routinely focuses on those who are discontent rather than on the source(s) of their discontent. Thus, the issue becomes one of criticizing the protestor rather than criticizing the system; necessary change, therefore, lies with the protestor, not the system. Women who speak out against the hegemonic social order are subject to "ridicule, condescension, derision and scorn" (Young,1990:146). This ensures that "the narrative form and its substance will bring order to the challenged moral order" (Young,1990:116).

## CONCLUSION

The media plays a role in supporting the manufacture of hegemony in patriarchal capitalist society. This has been illustrated by the case of crime coverage, which is the most popular type of news in newspapers. This coverage does not question the "common-sense" definitions of the causes of crime and the disruptions to social order. It assumes that society is, on the whole, rather stable.

Women's concerns and challenges to the social order may be heard in the media, since it is a discourse and other discourses may be heard. However, the ways in which this discourse are framed will tend to perpetuate a reading of this discourse as *alternate*, thereby making it easier to dismiss.



In order to maintain itself, hegemony must be able to change and accommodate different interpretations. Thus, in order to maintain legitimacy, the alternate voice must not be blatantly dismissed, but may be subtly denigrated. In this manner, hegemony is a process of co-opting or integrating different discourses. However, because hegemony is not an automatic condition, but the result of a pervasive effect, there is no guarantee that this process of integration or co-optation will be successful. Given the contradictory nature of the media as both a legitimizer of the dominant discourse and a site where alternate discourses can be "heard," the potential always exists for counter-hegemonic views to come to the fore.

It is now possible to begin to frame the media coverage of the Montréal massacre within these theoretical considerations. The next chapter, therefore, will outline the methodology which will be used to investigate this issue.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main question in this thesis concerns which interpretations of the causes of the massacre were given more attention and elaboration in the media immediately following the massacre. This chapter will outline the sample and the method of analysis used to address this research question.

### **The Sample**

The sampling universe for a study of this type is quite large, since it consists of several different media in various locations which covered the massacre. My sample was drawn from this universe based on four criteria.

First, I chose only to look at Canadian sources, on the assumption that Canadian media would focus on the massacre the most. I further assumed that Canadian sources would provide the type of coverage which would most concern me, such as "How could such a thing happen here in Canada?" Furthermore, my Canadian sample contained only *English* language media.

Second, I chose only to look at newspapers. Newspapers were chosen for two reasons. First, newspapers can offer more detailed, in-depth and comprehensive coverage than television or radio news (Audley,1983:9). In addition, newspaper reports can be followed up by columnist and editorial discussion (Campbell and Holmes,1980:5). Second, many individuals look to the media not only to inform them of the events, but also to provide them with an interpretation of those events (Hall et al.,1978). In this way, the newspaper is an extremely influential medium.

Third, I limited my search for articles to newspapers that were listed on the Canadian

News Index.<sup>8</sup> The Index lists seven newspapers: the Toronto Star (TS), the Calgary Herald (CH), the Globe and Mail (G&M), the Vancouver Sun (VS), the Halifax Chronicle (HC), the Montréal Gazette (MG), and the Winnipeg Free Press (WFP). These newspapers span Canada, and hopefully would reflect regional differences in coverage and interpretation. The Globe and Mail was chosen specifically for its status as "Canada's national newspaper," while the Montréal Gazette was selected because it is a large English daily in the city in which the massacre occurred.

From these newspapers, four newspapers from the Canadian News Index in print were chosen for exhaustive study of the initial coverage from the period of December 7th, 1989 to December 21st, 1989. This time period was chosen based on an analysis of several papers which suggested that coverage began to decrease after the one week period, and disappeared completely after the two week period. The four papers were the Montréal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, the Winnipeg Free Press, and the Toronto Star.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, an Infoglobe search was conducted to obtain the initial coverage in the Globe and Mail.<sup>10</sup> The key search words used were: "Montréal," "women," "Polytechnique," "gunman," and "Lépine."<sup>11</sup>

Finally, although all features, columns, editorials, and letters from these five papers were examined, only certain types of news stories were included in the study. As this study

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<sup>8</sup> The CNI was originally chosen as a data source because the original project was to include follow-up years of coverage. The index would have allowed in depth searching by topic.

<sup>9</sup> Due to a lack of financial resources, the Vancouver Sun and the Halifax Chronicle were not analyzed.

<sup>10</sup> Infoglobe is an information service run by the Globe and Mail, with computer indexes which search various newspapers across Canada.

<sup>11</sup> Several different terms were used to capture the initial coverage. The massacre was called the "Montréal massacre" only after the fact, and only by certain papers.

aims to determine how the massacre was made sense of, three categories of stories were included:<sup>12</sup>

- 1) news stories which dealt with the perceived causes of the massacre, either individualized or socially connected;
- 2) news stories which covered events which reacted to the massacre, such as vigil and funerals; and
- 3) news stories which suggested what "remedial action" would be necessary to change society.<sup>13</sup>

### **Method of Analysis**

A key theoretical concept utilized in this research is "discourse." The method most conducive to investigating the existence of different ways of thinking and conceptualizing, as expressed through language and explanations used, is content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic technique for analysing message content (Budd et al.,1967:2). It may be applied to practically any form of communication (Babbie,1986:267), including newspapers, as Michael Clow has demonstrated (1993).

Clow outlines two important ways in which news stories can be distinguished from features, editorials, and columns.<sup>14</sup> First, news stories have a "reportorial form" when

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**12** These three categories are derived from a study by Voumvakis and Ericson (1984:3). In analysing sexual assault coverage, they coded according to "the locus of the problem ... i.e. to what factors or social forces can the problem be attributed, and what remedial action is necessary to contain it?"

**13** By focusing on these three types of news stories, much of the initial "straight" reporting was overlooked, in which reporters tried to fill in details, as well as several "human interest" or witness and survivor accounts. These stories were not considered to be directly relevant in assessing the perceived causes of the massacre.

**14** I also included letters in this latter category.

reporting on an event or issue. This reporting usually consists of what one or more sources said at the event or about an event or issue (and, as we saw in Chapter One, these are likely to be bureaucratic sources). In reportorial form, the stories are written in an inverted pyramid format; that is, contrary to an academic paper or essay, what is seen by the journalist as the most important idea is presented immediately in the headline and lead sentence of the story. Thus, these stories have a deliberately easy to interpret format, as they take a specific angle. The headline and the introductory paragraph, therefore, set the theme for the story and provide clues to the reader as to how the rest of the story should be interpreted (Clow,1993:39-41).

Second, news stories may use sources differently in connection with the angle which is taken. Clow (1993:46) outlines three ways in which sources are used within a story: 1) a story is built around one source; 2) sources in a story support each other; and 3) there is a defining source and a responding source challenges it; that is, even though there are differing perspectives in the same story, the defining sources will carry the most weight, and any other interpretation is set up to challenge the "truth."

In contrast to news stories, editorials, letters, features, and columns are not set up in reportorial form, with the goal of being "objective." They do not usually rely heavily on sources, and are usually understood to be the opinion of the writer (Clow,1993:41).

Analysing these different types of coverage, therefore, will require different strategies or approaches. As outlined above, the criterion for evaluating news stories is a type of content analysis but with a specific methodological focus on the construction of news stories. Thus, when analysing news stories, I will determine the angle taken in the story by examining headlines and opening paragraphs, as well as how the sources in the stories are used. Whose voices are included in the story? Are feminist voices present? If so, are they a defining

voice (thus carrying the most weight) or a responding (or secondary) source?

When analysing the editorials, letters, features, and columns, I will evaluate the general angle of the piece; what is the main focus? Clow (1993) stresses that, although it is still possible to analyse these forms of media coverage the way we may analyse news stories, there are no "short cuts" since they are not in reportorial format. Thus, "we must read the whole story to discern the perspectives found in its content" (Clow,1993:50).

Using the theoretical and methodological considerations in the last two chapters, it is now possible to outline my hypotheses specifically. Before introducing these, however, it is necessary to understand what transpired at the massacre itself, and the general newspaper coverage fall-out which occurred immediately following. These concerns will be the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE MONTRÉAL MASSACRE

"You're women, you're going to be engineers. You're all a bunch of ... feminists. I hate feminists."  
- Marc Lépine, before killing six women in a classroom, Dec.6, 1989

On December 6th, 1989, Marc Lépine entered L'École Polytechnique at the Université de Montréal, the School of Engineering. At just past 5:00 pm, he shot and killed Maryse Laganière, 25, who worked in the budget department of the school. Her male boss had heard rumours of a gunman in the building, and she was going to lock the front office door.

Shortly after, at approximately 5:10 p.m., Lépine entered a classroom on the second floor of the school, where approximately 60 students were sitting for the final day of classes before exams. Lépine asked the men and the women to separate. Dressed in hunting gear, and holding a rifle, the surviving students would later recall that they had thought it was an engineering prank, until he fired a shot into the ceiling. The men went into the hallway. According to Nathalie Provost, a survivor, Lépine had asked the students if they knew why he had come. When they said no, he stated: "I'm against feminism. That's why I'm here." Provost responded: "Listen, we are only women who are studying engineering ... we (are) only women in engineering who want to live a normal life." She told him that the students were not necessarily feminist and, even if they were, it did not mean that they had anything against men. He may have answered, but Provost did not hear him, because he started to shoot.

There were nine women in this classroom. Six of these women died, and Provost was among the wounded.

After killing these women, Lépine went to the first floor, to the cafeteria. Students

had been warned by others about the gunman; some left, others did not. There were approximately 50 students in the cafeteria when L epine entered. Three women died here.

He then went to a classroom on the third floor, Room 311, where he climbed up on the desk and shot at students who were cowering underneath. Four women were killed in this room, including Maryse LeClair. LeClair was wounded by gunfire, but L epine stabbed her to death with a hunting knife, which he then placed on the professor's desk. After he killed her, he put down the approximately 40 cartridges which he was carrying, sat down on the speaking platform at the front of the room, and shot himself fatally in the head.

The whole rampage lasted approximately twenty minutes. Afterward, concerns were raised over the delayed police response, as well as the delayed ambulance response: the first call into 911 did not locate the shootings at the Polytechnique itself, but at the student residence at the Universit e de Montr al. The Poly is a difficult building to access, as it is isolated on a hill, compounding the problem. The police, upon arriving, heard rumours that there was a second gunman and did not enter the building until more than an hour after L epine had shot himself. There was speculation that the death toll might not have been so high if the ambulances had managed to arrive sooner. There were 14 dead and 14 wounded. Five of the wounded were men.<sup>15</sup> According to the coroner's report published in May, 1990, the death toll could have been much higher, as L epine had 60 cartridges of ammunition left.<sup>16</sup>

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**15** Various reports suggested that there were only 13 wounded (4 of whom were men). However, in looking through the coverage I counted 14 as wounded. The common reference to 13 wounded could have evolved from a Montreal Gazette story on December 7, 1989 which specified that 13 students were in hospital following the shooting; however, one male student was treated for a wounded arm and then released.

**16** This section was derived from initial media reporting, as well as the media reports from 1990 based on the Montr al Police Report and the Coroner's Report.



## The first three days of coverage

The first newspaper reports came out on the morning of December 7th. The events received front page coverage in all of the papers, with many sensationalist headlines aiming for emotional impact:

CAMPUS MASSACRE: Gunman kills 14 women before shooting himself: 'You are all feminists' he screamed as he fired (MG, Dec7).

WOMEN SLAUGHTERED: Montréal gunman kills 14 (CH, Dec7)

Gunman slays 14 women; 'You're all a bunch of feminists' killer yells (WFP, Dec7)

14 women killed in massacre; Montréal gunman's letter spewed hate at feminists (TS, Dec7)

This initial coverage took on a descriptive form, as reporters tried to flesh out exactly what had happened, using police sources and eyewitness accounts. Stories focused on the recollections of witnesses and the well-being of the wounded. Reporters were desperately trying to reconstruct what had happened from the time Lépine entered the school to the time that the police entered, after Lépine had killed himself. The first stories about those close to the women killed emerged, as one police officer at the Poly found his daughter dead inside the school.

It became apparent from witnesses' testimony that Lépine "want[ed] the women." ("Campus massacre ..." MG, Dec7, fp) One man who had been with a group of men in the stairwell stated that Lépine did not shoot at them when he realized there were no women in his group. Based on this observation, as well as what Lépine stated before he shot six women, it seemed quite apparent that Lépine - contrary to one male witness who claimed that it "was a human hunt and we were the quarry" ("Campus massacre ..." MG, Dec7, fp)

- was only taking aim at women. The initial press conference given by police also reported the presence of L  pine's suicide note, (see: Appendix) about which a police spokesperson commented that it was "anti-feminist, that's the least we can say" (QTD in "After the Montr  al Massacre"). In this note, L  pine blamed women for his problems.

Many women's groups across the country organized vigils on the Thursday night (December 7th) to mourn the women's deaths and connect them to the wider pattern of male violence in society. Media coverage on December 8th focused on women mourning at vigils across the country. It was also on this day that L  pine's name was released in the media, and the media began to focus on L  pine, his story, and his motives. Why had he done this? What or who had made him a terrible person? Was there a particular reason why he had stabbed LeClair? More information and more headlines about L  pine followed on December 9th, when reporters had discovered divorce testimony from L  pine's mother in 1978.

Both the women's vigils and L  pine's background were given coverage in these first few days after the massacre. Each offered the potential for making sense of the massacre, albeit in very different ways. While the former sought to connect the massacre with violence against women more generally, emphasis on the latter created a more individualized account. In this respect, the two interpretations were very much in competition with each other. How would this be accommodated within the media coverage? What elaboration and follow-up would each type of initial coverage receive? Would one type of explanation end up setting the tone for the coverage which followed?

## Statement of the problem

The theoretical approach outlined in Chapter One suggests that the media coverage of the Montréal Massacre would likely take a particular form. As stated in Chapter One, different ways of thinking which produce varying interpretations may be considered as "discourses." By labelling categories of coverage "discourses," there is an implicit theoretical assumption that realities are created and selected by these discourses, not merely "reported"; the number of possible interpretations for an event will be limited by these discourses. In this context, how each discourse is treated by the press will illustrate the role which the media play in the manufacture of hegemony. More specifically, since the massacre would fall under the definition of "criminal," and police are common sources for journalists, one would expect coverage which focused on the criminal aspects of the case to be dominant. That is, one would expect the sources to focus on Lépine's behaviour as caused by individual deviance, and not by social forces. Feminist sources, as I outlined in Chapter One, may be marginalized within coverage. As such, one would expect a feminist interpretation of the massacre to be present, but not attributed the same prominence as a criminal aspect of the case.

When examining the three types of news stories outlined in Chapter Two, I will classify them as representing either a crime discourse or a feminist discourse. I will classify writings as part of a crime discourse **if they individualize Lépine's actions, thereby offering solutions which do not critique gender relations.** Thus, even though some solutions may suggest social change (such as gun control, better facilities for mentally ill people), I will label these writings as part of a crime discourse because they operate on the assumption that the roots of Lépine's violence were within himself (and gender-neutral); therefore they are individualistic. I will classify writings as feminist **if they place Lépine's actions in the**

realm of the political, on a continuum of violence against women, or in the context of a war against women. This continuum ranges from the suggestion that women are not welcome in "male" professions such as engineering, to the relating of the massacre to other types of male violence against women such as sexual harassment, wife battering, rape, and sexual assault.

Interpretations which appear in the crime discourse are a part of the hegemonic ideology; that is, these are common interpretations which overlook the misogynist roots of our society which contributed to the gunman's actions. **I expect to find that, since the crime discourse supports hegemony by individualizing the causes of the massacre, and the feminist discourse challenges hegemony by politicizing the causes of the Massacre, the crime discourse will be most dominant in the news coverage.** It is further hypothesized that **in coverage which does not take a news narrative focus - specifically, features, columns, editorials, and letters - a feminist discourse will be more evident** than it appears in the news stories. The findings of the research are the focus of Chapters Four and Five.

## CHAPTER FOUR: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS STORIES

*No matter how sincere the desire not to be partisan, news reports are never reality written down. A news story is inevitably just one story among many which could be written down on the event reported. (Clow,1993:39)*

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the news story coverage of the Montréal massacre. In particular, the aim will be to determine whether or not - in making sense of the massacre - a crime discourse dominated. As well, the analysis will consider whether or not a feminist discourse was featured in the coverage and - if so - what particular form that coverage took. The analysis will provide a critical analysis of the coverage introduced in Chapter Three by examining the angles taken in the news stories and the sources used.

The three categories of stories I examined were outlined in Chapter Two. These were: i) stories which "made sense" of the massacre; ii) stories which contained a mourning reaction to the massacre (directly related to how people are making sense of the killings); and iii) stories which concerned pushing for change *as a result of* the massacre. Each of these three categories occurred within a crime discourse and a feminist discourse.<sup>17</sup>

Within the crime discourse, the massacre was "made sense of" by focusing on and defining the gunman, Marc Lépine. The mourning stories focused mainly on the funerals for the 14 women who died. The stories within this discourse which suggested pushing for change focused on gun control.

Within the feminist discourse, the massacre was "made sense of" as part of a violence

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<sup>17</sup> I started with approximately 190 news stories in my sample. Using these three categories, I ended up with 82 stories to analyse.

continuum. The mourning stories focused on vigils which women held across Canada. The stories within this discourse which suggested pushing for change dealt with ending violence against women.

In this chapter, I will present each of these discourses with two main goals: i) to illustrate that the crime discourse was dominant in explaining the massacre, and ii) that even in stories about feminist events the feminist voice was undermined.

## **CRIME DISCOURSE**

### **Making sense of the massacre: investigating Lépine**

Several stories focused on Lépine and his individual background and behaviour.<sup>18</sup> The angle of these stories centered around the notion that Lépine was an exception to other violent men. Implicit in this coverage was an assumption that, by explaining who Lépine was, his motives for the crime would become clear. Indeed, people who argued that there should be an inquiry reasoned that the more we knew about Lépine and his life, the greater the possibility of preventing such a "tragedy" from happening again.

The defining sources in articles about Lépine were overwhelmingly the police, although journalistic research and expert testimony also produced several stories. Each will be examined in turn.

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<sup>18</sup> The effort to explain Lépine's behaviour can be illustrated by the number of stories focusing on Lépine on December 8th and 9th: 16 articles in 5 papers.

### *The police define Lépine*

The initial stories which ran on December 8th named Lépine and introduced him as the mass murderer. These initial stories were based on police testimony, the first sources who knew about Lépine. Journalists reproduced the police definition of Lépine, and did so unquestioningly.

It was apparent from the initial testimony that Lépine had targeted women. The police looked for an explanation - or a "motive" - for this hatred. Consequently, one of the main explanations which emerged from the police "investigation" was the fact that Lépine was "always frustrated by women." This frustration, moreover, was connected with Lépine's inability to maintain a relationship with a woman. One of the two police spokespeople who defined Lépine described him as a man who, once he started having trouble in a relationship, would "just stop the relationship right there and never come back to the person he was talking with ... He didn't have any girlfriends" (TS,Dec9,A12). Relationship problems became an explanation for mass murder of women: "Campus gunman a loser at love; War-film fanatic had no girlfriends" (WFP,Dec8,fp). The connection was clearly made between being "frustrated by women" and killing women in the Calgary Herald, with the headline: " 'Frustrated by women'; Killer a war-film fanatic".<sup>19</sup> The opening paragraph of this story sets the tone:

The suicidal gunman who committed Canada's worst mass murder was a 25-year-old war-movie fanatic who "was always frustrated by women" police said Thursday. (CH,Dec8,fp)

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<sup>19</sup> Significantly, a woman reader of the Calgary Herald wrote a letter protesting this headline, saying that it blamed women.

The story explains the quotation by the police spokesperson and starts the next paragraph explaining that "Lépine's anger boiled over into a bloody rampage ..."

Similarly, the Toronto Star painted a picture of Lépine as "obsessed" with war videos and electronics, and his hatred of women stemmed only from being rejected. This is presented as an adequate explanation for murdering women:

The man who massacred 14 women on the University of Montréal campus was Marc Lépine, a man obsessed with war videos and electronics.

He also had a vendetta against women.

Last night, Montréal police said Lépine could be 'gentle and courteous' with women, but if something went wrong in a relationship he fled to his room and refused to speak ...

Wednesday evening, he raged through the university's engineering school, killing 14 women ...("War videos obsessed murderer," TS, Dec8,fp)

The Winnipeg Free Press mentioned both Lépine's "troubles" with relationships and his blaming of feminists for his own failures. Although these two explanations could seem inconsistent (especially without explanation), the story uses two different police explanations to illustrate the perceived role that women had in shaping Lépine's behaviour. The story stated that neighbours and police had described Lépine as:

... a failure in his academic, military and career ambitions, but especially in his relationships with women. In his ... suicide note he carried ... where he stalked women while sparing the male students, Lépine blamed "feminists" for ruining his life and leading him to massacre the women in revenge. (WFP, Dec10)

All societal implications of a man whose hatred for women took such a violent outlet are not explored, but are instead reduced to the picture of a man who was spurned by women. Although the fact that Lépine had problems in his relationships with women could be indicative of his sexist nature, stories mainly emphasized that he was shy and had difficulties in communicating. However, in his suicide note, Lépine did not once mention a relationship or a specific woman, but his hatred towards all women who broke with tradition - specifically,



"feminists" who wanted to seize the benefits of men while keeping benefits of being female - was clear. If a relationship had, indeed, acted as a catalyst for his behaviour, he did not mention it; and furthermore, if his hatred for feminists was caused by a failed relationship, his decision to blame women could suggest that he got his clues for who to blame from society.

Further characterization of Lépine's behaviour which was contributed by police described him as someone "obsessed" with war movies and electronics. The Globe and Mail picked up on the war-movie explanation, running a brief snippet which claimed that the Montréal media were considering a war movie that Lépine might have watched as a potential catalyst ("Violent film on terrorists preceded tragedy"; Dec9,A6). The movie, called "Commando Terreur" was aired the Monday night, two days before the massacre. The movie was about a terrorist attack at a high school, in which students are held hostage and shot. But police had no way of knowing if Lépine had watched the movie.

The police also stressed that Lépine did not smoke, drink, or do drugs. This is part of the sweep for clues which the police routinely embark upon. In fact, any snippet of personal information about Lépine was deemed newsworthy and potentially explanatory, such as the fact that he always wore a baseball cap and a beard, loved to read, and lived with another man. The police, following standard operating procedure, filled in information wherever they could.

There was also a focus on the fact that Lépine had experienced personal failure. Lépine had endured setbacks, such as failing courses.

He recently was fired from his job and was turned away by the Canadian forces on the grounds that he was anti-social... ("War videos obsessed murderer"; TS,Dec8,fp)

The police also make clear that Lépine "had no criminal record or history of violence" ("War videos obsessed murderer"; Dec8,TS,fp).

The "frustrated with women" explanation was the only one which was elaborated upon, however superficially. Indeed, the police explanations were never questioned in any of the articles. How the police had obtained their information was likewise never explained or questioned; their account was simply treated as fact.

### *Journalists sweep for clues*

Journalists roamed through Lépine's neighbourhood in an attempt to obtain descriptions of what he was like. According to an account from one neighbour, he was "always rushing," and the police were called to his house after complaints of loud music ("Murderer was always rushing" CH,Dec9,A3). One female neighbour stated that Lépine or someone in his apartment had watched her change one night. After she realized that she was being watched she heard giggling from Lépine's apartment. These bouts of giggling reoccurred over several weeks ("The killer: Lépine was reclusive, noisy at night- neighbour" MG, Dec8,fp).

By far the most popular story which was unearthed in the neighbourhood sweep was an interview with an employee at a gun store where Lépine liked to look at the guns. According to the employee, Lépine "didn't seem any crazier than anyone else." The fact that he bought hunting clothing and admired guns was emphasized; and one piece mentioned a grocery clerk stating that Lépine and his friends walked around the neighbourhood dressed in hunting clothing, and also rented war films ("Killer fratitized with men in army fatigues" G&M,Dec9, A6).

Journalists also unearthed some divorce testimony concerning Lépine's parents. By December 9th, every paper had carried a story on how Lépine was beaten as a child by his father, with front page headlines such as:

Killer's father beat him as a child (MG)  
Lépine beaten by father, mom says (TS)  
Killer's father was 'very brutal man' (CH)

These stories relied heavily on divorce testimony given by Lépine's mother, Monique Lépine, in 1978. Her husband had been very abusive to her and her children, and had beaten Marc about the head and face. Lépine's father was reported to have frequently stated that women were not men's equals. These stories became epic tales about Lépine's life, making an implicit connection between his abusive past and his decisions later in life. There was also an attempt to trace Lépine's "downfall" from the time when his mother moved him away from his best friend in high school, to live across town. In what appeared to be an attempt to reinforce the idea that Lépine's life changed drastically, journalists also interviewed Lépine's childhood friend who stated that Lépine had never been violent when the friend had known him.<sup>20</sup>

Abuse became another explanation for Lépine's behaviour. But rather than cancelling the others out (it does seem a more likely causal factor), it was added on to a list of descriptors about Marc Lépine provided by the police.

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<sup>20</sup> The press played up the idea that Lépine had experienced a "downfall." This is probably because in Lépine's suicide note he wrote that he had not been happy for "the past seven years." Tracing Lépine's history led to the suggestion that Monique Lépine's moving her son at this time was the beginning of the end for him.

## *Experts define Lépine*

There were a few stories that tried to make sense of Lépine by comparing his profile to those of other mass murderers. In these stories, however, Lépine was never defined as insane. These stories are dominated by psychiatrists, professors, and FBI agents as sources. One article included a description drawn up by professionals of Lépine as:

A quiet, reclusive loner with few or no friends. A man who feels severely inadequate. A man bent on revenge against "feminists" - the group he probably believed had usurped his rightful place in society. ("Analysts profile killer; mass murderers friendless, bitter loners"; WFP, Dec 8, 19)

According to one psychiatrist, such a killer feels resentment toward a system in which he believes everyone is getting perks except himself. Another psychiatrist suggested that the massacre could have been triggered by an event, "perhaps a rejection in a personal relationship" (in WFP article, above).

Another article discussed women-killers without specifically referring to Lépine, but generalizing about the characteristics of such killers, such as their class status. This article stressed that these killers do not usually have a male model present in their families, and harbour anger towards their absent fathers. This does not seem relevant in Lépine's case, since, according to the divorce testimony, he hated being with this father ("Women-killers share common backgrounds, probe discovers"; WFP, Dec 16, 24).

The final article made the connection between the killer and society; how the killer targets groups and wishes to make a social statement. One psychiatrist said that Lépine may not have lost touch with reality: a person who reacts to failure with violence uses it as a means to feel in control, "or at least people will suffer as you have suffered" ("Mass murderers

find themselves failing in life, anthropologist says"; MG,Dec8,A4).

A responding source placed near the end of the same article was the only source in the articles about Lépine who made the connection between misogyny and the massacre:

There are a lot of men with a lot of anger towards women. Some of the scary rapists I've known, they really hate women, all women. It's a cultural sickness. It's a prejudice and behind that prejudice it's scapegoating. It's a projection onto an outer group of a person's inner problems ... this dynamic is still sanctioned by society ... It's so unfair that so many things in our lives are decided on the fact that you have testicles. It amounts to society deciding that this group - men - will get benefits and this other group - women - won't. What happened at the University of Montréal ... is a pretty graphic illustration of that principle ... you know that there are a lot of people out there with the same psycho-dynamics. ("Mass murderers find themselves failing in life, anthropologist says"; MG,Dec8,A4)

Although these articles attempted to combine both personal and social factors in the making of mass killers, they are significant for the connections that they do not make: first, they do not classify Lépine as having lost touch with reality; and, second, they do not consider, as a defining angle, the role that misogyny plays in shaping men into beings who murder women.

### ***Result: Lépine has been defined***

After the 9th of December, stories solely about Lépine's life ceased, but the description of his motives/ behaviour became standard in the news discourse. Because of the individualizing tendencies of crime coverage, when Lépine was referred to in a news piece (such as, for example, a story about a funeral) it was common that the one sentence describing him would combine the definitions used by the police. Furthermore, when a term such as

"woman-hater" was used, it was used in conjunction with "demented", etc. Lépine was described in shorthand catch phrases, suggesting that his act was non-generalizable. For example:

Churches are expected to overflow tomorrow as Montréal, a city of tears, mourns the 14 women massacred by a sexist killer tormented by a miserable love life.

Police continued to dig into the past of Marc Lépine, the 25-year-old war movie fan who went on a rampage with a semi-automatic rifle Wednesday...(TS,Dec9)<sup>21</sup>

...the man who fatally shot 14 female engineering students Wednesday had been beaten by a child by a father who believed women should be the servants of men... the shooting rampage by a man who avowed hatred for women. (WFP,Dec10)

[A] feminist-hating misfit (WFP,Dec12)

...the suicide mission of a woman-hating misfit (CH,Dec12)<sup>22</sup>

Lépine, who took his own life, was the product of a broken home and an abusive father. Police said he was obsessed by electronics and war movies and always felt frustrated by women.(WFP,Dec12)

Evidence has revealed Marc Lépine, the 25-year-old loner who turned a rifle on himself after killing 14 women last Wednesday, had been an abused child and was fascinated by war films and violence. (MG,Dec12)

[Picture caption: mourning over women killed] by an apparently deranged gunman (WFP,Dec13)

These definitions were standard in the coverage of the massacre. The police explanations dominated, as one can see. However, the additional characterization of Lépine as "deranged" or "lunatic" seems to be solely a creation of the journalists. No psychologists

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<sup>21</sup> Notice how this lead paragraph shifts focus from the women killed to defining Lépine.

<sup>22</sup> These quotes in the Winnipeg Free Press and the Calgary Herald stories were from the same CP story; the term "woman" and "feminist" must have been considered to be equivalent.

cited ever characterized Lépine as insane.

The above explanations act to define woman-hating as a type of insanity. However, this explanation ignores the prevalence of misogyny in our society and does not define Lépine's behaviour as part of a continuum of male violence against women. A different interpretation of the event would result if a feminist analysis were constantly used to characterize Lépine. Such a description might read:

Marc Lépine, a 25-year-old man who, like other abusive men, blamed women for his failures, killed 14 women yesterday. His actions were typical of those of other violent men, but at the extreme end of a violence continuum, feminist groups said yesterday.

An introduction such as this was *never* used in any story about Lépine. Instead, the police interpretation was taken as the "objective" version or the "truth" about Lépine and his actions.

### **Mourning: memorials and funerals**

The main angle which all of the mourning stories took was that of Montréal as a "City of Tears." Stories focussed on the shock and dismay of all citizens, male and female, all classes, drawn together. Consequently, stories about the memorial services for the women, the mass funeral, and the individual funerals were all *individualized* and *non-political*. In fact, out of 23 stories that concerned either Montréal or personal mourning (vigil stories not included), only seven *mentioned* a differing feminist interpretation of the mourning activities. Violence against women was *never* the main angle or focus of a piece about mass mourning.

The coverage of the mass funeral held on December 11th is a telling example of how mourning was individualized. The angle of the coverage in the Montréal Gazette, for

instance, encouraged readers not to draw connections between the killings and society in general. By focusing on the event, and what people stated at the event, the coverage was inherently non-political. The headline and opening of the story read:

A quiet goodbye for slain women ...

For two minutes yesterday in Notre Dame Basilica, there was no attempt to assess blame or find a reason for the nine white coffins that lay before the altar. There were no sobs from grieving friends and relatives, no creaks from the pews.

There was nothing but silence as 3,000 people remained absolutely still, paying their respects to nine of the 14 women slain at the Université de Montréal last Wednesday ...

'The moment has come to pray,' Paul Cardinal Gregoire, Archbishop of Montréal, had told the packed church.

'Before doing so, I ask all of you to observe a deep and total silence. The tragedy we are living through calls for silence.'  
(MG,Dec12,fp)

Sources within the story reproduce the angle of silence, by ignoring the specific rage that Lépine had towards women. For example, the Cardinal later states that "Fourteen young women were brutally mowed down in the strength and beauty of their youth ... In a few minutes, all it took was the desperate and abhorrent act of another young person to destroy so many dreams, so much promise." In addition, Alain Perrault, head of the Université de Montréal Students' Association urged his colleagues to "build a world of peace and helping" in a way to pay homage to those who died.

Furthermore, connections made to the massacre by certain groups are only introduced in a non-political way:

Some people clasped bouquets of flowers, some wore pink scarfs *in honor of* the dead women, others wore white ribbons pinned to their shoulders to symbolize the *innocence* of those who were slain. ("A quiet goodbye for slain women"; MG,Dec12,fp; emphasis added)

The only other mention of a political interpretation in the same funeral piece was a comment by a man who wished to show his support, but who did not connect the massacre



to a pattern of male violence: "People have to stand together when something like this happens. I thought it was important for me to be here as a man right now. We have to show that we are as repelled by this crime as the women."

The funeral coverage was also picked up by the Winnipeg Free Press and the Calgary Herald. Their versions of the funeral also took a non-political stance. Both pieces, understandably, began with a grieving angle, describing a woman crying "tears of grief" outside of the church. The angle was supported in the Winnipeg Free Press by comments from people who acknowledged that women had been victimized, but had a non-political interpretation, such as "I think every woman has been touched by these 30 bullets. It makes no sense. There will never be any sense to something like this" and "They were young women just like me. I needed to come here. We need other human beings around us at this time, because we feel so helpless" ("Thousands crowd basilica for funeral service" WFP, Dec 12, 1986).

Two brief responding sources appeared later in the Winnipeg Free Press story. The narrative stated that "Some women wore pink armbands, on a suggestion by feminist groups who have said the massacre is a symptom of a larger problem of violence against women." One woman stated "... [v]iolence toward women is what drove the guy to do it." These comments, since they are quite brief and appear late in the story, only react to the defining angle; they do not define the interpretation of the massacre.<sup>23</sup>

There were five women who were not buried in the mass ceremony. The coverage of these funerals was similarly non-political. The angle was always one of individual grief.

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<sup>23</sup> A lot of the funeral coverage itself seemed to focus on who attended the funeral. Government dignitaries used the funeral as an occasion to emphasize the need for gun control, but did not mention violence against women.

For instance, in the story about Maryse Laganière's funeral, the angle was on the loss felt by the minister who had married her and her husband, as well as the loss felt by her husband. They had been married for four months. Within the story, the reverend asked the mourners to "pardon this senseless act" and reassured those in the church that Laganière and her husband will, one day, be reunited.<sup>24</sup> However, in a few stories there was some indication of political interpretation on behalf of those who knew the woman killed, but these were subsumed under the text. For instance, in the story about Anne-Marie Lemay, the angle of the story was that the "Killer [had] stilled the voice of fine church singer." Briefly mentioned in this story, among the mourning comments from the choral director, was the statement that Lemay's family had raised money for a women's shelter. Similarly, the story about Annie Turcotte's funeral ("Quiet funeral held for 'a country girl'" MG, Dec 12, A4) focused on how low key the funeral was: "It was a quiet, dignified funeral - just what Annie Turcotte would have wanted." The story describes Turcotte as a "fine sportswoman and a high achiever." In the second last paragraph of the story, a friend of the family states: "Marc Lépine got exactly what he wanted. He wanted to stop overly ambitious women. And it scares me."

While it is certainly understandable that journalists would focus on people mourning at funerals and memorial services, the example of the responding source above illustrates that some people also had other feelings such as anger and frustration. The anger was not focused on; pictures of people at these events only showed them crying (mostly women crying), which acted to undermine words of anger in the story. The only picture of a woman

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<sup>24</sup> It is significant that Laganière's funeral was the only one of the four stories (Michèle Richard's funeral was not covered) which ran in other papers (only 2); the newly-married grieving husband is considered to be newsworthy.

who was talking to reporters at a vigil (G&M,Dec8,A13) was undermined by describing her as one of those who had come "to mourn." She was not identified, nor were her words included in the caption. The focus on mourning simply illustrates the focus on the event, and reporting what happened at the event, rather than focusing on the issues which might be raised by the event.

One would also expect the mourning and funeral coverage to focus on the women who were killed. Instead, the coverage focused on the planning of the events, the mourner's (usually individualistic) reactions, and the government dignitaries who attended the funeral. The stories which were about the women's funerals actually said very little about the women, other than standard comments such as one comment which was made about Anne-Marie Edward and her constant smile. Violence against women was never a main angle in these stories, and a feminist responding source was mentioned in only seven of the stories.

### **Pushing for change: gun control**

Stories about the gun Lépine had used and the debate surrounding gun control featured prominently in the coverage immediately following on the 7th and continuing until December 21.<sup>25</sup> These stories took the focus away from violence against women, and instead centered on a debate about the required strength of new gun control laws. These stories also acted to individualize Lépine's actions. Focusing on how to strengthen a law so that such an individual cannot acquire a gun in the future emphasizes Lépine's "uniqueness." It certainly draws a distinction between a mass murderer and men who buy guns for hunting.

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<sup>25</sup> On the 7th and 8th, the papers carried 13 articles concerning guns and gun control. Between the 9th and the 21st, these papers carried 12 articles (the most of which appeared in the Gazette). In total, there were 25 articles in 5 papers over a period of 15 days.

The defining voice concerning gun control belonged to Justice Minister Doug Lewis, who refused to ban semi-automatics because you "can't legislate against insanity" ("Opposition MPs demand long-promised gun control amendments" G&M,Dec8,A4). Stories concerning Lewis emphasized that he was doing something about gun control by banning the importation of semi-automatic weapons which can easily be converted into full automatics, and also that he would not tromp on the rights of gun-owners by introducing a ban on semi-automatics. A full ban would stifle those "law-abiding" people who use the guns for hunting and target shooting, according to Lewis.

A couple of articles further individualized Lépine in their support for gun use or gun clubs. Since the articles emphasized the importance of training, the suggestion was made that Lépine would have been screened out if he had received any training. His "disturbing" attitudes about *guns* (but not women) would have been noticed ("Lachine council reaffirms support for new gun club" MG,Dec10,I-10).

The debate on gun control overlooked the possibility of any significant social change when it focused on what types of guns were necessary, magazine size, and improved training. In spite of gun control being a band-aid solution to the problem of violence against women, government actors still managed to find superficial distinctions to quibble over,<sup>26</sup> giving the illusion of action. The governmental debates over gun control provided journalists with easy-to-assemble stories; journalists got their sources and stories, while the government representatives got publicity and legitimation.

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, government officials became bogged down in a debate over whether magazine size restrictions were sufficient compared to a complete ban on semi-automatic weapons.

## FEMINIST DISCOURSE

### Making sense of the massacre

#### *Making connections to a continuum of violence*

Out of the 82 stories which were included for analysis, nine stories were specifically about violence against women; that is, these stories featured women making connections between everyday violence in women's lives and the massacre. Several stories specifically elaborated upon the idea of a continuum of male violence.<sup>27</sup> The first paragraph of one article, headlined "Killings on campus called a symptom of widespread hatred," set the angle.<sup>28</sup>

The massacre is symptomatic of a society that condones violence against women, feminist groups said yesterday. (MG,Dec8,D11)<sup>29</sup>

One spokeswoman in the story stated that the massacre was too easy to dismiss as an irrational act. However, while it was "an extreme example ... that kind of hatred is evident every day in women's lives." Another stated that:

As shocking in this case as [the massacre] is, it's also something that makes sense in a society that condones and in some cases advocates, fear and hatred of women ... [Sexual assault, murder, pornography, prostitution, are all] part of a continuum of fear and anger and hatred of women becoming independent, of women gaining power in our society. (MG,Dec8,D11)

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<sup>27</sup> As opposed to one event or reaction.

<sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that while articles about Lépine, gun control, and the survivors appeared in the news section, this piece was allocated to page D11, the fourth section of the newspaper.

<sup>29</sup> One counter-source in this story received the treatment that the feminist voice received in most of the news stories (Barbara McDougall urged people not to overreact to a random act).

Another article suggested that "Violence on women [is] epidemic" (CH,Dec17,A6).<sup>30</sup> The angle focused on men who are violent to their wives. One woman stated that she views the massacre as "the same act made daily by men who beat their wives or by men who kill their wives point-blank." A therapist stated that "Violence is not a loss of control in these men. It's a method of reaffirming and reasserting control over women. Oppression rarely occurs without violence."

The main angle of another story connected Lépine's behaviour to the behaviour of wife beaters. More men attended Ottawa-Carleton's treatment group for the wife-abusers after the massacre. The coordinator stated that:

Many of them said they could see him in themselves. Perhaps not to the point where they were going to buy a gun but that kind of hatred and rage toward women. They had hit and choked women and otherwise abused women so they could see a connection. ("Wife-battering men see themselves in Lépine: counsellor"; MG, Dec12,A4 early edition)

Another piece which emphasized statistics on violence against women, battered women and sexual abuse argued that Lépine's actions were not insane so much as part of a continuum:

A man who kills women is commonly regarded as crazy, a social aberration - whether he kills the woman he lives with or 14 women he didn't know. 'Well, he was crazy. What could we do?' policemen have said after a woman has been killed - the same woman who called and called the police station, begging for protection. But some U.S. researchers now believe that men who kill women have simply taken traditional masculine values and pushed them to an extreme. (MG,Dec16,B1)

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**30** This article, which focuses on violence against women in Quebec, is in direct contradiction to an article which appeared in the Gazette on Dec. 9 which claimed that the slayings of the 14 women were not indicative of a trend of violence against women.

Another piece compared Lépine to Robert Poulin, another mass murderer, who was also painted in the media as "insane." Anne McGrath, who lived through the mass shooting by Poulin, stated that, similar to Lépine, his hatred for women was overlooked as a motive: "Despite the fact that Poulin was a consumer of hard-core pornography, whose other main interest was war games, everyone described him as a crazed killer, not as someone who hated women." She and other feminists made the point that society must view Lépine's attack as misogyny. A criminologist stated that Lépine had delusions about women, and he was mentally ill. But delusions "are usually fed by the social climate."

Although he may have been extreme in his vengeful actions, he is not alone as a man in being unable to accept that women are gaining in equality ... Women students experience aggression, harassment and even violence from male colleagues who are enraged that women are demanding to be admitted into the professions. ("Early Terror Relived" CH,Dec8,fp)

Although these pieces strongly argued for a connection between violence against women and the massacre, and the normalization of Lépine's violence, they were few in number.

### *Favouring the event over the issue*

While a feminist interpretation appeared rarely as the main focus of a story, there were also cases where a feminist interpretation originally appeared, and then was edited out. This was typically done to replace a piece of social analysis with a "news-breaking" story which covered an event or occurrence. For instance, there were three telling examples of copy changes between early and late editions of the Montréal Gazette.<sup>31</sup> All of these changes

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<sup>31</sup> This might have occurred more frequently, but this is impossible for me to know, since there were only a few newspapers in my sample with both early and late editions.

excluded the feminist voice or interpretation of the events.

First, the story concerning wife-battering men (mentioned in the last section) which appeared in the Gazette appeared in the early edition of the paper. It was eliminated in the next edition of the paper, which prominently featured the headline: "Rifle bullet snuffed out dream of a new life: victim's husband." A piece on violence on the screen and in magazines which was also prominently featured in the first edition was reduced to a snippet underneath this "human interest" story.

Second, in the early edition of the Gazette on December 9th, a news story ran with the headline "Schools key to helping aggressive children." The article stated that violence is condoned and children, especially male children, learn to blame others for their failures. One doctor made the point that Lépine's behaviour could stem from a sense of failure in an upwardly mobile, materialistic society. This piece was later replaced by "Union leader and minister reported on killer's list." The piece named prominent Montréal women who Lépine had targeted, and their reactions. These two examples illustrate the important focus of the "event" over discussion of the social structure, as the analysis was dropped for the "news."

Another example involved a feminist interpretation of the massacre which was dropped from a late edition. In the early edition of the Gazette on December 8th, a story headlined "One of shooting victims was mayor's babysitter" appeared. This was alongside a feature about the women headlined "Hopes and dreams end in hail of bullets." The story about Montréal's mayor, Jean Doré, had a significant analysis of violence against women, although the lead paragraph set the angle:

A haggard-looking Jean Doré wiped away a tear and sounded more like a parent than a mayor yesterday as he discussed Wednesday's massacre of 14 female engineering students at the Université de Montréal. (MG, Dec 8, A3 early edition)



The story focuses on Doré's feeling of loss, as he knew Geneviève Bergeron, and the grief that he feels for the parents. He then stated that the shootings were "a gesture of hatred against women." He continued:

It's an act that attacks values that we are transmitting in our society.

We have tried to teach our children, in our homes and schools, equality between men and women. It's one of the foundations of our social system.

What we experienced yesterday ... reminds us that we still have a hell of a lot of work to do in that direction.

It's the isolated work of a madman for sure, but it also is the illustration - the translation - that a certain number of men in our society have not accepted, in their hearts and minds, the basic requirement of a social system which calls for equality between individuals, particularly men and women. (MG, Dec8, A3 early ed)

Doré's interpretation of the massacre had disappeared by the next edition of the paper, as his story was replaced as more information on the 14 women became available. The angle that remained in the story was of Doré as a grieving, weeping parent.

It was also the case that a feminist interpretation in the Montréal paper would not appear in other papers. For example, in the late edition of a Montréal Gazette story about the 14 women, where there was more elaboration on the women (and more of them) Maud Havernick's boyfriend described his companion "as a hard-working, job-oriented woman - the kind of woman who doesn't have to call herself a feminist to be one, the kind of feminist her assassin, in his suicide note said he disliked."<sup>32</sup> Her mate also stated: "It's so absurd.

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<sup>32</sup> Here is the suggestion that people are accepting Lépine's definition of feminist, as the media had molded it: someone who takes on male jobs, and works hard to get ahead. This is a very liberal definition of feminism.

How are we to interpret this event? It was a useless and unjust act." The statement about Havernick being a feminist did not run in the other papers; his statement suggesting that Lépine's act was incomprehensible did.

### **Mourning: women organize vigils**

One might expect that the coverage of the vigils would be a place where the feminist interpretation was dominant. However, this was only the case in three of the eight stories. In the other stories, the fact that men were asked not to attend or to be silent at vigils seemed to be more newsworthy than the purpose of the vigil itself. For example, one story criticizing feminism expresses anger at the exclusion of men in the face of feminists who state that Canada is a "woman-hating society":

Yet at a number of separate events, men who showed up in support of feminist demonstrators were not made to feel welcome. In Montréal, for example, a group of women tried to prevent a man from speaking to a crowd of 2,000 students. At a Toronto vigil, a group of female mourners spontaneously clasped hands, but wouldn't allow the sole man in their group to join with them. And in Thunder Bay, men were actually barred from attending a vigil to mourn the dead. ("Massacre forces men to debate issues" TS, Dec 13, fp)

The vigils at Université de Montréal and in Thunder Bay were emphasized because of "conflict" and "exclusion." The vigil in Montréal was designed by the student government of the Poly to be a silent vigil. In addition to the group of women who "silenced" a man, a woman was booed and prevented from speaking when she made the connection between violence against women and the massacre. Although these disagreements about the purpose of the vigil received attention in the Gazette's account, it became the newsworthy focus of the story carried in the Winnipeg Free Press: "Vigil for victims turns nasty." The angle of the vigil stories became conflict; the focus was no longer on the women. In the Toronto

Star coverage of the vigil, the focus was on general mourning, the conflict, and how the massacre has affected the Poly. Only one specific reference was made to violence against women, which was located as part of the "conflict." It was not the main focus of the story, as it begins:

Some clenched their fists in helpless rage. Others cried.

But most of the young, grieving students just clung to one another in the cold last night outside the University of Montréal engineering building, their thoughts with the friends they had lost to a crazed gunman the night before ...

Fourteen women died Wednesday after a gunman stalked three floors of the six-storey building, picking off female targets before he turned the gun on himself.

'We feel very vulnerable right now,' said Michelle Morrison ...

'It's an attack against women, feminists, and human beings. We need to mourn the loss of these people. It's something every woman is feeling right now.'

The vigil turned ugly as a group of women trying to prevent a man from addressing the crowd grappled for control of a megaphone.

As the candlelight vigil wound up, a group of women denounced a man for addressing the gathering of 2,000 mourners outside the school, saying it was a rally for women.

Then one woman told the crowd that the slaughter 'shows the extreme of hatred from men which women must live with in our society.'

She was drowned out by boos and catcalls from male and female students in the crowd. (TS, Dec8,A17)

The feminist interpretation, while present, is subsumed under the narrative, and counteracted immediately by the mention that men *and* women denounced the woman's views.

The coverage of the Thunder Bay vigil also vividly illustrates how feminist voices can be undermined. This vigil became newsworthy simply because men were excluded; this

became the angle in three headline pieces out of the five papers in the sample.<sup>33</sup> The variable nature of the framing of news stories becomes evident in the way that three differing papers presented the story with a slightly different focus. In the Toronto Star, the theme of excluding men is evident in the headline "Men are barred from vigil in Ontario" and the opening paragraph. Within the story, the feminist interpretation is given a lot of play and analysis. However, the story ends with a quote by Joe Vanderweed. Even though the quote acts as a counter-source, it reinforces the angle introduced in the opening paragraph and acts to undermine the feminist content of the story:

Organizers will bar men from attending a vigil tonight to mourn the women killed in the Montréal massacre.

'It's a personal, emotional event,' Anna Demetrakopoulos of the Northern Women's Centre said yesterday. 'We are not excluding men from the issue, we are challenging them to take responsibility for the issue of male violence themselves.'

'Women need a time to get together to mourn the loss themselves to realize that ... it's you, it's your daughter, it's your mother who are victims of male violence.'

Demetrakopoulos said women will not be able to express their hurt and anger as openly if men attend the vigil.

'I think women suppress their emotions and grief and its relevance to personal lives in a mixed group,' she said, adding that she would like to see men organize their own event.

But Alderman Joe Vanderweed said he does not approve of a segregated vigil.

'I think it's crazy, extreme,' he said. 'I find it radical even, maybe some kind of mind terrorism.'

When something this horrible happens, 'we should all hang our heads together,' he said (TS, Dec9,A13).

The Winnipeg Free Press version put even more emphasis on the exclusion of men. The opening paragraph set the angle with: "Organizers will bar men from attending a vigil tonight to mourn the women killed in the Montréal massacre, a decision one city alderman

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<sup>33</sup> In addition to the three headline pieces, the Thunder Bay vigil was also mentioned in the Calgary Herald within a piece about sexism, emphasizing that men had been barred, and that the decision had been called radical and a type of mind terrorism.

calls crazy, extreme and radical." The story contains the comments made by Demetrakopoulos and introduces Vanderweed's perspective by saying he does not approve of a segregated vigil "And I don't think the people of Thunder Bay are going to approve of it." This perspective is further reinforced by Rick Smith, a radio news commentator, who

... received about 35 telephone calls yesterday from people who said they were angry about the exclusion of men from the vigil. 'Ninety per cent of the callers were women,' he said. 'I heard from a man who said he has been urged to feel a sense of collective guilt because he's a man. Won't you let us associate with the fathers of the daughters - why must we be associated with the crazed killer?' Smith asked. (WFP, Dec 8, 8).

In the Montréal Gazette, the comments made by Demetrakopoulos were not included, but the focus was on a letter which was distributed at the vigil. The headline read "Men barred from Thunder Bay vigil: 'These deaths are your creations'."

Men are to blame for Wednesday's massacre at the Université de Montréal where 14 women were killed by a gun-wielding man, said an open letter distributed last night at a segregated vigil where men were barred.

'This is a men's issue, this is men's violence, this terrorism and these deaths are your creations and your shame,' Sasha McInnes wrote in the letter to the men of this Northern Ontario city.

McInnes's letter was passed among the 56 women at the candlelight vigil organized by the Northern Women's Centre.

The letter challenged men to join forces to stop violence against women and children.

While the women, many wearing black armbands, prayed, sang, chanted and lit candles, six men and one woman held their own vigil across the street.

Rev. Keith Ashford organized the vigil in the wake of the negative reaction to the women-only vigil.

'(The vigil) is not anti-men,' said Jennifer Tett, the lone woman who wanted to join the men.

'It is a time for women to mourn on their own and to be together,' she said.

At the other service, 14 candles were placed on a rainbow on the floor in the middle of the room.

One woman burned pieces of a tree branch in each candle dish. She said when spirits leave the body abruptly, as in violent deaths, they often don't know where they are (MG, Dec 10, A5)

The focus of the story then turns to the Engineering white scarfs campaign.

The tone in this story is significant. Although there is some explanation as to what is going on at this "women-only" event, the lead-in to the story did not stress male violence nor men ending male violence, but the fact that men had been *excluded*. In addition, the framing of the vigil made it sound somewhat bizarre, like a fringe activity in which only a small proportion of women would be interested.

In the coverage of these stories, we have seen that the issues at hand - about male violence and ending male violence - are reduced to conflict and to individuals (the two women who "blamed" men). By focusing on the conflict, it is possible to ignore the content of the messages and report the news "event" divorced from the larger issue. By focusing on individuals, the reader is led to believe that many women do not share the feelings of the women at the vigil.

In contrast to the coverage of the Thunder Bay vigil and the Montréal vigil, the coverage of the vigil held at the University of Toronto had a significant feminist angle.<sup>34</sup> Both the Globe and Mail coverage and the Toronto Star coverage emphasized the connections between the massacre and the violence women live with every day. In both pieces, however, the angle of violence against women is not introduced in the lead paragraph. The Globe piece had many more sources from women activists than the Star, and included a more thorough discussion of violence against women. The Globe piece, headlined "Violence against women assailed" starts:

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<sup>34</sup> The only mention of a vigil held in Calgary appeared in a piece about a forum held about "sexism." It briefly mentioned that a vigil had been held. ("Calgary shares in Montréal's sorrows" CH, Dec 9, fp)

Weeping and holding one another for comfort, hundreds of women and men - most of them students, professors, politicians and community activists - met yesterday before a statue of a crucified woman on the University of Toronto campus to mourn the 14 women who were murdered in Montréal on Wednesday night.

For many, the massacre was the brutal culmination of a season of escalating violence and hatred directed at women, especially toward those who are trying to make their way in professions - such as engineering - which have traditionally not welcomed women ...

Again and again, whether they were speaking during the brief service or just talking among themselves, the women described the hostile society around them. (G&M,Dec8,fp early edition)

Similarly, the Toronto Star piece is headlined " 'Never again' should be vow women plead" and begins:

The dead were mourned with tears, fury and disbelief.

About 500 men and women gathered at the University of Toronto yesterday for a vigil in memory of the 14 women massacred on the University of Montréal campus by a lone gunman with a hatred for feminist women.

Some clutched flowers. Many sang feminist anthems. Some prayed. Others wept openly.

'Any of us who've had any experiences with violent men in our lives are feeling this deeply today,' said Alice de Wolff ...

Other members of Metro area women's groups warned the killings are a sign of pervasive anti-female attitudes ... (TS,Dec8,A17)

It is significant that all of the sources in both of these stories supported the main angle of the piece and that neither of the stories mentioned conflict.

The coverage of the vigil in Winnipeg also took on a feminist perspective. Headlined "Mourners 'full of rage'," the opening paragraphs set the angle:

They came drenched in sadness, prepared to mourn the needless loss of 14 lives in a Montréal shooting rampage.

But the more than 300 people who gathered last night at the Manitoba Legislative Building left an emotional vigil charged with anger and resolved to put an end to violence against women. (WFP,Dec8,fp)

Coverage of the vigils was a likely space for a feminist analysis to appear in my sample. Mostly organized by women's groups, the vigils were designed to make a political statement.<sup>35</sup> However, this coverage was not predominantly feminist. The vigils which received national attention were the ones in Thunder Bay and Montréal, and were deemed newsworthy because of conflict, not because of violence against women. In addition, the few stories which dealt with violence against women always started with a general mourning angle, which moved into violence against women. The feminist voice was therefore not dominant in coverage of a feminist event.

### **Pushing for change: ending violence against women**

Although there were several pieces which made connections between the massacre and violence against women, only **one** news story had *ending* violence against women as its main focus. This was a piece about the Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, where the connection to violence against women emerged as a result of criticism from the opposition members in Parliament.<sup>36</sup> The headline reads "PM deplores violence against women as MPs demand action." The story begins:

Violence against women 'is one of the most serious problems in our society' Prime Minister Brian Mulroney told Parliament yesterday as opposition MPs demanded action to combat violence.

'We will act to - as much as possible - rid our society of violence because it is affecting women's condition and social justice,' he said.

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<sup>35</sup> And when the vigils were not organized by women, such as at the Poly, it became obvious that there were still feminists in the crowd.

<sup>36</sup> Only one other source referred to Mulroney making a comment about violence against women (in TS, Dec 8, fp). Mulroney stated that the fact that women were targeted made the massacre all the more "brutal."



Mulroney said he had discussed the problem when he met with female students at the École Polytechnique, the scene of Wednesday's massacre of 14 women. (MG,Dec9,A4)

This is the only indication in the media coverage that Mulroney was prepared to take action to stop violence against women. Yet, his statement appears to be a purely political one; designed to make him look as if he is taking action without committing himself to any potential changes.<sup>37</sup> To this extent, it would seem that the government was more concerned with discussing measures pertaining to gun control than taking steps to ameliorate violence against women in society.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed three different categories of news stories: articles which attempted to explain the causes of the massacre; articles which covered events connected to the massacre; and articles suggesting what needs to be changed in society in order to avoid another massacre. These news stories were classified according to whether they fit into a crime discourse or a feminist discourse. Overwhelmingly, the crime discourse was dominant within the news coverage. The explanation of the causes of the massacre centered mainly around Lépine's behaviour. The funerals and memorial services were never presented from a feminist perspective, and the coverage of vigils (which were intrinsically feminist in nature) was not necessarily from a feminist angle. The only issue singled out as a means of promoting change was gun control, thereby ignoring the broader issue of ending violence against women.

Since the feminist voice and the issue of violence against women have been subor-

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<sup>37</sup> It is also noteworthy to mention that journalists thought this empty political response was worthy of a headline.

dinated within the "objective" news stories, this raises questions about types of writing that are not reportorial in form and that do not rely on sources. Would these be framed in the same way? Would they have the same angle? Specifically, to what extent is a feminist analysis present in editorials, columns, features, and letters? These forms of media coverage will be the focus of Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NON-NEWS STORIES

### INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three, I hypothesized that non-news articles, because they did not follow the same format as news stories, would allow for more analysis and inclusion of a feminist discourse. Editorials, columns and feature articles will be the focus of this chapter. Letters will also be examined. In contrast to other forms of media reporting and coverage, letters offer a space for readers' voices to be heard.

As we saw in Chapter Four, news stories take on a reportorial form; their aim is to flesh out the "facts." In contrast, non-news coverage focused mainly on issues raised by the massacre. As people tried to make sense of the massacre, they hypothesized what caused it and what social (if any) changes were necessary to end such violence. More important, this type of writing did contain a significant amount of feminist analysis and, in some instances, the feminist voice was dominant. In the case of features and columns, articles about gun control or other individualized solutions to crime were rare to non-existent. However, more negative reaction to a feminist interpretation also appeared in the non-news coverage than in the news stories, especially within letters.

While the discussion in Chapter Four centered on a comparison of the crime discourse and the feminist discourse, my intention in this chapter is to investigate the extent to which a feminist discourse was present in editorials, features, columns and letters. The chapter will be divided into two sections: the first will consider opinion pieces (editorials, columns, and features) while the second will examine letters to the editor.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> It was not always possible to determine the sex of the authors of these pieces. When the sex of a writer is not mentioned, it is because it is not known.

## NON-NEWS PIECES: Editorials, columns, features

### Editorials

In my sample, there were nine editorials. Of these nine, four specifically featured gun control, two were more general (briefly mentioning violence against women but focusing on gun control as a solution) and three specifically featured violence against women.

Writings on gun control focused on the idea of L epine as insane. One editorial ("Taking a look at gun control"; WFP,Dec14,6) urged stricter control of guns in order to prevent a "seriously deranged person" such as L epine from accessing weapons. The author suggested that it took what happened in Montr al to realize that "this country can produce murderous madmen too." These editorials assumed that access to weapons (especially by an insane person) was the main causal factor of the murders. Therefore, gun control was presented as a way to limit the potential for this type of murder to occur again. Although one of the four editorials did mention misogyny and the "unanswerable questions" that misogyny "poses," gun control was the main focus. It was viewed as a temporary solution, as damage control:<sup>39</sup> "No one can properly claim that Marc L epine would still have murdered every one of those young women if he had been unable to get his hands on a weapon specifically designed for multiple killing" ("Control the Guns"; MG,Dec9,B2).

Two editorials which struggled to make sense of the massacre mentioned violence against women as an explanation for L epine's behaviour; but the change suggested did not focus on ending this violence. For instance, "Beyond Understanding" (MG,Dec8,B2) suggested that, while the massacre was "incomprehensible" and L epine was a "lunatic," the

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<sup>39</sup> By "damage control" I mean that the focus is on reducing the number of deaths made possible by each gun; by limiting the size of magazines, deaths may be lessened (but not avoided altogether).

event raised questions about violence against women. The solution suggested, however, was gun control. Similarly, another editorial writer - while willing to concede that violence against women exists - resisted drawing the connection between violence against women and the massacre:

Some commentators connect his act to the relations between men and women in general, but Marc Lépine was a madman. Most of the violence which men inflict on women is different both in scale and in kind from the act of Marc Lépine. Tens of thousands of women do suffer male violence, especially from husbands and lovers, sometimes from strangers. The perpetrators are sane and their behaviour is reasonably predictable ... Domestic violence is as serious a crime this week as it was last week. It should not be treated differently because of Marc Lépine's crime ... there is no broader social significance here. ("Lessons from a mass murder"; WFP,Dec9,18)

While violence against women was treated as a secondary consideration in the above pieces, three editorials did draw a clear connection between the massacre and misogyny. In one, Lépine's actions were viewed as decidedly social in their origins:

Crazed as he may well have been, the killer who carefully separated males from females before the shooting began absorbed his attitudes from the society around him. Collectively, unconsciously and sometimes overtly, we have provided him with all the context (albeit wildly distorted) he needed ... Despite the changes that have been made - or possibly because of them - there is fertile ground for the misogynist or male chauvinist. ("Why were women in the gunsight?"; G&M,Dec8,A6)

In a similar fashion, another editorial claimed that:

Despite what some are saying, it is extremely difficult to see this as an isolated incident perpetuated by a madman. Yes, the killer appears to have been a crazed individual.

But what cannot be ignored is that his madness was not developed in a societal vacuum. He was living in an environment where the hostile reaction to women and their advancement has become palpable.

In that regard, some of the excessively violent language used recently ... at Queen's University, mocking a woman's right to say "no," comes to mind. ("Montréal massacre: A country mourns"; TS,Dec8,A30)

Another common theme in these three editorials was the continuum of violence against women:

(Lépine)... used a semi-automatic rifle, but that is only one deadly part of the arsenal turned daily against women. Fists are still the preferred weapons in domestic disputes - marginally less violent than firearms, but as ugly and sometimes fatal. There is a wide range of psychological artillery. Some was observed ... in the House of Commons where, in 1982, Margaret Mitchell, a New Democratic Party MP, was greeted with jokes and laughter when she raised the subject of wife-beating. ("Why were women in the gunsight?"; G&M,Dec8,A6)

Similarly, "Women on firing line" claims:

After Montréal the implicit violence, verbal snipping, demeaning sexist jokes, and pornographic depiction of women will take on a macabre dimension. Recent campus controversies over panty raids, offensive posters and sarcastic slogans may pale in comparisons to the shootings but such instances will be inevitably connected as a symptom is connected to the cause of a disease. (CH,Dec8,A4)

Two of these editorials also make brief suggestions for change: the Globe and Mail suggested that "it is time for men to talk with men about their continuing oppression of women" (Dec8,A6); and the Toronto Star suggested that the struggle against hatred of women must be pursued "not just in Parliament and the courts, but in our homes, classrooms and places of work" (Dec8,A30).

In summary, the majority (two-thirds) of the editorials supported an individualized reading of Lépine, with gun control as a suggested solution. One-third of the editorials connected the massacre to violence against women, and suggested deeper societal change. Out of the three types of writing to be considered in this chapter, editorials contained the least amount of analysis on violence against women.

## Columns

There were 29 columns from my sample which were considered appropriate for inclusion.<sup>40</sup> Out of these 29, only three specifically urged people to support gun control. Three other pieces supported the crime discourse: one was backlash against a feminist interpretation, one concerned itself with mass murder, and one called for the death penalty.

Compared to the editorials, columns contained significantly more feminist content. Approximately fifty percent (16) of the columns dealt with feminist concerns, such as the frequency of violence against women and fear that women feel because of it. In addition, three columns attempted to make sense of the massacre more generally and four columns had a general theme about mourning. Five of these seven pieces made mention of violence against women.

Only three (male) columnists specifically focused on gun control. One of these columns referred to Lépine as an "insane psychopath" ("Shops of horrors need not exist in peacetime"; MG,Dec8,A3) and another described him as "deranged" ("Talking about guns won't stop horror"; CH, Dec21,A4). Working on the assumption that Lépine was insane, the latter column suggested banning guns in order to reduce the number of victims because once someone "gets to that deranged point" the "rage can be directed anywhere" (CH,Dec21,A4).

Although these two columns suggest banning guns as a solution, another male columnist argued that, since semi-automatic weapons will be around for a long time, one course

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<sup>40</sup> Four columns which dealt with the media and its coverage were not included in the analysis. One praises CBC Newsworld for its coverage, one Montréal writer was disgusted by the fact that Newsworld did not come through in Montréal and so he was uninformed, and two dealt with reader protests against the photo of Anne-Marie Edward, dead in her chair. These do not specifically deal with locus of the problem.

of action would be to reduce the size of magazine allowed for these guns. Again, the idea of gun control as damage control comes up, without the suggestion of actually banning guns; although magazine "restrictions might not have deterred suicidal Lépine" the death toll might have been lower ("Reducing power worth a shot" CH, Dec12,A4).

Only one column could be described as a "backlash" piece. It suggested that, despite women's progress into "male preserves," the "conflictual wing of the feminist movement, particularly outside of Quebec, is in the process of hijacking last Wednesday's tragedy for its own ends." This male columnist called feminists extremists for drawing connections between male violence and the massacre:

In the past few days, we've seen Marc Lépine transformed into a symbol not only of rapists and wife-beaters but of men who consume pornography, who oppose abortion-on-demand or, even, who leer at women in swimming pools. What's going on here? One madman falls off the edge and kills 14 women and the next thing you know any man who has tolerated a sexist joke to be told in his presence is practically lumped into the same category. ("Ontario, Quebec see massacre differently"; TS,Dec12,A21)

The author sees our society as "the relatively promising world that Marc Lépine, in his madness, blocked out for 14 young women - not the fear-ridden, male-dominated hell being depicted by some who would speak in their name."

Contrary to the perceived irrelevance of making the connection to male violence suggested in the column above, seventeen columns did deal with such connections. This took a number of forms.

Several columns argued that the society we live in is misogynist and thereby gave Lépine the justification which he needed. For example one male columnist argued that:

... madness usually has a method in it, a content shaped by the society in which it occurs. And this was no exception ... [The] thought of the gunman selecting his victims, separating the women simply because they were women, is chillingly parallel to the Nazis selecting Jews just because they were Jews. Adolf



Hitler was a madman. But he came from a background of latent and overt anti-Semitism. And that background helped shape his murderous intent ... Even such killers tend to frame their reasons in a form they think gives them justification, that will be acceptable to other people. (CH,Dec9,A4)

Contrary to the view that Lépine's violence was random, several columnists suggested that women experience various types of violence everyday. For instance, one male columnist discussed a woman who was taken hostage by her date and how it taught her

... what every woman in Montréal knows today: The École Polytechnique massacre may have been the isolated work of a single psychopath, but it is also a horrifying extension of something that goes on between men and women every day.

From the barmaid who endures pats and pinches 20 times a night to the secretary who has to walk by wolf-whistling construction workers to the woman whose heart pounds when she feels a stranger following her on the street, it is nearly impossible to find a woman who has not been brutalized by some man at some time in her life.

You don't have to be a feminist to know what goes on. Just look and listen. Women are beaten by husbands and boyfriends, taunted by sexist fools, followed on the street, resented on the job. They have to be aware every moment of every day of possibilities which occur to a man only if he decides to take a midnight stroll in the South Bronx.

The Montréal Daily News screams 'WHY?' on its front page yesterday ... and runs its usual pin-up of 'bubbly Babette' inside. A group of men stare at a bikini contest on TV, and then one of them says: 'If my wife ever wore something like that I'd beat the s--t out of her.' ("Reliving the terror of a date with a 'normal' guy"; MG, Dec9,A3)

The far-reaching types of violence were illustrated by another male columnist:

... all women were the target of the executioner at the École Polytechnique. A madman took to demented extremes a battle against the more vulnerable sex which is enacted daily without the sound of gunfire in so many fields across this country ... [including the House of Commons] ... The absence of women, their lack of power, is only one dimension of female reality in Canada. Another, more brutal and direct ... [example is a report on family violence] ... It accumulates the evidence of the war against females in the form of sexual molestation of infants and children, battering of wives and girlfriends, tormenting of aged, enfeebled mothers and grandmothers. An entire industry of publications and videos specializes in portraying women as

dying to be degraded in bondage to male sexuality ... We can only guess at the impoverishment of our lives- especially the lives of girls and women but all lives- because our society has not yet made peace with women. Till then, it -and we- cannot be whole and at peace. ("Massacre jolts all to reflect on place of nation's women"; MG,Dec8,B3)

Two columns specifically discussed women fearing physical violence. For instance, one male columnist compares the fear that he feels in New York with the fear that women must feel everyday: "Women know that violence against them and resentment of their emancipation is nothing new." He continues by noting that - while it would be comforting to think of the massacre as isolated, as random -

... what makes the incident at the École Polytechnique so disturbing, so horrifying, is that the 14 dead victims were deliberately chosen because of their sex and their occupation. They were separated from their male colleagues, then shot to death. Only women were killed at the École Polytechnique, and they were killed only because they were women.

Once again, women have become victims of physical violence because they are women. If the incident at the École Polytechnique is an isolated one, it is isolated only in its degree of its violence and insanity ...

... there is a deeper, more serious problem facing us than the ready availability of semi-automatic rifles that the incident at the École Polytechnique should have brought to public consciousness. The problem is that one-half of us are not free from violence, fear, intimidation and hatred, simply because of sex. And it will not be solved quickly or easily. ("Massacre reveals stark face of fear"; MG,Dec9,B3)

A female columnist, who also dealt with fear of violence in women's lives, noted the denial that the massacre had anything to do with violence against women: "Because he separated men from women, they're calling it a human tragedy, nothing to do with women, with men's hatred for them and rage toward them." The writer argued that ending the violence is up to men:

There is nothing more women can do for men. It's men who have to stop blaming women for their own failures, who have to stop taking their rage out on women ... It's men who must recognize that every time they tell a sexist joke, they're helping to create a climate where some madman can kill the women they've degraded ... It's men who must see that this man's madness wouldn't have focused on women if he hadn't lived in a world that tacitly accepts hatred of women, where violence against women is taken seriously only by women. I want men to be outraged by this act of violence ... I want men to take responsibility for themselves. ("Suddenly, no woman can feel safe"; CH,Dec10,C2)

In addition to the columns which specifically focused on feminist concerns, some columns which focused on mourning or making sense of the massacre also mentioned the connection felt by some women between violence in their lives and the massacre. For instance, one male columnist writing about mourning stated:

... if ceremonies inside the building were quiet and dignified, there were explosions of sorrow and anger outside. Certainly there is enormous sadness over the senseless murder of 14 vibrant, intelligent, hard-working young women. There is also certainty, among women at least, that Marc Lépine's outrage is simply a logical extension of what they endure every day. ("Anger mixes with sorrow for the slain"; MG,Dec11,A3)

Similarly, another male columnist, when writing about mourning, noted:

The immediate response of women across Canada to Wednesday's massacre, their strong identification with the dead victims, suggests that they experience the same conditions in their lives, the same threat of violence, the same hostility towards women and feminism, as their sisters in Quebec. ("Sense of family drew people closer: mourners came to protest sexism but also to tell relatives they care"; MG,Dec12,B3)

A feminist analysis, then, was much more prominent in the writing of columnists than in the editorials. Columnists used their space to elaborate quite extensively on an analysis of violence against women. This was also the case with features.

## Features

There were 18 features in my sample. Overwhelmingly, thirteen features dealt with the theme of violence against women and sexism: ten argued that the massacre was an example of the violence against women which is common in society; another two included this perspective in a debate about the causes of the massacre; and one feature connected the massacre to sexism on campuses. Out of the five remaining features, two contained backlash themes: one specifically against the feminist definition of "violence" and another against the media's reaction to the massacre in general. Two features elaborated on the social creation of mass murderers. Finally, one feature discussed a village mourning one of the women who was killed, Sonia Pelletier.

One woman wrote a special feature about her own abusive relationship. She stated that Lépine's act was both mad and an expression of male hatred of women, and drew a connection between Lépine and other abusive men:

There's little doubt Lépine was a profoundly disturbed individual. If he were not, the massacre would not have happened. But what is significant for women is that he blamed us for all that had ever gone wrong in his life. In this way, he was no different from any man who beats his wife or girlfriend or is in any lesser degree aggressive toward women for being women ... Those who refuse to see the connection - mostly men - argue that Marc Lépine was not a typical sexist; he simply had psychological problems. Of course he did. But there is no violent man on earth who can claim to be a whole person. ("The system let me down when I said 'no more' to violence: MG, Dec10,D2)

Two features dealt with women and the fear that living in a misogynist society produces. For example, one author wrote that she now feels more afraid after the massacre:

The guy is dead, his hatred spent. But he won in the end. It's just as he wanted. Marc Lépine lives on through my fear. Actually, serial murderers do it much better. Mass murderers hit with a flash and they're gone in a flash. Marc Lépine is dead. He can't climb up to my window. But the Boston Strangler, Ted Bundy- they scared women over the long term by

killing us one by one by one. That works. That scares us in ways that last a lifetime ...

The guy moved women's fears into high gear for a few days. They'll go back to the backburner eventually, but they're always there. You just learn to live with them. You avoid shadowy places, groups of boisterous young men in lonely parks. You lock your car doors as you sit inside warming it up in the back parking lot. You're used to it ...

I asked another woman at work if Lépine's actions had put some fear into her. 'Nope. He was just a crackpot. I didn't look at it really as a gesture against women. He could have attacked any group.' Later she said: 'Maybe I'm strange for not being scared.'

Of course she's right not to be scared. But then a male editor spluttered, 'What does it mean, this-this- *misogyny*,' as if it was the worst profanity he had ever muttered. He was outraged while I was overcome by fright. ("Fear is legacy women share after killer's hate is spent" MG,Dec9,fp)

Two features, written by men, urged men to stop their violence towards women. One male author urged men to understand how there is a war against women by men:

'But he was sick,' good men will say. Of course he was sick! Of course all men don't think like that! But let good men not hide. Let us not look the other way. There were no men on Marc Lépine's hit list and good men must look harder to find the reason why. Men abuse women. Men throw the punches. Men pull the trigger. Men build the walls. And only men can end it. Why is violence against women the domain of women? How did a man's fist in a woman's face ever get to be a *woman's issue*? Why do civilized men continue to hurt the women they love? 'Be calm,' a young man told an angry young woman at the vigil for the victims the other night. He was wrong. This is no time for calm. This is a time for anger. Men's anger. This is not a job for the women's groups, not just another beef for women's lib. Our daughters are afraid of us. If ever there was a time to say it: This is a job for men. ("We mourn all our daughters"; MG,Dec10,fp)

One feature provided a critique of a backlash against feminism which was occurring in the media. It was argued that women are framing the massacre within a social context that creates misogyny and tolerates it. Yet, while the social context has appeared in the media coverage it has

... fanned the flames of a seething anti-feminist backlash directed at feminism as a social movement and against individual women who identify themselves (or are identified by others) as feminists. (" 'Men cannot know the feelings of fear'; yet an anti-feminist backlash has been intensified by the massacre in Montréal"; G&M, Dec12,A7)

According to the (female) author, three types of backlash occurred: first, the shootings were not necessarily being recognized as an act of violence specifically against women; second, the theory of Lépine as madman was seen as a type of backlash:

The appeal to mental illness is a familiar excuse. We are often told, especially by psychiatrists, that men who beat or murder their wives, rape little girls or boys, or sexually attack women are "sick." They are not like other "normal" men. Judging by the prevalence of these problems, there must be a great many men who aren't "normal" in our society. (" 'Men cannot know the feelings of fear'; yet an anti-feminist backlash has been intensified by the massacre in Montréal"; G&M,Dec12,A7)

Third, there is an explicit hostility towards women, especially feminists, who are seen to use the tragedy as a "vehicle for feminist diatribe."

Two features could be described as "backlash" pieces, as they were designed to counter the feminist interpretation of the massacre (which the authors saw as dominant in the media). For instance, one male author argued that, because of feminist claims that violence is endemic, the meaning of the word "violence" had taken on an elasticity. He wrote that:

The shock of the killings in Montréal comes largely from their rarity. Wanton death has been an inescapable part of being human, and anyone who wants to know about day-to-day violence should read some history, or spend a night in New York ... (To make the case that violence is endemic) feminists have to throw in (and then throw out) everything from panty raids to magazine ads to David Cronenberg movies. A student at Queen's, with a straight face, managed to equate "gender bias" of her curriculum with the killings. (Always mistrust two abstract nouns lined up together) ... Confronted with real, sick violence in Montréal, the lobbyists against porn and immature male attitudes see everything as a point on the same continuum. ("Word Play: Violence and Anger"; G&M,Dec9,D6)

This, according to the author, will incite violence on the part of women:

Where does this loose use of language lead? To anger and fear, first of all. At a vigil held in Toronto, the participants sang a strange song with the warped words, "We are gentle, angry people and we are singing, singing for our lives." Anger, alas, breeds anger and even Marc Lépine was once the victim of someone's anger. ("Word Play: Violence and Anger"; G&M, Dec 9, D6)

This type of backlash was certainly not dominant in the features category of my sample. Rather, the connection to violence against women was the most prominent theme. Other reactions to a feminist interpretation, ranging from disagreement to anger, did figure quite prominently in the letters in my sample.

### **A PUBLIC VOICE: Letters**

Letters are in a different category than the above three categories of non-news coverage, as they allow interpretations of non-journalists and readers to emerge from the news discourse. Which letters run, however, it is still an editorial decision. A key question, then, is: do the letters which are printed reflect the crime discourse which is dominant in the news coverage or will there be alternate interpretations reflected in the letters?

There were 54 letters in my sample which were considered appropriate for inclusion.<sup>41</sup> Letters were much more difficult to classify (by discourse type), as people who wrote the letters did not necessarily stick to one topic.<sup>42</sup> However, letters which appeared generally

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<sup>41</sup> There were a total of 67 letters in my sample. Among the letters not considered: several letters which dealt with the "tastelessness" of the media coverage, especially of the picture of Anne-Marie Edward which was run; a couple of letters expressing gratitude that Lépine had killed himself, and a couple of general personal letters.

<sup>42</sup> Some letters mentioned several issues without connecting them in a way which made sense or supported their argument. This could have been due to heavy editing of the letters.

fell into themes which either individualized Lépine or connected him to wider violence.<sup>43</sup> Among those which individualized Lépine, there were nine letters which supported the view of Lépine as a sick individual, either as a product of urban decay and general glorification of violence, or as a product of a being mentally ill and not receiving adequate care. Gun control was suggested as a preventative measure against violence in eight of the letters; although two of these eight mentioned violence against women, gun control was suggested as the immediate solution. Two letters supported the rights of citizens to own guns in order to defend themselves against insane gunmen.

Approximately one-half of the letters (23) concerned violence against women, misogyny, or sexism. Of these 23, three urged gun control as one solution to end the violence. In addition, two letters connected the massacre to other social change which was needed to avoid such violence in the future.

Finally, there were 10 letters which I labelled "Reaction to the Feminist Interpretation" which also individualized Lépine. These letters ranged from simple disagreement that men were to blame for the massacre or that the massacre was a type of violence against women, to forms of backlash in which feminists were blamed for the massacre or angrily accused of being "opportunistic" for "using" the massacre to further awareness of violence against women.

The letters which blamed Lépine's actions on social decay or insanity are quite different from the reaction letters, as they are not reacting to an argument so much as putting forth their own. The 10 letters which appeared which disagreed with a feminist interpretation

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<sup>43</sup> It would be misleading to label these "crime" or "feminist" discourses, as the arguments made are a lot more far-reaching and vague than the arguments which appeared in the news stories.



argued against statements which had already been made in the media. In this section, then, I will illustrate the differences in these letters by including examples of letters which dealt with social decay, violence against women, and reaction to a feminist interpretation.

## Social Decay

In these nine writings, two main suggestions were made: that the massacre was caused by social breakdown, and that Lépine failed to receive adequate mental health care. One male writer attributed the social breakdown to low morals:

Why does it take the murder of 14 innocent women for us to look at ourselves and wonder what is wrong with society? ... Have our morals gone so low that we only care about those crimes that are reported? ... Come on Montreal, let's be the first to raise our morals a few notches and then others will be sure to follow. ("Let us raise our morals" MG, Dec 19, B2)

Another male writer connected the coldness of society and the rejection of "eccentric" people:

Marc Lépine may have chosen to place the guilt on broken relationships, but much more likely the root of the anger and frustration set in his formative years. (*sic*) The basic fact is that he was probably subjected to much mental cruelty in his life, either deliberately or accidental (*sic*) ... Christmas is a wonderfully warm and repairing time ... Reach out to those lost souls, so in need of someone to talk to ... Rather than ignoring that eccentric and strange person that lives next door, down the street or inside ourselves, we have to get to the root causes of the problem. ("How many more mass murderers?" MG, Dec 18, B2)

One couple suggested that preventing violence is a matter of better mental-health care:

The tragic events at the University of Montreal have deeply saddened both men and women alike ... If responsible, caring human beings of all sexes, colors and religions would band together to encourage better and more readily available mental health facilities and professional counselling, perhaps we could effect a lessening of the violence that is increasingly permeating society. ("Better health care may cut violence" CH, Dec 22, A6)

These writers do not consider violence to be structural, but a type of illness; an illness of society or an illness of the mind which was ignored by society. In contrast, many letters connected the violence of the massacre to a continuum of violence against women.

## **Violence against women**

There were 23 letters in my sample which dealt with violence against women, sexism or misogyny. These letters made connections between the violence which Lépine committed and also named causes of Lépine's behaviours. Some named violence against women as a men's problem and urged men to change.

Several letters made the claim that Lépine was simply part of a continuum in which many men are violent. For instance, one woman wrote that the slaughter was an outrage, a "malevolent and obscene act against women by a violent, sociopathic man."

When my initial shock abated, however, I wondered why everyone was so surprised. In the time that it took Marc Lépine to commit his crime, hundreds of other Canadian women were being assaulted by men, physically, verbally, emotionally, and sexually ... The real obscenity lies in our patriarchal, misogynistic society that for all its laws and rhetoric, pays little more than lip service to the rights of women ... The message is clear: gender is still the most important factor in determining the quality - and in too many cases, even the length- of a person's life. ("Real obscenity in patriarchy"; CH,Dec22,A6)

Similarly, one organization connected the women who died in the massacre with other women killed at the hands of men:

The symbolism of singling out and executing 14 women studying in a professional higher education faculty cannot be lost on those who are concerned about the violence against and control of women in our culture. We mourn the 14 women killed. We mourn all women who are victims of violence. ("Aware of symbolism"; G&M,Dec11,A6)

Not only was the massacre indicative of a violence continuum, but it was not surprising, according to one woman, given the way men (in this case, white men) are raised:

The white male enters the world with the knowledge that for him anything is possible. He will know no prejudice, for he is the maker of laws and the ruler of governments. However, it is these white males who make up the majority of serial killers and mass murderers. Instead of taking responsibility for their own personal and professional failures, they turn their frustration to anger and blame easy, accessible targets: visible minorities, Jews and women. The shootings ... happened because of society's casual acceptance of violence against women, the nurturing of that victimization and the broad misunderstandings many men have about feminism and where they fit within it. ("Sexism's insidious influence"; G&M,Dec16,D7)

Similarly, another male writer made the connections between being socialized in a violent male culture and the massacre. He grew up in an atmosphere which took male violence for granted, and he urged men to stop the violence:

This most recent crime was not an aberration, it came from us, from men. It's got to stop. Silence in this manner is the silence of consent. It's time to say in the strongest terms that violence against women in any form is intolerable and will in no way be condoned. And this must be said in the courts, in the schools and in the family, and it must be said by men. ("It's time to speak out"; MG,Dec20,B2)

The idea that men need to be responsible for ending their violence against women showed up elsewhere as well. One example is a letter by a group of Winnipeg men:

We are shocked and outraged but not surprised by the mass murder of 14 women in Montréal. This is not an isolated incident perpetuated by one crazy man; it is a horrifying reminder of the misogyny faced by all women in our society. Male violence against women must be confronted by men and will not stop until it is. ("Misogyny"; WFP,Dec16,19)

Some letters connected the massacre to a backlash against women. For instance, one stated that:

The gun man separated the women from the men and charged that the women were feminists before he so brutally murdered them. We condemn this act of hatred toward women and we are outraged by its manifestation. Feminism seeks to achieve equality for women. Feminists who strive toward this goal are courageous women who envision a better world. It is chilling to think that those who work toward this vision, or are perceived to, would be subject to such senseless violence ... ("An act of hatred to women"; WFP,Dec16,19)

Another author also connected the massacre to the backlash against women's gains:

Any time a minority seems to make a tiny bit of progress in achieving equality, the ugly head of vocal and physical violence seems to pop up. Anti-feminist activities of a few at Queens University are similarly the magnification of attitudes and ignorance of a certain segment of society ... The Montréal tragedy and the open display of anti-feminist sentiments at Queens have brought to light what most men have denied vehemently over the centuries ...

However, even though this author includes an analysis of backlash, he warns feminists that:

The mass murders, inequalities and discrimination cannot be solved by anger, frustration or verbal violence on the part of the oppressed, in this case the women or the feminists. Violence solves no problems, it breeds more violence be it physical or verbal. ("Murder shows what men have denied"; CH,Dec22,A6)

These writings urged people not to *deny* the connection between society's view of women and the killings. One author emphasized that she was disturbed to hear women in prominent positions stating that the killings were an isolated act:

In accepting this theory, we abdicate our collective, democratic right to seek ways to protect the lives of our daughters from fanatic female-haters ... If this pathetic killer had no easy access to a firearm that is used by SWAT teams, he would have had a tough time slaughtering so many young women with a kitchen knife. Marc Lépine bought the gun, and society's attitude towards women defined the target and guided the bullets. ("Killings not isolated incident"; MG,Dec20,B2).

This is the perspective on the causes of the massacre which many others wrote in to protest. These protests made up a significant proportion of letters which may be labelled as "Reactions to the Feminist Interpretation."

## **Reactions to the feminist interpretation**

There were 10 letters which reacted to the connecting of the massacre to male violence. These included backlash themes, which ranged from blaming feminism for causing the massacre, to letters angry at the feminist interpretation of the massacre. This latter category includes the argument that feminists are opportunist to use the massacre and the view that feminists are hostile to men. All but one of these letters were written by men, and all see Lépine as an individual aberration.

One author blamed feminists for creating the social climate which allowed the massacre to occur. According to this author, men, since they "possess greater physical strength have always acted to protect women and children." The problem at the Poly, he writes, was that no person (man or woman) had the courage to attack the gunman. "What sort of men are those who were prepared to abandon the women to their fate?" The author then shifts the blame for cowardly men onto feminists:

The gunman is said to have cried out, 'You are all feminists.' It is, in fact, those persons who (inappropriately) describe themselves as 'feminists' who are trying to change our society to one in which male strength, vigor and responsibility for physical protection of the female gives place to a wimpish equality of feminine men and masculine women, who are to blame. ("Where were the heroes?"; MG,Dec14,B2)

Several letters also denied the connection to violence against women made by feminists. For example, one author wrote that he was "shocked and distressed" by the shootings, and that these women died and people were wounded "for absolutely no reason whatsoever."

However, I was also shocked and outraged when I heard a number of women, as well as the CBC, claiming that the man's actions were representative of men's attitudes towards women. It is totally *ludicrous* to suggest that this senseless slaughter had anything at all to do with male-female inequality. However horrible the incident is, it is nothing more than the action of a *lone individual*, who in this case happens to be a man. ("Ludicrous suggestion"; WFP, Dec 16, 19; emphasis added)

Similarly, another author wrote that he was disgusted by all of the "media hype" surrounding the killings:

These women were not martyrs to some great ominous cause. The killer was not some oppressed political extremist making a statement. The hard and simple truth of it all is that Marc Lépine *went insane and randomly killed* 14 women to fulfill whatever delusion he was having. Do not let a big media circus turn it into something different. Hundreds of people are killed every week on this planet of ours. They die in similar incidents to this, they die in political acts of war, they die in accidents. But people only seem to notice it when it hits close to home. ("Appalled at 'media hype' over killings"; MG, Dec 20, B2; emphasis added)

Some writers acknowledged that men are, indeed, violent, but did not want the massacre connected to everyday violence. As one male writer stated:

We are told by women's rights activists that this event is symptomatic of the manner in which women are treated by men. Tommyrot! This act is the product of a *deranged mind, and in no way is typical of the problem of violence against women*. Women are indeed the victims of violence, and yes, men are for the most part perpetrators of such acts, but it requires a great leap in logic to tar all men with the same brush... Marc Lépine was *not a sane man*; his hatred of women was a result of a severe

psychological problem and no amount of legislation or socialization would have changed that fact. <sup>44</sup> ("Stand in solidarity with them"; MG,Dec17,B3; emphasis added)

It was also common in this writing to reason that, since the massacre was a "random" act, feminists had no claim to "use" it. By doing so, they were seen as "opportunistic" by this male writer:

It is opportunistic and facile to apply labels, as some have done, to the ... killings. Of what use would it be to us to tag the incident 'racist,' had the victims all been one ethnic group ... ? Would it have been 'masculinist' if they had all been male? We forget in our rush to categorize that we are *all* human beings; that the value of a life is neither diminished or augmented by applying a label to the victim. ("It's too easy to attach labels"; MG,Dec17,B3)

Similarly, another male writer wrote describing a vigil in which

(s)ome individuals selfishly gave this vigil a feminist overtone by stressing that *above all*, this was a violent attack on women ... This is precisely the kind of thinking that promotes an environment in which men and women are threatened by each other ... I say 'selfishly' gave the vigil a feminist overtone because instead of reserving the occasion for expressing our sympathy and coping with our shock, they took advantage of the situation to promote their cause. While I understand the horror and rage of many of the slogan-yelling women, I think the rally over a loudspeaker was inappropriate under the circumstances. ("Vigil became excuse for politics"; MG,Dec17,B3)<sup>45</sup>

In making a connection between everyday male violence and the massacre, feminists were perceived to be persecuting men. For example, one author wrote that to blame men for the massacre is useless. Reacting to the statement "We are challenging men to take

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<sup>44</sup> It is indeed interesting that this reader has made the leap himself to suggesting that all men are violent, when the feminist analysis - which he himself stated - was that the massacre was typical of a violent man's behaviour; these are two different issues which he himself has connected.

<sup>45</sup> Notice the attitude here that silence is the only proper way to grieve.

responsibility..."<sup>46</sup> which was "obviously from a 'feminist' " he writes,

I'm not against feminism, but in support of the equal rights for women as we are both equal components of the human race. Statements like the one quoted earlier won't help the problem, but make men more defensive towards the feminist movement. It seems as though women are waging war against men ... [It is] unfair to assume that all men are as cold and heartless as Marc Lépine ... Men are just as affected by this as women ... hopefully people like Anna Dematrakopoulos ... will realize, just as those who generalize about women, that she shouldn't generalize about men. ("Some statements just make men defensive"; CH, Dec22,A6)

Similarly, another writer states:

As a man, I am a little tired of being to blame for what society is and has always been. Violence, abuse, and degradation of the female has always been a part of society whether in politics, the church, or Hollywood.

According to this author, violence against women is not increasing, but the media attention results in "little events becom(ing) major issues." Instead, he writes, society is to blame since men are victims too. Women only love tough men, and "who's helping men to allow their feminine side out?"

I can only relay my sincere hope that all male-bashing will result in positive steps for mankind and not lead to too much backlash from the males hurt by it. ("Society, not just men, to blame for violence"; CH,Dec22,A6)

This was an observation made by many authors: that all women were blaming all men for the violence. Even among men who wrote that there was violence against women (and in so doing, admitting that some men are violent), there was a refusal to see the point that feminists were making: not that all men are violent to this degree but that Lépine's violence was extreme on a continuum of men who are violent towards women.

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46 This was the statement by Anna Dematrakopoulos of the Northern Ontario Women's Centre about the Thunder Bay vigil.



In summary, letters in my sample contained many interpretations, allowing room for opinions on gun control, violence against women, and other perceived social causes. Approximately fifty percent of the letters did emphasize sexism or violence against women.

## CONCLUSION

By examining these "non-news" writings, it has become clear that a feminist interpretation was heard in this form of coverage more often than in the news stories. This seems to support the theoretical considerations in Chapter One, which suggested that there is little room for women's issues in standard news coverage due to how newswork operates. Because non-news sections of the paper do not have the same type of organizational constraints, they are more able to entertain alternate writings and ideas, as this chapter illustrated. Chapter Six will explore further the differences between news stories and non-news stories in their ability to accommodate issues of concern to women, and what this means in terms of the manufacture of hegemony.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

In Chapter One, I discussed how the structure and operation of the media play a role in the reproduction of hegemony. My two hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three stated that the crime discourse would be dominant in the news coverage, and that non-news stories would be more conducive to alternate forms of discourse. Both of these hypotheses were supported by the data. In this chapter, I will locate the findings in a broader context. I suggest that the difference between the two types of writings in how they deal with feminist issues reflects the structure of each, as well as a societal shift in the acceptance of feminist ideals.

### **News Stories**

The content of news coverage is the result of the reporting practices of journalists. As was outlined in Chapters One and Two, news stories have a particular structure; that is, not only do they have a reportorial format, but they individualize, sensationalize, rely on sources and, in general, focus on the event and not the issue. Social analysis is not conducive to stories which need to be brief, "objective," and "factual."

Stories which focus on deviance/crime fit well with a reportorial format. Sources such as the police are unlikely to draw social connections to a criminal's "deviant" behaviour, as their job is to profile a criminal as an individual. This was certainly the case in the news stories in this study. There was little analysis offered in the news pieces other than a reproduction of the individualized explanations offered by the police. Further elaboration on this analysis was rarely offered. Thus, the journalists' reliance on the police as sources

to fill in the meanings of the massacre recreated the police interpretation of the gunman solely as a deviant individual.

Social problems are commonly described in individual terms and simplified in the news coverage. The problems of femicide and violence against women, as we have seen, are no exception. As in a typical case of femicide, we saw that the origin of the gunman's violent behaviour was not attributed to misogyny, but to individual sickness:

Instances of femicide are constructed as unusual and isolated incidents, or if patterns are noticed and connections made between a series of killings, then these are held to be the results of the actions of isolated and crazed psychopaths rather than a recurring expression of male sexual violence. Jane Caputi makes a similar point: 'We are now expected to understand the contemporary terrorization of women, not in political terms, but as the aberrant behaviour of mysterious sexual maniacs, preternatural monsters, or in the most acceptable jargon, *psychopaths and sociopaths*.' (Radford, 1992B:352)

The coverage of Lépine and his brief history also focussed on creating an image of him as an individual aberration. In his suicide note, Lépine makes it clear that he had planned to kill several women he had perceived as feminists, and who had "always enraged" him. He admits that his career was not important to him because he knew "in advance" his "fate" of killing "feminists" and then himself. This fact was never mentioned in the initial coverage, as the police (and, consequently, journalists) theorized about how his life decisions had led him to his "fate." As Francine Pelletier (1990) commented: "If Lépine were insane, never did a madman leave such a lucid message." And, yet, the police and journalists swept the neighbourhood for any possible "clues" to his aberration; standard procedure for professionals in search of the "facts."

This reproduction of the police definition of the gunman as a criminal/deviant had two consequences which were outlined in Chapter One. First, the suggestion that the cause of the criminal act was social was not reproduced, thereby diffusing the threat it may have

posed to hegemony. Second, by individualizing the causes, a call to order was legitimated and increased. In the case of the massacre, the call to order was gun control. Since those in government focused their attentions on gun control, the cause of the massacre seemed self-contained, and easily resolved with legislation.

The lack of feminist analysis in news stories reflects both the structure and ideology of our society in general and newswork in particular. Most of those in authority in our society (who act as sources for the media) are still predominantly men. As the content of newswork depends heavily on the structure of the bureaucracies to which reporters turn, it is not likely that feminist content will permeate news coverage until feminism permeates bureaucracies such as government and social control agencies. Currently, it would appear that most of the feminist coverage in news stories comes from feminist organizations which operate in a hierarchical pattern with an appointed spokesperson; these issues would not be given the same attention if there was not a "bureaucratic expert" articulating them.<sup>47</sup>

Within news gathering, there are strict guidelines and policies concerning "objectivity" which apply to the journalists as well as the editors. Topics and sources should be perceived as "objective." Owing to time constraints, it is likely that traditional (those used in the past) sources will be consulted and that new sources will rarely be sought out. Because these stories rely more on traditional form and sources and pass through more hands, it is likely that the story will more closely reproduce the existing (dominant) hegemony. The more people in power consulted regarding an issue, the closer that concept will come to reflecting the hegemonic discourse. Even if a journalist working to a deadline has a desire to write a

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, Tuchman (1978) illustrated how it was difficult for journalists to get sources from women's organizations when they do not operate with a hierarchical format where one woman may speak for the group.

story with a "feminist" angle - and thus strays from the "normal" channels of sources to find feminist sources - the journalist still has to pass the work by his or her editor. Thus, it is usually the case that a feminist journalist still has to deal mostly with people who reproduce the dominant hegemony, such as sources, editors and fellow journalists.

Although the crime discourse was dominant in the news stories, however, it is not a foregone conclusion that feminism is a) not something most people would consider and b) not something that ever appears in a newspaper. Indeed, the fact that, in my study, more than half of the features, half of the columns and letters, and approximately 30% of the editorials contained a feminist interpretation of the massacre as the main theme leads to some interesting considerations regarding hegemony, feminism, and feminist coverage.

### **Non-news coverage**

As outlined in Chapter One, hegemony is a process which is in constant flux. Since the media play a role in reproducing hegemony (and the news stories in my sample seem to have played this role), it is curious as to why writing with a non-news focus would contain so much feminist content. I suggest that this finding could be interpreted to mean that feminism is beginning to intrude upon the dominant discourse. According to Alan Hunt (1990:313), ideas which form a counter-hegemony are not constructed outside of the prevailing dominant hegemony. Counter-hegemony - in this case, feminism - needs to start "from that which exists" within the dominant hegemony, where people can begin to analyse critically something which they may have always taken for granted, or to extend existing concepts to new cases. In this way, a discourse which is counter-hegemonic may start from within a hegemonic discourse, and build from there; what is new will be valorized and will gradually replace the old within the discourse (314).

According to Hunt (1990), in order for a group discourse to become hegemonic, more and more people must accept the reasons given by a group for their existence, so that it becomes natural for others to accept their way of thinking. The fact that many writers employed feminist ideologies in their work shows that feminism may indeed be having an effect on the world; that some aspects of feminism may have penetrated the dominant hegemony.

There are specific examples of how some aspects of feminism have shifted from (to use Hunt's (1990) terms) a "local" hegemony, where they were seen to be the concern of women only, (and a small group at that) to something which is now accepted as "common sense," and which would now reflect a more "universal" hegemony. For instance, liberal notions of feminism (that women are equal, that women should be paid the same as men for the same job) have become commonplace in the public discourse. This is the result of liberal feminists working closely with the state, and pushing for reform. While some theorists may criticize liberal feminists for "co-opting" 'pure' feminism, and watering down the potential for real change through their alliance with the state (Franzway et al.,1989), one may also view this alliance as a shift in the dominant hegemony. Liberal feminists built upon the dominant discourse - on notions such as individuality, equality, and democracy - and applied it to women. In this way, liberal feminism, which employed concepts from the traditional discourse, had the capacity to transcend (or at least broaden) that discourse; equality and democracy (among other things) are no longer solely the domain of men.

Given the findings of this study, I suggest that there is a similar shift now happening with other issues of concern to feminists. Specifically, the recognition of patterns of violence against women has been embraced - at least amongst certain segments of the population - as "common sense." The violence that women encounter at the hands of men has been

transformed from a "private trouble" (affecting only a few, individual women) to a "public issue" (requiring state intervention and meriting media attention). Much of the non-news writing about violence against women was along the lines of recognizing it as a serious social problem which must cease, if only for the "practical" reason that half of the world's population is afraid to walk alone at night.

The structure of non-news writing, in contrast to news story format, allows individual writers to express views which incorporate the old with the new. Non-news pieces are not set up as factual news accounts about events or what sources said at, or about, an event. Because objectivity is not a goal, writers may be more able to raise issues of concern to them. In addition, unlike news coverage, non-news coverage is generally written by one individual with editorial assistance, but not with additional input. Non-news pieces are therefore allowed more flexibility in their content since they are considered the opinion of the author; they do not necessarily reflect the philosophy of sources or of the paper (and there is usually a disclaimer to this effect). Hence, editors do not have to worry about offending the reading audience and the advertisers with a political column - as they would with a politically slanted news story containing sources.

There is also more physical space allotted to pieces in the non-news sections of the paper. As space is not at a premium here as it is with news pieces, there is more opportunity for a writer to explore various aspects of a chosen issue. Since so many writers chose to focus on a feminist interpretation, this may suggest that feminism, as a discourse, may be in a process of intruding into the dominant hegemony. If this is the case then feminists have good cause to be optimistic about their efforts to bring about substantive change.

## Conclusion

Although it was the case in my sample that news stories were dominated by a crime discourse, this may indeed change. As a feminist discourse on violence against women becomes more commonplace, the crime discourse - with its individualizing tendencies - becomes less tenable. Certainly there will be more potential for feminists to use the media once feminists move beyond, using Hunt's (1990) terminology "local" (or group) hegemony, and to "universal" hegemony; when the goals are accepted as good for all, then they will receive more coverage. The problem is that they are not currently perceived as good for all, but only for women; even if liberal feminism is recognized in the dominant hegemony, it may only amount to a concession to women, and these concerns may still not be covered.

The non-news writing may be indicative of a growing impact of feminism on the dominant hegemony, which may be more readily reflected in this type of writing. This type of writing is not, however, a stable part of the newspaper; especially in newspapers which are run by ultra-conservative multi-national corporations. The ability for feminist columnists and writers to hold their jobs may be in question. Thus, although I believe that the great proportion of feminist writing is a sign of a shift in the dominant hegemony, the potential for writers to continue this work may be curtailed if their positions are unstable.

For this reason, news sections of the paper have more stability. A feminist interpretation would carry a significant amount of clout and longevity if reflected in news stories using bureaucratic sources. Moreover, it is not understood how people conceptualize the difference between news stories and non-news writings. If feminist interpretations only appear in non-news coverage, there is the potential that: they will not be taken as seriously as an interpretation made in a news story; they will not be seen as factual; they may be



overlooked by people who only read the news; or they may be viewed as alternate based solely on their location in the paper. The questions that the non-news coverage raises will be dealt with in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

In this study, my aim has been to determine whether or not a feminist analysis was included in the initial news coverage of the Montréal massacre. I discovered that the news stories were dominated by a crime discourse, which individualized the gunman and did not draw social connections to his behaviour. This illustrates the standard operating procedure of newswork, which relies heavily on bureaucratic sources, simplification and individualization. The tendency of the press to offer superficial coverage of crimes of violence against women was also evident in this research. In contrast, however, the non-news stories proved to be a forum for interpretations which were not commonly found in the news stories. Specifically, a feminist interpretation of the causes of the massacre was much more prominent in this type of news coverage.

Did the presence of an alternate feminist discourse in the media coverage of the massacre signal a challenge to hegemony - or - did it signify the co-optation of the feminist interpretation by the dominant discourse? In Chapter Six, I suggested that - rather than co-optation - the findings of this study could be interpreted as evidence of a broader societal shift in the acceptance of feminist ideals. In particular, a feminist interpretation of violence against women - one which locates the causes of the violence in broader structural sources - is becoming more and more a part of the public discourse. This would suggest that - as a counter-hegemonic discourse - feminism may well be achieving some measure of success in displacing the more individualized crime discourse as a way of making sense of violence against women. In this concluding chapter, therefore, I suggest some possibilities for further research to address this issue.

## Suggestions for future research

This thesis raises the question: what role does the non-news writing play in shaping people's interpretations of events? Does it challenge the news voice? Add to it? Reaffirm it? It was illustrated that the news stories reproduced societal hegemony by their explanations of the origins of the Montréal massacre, through standard operating procedure. Regardless of the process by which the editorials appeared, what effect does this have on the messages which are created in the news stories?<sup>48</sup> In order to investigate this, people could be interviewed as to how they view the content in newspapers. Studying the messages which people receive is only one part of understanding the equation; it does not necessarily follow that people blindly accept whatever explanations are offered to them in the media. How do people view news stories? Editorial writings? Do they believe that news stories contain the facts? The truth? Are editorial writings easily dismissed because they are opinion? Or do they provide an opinion with which the reader can agree or disagree, thereby confirming his or her own beliefs?

It was my assumption in doing this thesis that news stories were more influential in shaping opinion than non-news writings. But this is not necessarily the case. It is still my contention, however, that news itself needs to contain more feminist analysis and/or issues of concern to women. The very fact that news sets itself up as "factual" can lead people to dismiss interpretations in writings that they see elsewhere in the paper. The importance of achieving "mainstream" newsworthy recognition leads me to three more questions for future

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<sup>48</sup> This itself would be insightful, to ask journalists: What was considered a story? What ideas were censored or not considered important? Did all journalists necessarily agree on the paper's policy of what news was fit to print? An account of how journalists decide on what information to include in a story, such as Fishman's account (1980), can be fascinating and highly illustrative.

research: First of all, an examination of ALL of the initial news coverage needs to be undertaken, not only the stories which attempt to make sense of the massacre. In my sample, the initial news stories created the effect of the gunman as insane, and I did illustrate that the language used to define him was very individualized. It would be beneficial to explore the angles of these pieces: which angles were dominant? How did the initial reporting (before the identity of the gunman was known) make sense of the massacre?

Second, was the coverage the same in other communities? Including newspapers from across Canada, as well as smaller dailies and "rags," would provide a much richer sample regarding sensationalism and analysis of the massacre. Looking at how these papers compiled wire stories would be worthy of study as well, as this would indicate what material they considered worthy of inclusion. In addition, from reading letters written in the French press following the massacre, it became clear that cultural differences affected how the massacre was explained and defined. For instance, some French coverage still employed the masculine *etudiants*, rather than the feminine *etudiantes*, long after it was common knowledge that all of the dead were women (and not all were students).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, many writers in the English press in Montréal referred to Quebec society, not Canadian society; I imagine this tendency would be more pronounced in French coverage. Further research in this area must include the French coverage, as it would provide an opportunity for cultural analysis.

Third, to what extent did a crime discourse remain dominant in follow-up years of coverage? It would seem to make sense that only an interpretation of the massacre as

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<sup>49</sup> One woman, Maryse Laganière, worked in the budget department. In addition, one of the 13 students, Barbara Marie Klueznik, was a nursing student, not an engineering student.

symbolic of a greater social ill would emerge on the anniversary of the women's deaths. However, it was not necessarily the case that the "social ill" referred to was violence against women. What kinds of issues were still heard? Gun control remained a key issue of concern, as gun control laws were passed two years after the massacre.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Natalie Provost, a survivor, was angry at being called a feminist, and the Calgary Herald asked "Is feminism dead?" In some ways, the perception of the massacre as an act of violence against women has come to be more widely accepted, but by 1992, there was hardly a mention of it (or the Royal Commission on Violence Against Women) in the media. The newsworthy snippet in December 1992 came from women's groups staging an event by challenging Prime Minister Mulroney to give back his White Ribbon due to slashed funding to women's shelters.

The White Ribbon Campaign took off in 1991, and was created by men to encourage an end to male violence. Their main mandate, as outlined in the letters which they circulated in 1992, seemed to be to raise money in order to distribute white ribbons to men in order to show that they opposed violence against women. Their goal was to get as many men as possible to wear the ribbons. Feminists were cynical and worried about this campaign, because of its potential to detract funding where it was desperately needed, and to offer a way for men to look "politically correct" without changing their own behaviour (Landsberg, 1992). Even though Michael Kaufman, the group's founder, seemed sincere in his concern, the WRC seems to have set the agenda for the discussion in the media, taking

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**50** These observations are based on data which I obtained from the five papers from the years 1990-1992.

attention and resources away from women's organizations.

By investigating these questions, our understanding of the role of the media in reproducing and creating dominant discourses would be improved.

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## APPENDIX

### Marc Lépine's suicide note

Although I have difficulties including this text in this thesis when so much has already been learned of Marc Lépine and his so-called motives, this note is significant. He lays out his hatred for women and his plan that he had for several years to kill women that he perceived to be feminist. There was also a hit list of 19 prominent Canadian women listed after the note. The police reporting about this note did not emphasize the extent to which Lépine's letter reflected premeditated murder. This version was printed in The Montréal Massacre, edited by Malette and Chalouh.

Forgive the mistakes, I had 15 minutes to write this.

See also Annex.

Would you note that if I commit suicide today 89-12-06 it is not for economic reasons (for I have waited until I exhausted all my financial means, even refusing jobs) but for political reasons. Because I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker. For seven years life has brought me no joy and being totally blasé, I have decided to put an end to those viragos.

I tried in my youth to enter the Forces as a student-officer, which would have allowed me to get into the arsenal and precede Lortie in a raid. They refused me because antisocial (*sic*). I therefore had to wait until this day to execute my plans. In between, I continued my studies in a haphazard way for they never really interested me, knowing in advance my fate. Which did not prevent me from getting very good marks despite my theory of not handing in work and the lack of studying before exams.

Even if the Mad Killer epithet will be attributed to me by the media, I consider myself a rational erudite that only the arrival of the Grim Reaper has forced to take extreme acts. For why persevere to exist if it is only to please the government. Being rather backward-looking by nature (except for science), the feminists have always enraged me. They want to keep the advantages of women (e.g. cheaper insurance, extended maternity leave preceded by a preventive leave etc.) while seizing for themselves those of men.

Thus it is an obvious truth that if the Olympic Games removed the Men-Women distinction, there would be Women only in the graceful events. So the feminists are not fighting to remove that barrier. They are so opportunistic they neglect to profit from the knowledge accumulated by men throughout the ages. They always try to misrepresent them every time they can. Thus, the other day, I heard they were honoring the Canadian men and women who fought at the frontline during the world wars. How can you explain

then that women were not authorized to go to the frontline??? Will we hear of Caesar's female legions and female galley slaves who of course took up 50 per cent of the ranks of history, though they never existed. A real Casus Belli.

Sorry for this too brief letter.

Marc Lépine

*The letter is followed by the 19-name list, with a note at the bottom:*

Nearly died today. The lack of time (because I started too late) has allowed these radical feminists to survive.

Alea Jacta Est