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PAPER

**Narrative and Myth in Print Media Coverage of Women who Kill their Children in the Case of Abortion**

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Motherhood has been represented in fact and fiction as a supreme calling, a happy achievement, a heavenly blessing, a womanly profession, the pinnacle of femininity. Women who become mothers are supposed to be guided by "natural" feminine instinct that make them instantly loving, all-knowing, and selfless. Many 20th century feminists have challenged this notion and have challenged the mass media, including journalists, to offer more realistic representations of motherhood; representations based on women's lived experiences rather than greeting card sentiments and Victorian images. Some scholars suggest circumscribed views of motherhood harm women because they discourage them from seeking help when they cannot or do not mother well. The news media are today's modern story tellers, and as such, transmit information. However the media also transmit values and ideas.

Using qualitative analysis, this research paper explores the dominant narratives in news articles about women who killed. Findings revealed four distinct narratives: the perfect/imperfect mother, which positioned women who killed their children as either insane or evil. The good mother, which included stories from women who killed their children, who said they loved their children but also admitted they harmed them. The wounded community, in which the community was personified and presented as the victim of a crafty, deceitful mother. Using a framework of "master myths," in journalism, the analysis revealed that mother was presented as victim, scapegoat, and trickster. In addition, findings suggest that journalists employed "material myths" in articles about women who killed their children: Women were presented as fallen angels and rebels and were compared with a perfect, mythical "Good Mother." However, findings also revealed cracks in dominant narratives and myths, as journalists reported women's discussions of their own ambivalent maternal experiences.